Vander Weele Group LLC
Making Monitoring Meaningful

# 9 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR MONITORING REPORTS

## 1 Require citations.

Grantees don't deserve to be hit with findings based on subjective opinions. Use documented legal standards as your basis for formal findings, and include citations to support your argument. References to best practices or other ways to strengthen the program should be reported separately and marked as optional.

## 2 Require evidence.

Providing documented evidence along with each finding strengthens arguments for change and increases grantee confidence in the Monitor's judgement. It also protects the program and the responsible agency against accusations of unfair play or biased assessments.

## 3 Provide templates.

Providing pre-approved language for standards, findings, recommendations, and corrective actions not only promotes consistency, it reduces the need for a grammar guru's touch. Templates still allow Monitors to tailor their findings, but providing sample finding language speeds the process along and reduces time spent on editing and re-writing.

## 4 Set a style (and stick with it).

Will Federal be capitalized? Are Monitors called Monitors, Assessors, or Reviewers? Does your style include the Oxford comma? What language is too colloquial for a formal report? Making these decisions upfront and providing guidance to the Monitoring team on program preferences will save time on the back end and promote consistency in reports.

## 5 Provide training.

At the Vander Weele Group, we place a premium on excellent writing. To make sure every staff member can meet the required writing standards, we deliver a curriculum on important topics such as formal writing, structure, clarity, coherence, and common writing errors--and we recommend our clients do the same.This provides a baseline body of knowledge that can be cited during the quality control stage.

## 6 Write for an inexpert audience.

Assuming prior knowledge on the part of your reader--whether that's the meaning of an acronym, the history of a program, or specific legal requirements--is a quick way to lose them. Write your reports as though the person reading them has just been hired and is still getting up to speed.

## 7 Keep it concise.

When writing monitoring reports, the common wisdom of "keep it simple" applies. By their nature, monitoring reports can be long and dense, requiring concentrated focus time from busy program managers to read. The easiest way to streamline your writing is to be direct: use short phrases, cut unnecessary words, use bullet points when possible, and summarize key points at the end of each section.

## 8 Take a break, then come back.

It's easy to feel brain-fried when you're writing reports, which affects your comprehension and attention to detail. One way to stay fresh is to take frequent breaks. Get up and make a cup of coffee, take a walk, or spend some time on a project that doesn't require a lot of thought. Once you've recharged your batteries, come back to the report and read it over with fresh eyes. Watch for spelling, grammar, and coherence before you call it done.

## 9 Find a second set of eyes.

When you spend a long time looking at a document, no matter how careful you are, you may eventually lose the ability to see the forest for the trees. Ask a colleague or supervisor to review your report before you submit it. You might be surprised at what they find.