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STEP 2: CLARIFY THE PURPOSE (THE "WHY")

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In Step 2, you will learn how to

- clarify the purpose of your infographic,
- frame an infographic's purpose as an intended outcome for your audience, and
- work with multiple purposes for an infographic

Information is a means to an end. As consumers, we *access* information for various purposes, such as education, entertainment, motivation, and advancement. As providers, we *present* information for the purpose of achieving similar types of results. With a clear purpose, we can communicate information visually using infographics to achieve a desired result.

Once you identify your audience and understand their information interests and needs to the extent possible, the next step is to articulate a clear purpose for your infographic. In other words, what do you hope to accomplish through the infographic? An infographic's purpose is the change you hope to catalyze in your audience. This could be a change in your audience's awareness, understanding, interests, or behaviors, for example. Whatever the purpose, it should be clear in your mind as you develop the infographic.

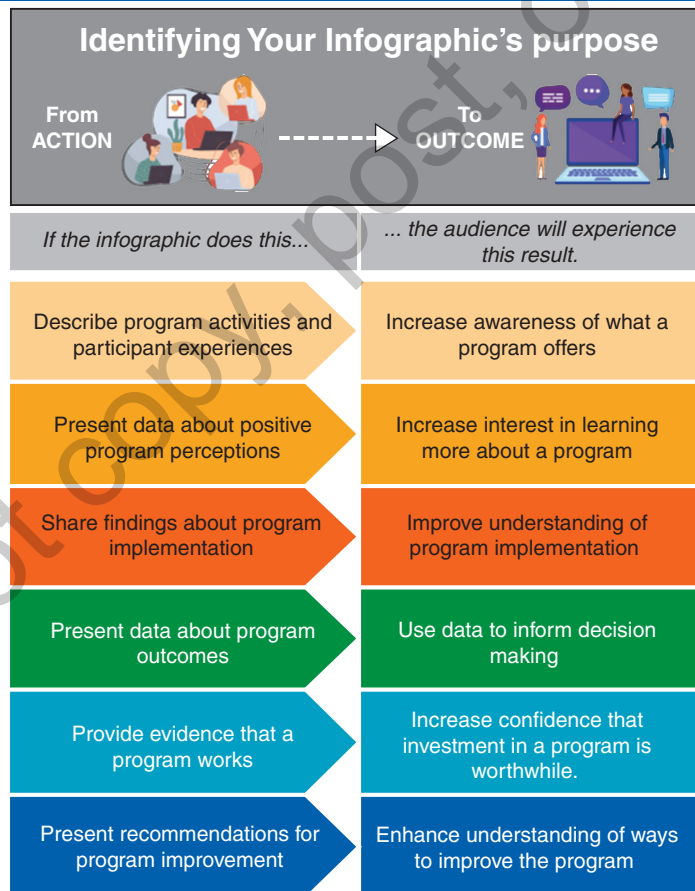## DETERMINING THE "WHY" OF AN INFOGRAPHIC

In Step 1, you identified your audience's information interests and needs. Now consider how they might use the information to meet their interests and needs. The purpose of your infographic should align to your audience's information interests and needs.

Think of an infographic's purpose as the intended outcome for your audience. Where we can get off track is framing an intended outcome as something we accomplish. Presenting, providing, sharing, and distributing information visually are not outcomes for your audience.

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Although presenting information visually might seem like an end goal in itself, it is an action that you take as an infographic developer. To identify the intended outcome for your audience, consider *why* you are presenting the information visually to them (Smiciklas, 2012).

In research and evaluation, we often use logic models to distinguish between actions and outcomes. We can apply a similar thought process to determining the intended outcome, or purpose, of an infographic by using "*if-then*" statements. *If* the infographic presents this information, *then* my audience will experience this as a result. This process will help you disentangle an outcome you might see for yourself versus the change you hope to catalyze for your audience through the infographic. Using action verbs to articulate intended actions and outcomes helps frame what your infographic will present and what outcome will result (Figure 2.1). The difference, however, is that the verbs for intended actions (e.g., share, describe, inform, present) represent "doing," and the verbs for intended outcomes (e.g., increase, improve, deepen, enhance) represent how your audience is "changing." As you determine the purpose of your infographic, be sure it represents the intended outcome for your audience.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Identifying Your Infographic's Purpose

Identifying Your Infographic's purpose

From ACTION ⟶ To OUTCOME

If the infographic does this...	... the audience will experience this result.
Describe program activities and participant experiences	Increase awareness of what a program offers
Present data about positive program perceptions	Increase interest in learning more about a program
Share findings about program implementation	Improve understanding of program implementation
Present data about program outcomes	Use data to inform decision making
Provide evidence that a program works	Increase confidence that investment in a program is worthwhile.
Present recommendations for program improvement	Enhance understanding of ways to improve the program

AN INFOGRAPHIC'S PURPOSE WHEN PART OF A STUDY

As evaluators and researchers, we design studies based on a study purpose. To determine a study's purpose, we identify stakeholders, their information needs, and how they will use study results (Gilliam et al., 2002). In developing study questions and a purpose statement, we consider what stakeholders would want to know from a study. We then align our data collection methods, analytical techniques, and reporting to our study purpose so that we can accomplish what we intended from the beginning (Yarbrough et al., 2010).

In many ways, an infographic is an extension of a study's purpose as it is one form of communicating information about a study. Both your study purpose and infographic purpose should be grounded in the information interests and needs of your audience (stakeholders). If you have a clearly articulated study purpose, then the purpose of your infographic should align to it. Your infographic serves as a mechanism for achieving the study's purpose (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2016).

CLARIFYING PURPOSE MATTERS

Being exceptionally clear about your infographic's purpose and ensuring subsequent design decisions align to your purpose are keys to making your infographic a powerful communication tool. A clearly articulated purpose guides the development of an infographic in future steps. It helps you determine what information is relevant and should be included in the infographic. For example, the infographic's purpose during Step 3 will inform the message your infographic conveys. In Step 4, it will ensure the data and visualizations you select for your infographic represent the information necessary to achieve the infographic's purpose. In Steps 5 and 6, you will select design elements that reinforce the purpose of the infographic.

BOX 2.1. STEP 2 DESIGN CHALLENGE
DESIGN CHALLENGE: WHAT IF THERE ARE MULTIPLE PURPOSES FOR AN INFOGRAPHIC?

You might face the challenge of creating an infographic to accomplish multiple purposes based on the information needs of one or more audiences. *What can you do if you are limited to creating just one infographic to serve multiple purposes*?

Review each purpose and determine if they are equally important. If they all seem equally important, prioritize them based on the following:

• The type of change in your audience you or your client consider to be most important. For instance, increasing an audience's understanding of program outcomes through the infographic might be more important than increasing their understanding about program implementation.

- The extent to which each purpose supports the larger purpose of the study. If there is one purpose that aligns most directly with the study's purpose, that might be the one to select.

- Look at the audience for each purpose you identified. Determine if a particular audience holds more stake in the information for the infographic than another audience. Focusing the infographic on the purpose for this audience might be a priority. For example, a key stakeholder group is future program participants, and the purpose of an infographic for them is to increase their interest and enrollment in the program. Another stakeholder group is program implementers, and the purpose of an infographic for them is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery. Enrolling future program participants might be the priority that can best be accomplished through an infographic, whereas a report or presentation geared toward providing program implementers with improvement feedback might be more effective.

Determine if any of the purposes for the infographic could be just as effectively accomplished through other communication and reporting methods. For example, a report might elaborate on the information about program implementation. Blogs or social media posts might be just as effective in increasing awareness about program activities and offerings. Presentations to program developers might be just as effective, if not more so, for communicating recommendations for program improvement.

Attempt addressing multiple purposes in one infographic. It might be that the same visualization can serve multiple purposes for various audiences. If page length isn't an issue, you can also create a longer infographic that includes all the information necessary to accomplish multiple purposes of the infographic.

BOX 2.2. CLARIFY THE PURPOSE
PLANETS ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE—CLARIFY THE PURPOSE

In Step 1, we identified the infographic's audience as out-of-school time (OST) educators because they are the intended users of the PLANETS curriculum units. We also surmised that they could be interested in information about the ease of implementing PLANETS curriculum units and their benefit to OST learners (Haden & Peery, 2021). We knew from the evaluation report that the PLANETS study included various findings related to OST educator implementation of the curriculum units and associated educator and learner outcomes.

There could have been multiple purposes of the PLANETS infographic for OST educators. One purpose could have been to increase the awareness of future OST educators about the
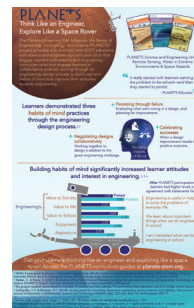
PLANETS curriculum units, their activities, and implementation requirements. Another purpose could have been to inform potential OST educators about the perceptions, experiences, and outcomes of the OST educators who participated in the evaluation study. A third purpose could have been to improve OST educators' understanding of student outcomes associated with participating in the PLANETS activities. Each purpose would result in a distinctive infographic because the ensuing story to achieve each infographic's purpose would have been based on different data and information. It would have been difficult to accomplish all of these purposes through a single infographic, while still making the story concise, compelling, and memorable.

We then considered which purpose best supported the key project objectives. While a key project objective was to disseminate the curriculum units to a national audience of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) OST educators, ultimately

> **PLANETS Infographic Purpose:**
> To increase OST educators' understanding of the learner outcomes resulting from implementation of the PLANETS curricular units.

the goal was to engage learners in collaborative problem-solving through an engineering design process to build learners' habits of mind and improve their attitudes toward engineering. As such, we decided that the purpose of the infographic should focus on learner outcomes. Learner outcomes would be of interest to multiple stakeholders, such as PLANETS project team members and NASA program administrators as well as OST educators. Therefore, we intended that the infographic would increase OST educators' understanding of the learner outcomes resulting from implementation of the PLANETS curricular units. In turn, we believed that with a better understanding of the benefits to learners, OST educators would be interested in accessing and using the PLANETS curriculum units in their OST settings.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN!

Try different ways of identifying and learning about an infographic's purpose:

- Find an infographic online and see if you can determine what the purpose of the infographic is (for example, Cool Infographics https://coolinfographics.com/ or Canva https://www.canva.com/learn/best-infographics/). Could the infographic serve multiple purposes? In what ways? If you are unable to discern a clear purpose, what would you change to make it clearer?

- If you are studying a program, consider the audience you identified in Step 1. Now, think about the change you want to catalyze in your audience to determine your infographic's purpose. How would you frame the intended outcome for your audience?

<div style="background-color:green; color:white; text-align:center; font-weight:bold;">RESOURCES</div>

Check it out!

- Nancy Duarte's **Seven Questions to Knowing Your Audience** in *slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations* (2008).

- Kylie Hutchinson's **Principles for More Effective Reporting** in *A Short Primer on Innovative Evaluation Reporting* (2017).

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Evaluation Reporting: A Guide to Help Ensure Use of Evaluation Findings: https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/docs/evaluation_reporting_guide.pdf