The Banbury Heritage Project Event: Radical Creative Ageing Evaluation

So hello and welcome to this radical creative aging evaluation event supported by the CADA team as part of the Banbury Heritage Project, a collaboration between Historic England, HGK Oxfordshire and SuperSum, which ran from March 2023 to December 2024 and explored how older communities that are underrepresented and underserved in the heritage sector can deliver in their own historic places to support wellbeing. One of the key outcomes of this project was SuperSum's development of a new evaluation framework, which is where the theme of this learning event comes from. We are joined by Tim and Karen from SuperSum, along with Victoria from the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance and Emma from the Centre for Cultural Value to explore the topic of creative and radical evaluation approaches.

This event is being recorded and will be shared through our wider networks as part of the dissemination of learning, so we have collected questions for our presenters in advance, but you can also use the chat function to pose any further questions you might have throughout the event. We want this event to be as inclusive and accessible and supportive as possible, so we will share details of the projects and partners mentioned today with all delegates soon after the event. So, with the housekeeping done, on to introductions.

I will introduce myself and then hand over to each presenter to introduce themselves. My name is Farrah Rinaldin and I'm the Director of CADA, Creative Ageing Development and Agency, a national charity committed to underrepresented and underserved older communities and creatives. We have a particular interest in how age, disability and class can increase the barriers older people experience, which is why learning from this project is so important.

To describe myself, I'm a white woman in my 40s with shoulder length blonde hair. I'm wearing glasses and red lipstick and I'm sat in my living room at home, which is a deep turquoise blue. So, SuperSum, would you like to introduce yourselves and share why you think we need a more radical approach to evaluation and what this might look like? Thank you, Farrah.

So, I'm Karen Gray, I'm an academic researcher currently at the University of Bristol, but also a freelance evaluator working on this project with Tim as part of SuperSum. I've got a particular interest in evaluation and ageing, which has grown over nearly 10, 12 years now. I am a white lady in her 50s with shoulder length brown hair, glasses and you can't see my background because it's blurred, it's my kitchen.

I'm going to pass over to Tim. Hello everyone, I'm Tim Senior, I'm the founder and director of SuperSum, an independent research agency working on wicked problems. I'll come back to that in a moment.

I'm a white man in his 40s with a beard, a twiddly moustache and not much on top. Think of your typical Bristol hipster and that might come close to what you're seeing. So, Karen and I are

really interested in this idea of radical in evaluation.

It's a term that has its origins in the root of things, radical as about what's fundamental and essential, something you choose to return to at a time of crisis. I should have done this before I started. In our work, we've been strongly influenced by the Centre for Cultural Values principles for good evaluation, but also a very exciting body of work around wicked problems, clumsy solutions and messy institutions.

So-called wicked problems arise when people can't agree on what the problem is, never mind how you solve it. And in some way, the frustrations felt in this field by participants in arts and cultural life, by organisations, funders, researchers, policy and sometimes with each other, speaks to the wickedness of this space. Our approach is to rethink good evaluation practice as a clumsy solution, one where everybody gets, where everybody involved gets a win that matters to them.

This can mean introducing radical forms of compromise in what different groups get out of evaluation, but it also makes it a joint venture and we think that's really important. So, in short, this is about going back to the essentials, the roots of why any of us are interested in well-being and how funding, programming, life experience can be meaningfully connected together to everyone's benefit. So today, we'll briefly touch on this new evaluation practice we're developing so that we can ground the conversation in something real whilst also pulling out three themes.

There's only eight minutes after all and I might go over eight minutes, we shall see. So, first of all, the origin of this work is with the Connecting Through Culture project at the University of Bristol and this is something we've been able to develop further with other creative and cultural organisations and then through the wonderful CADA and the Creator Later Lives programme, including the Boundary Heritage Project. Our first point of three is that we should be helping people tell well-being stories that matter to them.

At worst, evaluation can force people into ways of talking about their well-being that make no sense to them. We have a situation often where people who want to talk about their well-being and have a story to tell are shut down by the very process set up to capture those stories. So, a central focus of our work has been to understand how our wonderful groups of adults talk about well-being and the effects of participating in arts and cultural life in the most normal and natural way.

And what's jumped out is that people can talk with great clarity about well-being, but less so if you split it up into constituent parts assessed independently, like you might do in a questionnaire. Well-being stories also have a kind of structure. They're anchored in someone's own life, where they have come from to arrive at a well-being need, how an event or experience has shaped them on those terms and how, as a result, they might take a different way forward.

What we're developing is a simple way to help people frame and construct their story in the

way that they want to. It's built around a small number of big well-being themes, each with a set of indicative outcomes that form a scaffold around which a story can be built. It creates a social space to share well-being stories, stories that most often are themselves social in nature, and find resonance with others in a way that helps you tell your story.

It uses simple but beautifully designed resources to communicate that this process matters and that your story matters. And it forms a creative space where people can elaborate their story in the way that they want. Writing, drawing, talking, quiet reflection, a mixture of all of these.

So what comes out at the end is a sense of what someone's well-being needs are, how those needs have been shaped by an event or program, and what that might lead to next. We hope this is a great way to tell a well-being story, a great way to understand what matters and why, and a great way to move forward where well-being needs persist. Our second of three points is that reflecting on well-being can be a happy, healthy, and flexible part of programmed activities themselves.

At worst, evaluation is done at people, it intrudes on well-being activities, and it can even undermine well-being outcomes. We think there is a lot of room for new evaluation practices to be something organizations, artists, practitioners, facilitators, and even participants can work with themselves to their advantage in developing effective well-being programs. We're exploring how our new approach to evaluating well-being, the scaffolding for telling a story, can be combined with other tools and activities that foreground different aspects of well-being, like body maps.

It's got to be flexible. It's not about replacing everything else. It's about being part of what we need to do as organizations.

We're working with partners who have introduced, for example, our key well-being themes at the start of a project to shape the conversation from the get-go. So a reflection activity at the end of a program about well-being becomes simply part of what you're doing together. It's no longer an evaluation.

It's a healthy, happy part of what you want to do anyway. We're experimenting with new co-creation activities, such as AI-generated postcards, to help people get into a creative mindset about which stories they want to tell, so that when we reflect later on them, that those stories are richer and more meaningful. We've seen how groups themselves are actually the best facilitators for each other on uncovering and shaping their well-being stories.

Another great thing that people can do together in a session, improving the quality of storytelling and even laying the foundations for better working relationships between participants and organizations. What comes out of this then is a hugely expanded space for evaluation activities to be an integral part of the value you create through programming, as a funder, as an organization, and even as a participant. Not just showing whether some preconceived idea of what matters has been achieved, but as an instrument in your toolkit to

generate and reveal value at the same time.

In some ways, this is about as far removed from many conventional evaluation practices as you can get. Our third and final point is that everyone should have a win, because connecting people's lives, inciting to value, programming and funding matters. We're very good at generating data through standardized well-being questionnaires.

It's easy and you always get data. But what that data actually means, whether it's missing the value that really matters, whether a link between that data and the interventions themselves even make sense or is believable, that's a whole other matter. And I'm sure that's something we'll return to later in our conversations.

The fact remains, wherever you are in the stakeholder map, you may want something different out of evaluation activity. So the need to find a way that everyone can have a win is more important than ever. So we're designing this new evaluation practice to work for everyone as best as we can.

For participants, we're seeing how reflecting on well-being in this way can bring value into their own lives. A chance to express well-being on their own terms, hear from others experiencing the same, whether it's the shifting clarity of what they might do next or might not do next, why and what help they need, this is beneficial to them first and foremost. Then, whether learning is taken on board or not, whether funding priorities do change or not, or whether insight just goes into that administrative black hole of late modernity, it almost doesn't matter.

The benefits of evaluation are immediate, they're clear and they're for you. For organizations, bootstrapping well-being into a limited number of well-being themes and outcomes creates a wonderful overlapping space to scaffold stories, rather than a sort of endless, unconnected space for storytelling. Organizations can start to see where different themes dominate well-being outcomes or shift as a group or a program develops.

We're also finding that when people choose to tell their story through a scaffold like the one we're trying to develop, those stories become, in a way, more precise and purposeful. This means a transcribed audio file, as we're doing with our new practice, quickly generates clear stories about well-being, what matters most and why. This gives organizations quality content to work with without making massive demands on time, staffing, analysis.

It means it stands a chance of actually working for organizations too. For funders, finally, they may be interested in how well-being stories reveal different weighting amongst those well-being themes, outcomes and next steps. All of which can be expressed as simple, descriptive statistics about well-being impacts, well-being priorities, likely routes to well-being outcomes.

These sit very happily side-by-side to those stories generated through that process. Indeed, organizations we're working with see this as a way to change the conversation between themselves and funders about what really matters and why, and how those impacts emerge

over time and what that means for funding windows, all tied to the evidence we're trying to create. So what comes out of this is that this is a way that evaluation activity can drive greater alignment between everybody involved.

That's the clumsy solution. A better way to ensure that money, time, effort and energy is being spent in the right way for the right reasons. At the end of the day, isn't that what good evaluation is actually all about? That might have been over eight minutes.

Thank you. So without further ado, I would love to pass over to Emma. Oh, Emma, are you there? Hello, sorry, I couldn't unmute myself for some reason.

Thank you, Tim. Hello, my name is Emma McDowell. I'm a lecturer at the University of Leeds and also an associate at the Centre for Cultural Value.

Visually, I'm a white person with brown hair and black and white top and glasses, and I have a blurred background. You can see lots of books behind me that I haven't read. So I'm really delighted to be here today.

I'm actually sharing some slides. Tim's done that wonderful, engaging conversation, but I'm going to hide behind some slides if that's OK. So I will just share those and hopefully you can see them OK.

And so thank you to Steph and to Farrell and the CADA team for inviting me to be part of this discussion today on taking a radical approach to evaluation. And as you'll see from the image about I wanted to very similar to what Tim was saying, think about radical as in from the roots, as in a kind of fund looking at the fundamentals, the things underneath, I suppose. And I'm going to share some resources from the centre that I've personally worked on, but more importantly, platform some awesome and really useful practice and research from others.

So briefly about Centre for Cultural Value, you can go on our website and take a proper look at what we do. As you see, there's a there's a clear mission here around building a shared understanding of the differences that arts, culture, heritage and screen make to people's lives. And evaluation is one of the key areas that we've been particularly interested in.

I think we come from this basis that culture has value. It has value. That is a that is a given.

But how it emerges differently for different people in different contexts, in different ways, is what we're interested in. And crucially, we're interested in supporting organisations and projects and programmes and practitioners and researchers to all collaborate, working in partnership to articulate and communicate the value of what they do more, I suppose, effectively. So that's kind of a little bit about us.

You might have heard about the evaluation principles, which is something that came out of a series of listening events that the Research Centre set up in 2019, 2020. And evaluation emerged as a key concern for the sector. Unsurprisingly, this idea of kind of thinking of

evaluation as meaningful to practice a working group of about 40, over 40 practitioners and researchers came together and basically co-created this set of principles.

It's crucial to point out that the principles are in not about a sort of toolkit, but rather a way in which we can describe existing practice, good existing practice. And I think what's important to recognise here is that they are words, they can be applied in many, many different ways. And that's obviously a strength because they're applicable to that diverse range of programmes.

But of course, we realised that the sector and people needed ways to apply these. I'm going to briefly be talking about these three evaluation principles just because it's a bit of a short introduction. But there's plenty of resources, including a podcast and lots of other resources on our website around applying the principles to practice that might be of interest.

So the first one was this idea of sharing learning and research that I conducted in 2020 with the centre, a very small sort of survey looking at the role of evaluation in organisations. Probably not surprising that evaluation seen as, you know, we haven't necessarily got a consensus and that's okay. It sort of encompasses lots of different ways in which we communicate and articulate value from capturing value through to proving impact, justifying funding, making it clear how we have matched our objectives.

But I think crucially, one of the things that came out was this crisis of sharing, that we don't share our learning. Evaluation reports often sit on shelves gathering dust and there's a lot of really, really useful insight and learning that we could draw from. But as we've seen, not a lot of organisations share their evaluation systematically.

Perhaps they don't think it's interesting, perhaps they've not pulled out that kind of transferable learning. There are many, many different reasons why. So I think there's something to be said for me and I've worked on the evaluation learning space, which looked at pulling out evaluations from cities and capitals of culture based in the UK.

And it was really about not reinventing the wheel and just providing a platform and engaging with existing work, which I think is kind of one thing that I want to sort of suggest is useful when it comes to getting back to those fundamentals is that we don't have to always be thinking of the new answer. We don't always have to be coming up with sort of new ways of doing things, although that's great too. And I highly advocate for that.

It's also about acknowledging the diversity and vibrancy of evaluation practice by others. Another piece of really important research that was brought to my attention certainly was in our evaluation principles in practice essential reads, but which is a report that was published in 2022 by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre team. And I think it's a crucial one, especially in relation to sort of heritage organisations it was looking at in England.

And it talked about how evaluation is often methods seem narrow when they wondered how heritage organisations could provide an accurate picture of the impact. And in some cases, it

was even not asking community partners for feedback, but instead relying on own judgment about the success of the collaboration. They were concerned that ineffective evaluation practices combined with the seldom acknowledged imbalance in power and resources leave community partners with little opportunity to offer their experience of collaborations in a way that feels comfortable to them, which I think really chimes well with what Tim was discussing in terms of the SuperSum work around providing a way in which people can articulate what is meaningful to them in ways that is meaningful to them.

And linking this really importantly, I think that long-term change, it's unlikely without effective evaluation that delivers real learning and a willingness to apply that learning. And I would argue, yes, that this is absolutely fundamental to our understanding of the possible impact of evaluation. Another thing to consider, I suppose, not only in the work with communities and with partnerships and with participants in programme, but is also thinking about the evaluation as professional practice.

And this is something from Jess Bunyan from the Rising Arts Agency based in not far away from you in Bristol, in our Reflecting Value podcast. And she reflects on the idea that there's not a pipeline of evaluation as a genuine career in the creative sector. And as valuation as part of creative practice, or in some ways adjacent and just as rich and as creative, I suppose, as artistic practice.

And she calls for more genuine development programmes and the idea of evaluation being a leadership role in the sector, which I think is something, again, that's important when we consider the voices of the authorship, I suppose, of evaluations at multiple levels, organisational levels, policy level, and of course, at project level as well. So these are just a couple of examples, I suppose, of how different practitioners have used evaluation principles. And as I say, they might not have directly linked it to evaluation principles, but using this as a way in which to understand the strengths and the kind of the particularities, I suppose, of their own practice.

And I just wanted, obviously, to point out that there's a lot of overlap here and that if we're sort of thinking about sharing our practice, then there's a certain rigour. If we're considering how our evaluation can be many-voiced, then we obviously have to consider how we ethically make sure that invitation and that authorship is done with permission and with agency. So in conclusion, I think that, I mean, I'd love to hear from the rest of the panel and indeed anyone here in the chat, that a radical approach to evaluation is about getting the fundamentals right, sharing, learning, recognising existing work by others, but also pulling out and coming to events like this to pull out that transferable learning.

It's about thinking about how we can bring in a diversity of voices and how we can also make sure that that feeds back into the design of our programmes. All of this seems very basic and you might be nodding your head and saying, yes, yes, yes, we know all of this, but actually doing the thing, I think, is where the challenge lies. So thinking very carefully about who is

doing the evaluating and how.

And finally, evaluation is about being committed to learning. As we all know, this does mean listening to others, but also about providing space to learn from others. So on that note, I will shut up and provide some space for others.

But just if you're interested, I'll try and put some links in the chat, but we have got podcasts and resources. You can join the newsletter. We have also got a free evaluation, online evaluation training course on FutureLearn, which if you're interested, might be helpful both in terms of starting your practice, but also in terms of improving it.

And I will stop there. Thank you very much. I will stop sharing my screen and I will pass over, I think, to the wonderful Victoria Hume from the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

Thank you. Thanks, Emma. Hello, everybody.

Sorry, I have a slightly croaky voice because I'm just getting over a cold. I am here from the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance. I'm a middle-aged white woman.

I've got short brown hair, black rimmed glasses, and I'm in a yellow room, and I'm wearing a bright pink and purple scarf in an attempt to cheer up the February blues. So, yes, so the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, for those of you that don't know us, is a membership organisation that is focused on creativity and health and wellbeing. So, there's a big crossover with creative ageing, but I must apologise if I sometimes stray into slightly different territory.

Why do we need a more radical approach to evaluation? Well, SuperSUM and the Centre for Cultural Value have done amazing work in this area. I find those principles that Emma's just been describing immensely helpful. I'm not going to pretend that I'm an evaluator, but I will talk a bit about my own journey, as they say, with evaluation.

Someone who's had to do it a lot as a sort of non-expert, but usually without external help, and often trying to speak to multiple quite demanding audiences, which I hope might resonate with some of you. So, why do we need a radical approach? I don't know that I'm going to suggest anything that radical in this. I really like that you both refer to that definition of, you know, radical as being of the root, but in the more conventional sense, I'm not sure that what I'm talking about is all that groundbreaking.

But I do feel something needs to change, because at the moment, the word evaluation just causes consistently widespread anxiety in our sector. Whenever we ask people, our members, what they want and need more help with in creative health, evaluation is pretty much top of the list. It's one of the great mysteries of this work.

It feels as if evaluation is always just out of reach somehow. You follow one set of instructions, maybe they're coming from a funder, but they don't really seem to fit the work. They don't really express anything to do with what you consider to be valuable about it.

So, you look for another approach. Often, that might be tools that are validated in medical contexts, for example, but then you realize that your participants hate it, and it drives a wedge between you and the people you're trying to work with. And ultimately, it doesn't really capture what you're doing.

Again, it has this sort of gaslighting quality about it. Evaluation is a sort of coercive aspect in that it can feel as if you're constantly reaching for some kind of external approval that gets arbitrarily withdrawn. So, I ran a singing for breathing program for many years in a hospital, and I thought I was evaluating it like crazy.

But actually, it was always an attempt to sell the work, not to the patients who were already convinced and attending the sessions, but we had to sell it to the hospital, to funders, often to individual clinicians. We even took it to the extremes of commissioning a randomized control trial at one point. None of this, I now realize, was actually evaluation.

It was research of a sort, and in the end, it did benefit the wider work of singing for breathing, which is great, but it didn't help us run a better program. The actual evaluation was really our reflective practice, the conversations that I was having every week with the singing leaders to try and work out what we should do next, why people didn't turn up, whether we should have a public concert, how we should approach people at the bedside. Of course, none of this was formally documented, or really considered to be evaluation, because no one else was asking for it.

So, my not very radical contention is that we have to end this unhealthy relationship with this imagined external other, and focus instead, not always imagined, I must say, but to try and get back to the core of it and focus on sustaining the same creative approach that we use for the rest of the work, and consider it on its own terms, or rather in terms that we decide between participants and facilitators, if you like, terms that we co-produce. And in many cases, I would argue that the work itself is its own evaluation already. To give you a concrete example, I am in the midst of planning a roundtable at the moment, looking at training and creative health.

The aim of this roundtable is to bring together a broad group of people, and to try to create a more coherent sense of national priorities. We're going to end up with a report based on all the input, which will probably conclude with that set of priorities. And yet, I am planning to evaluate this by asking people to fill in postcards telling me whether they had a nice time.

Now, I really hope they have a nice time, but that's not actually the aim. The aim is to build consensus and priorities. The report's going to demonstrate that.

The work is its own evaluation. And yet, I feel I have to evaluate something else. And I don't really know why.

Nobody's actually asked me to do that. The funders haven't asked me to do that. The participants haven't asked me to do that.

My board hasn't asked me to do that. And yet, I still feel this obligation to evaluate something other than the actual aims. I'm not really sure what that's about.

I'll give you another example. I saw a brilliant presentation once from a group who'd been working with people who had recently been diagnosed with dementia and their families. The participants made, I think it was cyanotypes and poems.

And they were expressing how the families and the people concerned felt about their diagnosis. They were really powerful works of art, very moving, very relatable. And then the organization paid an external evaluator to demonstrate that people had got something out of the work by looking at, I think it was conventional welding measures, probably WEM webs or something like that, that I'm sure many of us have tried to use.

The evaluation gave some perfectly good statistics about the artworks. But the artworks themselves were already telling a much more interesting story, going back to the storytelling point, about the role that art-making has to play in tackling health diagnoses. The works of art were, to me, a very clear demonstration of value in and of themselves.

They wouldn't have been made had they not had some value for the participants. But they also had a lot of knowledge in them about how the process had worked and where the gaps might be in that process, who was participating, how they were participating. And that knowledge, I think, may have been lost because the evaluation process was separated out from the creative process.

So I'll be honest with you and say that the first thing I thought when Farrell asked me to do this was I am rubbish at evaluation and I don't really understand it. And I run a national organization focused on arts and health, so it's a slightly shaming thing to admit. And I've been doing this work since the late 90s.

I've run masses of evaluations, I've really done a lot of it, but I never feel like I know what I'm doing. And I think, and I'm sort of assaulted by this imposter syndrome feeling every time I try and do an evaluation, which I hope the rest of you don't get, but I suspect some of you will. And I think this comes down to the fact that evaluation is inconsistent and there is no set way to do it.

This creates a real discomfort because there is undeniable external pressure to evaluate consistently. This is something I have an argument about, about every three months. And it's a question that comes in different guises from people in government, in health, and in culture, and even freelancers working in this space who feel this anxiety about inconsistent evaluation.

The question broadly boils down to why don't we have one evaluation framework that every arts and health project everywhere can use so that we can all funnel data into a giant machine and prove to the government that we're worth investing in? That's the sort of essence of the question. My answer to that is, number one, it's impossible. There is no framework that would

help all of us in this room, let alone the millions of projects being conducted every year.

Yeah. The second point is that I think this kind of data feeding enterprise is a particular kind of impact research. I wouldn't say that it is evaluation.

So for me, this is the purview of research institutions. Number three, the imperative is wrong. You can't design evaluation on the basis of advocacy.

Evaluation for me should be about learning. And number four, it flies in the face of co-production and creativity. Evaluation is like any creative process in that it should be inconsistent.

It's about assessing a thing on its own terms. And obviously, those terms are going to be different every time. But I should say, this is not about splitting away from or losing that external critical voice that we have in research or reducing amount of impact assessment that's done.

That's all really important work. It just isn't the job of evaluation. And it's yet another reason to build partnerships with people who can do this.

But I do think we've got to hold our nerve when it comes to evaluation, despite that external pressure, which does exist. And we have to find a way of using the same imaginative approach we use to design or co-design every other aspect of our work and claim that right to learn from our own practice in a way that feels relevant and interesting to us and to the people we work with. It shouldn't really be about being judged, even though I think that is the sort of secret fear that's in it.

It could be a creative, generative activity that is a fundamental and exciting part of how we work. And I will stop there. A wonderful place to stop, Victoria, and it links all lovely.

It's almost like you'll speak to each other. So we do have a question that I posed in advance to the panel, but we've had a couple of extra questions in the chat that I will bolt on if that's OK. So in terms of the panel, and what are the opportunities and barriers of more radical approaches to evaluation? And in terms of the bolt on, we had a question around ethics and how ethical it is to share some of the lived experience stories as part of the project.

And the second sort of bolt on is that how do we how do we get past those more? What were they called, regularised and validated types of measures as a way of getting to the types of storytelling or more iterative ways of capturing information about people? Obviously, more on the challenges side than the opportunities, but there are opportunities in there too. I just really like your thoughts on that. So however you would like to respond over to you, the panel.

Would anybody like to go first? Oh, someone has to go first. Yes, there's there's there's a lot there, a lot there to unpick. I think something which Karen and I have been there's there's there's much more to explore, explore here.

But the idea that we should get rid of a certain way of doing evaluation in favour of another because it doesn't work for us in the particular project we're doing isn't necessarily helpful. I mean, it is it is possible to imagine certain aspects of arts and cultural life as as in scare quotes, an intervention, right? You know, it could be this isn't the world we're we're interested in, but it could be that when you imagine when when you can show that working with arts and cultural life in a certain way has particular outcomes and and you conceive of it as an intervention and that's how it's that's how it's made available to people, say through social prescribing, then part of that also includes an expectation from participants that it is an intervention in their life and that will shape the way they will, you know, get involved. They will imagine their own role in it.

It could be that in those situations, a type of evaluation that thinks about pre and post makes sense. Right. If the whole thing is being conceived as as an intervention of sorts and that works for everyone, then actually maybe that's that's in certain certain situations is OK.

The issue comes when you're working with the phenomenal creative potential of being human and and what arts and cultural life is is is is about as messy and generative and wonderful. Then if that's how you're working with it, like we've done with Boundary Heritage Project, it doesn't work as an intervention. It's wrong to see it in those terms.

So any way of trying to understand that has to itself be as exactly as Victoria says, generative and creative in its own right. It's got to be a way of helping people make sense of their own journey because they won't always be sure why should they. Wellbeing is complex and use that to shape the way programming works next time or towards the end of the programme or, you know, uncover gaps that can be filled as you go along in an agile and flexible way.

So that's really what we're talking about today. Right. It's it's it's it's it's we don't mention the E word in the work we do because it upsets people straight away.

So we just avoid it completely. But it's a way of understanding why we're here and what we're getting out of this and why that means something to us. And that quite naturally draws those wonderful connections between, well, where is the money coming from and who's available to fund this programme and what do you want as a as a facilitator? And it pulls everything together and that makes it generative and interesting.

But it's. I think if we get it, it's not helpful for us to go into the mindset that that should be everything and we we should fight because that's often the term used fight against when webs and fight against, you know, ice capo. I've slightly changed my own mind on this.

I think that there might be situations where where those are appropriate and helpful, but it depends on why you're engaging with arts and cultural life in the first place. And if you're engaging in arts and cultural life in a way that doesn't fit that model of intervention, then it's not going to help you. The problem is being forced to use those models of evaluation, as as Victoria says, that aren't really even evaluation at all.

It's being forced to use those things that are inappropriate for what you want out of engaging with arts and culture. That was a very long answer, and I don't know if that made any sense, but. If anybody else wants to come in on that.

Thanks, Tim. I'll come in briefly. Emma, I'm not sure if you were desperate to come in, but I was.

I was. You look like you were. So I am happy to.

For me, the opportunity is, as I think Tim outlined there and the other speakers have done already, is the real opportunity is offered by the people who are taking part in the kinds of activities that we're all interested in understanding more about. It's in developing ways to work with them, to co-create, to co-produce experience and to co-produce evaluation, however we frame it with those people. That's the kind of opportunity that we should be grasping with open arms, and I think funders are increasingly much more interested in what can be produced when you do that.

So that's very great news. I really like the way that Victoria framed it as perhaps there are things that other people can do. So maybe we should be leaving some of that big work, some of the kind of work that DCMS want us to do all the time, to demonstrate the economic value of arts and creativity.

Maybe we should be thinking about leaving that to other people and really focusing more on what we can learn about the projects we do and how to do them better and how to reflect and how to support our participants better. And when we do that work, naturally we are, when we do that focus in that way, naturally we work, hopefully, naturally we work better and more ethically with our participants. To answer one of the questions that was posed in the chat, and I'm going to shut up now.

Emma, did you want to come in on that? Well, I mean, I will if that's helpful, but just to kind of reiterate, I guess there's something isn't there about that kind of, when we're talking about ethical practice, we're potentially asking that question, does the way in which you are expressing this, the value of this or your experiences of this programme or the impact that it's had on you, feel authentic? Are you able to sort of connect with it in a way that, you know, for whatever language, you know, whatever language you're using, and I don't mean necessarily sort of English, but I mean that in terms of ways of expressing, do they feel, does that feel kind of authentic? And I think that's the same goes to Victoria's point, I think, which is that, you know, the actual kind of the work itself is the evaluation and will speak for its own value. So yeah, I think it's just to kind of like, kind of comment a little bit on that as well. And it's so, so hard when you have to sort of, if you've been potentially monitoring where you're having to sort of look at kind of maybe more quantitative metrics, and you're sort of perhaps a little bit more reduced in your own agency to be able to create, then you're having to sort of report in ways that someone else has defined, you know, these are the questions, and this is what, how we'd like you to answer.

It's difficult to find that sort of space. But when we are able to be creative, and when we are able to use those artists and creative teams, or whatever, those program designers who are creating that work to also have some say in how it's evaluated and how we are communicating and articulating the value of the project, then that's got to be sort of part of the challenge, meeting that challenge, I suppose. So I'm not sure if that, I'm just kind of reiterating what everybody else said, and it's slightly agreeing.

But yeah, definitely good questions. And I think in terms of practitioner, what you were saying, Victoria, really resonates with me, just the idea of the fear around evaluation. And the more the creative, the more the co-design, the more the person-centred the evaluation process is, the better it feels for everybody, the fear is gone.

Whereas the kind of instilled, very bespoke to a funder type of, you're constantly worrying, have I collected it incorrectly? Or has somebody else who's done a similar project applied the principles in a different way? And so you're never quite sure there's not, even when it's a standardised approach, the fear is still all about whether you're doing it well enough. I don't know if you want to come back on that. Yeah.

Yeah, I was going to touch on, well, two things, just to pick up on the point that Karen was making about, well, you were responding to what I'd said about sometimes it's not our job to do that kind of research. I think the other point about that is that if we don't do the reflective bit where we're looking at processes and trying to make the work better, there is no other external imperative in a way at the moment to do that work. And so it doesn't get done.

And then it doesn't feed into, if we don't publish that kind of evaluation or find ways of getting it out there, it doesn't make its way into the discourse somehow. And we know that there's a big hole in the research around practitioners' experiences of this work and participants' experiences in a more nuanced way. And that's because we've all sort of had to follow this impact line.

And again, I'm not saying that's not valid and useful. It absolutely is. But I think there's a big gap there that I think only we can fill at the moment.

So it's really important that we validate ourselves in a way. And in connection to Linda's question about how do you balance this in a way with the external demands from funders, it's difficult. I actually find it quite a difficult question to answer because the external demands I get are from the Arts Council.

That's where most of our funding comes from. And they tend to be quite, they ask for quite irrelevant stuff to us. It's always about audiences and we don't really work in that way.

So I think, but there's no avoiding it. You have to respond to what funders are asking you to do in some way. So I suppose it's a question of just finding ways of doing that that is as low in the amount of burden that it puts on you as possible, but making sure that you set aside time to do

evaluation on your terms as well and presenting that to the funders, finding ways to present that to the funders or to the other, whoever it might be, the power brokers that you're trying to deal with, because eventually what they're asking for will change.

And it is changing slowly. I think somebody was asking a question about whether that's shifting. I do think that things are shifting with funders and also with our colleagues in health and social care, you know, their own practices are changing and people are way more interested in stories than they used to be.

We get very mixed messages. Some clinicians say, oh, we're not interested in this work unless you present us with 75 randomised control trials looking at a specific condition. And then the next person will say, we don't really care about that.

We just want good stories about patient experience. So, you know, it's not consistent. The messages we're getting are not consistent.

We might as well just find ways of doing what we think is valuable and presenting that and then just doing what we have to do, but not letting that be the thing that makes us feel about ourselves, frankly. Agreed. So in terms of the next question, which maybe our last question may get one more in if anyone else has got one in the chat.

But in terms of us as a sector, as people in this learning space, what just one thing could we all do to take positive action on the theme of radical creative ageing evaluation? Is that one thing? Yeah. Yeah. I think it's keeping lines of communication open.

You know, it's very easy for us to and we've all been there to fall into fatalism around, you know, this sort of work. You know, I'll just have to do that extra meaningful evaluation myself. You know, it's dreadful and we have to do it because we still have to deliver these, you know, these metrics.

But, you know, in a way, I think this is what Victoria is saying, that actually, funders who can engage, funders and policy who can engage in this in a different way, will get a higher return on the outcomes they want if they change the conversation, if they keep pursuing their own agenda around monitoring. It does them harm. And that's the conversation we, you know, we do have and, you know, we all do have and should continue having.

This is what clumsy solutions are all about, is saying, actually, it isn't either or, it isn't this or that. The stories, the way you do evaluation, the way you can draw quantitative data from it and qualitative data, it's showing that richness of experience. We can all get the wind we need here.

That's about alignment and that can only come through dogged, determined conversation and keeping lines open. And it's hard, it is hard, but that's the one thing, you know, for me at least. Keep talking.

Tim, I totally agree and I hope it's okay to share a story of some other work that we were doing

using the framework that we've been describing, that Tim's been describing. We were using it with an organization to help their participants to articulate the experiences they'd had taking part in a program in that organization. And we were doing this work with a group of participants apart from, you know, kind of a funder, policymaker context.

But it so happened that those participants were put in a situation a little bit later on where they were able, of their own accord, to go up to people who wanted to hear those stories and to articulate those stories clearly, well, joyfully, you know, they wanted to tell those stories and the funders and policymakers could hear. So, it's about creating those opportunities to make links between participants, between people who deliver programs and between funders and policymakers. I think that's the one thing that we have to keep on doing.

Absolutely agree, Tim. It was, it was this, it was entirely unexpected, but, you know, a few of our more strident older adults who go up to, you know, up to a funder and say, let me tell you why this is important. And it is in these terms that this is why and this is the pathway and this is, and it's absolutely wonderful.

And that's where, you know, this isn't about that burden of persuasion being on organizations themselves. Actually, we are all in this and why can't great evaluation, you know, using some of those wonderful principles from the Centre for Cultural Value, you know, participants themselves are part of this too. And, you know, that's what we'd love to see, because that creates the weight of change around, well, actually, what matters and why.

And it can really push back against this sort of insidious approach which we pulled from the sciences. I have a PhD in neuroscience, I was a scientist, so I'm perhaps being more experienced, I don't know, that things always have to change, that, you know, you can't keep funding some program to keep doing good work. Actually, we do need to, because, you know, well-being needs don't vanish overnight, those needs can persist.

And actually that conversation around how long you fund programs for and showing through those wonderful, diverse, rich, generative methods, why that is, you know, we need that to change the conversation about funding and funding limits and so on. But that also has to come from participants. So evaluation tools that equip everyone to talk more sensibly about value, that's a win, I think.

And Emma, did you want to come back on that briefly or otherwise? Yeah, I mean, very briefly, I would love to pick up on some recurring kind of theme, which I feel is also something good to take away if I was a practitioner. And I definitely relate to what Victoria was saying about, I think it's hilarious when people ask me to come on evaluation panels, and I have done evaluation, numerous evaluations. I've authored those reports that sit on shelves and gather dust, believe me.

And I certainly am one that is not, you know, I will say something in lots of words instead of being succinct. So I've made all the mistakes. And I'm fascinated by evaluation, because I've

never been able to feel like I'm doing it really, really well.

And it's the same, my backgrounds in marketing, I find the same that some of these tools that we set up, it doesn't always necessarily equate to practice. So the one thing I would suggest, and it's something that's come out, I think, of the conversations that we've had with the sector, and I think the evaluation principles, they're not, this isn't new, this is about badging existing practice, this is about practitioners saying, this is what we think evaluation, good evaluation looks like. It's not, you know, they're not the Centre for Cultural Values, the audience agencies principles, they are, we believe the sector's principles, in that sense.

And I think it's about that confidence and having and confidence speaking to funders, yes, and to policy, obviously, makers, of course, and that advocacy for that kind of that sort of demolishing of the hierarchy of like methods and, and all of that. But it is also about going, okay, how am I already doing this? How are we currently evaluating whose voices are dominant, whose voices are being unheard? What are we already doing really, really well, because chances are, you are and it's not about starting again from scratch and throwing all of the practice out, but thinking, how are we being authentically able to talk about the value, the impact, the experiences of our work? How are we doing that already? And is there something that we can do a little bit more in evaluation? So that's kind of my final thoughts. And just to wrap up before I finish, I think one of the other things that I've really noticed is that a lot of practitioners are talking to each other, which funders are the most open to co-design and open to expressing evaluation and feedback in in more creative ways.

And we are starting to mobilize and, and talk with our feet, obviously, funding is, is very scarce, and we're all desperate for it. But But I think in terms of practitioners having, having a little bit of power to make the choice of where they want to get that funding from, and pushing back on some of those very heavy requirements, in some cases, for quite small amounts of funding for projects that are actually really quite complex. So I think there is change happening.

But I think coming together in sessions like this, sharing our own experiences of what works and those funders that are more radical and open to radical approaches is a really important one. So on that note, I just want to say a huge thank you to all of our presenters today for such an inspirational and thought provoking discussion. I did see in the chat that some people were asking where can I find the link, what will happen with SuperSUM's new evaluation framework, there will be a website coming very shortly that will share all the work.

And also any of the links that have been mentioned today will be shared with all of the delegates through the network. So I'm afraid that's all we have time for, but I'm sure our listeners will agree that this has been just the beginning of the conversation. And I'm keen to hear about the work that's going on across the country in this space, from those of you who are in the room as well.

So if you have any thoughts or reflections, then you can share them by email to hello at cardaengland.org, or find us on social media and share that with us today. Finally, I want to say

thank you to a couple of people who are in the room but haven't been mentioned today, who've been part of the Banbury Heritage Project, integral to it. So thank you to Helen Fountain at Age UK Oxfordshire, who was the project manager on the Banbury Heritage Project, and worked tirelessly to achieve so many wonderful outcomes with the community.

And also to Linda Monckton from Historic England, who is here today and did ask a question, who took a leap of faith and enabled this project and so much learning to happen. We need more pioneers like you, both of you, to support this work. And we will share more details about the other outcomes of the project that I just mentioned with delegates soon, and with our wider networks in the coming weeks.

So thank you very much. With one minute to spare, I've managed to keep us to time. Thank you everybody for today and enjoy the rest of your day.