

Report Writing: A Primer and Best Practice Guide

Columbus State Community College

Grants Department

Presented: 10/25/2024 at the NSF ATE PI Conference

INTRODUCTIONS

About Us:

- Ken Eppstein: Project Coordinator, Grants Reporting & Evaluation
- Sara Lucas: Project Manager, Grants Department
- Columbus State Team and NSF History

Access the Document

The Columbus State Community College Report Writing Primer and Best Practices Guide

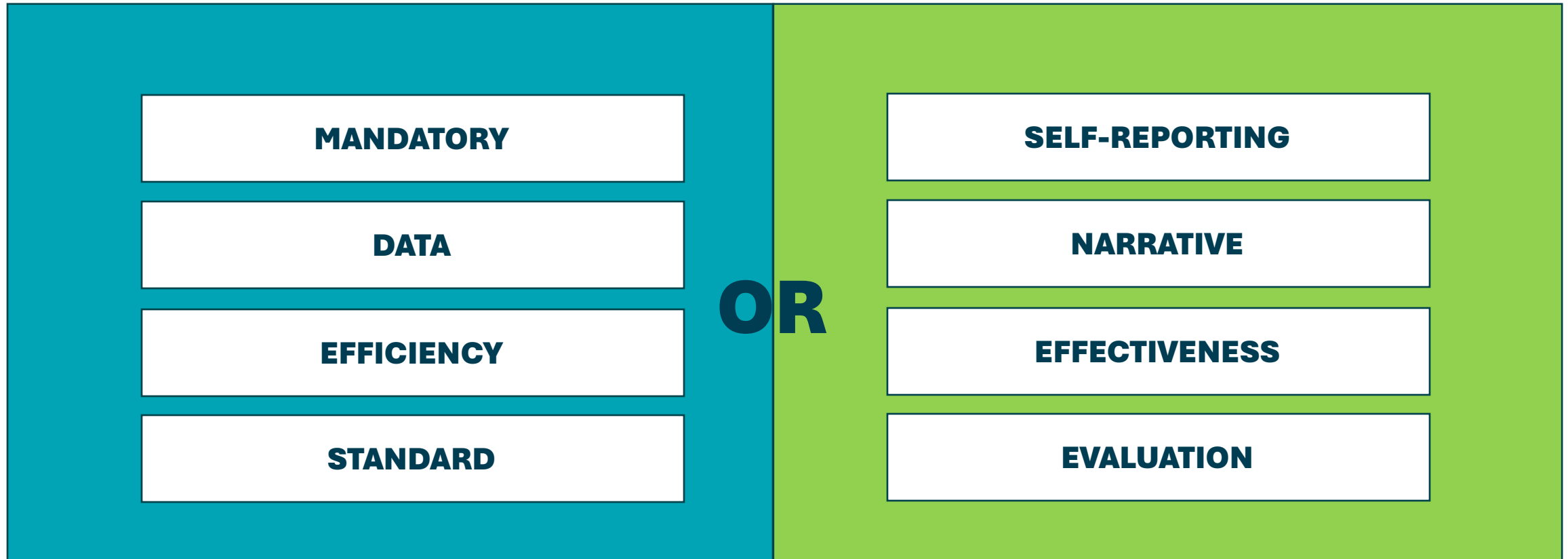


WHY A PRIMER?

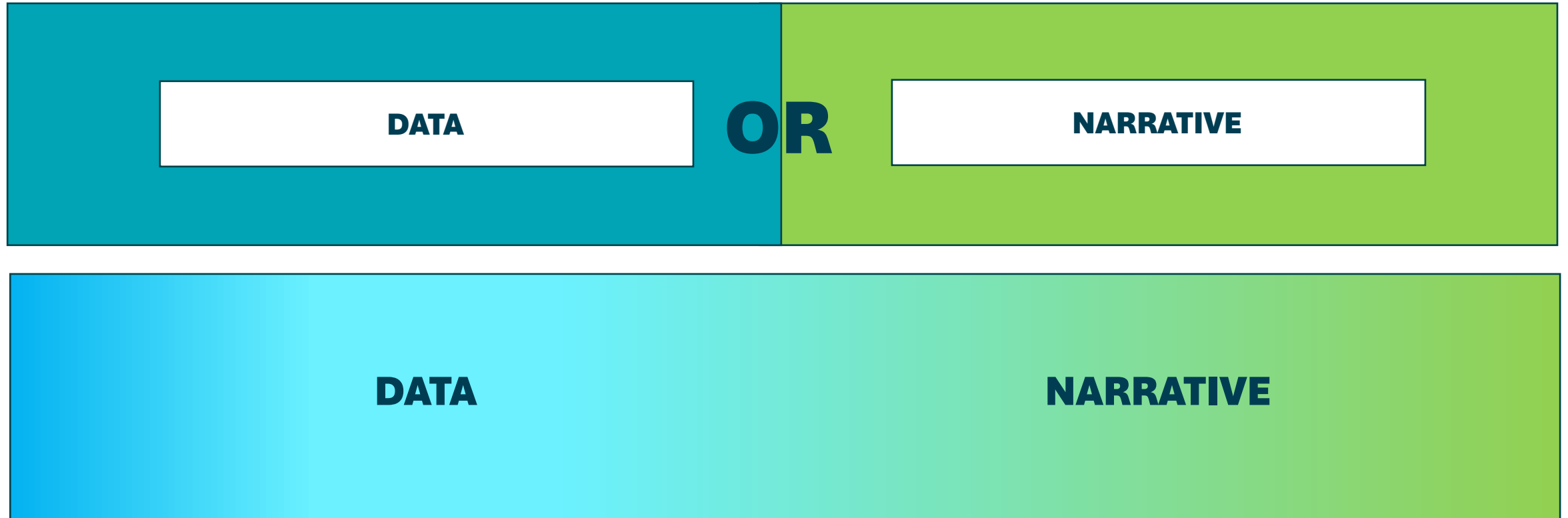
- **REPORT WRITING IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER TYPES OF WRITING**
- **REPORT WRITING COMES WITH ITS OWN DISTINCT BRAND OF ANXIETY**
- **KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF REPORT WRITING ALLEVIATES THAT ANXIETY**



THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF A REPORT



THINK OF THESE ELEMENTS AS SPECTRUMS, NOT FULL DICHOTOMIES



THINK OF THESE ELEMENTS SPECTRUMS, NOT FULL DICHOTOMIES



Mandatory Versus Self-Reporting



Mandatory Reporting: Required as part of a contract, agreement, or grant.



Self-Reporting: Non-required reporting created in response to a perceived need.

Mandatory Reporting



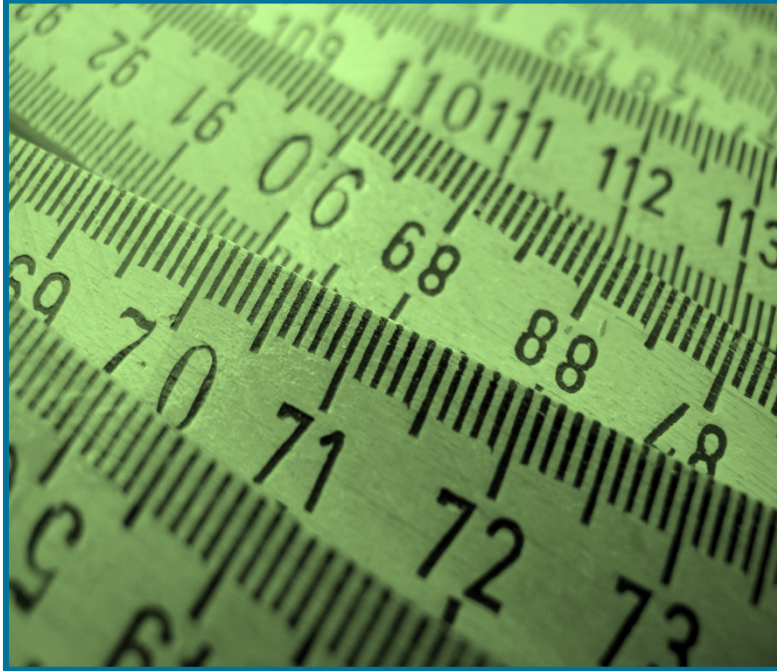
- **Required:** as part of a contract, agreement, or grant. The audience is the institution requiring the report.
- **Constrained:** Deadlines, format, type, and presentation of information is usually predetermined.
- **Examples:**
The US Census,
Tax Returns,
NSF APRs, etc.

Self-Reporting

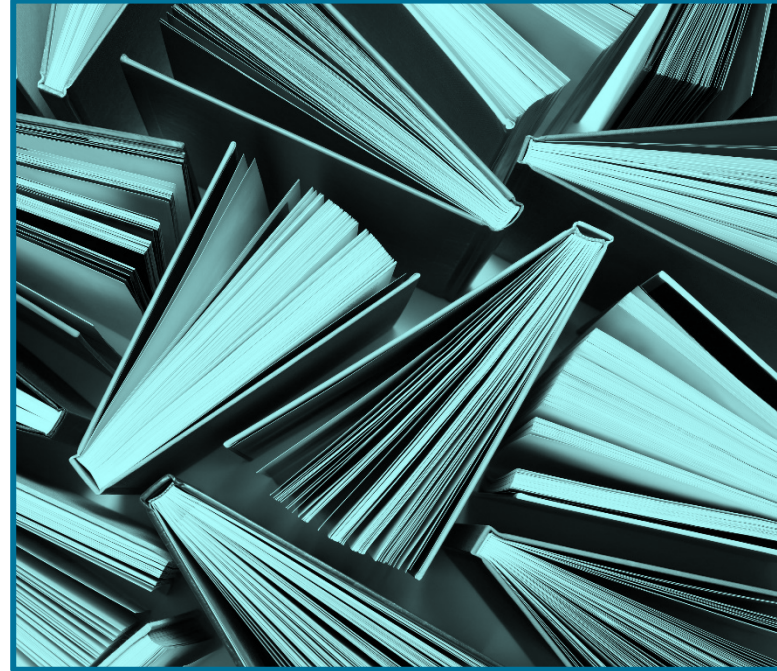


- **Created in response to recognized need.**
- **Important in a fluid environment**
- **Unconstrained: Deadlines, format, type, and presentation of information are variable according to needs and audience**
- **Examples:
Meeting Minutes,
Press Releases, Timelines,
Indexes,
NSF reports?**

Data Versus Narrative Reporting

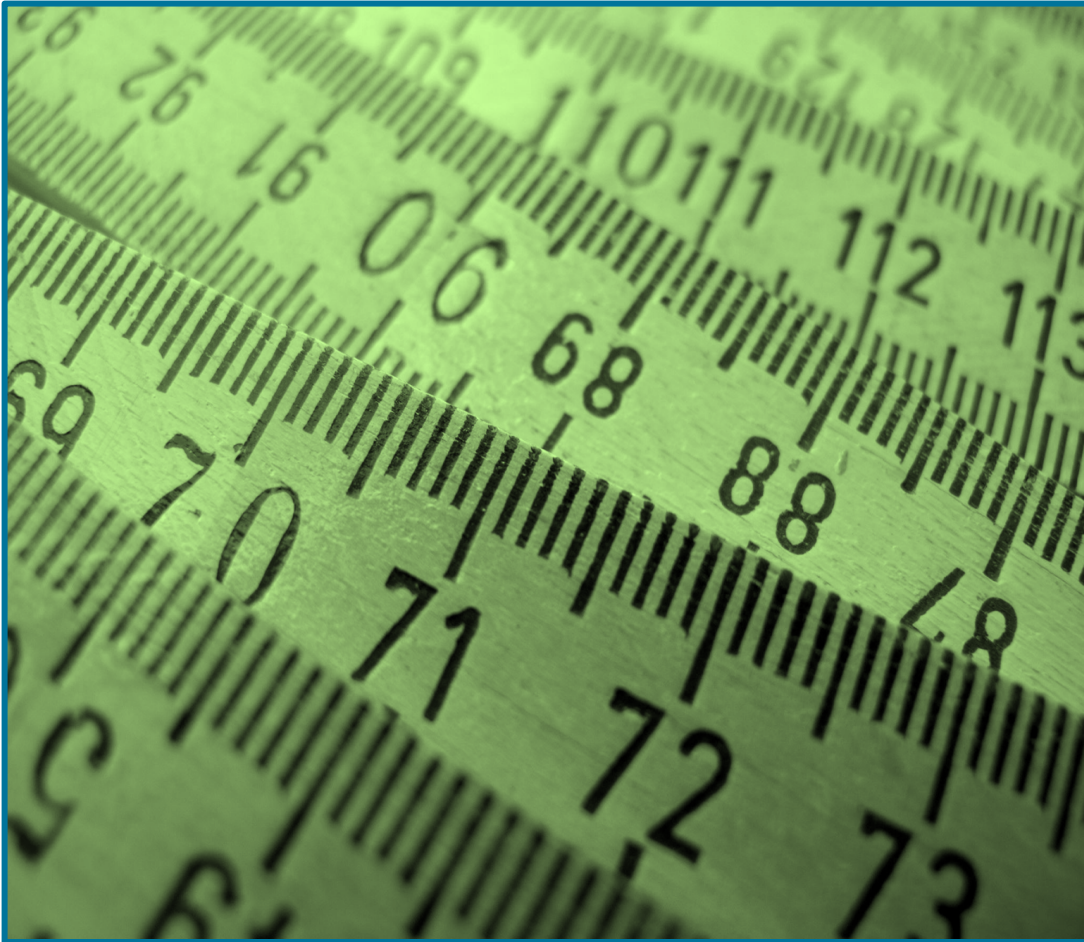


Data Reporting: story telling through lists, numbers, and math.



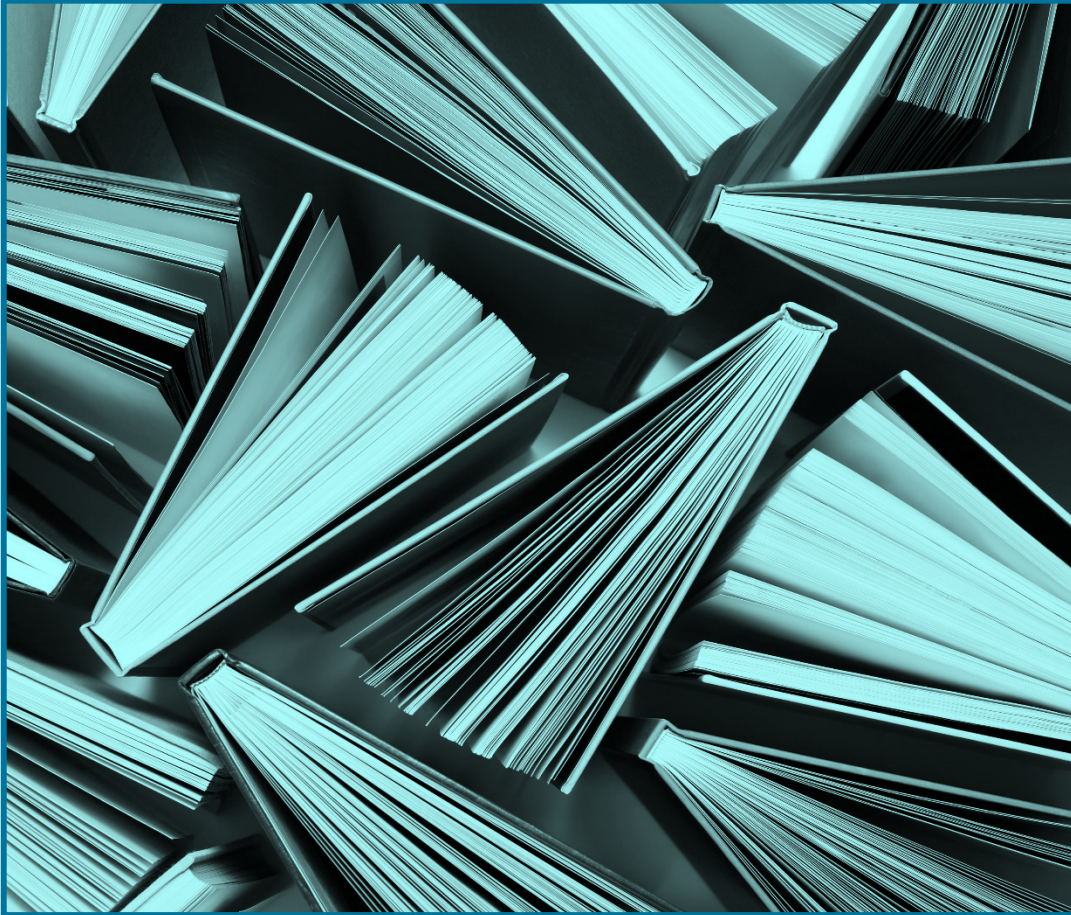
Narrative Reporting: story telling through language and graphics.

Data Reporting



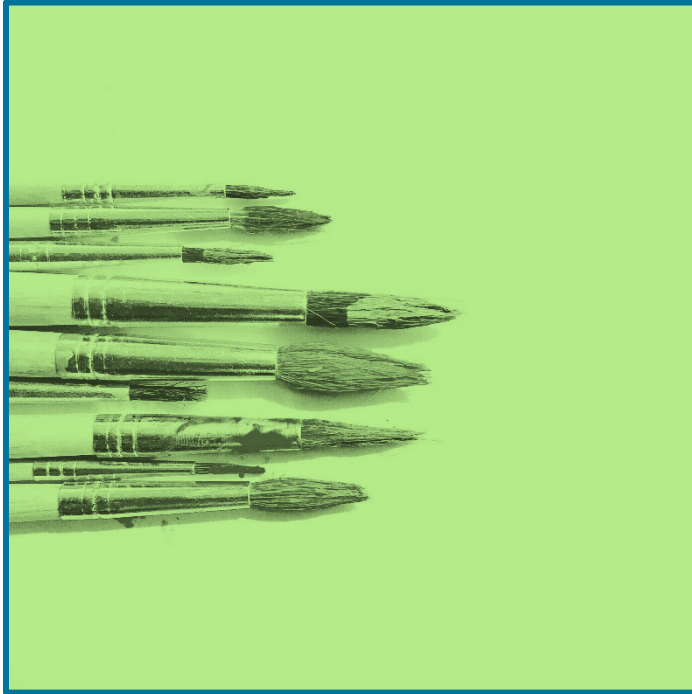
- **Data reporting is story telling through lists, numbers, and math. How the data is presented defines the story you are telling.**
- **Merits of data reporting include that it can be very concise and feels concrete.**
- **Examples of Data Reporting:**
Budgets:
Attendance Counts
Inventory Lists

Narrative Reporting



- **Narrative reporting is telling the story of the work with language and graphics.**
- **Narrative reporting has the advantage of allowing nuanced descriptions of work.**
- **Examples:**
Journal/periodical articles
Resumes and Biographies
Interviews and surveys

Efficiency Versus Effectiveness Reporting

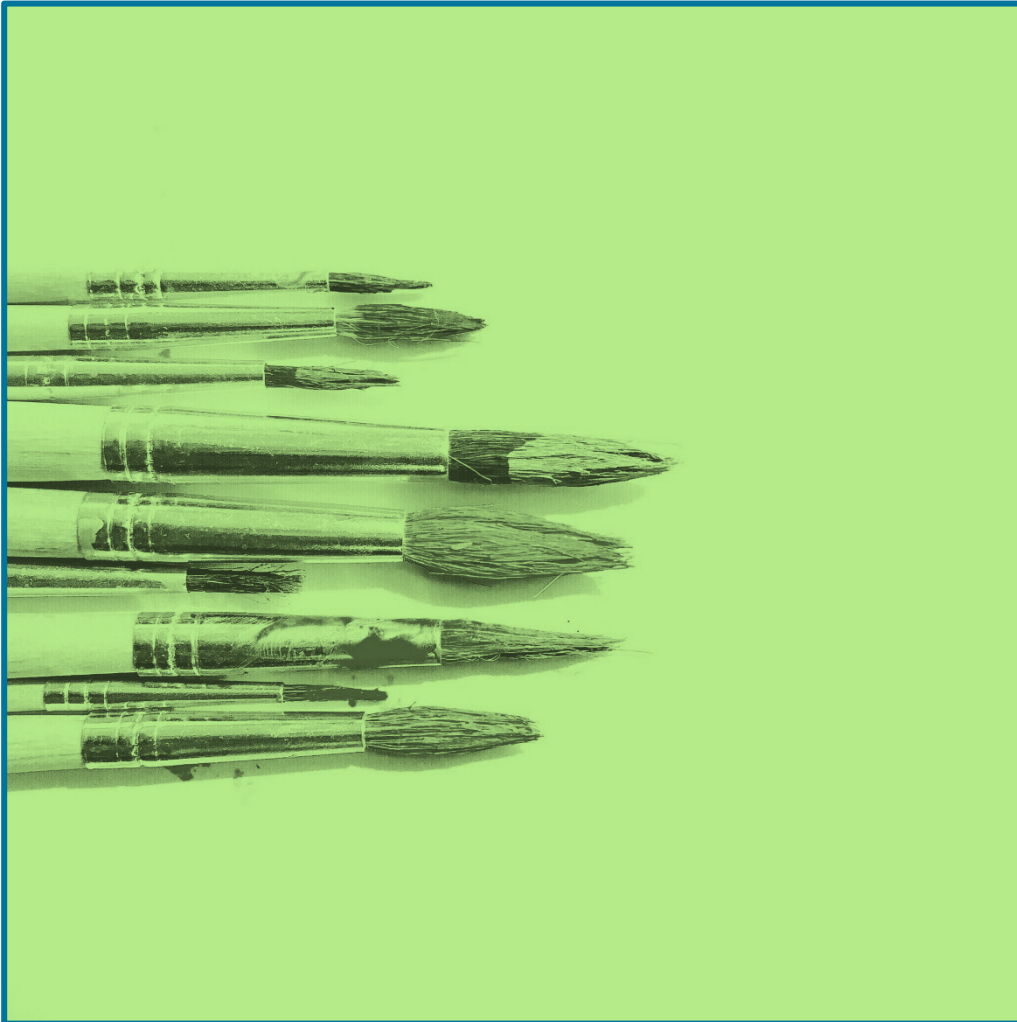


Efficiency reporting is about comparing inputs and outputs.



Effectiveness reporting is about outcomes of work completed.

Efficiency Reporting



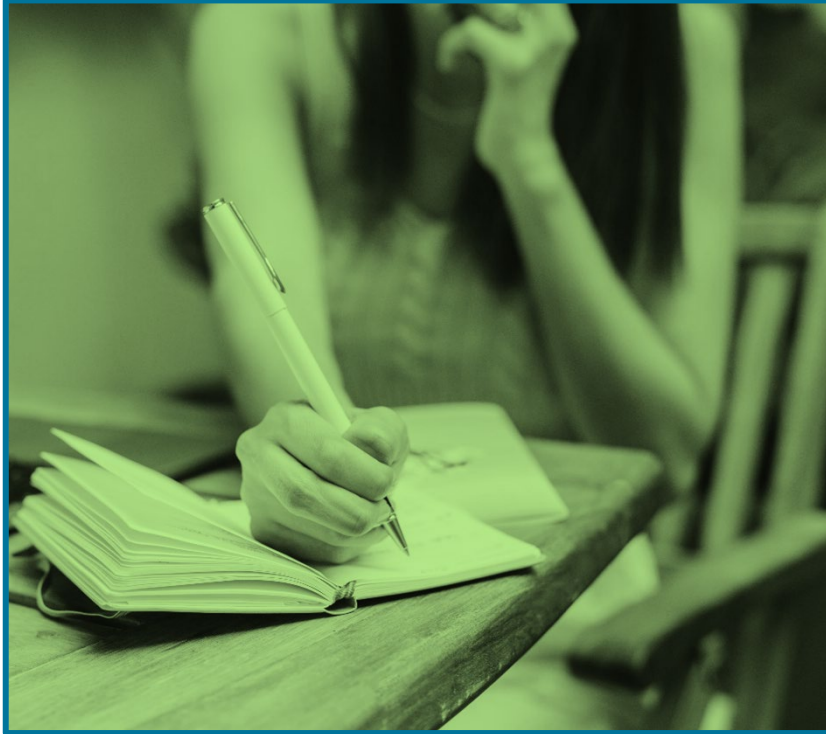
- **Efficiency reporting answers the question of “What Happened?”**
- **Efficiency is measured in terms of outputs in comparison to inputs.**
- **Efficiency reports tend to rely on data reporting.**
- **Inputs can be money/funds, time, skill, research, equipment, et. al.**
- **Outputs are countable "products" created.**

Effectiveness Reporting



- **Effectiveness reporting answers the question of “to what end?”**
- **Effectiveness reporting describes positive outcomes (or impacts or benefits) as opposed to tallying outputs.**
- **Effectiveness is often not easily countable.**
- **Effectiveness reporting tends to rely heavily on narrative reporting.**

Standard Reporting Versus Evaluation



Standard Reporting is a presentation of facts on a given body or work or subject.



Evaluation is an analysis of a body of work or process with the goal of improvement

Standard Reporting



- **The goal of standard reporting is to inform the reader/audience of work conducted.**
- **A standard report is a more-or-less a linear document. It describes a body of work from a start point to a finish point.**
- **The audience for a standard report can either be internal or external to the work group.**

STANDARD REPORTING PROCESS

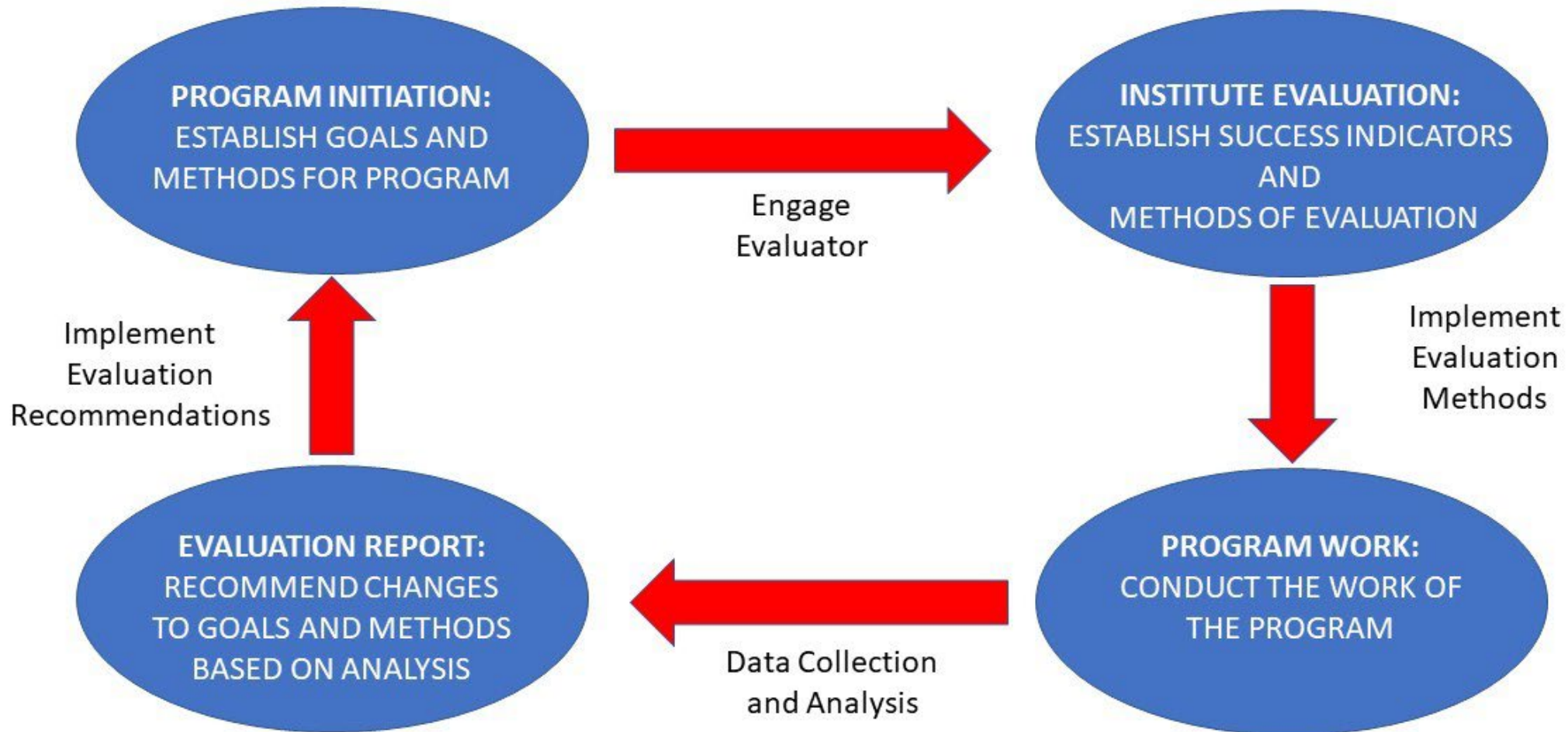


Evaluation



- **Evaluation is a cyclical process, the goal of which is to improve processes, outputs and outcomes.**
- **The primary audience for an evaluation is the person or team conducting the work.**
- **Evaluators are often a third party. Third party evaluators can provide objectivity and professional insights to a body of work.**

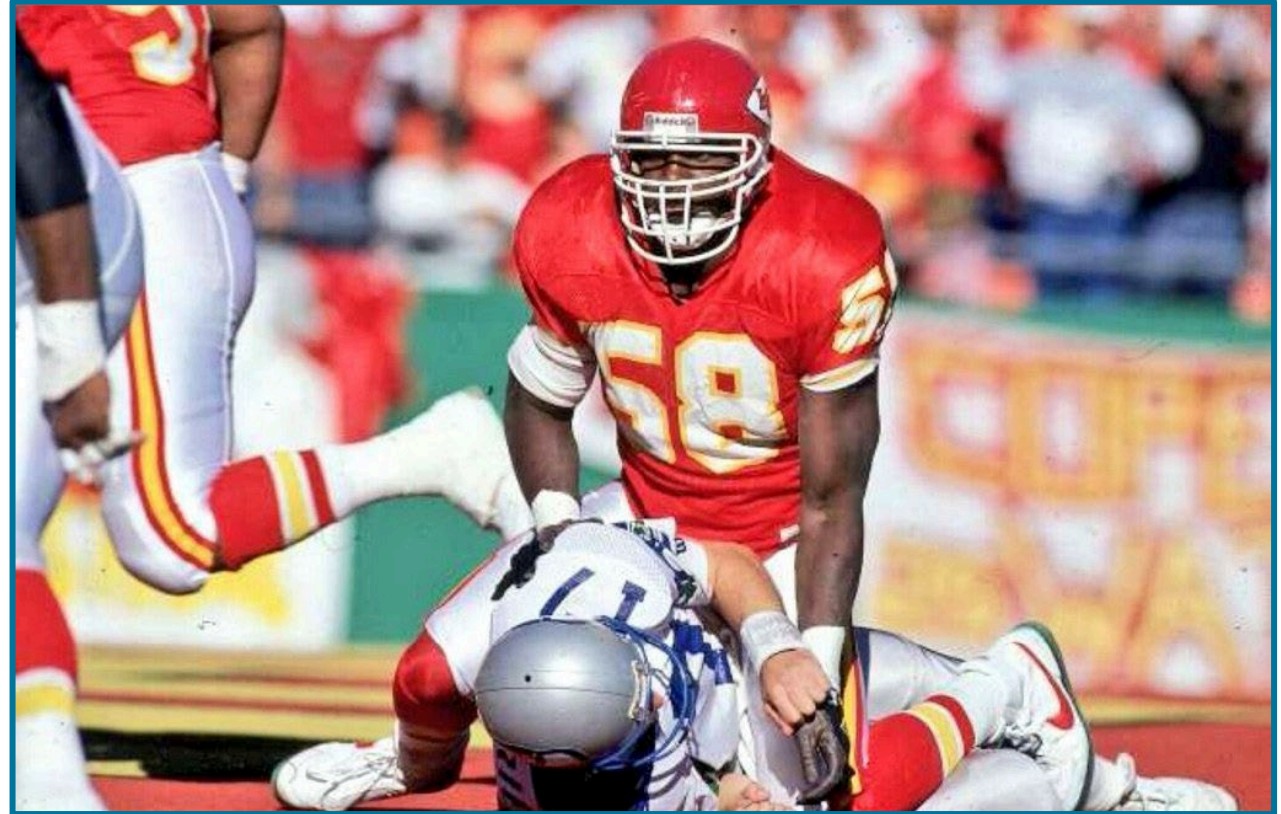
EVALUATION REPORTING PROCESS



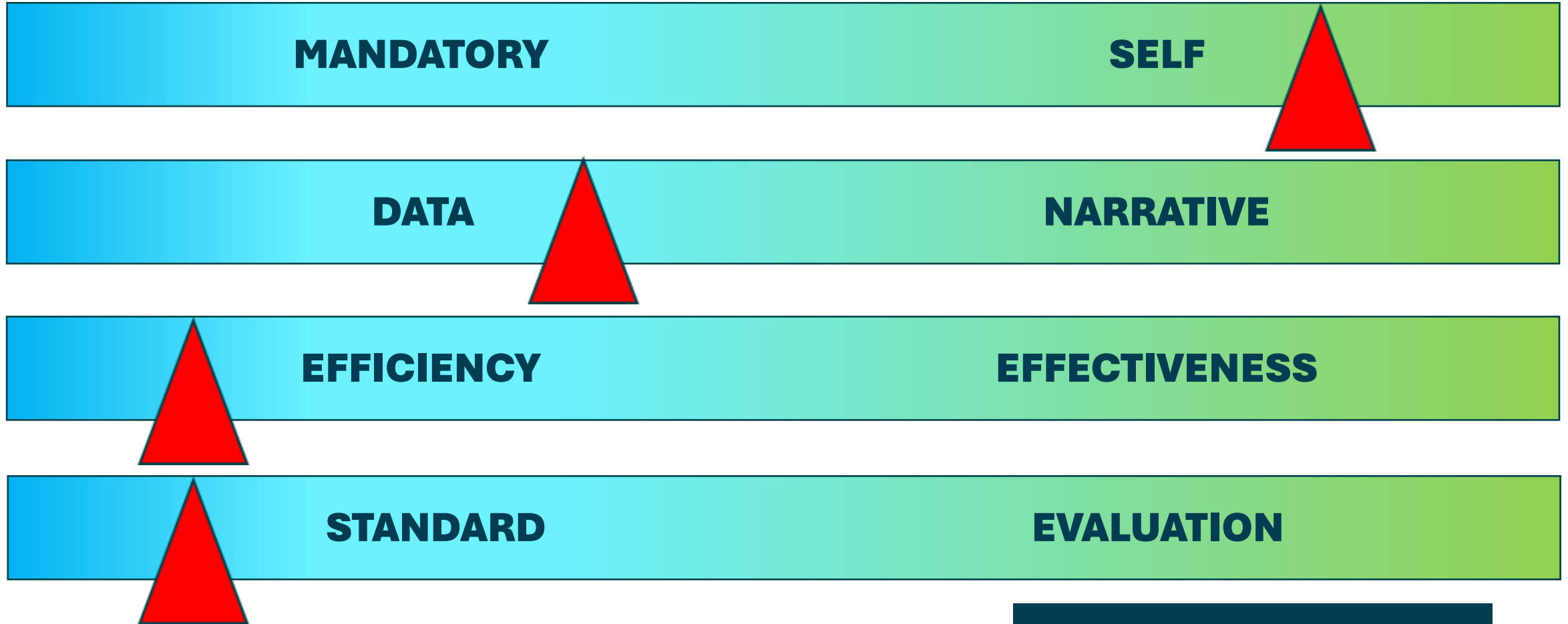
Analyzing A Report Using The Basic Elements

SAMPLE REPORT: Today in History: Derrick Thomas Sets Sack Record

**This day in NFL history on
November 11, 1990, Kansas
City Chiefs linebacker Derrick
Thomas sets NFL record with
7 sacks on Seattle Seahawks
quarterback Dave Krieg.**



Analyzing A Report Using The Basic Elements



Analyzing NSF Reports Using The Basic Elements

MANDATORY

SELF

DATA

NARRATIVE

EFFICIENCY

EFFECTIVENESS

STANDARD

EVALUATION

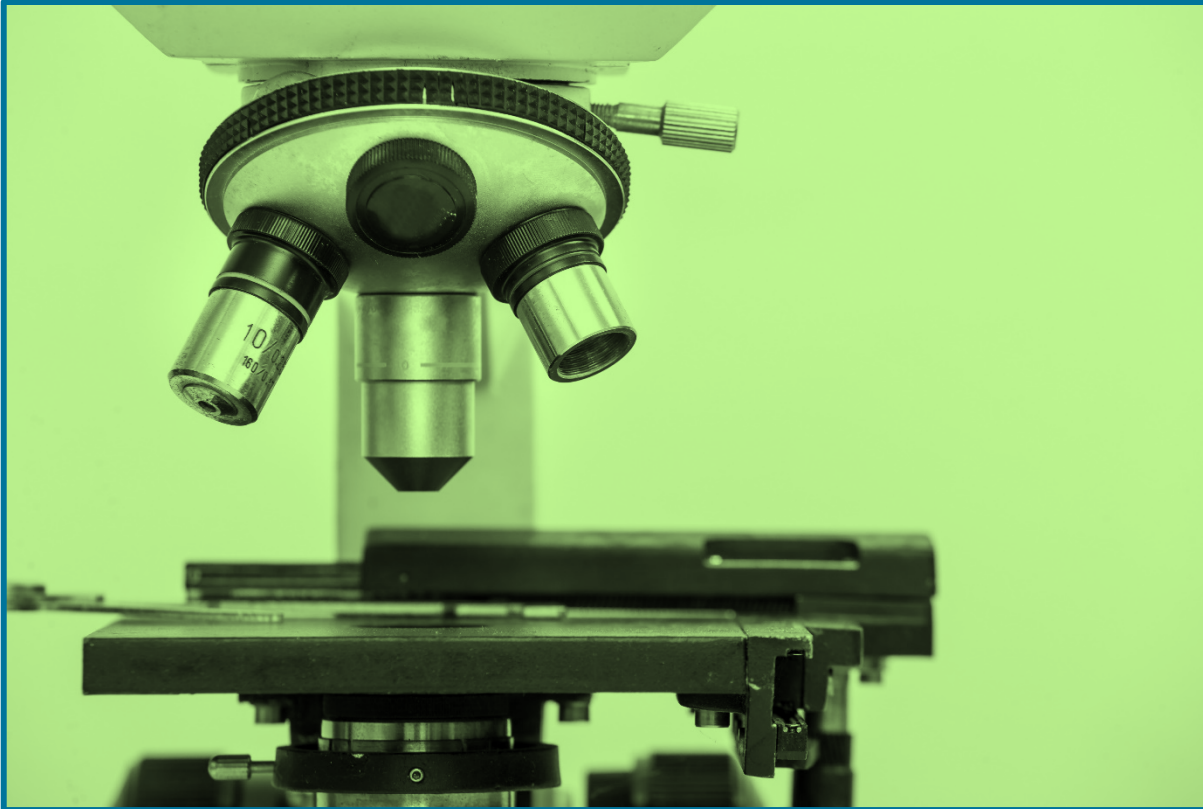
WHY BEST PRACTICES?

Hallmarks of Quality Reporting:

- **FOCUS**
- **CLARITY**
- **UTILITY**



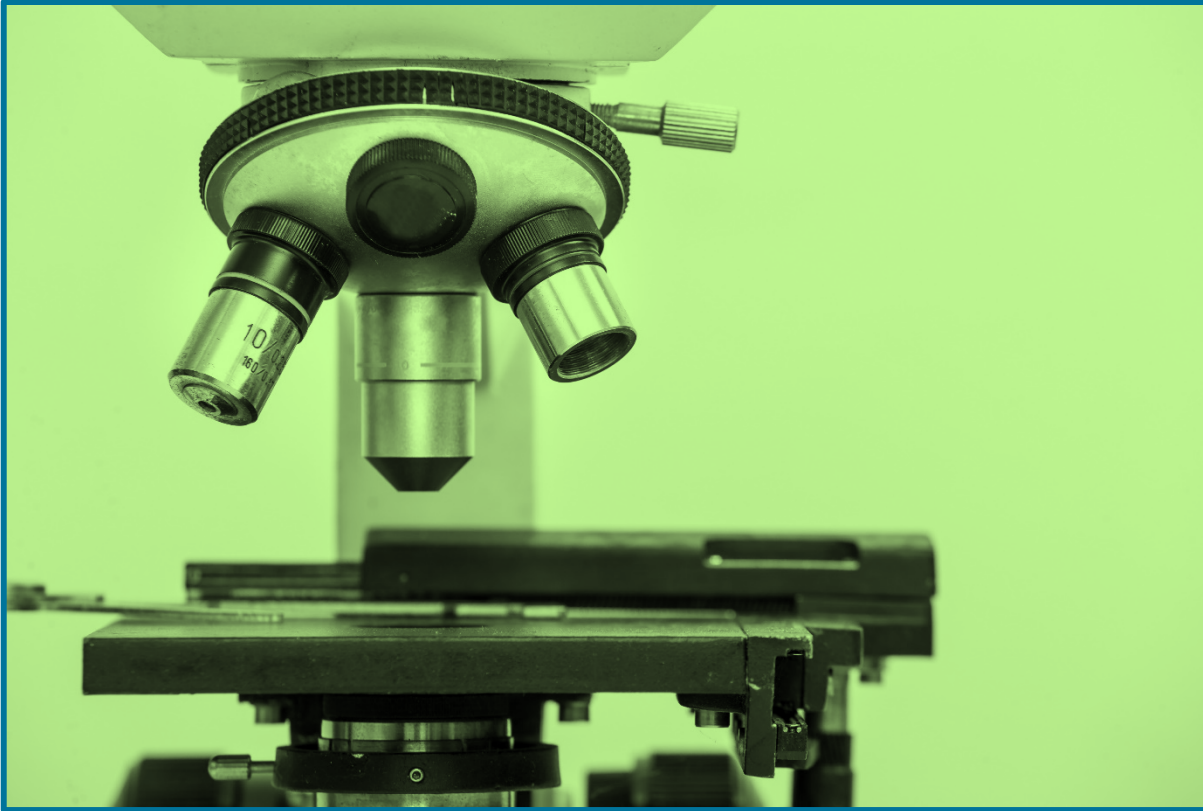
FOCUS



Recommended Practices:

- **Analyze or State Report Requirements**
- **Be Intentional When Choosing or Creating tools**
- **Delegate Responsibilities**

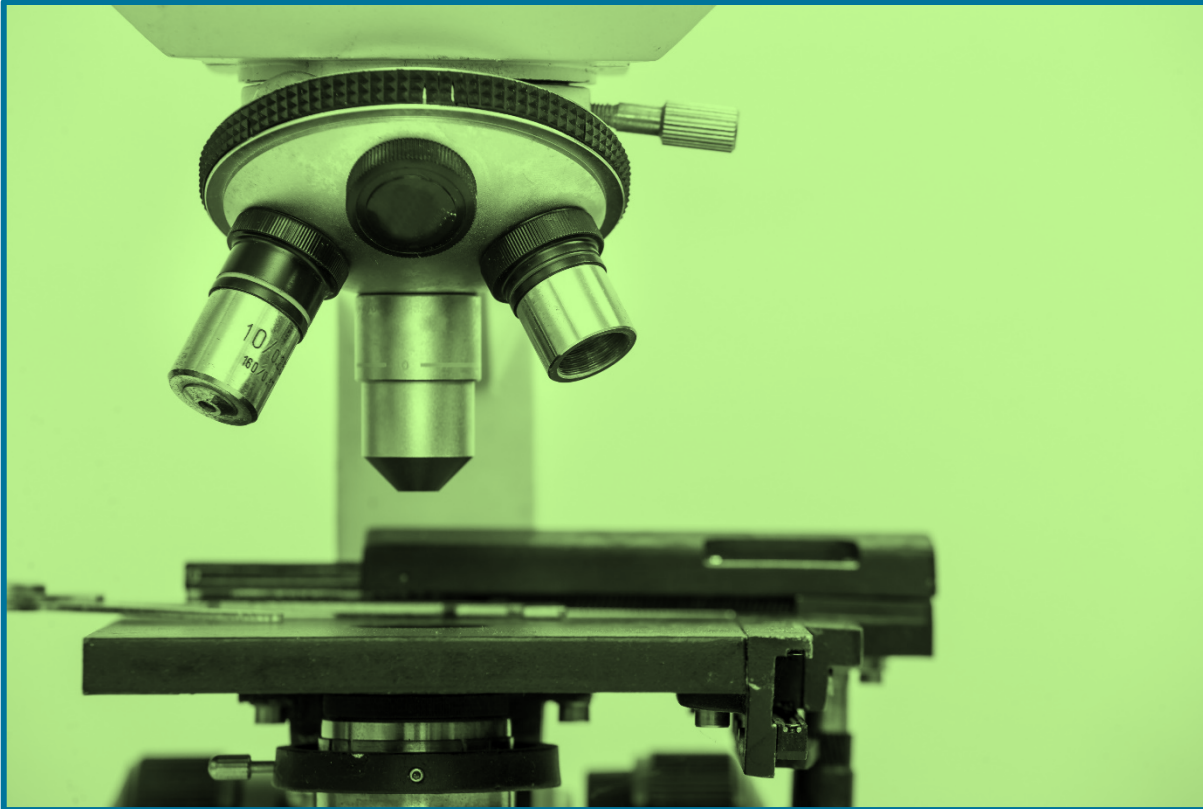
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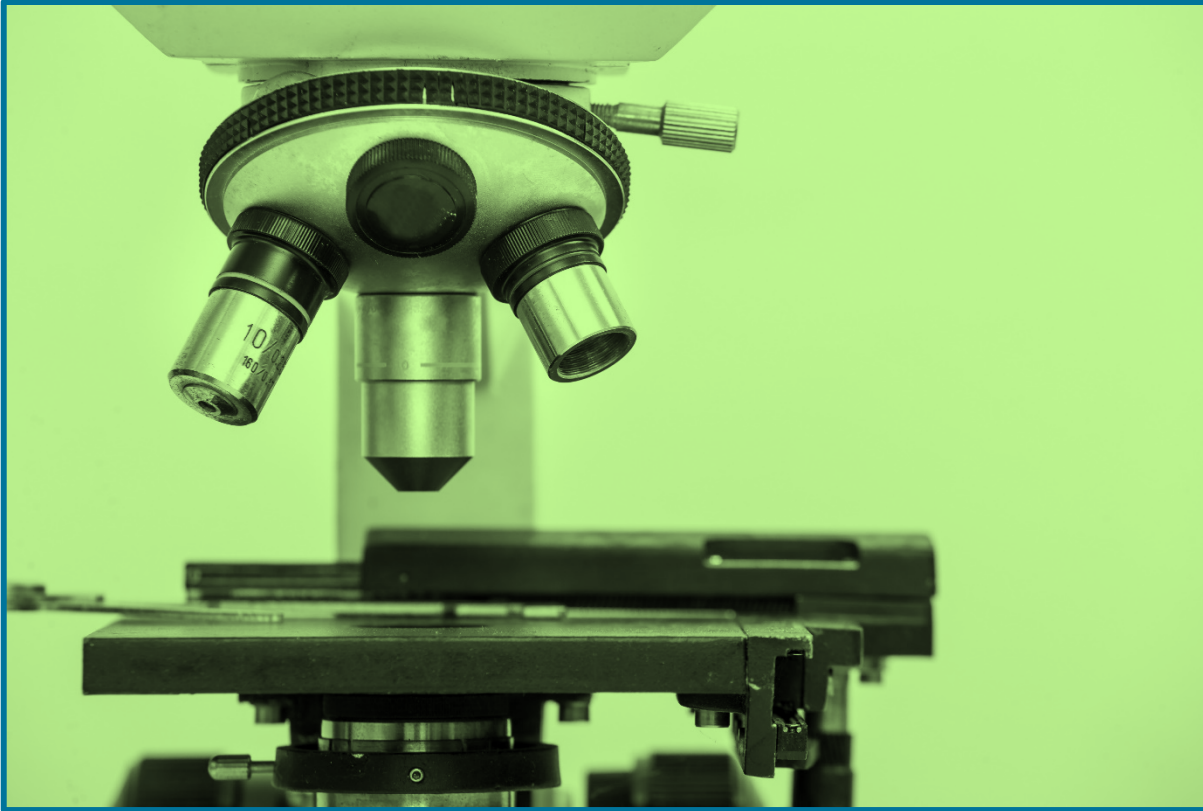
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CLARITY



Recommended Practices:

**Answer the Basic Questions
(who, what, where, when, and why)**

Make Comparisons to Deepen Context

Be Transparent and Accountable

Keep Your Audience in Mind

CLARITY



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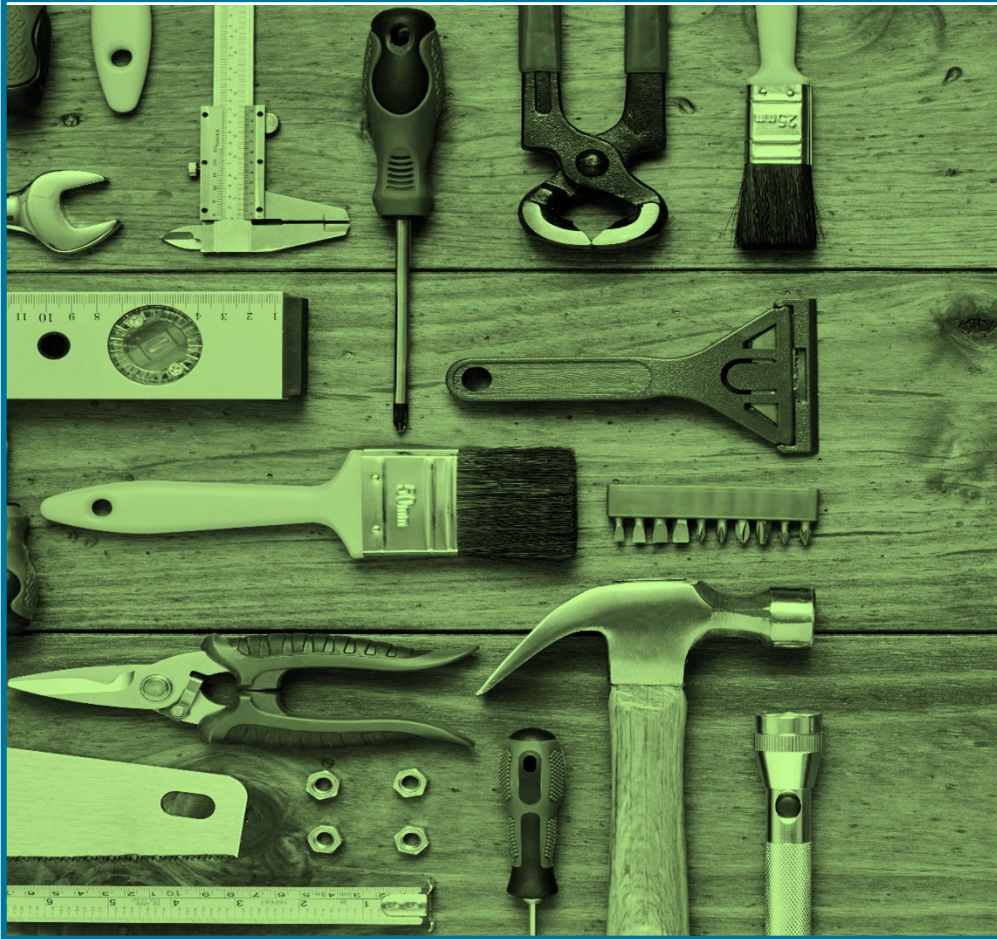
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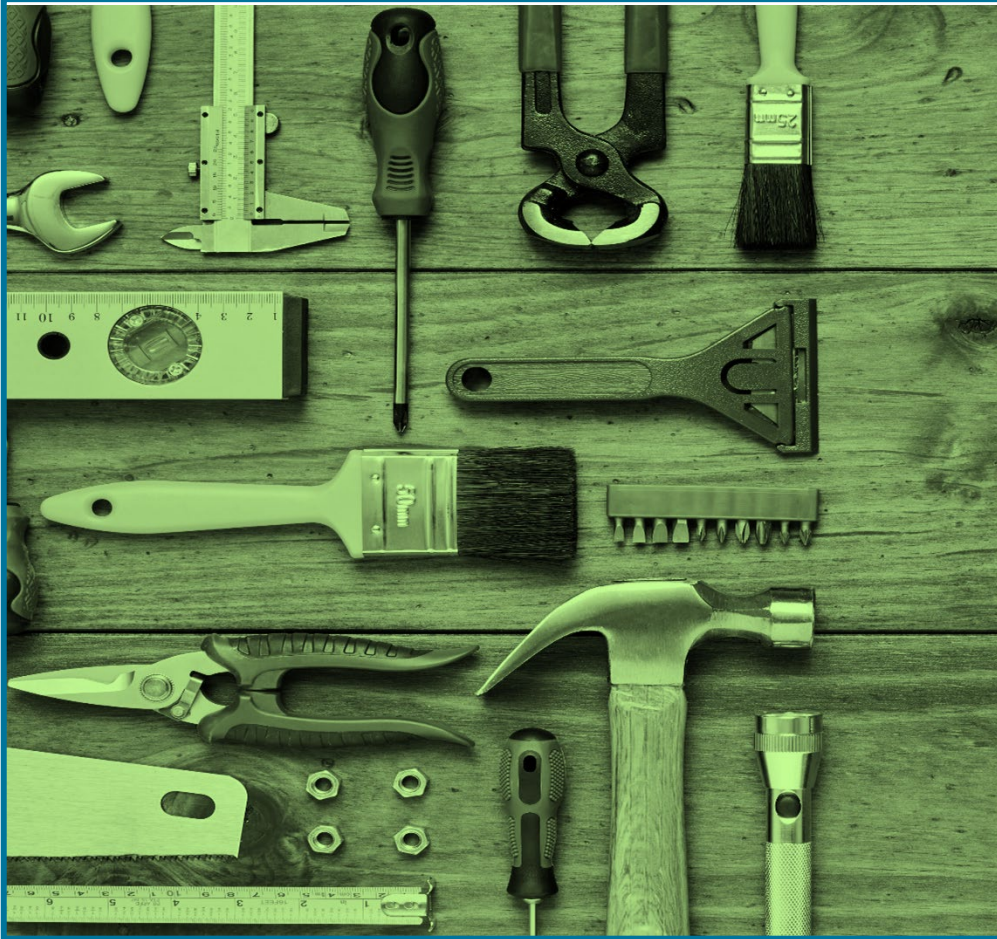
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**Choose/Create Central Location
Collected Information**

Assign a Data Steward

Create Helpful Artifacts

UTILITY



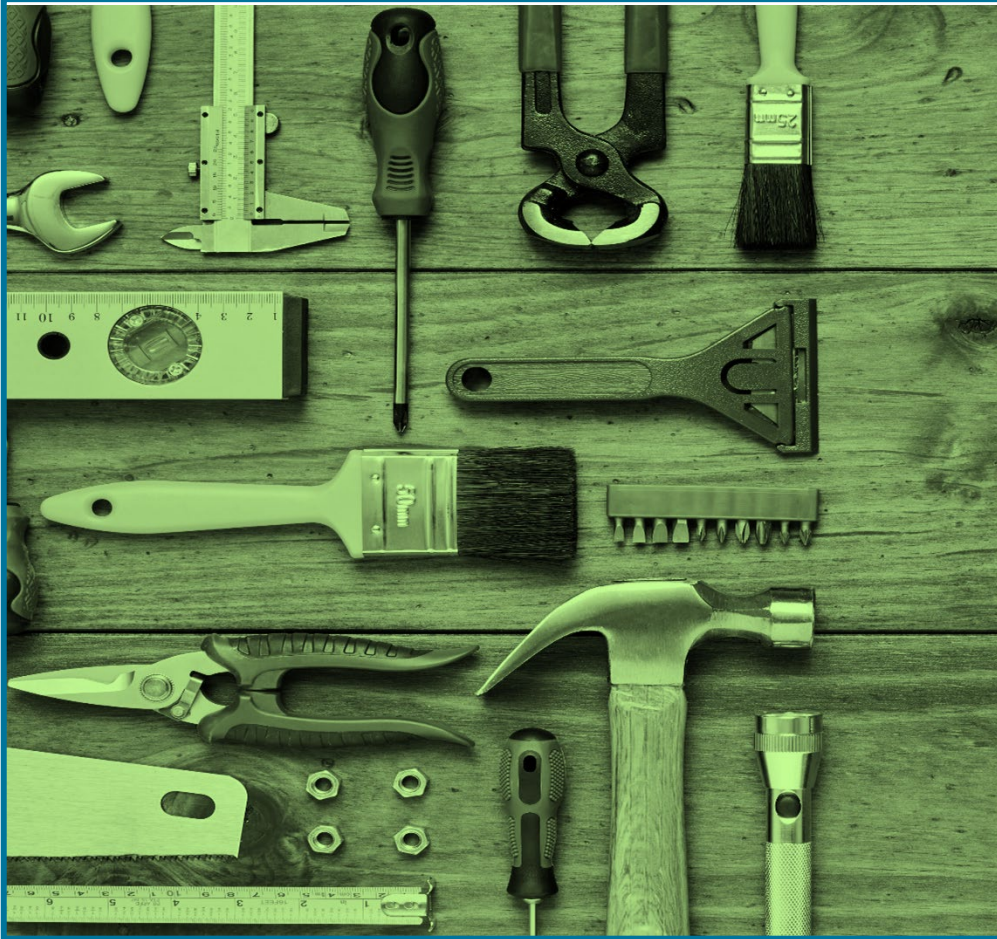
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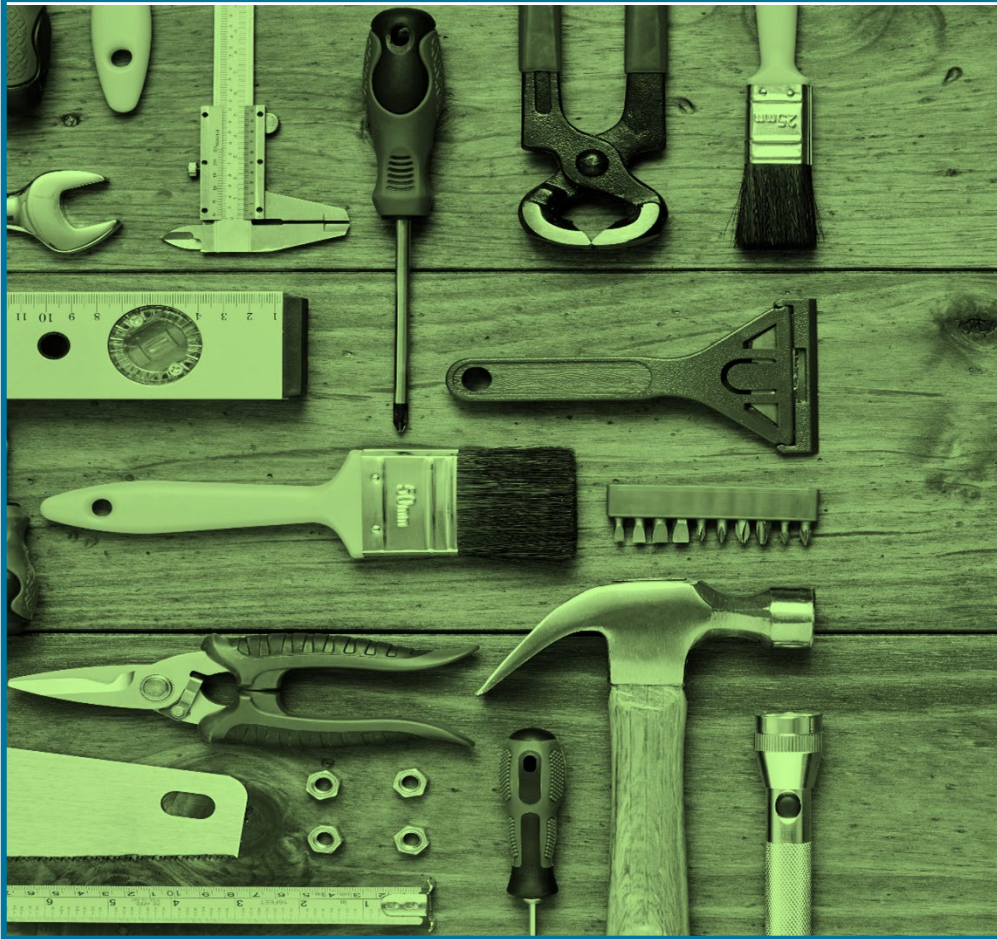
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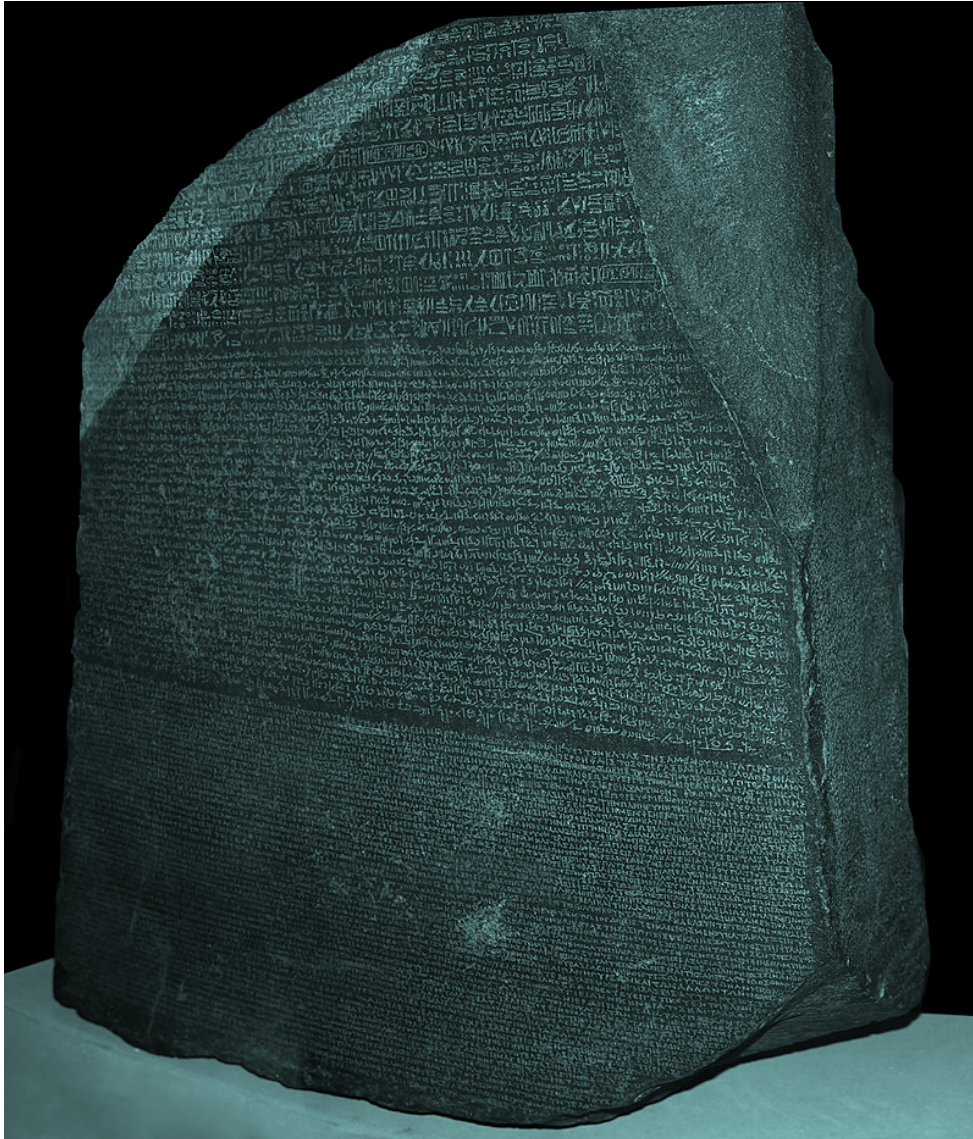
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(LITERAL) EXAMPLE OF VALUE OF AN ARTIFACT



Discovered in 1799, the stone was etched with a decree by royal cult of king Ptolemy, in three different languages.

**One of the ancient languages (Greek) had already been translated by scholars
The Stone allowed scholars to translate the other two languages (Egyptian Hieroglyphics and Egyptian Demotic)**

Discovery of this artifact advanced the entire field of Egyptology

APPLYING THE 5 Ws to NSF REPORTS

WHO? - WHAT? - WHEN? - WHERE? - WHY?

MAJOR ACTIVITIES:

- 1) The project team ordered and installed new equipment to the semi-conductor lab.
- 2) The project team hosted high school students at our semi-conductor lab.
- 3) A press release was designed and disseminated.

Thank you!

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