

# **Evaluating Transformative Arts Programming:**

## **An Introductory Guide to Evaluating Arts Programming in Non-Arts Settings**

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Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University Chicago

# Purpose of this guide

- NOT a textbook for evaluation, in general;
- NOT an exhaustive how-to guide for the usual skills and knowledge evaluations that are also critical to arts programming;
- Rather, IT IS a map and toolkit – based on our expertise and experience – for the evaluation of arts programming that seeks to lead to personal transformation for participants in non-traditional, non-arts based settings.

We hope it is a guide to you and your program as you begin to make a similar journey. Along the way we will provide you some brief introductions to resources, terms, methods, and goals, as well as links to our work as well as the work/tools of others.

# Who we are and why we hang out together

This guide is a collaborative effort of Fifth House Ensemble (<https://fifth-house.com/>) and the Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) at Loyola University Chicago ([www.luc.edu/curl](http://www.luc.edu/curl))

Fifth House’s “artistic, educational, and civic programs engage theater groups, video game designers, corporate innovators, and folk bands to share stories as diverse as the communities it serves.” Given the ensemble’s work with community groups of various types, it was natural to partner with CURL who seeks to do transformative research, evaluation, and education by building collaborative partnerships with community groups. “These partnerships connect Loyola faculty and students with community and nonprofit organizations, civic groups, and government agencies.”

# Who we are and why we hang out together (cont.)

5HE had been doing basic evaluation of their programming – pre- and post-test surveys for example. And, as professional musicians with years of experience building arts-integrated programming in public school classrooms, they were well-versed in more traditional evaluation work that examines improvements in core academic and arts-based skills. They had gathered anecdotal evidence that would suggest that the effects of their programs went far deeper than skills-based accomplishments, and that these transformations that were previously seen as a by-product of the main objectives of a residency might in fact be of equal or greater importance, but lacked an evaluation framework to measure data on these outcomes. When the ensemble had the opportunity to shift its education work into social service settings, they wished to explore this new territory with an outside evaluator, with personal transformation as a central focus.

Namely, ***5HE sought to measure impact of their work in non-traditional settings – homeless shelters, schools in juvenile detention centers, other types of social service agencies, etc. – that seek to provide opportunities to make and experience music that leads to personal transformation.*** Through deep listening and other activities, they seek to show the power of making art wherever we might find ourselves. Together, we sought to evaluate and understand that work.

Come join us as we sketch out a toolkit and roadmap for this work based on lessons learned from our own journey together!

# Why even bother with evaluation?

For many individuals and groups working in arts programming (and in many other fields), there is a healthy skepticism when it comes to evaluation. Why bother doing it at all and, why bother trying to measure something as difficult as “personal transformation?”

The answers are similar for both:

- Inform program design
- Show the impact of programming
- Demonstrate the value of the programming to funders and users of the work

These are some of the same goals for evaluating and understanding arts programming that seeks personal transformation. It pushes into new and less well-defined concepts and themes, BUT it is a critical component to help explain why people should be making art everywhere and every day.

# Where to start?

If a group of musicians or other types of artists want to begin this evaluation work, what are some of the key elements needed?

## **Mindset**

- An openness to self-reflection

- Willingness to be risk

- Ability and commitment to putting in the needed time to do the work

*\*Tip: Be sure to “evaluate what you do and do what you evaluate!” – too often there is a temptation to follow an exciting idea about an evaluation topic without actually reflecting on whether the group actually directly or indirectly does work on that topic. For example, a group might provide services to individuals experiencing homelessness but not provide housing. That’s fine but then be very careful to think through any plans to evaluate whether individuals in the program got housing. Otherwise you’ll be trying to evaluate something you have little to no control over. Conversely, sometimes it is easy to overlook the concrete services you do provide and, therefore, you fail to evaluate that work. It may seem obvious but it pays to reflect on this early in the process!*

# Where to start?

## Resources

### People

#### Internal

Point person for the group and the evaluation effort

Team of at least two or more artists to support the work

#### External (not always necessary but useful addition if possible)

Individual consultant

Evaluation firm

University-based evaluators

Tip: Talk to others in your network to see if they have recommendations for finding an evaluator. Besides the obvious advice of finding someone that is within your budget, be sure you also find someone that fits with your style and vision – if they can't hear what you're saying at the outset, they won't hear what you're saying throughout the process.

### Time

### Money

(to cover staff and artist time and, if desired, an outside consultant)

Foundations – talk to fellow artists or current funders of programming

Federal/State government – there aren't many but the National Endowment for the Arts might be a possible resource

# Where to start?

## **A plan**

No, you don't need to have everything decided and laid out! But it is never too early to begin planning and setting goals. Don't wait for everything to be 100% set before you begin to sketch the plans out. It is an iterative process throughout so go ahead and take the first steps. Remember: Evaluate what you do and do what you evaluate!



# Evaluation Methodology 101

## Types of Evaluation

**Formative evaluation:** Answers the question of how things are working. It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of a new program as it is being piloted and rolled out, providing on-going feedback to the project in order to make revisions, and fine tune the program.

**Process evaluation:** Process evaluation assesses how a program worked. It examines how the program implemented the intended goals of the program. It is often considered looking into the “black box” between a plan (programs goals and objectives). It is best done when assessing the program from the perspective and experiences of all those involved in the program, from program planners to staff to program participants.

**Outcome evaluation:** Outcome evaluation is used to obtain descriptive data on a project and to document short-term results. It answers what happened and the immediate effects on the targeted audience.

**Impact:** Impact focuses on the long-range results of the program on the targeted audience. Impact evaluations are rarely possible because they are usually costly, involve extended commitment, and, the results often cannot be directly related to the effects of an activity or program because of other (external) influences on the target audience that occur over time.

# Evaluation Methodology 101 (cont.)

## Methodologies

**Quantitative:** (Think numbers). Quantitative research focuses on the systematic gathering of numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon. Quantitative data collection methods include various forms of surveys – online surveys, paper surveys, mobile surveys and kiosk surveys, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, longitudinal studies, online polls, and systematic observations.

Tip: Here's a very brief webpage and video link (embedded) that describes more about the topic:  
[https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research\\_ready/quantresearch/overview\\_quant](https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/quantresearch/overview_quant)

**Qualitative:** (Think words and pictures) Qualitative research is a strategy for systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of phenomena that are difficult to measure quantitatively. Qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, document analysis, and participation/observations and event documentation (audio, photo, video).

Tip: Here's a few helpful sources on the topic: <https://course.ccs.neu.edu/is4800sp12/resources/qualmethods.pdf>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbdN\\_sLWI88](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbdN_sLWI88)

**Mixed-methods:** Mixed methods research involves collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data includes closed-end information that undergoes statistical analysis and results in a numerical representation. Qualitative data, on the other hand, is more subjective and open-ended. It allows for the “voice” of the participants to be heard and interpretation of observations. Combining the two allows for a stronger, more valid picture of what happened and how.

Tip: Here is a helpful and detailed overview of mixed methods:  
[https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research\\_ready/mixed\\_methods/overview](https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/mixed_methods/overview)

# Evaluation Methodology 101 (cont.)

## Participants

Clients/consumers/participants

Artists (i.e. those delivering the programming)

Other informants on the “outside” of your work

- Staff at the host site

- Community members

- Funders

- Others (different contexts mean different kinds of possible sources of information – be creative!)

## Data Analysis

Qualitative - here's a great resource from our friends in the Geoscience field – yes, Geoscience!

[https://nagt.org/nagt/geoedresearch/toolbox/analysis\\_tools/quantitative.html](https://nagt.org/nagt/geoedresearch/toolbox/analysis_tools/quantitative.html)

Quantitative – the Geoscience folks also have this helpful link to quantitative analysis

[https://nagt.org/nagt/geoedresearch/toolbox/analysis\\_tools/quantitative.html](https://nagt.org/nagt/geoedresearch/toolbox/analysis_tools/quantitative.html)

# We've Collected and Analyzed – Now what should we do?

**Further study** – it is perfectly acceptable – and often wise – to continue to do further data collection and analysis. You will see that our project has been going on for over 4 years and is continually adapting and moving forward.

**Feedback loop to inform programming** - Take time throughout and at the “end” to use the findings to inform and improve the programming. How often should this happen? Find a balance between overwhelming yourselves with constant feedback and blindly moving along without an understanding of what is happening.

**Reports and “reports”** – at the end, don't forget to allot time and space to report back on your findings. You will see in our appendices that we have produced technical reports that lay out the methods and outcomes of the work. But don't forget that there are other ways – “reports” – to share the findings – brochures, webpages, artistic creations, and, yes, even guides like this one.

**Presentations** – Finally, don't miss the opportunity to share the good news of your work and the lesson learned. Others can learn from your experience so look to make presentations on your evaluation work to peers and larger networks.

Do we stop? Now? Ever?

At some point, you must say “enough is enough” but always push to ask more/different questions. These questions and evaluations lead to a better understanding of your work and, hopefully, a better work product and experience for everyone involved.

# Our Story – A case study that followed this roadmap and produced some tools

## Intro

We can't rehash every detail of our shared journey but we hope you will find this quick review of our own story helpful in seeing the above process in action. Be sure to take a look at some of the key lessons for doing evaluation that we highlight AND the link to our three, year-end final reports thus far. They are full of helpful detail in our humble opinion.

As we noted earlier, 5HE had already been engaged in evaluation efforts. They were keen to take it in new and expanded directions. This meant talking as a team, reflecting on what path made most sense, and then, after several meetings and lots of coffee for everyone, developing a partnership with CURL. The key here is that 5HE began with what they had planned and moved into a new phase. It sounds simple but those simple steps cannot be overlooked!

# Our Story (cont.)

## **Year 1: Development of conceptual model**

Using a variety of methods described above (qualitative methods such as observations and focus groups, especially), CURL faculty and students began to work with 5HE Teaching Artists (TA) to not only document the work but to begin to understand the 5HE approach and how it helped to facilitate transformation. In short, a process evaluation (see above) was conducted.

Themes began to emerge such as TA flexibility, the importance of participant's sense of their own agency, and other similar themes that began to capture the core of 5HE programming. This, in turn, helped the team develop our foundational conceptual model for our work in the following years. Take a look at the final report for a lot more detail on the outcomes and the methods used.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Nw8itrVBAIEOjtNgFaxSqjgwRJ\\_pYR6s/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Nw8itrVBAIEOjtNgFaxSqjgwRJ_pYR6s/view?usp=sharing)

## **Key lessons for readers (i.e. others trying to use this guide):**

- Why pre/post isn't always the best approach – 5HE was doing a fine job of utilizing pre- and post-test measures. But it was only in taking a step back (and, in their case, doing so with CURL), that the key themes embedded in their transformation work emerged.
- The role/importance of outside evaluators in shaping evaluation – While it isn't necessary to have an external evaluator to do this work, CURL's role as an "outsider" did help to bring new insights and "eyes" to the work of 5HE and, in doing so a new sense of their work emerged.
- The role/importance of 5HE in shaping evaluation – having noted the importance of an outside evaluator, it is equally important to note the crucial role that 5HE played in forming these
- Using evaluation to inform program design – we have talked throughout about the "feedback" loop that is helpful in any good evaluation work. It was certainly the case here as 5HE quickly took on these new insights and themes and used them to shape their work.

# Our Story (cont.)

## Year 2: Testing the model

This second year employed many of the same methods as before – observations, focus groups, etc. The critical difference was that now we had a basic model and themes gleaned from Year 1 and we looked to test them out. “Testing” might sound big and scary but really it was looking to see if the themes and interactions were, in fact, present in the TA and participant interactions. Additionally, we used a pre- and post-residency survey to further explore these themes. In doing so, one theme in particular seemed to play a critical role – mindfulness – and that, in turn, helps to inform Year 3. Take a look at the Year 2 final report for a great deal more information: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YCbeo4sybG7YPsncGx26MFsOKhpwlsMD/view?usp=sharing>

## Key lessons for readers:

- The ongoing iterative process involved in evaluation – As you read the final report, be sure to look for the reality of evaluation work – it is rarely a straight line and, in fact, it involves a great deal of back and forth and even ups and downs. That can seem like a waste of time sometimes but it actually produces a better, richer product.
- It takes time and reflection to better understand models – The whole of Year 2 can look a lot like Year 1 in terms of methods and topics. In reality, though, we needed this year to really begin to explore the themes from Year 1 in-depth. So, don’t always feel the need to rush through the process!
- Patience – It will come as no surprise to anyone that sometimes plans don’t work out as we had hoped. In reading the Year 2 report, you might note that some of the sites weren’t able to fully participate as we had planned. That neither stopped 5HE programming nor did it “ruin” the evaluation effort. “Adaptability” and patience is a key theme for programming AND evaluation.

# Our Story (cont.)

## Year 3 - Greater attention to Mindfulness

As noted in the Year 2 overview, the concept of Mindfulness took on a greater importance. Year 3 took that theme and began to explore how to better utilize it AND begin measuring it. As you read the final report for Year 3, take note of how that concept continued to emerge and how 5HE and CURL made plans to measure it in Year 4. Additionally, CURL was not present in the residency sessions for Year 3 and 5HE took on more of the evaluation coordination. This is a key take away for those who wonder if they can “go it alone.” The answer is “yes, you can!” The report can be found here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hWgJYcf5wO4zFRgSFX63QVIFQOE\\_6CKh/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hWgJYcf5wO4zFRgSFX63QVIFQOE_6CKh/view?usp=sharing)

### Key lessons for readers:

- Having noted that CURL as an external evaluator wasn't present via in-person observations highlights the methods that 5HE needed to employ to get the work done. Key among the lessons – the need for 2 TAs in the room and the usefulness (and possible limitations) of using videotaped recordings of the sessions.
- Designing activity-based assessments – 5HE has taken an approach to evaluation that should be emulated. Namely, they have worked creatively with CURL to find ways to weave together activities in the program that also double as evaluation tools.
- Feedback loop and on to a new question – Year 3 resulted in a new “tool” the mindfulness tool. It should be no surprise to anyone that this co-created tool becomes the basis for both programming AND evaluation in Year 4. The feedback loop continues!



# Our Story (cont.)

## Year 4- Exploring the Role of Deep Listening

The Year 4 final evaluation is still being written. Indeed, CURL is still sifting through the data gathered – again via observations and focus groups and the like – to better understand the role of Mindfulness as well as how an activity like Deep Listening can help promote that theme. A key part of the programming was more of the activity-based programming that doubles as programming AND as an evaluation tool. Stay tuned for more information!

### Key lessons for readers:

- Post-Session Reflections – even at this stage in our reflection on Year 4, a clear point of conversation for 5HE and CURL is the role of an outside evaluator in helping the TAs at 5HE to see the interactions (and resulting themes) in a new way.
- Outside evaluator (Part 2) – related to the usefulness of an outsider in post-session reflections, is the notion of finding the balance that TAs must strike in acting as the teacher AND part of the evaluation team *while the session is in progress*. More to the point given the topic of mindfulness, the question we are asking ourselves is this: can a TA be fully and critically present in the session if they are also trying to act as an evaluator. Stay tuned for our further reflections!

# Final Thoughts

That is it – we have come to the end of our guide and case study. Hopefully you have found more than a few things to help you in your own journey. Our final advice is simple – don't be afraid, get involved wherever you find yourself, and realize that your journey, like ours, will take twists and turns but lead to a better understanding in the end.

If you have questions about any of this information, feel free to contact us:

For Fifth House Ensemble: Melissa Ngan - [melissa@fifth-house.com](mailto:melissa@fifth-house.com)

For CURL/Loyola: David Van Zytveld – [dvanzyt@luc.edu](mailto:dvanzyt@luc.edu) or Brian Kelly - [bkelly6@luc.edu](mailto:bkelly6@luc.edu)

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# Appendices

This is not an exhaustive list of (and links to) our tools, processes and reports but it will give readers a sense of the work we have collaboratively been doing. Check back as we plan to add more in time.

- Pre Assessment Student Interview Guide  
[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1U5CUjCx1uxxclb2JQ99ni\\_CrOaVU7fXXyYD1575Q-8I](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1U5CUjCx1uxxclb2JQ99ni_CrOaVU7fXXyYD1575Q-8I)
- Post Assessment Student Interview Guide  
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1tqE4ESHPSWhwNQL5klf5BaIXbomv5uWkZFJETbfs5jE>
- Pre- Assessment Student Interview Guide 2018 – Deborah’s Place version  
[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1yFtdXpP4QpzaCZ1rrwA9Ctmc3\\_zeGwGtHeR1YmVGYB8](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1yFtdXpP4QpzaCZ1rrwA9Ctmc3_zeGwGtHeR1YmVGYB8)
- Post Assessment Staff Interview Guide  
[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1M\\_hBHT5CA0e4z-lZq9wTXMZ9BfXQZ0fMjjymrCkhYw](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1M_hBHT5CA0e4z-lZq9wTXMZ9BfXQZ0fMjjymrCkhYw)

# Appendices (cont.)

- Evaluation Tool on Mindfulness and Deep Listening  
[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1M\\_hBHT5CA0e4z-lZq9wTXMZ9BfXQZ0fMjjymrCkhYw](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1M_hBHT5CA0e4z-lZq9wTXMZ9BfXQZ0fMjjymrCkhYw)
- Observation Log Example [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xQsh\\_iwTyPNUV6c5yTwvnFUGHeWqNT7t](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xQsh_iwTyPNUV6c5yTwvnFUGHeWqNT7t)
- Pre Assessment Quiz Example [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1gvRuDBwk8Df\\_sbS0Ue1ZsD-VcHnZD\\_JQ](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1gvRuDBwk8Df_sbS0Ue1ZsD-VcHnZD_JQ)
- Activity-based Reflection Example  
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1IVdthminyxQuoXCfo1SatQXL3dkx1fs4LY2uFHBFz3s>

Links to full annual process evaluation reports:

- Year 1: [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Nw8itrVBAIEOjtNgFaxSqjgwRJ\\_pYR6s](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Nw8itrVBAIEOjtNgFaxSqjgwRJ_pYR6s)
- Year 2: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1YCbeo4sybG7YPsncGx26MFsOKhpwlsMD>
- Year 3: [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1bkaF3xpMiu481py\\_yt3NxeFaGogUEMq1](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1bkaF3xpMiu481py_yt3NxeFaGogUEMq1)