

Singing Our Praises: Case Studies in the Art of Evaluation
commissioned by the [Association of Performing Arts Presenters](#)
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Book Summary

Throughout *Singing Our Praises*, two parallel tracks illuminate a new participatory approach to evaluation:

Case Studies

Case studies tell the stories of presenters, artists and funders as they learned about evaluation and put it into practice. These voices from the field provide real-life experiences, but they also reflect some of the more universal issues that will arise for other arts practitioners. The first case study, the Chicago Dancemakers Forum, is a multi-year project that provides support for the creative process and professional development for local artists; evaluation data comes largely from the artists, and the information gathered was used to refine the program in subsequent years. The second case study, Improbable Theatre's residency with the Wexner Center for the Arts and the Walker Art Center, with support from the British Council, is an international project that involved presenters, agents, and a government agency, and toured to some of the major national venues in the US. Evaluation data comes largely from audience responses to their new work *The Hanging Man*, and the process prompted reflection on the part of all involved about the quality of the collaborative process and the relationships that have been built over years. In both case studies, as the evaluations progressed, these arts leaders learned wonderful things about the ways in which audiences and artists value their work. In both, you will hear from arts peers about how they interpreted and used the information gathered.

Practical Advice

The case studies are complemented with a running commentary in the form of sidebars that explain methods used, give hints, and answer common questions. The sidebars provide some introductory training in research methods and explain common terms you've heard. Chapter 4, *Singing Your Own Praises*, talks about what we can each gain from the participatory approach, and the role we all can play in conducting useful evaluations in the arts field. At the end of the book in Chapter 5, *Try this at Home*, you will find a guide to applying the learning from your peers, as well as the concepts from the book, to your own evaluation. Finally, in Chapter 6, *Resources*, you can learn more about terminology used, online and print sources of information, alternative ideas for data collection, and summaries of some of the major national arts studies.

Serving as a guide, the book's two-pronged approach will help you to:

- * Read compelling stories about the ways in which peers have used evaluation to learn about programs.
Apply the concepts in the stories to your own situation, and incorporate your own context.
Learn by example some of the more technical aspects of evaluation, including how to use tools such as a logic model and an evaluation plan.
Identify your own outcomes and evaluation techniques, rather than merely replicating what works for others.
Think about a number of ideas, through answering the summary questions at the end of each chapter.
Use the tools and worksheets in the chapter entitled *Try this at Home* to begin to conduct your own evaluation.

Through this book, it is hoped that artists, administrators and arts organizations find ways to sing their own praises. Otherwise, the existing—but often inappropriate—standards for other fields such as social science and health will continue to be applied to measure artistic success, and the anxiety about evaluation will perpetuate. With the support of organizations such as the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, we can join the conversation and learn from each other. The cost of not doing it is too great. And, as you will see in the case studies, the rewards are many.