Sharing Your Impact Resource Series

PICKING METHODS FOR MEASURING PROJECT IMPACT

In this resource you will learn how to select methods for evaluating your project's impact and explore methods for different contexts and purposes. **The resource includes the following sections:**

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Step 1: Decide what information you need: Pick information that is relevant, feasible, and high priority.

Step 2: Think about your context: Consider your audience, timing, and whether you need numbers, stories, or both.

Step 3: Explore methods to fit your needs and context: Methods like surveys, conversations, and art will help you connect with your audience.

Example: Methods for Ritcher kickoff event: An example community used dot voting, a graffiti wall, and a focus group to measure their project's impact.

About the series:

An important part of community projects is **sharing their impact**, or the change they create in the community. Sharing impact celebrates your hard work, gets people excited about your project, and shows funders the outcomes you achieved. **Evaluation** is the process of measuring the impacts of your project. Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division and Centre for Suicide Prevention and PolicyWise for Children & Families collaborated to create a resource series to support rural community members in evaluating their mental health projects. To see the entire series, check out its web page.

Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta Mental health for all
centre *for* suicide prevention
PolicyWise for Children & Families
Rural Mental Health Network

PICKING METHODS FOR MEASURING PROJECT IMPACT

As you plan your community mental health project, you might be curious about whether you're having the impact you're hoping for. You know you need to collect data, but there are so many ways to do it. Some ways of collecting data seem boring, but more interesting ways seem like a lot of work. How can you collect the perspectives of your community members in a way that is engaging, efficient, and gives you meaningful insights?

After you have determined your project's goals and expected outcomes, you'll need to figure out what data you need to measure your outcomes and how you'll collect it. Gathering the right information will help you assess your project's impact.

To determine whether your project is on track, you will need to collect data on the indicators you identified. Indicators are the signs your project is meeting its goals. For more information about indicators, check out **Getting Started with Evaluation**. You'll need to figure out how you're going to measure these indicators, or the **methods** you'll use. The methods you use will depend on what skills and resources you have, your community's preferences, your project activities, and many other factors.

High-quality information will help you accurately show the impact of your project. With some creativity, you can use methods that are fun or even meaningful for your community. This resource will guide you through the process of determining what data to collect, choosing the right methods, and ensuring your evaluation is helpful and insightful.

Step 1: Decide what information you need

Before deciding how to collect information, start by identifying the indicators that will show your project is achieving its outcomes. This process involves getting clear about what you want to learn, making sure that the information you gather is right for what you want to know, and assessing whether the information is something you can actually collect.

Your indicators help guide the data collection methods you choose. The methods you use can also help you make your indicators more specific. For example, you might move from a general idea of an indicator to a specific survey question. This back-and-forth relationship between indicators and methods helps make sure that the information you gather is useful.

Example: A rural community, Ritcher, held a project kickoff event where community members could sign up for gardening shifts and workshops and share mental health supports. Organizers focused on two key outcomes each with two indicators:

Outcome 1: Building community connections

- *Measuring new interactions and relationships formed at the event*
- *Assessing participants' sense of belonging before and after attending*

Outcome 2: Spreading awareness of mental health events and resources

- *Understanding participants' prior knowledge of available resources*
- *Measuring changes in awareness post-event*

By taking the time to determine what data you need, you can pick the most effective way to gather information about your project's desired outcomes.

Considerations for your data needs

Relevance to project goals: Information you gather should be directly connected to the objectives of your project.

Example: if you hoped to decrease stigma about mental illness, you would want to ask people whether they feel more comfortable talking about mental illness since participating in your project. You wouldn't want to ask them whether they've developed new friendships through the project because it isn't relevant to stigma.

Feasibility: Focus on collecting information that is practical and within your available resources and timeline.

Example: if you hope to strengthen mental well-being, participants' therapy records could tell you whether your project achieved this, but this data wouldn't be feasible to get or appropriate to use. It would be better to ask people directly about whether their mental well-being has improved since your project.

High priority: Not all information is equally important. Identify the critical information you need to capture your project's impact.

Example: on your survey, you could ask each participant ten questions for each outcome, but the survey would be really long, and participants would give up part way through. It would be better to ask one or two of the best questions to make sure you get the data you need.

Step 2: Think about your context

There are many ways to collect information, but you need to decide which strategy is most appropriate in the context you're working within. Here are a few things to think about before you pick evaluation methods for your project:

Audience

- **Engagement:** Choose methods that suit participants' needs, abilities, and cultures. For example, if participants have limited access to technology, avoid computer surveys. If you are working with youth, explore ways to make evaluation fun and engaging. If you are working with communities with oral traditions, give participants opportunities to tell stories.

- **Privacy and Sensitivity:** Consider which topics should use more private or public methods. For example, if asking about sensitive topics, like mental health challenges or trauma, make sure to plan a more private evaluation, like an anonymous survey.

- **Accessibility and Inclusion:** It's important to make evaluation methods as accessible as possible. For example, provide translations or use visuals to help accommodate language barriers. Use verbal methods or assistance for participants with literacy or accessibility challenges.

Timing

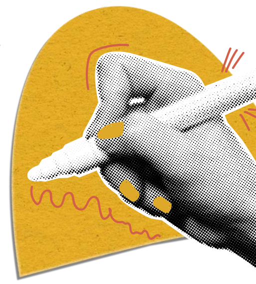
- **Time availability:** Decide if evaluation can be integrated into an activity, handled quickly at the end of an activity, or conducted at a later date. For short activities, it usually makes sense to collect information right away, but for longer activities, it can be appropriate to engage people later.

- **Timing of feedback:** For measuring impact, evaluations often work best at the end of an activity. Decide if a single, year-end evaluation or evaluations at multiple events will suit your goals better. Some outcomes will be felt immediately after an event or experience, while others take some time to develop.

Type of Information

Data can take different forms, each offering unique insights. Understanding the types of information you can collect, whether numerical, descriptive, or a mix, helps make sure you choose the methods best suited to answering your questions.

- **Numeric, or quantitative, data:** focuses on quantities, meaning it can be expressed with numbers. It relates to things that can be counted (e.g., how many people participated in an event, what percent of people agree with a statement, what percent of people fall into each category, or how many resources were distributed through the project).



- **Descriptive, or qualitative, data:** describes things using categories, characteristics, or personal opinions and experiences. It can capture feelings and emotions, attitudes, perceptions, or beliefs. This information can be thought of as the stories behind the numbers.

- **Mixed, combining quantitative and qualitative, data:** Combines elements of numerical and descriptive data. It is best used when you want a more complete understanding of a topic.

By carefully considering the timing, audience, and the type of information you need, you can select evaluation methods that align with your goals, your participants' needs, and your community context.

Step 3: Explore methods to fit your needs and context

Now that you know the specific information you need to assess your project's impact and the context you're collecting data in, you're ready to consider what specific method to use to evaluate your project. It can be tempting to stick with methods you've used or seen before, but these methods might not be best for your community. Try out new strategies and see what gets you the best quality data. Below is a list of different types of methods to capture the impact of your project in your community:

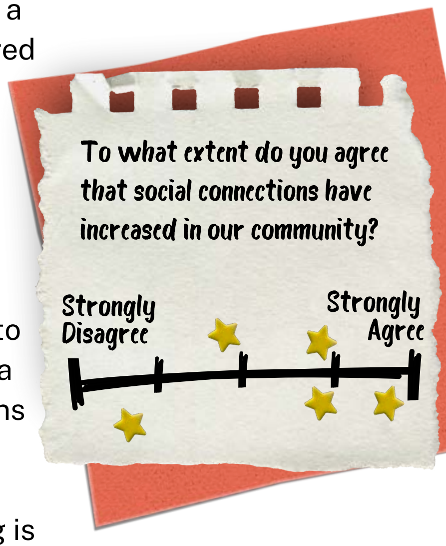
Surveys

Surveys gather general information from a community by asking people questions about themselves. They can be done in person, on paper, or online.

Surveys quickly collect general information from a large number of people. They are inexpensive and people can remain anonymous when filling them out. Many online survey tools have different question styles you can look at for ideas. People might not be motivated to complete your survey if it is too long or the questions are confusing. For more information on surveys, check out [Creating Surveys & Collecting Numeric Information].

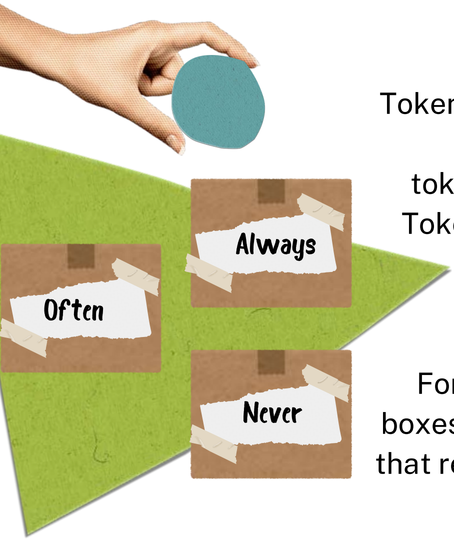
Dot Voting

Dot voting is a method where participants vote on options or statements on a poster board by placing a dot, sticker, or other marking next to their preferred option. After voting, you can count the number of votes for each answer choice. You can use different coloured dots to represent two different time points, such as before and after a workshop. You can use dot voting for multiple choice questions, like you can with a survey, but in a way that feels more interactive.



Dot voting is a great option for in-person events. It is easy and inexpensive to set up. Dot voting posters can be displayed off to the side by a common area or be integrated into a facilitated discussion. Dot voting is ideal for situations with only a few options to choose from. If there are too many options, participants might feel overwhelmed and use voting "shortcuts," such as voting with the majority instead of thinking about their response. Dot voting is not appropriate for sensitive topics, such as experiences of mental illness.

Token Voting



Token voting involves participants placing objects into labelled boxes to vote on options or statements. Like with dot voting, you can use different coloured tokens to represent different time points, such as before and after an activity. Token voting can be used to ask multiple choice questions, like with surveys or dot voting, but in a way that feels fun and hands-on. Token voting is most appropriate if you have one main question you're interested in.

For more personal or private questions, you can use non-transparent boxes or boxes with lids. This way, participants might be more likely to vote on an answer that reflects their true opinions, rather than be influenced by a majority vote. For more information on dot and token voting, check out The Facilitation Hub's Guide to Dot and Token Voting Resource.

Program Logs

Program logs involve gathering information about the design, implementation, and activities of a project, such as its outputs, processes, timelines, and resources used. Instead of collecting data from the participants in your project, you track the metrics that naturally occur, such as attendance numbers, numbers of resources distributed, or social media metrics. For example, to measure engagement in your community, you could count the number of social media likes.

Program logs are easy and inexpensive to track. They are helpful for reporting and applying for grants. However, program logs are limited in their ability to tell you about outcomes. For example, if you held a mental health workshop, you could count the attendees, but you wouldn't have any information about what they learned, whether they were listening, or the event's impact.

One-on-one conversations

One-on-one conversations are detailed conversations with one participant to gather personal insights. They are ideal in situations where you want to gather in-depth information about a topic. These conversations can happen spontaneously or as a planned interview. You can use a structured set of questions or let the conversation flow naturally.

One-on-one conversations can help participants feel comfortable to open up so you can collect meaningful information. They also allow you to observe participants' body language and monitor them for any discomfort. Think carefully about how to phrase your questions so that you don't influence participants to give a specific answer. For more information on how to phrase questions, check out **Gathering Formal & Informal Stories**.

Group Discussions

Group discussions are collaborative conversations where participants discuss a topic in detail. Some examples of group discussions include focus groups or sharing circles. Similar to one-on-one conversations, they are best to use when you want to collect detailed information about people's experiences.

Group discussions have many of the same benefits as one-on-one conversations, and you can save time and resources by talking to many people at once. You can't guarantee anonymity with group discussions, which may be a concern in small communities. To help people feel more comfortable, you can ask participants not to share details of the conversation with anyone outside the discussion group. Some participants might contribute more than others. It's a good practice to ask quieter people in the group to share in case they don't want to interrupt other participants. For more information on how to facilitate group conversations, check out **Gathering Formal & Informal Stories**.

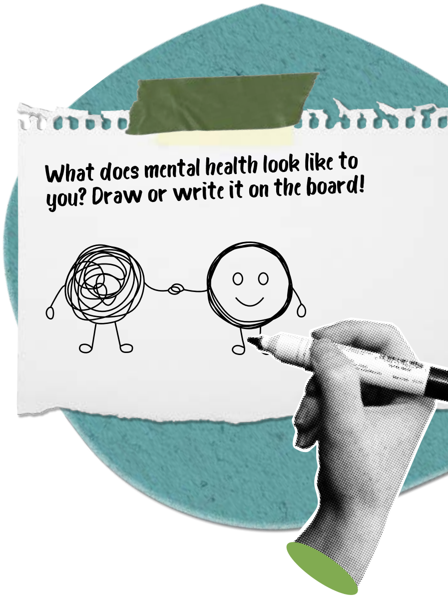
World Cafes

World Cafes can be used when hosting large groups to encourage conversation, story sharing, problem solving, and planning. Each table discusses a different topic. One person remains at the table to be the record keeper and share what the previous group discussed.

World Cafes encourage diverse perspectives because each participant brings new ideas as they rotate between tables. Since participants are exposed to new ideas at each table, it can promote creative thinking and collaborative problem solving. World Cafes can be integrated into workshops or community events. World Cafes can be very time-consuming. They also require people to stay on task. For more information, check out Guide to the World Cafe Method.

Graffiti Walls

Graffiti walls combine a written and visual approach. This method involves putting an open-ended question on a poster to encourage participants to share their thoughts through words, phrases, or drawings.



Graffiti walls are inclusive because they give everyone a voice, including those who might feel too shy to speak up. Some participants, especially youth, enjoy the opportunity for visual storytelling and creativity. Graffiti walls are also easy to set up – you put up a sheet of paper and provide supplies such as stickers, markers, and pictures. While graffiti walls are fun and engaging, it can be tricky to summarize them in reporting.

If you choose a graffiti wall, it helps to ensure that your open-ended question is clear and focused. Otherwise, graffiti walls can become disorganized. For more information on facilitating a graffiti wall, check out YouthREX's Graffiti Wall Guide resource.

Photovoice

Photovoice uses photography to gather participants' stories or perspectives. Participants take pictures of their environments, people, or things that matter to them in response to a particular question. The pictures can communicate participants' beliefs in powerful ways. After they take photos, participants gather to discuss, interpret, and analyze the photos together.

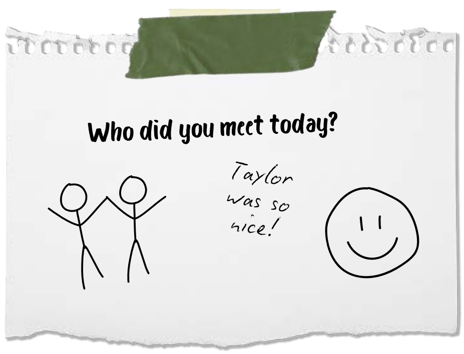
This method can be effective for populations who might feel hesitant to verbally share their feelings, such as youth. It is also inclusive towards participants with language barriers, and can be integrated as part of a workshop. Photovoice can be time consuming for participants, especially if you incorporate some teaching about photography. For more information on photovoice, check out YouthREX's Guide to Photovoice.

Example: Methods for Ritcher kickoff event

Ritcher is a small town that prioritizes the community's mental well-being. Ritcher wants to rebuild residents' connection to nature and deepen social connections. To achieve this, project leaders hope to involve Ritcher community members in a garden project.

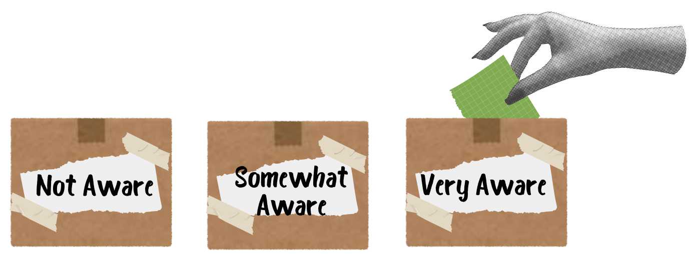
Graffiti Wall – Building Community Connections

At the kick-off event, organizers set up a large poster with the question: "Who did you meet today?" Participants were invited to write or draw their responses, share names or memorable conversations, or use symbols (e.g., smiley faces or connection lines) to represent their experiences.



Dot Voting Station – Mental Health Support Awareness

To assess awareness of mental health supports, participants were given a blue sticker upon arrival and asked to place it in one of three boxes labeled "Not Aware," "Somewhat Aware," and "Very Aware" to indicate their awareness of mental health resources in the community. As they left the event, they were given a red sticker and asked to vote again on the same question. Comparing the number of stickers in each category before and after the event showed changes in awareness levels.



End of Year Focus Group

Organizers conducted a focus group at the end of the year to explore changes in community members' sense of belonging and awareness of mental health resources. Participants who attended the kick-off event reflected on their experiences and shared how their sense of connection and awareness evolved over the course of the project.

These three examples use interactive strategies to engage different populations, making the most of in-person settings with hands-on activities. They also consider the sensitivity of the topics by allowing participants to share their experiences and awareness levels in a comfortable and approachable way.