

Evaluation tools: Exploring the impact of Public Engagement with Research



Evaluation tools can be a useful way to collect evidence on the impact of Public Engagement with Research (PER) activities. When used effectively, evaluation can facilitate learning and reflection to enhance future engagement.

Before selecting an evaluation tool, first consider:

- 1) What are the objectives of your PER activity?
- 2) Who do you want to engage?
- 3) What do you want to find out through the evaluation?

Here are some examples of evaluation tools. This is not an extensive list, but provides some ideas and inspiration for evidencing PER impact:

Evaluation tool	Description	Pros	Cons	Top tips
Audience participation	Ask audience members questions as a whole, with audiences responding through standing up/ sitting down or using audience response devices.	Quick method to gather feedback from a large number of people.	Does not explore the reasons behind audience responses.	Ask the presenters to leave the room, before inviting an external facilitator to ask questions to the audience to elicit more honest responses.
Drawing	Creative techniques (e.g. drawing, personal meaning mapping) to capture and visually display individuals' opinions and experiences in response to a question.	Creative activity to produce open, rich data and can be used to facilitate further discussion. Can be an effective method to capture 'before' and 'after' feedback.	May be challenging to analyse and interpret drawings without questioning.	Ask individuals to label their drawings, as these written comments will help interpreting responses.
Feedback postcards	Light-touch feedback cards with open-ended questions and/ or ranking responses.	Quick and easy method to gather feedback, useful way to capture any 'before' and 'after' feedback.	Does not enable participants to elaborate on their answers.	Use online templates to design feedback cards (e.g. <i>canva.com</i>) and print feedback cards onto thick A5/ A6 card.

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Graffiti wall	Large piece of paper on a wall or whiteboard for people to add post-it notes with their comments and feelings about an activity.	Visually eye catching and creative way to explore experiences. Post-it notes are a quick method to gather open-ended, qualitative responses.	Ideally a facilitator is needed to encourage responses.	Design the graffiti/ feedback wall to match the theme of your activity.
Interview/ focus group	Facilitated discussion with individuals/ groups of 6-8 people to explore in-depth experiences, opinions and perspectives about the PER activity.	Provides rich, qualitative information and enables people to elaborate on ideas. Interaction between participants in focus groups can stimulate ideas.	Time-consuming method to both conduct and analyse.	When facilitating an interview/ focus group, avoid leading questions and only ask open questions to enable participants to elaborate on their experiences.
Observation	Observing behaviours and recording comments and reflections on engagement.	Useful way to reflect on the effectiveness of an activity and levels of participation and engagement.	Observation is based on one individuals' perspectives, and therefore subject to one person's interpretation.	Ensure the observer is given a structured observation guide with questions on key areas to observe.
Questionnaire/ survey	Set of questions to gather feedback from a specific audience. This can be paper-based, online or face-to-face.	Inexpensive method to collect open and closed responses from a large sample.	Relies on self-selection, may not be suitable for all, and clarification for answers is not always possible.	Only collect the data you absolutely need to collect and no more.
Social media	Gathering online comments (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) or a live Twitter feed to explore responses to an event/ activity.	Low-cost method to gather spontaneous reactions and anecdotal evidence.	Only provides a partial picture of responses.	Ask individuals to use a specific hashtag when posting about the activity/ event, to enable the grouping of responses.
Voting	Asking participants to visually vote on the activity, for example, by dropping a coin into a box or adding a sticker to a chart.	Visual method that is quick to use and can accessible to multiple audiences.	Does not explore reasons behind voting.	This tool be used before and after an activity to compare responses and explore if changes have occurred.