

Impact Writing Guide for State Faculty

Writing an impact report is just like telling a story.

This is your story ... It is also a critical part of the Division of Agriculture's message. Stakeholders (today more than ever) want to know what return they are receiving from their investments in our research and educational programs.

Outstanding impact reports share common elements. They tell a human story related to critical needs. They provide a basic understanding of "what was done." They provide evaluation data and other evidence of value as a result of the program. They demonstrate that the writers have a commitment to this program and a connection to the communities they serve based on the content of the story.



Why should state faculty write impact reports?

State faculty can write impact reports from a perspective that no one else can. Direct involvement in program planning and implementation makes you the only person prepared and qualified to speak to the program's overall value. Subject matter specialists with program leadership responsibilities can identify the regional or statewide needs that a program was developed in response to, as well as the goals and scope of the program response.

Writing an impact report at the end of each year likewise provides state faculty members with the opportunity to review and analyze statewide evaluation data to inform and improve practice. Writing an impact statement provides the mechanism and framework for systematic evaluation and process improvement. This scientific framework is the basis for all of the Division of Agriculture work.

In preparation for authorship of an impact report:

- Print AIMS/AES program planning and results data.
- Access secondary data sources that relate to the program.
- Review the collective county impact reports and notes in AIMS.
- Analyze the meaning inherent in the data.

Writing Tips for Communicating Program Value

The Critical Decision of a Title:

The title should answer the stakeholder's question, "So what?"

Consider using a title related to the problem or an impact that occurred as a result of the project:

- "Providing the Best Care for Arkansas Children"
- "Saving the Family Farm: Cutting Debt 18%"

The title should communicate the project's value ... not just identify the project name. This approach increases the likelihood that stakeholders may actually read the impact report.

I. ISSUE: Who Cares and Why?

Provide a brief description of the compelling NEED for this program. This establishes both relevance and "believability" for the reader.

Quickly identify a specific problem and the role of CES/AES in helping provide a solution. Direct quotes from clientele always infuse power and meaning into your story.

II. What Has Been Done? (Program Information/Program Response)

Provide key information about the program:

- Structure
- Goals
- Scope (including county, multi-state, or international reach)
- Partnerships
- Challenges
- Inputs and outputs (what we did – methods and audiences reached)

III. Results

This is the bottom line. Impact is NOT the number of participants.

- Overall value to your clientele and to the communities you serve should be explained.
- Impact numbers relate to changes in behaviors and/or adoption of practices by our external clientele (as a result of/or related to our educational/research programs).
- Long-term impact numbers can also include systemic changes related to public policy, environmental factors, social, and/or health conditions, etc.
- Secondary risk-reduction, sustainability, resiliency, and other benchmark data can be cited if linked to well-established theories/models, as is appropriate per discipline.
- Cost/benefit analysis can also be included to quantify economic impact.

AES/CES Contact Person:

Provide the name(s) of the designated contact person(s) for this program and report so that individuals wanting more information can readily locate key faculty.

Dr. Karen K. Ballard
Professor, Program Evaluation