

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM HERITAGE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

Guidance Notes

FEEDBACK, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

There is no big secret to evaluation. It is, quite simply, a way of improving what you do. It involves asking questions about your service or activities, collecting evidence to answer those questions, and then analysing and acting on the results. It helps you find out what works, what doesn't, what other people think about your programmes and the impact they have had.

Evaluation doesn't have to be complex, time consuming or expensive. You can tailor your evaluation according to what you want to find out. Evaluation is especially helpful in enabling you to find out what people are learning from your programmes and how. It enables you to get different perspectives on your service and find out information you wouldn't otherwise have known.

Evaluation is a process. You can use it at different stages in a project to help you improve what you do.

- **Front End** evaluation is what you do at the very beginning of a project to help you decide on the best approach to take. For example, before starting to plan a new education workshop you might talk to teachers to find out what they would find useful.
- **Formative** evaluation takes place during a project to test what works and what doesn't. For example you might invite a local school in to fine tune a new workshop for you before offering it as part of your programme.
- **Summative** evaluation happens once your service is up and running to help you assess how successful it has been. For example, an evaluation form handed out at the end of a training course to find out what people learnt.

WHY DEVELOP YOUR PRACTICE IN THIS AREA?

The Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge requires providers to review the experiences they offer to users and act upon the feedback. Good organisations evaluate their own services, gather feedback from users and have a process in place to change their practice as a result of review, evaluation and feedback (Quality indicator 4, <http://www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk/quality/quality-detail>).

Good evaluation will help you develop and improve your service. It can help you to:

- Understand your users and meet their needs more effectively.
- Find out whether your projects and programmes are working as you intended.
- Win support and funding by providing evidence to demonstrate the value of what you do.
- Find the evidence to help you make decisions, from small ones (e.g. what size to make the text on a label) to major decisions (e.g. what to choose as the subject for a new education pack).

HOW TO GET STARTED

The easiest way to incorporate evaluation into a project is to put together a plan, ideally at the very start of the project to build evaluation in from the outset.

1. Clarify your objectives

Begin by deciding on a specific project or programme to evaluate. Think about an area of your service that you want to improve. For example, you might want to find out how to improve your primary school workshops, or discover why visitors don't spend as long in your exhibition galleries as you would like.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do you want to find out?
- How will you use the information? Will you be able to act on what you learn?
- Does your evaluation relate to a **process** (e.g. how a project went) or its **outcomes** (e.g. what people learnt)?
- What resources do you have available – time, money and skills?

Be as specific as you can. It is worth spending time making sure that you are asking questions that are really important to you – and that you can act upon the results.

2. Choose your methods

The methods you choose for gathering evidence are dictated by the kind of information you need to collect. Methods of data gathering are sometimes called 'evaluation tools'. They can include techniques such as questionnaires, face to face or telephone interviews, feedback cards, focus groups, observing visitors' behaviour and graffiti walls. They can also include work that is produced during a project, such as diaries, photographs, artwork, and films. Simple participatory techniques, such as thumbs up/down or moving to different parts of the room, can work well with young children. See the 'Further Information' section for a list of websites offering advice on the pros and cons of different evaluation techniques.

Some hints and tips:

- Make sure you ask a representative sample of people to contribute. For example, try to make sure that the visitors you talk to are representative of the age and sex profile of visitors overall.
- Ensure the methods you choose are appropriate for the people you will be working with. Don't rely on one method of evidence collection. Three different methods is ideal, as it will give you a range of types of information but should still be manageable. However, make sure you know how you're going to use the data. If you don't know, don't collect it!
- Test your methods first to iron out any problems. If you're designing a questionnaire, try it out on colleagues or friends before you use it with visitors.

Ideally, evaluation will include a mix of **qualitative** and **quantitative** information.

- **Quantitative** data is numerical or statistical data and helps you get an overall picture of what is happening from a large sample of people. For example, what percentage of your visitors are male or female; what proportion are children; what percentage of people would recommend the museum to their friends.
- **Qualitative** data is much more detailed information gathered from a smaller number of people in greater depth. It provides information on attitudes, experiences, learning and motivation and can explain the decisions behind people's behaviour. It often involves working with people face to face.

3. Collect evidence

There are numerous methods of collecting evidence for evaluation. See the links in the 'Further Information' section for examples. When deciding which ones to use, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who do you need to collect evidence from? Are the methods you have in mind appropriate? Think about how you can integrate evaluation into a project, such as using pupils' work as evidence.
- What resources do you have? Consider staff skills, time, equipment and money, and make sure you have the capacity to collect and collate the data.
- How easy will the evidence be to interpret? Some methods, such as children's drawings, can be hard to understand.
- Always make sure your methods are manageable and that you have the time and resources to carry them out effectively.

Remember: Make sure you tell participants that you are conducting an evaluation and get their permission to use data you collect. If you are collecting personal data, make sure you understand your responsibilities under the *Data Protection Act*. If you are collecting evidence with children, it is vital to follow appropriate child protection guidelines. These do change but you can get advice from your local child protection officer or from the *Independent Safeguarding Authority* (see Resources). Never work alone with children – always ensure that there is a parent, guardian or teacher present, for your own protection as well as theirs.

4. Interpret the evidence and draw conclusions

Once you have your evidence, you need to make sense of it!

- Collate numerical data into tables, graphs or charts so it is easy to understand. Be careful using percentages with a small sample size as they can be misleading.
- Look for patterns, trends and themes. For example, is there a correlation between visitors' age or sex and the way they have answered questions?
- Don't ignore data that doesn't fit the pattern. Often evaluation data can be contradictory. You may need to dig deeper.
- Take into account any contextual information that might have affected the results.
- Ask a colleague or friend to look at the data with you. Often other people will have a different perspective on the information and can spot things you might have missed.
- Make sure you assess the evidence in the context of what you wanted to find out. Go back to your original questions. How well have you answered them? Do you need to do any further research?
- Make sure you can justify your conclusions by referring back to the data.

5. Share your findings

Evaluation data needs to be shared and discussed with colleagues, and ideally with the people who have contributed to your research. If people have given you their time and shared their opinions they will appreciate feedback on what you have found out. Remember to check that participants are happy for you to 'go public' with data, and ensure that you take out names and identifying information where appropriate.

There are numerous ways of sharing your findings, for example a written report, formal or informal presentation, newsletter article, website or blog.

6. Act on the results!

Evaluation is worthless if you do not use the results. You may not be able to make far-reaching changes, but it is unlikely that you won't discover something that could be improved.

- Discuss the findings at departmental or team meetings. What changes could you realistically make? What would be the outcomes? For example, you may discover ways to help visitors learn more effectively or make better use of limited resources.
- Agree on priorities for change. Identify which changes are most important and agree a plan. Who needs to act, and do they have the skills and resources to do so?
- Can you act on the findings yourself or do you need to influence other people? You may need to convince others of the positive results that will come from improvement. Make sure you articulate the benefits that will result from change. Evaluation provides an evidence base that can help you argue the case for more resources to implement change.
- Ensure you monitor the impact of any changes to make sure they are having the effect you intended. There might be additional impacts you hadn't foreseen.

Once you have made your changes, you should plan some further evaluation to find out how successful they have been! When you get used to evaluation and start to see the benefits, it becomes a state of mind and an integrated part of what you do.

CASE STUDY: METALWORK GALLERY EVALUATION

The Question

Museums Sheffield wanted to find out what visitors thought of their Metalwork galleries as part of a new project. The project team decided on three specific questions that they wanted to address:

- Does the gallery communicate to visitors that Sheffield's metalwork industry is still thriving?
- How well does the gallery appeal to families and children?
- Which interpretation techniques are most effective?

The Methods

Staff had limited time to spend on the evaluation. They agreed on three data collection techniques to answer the questions:

- Comment books were left out in the gallery for visitors to write their responses.
- A researcher spent two afternoons in the gallery observing and interviewing visitors. They mapped how visitors used the space and how long they spent at different parts of the exhibition to identify which were most attractive to different types of visitors.
- The researcher also conducted short interviews with visitors to find out what they had learnt from the gallery. The interviews included individuals, families, adults and children.

The Results

- The interviews showed that most visitors arrived with the impression that Sheffield's metalwork industry was a thing of the past. There was not enough in the gallery to counter this impression.
- The gallery did not have enough activities to appeal to young children, though the family trail was popular. Lone adults or adult groups spent much longer in the gallery than those with children.
- The popularity of interpretation techniques varied. Adult visitors typically preferred to browse and read labels. Children preferred the physical and computer interactives. The pull-out drawers and information packs in the gallery were hardly used at all because most visitors did not notice they were there.

Action

- The gallery team agreed on a set of actions as a result:
- To label the drawers and information packs more effectively

- To include more contemporary metalwork in the exhibition and add specific information panels about local craftspeople
- To strengthen their partnerships with local industry, craftspeople and other organisations to tackle the media image about the metal industry
- To develop more family activities, such as a family activity box or story books for families to use in the galleries
- To do some further evaluation after the changes had been made to find out how effective they had been.

RESOURCES

1. The MLA website www.inspiringlearning.gov.uk is a framework designed to help museums, libraries and archives improve their services. It contains a lot of information on evaluation, particularly on evaluating learning and social outcomes, and describes different techniques for gathering evidence.
2. The Arts Council has published Partnerships for Learning: A guide to evaluating arts education projects (2004). Page 23 onwards describes different evaluation techniques.
<http://artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/documents/publications/phpLYO0Ma.pdf>
3. The Renaissance South East 'ABC of Working with Schools' offers advice on consulting with teachers and on how to evaluate. It contains a link to the National Trust's Friendly Evaluation Toolkit and other helpful documents. http://www.museumse.org.uk/ABC_working_with_schools/index.html
4. Renaissance East of England have published an evaluation toolkit for museum educators, downloadable from <http://www.renaissance-east.org.uk/Content/Current-Publications>
5. The Visitor Studies Group www.visitors.org.uk is a membership group and network for people interested in learning more about their visitors.
6. For people who want to study evaluation in more depth, the V&A website has a comprehensive reading list on evaluation. See http://www.vam.ac.uk/about_va/whoswho/dept_learning/Evaluation%20Reading%20List/index.html
7. The Research Centre for Museums & Galleries at the University of Leicester has published numerous evaluation studies and reports. These reports can help you get an idea of what research methods they used and what kinds of questions they asked. <http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/research/pub1116.html>

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about LOtC, the Quality Badge and learning through heritage, visit the following websites:

www.lotc.org.uk

www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk

www.gem.org.uk

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