

RESULT! WHAT GOOD IMPACT REPORTING LOOKS LIKE

NPC briefing, January 2016

Katie Boswell and Sarah Handley

On 16 July 2015, NPC held a seminar on how to plan and produce a good impact report. The event, which was chaired by **Sue Wixley, Director of Communications at NPC**, took place as part of our impact measurement seminar series, designed to give charities an introduction to various aspects of impact measurement.

At the event, **Sarah Handley, Senior Consultant at NPC**, outlined NPC's best practice guidance for reporting on impact. Delegates then heard from **Parita Doshi, Head of Impact at Oomph! Wellness**, and **Emma Robinson, Communications Officer at Leap Confronting Conflict**, who showed how they have put this theory into practice within their organisations. This report highlights the main themes discussed and summarises advice from our speakers, drawing on the experience of those in attendance.

What is impact reporting?

Impact reporting means communicating the difference you made to the people you are trying to help, or to the issue you are trying to improve.

Impact reporting often takes the form of an impact report or annual report, but it can also include:

- reports to funders, supporters, investors, and commissioners;
- board reports, management information, and organisational reviews;
- internal communications with staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries; and
- fundraising and communications material, such as websites, brochures and leaflets.

Good impact reporting is an essential part of impact measurement; it allows you and others to learn from your work, and it promotes a culture of accountability and transparency. However, many charities struggle with what information to include in their reports (and what to leave out), and how best to present their impact data.

This briefing outlines the principles of good impact reporting. It also provides practical advice about the questions that your impact report should answer; how to make the most of existing data; and how to communicate your impact to different audiences.

Why should you report your impact?

Reporting your impact can help you to:

- review your impact against your vision and goals;
- create a learning organisation where people focus on results and adapt and improve services;
- motivate staff, volunteers, and trustees through celebrating achievements;
- build trust and credibility with supporters, funders, policy makers, and beneficiaries; and
- share lessons with similar organisations.

‘Our primary business is to create social change, so we need to report on the difference we’re making.’

Sarah Handley, NPC

Case study: Parita Doshi, Oomph! Wellness

What?

Oomph! Wellness is a social enterprise that aims to improve the quality of life of older people through fun, inclusive, and interactive exercise classes, primarily in residential care homes.

Oomph! decided to put impact at the heart of everything they do and created an annual impact report that reflected this commitment.

Why?

As Parita explained: *‘Impact really does sit at the heart of everything we do. Creating an annual impact report was a natural step in communicating what we’ve been doing throughout the year.’* Oomph! uses its impact report to celebrate and showcase their existing clients, add credibility when speaking with stakeholders, and enhance their value proposition to care homes.

How?

Oomph! collected data and stories in a systematic way throughout the year. Every six weeks, their front-line staff completed a simple text message survey, which asked about their outputs (eg, number of classes delivered) and outcomes (eg, impact on residents). Oomph! also gathered regular quotes and stories from instructors, care home clients, residents and their families. This was recorded in written format or in alternative formats like videos.

The Oomph! staff organised all of this information into a logical order, from the background to their theory of change, through to activities, outputs and outcomes. The impact report starts with an executive summary and an infographic that gives an overview of the report and shows the key statistics. It finishes with songs written by staff and care home residents, reflecting the ‘fun’ side of Oomph!’s work.

The final report is visually attractive, with lots of colour, pull-out boxes, and photos. Oomph! worked with a designer to make their impact report look professional and to convey Oomph!’s brand of being fun, inclusive and interactive.

Oomph! also invited input from all of their internal stakeholders, who each wanted something different out of an impact report. The end report met the needs of different audiences, and received good feedback from across the organisation and beyond.

Getting started: The essentials of impact reporting

What should you report?

Your report should address the following key questions:

- **Need:** What is the problem that you, as a charity, are trying to address?
- **Activities:** What are you doing to address this?
- **Outcomes:** What are the results of these activities?
- **Evidence:** How do you know you've made a difference?
- **Lessons learnt:** How will you change your work for the better?

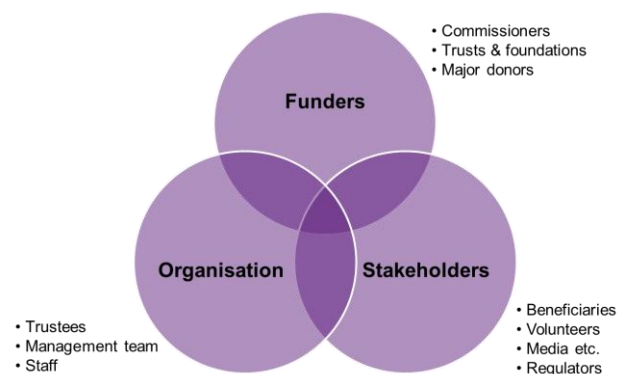
'Consider whether these questions need to be addressed in order. Some of the most exciting impact reports are structured around outcomes not activities.'

Sarah Handley, NPC

Who should you report to?

Start by identifying your audience, and what they *need* to know in order to understand and appreciate the impact of your work. For example, Trustees might need to know what is and isn't working and why, while your beneficiaries might want to know your plans to improve your services. Managers might need detailed written reports whereas you might want to consider using infographics for the media or your regular donors. If you have multiple audiences with different needs, you may need different report formats for different audiences.

Figure 1. The different audiences of an impact report



How should you report impact?

The [principles of good impact reporting](#)¹ produced by NPC in partnership with a range of sector organisations, sets out six general principles for charities, social enterprises and community organisations to communicate their impact.

1. **Clarity:** *'The reader can quickly and easily understand the organisation through a coherent narrative that connects charitable aims, plans, activities and results.'*

Clarity can be as over-arching as how you structure your report, or about details like avoiding jargon and replacing long lists of statistics and explanations with a simple infographic.

2. **Accessibility:** *'Relevant information can be found by anyone who looks for it, in a range of formats suitable for different stakeholders.'*

Considering your audience is key (see Figure 1); think about what they need and want to know, as well as what you want them to know.

3. **Transparency:** *'Reporting is full, open and honest.'*

Some of the best impact reports reflect on an organisation's shortcomings, as well as its successes.

¹ New Philanthropy Capital et al. (2012) [The principles of good impact reporting](#).

4. **Accountability:** *'Reporting connects with stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries to tell them what they need to know, and provide reassurance.'*

Impact reporting is all about being accountable for your work. Your report should reflect this, and you should be upfront about your commitment and motivations.

5. **Verifiability:** *'Claims about impact are backed up appropriately, allowing others to review. This can range from informal stakeholder feedback to external audit.'*

At NPC we have a saying: *'No numbers without stories, no stories without numbers.'* Providing a range of [qualitative and quantitative evidence](#) for your impact is key to the depth and breadth of your report.²

6. **Proportionality:** *'The level and detail of reporting reflects the size and complexity of the organisation, and the complexity of the changes they're trying to bring about.'*

Brevity, where possible, is always welcome. Some topics are more suited to detail than others, and it is worth thinking about how topics can be summarised in places for those looking for a quick overview of your work.

Top tips for impact reporting

Start planning early

Impact reporting works best when it's something you do as you go along, rather than just at the end of the year. Prioritise which outcomes you want to measure and ensure that you are collecting relevant data throughout the year. Then, when planning your impact reporting, think about what messages you want to communicate and what your audience is interested in.

Engage all of your staff

Impact measurement is a collaborative effort. Liaise early on with front-line staff about what data they are already collecting and how they can record outcomes as they go along. Build a culture of learning across the whole organisation by including the impact report in inductions and job descriptions, reviewing it in meetings and appraisals, and sharing impact stories in regular staff communication. Engage with trustees about the importance of impact reporting and ask them what they find useful.

Learn from others

Read other charities' impact reports to see what works well and what does not. Think about what is most engaging to you as a reader, and what you can apply to your own reporting. Ask somebody who is not familiar with your work to read your own impact report and give you their feedback.

Be creative!

Explore alternative ways of gathering evidence and communicating impact. For example, Oomph! Wellness used videos made by class instructors throughout the year to gather feedback on the impact of its exercise classes on care home residents. Think about how to make your impact report more interactive through presenting it digitally using online tools like issuu.com, publicising content from your report on your social media channels, or having a launch event with personal testimony.

² For guidance on collecting a range of impact data, see Thorne, M. and Noble, J. (2016) [Stories and numbers: Collecting the right impact data](#). New Philanthropy Capital.

Case study: Emma Robinson, Leap Confronting Conflict

What?

Leap Confronting Conflict is a charity that empowers young people to make changes in their lives through exploring their relationship with conflict. The charity decided to improve their impact report to make it more user-friendly, and to make the messaging as clear as possible.

Why?

Leap's existing impact report provided details about the individual impacts of all of their projects and programmes, but without a strong thread or narrative connecting them together. Emma recalls: *'I didn't really gain much understanding about Leap by looking at our previous impact report, other than that we work with young people who are offending. It was actually hard to navigate the report and to me it felt fairly disjointed.'*

Emma looked at around 30 other charity impact reports to understand what worked well and what did not, focusing particularly on the structure of the report and clarity of the messaging. This inspired her to change Leap's impact report to make it clearer, shorter, and more focused on key messages.

How?

In 2014, Emma simplified the structure of Leap's impact report, organising it around the four areas of work that Leap had clarified in a recent branding exercise. The contents page changed from a list of activities to an infographic that summarised the work that Leap does in terms of training young people, training practitioners, conducting research, and influencing policy and practice. This made the report easier to engage with and made Leap's purpose clearer. It also used the space more effectively—the 2014 report was four pages shorter than the previous report.

The new, clearer structure also helped Leap to decide what information to include in its impact report. The 2014 report focused in on fewer projects, but showcased the full range of the work that Leap does in schools, prisons, and communities.

Leap's 2014 report is bold about its impact, but is also careful not to over-claim—being clear about where the organisation lacks evidence of its impact. For example, Leap's data collection and impact measurement has become increasingly rigorous over the last few years, but its evidence is not yet statistically robust due to the small numbers of young people in its programmes.

By pointing out its limitations, Leap increased its transparency and added credibility to its findings. It also meant that the impact report engaged the reader in the improvement process that Leap was going through. As Emma points out: *'often the process can be just as interesting for the reader.'*

Final thoughts

'We're talking about good impact reporting, not perfect impact reporting. Start with the resources that you have and don't get paralysed by the idea of what "perfect" is.'

Sue Wixley, NPC

Good impact reporting brings clarity and transparency to the work of charities and social enterprises. It connects organisations with stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries, builds trust and support, and provides reassurance. This briefing has sought to provide practical advice about what, why, and how charities should report their impact. Charities can struggle to know where to begin with impact reporting, but with simple planning, the right information, and an understanding of their audience, charities can achieve better communication of the difference they make.

More in this series

This guide is part of a series developed from NPC seminars to give an introduction to various aspects of impact measurement. Other topics in this series include:

[Keeping it in proportion: Impact measurement for small charities](#)

[Stories and numbers: Collecting the right impact data](#)

[Measuring your campaigning impact: An introduction](#)

We will soon have new dates and topics for our measurement seminars in 2016, so check the [events section](#) of our website for the latest information.

Further resources

New Philanthropy Capital et al. (2012) [The principles of good impact reporting.](#)

Handley, S., 'Basic questions an impact report should answer', NPC, 20 October 2014.

Ni Ogain, E. et al. (2010) [Talking about results.](#) New Philanthropy Capital.

Kazimirski, A. and Pritchard, D. (2014) [NPC's four pillar approach.](#) New Philanthropy Capital.

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TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy which occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: NPC's mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact. We can help funders and those they fund to connect and transform the way they work together to achieve their vision.

New Philanthropy Capital
185 Park Street, London SE1 9BL
020 7620 4850
info@thinkNPC.org

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