



FACTSHEET

Art Jams: Evaluation Outside the Lines

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WHAT IS AN ART JAM?

When we hear the term “jam session”, our minds usually go to musicians playing and creating music together. However, jam sessions are not just reserved for musicians – they can be used in the visual arts, working with any type of material, process or medium too!

Art jams are a gathering of individuals who make art by way of collaboration, improvisation and responsiveness. In other words, it's social art making with a great deal of freedom, and a person's response to the art is just as important as their own contributions. An exciting aspect of an art jam is that you don't have to be an “artist” to take part; everyone and anyone can participate in and facilitate art jams!



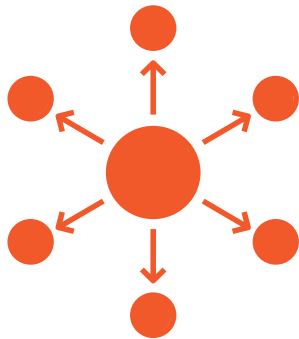
SO WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH EVALUATION?

Too often we get caught up in the idea that evaluation is made up solely of facts and figures, when evaluation can and does come from multiple sources and processes. With this in mind, art jams can be used in relation to Arts-Based Research (ABR). For ABR, the key isn't necessarily the end result, but rather the art-making process. By focusing on this, researchers can better understand and examine the experience of participants, who are providing qualitative data in their art-making. Art jams can be likened to focus groups, but with meaning arising about an evaluation topic through the interactive mode of art-making, rather than conversation.

THE ART JAMS MODEL

There are two parts that need to be considered when planning an Art Jam – **Design Elements** and **Implementation**.

DESIGN ELEMENTS



1. **Goals & Rationale:** Determine what your evaluation goals are and explain why/how art jams support your goals compared to other methods. This will help you justify this non-traditional evaluation tool to stakeholders who may prefer quantitative methods.
2. **Objectives:** Set specific aims that outline the actions you will take in your art jam to achieve your goals.
3. **Contexts:** Many contexts can affect an art jam's social interaction and art-making. It's important to keep in mind the physical context (the actual space you will use, size of space, etc.) and the social context (the relational aspects of the space, ie. power relations between the group).
4. **Facilitator:** Make sure to define the role and responsibilities of the art jams facilitator(s). They should keep evaluation goals in mind and on track, and

should guide but not control the process.

5. Scope: This is the practical part of the jam – determining the number of jams, the time limit, group sizes and the content you will cover.
6. Art Media & Activities: You have to know what materials you will need and where you will get them before you start.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Setup: This is more than just setting up materials. It is about curating a space to evoke an experience. Arrangement of a space can affect how people feel and think during art-making.
2. Introduction: It's important to make sure everyone is on the same page. Explaining the rationale and objective of the activity and setting ground rules for respectful social interaction does this. You may encounter participants who feel they have no talent. Address such barriers reminding the group that art comes in many forms and that participating is the most important part of the exercise.
3. Motivation: Motivational strategies can provide momentum to get an art jam going. When showing examples, include a range of artistic ability levels, which should help with any barriers to participation.
4. Jamming: Art jams are improvisational by nature and so providing a fixed procedure is very uncharacteristic. There should be structure in regards to things like timing, but content should not be set beyond guiding evaluation themes and questions. Participants should decide the artistic style. Facilitators can document the jamming to collect important data about the experience.
5. Response: Afterwards, reflect on the process, context, and meaning of the artwork together. This helps to elicit a deeper understanding of participants' artwork that may not be evident when interpreting the artwork alone. You should document all responses.
6. Clean Up: This is the practical side of the actual jam and includes putting the space back in order. Part of clean up is ensuring that the confidentiality of

artwork (like in traditional forms of research) will be safeguarded. For example, if you wish to take pictures of the process, photograph participants' hands doing the artwork, rather than their faces.

HOW ABOUT AN EXAMPLE?

Now that you have the steps to complete an art jam, here is an example using a Comics Jam. A Comics Jam is a collaborative, improvisational and responsive comics creation process. This is a pass-and-draw activity that results in a comic drawn by multiple authors. Comics are dedicated to answering an evaluation question, highlighting the emotional dimensions of participants' engagement through their visual representations of answers.

The structure of comics (panels placed side-by-side) allows for the interaction of participants' meaning when a different person draws each panel. This type of jam helps to generate qualitative data about the perceptions, experiences, and emotions of those involved in relation to the evaluation question and the jam itself.

COMMUNICATION WITH ART JAMS

Using an art jam helps to engage those who took part by getting them to think creatively about what an evaluation report can be. Sharing results in a visual form reflects the different ways in which people process, consume, and share information beyond text in our current society.

REASONS FOR ART JAMS IN EVALUATIONS

Art Jams...

- allow participants to bring out multiple meanings within a group about what is being evaluated;
- encourage the meanings drawn out from each group member to interact;
- provide an involved, participatory approach to data collection;
- are an exploratory tool for evaluation;
- help to build young people's artistic and creative capacity;
- use different channels of communication than the standard text evaluation report.