

FOUR DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY OUTREACH



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

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EVALUATING QUALITY OUTREACH

THE PROJECT

The project is the starting point for evaluating the outreach contributions of individuals or units. Projects range from complex, multi-partnered interventions to new off-campus course offerings to one-time presentations for non-university audiences. Projects are planned, approved, implemented, and assessed. They may have distinct components that are integral parts of the larger design which one may plan, approve, implement, and assess but which do not merit “project” status themselves. Projects can succeed or fail, be good or bad; the ultimate value of the projects forms the basis of any assessment of individual or unit outreach performance.

As a professional university responsibility, an outreach project is assessed according to commonly held values and familiar measures that are applied to teaching, research, and service. These, as well as additional measures and values specific to the success of an outreach project, are discussed in various sections of *Points of Distinction: A Guidebook for Planning and Evaluating Quality Outreach* and suggested in the matrix here, reprinted from the guidebook.

The Provost’s Committee on University Outreach defined outreach as

. . . a form of scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, and service. It involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences in ways that are consistent with university and unit missions (*University Outreach at Michigan State University: Extending Knowledge to Serve Society*, October 1993, p. 1).

THE MATRIX

Purpose. The following matrix is offered as a tool for the evaluation of an outreach project, be it short term or long term, instructional or non-instructional. The matrix may also serve as a planning guide for those initiating outreach activities. For those interested in assessing the outreach record of units or individuals in addition to projects, the appendix of *Points of Distinction* includes specific assessment tools for these tasks. For each, however, this matrix serves as the evaluation tool for the projects that are fundamental to those assessments.

Organization. The matrix suggests one way to think about evaluating outreach. The “Dimensions” (significance, context, scholarship, and impacts) reflect four fundamental characteristics of any outreach project in higher education. Commonly held outreach values drive the headings under “Components.” The “Sample Questions” guide users in the kinds of practical concerns associated with the outreach values in the components. The “Indicators” list possible ways to demonstrate and document quality in each area. We recommend that users understand the categories and questions as prompts and refrain from exercising taxonomic rigor with the matrix! Values inherent in specific components frequently overlap dimensions; often, sample questions can be rephrased and located elsewhere.

Customizing. The matrix is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. It provides guidance in the evaluation of four dimensions of outreach undertaken by higher education: its significance, its context, its base in scholarship, and the outcomes it generates. Users are encouraged to add and eliminate

MATRIX FOR EVALUATING QUALITY OUTREACH

Title of Project: _____

Descripton/Purpose: _____

Stakeholders: _____

DIMENSION

COMPONENTS

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Significance



Importance of Issue/
Opportunity to be
Addressed

- How serious are the issues to the scholarly community, specific stakeholders, and the public?
- Is the target audience at particular risk or open to new opportunity?
- What social, economic, or human consequences could result from not addressing the issue?
- What competing opportunities would be set aside by addressing this issue?

Goals/Objectives of
Consequence

- Have all stakeholders agreed that the goals and objectives are valuable?
- If the goals are accomplished, will there be a significant consequence or impact?
- Will value be added?

evaluative components, questions, and indicators, tailoring the matrix to the culture and expectations of their study area and examining the relevance of various measures to the specific project.

Priorities. The matrix does not assign priorities or relative values to the dimensions or components of quality outreach. It is impossible to do so absent knowledge of the professional traditions and expectations of the users. When customizing the matrix, users will want to determine the relative values of the dimensions, components, and indicators as they apply to their area of study and the nature of the project.

Documentation. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators contribute to the quality assessment of an outreach project. As a quantitative measure, for example, a high number of participants can support claims that others value the project. Similarly, the size of follow-up funding can indicate the significance of the outcomes. As a qualitative measure, a reflective narrative by the project director(s) may be an important document at various places in the matrix. A narrative containing annotated and persuasive arguments concerning the significance of the project, the attention paid to context, the process, the scholarly value, and the importance of the outcomes may lend support to claims of quality. The narrative may also include sections written as planning documents, as process logs, and as retrospective analyses of the entire project and outcomes.

EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

- Documentation of issues and opportunities based on concrete information; e.g., opportunity assessment, social economic indicators, stakeholder testimony, previous work.
- Leaders in the field or public figures addressing the issue, citing the need.
- The magnitude of the issue; i.e., size, trends, future directions.
- Description of competing opportunities set aside.

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- Narrative discussing scope and potential impact.
 - All stakeholders understand the goals and objectives as stated.
 - Increased visibility in community or profession; new structures created; new skills developed and knowledge generated.

EXAMPLES OF QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

- Indicators of demand/need.
- Number of citations; issue addressed in the literature.
- Financial and other resource contributions.
- Number of participants.
- Calculation of opportunity cost in terms of resources (i.e., people, projects, revenues).

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- Projections of scope and potential impact.
 - Degree of opportunity to change the situation.

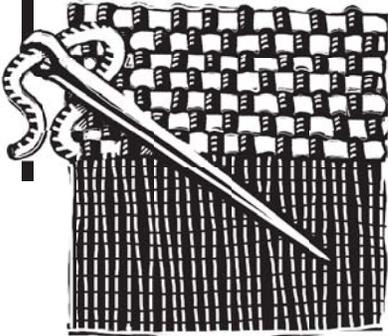
MATRIX FOR EVALUATING QUALITY OUTREACH (continued)

DIMENSION

COMPONENTS

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Context



Consistency with University/Unit Values and Stakeholder Interests

- To what extent is the project consistent with the university's/unit's mission?
- To what extent is the project a high priority among the external stakeholders?
- Does the plan recognize the relevance of ethical and professional standards for the initiative?
- Does the project demonstrate sensitivity to diverse audiences and interests?
- Is there an appropriate fit (consideration of the interests and well-being of all participants) between the target audiences and the goals and objectives?

Appropriateness of Expertise

- To what extent does the project fit with the individual's and the unit's available expertise and research?
- To what extent does the project utilize appropriate expertise among the stakeholders and/or external sources?

Degree of Collaboration

- To what extent do all the stakeholders participate in planning, defining impacts, implementing, and assessing the project?
- To what extent is communication and interaction open and multi-directional?
- Does the nature of the collaboration lead to timely and effective decision-making?
- What contribution does the collaboration make to capacity building and sustainability?

Appropriateness of Methodological Approach

- Is there an appropriate approach underlying the design; i.e., developmental, participatory?
- Does the project utilize an appropriate methodology?
- How does the project recognize and accommodate for the variety of learning styles, ways of decision-making and taking action, and education levels of the stakeholders?
- Does the project have a comprehensive and informative evaluation plan?
- Is there a plan to determine whether or not the project/collaboration will/should continue?

Sufficiency and Creative Use of Resources

- Are available resources sufficient to the scope of the effort?
- To what extent are multiple sources and types of resources (i.e., human, financial, capital, volunteer, etc.) being utilized?
- Are the goals/objectives realistic considering the context and available resources?

EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

- Comparison with explicit mission statements and goals.
- Plans recognizing ethical issues and regulations/guidelines to assure compliance.
- Evidence of ability to work sensitively with external audiences and key groups.
- Interviews with those potentially affected by the project.
- Comparison with stakeholder reports, proposals, letters of inquiry.

- Evidence of scholarship related to project or prior work in the field.
- Narrative showing degree of fit between project needs and expertise deployed.
- Relevant offices and organizations involved in the project.

- Language and structure of partnership agreements.
- Identification, participation, and retention of all stakeholders.
- Communication logs and minutes of meetings.
- Progress report from stakeholders.

- Evidence of scholarship on the application of the method to related issues.
- Evidence of adaptation during project implementation.
- Evidence that audience education level and learning style were considered.
- Process documentation by project director through journals, etc.

- Evidence of integration and creative use of multiple types and sources of resources.
- New funding sources identified and leveraged.

EXAMPLES OF QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

- Number of contacts and planning meetings of stakeholders.
- Resources/methods used to promote program.
- Profile of audience; i.e., demographic characteristics.

- Numbers and types of expertise involved; e.g., tenure-track faculty, academic staff, students, stakeholders, external consultants?
- Number of stakeholders in leadership roles.
- Related activities; e.g., years of experience, numbers of articles.

- Number of partners or collaborative arrangements.
- Number of intra-institutional linkages.
- Number of inter-institutional linkages.
- Number of planning meetings.
- Percentage of deadlines met.

- Number of instances of innovations in delivery; e.g., student involvement, use of technology.

- Amounts and types of the resources by source.
- Changes in extramural funding for outreach activities.

MATRIX FOR EVALUATING QUALITY OUTREACH (continued)

DIMENSION

COMPONENTS

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Scholarship



Knowledge Resources

- To what extent is the project shaped by knowledge that is up-to-date, cross-disciplinary, and appropriate to the issue?
- Is knowledge in the community or among the stakeholders utilized?
- To what extent is there an awareness of competing methodologies, replicable models, expertise, and/or writing related to the project?

Knowledge Application

- How well are the project and its objectives defined?
- Is the project design appropriate to the context and does it recognize the scope, complexity, and diversity?
- To what extent is there innovation in the application of knowledge and methodologies?
- Does the plan foresee a potential new application of knowledge gained for use in specific settings?
- Does the plan include provision for ongoing documentation of activities, evaluation, and possible midstream modification?

Knowledge Generation

- Does the project plan pose a new model or hypothesis in addressing the issues?
- Was new knowledge generated; i.e., program hypotheses confirmed or revised, outcomes creatively interpreted, new questions for scholarship asked?
- Were unanticipated developments appropriately incorporated into the final interpretation of the results?

Knowledge Utilization

- Are the stakeholders and potential interest groups involved in understanding and interpreting the knowledge generated?
- Is the knowledge generated by the project available for dissemination, utilization, and possible replication?
- In what ways is the knowledge being recorded, recognized, and rewarded?

EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

- Annotated narrative showing what sources of knowledge are used; i.e., community assessments, previous works, and applied theory.
- Quality and fit of the citations, outside experts, or consultants.
- Assessment of experience and accomplishments of major project participants external to the university.

- Professional feedback on the clarity of the project.
- Input from community, stakeholders, students, etc., attesting that the project plan is clear, appropriate, inclusive, and understandable.
- Reflective narrative, rationale for project, and documentation of the design process.

- Lessons learned documented.
- Assessment of scholarly merit by internal peer review process.
- External review of performance by stakeholders relative to innovation, satisfaction with approach and results.
- Project garnered awards, honors, citations relative to its scholarship.

- Stakeholder feedback.
- Project generated a replicable, innovative model.
- Nature of groups or institutions applying knowledge generated.
- Case studies or examples of utilization.

EXAMPLES OF QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

- Number of cross-disciplinary resources utilized.
- Number of years in positions.
- Dates of citations.
- Number of experts cited, participating.

- Number of in-house communications related to the project; e.g., in-house documents, interim reports, newsletters, e-mail messages, chat rooms, bulletin boards.
- Number of citations from the literature circulated within the project.

- Number of times project cited, recognized.
- Number of acceptances for publications, speaking engagements.
- Number of requests for consulting.
- Number of programs, curricula influenced by scholarly results.
- Publications in refereed journals.
- Professional speaking engagements.

- Scope of involvement in interpretation and dissemination; e.g., numbers and types of participants.
- Number of different avenues chosen to communicate results.

MATRIX FOR EVALUATING QUALITY OUTREACH (continued)

DIMENSION

COMPONENTS

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Impact



Impact on Issues, Institutions, and Individuals

- To what extent were the project goals and objectives met?
- Did the products or deliverables meet the planning expectations?
- Were intended, unintended, and potential impacts documented and interpreted?
- Was that documentation rigorous, thorough, understandable, and defensible?
- Were stakeholders satisfied? Did they value the results and apply the knowledge?
- Is the project affecting public policy? Has it improved practice or advanced community knowledge?
- Do impacts have commercial, societal, or professional value?
- How effectively are the products or results reaching the intended interest groups?

Sustainability and Capacity Building

- To what extent did the project build capacity for individuals, institutions, or social infrastructure; i.e., financial, technological, leadership, planning, technical, professional, collaborative, etc.?
- To what extent did the project develop mechanisms for sustainability?
- To what extent did the project leverage additional resources for any partners?
- To what extent were undesired dependencies eliminated?

University-Community Relations

- To what extent did the stakeholders come to understand and appreciate each others' values, intentions, concerns, and resource base?
- To what extent was mutual satisfaction derived from the project?
- To what extent did the project broaden access to the university?
- To what extent did the project broaden access to the community?

Benefit to the University

- How does the project offer new opportunities for student learning and professional staff development?
- How does the project lead to innovations in curriculum?
- How does the project inform other dimensions of the university mission?
- How does the project increase cross-disciplinary collaborations within the university?
- How does the project increase collaboration with other institutions?
- How does the project assist the unit's or faculty member's progress in developing outreach potential and in using that potential to improve the institution's operations and visibility?

EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

- Description of impacts (i.e., significance and scope of benefits) on the issue, stakeholders, and beneficiaries, to include:
 - Needs fulfilled, issues addressed, population or group involved in process.
 - Institutional processes changed.
 - Replicable innovation developed.
- Documentation such as program evaluations, surveys, letters, testimonials, and media coverage.
- Testimony and validation from peer review.
- Referrals to others and expression of interest by new groups.
- Assessments on learning outcomes by individuals, students, and stakeholders.
- Benefits resulting from changes in practice; e.g., knowledge applied, processes or approaches more efficient, circumstances improved.
- Result of changes in institutional and/or public policy.
- Evidence that knowledge is used in subsequent research, projects, or public discussion.

- Inventory of new or developed skills.
- Technology adopted and maintained.
- Surveys or reports of changed behaviors or attitudes.
- Activities and processes institutionalized.
- Networks activated.
- Cross-disciplinary linkages activated.
- Continued or alternative resources secured; e.g., funding, facilities, equipment, personnel.
- Planned degree of disengagement or continuing partnership achieved.

- Co-authored reports and presentations.
- Opportunities for new collaborations established.
- Testimonials from partners.
- Community partner participation in grading students, evaluating faculty/staff efforts.
- Expansion of university/unit constituency.
- Role flexibility and changes that provide for greater university/community interaction.

- Changes in quality or scope of student experiences.
- Curricular changes (e.g. new syllabi, courses, curricular revisions).
- Teaching or research activities benefiting from outreach involvement, including cross-disciplinary research or program innovations.
- Enhanced unit reputation.
- Recognition in reward and accountability systems.

EXAMPLES OF QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

- Changes from benchmark or baseline measurements.
- Number of appropriate products generated for practitioners and public (e.g. technical reports, bulletins, books, monographs, chapters, articles, presentations, public performances, testimony, training manuals, software, computer programs, instructional videos, etc.).
- Number of products distributed.
- Number and percentage of beneficiaries reached.
- Number of contracts, patents, copyrights.

- Quantitative changes in skills, technologies, behaviors, activities, etc.
- Amount of resources generated to sustain the project.
- Amount of resources leveraged.
- List of facilities, equipment, personnel available.
- Number of sites and cross-site linkages established.

- Number of new collaborations considered or established.
- Number of off-campus courses offered with syllabus modifications to accommodate nontraditional students.
- Evidence of increased demand placed on the unit or faculty for outreach.

- Amount of increased student support.
- Number of employment offers to students.
- Number of new courses and programs approved.
- Number of new cross-disciplinary or inter-university collaborative efforts.
- Increased engagement of faculty or students in outreach.
- Amount of increased external or university support for outreach.
- Revenue generated.

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