Impact Evaluation for the Arts

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Kingston Arts Council

About this workshop

Reflecting on impact is one of the most nourishing activities your organization can undertake. Creating space to consider questions that matter is an art.

This hands-on workshop will help you consider how you track and communicate your organization's impact. In a thoughtful and aspirational way, we will look at your key questions and discuss topics that matter to you: What is difficult to measure? As an artist or artistic organization, how can you 'capture' your impact?

Additional resources are provided in this handout to help support the development of your impact evaluation strategy.

About us

Helen Yung is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher, and consultant. She leads the Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence, which is an artistic and social R&D organization that creates new ways of framing, training for, and solving complex social and public problems.

As an advisory committee member, Helen helped the Ontario Nonprofit Network develop the first-ever sector-wide Evaluation Strategy. She is frequently consulted by funders, foundations, and nonprofits on a variety of topics related to change, impact, evaluation, engagement, inclusion, and audiences. Helen is currently looking at frameworks for federal government to assess the success of creative hubs.

Inquiries

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"While the process can be difficult and only becomes more difficult as you move from counting inputs to proving impact, just the effort to begin the process will increase the measurable or immeasurable impact you are having."

— Sean Stannard-Stockton,
Stanford Social Innovation Review

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What is impact evaluation?

Impact refers to the effects of your activities. Assessing impact for arts organizations is ideally a way to understand if you are doing what you want to be doing, how to do it better, at what scale, and to nourish your organization's need for images, stories and insights.

What kind of impact can I imagine for my organization?

Artistic, social, political, professional, organizational, intra-organizational, sectoral, personal, community, and ecological. It isn't necessary to think about all of these areas. But arts and culture often impact many of these areas.

What is process evaluation?

Process evaluation looks at inputs, activities, and outputs, and how they work together. Process evaluations allow you to monitor programs, and determine if the outcomes you wanted did not happen due to 'implementation failure' (doing it wrong) or 'theory failure' (error or flaw in the conception or plan). These terms come from social program evaluation, which works from a different epistemology and orientation to life from the arts.

Is impact evaluation just for funders?

No… not unless you make it that way. It's up to you to decide what is important. Impact evaluation prevents 'mission drift.'

By checking in, checking assumptions, asking questions, openly listening, allowing for growth, courage, and development, you are reflecting on what you do, why it matters, and making revisions to be more aligned with your vision and intentions.

What should my goals be?

You may believe you only have one ("to make art") or many ("to reduce social isolation, increase community spirit, promote artists, develop your brand, save the world…"). It's worth unpacking one's assumptions, aspirations, and expectations.

What works for us: Think about someone who is well-intentioned, but is misunderstanding your work. What do they mistakenly think is your purpose/intention/expectations? What do they think is a great outcome? What would you tell them?

What are some reasons to 'measure' culture?
• To learn (continuously)
• To perform an appraisal of what the org is doing/trying
• To assess the (social) value of the org's activity
• To increase the org's legitimacy (in the eyes of…)
• To map the point where we are
• To discover unintended effects of the org's actions
• To be fully accountable

What are some things that can be measured?
• Increased knowledge, awareness, understanding
• Improved relationships, communication, language, decision
• New values, motivations, visions
• Nurtured social capital, capacity and leadership
• New reasons for participation and mobilization
• Effects on systems quality, access, equity.

Generally, we tend to refer to a continuum of impacts on individual and social well-being. It is acknowledged that the impacts of culture are quite difficult to be measured and observed. Some groups are working to develop common sets of indicators to achieve this goal.

How do other people capture & present their impact?

- Questions
- Quotes
- Videos: process, comments, reactions, explanation
- Infographics
- Storytelling
- Slide deck

What tools do I need?

- Curiosity
- Desire or need to understand & communicate
- Computer
- Camera
- Phone
- Paper + pencils / pens
- Time

What are some good measurement tools?

- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Journey mapping
- Mad libs (i.e. fill in the blank templates)
- Card sorting

Artistic

Consider the impact of your activities on your audience/artistic relations, on the artform, and on your artistic, professional, and career development. Is there change? Are there aspects that could use more care, life, or imagination?

Consider the impact of your activities on the artform, the audience's understanding, exposure, and enjoyment, and the artistic, professional, and career development of the artists you work with. Are they growing, developing, changing. Are there aspects that could use more care, life, or imagination?

Individual

Institutional

Consider the impact of your activities on the social wellbeing of participants, the sector, and the community you operate in. Do people feel good, connected, engaged, changed? How do they describe the impacts?

Consider the impact of your activities on the social wellbeing of audience, participants, artists, sector, and the community you operate in. Do people feel good, connected, engaged, changed? How do they describe the impacts?

Social

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What can insights can I get from the data I already have?

Workshops delivered / # of attendees / sales at annual show / membership numbers

- Which workshops seem to be more popular (inferred from # of attendees) which may be explained or qualified by other considerations (cost, date, instructor, marketing/promotion, tie-in with other programming, partnerships, etc.)
- Bear in mind, workshops + # of attendees are outputs, not outcomes.
- Trends - anecdotal, qualitative, vs statistical
- To measure outcomes, depending on your desired/expected outcomes, you would look at how people felt about the workshops, what changed as a result of the workshops (e.g. the individual's experience, new connections formed, increased engagement, purchase behaviour, learning behaviour, social/philanthropic behaviour, etc.)

Social media statistics and gallery foot traffic

- Impact of marketing, communications, & promotions on gallery foot traffic
- Possibly impact of gallery shows on visitors, if you are able to see their social media activity and do content analysis on their posts.
- Certain shows might produce more social media word-of-mouth due to the use of a #hashtag or an artist's online presence, etc.

What staff, volunteers, and patrons say

- Write it down. Pay attention to positive, negative, and interesting comments.
- Ask for permission to quote the person. Be clear whether you will identify them.
- Aside from using the quotes in your reports, you can use the comments to help you identify construct questionnaires, devise interview or focus group questions, and identify the range of subjects you need to engage with, to better understand your impact.

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More questions from registrants

How to measure qualitative properties more concisely?

How to approach our presentation of sensitive content in a compassionate manner?

What difference does it make to measure impact, outcome, outputs?

How to utilize the data we collect?

More holistic ways to evaluate programming

Strategies to assess long-term impact vs post-experience questionnaire

How to evaluate 'online programs and such'

Developing evaluation methods as pilot programs are launched

Best practices, how to define impact

Better ways to make an impact with my practice

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Basic Questions

What is the evaluation for?
- Who will read it?
- What decisions will it affect?
- What makes it feel 'ew' or 'argh' and how can we creatively turn that into 'oooh' and 'yesssss.'

What are your values?
- How do you want your work to enact your intentions?
- What are you promising people?

What is the minimum data you need?
- Be clear about how you will use that data to make a decision
- Is there another way to get that information?
- Is there a creative or fun way to get that information?

If the research is exploratory, what are the benefits for participants?
- Why should someone bother to give you their time?
- What will your questions or intervention contribute to their life?

If an evaluation framework feels reductive, restrictive, or ill-matched, what are your options?
- Write down what doesn't work for you.
- Sketch out what would be better evaluation, and what would be ideal.
- Request a meeting with your funder (presumably the people who gave you the evaluation framework) to discuss what is important to them about the evaluation framework, how it gets used. Share what you've written and sketched out.
- Get feedback. Talk to others. Contact the ONN.
- Stay open and optimistic that funders and policymakers also want better evaluation.

Resources

The Evaluation Journey: A Toolkit for Cultural Operators - By Elena Di federico

The Evaluation Journey Toolkit aims to help address the initial obstacles to evaluation, by presenting a set of key background questions that should allow staff in cultural centres, and other cultural professionals as well, to define an evaluation model and methodology suited to their specific needs and context.

encc.eu/resources/database/evaluation-journey-0

A Handbook on how to assess your artistic organisation - By Vassilka Shishkova

The "Look, I'm priceless!" toolkit builds on the belief that arts organisations need to be equipped with the right tools to defend their own agenda when it comes to define, measure and investigate what is the 'value' of arts to our troubled societies. Art should not be reduced to a policy instrument and should not follow any agenda other than its own. That is the core principle that guided this toolkit too.

www.ietm.org/en/look-i-am-priceless-ietms-new-toolkit-on-how-to-assess-your-organisation

Ontario Nonprofit Network: A sector-wide evaluation strategy

Fundamentally, the sector needs a system that makes it easier, more rewarding, and less stressful for nonprofits and their partners to do meaningful evaluation work.

theonn.ca/our-work/our-people/evaluation

Lean Data Approaches to Measure Social Impact - By Acumen+

This course is designed for social enterprises and non-profits who are in the early stages of building their impact strategy, and are looking for an agile, effective and low-cost way to better understand their customers and assess their social impact.

www.plusacumen.org/courses/lean-data-approaches-measure-social-impact

BetterEvaluation.org

An international collaboration to improve evaluation practice and theory by sharing and generating information about options (methods or processes) and approaches.

www.betterevaluation.org

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Additional Resources

Monitoring and Evaluation in Art for Social Change
An interactive tool by Arts for Social Change
http://www.ascevaluation.ca

Infographic examples
Culture Days: Latest impact evaluation summary
https://culturedays.ca/en/research/impressions

Sample chart of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, impacts:
https://sunlightfoundation.com/2019/08/13/measuring-the-impact-of-community-engagement-around-open-data

Related readings
Open Engagement: 100 Questions
http://openengagement.info/category/100-questions

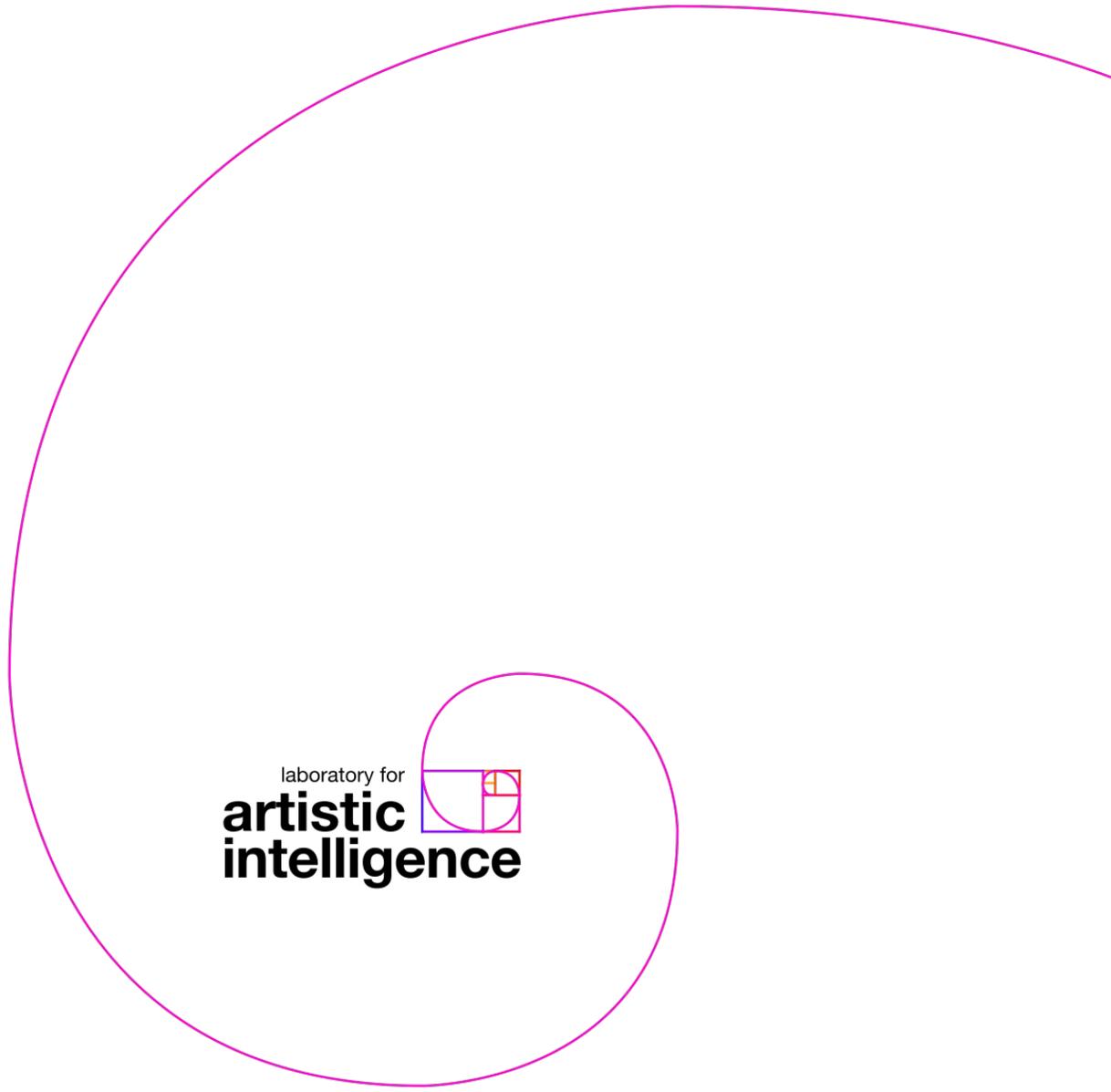Ontario Arts Engagement Study (summary and full text of study available in link)
https://www.arts.on.ca/research-impact/research-publications/newsflash-%E2%80%93-ontario-arts-engagement-study

Beyond the "Toolkit Approach": Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy-Making, by Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14797580903481280

Appreciative Inquiry
https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/what-is-appreciative-inquiry-ai

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