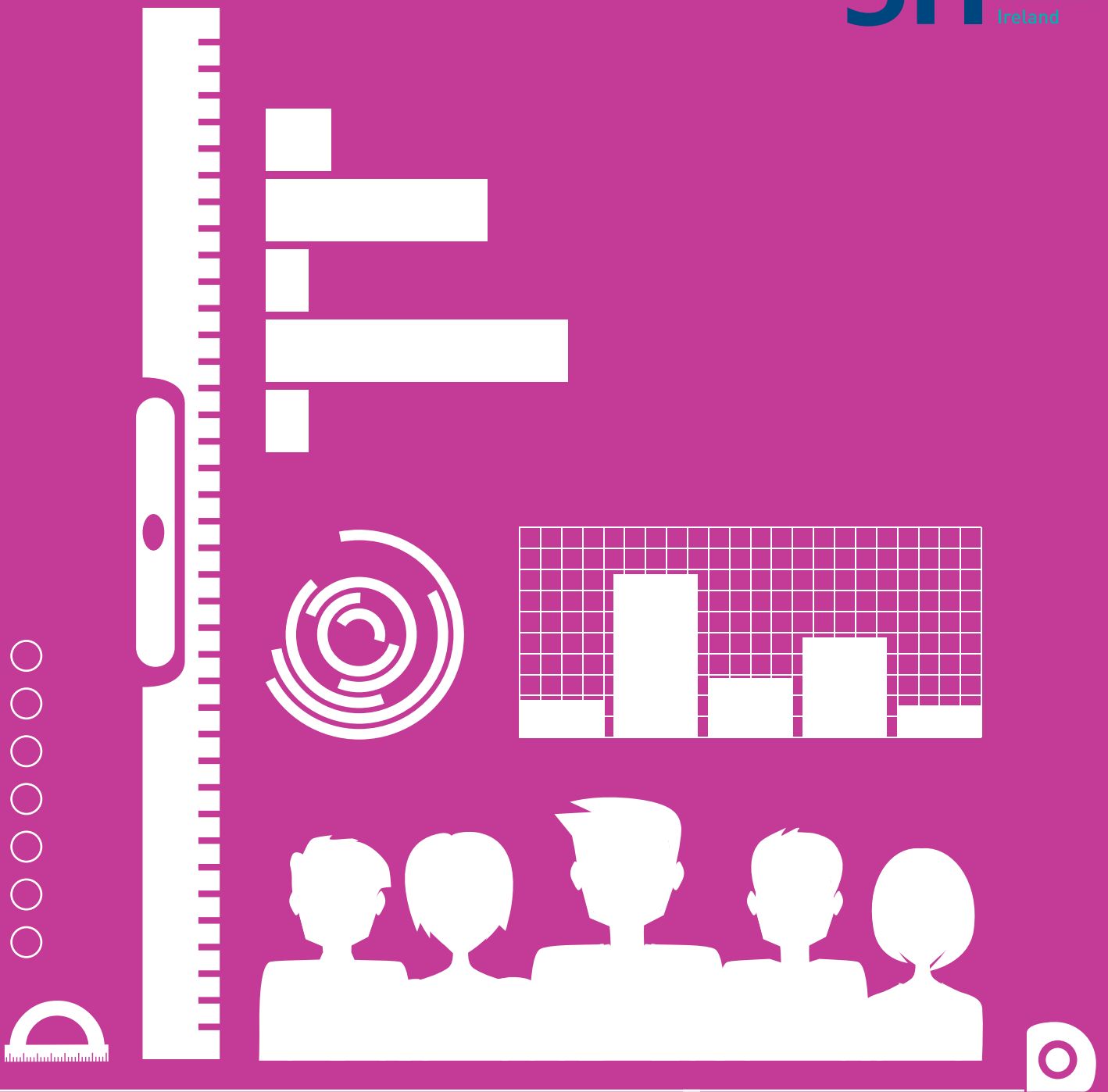


EVALUATION TOOLKIT



A GUIDE TO EVALUATING YOUR PROJECT

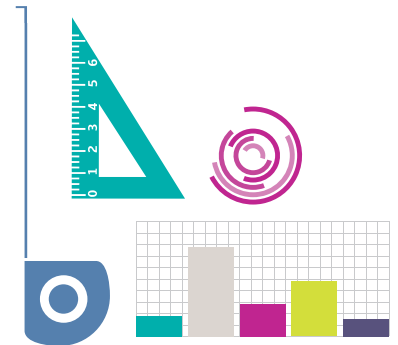
EVALUATION

SCIENCE FOUNDATION IRELAND EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION TO EVALUATION



This resource is designed as a support for those developing or rolling out education and public engagement (EPE) programmes, and will support the reporting structures under the SFI Discover Programme. It is important to note that SFI Discover funds a diverse range of EPE projects, and there is no 'one size fits all' evaluation method.



There are a number of user-friendly, detailed evaluation handbooks, which have been developed by other STEM public engagement funding agencies:

The National Science Foundation (NSF) in the United States has developed the comprehensive, user-friendly 'Principal Investigator's Guide: Managing Evaluation in Informal STEM Education Projects' (2012), which can be accessed here:

http://www.informalscience.org/documents/CAISEVSAPI_guide.pdf

The NSF has also developed 'Team-Based Inquiry: A Practical Guide for Using Evaluation to Improve Informal Education Experiences' (2014), which can be accessed here:

http://www.nisenet.org/sites/default/files/catalog/uploads/TBI_guide_V2_Final_8-25-14_print.pdf

The Royal Academy of Engineering has also produced an evaluation guide, which can be accessed here:

<http://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/other/ingenious-evaluations-a-guide-for-grant-holders>

WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

When we look at evaluation we first need to identify what we are evaluating. Identifying what we mean by the term 'public engagement' can help us to do this. SFI's Agenda 2020 states that an engaged public is one that understands the role of science, can judge between competing priorities and arguments, encourages young people to take STEM subjects, and feels that it has the appropriate level of engagement with, and influence upon, researchers. The Centre for Advances in Public Engagement in the US states that: "Effective public engagement invites average citizens to get involved in deliberation, dialogue and action on public issues that they care about".

The UK-based National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) defines public engagement as: "the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit".

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

Evaluation is a structured learning or research process that helps to identify what is working well in a project, and what can be done to improve your work even further. It can help you to see the value of what you are doing, and establish the people and participants you already work well with, or those who you are missing and would like to work with more. It can also help you to understand how and where to prioritise your time and budgets, and understand where your works sits in the bigger picture of your organisation, community and society.

WHY DO WE EVALUATE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

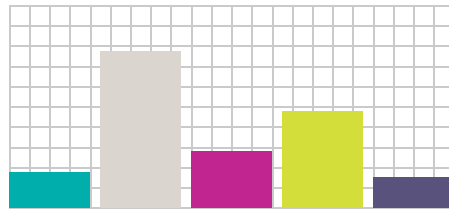
WE EVALUATE TO ANSWER THESE SIMPLE QUESTIONS:

- What was the point of our work?
- What difference did it make?
- What happened that wouldn't otherwise have happened?
- What did we learn from this?
- What should we do next?
- Have we achieved our aims?

EVALUATION ALSO HELPS TO PROVIDE:

- evidence-based practice;
- learning that can be shared;
- information about what worked, what didn't work and why;
- evidence to support future funding applications;
- identification of projects suitable for expansion/progression; and,
- information for future practices.

1. INTRODUCTION TO EVALUATION



WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL EVALUATION?

A successful evaluation generates outcomes that are valid and reliable, while indicating where improvements can be made. From our experience, your evaluation is more likely to succeed if:

- it is planned at the start of the project, rather than being an add-on at the end;
- as far as possible, monitoring and evaluation systems are integrated into project practice;
- enough time is set aside for monitoring and evaluation activities, including organising and processing the data;
- all project stakeholders understand the purpose and value of the evaluation;
- the evaluation plans are both realistic and transparent (i.e., clear about what is measured, why and how);
- it describes what works well and what doesn't;
- it gives directions or actions for improvements;
- it uses several methods, and combines a range of data and perspectives; and,
- the findings are shared.

CONFIDENTIALITY/DATA PROTECTION

You must take all reasonable steps to make sure that the respondent is not adversely affected by taking part in an evaluation. You must keep their responses confidential, unless you have their permission to do otherwise, and you must not do anything with their responses that you did not inform them about at the time. You may need to take particular care with children and teenagers, as permission needs to be granted from a parent or responsible adult, such as a teacher, for interviews with children aged under 18 years. The Data Protection Commissioner's website is a useful source of information relating to data protection and confidentiality issues (<https://www.dataprotection.ie>).

USEFUL LINKS

- Charities Evaluation Service: <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/>
- National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement: <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>
- Research Councils UK: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/>

