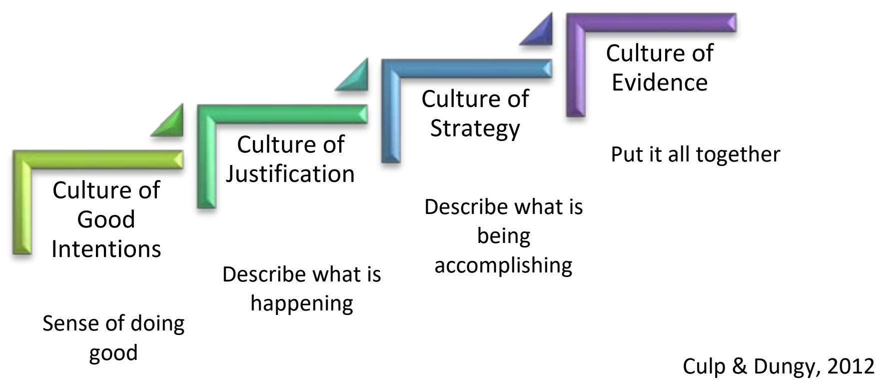
Texas Christian University
Student Affairs Assessment Guide

Chapter 6: Sharing Results

There are multiple reasons to share the results of our evaluations. It is one way to document the impact of our efforts. Sharing results is one way of celebrating our successes. It helps us promote learning through reflection and it motivates us to improve.

Building a Culture of Evidence



A culture of evidence is a commitment among student affairs professionals to demonstrate with hard data that the programs they offer, the processes they implement, and the services they provide are effective and contribute significantly to an institution's ability to achieve its goals and fulfill its mission. Establishing a culture of evidence may best be described as an evolutionary, not revolutionary, process. Effectively developing and instilling this culture is a gradual, not sudden upheaval of an attitude of "that's the way we've always done it." Designing and creating a culture of evidence is an ongoing process. As Kuh, Gonyea, and Rodriguez (2002) point out, assessments that use evidence-based data tend to provide information that can be reliably used by administrators to inform their decisions. When a culture of evidence is present, people know that they are doing the right things and can describe why they are doing them, and what they are accomplishing through them. Therefore, building a culture of evidence should not be seen as a one-time initiative, but as part of the regular business process of our student affairs division.

Sharing Results in Meaningful Ways

It's time to take everything you've learned from the evaluation and share it with the key stakeholders of your program. How you share your evaluation findings requires careful consideration of **who**, **what**, **where**, **when**, **why** and most importantly, **how**. Ask yourselves the following question to help decide the best way to communicate to each of your potential stakeholder audiences:

1. WHY should we should evaluation results be shared?
2. With WHOM should results be shared?
3. WHAT should be shared?
4. WHEN & WHERE should results be shared?
5. HOW can results be shared in a way that allows others to participate in the process?

1. WHY should we share our evaluation results?

This question is in many ways the most important, because communicating the results of the evaluation can help strengthen and sustain the program. Sharing results can show:

- How the program is **important**
- That program staff are **aware** of changes that need to be made
- How the program is **worthwhile to funders**
- How the program is working to **examine** and **improve** itself
- How **similar projects** at your agency are worthy of support!

Think about which of these reasons is important to your program. Once you've decided *why* you'd like to share your results, it's time to move to step 2…

2. WHO should we share results with?

Evaluation results can and should be shared with anyone who is a key stakeholder in your program. A key stakeholder is a person or group that is affected by a program's success or failure. This can include:

- **Clients, consumers** or **participants** of the program
- **Staff** who work for the program
- **Funders** who provide financial support for the program
- **Board members** who oversee the program
- **Community members** who live near the program

It is important to find a way to communicate the results of your evaluation to *all* stakeholders so they can understand how the program is affecting their **lives, health, jobs,** and **environment**. *What* you specifically communicate to each of these groups will differ. Which leads us to step 3…

3. WHAT should be shared?

Don't share everything you learned from the evaluation with everyone – this could result in information overload!

Determine what **key points** you'd like to make about your evaluation results, for example: *Is the program accomplishing what it set out to accomplish? What is going well? What needs improvement?* If mentioning gaps that were found, be sure to communicate plans to address these.

Be sure to **taper your key points to each audience** because what matters most to one group (e.g. clients) may be entirely different from what another group cares about (e.g. funders). Now you're ready for step 4…

4. WHEN & WHERE should results be shared?

Results can be shared in a variety of settings, and will depend largely on the audience and their role. Think of when this group will *look* and *listen*. For example:

- A **lunch meeting** can be held during which staff discuss the findings
- A written report can be shared with the board at the next **board meeting**
- Results can be included in a **grant application** to funders
- A video presenting results can be shown in the client **waiting room**
- Posters with key findings can be placed in **restrooms** for clients to view
- Result highlights can be shared with the community via **email, text and social networking sites**

Use your imagination and creativity! Now you are ready for step 5…

5. HOW can we share results in a way that allows others to participate in the process?

It is important to gather stakeholder feedback *before* sharing the final results. This can help **clarify what is most important** in the findings. For example:

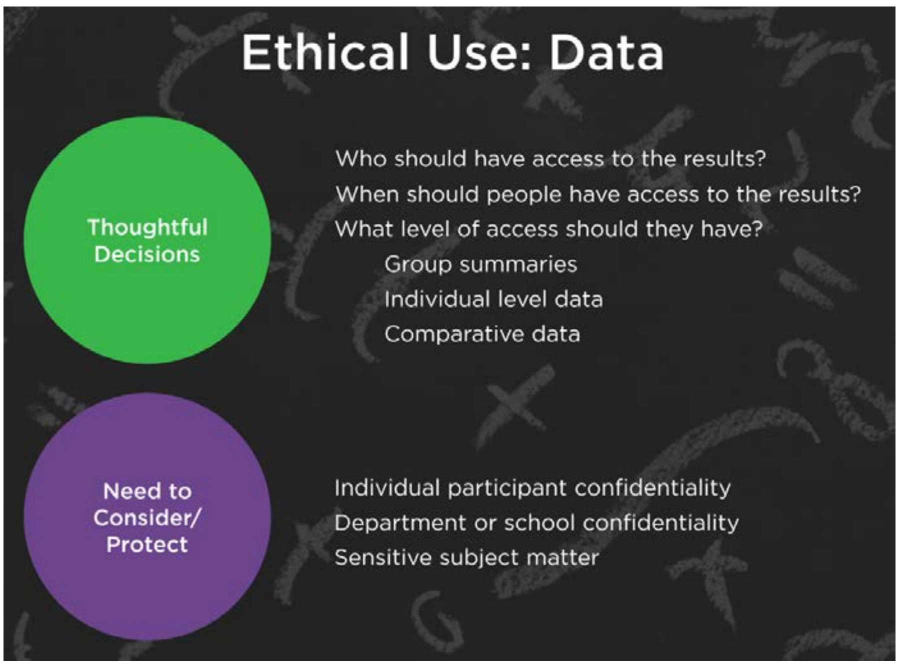
- Hold a **focus group** with clients of the program to share the preliminary findings. Ask them which of the findings are *most important* or *what they would do next*
- Ask program staff to do a **rating exercise**. Discuss the evaluation findings in a meeting, and ask staff to rate each issue on a scale from 1-10, with 10 being the most important
- Hold a **community meeting** to discuss preliminary findings. Ask community members *what, when* and *where* the results would best be shared with others in the community

Example #1

WHY: To help program improvement
WHO: Staff
WHAT: Which program objectives *are* being met, and which *aren't*
WHEN & WHERE: Special 2-hour staff meeting, lunch provided
HOW: Share preliminary results with staff. Gain staff participation by asking them to rate the objectives that aren't being met in terms of *importance to address*. Ask what *solutions* they envision.

Ethical Considerations

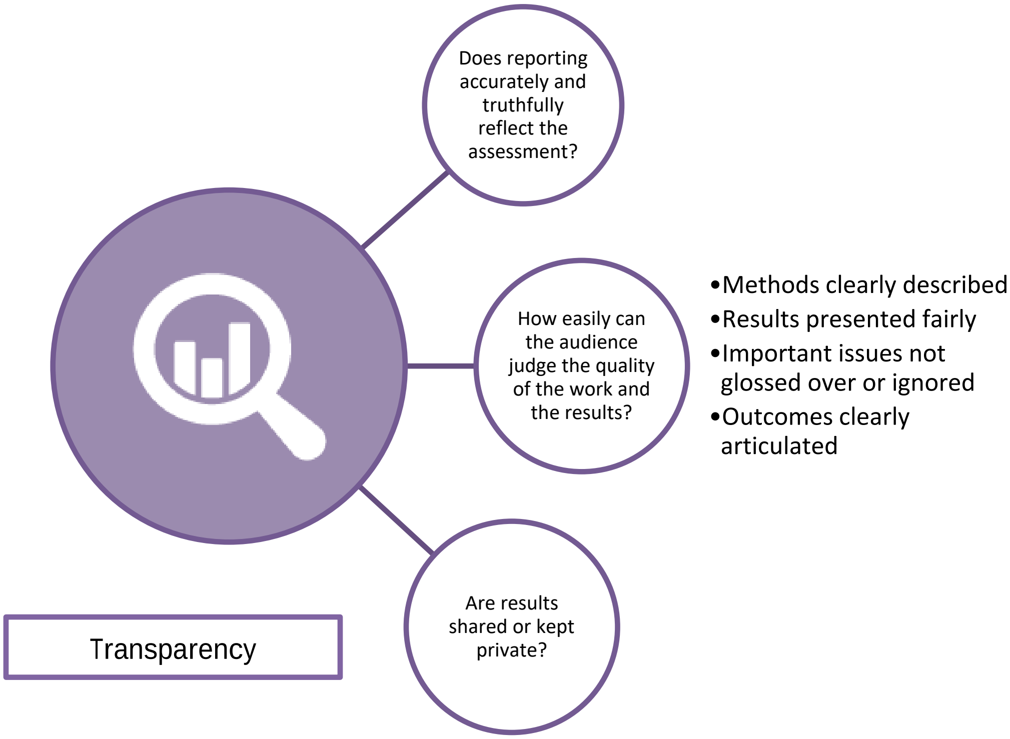
The search for truth, the unbiased reporting of that truth, and using those truths to improve our efforts are the ultimate goals of conducting program evaluation. Ideally, the reporting of evaluation results ought to be an objective task. In practice, however, it is fraught with numerous ethical pitfalls, seldom addressed. The lure of wanting to look good, coupled with the fear of looking bad, may persuade student affairs members to report results in ways that make data appear more interesting, or worthy. There are many ways that evaluation results may be presented that could be construed as unethical - including using inappropriate statistical tests, neglecting negative results, omitting missing data points, failing to report actual numbers of participants, using inappropriate graph labels or terminology, data dredging, and others. Although potentially inaccurate or inflated methods of data reporting may not constitute overt professional misconduct, the intentional misrepresentation of data is a form of fraud or deception. Regardless of outcome, every effort should be made to report evaluation results in the most accurate method. Accuracy and authenticity in data reporting are first and foremost a matter of individual integrity, and are crucial to the preservation of academic credibility, the protection of future participants in our programs/services, and stakeholder's trust in what we say and do.



According to Kinzie (2011), assessment ties into accountability and transparency. For her, accountability centers around three main observations. They include:

- Making plain the student affairs role in promoting student learning;
- Analyzing the progress and success students are having on learning outcomes; and,
- Comprehending the strengths and weaknesses of student’s time at an institution and how to create change.

If accountability is the starting point then transparency should follow from these steps. Now more than ever there is a demand for an openness with tuition and student accomplishments which stems from the 2006 report produced by the U.S. secretary of education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Transparency and accountability are assumed to be mutually reinforcing.



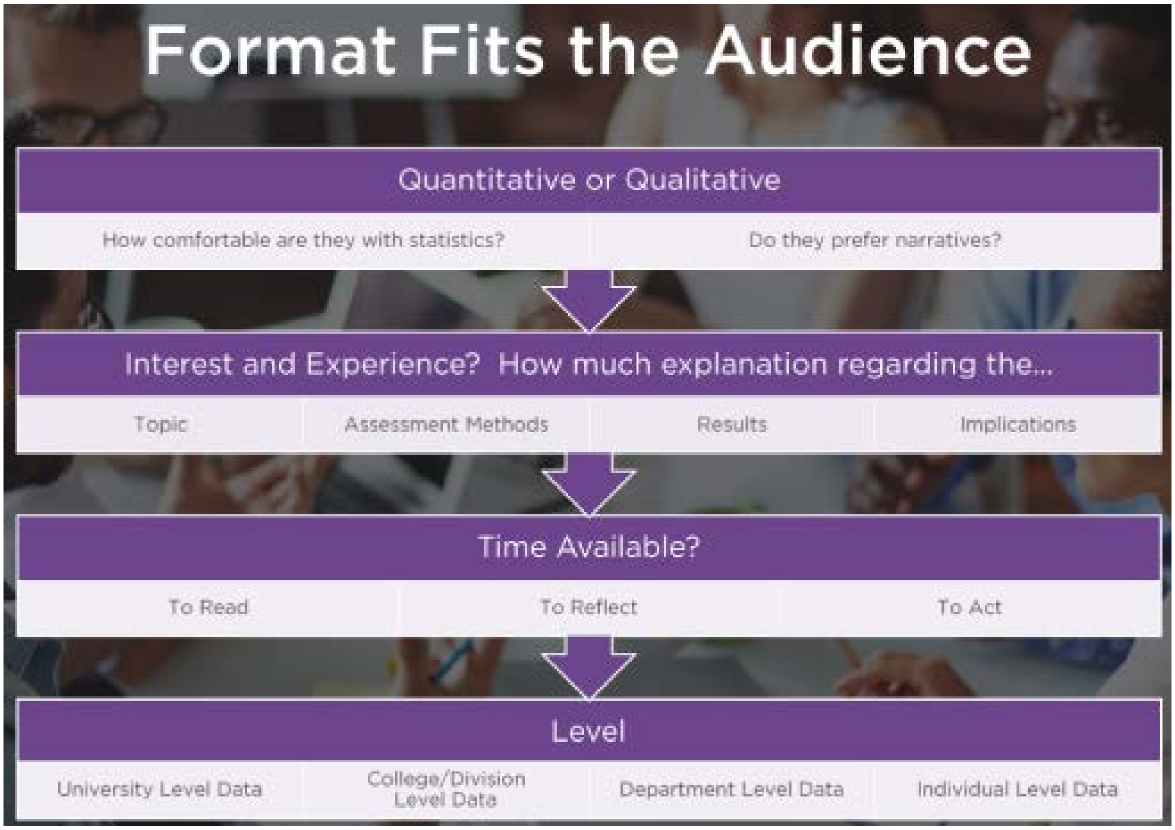
There are multiple reasons to share the results of an assessment project. These include, but are not limited to, documenting the impact of a program on students' lives, promoting student learning and reflection, celebrating successes, and furthering quality improvement efforts.

The Politics of Assessment

Assessment always occurs in a political context that must be taken into account from the start of the project to its completion (Upcraft & Schuh, 2002). Assessment results can influence the allocation of resources, as well as policy development and implementation. For these reasons, the most effective and successful assessment projects should align with the values, beliefs, and interests of the institution as a whole.

Audience Considerations

Because politics can come into play, it is important to know your audience and tailor the presentation of results to fit. For example, sharing results with the Board of Trustees might look and feel different from sharing the results with current students. Internal stakeholders may include administrative decision-makers, Board of Trustees, Faculty, Staff, Students, Staff Assembly, and Faculty Assembly. External stakeholders could include SACSCOC, alumni, neighborhood groups, community members, parents, prospective students, and high school guidance counselors. And certainly this list is not exhaustive.



Tell the Story

People need stories to relate to data. Simplifying and presenting data as stories helps make insights easier to find, digest, and act on. Stories help people make sense of the numbers. The data may hold tremendous amounts of potential value, but not unless insights are uncovered and translated into actions or outcomes. A story supporting the data helps you inform people more quickly about your programs and the impacts they have on our students.

- Make sense & order
- See the whole where there are disparate parts
- Give vision to what the future can look like
- Interactive - people put themselves into stories
- Make your job easier

During a 2009 interview, Google's Chief Economist Dr. Hal R.Varian stated, "The ability to take data—to be able to understand it, to process it, to extract value from it, to visualize it, to communicate it—that's going to be a hugely important skill in the next decades." If something we learn from the data isn't presented to the audience clearly and isn't compelling, no one will act on it and no change will occur.

Data visualization expert Stephen Few said, "Numbers have an important story to tell. They rely on you to give them a clear and convincing voice." Any insight worth sharing is probably best shared as a data story. The phrase "data storytelling" has been associated with many things—data visualizations, infographics, dashboards, data presentations, and so on. Too often data storytelling is interpreted as just visualizing data effectively, however, it is much more than just creating visually-appealing data charts. Data storytelling is a structured approach for communicating data insights, and it involves a combination of three key elements: *data*, *visuals*, and *narrative*.

It's important to understand how these different elements combine and work together in data storytelling. When narrative is coupled with data, it helps to explain to your audience what's happening in the data and why a particular insight is important. Ample context and commentary is often needed to fully appreciate an insight. When visuals are applied to data, they can enlighten the audience to insights that they wouldn't see without charts or graphs. Many interesting patterns and outliers in the data would remain hidden in the rows and columns of data tables without the help of data visualizations.

Finally, when narrative and visuals are merged together, they can engage or even entertain an audience. It's no surprise we collectively spend billions of dollars each year at the movies to immerse ourselves in different lives, worlds, and adventures. When you combine the right visuals and narrative with the right data, you have a data story that can influence and drive improvement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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