LONDON SCHOOL of HYGIENE &TROPICAL MEDICINE

Evaluating Public Engagement

Improving Health Worldwide

Planning a public engagement project, and planning how you will evaluate that project go hand-in-hand. By evaluating your project throughout its lifespan, you can monitor its progress, adjusting the project plan as necessary, and determine if you have achieved your aims.

Public engagement evaluation doesn't have to be difficult or complex. The type of evaluation you do will depend on the format and scale of your engagement project or activity. This guide provides some key considerations that will help you to develop your evaluation approach as well as some examples of evaluation in practice.

Cover image: An activity from an Open Day booth developed by researchers from the SONA study research team at the MRC/ UVRI & LSHTM Uganda Research Unit. The quiz allowed them to assess attendees' understanding of asthma treatment, provided an interesting conversation starting point, attracted people to their stand, and allowed them to quantify how many people they engaged with over the course of the day. Credit: LSHTM

What and who to evaluate

Your evaluation should be used to determine whether you have met the aims and objectives for your project or activity, which is why it is important that these are clearly defined when you are planning your project. It should monitor the impact the project has had in relation to these goals.

Your evaluation should also take in to account who it is that you want to evaluate. In thinking about who to evaluate, consider not just your participants but also your project team (including yourself) and any collaborators. The approach you use to evaluate these different groups may vary.

Here are some examples of things that could be evaluated, driven by the aim and target audience

Aim/objective	Target audience	What to consider evaluating
To increase participant knowledge of a particular subject	Workshop participants	Participants' knowledge of the subject before and after the project. This can allow you to determine the change in their knowledge as a result of your interaction with them
To encourage young people to pursue a career in science	Participating school students	The number of students thinking about pursuing STEM careers after the workshop (short-term) The number of students who enrol in a STEM course at university (long-term). This may not be possible to measure, depending on the scale, time frame and budget of the project
To highlight the importance of hygiene for disease prevention within a community	Members of the local community where a research project is occurring	How community attitudes towards good hygiene practices have changed
To improve research team skills and confidence in communicating with the public	Researcher/ research team	Researcher's feelings and attitudes towards public interaction with their research What has been learned from the engagement that is valuable to the research How confident researcher(s) feel in communicating and engaging with the public again What was something unexpected that was learned through public engagement

Other things to consider measuring

Project processes and satisfaction

Evaluate the execution of the project itself. For example: Did participants enjoy the activities? What did you and your colleagues learn about planning and delivering a public engagement project or activity? Did things go to plan? If not, how were you able to adapt the project? What would you do differently next time? These are key reflections to understand the success of project delivery and are useful for future project planning.

Project audience and reach

It is important to capture quantitative metrics for your project. For example, keep a record of how many people you engaged with and, if possible, the audience demographics (e.g. were the participants adults, families, professionals, patients, etc.?)

TOP TIP: Managing scale

Evaluation should always be proportional to the scale of the project. A one-off classroom workshop that cost £300 to run will have a much smaller evaluation than a £100,000 three-year project.

When to evaluate

Depending on your aims, evaluation can, and most often does, happen throughout the project. Here are some things to consider when evaluating at different points in the engagement project cycle:

At the start of the project

If you want to evaluate whether your project led to a change (in attitude, knowledge, etc.), you may need a baseline measurement. This can allow you to understand participants' current understanding, behaviour, etc. that can be reassessed and compared at other points within the project.

During the project

Evaluation that occurs during an activity or project can allow you to review the project as it is happening. This can help you to ensure that the project is appropriate for the audience and gives you the opportunity to adapt your approach if necessary. Monitoring the project throughout also allows you to record some basic stats about your audience and their participation (e.g. numbers, demographics, time spent on the activity, etc.).

After the project

Evaluation once the project is complete allows you to look back across the project and capture key successes and learning. Post-project evaluation can happen immediately after (e.g. to evaluate short-term impacts), or at a later date (e.g. to measure a change over time). Personal qualitative reflections – from yourself, members of the project team, collaborators etc. – can also be useful to consider at this point. These reflections can feed into your own future public engagement or be useful for others planning their public engagement.

It can sometimes be useful, or even required, to draw your evaluation together in to a report, to share findings with colleagues, a funder, etc.

Impact timeframe

When you conduct your evaluation, can be dictated in part by the timeframe in which your impacts are expected to occur. Consider whether you're trying to measure something with a short-term impact (such as participant understanding of the subject matter) or something more long-term (such as a change in community behaviour over time). Short-term impacts can be evaluated immediately, whereas evaluation of a long-term impact is more informative if it is done at a later date or even at several points over time.

Participant availability

When you evaluate, can also be influenced by the time you have with your participants. For example: will you only have a few minutes with participants straight after the activity, or will you be able to contact them at a later date for a more in-depth evaluation? If you would like to contact them at a later date, you will need their permission to do so.

> **TOP TIP:** Know your funder expectations
>
> If your engagement project or activity has received specific funding, check the conditions of your grant in terms of evaluation and reporting expectations and consider these when planning your evaluation. You may be required to write a report, capture specific information, or address certain criteria which can impact evaluation format and the time it takes to complete the evaluation.

How to evaluate

Once you know who, what and when you would like to evaluate, you can decide on your method. Don't be afraid to get creative – it can make evaluation more enjoyable for you and participants, and they may not even realise that they are being evaluated.

> **TOP TIP:** Data collection should be purposeful
>
> Always be mindful that your data collection is useful. Don't just collect data simply because you can or you are using standard survey questions borrowed from some one else. The danger with non-purposeful evaluation is that participants can be 'over-surveyed' without providing the information most important to you. Consider why you need the data and what it will be used for.

Types of evaluation

Your method may be **qualitative**, providing rich insight into the experiences of the individuals involved (e.g. open-ended questionnaires, focus groups, observations, etc.).

Alternately, it may be **quantitative**, measuring the scale and extent of outcomes (e.g. scaled surveys, audience voting).

A combination of both is often most effective.

Examples of evaluation methods

Focus groups – A tool for gathering in-depth qualitative information which works well with smaller groups (e.g. 6-12 people).

Web analytics – A must for any project with an online component to collect a range of quantitative information about those who access your website, social media, etc.

Video box/booth – Participants record their response to a project, experience or particular question on a video. This is a more creative and qualitative method that can provide powerful testimony.

Observations – Observing participant behaviour at an event can uncover what people really do, rather than what they say they do (e.g. how long visitors interact with you/your activity if it is a drop-in event).

Opinion postcards – A quick way for participants to provide answers to open-ended questions or for people to write anonymous comments and opinions free hand.

Graffiti wall – Encourage participants to write or draw comments, observations, feelings and messages on a dedicated wall/chalk board. This is a great visual representation of the engagement that can go in a report. Encourage creativity with different colour pens, post-it notes, surfaces to graffiti on, etc.

Interviews – Gain an in-depth perspective of participants' experiences, as well as why they have a given response. These can be conducted during the engagement or some time afterwards.

Peer interviews – Participants gather one another's opinions about an activity using different mediums (e.g. audio, video, or written format). Can often lead to more honest opinions as well as engaging participants in the process of evaluation. Works well with younger audiences.

Personal meaning mapping – Participants draw a mind map representing their views or knowledge of a certain issue before the project. This is added to throughout and after the event (e.g. in a different colour) to see how the meaning or concepts change to them.

Question boxes – Participants are given cards and encouraged to write anonymous questions or comments on them and place them into a box. At some point throughout the activity the facilitator can take out a card(s) and read the question, allowing for a broader group discussion. Useful if participants feel uncomfortable asking certain questions, or if the topic of discussion is sensitive.

> **TOP TIP:** Logistics
>
> There will be project logistics that will affect what evaluation methods are appropriate. Things to consider:
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> • Do you have the time, money and resources to carry out the evaluation that you would like to?
>
> • How much time will you have to get participant feedback?
>
> • What sort of feedback is your audience capable of providing?
>
> • How many people do you need to evaluate?
>
> • Can you take an audience sample?
>
> • Is the evaluation you want to do appropriate for the physical environment in which the project is taking place?

Please note: case studies of evaluation in action can be found at the end of this document.

Reflect and report

Once you have collected and, if required, analysed your evaluation data, it is important to reflect on what you have learned. This can take the form of a project team meeting and discussion, or a more formal report written up for you and your team or a report to your funder, institution, or the general public.

Top tips for successful evaluation

Do

- Plan your evaluation from the beginning and evaluate throughout the project.
- Take into account logistics such as environment, audience, project, etc.
- Collect data purposefully and think about what it is you need to measure.
- See evaluation as global; evaluating not just the public groups you engage with but also stakeholders, collaborators and yourself.
- Collect a mix of qualitative and quantitative information to gain the richest evaluation.
- Ask for help in planning your evaluation from the Public Engagement Team or colleagues.
- Consider the ethics of your evaluation approach. If you are concerned about this, speak to the Ethics Team at the School.

Don't

- Start by choosing your evaluation methods before considering what, why and who you wish to evaluate.
- Shy away from negative or unanticipated outcomes. These are often where we learn the most and can be the most valuable to inform others considering doing public engagement.
- Assume your evaluation plan will remain the same throughout the project.
- Over-evaluate or plan too big an evaluation. It should be proportional to the project and the resources available.
- Be afraid to be creative in how you evaluate.

TOP TIP: Consider ethics

Do you need to ensure the anonymity of those involved?

What are you planning to do with this information once you have collected it?

Under GDPR legislation you will need to obtain permission from people if you are going to use their image (e.g. photo or video). More information, including subject permission forms, can be found on the intranet.

Evaluation case studies

The case studies below highlight three different evaluation methods used in public engagement projects at the School. The examples each show only one evaluation method, however each project employed multiple methods, which addressed different project aims.

Focus on the Microcosmos: unfolding the past and present of diagnostics
Project coordinator: Ailie Robinson

Project: This project involved bringing year 11 students to the School, where they used Foldscopes, novel paper origami microscopes developed by Stanford University, to learn about microscopy and disease.

Aim: The project aimed to increase the students' knowledge of microscopy and the diagnosis of different diseases.

Evaluation question: Did the students gain any knowledge of microscopy or disease from the activity?

Evaluation method: Post-it note answers

At the start of the session, the students were asked a question about their knowledge of microscopy (How does a microscope work?) and parasitic disease (Can you name a symptom of malaria?). Students then wrote their answers on post-its and put them on a board. At the end of the session the students were asked the same questions. The changes in their answers (seen in the image below) demonstrated that the students had a better knowledge of microscopy and malaria after the project.

This was a really simple, quick and inexpensive way to measure how the workshop impacted student knowledge and understanding.
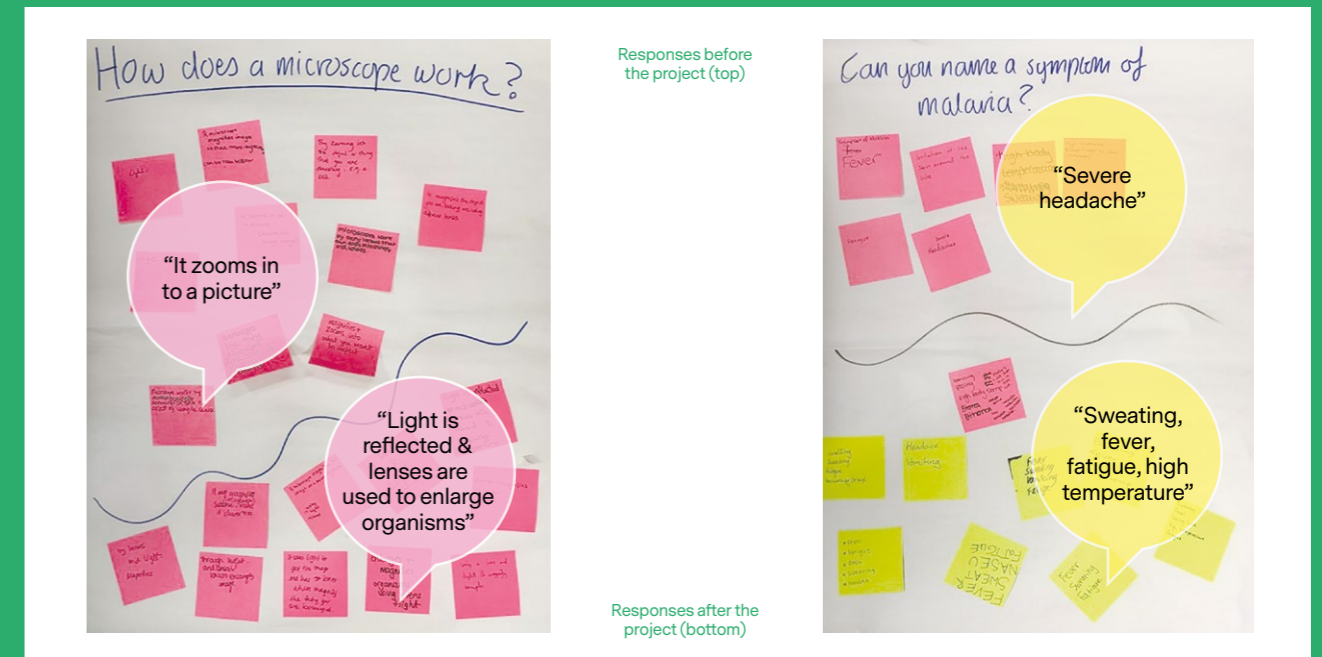
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Booth at New Scientist Live

Project coordinator: Erin Lafferty

Project: The School hosted a booth at the New Scientist Live Festival in London. The booth engaged with members of the public using interactive demonstrations related to mathematical modelling and infectious diseases spread by mosquitoes.

Aim: To engage people attending New Scientist Live with the School's research in global health.

Evaluation question: How many people engaged with the activities at the School's stall? What did visitors think was the priority for global health spending?

Evaluation method: Voting boxes

Visitors to the booth were each given one token which they could use to vote in a poll. The four voting boxes were labelled with the four main areas of the School's research (Infectious Diseases, Non-Infectious Diseases, Environment & Health, and Health Services & Systems). The question posed to visitors was: 'How would you prioritise spending £1million of research money?'

To vote, the visitor had to drop their token into one of the four boxes. The tokens were counted at the end of the event to give an estimate of how many people visited the stall over the course of the Festival.

Bonus: This method provided insight into what visitors thought were the biggest challenges to global health, depending on which of the four boxes they placed their token in, with many responses and reasons behind them surprising some of the researchers. It also created an opportunity for dialogue between researchers and visitors around global health challenges and the work of the School.

Image: Visitors to the stall at New Scientist Live vote for how they would spend £1million of global health research money, by placing coloured tokens in clear plastic voting boxes. Credit: LSHTM

The Gombe Girls for Maternal and Newborn Health

Project coordinator: Nasir Umar

Project: This project was designed to raise awareness of issues around maternal health in Gombe state in Nigeria. During the project, teenage girls visited local healthcare facilities, and engaged with healthcare workers and new mothers to explore the factors that contribute to a safe and happy birth.

Aim:

1. To stimulate the interest of female students in current issues and challenges in maternal and newborn health.

2. To demonstrate to young female students that further education or professional development will not impair their ability to be a wife or mother.

Evaluation question: What did the girls think about maternal and newborn health care in the region? What were their attitudes towards further education after completing the project?

Evaluation method: Qualitative interviews

The students were interviewed before the project began, and then again at the end of the project. Through the interviews, students demonstrated that following the project they had:

· A greater appreciation of maternal health research and how it applies in the context of Gombe State.

· A greater understanding of what health workers do in Gombe State.

· A wish to continue with their education to higher levels.

· An intention to pursue a career as a health worker.

Need support or advice planning your public engagement evaluation?

If you would like to discuss your evaluation plans, please contact the School's Public Engagement Team on: publicengagement@lshtm.ac.uk

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Twitter lshtm.ac.uk/twitter

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