A Common Standard for the Evaluation of Public Engagement: An Overview

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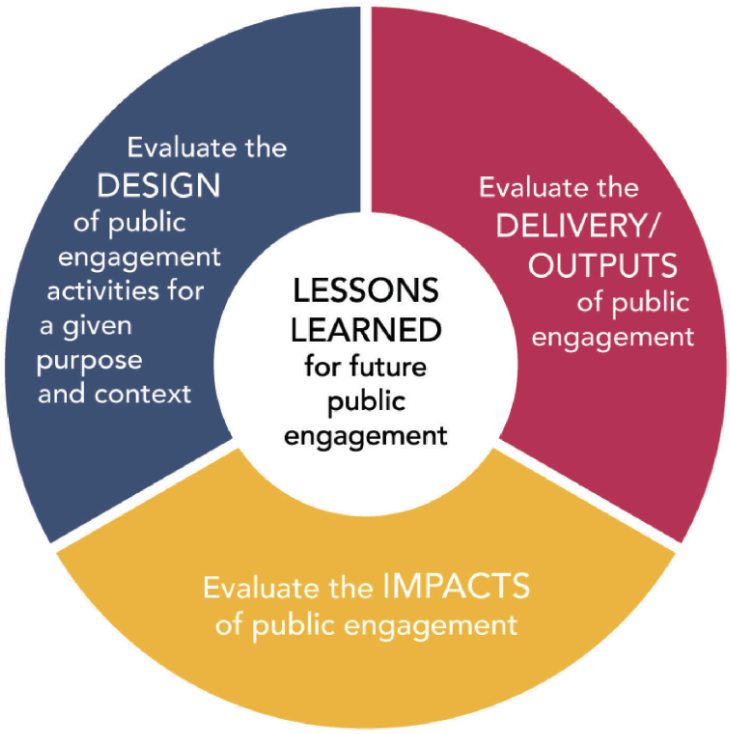
As scholars and universities have begun to focus more readily on public engagement, major questions have developed around how to evaluate engaged activities. Evaluation in public engagement poses significant challenges, not least because of the diversity of forms of engagement, possible impacts (both direct and indirect), and the timescale in which these impacts could occur. However, without evaluation, it is difficult to understand the effectiveness of individual engaged efforts, compare across these efforts, and develop best practices.

A team of practitioners and scholars in the U.K. attempted to address these issues in the evaluation of public engagement and have developed a conceptual framework for a "common standard" for the evaluation of public engagement.[1] The conceptual framework lays out three ways to evaluate a publicly engaged effort: by evaluating the **design** of the activity, the **delivery or outputs** of that activity, or the **impacts** of that activity. Together, these three facets help to drive lessons learned from that engagement activity that can then be collected and compared with other engagement efforts to drive the development of ethical, equitable practices in engagement.

Figure 1: Three ways to evaluate public engagement



[1] Reed et al. (2018). A common standard for the evaluation of public engagement with research. *Research for All* 2(1): 143-162. https://doi.org/10.18546/RFA.02.1.13.

Created 03/2024

The team further operationalized this framework with an accompanying planning template, as well as a toolkit to jumpstart the use of the framework in practice.[2]

Figure 2: Public engagement evaluation planning template

Design	**Have you evaluated the design of your public engagement?**		
	Does the design follow good practice, underpinned by sound ethics?	Have you systematically identified relevant publics (and stakeholders)?	
		Do you understand the expectations and specific benefits each group is likely to derive from engagement?	
		Have you identified and made contingencies for any risks & assumptions?	
		Have you tested your activities and sought feedback from relevant publics?	
	How well do you know the context you are working in, and have you adapted the design of your activities to this context?	Do your proposed engagement activities match the interests and needs of your target publics and their social and cultural context?	
		Is there experience of engagement and existing trust between members of the research community and publics?	
		Do you have sufficient resources and support for engagement in this particular context e.g. professional facilitation, event planning etc.?	
Delivery outputs	**What immediate outputs do you want to deliver from engagement?**	**How will you know you delivered these outputs?** *Identify indicators to show whether your delivery of public engagement activities is providing the immediate outcomes you want*	**What tool will you use to track your progress?** *Identify evaluation tools that will enable you to track the indicators you have identified*
Impact	**What benefits or "impacts" do you want to achieve from engagement?**	**How will you know you achieved these impacts?** *Identify indicators to show whether your public engagement is leading to "benefits" or impacts*	**What tool will you use to track your progress?** *Identify evaluation tools that will enable you to track the indicators you have identified*

It's important to note that evaluating these different facets of an engaged activity (design, delivery/outputs, and impacts) requires different evaluative questions, methods, and indicators. However, by planning for and articulating more clearly which aspect of an engaged activity you are evaluating, you can develop a clearer picture of the effectiveness of your engaged efforts.

How might you employ this common standard to evaluate your own public engagement efforts?

[2] Queen Mary University of London. *The Public Engagement Evaluation Toolkit.* https://www.qmul.ac.uk/publicengagement/support/evaluation-toolkit/