Evaluation
GUIDANCE

Dance for Strength and Balance workshop, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital. The group engages in gentle, coordinated movements designed to improve stability and mobility.
Photo credit: Richard Eaton

Introduction

Evaluation is an essential tool for understanding and improving the impact of your work. Effective evaluation can demonstrate the value of your programme, guide continuous improvement, help you make informed decisions, and secure future support.

This document clarifies key evaluation concepts and provides guidance to support effective evaluation.

Key areas covered include:

• Evaluation approaches, methods, and tools

• Key considerations for planning and delivering an evaluation

• Ethical principles and good practice

EVALUATION, ADVOCACY, AND RESEARCH

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of a project or programme's quality, value, and impact. Unlike research, which aims to generate new knowledge, evaluation examines existing services to determine their effectiveness and inform decision-making.

What distinguishes evaluation from opinion, testimonial, or advocacy is its rigorous approach – judgments of merit, worth, or significance are based on structured data collection and analysis, ensuring findings and recommendations are as objective and unbiased as possible.

While evaluation and advocacy can complement each other, they serve distinct purposes.

Evaluation seeks to answer questions, evidence outcomes, and explore impacts (both positive and negative), and improve effectiveness, while advocacy focuses on demonstrating positive outcomes to promote a specific project or programme.

Research is a systematic process of inquiry designed to generate new knowledge, theories, or insights. It explores unanswered questions, tests hypotheses, and contributes to broader understanding within a field. Research follows rigorous methodologies, often aiming for generalisability beyond a specific project or setting.

Academic research, conducted within universities and research institutions, follows strict peer-reviewed processes and theoretical frameworks. It seeks to advance knowledge within a discipline, contributing to evidence-based practice, policy, and theoretical understanding.

While evaluation might be used to inform wider practice where projects are similar, it is designed to support decision-making within organisations rather than to generate broadly generalisable findings.

Painting with a feather – Arts on Referral for patients living with chronic breathlessness.

EVALUATION BENEFITS

Evaluation is an essential tool for understanding and improving the impact of your work. It provides valuable insights that not only demonstrate the value of your programme but also guide continuous improvement, helping you make informed decisions and secure future support. The benefits of effective evaluation extend across all aspects of your programme, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and that your efforts lead to meaningful change.

Effective evaluation supports:

• **Accountability –** Demonstrating outputs, outcomes, and impact.

• **Practice Development –** Refining processes and improving delivery.

• **Effectiveness –** Understanding participant experiences to enhance impact.

• **Organisational Development –** Informing strategy, planning, and decision-making.

• **Advocacy & Fundraising –** Communicating impact to build support and secure funding.

EVALUATION CHALLENGES

Evaluation can sometimes feel overwhelming, particularly when those responsible for it are also responsible for other aspects of a programme such as fundraising, planning and delivery.

Research[1] into the evaluation of arts and health projects identifies several key challenges:

• **Time and Resources –** Limited time, resources, or expertise to evaluate effectively.

• **Unfocused Questions –** Uncertainty about what to measure or the right questions to ask.

• **Data Overwhelm –** Lack of focus resulting in too much data that is not useful and difficult to interpret.

• **Perceived Burden –** Evaluation can be seen as a costly, time-consuming obligation if it lacks clear value.

Further information

THE CULTURE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING ALLIANCE

The Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance has a resource section dedicated to research and evaluation:

www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/ resources/research-and-evaluation

CREATIVE & CREDIBLE

Creative & Credible supports arts and health organisations and practitioners to evaluate creatively and credibly:

www.creativeandcredible.co.uk

[1]Daykin, N. Willis, J. Gray, K. McCree, M. (2016) Creative and credible evaluation for arts, health and well-being: opportunities and challenges of co-production: Arts & Health 9(2):1-16. DOI 10.1080/17533015.2016.1206948

Evaluation approaches, methods and tools

The evaluation approach you take (e.g. formative or summative, process or impact etc.) will be determined by your reasons for evaluating and what you are trying to find out.

The evaluation approach will, in turn, inform the methods (e.g. quantitative, qualitative, creative or mixed methods), and tools (e.g. surveys, questionnaires, interviews, reflective journals, etc.) you choose.

These choices will equally be informed by the scale and maturity of your programme, and the resources available.

Key areas covered include:

- Evaluation approaches
- Evaluation methods and tools
- Proportionate and scaled approaches to evaluation
- Working with academic research partners

Evaluation Approaches

Different evaluation approaches suit different needs. Choosing the right approach ensures relevant data collection and meaningful insights.

APPROACH	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE
Summative Evaluation	Assesses impact at the end of a project.	Final impact report.
Formative Evaluation	Ongoing evaluation throughout a project to improve delivery during implementation.	Findings shared at periods throughout project delivery.
Monitoring	Systematic process of tracking inputs, processes, and outputs.	Collecting data on number of workshops, artworks, demographics, attendance, etc.
Process Evaluation	Examines how a programme is implemented, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.	Staff and participant interviews, focus groups, and feedback, etc.
Reflective Practice	Offers a continuous approach to learning, development, and improving service delivery.	Staff reflections, learning logs, feedback loops, debrief meetings, etc.
Outcomes Evaluation	Measures specific changes that take place as a direct result of the project. Changes might include psychological, physiological, social, and learning outcomes.	Pre/post wellbeing questionnaires, pre/post measurement of physical changes, etc.
Impact Evaluation	Seeks to understand and assess changes brought about by the project, including broader or longer-term changes.	Qualitative, longitudinal evaluation, Social Return on Investment (SROI), etc.
Economic Evaluation	Assesses the value of a project in monetary terms.	Cost-benefit analysis, Quality of Life Years (QALYs), Social Return on Investment (SROI), etc.

Evaluation Methods and Tools

Selecting appropriate evaluation methods and tools depends on the aims of the evaluation, the approach, and the questions being asked, as well as the context, participant needs and preferences, and available resources.

QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION

Quantitative evaluation methods measure the performance or impact of a project by collecting and analysing numerical data. It can help evidence impact, measure outcomes, or identify areas for improvement.

Quantitative evaluation ranges from simple monitoring (e.g. attendance or activity count) to more complex assessments using validated outcomes tools such as the Office of National Statistics Loneliness Measure (ONS4 Loneliness Measure)[2].

Quantitative data collection tools include:

- **Attendance Records –** Tracks participation trends.

- **Surveys & Questionnaires –** Structured feedback from participants.

- **Pre/Post Assessments –** Measures changes over time.

- **Validated Outcomes Tools –** Such as the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)[3].

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

Qualitative evaluation methods collect descriptive data to explore participants' subjective experiences. It is typically gathered through feedback, interviews, focus groups, and reflective observations.

This approach helps uncover insights into both intended and unintended impacts, as well as project delivery. Unlike personal anecdotes or testimonials, which may lack credibility, carefully collected qualitative data provides rich, balanced evidence that supports project improvement and advocacy while minimising bias.

Qualitative data collection tools include:

- **Interviews –** One-on-one discussions with participants and staff.

- **Focus Groups –** Facilitated group discussions to explore themes.

- **Observations –** Directly witnessing engagement and responses.

- **Journals & Diaries –** Personal reflections from participants or facilitators.

[2]www.measure-wellbeing.org/measures-bank/loneliness-ons
[3]www.measure-wellbeing.org/measures-bank/wemwbs

Mixed-Methods Evaluation

A mixed-methods evaluation combines both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods ensures that both measurable outputs and outcomes, and lived experiences of participants are captured.

By integrating numerical data with descriptive insights, this approach enhances data reliability and provides a fuller picture of a project's impact.

For example:

ASPECT	QUALITATIVE METHODS	QUANTITATIVE METHODS
Patient Engagement	Observations, interviews.	Attendance data, pre/post surveys.
Staff Wellbeing	Focus groups.	Validated outcomes tools (e.g., WEMWBS[4]).

CREATIVE EVALUATION

Creative evaluation may use arts-based methods like visual arts, photography, film, drama, poetry, or music, or simply involve thinking creatively to design evaluation tools that:

• Are accessible, engaging and rewarding for the people with whom you are working,

• Align with the creative nature of the work,

• Are appropriate for the contexts in which you are working.

They often elicit higher response rates and deliver rich, useful and more meaningful data than many standard evaluation tools.

Creative data collection tools include:

• **Picture Scales –** Explore feelings, opinions, or relationships to a concept,

• **Feedback Trees –** Gather collective feedback in response to a question,

• **Creative Writing –** Enables complex expression and nuanced responses,

• **Collage –** Provides a space for reflection and meaning-making.

[4]www.measure-wellbeing.org/measures-bank/wemwbs

Proportionate and Scaled Approaches to Evaluation

Alongside considering the best approach, methods and tools, it is vital to ensure that you take a proportionate and scaled approach to evaluation[5] that aligns with a programme's scale, maturity, and available resources.

Be realistic about what you can achieve. It is better to focus resources and build an evaluation practice over time. This might involve considering whether to conduct an in-depth evaluation of a specific project or start with broad monitoring across an entire arts programme.

A strategic, phased approach can develop over time as skills and capacity grow.

For example:

• **Stage One:** Establish internal monitoring alongside simple participant feedback.

• **Stage Two:** Conduct process evaluation, including internal reviews and reflective practice.

• **Stage Three:** Use targeted qualitative evaluation to explore specific impacts.

• **Stage Four:** Apply quantitative measures to evidence outcomes.

• **Stage Five:** Consider research partnerships to more robustly evidence outcomes, impacts and learning, contributing to the wider evidence base.

Working with Academic Research Partners

Scaled approaches can also be applied to research ranging from small-scale, single-arm studies (where all participants receive the same intervention) to large-scale, randomised control trials (where participants receiving the intervention are compared with an existing standard of care i.e. a 'control' group).

Research can be expensive, so establishing academic partnership costs up front to ensure there is adequate funding in place is vital.

If your NHS trust is partnered with an academic institution, you may already have access to researchers and it's always worth checking this before incurring external costs.

For a small-scale study, partnering with an individual researcher or a research consortium with affiliations to an academic institution might be more realistic financially than partnering directly with an academic institution.

Whatever route you take, developing your research protocol well ahead of implementation is vital, particularly as you may require ethical approval from the NHS Research Ethics Committee (NHS REC), and this can take up to 60 days from application submission.

If you are conducting a service evaluation (recognised within the NHS as a robust way of evaluating service standards internally), ethical approval may not be required. The NHS REC has a decision tool[6] you can use to determine this.

[5]For further informtation see The Creative Health Impact Framework / A Scaled Approach to Evaluation: https://londonplus.org/creative-health-impact-framework/
[6] Do I need NHS Ethics approval? Health Research Authority (HRA) decision making tool: www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/

Further information

Arts and Health Evaluation: Navigating the Landscape, the social behavioural research group:

www.sbbresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Arts-and-Health-Evaluation-report-UCLSBB-3.pdf

Creative and Credible; Creative and Arts Based Methods:

https://creativeandcredible.co.uk/category/resources/

The Little Book of Creative Evaluation:

www.creativeevaluation.uk

Creative Evaluation Training:

www.janewillis.co.uk/creative-evaluation-training

**Breathe Dance for Strength & Balance
Photo credit: Camilla Greenwell**

Planning and delivering evaluation

Evaluation planning is critical and requires time, thought, and careful preparation at every stage – from setting aims and collecting data to analysing findings, reporting insights, and applying learning to future work.

This section provides an overview of:

- **The evaluation cycle**
- **Planning and delivering an evaluation**
- **Ethical practice**
- **Top tips for evaluation**

The Evaluation Cycle

The Creative and Credible Evaluation Cycle[7] offers an overarching framework in which to understand evaluation as an iterative process.

There is no final endpoint to the cycle. Each phase leads into the next, just as the learning from each evaluation should feed into future project planning.

THE EIGHT STAGES OF THE EVALUATION CYCLE

1. **Evidence Review:** Assess existing knowledge to build on prior work.

2. **Consultation and Aims Setting:** Involve stakeholders in defining desired evaluation aims, outcomes and key questions.

3. **Evaluation Planning:** Outline methodology, timeline, resources, and responsibilities.

4. **Data Collection:** Gather relevant data systematically and ethically.

5. **Data Analysis:** Identify patterns and insights from collected data.

6. **Reporting:** Communicate findings clearly and effectively to stakeholders.

7. **Dissemination:** Share findings, conclusions and recommendations to inform practice and decision-making.

8. **Planning the next project:** Apply learning and insights to improve future projects.
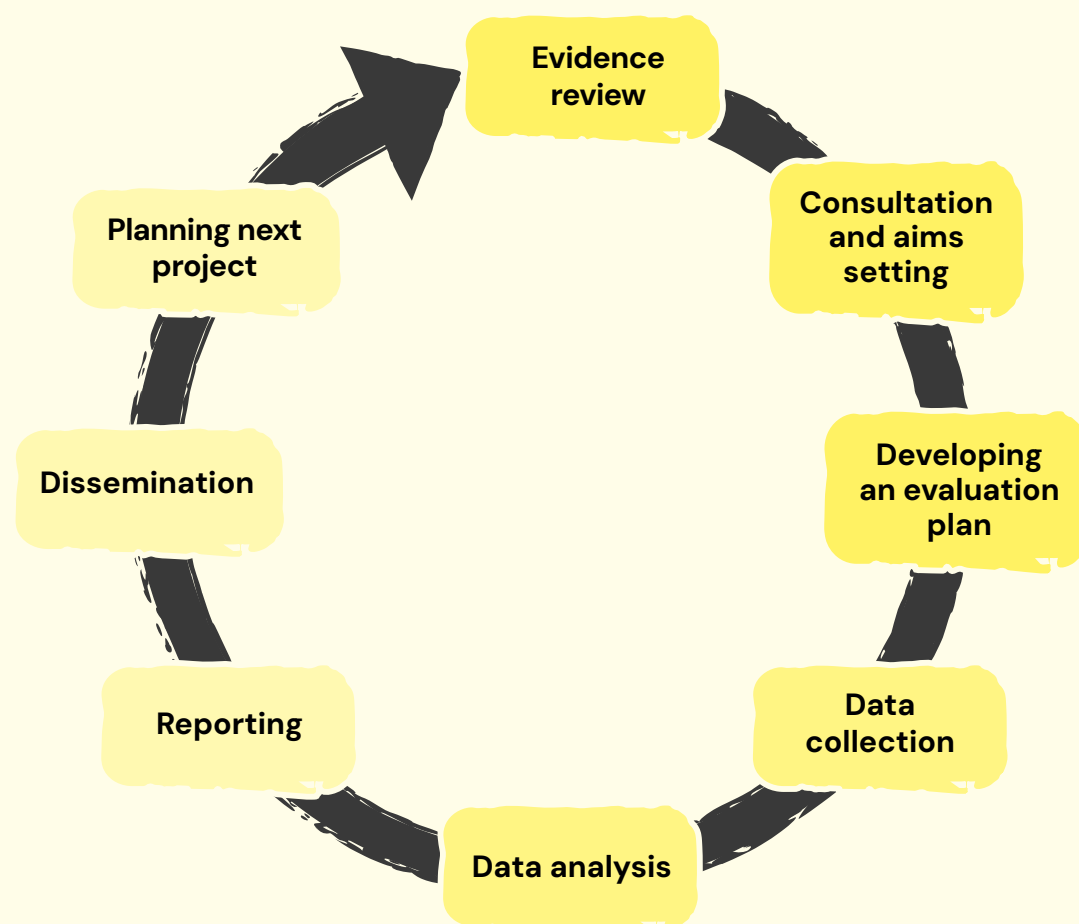
Reference: Daykin, N., Attwood, M. & Willis, J. (2013) *Supporting arts and health evaluation: Report of a UK Knowledge Transfer Partnership*. Journal of Applied Arts & Health. 4 (2): 179-190. DOI 10.1386/jaah.4.2.179_1

Evaluation Planning and Delivery

1. EVIDENCE REVIEW: WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?

An evidence review summarises existing knowledge on similar projects' impacts, outcomes, and delivery, highlighting gaps or uncertainties. It can also inform the development of a theory of change and logic model.

A theory of change explains why and how change is expected to happen.

The Public Health England Arts for Health and Wellbeing Evaluation Framework[8] defines a theory of change as follows:

"A theory of change should describe the desired change that a project seeks to make and identify the steps involved in making that change happen. Creating a theory of change involves identifying a clear goal or primary outcome, tracing intermediate outcomes that might contribute towards the primary outcome, using evidence to understand the link between outcomes by working out causes and effects."

This broad thinking can then be translated into a logic model.

A logic model visually maps how a project is expected to achieve specific outcomes, outlining inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

While a logic model describes change in a structured, linear way, a theory of change explains the reasoning behind it, making explicit the assumptions and conditions for success.

By creating a theory of change first, you ensure your logic model is grounded in a well–reasoned explanation of change, rather than just a linear process.

Together, evidence reviews, theories of change and logic models support project design and evaluation planning, guiding what to assess and which methods to use.

2. EVALUATION AIMS: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO FIND OUT?

Clearly defined aims shape your evaluation questions and focus your efforts. To make the best use of time and resources clarify the purpose of your evaluation. Consider why you are evaluating, who it's for, and what insights you need.

Clarify the purpose:

• Personal reflection.
• Improving future programmes.
• Meeting funder or commissioner requirements.
• Advocating for your work.
• Contributing to the arts and health evidence base.

Consulting key stakeholders – funders, partners, healthcare staff, patients, and artists – ensures your evaluation meets their needs.

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3. DEVELOPING AN EVALUATION PLAN

An evaluation plan outlines what you will evaluate and how you will go about it. Detailed planning will also support you to be realistic about what can be achieved within your budget and timeline.

An evaluation plan should include your aims and objectives, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, reporting, and resource needs.

Key Elements of an Evaluation Plan:

• **Rationale:** Purpose of the evaluation.

• **Aims:** Evaluation aims, objectives, and priorities.

• **Questions:** Key questions the evaluation will address.

• **Approach:** Methods for data collection, storage, and analysis.

- **Responsibilities:** Who will lead each stage of the process

- **Ethics:** Consent, risk minimisation, and privacy safeguards.

- **Reporting and Dissemination:** How findings will be shared.

- **Budget:** Costs associated with evaluation activities.

- **Timeline:** Key milestones and deadlines.

4. DATA COLLECTION

Effective data collection requires clarity around the evaluation questions, the data you need to collect to answer these questions, and the most appropriate collection methods. Data collection methods should also be designed to ensure that data is gathered and stored ethically.

Key considerations:

- Assign a lead to oversee data collection, storage, and ethics.

- Obtain informed consent and protect participants' privacy.

- Tailor methods to participants, activities, and settings.

- Consider the use of creative methods to support meaningful, accessible, and engaging data collection.

- Collaborate with artists and staff to integrate evaluation into project delivery.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis transforms raw data into meaningful insights. Use systematic methods to ensure accuracy and reduce bias.

Quantitative Analysis

- Identifies patterns in numerical data.
- Uses counts, percentages, and averages.
- Compares pre- and post-scores to measure change.
- Applies statistical methods for deeper insights.

Qualitative Analysis

- Identifies themes and patterns in participant feedback.

- Uses content or thematic analysis[9].

6. REPORTING

A clear, balanced, and unbiased evaluation report[10] tailored to your audience's needs communicates evaluation findings in an engaging and accessible way. Reports can vary in length and depth; however, they typically include the following:

Key Content:
- **Project Overview**
  - Evaluation Overview
- **Evaluation Aims**
  - Evaluation Questions
  - Evaluation Design
  - Ethical Considerations
- **Findings**
- **Conclusions**
- **Recommendations**

7. DISSEMINATION

Once you have finalised your report, consider how best to share its findings, conclusions and recommendations in ways that engage your target audience.

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[9]Creative and Credible Qualitative Evaluation: Using Thematic Analysis in Evaluation explains the process of thematic analysis.

[10]For more information on reporting and dissemination see www.creativeandcredible.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CreativeCredible_Reporting-and-dissemination.pdf

Key considerations:

• Identify who needs to see the findings.

• Choose accessible and engaging ways of reaching your target audience, including:

  Standard methods such as:

  • Social media

  • Conference presentations

• Sharing events

• Training and workshops

Creative methods such as:

• Storyboards and graphic novels

• Animations

• Performances and exhibitions

• Audio and podcasts

Ethical Practice

Ethical practice ensures evaluation does no harm, is reliable, and maintains safe and respectful relationships with stakeholders and participants.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND GOOD PRACTICE:

Secure Informed Consent:

• Ensure participants understand and voluntarily consent to take part.

• Clearly explain the evaluation's purpose, activities, and data-sharing procedures when gaining consent.

Maintain Confidentiality and Anonymity:

• Protect participant identities and ensure confidentiality.

Store Data Safely:

• Store data securely, following data protection laws, especially with personal data.

Ensure Safety and Manage Risk:

• Be sensitive to participant needs and avoid reinforcing stigma.

• Safeguard participants' personal values, mental health, dignity, and wellbeing.

• Anticipate and plan for any negative impacts.

• Ensure evaluators have the necessary skills and knowledge.

Avoid Bias:

• Collect, analyse, and report data impartially.

• Keep evaluation separate from advocacy to maintain objectivity.

Reciprocal and Non-Extractive Practices:

• Design evaluations that are meaningful and rewarding for participants, as well as useful for evaluators.

• Collect only data that will be analysed and used, avoiding unnecessary burdens on participants.

• Ensure evaluations do not disrupt or diminish participants' experiences of arts projects.

Unless you are conducting formal research, you are unlikely to need formal ethical approval. However, evaluation practice should align with the ethical protocols of the NHS trust, health board, or host organisation and it may be beneficial to consult with the hospital's research office for further guidance on ethical principles.

Top Tips for Evaluation Planning and Delivery

1. **Plan early:** Integrate evaluation into the project planning stage.

2. **Secure resources:** Identify and allocate funding and resources for evaluation upfront.

3. **Engage stakeholders:** Involve stakeholders in setting aims, designing, and delivering the evaluation.

4. **Ensure appropriateness:** Make sure the evaluation approach is appropriate and proportionate to the project's scale and goals.

5. **Focus your efforts:** Prioritise the most important questions to ask, doing fewer things well.

6. **Use appropriate tools:** Use well-designed methods to gather meaningful data in ways that are engaging, enjoyable and rewarding for participants.

7. **Analyse data:** Make sense of the data to report findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations.

8. **Share insights:** Communicate findings to inform future work and decisions.

9. **Embed learning:** Use evaluation insights to improve future programme design and delivery.

10. **Be flexible:** Adapt the evaluation process as the project evolves to meet emerging needs.

Further information

What Works Centre for Wellbeing: Commissioned evidence reviews including grey literature:

www.whatworkswellbeing.org

Public Health England Arts for Health and Wellbeing Evaluation Framework: See pages 11 and 12 for more information on theories of change and logic models:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/arts-for-health-and-wellbeing-an-evaluation-framework

Centre for Cultural Value Evaluation Principles:

www.culturalvalue.org.uk/our-work/evaluation/evaluation-principles

Notes

Join our Network

If you found this guidance document useful but would benefit from further advice and support, why not join the National Arts in Hospitals Network (NAHN). The network was created to support arts managers in hospitals across the UK to take advantage of shared best practice; build and share knowledge; and connect with peers for discussion and support.

Membership benefits

THREE ANNUAL MEETINGS
- Expert speakers
- Visits to hospital arts programmes across the country
- Knowledge sharing and best practice
- Discussion and support around shared issues
- Discussion around policy and practice.

REGIONAL GROUPS
- Regular regional meet ups to discuss regional issues and interests.

PROJECTS
- Collaborate with other members in regional and national projects (e.g. Our National Health Stories), shared resources and art tours.

WEBINAR PROGRAMME
- Share knowledge, best practice and connect with peers
- Question and answer peer support
- Opportunities for funding and professional development

NHS CHARITIES TOGETHER CONFERENCES
- Opportunity to attend virtually, at no charge
- Opportunity to attend in person, at a preferential rate

Join now

Join the National Arts in Hospitals Network here: www.nahn.org.uk/#membership

National Arts in
Hospitals Network

This document forms part of the NAHN Arts in Hospitals
Guidance.

The Guidance comprises a clear, engaging, and accessible
suite of resources aimed at supporting all those setting up
and managing hospital arts programmes.

Funded by Arts Council England, the NAHN Arts in Hospitals
Guidance was written by creative health consultant Jane
Willis in collaboration with NAHN members, many of whom
also generously contributed project case studies which
illuminate different aspects of practice across the full scope
of hospital arts programming.

The full NAHN Arts in Hospitals Guidance can be accessed
here: **www.nahn.org.uk/arts-in-hospitals-guidance**

For more information contact: **info@nahn.org.uk**