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NATIONAL ARTS INFORMATION PROJECT

Evaluation Toolkit

ARTS COUNCIL

2003

1 FIND OUT ABOUT EVALUATION

1.1 INTRODUCING EVALUATION

1.1.1 Concern for evaluation

Arts organisations are becoming more concerned with evaluation for several reasons, including:

- A wish to prove the value of the arts;

- The Government's emphasis on accountability as a means of improving public services; and

- The growing importance of culture itself, in its own right and as a mechanism for attaining other goals.

These are complex, contested issues; they also represent distinct, though not necessarily incompatible, motivations.

There are some in the arts who see evaluation as a way to improve standards and demonstrate the value of their work. There are others who feel that it introduces ways of thinking out of keeping with arts practice, and who are concerned about the influence of evaluation culture. Both views are valid.

1.1.2 Practical evaluation

We *do* need better information about the arts, better understanding of their processes and better evidence of their benefits, especially since they are playing a larger role in so many areas. But in working towards those goals, we must be aware of the limitations of the available tools, and of the risks associated with using them.

Evaluation is an important part of arts practice and management: it is not a simple solution for the cultural, economic or social challenges faced by arts organisations today.

In that context, this toolkit has a modest aim. It is intended to help arts organisations evaluate their own work in more consistent and methodical ways, so that they can learn effectively from their experience and share their successes, convincingly, with their peers, their funders and the wider community.

1.2   WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EVALUATION?

1.2.1   Understanding our terms

The term 'evaluation' has a number of uses and meanings.

- The **monitoring and reporting** of progress in a particular activity

- The **determination of the worth** of arts activity, specifically or generally

These are, or should be, quite separate issues.

The first is relatively straightforward and factual. We can say how many performances a theatre company has produced in a given period, how many people saw them and, to some extent, what was their character and quality. Such an assessment can be clear, broadly objective and independent of comparison with the work of other theatre companies or other ways of spending time and money.

The second is more complicated. Assessing the *worth* of those performances is necessarily subjective. Any judgement we make depends on our background, experiences, interests and tastes. We may be theatre enthusiasts or we may prefer music; we may not like art at all. We can only decide how much something is worth to *us*, and our judgements may carry little weight with others.

And we can only make *relative* judgements of worth. The value of something is always made in comparison with other things, because the time, care or money we invest in it cannot be invested elsewhere. These decisions become sharper when the investment is not simply the price of a ticket, but public or charitable funds which could be used for other purposes. Then the quality of the information on which we base our judgements becomes critical and the judgements we make have to take account of other people's views.

1.2.2   Monitoring, assessment and evaluation

We need to make a clear distinction between:

Monitoring
Gathering quantitative data on the character, scale and reach of the arts, together with more qualitative data about their effects on audiences, participants and others;

Assessment

Interpreting the meaning of the data in the light of an organisation's objectives, the aspirations of audiences, the expectations of funders and similar factors;

Evaluation

Making judgements about the worth of the results identified, in relation to possible alternatives.

This toolkit looks in more detail at the processes involved in the first two elements. We use the word 'evaluation' to cover the whole process, since this is how it is mostly understood, and use other specific terms where appropriate.

1.2.3   The importance of judgement

Don't forget that evaluation is, in the end, judgement. The things that matter about the arts cannot be proven, and their value can only be subjective.

The arts will always be highly political, and rightly so. They are critically important to how we negotiate our competing values as a society, and the idea that we could all agree about their role and worth is no more credible than that we could agree about how to educate our children, promote good health or conduct foreign affairs. We need to debate the arts, and we need the arts to help us debate all the other things we care about.

Evaluation, important as it is, and however well it's done, can't and shouldn't replace that dialogue: it should enrich it.

Judgements about the arts need to be made, by everyone from the individual artist or audience member to the Arts Council, local authority or other funder. But we need those judgements to be informed and clear. The proper role of evaluation is to support decision-making processes with reliable information.

1.3   EVALUATING YOUR OWN WORK

1.3.1   Self evaluation

This toolkit is designed to help arts organisations evaluate their own work. Self evaluation is important because:

- It is central to the creative process and arts practice generally;

- It helps organisation control and learn from their own work;

- It is available, cost-effective and practical.

The toolkit is designed to help you keep track of your own work, and its impact. Using it will help you be methodical about how you monitor and assess your work. It will also help you produce data and reports which meet the requirements of your funders.

However, there will be times when external evaluation is needed, particularly perhaps in larger or more experimental projects.

1.3.2   Commissioning external evaluation

Independent or external evaluation has a number of advantages:

- It is independent of the art project itself, and may be more objective;

- An experienced evaluator will have the time and skills to do the work;

- They may have knowledge or insight which enriches their understanding of the work;

- Their findings may be more acceptable to funders and others.

However, there are some drawbacks to bear in mind

- It adds to the costs and management of a project;

- It can affect the character and atmosphere of the project;

- An outsider will need time to understand a given project or situation;

- It may be difficult to identify an appropriate evaluator, or guarantee the quality of their work.

Like anyone else, an independent evaluator will have their own values, philosophy and practice: independence is not the same as neutrality.

In practice, external evaluation will usually be viable only for larger projects, with substantial resources and important issues to consider.

1.4   WHY IS EVALUATION IMPORTANT?

1.4.1   Evaluation is important to arts organisations because

It clarifies and validates the expectations of all their stakeholders.

Most arts activities, from projects to performances, represent a coming together of different interests, if only between artist and audience. So it's vital that everyone involved understands what a project is intended to achieve.

Even where there's a broad consensus about outcomes there may still be different expectations. There's no problem in projects encompassing a range of interests, if they're compatible with each other.

One obvious example is a partnership between the arts and health: here, the artistic, health, social and environmental benefits sought by different stakeholders sit comfortably with one another.

It identifies actual needs and aspirations, and shows how far they are met.

Setting clear, compatible objectives is an essential first step in an organisation's business plan, or planning an individual project. It enables everyone involved to judge progress towards their goals.

But arts organisations aren't always clear about what they intend to do. It's easy to assume, in the enthusiasm of the creative process, that its purpose is understood and shared by everyone involved. But this is often not so, even within small, relatively cohesive groups.

Where partnerships exist - with funders, community groups, or others - the likelihood of confusion about purpose increases sharply. So take the time to understand your partners' expectations; these discussions are a potentially valuable learning experience for everyone. Being clear about your funder's expectations of your work is essential to how you evaluate and report on progress.

Disputes over what a project is supposed to do, and therefore how it should go about doing it, are common, damaging and avoidable causes of project failure.

Evaluation can't prevent disagreement about the purpose or feasibility of an arts activity, but it will ensure that they are highlighted at an early stage. If they are deep, the work will be abandoned or will go ahead only with those who share a common sense of purpose. Either

is preferable to the emergence of these differences when the project is already underway.

It provides reliable and consistent information on which to base decisions.

In the arts, as elsewhere, judgements are constant. But they can be made on more or less solid evidence: good evaluation can help you make better-informed decisions.

Most artists have a feel for the results of their work - but that's why it can be hard for them to make objective assessments. Evaluation doesn't replace that intangible feeling, but it can enrich it with independent information.

Take the question of access. Attracting new audiences is a common aspiration of arts organisations. Although you can get a sense of who's coming by observing and talking to people, only a serious evaluation can show if your audience is changing over time, or more subtle questions such as how and why.

Decision-making demands judgements, but judgements about an access policy will be better if they are informed by reliable data.

It fosters organisations which learn from, and improve, their performance

Evaluation encourages reflection, consolidation of experience and real practice development, as people have a more impartial account of their work.

Evaluation can be seen as a kind of critical friend. A good process can tell you things you don't know, don't expect and sometimes don't want to hear. Organisations which don't want to learn from or improve their work should avoid evaluation at all costs: it will only irritate them.

Funders can fall into the trap of using evaluation to justify expenditure decisions, rather than a tool for learning about their impact or communicating with others. Even in terms of securing the best return on investment, their performance is often poor, with little consistent effort to identify the best projects or build strategically on successes.

Organisations which see themselves as pushing boundaries and setting creative challenges, will welcome the learning opportunity of evaluation.

It helps distinguish between competent and incompetent failure.

Many artists see 'the right to fail' as vital to their independence and their ability to take risks. Art often does fail, and sometimes its most complete failures are stages on the road to lasting triumphs; at other times, what looks like failure turns out later to have been more successful than was understood.

These paradoxes are inescapable in the arts (as in life) and we need systems which don't penalise the risk-taking which so often leads to real success. Fundamental to those systems is the ability to distinguish between avoidable and unavoidable failure.

No-one expects a surgeon's every operation to succeed but, because the causes of failure are critical, we're beginning to face up to the reality and results of professional incompetence. Failure in the arts doesn't have such serious consequences but, if we are to keep it to a minimum, we have to be able to distinguish between the legitimate problems of courageous innovation and the results of mediocrity.

The first will be well thought-out and executed to a high professional standard. Its failure will have valuable lessons because it will be legitimated as an outcome by the quality of the process which produced it.

The second, resulting from poor conception and execution, will have no more worth than an experiment conducted with bad science.

Being able to understand the difference between them is of crucial to artists and to their partners in other fields. Some funders will find the idea of competent failure challenging but that can be a valuable aspect of arts partnership. Public or private funding agencies committed to experimentation in the arts are unusual, particularly where social and artistic innovation is not legitimised by critics. The identification of common understandings of success, failure and risk is a crucial part of discussions between arts organisations and their partners.

All good art work is experimental in some way: if success is certain, there's no creativity, no imagination, no point. Even when projects do not succeed in their goals, they can still produce a great deal of valuable work and understanding - but only if they are undertaken competently. It is essential to understand the causes of failure in order to address them in future projects, without becoming risk-averse.

It communicates successes to funders and other stakeholders.

Everyone is looking for success, whether in their own work or in activities they support or fund. Success might be defined in many ways, including artistic, social, economic or other goals during project planning.

But the subtle and relative measures of success arts organisations often use can become difficult to manage as more partners are involved in their work.

A rigorous evaluation process will develop a better understanding of what success looks like to your stakeholders. By providing data and analysis, it can help communicate outcomes of the work to people beyond the circle of those directly involved.

It helps organisations account for their use of resources received.

In the past, arts funding tended to monitored by the Arts Council, Regional Arts Board or local authorities through meetings and reports on activity. However the demand for more rigorous accountability has increased, particularly with funding from the National Lottery.

The growing participation of other funders, including various regeneration, economic, social and community development sources has also placed new requirements on the arts world. In this climate, as the importance of culture in wider policy grows, it is essential that arts organisations improve their ability to account for the support they get.

It helps show the contribution of the arts to local communities.

Cultural policy is weakened by the lack of reliable information about the nature, extent and role of arts activity itself.

We can't answer simple questions such as how many theatre companies there are in East Anglia or how many artists worked in Ipswich schools last year. Consequently, most of what we claim about the arts, positive or negative, is little more than an extrapolation from our limited personal experience.

We need a much more coherent approach to gathering information about the arts and the impacts they produce, and that depends on the commitment of individual arts organisations and their engagement with evaluation. The vital support of local authorities for the arts depends on being able to show the contribution they make to local quality of life, social cohesion and economic prosperity.

It helps us debate the meaning, purpose and value of cultural activity.

The purpose of evaluation is not to calculate the value of an activity. There is no mathematical equation into which the variables of creative work can be factored, to determine a final value. What we admire, like or desire, and the political choices we make to pursue those goals, is shaped by our beliefs. The very idea that art *has* value is the reflection of a system of beliefs.

Evaluation is not a way to persuade sceptics or silence critics, but a means of improving our understanding of the meaning and purpose of cultural activity in our society, in the knowledge that, though these will always be contested, engaged dialogue lies at the heart of any creative process.

In a country with a rich cultural life discussion of these things is complex, informed and passionate.

Artistic activity implies constant evaluation: every creative choice represents a more or less conscious assessment of progress and possibilities. Broadening the scope of evaluation to include other aspects of your work, or other perspectives on it, and making it more conscious and consistent, is not difficult for a creative and well-run arts organisation.

1.5   WHEN SHOULD YOU UNDERTAKE EVALUATION?

1.5.1   During or after?

Deciding when to evaluate your work is not as simple as it seems, because when you undertake the work will affect how it is done and, perhaps, what the outcomes are, or what they are seen to be.

If you are looking at your whole programme, you might evaluate progress against milestones in a business plan, or at regular intervals within the year. Individual projects might be evaluated on completion, but that may depend on information having been gathered beforehand.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Though they tend to have different values and processes, you can combine them to produce effective feedback while the project is in progress, but steps back to consider it more broadly when it is concluded.

Decisions about whether to adopt formative or summative evaluation processes will be influenced by a range of issues including the nature of the work, the purpose of the evaluation, its intended audience, the resources available and so on.

1.5.2   Evaluating when the work is over

An obvious, and logical, solution is to evaluate the project when it's finished. But unless evaluation has been planned from the beginning, you might find it hard to do effectively.

For example, evaluating the impact of music education project aiming to encourage interest in orchestral music, will depend not only on finding out what people think of the experience, but contrasting that with what they thought of it before they took part. Evaluating some projects requires preliminary work to establish a baseline.

Even simple performance indicators, such data on attendance, need to be prepared for well in advance, because it may be impossible to collect the information at the end.

Evaluation undertaken at a project's end is sometimes described as summative.

1.5.3   Evaluating as you go along

It is also possible to see evaluation as a part of the project delivery process, providing regular feedback on progress so that adjustments can be made to the work as it's happening.

At a micro level, this is what artists and animateurs do all the time - adjusting the focus of a workshop or a programme in the light of people's responses. Longer projects, or regular programmes, can benefit from this approach, which is often described as formative.

1.6   THE ELEMENTS OF AN EVALUATION PROCESS

1.6.1   A basic evaluation process

Approaches to evaluation vary, but usually include these basic elements:

- Agreeing with stakeholders what the project is intended to achieve;

- Testing proposed plans against the aim and objectives;

- Identifying performance indicators and ways of monitoring them;

- Implementing work and recording data about progress;

- Reviewing the results and reporting back.

These stages are set out in more detail elsewhere in the toolkit.

1.6.2　Your work and its results

In planning evaluation, you need to distinguish between how something is done, and the results of it being done.

This matters partly for methodological reasons, but also because it's essential to understanding your own work. Projects can be done badly, but still achieve good results, perhaps because of the commitment of participants. Equally, they may be undertaken in an exemplary fashion but not produce the hoped-for outcomes, for reasons beyond your control or simply because of the challenges involved.

Project performance
A project's performance can be monitored relatively simply, since it involves keeping track of things which you mostly control and know about - the number of activities, who took part, professional standards etc.. The key to monitoring performance is good record-keeping, which helps with management, as well as satisfying external stakeholders.

Project results
A project's outcomes or impact, are more difficult to monitor because this is also an issue for other people - participants, audiences, partner organisations and even wider society. It is much more subjective, liable to change over time and open to interpretation.

Unlike outputs, which need to be fully monitored, it is often better to monitor impact selectively on the basis of methodically-chosen samples.

1.7 INPUTS, OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

1.7.1 The vocabulary of evaluation

Evaluation has its own vocabulary, and the most common terms are explained in the glossary. But inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact need more detailed discussion, if only because the approach to evaluation outlined here is based on a clear distinction between them.

Monitoring these four areas provides the essential data to consider the success and worth of a project. They are connected, and become more complex, subtle and difficult to quantify as you go down the list.

Basic information about your organisation's inputs and outputs can be gathered with the **arts①nfo** database, or by using the project report template.

Assessing outcomes and impact is likely to depend more on qualitative evaluation methods which are discussed elsewhere in the toolkit.

1.7.2 Inputs

Projects depend on inputs - the resources applied to achieving their goals. The most obvious are money and people-time, but projects may also receive help in kind, such as materials, voluntary help or use of facilities.

In working out the real cost of a project, you should take into account the often invisible contribution made by partners: a schools project, for example, is likely to depend on a substantial amount of teachers' time and other resources.

Inputs are an important element of evaluation: unless you know what it cost to make something happen - in cash, time and other commitments - you can't say whether it was cost-effective or worthwhile compared to other ways of using the resources.

1.7.3 Outputs

Inputs produce activity, and simple outputs such as jobs or services. Outputs are usually anticipated (you expect to run a specific number of workshops), quantifiable (they can be counted) and objective (it's clear whether or not they were produced).

Typical outputs might include:

- the creation of new artwork,

- the size of an audience,

- the numbers of sessions given,

- jobs created,

- partners involved etc..

There isn't always a rigid line between output and outcome data: as they become more detailed and sensitive - for instance in looking at the demographic make up of an audience - output data may come close to addressing outcomes.

Simple approaches to cost-effectiveness sometimes go no further than comparing some key outputs (number of jobs, number of training sessions etc.) with the cost. This is misleading, since it takes no account of the quality of the outputs or any change they produced.

1.7.4   Outcomes

Your work's outcomes are the central issue - though outcome data are of limited meaning without information on inputs and outputs.

At their simplest, outcome indicators help identify what the result of an activity was - what change occurred because it took place. Those changes should relate to what the activity intended to achieve. They might be:

- Subtle shifts in attitude on the part of an audience (e.g. a deeper interest in new dance);

- Evidence of personal development (e.g. gaining new skills); or

- Aspects of change at group or community level (e.g. new co-operation between teenagers and retired people).

You also need to be alert to the unplanned and unexpected outcomes of change, so that evidence isn't passed over just because of a rigid approach to evaluation.

Equally, the outcomes of a project may be (or appear to be) negative. The meaning of such data should be considered carefully; tensions may indicate a growth in confidence and empowerment.

Outcomes can be observed or tracked in many ways, but will often require qualitative methods, though the results may be expressed

quantitatively. Thus, you might interview a cross-section of an audience about their experience, but also report on the percentage who thought highly of the work.

1.7.5   Impact

Impact is used here to refer to the longer-term results of a project, particularly in relation to its broad cultural, social or economic goals.

- Does the presence of a gallery affect the town in which it is based?

- Does the experience of attending a concert produce lasting benefits for the audience

- Does participation in the arts lead to better school performance, more liveable neighbourhoods or richer lives?

The outcomes of a project working with young offenders could include observable changes in attitude and behaviour. The impact of that change might be identifiable six months later, in the future lives of the participants, in family and other relationships and in the life of the local community. A reduction in offending while people are part of the project is obviously a positive outcome, but it is the long-term change of direction which is the major impact.

Unlike outcomes, which relate to the experience of the project on completion, the impact of a project may change over time as events unfold.

It can take long-term commitment, if not substantial resources and experience to research the impact of the arts over time. Where the same respondents are involved, for example a group of children involved in a programme over a period of time, such a study is sometimes described as longitudinal research. Where different respondents are involved, for instance a random group of audience members, the research is described as cross-sectional. Such studies may be beyond all but the largest arts initiatives.

The impact of arts projects

The impact of arts projects, programmes and organisations is complex. While outcomes can be assessed at the end of the project, or against planned milestones, impact is long-term and changeable. It is also a highly subjective aspect of evaluation, since it inevitably involves questions of value.

The impact can be difficult to connect with the work itself, as it spins off producing all sorts of unexpected results. An arts in health project may have positive outcomes for those involved, but may have a lasting impact on policy as its success influences people who move into other positions.

The impact of work can also be very variable. Seeing a theatre production may lead one person to become an actor and another never to set foot inside a theatre again: most of the audience will just go home and forget about it, more or less quickly. Extreme impacts arising from a piece of work, or an experience, may have more to do with the individual than the work itself.

The impact of work may also change over time, because it is influenced by what comes after. The positive outcomes of a successful project may turn to disillusionment if people's hopes of change are raised only to be disappointed when the project is not continued, or followed by something else.

Assessing the impact of a project is complex and demands a long-term commitment. It is also much harder for people to do for themselves: some external perspective is likely to be necessary, though this may be from key stakeholders such as local authority or Arts Council officers rather than researchers.

1.8   A SIMPLE EVALUATION PROCESS

1.8.1   Integrating planning, monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation works best when it's a normal part of project management: that way it gets done, and it's easier to incorporate its lessons into your practice.

This approach underpins evaluation in many sectors, particularly development, where it is used by UNESCO, the World Bank and many aid agencies, as part of 'project cycle management' and is supported by logical frameworks.

The process set out here is much simpler, though it can be expanded, and starts from an awareness of the particular values and culture of arts organisations. Indeed, it reflects approaches already followed by many organisations.

Although it's presented here in the context of project development, the approach can be integrated with an annual or other planning cycle: you can adopt this approach in normal business planning.

It is a framework for thinking about your work and its evaluation in an open and conscious way from the start, informed by basic principles about partnership working.

1.8.2   Six principles for evaluating projects with non-cultural objectives

Although these principles have a precise focus, they're generally applicable to the work of organisations which have more than purely cultural objectives.[1] ()

Projects designed to produce social benefits should address stated needs or aspirations.

Unless projects are clear what results, artistic, social, economic or other, they intend to produce, they cannot know whether the action proposed is appropriate, nor to what extent it is successful. Establishing a causal link between an activity and changes in personal or community circumstances is always difficult, but it's a good start to specify objectives, anticipated results and proposed action beforehand.

It is unethical to seek to produce change in others without their informed consent.

This should be self-evident: who would accept the idea that someone was entitled to try to change them without their knowledge and agreement? However, the barriers to securing consent at the start of a project are many: people may not know or trust one another, or have a common basis for discussion. Some participants, for instance because of disability, may be able to express consent only by choosing to continue to take part. The fact that it can be so difficult to achieve this principle only makes it more important.

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[1]   The principles were originally published in *Defining Values: Evaluating art projects*, François Matarasso, (Comedia 1996): out of print, but available through the Comedia website

The needs and aspirations of individuals or communities are best identified by them, where appropriate in dialogue with other bodies.

Where arts projects are intended to meet objectives in addition to their artistic ones, the question of who has identified the goal is central; self-determination is a key principle. But people are not always aware of all the possibilities, or the benefits and costs of different courses of action. There will therefore often be a role for input from arts workers, the local authority or others with relevant experience in helping to set a project's objectives and the work to achieve them.

Partnership requires the agreement of compatible objectives, methods and commitments.

There are many characteristics of good partnership, but common agreement about goals, methods and commitments is crucial. That said, it's not essential that all the partners are interested in all the goals, only that their interests are compatible. In an education project the school's interests may be different from those of the artist or the local authority, but they do not pull in different directions.

Those who have identified a goal are best placed to ascertain when it has been met.

The project's stakeholders - everyone who can affect or be affected by it, including participants, artists, funders etc. - have the primary responsibility for deciding if or when their common or separate objectives have been met: we know our own interests best.

It should not be assumed that an arts project is necessarily the most appropriate means of achieving any given goal.

It is essential to begin discussions with a recognition that the partners' objectives may not be met through an arts project: purpose must determine method, never the reverse.

More general principles for evaluators have been developed by the American Association of Evaluation: see

www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/aeaprin6.html

The Office of National Statistics has also produced a code of practice for statisticians

www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/cop/default.asp

1.8.3   A five stage evaluation process

1   Agree the project's purpose and plan the work

Evaluation depends absolutely on a clear understanding of what your project - or your organisation - intends to do. The goal might be entirely artistic or involve some social or economic elements; it might be simple or complex, modest or ambitious. But without a goal, clearly expressed and agreed by those involved, you cannot evaluate progress. This stage should lead to a written statement of aim and objectives.

Most arts projects begin with a discussion between partners about the possibility of working together. There's a natural tendency to focus on what they are interested in doing, rather than what may need to be done, or what may engage an audience.

If you start by looking at a particular situation and how it might be improved, it's much easier to ask key questions such as who should be involved in the partnership, what kind of project is most likely to achieve the desired outcome or what success might look like. Of course, asking these questions may reveal basic differences, but knowing that is important. It's more likely that people have a range of objectives, some clearer and more achievable than others.

You need to be aware of everyone's assumptions - including your own. This can be difficult because they're often implied rather than stated, but it is crucial. For example, a proposal to use drama to work with disaffected young people is based on beliefs that may or may not be well-founded in specific situations. You need to understand and question the things everyone takes for granted.

Partnerships should aim to be inclusive, though in practice people will become involved at different stages. Artists may be commissioned well into the process; participants may not become involved until the project planning is complete. Try to help new people understand the project's objectives and feel able to contribute their own views.

The agreed project aim and objectives should be written. This ensures that all the partners sign up to the same thing, and provides a fixed point to return to when the project is completed. There are models you can follow for this, including logical frameworks which are widely used in the development and health sectors, but you don't need to get complicated. A good aim will be clear, easy to remember and work towards.

The process of building a partnership, agreeing common aims and planning a project which can meet them may take weeks, months or even longer, but it's rarely time wasted. Laying solid foundations, based on common understanding of a situation and its needs, is an essential part of effective community-based work; it is also a first step in creating a framework for evaluation.

2   Choose indicators and monitoring methods

When people are clear about what they're trying to do, It's not hard to choose indicators that can show the extent to which they are achieving their goals. Likewise, once the indicators are agreed, deciding how they will be monitored is often straightforward, because that is implicit in each indicator.

Once you have a shared sense of purpose with your partners, you can develop effective planning processes and begin to think about evaluating the project's performance and impact. Indicators are simply evidence that something has happened. Typical indicators for arts projects with social goals include:

- The acquisition of new skills by participants;

- The character and quality of the work produced;

- The development of new friendships and social activities;

- Changes in the policy or practice of partner organisations.

Identifying indicators is not difficult: on the contrary, projects often come up with too many. This doesn't really matter though: people will monitor the ones they care about, while the impractical or less-important will get forgotten about.

Targets: If you have decided that the acquisition of new skills by participants is a key indicator, you might want to set a target figure of those you expect will do so. But it's hard to judge what is a reasonable expectation of any particular project. Each is different, particularly in its context and, except where you have solid experience to build on, probably best avoided.

Monitoring methods Objectives suggest indicators; indicators suggest monitoring methods. If an arts project aims to improve the employability of young people, indicators might be enhanced self-confidence, independence and motivation, linked to a growth in teamwork and communication skills. Monitoring would involve gathering the views of the participants through interviews, questionnaires or

both, perhaps both at the start and again at the end, to compare re-sults.

Of course, an obvious indicator of success would be participants get-ting jobs, but this might not be realistic. It's easy to set disproportion-ate goals: such a big change demands more time and support than a single arts project can usually offer. There will also be factors beyond the project's influence, such as the local labour market. Finally, the impact may not be evident for some time: taking part in an arts pro-ject may start someone on a route of personal development, such as training, before they get a job.

3   Do the project and monitor progress

In smaller projects, the first two stages can often be undertaken in a meeting or two between project partners, though it can easily take longer. Agreeing these basic issues is a way of thinking through and planning the project, which becomes much easier to achieve as a re-sult. It also helps plan how to monitor key indicators as the project progresses.

Through these discussions, all the partners should be clear about what they hope to achieve, and how, before the project start begins. More than that, in shaping how its success will be judged, they will have a deeper sense of ownership over their work.

But some projects have no contact with the participants before they start: then, you will need to keep the evaluation process open to the perhaps very different perspectives of those who subsequently be-come involved.

Good planning helps minimise the impact of monitoring on the activ-ity itself, because data can be gathered appropriately. In doing this, simple record-keeping and photography shouldn't be undervalued.

It's unwise to change a project's aim once it's underway, even if peo-ple do decide that their original ambitions were unrealistic or mis-guided. The aim and objectives are the fixed point against which work is being assessed. Your evaluation may reveal unplanned out-comes, while demonstrating that anticipated results did not occur: the implications for your expectations and planning are crucial and shouldn't be obscured.

Changing your aims might also undermine the credibility of any good outcomes, since there's a temptation to bring them into line with what has happened as a way of showing that the project has succeeded in its intentions.

4   Analyse the data and assess the outcomes

When the project has been completed - or at the end of the year in the case of an organisation - there will a lot of data about what happened, the results and what people thought of it. There may also be visual records, the arts work itself and other material such as critical reviews. This needs to be analysed against the original aim and objectives to assess of the outcomes of the work.

When the project is over, there'll be plenty of information about what happened (its performance or outputs) and the results (its outcomes and, ultimately, its impacts). Post-project interviews, discussions and data gathering will need to be completed before you can begin analysing the information and comparing it with what was expected.

This may be the most difficult part of the process, because it is subjective and, in the best sense of the word, creative. How we interpret evidence, and the conclusions we draw from it, are inseparable from our own skills, experience and views.

A clear statement of objectives and indicators will be help structure analysis and limit subjectivity, along with discussion between partners. But, besides integrity, there's no single or correct way of interpreting the results of your evaluation.

5   Report back and plan forward

All this work will help you report to all your partners on what has been achieved and plan what happens next. Reporting is often limited to funders, but all the partners in a project should be involved in discussion about how their expectations have been met. That process is a natural springboard for considering next steps, taking account of what was done and its lessons.

Reporting is a crucial, but often neglected, part of the evaluation process. The first and most important audience are the project stakeholders: participants, local community, local authority, artists and so on. Reporting should include how far the project achieved its aims, the positive and negative results it produced, the problems it encountered, the solutions it invented and any unanticipated outcomes.

It might involve a meeting of stakeholders, a written report, or both, but it should provide everyone involved with a chance to stand back and think about what has been achieved. A report meeting also enables everyone to begin thinking about what they might want to do next.

In effect, the process has come full circle, and any future work stands on the foundation of what you've achieved and learned. Even if the project was always intended as a one-off collaboration, reporting back will help each participant to think about what they might do next

1.8.4   Evaluation and empowerment

This approach to planning, carrying out and evaluating arts projects reflects the best practice of many experienced organisations.

Some may need to adjust their thinking to see the whole process - and not just the third stage when everything seems to happen - as the arts project. The link between project development and evaluation isn't always accepted and people may be need to develop a wider range of skills and experience.

At the same time, like the principles that inform it, this process is an ideal. It won't be possible to follow it exactly all the time, and the ability of individual stakeholders to participate will vary. Community groups and participants may be less confident or articulate than local authorities, artists or funding agencies: time and effort is needed to support them.

The approach is appropriate to arts projects because, done well, it contributes to people's experience, capacities and, over time, empowerment. Each turn of the cycle will see partners learning from each other and gaining in experience and confidence. As a result, it can nurture community-based arts projects that are increasingly independent from external guidance or support - and that may be the most important cultural outcome of all.

1.9   RESEARCH APPROACHES

1.9.1   Approaches to arts evaluation

Evaluating the arts is, of course, secondary to creating or producing them, so arts organisations need workable evaluation tools that are compatible with how they actually work - integrating evaluation with creative, delivery and management processes.

Nevertheless, there are some basic conceptual issues which should be considered by anyone involved in evaluation, whether of their own work or someone else's. Perhaps the most important of these is the

theory that underlies that underlies the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research.

In the arts, quantitative research tends to be seen as mechanical, reductive and incapable of reflecting, still less understanding, the complex realities of arts practice. Qualitative research, in contrast, can be over-valued, perhaps because it appears to be concerned with what artists themselves are primarily interested in - artistic quality.

In fact, the two methodologies are related to different ways of understanding the world, and it's worth taking a few moments to look at them.

1.9.2 Quantitative and qualitative research theory

The social sciences, within which arts evaluation sits, form a vast and contested domain, organised according to different theories and disciplines. But a fundamental philosophical issue is whether social reality exists independent of people.

Researchers who believe that it does are often concerned with collecting and analysing facts about society and their inter-relationship: quantitative evidence such as demographic data, patterns of behaviour and so on. The analysis of crime statistics is an obvious example, in which we try to understand what is happening by considering the evidence of reported crime.

Others question the meaningfulness of such facts, arguing instead that social reality is made by people, as a result of how they perceive their experience. Researchers adopting this view will tend to be more concerned with qualitative research methods, such as interviews, designed to understand how people see things. For them, how people think about crime may be more important than the actual levels of crime, since this has a deep impact on their lives.

Distinct and highly sophisticated methodologies have been developed to support research of both kinds. But there is overlap between them: for instance, qualitative data about people's perceptions can be analysed quantitatively.

1.9.3 Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches

Each approach, of course, has strengths and weaknesses. While quantitative research methods can be simplistic and miss the subtle heart of a project, they allow comparisons to be made and are easily

understandable to outsiders. Qualitative research, which tends to produce narrative reports, requires some commitment from anyone wishing to understand it and is harder to compare.

In practice, evaluating arts work will often involve both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

1.10   UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS

1.10.1 Disappointing results

The importance of evaluating your work honestly means accepting that it might produce few positive results. That could be because:

- **The work was not done well**. There are badly though-out and delivered projects, and evaluation will reveal poor work. That can be hard for those involved, but it offers a chance to learn from mistakes and improve your work. Depersonalising the evaluation can help: look at the reasons why things didn't work, rather than the people who didn't do well.

- **People's expectations were too high**. Sometimes people load unrealistic ambitions on arts projects, ambitions which, with the best will in the world, they cannot fulfil. Artists themselves are not immune from this, not least because it's so hard to get support for your work, that there's a temptation to make big promises.

- **Factors beyond your control**. Sometimes projects don't deliver for reasons which are nothing to do with anyone involved. A local political crisis, a change of organisational policy, unusually bad weather - there is no end to the unforeseeable and unavoidable problems that can trip you up. Evaluation will help you understand where the problems lie.

Projects which aren't going well, for individuals or as a whole, present particular problems for evaluation, especially getting the views of people who've dropped out: they may no longer be in contact with the project or simply not want to talk about it.

As with all the problems you can encounter, the only solution is perseverance and honesty.

1.10.2 Interpreting negative signs and unexpected results

Signs of problems

However, problems revealed by evaluation are not necessarily a sign that things are going wrong. They may signal that deeper, positive change is occurring at the cost of passing tensions.

For example, it's not uncommon for young people taking part in a project to describe difficulties they are having with friends or with their parents. That may indicate that the project isn't working well, or it may be the result of personal growth, changing tastes an new-found confidence. Change and growth, which lie at the heart of most participatory arts projects, can bring growing pains. Only those involved can tell you what is happening, and only they can judge if the experience is worthwhile.

The essential thing is to avoid simple assumptions about the observed outcomes of projects, and to explore the reasons behind them as far as possible with everyone involved.

Unexpected results

Planning a good evaluation process, with clear goals, indicators and monitoring processes, has many advantages for arts organisations. However, there's always the danger that the process itself leads people to discount what they haven't planned to look for.

It's impossible, of course, to imagine every possible outcome from an activity. All you can do is try to keep alert to what is happening outside the scope of your planned evaluation.

1.11 QUALITY

1.11.1 The importance of quality

Most artists want to be judged by the artistic quality of their work. Equally, with the advent of Best Value, the idea of service quality has become a key issue for local authorities.

But assessing quality is hard: most of us think we recognise it when we see it, but few are so confident of defining it. As a result, questions of quality are often almost absent from evaluations.

We may not be able to solve all the challenges that it presents, but we should at least try to get an understanding of what they are.

1.11.2 Kinds of quality

As far as the arts are concerned, we can speak of quality in at least three different senses:

- **Quality of performance**, in the sense of how well an activity is done;

- **Quality of experience**, in the sense of how the activity is received;

- **Artistic quality**, or the intrinsic value of work as an artistic creation.

None of these, on its own, can be considered a reliable or complete guide to the quality of a project.

Something can be badly planned and executed but still produce a valuable experience for the audience. Or it may have high artistic quality, but not be much appreciated at the time.

But if we think about quality in each of these three areas, we may get closer to a fair assessment of an arts project or organisation.

1.11.3 Quality of performance

Quality of performance refers to how well something is done - to the standards of delivery and professionalism of those responsible.

In some cases, for instance in a service level agreement between a local authority and an arts organisation, those standards might be quite carefully specified.

In others, standards may be linked to membership of a professional body, or set by an individual arts organisation in the context of its own planning and values; they may be simply the targets that have been set for a particular project.

Whatever form they take, you can assess an activity against the performance standards it has set itself.

1.11.4 Quality of experience

Quality of experience is a central concept in Best Value, where customer satisfaction is an important performance indicator.

This works fine for some aspects of service delivery: levels of satisfaction with facilities, staff conduct and so on. But it falls down in rela-

tion to art. Not all artistic experiences which people come to value are appreciated at the time.

Audience perceptions are clearly important, but too much reliance on this single measure could produce a narrow and conservative programme. It is part of the task of the artist to broaden horizons, and that isn't always an immediately comfortable experience.

1.11.5 Artistic quality

Consequently, as well as assessing quality in terms of performance standards and user satisfaction, we need ways of thinking about the artistic quality or value of the work.

However we all have our own responses to art, according to personality, experience, culture and so on. How can we even have a meaningfully shared discussion?

One approach would be to agree some criteria for artistic quality, so that, although we make different judgements about each, at least we're comparing like with like.

Five criteria for artistic quality:

- **Technique:** Technical competence or sophistication is still one of the qualities which distinguishes much professional from amateur arts activity, although it is less valued today than in the past (particularly in the professional world). Technique can be assessed relatively clearly, although it may take a high level of expertise to go beyond a general view. For example, most people will be aware that the technical level of a community play is lower than a production by a company of trained actors, though they may find it harder to explain where the weaknesses of the first lie.

- **Originality:** Originality, as a concept, has been rather overtaken by the more fashionable idea of innovation, but it may be a more useful term. It can embrace the technically-based notion of innovation, while recognising the importance of the new utterance alongside the new mode of expression. In other words, it's possible to be an original painter, even making no claim to be innovative; likewise, it may be that some developments in the arts - for instance in early film or, at the moment in digital art - are more innovative than original.

- **Ambition**: Not all art is ambitious: there is a valued place for the small-scale, the decorative, the simply enjoyable, and for work

which has no intention of changing the world. But in terms of the highest quality work which might have a legitimate call on public resources, a high degree of ambition seems important. The work should aspire to stand alongside the best of the past, and the international present, and challenge both creators and viewers to extend themselves beyond the norm.

- **Connection**: Some sense of connection with the concerns of society may seem an odd thing to connect to artistic quality. Indeed some will argue that artistic quality is independent of society by definition and that ideas of relevance represent instrumentalisation of the arts or simply political correctness. But the opposite of relevance is irrelevance, not independence or artistic integrity. Art of real quality will have something significant to offer its audience, will make connections with the world beyond the artist.

- **Magic**: Our responses to art will always be individual and personal, shaped by our values, experiences, dreams and desires. Art can't be wholly explained by the intellect, any more than people can be considered purely rational beings. It is an experience, not simply an idea. One of the tests of artistic quality is its ability to provoke non-rational responses in us, inexplicable and inexpressible reactions that may stay with us for far longer than the most eloquent and lucid exposition. Great art triggers change that echoes long after direct contact is over: it becomes part of our selves, a ghostly presence, haunting and not always entirely friendly

Obviously, these are open to interpretation: but that is the point. The intention is not to define artistic quality, but to provide a structure for response and discussion. You might want to come up with alternative ideas that reflect your own organisation's priorities.

1.12 LIMITATIONS AND DANGERS

1.12.1 What evaluation can't do

Evaluation is important to arts organisations, but it isn't a panacea. There are many things it cannot do; in particular, evaluation cannot:

- Persuade people of the value of your work, or the arts in general;

- Solve problems it reveals or bring about constructive organisational change;

- Remove the need to make judgements or take difficult decisions.

The strength of evaluation is that, done well, it can play a role in finding solutions to these and other challenges of arts practice.

1.12.2 The dangers of evaluation

It's also important to be aware of the dangers that evaluation may hold for the arts. They include:

- **Cultural dangers** : how might it distort practice, perhaps by encouraging bureaucratisation and unwarranted caution in arts organisations?

- **Human dangers** : how will people respond to the need to engage in demanding new work?

- **Methodological dangers** : will data be accurate, and how can we avoid thinking it is more than part of the story?

- **Political dangers** : can the arts deal with effectively with political debates about value and values?

- **Philosophical dangers** : are we fuelling mistrust in public services, and undermining trust in individual judgement?

These are, evidently, serious risks and undesirable potential outcomes. They shouldn't be lightly discounted, but awareness of them, now and in future, should help us avoid some of the traps, and recognise those we do fall into for what they are.

2   EVALUATE AN EXISTING PROGRAMME

2.1   PLANNING INTERNAL EVALUATION

2.1.1   The difference of internal evaluation

The nature and demands of internal evaluation differ in some re-
spects from those that apply to external evaluation.

For example, arts projects shouldn't set themselves unrealistic stan-
dards of proof. It's hard enough for professional social scientists to
demonstrate the processes and outcomes of complex social phe-
nomena such as community development. You will struggle to *prove*
the value of your work, and may encounter all sorts of problems in
trying.

But you probably don't need to prove your work, beyond all reason-
able doubt. If the balance of probability is an acceptable test for civil
law, it should certainly be adequate for arts activity.

The aim of internal evaluation should be to learn from experience, to
improve future practice and perhaps to influence wider agendas, as
well as being able to report accurately on achievements: that is ambi-
tious enough.

2.1.2   Ground rules for internal evaluation

In developing your approach to evaluation, try to make it:

Practical and simple
Unless it fits in with delivering the arts work, evaluation will become a
problem and be undertaken badly. Don't try to answer all the ques-
tions raised by a project: it's better to produce solid information on a
few key aspects than over-ambitious and uneven data on lots.

Useful and understandable
Evaluation has to earn its keep: if it isn't helpful, it won't be sustained.
Since it needs everyone's support, its purpose and processes must
be understood among the project stakeholders.

Proportionate to the project's purpose
Evaluation is exists to support, guide and enhance your arts activity,
and shouldn't be allowed to dominate people's thinking. As a rule of

thumb, no more than ten per cent of your time and resources should go to the demands of planning and evaluation.

Undertaken seriously and methodically

Once you've established your project's objectives and how you'll monitor progress, it's essential that the evaluation work is done consistently to produce data with credibility and value.

Honest

Internal evaluation is subjective, but you can aim towards a self-critical objectivity; honesty is vital not only because the evaluation will have no credibility without it, but because creative work is worthless without it.

Confident but evolving

When you've thought about these issues and planned carefully, be confident about the evaluation process itself, even though you should be aware of possible improvements.

As the medical researcher, Raymond Illsley once said: 'successive partial evaluations and reforms are superior to perfect trials which demand such stringent conditions that they cannot be carried out'. Above all, internal evaluation requires common sense, integrity and commitment.

2.2   SETTING YOUR GOALS

2.2.1   Aim and objectives

The starting point of an evaluation process is to establish what the activity is intending to achieve. Whatever else emerges from the evaluation, it must be able to report on progress against goals.

Those goals might relate to an individual project, a programme, or the organisation as a whole: they remain the fixed point against which the evaluation will take place.

This isn't always as straightforward as it might appear. Arts organisations vary widely in how they set themselves goals.

Some are very general or vague, some are wildly ambitious, some are technocratic, some don't put anything in writing at all and some -

perhaps most - operate with a profusion of different aims, mission statements, targets and objectives.

You may need to begin the evaluation process by reviewing your organisation's or project's statements of purpose.

2.3   COLLECTING INPUT & OUTPUT DATA

2.3.1   Tracking data with the arts database

Evaluation depends on keeping track of the inputs and outputs of your work. Without this basic information, you'll struggle to make sense of more complex issues of experience and quality.

The **arts ⓘnfo** database will help you keep track of key data consistently, on an annual basis, and help provide essential information to funders, including local authorities and the Arts Council.

The same structure has been used to create a template - in the form of an Excel spreadsheet - in which you can keep data about individual projects. That data can then be totalled and entered into the database.

Although there will be common indicators - such as the number of sessions or attendances - most projects will be different, and you will need to identify relevant output indicators.

Monitoring outputs

There are also other ways of gathering basic output information about your work, according to which key indicators you are concerned with. Photography and other visual records can help record what took place: photos of each workshop session can be an easy alternative register of attendance. Workshop sheets and project diaries can be used to help arts workers or others to note key data at the time.

Monitoring at the right time

Input and output data may be time sensitive, particularly for things such as attendances. If no record is kept of who came to workshops, the information won't be available at the end when you start thinking about evaluation. So it's essential to plan the evaluation process carefully to ensure that what needs to be done is done at the right time, and so that whoever is responsible is properly prepared

Don't underestimate the value of this basic quantitative data. A detailed record of attendances in a participatory project can be very revealing. Knowing who took part (and who didn't), or who did so intermittently and who dropped out, is an essential part of understanding what happened.

2.3.2   Planning for evaluation

A good evaluation produces reliable information about an activity's performance and impact, in a form which is meaningful to stakeholders, without interfering with its delivery.

Although it should be a simple process, evaluation can become complicated when projects involve partners with diverse ambitions, so the elements involved need to be planned carefully. The first issue is who will take responsibility for it.

2.3.3   Assigning responsibility

An evaluation process will almost certainly fail unless it is someone's job to co-ordinate it - convening meetings, facilitating discussion, preparing report forms, gathering information, analysing the results and drafting a report.

The responsibility may be given to a single person, or a small group; ideally, it won't be the artists or arts workers with principal responsibility for delivering the project. Other staff or partners, particularly those with management or administrative skills may be able to give time and attention to evaluation.

In some cases it will be undertaken by a paid consultant or researcher, or may supported through one of the funding partners.

However it is handled in individual projects, successful evaluation almost always depends on someone agreeing to take responsibility for it.

2.3.4   Gathering information

The details of a project's activity, including factual data relating to what actually happened and more subjective data based on the views of people involved, are the raw material of any evaluation.

Before work starts, you need to agree:

- What is needed,

- How it will be gathered,

- When, and

- By whom.

That may take some planning: for example, if a questionnaire is to be used, it should be piloted well beforehand, to allow for any necessary revision.

2.3.5   Timing and resources

Evaluation makes its own demands on the project schedule. For example, it may be possible to get an audience's response only at the time of an event, so everything must be prepared for that window of opportunity.

Likewise, if 'before and after' comparison is important, interviews with participants will have to be completed on time.

These and other evaluation tasks require not just time and planning but resources: there may be staff costs, or equipment, such as computers for data entry or recording equipment, may be needed. All this will have to be considered and planned by the partners.

2.3.6   Ethical issues

Gathering and storing information about people raises many ethical and methodological questions, especially relating to confidentiality.

The Data Protection Act will not normally be relevant where computers are being used to analyse anonymous quantitative data, but legal guidance should be sought where there is any doubt.

2.4   THE OUTCOMES OF THE ARTS

2.4.1   The importance of outcomes

Outcomes are what most artists, managers and audiences care about. They are the reason that people want to work in the arts, and why people come to performances, exhibitions or take part in events and workshops.

Outcomes are experiences - and the arts are important, above all, for the experiences they offer and what people do as a result.

It is natural that an arts organisation should wish to understand better what people feel about the experiences they offer, both as part of thinking about their work and as part of reporting on it to bodies who provide the funds for it to happen. But monitoring outcomes in the arts is very different to monitoring outputs.

2.4.2   The difference of outcomes

Outputs are largely factual and objective. Outcomes tend to be much more personal, subjective and changeable. Two people may have completely different experiences of a concert or an exhibition; they may feel very differently about it at different times.

It's therefore essential to make a clear distinction between output data and outcome data: they should not be muddled up into a general pool of information. The first is concerned with what happened; the second with what the result was.

2.4.3   The range of outcomes in the arts

Outcomes are complicated by the range of experiences the arts offer, and the various meanings they may have for different people.

The most obvious of these are purely artistic - the responses triggered by exposure to the arts and which people have been trying to understand since before the time of Aeschylus. Some people argue that these are the only business of arts organisations, and it is certainly true that they are the core without which neither art nor experience can exist.

But - whether creators or consumers - have the very human habit of wanting to achieve all kinds of things in their work and of experiencing things in complex ways, many of which are completely unexpected.

So to limit our thinking about arts outcomes to purely artistic criteria - whatever we take them to be - isn't realistic. If we want to understand the richness of people's experience of the arts, and their complex contribution to our society, we need to take account of the whole range of outcomes they produce.

2.5 MONITORING OUTCOMES

2.5.1 Understanding the outcomes of arts work

Since we experience the arts in very subjective ways, finding out about outcomes is, above all, a matter of talking to the people who've been involved.

That happens quite a lot, of course: marketing departments conduct telephone surveys and focus groups, friends chat in the bar after the show, professionals pass comment.

But there are important differences between that everyday process and talking with people to assess outcomes. Above all, monitoring outcomes means being methodical and consistent in who you talk to and how, and linking the conversation with the objectives of your project or organisation.

2.5.2 Talking to people about their experience of your work

There are different ways of talking to people about their experience of your work.

You can talk to be people directly, individually or in groups, you can ask them to complete a questionnaire, or you can try some less structured methods such as setting up a video booth or a comment hotline on which people can record their views.

The choice will be dictated by the circumstances, the needs of the evaluation and the values of your organisation.

2.5.3 Interviews and discussion groups

The most obvious way to find out what people think is to interview them, whether face-to-face, by phone, or in a small group. In all cases, you can follow a more or less structured agenda or set of questions, though you should also offer people a chance to speak freely about whatever interests them.

An interview can be done by someone involved with the organisation or by an independent person; the responses you get may be different depending on your approach.

People may be more or less open with someone they have been working with, or whose art they have strong feelings about. But an outsider may find it hard to appreciate the nuances of a particular situation, or may not ask about aspects which only those closely involved know about.

Interviews and discussion groups raise the problem of how to record what people tell you. In some cases, it may only be possible or appropriate to listen to what is being said and make a note of it afterwards.

In others, written notes can be made as people talk, or a sound or video recording made. While the latter is the most reliable, in some situations it may be intimidating or unwelcome; it also imposes a substantial burden of listening back or transcribing recordings.

2.5.4   Questionnaires

Some people see questionnaires as a bureaucratic tool. They certainly can be, but they can also be effective in gathering people's views about your work. A questionnaire is, after all, only an interview in written form.

Questionnaires have some important advantages:

- They can be really anonymous, and encourage some people to be more open.

- They take much less time than interviews, and the results are recorded in written form.

- It's possible to get the responses of a much larger group of people, including people who may live some distance away.

- They can produce quantitative data and represent qualitative data - such as people's feelings - in quantitative form.

Of course, questionnaires do present problems:

- People need to have a certain level of literacy (usually in English, though obviously questionnaires can be prepared in other languages) and confidence in writing.

- There's also the danger that people who complete questionnaires are, to some extent, self-selecting and consequently unrepresentative.

These problems can be reduced by using the questionnaire as the basis for an interview, so that people's responses are recorded for them by the interviewer.

2.5.5 The quality of your tools

What really determines the effectiveness and value of different ways of talking to people about their experiences of the arts is not the tool used, but how well it is designed, used and understood. Neither interviews nor questionnaires, nor any other evaluation tool, will help produce a good evaluation unless it is carefully developed and fully integrated within the rest of the process.

2.6 SAMPLING AND PILOTING

2.6.1 Piloting research tools

Whatever research tools you use, they should be piloted or tested beforehand. When you've drafted a set of questions, an interview script or a questionnaire, try to test it with people beforehand. Look out particularly for:

- *Intelligibility* - Are you asking people clear questions?

- *Comprehension* - Can they be understood in more than one way?

- *Meaningfulness* - Do they get responses which are useful?

- *Omissions* - Do important issues arise which aren't covered?

And in doing all that, don't neglect the human aspects.

- How long does the process take?

- How do people respond to the questions?

- What information do they need to be given?

- What environments or situations seem to be most productive?

Use the experience of piloting to improve the research tools before they're used.

2.6.2   Guidance for evaluators

It may be that all the evaluation work will be undertaken by a single person - probably the person responsible for designing and managing the process. But others may also be involved: interviews might be conducted by several people, questionnaires might be distributed by front of house staff and so on.

Make sure that they are fully aware not only of their role, but of its contribution to the process. They need to understand how to do the task they have been assigned, and the importance of consistency and reliability. Finally, they need to understand the values of honesty and learning which underpin the process.

2.6.3   Sampling

It isn't realistic, or necessary, to evaluate every aspect of your work, any more than you would expect to speak to every member of your audience. Although input and output records should be complete and accurate, outcome data can be looked at differently.

In very small projects, you might interview all the participants to get their views about the experience and its effect on them. But that isn't realistic when dozens or hundreds of people have been involved, nor with an audience numbering thousands.

In most cases you can expect to assess outcomes by gathering the views of a sample of the people who had the experience. The important thing then is that you construct the sample properly, to avoid any unintentional bias which would undermine the findings.

2.6.4   Representative samples

The key characteristic of a reliable sample is that is representative of the whole group it is intended to survey. Sampling error occurs to the extent that it fails to do this.

A representative sample of the population at large can be gathered by 'simple random sampling' since the laws pf probability will ensure that subjects with representative characteristics will be included if the sample is large enough.

But if the group to be surveyed is the audience of a particular theatre, or the participants in an arts and regeneration programme, they are unlikely to mirror the characteristics of the whole population.

For instance, we know that women make up a disproportionately large part of the audience for ballet, so it is important not to mistake a sample of the audience as being representative of the population at large.

2.6.5   Random samples

Sampling theory and methods can be highly complex, but random sampling will often be sufficient for arts organisations. The question is how to make it genuinely random.

Distributing questionnaires with programmes might look like a way to get a random sample but, of course, it isn't. It will be skewed on several levels because:

- each event attracts its own particular audience,

- people comfortable with questionnaires are more likely to respond,

- and people who feel most strongly about the experience are most likely to respond.

The simplest way to construct a reasonably reliable sample at random is to use a numerical rule, such as interviewing every 20th person on the mailing list and including those who do not want to be interviewed in the results.

The size of the sample is more complex, depending on whether you are looking for quantitative or qualitative data. Obviously, a larger sample reduces the effect of the various errors which can occur: equally, there is a point beyond which enlarging the sample does not make it more representative.

Some researchers feel that 30 is a minimum sample size, if it's properly constructed. For statistical work, you may need a larger sample.

2.7   GETTING PEOPLE'S VIEWS

2.7.1   Audiences and participants

Most people who engage with the arts do so either as members of audiences or as active participants.

Audiences include people who attend concerts, performances, exhibitions, lectures as well as those who use various media, such as radio, television or the internet, readers and others: in short, everyone

whose relationship with the activity is essentially that of a consumer, albeit an active one.

Participants include everyone actively involved in creative activity offered by arts organisations, including those involved in schools or education projects, community arts projects, courses and so on.

2.7.2   Talking to audiences

There are many differences between audiences and participants, but the most important is probably the degree of commitment they make.

Although some audience members are deeply loyal to a particular arts organisation, attending at every opportunity, most have much less interest in individual companies' work. They may know little or nothing about you, your history or your ambitions; they may not expect to see your work again. The experience of seeing your work is brief - an evening at most - and fitted into busy lives. Two things follow.

First, it's unlikely that your work will have a profound effect on them, or a long term impact. (Of course, these things do happen, and are central to what the arts are about, but most of us experience a limited number of damascene conversions in our lives.) Their engagement with the arts generally may be tremendously important too them, but attendance at your event is more often than not a replaceable experience.

Second, they will often have limited interest in talking to you about your work: they've come for a night out or an afternoon at a gallery, and for all sorts of reasons. The time may be precious, and they're unlikely to want to spend it rationalising an experience or answering questions. This is one reason why it's common for marketing departments to conduct interviews by phone after the event.

All this means that the way in which you talk to audience members, whether at the time or subsequently, whether you are using questionnaires or interviewing them, will be different from how you talk to participants.

2.7.3   Talking to participants

People who become creatively involved in arts projects are likely to be making a much more substantial commitment.

Certainly, there are plenty of one-off workshops and education sessions which may demand no more of participants than a performance, and which may leave no deeper impression. But other projects will last for days, weeks, months and more, engaging people on a journey of creative exploration and personal development which may change their lives. It's on the experience of this kind of work that the sometimes large claims for the transformative power of the arts is principally based.

It's often easier to talk to people who have been involved in such work, because they have time, they have been through experiences which often promote reflection and they may have set quite clear goals for themselves in taking part. Moreover, they're often engaged with your organisation (and knowledgeable about it) and therefore ready to help in discussing the project.

For these reasons, among others, both the questions which can be explored with project participants and the ways in which that happens is likely to be quite different than with audiences.

2.7.4   Model questionnaires

Two model questionnaires are included in this toolkit, as much as anything else to illustrate what such questionnaires might end up looking like.

We recommend against using these questionnaires to evaluate your own work as they stand: they're a source of ideas. Neither is perfect. Thinking about arts evaluation is evolving all the time, and we still have a lot to learn about people's experiences and how to think about them.

2.7.5   Questionnaire checklist

- Whom will you ask to complete the questionnaire?

- Are you asking all participants to complete the questionnaire?

- If not, on what basis has the sample been constructed?

- Have you considered how to get the views of people who have dropped out?

- When, where and how will the questionnaires be administered?

- Will they be completed by respondents or through interviews?

- Will they be completed on site, or will people take them away?

- How will they be collected, and by whom?

- What completion rate do you expect?

- Will there be enough responses to make any quantitative data statistically meaningful, or comparable with data from past projects?

- Is anonymity an issue? If so, how will you guarantee it?

- Do you need to include demographic information on the questionnaire? If so, what use will you make of it? (It is possible to gather such information in other ways, and unless you want to compare the responses of different groups - which implies a large initial sample - this may not be the most appropriate.)

- Are there likely to be issues of language or literacy?

- Is every question clear?

- Is any question open to more than one interpretation?

- Have you made your questions as neutral as possible?

- Have you piloted the questionnaire?

- Have you included closed (requiring specific answers) and open questions (which people can respond to as they wish)?

- How will you use the data from the questionnaires?

3 EVALUATE A NEW PROJECT

3.1 PROJECT EVALUATION

3.1.1 Linking evaluation with project work

Although evaluation is increasingly recognised as an important element of arts projects, it tends to be seen as additional to the main task of developing and implementing the project itself.

It can be done as a quite separate activity, particularly when the evaluation is being undertaken by an independent consultant or a researcher.

However, most projects depend on internal evaluation, so integrating it with project management and delivery has several advantages:

- It helps incorporate learning and practice;

- It can improve project management processes;

- It can reduce workload by combining activities;

- It reduces the danger of evaluation being neglected;

- It helps ensure the active participation of stakeholders.

3.1.2 Stages in the process

Building evaluation into project development isn't difficult. It's largely a matter of taking a methodical approach to existing good practice. Specifically, it means:

- Agreeing with stakeholders what the project is intended to achieve;

- Testing proposed plans against the aim and objectives;

- Identifying indicators of success and ways of monitoring them;

- Implementing work and recording data about progress;

- Reviewing the results and reporting back.

3.2   STAKEHOLDERS

3.2.1   Identifying stakeholders

Most arts projects are partnerships of one kind or another - if only between an arts organisation and a funding agency. Complex projects can involve many partners including local authorities, community groups, voluntary organisation, regeneration agencies, education and health authorities, businesses and so on.

The term stakeholder is increasingly used to describe people with an interest in a project.

A stakeholder is someone who can affect, or be affected, by an activity or initiative: sometimes, as in the case of community participants or arts workers, they might occupy both positions.

The value of this approach is that it encourages the involvement of much broader groups in discussion about projects and their purpose. After all, if someone can affect how the project progresses, it makes sense to involve them as early as possible. Likewise, if the project is likely to affect them, good practice demands that they should be able to participate.

3.2.2   Incorporating stakeholders' views

So you need to identify all the people who might be considered stakeholders in the project at an early stage.

Of course, many won't want to become actively involved in planning, carrying out or evaluating the work. Local residents may be content simply to have been consulted; a funder might just expect to approve plans. But the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making and planning process ought to be open.

It's likely that you will meet with a wide range of expectations among the project partners. Some may be more interested in community development objectives, in personal aspirations or in artistic goals.

Partnerships thrive in the space where these varied aspirations overlap. The process of agreeing an aim and objectives is a key stage in finding this consensus.

3.3   SETTING AN AIM AND OBJECTIVES

3.3.1   The importance of aim and objectives

There are different approaches to setting project aims. The one described here integrates well with the evaluation process.

A project's aim and objectives is important because it states what people are hoping to achieve and how they intend to go about it. It doesn't need to be long, bureaucratic or laced with jargon. On the contrary, it should be clear to everyone involved, and memorable enough to be used in everyday explanations of project's purpose.

The objectives should describe the main activities being undertaken to achieve the aim. They should include everything which is essential to achieving it, and nothing which isn't.

Each objective can, if necessary, by expanded to include detailed plans about tasks, targets and assumptions, in keeping with various common planning and management practices. What detail you need will depend on the project's scale and complexity.

Of course, this model can be applied to the strategic aims of an organisation, or a long-term programme, as well as an individual project. A simple, clear and agreed statement of aim and objectives is essential to project evaluation: unless you know what you are trying to achieve, you have no way of assessing your progress.

An example of an aim and objectives

Here's an example of a statement of aim and objectives which might be drafted by a theatre project intending to work with unemployed young people.

- The project aims to reduce social exclusion among young people in this area.

- It will achieve this by:

- Involving up to 20 unemployed young people in a participatory project leading to a new theatre performance in the community centre and possibly elsewhere;

- Providing high quality training in theatre and related skills to participants, accredited by the local FE college, to build skills and self-confidence;

- Ensuring the participation of a representative cross-section of the local community and encouraging co-operation within the group;

- Supporting participants in developing their access to theatre and other cultural or educational activities after the project's completion.

This is clear enough to provide a solid basis for evaluation. The outputs, outcomes and impact of a project defined in this way could be assessed with a good degree of confidence.

3.4   CHOOSING INDICATORS

3.4.1   Performance indicators

You can identify indicators for each various elements of a project, including:

- **Inputs** (what was invested),

- **Outputs** (what was produced),

- **Standards** (how well it was done) and

- **Outcomes** (what the results were).

So, for a typical theatre skills training course, you might adopt these indicators:

- Staff time and costs (inputs),

- Sessions delivered, attendances, work produced (outputs),

- Tutors' qualifications, participants' satisfaction, quality of work (standards), and

- Acquisition of new skills and confidence by the participants, new friendships, greater commitment to the arts (outcomes).

3.4.2   Impact indicators

You might decide that the ultimate impact of the course might be clear from the number of participants who go into gain employment, but there problems with this.

- Is the fact that someone is now in work clearly and uniquely attributable to their participation in the course? Is their failure to get

work attributable to weaknesses in the course, or are external factors (such as the local labour market) the actual cause?

- Did they get a job as a result of what the course offered? (If they simply met someone who offered them work through the course, the result would be incidental to the aim of the course.)

- Is the desired outcome - i.e. someone finding work - in keeping with the inputs? Sometimes unreasonably high expectations are placed on arts projects, simply because their use in achieving socio-economic objectives is relatively new.

For all these reasons, you should be cautious when setting indicators for project impact. In most cases, the more easily managed (and perhaps more reliable) indicators for inputs, outputs, standards and outcomes will be sufficient for evaluation.

3.4.3   Choosing indicators

Indicators should be specific to projects or organisations. So you will need to develop indicators for your work which are appropriate to your own objectives and expressed in language which reflects your own values and preoccupations.

However, to help you plan your own work, we've added a list of typical outcome indicators for arts projects with social or other, non-artistic objectives.

4   INPUT DATA

4.1   INTRODUCTION

4.1.1   The arts①nfo database

The **arts①nfo** database is an on-line resource designed to help arts organisations keep track of their annual inputs and outputs - key data which they and their funders need.

To use the database for the first time, you need to create an account for your organisation. You'll need to choose a user name - usually the name of your organisation - and a password.

The database is designed to keep track of arts activity, finance and employment, as well as some basic information about your organisation. You don't need to have all the information to hand when you log on: you can go back and add to or amend your data as often as you like.

5   CREATE REPORTS

5.1   CREATE REPORTS FROM THE DATABASE

5.1.1   Reports generated automatically by the database

There are a number of basic reports which can be created from the data which you enter into the **arts①nfo** database. For reasons of confidentiality these are limited to your own data. Any data you enter will be available only to your Arts Council and local authority funders, with your agreement when you register to use the database.

5.1.2   Arts organisations can produce reports on:

- Full data for this year

- Full data for this year & previous years

- Activity data only for this year

- Activity data only for this year & previous years

- Average activity figures for all organisations in the same category with your own data

5.1.3   Local authorities can produce reports on:

- Full data on arts organisations funded by the local authority for this year

- Full data on arts organisations funded by the local authority for this year & previous years

- Activity data on arts organisations working in the local authority area for this year

- Activity data on arts organisations working in local authority area this year & previous years

- Average activity figures for all organisations in category

5.1.4   Arts Council can produce reports on:

- Full data on arts organisations funded by the Arts Council for this year

- Full data on arts organisations funded by the Arts Council for this year & previous years

- Activity data in each local authority area for this year

- Activity data in each local authority area for this year & previous years

- Average activity figures for all organisations in category

You can also export your data in CSV (comma separated values) format. This is interchangeable between databases and you will be able to use the data to conduct more complex searches with the programmes which you are most familiar with. You can also use this data in programmes like Word and Excel.

5.2   ANALYSING THE RESULTS

5.2.1   Understanding the results

Setting goals, choosing indicators and gathering data is a fairly logical process. Deciding what the results mean - interpreting your data - is much more difficult. It requires analysis skills and understanding (to say nothing of honesty) which are not so easily developed.

In some ways though, thinking about what the results of your evaluation mean and how they can be shared with your stakeholders, is the most creative part of the process. It demands many of the processes and skills that artists use in preparing their work and, like art, evaluation stands or falls on its integrity.

Although this part of the evaluation process cannot be easily set out in a toolkit, the following questions should help you think through some of the issues.

5.2.2   Analysis checklist

- Have you set a cut-off point for gathering data?

- How will you assemble and organise the various kinds of data you have?

- How much time will you set aside for reading, looking at and thinking about the material?

- Can you involve other people in this process, and test whether their interpretations coincide?

- Is some material more important or significant?

- Can you refer the material back to the aim and objectives?

- What does it tell you about your aspirations and what was achieved?

- The positive responses inevitably stand out. Are there particular reasons why people have been so positive? How can you reflect the more ordinary views of others? How can you put the positive in context?

- Does some of the material need verifying? Is it worth going back to talk to people again some time after the project, when their enthusiasm may have faded, or their hopes been tested against reality?

- What narrative emerges from the material? Is it possible to identify other narratives, reflecting other perspectives?

- Can you test your conclusions by sharing them with colleagues, participants, audience members or others?

5.3   REPORTING THE RESULTS

5.3.1   Do you need a written report?

How you report the findings of your evaluation depends on many things: the scale and character of the project, who you're reporting to and why, and so on.

But reporting doesn't necessarily mean that you have to produce a weighty tome, detailing every aspect of your organisation, what you did and what everyone thought about it. Most people aren't that interested.

In this information age, we've all got far too much to read so, before you invest your time in producing a long report, be sure that it will be read.

Projects which are genuinely innovative, testing new practice or ways of working, may merit a written report analysing their processes and making the findings available to other people working in the field. But in many cases, a short, clearly-written summary of a project's objectives, the extent to which they were met, and the key lessons which emerge, will be enough.

A post-project meeting of stakeholders to discuss the findings of an evaluation may actually be more valuable in the long run, since it encourages people to think about what happens next.

5.3.2   Reporting quantitative data

Quantitative data can be very powerful - witness the way it's bandied about in any political debate - but it can also be very deceptive.

Disraeli's phrase, 'lies, damned lies and statistics' has remained current not because it's cynical but because it reminds us that it's easier to mislead with figures, even unintentionally, than to tell the truth.

When you report figures, try to be as detailed and as accurate as possible. Though you might use figures selectively in the report narrative, the full data should always be made available in an appendix.

Always include the number of responses as a proportion of the number who were asked to respond. Where the number represents a sample, explain the basis of that sample.

Avoid using percentages when the number of responses is small, since they can give a false impression: it's better to say 2 out of 10 respondents, than 20% of respondents. As a rule of thumb, percentages drawn from fewer than 100 responses can be unreliable since a single person changing their response would alter the figures by 2% or more.

6   GET HELP

6.1   HOW THE TOOLKIT WORKS

6.1.1   Using the toolkit

This toolkit is divided into two main elements:

- The **arts①nfo** database, an online resource designed to help you manage key output information about your organisation and its work.

- The **toolkit resources** on this CD-ROM, designed to guide you through planning and undertaking an evaluation of individual projects or your organisation's work as a whole.

From the start page, you have a number of basic choices which will direct you through the material we have assembled. You can also plot your own course, by following links that interest you. In many cases you will find further information about what is being discussed by clicking on the MORE button.

Words which are underlined are explained in the glossary: you can click on them to get a quick explanation of how they are being used here.

6.1.2   Feedback

This is **arts①nfo** version 1.0. Our primary goal has been to develop a tool which is of real practical value to arts organisations, testing the technology and the underlying concepts. We welcome your comments or feedback on any aspect of the toolkit.

6.2   GENERIC OUTPUT AND OUTCOME INDICATORS

6.2.1   Output indicators

The following list of output indicators reflects many of the aspirations which people have for artistic projects, and particularly those which are intended to bring some positive benefit to the local community.

It isn't comprehensive: there are many other goals which projects might set themselves. Likewise, don't expect to track all of these outputs. The indicators are not definitive: they are intended to help you devise your own, appropriate to your own projects.

They have been grouped into five broad areas: this is somewhat artificial and many indicators could show change in areas other than the ones they appear in.

6.2.2 Arts output indicators

Artistic outputs
- The number of new productions

- The number of performances

- The number of new art works created or purchased

- The number of education or other participatory workshops produced

- The number of exhibitions and exhibition days

- The number and sales of recordings, publications and broadcasts

- The diversity of artists employed

Arts development outputs
- Services offered to the public

- Number and demographics of the audience

- Number and demographics of workshop participants

- Rate of growth of audience and proportion of regular attenders

- Range of partnerships, venues, tours etc.

6.2.3 Social and economic output indicators

Personal development outputs
- Number of training courses and workshops offered

- Number and demographics of participants in training

Community development outputs
- Number of partnerships with community, public and voluntary organisations

- Creation of new community organisations or associations

Economic outputs

- Total turnover, including earned, grant and sponsorship income

- Number of visitors from within and beyond the local area

- Number of permanent, part-time and freelance jobs, locally and further afield

- Number of volunteers and economic worth of their time

- Expenditure with local businesses

- Tax contributions from business

6.2.4   Outcome indicators

The following list of outcome indicators reflects many of the aspirations which people have for artistic projects, and particularly those which are intended to bring some positive benefit to the local community.

It isn't comprehensive: there are many other goals which projects might set themselves. The indicators are not definitive: they're intended to help you devise your own, appropriate to your own projects.

They have been grouped into five broad areas: this is somewhat artificial and many indicators could show change in areas other than the ones they appear in.

6.2.5   Arts outcome indicators

Artistic outcomes

Artistic outcomes refers to the character of the work itself; most of these indicators would have to be assessed against agreed quality criteria, such as those suggested in the toolkit. Artistic outcomes include:

- The quality of the creative process

- The quality of work of the individuals involved

- The quality of the final production or art work

- The response of audiences

- The response of peers, assessors, critics and others

- Development of new creative ideas or practice by the artists

Arts development outcomes

Arts projects also have a range of objectives which relate to their audiences and the demand for their work: these are termed arts development objectives here to distinguish them from the artistic outcomes themselves. Arts development outcomes include:

- Enhanced levels of interest and participation in the arts

- Larger, more diverse and more committed audiences

- More locally-based creative practitioners and companies

- Increased level of voluntary arts activity

- Increased support for the arts among professionals and public

- New partnerships with public, private and voluntary bodies

6.2.6   Social and economic outcome indicators

Personal development outcomes

Personal experience lies at the heart of all artistic experience. The principal outcomes which can be expected of any artistic project is personal - experiences which enrich people and support their individual growth. Personal development outcomes include:

- Positive and lasting experience of attending or participating in the arts

- Acquisition of new insights or experience, valued by those involved

- Development of new creative confidence and ideas, valued by those involved

- Acquisition of specific skills or development of existing skills, (e.g. creative, craft, technical, practical skills)

- Acquisition of transferable skills (e.g. teamwork, problem solving, administration, management etc.)

- Positive learning outcomes for students and teachers in education projects

- Better self-image, self-esteem and/or self-confidence

- Improved sense of personal health, well-being or happiness

- More active and varied social life and new friendships

- Increased participation in other community activities

- Take up of vocational training or further education

- Take up of permanent, part-time or freelance work

Community development outcomes

Communities comprise people, and the growth experienced by individuals can lead to development on a wider level, particularly when those people become active in community organisations. Community development outcomes include:

- Creation of temporary or permanent shared artistic symbols

- Successful celebrations of local cultures and traditions

- Internal community co-operation, partnership and joint projects

- Initiatives linking different communities and neighbourhoods

- Intergenerational or inter-ethnic contact and co-operation

- Enhanced skills, confidence and ambitions of community organisations

- Improved support for vulnerable or marginalised people

- Greater use of local community facilities and services

- Projects sustained locally and successful spin-off community initiatives

- Increased levels of ambition and expectation within communities

- Increased participation in local democratic life, (e.g. community events, local consultations, elections)

- Improved internal and external image of neighbourhood

- Increased sense commitment to neighbourhood

- Environmental improvements maintained over time

- Reduction in fear of crime

Economic outcomes

The economic outcomes of most publicly-funded artistic activity are limited. Arts organisations are businesses and, as such, they contribute to local economies, creating employment, consumer expenditure and other activity. Their most important economic role, however, is probably in the origination of creative ideas and material which other sectors of the economy may exploit. Demonstrating this link on a case by case basis may be difficult and require research expertise and resources which arts organisations do not have. Only a few basic economic outcome indicators have therefore been included here:

- New funding brought into disadvantaged neighbourhoods

- Proportion of local to external investment

- Number of permanent, part-time or freelance jobs created

- Worth of voluntary labour and contributions in kind

- Expenditure with local businesses

- Reductions in welfare costs

- Income from tourism (based on external visitors)

6.3   PROJECT EVALUATION CHECKLIST

6.3.1   Agree the project's purpose and plan the work

- Who are the current, and potential, organisational partners?

- Are there other stakeholders who should be involved?

- What do the partners expect to achieve by doing *this* project?

- What are their individual expectations of the project - are they compatible?

- Who are the intended beneficiaries or participants?

- What are their expectations of the project?

- Are they compatible with those of the other partners?

- At what stage can they be involved in discussions about their expectations?

- If that can't happen before the project starts, how else can you ensure their aspirations are taken into account in planning the project and its evaluation?

- What assumptions do the partners and other stakeholders bring to the project?

- Are they committed to the evaluation process?

- How can you engage each of the partners in the evaluation process?

- How can you minimise the impact of inequalities of power, experience, confidence or articulacy between different stakeholders?

- How will you manage the planning and evaluation process?

- How can you avoid the danger of evaluation seeming bureaucratic, irrelevant, tiresome or distant from everyone's creative aspirations?

- What do the partners want to do with the results of the evaluation?

- Have you allowed enough time and resources for the process?

6.3.2   Choose indicators and monitoring methods

- What indicators will be used to monitor the project's performance?

- What output and outcome indicators are needed?

- What criteria for thinking about quality might be appropriate?

- Do the indicators relate clearly to the objectives?

- Are some indicators more or less important than others?

- Are some indicators of greater concern to some stakeholders?

- Are some indicators really more interesting than necessary?

- Can you identify just six key indicators which would give a meaningful snapshot of the project's results?

- What methods will be used to record quantitative output information - a project diary, attendance sheets, management records etc.?

- What methods will be used to record qualitative information - observation, interviews, discussion groups, visual records, comment walls etc.?

- Can you find an opportunity to pilot the main evaluation tools beforehand?

- Do any of the partners have other ideas for evaluation techniques?

- Are the proposed methods in keeping with the values of the project?

- Are they appropriate to the people involved?

- Does your evaluation risk producing more data than you can sensibly deal with?

6.3.3 Do the project and monitor progress

- Who will be responsible for monitoring, gathering information, interviewing, taking photographs etc.?

- Could this, wholly or in part, be turned into a creative task for some of the participants or stakeholders?

- How will the monitoring methods work with, rather than intrude into, the normal creative processes of the arts project?

- Are the elements of the monitoring process planned into the project timetable?

- What role is planned for each of the stakeholders?

- Is there a role for an external evaluator or advisor? If so, what is it, and who might do it?

6.3.4 Analyse the data and assess the outcomes

- Who will be responsible for drawing together all the material?

- How will the data be prepared for analysis (e.g. using spreadsheets, or the **arts①nfo** database)?

- Are there data protection or confidentiality issues that you need to consider?

- Have you allowed enough time for compiling the data?

- Have you allowed time to think about its meaning and implications?

- How will you maintain interest in the evaluation when the arts work is over?

- If detailed analysis will be time-consuming, would an interim report help people review their progress and move on to the next stage?

- How will you protect the analysis against errors or misjudgements?

- How might an unsympathetic observer criticise the findings?

6.3.5   Report back and plan forward

- At what point after the event will all the partners come together again?

- In what form will the findings be presented to the stakeholders?

- Who will facilitate the discussion?

- How can people prepare for disappointments or problems which may emerge?

- How can the findings be used as the springboard for future work?

- Is there a wider audience for the evaluation work? If so, what is it?

- How can that audience be reached and what might influence it?

6.3.6   Remember…

Throughout the toolkit, we've tried to show that evaluation is an important aspect of arts activity, though how you approach it will depend on particular needs, interests and values. Evaluation can improve your own practice, demonstrate the worth of your work to others and advocate for your creative values more widely.

But in the end, the quality and impact of arts work is what matters to artists, audiences, participants - everyone. So it's worth remembering a few commonsense points about arts evaluation:

- Recognise that evaluation is subjective;

- Work nonetheless with honesty, towards objectivity;

- Have confidence in your own assessments and those of your partners;

- Be clear about the evaluation's purpose and audience;

- Plan the process as carefully as you plan arts work;

- Talk to partners and other arts workers and adapt their best ideas;

- Be clear, logical and consistent about the processes you use;

- Don't lose sight of intangible or minor changes;

- See, and help others to see, the process as creative learning;

- Don't confuse research with advocacy;

- Keep it in proportion - it is the arts work that matters.

6.4   GLOSSARY

Aim

An aim is the ultimate purpose of an activity. A project will usually have a single aim (it's difficult to work towards two destinations at once), but some people like to distinguish between long-term and short-term aims.

Baseline

In projects designed to produce change over time, it can be valuable to assess the initial situation, by undertaking a baseline study against which change can be observed.

Cross-sectional research

Studies which track *different* people's responses over time - for instance, by interviewing concert-goers each year - are described as cross-sectional since they do not track the evolving responses of the same group of people: see also longitudinal research.

Formative evaluation

Evaluation methods which assess the results of an activity while it is continuing are often described as formative; they tend to be prospective, looking at existing strengths and weaknesses and providing rapid feedback on current progress. They can be combined with summative evaluations.

Impact

Impact is used here to refer to the longer-term results of a project, particularly in relation to its broader cultural, social or economic goals. The outcomes of a project working with young offenders may include observable changes in attitude and immediate behaviour: the impact of that may be identifiable six months later, partly in the future lives of the participants, but partly in their families, communities or

other arenas. The impact of a project can be thought of as the sum of the outputs and outcomes, an overall analysis of the results it produced: unlike the outcomes, the impact of a project may change over time as subsequent events unfold.

Indicator

An indicator is anything which can show what progress has been made towards a given objective. There are many different kinds of indicators, but they all enable change of some kind to be observed; they can relate to inputs, outputs, outcomes or impact.

Inputs

Inputs are the resources which are applied to achieving stated objectives - most commonly, finance and time.

Logical framework

Often abbreviated to Log Frame, a logical framework is an approach to planning and evaluation is widely used in the voluntary sector and by development agencies as a way of integrating project planning and evaluation. It is not unlike the approach set out in this toolkit, though it tends to be more complicated and can sometimes be bureaucratic.

Longitudinal research

Longitudinal research is designed to gather data on a regular basis over a period of time, typically from the same respondents, so that the evolution of their ideas, perceptions, skills and so on can be tracked; see also cross-sectional research.

Objectives

An objective is an action or a task which needs to be undertaken in order to achieve an aim; likewise it is possible to identify principal and subsidiary objectives and a textbook Logical framework would sub-divide objectives in this way.

Outputs

Outputs are what is produced as a result of an activity, for instance, *x* number of workshops attended by *y* number of people, the production of new a art work, the number of jobs created etc.

Outcomes

The outcomes of a project are perhaps the most important question - though outcome data are of limited meaning without information on inputs and outputs. At their simplest, outcome indicators try to identify what the result of an activity was - what change occurred because it took place. Outcomes may, of course, be partly or wholly negative; they may also be unplanned or unexpected.

Performance indicator

Indicators are often used by funders specifically as a way to track the performance of an organisation, especially against contractual outputs: Performance indicators are otherwise the same as other indicators.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research theory questions the possibility of objective facts about society and sees people's perceptions, values and attitudes as more significant in understanding social phenomena.

Quantitative research

Quantitative research theory strives towards an objective analysis of society through the collection, analysis and interpretation of often statistical facts and their inter-relationship.

Stakeholder

A stakeholder is anyone who can affect, or be affected by, a project or activity. Not all stakeholders will choose to become engaged with a project, or its evaluation, but since their influence can be decisive, it's important to take their views into account.

Summative evaluation

Evaluation methods which assess the results of an activity at its conclusion are often described as summative; they tend to be retrospective, documenting past problems and achievements and informing future practice more generally. They can be combined with formative evaluations.

Value

The value of a project is always relative to the cost and other inputs, to the impact produced, to the context in which it occurred and to the value which could be produced by spending the money in other

ways. The worth of an artistic activity ultimately, and quite rightly, remains a matter of politics.

6.5   FURTHER RESOURCES

6.5.1   Publications

There is a huge body of work on evaluation and research methodologies. Here are a few places to start if you want to explore evaluation in more detail:

- *Communities Count: a step by step guide to community sustainability indicators*, Alex MacGillivray, Candy Weston & Catherine Unsworth, New Economics Foundation London 1998

- *Did it make a difference? Evaluating community-based arts and business partnerships,* François Matarasso, London, Arts & Business. 2001

- *Partnerships for Learning, A guide to evaluating arts education projects*, Felicity Woolf ACE, London, 1999.

- *Realistic Evaluation*, Ray Pawson & Nick Tilley, Sage, London, 1997.

- *Research Methods in Evaluation*, Louis Cohen & Lawrence Manion Routledge, 1994.

- *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process,* Tim May, Open University 1993

- *Vital Signs: Mapping Community Arts in Belfast*, François Matarasso, Comedia 1998.

6.5.2   Links

The Internet is a good source of ideas and tools about evaluation. The following sites are all worth looking at if you want to find out more about evaluation: many of them include material that you can download, as well as links to further useful sites. Rather than describe each site, we've quoted what they say about themselves:

- 'The UKES web exists to promote and improve the theory, practice understanding and utilisation of evaluation and its contribution to public knowledge.' www.evaluation.org.uk/ukes_new/index.htm

- 'The American Evaluation Association is an international professional association of evaluators devoted to the application and exploration of program evaluation, personnel evaluation, technology, and many other forms of evaluation. Evaluation involves assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organizations to improve their effectiveness.' www.eval.org/

- 'This page lists free resources for methods in evaluation and social research. The focus is on 'how-to' do evaluation research and the methods used: surveys, focus groups, sampling, interviews, and other methods. Most of these links are to resources that can be read over the web.' http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/

- 'A news service focusing on developments in monitoring and evaluation methods relevant to development projects and programmes with social development objectives.' www.mande.co.uk/

- 'Forms that Work is dedicated to the world of forms design.' www.formsthatwork.com/

- 'The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the government department that provides statistical and registration services. ONS is responsible for producing a wide range of key economic and social statistics which are used by policy makers across government to create evidence-based policies and monitor performance against them. It makes statistics available so that everyone can easily assess the state of the nation, the performance of government and their own position.' www.statistics.gov.uk

- 'The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively. This website is your single point of access for Audit Commission information and reports in the areas that interest you.' www.audit-commission.gov.uk/

- The World Bank Operations Evaluation Department: 'Enhancing development effectiveness through excellence and independence in evaluation.' www.worldbank.org/oed/

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