Method:	Voting

NERUPI network
Evaluating & Researching University Participation Interventions

Description:	This method involves conducting a poll. Face to face methods of getting people to vote include, for example, asking for a show of hands, dropping tokens in boxes or stickers on charts/maps, and using cartoons or emojis displaying different emotions and asking participants to select which represent their views. Electronic methods include use of voting applications on people's phones, use of electronic voting software (EVS) or polls included in online meeting software.
Application:	Voting systems are perhaps best understood as a tool for feedback, rather than an evaluation approach. They could be useful to get feedback to inform process evaluation across the NERUPI Framework.
Type of evidence:	Quantitative. Usually Type 1 (Narrative), although could be a before and after vote which would be a form of Type 2 evidence (pre/post)
Strengths:	Polls can be fun and interactive. It's often possible to build them into activities making the data 'naturally occurring'. It can be argued that voting anonymously encourages people to give more truthful answers. The process can be quick to complete, and the data is relatively easy to analyse (based on counts). Often the results are visible to the participants or if online can be fed back to them in real time. It is often highly visual and allows people who may find reading a lot of information difficult the chance to participate. Participants tend to like seeing how their response compares to others, and it can help them to feel more engaged. Running a poll twice (before and after an activity) may help you to judge whether any change has occurred.
Weaknesses:	Peer pressure and confirmation bias may influence the responses received. Polls usually only capture immediate views during the event and can therefore miss more considered and longer term perceptions. Online polls on websites can sometimes be considered an irritation and those who respond are self-selecting, running the risk of sample bias.
Expertise:	Low
Requirements:	Polls are relatively cheap and quick to administer. The specific requirements will depend on the method or type of technology used.
Ethical issues:	If voting is done anonymously, the approach overcomes issues associated with confidentiality and anonymity. Participation still needs to be voluntary and the participants need to understand the purposes of the data collection and how the data will be used.
Work planning:	Consideration needs to be given to the questions you are trying to answer through the voting process. You may then need to develop categories that enable people to choose from the widest range of options. Make sure you are clear about how you have decided which categories to use – you may need to run some other pilot research first to test these. There are usually practical considerations to be dealt with. For example, if you are using technology then you will need to think about the practicalities of using apps or handset distribution and management. This can take time and participants usually need assistance. As use of voting systems increases within institutions, electronic methods may become more accessible and the practicalities of managing and administering voting systems may be resolved. One of the advantages of using online meeting software is that you can run polls from some of the meeting software apps (e.g. Zoom, Mentimeter, etc.). Effective use of voting systems requires an understanding and belief in participatory methods, and there are staff development implications not just for the application of the technology involved but for the underlying and supporting concepts.

	Sufficient time needs to be built in to allow for the voting to take place. The participants need to be given clear written and verbal instructions. Ideally, someone will be on hand in a supporting role to offer help (and to make sure participants are following the instructions correctly).
Analysis:	Analysis of voting data usually involves making simple counts.
Reporting:	Report the count of votes and what conclusion might be drawn from this. A bar or pie chart could be used to help visualise the result.

Voting: Practice example

Participants were given verbal instructions, plus there were notices at the voting stations with written instructions. In addition, student ambassadors and staff volunteers were trained to support the voting process and were on hand at each of the voting stations to encourage and support the participants to take part.

The voting was part of a structured research process, and the method was used as consistently as possible in different locations, with the data collected systematically recorded. Voting data was compared across the whole programme of events in order to cross-check the accuracy of the findings and to draw out differences which could then be considered in relation to the audiences taking part in different events.

This approach to evaluation and gathering feedback was considered accessible and realistic in the context of a short information session. The recording of data was time consuming but getting people to answer a question in a novel way encouraged people to take part. Many participants appeared to be drawn to the process because it was interactive and they were curious about the activity. The researchers felt that similar data could not be gathered using a survey because of the difficulty of securing people's participation.

References:
Adapted from Davies, S. (date not given), Evaluation in participatory arts programmes.
https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/evaluation-participatory-arts-programmes