# 2. PLANNING YOUR EVALUATION

It is important at the outset of any project to be clear about what you want to achieve. This will help you to develop a plan to determine if your project has been successful. More specifically, you need to articulate clear project goals and measurable, targeted outcomes. Goals often tend to be more visionary, while outcomes are specific and describe the changes that you expect people to undergo as they experience your project. With clearly articulated goals and outcomes in hand, you can develop a plan that serves as the roadmap for your project evaluation.
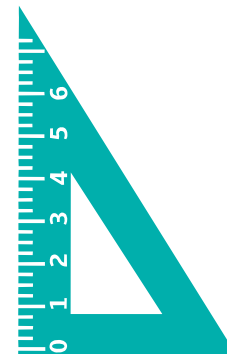
YOUR PLAN SHOULD:

- provide information about the purpose and context of the evaluation, who will be involved, and how data will be collected and reported;
- include evaluation questions that align to the goals and outcomes; and,
- include a detailed timeline, budget, reporting strategies, and other logistical considerations.

OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE SMART:

- **Specific**
- **Measureable**
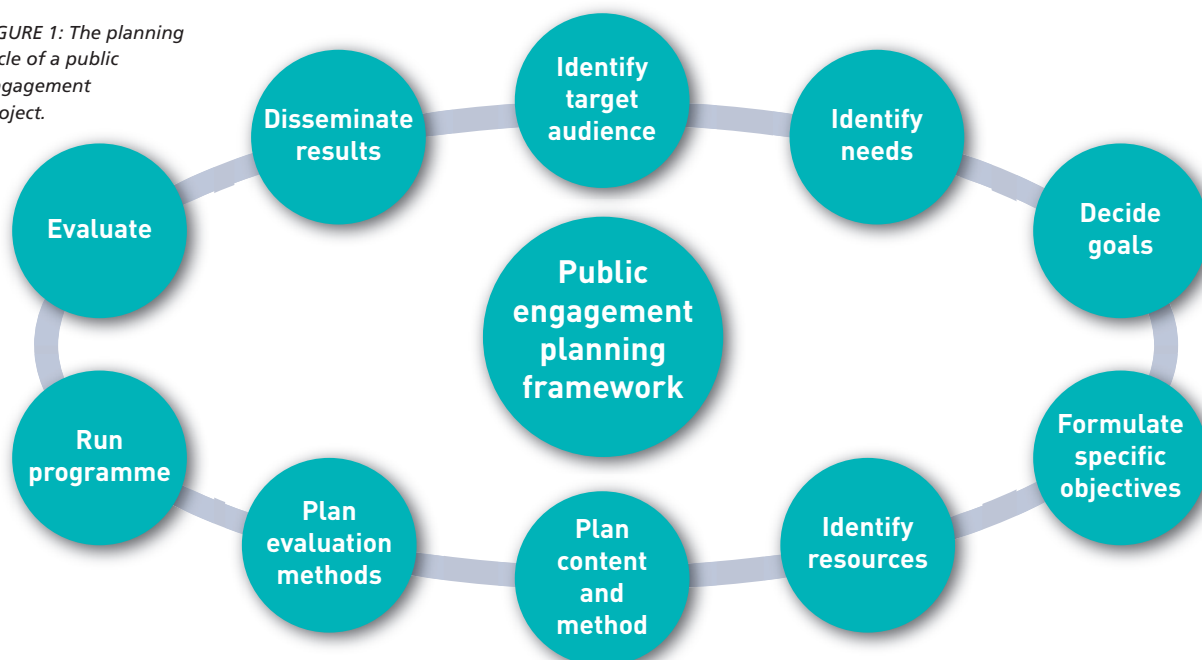- **Achievable**
- **Realistic**
- **Timed**

Evaluation should start in the planning stages of the project. Figure 1 shows the planning cycle of a public engagement project. Formative evaluation should take place in the initial stages when you are identifying the target audience and their needs (see Part 4 of this toolkit for information on types of evaluation). The project should be designed to meet the needs of the target population in a way that is acceptable and accessible to them. From here, the overarching goals of the project should be decided, followed by the objectives outlining how these goals will be achieved.

Once the resources, content and delivery methods have been planned, the evaluation methods can be planned to suit the programme.

Evaluation should take place during the delivery of the programme, on completion and, where possible, after a period of time in order to establish whether sustained changes have been made.

An important element of the evaluation process is the dissemination of the results to share what you have learned with other STEM public engagement practitioners.

FIGURE 1: The planning cycle of a public engagement project.

Identify target audience
Identify needs
Decide goals
Formulate specific objectives
Identify resources
Plan content and method
Plan evaluation methods
Run programme
Evaluate
Disseminate results

Public engagement planning framework

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EVALUATION TOOLKIT

WHO SHOULD EVALUATE?

Evaluations can be conducted internally by members of the project team or externally by another organisation. Alternatively, peer evaluation, where two or more individuals or organisations evaluate each other's work, may be an option. For most projects internal evaluation is fine. However, for larger projects it may be worthwhile to consider external evaluation. A fresh set of eyes is healthy for a project and allows specialist evaluation skills to be applied. External evaluators do not necessarily have to come from outside your organisation. Evaluators within your organisation who are not associated with your programme and who have no personal interest in the results of an evaluation may serve your needs. It is important to note that if you plan on outsourcing your evaluation, you can include this in the budget of a Discover Programme Funding Call application. International best practice suggests that 10% of the budget for a public engagement intervention should be assigned to evaluation.

COMPONENTS OF AN EVALUATION

Every evaluation should contain certain basic components:

1. A clear and definite objective:
Write a statement defining clearly and specifically the objective for the evaluation. The statement will vary depending on the aspect of the programme that is being evaluated. For example, before the programme begins, you will need to test any materials you plan to distribute to participants.

2. A description of the target population:
Define the target population and, if possible, the comparison (control) group. Be as specific as possible.

3. A description of what is to be evaluated:
Write down the type of information to be collected and how that information relates to your programme's objectives.

4. Specific methods:
Choose methods that are suitable for the objective of the evaluation and that will produce the type of information you are looking for.

5. Instruments to collect data:
Design and test the instruments to be used to collect information. It is important to consider how you will analyse the data collected when designing these instruments.

6. Raw information:
Collect raw information from the members of the target population. Raw information is the information you collect as you run the programme (e.g., the number of people who attended, or the number of items you have distributed). Raw information is information that has not been processed or analysed.

7. Processed information:
Put raw information into a form that makes it possible to analyse. Usually, that means entering the information into a computer database that permits the evaluator to do various statistical calculations, for example MS Excel.

8. Analyses:
Analysing either quantitative or qualitative information requires the services of an expert in the particular evaluation method used.

9. Evaluation report:
Write a report giving results of the analyses and the significance (if any) of these results. This report could be as simple as a memo explaining the results to the programme manager. However, it could also be an article suitable for publication in a scientific journal, or a report to a funding agency. The type of report depends on the purpose of the evaluation and the significance of the results. If your project/programme has been funded through SFI Discover, it is important to include a copy of the evaluation report with your final report.