

Guidance for Writing a Meaningful Impact Statement in a CRIS report

How will a CRIS impact statement be used?

CRIS reports are referenced by other Project Directors, potential applicants, NGOs, other government agencies, and USDA staff. One of the most important uses of the information in your reports is briefing leadership and legislators about what has been accomplished with the public funding invested in grant programs. In other words – your CRIS reports are used to justify the continuation of the grant funding program through which you received your award. It may seem that you are entering information into a database that no one sees, but CRIS reports really are an important resource, both for competitive and formula programs. Through the guidance offered here, we will help you understand how to write impact statements that will be most meaningful to the audiences they serve.

Target the messages in your CRIS Impact statements to stakeholders:

- **Community leaders and representatives**, including legislators from local to national level
- **Taxpayers**
- **Farmers**
- **Consumers**

What benefit has come from your work? Provide answers to this question in terms that will be meaningful to community leaders (politicians), taxpayers, and farmers. Because you, as an agricultural scientist, are accustomed to communicating in technical terms about details of your work, this will require stepping back to consider a broader perspective. You will likely need to translate results of your study from scientific terms to lay terms – things that everyday people can relate to.

For example, when deciding what impact to report, you might consider changes in:

- **Economics**
- **Community**
- **Environment**
- **Agricultural norms**

Most people who review CRIS reports will not share the expertise of the author of the report. For that reason it is important to use plain language in your impact statement. Scientists speak and write in technical terms that are filled with jargon and fine detail. For your impact statement, please think and write in words that can be understood without specialized training. Explain why the outcomes of your work matter as though you are talking to a group of middle school students who are visiting your research or demonstration site.

How to accomplish this:

Revisit the logic model for your project if you have one. Impact statements should arise from the outcomes described in a logic model. A good impact statement has three elements:

1. State the issue in terms that will connect with a broad audience. Think back to what need you were seeking to address when you proposed the project.
2. Describe, in general terms, who did what, and the results. Specific quantitative values or trends help validate the impact.
3. Translate those results into broader outcomes in the real world. Engage your peripheral vision in order to remember how the work you are doing is important to the bigger picture and then explain that simply and directly.