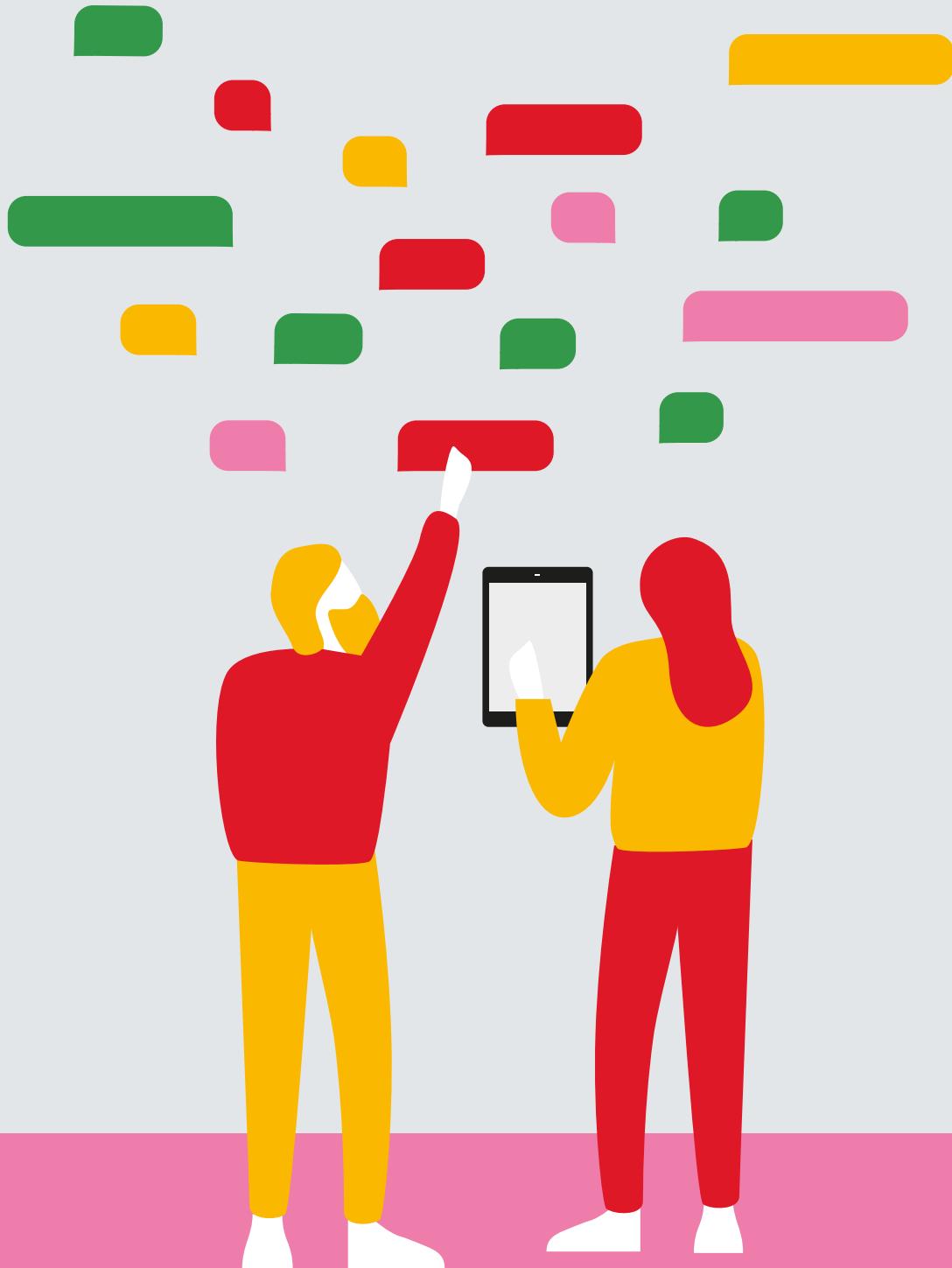


CultureCounts



EXPERT TIPS FOR BEST-PRACTICE DATA COLLECTION.

How to avoid survey fatigue, reduce bias and get the most from your data.

Expert tips for best-practice data collection

New technologies mean that data collection is easier than ever. People are more connected to each other and their local and global communities - with smartphone ownership in Australia rising to 84% in 2016, above a global average of 81%.

This means that mobile and web-based applications can play an increasingly important role in capturing user feedback, thoughts and opinions in real time. These technologies also make it far easier to use the data collected in a meaningful and effective way.

As people are surveyed more and more by different businesses, it is important to make your evaluation count. Hundreds of cultural, community and government organisations in Australia and the UK have collected over 300,000 survey responses using Culture Counts. This has helped us to identify relevant guidelines for best practice evaluation. Check out our easy tips to improve your data collection:

1. Keep surveys as short as possible

This is absolutely key! Audiences, visitors and customers receive multiple competing surveys and have limited attention spans. This is only going to get worse, so the days of 15-minute feedback surveys are on their way out. We encourage organisations to keep surveys to a maximum of two minutes, after which there is a notable drop off in response rates. Be clear up front that you're only asking for a small window of their time – and be truthful. Your patrons will be more willing to engage with you in an ongoing way.

2. Don't ask questions for the sake of it

To keep surveys short, you need to be choosy about the questions you ask. Often questions are included simply because they've been asked in previous years, even though they're no longer relevant. Continuity can be important, but only if the data collected is actually used to view changes over time. Think about why you're evaluating and choose questions that will help you see whether you're achieving your objectives - or where improvements could be made (see Cheat Sheet 1 for a guide to choosing the right questions that will be relevant for your whole organisation). Think about what you'll learn from the data collected, and resist the urge to include questions that don't generate actionable insights.

3. Present surveys as an opportunity for patrons to give feedback

Evaluation should be seen as a two-way street. Surveys generate valuable information to help your organisation grow, but they also give patrons the opportunity to provide feedback that can improve future experiences. Many people appreciate the chance to have their say, and don't be afraid if this leads to negative feedback. Giving people an outlet for frustrations and showing that you care about their opinion often minimises further damage – and can lead to stronger relationships and more engaged patrons.

4. Include a compelling reason why their feedback can help you keep making great art (or great places, programs or investments)

People receive value when they attend a cultural event, participate in a community program, or interact in a vibrant public space. With competing priorities and tight budgets, organisations need to direct funds to where they have a strong impact. Be clear about the fact that their feedback will help you generate evidence to demonstrate to boards, Councils or funders that the investment is worthwhile.

5. Evaluate as quickly as possible

This may seem obvious, but frequently evaluations are carried out weeks or even months after an event or program. Often surveys are sent to all attendees at the end of a lengthy exhibition or performance season, meaning that people who attended early may have pretty much forgotten the experience. Many ticketing systems and CRMs make it easier to schedule a mail out to correspond with the date of attendance, while intercept interviews or WiFi surveys can collect responses during or immediately after. This ensures that the experience is still fresh in people's minds, they're more willing to complete the survey, and they can accurately report the impact.

6. Use a mix of distribution methods where possible (interview, smartphone, online, WiFi)

People access information and are connected to organisations in different ways. To maximise your sample and engage a mix of demographics, it helps to implement multiple survey distribution methods where you can. For free public events or programs (without ticketing databases), it is often not possible to email attendees. Short intercept interviews using tablets allow organisations to spot sample and target groups that may otherwise not complete a survey (including elderly or disadvantaged communities). Tools that enable people to download and complete surveys on their own smartphones are also a good option. Many organisations are looking for new ways of collecting on the spot data, including linking brief surveys to free public WiFi networks.

7. You don't need enormous sample sizes

There is a myth floating around that organisations must always capture survey responses from 10% of their estimated visitor/audience populations. This represents a huge burden for large events and festivals, and is not necessary to achieve a statistically significant sample. A significant sample means that if you were able to survey your total audience or visitor population, you could be confident that their opinions would not differ significantly from the opinion of your sample. Contrary to the 10% myth, as your audience size increases you need proportionately less responses to make up a representative sample. Many organisations find that 100-300 responses easily fall within a significant range. There are simple online tools for calculating sample size, or please contact us to find out more.

8. Consider multiple short surveys with rotated questions

If you want to collect data across a broad range of outcome areas (cultural, social, economic), consider creating several short surveys containing different questions. Each survey can be sent to a segment of your database, rotated on social media or WiFi networks, or assigned a survey

response quota by intercept interviewers. This means you can ask more questions while still keeping surveys short. The shorter survey length will encourage more people to complete the survey, so your overall sample for each question will still be large enough to draw representative insights.

9. Keep some consistent questions in all surveys for comparison purposes

Evaluation can be a great way of finding out how your events or programs compare. Maintaining some of the same measures in all evaluations will allow you to see where the greatest impact is occurring, or where improvements might be needed. This could just involve including a small set of core questions that reflect your organisation's overarching objectives in all surveys. This means you can see where best to focus your energies and resources, and monitor whether your program as a whole is heading in the right direction. Some industries also have standard measurement frameworks, where using the same questions lets you compare and learn from similar organisations.

10. Collect anecdotes or free text answers to sit alongside the numbers

Everyone loves a feel-good story, and the inclusion of open text questions helps you to capture rich descriptions or interesting details about people's experiences. These can be used to capture the imagination of potential patrons, generating powerful marketing collateral. Open text answers also give people the chance to communicate with you freely and discuss issues or outcomes that you may not have anticipated. Although an individual anecdote alone is not evidence of broad impact, they can provide additional context and colour to sit alongside rigorous numerical data.

11. Do a self assessment and include as many people within the organisation as possible

Completing a short self assessment before their event or program is one of the simplest and most effective things that organisations can do. This involves setting targets for what you want to achieve, which can later be compared with public responses to see if your expectations were met. Including a range of people from throughout your organisation (a board member, management, creative staff) provides an opportunity for the group to discuss objectives and make sure everyone is working towards the same outcomes. Self assessment after an event or program also allows for significant internal review and reflection.

12. Use peers to your advantage and capture their advice as well as their opinions

Peer assessment can also generate significant learnings with minimal effort. Peers are generally people within your industry with a high level of subject matter expertise. Asking peers to evaluate your events or programs will give you immediate access to expert feedback. Peers may be able to provide advice that can help you grow or innovate, while also giving additional rigour to your reporting. Peer networks are a simple way to use sector expertise to connect, collaborate and strengthen.

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