

information

Self-evaluation

This information sheet introduces the idea of self-evaluation for artists and arts organisations. It provides a brief definition of evaluation, explains why we think it is important for everyone and suggests some approaches to self-evaluation. Finally, it lists resources to help with self-evaluation, many of which are downloadable from the web.

Contents

1	What is evaluation?	1
2	Evaluation helps artists and arts organisations	1
3	Evaluation helps Arts Council England	2
4	Evaluation helps the arts	3
5	What sort of evaluation?	3
6	Planning the evaluation	4
7	To find out more	5
8	Other guides and resources	5
	Contacts	7

1 What is evaluation?

Evaluation involves gathering evidence before, during and after a project and using it to make judgements about what happened. The evidence should prove what happened and why, and what effect it had. Evaluation can also help you to improve what you are doing during the project and what you do next time (Woolf, 2004).

2 Evaluation helps artists and arts organisations

Evaluation is a valuable tool for learning and involves critical analysis of your activities. Artists all make evaluative judgements about their work and evaluation makes the 'reflective practice of creative work explicit and conscious' (Moriarty, 2002).

There are clear benefits to you if you evaluate your work.

- Evaluation helps with planning, as it makes you think about what you're aiming to do, how you will do it and how you will know if you've succeeded
- Ongoing feedback keeps you on track and helps to avoid disasters
- Evaluation helps you to adapt and change as your project continues
- Evaluation is a good way of dealing with 'quality assurance' – you keep an eye on things to make sure quality is maintained
- Evaluation helps prove the value of what you are doing
- Evaluation records your contribution to the field you are working in
- Your evaluation can help others working in the same field
- Information you collect can also be used for reporting back to those with an interest in the project (eg participants, funders) and telling others about what you've done
- The evidence you collect can support future funding applications

Evaluation should be put to work for you or your organisation.

Moriarty (2002) is unequivocal: 'self-evaluation is a vital part of the discipline imposed in undertaking creative work'.

3 Evaluation helps Arts Council England

We want you to share the results of your self-evaluations with us. They help us build a clearer picture of current arts practice and give us a better understanding of arts audiences and participants. The evidence from your self-evaluations helps us to be better-informed and more effective advocates for the arts. This evidence also provides us with information for reporting to Government about how we are spending public money.

We also use your self-evaluations to feed into the evaluation of our programmes of work – eg decibel, Grants for the arts. Our programme evaluation shows what has been achieved overall as a result of our funding and helps us to make decisions about what to do next and how. It also helps us to improve our funding programmes over time. But it would not be practical for us to evaluate individual projects, as it would take too much time and too many resources. So as well as encouraging all those receiving grants from us to self-evaluate, we also ask them to provide some basic feedback through forms like the Grants for the arts activity report form. This ensures that we have information about all the projects to feed into our programme evaluation.

4 Evaluation helps the arts

Rigorous evaluation enables all of us to accumulate a collective body of evidence which contributes to the 'collective practice wisdom of the sector', building a record of our 'history and achievement' (Arts Victoria, 2002).

If, as artists and arts organisations, you evaluate your work and share the results, it helps others to contextualise their work, develop new ideas and learn from what you did. For this reason, being honest about the results of your evaluation is essential. The participants and funders of your work, and other artists and arts organisations, need to trust your evaluation: it should be honest and explain problems and things which were less successful, as well as showing what the project achieved.

5 What sort of evaluation?

Evaluation takes time and resources, and you cannot evaluate all projects in the same way and in the same depth. Evaluation can be more or less formal, and more or less detailed, to suit your purpose. Evaluating process is as important as evaluating product: your evaluation should explore the quality and impact of both.

The way you approach evaluation will depend on the type of project or activity you are doing, and whether you are an individual or an organisation. For example:

- if you are an artist working on the research and development of an artistic idea or a new way of working, your evaluation may involve just you. It could involve others too, such as artists who are working with you on the project or people outside the project who are giving you feedback on your work. You will be making artistic judgements about process, materials, form and content. You will also be making judgements about the results of what you did and what you have produced
- if you are an arts organisation developing an artistic idea, your evaluation will possibly include artists, directors and other project staff. It will involve artistic judgements and perhaps an assessment of the impact on your organisation and its audience
- if you are an arts organisation running a participatory project, your evaluation will include project staff, including artists and those participating in the project, whether they are young people, schoolteachers, adults or other individuals or groups

If you are working in partnership with other people or organisations, they should always have the chance to say how they feel about a project through the evaluation. This applies to everyone, from funders through to participants in a community project.

6 Planning the evaluation

You should start thinking about evaluation at the planning stage of a project. The main focus of your evaluation will be the planned outcomes (your aims, objectives and targets) and whether they were achieved. You should also build in checks to ensure that unplanned outcomes are not missed.

You can organise an evaluation yourself or you can ask someone else to do it for you. Either way you need to include it in your budget, as whoever does the evaluation will need to be paid for their time.

The things you need to sort out when planning an evaluation include the following points.

1. What kinds of information or evidence you are going to include in your evaluation – eg what people say, what they have done (process and finished work), what you have done, how an audience has responded.
2. What questions you are going to ask.
3. How you plan to answer those questions – this is really about what sort of information you need to answer the questions and how you will collect it. Do you need numbers (eg 50 people attended 20 workshops) or information with more depth? Useful evaluation usually combines both types of information.
4. When you should collect the information. As a minimum you need to collect information at the end of your project but if you can ask questions at the beginning of the project, you will have a ‘before’ picture against which you can look at the ‘after’ picture to assess change.
5. How you will collect the information. You may already have some of the information you need, perhaps from previous evaluations or findings from market research. There are many different ways of collecting information, eg keeping a register, using a questionnaire, taking photographs, videotaping people’s thoughts about a project, asking them to keep a diary, etc.
6. How you are going to make sense of the information you have collected.
7. How you are going to present the results of the evaluation.
8. Who you are going to share it with and how.

Moriarty (2002) reminds us that ‘self-evaluation is hard work and time-consuming. The reward is that it can give us the ability to do things *beyond* the best of our present available knowledge’.

7 To find out more

There are many existing guides to self-evaluation and there is something to help everyone, regardless of your previous experience of evaluation.

We particularly recommend *Partnerships for learning: a guide to evaluating arts education projects* by Felicity Woolf, which has been revised this year (Arts Council England, 2004). It will be useful to anyone who organises, funds, delivers or takes part in participatory arts projects, although its specific focus is education.

Partnerships for learning divides evaluation into five stages: planning, collecting evidence, assembling and interpreting, reflecting and moving forward, and reporting and sharing. Each section includes focus questions, a discussion of key issues, examples illustrating key concepts and a summary checklist. The revised *Partnerships for learning* can be downloaded from the Arts Council website, www.artscouncil.org.uk, or a hard copy can be purchased from Marston Book Services Ltd, PO Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4YN. Phone: 44 (0)1235 465500. Fax: 44 (0)1235 465555. email: direct.orders@marston.co.uk

8 Other guides and resources

The following references and directions to access them were current when this information sheet was published. If you have difficulty finding them, try using each website's search function, or contact that website's administrator.

1. *Scottish Arts Council Evaluation Toolkit* (2003). An interactive, online resource available at www.evaluationforall.org.uk which develops and expands on the approach to evaluation introduced in *Partnerships for learning*. The toolkit offers ideas and information about conducting each of the five stages of evaluation, including planning and collecting, interpreting and reporting on information. The toolkit also shows the theory being put into practice by following a case-study project through each stage of evaluation. The toolkit is currently being tested and you are invited to give feedback on how useful you find it.

2. Ellis, J (2004). *Practical monitoring and evaluation: a guide for voluntary organisations*. London: Charities Evaluation Services. A comprehensive guide to monitoring and evaluation aimed at small and medium sized voluntary organisations. You can buy the full guide (Basic, Advanced and Toolkit) or the shorter basic set (Basic and Toolkit) from Charities Evaluation Services, 4 Coldbath Square, London EC1R 5HL. The website has other downloadable guides to self-evaluation, including Cupitt, S and Ellis, J (2003), *Your project and its outcomes*. London: Charities Evaluation Services and

Community Fund. *First steps in monitoring & evaluation* is also useful. Go to www.ces-vol.org.uk and click 'about monitoring & evaluation'.

3. Ball, L (2004). *The artist's development toolkit*. www.itool.co.uk/Interactive/artdev/1005020101.php (requires registration). This interactive resource provides self-reflective material for artists, and for art and design students. It aims to help users to review their achievements and explore ways in which they can develop themselves and their practice.

4. Moriarty, G (2002). *Sharing practice: a guide to self-evaluation in the context of social exclusion*. London: Arts Council England. This guide focuses on processes which can be used by arts organisations, individual practitioners and participants to reflect on and develop their practice. It also discusses why self-evaluation is important for all artists and arts organisations. Available at www.newaudiences.org.uk under 'resources', then 'Independent evaluation and research'.

5. Arts Victoria (2002). *Evaluating Community Arts and Community Well Being*. Available at www.arts.vic.gov.au by clicking 'Publications'. This guide presents a complete approach to evaluating community arts work, using a framework based on process, impact and outcomes. It has practical guidance on planning, conducting and presenting an evaluation. The sample tools include evaluation indicators, a focus group outline, a participant questionnaire and project journal guidelines.

6. Voluntary Arts Network (2003). *Monitoring and evaluating your arts event: Why bother?* A helpful guide to evaluation which offers a manageable approach to evaluation for community and voluntary arts organisations. Practical and straightforward, the guide includes some less conventional suggestions for collecting information from project participants, including young people. Sample questionnaires and other data collection tools are also included. To download from the Voluntary Arts Network website go to www.vaw.org.uk and click 'VAW publications', then 'Other publications'.

7. Walker, P, et al (2000). *Prove it: Measuring the effect of neighbourhood renewal on local people*. London: Groundwork, The New Economics Foundation and Barclays PLC. This guide describes how to measure the effect of community projects on local people, on the relationships between them and on their quality of life. It explains how to involve local people in setting targets and gathering information. The guide can be downloaded at www.neweconomics.org/gen/newways_proveit.aspx

8. UK Evaluation Society's website lists many online evaluation resources. www.evaluation.org.uk/Pub_library/Online_eval.htm

9. Swords, M (2002). *Built-in, not bolt-on: engaging young people in evaluation*. London: New Opportunities Fund. This is a report which discusses effective ways of consulting with young people. It has practical suggestions of how to engage young people in evaluation. This report is listed as the 'Engaging Young People Report' on www.nof.org.uk – follow links to 'Evaluation/Research', then 'E&R publications'.

10. New Opportunities Fund (2002). *Working in partnership: A sourcebook*. This book offers detailed and practical guidance on working in partnership across many different sectors and includes a section on self-evaluation. It can be downloaded from www.nof.org.uk by following links to 'Evaluation/Research', and then 'E&R publications'.

11. *Arts Council of Northern Ireland Voluntary and Community Arts Evaluation Toolkit* (2004). This evaluation toolkit was written in 2004 to help voluntary and community arts organisations in Northern Ireland to evaluate their work, especially the social impact on participants. However, the toolkit is useful for all those looking for information and resources on evaluation. It provides a detailed introduction to evaluation and takes users through the design and implementation of an evaluation plan. It includes discussion of the various means of data collection and includes forms which can be adapted.

www.artscouncil-ni.org/departs/all/report/research.htm

12. Taylor, M et al (2005), *Evaluating community projects: a practical guide*. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's guide offers advice and some planning resources on evaluating community-based projects. Although it makes an assumption that projects are designed to solve 'problems', which is clearly not the case for many arts projects, it provides a useful introduction to evaluation, suggesting a range of practical approaches to undertaking a project evaluation. The guide is at: www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop

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