

## WHAT IS "DATA" AND WHERE DO I GET IT?

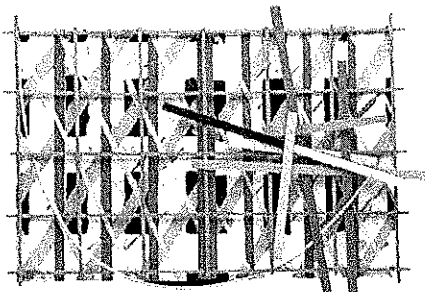
If you can observe it, it is data.

Data is factual information, especially information that is systematically organized and used to help someone make a decision. Most people associate the word "data" with numbers: dollars, demographics, percents or averages. Statistical or standardized information, usually called *quantitative* data, is part of most evaluations, but is by no means the only kind of information that is useful to arts organizations. While quantitative data can identify important trends or patterns, *qualitative* data is often needed to reveal the deeper meaning behind the numbers.

For instance, an audience survey can quantify the percent of people who might attend another performance at your venue. Until you probe for additional qualitative information, however, little about that data is actionable for you as an arts manager. Asking "Why or why not?" to elicit qualitative responses may reveal important insight, such as:

- The parking is terrible,
- I could not hear the dialogue,
- I only go to events when I can get a babysitter,
- I received this ticket as a gift and cannot afford to buy another, or
- I faithfully attend every choral event in our town.

Armed with such information, you can now decide which conditions you wish to address in the future. This is why a good evaluation typically blends different kinds of information: quantitative information to identify major trends, and qualitative information to provide depth of understanding.



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### ARTS DATA: A SAMPLER OF IDEAS

**Participation data** describes your audience and their experiences.

- Number of individuals participating
- Participant demographics
- Home zip code or address
- Motivation for attending
- Opinions about the event or exhibit
- Personal arts interests and preferences
- Participant ratings of your customer service
- Perceived barriers to participation
- Etc...

**Marketing data** helps you attain your audience development goals and understand the effectiveness of your outreach.

- Where did participants hear about this event?
- Were tickets purchased via mail, on-line or in person?
- What types of tickets were purchased?
- Were outreach strategies to target markets successful?
- Etc...

**Financial data** can help you calculate management efficiency and return on investment.

- Admissions income
- Memberships
- Grants and contributions
- Number of donors
- Number of donors increasing their contributions
- Project costs
- Savings achieved
- Etc...

**Impact data** helps you understand the effects of your program on participants and your surrounding community.

- Perceived benefits to participation
- Changes in behaviors or attitudes
- Learning outcomes
- School climate
- Achievement, attendance or discipline of students
- Audience spending on parking, meals or housing
- Quality of life
- Etc...

## OUTCOMES

Measurable changes in a person or group's status, skills, attitudes, knowledge or circumstances.

## OUTCOME GOALS

The changes you hope to achieve in your organization, in your community or among your program's participants. Outcome goals can be short-term or long-term. It is helpful to articulate them in your project plan or your organization's strategic plan.

## INDICATORS

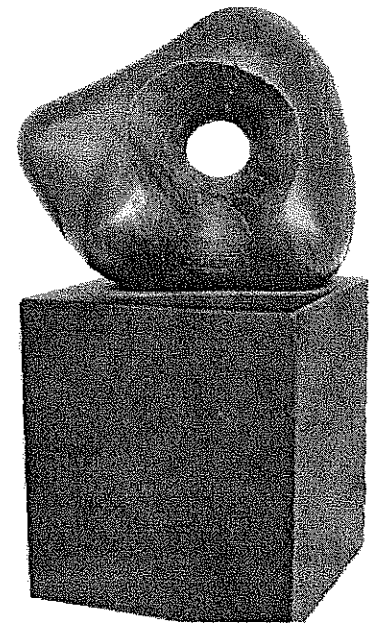
Selected data—quantitative or qualitative—that can be gathered to measure progress toward your outcome goals. You can choose any indicators, but make sure that they are both *relevant* to the outcome and *feasible* for you to collect.

Many different sources of data are available to arts organizations. A few examples include:

- **Admissions/enrollment records:** Many arts organizations track ticket sales or class enrollments through a database or spreadsheet program. Consider how you might mine this data in order to measure the extent of participation in your events. Are numbers increasing over time, holding steady or declining? Why? Do you systematically collect and record all the information that you and your funders need? Assess whether you should secure additional information to tell you more about your audience and assist you with marketing your programs.
- **Financial records:** Try to tally all financial transactions (including salaries) connected to your

project. How do your expenses compare with your revenue? What areas are most expensive, but worth every penny? In what areas might cost-savings be achieved? Do you have specific financial goals for your organization or program? How close are you to achieving those goals? When developing your budgets at the beginning of your fiscal year, be sure they contain enough detail for you to realistically reflect on these questions and make sound financial management decisions.

- **Surveys:** Surveys, especially audience surveys, are common evaluation and marketing tools in the arts field. Often they are used to understand the composition of an organization's audience, but they also can be adopted to gather information on opinions, motivations, preferences, perceived barriers or other issues. The success of surveys usually hinges on two factors: the quality of the questions (crafting questions that are clearly understood and can be accurately answered) and the respondent pool (securing a response that is sufficiently large and diverse to be truly representative of your population).
- **Interviews:** Interviews may be conducted in person or on the telephone and are a good choice when the information you need is sensitive or confidential in nature, or when the respondent will appreciate personal attention. Interviews also offer you the flexibility to adapt the inquiry to individuals by omitting irrelevant questions or taking more time to probe key issues. To encourage candid responses, choose an interviewer who will be perceived as trustworthy by the interviewees.
- **Focus groups:** Focus groups are designed to elicit qualitative information from a small number of people through dialogue and group interaction. Five to ten individuals typically participate in a focus group, which are often used to probe the "why's and wherefores" of participants' behaviors or opinions. Focus groups are best led by a trained moderator— an impartial individual who is



*Untitled*, Marjorie E. Jones-Candwell  
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knowledgeable about the subject and skilled in group facilitation techniques. If you want to conduct a focus group, you will need to develop a protocol in advance, to ensure that the conversations address the questions that matter most to you. Arrange for a transcript of the proceedings to enable analysis of the information.

- **Pre- and post-tests:** When designed around specific learning objectives, tests can measure the “before and after” skills, knowledge or perceptions of students in workshops, classes or other educational programs. A comparison of these two scores is one way of measuring the learning and skill outcomes of arts instruction.
- **Journals or portfolios:** Journals or portfolios provide a written or visual record of learners’ experiences and achievements. Artists and arts teachers often cite the dual value of these assessment techniques. They not only help instructors measure skill development, but also are tools that encourage students to self-reflect on their own work.
- **Direct observations:** Observation is a useful way to gather real-time behavioral information using artists, teachers, staff or volunteers. Observers can be trained to look for specific actions, activities or behaviors during a class, performance or other event. Consistency is the key to observation success. Be sure that all observers are well-practiced and attentive. Provide a uniform checklist or log that helps them record what they see.