

**SHARING RESEARCH RESULTS**

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### Sharing Your Results

One of the most vital steps in the research process, and one of those most frequently left undone, is the sharing of results. Unless results are shared in some way, no one else can benefit from the efforts of the researcher. Even if the results are not what you anticipated, it is important to allow others to learn from your findings. Results do not always have to be “significant” to be meaningful.

### The Importance of Communicating Results

There are several reasons why it is important to share research findings.

1. *Others can benefit from your experience.* Although no two school food service operations are the same, child nutrition professionals find that they share many of the same problems and challenges. Reading or hearing about the results of a research project in a similar setting may shed new light on a situation in another district, leading to resolution of a problem or new ideas on how to approach the situation. Plus, it’s always comforting to learn that one is not alone in facing day-to-day operational challenges!
2. *Research findings contribute to the body of knowledge about Child Nutrition Programs.* Child Nutrition Programs are relatively new areas for research. There is much to learn about our field and many questions which need to be answered. All research projects, no matter how small, can contribute important information. Unless findings are shared, however, this information cannot benefit those working in this field.
3. *While research projects answer some questions, new questions are always generated.* Research always leads to more questions, leading to more research. This is how a body of knowledge is expanded in any area. When others read or hear about your research project and its findings, new questions are generated in the minds of those receiving your results, and ideas for new research projects are born.
4. *Research protocols are established.* As research is conducted in Child Nutrition Programs, methods of conducting research which may be unique to this area are formalized. As methods or processes are standardized, data may be compared more easily from one project to the next.

## Ways of Sharing Research Findings

According to Monsen in her book *Research: Successful Approaches* (Monsen, 1992), there are several ways of presenting research findings. Technical reports, abstracts, poster sessions, oral presentations, research papers, and articles in lay publications are all important means of sharing research findings. Selecting the best way to communicate your findings depends a great deal on the audience to whom you are presenting. You must know your audience well. Are they familiar with your project and its setting? Is the audience made up of people inside your own organization or external to it? Are they researchers themselves or are they unfamiliar with research techniques? Are your conclusions best shared verbally or visually? Answers to these and other questions may have an impact on how you share your results.

### Technical Reports

If your research has been funded by a granting agency, technical reports are often required to show progress and outcomes of your project. Interim reports, summary reports and evaluation reports are all types of technical reports which you may assemble. According to Chernoff (1992), a hallmark of technical reports is the need for clear, concise writing. The purpose of the project, the objectives, the methods used, the rationale for the project, what was accomplished and what outcomes were measured are all important parts of a technical report (Steinbaugh, 1986). Interim reports allow the project's sponsors to know the progress of your project. Summary reports are used to present the total project or study. Sometimes problems which were encountered during the course of the study are shared in the summary report.

The most comprehensive type of technical report is an evaluation report. Not only is the total project and all of its steps recounted, but a discussion section also is included in which the results of the project are interpreted. The overall project outcomes are analyzed and an attempt is made to show what applications can be made of the study's findings.

### Abstracts

Another common way to share research results is in the form of an abstract which may be published in a journal, magazine or professional meeting booklet. Abstracts are often used as the basis for an oral presentation or a poster session about the research project. Abstracts are challenging to write because all the major components of the project must be included in a limited number of words: the purpose of the study, a description of the study sample, the methodology, the results and the conclusions and/or implications of the project. Abstracts may be limited by the number of words you can use or the amount of space you can fill, so every word must be carefully chosen.

### Poster Sessions

Poster sessions are a wonderful way to share research findings because it allows the researcher the opportunity to come face to face with those interested in the research project. Obviously, a poster session is a predominately visual method of presenting the project and its findings and must be carefully thought out and arranged. Typically a four feet by six feet

area is allowed for each presenter. The poster session components should follow the same sequence as in an abstract: the purpose, the sample, the methodology, the findings, and the conclusions. Charts, tables, graphs and other visuals should be used to provide interest and an easy means of illustrating the project. Lettering and other components should be easily viewed by a distance of three feet or more. An advantage of a poster session is that the researcher can be present with the posters and answer questions of those who come by to view the presentation.

### Oral Presentations

Oral presentations allow the researcher the opportunity to explain in greater detail the project and its findings. Visuals are also important with an oral presentation as they help the listeners to focus on what the presenter is saying. The most significant findings of the project should be presented and an opportunity for the audience to ask questions should be provided.

Computer software now makes it possible for presenters to have very professionally done visuals with minimal effort. Programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint or Astound allow presenters to have visuals with movement and sound which can greatly enhance a presentation. Slides or overhead transparencies may also be used as can videotape or film.

Speaking before an audience, no matter what its size, may be a frightening experience. There are several things which a presenter can do to help alleviate the anxiety which accompanies public speaking. First, the presentation may be written out completely so that the presenter is comfortable that all important information is being covered. Then, more brief notes may be made from which to actually do the presentation. Practicing the presentation ahead of time, and perhaps even video- or audiotaping the presentation can allow the presenter to critique his/her performance and delivery. Timing of the presentation is also important so that the presenter stays within the preset limits.

### Publishing Research Findings

Research projects and their findings may be published in refereed research journals or in lay publications. Refereed journals are those in which the published articles have undergone a "blind review" process; in other words, the reviewers do not know who the author is and vice versa. Feedback is provided to the author by the reviewers in order to make the article the best presentation possible. Articles may undergo several revisions before the final draft is accepted by the reviewers and the journal editor.

Articles may be submitted to journals such as the *Journal of Child Nutrition and Management* (formerly the *School Food Service Research Review*). This journal has as its audience, district and state level child nutrition personnel as well as college and university teachers and researchers. In this journal, there are several categories for which an article may be submitted such as *Current Issues*, *Research in Action*, or *Practical Solutions*. The *Practical Solutions* section is particularly well-suited to the publication of unit level issues. Papers in this section should describe a problem or challenge faced by a school food service operation and discuss how a partnership between the operation and the academic community solved the problem and led to enhanced operational effectiveness.

The idea of Child Nutrition Programs teaming up with college and university programs is especially important and can be a real win-win situation. Child Nutrition Programs may have problems or challenges they wish to address but may not be sure where or how to start. College and university faculty often are looking for research opportunities for themselves or their graduate students. A mutually rewarding partnership can ensue.

Articles also may be submitted to non-refereed publications such as trade journals or professional association newsletters at the state or national level. These publications may have a wider readership and may reach unit level managers or line employees who can benefit from the information presented. It is important to remember to write to the level of the audience who is anticipated to read the material. Unit level managers and line employees may be more interested in the findings and conclusions or implications than in technical methodological discussions or statistical analysis. Keep in mind the “take home message” and make sure it comes through loud and clear.

### **Summary**

The importance of sharing research findings cannot be overstated. Given our limited time and resources, it does not make sense for researchers to “reinvent the wheel” when a project has already been done somewhere else. However, if findings of the project were never reported, there is no way for the current researchers to know that their project had already been done by someone else. Child nutrition professionals are in need of accurate, reliable, and valid research findings in order to support programs and projects. Administrators are looking for data to support decision making related to Child Nutrition Programs. The government is looking for data to support funding priorities. All of these different audiences have a need for research, and only child nutrition professionals, working hand in hand with academics or other researchers, can provide the much needed answers to questions facing us all.

In Luke 11:33, the scripture tells us, “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.” What better analogy to publishing your research findings! When you do research, no matter how insignificant you may think it is, share it with others in one of the ways presented in this paper. There are so many others who can benefit from your knowledge and findings. Don’t hide your results, but rather share them with others. Shed your light so that your colleagues may have a clearer vision of the path ahead. Child Nutrition Programs will be stronger because of your efforts.