

Creative & Credible

CASE STUDY: DEVELOPING AN OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR ARTS AND OLDER PEOPLE

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This hypothetical case study draws on Willis Newson's experience of evaluating arts projects with older people in residential care homes. It outlines the development of an outcomes framework in five stages as follows:

- Stage 1. Identifying evaluation aims
- Stage 2. Consultation to refine evaluation aims
- Stage 3. Generating evaluation questions
- Stage 4. Considering positive, negative and unanticipated outcomes
- Stage 5. Deciding on measurement tools and approach.

Stage 1. Identifying evaluation aims

The first stage in developing an outcomes framework is establishing project or programme aims. These are often quite wide ranging and it is difficult to include all project aims in every evaluation. Some project aims may be easy to evaluate using simple monitoring tools, whilst others need more complex evaluation and research tools. Let us take an example of a project that seeks to evaluate the effects of participatory arts, including visual arts, movement and music, on older people in residential care settings. It is not unusual for an arts project to encompass this wide range of activity. In our example, the project aims include:

- Offer participants meaningful activity with which they can engage
- Provide an enjoyable experience for participants
- Provide benefits to participants from physical activity and singing
- Provide intellectual stimulation
- Improve participants' mental health and wellbeing
- Enhance participants' quality of life
- Support communication and connection, reducing isolation among participants' and enhancing relationships between participants, staff and carers
- Raise staff awareness of the value of arts based activities in delivering participant centred care
- Help to bring about a positive cultural change towards person centred care using arts based approaches within an organisation
- Provide a service that offers value for money
- Raise national awareness about the role of arts and influence policy making

It may be helpful at this stage to group the outcomes into different types. In our example, following the Youth Music outcomes framework (NFYM, 2014), we include four domains: personal, workforce, organisational and social outcomes.

Personal outcomes: Offer participants meaningful activity with which they can engage; provide an enjoyable experience for participants; provide benefits to participants from physical activity and singing; provide intellectual stimulation; improve participants' mental health and wellbeing; enhance participants' quality of life; support communication and connection, reducing isolation among participants' and enhancing relationships between participants, staff and carers.

Workforce outcome: raise staff awareness of the value of arts based activities in delivering participant centred care.

Organisational outcomes: help to bring about a positive cultural change towards person centred care using arts based approaches within an organisation; provide a service that offers value for money.

Social outcome: raise awareness about the role of arts and influence strategic change at national level.

These aims can all potentially be evaluated, but there are significant challenges. The aims are very wide ranging and a large research study using different types of data would be needed to assess them. It is clear from this that the majority of the outcomes that the project seeks to affect are personal outcomes. While some of these seem relatively easy to assess by staff and observers, others, such as changes in mental health status, are difficult to capture without using relatively intrusive measures. At the other end of the spectrum, social outcomes are challenging to capture in a single evaluation. Assessing impacts in terms of awareness and policy require a longer term and more exploratory approach. Although this is ambitious, many organisations are increasingly aware of their social and media presence and monitor their impact in this area, for example, using social media.

Stage 2. Consultation to refine evaluation aims

In order to design a manageable evaluation process, it is necessary to hone down the aims and provide a focus for the evaluation. This needs to be done in consultation with stakeholders as their priorities should be reflected in the

evaluation. Ideally it should also be informed by an evidence review so that the evaluation builds on what is already known and reflects priorities that are relevant to current policy and practice. Deliberative tools such as conversation games can help with consultation.

The consultation process seeks to identify evaluation aims that can be realistically assessed within the evaluation cycle. During this process, stakeholder priorities may change as they become more aware of the challenges of assessing particular outcomes. Given that this is evaluation and not research, the process needs to be nonintrusive and it should not make too many demands on participants, especially those who may not be able to respond to complex requests for information. Finally, practical considerations such as budget, resources and scheduling may limit what is possible in terms of evaluation.

Stage 3. Generating evaluation questions

In our example, the aims consensus process is used to help the evaluation team and stakeholders to narrow down the aims of the evaluation into three key areas: personal, workforce, organisational outcomes. These now need to be expressed as questions about the project. In our case study, after a period of deliberation, the group chooses the following:

1. Does the project offer participants meaningful activity with which they can engage?
2. Does the project benefit participants' wellbeing?
3. Does the project affect enhance communication and relationships between participants, staff and carers?
4. Does the project raise staff awareness regarding the role of arts based activities in delivering participant centred care?
5. Does the service offer value for money?

Even these refined questions present evaluation challenges. Some of these outcomes are difficult to measure directly, although 'proxy' indicators can be used. For example, wellbeing is a broad indicator and might be approached more simply by looking at specific elements such as mood or relaxation. Further, the wording of these questions is problematic from an evaluation point of view. Let's look at the first question, *Does the project offer participants meaningful activity with which they can engage?* This is a closed question but it is asking something about which there is unlikely to be a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. Further, it is not clear how engagement in meaningful activity can be demonstrated, but this kind of question would benefit from an open ended, qualitative approach.

There is also a problem with the second question, *Does the project benefit participants' wellbeing?* This is also a closed question. Further, it is not clear what is meant by 'wellbeing' in this context. It is important when framing questions to avoid bias and to allow a range of possibilities including that of the project having no effect or a detrimental effect.

The third question is also problematic. Generally, it is a good idea to avoid creating outcome statements that combine more than one element. For example, 'communication' and 'relationships' are from the point of view of measurement, not the same thing at all, although an improvement in the former might reasonably be expected to support the latter.

Finally, evaluation questions should make clear who the participants are, what intervention they will receive, what outcomes (or impacts) are sought or anticipated and how these will be assessed. A more appropriate set of questions might be:

1. What are the subjective impacts of participation in an arts project by older people in residential care home settings?
2. Does participation in the arts project lead to a change in wellbeing scores among participants?
3. What effects of the project on communication between people within the settings can be documented?
4. What are the views of staff who have participated in the project concerning the role of arts based activities in supporting high quality care?
5. What are the financial cost and benefits of the service?

Some of these questions are challenging to address within an evaluation and need a more extensive research process to investigate them. In this case study, the project is at the start of an iterative evaluation cycle and a pragmatic approach is needed that will gather relatively simple data as well as increase understanding and inform further evaluation.

Stage 4. Considering positive, negative and unanticipated outcomes

An outcomes framework should allow each evaluation question to be clearly answered. It is important to recognise that answers that may not be positive, and to allow space for unanticipated outcomes. The outcomes framework needs to identify indicators or statements that express the different possibilities.

A simple example is given below in relation to our original evaluation question 1.

Outcome	Outcome statement			
Engagement with the activity	Participants seem engaged in the activity	Participants seem not to be engaged in the activity	Activity seems to cause problems for participants	Other
Improved wellbeing	Improvements in mood, relaxation, distraction and enjoyment are observed or reported	No improvements in mood, relaxation, distraction and enjoyment are observed or reported	Negative changes in mood, relaxation, distraction and enjoyment are observed or reported	Other

Stage 5. Deciding on measurement tools and approach.

The next stage is deciding on the measurement tools and approach. A range of data sources may be routinely available including attendance records, feedback from artists and staff, feedback from participants and carers, and reports by managers and staff

It may also be necessary to undertake additional data collection, using observation as well as interviews. In our example, a data collection questionnaire is used along with interviews, focus groups and a structured assessment tool, the ArtsObs (<http://www.cwplus.org.uk/art-and-design/arts-research/artsobservational.htm>). The final outcome framework is illustrated below.

Evaluation of the impact of an arts project on older people: Outcomes Framework

Outcome area	Assessment tools
Participants' engagement with the activity	Monitoring data to record take up of the activity by participants, attendance and drop out information. Feedback from participants, including those who did not take part in the activity or who left before its completion Observation using structured observation sheet Reflective reports by staff and managers
Improved mood, relaxation, distraction and enjoyment	Feedback from participants, including those who do not take part in the activity or who left before its completion Pre and post assessment of each session using ArtsObs tool Reports by staff and managers
Effects on communication between participants, carers and staff	Observation using structured observation sheet Feedback from participants. Interviews with participants, carers and staff
Effects on staff awareness	Focus group with staff
Value for money	Project costings Project benefits in the form of savings or wealth gains Projected costs/benefits over time. Cost that might arise as a consequence of not doing the project

Conclusion

Project evaluation is a challenging task but it can be made easier by following a clear plan. This entails identifying clear and measurable aims and is best done in consultation with stakeholders including commissioners, funders, project staff, artists and service users, all of whom need to be 'on board' with the approach and the outputs it is capable of producing. It is important to generate clear questions for evaluation. These need to be measurable or assessable within available

resources and care needs to be taken to avoid bias and produce meaningful results. It is important to consider that project outcomes may not always be positive: evaluation should include the full range of perspectives and experiences. Finally, once the framework is agreed, it is important to choose appropriate measurement and assessment tools and strategies. Choice of methodologies should be determined by the evaluation question rather than the preferences of evaluators and project partners or assumptions about the inherent superiority of a particular method or approach.

References

National Foundation for Youth Music (2014). Taking an Outcomes Approach. Guidance on Youth Music's Outcomes Framework. Youth Music/Arts Council England. http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/sites/default/files/users/Funding_docs/Taking_an_outcomes_approach.pdf. Accessed 25.3.15