#CitSciNZ2018

ROUNDTABLE: EVALUATING PROJECT SUCCESS

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'If I would have done what the scientist wanted is to do, no one would have been interested'

Citizen science is not a new thing, but recognition is improving (i.e. trustworthiness of data).

The journey is as important as the outcome and the funder needs to be aware of this. Long term projects better – how to get funders to invest in long term evaluation?

Principles of evaluation

- Have clear, specific objectives to start – you can't measure what you don't know you want to. This also provides a timeline to monitor progress to success.
- Evaluation needs to be targeted: different audiences for evaluation (e.g., funders, volunteers) will have different interests.
- Evaluation doesn't always have to be formal – a photo can tell 1000 words
- Evaluation needs to be systematically collected e.g., to determine project strengths and needs to be known by everyone with room left to adapt and refine
- Consider ethics and consent!

When do you evaluate?

Front end evaluation – Who is the target audience? What are our resources? This step is often skipped as part of the design process.

Formative evaluation - Testing resources and strategies, this approach informs design and the end result. As 'action research' it is fluid.

Summative evaluation – Needed to secure future funding by asking 'Did the project achieve outcomes? Note outcomes may differ for citizen science e.g., biodiversity outcomes vs community outcomes. Therefore, it's best to separate out science outcomes from participant outcomes and community outcomes (these need to be acknowledged from the beginning(!) although the people element is harder to measure…). Further questions include Who is driving the project/program? What's important for your audience?

Methods

- Indicators – show outcomes achieved, how learning assessed? Pre- and -post surveys are good for this but takes longer to analyse the results than the project
- SurveyMonkey – richer data from free-entry but slower analysis
- Consider annotated drawings – rich data but very time intense
- Ask 3 questions and do a quick count and repeat at end vs fill paper surveys. Have a chart and stickers for kids to 'vote' with but consider who the data are for
- What % of people value our programs? This question is very difficult to answer so make it easy by including it in your evaluation

- $$ at the end of the day, the funders just want to know they've had value for money. With charities commission funding, there is also more reporting. Weave this into your evaluation to more easily transfer the information into your reporting
- Art gallery – gave kids 5 postcards, 'you can keep 4'. Tell us which ones you want. Then oh! We lost your feedback tell us again? After visit ideas shifted.
- Think about physical/tangible that you can do now (logic models!). There are dramatic differences in a pre-post survey evaluation model that is 1-day vs 6 months
- Have an evaluation dialog with volunteers along the way – not just at the end and weave in changes. Make frequent, informal check-ins
- Data verification?! data from 1-day vs data from long term projects lumped together? How to measure something that might not attributable to your measure?

Community outcomes

Example of unexpected outcome – reporting back on a project, but success took the form of 3 paintings of bats around town and cafés indicates project ownership! A Penguin survey led to community empowerment – running own dog control program!

Resources

User's Guide for Evaluating Learning Outcomes from Citizen Science. Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Evaluation of the Great Kererū Count 2014 and Recommendations for Future Citizen Science Projects Brumby, A. Anni Brumby, Hartley S & Salmon, R. 2015. Victoria University of Wellington

Guide to citizen science: developing, implementing and evaluating citizen science to study biodiversity and the environment in the UK. Tweddle JC, Robinson LD, Pocock, MJO, & Roy HE 2012. NERC/Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.

Doing Real Research Jensen E & Laurie C. 2016. Sage.

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