

# Needle in the Data Haystack: Reporting Evaluation Results

by Robin Kipke

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When it comes to writing up evaluation results in your Final or Brief Evaluation Report, there can be a lot of data to wade through. Too much detail will overwhelm readers, but too little detail leaves them with unanswered questions. The trick lies in deciding which pieces of information are important enough to include.

You need to report results for every evaluation activity in your plan, but you don't need to include the results on every data point. Your survey, observation, key informant interview or social media campaign record may have included a number of questions or variables, but most likely

some of those results turned out to be more informative than others. And that's what is worth reporting.

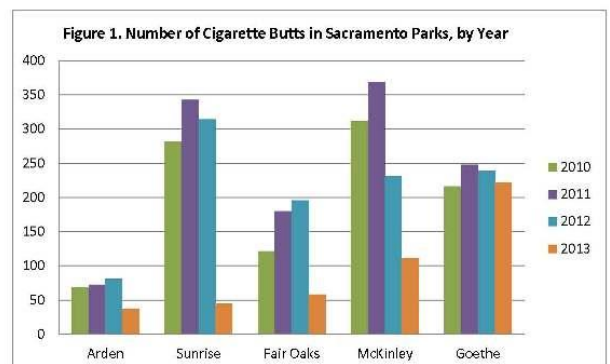
It helps to go back to the original purpose of each evaluation activity and answer three questions:

1. What was it that your project wanted to find out?
2. How did you plan to use the data – to persuade decision makers of the need for policy action, or to inform your own project about the strategies or timing of next steps?
3. What did you find out that was most useful to these end-users?

Keeping the audience and research questions in mind should make it easier to narrow down the results to just key findings that answer the questions. If the information doesn't reveal something new, instructive or valuable to these audiences, you probably don't need to include it.

To report results, use narrative text along with tables, charts and graphs when visual representations will help emphasize, clarify or compare data. There are lots of different formats in which data can be presented.

For ideas, check out this [periodic table](#) of visualization methods. A large majority of formats are more conducive to quantitative data, while others work are designed for use with qualitative data. In any case, avoid creating a chart or graph for every result. You know, too much of a good thing...





In addition to presenting the results of your analysis, be sure to interpret or explain what those data indicated to your project. Without knowing the background and context of the local context, readers may miss the real import of the findings unless you “translate” for them. Include as well an explanation of how your project used the results and what difference that made. For example, if your public opinion survey data showed overwhelming support, what happened when you showed it to county supervisors in order to urge them to consider a smoke-free parks policy?

The upcoming March regional trainings on Writing Final Evaluation Reports will cover this topic in a little greater depth and provide some examples of ways to convey your data in the most compelling way. For more details about training dates and locations, see this [link](#) to the TCEC website.

For more ideas about how to present data effectively in various visual formats, you won’t want to miss our upcoming webinar on **Visual Representations of Data** with guest speaker Lisa Peterson from TECC. The webinar will be held on **Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup> from 10-11:30 a.m.**