

Arts-Based Evaluation Methods

Creative approaches in gathering and sharing stories of impact and change

Why integrate art into evaluation?

Arts-based methods can make evaluation more meaningful and impactful. By incorporating art into the evaluation process, participants experience the evaluation differently and can express themselves in ways that are difficult to capture with traditional evaluation methods. Art can help to authentically engage people and meet them where they are at. This can lead to powerful visuals and end products that more fully communicate experiences, insight, context, impact, and community wisdom. Art can bring life and meaning to numbers and reports, thereby magnifying the impact of your work and enabling participants to see themselves reflected in the evaluation results.

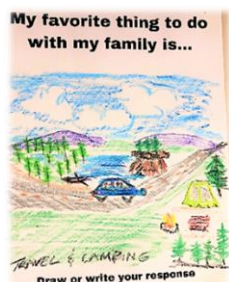
What exactly are arts-based methods?

There are many different art forms that can be integrated into evaluation, including but not limited to visual art, music, dance or movement, and poetry. Arts-based methods can be conducted alongside traditional research methods like surveys, interviews, and focus groups. These methods can be used at any point in the evaluation process, including:

- **Theory of change:** Going beyond boxes and arrows to create an illustrated theory of change that shows what your program aims to accomplish and how you approach your work.
- **Data collection:** Using methods such as PhotoVoice or Harvest Poetry allows evaluation participants to express themselves in more visual, illustrative, affective, and less formal ways. This also alters the power dynamics so that evaluation participants define and identify the data worth capturing.
- **Data analysis:** Employing creative and interactive approaches to interpret and make sense of data, often in collaboration with evaluation participants.
- **Sharing evaluation results:** Integrating findings into infographics, murals, songs, or dance that communicates key takeaways through engaging, more accessible and evocative formats.
- **Ongoing learning throughout the evaluation cycle:** Art can also be integrated throughout an entire evaluation, like creating an illustrated theory of change and then using a visual harvesting approach to community-engaged data analysis.

What are concrete examples of arts-based methods within evaluation projects?

Coloring activity at community events: Asking kids and families to define success



As a way to collect stories, images, and ideas of what it looks like for kids and families to thrive, Wilder Research created a coloring packet activity for use at community events. The top sheet of the packet had the prompt “*My favorite thing to do with my family is...*” Kids (or adults) could draw or write their answer, then pin the finished coloring sheets to a board at the event so kids can see their work and get a sticker. Participants get to keep the rest of the coloring packet and take home a box of crayons, while the project learns how kids and families define what it means to thrive.

Family journal stamping activity: Understanding how families interact with services



To gather participation data at an arts-based family event, Wilder Research created the KID CITY Journal. As families interacted with the booths, presenters, and activities at the event, they received a stamp in their journal. Families were instructed to fill out the backside of the journal as well, which asked for demographic characteristics. Families could then turn in the journal for a chance to win fun raffle prizes. This interactive and arts-based data collection approach provided useful information about how families spent their time at the event while also giving a sense of the demographic makeup of those who attended the event.

Reflecting on the year: Integrating visual recording into story-mapping sessions

To capture milestones, challenges, and stories of impact, Wilder Research integrated a graphic recorder—someone who visually captures an event or meeting through drawings of images and words—into year-end story mapping sessions for a multi-organization evaluation. While detailing their experiences and impact in the past year, the graphic recorder created a visual with the key words and images. Participants then provided feedback in real time on the visuals being created, and sent photos or materials after the session for inclusion into the visual. Each organization received the resulting image, combined with a qualitative analysis of the meeting notes to capture the impact and stories from the year of work.



Story map of Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES) created by Wilder Research's Anna Alba. This summary describes the work of CLUES in their first year of the initiative.

Exploring through movement: Learning experiences and capturing program impact through dance

To learn about the experiences of program participants – especially when those experiences may be varied, difficult, or bring up a mix of emotions – movement-based evaluation methods can access deeper ways of knowing and engage participants in a more holistic, generative way. Wilder Research is beginning to design group sessions through which participants use movement to explore their experiences with a program, organization, or social issue. Through a mix of individual and group reflection and movement, participants express themselves through movement and later discuss the meaning of their movement as it relates to the evaluation topic. Both the movements themselves and the participant's meaning-making is used to learn about the topic or experience of the program.

Any organization or program can use arts-based methods in their evaluation!
Contact Wilder Research to learn how we can take a creative approach in your evaluation.

651-280-2790 | research@wilder.org

Wilder Research.
Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700
www.wilderresearch.org