GUIDE TO EVALUATION OF CULTURAL MEDIATION PROJECTS
The Importance of Evaluation in Cultural Mediation

The Evaluation: Why and for Whom?

Evaluation is a fascinating subject. In cultural mediation, as in any field, evaluation makes it possible to take an in-depth look at activities, strengthen partnerships, and contribute to the achievement of objectives. However, evaluation is often undertaken hastily, at the end of a project, and with a performance-measurement objective that impedes its potential to make a contribution. It is therefore not the favourite task of managers and professionals in the field.

Evaluation is a strategic priority in the implementation of cultural mediation projects, given the number of stakeholders and partners involved, the diversity of their expectations, and the relatively innovative nature of the activities. The evaluation process should thus be integrated as a guidance tool from the start of the planning process, be carried out on a continuous basis, and be administered either within the organization or by an external consultant.

Most partners, especially financial backers, are not affected closely enough by the reality of projects in the field to understand their nature and impact. When everyone is invited to participate in the discussion from the start, it is less likely that some will perceive aspects of the project as failures.

The better defined the concepts, the easier it will be for the project’s leaders to take the right actions, as they will know which parts of the evaluation to prioritize and which to set aside. The best example is participation rate: in arts and culture, the highest number is not always the best; one must know how to gather the influence factors, whether participation is at its lowest or highest level.

This kit is designed for developers of cultural mediation projects who would like to conduct a participatory and evolving evaluation process. It includes two documents:

1. A practical guide providing details on the different steps of implementing an evaluation (choice of indicators and methodology; data collection, organization, and analysis), with definitions, examples, and advice.

2. A toolbox: the tools (facilitation worksheets, report forms, schedule, etc.) follow the implementation steps of your projects and will be tailored to them.

Have a good read!
The Steps in the Evaluation Process

The evaluation grid, which evolves throughout the process, is used to:

- Come to agreement on the objectives to be achieved by the project
- Execute the action plan to accomplish the objectives
- Reveal good practices by evaluating operating methods

The evaluation process requires that objectives and strategies be clarified, the target public be determined, and adapted indicators be chosen, whether they are objective (numbers, rates) or subjective (testimonials, opinions, perceptions). During the preliminary consultation activities, the framework for the evaluation begins to take form.

Here are the general steps:

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Step A: Choose Indicators

This step is divided into two actions:

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<td>Choose indicators</td>
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Identify the Objectives

The common objectives to be achieved in order to ensure the project’s success, over the short or long term, are identified through consultation with the partners involved. “Facilitation worksheet no 1” in the toolbox will help you conduct this type of shared exploration:

- What exactly do we want?
- What results do we hope to achieve?
- What means are available to us to achieve them?
- How much time do we have available to achieve our objectives?
- Might there be challenges along the way?
- Are these objectives realistic for me and my team?

There are two types of objectives:

1. A general objective: This objective goes beyond the cultural mediation project. It provides the structure for all steps taken by the partnership or for the organization carrying out the project.

2. The specific objectives: These are short- or medium-term objectives that serve to achieve the general objective. The specific objectives are elements that break the general objective down into smaller parts.

Finally, from these specific objectives will flow concrete actions, such as the activities in your cultural mediation project. The specific objectives may also be established as “preconditions” for success of the general objective, which becomes easier to achieve through a number of smaller objectives accompanied by concrete actions.

The objectives must be clear and concise, shared by all partners, realistic and attainable, quantifiable, and limited to a defined time frame. Once everyone has agreed on the objectives, you will be able to construct the indicators—the variables that will serve as a basis for evaluating your project.
Introduction to the Concept of Indicators

In the glossary at the end of this guide, you will find a general definition of “indicator”. To refine this definition in the context of cultural mediation projects, we could say that if cultural mediation activities are concrete actions for achieving specific objectives, indicators are the concrete manifestations of changes resulting from the project. An essential criterion of the quality of an indicator is its measurability, whether in quantitative (for example, percentage) or qualitative terms—whence the importance of developing evaluation tools that are effective in bringing out the indicators relevant to your project. To be relevant, it is also preferable that an indicator be able to demonstrate that one or more preconditions for attaining your general objective have been fulfilled.

It is important that all of the partners, as a group, be involved in identifying the indicators; if possible, the process should also include representatives of the target public—the participants. With input from all of the partners, it is possible to formulate indicators that are both representative of everyone’s concerns and highlight the specificity of your project. As researcher Louis Jacob (2012: 94) noted, “There are no universal indicators”; this means that your indicators will be defined to take into account the uniqueness of your project, its operating mode, and its objectives.

Case Study: L’Anonyme Youth Centre

The L’Anonyme Youth Centre wants to have a mural painted on the façade of its building, which is situated in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. The participants will be the young people who visit the centre, who will work under the supervision of a professional artist. The youth centre has suffered a great deal of vandalism in the past, and the Sainte-Marie Borough hopes that the young people will appropriate it and make it their second home.

The L’Anonyme team (directors and social workers) held consultation meetings with the team delegated by the borough and certain users of the facility to define the main objectives and the preconditions for attaining them. On the latter point, please refer to Appendix 2, “Example of a Report on Preliminary Objectives”, in the toolbox.

*Overall long-term objective:*
For the services and resources of the youth centre to become better known and used by the local population.

*Specific short- and medium-term objective:*
For the project to encourage neighbourhood teenagers and their families to visit the youth centre.
Thus, over the short term, it is hoped that as the project is carried out, it will draw more people to the youth centre and eventually get them involved in creating the mural. The production of the mural becomes an action for meeting the specific objective. What might the indicators be for this short-term higher visitor rate? First of all, we could say that they are quantitative, and this would lead us to gather the following data, among others:

- The total number of participants
- The number of participants who attend repeatedly
- The number of members of individual families who participate in the project

Over the long term, we try to measure retrospectively how the attendance rate at the youth centre has evolved over a given time scale—weeks, months, or even years, depending on the extent of the project. Since there is interest not just in the number of people who will visit the centre but also in the quality of the relationships that will be formed there, qualitative indicators may look, among other things, at the development of certain relational skills by those who use the youth centre’s services.

Over the short term, will the process of carrying out the project enable participants to test their capacity for conflict resolution and the search for solutions? Over the long term, will the production of the mural have allowed for the creation of new friendships among young people or parents from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds? As we recall, the indicators chosen must be rather precise, even if they may be abstract; in effect, how can a friendship be measured? In this regard, the choice of methodology and evaluation tools will make all the difference. At the end of your evaluation, you will be able to show the outcome of the objective statement that you established at the start.
### Summary of the Formulation of Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Quantitative indicators</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Qualitative indicators</th>
<th>Tools</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Short-term indicators</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Total number</td>
<td>· Artist’s logbook</td>
<td>· Development of collaborative and mutual assistance relations among participants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of participants</td>
<td>· End-of-project questionnaire—artist</td>
<td>(intergenerational, interethnic, etc.)</td>
<td>· Observation in the field</td>
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<td>· Number of participants in each workshop</td>
<td>· End-of-project questionnaire—participants</td>
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<td>· Artist’s logbook</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Number of participants who came to more than one workshop</td>
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<td>· Midway questionnaire—artist</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Number of members of a single family participating in the project</td>
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<td>· Midway questionnaire—participant</td>
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<td>· Development of communication skills among participants (ability to communicate one’s emotions and needs adequately)</td>
<td>· Final questionnaire—artist</td>
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<td>· Midway questionnaire—participant</td>
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<td>· Final questionnaire—participant</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Medium- and long-term indicators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>· Increase in the rate of visits to the youth centre</td>
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<td>· Statistical record of visits to the youth centre</td>
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<td>· Statistical record of visits to the youth centre</td>
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<td>· Diversification of clientele at the youth centre</td>
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<td>· Maintenance of social relations developed during the project</td>
<td>· Statistical record of visits to the youth centre</td>
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<td>· Follow-up interviews with the team of partners</td>
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Step B: Creating and Applying the Methodology

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<td>· Schedule</td>
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<td>Action no 4</td>
<td>Gather daily data</td>
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<td>· Artist – mediator’s logbook</td>
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<td>Action no 5</td>
<td>Survey participants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Midway questionnaire for participants</td>
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<td></td>
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Data Collection

With indicators in hand, you can create your methodology. Now that you know what you must evaluate, you will choose how to do so. It is at this stage that you integrate evaluation actions for the project into an action plan, in the concrete form of a schedule. This document becomes the basis for monitoring your project, but it must not be seen as a fixed, immutable element. On the contrary, it must be in the image of your approach: lively and dynamic.

You will already have identified the person who will act as project leader during the consultation stage. This person will be responsible for monitoring the tasks to be accomplished by each partner. Your schedule must be realistic. Are the intended actions well defined and understood by everyone? Are the partners sure that they will be able to meet the project deadlines? Transparency is key.

For data collection we propose the “social work journals” model. For each activity, you will ask your artist – facilitator – mediators to keep a logbook. The objective is to see if particular factors have an impact on how activities function. Is the artist comfortable? Does he or she require more structure, specific training, support, or something else? Are the needs that you identified at the beginning of the project as important for the participants as planned, or are other expectations emerging? Through the repeated entries, you will be able to discern trends.
You will not evaluate everything that takes place in a single activity. You can choose to evaluate the perception of participants, changes occurring among them, changes of direction, and so on. It will be possible to conduct one activity one to three times for comparison purposes, or to conduct another activity at two or three different times in the project. Whatever you choose to do, make sure that you measure the same thing each time in order to acquire comparable data. This is the only way to create meaning and reach conclusions.

There are three key times to evaluate activities in this way:

1. At the beginning of the project: to take the pulse of the community and the participants
2. During the project: to understand what is happening while it is in progress, to see if there are things to change or redirect
3. After the project: to grasp the essence and depth of changes

You will search for a great deal of information with which to feed your indicators, while remaining realistic with regard to your internal capacity to process the data that you will collect. The collection process must not be too cumbersome for the team members and the participants. Asking them to invest a great deal of time in answering questionnaires may be a factor in the project’s lack of success. Therefore, you must be sensitive to the impact that these questionnaires have on participants and respect the time that they have to offer to the process. The first questionnaire must be quick to fill out.

To write a questionnaire that is effective in gathering information, it is important to use only multiple-choice questions. The data will be much easier to compile, compare, and analyze. This way, whether you have 10 or 1,000 responses to analyze, you will be able to make technology work for you. Excel is one such tool. You can create online questionnaires using Google Apps on the Web. Once a participant or artist fills out a questionnaire, the system compiles all of the data in an Excel spreadsheet. You therefore don’t have to manually process the questionnaires by entering data by hand in a software package, for example. You will be able to create tables and graphics in the online applications, or export the data into a Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet on your computer.

When numbers, questionnaires, and interviews don’t produce all of the information you require, the methodology of arts-based evaluation uses creative processes as a way to explore the participants’ experiences and feelings. By using educational and artistic tools, you may assess the changes taking place among participants through your activities. For example, has there been an “improvement”, a learning experience, or a criticism of the workshops that is difficult to discern? Art objects resulting from the workshops (drawings, choreographies, sketches) or documentation of them (photographs, videos, sound recordings) can also be used to attest to the processes and history of activities.

The tools presented in the appendix (schedule, logbooks, questionnaires, creative activities) may be used as they appear, but we strongly suggest that you devise your own methods and processes for this section of the evaluation.
Step C: Compile and Analyze the Data

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<td>Analyze</td>
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Compilation

Once some or all of the data are gathered, it is time to begin building the digital magnifying glass through which you will examine the field. Each tool will have its own particular compilation method.

Facilitation Worksheet 1
You will find the compilation method for this worksheet in the tools “Example of a Report on Preliminary Objectives” and “Report on Preliminary Objectives (blank)”. During the meeting, you may record the discussion and/or ask someone to take notes.

Artist – mediator’s logbook
The best way to organize the data is to ask your artist–mediators to keep a logbook on a computer. You will thus be able to copy and paste information and codify the logbook entries.

Coding is without doubt the most important aspect. You will try to group the useful information into homogeneous categories and to observe models, repetitions, and other patterns. You are not yet analyzing the data, but you are remaining open to what is meaningful to you. It is normal to go back and change groupings, category labels, or other items. With this type of analysis, we don’t always know what we are looking for. It is as we move forward, consulting more and more data, that we begin to understand what we are looking for – what is going on within the context of the cultural mediation activities.

Questionnaires
The questionnaires are easier to compile. You may use free online tools to create them and manage the data generated. We recommend that you use Google Apps tools, which will enable you to create Excel “lite” spreadsheets and then transfer them into a full spreadsheet in the Office Suite on your computer. As you will have written questions with multiple-choice answers, thus reducing the time needed to read and analyze data, you can make graphics and tables for each question, use dynamic cross-tabulation tables to compare data sets, and create your indicators.
Arts-based evaluation (ABE)
With this method, one takes notes as faithfully as possible, if only to record conversations so that they can be reviewed as necessary. You will proceed the same way as for the meeting analysis proposed in “Facilitation Worksheet 1”: dividing up themes, grouping opinions, and so on. You may always use “artworks” or artistic results as examples in order to support your hypothesis or illustrate that an objective was reached. As the saying goes, an image is worth a thousand words. You will use information gathered through these artistic tools to explain trends and figures, thus giving depth to your analysis of the results.

Group discussions
Hosting a discussion group will also generate a large quantity of data. The best option is to record conversations and/or to ask someone to take notes. You can then make use of the coding method undertaken with the artist’s logbooks.

Data Analysis:
Creating Links between People, Creating Meaning in the Data
As you organize the data, you may notice certain trends: the achievement of certain objectives, adjustments to be made, paths to explore, and so on. At this stage, you will try to explain these trends—to understand why things have happened. While it is great that you have attained your objective(s), you must be able to clarify how and why you got there. The more you work at evaluating your projects, the more refined your skill at connecting and analyzing the results will become. Within the context of cultural mediation, evaluation is an ability to create links among things, to sense relationships among the numbers or behaviours that you have gathered.

It is important, in fact, to know how to crosscheck the information with the identity of the individuals questioned. If you use Google Apps tools, you will note that the spreadsheet keeps each questionnaire answered on a single line. Each line represents one participant, and each column represents all participants’ response to a single question. As mentioned above, the online tools offer you great flexibility, in addition to saving you a good deal of time. If you know how Excel works, you can use these applications. If not, ask someone on your team or one of your partners to provide you with the necessary logistical support.

We suggest that you create blind questionnaires, which ensure participants’ anonymity. Although you have a greater chance of obtaining truthful responses this way, you will not be able to crosscheck this information with the information that you obtain during face-to-face meetings (discussions, performance, and so on). You shouldn’t try to crosscheck the data. The questionnaires will give you the pulse and the other tools will explain the trends that the responses to the questionnaires bring to light.
For example, you may notice that people with regular attendance draw more benefits from the activities; that men aged 18 to 25 don’t like the activities; that activities led by a particular cultural mediator are preferred to others; and so on. The responses to the questionnaires will serve as a guide as you analyze the data acquired from other tools. You will try to understand what is most appreciated, what the participants would like to change, what should stay the same, what should be emphasized, and so on.

You must be careful, however, not to totally change your project following the evaluation. If your objectives are reached but the satisfaction rate is not optimal, ask yourself what changes are desirable. If the project is a success, remember that a certain dissatisfaction rate may go hand in hand with a certain level of displeasure: confronting fears and impasses and rising above judgment are not always easy, and even though certain activities may be dissatisfying, they may be essential to the project that you have established. Nevertheless, remain critical with regard to the data and the participants’ opinions and comments at this stage—and above all, don’t take anything personally.

**Back-and-Forth: Actors vs. Data**

No one is immune to errors of interpretation. Although the figures say one thing, the reality may be something different. It is important to confirm your conclusions with your partners to make sure that you have properly interpreted some of the participants’ comments. It may also be that a workshop has not been as successful as anticipated because of factors that overshadowed the process, such as rainy days for all the activities planned or a scheduling conflict with other important events for the community targeted by the project.

It may be a good idea to form an evaluation committee so that the data and interpretations can be passed around to a number of individuals. This will make it possible to avoid making certain errors and improve the processing and analysis of data—whether in terms of technical matters (Excel, spreadsheet, graphics, and so on) or of interpretation. You may decide to hire a reviewer.

There is always the possibility of hiring an evaluation consultant in order to gain a neutral outside opinion. Treat this person as you would treat the partners—he or she must be able to grasp all the expectations and issues inherent to the project. In short, there are many solutions; choose the ones that mean the most within the context of your project.

These meetings will undoubtedly enable you to explain some of the unforeseen positive effects and to put certain negative phenomena identified by the evaluation into perspective.
**Between Pitfalls and Success:**

How to Read Statistics and Transform Negative Aspects Into Opportunities

In performing an evaluation, you will certainly find holes, negative elements, things to rework—and that is normal. However, these faults do not disappear if you don’t proceed with an evaluation. As long as you are unaware of their existence, these weaknesses may expand until your project collapses on itself. Therefore, you must keep a cool head when evaluating your activities.

Cultural and artistic practices are always experimental. In one way or another, they involve a good share of risk and uncertainty. Even when projects do not reach the anticipated objectives, the processes at work may still produce value. For this to happen, the stakeholders must be able to understand the causes of a failure and draw lessons to apply to other projects. Learning from failure is just as important as creating good practices: the two go hand in hand.

Once the evaluation process is an integral part of your mediation project, it will become essential to the management of your projects. We sincerely hope that you will be interested in developing and applying your method, and, above all, that this process will increase the impact that your activities will have on the participants.
Short Glossary of Evaluation Terms

**Arts-Based Evaluation (ABE):** Evaluation method using the results of creative processes (choreographies, writings, photographs, etc.) to understand what the participants in an activity are experiencing and feeling. For example, is there an “improvement”, a learning experience, or a criticism of the workshops? Each discipline will have its own evaluation tools.

**Data (singular: datum):** Bits of information that serve as control points; results of observations or experiments performed, on their own or through other tasks, and subjected to statistical methods.

**Graphic:** Representation of qualitative, ranked, or quantitative data in a construction using the properties of visual perception and applying the laws of graphics.

**Indicator:** Qualitative (good, average, obsolete) or quantitative (percentage) variable allowing for assessment of a phenomenon or an action based on objectives, expressed in the form of normative or comparative values.

- **Objective:** Indicator that specifies facts that, if they were measured by different people, would give the same result.
- **Subjective:** Indicator based on opinions or perceptions.
- **Quantitative:** Indicator that uses numbers and expresses quantities or amounts.
- **Qualitative:** Indicator that uses words, colours, or symbols to express attitudes or viewpoints.

**Method (methodology):** Logical ordering of a group of principles, rules, or steps, constituting a means of arriving at a result; way of conducting an action, task, or activity based on a reasoned approach.

**Open-ended evaluation:** Evaluation focused on dynamic connections between processes inherent to an initiative, program, policy, and so on, and the results of these processes. By providing immediate feedback on the approach, it allows for changes to be made as the project is underway.

**Sample:** Representative group of a reference population possessing the same characteristics. A sample is composed either at random or via the quota method.

**Statistic:** Group of observed data related to a group of individuals or units (often plural because we refer to “units” when we are dealing with groups of individuals—for example, team A, Team B, or young people and adults); group of methods whose objective is to gather, process, and interpret these data.

**Statistical measurement:** Measurement acquired by a statistical study, related either to an entire dataset (by way of a general trend or throughout the extent of the study), or to a particular dataset (through its position within the big picture). There are different types of statistical measurements.

**Table:** Graphical arrangement for recording data; the data themselves.

**Tool:** Element of an activity acting as a means or an instrument.

**Trend:** The orientation of a series of data observed over a certain period.
Bibliography


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