

What is a poster?

A poster is a visual description of a project, prepared for viewing by those attending a conference. Posters can depict research or evaluation findings, outline a research process, or describe a program. Posters take up a larger space on a bulletin board or wall than what the word “poster” might suggest (usually larger than 3 feet by 5 feet). Conference attendees can visit a variety of posters and talk with the people who prepared them. Handouts at the poster summarize the poster and provide the presenter’s contact information.

Why prepare a poster?

Poster sessions at conferences allow for one-on-one networking between people who prepare posters and others who are interested in learning more. Preparing a poster allows the author to:

- Share approaches and lessons with others
- Discuss how lessons are being used to improve programs
- Showcase programs to current funders
- Highlight strengths for potential funders
- Provide evidence that lessons from the program have been disseminated to a broader audience



Handouts include more detail on the project and contact information. A poster author should plan to be present during scheduled poster sessions.

What are elements of an effective poster?

A poster should have enough information to paint a relatively clear picture without overwhelming the viewer. Ideally, viewers should not have to spend more than five minutes reading through text on a poster. Select graphics carefully, choosing information that conveys the most important message from the poster. Graphics and font sizes should be easy to read from at a distance of at least five feet.

- Focused, limited topic
- Statement of problem addressed by project or research/evaluation question

- Clear title, author and funding source
- Selected graphic depictions of data, participants, or before/after program effects
- Clear source of information
- Logical flow of information
- Explicit implications or lessons
- Handouts summarizing poster and contact information

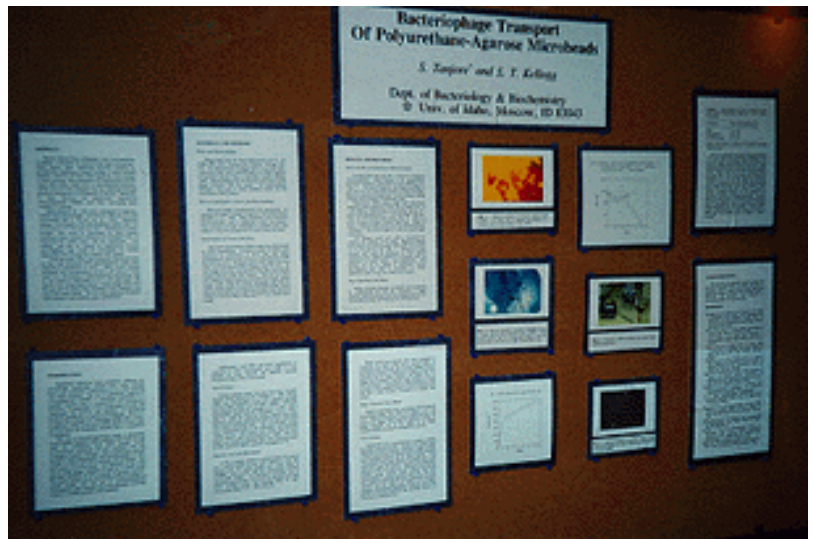
Do posters have to convey research or evaluation findings?

No. Posters can describe activities in progress. However, effective posters include a clear statement about how the activities will lead to short, intermediate and long-term outcomes. Program descriptions should provide some discussion of the evaluation plan and evaluation information collected so far.

How much work does a poster require?

A poster does not have to generate a lot of work. Imagine giving a five-minute report to a peer. What would you say? Write down what you would say, and organize the key points in the following way:

- 1) Statement of problem (need for project)
- 2) Purpose of the poster (can also be clearly stated in title)
- 3) Who prepared the poster
- 4) Description of the program and target outcomes (should not be more than three to five sentences—can be depicted in a logic model)
- 5) At least one graphic (can be a photograph) illustrating the program's progress, who is involved, or how the program works
- 6) Lessons learned so far (if the program is currently underway)
- 7) Implications for future action (where will this lead?)
- 8) Source of funding for the project



This poster provides both text and graphics. Graphics will most often draw viewers' attention first.

How do we choose what to present?

Posters should represent a focused piece of the program. Rather than trying to depict every component of a program, choose one element and highlight it. For example, if a youth advocacy project has five components among two age groups, select one of those components or age groups and prepare a poster around it. Ask yourself what would be most interesting to those viewing the posters, including peers and funders. What would you like to see others present if you were attending the poster session? Is evaluation information, however informal, available to share?

What is an abstract?

An abstract is simply a brief summary of the poster. (Abstracts also appear at the beginning of published papers.) Conferences accepting abstracts will usually require presenters to complete a standardized abstract submission form.

Conference abstracts usually require some form of the following information:

Research or evaluation abstracts	Abstracts describing program process
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A clear statement of the research or evaluation question(s)• A brief description of the methods used to collect information and analyze it• A concise list of findings• A summary of implications of the findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A clear description of the program or project and its context (e.g., goals, where it takes place, who is involved, etc.)• Steps taken in the project or program• Ways progress is being measured• Lessons learned from the project or program

Materials to help create an effective poster

The effort required to prepare a poster depends on the purpose of the poster, the context in which it appears, and the audience that will view it. Posters can range from colorful, glossy productions to simple, crisp black-and-white presentations that convey a clear message.

The following materials can help you create a professional-looking poster on a limited budget:

- A large piece of colorful fabric to cover the poster
- 11" x 17" colored construction paper to frame the printed information
- 8" x 10" printouts of Powerpoint slides (choose File > Print > Print What > Slides to print the slide on an entire page)
- A graphic or two—this can be a photograph, a graph of data, or a large quote from a program participant

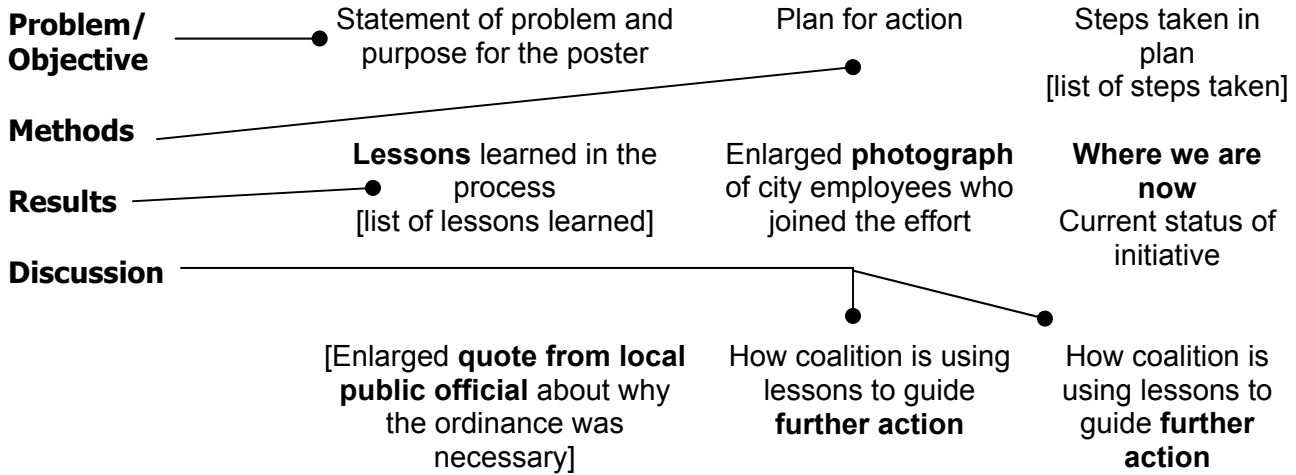
Tips for presenting a successful poster

- Keep it simple! Remember that viewers will take away one or two points from your poster. You want them to remember those points and where they came from.
- Bring a bowl of wrapped candy and place it in a basket on a chair or table next to your poster. If you see your poster as a sort of "open house" for your project, you will be more likely to attract viewers and conversation.
- If you cannot be present for the poster session, assign someone from your staff or coalition to "staff" the poster. Wear a nametag that links you to the poster.
- Handouts that summarize the poster help viewers take away the main points of the poster.
- Provide contact information in case potential funders would like you to receive requests for proposals.

Example A: Plan for poster layout

**Restricting Smoking in Williamsburg Municipal Buildings:
Lessons learned**

Shelly Cordoba and Rich Heffernan
Williams County Tobacco-free Coalition



Funds for this initiative were provided by the Williams County Health Department through a grant from the Wisconsin Tobacco Control Board

**Example B: Poster
Restricting Smoking in Williamsburg Municipal Buildings:
Lessons learned**

Shelly Cordoba and Rich Heffernan
Williams County Tobacco-free Coalition

The problem

In 2001, only two of ten buildings owned or leased by the City of Williamsburg were smoke-free.

This poster describes lessons the Williams County Tobacco-free Coalition has learned in its campaign to pass ordinances to ban smoking in Williamsburg municipal buildings.

Lessons learned

- Create a plan to guide the process
- Don't begin the process until you are fully prepared
- Get input from the mayor early!

Changes in attitude among local opinion leaders are a key measure of our progress:

I didn't think this rule was necessary, but then we started hearing from city employees about the need for smoke-free buildings.

--Jim Branford, Williamsburg Mayor

The plan

The coalition developed a plan to push for a smoke-free municipal building ordinance in Williamsburg.

Inputs	Activities	Reach	Short-term	Inter-mediate	Long-term

Steps taken so far

- Plan in place
- Core group of city employees identified and briefed
- Mayor supports resolution
- Meetings held with key decision makers to gauge support
- Hearing set for May 5, 2003

Lessons learned

- Get a core group of constituents from the city involved. Brief them on the issues.
- Document changes that have taken place
- Find out early who supports the initiative
- Identify a spokesperson for the initiative



Above: City employees unite to work toward smoke-free buildings

Plans

The lessons and public support generated from this initiative will help the coalition begin work toward further smoking restrictions in Williamsburg

Funds for this initiative were provided by the Williams County Health Department through a grant from the Wisconsin Division of Public Health and the Wisconsin Tobacco Control Board

Monitoring & Evaluation Program

UW-Extension

UW Comprehensive Cancer Center

Center for Health Policy and Program Evaluation



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