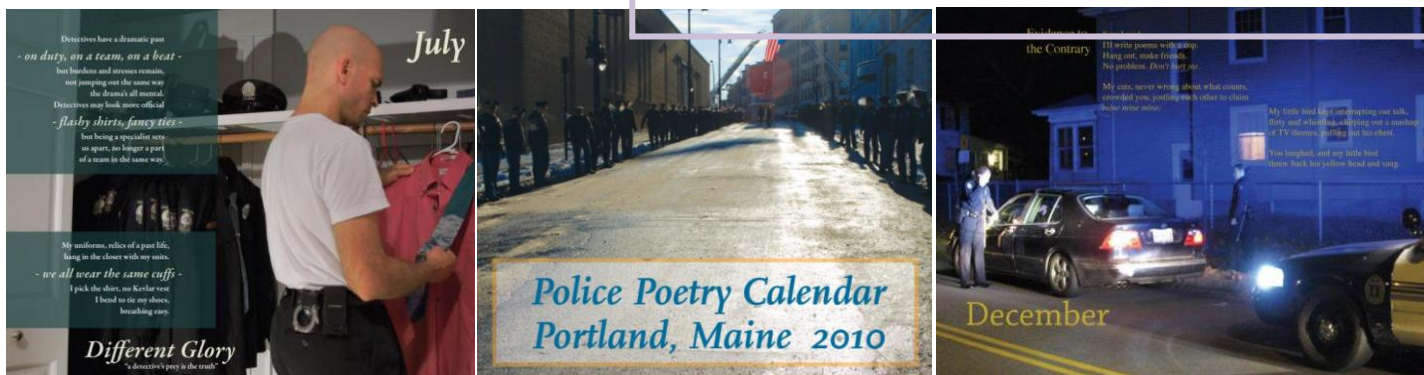


A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change

A collection of writings depicting the wide range of ways the arts make community, civic, and social change.



EVALUATING IMPACT/APPRECIATING EVALUATION

By Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon

Two artists' stories convey how evaluation helped them know what difference their projects made and show how evaluation can be doable and even enjoyable!

Most community-based arts practitioners feel overwhelmed by what it might take to implement credible evaluation. They're pressed to define what is meant by "civic" or "social" impact, whose standards to apply, what evidence to look for, and what to document and track. They wonder how to gauge hard-to-measure outcomes such as shifts in attitude or understanding and whether they can attribute civic outcomes to their community arts efforts, exclusive of other factors. Rha Goddess's Hip Hop Mental Health Project and Terra Moto's (led by artist Marty Pottenger) and the City of Portland's Art At Work initiative offer practical examples of evaluation approaches that served to enhance understanding of both creative and social effects. The paper provides entre to defining clear and reasonable outcomes that creative work is suited to achieve and determining what indicators or evidence of change to look for, while highlighting and linking to resources on Animating Democracy's new IMPACT web site.

This paper will appear in a new book and online source, Building Communities, Not Audiences: The Future of the Arts in the United States, edited by Doug Borwick, to be released in 2012. The book examines the relationship between established arts organizations and their communities. It analyzes the sources of separation between the general public and the Western "high art" tradition, discusses the benefits to communities and to the arts of reducing that separation, and provides an introduction to the means of doing so.

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Improving Municipal Government through Arts-based Engagement: A Golden Story about Impact

On a sunny July day in 2011 in downtown Portland, Maine, Mayor Nick Mavodones is poised before a brightly painted mural. He announces to the press and the community that Portland's Art At Work program has been selected as a recipient of a \$100,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The [Our Town](#) grant supports creative activity that fosters public/private partnerships that strengthen the social, economic, and physical characters of neighborhoods. The grant will extend the scope of Art At Work which seeks to improve municipal government through strategic arts projects with municipal employees, elected officials, and local artists.

Artist Marty Pottenger, who created Art At Work through her arts nonprofit, [Terra Moto, Inc.](#) and in partnership with the City of Portland, takes the podium next. From her perspective, having worked with Portland's city workers for four years, she underscores that, "The biggest asset any city has is its human capital. In our case, these are our Portland residents and our city workers. . . . And one of humanity's core elements and engines is creativity. I thought, what if people in local government could connect to this place of creativity in themselves when they're actually forming policy; when they're thinking of practical ways to keep things in a forward moving direction."



Police Poetry Project in Portland, ME by Art At Work.
Photo credit: Terra Moto, Inc.

Assistant Chief of Police Mike Sauschuck, "not surprised" by this national recognition, steps up. He has personally been involved in the Police Poetry Project along with fellow police officers who worked with local artists to write poetry about their work and lives and to share them via an annual calendar and through public readings and dialogues. The aim of this project is to improve department morale and public perception of the police. "After four years, I couldn't be more impressed with the outcomes that we've had in the community, within our own hallways, and personally," Sauschuck also cites a recent play which police officers performed with immigrant youth. "Interaction with the community has certainly improved. This project has allowed the citizens to see police officers beyond the uniform as human beings with feelings and thoughts."

Mayor Nick Mavodones acknowledges the power of art in what can be exhausting and even dangerous work that often goes unappreciated by the public. "Our city workers, the things they

deal with on a day-to-day basis, they've been able to express through art. This project has been a bridge to the rest of the community."

Using visual art, performance, poetry, photography, video and audio, Art At Work has succeeded in fostering a culture of creativity that has directly involved over 60 city employees and 30 local artists. Employees in Police, Public Works and Human Service departments have created 200 original artworks that have engaged over 25,000 people in the region and reached over a million through local and major media outlets. Their posters, photographs, prints and poems hang in galleries, city parking garages, lunchrooms, recycling centers, police stations, libraries, conference rooms and maintenance shops. The program has been nominated for a National League of Cities Best Practices award (2009) and selected by the Mayor to represent Portland in the NEA's Mayors' Initiative (2010).¹

Finally, Anne Haskell, Maine House of Representatives, takes the stand. She testifies to the importance of telling stories to get to know each other—to reveal, "not only the stories of work but the stories of who we are as individuals." "The police calendar," she says "really helped to foster communications and connections that might not have been fostered absent the impact of that art."

This grant award, these testimonials by civic leaders, the numbers of Portlanders reached, and the effects of Art At Work on city workers are golden. They happen in the context of a city, like thousands of others that are facing increasingly complex municipal challenges and diminishing resources. The arts-based civic engagement work in Portland, as the [Art At Work](#) website confidently proclaims, has successfully demonstrated how "artmaking is a valuable, cost-effective and sustainable vehicle for strengthening cross-cultural understanding, enhancing communication, raising morale, and increasing understanding and cooperation between city agencies and the public."

To view the Our Town announcement press conference [video], [click here](#).

A CONTEXT FOR EVALUATION

As Portland's leaders and workers have discovered, art is a powerful force for illuminating civic experience. For over a decade, [Animating Democracy](#)² has been exploring this power by observing community-based arts endeavors nationally, and more specifically, those with explicit civic or social goals. Art has a unique capacity to communicate beyond the limits of language, express difficult ideas through metaphor, and creates indelible images. The arts open hearts and minds. We have seen how artists and arts organizations are

strong partners with civic organizations and other sectors, applying the power of both creative process and product to foster productive dialogue and engagement within and between groups. The arts inform and empower. They can broaden citizen voice and participation, give disenfranchised groups access to the civic realm who had not felt welcome, enhance public understanding of complex and often divisive issues, and motivate people to make change. The arts serve as catalysts, conveners, forums, and forms of civic engagement and social change.

While the potency of the arts as a contributor to civic and social change is widely observed, arts practitioners are increasingly asked to substantiate beyond anecdotal evidence how investments in arts-based civic engagement lead to positive change in communities.

Funders experience greater pressure, too, to demonstrate the impact of their investments. Likewise, civic organizations, community organizers, and policy makers who have the power to include the arts in community efforts and to allocate resources need to be convinced that the arts add value to impact.

As arts organizations and artists try to meet this challenge, they are pressed to define what is meant by “civic” or “social” impact, whose standards to apply, what evidence to look for, and what to document and track. They wonder how to gauge hard-to-measure outcomes such as shifts in attitude or understanding and whether they can attribute civic outcomes to their community arts efforts, exclusive of other factors. Recognizing that some outcomes might not be felt until well after a project concludes, many ask what they realistically can do to track evidence of change over a longer term. With limited staff and financial resources to support the demands of serious evaluation, efforts are often constrained, even with the best of intentions.

Arts practitioners most often do program evaluation focusing largely on what worked and didn’t about program design and implementation. Some have gained skill and/or partnered with researchers to demonstrate the economic effects of their work. Arts practitioners consistently find it more challenging to assess community level impact, particularly against the less tangible social or civic changes that have been defined. But, without more concrete evidence, the arts’ full contribution can be undervalued if not missed entirely.

Despite the challenges, there are things that arts practitioners and their partners can do and choices they can make in focusing on evaluation, starting with defining clear and reasonable outcomes that the creative work is suited to achieve and determining what indicators or evidence of change to look for. This chapter focuses primarily on these fundamental aspects of evaluation. It is not a how-to guide but rather establishes why evaluation is important, useful, and doable!

Civic Outcomes for Art At Work

In Portland, artist Marty Pottenger wanted to know what changes in public perception of Portland police occurred once the poetry calendars appeared across the city and the public had a chance to attend readings and dialogues with the police. She wanted to understand what, if any, shifts in morale took place within the Police Department that could be attributed to Art At Work as well as how government leaders would view the role of art in improving municipal government.

She knew that the program's civic outcomes would have to be measured and supported with evidence meaningful to key stakeholders—city government and department leaders, workers, and the public—if the program was to continue beyond Portland's three-year commitment and with greater public dollar investment.

Pottenger therefore jumped at the chance to work with researcher and evaluation professional Christine Dwyer of RMC Research, based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire as part of the [Arts & Civic Engagement Impact Initiative](#) developed by Animating Democracy. Pottenger and Dwyer had the opportunity to team up in the initiative's Field Lab to explore together how to gauge and describe the social outcomes of Art At Work activities. They worked over a period of a year using an evaluation framework developed by Dwyer to systematically define outcomes and indicators for the Police Poetry Project. Their learning was documented in an [Art At Work Evaluation Plan](#) so that others grappling with similar questions could gain insights and approaches from their collaborative inquiry.³

Stories and resources referenced in this chapter come from Animating Democracy's [Arts & Civic Engagement Impact Initiative](#). The Impact Initiative works to advance understanding of and help make the case for the social efficacy of arts-based engagement work. Among its goals is to strengthen the capacity of practitioners to assess and describe social/civic outcomes. The two stories in this chapter emerged from the initiative's Field Lab which paired practitioners with evaluators to examine how to gauge and describe social change outcomes of their work. The initiative coalesces tools, frameworks, writings, and other resources on Animating Democracy's [IMPACT](#) website that have valuable application for community-based arts endeavors. Several papers and resources are referenced that provide both practical and theory-based investigation of concepts introduced here.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SOCIAL IMPACT? DEFINING INDICATORS

In conventional program evaluation for a performance or artist residency, arts organizations might document the numbers of participants and audience members, assess how the program helped to meet organizational goals, such as education about art forms, or assess community members' experience of the art form in terms of joy and fostering interest in art. Artists, curators, and programmers are often interested in the success of the artistic product in terms of aesthetic investigation, advancing a genre or type of work within the field, or contributing to artistic methodology or practice. In community-based arts, where community members are engaged in informing and often creating the work, goals related to actually engaging in art, individual transformation for participants from that engagement, reaffirming cultural identity, and community-building often come into play.

Based on Animating Democracy's research, arts practitioners and their partners most commonly aspire to and achieve *social or civic outcomes* that fall into one or more of these six "families":

- Enhanced awareness, knowledge of social or civic concerns;
- Improved public discourse around issues;
- Clarified values and confirmed or shifted attitudes;
- Increased capacity—skills, resources, status—to engage in civic concerns;
- Increased and more effective participation and action; and
- Improved systems and policies that ensure social justice.

Diagram 1 shows what difference arts and culture can make along a continuum of these kinds of social outcomes.

ANIMATE
INFORM
INFLUENCE
EXPRESS
ENGAGE

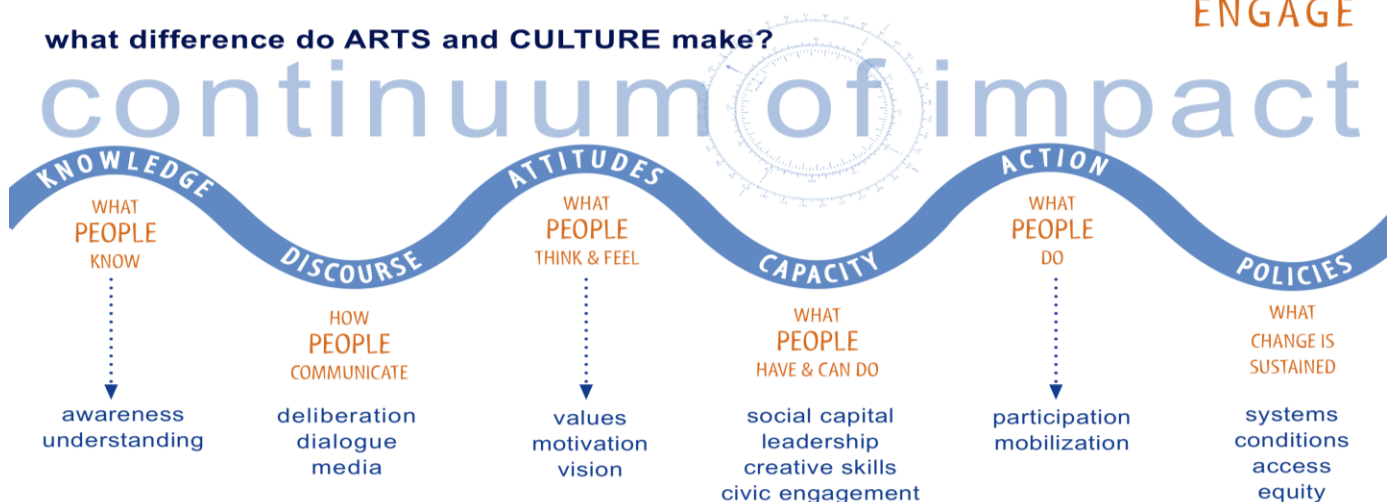
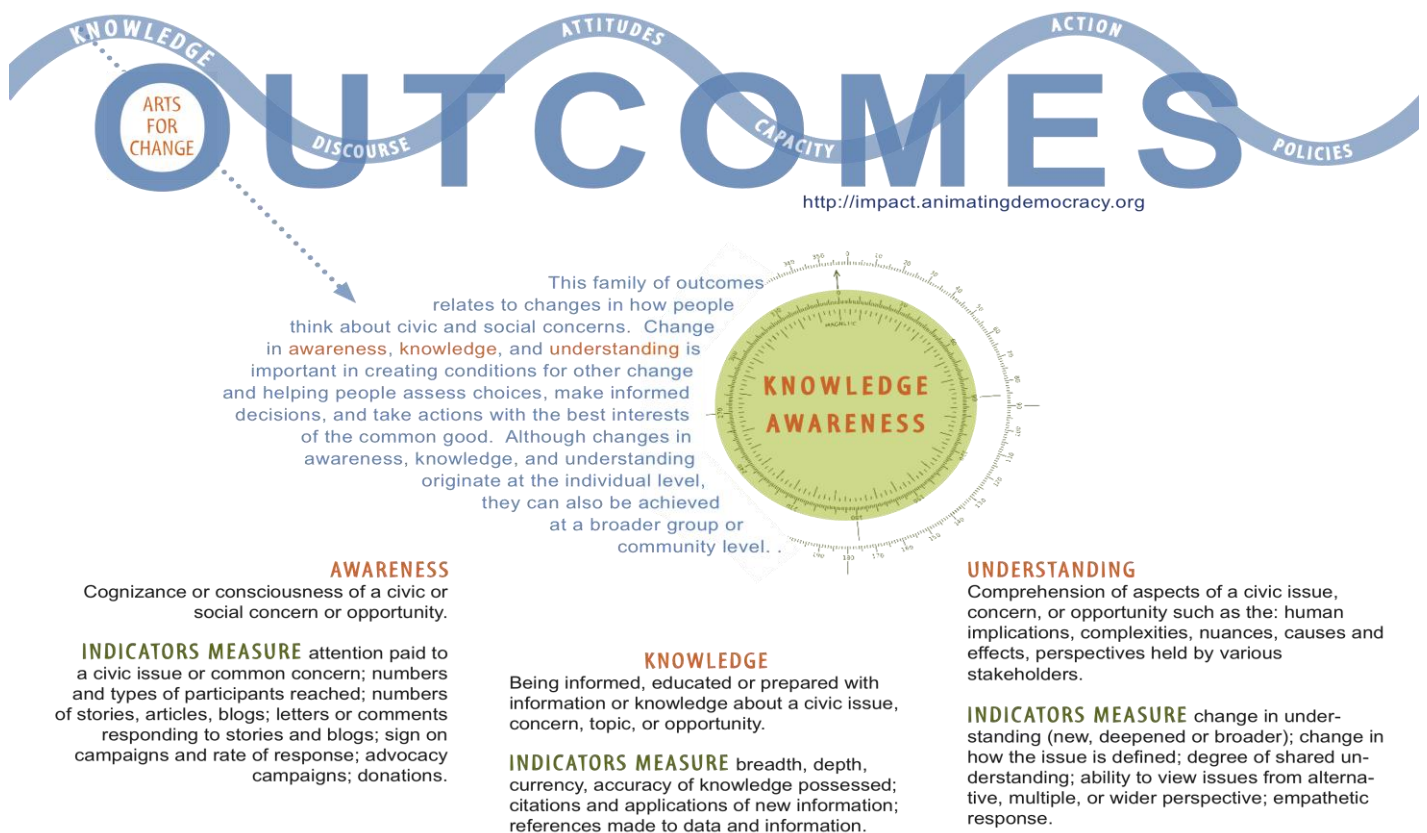


Diagram 1: Continuum of Impact

The wavy line suggests that these outcomes are not necessarily sequential within a project or across an arts organization’s many efforts. Nor is there a hierarchy of importance among these outcomes. Relationship building among fragmented and uninvolved residents may be the most critical need and desired outcome of a neighborhood arts project because it will help to build civic engagement capacity for a range of endeavors. In another context, policy change around an issue of environmental justice may be paramount.

With the help of evaluator Suzanne Callahan, Animating Democracy developed a set of definitions for each of the six outcome families above. Diagram 2 shows definitions related to the Knowledge and Awareness family. Such definitions can help to isolate and more clearly articulate the type of change(s) that is at the heart of a project or an organization’s work.

For definitions of all six families of outcomes, [click here](#).



Examples of outcomes, indicators, and data collection methods →

Diagram 2: Awareness, Knowledge, Understanding

Because civic engagement and the creation of human, social, and community capital⁴ are acknowledged as the place where the arts make perhaps their greatest contribution to social change, it is important to understand such effects in order to discover the best approaches to measurement and casemaking. These effects include: heightened awareness or deepened knowledge of civic/social issues; increased understanding of other perspectives; increased or more diverse participation; increased capacity for engagement and dialogue; new relationships built and/or existing relationships strengthened; and connections made that cross institutional boundaries such as policy domains or sectors.

Shifting Attitudes through the Power of Theater: The Story of LOW



Rha Goddess performing in *LOW*. Photo: Jacques Jean Tiziou.

The Hip Hop Mental Health Project (HHMHP) was an initiative of 1+1+1=ONE, a Brooklyn-based nonprofit founded and led by artist [Rha Goddess](#) that utilizes her methodology of “Arts-based Civic Transformation” to empower individuals and communities to affect positive social change. At the center of the HHMHP was a one-woman performance titled *LOW*, created and performed by Goddess. In it, she depicts the very human reality of mental illness in our culture by fusing monologue, movement, and music to tell the story of a vibrant young woman’s all too common journey through

the mental health system. Through the touring theater piece and structured post-performance dialogues, Goddess leads audiences to explore, and maybe confront, the mythology, stigma, fear, and confusion surrounding mental illness.⁵

Goddess was compelled to create HHMHP after the suicide of a close friend and mentor to many artists in the hip hop community. She observed that the hip hop community was largely silent about his struggle. Goddess’s experience working with issues of urban violence and trauma pointed to a lack of safe outlets for young people of color who experience mental illness. She believed that hip hop performance could create a safe place to confront the issue. The Project was committed to engaging young urban and low-income communities of color as they are the most adversely affected by the disparities in mental health diagnosis, treatment, and care, as well as those who provide support to them.

Through the integration of performance and structured dialogues, the HHMHP works to impact public discourse and values. Goddess explicitly defined her desired outcomes as being to:

- educate about the signs and symptoms of mental illness and tools for recovery;
- decrease the social stigma of mental illness;
- explore possible solutions to some of the life stressors that influence mental health;
- increase awareness of, and access to, mental health services and support; and
- influence public discourse about mental health.

As part of Animating Democracy’s Arts & Civic Engagement Impact Initiative, Rha Goddess seized two opportunities to assess how performances of *LOW* and related dialogues might uncover, influence, and even change audiences’ views on mental health and illness. Two complementary studies—one with City University of New York and the other with evaluator Suzanne Callahan, of [Callahan Consulting for the Arts](#) – allowed comparison of research processes and results. The two studies also informed Goddess about how specifically the theater piece served to move, challenge, engage, and inform audiences.

For more on the evaluation processes related to the HHMHP, read [Moments of Transformation: Rha Goddess’s *LOW* and Understanding Social Change](#).

OF WHAT VALUE IS EVALUTION? APPRECIATING EVALUATION

Leaders of Art At Work and the Hip Hop Mental Health Project appreciate the critical value of evaluation in their work.

“Having an in-depth evaluation design process and such a respected evaluator allowed partnering municipal government agencies and employees to see the project as a more serious, credible and useful activity.”

Marty Pottenger
Art At Work

Evaluation helps in understanding contribution to social change, that is, how arts-based programs are moving the needle to achieve intended social or civic outcomes. For example, mental health workers connected to the HHMHP observed and commented that the “treatment” of a provocative work of art coupled with dialogue works better than counseling in getting people to disclose their issues and pain related to mental illness. For Rha Goddess, this and other evidence of effects gained through her

evaluation efforts would influence future bookings. It would help her respond to prospective community and mental health partners' questions about how and whether art contributes to changing attitudes about mental health.

Evaluation helps arts practitioners be accountable to their own organizations, partners, and public and private funders. In an ongoing way, the overarching goal of Art At Work “to improve municipal government” became a check point to beg the questions during implementation: How are we doing in relation to this goal? How are we getting at the things that matter to municipal department heads and city officials? The evaluation kept Pottenger focused on her “theory of change,” that is, that the process of making art dramatically increases participants’ ability to function as a team; understand other viewpoints; open lines of communications between the Police Department, the City, and the community; envision positive outcomes; and take inspired risks that lead to innovative solutions. Pottenger was able to integrate evaluation findings in her discussions with heads of Portland’s Police, Public Works, and Human Services departments, as well as funders and participants, and to effectively frame the case for the program’s continuation.

Evaluation helps improve civically engaged arts practice. Fundamentally, evaluation improves practice and programs in order to be most effective in achieving positive social change. It can help clarify capacity needs and issues, sharpen roles, and enhance partnerships. Evaluation reveals the efficacy of implementation strategies and creative methodologies; for example, it gave Rha Goddess insight into how specific artistic choices created safe space, impacted audiences’ emotional response to the performance and the issue, increased understanding of mental illness and homelessness in more nuanced ways, and fostered willingness to engage in dialogue, etc. It can help you know *how* art “moved the needle” to effect certain change.

Evaluation and Planning: Working Together

“Similar to a complex construction job, the project lives inside my head differently every day from having incorporated an evaluation plan.”

Marty Pottenger, Art At Work

Evaluation planning helps in planning the arts-based project or program. Imagining what the desired social change might look like can help make programmatic choices and establish priorities that are aligned with resources and what the art project is best suited to achieve. Planning for evaluation at the same time one plans for the program can help focus a program’s intentions, identify who needs to be involved in evaluation, and evaluation approaches that will be most suitable and feasible.

The evaluation framework that Christine Dwyer and Pottenger created For Art At Work included:

- the major questions to be answered in an evaluation which relate to outcomes;
- the indicators of behavioral or attitudinal change that would be used to respond to the questions;
- potential data collection instruments and strategies that are appropriate for the indicators;
- notes about the target sample for a particular data collection strategy;
- timing of data collection; and
- where relevant, any appropriate comparisons that might be made.

The framework was developed in consultation with key City partners. In the short-term, it guided evaluation of the Police Poetry Project, providing a comprehensive “menu” from which Pottenger and others could isolate the most important outcomes and indicators to focus on in evaluation, given learning priorities and capacity. Over time, the framework would allow similar priorities and choices to be made. Also, by focusing data collecting over time, the framework could be used to further substantiate the case for the role of the arts in Portland’s municipal systems and processes.

The benefits of linking evaluation planning to program planning goes beyond helping to clarify intent and focusing program activities to meet that intent. Planning for evaluation while you’re developing a program also helps:

- decide the evaluation approach to take;
- anticipate kinds of data to collect;
- determine whom you may need to enlist to conduct or assist with evaluation; and
- assess resources needed.

YOU CAN MEASURE SOCIAL CHANGE! INDICATORS ARE KEY

The push by many trustees, funders, civic leaders, and community partners to move beyond anecdotal evidence and to provide quantitative evidence makes the question of measuring social change not only challenging but often exasperating for arts practitioners. Some find it simply overwhelming because they lack evaluation expertise. Others ask: How do you measure such intangible results as “transformation,” “community building,” or “social justice?” They may resist the idea of applying empirical approaches that they believe are ill-suited to art and social change. Yet, others see usefulness and necessity in getting “more concrete.” They want to know if they are meeting their aspirations and goals and why or why not. They want to be convincing to social service or movement building partners or funders and to compete effectively for resources. But even champions of evaluation know that it can be a demanding enterprise, often requiring the help of outside researchers or evaluators, and demanding time and money that are not often available.

While there is truth in all of this, almost any project that aspires to contribute to community, civic, or social change should be able to measure change at some level. Many evaluators and researchers proclaim, “if you can describe it, you can measure it.” A key to this is in identifying *indicators*—measurable elements that signify that change has occurred. Indicators address the question: “If change occurred, how would we know? What would it look like?” Identifying *indicators* of change suggests what kind of data to collect.

Indicators for *LOW*

Artist Rha Goddess and evaluator Suzanne Callahan looked at HHMHP’s desired outcomes related to building knowledge and understanding as well as changing attitude and behavior. They defined indicators for which they could collect data. These indicators included:

- Emotional response—opening hearts and minds in a new way; fostering empathy
- Re-humanization—seeing beyond abstraction and statistics to the human side and implications of the issue
- Validation—validating experiences of or related to mental illness
- Reconnection to community—sharing experiences of mental illness with others
- Moments of insight—deepening understanding about causes of mental illness
- Interest in taking action—motivating even small actions
- Connections to information and services—seeking out information to become better informed, to pass on to others with mental illness

Each indicator served as a kind of yardstick, measuring the extent to which change is observed to have occurred. Data collection took place primarily through pre- and post-performance surveys administered to targeted audience members. For more on these indicators, read [Moments of Transformation: Rha Goddess’s *LOW* and Understanding Social Change](#).

Art At Work’s evaluation plan included outcomes, indicators, and data collection methods as well as the timing of the evaluation effort. It also noted where there was possibility of comparing the data collected with other data to understand change. Diagram 3 plays out just one of the Police Poetry Project’s outcomes with associated indicators.

Diagram 3: Indicators — ART AT WORK Police Poetry Project

Outcome	Behavioral/attitudinal indicators of change	Instrument/ Method Sample	Timing Comparison
Improved Community Relationship with Police Department	Community pride in professionalism of Portland Police Department	Interviews with community stakeholders	Ongoing
		Records—editorial opinion; coverage post incidents	Ongoing; event-generated
	Perception that police are fair/act fairly, especially on the part of communities of color/immigrant communities	Interviews with community stakeholders	Post initial launch and after completed project
	Citizens are satisfied with the level of community safety	Community survey (if part of City practice)	Comparison potential
	Police Department proactively recruits people of color for jobs	Records	Ongoing/event-related
	People of color apply to the Police Department for jobs (and are hired)	Records	Ongoing; pre/post project comparison
	Police force is representative of community demographics in multiple ways—race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.	Records	Pre/post project comparison

Indicators can be used in a number of ways: a beginning point for developing survey or other instruments; the framework for content analysis of documents and records; a frame for guiding other types of documentation, *e.g.*, a film documentary; and a structure for collecting anecdotal information about the project. Marty Pottenger found the indicators for the Police Poetry Project helpful in all of these ways. She literally kept file folders on her desk tabbed with various indicators. Each time she heard an anecdote or learned about a piece of evidence supporting an indicator, she made note (documenting it) and slipped it into the folder. Her cumulative notes became a body of evidence. Having the forethought to video document the press conference described in our opening story (as well as other activities in Art At Work) enabled her to create a highly compelling piece conveying evidence of impact on influential stakeholders in the project which will serve the program’s casemaking into the future.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY: EVALUATING THE VALUE OF QUALITATIVE WITH QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE

“No stories without numbers. No numbers without stories.” This was the consensus of a group of funders as they discussed how to best understand and communicate the social effects of arts-based work. While anecdotes have sometimes been dismissed in favor of quantitative evidence, it is now generally agreed that qualitative data, narratives, and storytelling combined with quantitative data can strengthen social impact assessment.

“One of the things people always ask in talk backs . . . is ‘how was it for you?’ But to have the audience experience is for me phenomenal. To have that depth and specificity is huge. This is a sample of what it is like to view LOW through the eyes of audience. It is a privilege to be able to do that.”

Rha Goddess
Hip Hop Mental Health Project

The push for more “concrete evidence” suggests a desire for *quantitative* indicators that perhaps substantiate the scale of a project’s impact, its reach, or the extent of social effects. Despite increasing demands for *metrics* (quantitative measures), there is conviction among evaluators and researchers, as well as arts practitioners, that *qualitative* data and evaluation methods provide important and relevant evidence of the social impact of arts-based work. Qualitative data are important, as ethnographer Maribel Alvarez states, “to measure what is meaningful to people and how

they see themselves in relationship to the social dynamics that surround them,” as well as to “yield data that will be deeper, more meaningful, more attentive to context, and substantially more complex and emotive.”⁶ Mark Stern and Susan Seifert of the Social Impact of the Arts Project at the University of Pennsylvania observed that qualitative methods are accessible to non-researchers and complementary to participatory evaluation, a democratic evaluation method well aligned to the values that inform arts-based social change work.⁷

The credibility of evaluation can indeed be strengthened when quantitative *and* qualitative methods and information are combined and corroborated. Partnerships between cultural agents and professional researchers and evaluators at universities, regional planning centers, and other entities can ensure needed expertise to collect and analyze quantitative data. Stories of the impact of socially engaged art, like the one told by Art At Work’s Officer Sauschuck, are compelling and can speak as powerfully if not more powerfully than numbers. Beyond individual or random anecdotes, qualitative data can be methodically collected and analyzed to ensure a level of credibility.

A Tool for Defining Indicators and Data Collection Strategies

Stakeholders often describe articulating indicators as the most challenging part of evaluation work. Animating Democracy’s [Outcomes families framework](#) aims to facilitate this task. This framework provides numerous examples of creative strategies for each of the six outcome families—Knowledge, Discourse, Attitudes, Capacity, Action, and Policies—and the types of indicators that might be observed and related data collection methods.

This diagram shows an excerpt from the framework. It extrapolates outcomes, indicators, and data collection for the [Thousand Kites](#) project based at Appalshop in Whitesburg, KY.

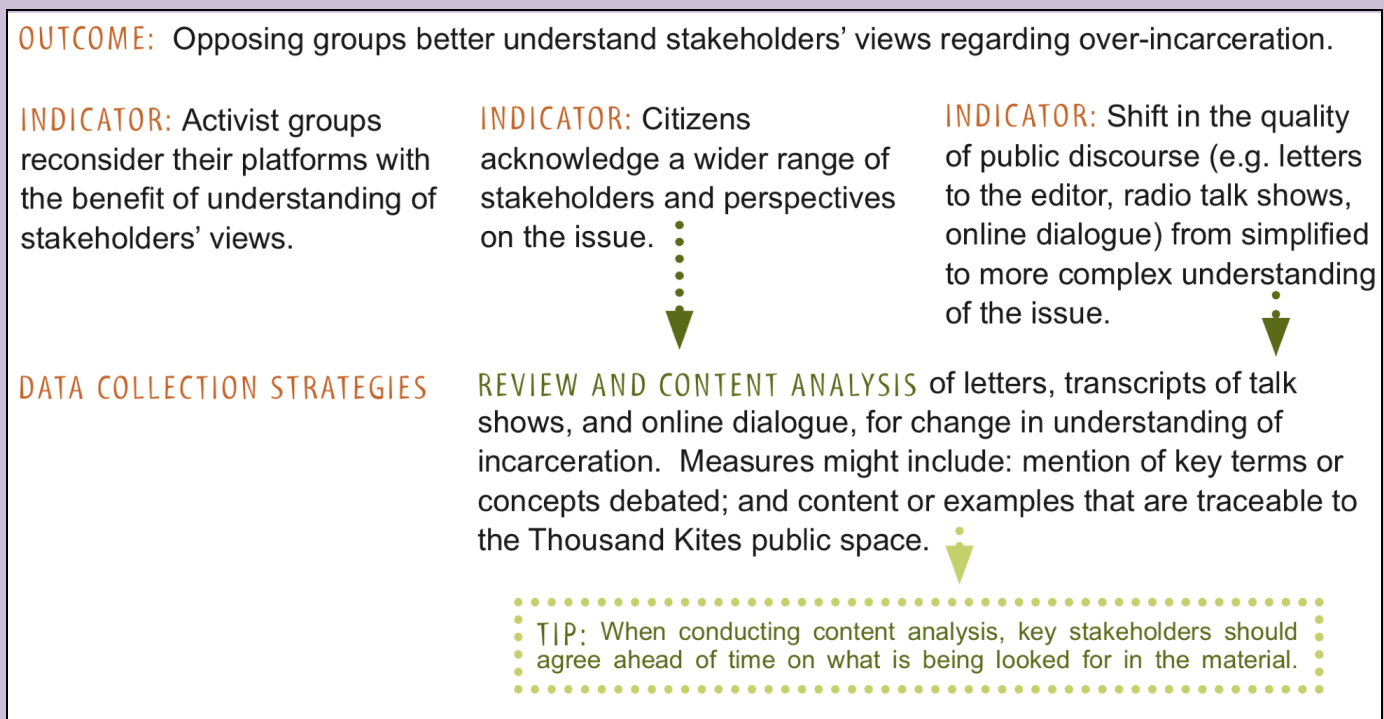


Diagram 3: Thousand Kites Project Indicators

EVALUATION IN ACTION: “WALK BEFORE YOU RUN”

Rha Goddess chose to focus on the effects of the performance of LOW and pre- and post-show dialogues about mental health issues. However, touring LOW across the country often involves collaborations with community-based mental health and arts presenting partners, empowerment-based training for community members, and participatory research to gather information that grounds and informs her performance and work in community in general. It was outside her capacity to evaluate the full “project” despite knowing these dimensions are critical to the impact of the Hip Hop Mental Health Project as a whole.

As a one-person operation, supported by interns, Art At Work chose to focus its first evaluation on the Police Poetry Project rather than the work being done in all three city departments. Pottenger was thereby able to ensure that she could support data collection related to city workers and leaders and the public, all of which were important to understanding the effect of the project against its defined goals. Despite this stated focus, the evaluation plan and coaching offered by a professional evaluator fostered a mode of evaluative thinking in Pottenger’s day-to-day work. The evaluation questions were ever present as she shaped the project and interacted with participating local artists as well as city leaders. The evaluation reinforced the importance of less formal evaluation practices that she could easily manage, for example regular go-rounds with project participants and stakeholders asking for insights, highlights, and questions at the beginning, middle, and end of meetings.

“I don’t think any one effort in any arena can claim 100 percent causation. . . . My experience of large scale impact and change comes from the culmination of many localized efforts that are powerfully coordinated, networked, and leveraged over time. . . . I see it as a continuum [as opposed to] simply a before and after.”

Rha Goddess
Hip Hop Mental Health Project

Most community-based arts practitioners feel overwhelmed by what it might take to implement credible evaluation. Maria Rosario Jackson, researcher with the Urban Institute, believes this is true because arts practitioners are driven by genuine passions and aspirations to make change and often set unrealistic expectations about what they can achieve through their arts-based efforts. Furthermore, they often feel compelled to assess *all* possible outcomes and to *prove* that an arts program “caused” a particular outcome. This is a tall order beyond the capacity of almost any

organization, never mind under-resourced arts organizations and artists. Jackson and fellow evaluators and researchers who were part of Animating Democracy’s Arts & Civic Engagement Impact Initiative agreed that arts practitioners (as well as funders and other stakeholders) need to recalibrate expectations about what change can be claimed in relation to arts and cultural endeavors as well as proving that an arts intervention “caused” a particular outcome.

Jackson underscores that community-based arts endeavors that aspire to social change should not make claims or take full responsibility for impacting social conditions over which they have no direct control. While it is important to aspire to a compelling long-term vision for social change, cultural organizations and artists need to see more realistically where they can *make a contribution* to change. By taking a more realistic stance, the possible appropriate focal points for evaluation come into relief.

Arts-based civic engagement initiatives should not expect to “prove” through quantitative analysis that an arts intervention “caused” a particular outcome. Jackson observes that the arts field, perhaps more so than any other policy area, is particularly concerned with establishing causality to confirm its value. The mere establishment of correlation with an intended outcome is enough in many fields to command attention and make a case about effects. The exception might be programs that are sustained over time (multiple years) and take place in relatively controlled environments (schools or similar settings).⁸

Read Maria Rosario Jackson’s article, [Shifting Expectations: An Urban Planner’s Reflections on Evaluation of Community-Based Arts](#).

In a similar vein, [The Metropolitan Group](#), an agency that supports social change endeavors, advises to “walk before you run.” It has outlined practical thoughts on making evaluation manageable in [“Measuring What Matters”](#) which offers a framework that divides measures of change between those that measure *outputs* (what you create, such as collaborations, donations, news stories, community engagement activities) and those that measure *results*. The latter is often harder to do but more relevant to understanding social change.

Too often, arts organizations and their funders mistakenly expect that results of a singular project or program can be generalized to broader assertions of impact. The Social Impact of the Arts Project at the University of Pennsylvania emphasizes that an aggregated body of research that looks across organizations, neighborhoods, regions, or the nation as a whole is required to move the field’s case-making concerns forward. That said, evaluations of local initiatives and projects are important. They provide opportunity for reflection that can lead to improvement of practice and the recalibration of goals and expectations. When made available to the field, they also contribute to a larger body of knowledge about the work in question.⁹

Read Mark Stern and Susan Seifert’s paper, [Civic Engagement and the Arts: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement](#).

CONCLUSION

For the arts' *social* impact to be recognized by civic leaders, policy makers, and funders as on par with prevailing economic and intrinsic arguments will require concerted efforts—partnerships between national organizations, funders, and research centers that might collect, aggregate, and analyze data. While the arts' economic impact has been well documented through empirical evidence and promoted locally and nationally, the social impact of the arts has received far less attention. There is yet a long way to go to broadly position the arts as valid and viable contributors to civic engagement and the achievement of social goals. [The Social Impact of the Arts Project](#) has played a leading role to research and document such impact and to coalesce efforts. The efforts, however, must start with practitioners and others committed to community-based arts and arts for change work. Animating Democracy and its Arts & Civic Engagement Impact Initiative invite your thoughts on this paper and on the resources in the [IMPACT](#) website. Visit and comment and become part of the process.

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End Notes

- ¹ Art At Work web site, www.artatworkproject.us/
- ² Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, inspires, informs, promotes, and connects arts and culture as potent contributors to community, civic, and social change. It brings national visibility to arts for change work, builds knowledge about quality practice, and creates useful resources. By demonstrating the public value of creative work that contributes to social change and fostering synergy across arts and other fields and sectors, Animating Democracy works to make the arts an integral and effective part of solutions to the challenges of communities and toward ensuring a healthy democracy. animatingdemocracy.org/
- ³ Marty Pottenger collaborated with evaluator Chris Dwyer of [RMC Research](#). They applied an evaluation framework developed by Dwyer to systematically define outcomes and indicators for the [Police Poetry Project](#). The framework is documented in an [Evaluation Plan](#) written by Dwyer and Pottenger. Its application over time can help substantiate the case for the role of the arts in civic systems and processes.
- ⁴ Craig McGarvey describes *human, social, and community capital* as three interconnected and measurable outcomes of civic engagement work. Human capital is the development of individual potential with measures of acquired skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Social capital is the development of networks of human and institutional relationships, with measures of depth, breadth, diversity, and durability. Community capital is the development of positive change in communities, with measures of problems solved or prevented, policies improved, systems and institutions made more accountable. ([Civic Participation and the Promise of Democracy](#), 2004)
- ⁵ Callahan, Suzanne with Jane Jerardi and Caitlin Servilio and reflections by Rha Goddess. "Moments of Transformation: Rha Goddess's LOW and Understanding Social Change." Washington, D.C.: Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, 2009.
- ⁶ Alvarez, Maribel. "Two-Way Mirror: Ethnography as a Way to Assess Civic Impact of Arts-Based Engagement in Tucson, Arizona." Washington, D.C.: Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, 2009.
- ⁷ Stern, Mark J. and Susan C. Seifert. "Civic Engagement and the Arts: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement." Washington, D.C.: Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, 2009.
- ⁸ Jackson, Maria Rosario. "[Shifting Expectations: An Urban Planner's Reflections on Evaluation of Community-Based Arts](#)." Washington, D.C.: Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, 2009.
- ⁹ Stern, Mark J. and Susan C. Seifert. "Civic Engagement and the Arts: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement." Washington, D.C.: Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, 2009.