British Columbia
Museums Association
SINCE 1957

Best Practices
Module

MEASUREMENTS & EVALUATIONS

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Content

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Introduction

Is your education program effective? Was that last exhibit a hit? Where do you start?
To make the best use of your resources (people, cash, supplies and contacts), to produce effective programs, assess achievements and choose from alternatives you must insure that your measurement and evaluation skills are at their best.

Measurement and evaluation provides feedback, indicators (such as increased attendance), and evidence of progress towards predetermined goals. They provide data or information that can be compared internally, externally or historically and they can be used to report on **outcomes** and assess the health of the organization. The term "best practice" refers to those measurement and evaluation practices that have produced outstanding results in another situation and can be adapted for your situation.

Who Requires Information?

Accurate, relevant information is required in order to make informed decisions and to provide accountability to stakeholders. Good decision making on any level relies on being well informed, while stakeholders want to know that the resources of the organization are being efficiently and effectively utilized to achieve the stated goals.

TIP:
Stakeholders could include Boards of Directors, management, funding agencies, donors, staff, volunteers and users of an organization's services (visitors, customers and other clients).

TIP:
Make a list of stakeholders and describe the kind of measurements or evaluations currently reported to them.

TIP:
Role Play: Imagine yourself in the place of each of your stakeholders; what kind of information would you want to know? Is your organization currently providing it?

TIP:
Identify what each kind of information tells the stakeholders about your organization. Examples are membership base, staff competencies, project grant success.

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What Kind of Measurements?

Measurements can be made of virtually every aspect of an organization's operation. Measurements can be **quantitative** — involving the description of a characteristic using a numerical measurement (ex. museum is 30,000 sq ft.) or **qualitative** — describing a relevant characteristic that does not include a numerical measurement (e.g. museum is large). Collecting regular measurements will provide a toolset of information that can be applied to an evaluation of a program, policy or people

TIP:
When using quantitative or qualitative data, it is worth having an understanding of some basic statistics. A lesson on statistics is beyond the scope of this article, however many resources are available in your local library and on the Internet.

Quantitative Measurements

To be useful, quantitative measurements must be:

Made using the same guidelines, criteria, or ruler. For example, is the attendance measured by counting all persons visiting the organization? Are school groups measured separately? Are complimentary visits included? Is the number of persons attending an event after regular operating hours included in attendance?

Based on consistent data collection conditions. Are the conditions for capturing attendance information always the same? Are some numbers estimated? Are there days when attendance is not counted? Was the organization open for the same number of days or closed for a period due to renovations?

Described in their context. Did a special exhibition contribute to a substantially larger number of visitors? Did the organization move from free admission to a pay for visit situation?

Financial Measurements

Financial reports and statements provide a good source of quantitative data for measurements and ratios that indicate the financial health of an organization. Some commonly used financial measurements and ratios are:

Current Ratio
- Current Assets divided by Current Liabilities
- Measures the ability to meet short-term debt obligations. An organization should target a Current Ratio of 1 or better.

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What Kind of Measurements, cont'd…?

Financial Measurements, cont'd…

Quick Ratio or Acid Ratio
- Cash plus Accounts Receivable, divided by Current Liabilities
- Indicates liquid assets available to cover current debt. This is a harsher version of the Current Ratio, which balances short-term liabilities against cash and liquid instruments.

Product Cost – Inventory Ratio
- Cost of Gift Shop Sales divided by Inventory
- Reflects the number of times inventory is turned over during the course of the year. High levels can mean good liquidity or sales, or shortages requiring better management. Low levels may indicate poor cash flow or overstocking.

Gift Shop Profit Ratio
- Gift Shop Net Profit divided by Gift Shop Annual Sales
- This is the key profit ratio, indicating how much is contributed to the institution for each $100 of sales.

Performance or variance with budget
- Comparison of actual revenues or expenses with those budgeted for the same period. A positive variance occurs when actual revenues exceed budget and when actual expenditures are less than budget.

Comparison with previous year
- Comparing dollar amount changes from one year to the next on operating statement accounts. Explain larger variations.
- Calculate an expense as percentage of total revenue and compare to the previous year.

Surveys are another good source of quantitative information. Visitors could be asked to indicate their enjoyment of an exhibit by selecting a number between 1 and 5 where 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "very much".

TIP:
Always include a description of how the measurement is made, any assumptions that are included and special circumstances that may have affected a measurement.

TIP:
A large amount of information is available in your organization. Collect data about attendance, square footage, $ gross gift shop sales/sq ft, memberships, tourists, seasonal variations, school programs offered, and volunteer hours.

TIP:
Use an excel spreadsheet to assemble a base of statistical information to provide readily accessible data for various analysis purposes.

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What Kind of Measurements, cont'd…?

Qualitative Measurements

Organizations also use other value indicators besides quantitative data to measure numerous characteristics about operations. Qualitative data measurement is generally used to gather information that is difficult to measure or express in numerical form. This data can be gathered through surveys, focus groups, and suggestion boxes, as well as formal and informal estimates. Opinions are ranked by selecting from a range of options such as 'most strongly fits.' Rankings are tallied to provide a spectrum of opinion and indication of preferences.

Some examples of qualitative measurements are:

- Strengths, weaknesses, threats, opportunities (good board, strong competition) are often subjective
- Visitor experience (satisfied, disappointed)
- Collection value (outstanding, unique)
- Staff morale (content, poor)
- Staff performance (meets or exceeds expectations)
- Institutional reputation (highly respected)
- Program and exhibit execution (well designed, meets curriculum standards)

TIP:
Seek some professional help when developing a questionnaire designed to provide qualitative measures. The way the question is framed may affect the answer.

TIP:
Save time and money by adapting other organization's methods to your circumstances.

Benchmarks

A benchmark is a point of reference from which measurements can be made. Quantitative benchmarks compare performance results with a base figure. They can be expressed as a ratio, percentage, or dollar figure. Managers and boards can assess the comparative performance of their organization over time.

Qualitative benchmarks measure improvement in perceived performance or service from a base assessment.

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What Kind of Measurements, cont'd…?

Why measure?

At the core of each institution is the mission statement or the purpose. This is the difference an institution will make; the value that it adds, why anyone would care if it disappeared. To support the mission, organizations develop general goals. These goals are defined by specific objectives or strategies that allocate required resources, identify timelines or milestones and predetermine goals. Measurements are required to determine if these goals and milestones have been achieved, on time and on target.

When setting out specific objectives that will support a goal, begin by identifying quantitative and qualitative measurements that will provide indications that the objective has been met.

Goal:	To illuminate the history of 'tea spoons'.
Objective:	Develop and present a public and school program on the use of the teaspoon as a measurement in cooking.
Quantitative Measurements:	• Number of hours of staff or volunteer time required to develop program • Cost of materials for the program • Estimated revenue from school groups and general public estimated to attend the program.
Qualitative Measurements	• Description of ways that this program fits with the school curriculum. • Reasons that this program would be of interest to sponsors • Summary of how this program supports and advances the mission of the organization.

These initial measurements are the beginnings of a toolset to provide data and information that will build to an evaluation of the program.

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Evaluation from Beginning to End

Learning to perform competent evaluations on various aspects of the organization will build a framework of measurements and indicators for monitoring and assessing organizational performance. Ongoing assessment will generate data that can be used in evaluations.

Evaluation is undertaken primarily for:

Accountability - Demonstrate the results of a program and use of resources
Program planning and improvement - Identify changes that will improve a program or process
New understandings - To create a body of information that informs future decisions and plans

Evaluation can take place at the beginning and at the end of a program or activity. Most references consider only the end-of-project evaluation, but close examination of the goal and the methods of achieving it will ensure better decision making from the start.

Steps in an Initial Evaluation

Many organizations begin their evaluation process after the program has started, when the exhibition has finished or when the employee is not productive. Although valuable information can still be gleaned from these situations, evaluations will be more useful if the process begins before the resources are allocated, before the exhibition choices are made and before employees are engaged.

Begin with the goal in mind (what do you expect to achieve)?

Clarify motivations:
- What motivations are driving the goal (mission or purpose, revenue considerations, or other)?
- What is the clear benefit?

Evaluate all investments or inputs:
- Cash, in-kind contributions, staff time and management costs, and volunteer time - are each recognized as important inputs to a successful program?

Identify opportunities for leverage:
- What other external resources will contribute to the project, as a result of the initial investment?

Identify project benefits:
- Refer to the goals and motivations established for the project
- Identify tangential benefits
- What other unintended impacts may the project bring?

Measure impact and outcomes
- Develop longer-term indicators to track the value of the change in a community that occurs because of the initial investment in the project.

Evaluation from Beginning to End, cont'd…

Planning

The project is selected based on the identification of the goal, estimation of costs and selection of criteria with which to measure the impact, effectiveness or outcomes. This is a similar process as that involved in setting a budget for an organization. If the steps required to accomplish the outcomes are established, progress toward the effectiveness or outcome can be measured.

Performance Assessment

"The distinction between evaluation and performance assessment is one of focus and timing."[1] Evaluation is focused on a specific program or activity at a point in time. Performance assessment is ongoing and a more encompassing routine of assessment and monitoring applied to all aspects of an organization, including the organization as a whole.

Performance assessments are most useful when conducted on a regular basis. This provides points for comparative measurement and tracking progress.

Types of Performance Assessment

- **People (Staff)**
- **Performance** of individuals in the execution of their job is common to many organizations
- **Employees need feedback on how they are doing**. Employers need to know that the work is being accomplished effectively. An annual (or more frequent) performance assessment will permit communication pertaining to the job description, accomplishments, challenges, failures and inefficiencies.

A performance assessment should provide the employer and employee with a mutual understanding of:

Organizational Effectiveness
- Ensure that the employee's work plans are directed towards or support the strategic direction of the organization

Performance Improvement
- Establish clear communication between the manager and the employee about what the employee is expected to accomplish
- Provide on-going, constructive feedback on performance
- Identify areas of poor performance
- Establish plans for improving performance, as necessary

[1] Phillips, Susan and Tatyana Teplova, Control to Learning, Accountability and Performance Assessment in *The Voluntary Sector Management of Nonprofit and Charitable Organizations in Canada* Vic Murray Ed., Canada: LexisNexis, 2006, p. 318

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Evaluation from Beginning to End, cont'd…

Identification of Strengths
- Identify the skills and abilities of each employee so that work assignments build on and reflect an employee's strengths
- Identify individual employees for more challenging work
- Assist and support staff in achieving their work and career goals by identifying training needs and development opportunities
- Administrative decisions
- Support decision-making about promotions, terminations, compensation and rewards
- Legal documentation
- Provide a paper trail for legal challenges related to dismissal or vicarious liability.

TIP:
Make sure that annual budget preparation and employee performance assessments do not occur at the same time to limit expectations of salary increases.

TIP:
Use a performance assessment checklist or form and review results with employee.
Insure that poor work habits, absenteeism, and other performance problems are noted and addressed promptly with the employee. Do not wait until the annual assessment to discuss these matters.

People - Volunteers

The cultural sector relies heavily on volunteers. It is necessary to find the right combination of incentives and job characteristics to induce a volunteer to stay interested in helping an organization.

When assessing performance of the volunteers in your organization it is important to examine the volunteer job design:

- Clarity of the task - what exactly needs to be done?
- Variety and level of skills needed - mundane and boring versus challenging and varied work
- Perceived significance of the work - the importance to the stakeholders
- Level of autonomy - highly standardized or able to make decisions
- Level and quality of feedback

TIP:
Understand the volunteers' needs and match them with the appropriate job

TIP:
Emphasize and communicate the social meaningfulness of the activity.

TIP:
Link the activity to generalized skills.

Evaluation from Beginning to End, cont'd…

TIP:
Value their time, give them feedback and publicly and privately recognize their contributions and reimburse their expenses.[2]

TIP:
Inform the volunteers of their job description and that their contributions are being evaluated.

People - Board

Boards of cultural organizations are made of uniquely committed volunteers. They accept fiduciary responsibility for the organization, hire and review the performance of the executive director and provide visionary and fundraising leadership. Board performance is enhanced if board members are carefully selected.

There are two universal criteria for board members:

1. Board members must be committed to the organization's mission.
2. Prospective board members must have the time and energy to do the board's business.[3]

In order to perform effectively, boards must have a well-defined job description and possess the knowledge and skills required to make good decisions. Organizational by-laws will specify some procedures for the removal of a board member if responsibilities are not properly filled.

Boards can perform self-evaluation and use the results for planning and assigning responsibilities. **Some boards include a quick review at the end of each meeting with the following two questions**:

The information provided for today's board meeting was:

Useless	1	2	3	4	5	Essential

Today's board discussions were primarily concerned with:

Operations	1	2	3	4	5	Ends/Policy/Strategy

[2] Meinhard, Agnes, Managing the Human Dimensions in Nonprofit Organizations: Paid Staff and Volunteers in *The Voluntary Sector Management of Nonprofit and Charitable Organizations in Canada* Vic Murray Ed., Canada: LexisNexis, 2006, p.414

3 Murray, Vic, Managing the Governance Function: Developing Effective Boards of Directors in *The Voluntary Sector Management of Nonprofit and Charitable Organizations in Canada* Vic Murray Ed., Canada: LexisNexis, 2006, p.84

Evaluation from Beginning to End, cont'd…

Typical areas of board self evaluation include:
- Preparation for meetings
- Do the right items get placed on board agendas?
- Does the board get suitable information in support of agenda items?
- Does the board receive the right kind of information regarding the organization's performance and challenges?

Conduct of meetings
- Is the total time allocated to board meetings sufficient?
- Is the time allocation to individual items satisfactory?
- Is the board familiar with its governance responsibilities related to decision-making?
- Is the board familiar with the responsibilities of management?
- Does the board allow sufficient opportunity to review policies and contribute to the development of the strategic direction?

Board structure and participation
- What would the ideal board look like for this organization?
- What orientation, information and education should new board members receive?
- Boards should self-assess their participation and performance on the board.
- Perform a 360-degree evaluation of the board members and chair annually.

TIP:
Provide a board manual with board positions and job descriptions, terms of reference for committees, policies, brief organizational history, current plans and programs.

TIP:
Organize a formal orientation for all board members so that they are familiar with staff, the facilities, programs, and strategic issues.

TIP:
Provide the board with program and project assessments so that they will be familiar with the process.

Program Effectiveness

Project grant and funded programs generally require the applicant to specify and assess the outcomes or outputs of the activity. Long-running or core programs or exhibitions of an organization will also benefit from evaluation.

Simple Assessments

The simplest information to collect about a program or exhibition is the attendance statistics. The numbers can be further analyzed to determine categories of attendance such as school groups, members or other types of visitors. Compare these with other programs.

Inviting visitors to respond to a simple questionnaire, or survey can provide an informal way to evaluate programs designed with measurable goals in mind. Teachers may respond to a follow-up survey after a class visit. A suggestion box or guest comment book are also simple ways of obtaining feedback.

Educators or peers may be willing to provide assessments of a program and a comparison of your programs with similar programs offered by other institutions with a similar audience can be done internally. Staff and volunteers are valuable sources of information about program delivery and effectiveness and they should be canvassed regularly to monitor program effectivness.

Observe and listen to visitor comments as they move through your facility.

TIP:
Not everything has to be statistically significant to be of value. Use good judgment to adopt sensible suggested changes.

Formal Evaluations

Formal evaluations that develop large amounts of high quality, detailed information may be required for making internal strategic decisions or to report to important external stakeholders. In these circumstances, the following list of questions will provide a guide to the type of data that needs to be collected.

- What is the purpose and audience of the evaluation?
- What should be the focus?
- Who will be the users of the evaluation?
- What decisions will result from the evaluation?
- Is the program ready to be evaluated?
- Is the evaluation about process, outcomes, or benefits?
- Who will conduct the evaluation?
- What are the possible sources of information?
- What data or information will be required?
- What methods will be used to collect the data?

Program Effectiveness, cont'd…

TIP:
Make the analysis of results easy to understand by using clear language, graphs or charts, and comparison of consistent data.

TIP:
If you provide a suggestion box or comments book, read the submissions.

TIP:
Remember to apply the results of the evaluation to change and improve the performance.

Data Collection Methods [4]

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Questionnaires, surveys, checklists	Quick information from many people	Can be anonymous Can represent a diverse population Inexpensive Easy to analyze	Low response rate Bias in wording Feedback may not be thoughtful May require expert Not full story
Interviews	To understand more about interviewees' experience	Rich range and depth of information Develops relationship with participant Flexibility to follow-up on other questions	Can take time Harder to analyze Can be more costly Possible interviewer bias
Observation	Understand how the program works	View operations of program as it happens Can adapt to events as they occur	Can influence behaviour of program participants Can be expensive and time consuming
Focus Groups	Explore a topic in depth through group discussion	Quickly get an impression Can be efficient way to get range of information Can convey key information about programs	Can be hard to analyze Needs a good facilitator May be difficult to schedule

[4] Phillips, Susan and Tatyana Teplova, Control to Learning, Accountability and Performance Assessment in *The Voluntary Sector Management of Nonprofit and Charitable Organizations in Canada* Vic Murray Ed., Canada: LexisNexis, 2006, p. 333

Conclusion

An exhibition that acts as a catalyst igniting a life-long interest in a child or the special bond that develops between a grandparent and grandchild when a museum artifact triggers memories and stories are examples of outcomes that are difficult to capture and the measurement of impact is impossible to determine.

Although the value of contribution made can take a long time to realize, it is important that the immeasurable social benefit of museums does not get lost. Measurements and evaluations have become a predominant concern for non-profits as ways to demonstrate accountability. Improved institutional capacity to collect and interpret data about the results of programs and the use of resources will help to illustrate value and inform strategic decisions. However, do not stay with 'safe' measurable projects at the expense of fostering innovative and creative experiences.

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Resources

Phillips, Susan and Tatyana Teplova, Control to Learning: Accountability and Performance Assessment in *The Voluntary Sector Management of Nonprofit and Charitable Organizations in Canada* Vic Murray Ed., Canada: LexisNexis Canada Inc., 2006, p. 308-340

Culture Scope – Canada's Cultural Observatory
Look in Research Topics under *Indicators*/*Frameworks for Measurement* for various papers on the subject.
See: **http://culturescope.ca/**

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Results-Based Management and Accountability Frameworks: New 2005 Guidance: A Strategic Approach to Results-Based Management Frameworks. This Treasury Board document, written for the corporate sector, provides many useful guidelines applicable to the cultural sector. It also provides some insight into corporate sponsors expectations from their cultural partners.
See: **http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/eval/ppt/feb05-001_e.asp**

National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy. This paper addresses corporate philanthropy and will set the standard that recipients of corporate support will have to report on.
See: **http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/eng/programs/Current_programs/Capital-Markets/Documents/Measuring-What-Counts/Measuring-What-Counts_9-Business%20Benefits_E.htm**

Charity Village. A site that lists areas of evaluation and it is linked to in-depth articles on specific areas.
See: **http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/research/rom38.html**

Go Volunteer – Resource Library. A good resource library of materials that can be borrowed including 37 books on evaluation.
See: **http://www.govolunteer.ca/library/Main.do**