

# Capturing Information on Arts Participants: Exploring Engagement Fund Toolkit



The Exploring Engagement Fund provides risk capital for arts nonprofits to experiment with innovative ideas about how to engage diverse Californians. In order to understand the variety of Californians engaged in arts experiences, this guide is intended to support current and future Fund grantees in collecting participant information.

# Overview of Key Steps

Exploring Engagement Fund grantees are testing their approaches to engaging participants from communities of color and low-income groups — two populations historically underserved by arts nonprofits and of particular interest to The James Irvine Foundation.

To assist Exploring Engagement Fund grantees with their data collection efforts, the Irvine Foundation worked with independent consulting firm Harder+Company Community Research to provide technical assistance to organizations and their projects. As a result of this work, Harder+Company has identified the following key steps as essential elements of information-gathering efforts. These steps are explained in depth on the following pages, and form a framework for planning and implementation.

## PLAN



**1 Identify Learning and Reporting Needs**



**2 Determine How to Collect the Information**



**3 Create User-Friendly Tools**

## IMPLEMENT



**4 Collect the Information**

## USE



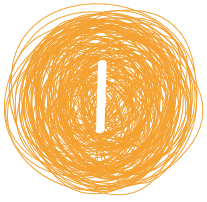
**5 Analyze and Apply the Information**



**Current grantees:** Contact your Harder+Company technical assistance provider with any questions and requests for support—such as drafting specific survey questions or setting up an Excel template. Technical assistance providers also have resources on effective strategies for capturing participant information on race/ethnicity and income. We are here as a resource for your Exploring Engagement Fund information-gathering efforts.



You'll see this icon at points in this document where we want to remind you that we are here for you!



# Identify Learning and Reporting Needs

With your project team, discuss your project's reporting requirements, what you would like to learn, and how information can inform project and organizational decision making.

For example, the Irvine Foundation asks Exploring Engagement Fund grantees to estimate participants' race/ethnicity, as well as the percent of total participants who are part of a low-income community. Some grantees are also interested in assessing how their project impacts the people who participate. It is important to consider how different kinds of information can benefit your project and organization.

## Considerations

Identify the learning interests and requirements of project partners and artists, your board of trustees and funders.

Prioritize what you want to learn. What is most needed, timely or required? What information will help inform your future work? Plan on collecting only the information that you will use.

## What Do You Want to Know?



Participant characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, age, gender or income?

Required for Exploring Engagement Fund grant reporting



New skills developed by participants, such as singing, drawing or telling their story?



Participant satisfaction and feedback on the event, and/or their likelihood of attending another event?



How participants heard about the event?



Participant overall opinions and experiences?

*These examples are not a comprehensive list, but may be helpful as you think about the types of information that are important to your organization.*

# 2

## Determine How to Collect the Information




Your project team can consider a variety of information-gathering methods including surveys, focus groups and observations. Each method works well for collecting particular types of information, and each has time, equipment and financial implications. You can select one or more methods to collect participant information.

Before selecting your information-gathering method(s), you will need to determine whether you can collect information directly from participants and/or if you will need other indirect alternatives.

Asking someone direct questions about their age, race/ethnicity, income and other personal information is typically more successful when you: 1) **have a relationship with the participant** (e.g., they already attended multiple workshops or know your organization), and 2) **offer an incentive** to those who answer questions (e.g., a raffle or take-home goodies). Asking direct questions also provides an opportunity to capture participant contact information for future outreach efforts. Some situations are not ideal for direct questioning — for example, when participants are new to your organization or when you don't offer incentives. **If you have concerns about alienating people or harming project participation by asking people direct questions, you should explore indirect information gathering.**

Indirect methods include gathering information from community partners, the U.S. Census Bureau, or other available reports. For example, if you have an event that mainly attracts local residents to a neighborhood park you can look at the Census data for that neighborhood to make informed estimates about race/ethnicity and income for your participants.

Note:  Information gathering should never hurt or interfere with the arts experience

### Example Methods


#### Survey

A survey is a set of questions that are answered in a written, interview or online format. Surveys are good for learning information about participant characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity or income) and opinions (e.g., satisfaction or engagement) from a large number of people. They can be conducted in person, by mail or online.

#### Focus Group or Interview

These techniques are guided by a set of questions — interviews are one-on-one, and focus groups engage multiple people. They are best used for obtaining feedback from a smaller group or learning how a program impacted some of its participants.

#### Observation

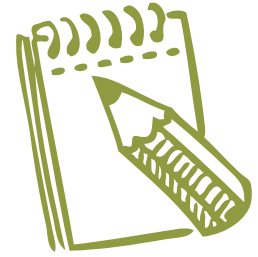
In structured observations, data is collected by watching people at an event and recording information (e.g., by counting or assigning categories). Observations work best when you want to document behavior or responses that can be easily seen. Observations are not recommended for use in identifying participant characteristics such as race/ethnicity and income. 

#### Graffiti Wall

This technique invites people to write or draw responses to a posted question on a physical or virtual "wall." Graffiti walls are best used for collecting information about people's experiences or feedback. They allow people to respond using one word, multiple sentences or visual representations like drawings.



# Create User-Friendly Tools



Now that you have decided what you want to learn and report, and how you will collect that information, you are ready to design effective information-gathering tools.

Each method for collecting information has different considerations. For example, surveys are more effective when they are relatively short, easy to read and in accessible language. On the other hand, focus group questions are usually only seen by the person conducting the session; however, questions should still be clear and easy to understand when asked to participants. Effective tools should be user friendly for your staff, relatively short and understandable by all participants. Several components (outlined below) will help you design effective information-gathering tools.

## Four Things to Consider

### Questions

Before writing questions for participants, consider their style, flow and accessibility. For each question, think about the kind of answers you expect to receive and how you will analyze the information. Thinking about analysis during this development phase will help ensure that you meet your learning priorities and can help you refine your questions and response options. Also, consider if you want to gather the information anonymously (no name attributed to responses). Anonymous responses may help people be more candid. However, identified responses can help you be responsive to individual feedback. **See “Tips for Developing Good Questions” on the following page.**

### Location

Think about where you will be collecting information. Is it outside in a noisy area, or inside a quiet place where talking is discouraged? Consider how the location could impact how much time someone would be willing to spend answering your questions. Also, think about logistical barriers, such as the number of entrances and exits for the event and having a space for people to stand or sit to complete surveys.

### Testing

Testing or piloting the questions with a few current or past participants is recommended. It can help highlight areas that need to be clarified or shortened. Listen carefully and embrace feedback. If it is not possible to test your questions with participants, you could have staff members who are not involved in the project review them.

### Sampling

What is sampling? At events with a large number of people, information can be collected from a smaller group of people instead of all attendees. For example, at an event with 1,000 participants, you could conduct surveys with 100 to 200 attendees. Find a way to keep the sampling as random as possible in order to obtain feedback that represents the entire range of participants attending the event. For example, sampling could be conducted by surveying every fifth person who walks through the entrance to the event.

# Tips for Developing Good Questions

Use these tips while planning and writing the questions you will ask project participants. Taking care with the following elements in advance can help you be more effective when gathering information.

1. Begin with **warm-up questions** to make people feel comfortable.

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2. Put questions in a logical order with **related topics** near each other.

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3. Use words and sentences that are **simple and easy** to understand.

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4. Consider the **language(s)** that participants speak, as well as their literacy and education levels - a sixth grade reading level is a good benchmark for most survey and focus group questions.

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5. Think about **how much time** people will be willing to spend answering your questions, and limit the number and type of questions. Seven to 10 questions works well.

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6. Think about **how people will feel** being asked these questions. Consider if there are ways that the questions could be misinterpreted.



# 4

## Collect the Information



**You are now ready to begin gathering information from participants!**

The first step is to train your staff and/or volunteers and set some parameters on how to collect information from participants. Keep in mind the type of event you are having, and be flexible. Sometimes data collection does not go as planned — to be well prepared, have back-up plans.

### Considerations

#### **Training Staff & Volunteers**

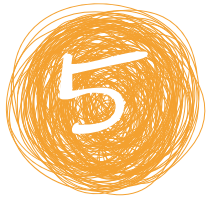
Provide clear training to the staff/volunteers collecting the information. Discuss with them the information-gathering approach, learning and reporting priorities, possible participant questions, logistics and supply needs (e.g., pens and clipboards), as well as potential challenges. People usually feel most comfortable answering questions from someone similar to themselves who is friendly and genuine. Select your staff/volunteers carefully.

#### **Providing Instructions to Participants**

When announcing or asking people to answer questions, it is important to tell them why you want to learn this information and provide clear instructions for how they can participate in the process. Let them know why it is important to your project, your organization, your work in the community and your funders. Let participants know that their input will benefit the project and your organization.

#### **Giving Incentives to Participants**

Incentives help motivate people to share their information and opinions. Incentives can be universally appealing items, such as being entered into a raffle to win a \$50 gift card. Incentives may also be something unique to your project, such as a behind-the-scenes arts experience or branded merchandise.



# Analyze and Apply the Information



**After you have gathered the information from participants, it is time to make sense of your “data.”**

Depending on the information-gathering techniques you used, the information will be in the form of survey responses, observations conducted by staff or volunteers, or notes from a focus group. The type of information you gathered will impact how you analyze it and what decisions it can help you make. Before you begin analyzing, determine your response rate.

The response rate is the number of people who participated in the information gathering compared to the total number of people who participated in the entire event/activity. For example, if 100 people participated in your event and 20 people completed a survey, the response rate is 20 percent. It is important to highlight the response rate when sharing information with your funders, board or others, and when making decisions. Your organization might use the information from only five percent of participants differently than information drawn from a higher percentage of participants. You should strive for at least a 20 percent response rate.

## Analyzing Surveys, Focus Groups and Interviews: Example Processes

### Surveys

Create an Excel document with a column for each survey question, and responses from only one survey on each row. Responses should be entered consistently from survey to survey, and you should note if someone did not respond to a question or if they gave two answers when you only asked for one. Use Excel to calculate percentages of responses for each question across all surveys. Questions that required people to write in their answers can also be listed in Excel and analyzed in a manner similar to focus group/interview information below.



### Focus Groups & Interviews

Review the notes from each focus group and list themes (common comments or opinions) from the discussion. After you note all the themes, review the notes again to count the number of times each theme appears. This will help you identify the stronger (most repeated) and weaker (less repeated) themes.

**Using your information:** Organizations can use the information gathered in a variety of ways. While one primary use may be to report to your funders, we recommend that after the information is analyzed you review and discuss it as a project team. Some questions to consider and discuss include:

- What is surprising about the information gathered? What is not surprising?
- What information should inform our current and future programming?
- What information should be shared with our board of trustees and funders?
- What information is not clear and requires that more information be gathered?
- What questions may have not been clear to participants?
- How can we improve information-gathering efforts going forward?





Harder+Company Community Research is a comprehensive social research and planning firm with offices in San Francisco, Davis, San Diego, and Los Angeles, California. Harder+Company's mission is to help our clients achieve social impact through quality research, strategy, and organizational development services. Since 1986, we have assisted nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies throughout California and the country in using good information to make good decisions for their future. Our success rests on providing services that contribute to positive social impact in the lives of vulnerable people and communities.

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The James Irvine  
Foundation

The James Irvine Foundation is a private, nonprofit grantmaking foundation dedicated to expanding opportunity for the people of California to participate in a vibrant, successful and inclusive society. The Foundation's grantmaking focuses on three program areas: Arts, California Democracy and Youth. Since 1937, the Foundation has provided over \$1.3 billion in grants to more than 3,500 nonprofit organizations throughout California. With about \$1.9 billion in assets, the Foundation made grants of \$73 million in 2014 for the people of California.

[www.irvine.org](http://www.irvine.org)