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STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE (THE "WHO")

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In Step 1, you will learn how to

- identify the audience you want to reach through your infographic,

- decide if you will use one infographic to reach multiple audiences or create multiple infographics,

- consider the information needs and interests of your audience, and

- determine how your audience will access your infographic.

The power of an infographic lies in its ability to catalyze change. Through a compelling story and a call to action, an infographic can inform or transform its audience. Yet the audience won't experience change in understanding or take any action if the infographic's message doesn't connect with what matters to them.

By visually displaying information, infographics connect with their audience on both intellectual and emotional levels (Smiciklas, 2012). When an infographic's message resonates emotionally with an audience, they are more likely to recall the information conveyed and take action (Medina, 2014; Norman, 2004). Therefore, understanding the information needs, priorities, and interests of the infographic's audience is a critical first step for creating a powerful visual message.
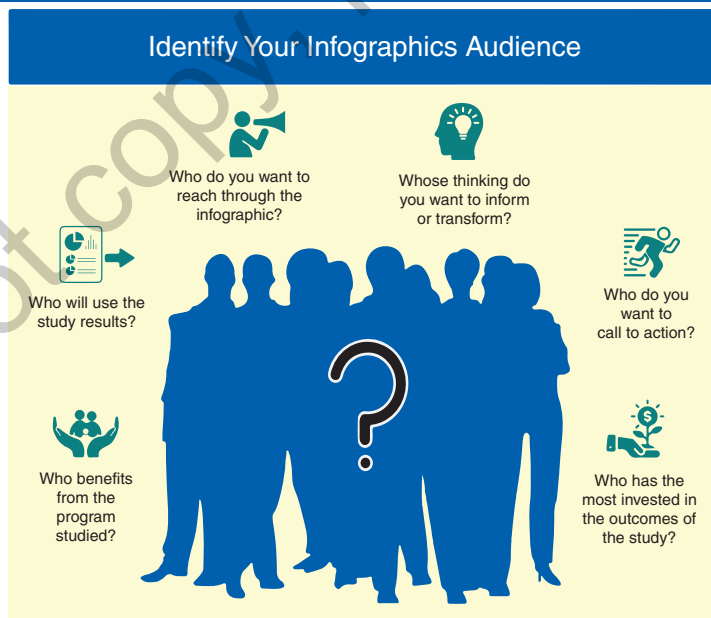
UNDERSTANDING THE "WHO" OF AN INFOGRAPHIC

Creating an infographic begins with knowing your audience. The infographic, after all, is for them, not for you. As professionals conducting studies and working with data, we sometimes believe that all the information generated from studies has pressing value and importance. But to a specific audience, some pieces of information hold more value than others. For example,

consider a study that focuses on a particular program. The information from the study that program sponsors need for guiding future funding decisions will be different than the information that program developers need for making program improvements. Program providers might need information about how to successfully deliver and implement the program, whereas potential participants might want to know about the experiences and outcomes of past program participants. When we take into account how intended audiences, or stakeholders, will be using study results, we can ensure that our infographics respond to their information needs.

DETERMINING THE AUDIENCE FOR AN INFOGRAPHIC

Key audiences for an infographic might include those who invested in the program or study, as well as those who stand to benefit from program outcomes (Figure 1.1). Consider who has the most funds, time, or resources invested in the study. The investor audience could include study funders, program sponsors, program developers, and program providers. Investors also include stakeholders who are personally or emotionally invested in program outcomes—perhaps those who have the greatest to gain or lose based on study results. Program beneficiaries could include current and future program participants. Investors and beneficiaries typically are audiences directly involved in supporting the program or the study. Investors and beneficiaries might also receive study results in other forms, such as a written report, findings summary, or presentation, so consider the added value of presenting these audiences with an infographic. Often, an infographic allows these audiences to communicate with other stakeholders about the program and therefore is an effective dissemination strategy.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Identify Your Infographic Audience

Identify Your Infographics Audience

Who do you want to reach through the infographic?

Whose thinking do you want to inform or transform?

Who will use the study results?

Who do you want to call to action?

Who benefits from the program studied?

Who has the most invested in the outcomes of the study?

An infographic can reach broader audiences as well, perhaps audiences who won't have access to the study report and who are unaware of the program under study. You might want to inform them about the study results to increase their awareness, build their understanding, and perhaps call them to take action. These audiences could include, for example, the general public, community members, parents and families, potential investors, social justice advocates, and policymakers.

If your study is client-funded, talk with them about who they see as the audience for the study results. Your client might have a communication plan already in place that specifies which audiences or stakeholder groups should receive what information. Alternatively, your study might have a reporting and dissemination plan that outlines the communication method you will use with each stakeholder group (Hutchinson, 2017). When you and your clients incorporate infographics into the design phase of a study, they become part of a larger communication and dissemination strategy for reaching intended audiences. In this case, there likely is a planned budget for infographics, which will influence the number of different infographics that can be created for various audiences. Alternatively, knowing that there is a budget for only one infographic will help you prioritize which audience is most important to reach.

IDENTIFYING THE INFORMATION NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Once you identify who the audience is, you'll want to delve into understanding what they care about and how the study is relevant to their information needs and interests. Most key audience members will care about whether the program was effective in accomplishing its intended outcomes, but you can't assume that is all they will want to know. Asking your client and study audience representatives about their information needs and interests during this step will anchor future decisions in the infographic development process (see Know Your Audience: Questions to Ask).

BOX 1.1. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: QUESTIONS TO ASK

During Steps 1–3 of developing an infographic, you will want to connect with your client and audience groups to understand their information needs, priorities, and interests. Here are some guiding questions to consider.

1. Who is your audience for this study?
2. What information from the study would be most relevant to your audience? What information matters to them?
3. How might the audience use information from the study?
4. Who will receive information about the study, and how will they receive it?
5. For which audience members would an infographic be an appropriate communication tool?

6. What background knowledge does the audience have about the topic? Are they aware of the study? Do they have background in evaluation or research?
7. What is the audience's cultural background, and how might that inform their receptivity to information and visual design choices for the infographic, including color and image associations?
8. How would you share an infographic with your audience?
9. If there is one thing the audience takes away from the infographic, what would it be?
10. What do you hope will change for the audience as a result of reading the infographic?

Study Funders and Program Sponsors

Program investors, beneficiaries, and general public members might have different information needs from the same study, and an effective infographic should take into account these needs (Torres et al., 2005). For example, those that fund a study but have no ties to the program itself, such as a federal agency or nonprofit organization, might care about the rigor of the study design and the validity of its findings (Figure 1.2). They want audiences to have confidence in the results from the study they funded. Program sponsors want to know the program is worth the investment. They also might need to make decisions about continuing program funding or scaling up implementation. Future study funders or program sponsors might want to know if a program or initiative has evidence of effectiveness or shows promise and therefore would be worth funding (Wilkerson & Haden, 2014).

Program Developers and Providers

Program developers and providers are probably the audiences with the most knowledge and experience with a program or initiative, and therefore, they are heavily invested in its implementation and outcomes. Program developers often are interested in recommendations for improvement and in data that will inform program modifications. If the program didn't accomplish the intended outcomes, they might want to know what aspects of the design could be improved. If the program accomplished intended outcomes, developers might want to know if there are program design features that could be replicated for new programs.

In addition to information related to a program's design, program developers and program providers might be interested in study findings about program delivery. They might be interested in knowing the conditions and supports for successful implementation. They might also want to know about the feasibility of implementation in different contexts and if program providers were able to implement the program as intended. Program providers might be interested in practical information and best practices for ensuring successful implementation, as well as lessons learned and implications for future practice (Wilkerson & Haden, 2014).

Program Participants

Infographics that capture the experiences, perceptions, and voices of participants can tell a compelling story about the importance of a program. Program participants might look to an

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Audience Information Needs

Examples of Audience Information Needs

👥 Audience	🧠 Information Needs
Study funders	Evidence of effectiveness Validity of results
Program sponsors	Evidence of effectiveness Potential to scale up implementation Funding continuation
Program developers	Evidence of effectiveness Feasibility of implementation Conditions and supports for implementation Data to inform program modifications Recommendations for program improvement
Program providers	Evidence of effectiveness Lessons learned and best practices for implementation How to implement with fidelity in local context
Program participants	Participant experience Participant changes and impact
General public	Description of topic and problem addressed Why it matters; reason to care about it What can be done and the benifit of taking action
Policymakers and policy advocates	Description of topic and problem addressed Prevalence and salience of problem addressed Evidence of effectiveness Policy implications and recommendations
Evaluators and researchers	Study design and methods Methodological approach, challenges, and lessons learned Study results

infographic to accurately represent their experiences in the program or study. If the infographic doesn't reflect their experiences, participants are unlikely to see much value or credibility in the information presented. Program participants might also be interested in knowing about the broader program impacts for all participants.

General Public

The general public is a common audience for infographics because an infographic's purpose often is to raise public awareness of the problem or issue that the program is intended to address. To accomplish this goal, the infographic needs to provide members of the general public with

information about the topic of study, the problem addressed, and how it was addressed. The public will also want to know the benefit to them for caring about the program or taking action based on the study's results.

Policymakers and Policy Advocates

Policymakers and policy advocates might be unaware of the program or initiative being studied, but they are likely to have some awareness of the topic or problem being addressed. They might be interested in the prevalence and salience of a problem because they make decisions that affect communities and large populations. The evidence supporting study findings is important, but policymakers are often most interested in understanding the implications of study findings for creating or modifying policies. They need clear and concise policy recommendations that are within their sphere of influence.

Evaluators and Researchers

Fellow evaluators and researchers are also potential audiences for infographics as part of a professional community of learners. In this context, interest could relate to study design and methods, methodological approaches for complex programs, and challenges and lessons learned during study implementation. Aside from an interest in study methods, evaluators and researchers will also be interested in study results.

The information needs, priorities, and interests of infographic audiences may be similar to the general needs of the study's audience. If you identified your audience and their information needs at the onset of designing a research or evaluation study, then the study's findings should respond to those needs. When a study is complete, the focus becomes selecting the communication method that is most appropriate for responding to the needs of a particular audience. Infographics are an effective way of disseminating information to a range of audiences, and they might be preferable over a written report or other communication method for audiences who

- won't have access to the full report;

- have limited time or interest in reading a full report;

- need a "hook" that resonates with them, connects them to the value and importance of the study, and motivates them to learn more through the full report;

- need a portable and easy-to-share method for disseminating findings to broader audiences, such as through social media and email; and

- want a visually engaging way to embed program information or findings on a website.

Identifying the audience for an infographic involves knowing their information needs and confirming that an infographic is an appropriate communication method to respond to those needs.

ADDRESSING MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

When there are several potential audiences for an infographic, it can be challenging to determine if an infographic can respond to the needs and interests of all of them. Sometimes multiple audiences will have shared information needs and interests, but they will use the same information in an infographic differently. Our infographic, *K–12 School Employee Sexual Misconduct: Lessons Learned From Title IX Policy Implementation*, summarized key study findings relevant to multiple audiences. However, the findings had different implications for each audience (i.e., researchers, educators, state and federal leaders, and higher education faculty), therefore, we listed separate action items for each audience group in the infographic's conclusion (Figure 1.3). This was an efficient and cost-effective way of using one infographic to address the needs and interests of multiple audiences.

Conversely, you might find that multiple audiences have distinctly different information needs and interests, which makes creating one infographic that will satisfy everyone impractical.

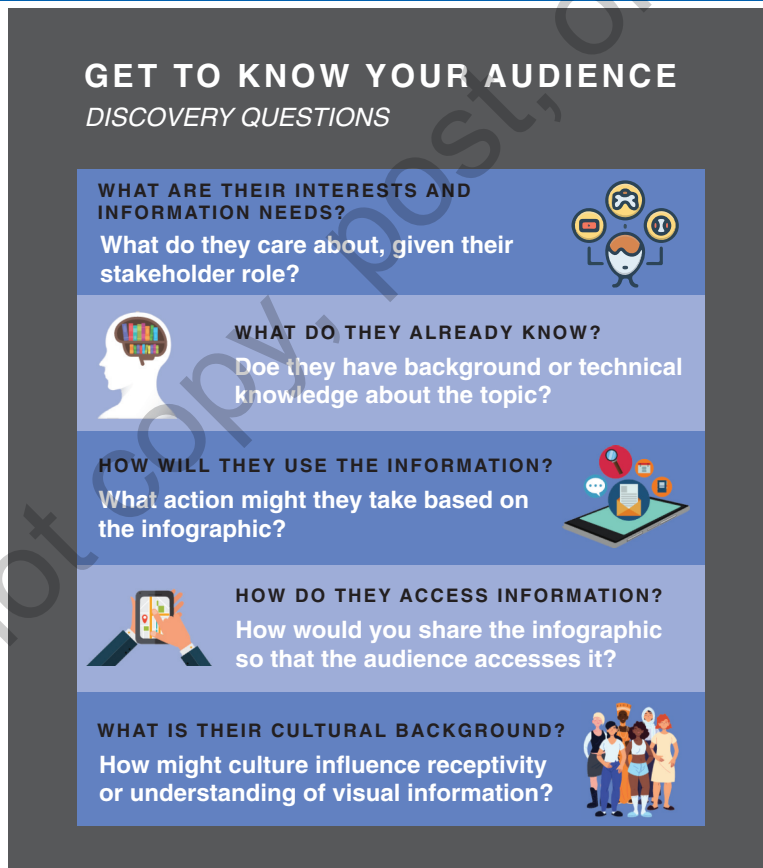### FIGURE 1.3 ■ Example Infographic With Multiple Audiences

Source: Stephanie Wilkerson, Anne Cosby, Molly Henschel, Billie-Jo Grant, 2023

If there is time and budget for creating more than one infographic, you can develop distinctly different infographics for each audience and purpose. Alternatively, you can create a family of complementary infographics that together tell a comprehensive story about the program or topic. In this case, consider creating a replicable infographic design template that you can populate with information and visuals relevant to each audience. If funding prevents developing multiple infographics for various audiences, then perhaps create one infographic that addresses the information needs held by the audience you most want to reach.

GET TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Many evaluators and researchers design studies to address a problem or an area of need for a given population. Even if you designed the evaluation or research study with an audience's needs in mind, communicating with the audience requires an additional understanding of their culture, background knowledge, and intended use of study information (Figure 1.4). This goes

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Get to Know Your Audience

GET TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE
DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

WHAT ARE THEIR INTERESTS AND INFORMATION NEEDS?
What do they care about, given their stakeholder role?

WHAT DO THEY ALREADY KNOW?
Doe they have background or technical knowledge about the topic?

HOW WILL THEY USE THE INFORMATION?
What action might they take based on the infographic?

HOW DO THEY ACCESS INFORMATION?
How would you share the infographic so that the audience accesses it?

WHAT IS THEIR CULTURAL BACKGROUND?
How might culture influence receptivity or understanding of visual information?

beyond identifying a need or rationale for conducting the study. It's about putting yourself in the shoes of your audience—the people who will interpret and derive meaning from your infographic.

To the extent possible, you will want to understand and take into account the cultural background of your audience when developing the infographic. Improving your cultural awareness of the characteristics, beliefs, and values your audience holds related to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, social class, and profession will help inform the design decisions you make in later infographic design steps. Ultimately, you want to create a culturally sensitive infographic that is appropriate for your audience and how they might perceive and interpret the visual information in your infographic.

You'll also want to consider how much the audience already knows about the topic of the infographic. Primary stakeholders, such as program sponsors, developers, providers, and participants, will likely know more about the study focus, whereas secondary or tertiary stakeholders, such as the general public, policymakers, or other evaluators and researchers, might know less. Understanding what background knowledge the audience brings to the table will help you determine the type and level of descriptive program information you need to include in the infographic. This is the information the audience needs in order to understand the infographic's central message.

You'll also want to take into account how much the audience knows about the technical aspects of the infographic's data and study information. This influences the tone and language you use in the infographic. An audience with a technical background in research and evaluation methods might expect to see extensive statistical documentation in an infographic, such as effect sizes, *p*-values, and sample sizes. But presenting data in this way could make it hard for nontechnical audiences to understand the infographic's message. An infographic needs to speak the language of the audience in order to keep their attention and promote understanding.

CONSIDER HOW THE AUDIENCE WILL ACCESS THE INFOGRAPHIC

The local context in which the audience will access and use the infographic has implications for the design elements and dissemination methods you choose during later steps of infographic development. Will the audience access the infographic by visiting a website, following social media, reading an email or newsletter, participating in an electronic mailing list, or receiving a report? You'll want to think about the audience's access methods and identify any potential barriers or limitations to access, such as Internet connectivity or social media use. Where the infographic will "live," such as in a blog post, on a website, in a report, or on social media, will affect the size of the infographic. Whether the audience will view the infographic in a print or online format influences design elements such as color, font size, and page size as well as other design specifications (see Steps 5 and 6 for more on infographic layout and design).

BOX 1.2. STEP 1 DESIGN CHALLENGE 2

DESIGN CHALLENGE: WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUDIENCE?

Determining the information needs and interests of an infographic audience isn't always easy. You'll have direct access to some audiences, such as program providers and participants, who might also be involved in the study. Other audiences, such as community members or the general public, might be less accessible and more challenging to understand. *So how can you determine the information needs and interests of your audience when they aren't clear?*

**Ask!** The best way to know your audience is to contact members of the group directly. These could be primary stakeholders for the study—that is, people who stand to benefit from or are impacted by study results. You'll also want to engage these stakeholder representatives to review your infographic during later development steps, so it's best to involve them early in the process. If you don't have direct access to representatives of your target audience, ask your client, study funder, or program sponsor. They should have a good understanding of the audiences they serve and intend to reach.

Research! Visit the websites and social media accounts of groups, associations, and organizations that the audience might belong to. What they post represents what matters to them. Learn about their mission, their purpose, and the difference they want to make through what they offer. You can also scan research and evaluation literature for needs assessments, market research, or other studies involving the target audience to see if these studies shed any light on the audience's needs, interests, and priorities.

BOX 1.3. PLANETS ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

PLANETS ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE—IDENTIFYING THE AUDIENCE

The Planetary Learning That Advances the Nexus of Engineering, Technology, and Science (PLANETS) project provides educators in out-of-school time (OST) settings with curriculum guides that include National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) planetary science content aligned to National Science Standards. With funding from NASA's Science Activation five-year grant program, researchers at the Northern Arizona University Center for Science Teaching and Learning (NAU CSTL) lead the PLANETS project in collaboration with scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Astrogeology Science Center and researchers at the Museum of Science, Boston (MOS).
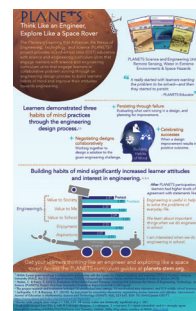
As part of the grant, external evaluators at Magnolia Consulting, LLC, conducted an evaluation study to measure project implementation and outcomes. Key evaluation stakeholders, including PLANETS project partners and NASA Science Activation program administrators, received a comprehensive report on the multiyear formative and summative evaluation. Because disseminating the PLANETS products and study findings was a key project objective, OST educators, who were the intended users of the PLANETS products, seemed like an appropriate audience for the infographic.

What did we know about OST educators? Based on OST educator participants in the evaluation study, OST educators worked in informal education settings such as museums, science centers, and after-school youth clubs, many of which served minority and underrepresented youth. They would have been interested in educational materials that engage learners in hands-on interactive content that reinforced or expanded upon the educational content learners received in formal education settings. Because their time with learners was limited, they needed access to evidence-based materials shown to benefit learners in OST settings. They might have also wanted to know if curriculum materials were appropriate for their OST setting and easy to implement. They could use the information presented in an infographic to determine if the PLANETS curriculum guides would be feasible to implement and beneficial to their OST learners. OST educators would have had varying levels of education, represented different cultural backgrounds, and served diverse populations of OST learners. OST educators typically would not have had technical knowledge of education research and statistics, but they could have had an understanding of general STEM educational content since many OST programs focus on STEM topics and occur within science centers and museums. OST educators would access information digitally and online, and the infographic could also serve as a companion to the PLANETS evaluation report.

> **PLANETS Infographic Audience:**
> Out-of-school time educators in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) settings.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN!

Try different ways of identifying and learning about audiences:

- Find an infographic online at Cool Infographics (https://coolinfographics.com/) or Canva (https://www.canva.com/learn/best-infographics/). After viewing the infographic, is it clear who the intended audience is? Why or why not?

- Think of a charitable organization that serves members of your community (for example, youth, senior citizens, homeless individuals). If a study measured the impact of the organization's outreach to the community members they serve, who might read an infographic presenting information from the study? What might the different audiences be interested in knowing about the services community members receive and why?

- If you are studying a program, who are the audiences who might care about the study's results? Consider the questions in Figure 1.1 to learn as much about your audience as possible.

RESOURCES

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).