
Evaluation How To: Storytelling

Stories are an Indigenous way of sharing knowledge and a valuable form of data. Indigenous people have used storytelling to pass down teachings, share ideas, and core values that guide our communities and future generations. In research and evaluation, storytelling is often called qualitative data. There are many ways to incorporate storytelling into the evaluation of health and wellness programs and events.

Start by choosing a method that makes the most sense for your community.

In this pamphlet, we will guide you through the general process of designing, collecting, analyzing, and sharing the stories that reflect the resilience, strengths, challenges, and needs of community programs.

Stories are a crucial component of all evaluations at the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) as an age-old means to demonstrate the overall impact of a program on participants and staff. Stories provide insight beyond multi-choice questions or numbers tell us. At UIHI, stories are an essential part of community evaluation along with counts or quantitative data. We believe real-life stories from urban communities and programs that serve Native people are crucial to understanding the impact of efforts to improve health and wellness.

UIHI asks our grantees to collect and submit stories as part of the program evaluation. Along with these stories, we ask that they include 1–2 images (either photos or art) that illustrate and provide context for the story. Our method of story collection is just one example among many. You can adapt these ways of story collection to your community and traditional ways of storytelling. You could collect stories through one-on-one interviews with participants, focus groups with program staff, an open-ended question on a survey, or even through informal conversations with community members.



This guide includes:

- How to collect stories
- How to identify themes
- How to use stories
- Sample stories from UIHI grantees

“Telling stories is fundamental to being Indigenous peoples. Stories are a method and means for understanding the consequences of lived experience. Indigenous evaluation is about telling stories.”

(LaFrance and Nichols, 2012, pg. 66)

What do you want to learn?

Evaluation should serve the interests of the organization and program, so you can better serve the needs of the community. When deciding what you want to know about a program consider the core values or guiding mission of your organization. It is also crucial to have a clear vision of how this evaluation will be useful or meaningful to the community you serve.

How has the program:

- impacted emotional, spiritual, mental, or physical health?
- increased access to a health service?
- changed community perspective on the topic?
- increased a sense of cultural or community connectedness?
- influenced community to integrate what they learned into their own family/work/community?

How to collect stories

We recommend that you think carefully about who you select to be storytellers. Consider what evaluation questions you want to answer and who would be best suited to answer them. This could mean reaching out to program staff, participants, or leadership.

Once you select storytellers, you need to decide the best way to collect stories. It could be a series of open-ended survey questions, conducting a focus group, or interviews. If you decide to conduct focus groups or interviews, it is important to take notes or audio record with permission from the storyteller.

Examples of story collection questions:

- Could you please describe your role and involvement in [name of activity/program]?
- Please share a story that you feel illustrates the most meaningful impact of this program?
- Why does that change matter?
- What were the most important lessons you learned from this program?
- How has this program affected your feelings of connection to your culture?
- Has this program strengthened the sense of community among participants? If yes, how and in what ways?

How to identify themes

After you have collected a few stories, identifying common themes across stories can be a helpful way to analyze the stories to answer evaluation questions. There are many ways to identify themes—or do a thematic analysis as some researchers call it. Multiple people can read through the interview transcripts (or notes) and write down any reoccurring topics and broader themes that they notice in the conversations. Then everyone brings their observations together to discuss and come to a consensus on the main themes seen across the interviews. You can use a similar process for focus group transcripts, photos, art, or any other type of qualitative data.

If you need help identifying themes from stories, UIHI offers technical assistance for evaluation through our website:

uihi.org/request-technical-assistance/

How to identify themes (Cont'd)

Below are several themes that can help guide story analysis

Examples of Staff member themes:

- Observed changes in organizational capacity to improve health and wellness in urban Indian communities
- Impact of including culturally based approaches to disease prevention and health promotion in their program
- Increased awareness of ways to promote health through cultural knowledge and resources
- Impact of new partnerships with other organizations or community members
- Overcoming challenges faced by the organization when delivering the program

Examples of Program participant themes:

- Changes in access or awareness of Indigenous culture and knowledge to disease prevention and wellness
- Changes in knowledge of Indigenous culture and ways to incorporate it into daily life.
- Changes in enthusiasm around harvesting and preparing traditional foods
- Changes in participant self-confidence to incorporate more physical activity into their daily routines
- Changes in participant feelings about connectedness to community and culture



How to use stories

When sharing the stories collected consider including the following information to place the story in context: a brief description of the storyteller (community member or organization staff), their role or participation in the program (if applicable), and the change or impact the program demonstrates. Depending on how you are sharing the story it may make sense to include some or none of these components.

Program planning

The goal of Indigenous evaluation is to serve the community. One way to use stories and evaluation to serve the community is utilizing them to improve the program. What did the participants and staff who shared their stories like about the program? What were areas did they see to improve? How were they, individually or on the organizational level, impacted by the program?

To share with the community

Stories are a great way to share the impact of a program back with the community. It is important to distribute stories back to your community in a way that resonates with them. This may mean showing a video of one of the storytellers at a community event or share the story in written form in a newsletter or on the website for your organization. Stories can also be shared back with the community in the form of art, photos, or even performances.

Marketing purposes

Stories can be used to create communications materials for your organization, such as blog posts, flyers, or graphics for reports. These can be helpful to share evaluation results within your community, to help promote future programs, and to demonstrate the impact of your program to potential partners, funders, or community leaders.

Report to funders

Evaluation, including stories, should be based on how you want to measure the impact of your work in a way that is most useful and sustainable for your organization and community. However, you can also incorporate stories into reports for funders. They can be included as part of a program evaluation plan or be used for future grant applications to secure more funding for programming. Whichever method you choose, just make sure it aligns with your evaluation question, and more importantly, the needs of the community.

Story examples from UIHI grantees

Here are examples of stories collected from UHI grantees. They are shared here with their permission.

uihi.org/branching-out-for-success



Was this handout helpful?

Please send your feedback to info@uihi.org.