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Striving for Integrated Assessment- A Work in Progress

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STRIVING FOR INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT – A WORK IN PROGRESS
Promising Practices in Assessing Public Scholarship in the Arts, Humanities & Design

Observations of the APPS Collaboratory (Assessing Practices of Public Scholarship)

These observations are based on responses by Imagining America members and others who were invited in spring 2011 to share approaches, models, frameworks and tools that they believe strive, at some level, to embody the values of integrated assessment as suggested by our Collaboratory. Following are: APPS’s definition of integrated assessment, the five values, and some preliminary observations.

What is integrated assessment? Assessing the actual community impacts of public engagement and involving community partners in such assessment are critical aspects of responsible assessment of publicly engaged scholarship at any scale. We call this kind of assessment integrated assessment — assessment that emphasizes community impact and involves community stakeholders in collaborative and meaningful ways.

The goal of integrated assessment is to understand the impacts of publicly engaged scholarship off campus as well as on campus, in relation to defined civic, social, and academic goals. At the same time, integrated assessment invites evaluation of the institution’s own practices, position, contributions, and benefits in relation to the goals of civic engagement, knowledge building, and effective campus-community partnership.

COLLABORATIVE—Integrated assessment engages community- and university-based stakeholders in defining what are meaningful outcomes and indicators of success, long before the assessment itself begins, and often in implementing the evaluation activity itself. Integrated assessment is grounded in a shared understanding of interrelated goals.

Promising integrated assessment practices:

- *Protocols are developed in concert with community stakeholders and practitioners, asking what would count as meaningful outcomes and what standards of evidence are appropriate. (Art At Work, Terra Moto and City of Portland, ME; UC/Davis, Art of Regional Change)*
- *Values of integrated assessment guide goal-setting conversations at the start of each year with core community partners. (Art At Work, Portland, ME; U of WI/Milwaukee, Community-University Partnership Grants Program; Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at University of Richmond)*

RECIPROCAL—Integrated assessment is useful to community- *and* university-based stakeholders. It goes back to the stakeholders involved; it invites reflection, feedback, and critique.

Promising integrated assessment practices:

- *Multiple points of view are gathered and a range of informants are engaged through the assessment process.* (U of WI, Milwaukee, The Penelope Project; Brandeis U, CHYME [Community Histories by Youth in the Middle East] program evaluation; University of Arizona, Finding Voice project evaluation)
- *Documentation and assessment products are identified that can be useful to partners and stakeholders.* (University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee, The Penelope Project; Brandeis U, CHYME [Community Histories by Youth in the Middle East] program evaluation)

GENERATIVE—Integrated assessment feeds the project, program, or course at hand. At the same time, it looks beyond the semester or project unit and invites stakeholders to evaluate the overall, long-term relationships at the heart of community-based education and public scholarship. Integrated assessment is part of an ongoing and dynamic process of programmatic, institutional, community, and/or regional development.

Promising integrated assessment practices:

- *Intermediate outcomes are recognized as relevant and important and tracked in terms of assessing progress toward or contributions to longer term outcomes.* (U of MI, Building Capacity for Community Engagement Institutional Self-Assessment; Say Yes to Education/Syracuse University)
- *Deep and diverse documentation is implemented along with strong process and results evaluation to advance learning and understanding of quality practice, outcomes, and knowledge building within university, among partner agencies, and in related fields.* (U of AZ/Tucson, Tucson Finding Voice Project Community Forums, Learning Exchanges focused on relationships, impact; U of WI, Milwaukee Penelope Project; St. Louis Regional Arts Commission, Community Arts Training program 10-year evaluation)

RIGOROUS—Integrated assessment utilizes sound evaluation methodologies and practices.

Promising integrated assessment practices:

- *Indicators of desired outcomes are established to frame a clear standard of achievement.* (Brandeis U, CHYME [Community Histories by Youth in the Middle East] program evaluation; U of MI, Building Capacity for Community Engagement Institutional Self-Assessment; Animating Democracy, Social Impact Outcomes/Indicators framework; Say Yes to Education/Syracuse University; St. Louis Regional Arts Commission, Community Arts Training program 10-year evaluation)
- *Multiple methods are used vs. singular ones to build a more holistic picture of the project, participants, and effects.* (U of WI, Milwaukee Penelope Project; U Penn academically based

community service course evaluation; Arts of Citizenship program evaluation, U of MI; Say Yes to Education/Syracuse University)

- *Qualitative data, narratives, and storytelling are validated.* Despite increasing demands for metrics, *qualitative* data provide important and relevant evidence of the social impact of arts-based civic engagement work and community change. Qualitative data can be methodically collected and analyzed to ensure a level of credibility. (U of AZ/Tucson, Tucson Finding Voice Project ethnographic approach to evaluation; U of Minnesota, CES4Health scholarly product review; Roadside Theater)
- *Quantitative and qualitative methods and information are combined and corroborated to enhance credibility.* No stories without numbers and no numbers without stories. To achieve this likely requires partnerships between cultural agents and professional researchers and evaluators at universities, regional planning centers, and other entities that regularly collect quantitative data. (U of PA, Netter Center for Community Partnership)
- *Standards of excellence related to art, humanities, and design that are appropriate to community-based process and products are articulated and applied.* (Brandeis U, CHYME [Community Histories by Youth in the Middle East] program evaluation; U of Wisconsin/Milwaukee, Penelope Project)

PRACTICABLE—Integrated assessment activities are proportionate to the project and resources available.

Promising integrated assessment practices:

- *Reasonable expectations are set regarding what change can be claimed and proved in relation to arts and cultural endeavors.* By taking a more realistic stance, the possible appropriate focal points for evaluation come into relief. The mere establishment of correlation with an intended outcome is enough in many fields to command attention and make a case about effects.
- *Reasonable expectations are set regarding the level of evaluation that can be implemented within resources available.* (Art At Work, Portland, ME)
- *Common creative practices in arts, humanities, design may be useful and adapted as evaluation practices and thus lend themselves as “practicable”* (Roadside Theater, Story Circles)
- *Adapt and build on standard evaluation processes and tools used by offices of institutional effectiveness to focus on community change and to include community partners.* (Arts of Citizenship, University of Michigan peer review; CES4Health, University of Minnesota peer review of products and projects)
- *Some small-scale (e.g. small sample size) but thorough evaluation practices can yield data effective in making the case within institution regarding impact.* By thorough we mean multiple data collections strategies—surveys, focus groups, interviews, observation—each of which includes community partners alongside other stakeholders. This ENACTS the community of scholars. (U of MI, Arts of Citizenship program evaluation)