Approaches to Evaluating University Outreach

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Why evaluate?

- Monitor the quality of your outreach work
  - Improve what you deliver
  - Calibrate your own judgment
  - Increase participation; identify additional needs or audiences
- Gather evidence about the impact of your work
  - Share your model with others
  - Seek additional support, funding, partners
  - Make a case for this work in your professional advancement
- Document outreach work & justify to outside stakeholders
- Bring a scholarly mindset to your outreach work
Why not to evaluate

- I don’t have time
- I don’t know how
- I already know it’s a good program
- I wouldn’t change what I do anyway
- I want to focus on doing outreach, not studying it
- I’m not an evaluator or education researcher
- I don’t need more funding or partners
- Outreach doesn’t count for my advancement anyhow
Why evaluate?

- Monitor the quality of your outreach work
  - **Level 1**: do it most of the time, especially at the start
  - What are the outcomes? How do they follow from your program design? How can you improve the program over time?

- Gather evidence about the impact of your work
  - **Level 2**: appropriate once in a while, for many (not all) projects
  - Support claims with plausible evidence

- Document outreach work & justify to stakeholders (outputs)
  - **Level 0**: outputs—activities, audiences, head counts & contact hours
  - Better communicate what you already know about impact
E&ER studies

- Needs, opportunities & challenges for evaluating outreach (based on OUO Faculty Outreach Grants)
  - Seek patterns in projects’ evaluation needs…
  - …in order to help projects better evaluate their work
  - Offer advice to OUO

- Three demonstration projects:
  - Dance: Graduate troupe residency in Trinidad, CO
  - SLHS: Sound & hearing health teacher workshop
  - Museum: Afterschool program for girls grades 4-5
Patterns in outreach programs

- **Type I: Teaching model; less integrated with faculty scholarship**
  - Often teaching-centered: sharing subject matter expertise &/or CU resources
  - Desired outcomes: audience learning, application, & affective outcomes
  - Common in sciences and languages

- **Type II: Engagement model; strongly integrated with scholarship**
  - Reciprocity with audience: faculty offer service, experience or knowledge, gain something useful to their scholarly work
  - Desired outcomes: well characterized, relevant to faculty scholarship
  - Common in disciplines with traditions of applied work: clinical, education, engineering

- **Type III: Performance model; one-off events or series**
  - Often performances & public events for large audiences for short duration
  - Desired outcomes: exposure to ideas/resources, affective outcomes – broad reach
  - Most common in performing arts and sciences

*Nature of outreach ➔ nature of evaluation needs & challenges*
Patterns in evaluation opportunities & challenges
Example: Teacher workshop (one-off model)
Example: Teacher workshop (extended model)
Example: School performance
Try it yourself!
Patterns in evaluation opportunities & challenges

- **Type 1**: Teaching model; less integrated with faculty scholarship
  - Desired outcomes: audience learning, application, & affective outcomes
  - Fewer participants at some depth → can learn something about what they take away

- **Type 2**: Engagement model; strongly integrated with scholarship
  - Desired outcomes: well characterized, relevant to faculty scholarship
  - Often have skills, already have data, but do not communicate it well in outreach reports
  - What is the value added by the outreach component?

- **Type 3**: Performance model; one-off events or series
  - Desired outcomes: exposure to ideas/resources, affective outcomes – broad reach
  - Intervention with audience is short in time: opportunity to evaluate is modest
  - May need help with evaluation goals, methods, analysis
People tend to worry about methods—but getting the questions right, and thinking who you need to involve are more important. You are using everyday skills of making contact, getting people to speak, and listening and taking notes—only in a more planned and rigorous way.

Evaluation Trust toolkit

- Keep it simple to start… you may know more than you think
- Use what you know as a teacher (setting learning goals, designing learning activities, assessing learning)
- Make claims commensurate with evidence
- Collect responses systematically
- Don’t forget to keep track of outputs
What are your opportunities?
Digging deeper: Examples from the field
Next steps
Additional resources


http://www.colorado.edu/eer/research/outreach.html#Evaluating