



Engaging in-place: Data collection in hardly reached communities

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- Engagement fatigue is real problem, and people are tired of surveys
- There's often a tendency to use online data collection methods
- For evaluators and community workers, this means our usual methods may miss those who need us most.



How do we break through?

- How do we create meaningful engagement that benefits communities and evaluators alike?
- I'll share lessons from the Whittlesea Food Collective evaluation—a project that fused evaluation with community engagement.
- In short, It's about being present, creative, and reciprocal.



Whittlesea Food collective

- The WFC was established in 2019 by Whittlesea Community Connections and the Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network
- The Food Collective aims to create a more equitable food system in the City of Whittlesea.
- They also aim to improve health and wellbeing, increase training and employment opportunities in the hospitality industry, and support households with food relief.



Whittlesea Food collective

- Weekly produce market.
- Local produce boxes.
- Providing food relief
- Café and catering social enterprises.





Purpose of the evaluation

- Goal was to understand the effectiveness of the model to address food insecurity
- Particularly, to understand
 - The enabling factors
 - The outcomes
 - Potential for scaling its impact.



The problem.....

- Who were we trying to reach?
 - Largely time poor students,
 - A large portion of English language students from migrant and asylum-seeking backgrounds
 - Recipients of food relief
- Because of these concerns, we anticipated low engagement in, and recognised the need for a involved approach.



Our approach

Working with stakeholders within WFC, we designed an approach based that allowed us to:

- **Be present:** go to where your audience is
- **Be contextual:** consider context specific data collection approaches
- **Be reciprocal:** Choose incentives that benefit local systems



Lesson #1: Be present

- Go to you audience, don't expect them to come to you



Being present

- We attended the fresh produce market and spoke directly with shoppers
- We held a community lunch for food relief recipients





Showing up

- We reached over 100 people at this market, and had 20 people attend the community lunch
- Most attendees were staff or students of the Polytechnic campus. Primarily, English- language students from non-English speaking background.
- It's unlikely we'd reach this many through simple online surveys



Lesson #2: Consider the context

- Consider the specific context of the audience you're hoping to engage,
- In this case, the context was quite specific



The context...

- They address food systems and food security
- The collective is co-located Melbourne Polytechnic Whittlesea campus
- There was a diverse audience of English language students and people accessing food relief



Our response

- We hosted a community lunch for food relief recipients.
 - Sharing meals naturally creates opportunities for connection and sharing of stories.
- Avoided traditional surveys, instead opting for conversational approach
- At the market, we had language support from Arabic and Mandarin speakers



Lesson 3: Reciprocate

- Respect and value people's time and contribution
- Build reciprocity into the process
- Chose methods that support the communities and systems you're operating in



The market

- At the market we offered a \$10 voucher – redeemable at the WFC café to anyone who spoke to us
- This provided a benefit not only to those who spoke to us, but provided additional income to the WFC café



The community lunch

- At the community lunch, everyone who came received a free local produce box
 - Also free lunch



Importantly...

- These remunerations were paid for by us at FPC.
- They benefited both those we engaged and strengthened the systems we were operating withing
- We demonstrated to participants that their perspective is authentically valued



In reflection

- When we:
 - meet people where they are
 - design context specific data collection methods
 - value their involvement,
- Engagement becomes meaningful—and evaluations become richer.



Thank you