

## Reading 1: Finding the Data-based Story You Want to Tell

### Data Types – Inputs, Outputs, and Outcomes

Now it is time to determine what data you can use in your story. To do so, let's consider the *types* of data your library may collect: inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

#### Inputs

In simple terms, inputs are what we **put into** a program, service, or resource our library offers. In other words, what are the costs associated with the program, service, or resource? We can also think of inputs in terms of staffing—how many staff are working on the project, and how much time are they spending on it?

As an example of inputs, consider a Coke machine. In this example, the input is the money we put into the machine so that we can buy a drink.

Now let's move into the library context by considering summer reading program inputs. In this context, inputs would include all of the costs associated with the summer reading program, the number of staff working on the program, and staff time spent on the program.



#### Outputs

The second type of data is outputs. Outputs are the levels of service or materials provided as a result of the inputs. In the context of the Coke machine, the output would be the can of Coke we receive after putting our money into the machine.

For summer reading, examples of outputs include the number of summer reading events offered, attendance at these events, the number of minutes participants spent reading, and circulation.

#### Outcomes

The third type of data is outcomes. Outcomes are the effects of a program, resource, or service on an individual, organization, or community. Returning to our Coke machine example, outcomes might include getting a caffeine high or sugar buzz after drinking the can of Coke.

In the context of summer reading, examples of outcomes include that participants enjoy reading more after being in the program, have improved reading skills, or are more likely to read by choice.

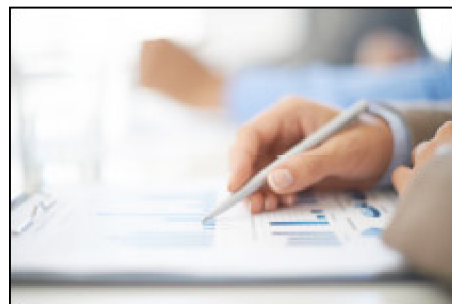


Note that the outcomes described above are at the level of the end user. This is common, as our focus tends to be on demonstrating the library's effect on our users. However, it's important to recognize that outcomes can occur at other levels, as well. For example, perhaps a library worked with the local school

district to promote summer reading and, as a result of this arrangement, developed a long-term partnership with the district. This is an example of an organizational-level outcome for both the library and the school district.

When determining what data to include in your story, it is useful to consider what kinds of stories these three data types can tell. Outcomes tend to be particularly powerful because they show the effect the library has on users, organizations, and communities. How did the library change them?

If you have all three types of data available, you may choose to discuss the outcomes in the context of inputs and outputs so that you can demonstrate the effect the library had (outcome) as a result of the resources it invested (input) and the level of service or materials it provided (output).



If you don't have outcome data, you can still tell an effective story with input and output data. Remember the video you watched about Gene Jaramillo? In this video, the producers used output numbers such as "each year more than 22 million Americans rely on libraries to find a job" to help tell the story.

You can see additional examples of how to use data in stories in the videos *Libraries: Access to Opportunities* and *Libraries: Linking Seniors in a Digital World*. When viewing these, try to identify the *types* of data the producers use—outputs and outcomes—to tell their stories.