

Before you start ...

Before setting out and undertaking any of the following methodologies it is important to consider the aims of the project (i.e. what you want to achieve). As you will be unable to tell whether your project was a success unless you have decided what it was supposed to accomplish.

It's important to know the difference between aims and objectives: **aims** are the changes you hope to bring about as a result of what you're doing; **objectives** are the things you do in order to make these changes happen.

A typical aim would be "to increase Londoners awareness of UCL's work in nanotechnology". This would lead to the objective "to host a series of public events that effectively increase this awareness". Aims should be as specific and detailed as possible, as they will form the basis for any evaluation undertaken.

A good project has an impact, on the participants, the audience or both. In the UCL Public Engagement Unit, we often think of these possible impacts on a grid such as this:

	Knowledge and awareness	Attitudes	Skills	Empowerment
Participants (i.e. staff, partners)				
Audience (i.e. publics)				

The main funders of academic-public engagement use similar tables to judge the impact of projects.

The next things to consider are: what evidence you need to collect to know you have met your aims (i.e. indicators), the focus of the evaluation (i.e. what and who with) and when the evaluation will take place (i.e. pre and post project, during the life of the project).

The answers to these questions will shape what method(s) you decide are appropriate for the evaluation of your project. The more you think about the answers to these questions the more you will be drawn towards particular methods of evaluation. Furthermore, the clearer you are in your aims and objectives, the more you will be able to use monitoring and evaluation to judge your success.

The table below summarises some of the most common evaluation techniques, so you can think through and choose the most appropriate techniques to evaluate your project. You shouldn't restrict yourself to this list – if your thinking about your aims has given you ideas for new and better ways to measure success, don't be afraid to use them!

Technique	Strengths	Weaknesses	Who to use it with and when to use it
Interviews	Great to understand different people's experiences of being involved. Allows you to explore in-depth reflections, and can uncover surprising findings.	Interviews can be staff intensive. There is a limit to how many interviews you can conduct, so you might end up with small numbers. You can end up with a skewed sample.	Any person that you require more in-depth and qualitative answers from. Useful to use at the end of the project, or anytime after the project.
Questionnaires	Potentially big data sets. Multiple choice questions are better for providing statistics, but you do need enough	Questionnaires do not tend to access the underlying reasons for responses. Only interested people will	Can be used with everyone who is involved in your project. Usually self completing (handed out on paper, or later online).

	people to complete them for the statistics to mean anything.	respond. Answers will be limited to pre-chosen questions (unlike interviews).	
Observations	Useful for studying and gathering information on an activity (what happens, what someone does or how they behave). Uncovers what people really do, rather than what they say they do.	Only useful for some participatory and interactive projects. Observations can be very subjective: a template should be generated outlining the activities to be recorded.	The project planning and the activities can be observed (e.g. team, audience/participants). Most useful for participatory and interactive projects.
Walk and talks	A 'go along method' which involves both walking and talking, can be particularly useful for evaluating location based projects or activities e.g. festivals or exhibitions.	These can take time to organise, conduct and analyse. There is a limit to how many walking interviews you can conduct, so you might end up with small numbers participating.	Any person that you require more in-depth and qualitative answers from. Good with location based or spatial projects.
Focus groups	Useful for organised discussion with a group of individuals to understand their views and experiences of a project. More qualitative information than a questionnaire will provide you and will take less time than administering several individual interviews.	Focus groups require good mediation. As it is an open-ended process, you may not get the precise answers that you would expect from a questionnaire or interview. The size and composition of the group are important considerations.	Can be used with a selection of the project team or audience. Most useful if used before and after the project.
Personal logs (diaries, log books, reports)	This can take many shapes or forms. Personal logs that are kept throughout a course of a project can provide evidence of personal development, behaviour, thoughts and feelings.	The value of the information collected depends on how truthful it is. They are unpredictable, some will provide lots of information; others will be brief and uninformative.	These work best with staff or participants directly involved in the project. Ideally, throughout the life of the project.
Workshops	It is an excellent, interactive way to understand different peoples' opinions and experiences of a project. It is also a useful tool to provide participants with the chance to challenge the agenda set by the project leader; raising new issues and/or asking questions back.	As with focus groups, workshops require good mediation. Openness and honesty: if undertaken as a group exercise look out for shy individuals who may feel intimidated by the situation and require encouragement.	These can be used with established groups (such as the project team) or with an assembled group (such as those involved in or affected by a project).
Creative methods	It is an excellent visual way to understand different peoples' opinions and experiences of a project. Creative methods can be very attractive, providing a focus for discussion.	The information you obtain will be unpredictable. You will not get precise answers, compared to what you expect from a questionnaire or semi-structured interview.	Could be used with all those attending a project event. Could be undertaken both at the start and end of a project.

If the object of the evaluation is to allow you to know whether you have succeeded (in your own terms), then the important thing is to collect evidence that relates to your initial aims. This is the evidence that will be most useful for future projects, and this is the sort of information that funders are keen to see.

Whatever evaluation methods you decide to use, it is good practice to tell people what information you are collecting, why you are collecting it, and what you will do with it (i.e. the purpose and uses). The approach to evaluation should be transparent and it is important to make it clear to all parties involved how much (or how little) the information you gather will inform future work.