University of Southampton

A How-to Guide to Creativity in Policymaking

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What is this toolkit?

This toolkit is for faculty and staff working in academia on research projects who are looking to create policy impact with their work. In this toolkit, you will find helpful tips, case studies and principles to help you implement creativity in your policymaking practice.

Why was it created?

This toolkit was created to improve understanding on how policymakers use creative methods to encourage academics to also incorporate it in their policy impact practice. Together, we can bring communities together, creatively solve problems and implement lasting change.

What are the core principles for creativity in policymaking?

By Dr. Vanissa Wanick

To understand how creativity and policy making work together, it is paramount to draw a parallel from three key areas: arts-based research, knowledge co-production, and research around participatory and creative policy design, which includes design thinking, participatory design and creative practices.

This toolkit summarises these areas and challenges into 7 specific principles:

1. **INCLUSIVITY:** Ensure diverse perspectives, especially from under-represented or marginalised groups, are genuinely included in the design and development of policy.

2. **OPENNESS TO EXPERIMENTATION:** Allow space for uncertainty, failure, and creative exploration, using tools like storytelling, games, or role-play to rethink assumptions.

3. **CO-CREATION:** Collaborate with stakeholders and communities to develop ideas with them, not just for them, creating shared ownership of the policy process.

4. **REFLEXIVITY:** Acknowledge your own position, power, and influence in the process. Consider how your identity, values, and methods shape the work.

5. **TRANSLATION AND ACCESSIBILITY:** Use formats and media that communicate complex policy ideas in ways that are tangible, meaningful, and emotionally resonant.

6. **PURPOSE-DRIVEN DESIGN:** Align creative methods with the aims of the policy work, ensuring that the method is appropriate to the challenge, context, and people involved.

7. **PROCESS OVER OUTCOME:** value the journey of learning, relationship-building and meaning-making. Creative methods are most powerful when they reveal nuance.

Tool Kits, Think Kits, and Public Policy

By Professor Dan Ashton and Dr. Joseph Owen

Our exploration of how creative methods can inform policymaking brings together experiences from several projects led or supported by **Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities (SIAH)**. We explore the tool and the think kit as distinctive genre of policy engagement and mode of communication. Firstly, we introduce resources that demonstrate how creative methods can be employed in policymaking. Secondly, we explore how creative methods, particularly their applications and implications, can be framed within the tool/think kit form.

Creative methods and policymaking

The importance and value of using creative methods to engage policymakers and effectively inform policymaking is evident in a range of national initiatives and projects. **The Wellcome Trust Policy Lab**, for example, has shared approaches including:

→ Serious games and simulation to break down barriers in mental health policy

→ Collaborative mosaic-making to visualise and explore complex policy issues

→ Humour and circus arts to think differently about the climate crisis

→ A 'Tomorrow Party' to imagine climate and disaster-resilient futures to unlock new solutions

The UK Government's ***Policy Lab*** similarly shares and interrogates **11 experimental policy design methods** including: Bodystorming; Serious Gaming; Legislative Theatre.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) explores ***Open Policy Making*** by sharing tools and techniques, offering introductions, examples and guidance on when and how to use them. Several of these tools and techniques may be described as creative: they include acting, journey mapping, and sketching.

These creative tools and techniques can test policy ideas and engage policymakers. An essential element is the relationship between the creative methods and policy issues. Policy Lab, for example, explores tools for climate change including **co-design**, **systems mapping**, and **art**.

Creative methods within tool/think kits for policymaking

The *Policy Lab* **examples on climate change** illustrate the important congruity between creative methods and a given policy issue. This element has been explored in several SIAH projects. SIAH is a research institute based at the University of Southampton that develops culture-led solutions by working with places and communities.

In *And Towns*, understanding people's pride in place within hyper-local communities was explored through the creative methods including poetry collage, timeline drawing, photo elicitation, and emoji mapping. In Diverse Capacities, cultural sector networking was explored through creative methods including postcards, Padlets, post-it notes, and performance.

For both projects, creative methods engaged participants and underpinned policy

recommendations. *And Towns* resulted in **five place-based reports** and a **policy brief.** *Diverse Capacities* resulted in policy briefs for **local government officers** and for **creative freelancers**. While the policy briefs were developed through these methods, each project also developed a *think kit* which introduced methods and explored their application.

Toolkits provide a set of approaches that contextualise, assess and address policy problems. Think kits are less focused on delivery relating to policy aims. Instead, they emphasize improve understanding and reflexive critique of policymaking.

This semantic and practical distinction between the tool and the *think kit* is important. The tool kit is channelled towards application and making policy recommendations accessible and *useful*. The think kit may also do this but with a distinctive and dedicated focus on transparent, collaborative and reflective approaches to *policymaking*.

Our view is that creative methods are most effective as part of a think kit that explicitly brings into dialogue methods with policy. And Towns produced a **place-based creative think kit** that supported the engagement activities of local authorities and community organisations. It also provided a broader analysis of cultural placemaking and the pride in place mission that formed part of the levelling up agenda. Diverse Capacities produced a **think kit for building bridges across cultural and creative sectors**. The think kit enabled insight into how the policy recommendations were generated, including the principles and methods, and provides suggestions and reflections for others.

We understand the *think kit* as a mode of communication and genre of policy engagement that moves beyond the static, fixed and dialectic characteristics of the policy brief. We highlight the following features of think kits that bring into dialogue creative methods with *policymaking*.

→ **METHODS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**
Policymakers have access to detailed and critically reflective accounts of how methods engage participants, rather than asserting that methods lead to recommendations.

→ **DYNAMIC AND RE(DOABLE):**
The guidance on methods invites the research to grow and extend itself. This element includes thinking about the effectiveness and limitations of a specific method and inviting policymakers to be part of a collective and collaborative investigation.

→ **SYNTHESIS:**
Policymaking is a synthesis of evidence and perspectives. Rather than elevating or isolating project findings and recommendations, the think kit invites policymakers to understand and question how recommendations were developed and draw links with evidence from other projects.

Noting these features, we propose that the think kit can be a resource for discovery and reflection, rather than a means of presenting findings and recommendations for policymakers in the form of a brief. The think/tool kit form is particularly appropriate for aligning with and extending the creative methods ethos of openness and exploration.

In summary, the think kit, specifically, can help researchers to intricately explore how creative methods and policy issues relate to one another, and it can expand the possibilities for policymakers to understand and contribute to that relationship.

Poetry Collage

By Dr. Joseph Owen and Professor Nicky Marsh

Poetry collage as a methodology is interested in the purpose of poetry, in understanding how it can orchestrate a conversation between policymaking and place-based research. This interest stems from the fact that poetry often appears at the intersection of academic and public worlds: requests for poetry come from many, various places. In our institution and practice at the University of Southampton, we see community groups use poets as facilitators; animators engage poets as scriptwriters; public engagement teams pair poets and scientists; environmental engineers deploy poets for educational initiatives; and environmental scientists wield poetry for thinking about sustainability and climate change. Poems even herald Research Excellence Framework (REF) submissions.

Poetry is prevalent because it isn't a single essential thing: the boundaries between poetry and other cultural forms, especially narrative and story, are undelineated and undelineateable. Poetry is culturally and historically specific; it means different things to different communities. Much has been written about the construction of reading publics for diverse kinds of literary forms, and poetry is said to imitate realities and imagine new ones. Yet the practical deployment of poetry seems distinctive: poetry is often assumed to be a method for distilling—rather than narrating—complex ideas and emotions. We're interested in unpacking specific assumptions that underpin the use of poetry. If narrative is associated with rationality, cognition, action—see modelling, anticipating, building—poetry has been frequently associated with affect, identification, connection.

There are several examples of what poetry in this context might look like: new styles of workshop that produce different types of engagement and affect; and novel modes of critical inquiry that produce different types of data and evidence. With poetry collage, the focus on language and form combines with the act of creation to encourage participants to collaborate on articulating different ideas about the nature of place. Participants write down statements in response to
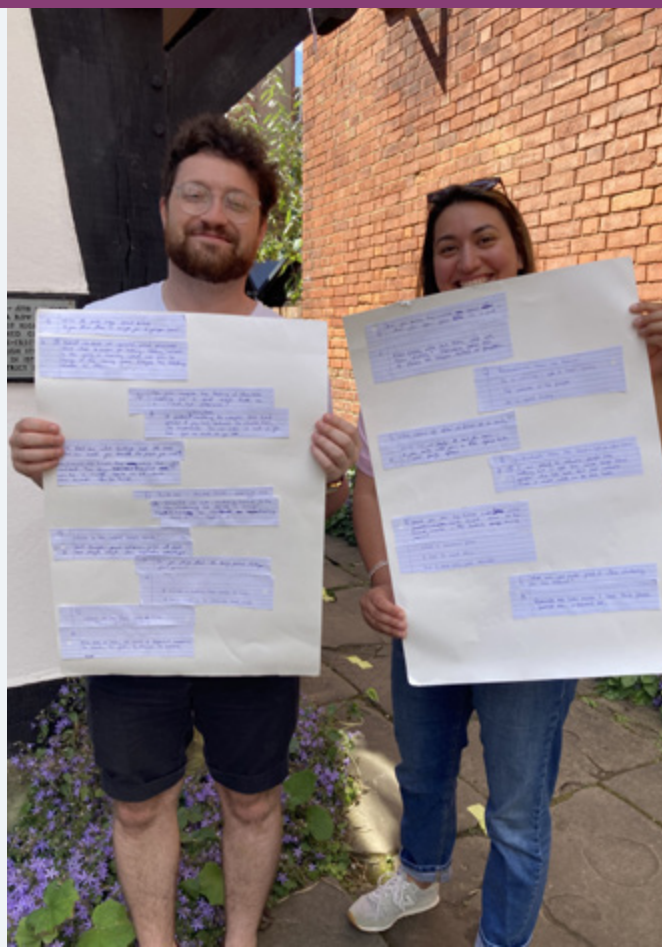
(sometimes surreal) prompts about where they live. They cut up and stick down their responses, mixing and matching them with others to create a poetic collage. A lot of participant discussion is elicited by this process, that is, the act of conjuring up imaginative responses and deciding the order in which they should be organised. Part of this discussion tends also to be about the boundaries of language, the power of concepts and—more specifically—the metaphors we live by.

People are often ambivalent about their place. Poetry collage is a way of further eliciting this ambivalence, but also a distinctive form of illustrating it. Poetic prompts act as standalone provocations, tapping into overt and subterranean feelings held by participants. In our research, one town was described as a cinnamon bun that needed to be "unravelled", and as a sleepy elephant, "complacent but with a lot of potential". Ordering these single sentiments into a collage was not an act of simple coherence; rather, it incited a necessary assembly of dissonance. In the context of cultural placemaking agendas, poetry collage concerns itself with both the process and the artefact, which suggests its usefulness as a piece of co-production with communities and local authorities, but also as a contribution to wider thinking on what stories of place are supposed to do, and what narratives of regeneration intend to capture.
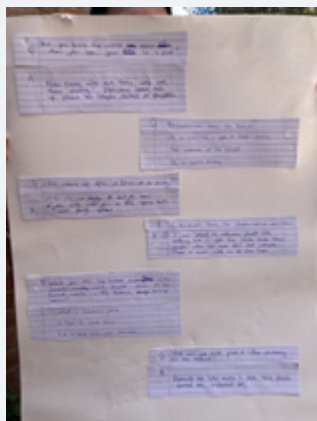
Repair Acts

By Professor Theresa Dillion

Established in 2018, **Repair Acts** is a transdisciplinary, artist-led programme that explores material and spatial cultures of repair, care, and maintenance. The programme was initially established in 2018, through an AHRC Global Network Grant. Since then, Professor Teresa Dillon has been directing the programme in collaboration with several academic colleagues, creative practitioners (artists, designers, makers), circular economy and waste NGO's organisations, local and national councils, and non-human partners including, namely the landscapes and climates in which we carry out our work.

Focused on creating contexts for dialogue and goings-on around what it means to build more restorative material futures. Repair Acts does this by raising awareness and carrying out direct action, through making and building artworks, conducting desk and applied research, and designing community and conversational spaces.

Working deeply at the local level, our work connects on the knowledge and wisdom, with global flows, in material policy, laws and legislation.

Specifically, regarding our influence on policy, our work aligns with broader agendas such as the **Right to Repair** and **circular economy** frameworks. Employing creative and experimental methods, we work across media including mixed media installations, visual ethnography, graphic design, documentary photography and film, media archaeology, and digital culture research—with a particularly focus on counter-cartographies, visualising or uncovering invisible, or hidden histories and patterns of living and storytelling as a methodology for evidencing alternatives, or possibilities for doing things differently.

"*Working deeply at the local level, our work connects on the knowledge and wisdom, with global flows, in material policy, laws and legislation.*"

Our efforts have had measurable policy impacts. We've curated and delivered some of the first policy-facing talks on local economic repair cultures in the UK, Ireland, India, and Brazil. Our **Local Repair Declarations**, which are crowd sourced statements/manifestos that we co-create with citizens have raised awareness and brought attention nationally and regionally on the Right to Repair policy and planning— with this particularly have effect in rural regions, such as Westmeath, Ireland, and northern Brazil, in the town of Casa Branca. Our work in Ireland has been cited by the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** as a case study on repair and circular economy practices. Our ongoing partnership with the New Delhi based, environmental NGO, Toxics Links, and art collective Gambiologia has led to local actions such as the creation of a permanent Repair Café in Casa Branca, and further policy-facing work by Toxics Links, who are leading, electronic waste (eWaste), NGO in India, who work has global reach.

In 2024, Repair Acts played a foundational role in establishing the **Bristol Repair Coalition (BRC)**—a consortium including Bristol City Council, Bristol Waste, the University of the West of England, FixMyTech, and Materials in Mind. Meeting monthly, BRC is now shaping Bristol's repairability pathways, creating capacities for city and regional change and coordinating city-wide activities for **International Repair Day**, including enhancing local Repair Cafés offerings, and promoting repair-based employment opportunities.

Postcards

By Professor Will May, Professor Dan Ashton and Dr. Aiysha Jahan

We developed a creative networking project which used postcards to develop relationships between local freelance creative practitioners and local government officers (LGOs) with a responsibility for culture. We noted their success in empowering local communities in projects designed by **Marion Lean** and the **Doing Data Differently team.**

Why postcards? Many of our project participants lived in areas with significant tourist economies, and postcards were a chance to speak back to the ways their places were marketed vs. the year-round experiences for communities who lived there. We invited participants to use art practices reflecting a range of communities from their areas, including Warli art, a South Asian art form which records narratives, beliefs, and customs using triangle, circle, and square patterns. **Existing research** has shown how the coastal tourist economies of the UK often silence racial difference, and many of the districts our LGOs represented had significant South Asian communities who were underserved in the current culture offer.

In the first session, LGOs created their own postcards, drawing representations of their communities and the intricate networks within them. Creating postcards which represented themselves and their networks was an effective way of telling their story and humanising them as individuals rather than simply as representatives of local government. As our workshops with freelancers were scheduled between sessions with LGOs, postcards were a creative and engaging way to begin a dialogue between the two groups that could continue afterwards via email, creative collaboration, and finally face-to-face meetings.

When the postcards were shared with the eight creative freelancers involved in the project, they were surprised by images the LGOs had created and intrigued by what they represented. They asked about the people and places behind these images and this was a productive way into a conversation about the role that local government can play in supporting creative practitioners who work in the area. While the drawings often sparked connection, in some instances the images LGOs had chosen to represent their regions raised more complicated responses. Did local government want to create a more connected, creative place, or to increase tourist footfall?

"Did local government want to create a more connected, creative place, or to increase tourist footfall?"

The approach suggested the benefits of using unexpected methods of communication: postcards broke through the previous experiences the creative practitioners had often with complex online invoice systems. When the first in-person meeting between these two groups finally took place, the creative engagement led to a more productive, reflective, and fruitful conversation about shared plans and strategies for working together in the future.

Lemonade

By Cara Black and Naomi Leonard

Board games with serious intent have become increasingly popular in education, research and decision making. The engaging nature of boardgames when combined with pedagogical learning frameworks can create a powerful tool for co-creation, problem solving and improved knowledge retention (Gee, 2007; Luckner, Pollak & Purgathofer, 2024). Steinkuehler & Squire (2014) found that games create alternative learning spaces facilitating cognitive and behavioural change through the exploration, interaction and understanding of game systems that mimic realistic scenarios.

The creation of our board game 'Lemonade... when life gives you lemons' builds on this understanding of games as spaces for projected exploration of real-world scenarios that leads to better understanding and improved health and wellbeing through whole systems thinking. 'Lemonade' was designed by experts in game design, sustainability and behavioural sciences, to provoke future thinking and illicit conversations about aspirations, opportunities and barriers to achieving an ideal future state. In particular, the game prompts players to think about the balancing of health and wellness resources in order to successfully move towards their ideal futures.

Along with professional researchers, the game was co-created with young people as the target demographic and is intended to be played within a PSHE (Personal, social, health and economic education) lesson within schools to support young people's understanding of aspirations as important factors for their overall future health and wellbeing. Although the game was initially intended for young people, it has been played extensively by adults and further exploration is revealing its potential in discussing retirement and care with older populations.

Game set up and maximising impact:

The Lemonade... when life gives you lemons game pack includes 8 player tokens, 8 character cards, a game board, various action cards and a session plan to support delivery in education environments (figure X). A facilitator is needed to maximise the games impact and guide conversations along

with gameplay. The facilitator is responsible for initiating conversations with the players about what their ideal futures look like, how they plan to get there and what is stopping their progress before the game begins. This sets the framing for the game and allows players to understand its purpose. Throughout the game the facilitators prompt players to draw on their lived experiences to rationalise game play. Following completion of the game the facilitator guides conversations around how players managed their resources, the strategies they used and if they can identify any links between the game elements and their real lives.

'Lemonade' is designed to be played in teams of two, with partners needing to collaborate and strategize to win the game. This element of the game effectively promotes conversation between groups. This combined with the exploration of players lived experiences helps players relate to each other and build rapport.

During the summer of 2024, a Youth Jury was held at the University of Southampton in collaboration with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Partnership (ICP). During this Youth Jury, young people were asked to create a series of recommendations that would inform the improvement of health and social care services for

young people for the next 5 years. In order for successful collaborations to occur between the young people and the ICP members, rapport first needed to be built between the two groups. For this reason, Lemonade was chosen as the ice-breaker activity for the event. Young people and ICP members were strategically divided between the game boards, with every ICP member paired with a young person as their partner (Figure X). The game allowed young people and decision makers to get to know each other as individuals over the hour of game play and start to build relationships. The young people commented that they felt nervous to interact with decision makers but that the board game helped calm their nerves and allowed them to get to know the decision makers as individuals before the work commenced. This made later collaborations in the day less stressful and more productive.

Lemonade can also be a powerful tool in understanding the lived experiences of young people. With expert facilitation, young people connect occurrences in the game to their real-life experiences, giving an insight into what they value and what challenges they may face. These insights have the potential to give decision makers valuable and relevant information about what young people need to live healthy and happy lives now and, in the future, and the associated barriers that need to be addressed.
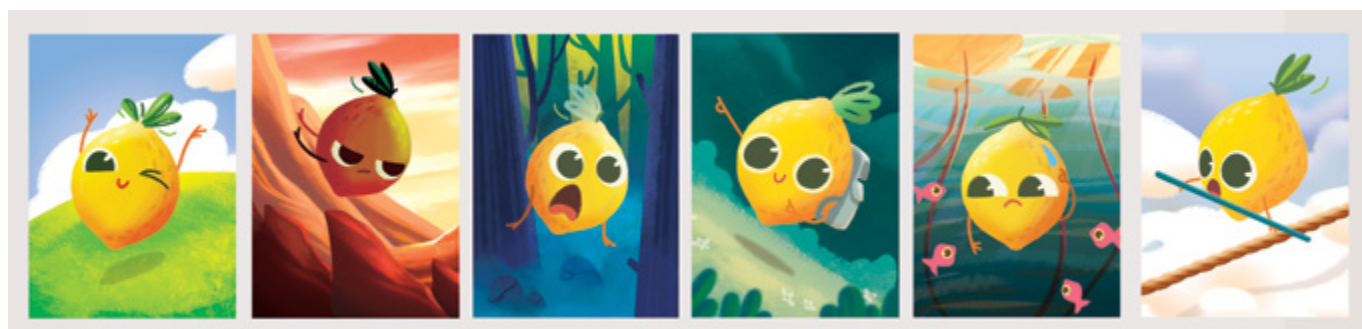
A little of this and a little of that: From sample to sonic composition

By Dr. Kwame Phillips and Dr. Hayato Takahashi

> "This is a sampling sport
> but I'm giving it a new name
> What you hear is mine"
> (*Public Enemy, Caught, Can We Get a Witness?*)

Background

Sampling involves taking a section of audio (or a 'sample') from another source and reusing it as an instrument or a sound recording in the creation of a new track. While often that source is music, any audio source can be sampled. Sounds might be derived from recordings of musical instruments, the human voice, the natural environment, field recordings, synthesizers and computer-based digital sounds. Samples can then be sliced, spliced, layered, equalized, sped up or slowed down, repitched, looped, or otherwise manipulated.

Creative Method/ Activity

Sound is more than an object of study, but also as a medium of argumentation, experience, provocation, and communication (Stoever, 2009). This is a sound-based activity that utilises the practice of sampling as a methodology. Anyone interested in sound practice as a means of storytelling and/or knowledge production might be interested in this activity. At the heart of this exercise is a process that regards the curation of sampled sound as a potential method of "communicating findings and telling stories" (Hammond in Cahnmann-Taylor and Jacobsen, 2024). It also affords an opportunity for compositions created from a bricolage of sonic materials to offer a new 'voice.' As renowned Hip Hop producer Madlib (using his alterego Quasimoto) raps on his song 'Return of the Loop Digga,' "the selective approach provides the essential conditions for creative freedom." Similarly, anthropologist and artist Megan Jeanne Gette states "a sonic composition expresses something different from recordings themselves [and is] a mode of navigating incoherence, incredulity, chance and the novelty of social form in temporal settings." This potential of sound can go beyond what is predetermined and conceived within the realm of 'word'. This point also resonates with what sociologist Les Back calls "lived sociology", a form of knowledge gained and played back through the experience of "listeners" (Back, 2007).

What do you need?

– Any recording device (this could be a phone or a sound recorder)

– A computer

– A notepad and pen to document the production process

– A digital audio editor

– A means of transferring data from the device to the computer

– Patience!

The Prompt:

The time it takes to complete this exercise depends on your own ambition, but we recommend taking your time to collect, develop a concept, curate and produce a composition.

Part 1: COLLECT

Collect a body of sonic material that you want to explore for the subject of your project. This might be something very specific like field recordings of a particular space or archival sounds from an event. This might be something more abstract like focusing on rhythm and melody. For those who have never experimented with this kind of practice, you might want to collect sounds more randomly. To collect the sounds, you will need a recording device. Using your phone is fine, but using a more dedicated sound recording device is ideal. You could also use something more experimental like some kind of analog technology. As you are recording, make notes on the sounds that you are collecting. This should include details of the sounds but also thoughts about what makes them interesting to you.

Part 2: CONCEIVE

Now that you have a collection of sounds, you need to conceive of what to do with them. Reflect using these questions:

1. How do your sounds relate to each other? Is there a common thread that unites them or that you want to pull from it?

2. What sound properties (rhythm, pitch, amplitude, timbre, duration, envelope, location, etc.) stand out?

3. How might you put these sounds together as one mix?

4. How might this mix forward a perspective or respond to question or offer insight from research?

5. What is your positionality as a researcher and a sound practitioner?

Part 3: CURATE

You will have to transfer your collected sounds from your recording device to a computer. You will likely have far more sounds than you will use, so your next task is curatorial. Your curation offers answers to your conception, moving from ideas to more concrete plans and design. You don't have to follow the rules laid out by John Cusack's character in 2000's High Fidelity for a 'great compilation' ("You gotta kick off with a killer, to grab attention. Then you got to take it up a notch, but you don't wanna blow your wad, so then you got to cool it off a notch."), but you do have to have a plan. You will need to think concretely about:

1. How long does your piece need to be?

2. How many different sonic parts will it be composed of? How will they be labelled or marked?

3. How will it be ordered? How will it begin and end?

4. How will its organization communicate the perspective you wish to share?

5. How will you make it cohesive?

6. How will it be distributed?

7. What will you call it?

Part 4: COMPOSE

You will need to have a digital audio editor installed on your computer and have some training on how to use. The software Audacity is free, open-source and cross-platform, and has a detailed tutorial. If you are affiliated with a university institution, you may have access to Adobe Audition, which is a more advanced audio editor. There is no shortage of software you might use, but the basic functionality is the same, you place sounds on tracks, you layer and organise these tracks along a timeline, you manipulate the sounds as you wish, and once you settle on a mix that you are happy with, you export that mix as a single digital sound file.

Part 5: CONSIDER

Once you have your mix, you might want to think about the following questions:

– Do you think your mix is successful?

– Can you still feel/listen to the space where the original sound was recorded/sampled? How?

– What is gained by this approach to knowledge production?

– What practical limitations are there for creating your project in this way? What resource limitations are there?

– How do we understand the cultural histories of various sound media—the phonograph, the radio, the tape recorder, the telephone, the digital recorder and its various playback systems—in relationship to power and the production of social difference?

– How does your project engage issues of positionality and power, accountability to ethical and equitable practice, and accountability to the sounds that are represented?

Village Monopoly: A Playful Participatory Tool for Surfacing Community Value

By Kristina Risley, Professor Jo Sofaer-Derevenski and Heather Parsons

Village Monopoly is a creative, participatory tool that helps communities surface and communicate what they value about local life. Using the familiar format of a Monopoly board, participants are invited to label colour-coded property squares with real places, services, activities or traditions from their own village - placing them according to how valuable they feel, rather than how much they might cost. The traditional Monopoly board's built-in value scale (e.g. Mayfair vs Old Kent Road) encourages layered interpretation - from playful and ironic to deeply personal, while drawing on traditions of participatory mapping (Kindon et al., 2007), critical play (Flanagan, 2009) and co-design (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Village Monopoly offers a low-tech, high-insight method for community engagement that is accessible to all and flexible in the amount and type of facilitation accompanying it.

Participants label each space with something from their village - such as the town hall, the village fete or the weekly pub quiz - and locate it in a zone that reflects its perceived value. Monopoly's traditionally high value dark blue squares are often used to signal what is cherished, while lower-value areas like brown squares or 'Jail' highlight frustrations (e.g. lack of transport, poor Wi-Fi). The activity also invites adaptation: players may rework elements like 'Tax', 'Jail' or the game's rules revealing how communities define value beyond economics. Individual board development sessions typically take 10 – 15 minutes as drop-ins, but this can be adapted or expanded for longer group work with more structured discussion and consultation.

CASE STUDY: Barton Stacey & Lockerley (Hampshire, UK)

Village Monopoly was used at open community events commissioned by Test Valley Borough Council in Spring 2025 at Barton Stacey and Lockerley - two villages in Hampshire, UK where housing growth and infrastructure change were on the horizon.

Twelve residents took part across both sessions, each producing a board that reflected the emotional geography of their village. Contributions ranged from childhood memories and local campaigns to critical feedback on infrastructure, services and planning.

Dark blue and green zones were often used for community anchors such as shared outdoor spaces, rivers, schools and village events. Brown zones, 'Tax' and 'Jail' often became spaces of frustration or (potholes, isolation, lack of buses). However, some placements were more symbolic or ironic and showcased a shared humour or identity - e.g. 'Go to Jail' became "My drive - not yours!"

Boards were digitised and thematically analysed, which revealed patterns of emotional attachment, social memory and aspirational value that often remain invisible in traditional consultation methods. These outputs were then turned into summary posters and shared back to Test Valley Borough Council at an end of consultation event.

Village Monopoly works well for:

→ Planning and policy teams needing meaningful, early-stage engagement.

→ Parish councils and local development groups who want to understand what matters to communities with complex histories, strong attachment to place or concerns about change.

→ Community researchers and facilitators using playful or participatory methods or rural housing partnerships where identity, history and belonging are key.

Breaking the game: rule-bending as insight

Some of the most revealing moments came when participants challenged the game's logic and rather than simply placing local items onto the board, residents rewrote the rules:

→ 'Jail' or utilities squares were used to house potholes, poor roads and unsafe paths. Meanwhile, 'free parking' became a place for "free tea and cakes".

→ 'Community chest' cards were reimagined to contain unexpected acts of kindness, akin to those experienced as part of the community.

BARTON STACEY

Theme	Value Placement	Key Insights
Infrastructure	Mid–Low (Brown, Utility, Jail)	Poor WiFi, roads, and drainage placed low, frustration expressed clearly.
Natural surroundings	High (Green, Dark Blue)	Valued for walks, scenery, and as identity anchors.
Events & Culture	Mid (Red, Yellow, Free Parking)	Some fondness for past events, but less emotional attachment than Lockerley.
Age-specific spaces	High (Green, Dark Blue); some playfulness (Jail)	School, kindergarten and older adult clubs respected; a few joking placements.
Sentiment & Memory	Symbolic spaces (Chance, Free Parking, Go)	Used symbolically – e.g. "Charlie's house" and community legacy spaces.
Social action activities	Mid–High (Chance, Orange)	W.I. and Parish Council placed deliberately, viewed as glue of the community.
Faith-based activities	Very High (Dark Blue, Green)	Highest average rank; church and bell-ringing strongly valued.
Commercial	High (Dark Blue, Yellow)	Shop, pub and services placed prominently; positive emotional tone.

→ At times mechanics like paying rent when landing on a property were rejected, replaced with suggestions like receiving an increase to social or emotional wellbeing instead.

→ One participant offered a new frame altogether: replacing traditional Monopoly money with a "currency of kindness"

These re-interpretations showed how communities use creativity and humour to reframe value - not just in economic terms, but in emotional, social and cultural ones.

Players will need:

→ Blank Monopoly-style printed boards (ideally A3 size paper, in colour).

→ Colour markers, sticky notes, stickers or cards.

→ Friendly facilitation and space for group discussion.

→ A clear sense of purpose: how the findings will be used as well as how results will be shared

Create/Connect: Using Creative methods in participatory research with trans and gender diverse young people

By Professor Olu Jenzen

The Creativity Community & Resilience project (AH/Z505791/1) is the first UK research project to adopt a strengths-based, youth-rights, and community-led co-creative approach, investigating how community belonging can improve liveability, build collective resilience, and support the wellbeing of trans and gender-diverse young people. In this project we seek to tell a different story about trans and gender diverse youth, centring their creativity, vitality and amplifying youth voice. To do so, we have developed the 'Creative Youth Voice' methodology, which we call Create/Connect. It comprises a suite of modular activities that enables young people to engage in a variety of ways: in group sessions or individually, in person or online, synchronously or asynchronously.

The Creativity Community & Resilience project was co-designed in consultation with young people and is supported by a trans youth advisory group. In other words, trans and gender diverse young people play an active role in the project, not just as research participants or beneficiaries of the research outcomes, but as stakeholders with input on both research design and project governance. This has a significant impact not only on how the research is produced but also on core aspects such as the research questions we ask and the project's ethical protocol.

Why a strength- and rights-based participatory approach?

As noted in a recent UN report, 'the UK is considered a hostile country for trans people, especially for trans children' (UN report cited in Horton 2024), a situation that has worsened further since the project began, with discriminatory policies across health and education, contributing further to already existing stress factors that affect the liveability and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse young people. Research that speaks back through a rights-based approach is necessary and important to centre young people in a way that enables agency. Further, UK news media continues to contribute to a toxic public discourse about trans youth and frequently not just excludes but actively undermines trans youth voices (Jenzen, Collier & Trenner 2022). This speaks to the need for trans and gender diverse youth self-representation and voices to be amplified. The exclusion of young people's perspectives is also true for a large amount of research that has been produced about trans and gender diverse young people, but rarely with them. Countering this, the Creativity Community & Resilience project seeks to produce research that centres youth as active participants and experts

in their own lifeworlds, without replicating the deficit model which dominates research with this group, and typically overlooks vital aspects of trans youth lives, such as resilience, vitality and creativity. We are also acutely aware that this group is over-monitored, hyper-surveilled, and perpetually asked to explain themselves to others in hetero–cis–intelligible terms, an experience we do not want to further contribute to. This is a key motivator for the project to use creative methods, to co-produce knowledge in ways that allow for more agency and a wider register of expression.

## Why use arts-based creative methods?

The Create/Connect suite of activities includes creative workshops, co-delivered with creative practitioners and partner youth organisations, digitally mediated activity boxes for remote working, a 1-day diary workbook, co-designed with young people and the WSA design studio (Studio 3015) in collaboration with the Mass Observation Archive, to facilitate self-documenting everyday life, as well as participatory youth centred digital methods. The creative workshops are designed to align with and enrich the pre-existing youth groups' program to ensure they are resource-effective for the partner organisation. By working with a diverse range of creative facilitators we bring in a range of different arts practices to the project, from zine making rooted in a queer and feminist subcultural DIY tradition, to 3D modelling and digital media art. One example would be our zine making workshop co-delivered with the Museum of Transology, the UK's 'most significant collection of objects representing trans, non-binary and intersex people's lives' (https://www.museumoftransology.com/about), where both the concept of a community organised archive of trans lives and experiences as well as selected personal objects from the collection, including the accompanying hand written message from the donor, which explains its significance to them, were used to frame questions of community belonging, support and resilience in response to contemporary challenges.

For our 1-day diary activity, we co-produced together with a group of young people from a local organisation supporting LGBTQ+ youth, a workbook aimed at inspiring and supporting other young trans and gender diverse young people to self-document an ordinary day in their lives, in writing or a collage, a drawing, a playlist, a video or pictures, however the young person want to share their day. A core underpinning principle of this activity is to enable young people to tell their story in their own words, but equally important is to enable participants to bring their whole selves to the research, and engage with all kinds of everyday experiences, not just select aspects that are typically narrowly brought into (hyper) focus in research with this group. For the same reason, we collaborated with the Mass Observation Archive's 1-day diary project, which holds a significant collection of children's diaries, to give participating trans and gender diverse young people the option of donating their diary to the archive so that the everyday lived experiences of trans and gender diverse young people can be seen and celebrated and trans histories can be remembered and researched. This illustrates how using creative methods with under-represented groups can actively contribute to diversifying established collections and archives.

As an end note to this short introduction to the participatory research centring trans youth rights and creativity, it remains important to note that we need to continuously critically reflect on the methods used and our own part in the process as researchers. Creative methods are not innately emancipatory. Therefore, the project also actively asks questions about how trans and gender diverse youth rights and participation can be explored and enhanced through creative methods, rather than assuming these outcomes.

How can creative methods be used with underrepresented groups?: Maimonides from Scratch

By Dr. Sami Everett, Anoushka Alexander-Rose and the MfS research team
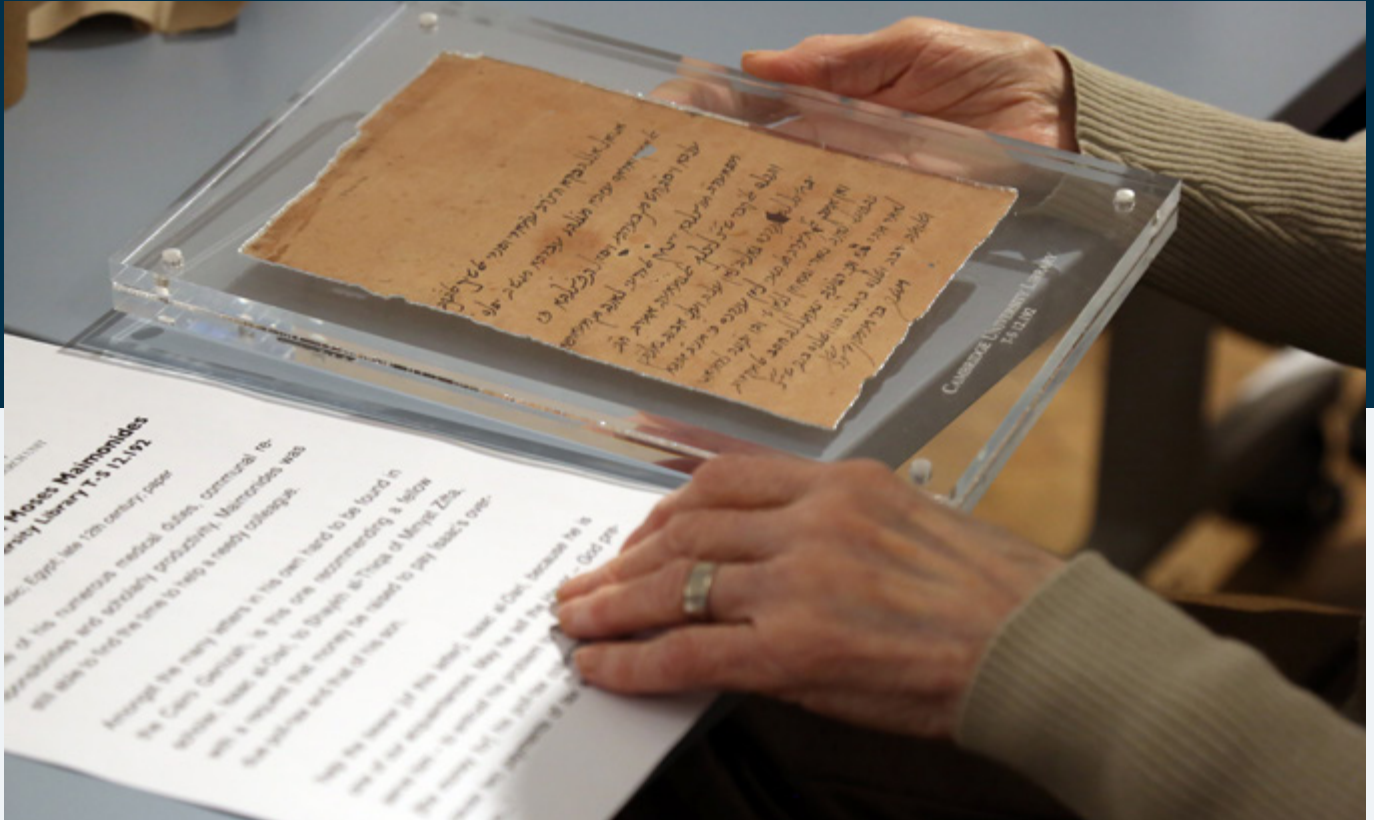
Recent policy agendas on pride in place, heritage literacy, and community cohesion highlight the need for meaningful empathy within group interaction. Born out of fundamental anthropological research, "Maimonides from Scratch" (MfS), addresses this through practice-based arts workshops comparing a predominantly Ashkenazi, middle-class Jewish Orthodox primary school in Manchester with its largely traditionalist, Sephardi, lower socio-economic counterpart in Marseille.

The programme centres on the multilingual polymath Maimonides (b. 1138 Cordoba)— known by the Hebrew acronym Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon) and Musa ibn Maimun in Arabic. Shaped by his intellectual symbiosis across medicine, Graeco-Islamic philosophy, and Jewish law, MfS uses artistic practices to transcend language barriers and deepen understanding of Mediterranean histories, engaging – and empowering creatively – publics for whom this figure is framed through selective religious historical narratives.

Workshops use co-creation methods including storyboarding, illustration, graphic novel creation, and stop motion animation.

Conducted in museum spaces with volunteer retirees, community representatives, and local artists, school groups undertake three sessions: covering Maimonides' itinerant Mediterranean biography; examining language and ephemera using Cairo Genizah archives; and finalizing narratives while embedding participant reflection. MfS explores Maimonides as a vehicle for understanding young people's contemporary relationship to belonging, widening their understanding of encounter and place while creating space for discussing minoritized urban histories of movement and difference, and their positions within a multicultural society which is as much prone to dynamism as it is to division. The 'scratch' method rejects information hierarchies, ensuring outputs reflect each group's experiences and creative journeys.

The programme demonstrated that successful cross-institutional community engagement requires sustained and sensitive relationship-building. Challenges which required deep consultation and emotional attentiveness included hosting a session on the first anniversary of the October 7th, 2023 Hamas attack, as well as navigating the needs of a secular municipal museum and Jewish faith school. These required

"**Workshops use co-creation methods including storyboarding, illustration, graphic novel creation, and stop motion animation.**"

the team to bridge perspectives between representing the religious figure of Maimonides through artistic means, and to advocate for unfamiliar collaboration forms, developing shared language around inclusion, alternative modes of learning and respect. Such ethical capacities must be intentionally cultivated within cross-cultural heritage work.

MfS operates as a partnership between Manchester Jewish Museum, the Cairo Genizah Research Unit at the University of Cambridge, and Marseille History Museum, supported by AHRC IAA (through the Winchester School of Art and the Parkes Institute) and HEIF (through SIAH), including early and mid-career scholars, and artists.

Following the pilot, Manchester Jewish Museum—a 19th Century Sephardi synagogue and modern curation space located in a strongly South Asian Muslim Cheetham Hill—will host our exhibition in 2026, displaying workshop outputs including: the animated short film 'Maimonides the healer' (alongside educational materials providing a toolkit for arts-based pedagogical activity and guidance on Maimonides and his context), stop motion films, work-in-progress illustrations, storyboards, workshop photos, Genizah fragments, and two pages of a future graphic novel. This is the foundation for future iterations of the project which seek to integrate Muslim primary schools and respective community institutions, broadening methods with a group for whom Maimonides is equally, yet differently, significant.

When should Creative Methods be used?

By Dr. Vanissa Wanick
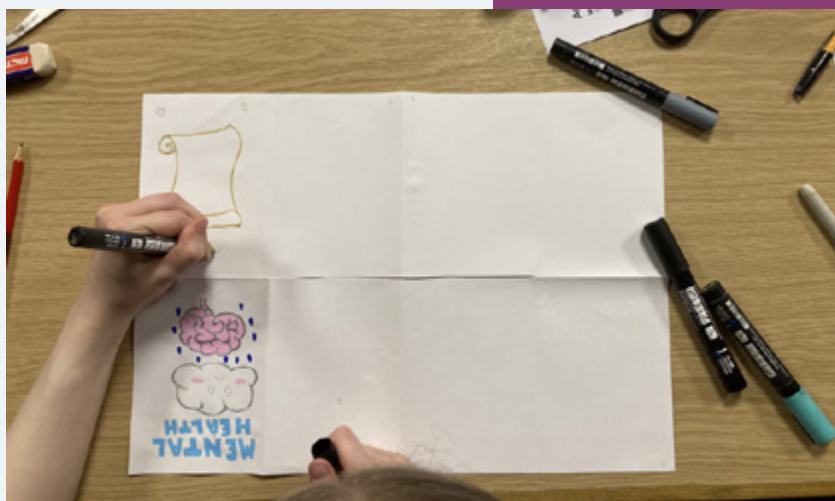
Creative research methods can help to address and answer complex and dynamic contemporary research questions that are difficult to answer using traditional methods alone. They are particularly valuable when exploring lived experience, power dynamics, or social issues that require empathy, imagination, or multi-sensory engagement. While visual and arts-based approaches are not new, their relevance has grown in response to today's dynamic challenges, where researchers must engage diverse participants and uncover insights that may not emerge through conventional techniques alone.

To decide whether creative methods are right for policymaking, consider asking:

→ What policy issue or societal challenge are you addressing, and why might traditional approaches be insufficient?

→ What kinds of insight, experience, or imagination are you hoping to elicit through creative means?

→ How will creative methods support more inclusive or participatory policymaking?

→ At what stage in the policy process will creative methods be most impactful?

→ How will the method contribute to both the process and the outcome of your policy engagement?

→ What is the relationship between creativity and your policy goal? Is creativity being used as a lens, a tactic, a participatory device, or a provocation?

→ How will you evaluate and communicate the impact of these methods in policy terms?

These questions might encourage thoughtful integration of creative approaches, ensuring they are used with intention and aligned with the goals of the project. On the next page, a case study that illustrates a scenario in which the method chosen was not appropriate.

CASE STUDY: Zine Making and Young People: When Creative Methods Might not Work

When looking at how art-based methods could influence policy making and young people, we have selected zines as a method. Unfortunately, that was applied during the wrong phase of the research. By that time, Young people have already identified their recommendations and did not see value on making a zine as a 'presentation' of these recommendations. This is because the zines should have been used to decompose the complexity of the issue and should not be used as a 'presentation' of an outcome. As such, young people felt that they didn't have the skills to make the zines look 'presentable' for policy makers. Some of them even mentioned how they didn't like GCSEs in Art and how they were 'really bad' at art. There is, indeed, a barrier on how 'art' is presented and represented even in the educational setting. The idea of 'I am not an artist' is often something that comes along when we try to apply these methods. And this is mostly an issue due to the understanding of the meaning of the method by the researcher and how to manage expectations from participants. Careful setting and selection of the method are paramount in this case to avoid problems in the research.

> "There is, indeed, a barrier on how 'art' is presented and represented even in the educational setting. The idea of 'I am not an artist' is often something that comes along when we try to apply these methods."

Using creative methods with Young People

By Naomi Leonard and Cara Black

Creative methods are essential in making research and information more accessible to a greater diversity of participants. Along with accessibility, it inherently reduces anxiety and supports mental health.

Despite extensive literature documenting the benefits of creative methodologies with adolescent populations, there remains a significant gap in implementation guidance and best practice frameworks. This section marginally addresses this gap by synthesising insights from two program co-leads of the NxtGen Research Programme (NxtGen). NextGen is a 16-session programme that trains young people in research skills and advocacy, relying on creative methods to increase engagement and impact across the programme. From this experience we suggest several factors need to be considered to successfully implement creative methods with young people.

1. **Demographics and lived experience** (who will you engage?)
2. **Engagement objectives** (what will you engage them in?)
3. **Ethics and safeguarding** (how will you keep everyone safe?)
4. **Power dynamics and autonomy** (how will you make sure everyone can contribute equally?)
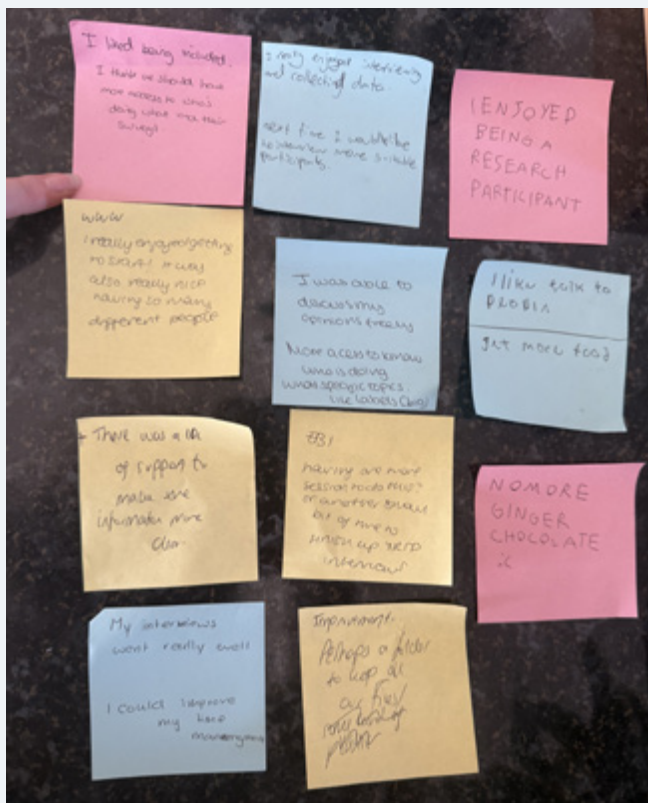
Demographics and Lived experience

Young people consistently demonstrate affinity for tactile and creative stimulation. Observational data indicates spontaneous engagement with available creative materials (e.g., repurposing adhesive notes for origami construction and doodling) during structured sessions. When provided manipulative objects or stickers, participants independently incorporate these into their engagement process, suggesting an intrinsic attraction to sensory-creative experiences. Participant feedback indicates preference for creative methodological approaches compared to conventional data collection procedures, with specific techniques like the River of Life and Emoji Mapping eliciting descriptors such as "cathartic" and "fun and interesting" respectively.

Effective implementation of creative methods necessitates careful consideration of participant demographics. Demographic factors, including age, neurodiversity status, and sociocultural background should inform methodological selection. Gender considerations are particularly salient; activities like dance workshops or drama productions often encounter resistance from those identifying as men, potentially compromising methodological efficacy. Visual methodologies such as photo-elicitation or collaging generally demonstrate greater accessibility than verbal or written approaches for participants with special educational needs or younger cohorts.

Engagement objectives

Implementation strategy should align with specific engagement objectives—whether decision-making facilitation, idea generation, exploratory investigation, data collection, dissemination, reflective practice, or relationship development. The activity needs to be fit for purpose, for example the use of zines is effective as a creative dissemination piece, however they would not normally be used for relationship building.

Creative engagement functions as both methodological tool and environmental mediator. Activities designed to promote narrative exchange, such as adapted interactive games like 'research bingo' or the board game 'Lemonade... when life gives you lemons' effectively establish psychological safety and interpersonal connections in novel environments. Movement-based interventions demonstrate particular efficacy in removing communication barriers; observational evidence from a dance workshop conducted by Zoielogic (Southampton) revealed marked improvement in participant expressiveness and disclosure comfort following kinaesthetic engagement.

Ethics and safeguarding

Creative methods are powerful tools in understanding and sharing the lived experiences of its users, however potentially sensitive disclosures need to be planned for and mitigated through safeguarding protocols and risk assessments.

Robust safeguarding protocols should state what to do in the event of a disclosure, the chain of reporting that needs to be followed including the assigned designated safeguarding lead, how to access external support services such as No Limits and provide details of internal support for researcher and participant. Safeguarding certifications need to be up to date for all facilitators and continuously renewed. Risk assessments and safeguarding protocols should form part of an ethics application outlining how the research/ engagement will comply with ethical standards and ensure safety of all stakeholders.

Power dynamics and autonomy

For power dynamics to be maintained, fair value exchange needs to be a priority. Payment of young people for their time and contribution demonstrates good practice and allows a greater diversity of individuals to participate.

Optimal engagement occurs when methodological selection incorporates participant agency, allowing young people to influence their own creative spaces and activities. For example, within NxtGen, young people provide anonymous feedback at the end of every session through post-it notes expressing what activities they enjoyed along with any improvements for the upcoming session. Where engagement is based off a single interaction, youth consultation should take place to ensure activities are appropriate for the chosen cohort and places youth voice at its centre.

In addition, facilitation personnel ratios require careful calibration. Sufficient support must be available, particularly for neurodivergent participants, while avoiding unnecessary adult presence that may create observational discomfort or disrupt power equilibrium. Maintaining participant parity in collaborative creative contexts is essential to methodological integrity.

These implementation considerations provide initial guidance for researchers and practitioners employing creative methodologies with youth populations.

"…there remains a significant gap in implementation guidance and best practice frameworks."
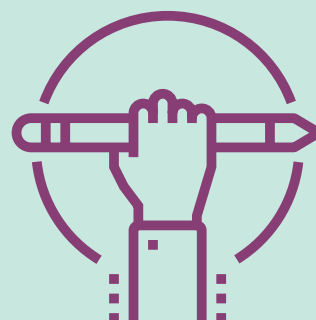
Using Creative Methods to Evaluate your Research Impact

By Naomi Clements and Jess Macpherson, Centre for Higher Education Practice

Evaluation can often prioritise quantitative and metrics-based approaches of understanding impact (Thorburn, Ward & Kinnane, 2025). For example, experimental methods such as Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) are considered by some to be the 'Gold standard' to providing causal evidence of impact (Office for Students, 2019). But these measurable approaches sometimes exclude experiences of impact within the communities, or policies, our research seeks to support. Reed et al. (2021) define research impact evaluation as 'the process of assessing the significance and reach of both positive and negative effects of research' by recognising impact is subjective and perceived differently by different groups, times, places and cultures.

Creative evaluation uses imaginative, participatory, and often arts-based methods to assess the impact of research. Rather than one specific method, it is a constellation of approaches and applications to evaluation. It enables researchers to explore impact beyond numbers and understand what is valued by different groups, including policy makers. Thinking creatively, and doing creative evaluation, can often provide evidence of unexpected outcomes within complex environments.

Principles of Creative Evaluation

→ **INCLUSIVE:** Use appropriate methods for our evaluation questions and evaluation participants

→ **PARTICIPATORY:** Be conducted ethically and collaboratively or co-produced where appropriate

→ **ROBUST:** Have a clear purpose and articulate outcomes for impact. Have a rigorous approach to collecting, analysing and reporting on data. Identify causality where appropriate.

→ **PROPORTIONATE:** Be proportionate to the activity, intervention or project you are evaluating.

→ **RESPONSIVE:** Be responsive to contextual changes and external evaluation requirements (e.g. can be used alongside traditional evaluation methods).

"Demonstrating your understanding of ethical good practice will, in itself, go a long way to delivering a trustworthy evaluation.

You also demonstrate your credibility through use of a well-designed evaluation: one that uses appropriate methods and tools, does not gather information that is not used, and which does not place unnecessary burdens on your participants.

In addition, it is important to demonstrate that you have considered and attempted to avoid bias wherever possible." (Creative & Credible, n.d)

Practical Guidance

When to use:

→ To understand how your research has influenced or made impact for a person, group or policy instead of, or alongside, traditional monitoring and evaluation data such as surveys and focus groups.

→ To enable collaborative or co-produced methods that create outputs from the evaluation. For example, this could be artwork, digital artefacts or performances that tell a story about the impact of your research.

→ To evidence societal impact that describes the continuing influence of your research upon people's lives, public policy, or professional practice.

→ To effectively communicate the impact of your research in an engaging way, navigating away from traditional evaluation reports.

"Documented evidence of how this activity changed, influenced or informed public policy, social policy, international development policies, legislation, regulations or guidelines… through informal…or formal engagement with public policy eco-systems" (University of Southampton, n.d.)

Creative Evaluation Framework

The CHEP Evaluation Cycle provides a framework to guide your evaluation practice. An interactive version of this is available on the CHEP website under evaluation resources (link provided in reference section here).
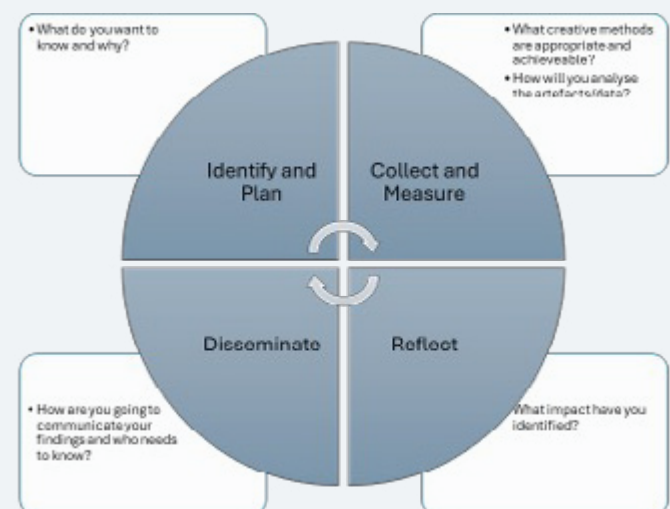
CHEP Evaluation Cycle (University of Southampton, 2025)

The following reflective questions provide a useful framework for engaging in creative evaluation.

1. What is your project/activity trying to achieve or influence?

2. What do you want to learn from the evaluation?

3. Who will be taking part in the evaluation, and how can you ensure inclusive engagement?

4. What are the evaluation constraints/limitations?

5. What ethical implications will you need to consider?

CASE STUDY: Reverse Mentoring to enhance Research Culture

About the Project

The Reverse Mentoring Programme (RMP) was delivered by The Reverse Mentoring Practice and initiated by the University of Southampton's EDI Team and CHEP (Dr. Neelam Wright), with funding from UKRI's Research Culture initiative. The programme paired 22 senior staff members with student and junior staff mentors who identify with protected or underrepresented characteristics. Running from November 2023 to June 2024, the programme aimed to deepen senior leaders' understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through structured training, regular mentoring sessions, and reflective support.

An initial evaluation by The Reverse Mentoring Practice showed positive outcomes. Project leads sought to understand whether mentees had implemented changes in their working practices, and if mentors continued to experience positive impacts six months after the project ended.

Creative Evaluation Methods Used

Two qualitative methods were selected to explore long-term impact:

1. **Storytelling**
   To capture ongoing benefits for mentees and shifts in leadership practices.

2. **Creative Evaluation Activities**
   Including collage-making and an "evaluation tree" exercise.

These methods were used during a dedicated Evaluation Celebration Event, where mentors reviewed mentees' stories and reflected on personal and institutional change through creative tasks.

Evidence provided by these methods

Storytelling enabled participants to articulate nuanced shifts in practice. The creative evaluation activities provided a safe and celebratory space to acknowledge the mentors' commitment and to surface shared frustrations about the slow pace of institutional change. These methods highlighted the emotional and reflective dimensions of the programme's impact—elements often missed in traditional evaluation approaches.

Further Information

From Dr. Kwame Phillips and Dr. Hayato Takahashi

What to listen to/read:

"Recording an Ethnographic Soundscape" in The Creative Ethnographer's Notebook (Cahnmann-Taylor and Jacobsen, 2024).

Studying Sound (Collins 2020) – a step-by-step guide to sound design skills

"Into the Labyrinth" from the Album "Into India" (Westerkamp 2002) – an ethnographic soundscape about Indian culture

"A Heavenly Chord" (Theaster Gates 2022) - A sound art installation that uses the Hammond B-3 organ and seven Leslie speakers.

"Collisions: Memory, Voice, Sound and Physicality through a Multi-sensorial Radio Remix Installation" (Phillips and Vidali 2017)

"The Mixtape as Maroon" (Phillips 2022)

Creative methods:

Kara, H., 2020. Creative research methods: A practical guide. Policy Press.

Kara, H., Mannay, D. and Alastair, R. eds., 2024. The handbook of creative data analysis. Policy Press.

Resources:

The CHEP Evaluation team offers regular training on creative and storytelling evaluation methods. Please refer to **CHEP Resources - Home** for upcoming dates.

Evaluation Community of Practice

Evaluation

The Social Value Framework

Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities: International Journal of Cultural Policy: Vol 8, No 1

Creative & Credible

ImaginationLancaster - The Design Led Research Centre at Lancaster University.

The Little Book of Creative Evaluation

Creative and Participatory Evaluation – Creative Communities Unit

Vol. 17 No. 40 (2021) | Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation