

Making Sense: Using FER Feedback to Tell a Better Story

What's in a score? When it comes to the ratings given your Final Evaluation Reports, it's true that the whole is more than just the sum of its parts. In other words, it's really not about the numerical score your report received. Whether you did better than you hoped or worse than you expected, what's important is the feedback the TCEC reviewer is giving about how well you told the story of your project and where your report could be improved.

Don't make it about the score

The scores, which measure the various elements of a final evaluation report outlined in the reporting guidelines of *Tell Your Story*, are useful only in that they can give projects a general idea of where they are in terms of meeting the mark of telling an effective story about their efforts on a particular objective. High scoring reports (receiving 24-32 points) will be archived in ROVER by CTCP with the assumption that they can be good examples of effective write-ups of either project interventions and/or evaluations. Medium and low scores indicate that there is still a lot of room for improvement in future report writing.

Remember that a final evaluation report should not only tell the story of *what happened* as your project worked on a particular objective, it also should describe *how* you went about it. If critical pieces of the picture were left out, your report lost points according to the related section of the rating form. When that occurred, reviewers specified what seemed lacking.

How should feedback be used?

We hope that you project directors will use the feedback as an opportunity to meet with your evaluator and review where there was a mismatch between the way information was presented about your efforts and the expectations outlined by CTCP and TCEC in *Tell Your Story*. Take some time to sit down together and review the report with the scoring sheet and the guidelines so that you can identify what things you reported well and where a section could have been stronger. It's important to do this early in your new funding cycle, so that you can be sure that you are collecting, documenting, analyzing and using data in a manner that will have the most utility to your program (and will fulfill evaluation expectations).



Good reports include three key elements

As you review and discuss the feedback for each section, focus on a few overarching themes we emphasized in the regional trainings, webinar and newsletter which addressed report writing. Throughout your report, was the following made clear about each intervention and evaluation activity?

- **rationale** -- the purpose of the activity and reasons for conducting it in the way you did
- **sequence** -- how this activity built on activities that came before and helped move the objective forward

- **utility** -- what difference did this activity make? what was learned as a result and how did it inform activities that followed?



Although it may sound corny, it really does come down to being able to tell a good story---with just enough detail to answer people's questions but not so much that you bore them to tears. If pieces like the rationale or the utility are left out, the story becomes hard to follow. And because the storyline is about conveying results, if you don't explain sufficiently about how the data was collected, then your audience begins to wonder if they are being told a tall tale. Your report needs to provide adequate explanation of how activities were carried out and why certain decisions were made in order for them to trust that your results really represent what you say they do.

So there you go. A compelling final evaluation report takes a little bit of the old "once upon a time" and a dash of the scientific processes of Sherlock Holmes. Discover how your next report can do the same by pouring over the comments you received and figuring out where you can improve!

Photos by Microsoft, Matthew and Tracie, and m_bahareth

