NEW JERSEY COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

Evaluation as a Tool for Success
Session III: Creating Your Evaluation

This session took place via Zoom on May 24, 2022. A recording of the session along with relevant resources is available at https://njhumanities.org/programs/in-the-weeds/. These notes provide a summary of topics discussed in the session.

Workshop facilitators:

- Montrell Sanders, Ph.D. student in Public Affairs at Rutgers-Camden
- Gigi Naglak, NJCH Director of Programs

Determining what constitutes success

- Within projects and within organizations, there are a number of stakeholders who have a vested interest in your project. Think about how each of these stakeholders view success for the project.
  - Different stakeholders may view success differently.
  - Different evaluations may specifically speak to different stakeholders.
- Determine <u>measurable</u> indicator of success.
- Use outcomes from logic model or other planning document as a starting point
  - The outcomes that you have identified are informed by the different stakeholders and their definitions of success.
  - These outcomes guide you on what you are measuring and help determine the best way to measure it. Example: measuring demographics looks different than measuring how someone felt about the program attended.

Formulating questions

- Figuring out best questions to ask is arguably the most important and difficult part of evaluation.
- Avoid asking leading questions that will influence responses.
- Make sure your question is specific to the information you want to gather.
  - "Did you learn something new during this program?" is different from "What did you learn in this program?"
  - If a goal of your program is for people to learn new information, the first question gets you to the answer you need.
- Keep questions short and simple.
  - Avoid asking more than one thing in a single question.
  - Using the learning question above, if you wanted to both find out if they learned something new AND what they learned, make it two questions, not one compound question.
- Returning to your logic model (or other planning tool) will help you ask specific questions.
  - Again, using the question about about learning, reviewing your outcomes will clarify it is important to you that they learned something or that they learned something *new?*
- Test out your evaluation on a number of people before you send it out into the world.
  - You can look at the data to make sure you are getting the answers you anticipate.
  - You can query the people you have tested about their experience doing the evaluation.
  - This is critical to creating good questions.
- Even very straightforward data collection deserves thought for how you want to collect it. For example, in collecting demographic information:
  - If you are collecting age of participants, do you want them to input their exact age? Check off a box that includes an age range? Year of birth?
  - Race/ethnicity: self-input v. list of choices.
    - Easier to aggregate data with a list.

        - But race/ethnicity is deeply personal and often complex, so allowing people to self-identify by leaving open text box can be empowering. You can then figure out how to aggregate the data in a meaningful way.

How to read and use the data collected

- Types of data collected
    - Quantitative: data that is numerical.
        - This would include demographic and attendance data.
        - This type of data can be aggregated and easily depicted graphically to display impact and change over time.
    - Qualitative: data that deals with qualities or characteristics.
        - This would include data that tells how the audience felt or experienced a program.
        - This type of data is depicted in a narrative format and involves you reading over the information to find commonalities among participant experiences.
    - Mixing qualitative and quantitative data can give a more robust picture of impact.
    - Small bits of data that are different from most of the data you collect are called outliers.
        - It is worth investigating the outliers if you are able to in case this data represents opinions that could be useful to you, such as non-traditional audiences or marginalized voices. Might be a new audience for you to connect with!
        - Qualitative data can help EXPLAIN outliers in quantitative data, which is why mixing qualitative and quantitative can give a more robust picture.
- Gathering and sharing data
    - The original form of the data you collected is the raw data.
        - This data is not terribly useful in its raw format because it is often in significant quantities and difficult to parse.
        - The next step is to put the data together into a report about your findings.
    - Reports take the raw data and examine patterns.
        - Quantitative data is aggregated and usually depicted graphically to make the information easily digestible.
        - Similarly, qualitative data can be examined for patterns and commonalities in the responses gathered.
    - A short report from the evaluation can be prepared that can be shared more broadly with stakeholders. The report will include:
        - Summary of findings from the evaluation, quantitative and qualitative.
        - Discussion of conclusions drawn from those findings. This is the place where you take the information learned in your evaluation and discuss how it will impact the work you are doing.
        - A report can also be a place where you identify areas of priority for further evaluation. (“We were surprised to discover ____ and would like to further investigate that by doing ____.”)
        - Reports can be prepared for specific stakeholders. What you share internally with may take a different form from what you share publicly.
        - Evaluation reporting can be a way of developing trust with your community by transparently sharing the impact of your work.

Meet with Us!

If you wish to schedule a 1:1 session with facilitator Montrell Sanders to talk through evaluation needs or review materials, times are available through July 31, 2022. Email msanders@njhumanities.org to schedule.