

Open Studios evaluation

Open Studios research for Open Studios Network conference October 2009

What is evaluation?

There are many different ways of categorising evaluations. Evaluation findings may be designed (and used) to make a judgement about a system or service, or one of its components; to provide a basis for making improvements; or simply to generate knowledge. One way of categorising evaluation, which is particularly useful when working with projects and programmes, is by its relationship to the state of development of the project/programme itself. Therefore *formative* evaluation concentrates on ways of improving a project or a programme while it is still ongoing; *summative* evaluation is undertaken after the project or programme has been completed and judges its overall effectiveness. A useful distinction is that formative evaluations are usually intended for the project/programme participants while summative evaluations are intended for an external audience. i.e.:

"When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative" Bob Stake, *quoted from Scriven*.

Evaluation can have many different targets. What is important is that before you embark on an evaluation exercise you are quite clear as to your purposes, and that you keep focussed on these as you plan it, carry them out and present the results.

Among possible purposes are:

- To increase **understanding of artists needs**. The aim is to evaluate needs in the context of the events current services and to identify your artists expectations on how the event is delivered.
- To fulfil **requirements for accountability**. Projects which expend public money must expect to be held accountable and there are contractual obligations on projects to undertake evaluation. However it is worth bearing in mind that these requirements are intended to assist both with the running of the event and with the artists expectations and that is not only a positive evaluation that is beneficial, much can be learnt from negative achievements, e.g. evidence that a promising approach doesn't in fact work.
- To determine **whether processes are working correctly**. For example, part of evaluation should focus on whether the project management team is effective. This might involve a review of how decisions are being taken and implemented.
- To check **whether an event conforms to specification**. This is sometimes called 'quality assurance' but it is a type of evaluation nonetheless. Usually there will be explicit criteria against which conflicts can be judged, the key question is, 'Does this event and running of this event do what it was designed to do?'
- To judge **the effectiveness of an event**. Here the aim is to discover whether or not a project has produced its intended outputs. There will be an explicit link to objectives set at the start of a project, using questions such as, has your event reached your intended target audience? Has your event matched the steering groups expectations?
- To assess **the outcomes of the event** - the impact that it has had on its intended audience, artists and tourist industry.

Applied from source reference: Cerlim.ac.uk

Why evaluate?

Evaluation methods are tools for change. If they are simply used as *score sheets* or as *pats on the back*, evaluation tools can lead to complacency - rather than to change and innovation. End of open studios event feedback can play an important part in designing an evaluation strategy - but it is by no means the only part!

Look at your core set up, who are your stakeholders? What do you need to achieve from the project and how can you analyse whether you have achieved your aims?

Some useful formative evaluation approaches are:

- To explore variations which have occurred between the open studio events proposal, the agreed work schedule of the event and the actual work carried out.
- Who is involved in the event? (artists, steering group, organisation team, design team, audience, funders) It is especially useful to explore the actual engagement of the different stakeholder groups.
- What does the project team see as the main lessons learned to date (including the 'negative' lessons, the things that didn't work as expected).
- Which other factors are getting in the way. For example, the lack of expertise in technical processes might be hampering development decisions.
- How adequate are the resources available.

While a summative evaluation might examine:

- The extent to which the original aims of the event and concept were realised.
- The lessons which have been learned, for example on the feasibility of different approaches.
- Whether the event is sustainable.
- Whether the event and its outcomes represent good value for money for your artists, audience and funders.
- The relationship of the project to others which have been undertaken elsewhere, perhaps in parallel. In other words, is this the optimum solution to the problem?
- The process issues which have emerged which might be applied to future projects.

Funders are your stakeholders and include:

- Artists
- Local authority
- Advertisers
- Sponsors
- Public funding

You should consider the following points when undertaking evaluation :

The organisation of your event:

- have you got the right team?
- Can you make your budget work harder?
- Can/Should you bring in new members to your steering group? New members = new ideas

The performance of your event from artists perspective:

- Data on visitor & sales
- Their comments & input on the event

The performance of your event from visitor perspective

- Their comments & input on the event

Applying evaluation to Open Studio funding:

Evidence for potential & current funders

Whether you have funding in place from a local authority or an arts organisation, most funders request an element of proof that an event has performed up to its expectations.

If your event is funded by public money, you need to provide evidence on the outcomes of the event, in most cases it is:

- The number of visitors your event has generated
- Number of sales per studio and value of sales: giving evidence of sustaining small creative industries

In the case of Spring Fling, they produce evidence of small businesses benefiting from open studios taking place, through visitors generating income to shops, cafe's hotels and restaurants to name a few

How do we evaluate?

Gathering data has benefits for all open studio events, and should not be seen as just a requirement for publicly funded events. By gathering relevant data you can provide evidence of your events outcomes to potential sponsors, or if you wish to develop your open studio event, you can provide evidence of what are you successful outcomes and what areas you wish to develop.

What data could be collected? (some obvious, some more obscure!)

- Participating artists – if your event has been going on for a few years, compare, provide evidence of how your event has grown (SAOS start up year: 91 artists, 10 years later 385 artists)
- Costs of marketing – how much are you sending on your event? Can you produce a visitor survey to find out which marketing tool is most effective?
e.g. SAOS marketing spend of 2009 was £ 29,000, with printing £ 15,716 (this figure includes support from SCC). From visitor feedback, advertising especially radio was the most effective, this would account for £ 5000 of our budget
- Where is your marketing aimed at? – product placement, where is your distribution going to, is your design work accessible to all ages
- What is your target audience? – gathering data on your audience through visitor surveys allows you to establish who goes to open studios; how can you keep them going? How can you attract new audiences?
- Value of sales overall – gathering evidence of the income your event generates for its artists, this will attract new artists and public funding
- Items brought – large scale originals? Small scale trinkets? – gathering such evidence can provide artists with valuable information as to the range of the work they could offer
- Do you have a launch event? – this can help with publicity and profile your event to a wider audience
 - If yes – what are its aims, but if you have decided not to continue – why?
 - If no – have you considered running one?

Broadly speaking, evaluations may use either *quantitative* or *qualitative* methods, or a mix of the two. As a starting point it is useful to consider what sources of data are, or might be, available to the evaluation. Bear in mind that you may want to use at least three different methods in order

to 'triangulate' your findings - in other words, to see how one set of data supports (or not) another.

SWOT analysis : Strengths Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

This is particularly Good for open discussion forums with artists and steering groups and another method for gathering data

Evaluation Advice – research resource: 'Reviewing'.co.uk

- **Be selective!**

Don't bombard artists with a huge list of questions. Work out what you really want to know. Then work out the best way of obtaining this.

- **Be realistic!**

Form-filling is not fun (however much people may have enjoyed your event). So don't expect people to conscientiously work their way through a long, complex evaluation form (even if it is on coloured paper!). And don't read too much into the results of a rushed process. The more care people take in providing feedback, the more notice you should take of what they have to say.

- **Be creative!**

Why not create an evaluation activity that is itself engaging and enjoyable! By fully engaging artists they will provide you with the feedback that you want and that you will be able to use.

- **Be honest!**

If all you want is a pat on the back and some good quotes to promote what you do, then be honest and plan it all as a *public relations* exercise. If you want to learn from the process and improve what you do, then plan it as an *evaluation* exercise.

- **Be balanced!**

You may end up with a standardised evaluation process so that you can monitor results over time. But beware of applying 'production line' thinking to what is a highly variable and very human process. If you always ask the same questions, you are always looking at the event from the same perspective. Why not adopt a compromise that gives you the best of both worlds? Try combining a standardised element that allows you to make comparisons over time, with a random or changing element which allows you to get feedback from a new perspective on each occasion. E.g. for SAOS I am starting the evaluation at registration by asking 'What are your expectations in participating in this event?' to compare with the evaluation after the event with the same question but involving the artists benefit of hindsight.

- **Be holistic!**

After an event in which people have been through a whole range of experiences, and have been communicating in many ways, it might not be realistic to expect anyone to express their true evaluation of an event on a piece of paper. Paper exercises can be very useful but they should be seen as part of a much wider evaluation process that includes dimensions of expression that are less easy to capture on paper.

- **Be human!**

Traditional evaluation methods tend to dehumanise the process. In order to engage the maximum number of participants, a post-event get-together involving artists can provide an excellent forum for useful evaluation.

Collecting the data for evaluation

Examples of forms: SAOS

SAOS Artists Evaluation Form 2010 **** **every studio to complete a form** ****

* *Mandatory Fields*

* **Studio number** (Please state):

no. of artists at studio:

1. Please indicate:

(per studio only) * Total value of sales for the studio

* Total Number of Visitors to your studio

* Total No. of sales under £5

* Total No. of sales over £5

2. What were your expectations in participating in Surrey Artists Open Studios in 2010? (Please state)

3. Did participating in this event match your expectations? *Tick one only*

Completely

Mostly

Partially

Barely

Not at all

4. Do you think participating in this event is value for money? Yes

No

Any comments:

5. Did you volunteer to help with the organisation of the event or its promotion? Yes

No

6. Did you participate in extra promotion events, if yes please indicate (e.g. Studio on Bus tour, taster exhibition etc)

7. Any unexpected benefits, if any, did you get from taking part?

8. Have your say: (consider communications from SA, design of publicity, ease of use of the website)

Continue on separate sheet if necessary

9. Would you consider taking part in the event again next year? *Tick one only*

Yes definitely

Probably

Possibly

Probably not

Definitely no

Please return to: Caroline Jackman, Surrey Arts, Westfield School, Bonsey Lane, Woking, GU22 9PR by Friday 25th June 2010.

Surrey Artists Open Studios: 5 – 20 June 2010

Studio Recording Sheet – visitors and sales

	Studio Open (Tick)	Total number of visitors to studio	Number of ARTWORKS sold	No. of small items sold (eg. cards)	Total value of sales at this studio £
Saturday 5					
Sunday 6					
Monday 7					
Tuesday 8					
Wednesday 9					
Thursday 10					
Thursday 10(eve)					
Friday 11					
Saturday 12					
Sunday 13					
Monday 14					
Tuesday 15					
Wednesday 16					
Thursday 17					
Thursday 17 (eve)					
Friday 18					
Saturday 19					
Sunday 20					
TOTALS:					

*** NUMBER OF ARTISTS SHOWING AT THIS STUDIO

WORKSHOPS (if applicable)

Date **Cost £** **Number that attended**

Date **Cost £** **Number that attended**

Providing artists with a record chart allows the evaluation and collection of stats very easy

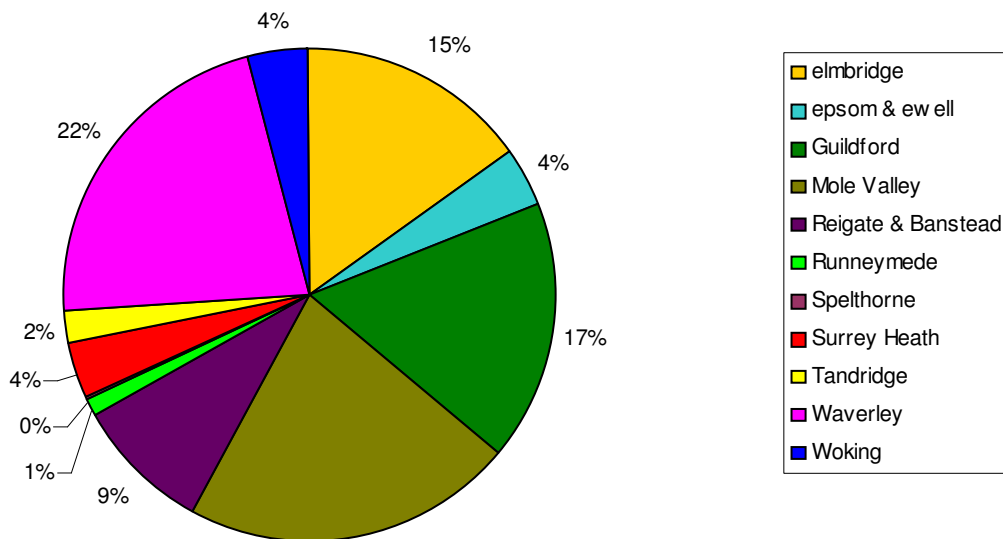
How to use the data collection for evaluation

By using simple spread sheets in Excel the data collected can be used to create useful charts that highlight the strengths and weaknesses of your event.

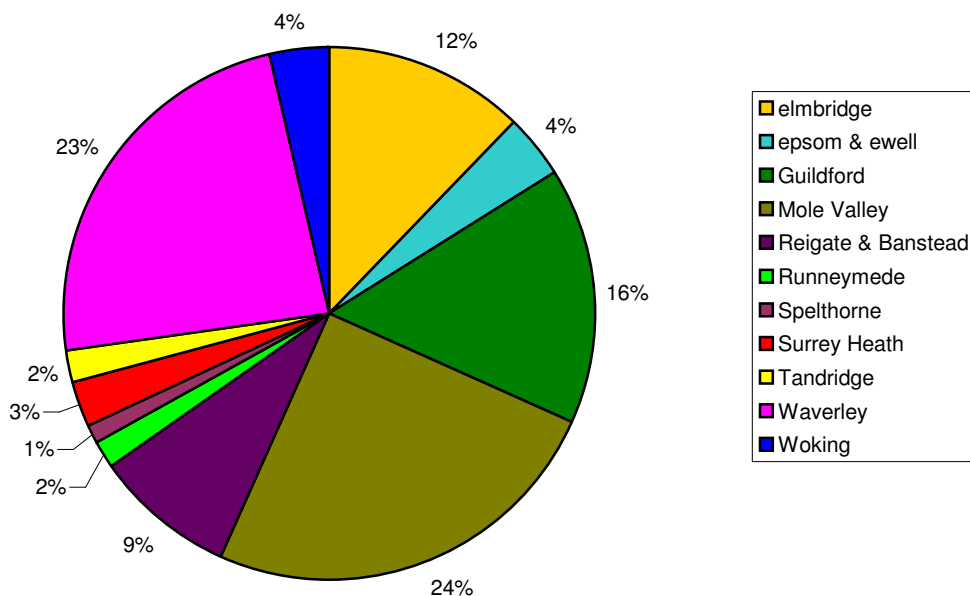
In the case of SAOS, the following charts document the number of visits per studio in every district and borough. This can help the event gain knowledge of our audience, i.e., is the local publicity working; comparing this data against the number of artists in each of the areas. The result showed that for us, Elmbridge and Epsom & Ewell had a good ratio of visitors to artists in these boroughs. However the sales data showed that even though Elmbridge had a good percentage of visitors they had less value of sales, whereas Mole Valley did well for the value of sales against the number of visitors they had through their doors.

Of course all of the data you collect is subject to human error and artist participation. How accurate is the data that has been submitted and how many of the artists submitted data? For SAOS there was 86% evaluation forms returned, not 100% but much better than 2008 where we only had 58% forms returned.

Total visits per district/borough



total amount of income per district/borough



Evaluation: Putting it all together

From the data collected the task is to piece it all together to provide useful information for the progress of your event. Much of the correlation of the evaluation will be decided on three things:

1. Your objectives
2. Your resources – do you have the time & budget?
3. Your data collection requirements from your artists and visitors

Once you had decide on the above then you can decide how to collect the information:

1. Paper format and input data, this can be done through a programme such as Excel
2. Using an on-line resource, this could be through a programme that you could use for your own questions: Monkey Survey
3. Create your own on-line data collection that could be formatted to the system of your choice, e.g, downloadable spreadsheets.

Once you have extracted the information you need you can compile a document of your:

1. Accountability
2. Strengths & weaknesses
3. Plans for the following year and how you plan to implement them
4. The long term future of your event

Visitor Surveys: Why are they important? I highlight the following points:

- Which audiences are you reaching?
- Which of your marketing material works?
- Which area needs more marketing?
- What does your audience like most about your event?
- What does your audience want you to improve on?
- Building up your mailing list

How to source the right questions and format?

Look at other visitor surveys from other open studio events and your local galleries or arts organisations. The main aim is feedback, once you have decide on the type of feedback you wish to gain then you can work out the exact questions you wish to ask.

The results can lead to development of your event through marketing strategies, reaching a wider audience but most importantly listening to your audience and their favourite parts of your event!

You can scale up your visitor surveys and find out other details:

- Average age of your audience
- The gender of your audience – is your audience mostly female?
- The postcodes of your audience - to find out how far your audience is travelling and how far your marketing reaches

Using this information you can define the outline of your main audience, e.g. the SAOS 2007 visitor survey highlighted that our majority of visitors were aged 40 and over, female and from the South West of Surrey. From this information we planned marketing and promotional strategies to target new audiences in the north of the county and included marketing aimed at younger members of the public.

Of course this type of extensive survey requires artist participation by handing out forms to the visitors to fill in, then you rely on the visitors completing the forms and sending them in for evaluation. Therefore this type of survey is speculative though useful.

To encourage visitor to complete surveys you can offer incentives. Many of the open studio events already offer free prize draws, if your budget is tight, look to local businesses for support, e.g. A local framers or art material shop could supply prizes in exchange for free advertising in your brochures.

Recommendation: Short surveys are good to build up your mailing list and find out what marketing works for your event. The more extensive surveys are useful for audience development and you most likely would find one every 3-5 years is enough for your event development.

Evaluation Case Study

Surrey Artists Open Studios: Why do we evaluate?

A vital part of the annual open studios cycle is the evaluation of each year's event. We need to find out what has been successful and what areas need to be further improved for future years. We need to know how many visitors the event has attracted, how many sales have been achieved (and the value of these sales), which days are more popular for visitors, in which geographical areas we need to work to build public awareness, whether our marketing and publicity has been effective and, most importantly, how satisfactory an experience participation has been for the artists.

The event is hugely subsidised each year by contributions from Surrey County Council and the local borough and district councils and it is our duty to justify this expenditure and make a case for its continuation. We also need to strive to make the experience worthwhile for our artists, to raise the profile of the event, to encourage Surrey artists to take part each year, and to attract ever more visitors to the studios.

How do we evaluate?

We hold a post event meeting, which all participating artists are strongly encouraged to attend. This is their opportunity to share their first hand experiences, to tell us what has and what has not worked for them, and offer suggestions for the development of the event. We also need to gather comprehensive and accurate data.

What is the responsibility of participating artists?

Each artist who registers to take part commits to keeping an accurate record of visitors and sales achieved and any other data we need to gather. They **MUST** send this immediately after the event to Surrey Arts, for us to compile a detailed evaluation report. Artists are reassured that no information submitted will be passed on to other organisations in any way that may be traced back to individual artists or studios. We have no communication with the Inland Revenue. The information needs to be detailed so that we can see how the figures relate to artists in particular areas, solo studios as against group studios, weekdays as against weekends, and so on. For our evaluation to be accurate and worthwhile we **MUST** have this information from each

and every studio taking part in the event and by registering to take part they commit to recording and submitting this information by the required date.

Some extracts from the SAOS evaluation 2009

The results:

In the case of SAOS 2009 evaluation we had done a small visitor feedback form with simple and select questions, our aim was to establish what marketing material helped generate audiences to the event; to find out how popular this event is in the public's eye; to allow the public to have their say and to build up our mailing list.

In the case of marketing the event it was inevitable that 'Word of Mouth' was going to come out on top as many audience surveys have found, personal recommendation on a product is the most valuable marketing tool. It was interesting that radio advertising scored high but banners and fliers scored low. For radio you advertise in the few day's preceding the event and whilst the event is taking place therefore capturing the audiences immediate attention. Though public did not rate banners and fliers highly these two marketing tools have a vital role to play, they are displayed early to give the drip drip marketing effect, so when the main campaign starts the public are: 'That sounds familiar', 'I've heard of that', 'I recognise that'.

With this conclusion for 2010, fliers and banners will still be used as a marketing tool, however to enable a good budget for radio, no new banners will be purchased. In the case of radio advertising, our simple audience survey have provided us with the evidence that radio works and with this we intend to approach the radio station (who we already have a good relationship with) and ask if they can give us more for our money and also for media sponsorship with the angle of supporting our 10th Anniversary year. This one case shows surveys and evaluation can play a vital role for marketing & financing an event.

From the questions we asked, we found out issues concerning the running of SAOS

Such as:

- Lack of artists volunteering
- Unable to source work placement & external volunteers
- Many artists failed to Proof their brochure insertion, therefore print errors were left uncorrected
- The banners highlighted a planning issue with our local authority

The comments we collected have enabled us to Plan & develop this event for 2010, such as:

- Re assess design of brochure layout
- Provide two proof-reading days, one in the west and one in the east of the county
- re-instate final Proofing of brochure by volunteers before it goes to print
- Introducing public access points to studios, e.g. nearest bus route

The evaluation has also raised topics for Our Future including the need to assess the strengths & weaknesses of the time of year the event takes place.

Finally our short Visitor survey on our loyalty card has provided valuable Feedback

Having asked the following questions:

How did they find out about Surrey Artists Open Studios? *(top three highlighted)*

- Word of mouth (through an artist/friend) 41%

- Advert (including radio) 14%
- Picked up/given a brochure 11%

Would they visit open studios again? Of the feedback forms counted 96% said yes

Would they recommend to a friend? Of the feedback forms counted 87% said yes

Any comments about this event including any improvements you would like to see put in place?

This highlighted the access points to studios via public transport

Overall the feedback was excellent with comments like:

'Good Brochure'

'Very Enjoyable'

'I like the event the way it is!'

'It's an excellent scheme'

'A wonderful opportunity to meet artists'

'well signed'

Note for visitor surveys' keep it short and simple, and this will give you valuable feedback and how to promote your project!

A note to leave you with:

In assessing the value of your event ask yourself: What does an artist get for their money?

For SAOS:

- Published on website & brochure
- Access to printed publicity
- Take part in a county event
- Network with other artists
- Join the Surrey Arts database
- Access artists training
- Showcase in promotional events
- Take advantage of events press campaign

Contact:

**Caroline Jackman, Surrey Artists Open Studios Coordinator, T: 01483 519285,
e: caroline.Jackman@surreycc.gov.uk, www.surreyopenstudios.org.uk**