

Assessing the Impact of Service

Students in Action, Jefferson Awards, Leadership Conference

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Session Outline

1. Why should we assess the impact of projects?
2. Difference between Impact Assessment and Progress Monitoring
3. Unpacking Impacts - Case Study
4. SMART Goals
5. “Do and Do-Not” Advice

Why Assess? Isn't the Activity Enough?

- **Setting a goal and evaluating your impact allows you:**
 - To set realistic goals for future action - points towards *HOW* to increase your impact in future projects and set future goals;
 - To tell your story to your stakeholders in multiple ways (school and district leadership, school board, the public, the student body);
 - To Legitimize and stress your student voice and agency - shows that you're serious, that youth can be serious partners in problem solving.

The Golden Rules of Assessment/Data

- 1) Data/numbers **never** speak for themselves.
- 2) If Data/Results don't inspire additional/future conversation, it's useless.
- 3) Disappointing data is better than no data, or data that doesn't get used.

Impact Evaluation V. Progress Monitoring

- Goals express what you want to happen as a result of your action.
(Aspirations)
- Impact Evaluation *Measures* the level of success you reached, in terms of your goals. (Autopsy Data)
- Progress Monitoring are check-in opportunities, *DURING THE PROJECT*, where you pause, take stock of how well your *PROCESS* is proceeding towards meeting your goals.
- Successful projects use **BOTH KINDS** of EVALUATION.

Progress Monitoring - Best Practices

- 1) Check progress OFTEN, at regular intervals, and AT LEAST at critical moments during the planning and preparation.
- 2) Use MULTIPLE methods for reflection - if you rely too much on one way, folks don't put enough thought into it.
- 3) Check progress for:
 - a) Group involvement and leadership voice - make sure everyone is involved and effective;
 - b) Logistics - are we on schedule? Are we prepared for the next step?
 - c) Project Design: based on what we've already done, will this form of the project get us where we want to be, or do we need to CHANGE it?
- 4) If you don't check for progress during the project, you may miss your goals.

For this cycle to work, you **MUST** check in and evaluate for Process, not just results, at **ALL** stages.



Unpacking Impacts - Case Study

The Facts:

A local alternative school, serving students at risk of not graduating, collaborates with a local private college. ALC students partner with college students (Education and Social Work majors) over a semester, meeting every other week, working on a common project. The common project is a group of short films (Public Service Announcements) on various contemporary social issues relevant specifically to American youth.

NAME ALL THE POSSIBLE IMPACTS OF THIS PARTNERSHIP AND PROJECT.

Impacts and Measurements:

- Students impacted by the use of the videos in classrooms (# of students, surveys);
- Teachers who used the videos for lessons (# of teachers, # of times shown);
- ALC students who decided to apply for more college, or apply at all, because of this experience (number of applications filed, changes in post graduation planning);
- College students intent on careers working with youth getting a chance to work and connect with youth (surveys, increases in declared majors);
- A college which may receive more and diverse applications from a new population (number of applications received from this school).

Make the Assessment fit the Goal - Ideas

- Awareness projects: number of educational events you plan and host, number of people who attend your educational events;
- Service projects: pounds of food collected or harvested, pounds of recyclables collected, number of students tutored; dollar equivalency of hours served.;
- Advocacy projects: number of petitions or pledges signed, number of letters written to public officials.
- Philanthropy projects: dollar amount raised, number of donors
- Improved behavior (e.g., more people wearing seat belts)
- Enhanced knowledge (e.g., people more aware of ways to conserve water)
- Uses of funds raised (e.g., funds used to create disaster preparedness kits)
- Changes in physical structures or infrastructure (e.g., garden beds built)
- Changes in laws or policies
- Surveys
- Anecdotal Stories

SMART Goals

S = Specific: General, safe goals are useless (more people will enjoy x...so what?)

M = Measureable: (X dollars raised, X # of students engaged, X of surveys answered positively)

A = Achievable Action: (5 students raising 5 million \$? Possible, but not probable.)

R = Realistic, Relevant: (see above; also, all stakeholders need to CARE about the issue)

T = Time Specific: (Clear time frame...without a time frame, without urgency, projects die).

Do's and Don't of Assessing

DO:

- Assess for **MULTIPLE** impacts
- Assess using **MULTIPLE** Methods
- Monitor Progress
- **USE** the data to inform future projects.
- Use data to tell your story!

DON'T:

- Set super easy goals
- Set super general goals
- Use only **ONE** measurement of impact
- Minimize your data - Be proud, but honest, regardless of the outcome.
- Assess only at the end.