

# Creative & Credible

## CREATIVE AND ARTS BASED EVALUATION METHODS

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Within the field of arts and health evaluation, concern is sometimes expressed that artists' voices and perspectives are marginalised, with methodologies dominated by medical and health approaches. Within research, there is a burgeoning interest in arts based methodologies. While creative and arts based methods and tools are often used in informal evaluation, they are less likely to appear in formal reports.

Creative and arts based approaches can be particularly powerful, especially at the data collection and dissemination phases of the evaluation cycle. They include a vast array of techniques including photography, film and visual arts, poetry and creative writing, music, drama and performing arts. These are used in order to uncover hidden perspectives, add empathic power, and strengthen participants' voices. They are also used in dissemination to make evaluation and research findings accessible to wider audiences beyond traditional academia or policy making circles. There is a need to consider the contribution of arts based approaches to evaluation and how these approaches can be adopted in a rigorous way.

### **Why use arts based methods?**

Arts based methods are attractive to evaluators for a number of reasons:

*Eliciting new perspectives on a theme or topic:* Different disciplines have different ontological standpoints, which at the most simple level means different understandings of the nature or reality and of phenomena. Arts based methods are seen as redressing an imbalance wherein knowledge from the arts is viewed as being subsumed by medical and health perspectives. Arts based methods can extend the ways in which phenomena can be known, understood and appreciated. Hence they can bring new questions to bear and challenge accepted notions of health and wellbeing.

*Generating rich data:* As well as eliciting new perspectives on a theme or topic, arts based methods can help to generate rich data to enhance evaluation. For example, they can make available stories, music, songs, poetry and visual images to reveal and illuminate impacts and process issues.

*Empowering participants:* Creative methods can be empowering for participants, since they are often less intrusive than more clinically based evaluation tools. Further, they can be modelled on the intervention itself, hence they less likely to disrupt participants' experience of the arts activity.

*Enhancing dissemination:* Creative arts approaches such as film, photography, music and creative writing are often used to support dissemination, making project reporting more engaging as well as accessible and relevant to a wide range of people beyond professional practice and academia.

### **Challenges of using creative methods**

Creative and arts based evaluation methods bring significant challenges to evaluation. Their outputs are by nature difficult to interpret and the multiple standpoints they accommodate can be difficult to disentangle. They also pose technical challenges, requiring artistic and craft skills that are not usually required in standard evaluation procedures.

There are also some key ethical issues to consider when using arts based methods. The conventions of informed consent, privacy and anonymity sometimes run counter to artistic values. For example, should authorship be acknowledged when participants produce artworks as part of an evaluation, or does this breach the principle of confidentiality and might it put participants at risk of exposure?

### **Examples of arts based methods**

The use of arts based methods in arts and health research was explored in a systematic review by Fraser and Sayah (2011). A total of 30 papers were included in the review. Visual arts were used most often, followed by performance arts and literary arts. Arts primarily used for generating ideas and disseminating learning. They were less likely to be used as tools for interpreting evaluation data. Other examples of arts based methods were considered in detail during the Creative and Credible Project. These include the Visual Matrix (VM), a group-based visual methodology that builds on psychosocial theories (Froggett et al (2014)). Another approach is Participatory Action Research, which places the participant at the centre of evaluation and lends itself to creative methods

(Hall, 2005). More information about these approaches can be found on the project website:  
([www.creativeandcredible.co.uk](http://www.creativeandcredible.co.uk))

## References

Froggett, L., Manley, J., Roy, A., Prior, M., & Doherty, C. (2014) Public Art and Local Civic Engagement. Arts and Humanities Research Council, and Preston University of Central Lancashire. [http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/10961/1/AHRC\\_CV20RDA\\_TOC\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/10961/1/AHRC_CV20RDA_TOC_FINAL_2.pdf)  
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