Quantifying Impacts: Data Collection and Representation

How will you know if you have succeeded? How will you convey your success to others?
- Proactive data collection can help you quantify, compare, predict, measure, track, and report your project's impacts.
- Creating systems to collect, store, manipulate, and share your data is critical.
- Representing your data in a compelling and accessible visual way heightens its impact.
- Strong data can support your story, document your success, and help you to create realistic benchmarks for progress.

In its rawest form data is numbers and individual pieces of information which become statistics and facts when explained in the context of a larger goal or plan. Quality data is accurate, appropriate in scope, and up-to-date; precise and user-friendly data adds credibility to the narrative of your report. Writing a final project summary is easier if you have built data collection into all stages of your project, especially when documenting measurable results.
- How many (people, occurrences, locations, categories, …)
- How much (time, money, human and other resources used, …)
- Comparative inputs (pre-program, during program, post-program)
- Effective tracking methods (sign-in sheets, questionnaires, reports, surveys, observation logs, timesheets, mileage logs, social media posts/followers, website hits, funds received, calls made, etc.)
- What information already exists either at your institution or publicly that can be used for comparative purposes? (size of target population, prior efforts/results, documented trends, research findings)

Tools for managing your data and sharing it with diverse audiences
- Excel and googlesheets store vast amounts of discrete information with multiple sorting and filtering options
- Excel spreadsheets can be manipulated to create diagrams, charts and graphs to provide snapshots of aggregate data (such as totals and percentages)
- Infographics are simple visual representations of qualitative information
- SurveyMonkey, doodle, google forms, many other tools exist to help collect and manage your information.

Quantifying the impacts of your project goes hand in hand with a compelling story and a powerful photo. The type of report and audience of your presentations should guide how you choose to convey the impact of your project. Formal reports may require detailed and technical excel sheets while an in-person presentation to a group of supporters calls for something more visual and easily-absorbed. The Internship Statistics at https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/internships/experience/
provides a great example of using infographics. Following are some online resources.

http://www.strengtheningnonprofits.org/resources/E-learning/Online/datacollection/
https://venngage.com/blog/present-data-visually/
https://www.smartsheet.com/project-design-any-industry
https://www.sopact.com/social-impact-assessment
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