Communicating the Impact of Funded Projects:

A How to Guide

One way to bring awareness to the role of the State Administering Agency (SAA), and the value your agency brings, particularly to partners who may be unfamiliar with federal grants, is to communicate who the money goes to and what it ultimately does for individual communities, cities and beyond. This guide will help you describe and publicize the work of your funded projects, as well as the impact of those funded projects on your state’s/territory’s criminal justice system as a whole.

**How Do You Measure Success?**

Before disseminating information about funded programs, it’s helpful to determine criteria for a successful program, or to compile a list of markers of success. Each SAA is uniquely situated, with differing expectations and capacities for evaluating the success, impact and outcomes of funded programs. The best way to know if a program is effective in what it sets out to do is by conducting a rigorous evaluation. Evaluations of funded programs are considered the gold standard in terms of determining success. However, evaluating every single funded program most likely is not attainable for your agency. There are other markers of success to consider. For some ideas, please see below:

* Strong collaborations/relationships with other agencies, community-based organizations, or with the community itself.
* The funded program is doing something unique or innovative. This could be an innovative collaboration, innovative programming or services, or maybe the program targets its services to a particular group of individuals that has been disproportionately affected by a particular criminal justice issue.
* Data is important, but personal stories are, too. Personal success stories could come from progress reports, PMT reports, monitoring visits and/or other interactions. Maybe you have a prosecutor who has worked on a particular grant for many years and who is deeply passionate; or maybe you could highlight how individual people’s lives have changed as a result of the funded program.
* Remember that data can come from progress reports, PMT reports and other requirements you may set up for your funded programs. For example, you’re reviewing a subgrantee’s progress report and you see that participants of a community-based substance use disorder treatment program have a high percentage of participation and a low percentage of relapsing during the course of the program. That’s a marker of success!
* Programs that include culturally informed and relevant practices and programming.
* Bringing services, resources or programming to a new area, such as a rural area, or an underserved community.
* Strong problem solving can also be a marker of success. How do funded programs respond to unpredictable events? For example, maybe there was a natural disaster, and a specific program found a unique way to lend their services to the problems faced by those reeling from the natural disaster. Or maybe a funded program decided to address a specific problem or need that they saw; for example, under the [Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding (CESF) program](https://bja.ojp.gov/program/cesf/overview), many programs began to address specific needs, such as attending court via online platforms such as Zoom.

**Telling the Story of a Successful Funded Program**

The two most common ways to tell the story of a successful program are through data or through relationships/people.

By the Numbers

Data tells a story. The data-based approach is a great way to highlight programs with traditional markers of success, as well as to determine whether program services are having a measurable effect on the people served and the problem being solved or mitigated. Selecting some key statistical points of success, or positive results, and framing those around a description of the program, including how it works, any key partners and how the program is funded, can be an effective method of showcasing a program’s success. Curious to know what this can look like? Check out this [short program spotlight.](https://conta.cc/46BM8Bx)

This by the numbers approach works well for short-form content as well, such as social media. Consider creating a graphic and short social media post. For inspiration, check out [“Saving Lives in KY.”](https://www.ncja.org/byrne-bytes)

For this method of communicating success, make sure you include statistics or data that prove the effectiveness of the program. In evaluations, after reading the entirety of the report, the discussion section often includes some significant data points regarding effectiveness. Don’t bombard readers with too many statistics—instead, pick a few significant data points and link to the full evaluation.

Centering People

Another way to highlight the success of a funded program is to center the program’s story around a particular person, group of people or relationships. This person-centered approach highlights what these funded programs can do and the real impact they can have on real people’s lives. For longer content, start with a personal story and ideally, expand to say something about the larger picture of the funded program or, at a minimum, tie the personal story into the “why” and “how” of the program’s operation. For an example, [check out this press release](https://impactjustice.org/cjl-koron-richardson-americorps-30/).

The personal story approach works well for social media, too, as you can include pictures and/or videos and tag relevant people.

[Example 1](https://cda224d2-29d9-4afe-b752-b4afb8866a57.usrfiles.com/ugd/cda224_f72519bf105e490d8428096796bcd96c.pdf)

[Example 2](https://cda224d2-29d9-4afe-b752-b4afb8866a57.usrfiles.com/ugd/cda224_8eb437c5da5749a49453922882938818.pdf)

You may find the personal story approach feels disconnected from the larger picture and the tangible impacts, but the data approach lacks a connection to the people being served. Some funded programs may benefit from a blended approach, marrying the data and personal story perspectives. For an example of how to blend these two approaches, [view this short blurb.](https://impactjustice.org/successful-airbnb-housing-formerly-incarcerated/)

Keep in mind that these are not the only two ways to tell the impact of a funded program. These are merely suggestions, so feel free to find the way (or ways) that work best for your agency when it comes to communicating the story of what your funded programs do for your state/territory.

**Additional Examples**

* Structure the description of the program and its success around an accessible discussion of the program’s evaluation findings: [example from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.](https://icjia.illinois.gov/researchhub/articles/seed-a-diversion-program-for-young-adults-an-alternative-to-incarceration/)
* Share interesting resources created by grant dollars and/or grant-funded programs: [example from the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services.](https://ocjs.ohio.gov/about-us/news-and-events/all-news/ovwa-releases-guide-improving-services-for-homicide-co-victims)
* There may be situations where you want to highlight a new grant program or a newly awarded program. For programs that are early on in their programming and have not yet demonstrated success, remember that you can highlight how your agency contributes to improving community health and safety and tie that to a description of the funded programs themselves: [example from the Washington State Department of Commerce.](https://www.commerce.wa.gov/news/commerce-invests-4-3-million-to-expand-behavioral-health-care-access-for-people-in-crisis/)
* [Another example](https://www.innovatingjustice.org/programs/project-reset) of a short program highlight that includes data, with a small personal highlight.
* This guide can also be used to create a larger document showcasing the impact of a single grant program on the state. You could create short (or long) descriptions or highlights of all the programs funded under a particular funding stream, with the goal of having readers walk away with an idea of the types and variety of programs funded under that funding source, as well as their successes and impact. For inspiration, [check out the California Board of State and Community Corrections’ report about program accomplishments under a particular funding source.](https://www.bscc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Prop-47-C1-final-evaluation-report.pdf) At the end of the report, you can find key project highlights and/or successes contributed by the funded programs themselves. Requesting success stories from your funded programs can be another way to make highlighting the great work they do that much easier.