



the improve groove

The Quarterly
Newsletter of the
Improve Group

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Displaying Information

By Deborah Mattila

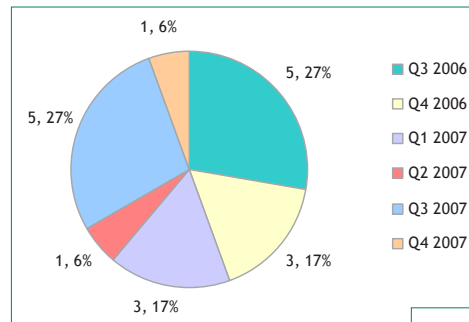
After you have collected all of your research, evaluation or strategic planning information, and you have run all of your statistical and qualitative analysis calculations, it is time to consider how you will display your results. Like with narrative or oral presentations, it is always important to consider your audience when developing tables, charts and other visual displays. Look at other publications from your organization or your audience's organization. Try to mimic styles and formats that effectively communicate information. Use fonts and color schemes that are familiar to your audience. Your audience will then focus on the content of your information instead of trying to decipher the format.

There are many different ways to display data results visually, including tables, pie charts, line and dot charts, bar and column charts, scatter plots and area charts. With all these options it can be difficult to determine which is the best method for displaying your information.

Tables are best used when you want your audience to be able to scan categories and then look up their associated data. For example, this table shows the eight Inside Groove blog topics that Improve Group staff write about most frequently, with the date of their first post.

This table is useful if you are interested in seeing a broad comparison of the various Inside Groove topics.

Blog Category	Number of posts	Date of first post
About planning	12	9/6/2006
Around the office - staff activities	15	11/8/2006
Knowledge exchange	18	2/9/2007
Musings from Leah's desk	24	11/3/2006
Field notes	25	7/24/2006
Around the office	32	7/20/2006
About evaluation	36	7/28/2006
Grant Gazing	52	11/20/2006

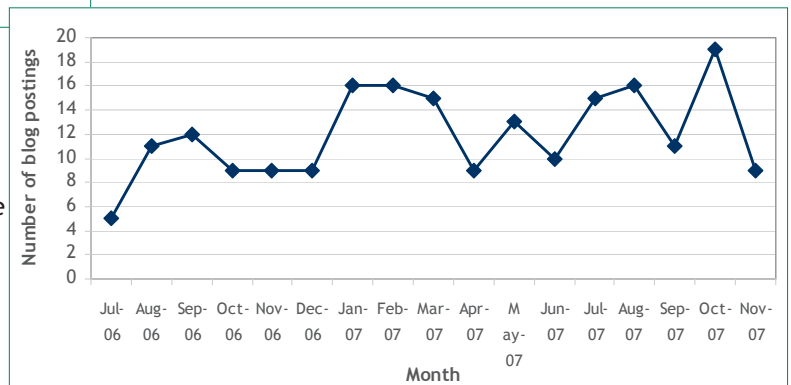


Pie charts are best for seeing how various categories add up to a whole. For example, this chart shows the number of blog topics that were started during each fiscal quarter in proportion to each other.

Line and dot charts are most useful when describing averages or other discrete points on a scale. They are also appropriate for observing change over time because

the line acts as a time thread. For example, this line chart shows that the number of blog postings per month tends to fluctuate but has steadily grown since the Inside Groove was started in July 2006, and that the most postings in a month occurred in October 2007 with 19 postings.

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Client Reflections

Instead of highlighting just one client in this issue, we would like to look back over 2007 at the successes of several of our clients who have experienced important changes and new growth.

City House, Minneapolis MN

We are most excited about a new self-understanding of who we are and our purpose. Research on outcomes has not just become a justification for funding, but has opened up the possibility of a new service that by itself might generate revenue. The Improve Group has been very much a part of that process. Thank you!

- Tom Allen, Executive Director

Perpich Center for Arts Education, Minneapolis MN

I think one of the strongest results of Quality Teaching in the Arts work last year, revealed in the Improve Group evaluation, was that our progress with the three program goals appeared to be resulting in progress toward our overarching goal: raising student achievement in and through the arts. As teachers came to clearer understandings of the standards, their assessment and evaluation practices, the evaluation showed many teachers perceived positive changes in student learning in their classrooms.

- Byron Richard, Education Research Coordinator

Austin School District, Austin MN

Our proudest accomplishment this year is receipt of a \$2.8 million grant from the Hormel Foundation to make Austin Public Schools a leading center for math and science education. \$1.3 million of the grant allowed us to create a fellowship program that includes four dynamic options for teachers at all grade levels and stage of their career to increase their content knowledge and pedagogy in the areas of math, science and literacy. The remaining \$1.5 million of the grant will upgrade the district's facilities for math and science education at Austin High School. This accomplishment is an excellent example of fulfilling our mission and providing an environment of excellence within our schools and community.

- Candace Raskin, Superintendent

Stephen-Argyle Safe Schools/Healthy Students, Crookston MN

Our experiences working with an evaluation plan and receiving feedback on our data allowed us to do business in a whole new way. It helped us to understand how the results we were hoping to achieve directly relate to the strategies we implemented. We were able to

connect-the-dots from the initial plan of how to address an issue to whether what we were doing actually made a difference. We now have the ability to tell our story to everyone interested in our efforts. Special thanks go to the Improve Group Team for helping us in our endeavors.

- Colleen MacRae, Project Director

Chicago Opera Theater, Chicago IL

Chicago Opera Theater's Education department is proud of the relationships we are building with our partner schools. Our goal is to move from a service provider model to a collaborative model and our work with The Improve Group is helping facilitate this. We are looking forward to leveraging this knowledge garnered through our more frequent program evaluations to continue to build our program and make our successes repeatable.

- Kara Kane, Director of Education and Outreach

Performing Arts Workshop, San Francisco CA

Performing Arts Workshop had a very productive 2007! Following are some of our accomplishments from the year:

- During the 2006-07 academic year, the Workshop's Artists-in-Schools and Artists-in-Communities programs served more than 6,500 youth in four Bay Area counties, a 28% increase over the previous year.
- In 2006-2007, the Workshop created a new partnership with First 5 San Francisco through the city-wide Preschool for All initiative. The Workshop served more than 1,000 pre-Kindergarten youth with residences in Dance and Creative Movement.
- In January 2007, the Workshop was selected as San Francisco's quality improvement arts provider through the Afterschool for All initiative. The Workshop served more than 300 at-risk youth with innovative arts programming at community centers throughout the Bayview-Hunter's Point and Visitacion Valley neighborhoods.
- The Workshop relocated to the Bayview District of San Francisco—our new home has five times the floor space for community events and is geographically closer to the majority of youth we serve.

- Nick Hutchinson, Development Director

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January marks the launch of our brown bag lunch on evaluation for non-profit staff. We'll have warm pots of coffee and tea going while we discuss logic models and how they can be used for programs and organizations. Bring your own logic model and questions to share with your peers and our experienced evaluators over the noon hour on Wednesday, January 23. While registration is free, space is limited - email Susan Murphy at susanm@theimproveteam.com to reserve your spot.

Do you worry that your surveys are not collecting the information you need? Do you ask the same question on several forms and want to reduce duplication? Would you like to try something completely new - web-based quizzes, focus groups, blogs, but aren't sure where to start? Have you written a report only to realize later you could have calculated results in a completely different way? The Improve Group offers coaching for non-profits that conduct their own evaluations. We can help you in design, analysis and reporting. Feel free to email Leah to schedule your coaching sessions - leah@theimproveteam.com.

Designing a survey? [The survey toolkit from Pearson's Data Management](#) has easy tips on the best way to organize response scales and questions.



Sharing Evaluation Results through Presentations

By Susan Murphy

Presenting your evaluation results in front of a live audience can be a challenge. Whether you are trying to convey progress toward an organizational goal, rally support around a strategic initiative or solicit creative ideas for addressing challenges, it is good to have some tools for successful presenting.

The key element is to know your audience. Are they likely to be friendly, resistant or curious about what you are presenting? Are they colleagues with a similar knowledge level on your topic or are you introducing information to an audience that is new to your organization? Do they need to have a detailed explanation of your results or would they be more receptive to quick bullet points? Questions like these should be examined before you compose any talking points or prepare your first PowerPoint slide.

Borrow a chapter from political campaigners and take time before your presentation to brainstorm possible questions that might arise from the data you are presenting. If you are giving your report to a funder, research the type of information they value most. Some audiences will want the quantitative number data concerning your outcomes while others will prefer to hear about qualitative, personal experiences to give them the total picture.

Another good practice is to know what elements are most important to cover and those that could be left out if presentation time starts running short. Know your material well. Slides are meant to be read by the attendees not the speaker.

Before the day of the presentation take time to practice. It adds validity to what the speaker is saying if they are not constantly looking at notes or taking long pauses to find their train of thought. Be sure that your voice, posture and gestures are not conveying the wrong message. Using a mirror, a co-worker or a camera as a practice audience is very helpful.

Just before your presentation find a quiet place to do a little vocal warm up by stretching the muscles in your face. It will help with diction and clarity in your speech. Physically stretching your body will ease pre-speech tension. This is also the time to take a few slow, deep breaths to relax and remind yourself that a well-projected voice comes from down in your diaphragm and not up in the throat.

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(Client Reflections, Continued from pg. 2)

The Business, Arts & Recreation Center, Windom MN

In March, 2007, The Business, Arts & Recreation Center (BARC) in Windom, MN, received the great news that they had been awarded a pilot project grant from the Bush Foundation. The award involved: the hiring of a part-time Education/Events (E/E) Director; the offering of quarterly classes and special events at BARC for area residents; and working with a professional evaluation consulting agency to evaluate the program. BARC hired Cathy Peterson as their new E/E Director, who has been developing program forms and setting up classes since March. The program, now only 9 months old, has also been happily working since September with the Improve Group on the evaluation component and gathering data for reporting back to the Bush Foundation and for reapplying for additional funds. The BARC Board and staff believe that they are in capable hands with the Improve Group!

- Cathy Peterson, Education/Events Director

Minnesota Department of Human Services —Waiver Review Project, St. Paul MN

We believe the Waiver Review Project is a very valuable process. It not only enables us to meet requirements in order to continue federal funding of these programs, but it helps us and the counties identify problem areas and correct them. It also helps the state and counties identify strengths and build on them. We make assurances to the Center for Medicaid

and Medicare Services (CMS) that the waiver rules are being enforced and that we are monitoring the programs. The waiver review is a critical component of our response that we are keeping track of the practices and policies of these programs. We will continue to monitor systems data and conduct site visits to track progress, identify promising practices and review compliance. and where necessary, DHS will ensure that corrective actions plans are put in place and recommendations are followed. It is also my hope that this initiative becomes a catalyst for counties to use one another as resources as they seek to improve their administration of these programs.

- Robert Meyer, Director of fiscal analysis and planning in the Continuing Care administration.

It's All About the Kids, Minneapolis MN

We added a Mental Health Counselor and Education Support Advocate to better meet the needs of the youth served through the Its All About the Kids Collaborative. We are just beginning parent education and support to prevent child abuse funded by a three-year award from the Department of Human Services, Children's Trust Fund. The Kids Collaborative has been a wonderful government and nonprofit partnership—each participating organization (Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis Public Housing and Lutheran Social Services) takes the lead on issues related to their own expertise.

- Amy Smith, Program Manager, Housing Services, Lutheran Social Services



Staff Travel Reflections

The Improve Group staff enjoys traveling across America and in their own backyards for work with clients. Here are some travel highlights from 2007.



Elizabeth Radel
- This year, my travels with the Improve Group took me all across the state of Minnesota with the *DHS Waiver Review*, to Albuquerque,

New Mexico with Girl Scouts' *uniquely ME!* program and to Baltimore, Maryland to attend the American Evaluation Association National Conference. Last March, Marian and I traveled to New Mexico together for a *uniquely ME!* site visit and it was such an enjoyable evaluation project. We observed 8 to 11 year old girls attending a self-esteem building theatre day camp in their daily activities, we interviewed girls and helped them interview each other. Finally, we were audience members in their culminating performance. After hearing so much about the *uniquely ME!* program, it was great to see firsthand how these girls transformed into confident actors in one short week.



Deborah Mattila
- This year I was fortunate to visit two wonderful California cities for site visits. I visited San Francisco for the Performing Arts Workshop *ARISE*

Project evaluation several times. I have been working with Performing Arts Workshop for several years now and have stayed in many fine and not so fine hotels. My favorite hotel that I have stayed at many times is the Kabuki Hotel (formerly the Radisson Miyako). This hotel features luxurious bathrooms with Japanese soaking tubs, balconies on every room and, best of all, Aveda toiletries. I visited San Jose in June for Montalvo Arts Center's *Teaching Artist Fellowship* evaluation. While there I spent one very pleasant afternoon touring the Winchester Mystery House, which features windows into walls, stairways to ceilings and a séance room.

Susan Murphy - Although I am more of Twin Cities-area-traveler for the Improve Group I did have a couple chances to take my boys to their grandparent's in Kenosha, WI. In summer, a friend and I also drove to Sioux Falls, SD to drop the boys off with family.

We took a page from our staff travels for the *DHS Waiver Review* and visited small towns along the way, avoiding the highway as much as possible. Our favorite stops were: Pipestone, MN, home of the beautiful Native American Pipestone National Monument; the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove, MN and (don't come back home until you've eaten at) George's Fine Steaks and Spirits in New Ulm, MN.

Leah Goldstein Moses - This past year I was lucky to get to travel to one of my favorite



places, both for work and for vacation -- Duluth and the north shore. Altogether I spent about two weeks of the year there. During my vacation over Fourth of July week, there were record high temperatures

and local lakes were at historic low levels. When temperatures cooled in the evenings, we enjoyed foraging for scrap wood to build bonfires and the hysterical reaction of a small island's worth of seagulls to our nightly firecrackers (we created whole dialogues based on their sounds). Later in the fall, after some much needed rainfall, everything was green and beautiful, and a foray into Wisconsin brought me to the wonderful Golden Inn Restaurant. Garrison Keillor has it right -- "It's delicious, it's deluxe, and it's Duluth" (and the surrounding environs).

Eric Wong - This year, my travels with the Improve Group took me all across the state of Minnesota with the *DHS Waiver Review*. I have had the opportunity to go as far west as Marshall, MN, as far south as Albert Lea, MN and as far north as Wadena, MN. I have also had the chance to work near my Improve Group home in Minneapolis, MN and near my "real" home in Duluth, MN. My travels have provided me an opportunity to examine the wide diversity of physical, socioeconomic and demographic conditions across Minnesota. I also had a chance to show our clients and my co-workers the site of my family restaurant, The Golden Inn in Superior, WI.

Interesting tidbits from research: A number of journal articles pass our desks each week.

Did you know:

- It is more expensive to be a woman? Between 2000-2002, 40 percent of all health care expenses by women were for female-specific conditions (Kristen H. Kjerulff et al, January-February, 2007 *Women's Health Issues* 17, pp. 13-21).
- Even as people remain healthier well into their senior years, the demand for in-home supports (home health aids, chore services, etc.) is expected to increase due to increasing numbers of seniors and a stronger commitment to staying at home related to higher rates of home ownership (Christine Bishop, 2004 *Home Health Care Management Practice*).
- Recently released prison inmates with mental health or substance abuse issues are significantly more likely to remain drug- and arrest-free if receiving a therapeutic community treatment program (James Inciardi et al, 2004 *Crime Delinquency*).
- Although all types of college tuition have increased, public universities had the greatest percentage increase in college tuition between 1993 and 2003 (47% inflation-adjusted); 2-year public colleges had the lowest (21% inflation-adjusted increase). Funding sources increased - but grants grew by 22% while loans grew by 173% over the same period (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2003-04 *Environmental Scan*).

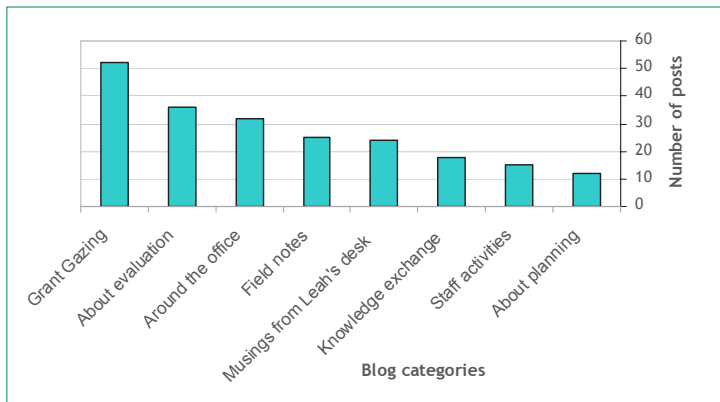
During your talk, tell the stories behind the data. All the charts and graphs in the world cannot compete with a well told story for enhancing data reporting or moving audiences to action.

Give your audience something to take away with them. A simple way to do this is to supply them with links to more information, such as full reports, more detailed charts or relevant research about the topic you discussed. Be sure to be well-stocked with business cards or other materials that can direct them back to you or your website if they have follow-up comments or questions.

Finally, know when to stop talking and start listening—attendees will appreciate the chance to hear from each other and ask questions. Thoughtful preparation, practice, relaxation and flexibility will help you communicate your evaluation results in a professional manner to a more receptive audience.

(Displaying Information, Continued from pg. 1)

Bar and column charts are best when displaying totals of something, where the area of the bar or column is a visual cue of “how much” or “how many”. This chart shows how many posts to the Inside Groove blog have been made under the eight most heavily written topics.

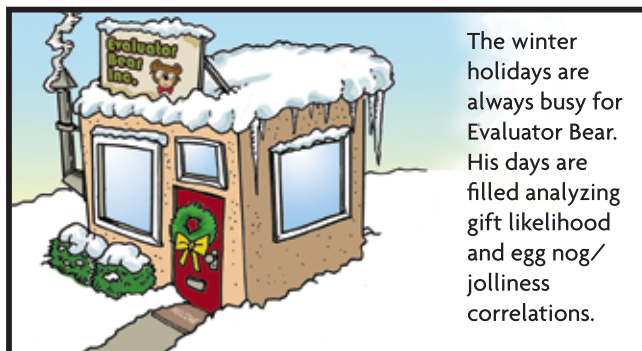


Multiple graphic methods are often used within the same document. Using consistent color schemes, fonts, and spacing can help to unify your information display and minimize distraction from your content. Finally, with whatever graphs you use in your presentations and documents, it is important to make sure that your content is clear and not obscured by graphic design.

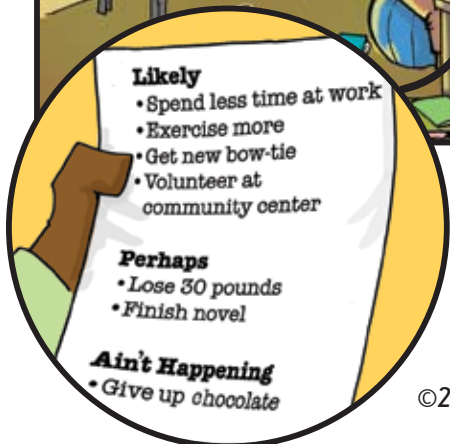
Detailed information on creating quality information graphs can be found in the works of [Edward Tufte](#); tutorials on creating simple and complex charts in Excel can be found at www.peltiertech.com/Excel/Charts/index.html; and information and tools for use of color in graphics can be found at www.ColorBrewer.org.

Evaluator Bear

by: Meleck Davis



The winter holidays are always busy for Evaluator Bear. His days are filled analyzing gift likelihood and egg nog/jolliness correlations.



Of course, even the busiest bear in town finds time for some personal New Year's resolution evaluation.

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Upcoming Grants and Requests for Proposals

By Susan Murphy

2008 brings a new year of funding possibilities. To celebrate this new beginning, the Improve Group is spotlighting the following requests to give applicants time to plan and prepare great proposals. To find weekly grant leads visit [Grant Gazing](#) at our blog [The Inside Groove](#). For questions on applying for grants contact Susan Murphy at susanm@theimprovegroup.com. Best of luck to you all in the new year.

The CIGNA Foundation gives targeted grants to 501 (c) 3 charitable organizations that are working in their five areas of concern: healthy woman, children and families, obesity awareness and prevention, patient/doctor communications and health literacy, elimination of gender disparities in health care and the connection between a healthy mind and a healthy body. Details and an eligibility checklist can be found at www.cigna.com. To begin your online introductory application process, send your requests to FoundationGrants@cigna.com.

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) will hold the second round of grants "to support asset-based collaborative projects or programs that support its strategic efforts in emerging business and emerging workforce areas." Grants up to \$20,000 are available. The foundation aims to fund collaborative efforts which support workforce readiness and economic development. To see a list of the 20 county-area served by the foundation and for more details on how to apply visit www.smifoundation.org/grantinfo.pdf. Pre-applications are due by March 1, 2008.

The Northland Foundation accepts pre-applications by the 15th of each month for grants requests addressing their three main areas of interest: connecting kids and communities/strengthening families, opportunities for self-reliance and aging with independence. A seven county area in the far north east region of Minnesota is eligible for these grants. Contacting the foundation's program staff, mary@northlandfdn.org, to see if a project is a promising fit is required to begin the application process.

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