

# Overview

Read time: 6 minutes

## What do we mean by evaluation?

There are many ways of defining evaluation, ranging from the broad – see, for example, the definition used by Better Evaluation: “Any systematic process to judge merit, worth or significance by combining evidence and values” – to the specific, from the Reading Outcomes Framework: “To understand, demonstrate and improve the **impact** of your activity”.

You could be evaluating to:

- spot opportunities for improvement in the delivery process;
- understand the cost-effectiveness of the initiative for its intended purpose; or
- understand the impact that the initiative has had on those taking part.

These are all important factors. However, impact is of particular focus in this guidance.

### **Definition: Impact**

The term ‘impact’ is commonly used in relation to the reporting of media literacy projects and is sometimes used to refer to reach (for example, the number of participants who engaged with the material). For the purposes of this guidance, when we talk about impact, we mean change at an individual or societal level that can be attributed to an intervention.

We think it is important that wherever possible, evaluation is integrated into the development of any project from the very beginning and is woven into its design. There are two main reasons for this:

- Many of the techniques employed as part of the evaluation planning process – such as mapping out what you think the overall impact of your initiative will be – will help you develop a deeper understanding of how the project is intended to work.
- By laying the groundwork for evaluation from the beginning, you are making the process easier. For example, planning data collection into the design of your project can be a good way of ensuring you have the right content to analyse later in the project.



## Why should I evaluate?

It is important to understand what works when it comes to media literacy, and evaluation plays a vital part in this. A 2021 Ofcom report found that embedding evaluation into media literacy curricula would help the people delivering initiatives to clearly identify the impact these initiatives have on audiences' knowledge, attitudes and understanding<sup>1</sup>.

### Definition: Outcome

An outcome is the result of an intervention, ideally a benefit received by the target audience. It is usually finite and measurable.

For example, for a media literacy project, this could be:

- an increase in participants' knowledge,
- participants gaining a new skill,
- a change in attitude among participants

In its 2021 Online Media Literacy Strategy<sup>2</sup>, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport identified a lack of robust evaluation in the sector as one of six challenges that needed to be addressed in order to improve media literacy **outcomes** for users. Evaluation is about measuring and understanding change. It has a range of benefits and should not be a 'pass or fail' judgement at the end of the project. It can:

- help you learn about your project, apply that learning, make changes to improve the project and make further progress towards your goals;
- tell you how effective your intervention was and give you confidence to roll out your approach more widely in the future;
- help you discover outcomes from your project that you weren't expecting to see.

By sharing the results of your evaluation, you can help others working on similar projects strengthen their approaches, particularly if your project is breaking new ground or covering themes or topics that have not been previously evaluated. Sharing evaluation evidence is vital to helping the media literacy sector to become more effective, in that:

- your organisation and others with similar aims will be able to make a stronger case for the value of your projects;
- those planning future initiatives will have more information as to what works, and what doesn't, and will be able to deliver better interventions as a result; and
- funders will feel more confident about directing funds to media literacy organisations if they have evidence that media literacy projects are making a difference.

We know that sharing can be challenging (especially if something didn't work as planned) but by making your findings available to others who are carrying out similar media literacy interventions, you are enabling them to apply your learnings to their own work. By working together, and pooling knowledge, you can help the sector as a whole move in a positive direction.

<sup>1</sup> Edwards, L. Stoilova, M., Anstead, N., Fry, A., El-Halaby, G. and Smith M. (2021) [Rapid Evidence Assessment on Online Misinformation and Media Literacy: Final Report for Ofcom](#).

<sup>2</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. (2021). [Online Media Literacy Strategy](#).

## How this guidance works

The three steps are set out in the following chapters:

### Step one: Preparing

Planning your approach and creating your framework

### Step two: Doing

Gathering and analysing your data

### Step three: Sharing

Reporting and communicating your findings

