Spirit of 2012 & Local Trust │Social Value of Community Events

Final Report

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1 Introduction

This research is designed to investigate the social value of community events. Stevenson (2020) proposes that community events can play a vital role in processes of local development enabling the articulation of 'community values and practices'. This piece of research has been commissioned by Spirit of 2012 and Local Trust in order to identify the ways in which events contribute to the communities in which they take place. While there is a significant volume of research that examines the benefits and drawbacks of hosting larger scale events, alongside that which recognises the economic impacts of events, there has been less focus on the social benefits of events and on smaller scale occasions.

This research seeks to address these issues. It is important that the social and community impacts that events create are properly planned for and recognised. This will assist event planners and participants in gaining a fuller understanding of the significance of their events and ultimately achieve their goals. It will help community groups to identify and develop the wider societal and individual objectives that their groups have set out to achieve (i.e., broadening participation, developing inclusion, engendering community and pride in place, reducing isolation and increased wellbeing) and mitigate negative outcomes (i.e., noise or traffic pollution, littering, over-crowding). Overall, it will help communities better understand the social value of their events and contribute to their longer-term sustainability.

This study has three key elements:

1. A literature review of the social value of events, and the evidential base and methods which have been used to date;
2. A process of engaging and consulting with some community event organisers, including trialling elements of a self-evaluation framework;
3. The development of a set of guidelines for community event organisers, including a template and drawing from the literature review and elsewhere to introduce concepts and approaches to measuring the social value of community events.

This final report outlines the process which we have undertaken, and identifies the key findings from the literature review and the consultation process, and sets out the principles which have underpinned the development of the guidelines.

Published separately from this report are: the literature review and the guidelines of evaluating the social value of community events, with the supporting template.

2 Literature Review - Evidence Review

The literature review was produced as an evidence review and sent to both Spirit of London 2012 and Local Trust as the final published output, ahead of the project's completion. The early publication of the review was to accommodate a request from Wavehill, who were also working with Spirit of 2012 and EventScotland, to access evidence that we had gathered around

wellbeing and community events
https://issuu.com/ccse_uws/docs/job_5270_the_social_value_of_community_events-_a_l

In addition to the evidence review, we have created short summaries of the six dimensions of social value as standalone guides. Each summary includes a digest of the key considerations for each dimension alongside suggestions for relevant indicators. The six dimensions are: Place, Community, Participation, Wellbeing, Learning and Disruption.

Social Value – Quick Guide to Evaluating the Six Dimensions	
Collective Values	**How to evaluate**
Place Events may create feelings of pride and attachment to a place. This may strengthen or create local identity tied to the place. You may also do this digitally through social media and work with others to understand the impact.	Understanding how civic spaces, public parks or other public spaces that are used in communities can create a sense of identity, place recognition and branding can be important markers for evaluating and promoting future events. **Quantitative:** Eventsimpact "Identity and image" toolkit gives a range of questions on pride and positive sentiment towards the area. It is possible to add scale questions on "Attending [event] enhances my attachment to this place" and "When I attend [event] I feel proud of where I live" and similar. **Qualitative:** Asking people to recount an experience that made them proud of the place or tell you about their relation to the place may be valuable for the event's record and help to achieve wider goals. So, for example, "What does this place mean to you" and "How does this event make you feel?" are good questions if you have volunteers speaking with people at the event.
Community Sense of community may be affected by events. Trust, wanting to be included in the community and feelings of belonging. How do you know if your event has contributed to these wider community objectives for your organisation?	Community identity, community inclusion and be part of the community are often objectives that local organisations running events want to achieve. The examples below can help. **Quantitative:** World Bank's Questionnaire on social capital asks about sense of community, especially from p 32. Questions on being involved, feeling valued, connection to community, are possible additions. **Qualitative:** Is the event good for the community? Why? Are there new interactions? Does this event tie people together? Does the event further wider group or organisational objectives? These may be prompts for interesting answers. Again, don't be afraid to just speak with people at the event and write it up afterwards.
Participation Ask yourself what type of participation you are trying to achieve from hosting an event or festival? Again, this maybe be linked to a wider remit of	Participation is often tricky to evaluate depending on if people are active participants at an event, or passive spectators. Knowing how you want people to participate and engage will help you measure and evaluate in a more meaningful way.

key stakeholders or a funding requirement. Staging an event may increase participation, at and beyond the event itself. Taking part in common social and cultural activities.	**Quantitative:** Eventsimpact "Participation" toolkit asks about likelihood of attending other events, event-related behaviour change. One could add questions on increased social network. **Qualitative:** Respondents may have things to say about what they have attended at the event and whether it inspired them to do more things, or have you had a large amount of volunteers and you are interested in what the experience was like for them. Volunteers are a key group of stakeholders that can give you valuable data on how others engaged with the event so be sure to use them in the feedback and reflection stage of your event.
Individual Values	**How to evaluate**
Wellbeing Mental and physical health may improve from events but may also be shortlived. So, ask yourself if the event is the moment or the movement to further engagement? Increased sense of quality of life due to sense of purpose, satisfaction, decreased isolation are big objectives that need clear means to evaluate them.	Some pointers to think about wellbeing if you want to measure are these two examples: **Quantitative: The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale** was developed to help evaluate programmes, projects and policies so may be a good fit to your wider programme objectives aimed at reducing loneliness and isolation. UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures kit gauges emotions in relation to the event: frequency and intensity. Willingness-to-pay is a common addition to wellbeing studies. The SO18 Big Local project has also been working with a simple questionnaire which captures before and after data about loneliness, and which is very friendly and easily adaptable for other questions. There is also a brief guide to measuring loneliness from the What Works Centre for Wellbeing Centre, which includes a template questionnaire that you can use. **Qualitative:** How did the event make your respondent feel? What was the best thing about it? Describing experiences about purpose and family may give valuable answers. If looking to evaluate wellbeing qualitatively it is good to follow up after the event with key groups or participants, follow stories of engagement, did people go on to get involved in other things because of your event? Sometimes, the answers happen months after the event so this should be considered in your evaluation process and timescale.
Learning - Skill development Learning new things, either from the programme or as a volunteer. Local history, organising skills, social skills, career skills	**Quantitative:** Generic Learning Outcomes measures learning from cultural experiences. 5-point scales on inspiration, learning. Questions on tangible skills may be a good addition if you want to show the development of your volunteers for example or if you are showing stakeholders that involvement with your event and organisation can lead to the development of social economy skills. **Qualitative:** Sections 3 and 6 of GLO Researcher's Question Bank asks both open and closed questions on skills and changing behaviour. Finding volunteers, organisers, and participants and asking about learning may give very different answers, showing the width of skills learned, on many complexity

Negative Values	How to evaluate
	levels. This can be as basic or complex as you need, so it is a good resource for you to use.
Disruption - Negative impacts and social costs Events may bring anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, but also traffic, noise, littering, and even over-taxing of local resources. Events may also be about protest and the right to protest so you would frame evaluation of this differently.	Often people shy away from evaluating the negative aspects of events or don't know how to do it in a positive and meaningful way. **Quantitative:** There are no standard tools for measuring disruption and the negative impacts of events. Complaints, either to event organisers or other parties (e.g. local authorities) may be a useful indicator, alongside any information from the police, street-cleaning and other public services about any rises or clusters of activity/required intervention. If you are able to survey local residents and community members, you could also collect their experiences of this kind of practical disruption too. **Qualitative:** Section 1 of GLO Researcher's Question Bank contains a list of negative open-ended questions. Though aimed at museums, they are useful for events as well. Not all have negative things to say. Finding those who do may be one way, but also to ask those who seem positive again; the very negative are often not representative.

More resources about social value:

The evidence and literature review undertaken as part of developing these guidelines is available to read here: https://issuu.com/ccse_uws/docs/job_5270_the_social_value_of_community_events-_a_l

The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) has developed some learning from working on social value in health and care commissioning, and has published some key learning here: https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/12_Steps_HealthSocialValue_SEUK2016.pdf

3 Community event consultation

Complementing the evidence review, it was important to work with a select group of community events to learn from their experiences and to also translate the review findings into practical support. We drew on the six one-page guides to help select the range of groups. We wanted to recruit a range of community event types and genres that satisfied the objectives of both Spirit of 2012 and Local Trust.

The process has enabled us to:

- Refine our definition of a community event

- Explore what social values organisers anticipate a community event might generate
- Understand how organisers of community events currently evaluate and reflect on their practice
- Explore the practical issues and opportunities for evaluation around community events
- Support a group of organisers with some additional reflection, providing them with a logic model and support in thinking about possible areas for data collection and evaluation
- Provide a two-stage evaluation template to work through with the groups
- Underpin our evaluation framework design
- Support those who have participated in this process by introducing and sharing the framework with them, when it is complete.

Inviting all of these individuals and groups to a webinar and indeed, a few have indicated they would like to participate in explaining to others how the process has benefited them in their understanding of evaluating the social value of events.

The process for selecting and securing engagement from a target of six community groups running events, started early in the project period. First, we presented at the Moment to Movement webinar led by ImpactFocus in November 2020. This gave us a chance to hear from those involved in the legacy project and allowed us to reach out to a number of organisations to highlight our project and create a call for involvement from community groups. It was clear from earlier work from Spirit of 2012 and Local Trust that grassroots organisations wanted to run community events and that they believed these were a mechanism for creating meaningful change. We reached out to people to get in touch if they wanted to be part of the consultation with groups. The Jo Cox Foundation and Activity Alliance's Get Out Get Active group were both keen to participate in the process. In addition, Local Trust put us in touch with the Big Local Facebook Group and we were able to reach out to members through that platform. Our final selection of groups gave us representation from England, Wales and Scotland.

Local Trust also allowed us to send three questions to 146 Big Local Reps as part of a survey they were conducting to gauge the appetite for returning to face-to-face events and to determine what was being planned by the Big Local Reps. We asked if they were planning any live events in the coming year, what, if any, adjustments had been made as a result of Covid-19 and if they were planning to collect any data or evaluate their event. Out of 146 respondents to the Local Trust January survey, 38 said that they were planning community events. Of those, around a third specifically said that their activities were dependent on COVID restrictions or affected/altered by COVID, and many others talked about activities which would likely be altered if in-person restrictions were to continue. Many respondents referred to more than one community event, and sometimes to a programme of repeated events or a wide range of activities.

The types of activities included general 'celebration' activities, such as fun days, festivals, carnivals, shows and seasonal celebrations. There were also a couple of events planned to commemorate or celebrate the end of COVID, circumstances permitting. Some activities had a more specific focus, for example there were quite a few plans for community cinemas (some outdoors and some indoors), and others had plans for science events, sports events, outdoor performances and music gigs. A few activities were specifically focused on physical assets, for example, using events to animate new community buildings or community-owned land, or celebrating the restoration of a local landmark. Respondents also described a range of

community engagement activities, from formal activities like AGMs, planning and consultation events and open days, through to more informal engagement like a 'community cuppa'. Several Local Trust areas planned to do fundraising/charity events, like the MacMillan Coffee mornings. A few also planned to reinstate trips out for their community.

When asked about the purpose of the events, a few respondents provided some information in response. Almost all the responses focused on the opportunity to bring the community together, and some particularly framed this in response to COVID: bringing the community together after so long apart, looking for opportunities to raise spirits, celebrate and have fun. Generally, the focus was on a sense of community togetherness and opportunities to have fun and do positive things aligning to four of the key areas of social value from our literature review of: place, community, participation and wellbeing.

We used this to inform our broader understanding of the issues affecting community groups to help draw up criteria for selection of the groups.

3.1 Community event selection

We initially reached nine different groups who had shown an interest in being part of the research. We narrowed this down to seven groups for inclusion in the research. In order to do this, we examined the criteria that both Spirit and Local Trust had mentioned were important to them. All of the groups were consistent in that they saw the role of events as bringing the community together to have fun, create a sense of pride, but also to create positive change to individuals and community wellbeing.

Initially, we based our selection criteria on community groups that were governed locally at a grassroots level, rather than events run by local authorities. For this project, we defined community events as those that 'provide a range of activities, involve face-to-face interactions, are held in shared or publicly accessible spaces, are provided for people who live in an area and are not-for-profit' (Stevenson 2020). Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, community events can also be those held online, as long as they are events that play a role in processes of local development. For the purposes of this project we were interested in events (one off or recurring) that emphasise participation, generate interactions between people, foster stronger local networks, and/or contribute to wellbeing and sense of place, highlighting the six key dimensions/themes of social value that emerged from the evidence review.

Thereafter, we also wanted our selections to include representation across the Active, Connected and Creative themes that the Jo Cox Foundation had embraced. We developed a broad definition of community events for selection of community groups/events and shared that with them to ensure they could see themselves within this definition. Subsequently, we sought to secure a wide range of community groups or event organisations that were delivering community events around one or more of these broad categories. We were also keen to ensure we had as representative sample of the population as possible. We looked for community groups that had aims and objectives within their wider programming and remit to ensure social inclusion: specifically, gender, disability, ethnicity and families. We spoke with representatives of all nine possible projects initially to determine those that would benefit the most from the consultation and support and ensure a fit to the brief.

The final seven groups selected to participate in the consultation were:

- **Three from Jo Cox Foundation – More in Common**
- Run for Jo event – in person and virtual – Batley & Spen (Active and Connected)
- Chatty Café – Llantwit Major, South Wales (creative and connected)
- Events Collective (women's group initially) – Halton Merseyside (active, connected and creative)
- **Two from Activity Alliance – GoGA**
- Launch of TV.Fit (disabled and able bodied) Barton and Humber (active and connected)
- Sport events working with this girl can network and volunteer focused – Nottingham (active and connected)
- **One from Local Trust**
- Barrowcliff Big Local Partnership – volunteer run - Scarborough (connected and creative)
- **One large scale festival and event**
- Govanhill Community Festival – Glasgow (active, connected and creative)

Our project lead spoke with representatives of all the organisations before we began the consultation to ensure they were a right match to benefit from the consultation (approx. 1 hour each). We then created a basic event guide template and logic model for participants to complete before our first in-depth conversation with them. We helped them to populate this from the information they shared with us. Thereafter, we sent them an evaluation template guide to complete before our second in-depth consultation with them. Participants ranged from 1 person in the consultation, to 12 people participating the group discussion. The discussions/consultations mostly ranged from 1.5-2hrs each, plus time for us to reflect on and write up notes on each evaluation template for each group.

We stressed to participants that we were interested in learning from them the process that they engaged in decision-making around which events and why? The process of selection, discussion with the community, the role of stakeholders, volunteers, and any wider objectives of partners or partnerships etc.

We worked with them to understand:

- What they wanted their event (s) to achieve and what success looked like for them
- To understand if they wanted to improve or prove they were getting a good representation from the community
- Understand if they were creating inclusion or testing if they had achieved inclusion etc
- Provided them with some support in how they might evaluate their event, to understand if it did what they hoped it would.
- Learn from the participants running the events what they felt it was important to know about community events and their benefits.
- Asked them to help us with some feedback on how we design the framework and toolkit so that it is realistic and usable

3.2 Key findings

Through our consultation with community events across the UK, it is clear to us is that the guidance and templates have to be simple, flexible and straightforward for a range of people and groups to be able to use them. Generally, we found that community groups have a wider set of objectives and events are viewed as one way of helping them create change; occasionally physical change to a place within their community but also an emotional and social change within their community. The groups we worked with had generally not undertaken much systematic evaluation before. Some had partners that did formal evaluations for them, mostly using quantitative measures relating to participation, economics etc for larger events. The groups understand that their events were largely successful, in that people had fun, turned up, looked happy and intuitively they knew they worked.

What the groups were looking for though, was some help with understanding how they would evaluate and measure (if appropriate or possible) whether their event had reduced loneliness, isolation, aided mental health, increased their sense of place and civic pride etc. Again, nearly all the groups provided useful anecdotal evidence through stories of success, or people going on to do other things, but needed help in how to catalogue or document that, and share with local politicians, funders or other partners. Again, there was evidence of a strong connection between the community events being run and the wider programme of activities delivered by groups. It is important to stress that the events were mostly seen as a means of achieving wider community organisation objectives.

The templates shared with participants helped them to think more carefully about the social value they hoped to generate in the longer term and select the focus for each event and avoiding being overly ambitious with one event. So, while events clearly contribute to the achievement of positive social value, they do not do that alone, or in isolation. For example, the strength of success may come down to the input from a wide range of volunteers committed to the project/programme/group. It also may be through working and developing the volunteers that some of the objectives of reducing loneliness, improving mental health and developing social economy skills are realised. All groups were keen to tell us people enjoyed themselves etc., but they need to feel more confident about asking people on the day, training volunteers to do that in a structured, even if informal, way.

It was clear that groups need to feel more confident that their events are important; that their events can and do achieve positive outcomes; that while outcomes can sometimes seem on the surface to be a bit 'soft' / 'fluffy', these outcomes (e.g. positive social interaction, opportunities to test out physical activities, to learn a simple skill, to visit a facility not normally visited) are exactly the kind of changes that cumulatively create enhanced quality of life, increase civic pride and participation etc.

Another key take-away we found from the groups, especially those that had been forced to run some of their events online, was that it had provided people with digital skills they didn't have before, as well as some groups were able to provide tablets to some people. They were able to demonstrate a reduction in isolation through online engagement and still help people to be physically active, for those that had active events as an objective. There was evidence that digital engagement had also reached an older population and allowed them to engage in more gentle exercise, so extending their impact with a target audience that had been hard to reach previously. Other groups had a specific remit to showcase a anti-racist celebration and all that entails; bringing migrant communities together and promoting and celebrating activism. These

groups knew a lot about running events, but more was needed in terms of ensuring they worked in partnership with others to highlight the key outcomes from the evaluation process and demonstrable outcomes for politicians and funders.

Also, we learned that these community groups already know a lot about the value of their events and how they contribute; they just didn't know how to present that in a meaningful way that might attract further funding or satisfy politicians for example. They know the kinds of community groups that they work and the importance of building trust with these groups so as to communicate effectively. Accordingly, they know that evaluation guidelines must not be 'one size fits all' but should be flexible and adaptable to local scenarios.

We learned that many of these groups have many demands on their time; that events are not their sole priority and in fact may only be a small part of a much wider programme of activities designed to promote change. This knowledge should temper expectations about how much time and resources they can commit to evaluation.

These are multi-tasking hard working community groups, and it would be great if the evaluation data produced could be as useful as possible (e.g., to apply for more funding; to market their event to sponsors; to attract more participants, to demonstrate to the wider community their achievements etc.)

4 Guidelines

Using all the engagement and understanding of working with the 7 case study groups, we have produced a set of guidelines with an accompanying example logic model template for community event organisers to evaluate the social value of their activities. These will be made available online by Spirit of 2012 and Local Trust. The aim is that they can be easily printed and used but can also be used in a digital format and thus are accessible to a wide range of people and groups. The guidelines include some simple introductions to concepts like social value in relation to community events, provide some examples of ways in which these areas have been evaluated previously and also introduce and link to external resources which users may find valuable in planning and undertaking an evaluation. These have been written for a member of the public in mind, who is part of a community group and may not know how to go about developing an evaluation process for the event they are running.

Key principles for the guidelines

On the basis of what we have heard and read, it is clear to us that a very specific and technical framework would be unhelpful. So, we have designed an approach which balances the following elements:

- A robust, bespoke, friendly and accessible process, which helps those running events to think about what they hope their event will achieve, consider what kind of evaluation would be useful to them and supports them to design and undertake that evaluation;
- It must start from a low base so the language can't be too technical as most events are run by volunteers not professional event staff. Events can be fleeting so they can't expect to change lives by one event.

- Specific context and content relating to community events and social value, which helps event organisers to:
    - Situate their work in a wider context of a programme or with other stakeholders;
    - Challenges and prompts them to think about things they may not have thought about before;
    - Provides useful concepts, articulations, indicators and, where appropriate, standards and tools for measurement which relate to social value and community events that they can refer to if their event requires.