

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

Community Benefit

measuring the impact of arts and crafts activity

As you go about your arts and crafts activities – organising events, running workshops, holding weekly meetings – it's easy to overlook the world outside your window, and the impact you're having on it. Don't underestimate the wide-reaching effect the voluntary arts can have on both individuals and society as a whole.

This briefing gives you an overview of the various ways you can measure the quality and impact of your activities, explains who might be interested in hearing about them, and provides guidance on how you can communicate this in ways they will understand.

A. Know your worth

Before you can start proving the benefit you bring to the wider community, you need to work out exactly what it is you do – and for whom. One of the key things you can do at the outset, with or without any of the tools mentioned in this briefing, is talk to people who are involved in your activity, both directly and indirectly. Not only will this give you a clearer picture of what your group/activity is achieving, but it might also throw up some new possibilities or inform you of things you could be doing better!

B. Who else wants to know?

If your activities are having an impact, there are a number of people who may be interested in hearing about it:

- **Funders** – the people funding (or potentially funding) your venture are always interested in the results their money helps bring about.
- **Local authority** – if you're thinking of getting involved in community planning (having a say in the way your local area

is run), then your local authority/council may want to know why yours is a worthwhile voice at the table.

- **Local community** – being able to demonstrate good results may well attract new members keen to get involved in such a worthwhile project. It's also a way to show why you deserve in-kind support (i.e. non-financial help such as goods and services) from your local community.
- **Charity regulators** – if you are thinking of registering as a charity (or have already done so), then according to Charity Acts across the UK and Republic of Ireland, you must have aims that are for the 'public benefit' – and be able to demonstrate this. Information on how to meet the criteria can be found at:
 - **England and Wales** – www.charity-commission.gov.uk
 - **Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator** – www.oscr.org.uk
 - **Charity Commission for Northern Ireland** – www.dsdni.gov.uk
 - **Republic of Ireland** – www.wheel.ie

C. How to measure

As the former UK Culture Minister, Estelle Morris said in 2003, *"I know that arts and culture make a contribution to health, education, crime reduction, to strong communities, the economy and to the nation's wellbeing, but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a way of describing its worth."*

Since this statement was made, research on how we measure and describe the value of our activities has increased, and even though more needs to be done – especially at a grassroots level – we now have a better idea of what to do. There are probably many ways in which you already benefit the community, possibly without even realising it. Aside from giving people enjoyment, passing on traditional crafts or teaching



new skills, there may also be bigger benefits you haven't thought about.

For example, joining your group may lead to somebody getting a new job, gaining confidence, improving their mental or physical health or acquiring the skills to start their own group. Similarly your activity may have boosted the local economy through tourism or venue use – it may even have contributed to the regeneration of an area.

A number of organisations and tools exist to help you explore your achievements, some of which are listed here. This list is not exhaustive, and not all of them will appeal to voluntary arts groups, but as these terms are being increasingly used in the private, public and voluntary sectors, having a brief knowledge of them may prove useful.

1. Social Return on Investment

One of the more talked about methods at the moment is 'Social Return on Investment' (SROI). This is a tool that can be used to measure and demonstrate the changes and improvements that happen to people's lives as a result of being involved in your project. At the end of an SROI report, you are left with a 'bottom line ratio', such as 1:4, which means that for every £1 invested in your project, the return to society is £4. This figure is calculated via a number of 'indicators', such as the cost of prescriptions used, social work input needed and money spent on healthcare before your project began, and the money ploughed back into the economy as a result of it taking place.

It may seem impossible to put a price tag on happiness or find a financial value for contentment or confidence – things often achieved by arts participation. As SROI proves, however, if you dig a little deeper, you can often attribute costs to seemingly intangible things. For example, prior to 68-year-old Elizabeth joining her local knitting circle, she was lonely and depressed. Now she has a new group of friends, and a sense of purpose, sending baby clothes to her local hospital, and is feeling far happier. Consequently she has stopped taking anti-depressants, has more of an appetite so buys more food, and has started swimming again – thus reducing costs to the NHS and contributing to the local economy. You can also project forward and work out what could potentially happen if your activity takes place, and the costs associated with that.

Although it may seem as though the main focus of SROI is financial, the actual process of doing your report and the 'story of change' it captures, is just as important – if not more so – than the bottom line figure you end up with. The only way to discover the true impact of your activity is by talking to the people involved, learning about their needs and finding out if you are meeting them. So, the first step is working out who those people are (e.g. group members, their families, funders,

people in the wider community). This process alone can be hugely helpful.

"Instead of focusing on your own objectives, and what you think is important to the people you serve, you actually listen to them, use their language and find out what they value about your project," says Agnieszka Swida of the SROI Project, "which then gives you information you can use to improve what you do. So even if you don't end up doing the full report, it will give you a new perspective."

SROI is still a relatively new approach, but is steadily gaining popularity. As it stands in late 2009, it is probably too great an undertaking for small groups – both in terms of the money and time involved – and more suited to larger organisations, umbrella bodies and networks. However, this may well change in the future. The 'indicators' mentioned above are being collated by the SROI Project into a 'bank' of information (i.e. prescription costs to the NHS, the price of home help to Social Services, how much the local council spends on removing graffiti, etc), which will cut out a lot of research time, as will the proposed database of case studies, which will help new SROI reports to be compiled more quickly and cheaply.

SROI resources

- www.thesroinetwork.org
- www.sroiproject.org.uk (SROI in Scotland)
- **SROI Primer** (a user-friendly video made by London Business School talking you through the SROI process) – <http://sroi.london.edu>
- **A Guide to Social Return on Investment** (published in April 2009 by the Cabinet Office) – download from www.thesroinetwork.org

2. The Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit

Developed by the Institute for Volunteering Research UK, this toolkit helps organisations and groups measure and assess the impacts of volunteering on the volunteers themselves, the organisation, those who use or benefit from the organisation, and the wider community. Given that many arts groups are volunteer-led, this could prove very useful.

The Toolkit is designed to be simple to use and adaptable, and by working your way through it you should hopefully be able to provide evidence to attract new funding, improve any volunteering programmes you may have, demonstrate the impact volunteering in your group has on the wider community, show the benefits of being involved in your group and help improve your activities.

The Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit can be purchased for approximately £35 from Institute of Volunteering Research – www.ivr.org.uk / T: 0845 3056979 or Volunteer Development Scotland – www.vds.org.uk / T: 01786 479593.



3. Proving and Improving

Proving and Improving is a quality and impact toolkit for charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises. Through the many resources available on this website, you can explore practical ways to measure your impact, and demonstrate the quality of what you do and how you operate. It features over 20 well-known approaches to proving and improving, which will talk you through:

- what information you need to collect to measure the impact of your work;
- how to measure what matters to you; and
- how to identify whether you have made a difference to individuals, your community, the environment, the economy – or all four.

The toolkit has been developed by the New Economics Foundation, and you can access it at www.proveandimprove.org.

4. The Big Picture

The Big Picture is a development tool created for and by the voluntary sector. It can help you identify your strengths and the areas you need to improve, devise a plan based on any needs your group may have and review your successes. The Big Picture comes in the form of a workbook and can be used in the way most appropriate to you, including bite-sized chunks. It works for organisations of any size, in all stages of development. www.thebigpic.org.uk

5. The Way Ahead Pack

This pack has been designed by Voluntary Arts to help you work through issues relating to managing your organisation, running activities and being part of a community. It also gives you an indication of how well you are doing. A revised, interactive version of the pack will be available by March 2010 from www.voluntaryarts.org.

6. PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)

This is a standard to work towards, rather than a straightforward evaluation tool. It is widely used across the voluntary and community sector, and is a step-by-step approach to improving the way your organisation is run. PQASSO features 12 categories, such as 'planning', 'managing resources' and 'monitoring and evaluation', and there are three levels of attainment (although very small or newly formed organisations may decide just to work towards level one). To buy a PQASSO workpack and CD-Rom costs approximately £150.

For more information contact Charities Evaluation Services – www.ces-vol.org.uk / T: 0207 713 5722.

7. Social Accounting and Auditing

Social accounting and auditing is a way for voluntary organisations, community organisations and social enterprises to measure and report their social, environmental and economic impact. It's a way of showing the benefit of what you do, when it can't be reduced to numbers. Producing a set of audited social accounts is a three-stage process, involving working out who has an interest in your organisation and collating information on all your activities. The findings go before a panel, are checked by an approved Social Auditor and a Social Audit Statement is issued. For more information contact The Social Audit Network – www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk.

8. Social Capital

In simple terms, 'social capital' can be defined as the way in which people work together. When measuring the social capital in an area, you look at the quantity and quality of human relationships, with a major emphasis on trust. We work best with people we get on with and have faith in – so where social capital is high, individuals and communities tend to be healthier, happier and more productive. Social capital is nothing new. Communities working together for mutual benefit have always been there – but now it has a name and a means of measurement. More information on social capital and how to work towards increasing it in your area, can be found at www.social-capital.net.

9. EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management)

EFQM is a not-for-profit membership foundation with an 'excellence model', which looks at an organisation's management system, compares it with other organisations and helps identify areas for improvement. It is the most widely used organisational framework in Europe, but is unlikely to be of use to smaller organisations. For more information visit <http://www.efqm.org> or British Quality Foundation (www.bqf.org.uk), Quality Scotland (www.qualityscotland.co.uk), Excellence Ireland Quality Association (www.eiqa.com) or Wales Quality Centre (www.walesqualitycentre.org.uk).

10. Economic Impact Study

Does your activity bring people to the area? Boost your local economy? Create jobs? Then it may be worth carrying out an Economic Impact Study (or asking a consultant to do one for you). For example, Keith Traditional Music Festival, an annual volunteer-run event, recently carried one out to prove how many people it attracted to the town during the festival, and the money they spent that benefited the residents of the town.

Further Resources

Publications

There are a number of Voluntary Arts briefings and publications which may prove useful, all of which can be downloaded from www.voluntaryarts.org.

- 102 – **Accounting for Worth**
- 85 – **Value and Values in the Voluntary Arts**
- 32 – **So, what's so great about the voluntary arts? 50 points to make to policy makers and funders**
- 42 – **Culture Makes Communities**
- **Monitoring and Evaluating your Arts Event – Why Bother?**
- **Tear up your tick boxes** – a guide to the creative evaluation of participatory arts projects

Interesting documents

- Arts Council England's – **The Power of Art: Visual Arts Evidence of Impact** – download from www.artscouncil.org.uk
- Scottish Arts Council's – **The evidence base for the impact of arts and culture policy** – download from www.scottisharts.org.uk
- Department of Culture, Media & Sport's – **Our Creative Talent: the voluntary and amateur arts in England** – download from www.culture.gov.uk
- NHS Evidence's – **The impact of participation in performing arts on**

adolescent health and behaviour – download from www.library.nhs.uk

- The Cultural Commission's – **Study of the Input of the Voluntary Sector to Culture in Scotland** – download from www.culturalcommission.org.uk
- The Arts Council of Northern Ireland's – **Evaluation Toolkit for the Voluntary and Community Arts in Northern Ireland** – download from www.artscouncil-ni.org
- The Performance Hub's – **Full Value: Public Services and the Third Sector** – download from www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Evaluation

- Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) works on a Social Assets approach to evaluation and has produced a useful resource called – **Prove & Improve: A Self-Evaluation Resource for Voluntary and Community Organisations** – download from www.ceni.org
- Evaluation Support Scotland has many resources including – **A Guide to Self Evaluation: How to Tell You are Making a Difference** – download from www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk
- Charities Evaluation Service is UK-wide source of information on evaluation systems for the voluntary sector – www.ces-vol.uk

Information contained here may go out of date and you are therefore advised to check its currency. Updated information may be available on the VAN website: www.voluntaryarts.org

Disclaimer: Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure the information in this document is accurate. However, it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith at the stated date but without accepting liability. We therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.

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