FPC FIRST PERSON CONSULTING

Guide

Rapid Approaches to Data Collection

RESEARCH | EVALUATION | DESIGN

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Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd

We acknowledge the work of Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd in the development of the original *Evaluating Events* Workshop Manual that this guide is adapted from.

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1.1 Overview

Events or short-term engagement with groups are a common means of raising awareness, building knowledge and skills. There are a variety of methods used to collect data from event participants, such as feedback sheets and follow-up surveys. However, there are instances where participants are not able to fill out feedback sheets or it is unlikely that online follow-up surveys will be completed. This is particularly common in short events or where there are other considerations (e.g. language or technical barriers).

Such events can include:

- field trips
- bus tours or trips
- public forums
- one day workshops
- seminars or networking events
- formal courses.

Given this, it is worth considering what other ways there are to collect data and how this can be done in an equally effective way without being burdensome or complex.

The purpose of this guide is to provide an introduction to **Rapid Approaches to Data Collection** that can be used in these instances where participants may not have much time or there are technical or language barriers.

Rapid data collection seeks to establish 'best' estimates, trends and directions. They can incorporate participation and open-ended questions to some degree, but generally do not allow for great depth of discussion. However, rapid data collection is still valuable, particularly for getting a better understanding of the outcomes of your events.

1.2 Structure of the Guide

The remainder of the guide is structured as follows:

1. understanding your event (Section 2.1)
2. identifying where your data will come from (Section 2.2)
3. prioritising what to capture (Section 2.3)
4. choosing the method to suit your event (Section 2.4)
5. considerations for data collection (Section 2.5)
6. storing your data (Section 2.6)

All of the tables and templates provided throughout the guide are also in Section 3 to make it easier to print out and replicate.

2 Process of Rapid Data Collection

2.1 Understanding your event

To plan for collecting data at your event it is important to know what 'type' of event you are running. This will help determine what data you can capture, what data is most important and what tools may be available to you.

The first sets of questions are structural, in that they consider the nature of the event and the different aspects of it that inform the content (e.g. length, location, expected participants).

Table 1: Structure of the event

What type of event is being held? *(e.g. training workshop, field day, information session etc.)*	
Is it a one off event or a series of events?	
Where are they to be held?	
When will they be held?	
What resources have been allocated?	

The second set of questions relates to the participants and what kind of change you would like to see in them as a direct result of the event. For example, do you want them to learn something? React to something?

This will help inform the types of data collection tools that you will use, as well as the most important questions to ask.

Table 2: Audience and purpose of the event

Who do you want to come? *(Target Population)*	
Why have you organised this event? What do you want participants to learn? How do you want them to react?	

2.2 Identifying where your data will come from

Simply speaking – who will be at the event you are running? What kinds of things could they tell you? Examples of these are summarised below in Table 3.

Table 3: Sources of data

Data sources	Can provide information on:
The organisers	• Data about the audience • Expected outcomes and objectives • Information about the process and activities of the day • Suggestions for improvements • Observations of audience engagement or reactions
Participants	• Reactions to the event • Changes in knowledge, skills or aspirations • Intentions to change practices, policies or behaviour • Suggestions for improvements to the event
Presenters	• Reactions and impressions of audience engagement/ participation • Suggestions for improvements to the target audience, location or process • Comparison to other events or locations
Outside observers	• Reactions and impressions of audience engagement/participation • Suggestions for improvements to the target audience, location or process • Comparison to other events or locations
Materials (what has been created)	• Information about what was achieved • Reactions to the event • Evidence of changes in knowledge, skills or aspirations

2.3 Prioritising what to capture

This question requires some reflection on your part – both in terms of the nature of the event, but also the capacity and capability that you have on the day of the event. For example, if you are spending much of your time presenting, you may not have much time to interview attendees.

The other aspect to consider (and where people can often get caught up) is the difference between **what they need to know** and **what is nice to know**. Remember that you may only have people's attention for a short time and as such you should prioritise what you are capturing.

This is also a good time to look back at the project logic you have developed and the outcomes you have described resulting from the events. For example, if you have indicated that participants will possess increased awareness about the signs and symptoms of problem gambling, then it would be a good idea to capture data that relates to that outcome.

We would suggest that you prioritise capturing **output** data as part of any event that you run. This includes:

- date of the event

- venue/location of the event
- type of event (e.g. workshop, bus tour, guest speaker)
- number of people that attended
- the length of the event

This information can then be recorded in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. If you enter this data after each event you will then build up a record of all events that you have run. This can then be used in your reporting and the evaluation (this is discussed further in Section 2.6).

The focus of data collection for the event should link back to the desired outcomes articulated through your project logic. This then guides your questioning (e.g. do attendees know more about a particular topic) and can also inform your method.

You may find it useful to refer back to Table 3 at this point when considering what your attendees might be able to tell you.

The **method** for capturing that data is the purpose of Section 2.4.

2.4 Choosing the right method

Data can be collected from the identified data sources in one of three ways:

- **Asking questions** – of participants, observers, presenters and organisers
- **Observing** –reactions, activities, interactions, location and facilities
- **Reviewing materials** – either about the event or produced by participants

Examples of tools in each of these categories that may be useful for events in particular are outlined below in Figure 1.

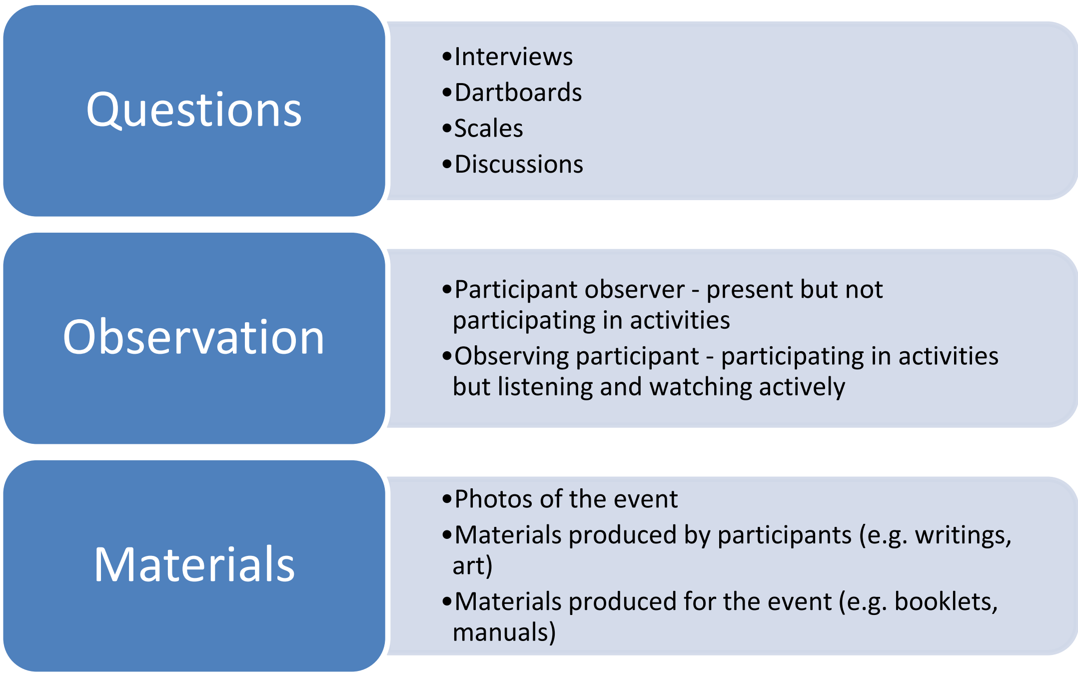


Figure 1: Data collection method categories

The particular data collection method that you choose depends on a variety of factors, such as:

- what information you are trying to gather
- who you are going to be gathering it from
- how you want to use the data at the end
- issues of anonymity, privacy and cultural appropriateness
- skills, time and resources available.

The larger your event the more methods you might want to consider using. For example, at extremely large events you might want to:

- survey attendees
- interview your presenters
- gather reflections from your team who helped organise the event
- conduct observations of attendees to understand how they are enjoying the event.

The following sections cover each data collection method category.

2.4.1 Questioning techniques

Most of our data collection methods rely on asking questions in some way. However, this does not always have to be in a survey or a form! The following approaches all ask questions in different ways and will be suited to different audiences.

How to ask a good question

- Each question should only have one request in it. For example:

'From today's session, what will you implement?' has one proposition whereas *'From today's session, what was the most useful and what will you implement?'* has two ideas and should be split.

- Ask exactly what you need to know and no more.
- Avoid testing knowledge; there should be no correct answer.
- Do not use leading questions where the respondent's response is anticipated. For example:

'*How much did you like the workshop?*' this assumes that the respondent liked the workshop.

- Don't provide judgement or feedback, e.g. say things like 'I understand' rather than 'I agree'.

Interviews

Interviews involve speaking to individuals to gather data. This could include their knowledge, perspectives and attitudes. Interviews are a very common data collection tool in evaluation. In evaluating an event, interviews can be done with:

- event organisers
- presenters
- a sample of participants
- observers (such as teacher)

Very short semi structured, informal or open interviews may be the most useful in evaluating an event. For example:

- ***Informal conversations, unstructured or open interviews*** - Take a more conversational tone and are most useful for exploring the respondent's opinions and ideas on a given topic. Questions are not pre-determined or fixed but adapted to suit the particular interview situation.
- ***Semi-structured interviews*** use a combination of more, and less, structured questions. Questions tend to be pre-determined but open-ended.

Questions you might be able to ask include:

- How are you finding the event?
- What has been useful so far?
- Is there anything that you would change about the day?
- How are you hoping to use this information?

These interviews can be conducted face to face on the day of the event, over the phone, by email or writing afterwards. If to be collected on the day you could:

- Use 2 - 3 general questions in conversations during breaks, during periods of travel (e.g. on a bus) or afterwards.
- Place interviewers at entry or exit points to the event. Use a selection scheme, such as choosing every fifth person, to truly represent the diversity of the attendees

Line up or Spectrum

The following rapid data collection methods are often used in workshops, training or at events. They are also suitable for use with a range of different audiences.

Spectrum - ask participants how they feel before and after the workshop, by posing questions such as: *How comfortable do you feel about evaluating events?*

A photo needs to include a point against which the participants can be distributed that shows change, for example, left or right of a window, light or curtain. For example:

Before

After

Card Sort

Print explanations of program outcomes or topics on cards. Ask participants to sort cards into piles to indicate their ratings, e.g. what I learnt, what I am still not sure about. This can be done individually or in small groups.

Simple key words or images can be used, which can help in overcoming any literacy challenges. Comments made about each card can be recorded, or just the size of the piles.

Voting methods

Foot Votes

A foot vote is a similar activity, where different locations (such as the corners or a room, or different trees in an area) are allocated different categories. Participants are asked to move to the appropriate one, based on their response to a question. The number of participants in each category should be recorded.

Show of hands

Show of hands is where each call asks for a response to an evaluation question. For example:

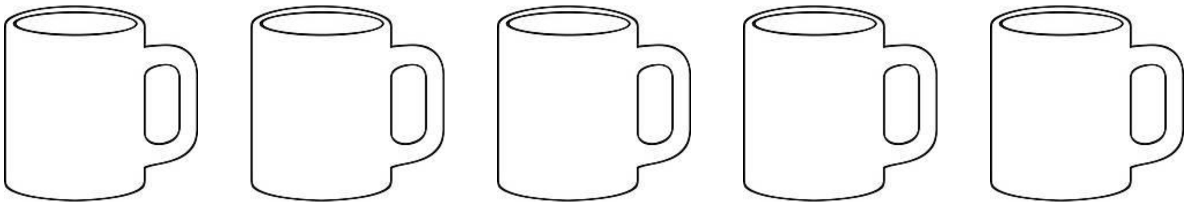
I am going to ask you to show me how you found this workshop, whether it was useful, not useful or very useful. First, not useful? Put up your hands if you found this workshop overall was not useful for you.

Be sure to count how many hands are raised for each option.

Rubbish Bin or Container Votes

This could be done with rubbish, or in returning materials (e.g. pens) or equipment at the end of the day, or use specific tokens in labelled jars. You can use this method as a way of asking people to indicate the extent to which something occurred. For example:

When returning your pens please place in one of the three cups. Each cup is labelled differently; "learned a lot", "learned a little", "didn't learn anything". Or alternately, if you ask people the extent to which they agree with a statement you may lay it out as follows:

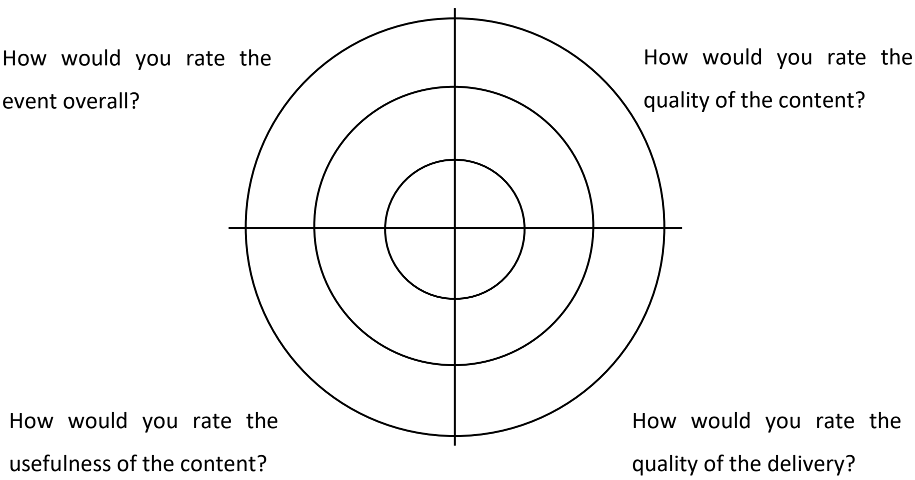


Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Dartboards and Scales

Dartboards

A dartboard is drawn on a piece of butcher's paper, or printed on a large piece of (e.g. A3) paper. Each section represents a graded response to an evaluation question from bull's eye to not so good at the outer circle. Questions could be: *How would you rate the quality of the content? How would you rate the quality of the delivery? How would you rate the usefulness of the content? How would you rate the event overall?*



Scales

Another version is a **scale** that is drawn on a piece of butcher's paper and each line represents a graded response to an evaluation question. For example:

How would you rate the quality of the workshop delivery?

x *xxx* *x* *xx* *x*

Needs improving Good Excellent

Dartboard and scale responses can be quantified and compared across a series of events or as adjustments are made to a single event. The similarities and differences can be seen visually or quantified more numerically.

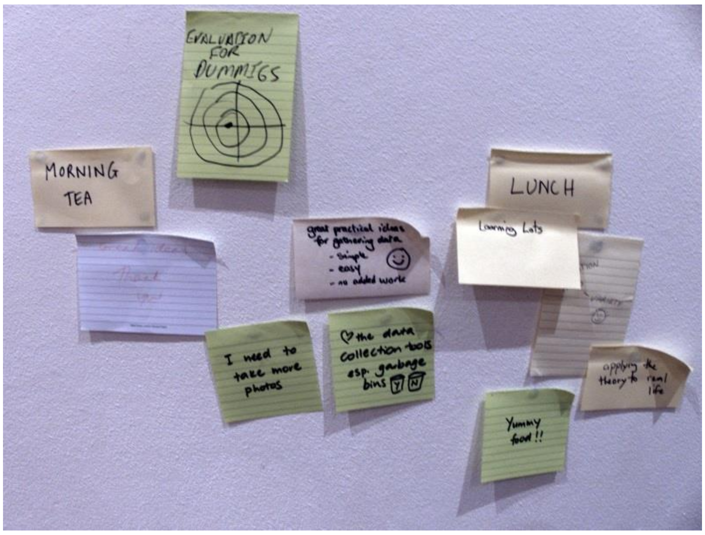
Timeline

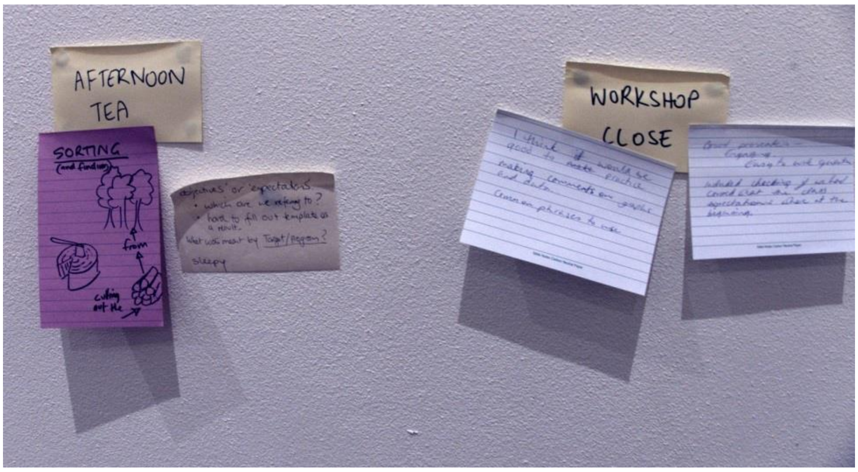
The day can be broken into its obvious parts: beginning of the day, morning tea, lunch, afternoon break and end of the day. Participants are asked to write comments or draw pictures on sticky notes about how they are finding that part of the day and add them to the timeline. Participants are encouraged to complete the timeline throughout the day.

The timeline can be drawn on a long sheet of paper or just it headings can be posted onto a wall. Space is needed to ensure that your attendees can fit their contributions under headings. Posting it on a wall near the refreshments is a good idea.

Start of the day	morning tea	lunch	afternoon tea	day's end

Here are some examples:





Discussions

Evaluation questions can be simply asked over a group in a general discussion format. This is particularly useful for small groups and one off events. Discussion responses should be recorded (e.g. through taking notes) or by getting participants to write down their comments.

This quick evaluation activity can be used at the end of your workshop, or at the end of each day in a multi-day workshop. In the second case, it is advisable to start the following day by summarising the results of the evaluation and pointing out what concrete steps you've taken to apply participants' suggestions for that day.

Generally it takes 5 to 15 minutes and can be used with any number (though better with a smaller group than hundreds!) You will need:

- Flip charts
- Markers
- Sticky notes (e.g. Post-it®)
- Pencils

Beforehand, prepare three flip charts with three questions written in large capital letters at the top:

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What do you suggest for tomorrow/next time?

For the evaluation, put the flip charts on the wall. Hand out sticky notes and pencils to the participants, and ask them to evaluate the workshop based on the three questions.

Have participants write their responses on sticky notes and place them on the flip charts. Alternatively, participants may write directly on the charts or a blackboard.

Electronic Surveys

Surveys don't just have to be on paper in the form of a feedback sheet. Some electronic methods can help to collect personalised responses to questions quickly and anonymously. The additional advantage is that they don't involve any transcription later and therefore are fast and simple to analyse. Some suggestions of how these could be used at an event include:

Wireless voting systems

These can be used to collect feedback ‘live’ during an event. This technology does tend to be more expensive though.

Electronic Surveys on portable devices

Many online survey platforms allow you to build surveys that will run on tablets (e.g. iPad) that can be used on the day. These may be useful at an event such as a bus trip where it may be possible to pass around a tablet, with a very simple survey installed that participants can fill in (think multiple choice or scale questions) anonymously, submit their responses and pass it on to the next person.

There is usually a cost for these platforms, so keep that in mind. Example platforms include:

- QuestionPro
- FluidSurveys
- QuickTapSurvey
- SurveyMonkey

The other benefit is that the data is already entered into a spreadsheet for you when you download it, making it much simpler to manage.

Reflections

As the organiser of an event, the experience you have in the process of planning and delivery are very useful to reflect upon, particularly in evaluating the process of an event. Reflection, either formally or informally, generally involves asking yourself (and your project team) questions about:

- what worked well?
- what didn’t?
- what would you do differently next time?

Individual Reflections

A **project diary** is a written record of significant activities, events or processes that occur during the life of a project. Project staff’s diaries can provide a meaningful reflection of the time that may be needed to implement a project. Project diaries therefore help collect the information that helps make a meaningful evaluation of a project’s implementation, rather than having to depend on sketchy memories or anecdotal evidence.

It can also help give you an indication of the time taken to organise the event, delays or key lessons that could help improve future events.

Team Reflections

Individual project diaries might be able to be combined with team meetings to record the broader experiences of those involved and any improvements needed. Team debrief meetings immediately after events are also valuable to collect experiences, observations and ideas for improvements from the rest of your team members.

2.4.2 Observation approaches

Observing is about watching what people do, listening to what they say and seeing how they interact without you asking questions. Observation of participants in an activity or event is particularly useful for evaluations of processes. Such as *"did participants seem engaged?"*

Observation is useful when:

- There is a need to know how an event operates, what appears to work and what does not.
- The natural setting or context is important.
- The activities or interaction between participants is important.

Observation can be done in four different ways:

- ***Complete participant*** (covert observer) – take on the role of a participant, as would undercover police 'on the inside'.
- ***Participant as observer*** - participate in the activities but make your role as an observer known.
- ***Observer as a participant*** – Some minimal interaction with participants, but general role is to observe only.
- ***Complete observer*** – hidden observer, usually unknown to participants or attendees.

Which approach you use will be influenced by the impact your presence as an observer is likely to have on the participants. Be aware there may be ethical implications with being a covert observer.

In observing events, there are a number of things to look for:

- **Goal**: the things that people are trying to accomplish
- **Actors**: the people involved
- **Space**: the physical place or places
- **Activities**: a set of related acts that people do
- **Objects**: the physical things that are present
- **Time**: the sequencing that takes place over time
- **Feelings**: the emotions felt and expressed.

These observations can be recorded on to paper or a standard form, direct into a laptop or by audio recordings, photos or video.

Example tool

The following is a template for observation at an educational workshop series:

Workshop Participant Observation Sheet
Demographics Number of men Number of women Age range Background (how many in each group)
Event objectives achieved

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">Objective 1:
Objective 2:
Objective 3:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">What is the evidence that learning styles catered for?
Activists:
Reflectors:
Pragmatists:
Theorists:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Level of participation</td></tr>
<tr><td>P1</td><td>P4</td><td>P7</td><td>P10</td><td>P13</td><td>P16</td></tr>
<tr><td>P2</td><td>P5</td><td>P8</td><td>P11</td><td>P14</td><td>P17</td></tr>
<tr><td>P3</td><td>P6</td><td>P9</td><td>P12</td><td>P15</td><td>P18</td></tr>
</table>

These should be tailored to meet the needs of your evaluation (remember to refer back to your project logic).

2.4.3 Materials review approaches

Photos, videos or pictures

Material review tends to be the review of photos of an event or images created by participants, which can be a rich source of data about events. Visual data collection in this form can be particularly useful when there may be language barriers (e.g. asking people to draw how the content makes them feel).

Images can be used to understand interactions between people. The use of images is most effective in contexts where:

- There is a visual component
- You can see things being created or people interacting
- The physical or locational context for a program is important.

At the outset of the day, ask participants if it is ok to take photos of them, particularly if there is a small number and it is likely that they will be identifiable. You can ask them to come and see you at morning tea if they would prefer not to – it is important to not take photos of people until you know that they are ok with it.

Photos of an event and its participants can be taken throughout the day. You should plan your image collection activities to adequately sample. Some sampling techniques include:

- **fixed time sampling** – photos taken from a fixed position at regular intervals

- **sampling across time** – to capture the full range of activities
- **event based sampling** – just capture a certain aspect

Consideration

Be careful of photographing participants without permission - particularly children – as there are ethical considerations (Section 2.5). It can be easier at times to just take photos of people backs!

Example – Photos from a field day

The photos below come from a field day about repairing creek and river banks to improve the water quality and increase the biodiversity of these zones. The target audience is dairy farmers. The objectives of this project were to:

1. Provide information to the dairy industry about the principles and practical methods of sound river and riparian management;
2. Through interaction with researchers and leading dairy farmer groups, provide training to local groups/personnel relating to different aspects of riparian management (for example: stock, monitoring, evaluation and in-stream health)

What do these photos tell you about the event?

2.5 Considerations when collecting data

2.5.1 Privacy and Confidentiality

The Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth) requires 'reasonable steps' to be taken to ensure the individual providing data is aware of:

- the identity of the organisation and how to contact it
- the fact that he or she is able to gain access to the information
- the purposes for which the information is collected
- the organisations (or the types of organisations) to which the organisation usually discloses information of that kind;
- any law that requires the particular information to be collected; and
- the main consequences (if any) for the individual if all or part of the Information is not provided.'(Office of the Privacy Commissioner 2003).

2.5.2 Ethics

All evaluations and social research are governed by strict ethical rules and codes of professional behaviour that everyone involved in an evaluation should read and follow. These standards are widely available and developed by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluations (1994). An Australian version appears on the Australasian Evaluation society website http://www.aes.asn.au/about/ethics.htm. The main points in the Australian code include:

Ethical conduct - When conducting or reporting an evaluation, members should strive to uphold the ethical principles and associated procedures endorsed by the Society in the Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations.

Public Interest - Members should consider the interests of the full range of stakeholders in their evaluation work, including the broader public interest, and in particular, the potential impacts of differences and inequalities in society.

Truthfulness - Members should not knowingly make or prepare or certify as true any oral or written statement which is false, incorrect, misleading or incomplete.

Reasonable criticism - Members should only use reasonable criticism and should not attempt to maliciously damage the professional reputation, practice or prospects of others in the field of evaluation.

Confidentiality - Members should ensure responsible use of information obtained in the course of their evaluation practice, and respect confidentiality undertakings.

2.6 Storing your data

Once you have collected your data it is important to store it securely in a way that will allow you to refer back to it easily when it comes to report. Depending on what you have collected this will usually take the form of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The layout for the spreadsheet will vary depending on what you capture, but could look like the following:

Date	Type of event (e.g. workshop)	Total number of attendees	Length of the event	Number who learned something new	Number who plan on making a change to the way they do something

You will notice that the categories cover both output data and outcome-related data. This will make it much easier at the reporting stage of the evaluation to account for:

- Number of events held
- Reach of the events (both total and individual)
- Total number of people who learned something new (for example)
- Total number of people who plan on making a change to the way they do things

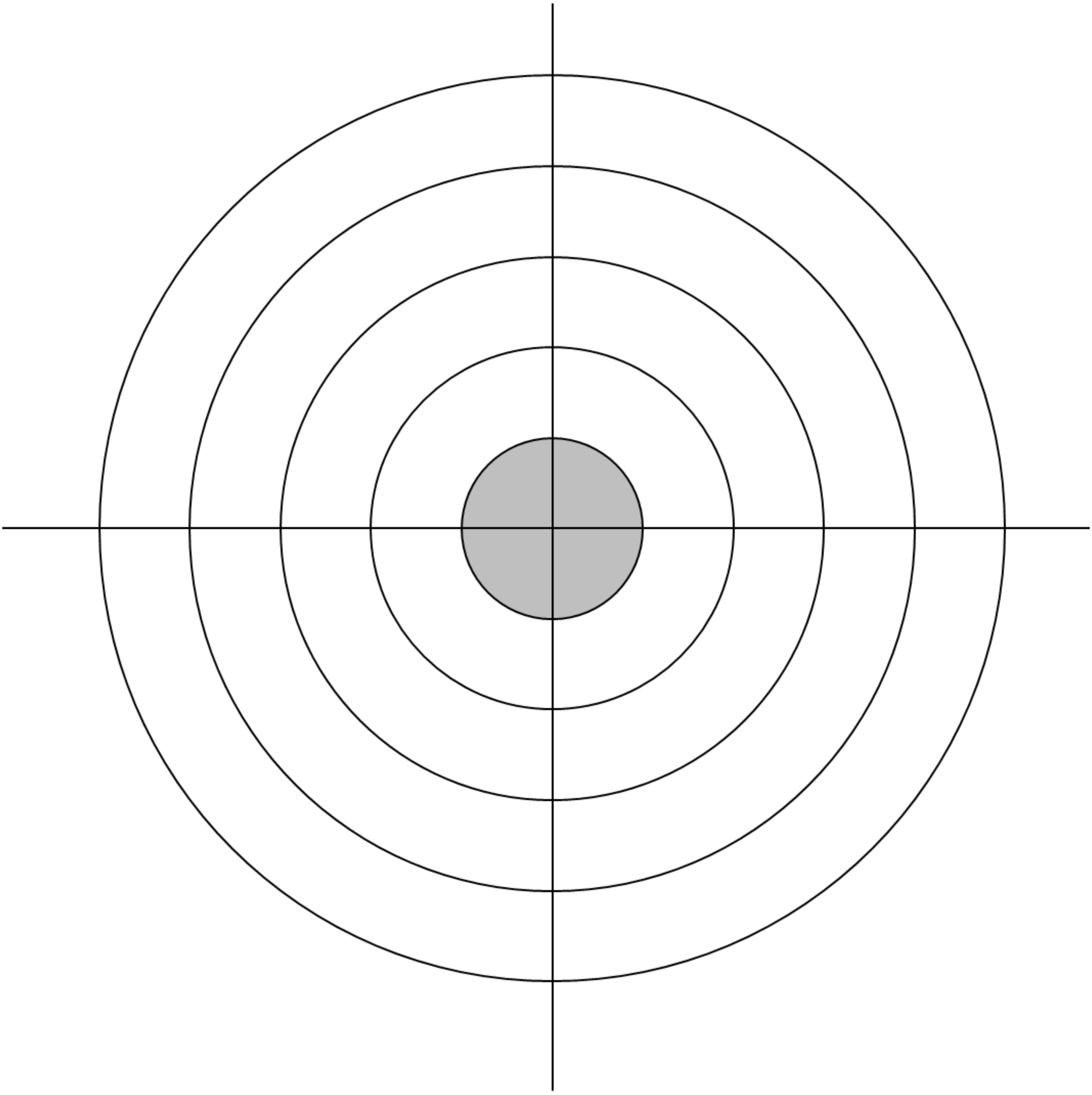
The other aspect to make sure you capture are the inputs or resources required for your events. For example:

- cost of running the events
- number of staff involved in preparing and running the event (and amount of their time)
- whether project partners provided any resourcing (including in-kind contributions).

This will then allow you to provide a full picture of the 'real' cost of running the event and the outcomes of your approach.

3 Templates

What type of event is being held? *(E.g. training workshop, field day, information session etc.)*	
Is it a one off event or a series of events?	
Where are they to be held? (i.e. venue or location)	
When will they be held?	
What resources have been allocated? (E.g. staff, funding, are there guest speakers?)	
Who do you want to come? *(*Target population) Who else is going to be there? (E.g. people from your team or organisation?)	
Why have you organised this event? What do you want participants to learn? How do you want them to react?	



Workshop Participant Observation Sheet					
Total number of attendees: **Demographics:** Number of men: Number of women: Age range: **Background to the event:**					
The location: How is the location set up? **The people:** How are people interacting with each other?					
The activities: How are people responding to the activities/content? Is there anything that appears to be more or less engaging about the activities?					
Level of participation (rate on a scale from 1 to 5 for each participant)					
P1	P4	P7	P10	P13	P16
P2	P5	P8	P11	P14	P17
P3	P6	P9	P12	P15	P18