Measuring Socially Engaged Practice

A Toolkit for Museums

Museums Association

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Foreword

This toolkit comes from the grants we have provided through the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund (EFCF) and the Digital Innovation and Engagement Fund, supported by UKRI and AHRC. Its production is motivated by wanting to see the best possible grant applications and projects from museums that utilise their collections to build social value with communities. And it has been updated in 2023 to share learning from the projects funded over the last few years, notably during the Covid-19 pandemic where museums have made much greater use of digital means to engage a diverse range of audiences and participants.

Values-led and socially-engaged practice, alongside a reliance on project funding, has become normal in museums over the last decade or more. That makes the guidance in this toolkit all the more relevant and applicable to just about all museum work. We are all thinking about change, be it the difference we want to make with a community that we work with, or how we want to adapt our organisations.

We are increasingly seeing that the best applications for funding are from organisations that understand project planning, theory of change and the need to make relatively small projects work for long-term outcomes. This toolkit introduces these principles in the context of measuring and articulating social impact.

Sally Colvin, Programmes Manager, Museums Association

MA | Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund

UK Research and Innovation

Arts and Humanities Research Council

> “We are all thinking about change, be it the difference we want to make with a community that we work with, or how we want to adapt our organisations.
>
> Sally Colvin, Programmes Manager, Museums Association

Introduction

The Museums Association's **Museums Change Lives** Campaign encourages museums to improve their socially engaged practice delivering a **positive social impact** on the communities in which they function.

Many museums have taken this on board and are undertaking work streams which aim to positively impact audiences and communities. With increasing financial pressure however, museums need to understand the importance of socially engaged practice and how it relates to their purpose; measure the impact of their work; and articulate it effectively.

> “We do this because it is all too easy to overlook the very real economic and social benefits of cultural activity. At a time of diminishing public funding it is crucial that these benefits are spelled out clearly.
>
> David Fleming, former director, National Museums Liverpool on why Liverpool Museums measure their impact. Making a Difference: The economic and social impact of National Museums Liverpool, March 2017

However, measuring social impact is not always easy. Impact can be far reaching and can continue to be felt months or even years after project completion. It can be challenging to find the right approach as social impact is not simple to quantify and therefore qualitative measures such as interviews and testimonies of participants are frequently used. These present their own challenges and require ethical consideration.

This toolkit is designed to assist museums to find the right approach for their participants and organisation. Each section can stand alone and includes examples from real organisations who have undertaken this type of work. This toolkit is not designed to evaluate your current levels of socially engaged practice or help you develop priorities for delivering socially engaged practice. However, it will help you to design an approach to measure the social impact of a particular piece of short-term or project work. There is no one correct approach to measuring social impact and each organisation must find the best approach for each piece of work.

> “Museums can increase our sense of wellbeing, help us feel proud of where we have come from, can inspire, challenge and stimulate us, and make us feel healthier. With society facing issues such as poverty, inequality, intolerance and discrimination, museums can help us understand, debate, and challenge these concerns.
>
> MA Website

What do we mean by social impact?

The phrase **social impact** has been used with increasing frequency in the museum sector in recent years. Some prefer terms such as **social value** or **socially engaged practice**.

In simple terms, when we talk about this work in museums we are referring to museums influencing positive changes and fostering rich and meaningful relationships between staff, volunteers and participants, enhancing the lives of everyone involved.

There are many different ways in which museums can have and are having a positive impact. The Museums Change Lives campaign breaks this down into several areas of change:

- Creating better places to live or work
- Enhancing health and wellbeing
- Inspiring engagement, debate and reflection

These categories can be useful in helping to define what type of social impact a work stream can have.

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Further Reading

The following links can provide more detail on the social value of museums:

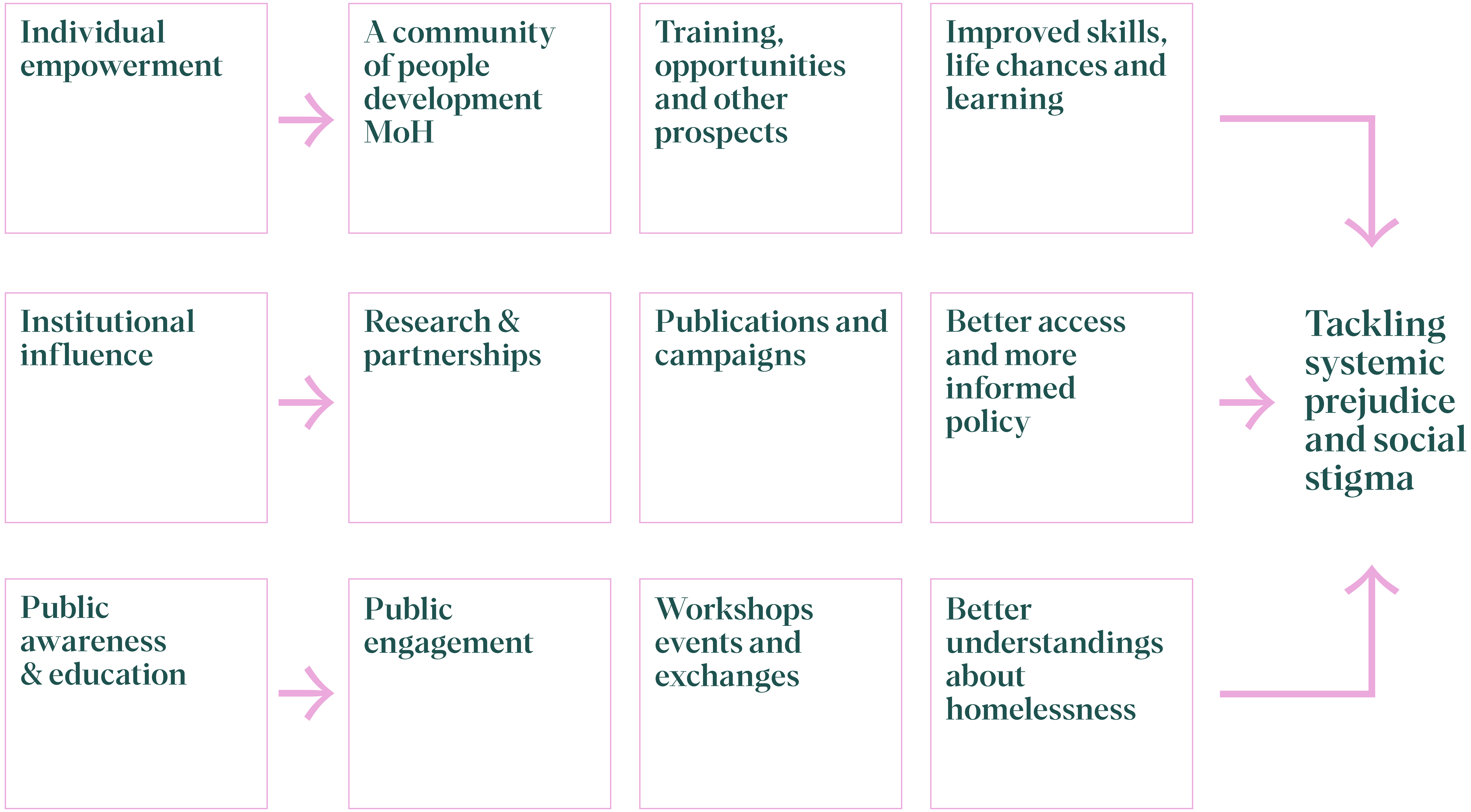
- Making a Difference: The economic and social impact of National Museums Liverpool, March 2017
- Museums Association Museums Change Lives campaign
- Mind, Body, Spirit report, Jocelyn Dodd & Ceri Jones, June 2014, University of Leicester, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries

Getting Started

With core budgets tightening museums are increasingly dependent on shorter-term project work to **help them achieve social value** and undertake socially engaged practice.

It is therefore important to be mindful that project work should fit into the organisational strategy and therefore contribute towards long-term goals. Many organisations will have a Theory of Change in place to define their commitment to providing social value. These are the long-term aims of an organisation and project work should be designed to work towards achieving these.

Theory of Change



Individual empowerment

A community of people development MoH

Training, opportunities and other prospects

Improved skills, life chances and learning

Institutional influence

Research & partnerships

Publications and campaigns

Better access and more informed policy

Public awareness & education

Public engagement

Workshops events and exchanges

Better understandings about homelessness

Tackling systemic prejudice and social stigma

Museum of Homelessness (MoH) Theory of Change.

Understanding where you are now

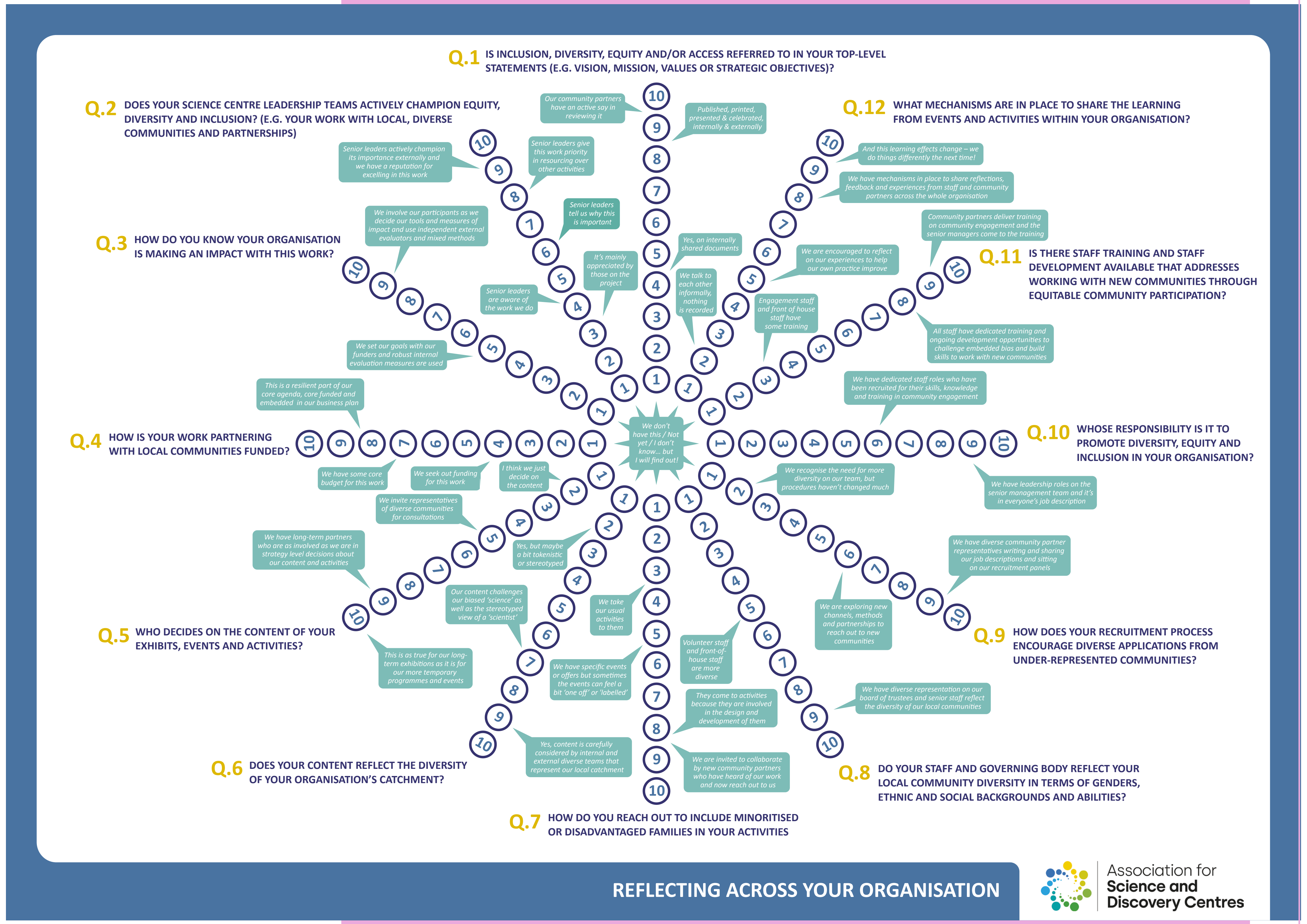
Before you begin to measure the social impact of your work it is important to understand what level your organisation is working in terms of its participatory practice. This can enable you to ensure that the work you undertake also develops your organisation practice as well has having a positive impact on the people involved.

The Museums Association's Power to the People Framework is one tool for evaluating this. It is designed to enable you to benchmark different organisational areas and enable reflection and learning to support deeper and more sustainable community engagement and participation.

The Museums Association's Power to the People Framework is one tool for evaluating this. It is designed to enable reflection and learning to support deeper and more sustainable community engagement and participation. It covers the following organisational areas:

- Mission, values and vision
- Leadership and governance
- Commitment to action
- Engagement and decision making
- Workforce and professional development
- Evaluation and evidence of change.

The Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) has produced an inclusion wheel (pictured) for organisational reflection that covers similar themes. This can be used to map current levels of practice in order to understand where you need to focus resources to see improvements.


Q.1 IS INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND/OR ACCESS REFERRED TO IN YOUR TOP-LEVEL STATEMENTS (E.G. VISION, MISSION, VALUES OR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES)?
Our community partners have an active say in reviewing it
Published, printed, presented & celebrated, internally & externally
Senior leaders tell us why this is important
It's mainly appreciated by those on the project
Yes, on internally shared documents
We talk to each other informally, nothing is recorded
Q.2 DOES YOUR SCIENCE CENTRE LEADERSHIP TEAMS ACTIVELY CHAMPION EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION? (E.G. YOUR WORK WITH LOCAL, DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS)
Senior leaders actively champion its importance externally and we have a reputation for excelling in this work
Senior leaders give this work priority in resourcing over other activities
Senior leaders are aware of the work we do
Q.3 HOW DO YOU KNOW YOUR ORGANISATION IS MAKING AN IMPACT WITH THIS WORK?
We involve our participants as we decide our tools and measures of impact and use independent external evaluators and mixed methods
We set our goals with our funders and robust internal evaluation measures are used
Q.4 HOW IS YOUR WORK PARTNERING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES FUNDED?
This is a resilient part of our core agenda, core funded and embedded in our business plan
We have some core budget for this work
We seek out funding for this work
I think we just decide on the content
We don't have this / Not yet / I don't know... but I will find out!
Q.5 WHO DECIDES ON THE CONTENT OF YOUR EXHIBITS, EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES?
We invite representatives of diverse communities for consultations
We have long-term partners who are as involved as we are in strategy level decisions about our content and activities
This is as true for our long-term exhibitions as it is for our more temporary programmes and events
Yes, but maybe a bit tokenistic or stereotyped
Our content challenges our biased 'science' as well as the stereotyped view of a 'scientist'
Q.6 DOES YOUR CONTENT REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF YOUR ORGANISATION'S CATCHMENT?
Yes, content is carefully considered by internal and external diverse teams that represent our local catchment
We take our usual activities to them
We have specific events or offers but sometimes the events can feel a bit 'one off' or 'labelled'
Q.7 HOW DO YOU REACH OUT TO INCLUDE MINORITISED OR DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES IN YOUR ACTIVITIES
They come to activities because they are involved in the design and development of them
We are invited to collaborate by new community partners who have heard of our work and now reach out to us
Volunteer staff and front-of-house staff are more diverse
Q.8 DO YOUR STAFF AND GOVERNING BODY REFLECT YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY DIVERSITY IN TERMS OF GENDERS, ETHNIC AND SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS AND ABILITIES?
We have diverse representation on our board of trustees and senior staff reflect the diversity of our local communities
We are exploring new channels, methods and partnerships to reach out to new communities
Q.9 HOW DOES YOUR RECRUITMENT PROCESS ENCOURAGE DIVERSE APPLICATIONS FROM UNDER-REPRESENTED COMMUNITIES?
We have diverse community partner representatives writing and sharing our job descriptions and sitting on our recruitment panels
We recognise the need for more diversity on our team, but procedures haven't changed much
Q.10 WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN YOUR ORGANISATION?
We have leadership roles on the senior management team and it's in everyone's job description
We have dedicated staff roles who have been recruited for their skills, knowledge and training in community engagement
Q.11 IS THERE STAFF TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT AVAILABLE THAT ADDRESSES WORKING WITH NEW COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION?
All staff have dedicated training and ongoing development opportunities to challenge embedded bias and build skills to work with new communities
Community partners deliver training on community engagement and the senior managers come to the training
Engagement staff and front of house staff have some training
Q.12 WHAT MECHANISMS ARE IN PLACE TO SHARE THE LEARNING FROM EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION?
And this learning effects change – we do things differently the next time!
We have mechanisms in place to share reflections, feedback and experiences from staff and community partners across the whole organisation
We are encouraged to reflect on our experiences to help our own practice improve
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
REFLECTING ACROSS YOUR ORGANISATION
Association for Science and Discovery Centres

The Inclusion Wheel for Organisational Reflection, ASDC

Setting outcomes and outputs

The desired social impact may be defined at an organisational level in the mission, values and vision of a particular museum or in its Theory of Change. For example, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums set out their mission as: ‘to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others’.

Projects should be aligned to the mission, values and vision of the organisation. This can be achieved by setting outcomes and outputs that will contribute towards overarching organisational aims.

Outcomes are the backbone of your work. They define the positive changes or improvements your project is designed to work towards. These outcomes set what it is you will be measuring when looking at the social value of your work. Sometimes outcomes are bigger than one project and your activities will only partially contribute to it. This is fine, and longer-term thinking can add to a project’s value and indeed the strength of the organisation overall.

The outputs are the activities you will undertake to achieve your outcomes and can be used to set your evaluation framework.

> “Outcomes are the backbone of your work. They define the positive changes or improvements your project is designed to work towards.

Examples of outcome and associated outputs: Derby Museums EFCF Project

Outcome	**Outputs**
Increased knowledge and research, including social history and community stories on objects from our world collection, creating an improved understanding and appreciation of the collection as a whole	Increased research and stories collected and collated about the objects within the world collection
	New research information recorded on over 500 objects in the world collection
	Over 10 different community groups participating in outreach sessions or in-house sessions
	45 outreach human-centred design (HCD) sessions using objects from our world
	Over 35 HCD sessions conducted within the museum collection conducted across the city
	10 subject specialists sharing the knowledge and expertise on objects within our world collection
	Up to 12 other organisations or institutes sharing their knowledge and also partaking as critical friends
	A digital platform created to record and share the project as it progresses, to ensure wider participation
	A contemporary collecting strategy developed to ensure Derby Museums' collection remains relevant to Derby's changing communities

Ethical considerations

It is important to think about your participants and staff when choosing your outcomes as there are ethical issues to consider when selecting them. Are your outcomes appropriate and useful for all involved?

The Museum of Homelessness takes its ethical responsibilities very seriously and says they would be unlikely to set outputs relating solely to employability, for example, unless they were specified by participants themselves. "Our team, informed by lived experience of homelessness, has set outcomes such as an increased sense of social connection or a sense of common purpose. We don't believe that employability is the only way an individual can be of value to society and reflecting that in our outcomes sends an important message" says Jess Turtle, co-founder of the Museum of Homelessness.

By working with participants to set outcomes at the start of a project you can avoid these pitfalls and make the work a two-way process.

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Logic models

Once you are clear about your desired outcomes you can begin putting processes into place for the measurement of social impact. Outcome-based evaluation is an approach for demonstrating social value and works on the basis of an outcomes-based commissioning framework. There are lots of different formats to display simply whether your activities will result in your desired outputs and outcomes but creating a logic model can be a useful starting point. This will define when and what to evaluate.

A logic model is intended to be brief, summarising the project at the top level of its activities and purpose. The logic model should help people involved in the project to:

- get an overview of its outputs and objectives
- test whether the resources and activities are enough to achieve the outputs and contribute to outcomes
- set the aims and objectives in context: short-term outputs should be evident during the lifetime of the project, medium-term outcomes should begin to be measurable in evaluation, and longer-term outcomes are less attributable to the individual project and perhaps not measurable in the lifetime of the project but are nevertheless key drivers
- identify assumptions that must be true for the project to work, i.e. areas that people working on the project should keep an eye on
- monitor changes to the overall project by periodically updating the logic model.

STREET MUSEUM
ELLA

Durham University's
Street Museum project
© Alan Sill Photography

Logic Chain

Collections Fund Grant Programme

Gawthorpe Textiles Collection
inspire connect learn

Example of logic model: Gawthorpe Textiles Collection

Issues/Challenges

Disconnection between collection & documentation ie. labels, provenance letters, old systems, database etc.

+

Unmapped wider networks and links that connect and contextualise the collection across the UK.

↓

Limited narratives result in limited and ways of engaging audiences with the collection.

+

Lack of understanding/profile of Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth and her collecting ethos & values.

Resources

Curatorial time and expertise:

- 2 days p/week Curator (3 yrs)
- 2 days p/week Assistant (3 yrs)

Research time/capacity:

- Researcher x 52 days (1 yr)
- Support establishing systems & coordinating x 52 days (1 yr) AV Support as necessary

- Learning Facilitator (3 yrs)
- Artists (3 yrs)
- Materials and resources
- Partnerships (ongoing)
- Funding for Symposium
- AV Support as necessary

Activities

- Rationalising materials on site
- Reconnecting objects / info
- Mapping and formatting this on database with digital images
- Conducting linked research in external collections & records
- Flagging up & drawing out the engaging items/stories

- Exploring ideas / narratives that emerge creatively with audiences via partnerships, workshops, outreach activity & craft practice
- Participating in the research team – supporting & building its visibility
- Raising profile of RBKS herself in 2017/18 – via events Symposium
- Examining health / wellbeing potential of textile craft – in line with ethos of collection

Outcomes

- Data / objects reconciled making the collection more readable, researchable and understood
- New narratives discovered and documented to unlock collection – influencing displays/programme
- Collection is now framed in context of others in UK – increased profile within sector
- New material is accessible for artists / learning facilitators to use & progress is made online via ECK

- New audiences engaging in ways, on and off site
- Changed image / reputation for GTC to a more relevant, dynamic and audience focussed organisation
- Increased recognition for RBKS and her alternative methodologies of collecting – via symposium
- Strong partnerships and evidence mounting of health / wellbeing potential of textiles & textile craft

Example of logic model: Marvels and Mayhem: Tower Circus collection project, Blackpool Museums

Resources	Activities	Short-term outputs	Medium term outcomes	Long term outcomes
→ EFCF Funding → Staff Time (Collection Manager, Heritage Assistants) → Volunteers → Training	→ Collection Survey → Volunteer recruitment → Volunteer training → Conservation → Documentation	→ Collections preservation → Wider access to the collection → Collections will support engagement activity	→ Public access can be provided → Collection can be developed and promoted more widely	→ Blackpool Circus Heritage will be more widely understood and celebrated internationally
→ EFCF Funding → Staff Time (Collection Manager, Heritage Assistants) → College faculty → Students → Guest speakers → Council colleagues → Digital/IT design and production	→ Research → Course planning → Delivery to students → Faculty familiarisation sessions → Partnership development → Resource development → Blended learning package development	→ School faculty have a greater understanding of local collections → Delivery of lectures, seminars and workshops → Student led research project utilising circus collection → Blended Learning module development and delivery	→ Partnerships activity will inform future validation of course → Offer will be imbedded in college blended learning	→ Employers and employees working in health and social care settings across Blackpool and the Fylde Coast will become familiar with Blackpool heritage collections and confident in using them in their practice. → Employers/employees will proactively seek to work with Blackpool Collections
→ Staff Time: Art Service → Library Service → School and Teacher time and development → Freelance co-ordinator → EFCF Funding → Collections → S.O.S Vehicle → Storyteller/artist	→ Recruitment of Storyteller/artist → Collections research and selection of material → Recruitment of the co-ordinator → Creation of collection resources for schools → Delivery of assemblies, workshops and activities → Celebration event at WordPool family day in the park	→ Interactive School Assemblies to inspire and engage all pupils on circus and the collection → School creative-writing and craft workshops to develop literacy, confidence and creativity → Circus themed, WordPool Family-Day in the park celebration event showcasing children's work	→ A resource pack for future use by the schools which is used → Schools engage with the Blackpool Museum and Circus collection	→ Development of literacy skills in schools → Health, wellbeing and enjoyment are fostered by ongoing use of Circus collection

Further Reading

For further reading about Theory of Change see:

- Theory of Change resources, Learning for sustainability
- Centre for Theory of Change

For further reading on setting outcomes and producing a social impact statement see:

- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation – Outcomes and indicators
- NCVO KnowHow NonProfit – Strategy and Impact
- What is our museum's social impact? July 2017, Kelly McKinley, Deputy Director, Oakland Museum of California

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Methods for measuring social impact

Once you have your outputs and outcomes set you can begin to think about how you will measure against them. In order to do this effectively it is important to **build a robust approach that is tailored to your particular project** using a selection of the tools, detailed in this section.

However, it is also useful to think about what you don’t need to measure so you are concentrating your resources on measuring what is useful.

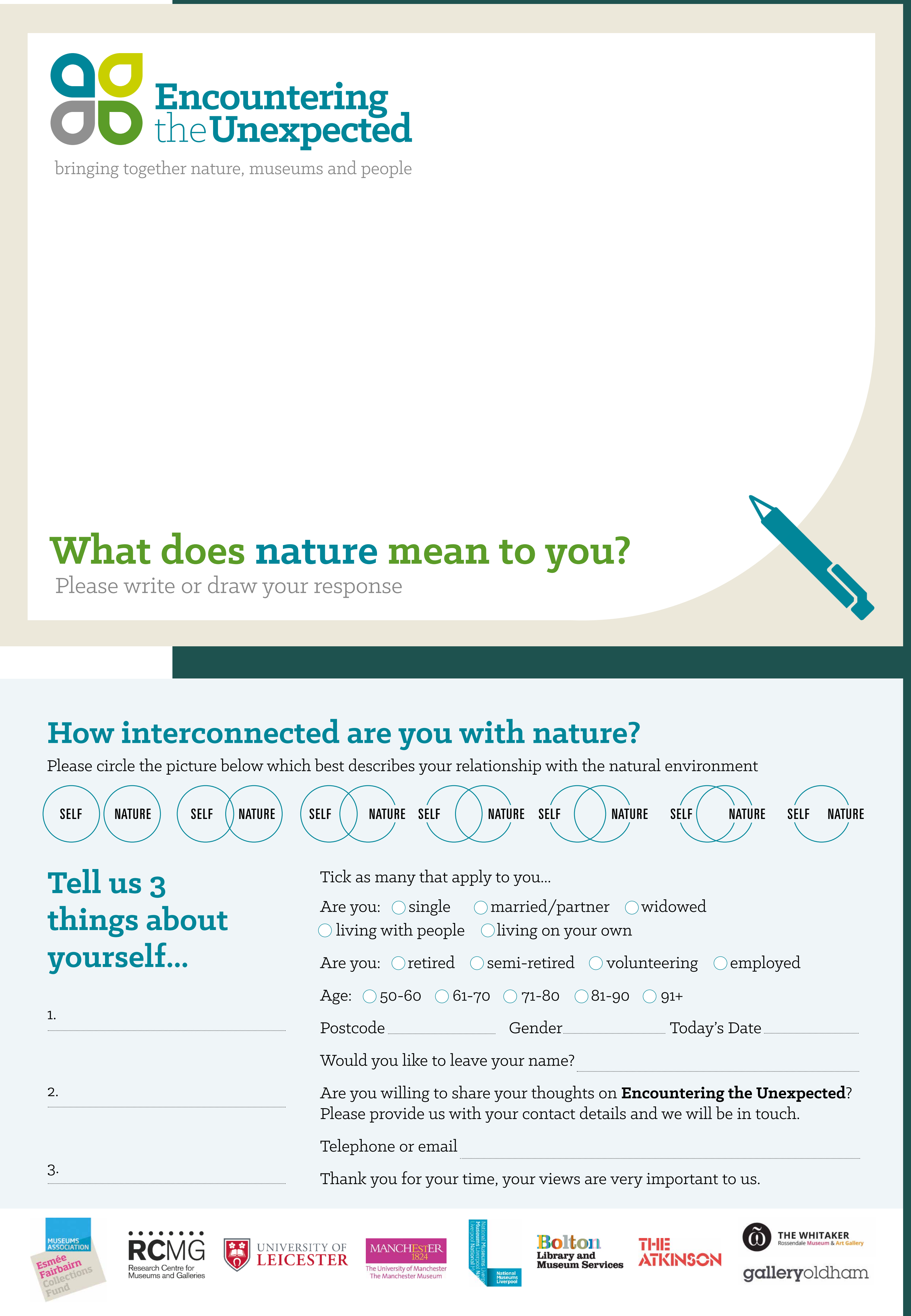
> “Evaluation was embedded into the design and delivery of the project across its life course, and this holistic, participatory approach to evaluation has provided the insights.
>
> Evaluation report for Durham University’s Street Museum project.

You will also need to consider whether evaluation needs to be undertaken in-house or by an external evaluator, so your budget can reflect this. In-house evaluation is sometimes assumed to be the cheaper option, and external evaluation as being more robust: neither of which is necessarily true. Evaluation Support Scotland has produced a useful guide if you are going down the route of external evaluation that can help you ensure you get the most from this process. See the further reading section for the guide.

Before choosing an approach, you should first consider if there is an existing approach being used by local partners that can be adapted. This can have the benefit of aiding the sharing of information across different sectors.

You should also think carefully about how your approach to measuring the social impact of a particular project links to long-term evaluation at your organisation. For example, are there metrics or questions you can use that support longitudinal understanding of engagement, or that minimise what you ask of participants?

Doncaster Museum aimed to engage with local cultural not for profit organisations (NPOs), about a shared impact evaluation for their Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project, building skills and raising aspirations in Doncaster’s ex-mining communities. Carolyn Dalton, former heritage service manager at Doncaster Museums explains *“this is so that we can easily compare and use to advocate for the value of culture on health and wellbeing and community resilience.”* Critically, this process was planned from the outset of the project ensuring baseline measurements were assessed.



Encountering the Unexpected
bringing together nature, museums and people

What does nature mean to you?
Please write or draw your response

How interconnected are you with nature?
Please circle the picture below which best describes your relationship with the natural environment

SELF
NATURE
SELF
NATURE
SELF
NATURE
SELF
NATURE
SELF
NATURE
SELF
NATURE
SELF
NATURE

Tell us 3 things about yourself...

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....

Tick as many that apply to you...

Are you: ○ single ○ married/partner ○ widowed
○ living with people ○ living on your own

Are you: ○ retired ○ semi-retired ○ volunteering ○ employed

Age: ○ 50-60 ○ 61-70 ○ 71-80 ○ 81-90 ○ 91+

Postcode .... Gender .... Today’s Date ....

Would you like to leave your name? ....

Are you willing to share your thoughts on **Encountering the Unexpected**?
Please provide us with your contact details and we will be in touch.

Telephone or email ....

Thank you for your time, your views are very important to us.

University of Leicester, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries

Quantitative evaluation

In museum evaluation we often think of examples of quantitative evaluation that are not necessarily relevant for measuring social impact, for example, visitor numbers. However there have been attempts to develop quantitative methods for measuring social impact.

Daniel Fujiwara of the London School of Economics developed such a method for the Happy Museum Project to look at the social value of museums in improving health and wellbeing of visitors and giving these a financial value to demonstrate their worth.

National Museums Liverpool used this wellbeing value to demonstrate its social impact in financial terms giving its venues a wellbeing value of £130 million. This approach is harder to undertake on a project level but can be a useful tool for a whole museum service to demonstrate its social value at a higher level.

On a smaller scale there may be quantitative tools that can build up a picture of the social impact of a piece of work, especially if used in conjunction with qualitative tools.

For example, the University of Leicester's "Encountering the Unexpected" project which used response cards to capture a wide variety of information.

Quantitative evaluation tools can include:

- **Closed questions:** Responses to interviews and questionnaires using closed questions can be used to ascertain simple attitudinal or knowledge level information about your audiences, for example, "Have you visited the museum before?" This can be very useful for establishing a baseline.
- **Personal data:** Personal data about users such as age, ethnic identity or postcode. However, there should always be an opportunity for participants to opt out of providing this data, such as a "prefer not to say" option.
- **Range statements:** These can be a useful way to capture more abstract data such as feelings or desires. When using range statements, it is important to keep the statements simple and straightforward so it won't adversely affect the work you are trying to do.
- **Visual aids** : Visual aids such as blob trees are a creative way of capturing data on a participant's feelings towards a piece of work. It that can be measured at different stages of a project to reflect individual attitudinal change.

Online Quantitative Evaluation

You may feel that you know less about your online audiences and often the most easily available digital stats can tell you more about the reach of your work than the depth of engagement. However, there are various tools and techniques that can be used to uncover the impact that your digital activity is achieving. Its important to choose the digital metrics that are best suited to your wider mission and vision.

Online surveys

Online surveys can be distributed though your website via a pop-up module or banner, your email newsletter, your social media profiles or sent directly to participants of online engagement. These can give you more of an insight into who you're reaching on these different platforms, their perception of your digital activity, and what impact it has had.

Try to stick to questions with single or multiple choice answers as this makes it quick and easy for people to answer them and easier for you to analyse the results.

Off the shelf survey tools, such as Survicate, Survey Monkey and HotJar, allow you to deploy surveys on specific pages. This can enable you to get contextual data on how users are responding to different parts of your website/product and help you to collect more granular feedback at scale.

Connecting with Yemeni Elders Heritage project at House of Memories, © National Museums Liverpool, Robin Clewley

The Food Museum

Website analytics

A website analytics tool such as Google Analytics, can help you understand how many people are accessing your website, which pages they access, and what functionality they use (for example, forms submitted or PDF's downloaded).

These sometimes require some configuration to track some types of user interactions, and to collect data accurately. You should also comply with privacy legislation, particularly around the use of cookies.

It is possible to configure website analytics to give you data about how users are engaging with your content. For example, on article pages, you might measure the average time on page, the average scroll depth, and the rate at which people click on calls to action. Stats like these can give you an indication of the depth of engagement with your content.

> “The weekly Photo Friday post performed well across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram...Some posts sparked heated debate, others provoked reminiscences, while others led to new information being added to the database.

Evaluation report for Scottish Fisheries Museum's Fishnet project

Social media analytics

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, and YouTube all provide usage data, allowing you to see the number of people that have viewed your content and interacted with it.

However, it's worth factoring in that just because a social media analytics package is telling you that a large number of people engaged with your posts, that level of engagement is likely to be of a much lower level than a face-to-face interaction: someone liking a tweet is not the same level of investment as them coming to the museum.

Some types of online engagement are likely to be more difficult to measure, but there are often steps that can be taken. If you produce a learning resource that a teacher will use in their curriculum for years on end, there won't be a reliable way to measure the impact of that resource on students over time.

Most of these packages will give you demographic data, but not at a very granular level; you can see the demographic breakdown of your followers as a whole but not who has responded to particular posts.

Digital ads data

As well as the content you can publish for free on the main social media platforms, you can also pay the platforms to run digital advertising for your organisation.

On its own running digital ads won't create social impact. However, they can be an effective method of getting your content and products to reach the right target audience. For example, if you recognised you have high quality learning resources but that very few teachers are finding currently, you could run targeted ads to place this content in front of teachers in the local area. Put simply ads can help your socially impactful work reach the right people.

Digital ads allow you to target content to very specific groups based on a wide variety of demographic information: for example telling those interested in theatre about an upcoming performance near them.

Ethical considerations

There are many pitfalls to relying too heavily on quantitative methods to gather data about participants. It can be easy to make assumptions about a person based on this data and the risks should be assessed. For example, a postcode may indicate that a person resides in an area of economic deprivation, but this does not present any information about the individual's economic status.

Quantitative methods of evaluation can tend to focus on negatives (deprivation, lack, deficit). Therefore evaluators should be mindful of the impression this focus on 'lack' gives to participants and whether this undermines the work of the project.

It is important to consider informing audiences about the evaluation you are undertaking. Leicester University's "Encountering the Unexpected" project used consent forms and information sheets to explain what their evaluation was for, how it would be used and how people would be involved in accessible language.

> "
>
> Evaluators should be mindful of the impression this focus on 'lack' gives to participants and whether this undermines the work of the project.

Qualitative evaluation

There are various different methods that can be used to gather qualitative data to demonstrate social impact. Qualitative data can provide more substance to your case for social value and will tell you more about the ways in which your work is impacting participants lives.

Interviews and questionnaires

Interviewing participants and stakeholders is one method of looking at the social value of your work. This may take place at various stages to see how respondents' answers may vary. There are several factors you may wish to consider when planning for this type of data capture.

Conducting interviews can be a formal process with a set list of questions which the interviewer may not deviate from or less formally where the interviewee may just be asked generally about a specific topic or theme and questions adapted as the process unfolds. With the former the results can be easier to quantify amongst multiple participants, but the latter can offer more flexibility and therefore provide a wider plethora of information.

If undertaking formal interviews, the questions asked require careful consideration. Closed questions which require a yes or no response are easier to analyse but have little scope for anecdotal evidence unless there is a follow up question asking the respondent to expand.

The location of your interview can be just as important as what you are asking. Consider what will make participants comfortable, for example, will you interview people individually and will you use a recording device? You could also consider the option of online interviews, this could be more appropriate if it's difficult for the audience member to visit you in person (for example if they have access issues or are not in the local area).

Online interviews are not dissimilar in format to in person ones, although the interviewer should be particularly sensitive to non-verbal communication expressed by the interviewee, as this is likely to be less obvious than in the physical space.

Online usability testing

Usability testing is a widely used technique that you might consider if the output you wish to evaluate is a digital product. A facilitator will ask a number of testers to perform the same tasks on the website (or app, or in-venue interactives) and record any difficulties and barriers they come up against. Results from this kind of testing provide qualitative data on how users are interacting with your content, what their preferences are, and any barriers they are currently facing with your content.

> “
> The environment in which the participant is interviewed is critical. Being able to interview survivors in their own home brings out with it a depth of answers that may not be possible when interviewing at the museum.
>
> Aneesa Riffat, former curator of the National Holocaust Centre and Museum

Ethical considerations

When finding the right approach for gathering your qualitative data it is important to consider the impact it may have on participants and their needs should be central to the process.

“People who have encountered systems of care during their life may understandably have a negative response to data capture” says Jess Turtle of the Museum of Homelessness. For new volunteers the museum uses a ‘getting to know you’ form which captures access requirements as well as basic information. The museum takes a relaxed approach with these forms “Participants may not fill in all details in the first instance,” says Jess “we often get responses that say things like ‘not now’ or ‘I’ll tell you later’ and we accept this. It’s important to build trust before asking people to open up”.

The same principles apply to questionnaires as interviews although you’ll need to consider whether the questionnaire is a self-led activity or if it will be facilitated. The needs of those being questioned should be considered again; think about the use and tone of the language and make sure it is not going to be intimidating or off-putting, otherwise your response rate will be lower. Web apps such as Survey Monkey have the benefit of being accessible virtually, ensuring the anonymity of participants. As with written questionnaires the needs of the participants should be the main decider of the approach chosen as the use of technology can be a barrier to participation.

Ethical considerations

It is also important to consider your own needs when undertaking qualitative data capture. Measuring social impact can be an emotional experience for those leading and undertaking the work.

Aneesa Riffat of the National Holocaust Centre and Museum explains: “In the main, the process of interviewing has been challenging. Risk assessments, pre-research, post-research and every other procedure can be put into place but ultimately you are dealing with trauma and traumatised memory and that is coming through the narrative.”

Observations

These are more one way with the observer recording interactions or activities and the responses from participants. Like interviews and questionnaires, a structured approach is necessary for this type of measurement. A structured form should be used and completed by the observer to ensure a level of continuity between instances of observation. Observers can be part of the project team or it may be done by people who work with the participants in another way. The Happy Museum project points to dementia care mapping as a method of observational recording that is undertaken by care practitioners.

> “As with individual assessments, it is sometimes useful to use the tools of partners. The observations recorded by the mapper capture levels of behaviour and well-being in order to gain an understanding of the experience of care from the perspective of the person with dementia.

Observational evaluation guidance from the Happy Museum project

Testimonials

A popular and effective form of measuring social impact is to capture testimony from participants. This is often done towards the end of a project once a relationship and trust has been built up with individuals. It can be a powerful way to convey the difference streams of work can make to individual lives.

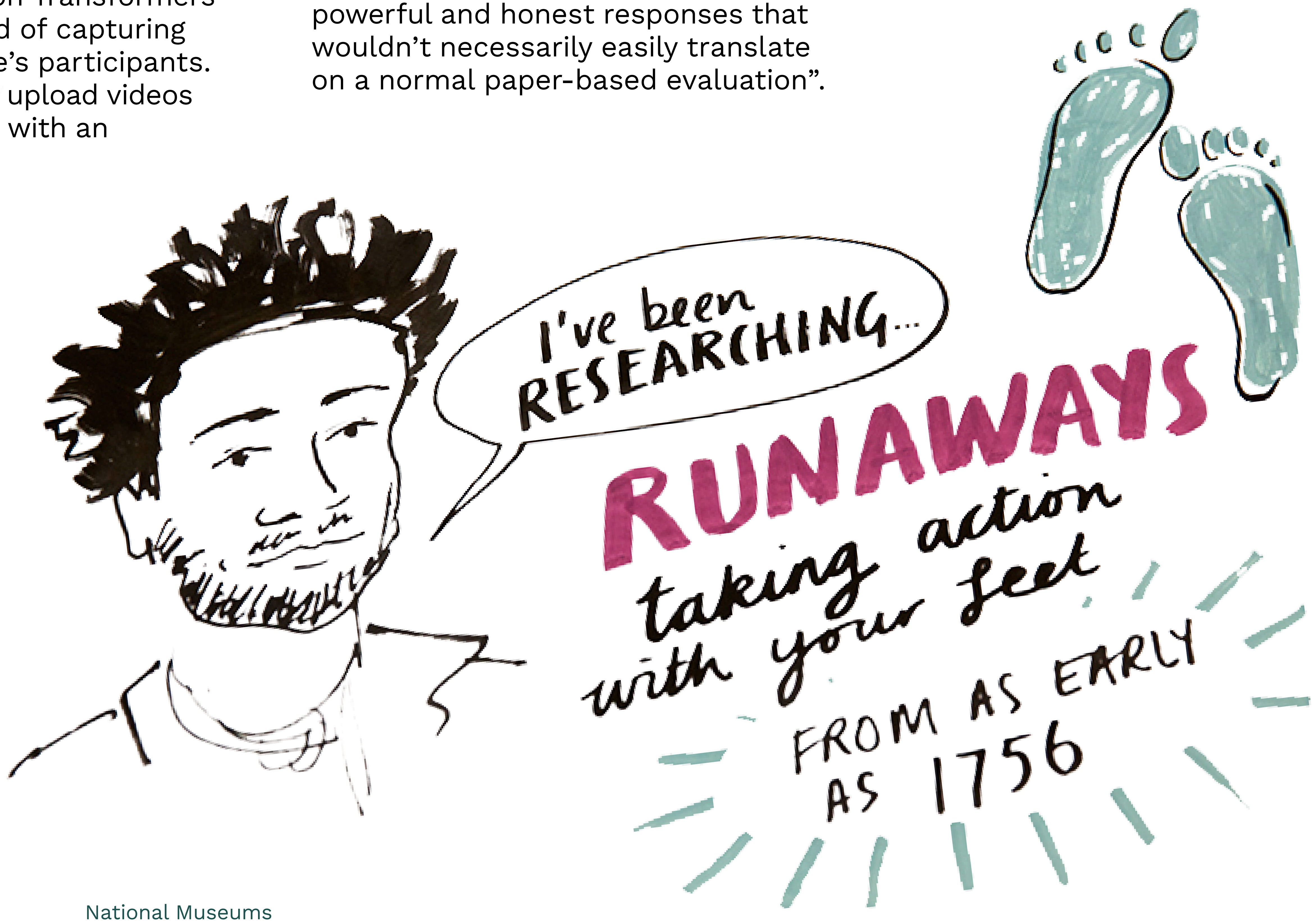
There are various different ways to capture and record this – it could be first-hand accounts from participants or it could come via partner organisations such as healthcare providers or community groups.

Gawthorpe Textiles Collections captured individual testimonials from members of their "Sew Social" programme – part of their Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project. The testimonials were captured as part of a film production and demonstrate very clearly the social impact of this work.

Testimonials can also be captured digitally. The social media app, Indeemo, was used by the Museums Association Transformers scheme as a digital method of capturing testimonials of the scheme's participants. Participants were asked to upload videos throughout the programme with an emphasis on these fitting in with their day so impact on their time was minimised. "The uploads allowed the personality of individuals to come through and allowed them to formulate a more honest response in an unpressured or rushed environment" says Claire Renard, former Project Assistant, Transformers Programme, Museums Association. "We found real value in this format of feedback because of the immediate, powerful and honest responses that wouldn't necessarily easily translate on a normal paper-based evaluation".

> We found real value in this format of feedback because of the immediate, powerful and honest responses that wouldn't necessarily easily translate on a normal paper-based evaluation.

Claire Renard, former Project Assistant, Transformers Programme, Museums Association



National Museums Liverpool

Creative methods

Creative methods for data capture are often well suited to qualitative measures and can work very well in a project setting. There are advantages in using creative ways to gather data as participants might be more relaxed and involved than in traditional methods such as questionnaires, although more thought might have to be given to quantifying the results.

The University of Leicester ‘s Encountering the Unexpected used journals as a method of capturing responses from participants. This provided an extra benefit to participants as it was something they could take away with them to reflect upon their experiences.

“We encouraged projects to give all participants journals, we had envisaged that people would reflect on the process” says Jocelyn Dodd, director of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University. “The journals were especially interesting, helping to focus, gather momentum and for reflection too”.

National Museums Liverpool used visual minutes in their Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project, Sankofa, to record workshops and meetings with community groups in a fun and interesting way. This enabled sessions to be kept on track and key outcomes recorded in a less formal way which didn’t alienate participants.

Off-the-shelf tools

There are a variety of tools that have already been developed and are available for use, meaning you don’t have to design your own. University College London (UCL) has designed and developed a toolkit for measuring wellbeing that has been used effectively in Pontypridd Museum to assess the social value of volunteering.

“I asked the volunteers to score each emotion on the [wellbeing] umbrella when they started their session in the morning, and then to score each one again at the end of the day. To keep it quite unobtrusive I just ask them to complete them once every two months or so. It is kept anonymous with the option of writing additional comments on the back.” says Morwenna Lewis, curator of Amgueddfa Pontypridd Museum. “The first time I asked the volunteers to complete the umbrella, some of them were a bit reticent about it, most of them though were happy to complete it and said it actually helped them to reflect on their experiences of volunteering.”

The Happy Museum project has produced a number of resources and guides that are useful when developing an approach to evaluation. They have developed a number of tools and techniques for measuring wellbeing such as the Happy Tracker which encourages participants to demonstrate their wellbeing by lifting their hands, the higher the more positive they are feeling.

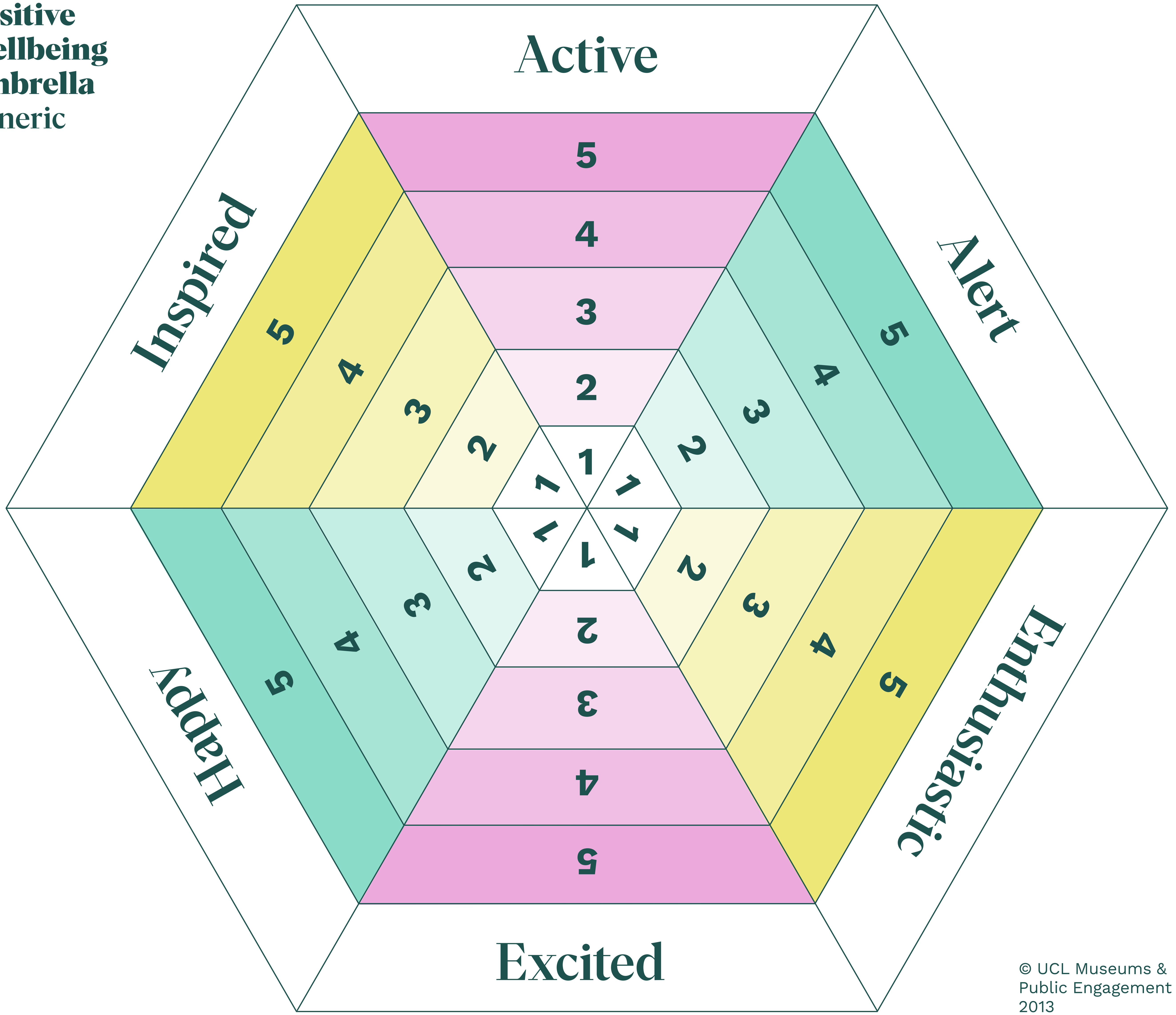
Ethical considerations

It is important to consider your participants very carefully when selecting an off-the-shelf method for measuring social impact. Not all toolkits are right for all audiences. Be mindful of the impact that a particular method might have on participants – does it undermine what the project is trying to achieve?

It is important to consider the emotional wellbeing of both participants and staff. Partnering with experienced organisations who are used to dealing with issues your work is exploring is a good idea as you can benefit from their experience. It can also be a good idea to incorporate group reflection sessions or offer individual counselling to participants. These types of sessions, facilitated by a professional psychologist, can be a way to put safety mechanisms in place and are not as expensive as you might imagine.

Positive Wellbeing Umbrella

Generic



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Further Reading

- → Getting the best from an external evaluation, Evaluation Support Scotland, July 2009,
- → Blob Tree resources
- → Inspiring Learning for All Question Bank, Arts Council England
- → Observational evaluation, Hilary Jennings, the Happy Museum
- → UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures
- → Evaluation toolkit for museum practitioners, Renaissance East of England

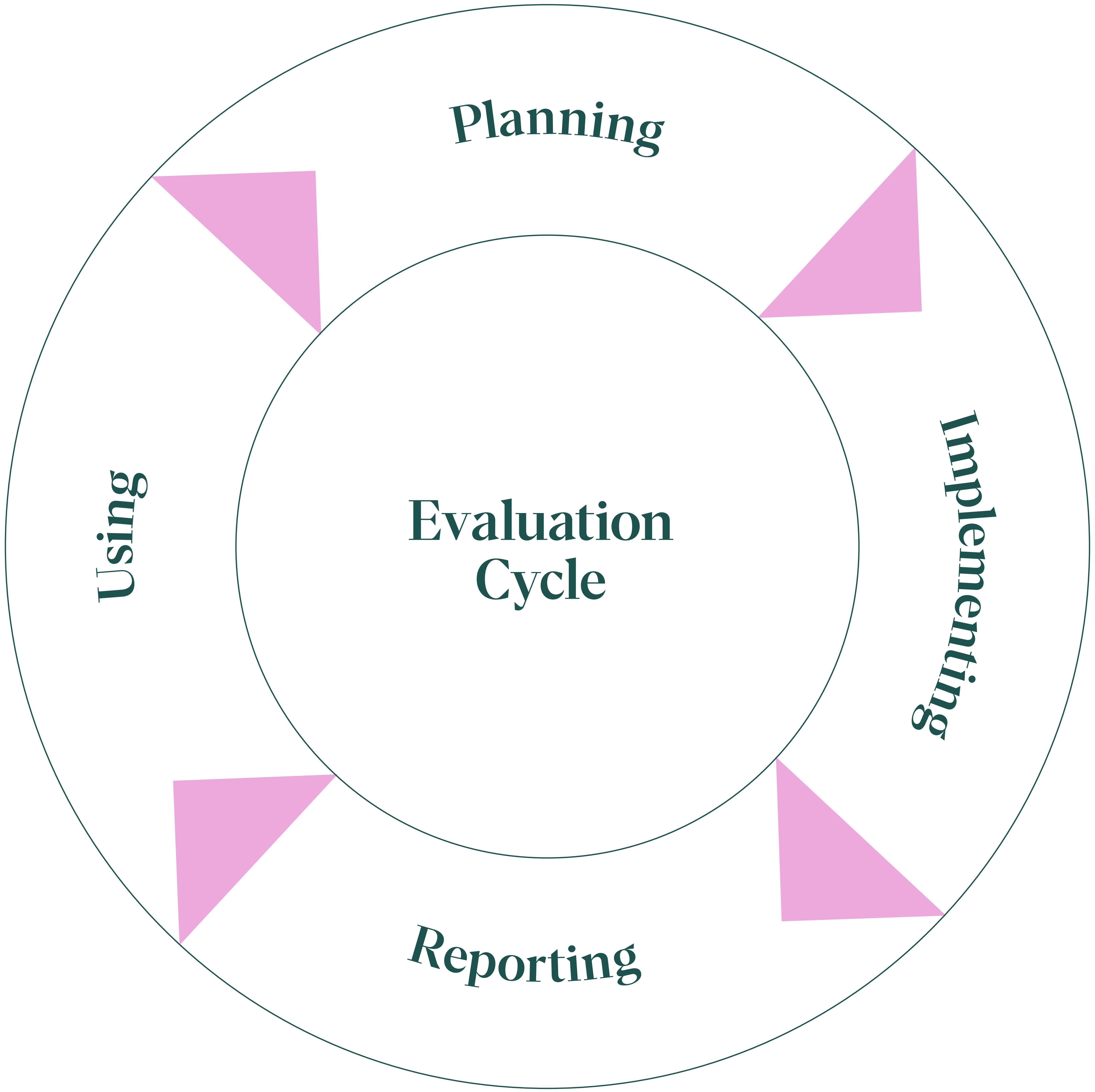
When to measure

The measurement of the social impact should be an ongoing task in order to monitor the project and make changes if necessary.

The evaluation cycle demonstrates that evaluation is an ongoing process and measurement should be done throughout to feed into the various stages.

During the planning phase data collection can enable effective outcomes to be set and establish a baseline set of data. Throughout the project social impact should be measured at various stages with either quantitative data, qualitative data or a mixture of the two being collected. This data can be used to assess and revaluate outcomes and make adjustments if necessary.

> “
>
> Evaluation is a crucial part of the project. Evaluation and reflective sessions were held throughout the duration of the project using an evaluation methodology.
>
> Evaluation report for Birmingham Museums Trust’s “Guide Us” project



Baseline, front-end and formative evaluation

There are various types of measuring and evaluation that need to take place early on in a project life-cycle.

> “In socially engaged practice it enables participants to be involved at a deeper level in guiding the project direction.

Establishing a baseline is an essential starting point for any type of evaluation to assess the current situation. In order to assess if a particular course of action has increased visitor figures, for example, you must measure the visitor figures before the work is undertaken or indeed what work it is you will be doing to achieve this outcome.

With social impact the principal is the same, although data can be harder to quantify, the tools and techniques used should be the same as those laid out in section 5.

The Time Capsule approach developed by the Happy Museum project is a good collaborative way of establishing a baseline. The process can then be repeated at the end of the project to produce comparable data.

Before a project begins or during the planning stage, front-end evaluation should be undertaken with your target audiences and stakeholders. This can establish current levels of knowledge or feeling in a particular area but also involves the audience in the process from the outset, increasing its participatory nature. Front-end evaluation is usually about identifying needs and qualitative measurements are often the best at getting this information.

Museums Sheffield used an innovative approach at this stage of their Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund Protest and Activism project. They gave one of their city centre exhibition spaces over to Protest Lab, an exhibition with little formal content but instead space for the public to input into the project plan via graffiti walls and stickers answering open questions such as “what causes matter to you?” This enabled them to assess gaps in their collection in relation to protest and activism.

Formative evaluation should also be done early in a project timeframe, but unlike front-end evaluation, it is designed to enable you to learn the best methods for achieving your outcomes as quickly as possible.

It enables you to check that the project is on track and adjust outcomes and outputs if necessary. In socially engaged practice it enables participants to be involved at a deeper level in guiding the project direction.

Derby Museums used a Project Lab approach in work, such as their Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund World Cultures project. This adheres to the principals of human-centred design and involves opening up gallery spaces in order to gain public insight and test approaches to elements such as object interpretation and display.

Summative evaluation

Summative evaluation is usually undertaken towards the end of a project cycle and tests whether outcomes have been achieved. This might be where output indicators are checked and compared against baseline or front-end measures and therefore the same techniques used at that stage are usually repeated.

Further Reading

→ Human-Centred Design & Co-production Handbook, 2016, Derby Museums

Threads © Glynn Vivian
Art Gallery, Swansea

Glossary

Baseline evaluation	The starting point of the measurable outcomes
Closed questions	Questions that require a yes or no response or a one-word answer
Evaluation framework	An overall framework to measure whether a program of work is a success. It can include guidance on data collection methods and processes, as well as an overall programme
Formative evaluation	Used to assess methods of generating outputs early on in the project cycle in order to establish what is working and what isn't and enabling adjustments to be made to project methods
Front-end evaluation	Used to assess participants prior knowledge and experience. The main aim is to establish a need
Logic model	A visual plan summarising the project at the top level of its activities and purpose
Mission	A mission statement defines the organisation's work, its objectives and its approach to reach those objectives
Open questions	Questions that require a more in-depth response
Outcomes	The end result or consequence of your work
Outputs	The activities you will undertake to achieve your outcomes
Participants	Anyone who is taking part in your socially engaged practice including staff
Qualitative data	Data that is expressed in descriptive rather than statistical form
Quantitative data	Data that can be quantified and verified. Quantitative data lends itself to statistical analysis
Theory of Change	An organisational tool to define long-term aims to deliver social change and develop a strategy to achieve them
Values	Beliefs, ideals and principals of an organisation that underpin decision making
Vision	A vision statement describes the desired future position of the organisation

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- Museum of Homelessness
- Pontypridd Museum
- Scottish Fisheries Museum
- The Food Museum
- The National Holocaust Centre and Museum
- Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life
- UCL Division of Biosciences
- UK Research & Innovation
- University of Leicester, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries

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