

Information Sheet: Evaluating your project

Funders will always ask you to evaluate projects in which they have invested, but evaluation should never be seen just as a tool which shows how money has been spent. It can be extremely useful for demonstrating the great value for money you deliver, but it is also extremely useful to help you see how you or your organisation are developing, to help you plan for the future and to help you learn from areas of work that didn't go quite as well as you had planned. Evaluation will help you get better at what you do.

Evaluation means gathering evidence before, during and after a project or event and using it to help you understand what happened, what effect it had and how you can improve on what you have achieved. Evaluation is a *critical analysis* of your activity, event or group.

A good ongoing evaluation process will:

- Help with planning
- Keep you on track
- Go some way to avoiding disasters
- Help you adapt as your work develops
- Ensure quality is maintained
- Provide valuable information for funders, partners and other stakeholders
- Record your contribution
- Collect evidence for future funding applications
- Help you share what you have learnt with your peers

Evaluation takes time and effort, but it helps to plan what you need to do from the beginning. You cannot evaluate everything in the same way and there are lots of different methods – some formal, some informal, some using statistics, some using anecdotes, some very detailed and some painting a broader picture.

Your evaluation process is unlikely to involve just you (as an individual artist or arts/heritage administrator) or your organisation. It should involve all the people who are involved in your work – as artists, audience members, participants or from other organisations. It will involve making judgements about what you did, how you did it and what the outcomes are. These judgements will include considering the quality of the work as objectively as possible.

Start planning your evaluation at the same time as you begin planning for your project or event. The main focus should be to record your planned outcomes (this is your aims, objectives and specific targets) and whether or not they were achieved. You also need a way of recording *unplanned* outcomes, because these can be very important and should not be missed.

It is possible to pay an external person to do your evaluation for you, but this should only be necessary if your event or project is quite large or complex. You need to include evaluation in your budget whoever does it, because there will usually be costs associated with it.

In order to plan your evaluation you need to think about:

- The information/evidence you need to collect. This will include what activity or event you have undertaken, how many people participated, what they said about it etc.
- What questions you will need to ask and which groups you will include. This may include artists/performers, audience members/participants, group/organisation members etc.
- You will need to think about how detailed you need the information to be. You will almost certainly need to know numbers i.e. how many people attended or how many workshops you ran etc. You will probably also want more detailed information – how many people under 25, for example, or how many from your local area.
- When are you going to collect the information? You need to consider what opportunities you have and also how people will feel about being asked to complete an evaluation at any given time. You also need to think about the practicalities – you could, for example, put evaluation sheets on the seats of a performance venue but who is to say that your audience members have a pen with them! If you ask

questions at the beginning and at the end of an ongoing process – such as workshops – you will have a much clearer idea of what change your project has effected.

- Consider how you will collect the information – there are multiple ways and you may like to use a combination. You may use surveys or questionnaires (online or not), keep a diary or journal or blog (or ask key members of the delivery team to do this), take photographs or make a film of your event, keep records of audience numbers etc., track mentions/likes/follows/shares on social media, or a number of other techniques.
- You also need to know what you are going to do with the information once you've got it – how will you make sense of it? How can you pull it together so it can be presented and understood in a useful way
- With whom are you going to share the results of your evaluation and how can you do this in the most useful way?

No-one will pretend that evaluation is not hard work and time-consuming, but it is also a useful and rewarding process if it is undertaken wholeheartedly.

Remember that evaluations which other groups or individuals have carried out of similar work or events could also be very useful to you. If you can, find out what techniques they used, how successful they found them and how useful the end information was. You can also learn from the results themselves – did they discover that they should have pitched their marketing differently, did they realise that their event was held at an inappropriate time or day, did they find that a particular way of working was particularly successful?

You may find the Arts Council Evaluation Toolkit useful: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/self-evaluation-toolkit>