Thinking Like an Evaluator: Capacity Building at Two Children’s Museums

Jessica Sickler of J. Sickler Consulting
Jennifer Uhl of Discovery Center at Murfree Springs
Aubrey Henriksen of Creative Discovery Museum
The Museums for America program supports projects that strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve its public.

- Lifelong Learning
- Community Anchors and Catalysts
- Collections Stewardship and Public Access
Museums Empowered

Goal of strengthening the ability of an individual museum to serve its public through professional development activities that cross-cut various departments to generate systemic change within the museum.

- Digital Technology
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Evaluation
- Organizational Management
Capacity Building Efforts at Discovery Center with help from J. Sickler Consulting
Evaluative thinking is critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation.

- Inquisitiveness
- Identifying Assumptions
- Thoughtful Questions
- Reflection & Perspective-Taking
- Informing Decisions

[Buckley, et al., 2015]
We focused on a skill-building process in a cycle of learning and practice.
Step 1: Thinking about goals like an evaluator.
Inquiry doesn’t start with a question. It starts with knowing what is known.
We practiced using logic models to describe 6 exhibits and programs.
That Murfreesboro will be a more global community, supported by these types of experiences that better serve, highlight, and celebrate diverse audiences and build cross-cultural connections and awareness among the families of our community.
3 Projects

Strategic focus on exhibits, programs, and outreach

1. Tiny Town
2. SPARK!
3. Community

Free Days
3 Teams

Cross departmental teams of 3-5
Step 2: Thinking about evidence like an evaluator.
We practiced identifying indicators. What would we see if ________________?

OUTCOME #1

Participants gain skills to be self-sufficient vegetable gardeners.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

What will we see if____?
After we knew what we were looking for, we planned how to measure it.

**INDICATORS:**

**evidence**

*How do we know what we know?*

**MEASUREMENT:**
Method Options: Examples for Gathering Data

- Questionnaire
- Focus Group
- Testing
- Journaling
- Embedded Activity
- Interviews
- Observation
- Timing/Tracking
- Anecdotal
- Student Work
Method Options: Examples for Gathering Data

- Questionnaire
- Focus Group
- Testing
- Journaling
- Embedded Activity
- Interviews
- Observation
- Timing/Tracking
- Anecdotal
- Attendance Data
Step 3: Making meaning like an evaluator.
Tiny Town EQ1: How do children use the Tiny Town exhibit space?

**Heat Map of where children most commonly stopped in Tiny Town**

- 20% at the Play Area
- 53% at the Tree
- 47% at the Park

**Heat Map of where children spent the most time when they stopped**

- 3.6 min at the Play Area
- 3.1 min at the Tree
- 2 min at the Park

**Map shows the percentage of all groups (n=15) who stopped at an area of Tiny Town.**

**Map shows the median (midpoint) time spent at each stop among children who stopped (number varies for each area).**

**Typical Visit Patterns**

- 14.5 Total minutes per observation (median)
- 5 Number of stops per child (median)
- 73% Stopped at 3-5 areas of Tiny Town in a visit
- 13% Were “Diligent Visitors” Stopped at more than half (6) exhibit elements
Free Days EQ1: What audience(s) currently come to Free Days?

Where visitors come from: ZIP Codes provided in survey data (n=83)
- States: 96% Tennessee, 4%
- Counties (in TN): 57% Rutherford County, 13% All others
- Cities (in Rutherford Cty): 35% Murfreesboro, 13% All Others

Where visitors come from: ZIP Codes provided on talk-back wall (n=89)
- States: 95% Tennessee, 5%
- Counties (in TN): 36% Rutherford County, 17% All others
- Cities (in Rutherford Cty): 25% Murfreesboro, 11% All Others

Heat Map of ZIP code data from all sources (n=163)

How many visitors are at DC for the first time? (n=89)
- 73% Been to DC before

How visitors identify their race/ethnicity? (n=89)
- White: 60%
- Black: 34%
- Hispanic: 12%
- Asian: 9%
- Other: 2%
- No response: 4%

Demographics on different Free Days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>MLK Day (n=67)</th>
<th>HH Day (n=22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black / African American</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic / Latino</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# SPARK EQ2: Why do parents come to SPARK?

**Parents’ main reason for coming to SPARK (n=19)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socializing with other children</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Enrichment</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine and Structure that it provides</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons (various)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Combined interview and survey data

**The main reason we come to SPARK...**

*From Interviews:*
- Socialization, structured education.
- Nice class for kids, not anywhere else to get this type of activity.
- Doing something with friends.
- Structure.

*From Survey:*
- Get my son ready for school and learn to be with a group.
- For my child to learn, explore topics that might not be discussed at home. Also for social interaction, crafts, learning.

**Children’s favorite parts of SPARK (n=14)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Songs, singing, and/or dancing</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art / Craft activity</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What parents enjoy about SPARK (n=3, survey)**

*What do you enjoy most about SPARK...*
- Group setting and great teacher attention. Also a different atmosphere for learning.
- My child loves it! The ladies are very invested in the children.
- Crafts, social interaction.

*Other Comments from Interviews:*
- Love the relationships their child builds with staff, Katie does a really good job of tying activities to themes.
- Teachers do a great job; mom likes yoga & deep breathing
- Teachers are great.
- Best program in Murfreesboro, open play is really important.

**What parents dislike about SPARK (n=3, survey)**

*What do you like least about SPARK...*
- Seems like the same themes from previous year.
- Occasional field trips that come, but you all work hard to make sure our SPARK! Time is not disturbed.
- Nothing, love it. [first-time attendee]

**Ideas for future topics / things reinforced at home**

*We reinforce at home...*
- Kindness, cleanliness, spiritual needs, sharing
- Anything science
- Days of the week, months of the year, alphabet, yoga.

*Future topics...*
- Anything about science, art, music, etc.
- Learning letters or writing projects.
- More about animals
1. What do these data tell you?

2. What might we do with what we learned?

3. What other questions does this raise that we might want to explore in the future?
Indicators: What would we see if _____?

**OUTCOME #1**

Participants gain skills to be self-sufficient vegetable gardeners.

**POTENTIAL INDICATORS**

What will we see if _____?
Participants gain skills to be self-sufficient vegetable gardeners.
Growth of # gardens in neighborhood
They have vegetables @ end of season.
They teach others what they learned.
Able to plant garden next season.
Spend winter doing research, reading.
Join master gardeners.
Tell other people about their garden.
"""""""" the prog.
Can answer questions about why X worked/didn't.
In 2 seasons later, garden thriving.
Able to do it without assistance.
Capacity Building Efforts at Creative Discovery Museum with help from RK&A
3 Prong Approach

1. Internal Working Group
2. External Professional Development Group
3. Support from Local University Interns
3 Prong Approach

1. Internal Working Group
2. External Professional Development Group
3. Support from Local University Interns
Internal Working Group

- Impact evaluation planning with RKA
- Visits to and from advisors
- Cross-departmental monthly evaluation meetings
Internal Working Group

- Impact evaluation planning with RKA
- Visits to and from advisors
- Cross-departmental monthly evaluation meetings
Internal Working Group

- Impact evaluation planning with RKA
- Visits to and from advisors
- Cross-departmental monthly evaluation meetings
Internal Working Group

- Impact evaluation planning with RKA
- Visits to and from advisors
- Cross-departmental monthly evaluation meetings
Evaluation of the evaluation grant
Mid-point site visit key findings

- Project integration
- Perceptions of evaluation are changing
- Evaluation practice is shifting project development process
- Institutional shifts
Evaluation of the evaluation grant
Mid-point site visit key findings

- Project integration
- Perceptions of evaluation are changing
- Evaluation practice is shifting project development process
- Institutional shifts
Evaluation of the evaluation grant
Mid-point site visit key findings

- Project integration
- Perceptions of evaluation are changing
- Evaluation practice is shifting project development process
- Institutional shifts
Evaluation of the evaluation grant
Mid-point site visit key findings

- Project integration
- Perceptions of evaluation are changing
- Evaluation practice is shifting project development process
- Institutional shifts
Evaluation of the evaluation grant
Mid-point site visit key findings

- Project integration
- Perceptions of evaluation are changing
- Evaluation practice is shifting project development process
- Institutional shifts
3 Prong Approach

1. Internal Working Group
2. External Professional Development Group
3. Support from Local University Interns
External Professional Development Group

>40 individuals

>14 institutions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because of Chatt Eval Group...

100% said they are more knowledgeable about evaluation.

Strongly agree | Agree

“It has made myself and my team more aware of different evaluation methods and also the value behind quality evaluation techniques!”
93% said they have a more positive attitude about evaluation.

“We are more driven by data, and feel empowered to do the work to get that data.”
Because of the Chatt Eval Group, my department has been able to **develop and implement program and special event evaluations**... and make adjustments when needed to increase the quality of the programs.
69% said their colleagues talk about evaluation more.

“Our decisions are informed by what our visitors actually want, not what we think they want.”
63% said that more people at their institution participate in evaluation work.

Strongly agree  Agree  Unsure  Disagree

“One staff member got very interested in evaluation, put in a proposal to our internal professional development award, and will be going to AEA's summer institute.”
3 Prong Approach

1. Internal Working Group
2. External Professional Development Group
3. Support from Local University Interns
Support from Local University Students

- Psychology
- Sociology
- Family & Child Studies
- (History)
- (Marketing)
University Students

Evaluation Internship
“This internship taught me how to collect, organize, and analyze data. I had so many opportunities to go to workshops and to learn and grow on a professional and personal level. It was great to work with kind and caring people who were passionate about working for a non-profit organization.”
Successes & Challenges
Contact Information

Jessica Sickler  jessica@jsickler.net
Jennifer Uhl  juhl@explorethedc.org
Aubrey Henriksen  alh2@cdmfun.org