

Working with Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit: Guidance for NPOs

1. Introduction

Audience Finder is a national audience data and development programme, funded by Arts Council England and provided by The Audience Agency. Used by all Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), it provides tools for collecting and analysing data on audience profile (demographics, behaviours, motivations) in a standardised way. Organisations use Audience Finder primarily to plan and monitor audience development.

The Impact & Insight Toolkit is a digital platform to help NPOs evaluate the impact of their work on the people who experience it, funded by the Arts Council and provided by Counting What Counts. The toolkit enables organisations to collect feedback on events from audiences and peers, and compare this feedback with their original objectives for the work. Organisations use the toolkit primarily for evaluating and developing their creative practice and programming. The Arts Council requires Band 2 and 3 NPOs to use the Impact & Insight Toolkit to evaluate at least four events per year.

Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit are different systems designed for different purposes. Audience Finder is a rolling programme in which NPOs collect a small amount of audience data at most or all of the productions, exhibitions and projects in their programme, producing an annual picture of *who* is experiencing their work. The Impact & Insight Toolkit enables NPOs to select a small number of productions, exhibitions or projects to evaluate in depth, typically collecting feedback from around 70-100 audience members per evaluation, building a picture, alongside peer reviews, of *how* people are experiencing their work. More detail on the main differences between the two systems is provided in the appendix.

Both Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit involve collecting data from audience members via a survey. The Audience Agency, Counting What Counts and the Arts Council therefore want to support NPOs to use the two systems together as cost-effectively as possible and ensure that the process of contributing data and feedback is straightforward and engaging for audience members.

2. Guidance for NPOs

To begin with, please do not attempt to combine the surveys for Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit yourself, or substitute questions from one platform for another, even where they seem to cover similar themes. To carry out Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit surveys separately and successfully, there are two main options:

Option A: use Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit at different productions/exhibitions/projects

- Start by selecting four productions, exhibitions or projects in your programme that you would be interested to evaluate using the Impact & Insight Toolkit – those where you think your organisation has most to learn from understanding peer and audience responses
- Evaluate those four productions/exhibitions/projects using the Impact & Insight Toolkit, aiming for 70-100 public responses per evaluation
- Use Audience Finder to capture audience profile data across the remainder of your programme, aiming for a total sample size across the year of 380

Option B: use Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit at the same productions/exhibitions/projects

You may feel that some or all of the productions, exhibitions and projects that you wish to evaluate using the Impact & Insight Toolkit should also be included in Audience Finder, as they represent a significant portion of your programme and total audience. In fact, if your organisation runs a relatively small public-facing programme, then you may not be able to meet your reporting requirements by using Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit at different productions, exhibitions and projects. For example, if your programme comprises seven or eight major productions/exhibitions/projects, you may not feel you will be able to evaluate four using the Impact & Insight Toolkit and still achieve the required Audience Finder sample size across the remainder of your programme.

In this case, you can consider splitting the audience for a production, exhibition or project in two so that half of the audience members receive the Audience Finder survey and half receive the Impact & Insight Toolkit survey. This can be done by:

- Splitting a database of ticket buyers in two – for example by unique customer number, so that those with odd customer numbers receive the Audience Finder survey and those with even customer numbers receive the Impact & Insight Toolkit survey. You could also randomise your list of ticket buyers (see <https://www.excel-easy.com/examples/randomize-list.html>) then simply split the list in half.
- Using Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit at different time points – for example, collecting data using Audience Finder during the first week of a show or exhibition and the Impact & Insight Toolkit during the second week
- Distributing Audience Finder and Impact & Insight Toolkit surveys using different methods – for example, collecting Impact & Insight Toolkit data from audience members via face-to-face interviewers and Audience Finder using a post-event email survey

If you are a Band 2 or 3 NPO you may wish to develop a data collection plan that sets out the most efficient way of collecting Audience Finder and Impact & Insight Toolkit data across your programme for the year, based on options A and B above. If you would like help developing your data collection plan, please contact The Audience Agency or Counting What Counts to discuss which approaches will suit you best, given the type of events that you run and your typical audience size.

Please remember to register with both Audience Finder and Impact & Insight toolkit separately where the support teams can advise you on how to set up and carry out your surveys via their respective platforms.

3. Exploring longer-term options

In 2019-20, The Audience Agency and Counting What Counts will run a trial to explore how NPOs might integrate their work with Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit by using one of the two systems to collect all their audience data. We have identified a small number of organisations to take part in the trial based on our knowledge of their data collection processes, prioritising organisations that are part of the Impact & Insight Toolkit Strategic Development Strand and ensuring a mix of artforms and geographic spread.

During the trial, four or five NPOs will experiment with collecting Impact & Insight Toolkit data using Audience Finder, and a further four or five NPOs will try collecting Audience Finder data using the Impact & Insight Toolkit. The Audience Agency, Counting What Counts and the participating NPOs will monitor the processes, experiences and outcomes of integrating the systems in these two ways. We will recruit a control group of around ten NPOs that are working with the two systems separately, using either option A or B described above. This will enable us to judge the benefits and costs of integration compared with separate use of the platforms.

We will produce a report on the trial in March 2020, with an interim review point and early findings and recommendations to the Arts Council in 2019.

4. Get in touch

If you would like further guidance, or would like to give us feedback on your experiences of working with Audience Finder and the Impact & Insight Toolkit, please contact support@countingwhatcounts.co.uk or support@theaudienceagency.org.

Appendix: summary of differences between Impact & Insight Toolkit and Audience Finder

	Impact & Insight Toolkit	Audience Finder
Purpose	<p>For use in self-evaluation.</p> <p>Helps you understand how audience experience compares with peer review and with your own objectives for specific events</p>	<p>For use in planning and monitoring audience development.</p> <p>Helps you understand profile of current and potential audiences (demographics, behaviours, mapping, and motivations).</p>
Approach	Survey of audience, self and peer opinions of at least 4 events per year.	A regular or continual audience survey process
Benefits	A triangulated evaluation of a particular event from key stakeholders (audience, self and peers)	A detailed picture of all audiences across your programme compared to the wider market/public
Who does ACE require to use?	Band 2 and 3 NPOs	All NPOs
Challenges for NPOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> resources required to plan and manage data collection using two different survey systems risk of survey fatigue 	