

Summary of 'Measuring our impact' toolkit

Background

Measuring our impact, a toolkit to support the cultural sector in 'making the case' for culture, was developed in 2023 by MB Associates for Suffolk County Council and the Association for Suffolk Museums (AfSM). The page references in this document refer to the toolkit, where more information is available.

The toolkit includes (p2):

- Guidance to plan, support and evidence your impact
- Introductory level – for those just starting to figure this out
- Intermediate level – for those who want to dig a little deeper
- A sector-wide evaluation framework
- Example tools for capturing data
- External data sources to support and evidence projects
- Case study examples
- Local contacts
- Worksheets

Purpose of evaluation

We all know that arts and culture work (p46). For the Culture Project Fund (CPF), evaluation should measure YOUR project and its impact. Evaluation will not always show that a project made a positive change – learning what doesn't work, or what might work better in a different way, is also valuable.

The evaluation is for **you**, and for Suffolk County Council, to help us all do better (p8, p10). It should not be excessive, just good enough (p10) to answer questions such as (p18, p25):

- How will you know if your project was a success?
- What was the impact of the project?
- Can you measure any changes? (audience count, emotions)
- Who did your project affect? (Were they the people you expected?)
- What would you do differently if you did it again?
- Was money spent wisely?

Types of evaluation or measures (p51, p69):

- Quantitative – what you can count (how many?)
- Qualitative – what feelings or opinions? (how much?)
- Case studies – stories
- Formative evaluation – supports the development of a project
- Process evaluation – looks at delivery and implementation to improve effectiveness
- Use outcomes evaluation at the end of a project – to what extent has it met its aims and objectives? What were the effects or impacts on participants?

Before you apply (p7, p13)

Plan your evaluation when you plan your project, to check it will do what you want.

- Record-keeping: keep data in one place and follow GDPR principles. Plan record-keeping (p49, p50, p52)
- Have you got permission to ask people – and to store and share their answers?
- Can you follow up with people?
- Get a baseline! If you don't know how people feel before the project starts, you won't know what's changed! You may also want to measure a control group (people who you don't reach) for comparison. (p28, p40, p50, p88)
- Use numbers and narrative for a more complete story. Have you planned what data to collect to answer questions such as: "who was involved?", "how many?", "what did they think or feel?", "what (how much) difference did you make?" Key resources: Analysis tips (p49, p51, p52)

What evaluation do you do already? (p10)

- What are YOUR measures of success?
- What data do you already collect?
- What targets does your organisation already have?
- Can you use these measures to monitor and audit the project? Are they enough?

During the project (p22-24)

- Record who was involved (funders, participants, staff, volunteers, carers, teachers)
- Collect photographs, quotes and feedback that you can share with us. This might include case studies and testimonials (p42)
- Collect evidence of change during the period (p52).
- Keep things simple
- Enable comparisons
- Survey people if appropriate. This might be done your email list, postcards at an event, asking people in person. Questions might include (p22, p30):
 - How much of the impact they think was due to your project
 - What else they have been involved with in the time.
 - Whether they stopped doing anything to come here, or what else they would be doing with their time.
- There's more information on survey design in the main toolkit (p22)
- Bookings data might show new customers, new postcode areas, more bookings by people bringing a carer, tickets for children / older adults / unemployed (p29)
- Gather evidence during the project (Use formative or process evaluations during projects to make sure you're on track)

Analysis after the project (p8, p49, p52)

- What did it cost? (money, time, overheads)
- It may look like you haven't seen an improvement, but you may have turned the curve
- Existing data can be compared to new to show what's really happening (p53)
- Basic adjustments: "what would have happened anyway?" - Can you explain your impact?
- Basic valuation: prioritise outcomes, consider what else could have been funded
- Use outcomes evaluation at the end of a project – to what extent has it met its aims and objectives? What were the effects or impacts on participants?