GETTING STARTED WITH PROGRAM EVALUATION

A GUIDE FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

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In addition to demonstrating accountability to your funders and stakeholders, evaluation can strengthen your organization by helping you to improve programs, solve problems and make a compelling case for more resources.

Useful data is all around you. It is embedded in the response of your audience and many tools you may already use to manage your work. Choose a thoughtful variety of information—quantitative and qualitative—to tell your story and measure the outcomes of your programs.

Yes. Both the artistic and business dimensions of your work can be meaningfully evaluated, although your methods may need to be as creative as your programming!

Logic models and rubrics are powerful planning tools that also can help you organize your evaluation efforts.

Following some practical "dos" and "don'ts" can help any arts organization get started with evaluation.

Make the most of your evaluation efforts by engaging your constituents, staff and board.

Consult these resources for additional information and ideas.

Untitled, Tom Graffagnino
Georgia State Art Collection

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Zebra Beach IV, Patrick McCay
Georgia State Art Collection

WHY EVALUATE?

What methods will you use to evaluate this program?

How will you monitor the effects of your program on participants?

What indicators will you use to measure your progress in attaining your goals?

Phrases like these will be familiar to many arts organizations, especially those that seek funding from public agencies or foundations. If your organization has not yet encountered an evaluation requirement of some kind, get ready! Evaluation has become a fact of life for nonprofit organizations in the 21st century. Like all other charitable groups, arts and cultural organizations are increasingly required to document what they accomplish and assess the impact of their programs.

When combined with good planning practices, however, evaluation is not just a reporting requirement imposed upon arts organizations by funders. It is also a tool for organizational learning—a tool that can help manage your programs, spend your funds wisely and help your constituents and potential investors understand your work.

This guide is designed to help arts organizations reap these evaluation benefits. Its intent is to provide introductory information and ideas that arts organizations may supplement with their own experience, as well as with the growing body of literature about program evaluation in the arts. Most of all, this guide is designed to invite your creative thinking and to encourage you to use evaluation to tell your story in authentic and compelling ways.

- **ENHANCE THE RESULTS OF YOUR PROGRAMS, MARKETING EFFORTS OR MANAGEMENT.** Evaluation can shed light on persistent challenges and reveal keys to success. It can also help you pinpoint what strategies provide the greatest return on your time and effort.

- **HELP GRANT-MAKERS AND DONORS UNDERSTAND YOUR WORK.** Evaluation results illustrate the impact of your programs. This information helps funders describe the community benefits that stem from their sponsorship. It also can help them justify future funding. Evidence of ongoing evaluation further shows that good planning and management practices are in place in your organization, which raises confidence among all of your investors.

- **DEMONSTRATE ACCOUNTABLE USE OF TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS.** State, federal and local governments bear additional responsibilities for ensuring that public dollars are being put to good use. When you receive funding from a state arts agency, the National Endowment for the Arts or any municipal or county agency, you become a steward of that public trust, too. Evaluation helps to demonstrate that the taxpayers' dollars you receive are in good hands.

- **ENGAGE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS.** Program participants —audience members, staff, volunteers, artists and teachers—all have insight to share. Involving stakeholders in your evaluation conveys that you value their input and reinforces connections among the people taking part in your program.

- **HELP COMMUNITIES RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF THE ARTS.** Suzanne Callahan, in [Singing Our Praises: Case Studies in the Art of Evaluation](#) writes that research, "builds trust, understanding and visibility for the arts field, convincing those in the outside world of the value of what we do." (Callahan, p. 15) By evaluating their programs, conducting research and sharing knowledge with others, arts organizations deepen public appreciation for the role that the arts play in society.

- **MAKE THE CASE FOR MORE RESOURCES.** Evidence of what you are currently accomplishing—and what you could accomplish with additional resources—strengthens your requests for financial, human and material assistance. This is particularly important in the public sector, where funding is scarce and the arts must compete with a host of other pressing needs. Your evaluation efforts can help you and others advocate for the arts and prove that supporting culture is in the best interests of your state's citizens, children, families, businesses and communities.

WHAT IS "DATA" AND WHERE DO I GET IT?

If you can observe it, it is data.

Data is factual information, especially information that is systematically organized and used to help someone make a decision. Most people associate the word "data" with numbers: dollars, demographics, percents or averages. Statistical or standardized information, usually called *quantitative* data, is part of most evaluations, but is by no means the only kind of information that is useful to arts organizations. While quantitative data can identify important trends or patterns, *qualitative* data is often needed to reveal the deeper meaning behind the numbers.

For instance, an audience survey can quantify the percent of people who might attend another performance at your venue. Until you probe for additional qualitative information, however, little about that data is actionable for you as an arts manager. Asking "Why or why not?" to elicit qualitative responses may reveal important insight, such as:

- The parking is terrible,
- I could not hear the dialogue,
- I only go to events when I can get a babysitter,
- I received this ticket as a gift and cannot afford to buy another, or
- I faithfully attend every choral event in our town.

Armed with such information, you can now decide which conditions you wish to address in the future. This is why a good evaluation typically blends different kinds of information: quantitative information to identify major trends, and qualitative information to provide depth of understanding.
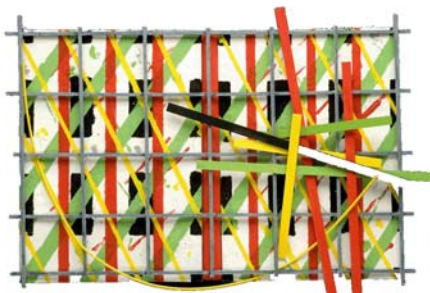
Untitled, Patricia Hetzler
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ARTS DATA: A SAMPLER OF IDEAS

Participation data describes your audience and their experiences.

Number of individuals participating
Participant demographics
Home zip code or address
Motivation for attending
Opinions about the event or exhibit
Personal arts interests and preferences
Participant ratings of your customer service
Perceived barriers to participation
Etc…

Marketing data helps you attain your audience development goals and understand the effectiveness of your outreach.

Where did participants hear about this event?
Were tickets purchased via mail, on-line or in person?
What types of tickets were purchased?
Were outreach strategies to target markets successful?
Etc…

Financial data can help you calculate management efficiency and return on investment.

Admissions income
Memberships
Grants and contributions
Number of donors
Number of donors increasing their contributions
Project costs
Savings achieved
Etc…

Impact data helps you understand the effects of your program on participants and your surrounding community.

Perceived benefits to participation
Changes in behaviors or attitudes
Learning outcomes
School climate
Achievement, attendance or discipline of students
Audience spending on parking, meals or housing
Quality of life
Etc…

Many different sources of data are available to arts organizations. A few examples include:

- **Admissions/enrollment records:** Many arts organizations track ticket sales or class enrollments through a database or spreadsheet program. Consider how you might mine this data in order to measure the extent of participation in your events. Are numbers increasing over time, holding steady or declining? Why? Do you systematically collect and record all the information that you and your funders need? Assess whether you should secure additional information to tell you more about your audience and assist you with marketing your programs.

- **Financial records:** Try to tally all financial transactions (including salaries) connected to your project. How do your expenses compare with your revenue? What areas are most expensive, but worth every penny? In what areas might cost-savings be achieved? Do you have specific financial goals for your organization or program? How close are you to achieving those goals? When developing your budgets at the beginning of your fiscal year, be sure they contain enough detail for you to realistically reflect on these questions and make sound financial management decisions.

- **Surveys:** Surveys, especially audience surveys, are common evaluation and marketing tools in the arts field. Often they are used to understand the composition of an organization's audience, but they also can be adopted to gather information on opinions, motivations, preferences, perceived barriers or other issues. The success of surveys usually hinges on two factors: the quality of the questions (crafting questions that are clearly understood and can be accurately answered) and the respondent pool (securing a response that is sufficiently large and diverse to be truly representative of your population).

Untitled, Maurice Blaine Caldwell
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- **Interviews:** Interviews may be conducted in person or on the telephone and are a good choice when the information you need is sensitive or confidential in nature, or when the respondent will appreciate personal attention. Interviews also offer you the flexibility to adapt the inquiry to individuals by omitting irrelevant questions or taking more time to probe key issues. To encourage candid responses, choose an interviewer who will be perceived as trustworthy by the interviewees.

- **Focus groups:** Focus groups are designed to elicit qualitative information from a small number of people through dialogue and group interaction. Five to ten individuals typically participate in a focus group, which are often used to probe the "why's and wherefores" of participants' behaviors or opinions. Focus groups are best led by a trained moderator— an impartial individual who is

knowledgeable about the subject and skilled in group facilitation techniques. If you want to conduct a focus group, you will need to develop a protocol in advance, to ensure that the conversations address the questions that matter most to you. Arrange for a transcript of the proceedings to enable analysis of the information.

- **Pre- and post-tests:** When designed around specific learning objectives, tests can measure the "before and after" skills, knowledge or perceptions of students in workshops, classes or other educational programs. A comparison of these two scores is one way of measuring the learning and skill outcomes of arts instruction.

- **Journals or portfolios:** Journals or portfolios provide a written or visual record of learners' experiences and achievements. Artists and arts teachers often cite the dual value of these assessment techniques. They not only help instructors measure skill development, but also are tools that encourage students to self-reflect on their own work.

- **Direct observations:** Observation is a useful way to gather real-time behavioral information using artists, teachers, staff or volunteers. Observers can be trained to look for specific actions, activities or behaviors during a class, performance or other event. Consistency is the key to observation success. Be sure that all observers are well-practiced and attentive. Provide a uniform checklist or log that helps them record what they see.

CAN WHAT WE DO IN THE ARTS REALLY BE MEASURED?

"Can we measure joy? Yes we can. And by knowing where and how to look for it, how to document what we see and hear, and how to communicate that, we can create opportunities for more joy more often."

These are the words of Deborah Bedwell, director of [Baltimore Clayworks](#), a nonprofit ceramic arts center housed in Baltimore, Maryland. Challenged by funders to evaluate the impact of their community arts program, the Clayworks staff decided to investigate not only the delivery of their services but also the effects of hands-on clay classes on local youth. To do this, Clayworks staff developed a list of indicators teachers would be able to observe and record among students when an authentic, engaging experience was taking place. A few of those items included:

- Shows work to peers
- Concentrates on techniques
- Holds work close to body
- Uses clay vocabulary

Clayworks also tracked students' enrollment, their completion of ceramic works, their completion of journals and whether they recruited friends and family members to participate in subsequent events and

Basket, Kathy Gottlieb
Georgia State Art Collection

classes. Combined, this information painted a powerful portrait of the program's success. Using a [logic model](#) for their program also helped Clayworks clearly articulate their intended outcomes and focus their evaluation efforts where they would provide the most useful feedback for planning and further program improvement.

Similar stories can be shared by many arts organizations who have found creative ways to assess the arts participation experience of their constituents. None of these organizations is seeking to quantify the transcendent nature of the artistic experience. However, an evaluation that focuses exclusively on the mechanics of an arts program may leave a significant gap in our understanding of its full value and impact.

One useful way to add an artistic dimension to an evaluation is to brainstorm what might be *observable* about a participant's experience. For instance:

> An evaluation that focuses exclusively on the mechanics of an arts program may leave a significant gap in our understanding of its full value and impact.

- **How did individuals participate in your event?** Did they stay for the entire event? Did they attend multiple times? Did they watch attentively? Did they become physically involved? Did they take advantage of all participation opportunities, such as interactive exhibits, audio tours or artist discussions?

- **What reactions did your work evoke among participants?** What did they like the best? Like the least? What feelings, ideas or questions did their experience evoke?

- **What do you hope participants will learn about the art form or the artistic process, and how could that be measured?** Can students use the required tools, materials or instruments? Do they demonstrate mastery of certain exercises or techniques? Can they express key concepts? Do students exhibit creativity by engaging in experimentation or pursuit of their own original ideas?

- **What else might participants learn—about themselves, their fellow participants or the larger community—through your program?** Inviting personal reflections from participants can be a rich source of qualitative information.

- **What did the artists, performers, instructors or other project staff experience?** What did they learn, themselves? What reactions did they observe in others?
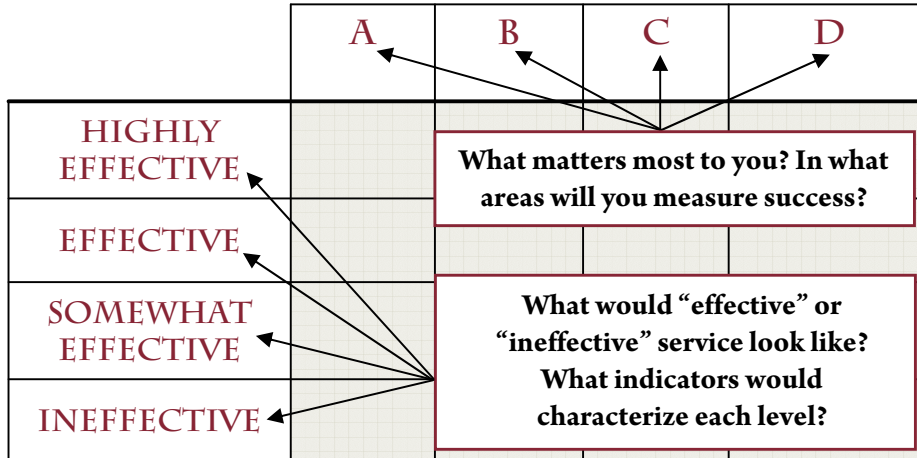
Remember that the most meaningful measures will be those that are authentic to your unique goals, constituency and art form. There are no "right" or "wrong" indicators to monitor. Measure what is relevant to you and aligns best with your program's goals and objectives.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

Rubrics and logic models are two planning tools that can provide helpful structure for the evaluation of any arts program.

Widely used in the education sector as a tool for measuring student success in classroom settings, **rubrics** are a tool that many arts organizations have adapted to their unique arts programming and management environments. Simply defined, a rubric is a grid that articulates what project success and failure look like in concrete terms. Rubrics force an organization to focus on what is most worth measuring, rather than what is easiest to count.

RUBRIC FRAMEWORK

	A	B	C	D
HIGHLY EFFECTIVE				
EFFECTIVE				
SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE				
INEFFECTIVE				

What matters most to you? In what areas will you measure success?

What would "effective" or "ineffective" service look like? What indicators would characterize each level?

SAMPLE RUBRIC
(ACTIVITY: TEN-WEEK EXHIBIT)

	QUALITY OF EXHIBIT	ACTIVE VISITOR PARTICIPATION	ATTENDANCE
HIGHLY EFFECTIVE	▪ Memorable or evocative to visitors (75% or more of visitors can identify a "favorite" or "most interesting" work during exit interviews) ▪ Receives consistently high critical acclaim	▪ 80% or more of visitors used one or more interpretive tools (e.g., the audio guide, the children's treasure hunt, interactive exhibit features, or the exhibit catalog)	▪ Weekly admissions reached target numbers in all 10 weeks of the exhibit
EFFECTIVE	▪ 60% of visitors identify a "favorite" or "most interesting" work ▪ Most critical reviews favorable	▪ 70% of visitors used tools	▪ Weekly admissions reached target numbers in 8-9 weeks
SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	▪ 50% of visitors identify a "favorite" or "most interesting" work ▪ Mixed critical reviews	▪ 60% of visitors used tools	▪ Weekly admissions reached target numbers in 6-7 weeks
INEFFECTIVE	▪ 40% or fewer visitors identify a "favorite" or "most interesting" work ▪ Critical reviews consistently negative	▪ 50% or fewer of visitors used tools	▪ Weekly admissions reached target numbers in fewer than 6 weeks

Numerous cultural groups funded by the [Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation](#) in New Jersey have developed rubrics that not only help them describe their achievements to the foundation but, more importantly, enhance their ability to visualize success and manage their work to achieve their project goals. These New Jersey arts organizations developed rubrics to evaluate all dimensions of their work: student learning, a performance or exhibition, marketing practices, communications, board and community engagement… even office cleanliness!

How many columns or rows your rubric contains is not terribly important. What does matter, however, is choosing factors that are meaningful to your work and mission. Be as specific as possible about what you believe constitutes excellence, and challenge yourself to define what data or indicators will be associated with each performance level.
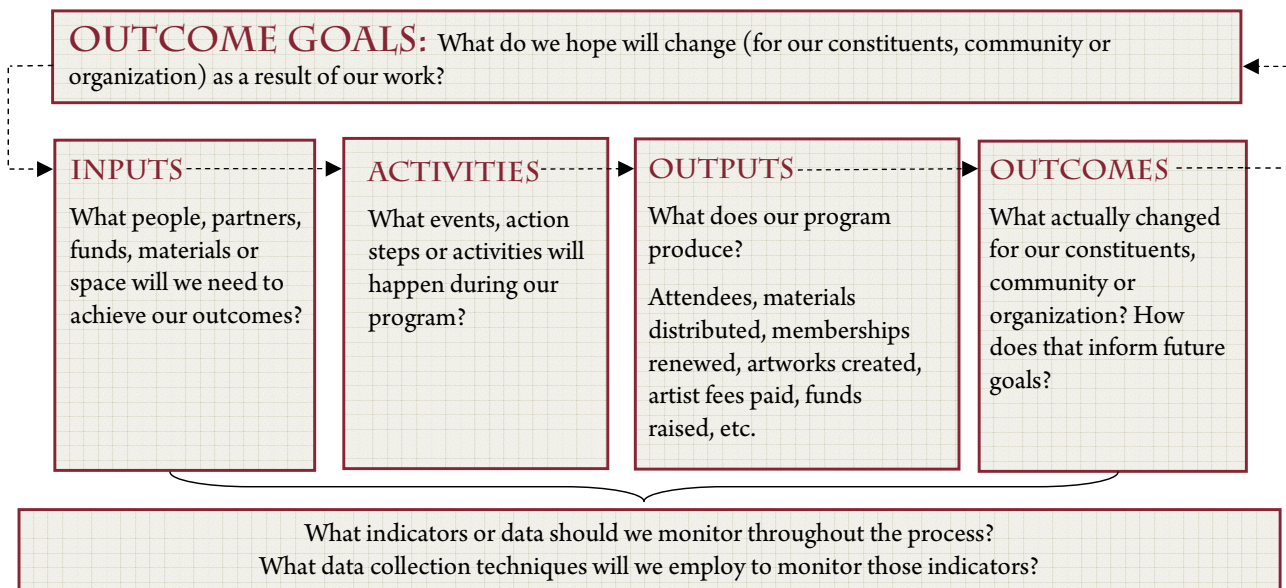
Logic models are another powerful tool that arts organizations harness for planning and evaluation. First popularized in the nonprofit sector by the United Way in the 1990s, logic models today offer a blueprint that helps many arts organizations articulate their desired outcomes and identify the inputs, activities and outputs necessary to achieve those goals. Logic models are especially useful because they encourage "planning backwards." By first describing your outcome goals, then describing the resources and activities you will pursue to achieve those ends, logic models help to keep your work on track.
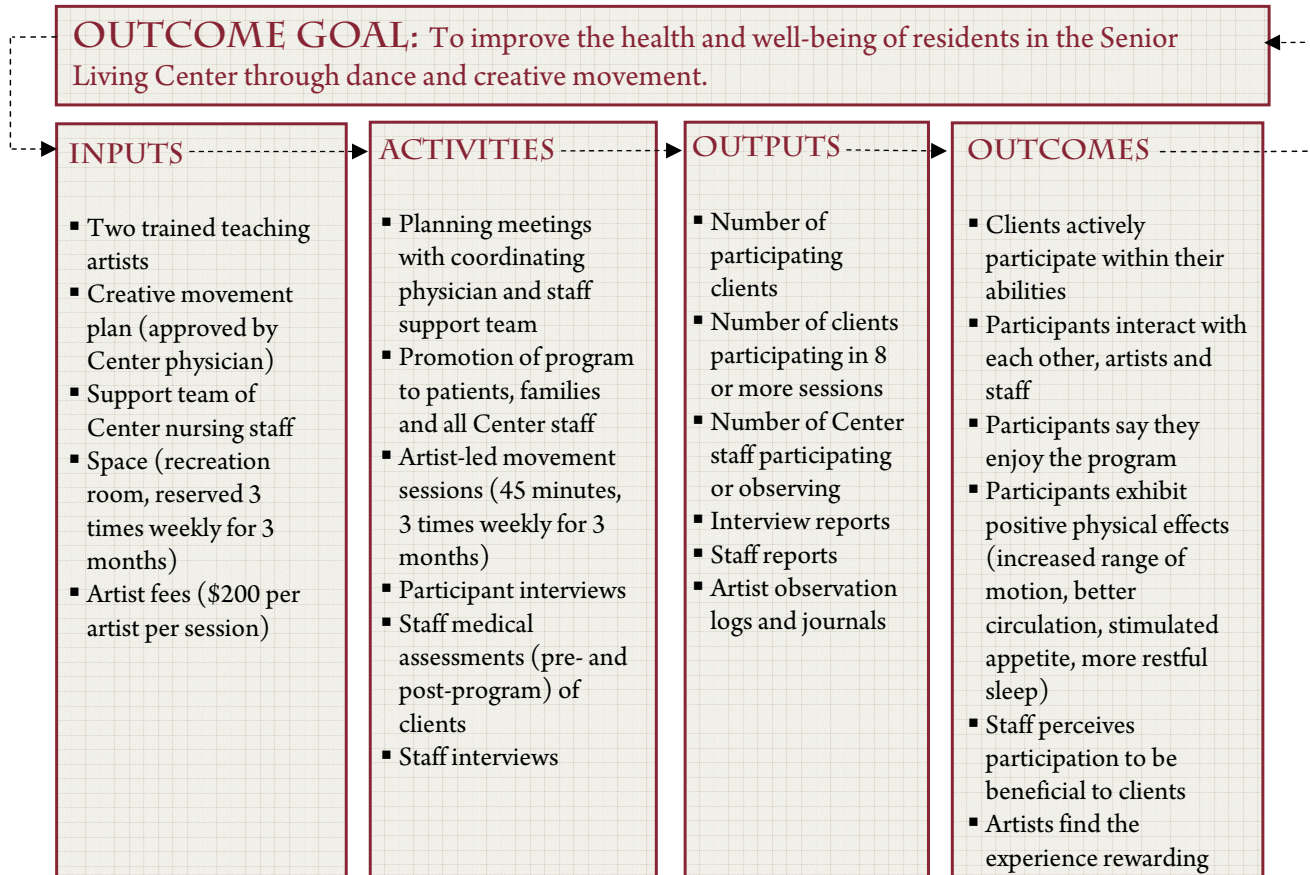

Comedy, Tragedy, Fear, K.G. McIntosh
Georgia State Art Collection

This approach also helps your evaluation stay tightly tuned to your program goals. Clarity and consensus about outcome goals is vital. If your outcomes are vague or have different meanings to different people, it will be very difficult to determine what evaluation strategies and data will be productive.

LOGIC MODEL FRAMEWORK

OUTCOME GOALS: What do we hope will change (for our constituents, community or organization) as a result of our work?

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
What people, partners, funds, materials or space will we need to achieve our outcomes?	What events, action steps or activities will happen during our program?	What does our program produce? Attendees, materials distributed, memberships renewed, artworks created, artist fees paid, funds raised, etc.	What actually changed for our constituents, community or organization? How does that inform future goals?

What indicators or data should we monitor throughout the process?
What data collection techniques will we employ to monitor those indicators?

SAMPLE LOGIC MODEL

OUTCOME GOAL: To improve the health and well-being of residents in the Senior Living Center through dance and creative movement.

INPUTS

- Two trained teaching artists
- Creative movement plan (approved by Center physician)
- Support team of Center nursing staff
- Space (recreation room, reserved 3 times weekly for 3 months)
- Artist fees ($200 per artist per session)

ACTIVITIES

- Planning meetings with coordinating physician and staff support team
- Promotion of program to patients, families and all Center staff
- Artist-led movement sessions (45 minutes, 3 times weekly for 3 months)
- Participant interviews
- Staff medical assessments (pre- and post-program) of clients
- Staff interviews

OUTPUTS

- Number of participating clients
- Number of clients participating in 8 or more sessions
- Number of Center staff participating or observing
- Interview reports
- Staff reports
- Artist observation logs and journals

OUTCOMES

- Clients actively participate within their abilities
- Participants interact with each other, artists and staff
- Participants say they enjoy the program
- Participants exhibit positive physical effects (increased range of motion, better circulation, stimulated appetite, more restful sleep)
- Staff perceives participation to be beneficial to clients
- Artists find the experience rewarding

ADVICE FOR THE BEGINNER

- **Design your evaluation at the *start* of the project or funding cycle.** Last-minute evaluations miss abundant opportunities to learn, interact with constituents and collect useful real-time feedback throughout the course of a project. Combining evaluation with your strategic planning maximizes the benefits of both.

- **Start small.** While comprehensive evaluation or large-scale research studies are sometimes appropriate, even modest evaluation efforts can reap significant rewards. Start by evaluating one program or project.

GETTING STARTED

1. **Articulate your outcome goals.** What are you trying to learn, change or accomplish with this program?

2. **Identify indicators.** What kinds of information might reveal your progress or challenges?

3. **Inventory what you already know.** Is there useful information already in place? Does your experience suggest certain factors would be worthwhile to investigate?

4. **Get ready to secure additional information.** What surveys, interviews, tests or other activities will need to take place?

5. **Brainstorm how you will use the information.** With whom should you share what information, and why? How do those factors shape your evaluation plan?

6. **Ask for help.** What staff, volunteers or consultants will you need to assist with data collection, analysis or reporting?

- **Build a data "mosaic" that is unique to your program.** Assemble a selection of indicators that are feasible to monitor and that can provide you with insight into your work and its effects. Quantitative and qualitative information complement one another, so be certain to include some of each.

- **Do not be afraid to "do-it-yourself."** Many kinds of evaluation can be conducted by your own staff, board or volunteers. Taking a hands-on approach means that your evaluation will greatly benefit from the knowledge and experience (of your programs, your audiences and your organization) that you bring to the task.

- **However, know when to ask for help.** Professional assistance is useful when you need to employ special research methods or conduct advanced analysis. The design of questions and sampling methods used for polls and surveys often can benefit from outside expertise, as can the facilitation of focus groups or other feedback forums. When evaluating sensitive issues, using a neutral "third party" evaluation also may help you to remain objective and avoid the perception (or the reality!) of bias.

- **Do not try to guess what your funders want to know.** First, consider *your* needs. Decide what methods and metrics will enhance your own learning and program success. Then, if you are not sure what additional information your funders need, ask. Most will be looking for evidence of good planning and evaluation practices and will be highly receptive to the indicators that are authentic for you. Grant makers often need specific information on your audiences, finances and economic impact, so you may have to collect additional data to comply with these requirements. But many grantees find this data collection much less onerous once systematic evaluation and performance measurement are in place.

- **Evaluation takes time, so plan accordingly.** Reserve time on your calendar to discuss and design the evaluation, train your data collectors, gather information and analyze it.

CULTIVATING A LEARNING CULTURE

Ongoing evaluation can empower many different dimensions of your work: program design, audience development, promotional strategies, governance and fund-raising, just to name a few. These benefits, however, rarely accrue to an organization if one person alone is involved in the evaluation.

- Establish an evaluation team.

- Encourage individual and group reflection.

- Make evaluation an ongoing effort.

- Share your results.

Consider who in your organization might become part of an evaluation team. Staff members, artists and teachers involved in a project are logical stakeholders. Board members, volunteers and former program participants may also be of assistance. Engage your crew in brainstorming about the challenges and opportunities they believe your program is facing. Then discuss how additional information or insight might facilitate the program's success. An evaluation team also can assist with the collection and analysis of information.

Look for ways to encourage your whole staff and board to reflect on their work at regular intervals. Sometimes the brightest ideas and epiphanies occur not during formal evaluation projects, but during routine staff and board meetings, or during informal discussions of questions such as:

- How is this program going?
- What are we doing very well?
- What could we be doing better?
- What are our hopes and aspirations for the future of this program?
- How can we get there?

Embedding such questions into your work on an ongoing basis helps your organization learn and grow over time. It also helps to build cohesion and a unified vision for your future success.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Singing Our Praises: Case Studies in the Art of Evaluation
A comprehensive how-to book for the arts. Includes case studies from cultural organizations as well as practical advice on designing an evaluation, choosing indicators, collecting information, conducting surveys and working a logic model from start to finish. Written by Suzanne Callahan and commissioned by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters with funding from The Wallace Foundation.
www.forthearts.org/publications/singing.shtml

Measuring Joy
Baltimore Clayworks' executive director tells how evaluation using logic models helped her organization to strengthen their programs, allocate resources and tell the story of their impact on young lives. Originally published in the *National Arts Stabilization Journal* in 2000, this article is excerpted by the National Endowment for the Arts in "Lessons Learned: A Planning Toolsite."
www.nea.gov/grants/apply/out/joy.html

Outcome-Based Evaluation: A Working Model for Arts Projects
This guide for arts organizations describes an outcome-based evaluation process and includes examples from opera, dance and the media arts. Published by the National Endowment for the Arts.
www.nea.gov/grants/apply/out/index-out.html

Cultural Vitality in Communities: Interpretation and Indicators
This monograph introduces a definition of community cultural vitality that encompasses opportunities for arts participation, actual participation by the public and systems of support for cultural activity. Includes suggested indicators and sources of data. Written by Maria Rosario Jackson, Florence Kabwasa-Green and Joaquin Herranz. Published by the Urban Institute.
www.urban.org/publications/311392.html

Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Assessment Initiative
This Web resource summarizes nine principles of meaningful measurement. Several sample rubrics are provided to illustrate key evaluation concepts.
www.grdodge.org/learning/assessment/index.htm

Arts Education Project Designer's Toolbook

Describes outcome measurement frameworks for arts education. Written by Michael Sikes and published by the Idaho Commission on the Arts.

www.arts.idaho.gov/ae/tool.aspx

Program Planning and Evaluation Using Logic Models in Arts Programs for At-Risk Youth

A profile of how logic models facilitate planning, forming collaborations, artist training and evaluation of program outcomes. Written by Steve Heulett and published by Americans for the Arts.

www.americansforthearts.org/NAPD/files/9491/Using%20Logic%20Models.pdf

More than Measuring

A long-term evaluation report that includes tips for designing evaluations in ways that build the capacity of communities to design and improve arts education programs for children and youth.

www.bigthought.org/

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS