# LEARN THE PARTS OF AN IMPACT STORY.

Some impact reports or forms use different terms than the ones listed here, but the intent of all impact statements is the same; the basic principles outlined here still apply.

issue

action

results/outputs

IMPACT

WHAT IS the ISSUE, WHY WAS IT an ISSUE & FOR WHOM IS IT an ISSUE?

- Connect to **hot topics.**
- Make people **care.**

WHAT WAS DONE?

- Describe **major** activities.
- Tell **who** was involved.
- Be **brief** and **clear.**
- **Don't** go on and on about theory.
- **No jargon.**
- Highlight **innovation.**
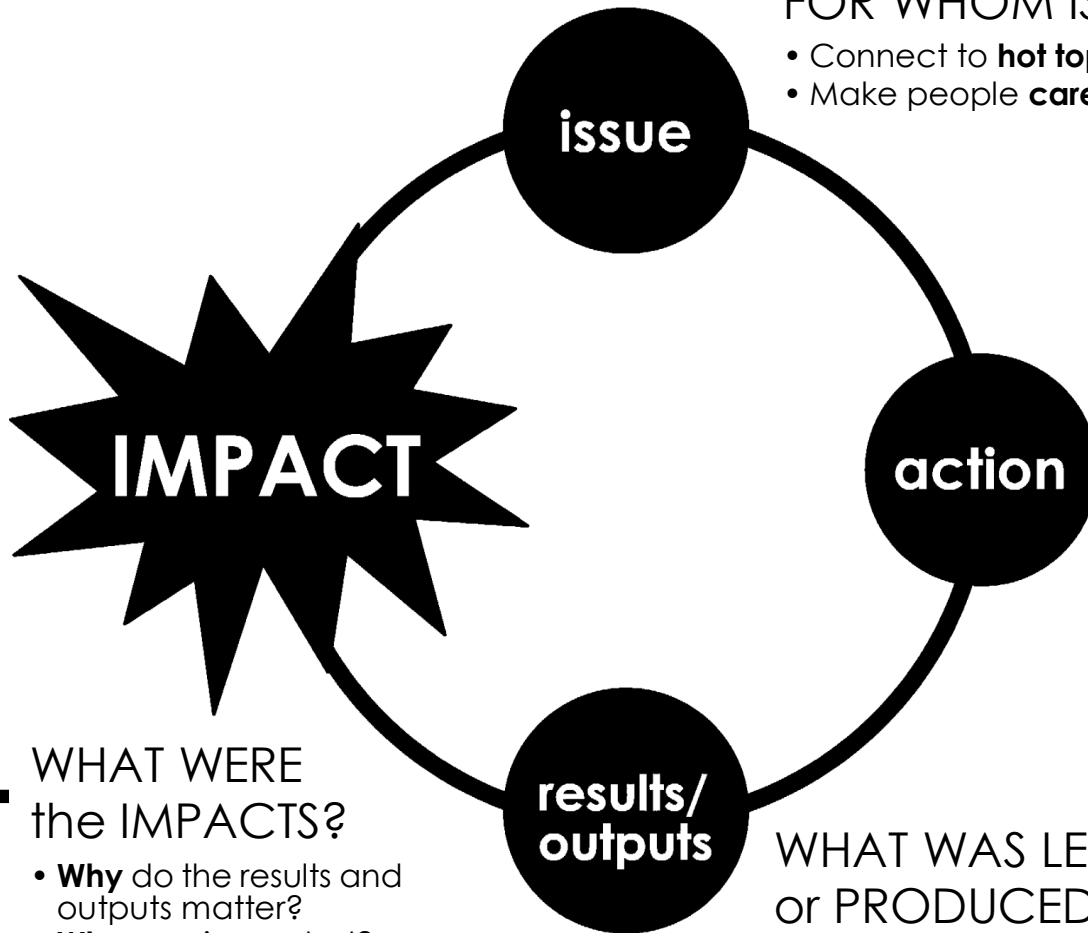
WHAT WERE the IMPACTS?

- **Why** do the results and outputs matter?
- **Who** was impacted?
- **Where** did the impact occur?
- **How big** was the impact?

WHAT WAS LEARNED or PRODUCED?

- Share **major** findings.
- **Don't** list tons of data.
- Share **important** tools, products, workshops, and other outputs.

IMPACT = CHANGE IN

- Knowledge
- Behavior
- Economic, environmental, or social condition

PUBLIC VALUE

- Go beyond program participants or a specific study site.
- How does the project or program affect the general public or a broader area?

CAN'T IDENTIFY IMPACTS?

- Think about **potential** impacts.
- Explain how your work creates a foundation for **future** impacts.
- Describe the **ripple effect.**
- Show how your work **played a part** in certain impacts.
- Share **anecdotes** as examples.
- Remember: at the start of a project, **plan** how you will **measure** impacts.

IDENTIFY THE PARTS OF *YOUR* IMPACT STORY.

Jot down notes and key words to answer the following questions and start building your impact statement.

• **What issue is being addressed?**

• **Who cares about this issue?**

• **Why do they care about the issue?**

• **What did the project/program do to address the issue?**

• **Who was involved?**

• **Did the project/program use any unique or innovative methods or tools?**

• **What were the major results or outputs?**

• **What impacts did the project/program have or could it have?**

• **Who was impacted?**

• **Where did this impact occur?**

• **How big was this impact?**

USE YOUR NOTES TO WRITE AN IMPACT STATEMENT.

DID YOU REMEMBER TO:
• NOT run on about **methods/theory**?
• NOT use **jargon**?
• Write with an **active** voice?
• Be **clear** and **concise**?
• Use numbers to show **magnitude**?
• Include a **link** or **contact** for more information?

FINESSE YOUR IMPACT STATEMENT.

FORMATTING TIPS:

When you are not given a form to structure your impact statement, you have to decide how to best present your work.

- Keep it **organized** (e.g., group your impacts by type of impact or by objective).
- Use **formatting** (e.g., headings, bullets, font styles) to break up and draw attention to information.
- Focus on the **highlights**.
- Include **links** or **attachments** to supplemental materials.
- Include **visual aids/photos**.

Sometimes, you will be asked to use a form to report impacts.

- Follow the **instructions**.
- Fill out **all** sections.
- Submit **on time.**

WRITING FOR A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE?

GENERAL PUBLIC
- Big "so what" **hook** at the beginning
- Make it *relatable* (use **visuals** or **analogies**)
- Be *straightforward* and *transparent*
- Share **anecdotal impacts**

MEDIA
- Start with the impact—the **"big news"**
- Show how your work is *unique/innovative*
- Use **keywords** and connect to **timely topics**
- Share supporting **data** in supplemental materials

LEGISLATORS/POLICYMAKERS
- Relate your work to **national issues** or **topics/ communities** the representative *cares about*
- Focus on *measured* impacts and **ROI**
- Show the *public* **value**
- **Include an ask**: what is still needed; what's next

FUNDERS/PARTNERS
- Relate your work to **topics/communities** the organization *cares about*
- Connect your impacts to your original **objectives**
- Focus on *measured* impacts and **ROI**

UNIVERSITIES
- Emphasize the role of any **special tools, labs, expertise** at your institution
- Show how your university is *making a difference*

SOCIAL MEDIA
- Keep it **super short** and to the point
- Use **hashtags** to connect to conversations
- **Tag** the accounts of people/institutions involved
- Use *high-quality, simple* **visuals**
- **Engage** with followers

GOOD TIMING
- Share your impacts when people are primed to **pay attention.**
- Have impact statements *on hand* in case of unexpected requests or opportunities.
- Know when conversations related to your work are taking place so you can **join.**

FOR ALL AUDIENCES:
- Build **relationships** (familiarity, trust)
- Identify **who did the work** and **funding sources.**
- Provide a way to **get in touch** and **learn more.**

REVIEW IMPACT STATEMENT EXAMPLES.

DISCLAIMER: Please do NOT use the following impact statements outside of training purposes. While these example impact statements are based on real cases, they have been modified and are NOT intended to provide information. The examples may include inaccuracies, confusing statements, made-up names, and broken links—this is intentional for training purposes.

EXAMPLE 1: Public health officials want to know if their nutrition-related programs are leading to healthier diets, and people who invest in nutrition programs, including taxpayers, want to make sure they are getting bang for their buck. Assessing what foods people eat is difficult because people have a hard time remembering and accurately reporting what they eat. Nutrition and biomedical informatics researchers at the University of Utah addressed this problem by developing a new tool that doesn't rely on people reporting what they eat. Instead, the researchers used the barcodes of foods families purchase at stores to classify foods and created a scoring system to assess the healthiness of the foods. In a national sample of over 4,000 households, the new tool performed more accurately than conventional diet quality assessment tools and was much easier to use and more reliable than self-reporting. In the future, the new tool could make it easier to collect data needed to understand relationships between food choices and health outcomes, and it could be used to help determine whether or not nutrition programs and policies are working. These are key steps in creating effective health interventions.

EXAMPLE 2: Water quality analyses showed that iris reduced PO4-P concentrations in treatement tank 3.

EXAMPLE 3a: The cropland in the Midwest is among the most productive in the world, but only if adequate drainage is provided. Much of the region uses underground pipes or "tiles" to channel excess water away from fields, but nitrogen, phosphorous, and bacteria can make their way into tile drainage systems and enter lakes, rivers, and groundwater. This pollution can be harmful to humans and can create "dead zones" where aquatic life cannot survive. A team of 22 land-grant university researchers worked with USDA scientists and industry partners to design new technologies and strategies that improve drainage. Based on this research, the U.S. EPA updated drainage regulations and recommendations. Since 2017, farmers in 12 states have installed 32 bioreactors, which have prevented over 300,000 pounds of nitrate from entering the Mississippi River so far. This has significantly reduced water quality problems and related environmental and human health risks. Furthermore, improved drainage can boost crop yields and reduce variability from year to year, providing a stable source of food for consumers and predictable profits for farmers.

EXAMPLE 3b: Nitrate is a necessary ingredient in fertilizers used by farmers in the Midwest, but without proper interventions, excess nitrate often drains off farmland and pollutes bodies of water. The excess nitrate often ends up in the Mississippi River and makes its way to the Gulf of Mexico, where it creates a "dead zone" and impairs fisheries. But thanks to a project funded by the USDA, over 300,000 pounds of nitrate have been kept out of the Gulf of Mexico since 2017. As part of a Hatch Multistate project, land-grant universities in 12 states along the Mississippi River worked together to address drainage issues. For example, University of Illinois scientists designed bioreactors that can be installed on farmland and filter 90% of nitrate from drainage water, while Mississippi State University Extension developed an app that 32 farmers have used so far to fine tune bioreactor placement. Scientists at the University of Tennessee identified cover crops that reduce nitrate runoff by 40%. Altogether, these drainage improvement have contributed the lower-than-average nitrate loads in the Gulf of Mexico in recent years and a smaller "dead zone." Learn more about this work: bit.ly/agricultural-drainage

EXAMPLE 4: In the U.S., about 29 million people have diabetes. Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native adults are about twice as likely to have diagnosed diabetes than non-Hispanic white adults. Diabetes can lead to a number of other health issues. In 2015, diabetes was the underlying cause listed on nearly 80,000 death certificates and a contributing cause listed on over 172,000 others. To date, $176 billion was spent for direct medical costs, and reduced productivity cost the U.S. economy another $69 billion. USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture is a leader in the fight against diabetes, with research and consumer education projects spanning all 50 states and U.S. territories. For example:
- The University of California implemented a multi-tiered food incentive and education program with a supermarket chain that has 41 stores in low-income areas of Southern California.
- Penn State Extension established "Dining with Diabetes," a series of nutrition and health classes, in 46 Pennsylvania counties. 2,880 people have attended so far. Half of the program participants reported improved blood sugar levels, 33 percent reported eating more produce, and 17 percent exercised more.

EXAMPLE 5: Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and more. Faced with labor shortages, global competition, demand for higher quality, and concern about environmental impacts, the industry is urgently seeking automated devices to aid with growing, harvesting, handling, and processing. For the past five years, a team of researchers at land-grant universities in multiple states has developed automated sensors, designed mechanized devices, and partnered with manufacturers and farmers to commercialize and implement new technologies. For example:
- University of Florida researchers designed an autonomous robot that counts and maps citrus fruits. Mapping and monitoring fruit yields showed farmers where there were issues, helping them make targeted management decisions that saved time and money and improved yields by 15%.
- Washington State University developed unmanned aerial vehicles to deter birds that eat and damage fruit crops.
- Penn State designed a harvest-assist device that eliminated ladder falls during apple harvest and reduced the time pickers spent in awkward, dangerous postures from 65% to 43% of picking time. The device also increased the number of apples harvested per second by 50%.

Altogether, these advances in automation are helping the specialty crop industry overcome labor shortages, make smart management decisions, and conserve resources. By making the specialty crop industry more efficient and sustainable, these advances should result in significant savings for growers and consumers and stable food production for a growing population.

REVIEW IMPACT STATEMENT EXAMPLES, continued.

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EXAMPLE 6: University of California researchers characterized specific bacteria taxa and metabolites consumed in foods and beverages that reduce the prevalence of obesity and Type 2 diabetes.

EXAMPLE 7: Young adulthood often involve big changes in living and social situations and declines in healthy behaviors. For example, many young adults live on college campuses, where there may be limited access to healthy foods and physical activity as well as high stress and peer pressure. Researchers at West Virginia University, the University of Tennessee, and Kansas State University developed the "Get FRUVED" program to help campuses support healthy habits among their students. The program starts with an assessment that measures campus food access and availability in vending machines, convenience stores, dining halls, and restaurants; walkability; bike-ability; recreation facilities and programs; and health-related policies. Then, researchers offer specific suggestions for campus improvements and provide online programming that teaches students about healthy habits for nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and stress management. So far, 90 college campuses have used the Get FRUVED program to identify campus needs and make changes that promote health. Get FRUVED led to increased fruit and vegetable intake among student participants as well as decreased waist circumference, systolic blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and body mass index. These kinds of reductions during young adulthood can significantly reduce the likelihood of chronic disease development over a lifetime. Learn more about the Get Fruved program: bit.ly/HealthyYoungAdults

EXAMPLE 8: Determining when peanuts are at the right maturity to harvest is important, but difficult. Significant yield and quality losses can occur if farmers dig peanuts too early or too late. University of Georgia scientists designed the Peanut Pod Blasting Method to accurately determine peanut maturity and the best time to harvest. Using this method, farmers have saved an average of 300 pounds of peanuts per acre and increased gross returns by $60 per acre (based on the 2015 contract price of peanuts). Statewide, that's an extra 173 million pounds of peanuts worth an estimated $35 million.

Funding: Hatch/USDA-NIFA, Georgia Peanut Board
More information: ugapeanutteam.org
Contact: John Smith

EXAMPLE 9. Storage, shipping, and handling can lead to bruising, browning, rot, and deterioration of texture and flavor, making the fruit unappealing to consumers and causing major losses for the industry. After adopting a research-based storage strategy recommended by Washington State University scientists, a major pear packer in the Pacific Northwest documented a $2,000,000 annual increase in market value and almost $800,000 reduction in repacking costs for a single pear variety. Improved, consistent sales indicate buyer confidence in fruit quality also increased. Learn more: bit.ly/fresh-fruit-quality

EXAMPLE 10a: In 2022, youth participation in EFNEP increased. In 2022, NIFA provided $69.4 million for Land-grant University Cooperative Extension partners to conduct EFNEP in all 50 states, six U.S. territories and the District of Columbia. EFNEP employed 1,285 educators who worked directly with 187,663 youths, providing tailored lessons on diet quality, food resource management, food safety, and food security.

EXAMPLE 10b: EFNEP instructors led a six-week course to teach 600 high school students in West Virginia about nutrition, meal planning, cooking skills, and food safety. 75 percent of students showed improved knowledge and skills. One year after the course ended, the mother of one of the students reported that her son now helps plan grocery lists and cook meals at home instead of eating fast food and has a job in the food industry training to be a chef. Over the past year, the family has saved money on food expenses, strengthened their family relationship, and had better health reports at their health check-ups. "I never dreamed how a simple class could change my family's daily life and future so much and help my wallet at the same time," she said.

EXAMPLE 10c: For this example, please review the full 2022 EFNEP Impact Report here: https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/EFNEP%202022%20Impact%20Report.pdf

OTHER RESOURCES:
- See how MRF Impacts prepares Impact Statements for USDA NIFA-supported Hatch Multistate projects: mrfimpacts.org
- See how USDA NIFA writes about research activities and impacts on their blog and social media and in various e-newsletters and annual reports: nifa.usda.gov/impacts
- Check out your institution's news stories, web articles, magazines, and social media
- Work with you institution's communications and/or public relations staff and understand your institution's brand and messaging; they may also provide assistance or resources for improving and sharing your impact statements
- Work with your institution's evaluation staff so that you fully understand reporting requirements and processes; they may have trainings or other resources available

CRITIQUE THE IMPACT STATEMENT EXAMPLES.

EXAMPLE 1:
- Uses plain language
- Good flow
- Know who's involved
- Focuses on one important output and explains why the new tool is better and how it will be used
- Good example of potential impact
- Might be stronger if it more explicitly circled back to "public health officials" at the end of the statement
- "bang for buck" and "intervention" may not sit well with some audiences

EXAMPLE 2:
- This is just a result, not an impact
- Uses technical jargon and abbreviations
- A general audience can't tell the importance of this finding without context about the issue and impact

EXAMPLE 3a:
- Explain issue briefly; defines "tile" drainage in simple terms
- The action ("design new technologies and strategies") is vague, but hits the basics; could share details via link
- Discusses impact in terms of change in behavior—influencing regulations and installing bioreactors
- Indicates magnitude of impact on the environment
- Impact is only mentioned for nitrate, but phosphorous and bacteria are mentioned in the issue section
- Connects these impacts to society in a general way—profits, food security, water quality—but doesn't provide specific numbers

EXAMPLE 3b:
- This is another way of writing about the project in 3a
- In this version, the focus is tighter--only on nitrate run off
- This version includes more specifics about who did what and gives a more examples of key outputs and results.
- Focuses on the change in environmental condition; could be bolstered with numbers or anecdotes about the impacts on water quality and fisheries
- "contributes to" avoids taking too much credit
- For some audiences, expanding focus to include impacts related to food security and farmer profits may be wise

EXAMPLE 4:
- The intro paragraph explains the issue, but uses too many numbers and feels overwhelming
- Bullet 1 uses too much jargon and doesn't explain the importance well; issue, impact, and stakeholders get lost
- Bullet 2 tells who did what and indicates the magnitude of changes in behavior/health
- The statement as a whole needs a conclusion about how these projects impact the social and economic issues mentioned in the intro

EXAMPLE 5:
- Defines "specialty crops"
- Lists the challenges/issues
- Gives key examples of actions, outputs and their impacts
- Bullets 1 and 3 use numbers to show impact magnitude
- In bullet 1, an example issue the robot can detect and an example "targeted management decision" would help readers clearly see how the robot saves farmers time and money and improves yields
- It's okay to focus on these 3 examples, but the statement would be even stronger if it also included examples that connected back to the listed issues of "quality" and "environmental impacts"
- Closing paragraph is general but at least alludes to the public value of the work

EXAMPLE 6:
- This is not impact; this is an action and findings
- On it's own, this sentence is too technical to make sense to a lay audience; it needs more context
- Obesity and diabetes are timely topics, but the statement fails to identify stakeholders or convey the work's value

EXAMPLE 7:
- Uses (mostly) plain language; some of the health metrics listed at the end are a bit technical
- Decent flow through all parts of an impact story
- Know who did the work
- The statement goes beyond number of participating campuses to share impacts (change in health)
- Focuses on impacts to participants; sharing the public value could strengthen the statement for some audiences
- For some audiences, an anecdote or quote would make the impact resonate deeper and feel more relatable
- Includes link to learn more

EXAMPLE 8:
- Explains the issue in concise, simple way
- Know who did the work and who funded
- Briefly states action and output (a new method); method details shared via link for those interested
- Connects action and impact back to the issue
- Uses numbers to show the magnitude—includes insight into the impact calculations, but keeps it simple, brief
- Focuses on change in economic condition, peanut farmers, peanut industry; for some audience, the statement may want to allude to the public value, impacts on consumers, etc.
- Has contact for follow up

EXAMPLE 9:
- Short, but hits all elements of an impact statement
- Not much detail about the actual research, but links to a report with more information
- The impacts stated are clearly linked to the issues/stakeholders mentioned

EXAMPLE 10a:
- Need to spell out EFNEP and NIFA
- Increased participation is a change, but not impact here
- Says what EFNEP educators did but no impacts shared
- The numbers included here don't mean much to most audiences beyond policymakers or internal NIFA staff

EXAMPLE 10b:
- Need to spell out EFNEP
- Say what was done and who participated AND follows up with impacts--changes in knowledge behavior, health/wellness, saved money
- Includes anecdote to make the impact resonate more
- 75% doesn't seem that great; should include more context about this number to show its true value; or, focus on the anecdote to show the program's impact

EXAMPLE 10c:
- Includes a lot of info in the opening pages, but the use of headings and formatting allows readers to easily skip to other sections
- Uses visual aids to share a lot of info in a digestible way; if the info was shared as text, it would feel overwhelming
- Includes statement about ongoing work and need for continued support after proving value of past work
- Uses anecdotes to supplement the data
- Includes links and contact info