

# **CHAPTER 9**

## **Preparing Your Reports**

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#### 9.1 Introduction

The data from your reports and the quality of services that you provide to your clients will be of great interest to many people in your city or district. Positive results about your organization's service delivery can help to educate decision-makers on the city and county council and can assist in generating additional funding for your organization. This chapter discusses the tasks of determining your target audience, determining the length of your report, using graphics in the report, comparing your data to other data sets nationally and in your community, and working with the local media to publicize the report results.

#### 9.2 Who is Your Target Audience?

In preparing the report on service delivery satisfaction, it is important to be aware of who are your primary target audiences. There are a number of choices for the target audience and the report can emphasize different aspects of your program depending on the target audience. Potential target audiences include:

- The general public
- People served by your agency
- Your agency staff
- Funding sources
- Potential funding sources
- Local political bodies
- Other social service providers in the community.

The local agency can pick a primary target audience and several secondary audiences for the report. As discussed below, the form and content of the message from the report may vary significantly based on the target audience.

#### 9.3 What Kind and How Long Should Your Report Be?

You can publicize your results through a wide variety of report methods including:

- Printed publications, such as newsletters, fact sheets, executive summaries, or a comprehensive report;
- Media presentations, such as a video or public service announcement; and
- Oral presentations made directly to public bodies or other interested groups.

These possible report types are not mutually exclusive. Your agency can prepare a detailed report and publicize the finding in a widely distributed executive summary and in your monthly newsletter. In addition, you can make oral presentations to local political bodies and other community organizations and prepare a media presentation for the local newspapers and television stations.

If a detailed report is prepared, it is important to have a brief 3 to 5 page executive summary that can be removed from the report and distributed more widely in the community. Select the findings from the report that will have the most interest and impact and target these findings to specific audiences for broader dissemination. The executive summary section can also introduce any recommendations for changes in your service delivery system as a result of the findings.

If you are using a contractor to collect the data and prepare the report, clearly specify the kind of report that you want in the contract.

It is important to vary the report and summary materials you use for reporting to different audiences. For each audience group consider:

- Existing levels of knowledge about your agencies' programs;
- Key concerns and issues that the audience may have;
- Method of presentation most likely to draw that group's attention; and
- Types of information most likely to motivate action.

Emphasize those aspects of your report data that are most interesting to each audience. Focus on the most important points you want to make rather than overwhelming the audience with detail. Organize your presentation findings in a way that clearly presents the implications from your data.

#### **9.4 Using Graphics in the Report**

It is important to use graphics in any report that you produce on the data. Graphics make the report much more visually appealing to the reader. Graphics can break up the text for a reader and make a report much more readable. Graphics are also very useful in presenting data. Some readers can understand tables much easier if they are presented in a bar graph or a pie chart.

Good graphics software comes with standard spreadsheet software now. Microsoft Excel has graphing software and it can be used for presentations using their Power Point program. Word Perfect also comes with graphing and presentation software.

A good book on the uses of graphics is "The Visual Display of Quantitative Information" by Edward R. Tufte. Tufte presents five principles of graphical excellence. They are:

1. Graphical excellence is the well-designed presentation of interesting data – a matter of substance, of statistics, and of design

2. Graphical excellence consists of complex ideas communicated with clarity, precision, and efficiency
3. Graphical excellence is that which gives to the reader the greatest number of ideas in the shortest time with the least ink in the smallest space
4. Graphical excellence is nearly always multivariate (multiple variables)
5. Graphical excellence requires telling the truth about the data.

These same graphic displays that are in the reports can also be used in any presentations of the data before audiences. It is very straight forward to prepare slides or a slide show using either a projector connected to your computer or overhead slides using the software described above.

### **9.5 Compare Your Data to Other Data Sets and Sources**

Your report results will be more meaningful if presented with other relevant data. Additionally, the results of other data collection methods, such as focus groups or interviews, can be integrated into your report. For example, if there is some data that appears unusual or you have difficulty describing, it may be useful to conduct a focus group with 8 or 9 service participants to discuss the specific topics that you want clarified.

You may want to compare your AAA service district to others in the state or to national data sets that were described in the previous chapter.

### **9.6 Work With the Local Media in Releasing the Report**

When your report is finished and assuming that you have positive results to report, you will want broad dissemination of the information. The local media can be very helpful in disseminating the report results. There are several ways to work with the local media including:

- Holding a press conference with newspapers and television stations to present the results and hand out copies of the reports;
- Mail a press release summarizing the report results and a copy of the report to all of the local newspapers and television stations; and
- Prepare a video tape of the services your organization provides and the results of the survey on the same services that can be sent to newspapers and television stations.

A high quality report and briefing materials can be very important to your agency. It is important to tell the story of the services your agency provides and that the quality is high in terms of consumer satisfaction. This chapter provided guidance on some key factors to consider in preparing your report, in analyzing and comparing your data, and graphically presenting the key findings to selected target audiences. It was also stressed that the key findings should be distributed to the local media so that you can get broad dissemination of the results of your surveys.