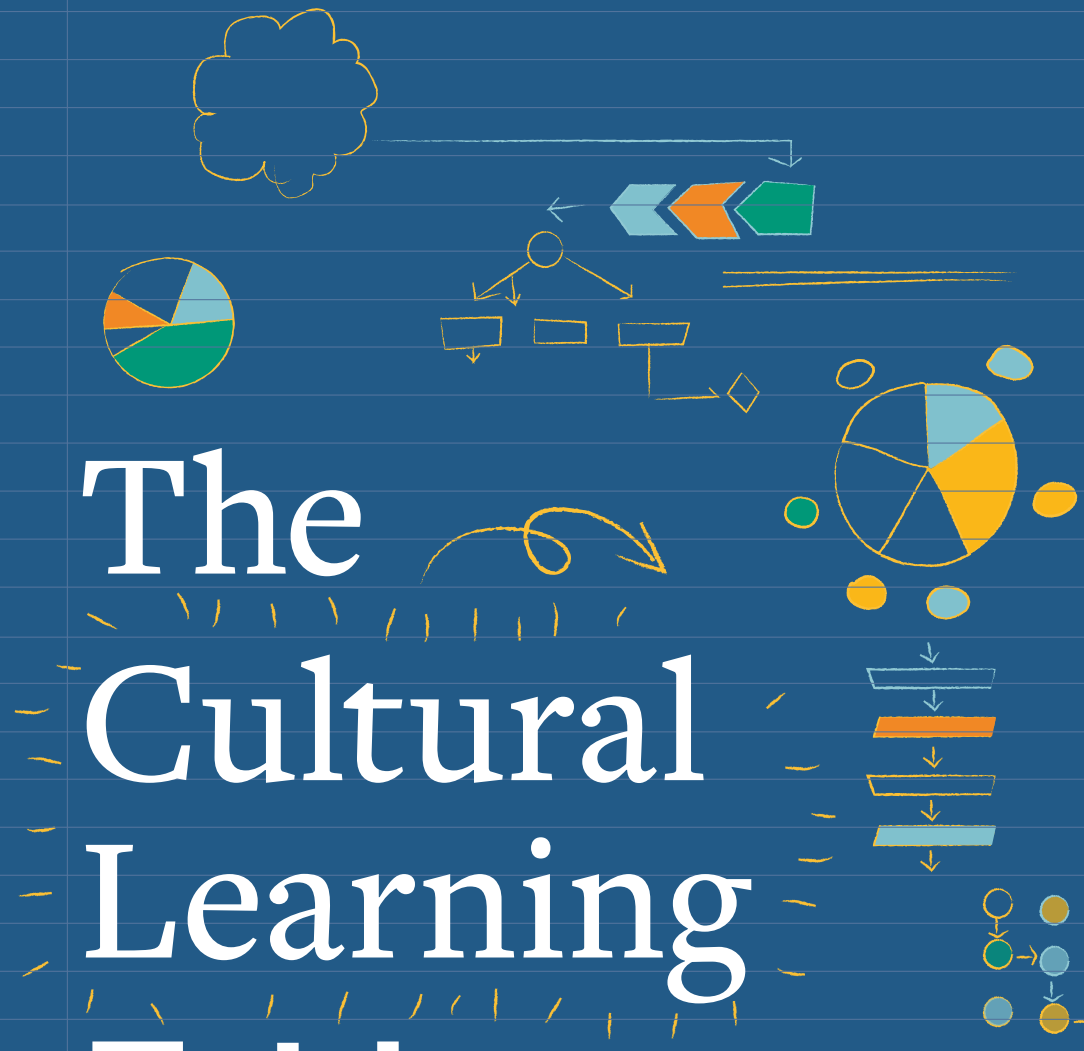
RSA
Action and Research Centre



The Cultural Learning Evidence Champion's HANDBOOK

LAC
Learning About Culture

Key skills of an Evidence Champion

Source:

Gathering appropriate evidence to design projects for impact

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Lead:

Taking collective ownership of project evaluation

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Learn:

Collecting accurate evidence of what you have done, the difference you have made and how you might improve.

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Planning evaluations that tell me about the difference my work makes to the people taking part	27
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How to be an Evidence Champion

Your guide to winning at evidence and evaluation

This handbook is a guide to getting to grips with what we call the 'evidence agenda' in arts and cultural learning. Evidencing the difference your work makes to the people who take part and learning from how others have evaluated their work can help all of us improve and make arts and cultural learning stronger and more sustainable. The trouble is that it is *hard* and no one ever tells you what you need to be good at, to be good at using evidence.

This handbook is designed to make it easier not only to 'do' evidence and evaluation, but to love them, to become a champion for them and spread the good word throughout arts and cultural education. Throughout the document we talk about the attitudes and the approaches that Evidence Champions take as well as the key skills they need. Beginners can be Champions, just as much as experts can, but you might want a little guidance when you're taking your first steps. That's why we cover some of the key knowledge and skills you'll need, as well as some things you can do right now.

Who can be an Evidence Champion?

You can be an Evidence Champion no matter which part of arts and cultural learning you work in. We need Evidence Champions among:

- School leaders, teachers and non-teaching staff
- Cultural learning organisations
- Artist practitioners
- Funders and sector support organisations[1]
- Independent evaluators and researchers

Successful Evidence Champions don't work alone. Funders' requirements might set the standards for evaluation, but cultural learning organisations' commitment to accurate reporting and sharing their learning make it meaningful. Artists who are empowered to collect participant data need the enthusiastic consent of the schools they work with. All parts of the sector need to remember that evidence-rich practice is a collective endeavour and that it can benefit all of us.

> *"Mostly, we think about doing evaluation to speak to funders, but we should do it for ourselves. For one project, if we could ... let the teams have a real exploration of a question, that would be much more motivating for them to do evaluation".*
>
> **Julia Lent**
> from Cambridge Music Education Hub[2]

So, what makes an arts and cultural learning Evidence Champion?

Evaluation is often perceived as a way to meet someone else's priorities, a way for funders, trustees, governments or the press to hold practitioners to account. Evidence Champions, however, are in the driving seat of evidence and evaluation in their work. They believe that the evidence agenda is their agenda, not someone else's. They understand that both evidence and evaluation support their own learning and development and the sustainability of arts and cultural learning. This approach is what Evidence Champions call 'evidence-rich practice'.

Source: Gathering appropriate evidence to design projects for impact

What's this theme about?

Evidence Champions learn from others about approaches that have worked in the past. **Pages 10-17** explain how to find evidence that can support your decisions.

How can it help you?

Cultural Organisations and Practitioners:
Designing a new project or improving an existing one?
Funders:
Considering the case for funding something new?
Schools:
Want to work with an arts organisation to improve pupil outcomes?

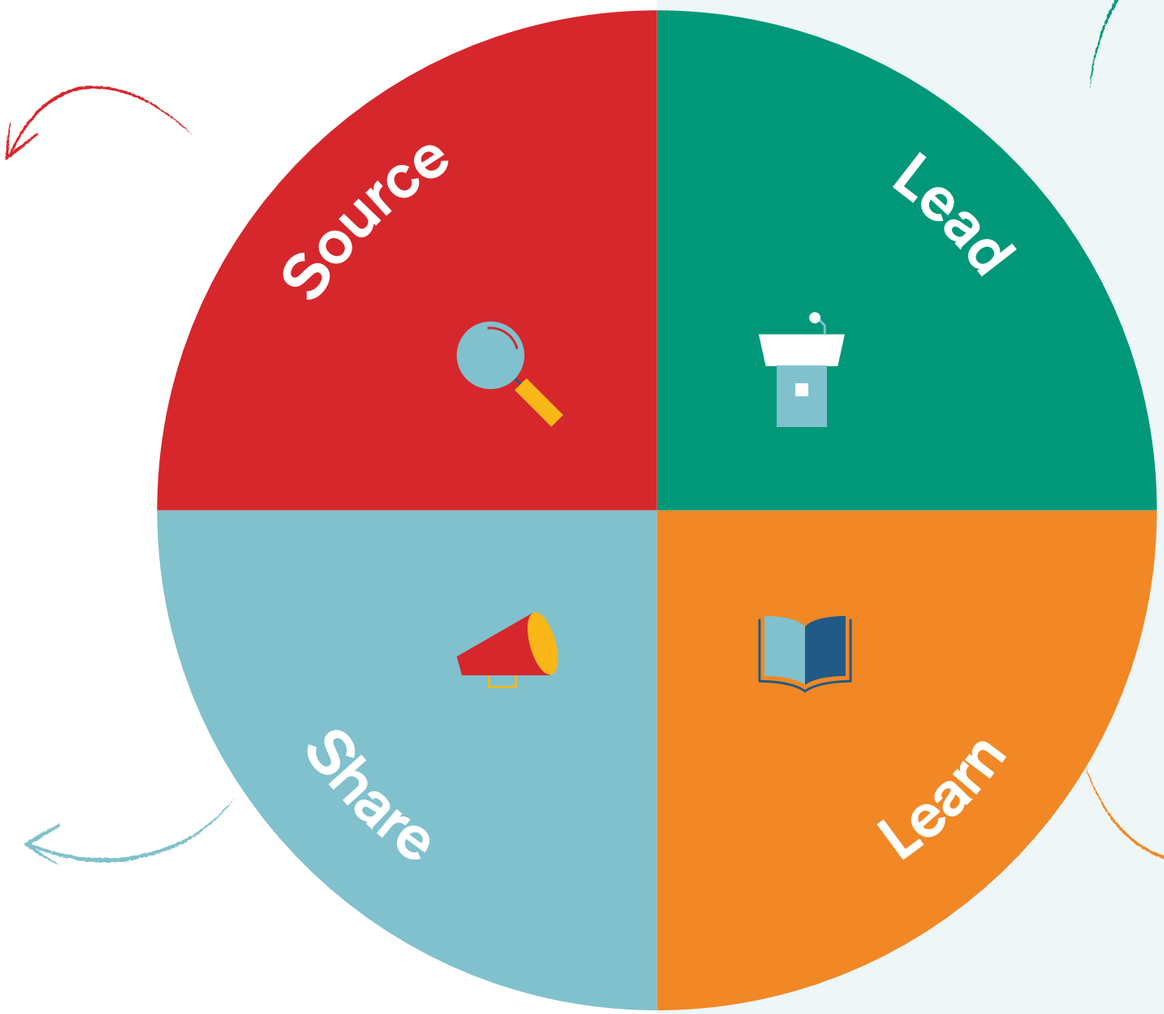
Share: Supporting colleagues and peers across the sector to improve

What's this theme about?

Evidence Champions share what they've learnt with colleagues in the hope of supporting them to make a difference too. **Pages 34-37** provide ideas about how to do this and how it can benefit you and the sector as a whole.

How can it help you?

Everyone:
Want arts and cultural education to thrive, based on mutual support and better knowledge sharing?



The Four Themes of Evidence-Rich Practice

Lead: Taking collective ownership of project evaluation

What's this theme about?

Evidence Champions know that good evaluation happens when we work together. **Pages 18-25** look at how to share responsibility for good evaluation and how to ask each other for support.

How can it help you?

Cultural Organisations and Practitioners:
Want to explain how your project works to funders, schools and external evaluators? Want better evaluation conversations with schools and evaluators?
Funders:
Want to support your grantees to demonstrate their impact?
Schools:
Want to work with arts partners to understand their impact? Want to persuade colleagues that your cultural learning provision is worth sustaining?
Independent evaluators:
Want to make sure your clients are participating fully in your evaluation and trust you to do your best?

Learn: Collecting accurate evidence of what you have done, the difference you have made and how you might improve

What's this theme about?

Evidence Champions seek out the truth about the difference they make. **Pages 26-33** help you design an evaluation, gather and analyse data, and use it to improve your work.

How can it help you?

Cultural Organisations, Schools: Want to make sure your evaluation gives you meaningful evidence of what's working? Want to keep improving your impact?
Funders: Want to know how your support is making a difference? Want to have more frank conversations with grantees about their learning?

Why should I be an Evidence Champion?

Achieve quality

Evidence-rich practice helps you know *if* you have made the difference you set out to make and understand exactly *how* you have done it.

Advocate

Evidence-rich practice helps you advocate for the arts even if evaluating your work reveals that you didn't get the results you'd hoped for.

Demonstrating your commitment to knowing what is really happening and to putting young people's outcomes first allows for better conversations with others who care about children's learning.

Learn

Evidence-rich practice allows you to more reliably use your own work, and that of others, to identify your next steps. Realising that your activity hasn't had the effect you'd hoped for isn't a failure, it's a lesson. And while evidence and evaluation can become very complicated, it's possible to learn a lot by doing simple things well.

"Do simple things well; ask good questions; make the most of the current best available evidence; develop your skills incrementally; apply what you find out to improve your practice; and, evaluate what you do. In doing so, you will end up having a far more interesting and enjoyable career. More importantly, it will make positive differences to the lives of pupils and colleagues. Remember, you are teachers wishing to improve, rather than researchers seeking to prove".

Dr Gary Jones, 2015[3]

Getting to grips with the evidence agenda

Act like an Evidence Champion

- Take an interest in evidence of the difference that arts and cultural learning makes to children who take part.
- Remember: evidence that something makes a difference is not the same thing as proof that it does.
- Know that evidence can help improve your effectiveness, but doesn't prove it.
- Remember that policy isn't always based on evidence of what works, but your practice can be.

What is 'evidence' anyway?

Evidence = information that supports a claim or belief. Evidence is uncertain and contestable, it's not the same thing as proof.

When we talk about evidence in relation to education, we usually mean evidence for the effectiveness of an activity in contributing to lasting benefits for students, or 'outcomes'. You may have heard the terms 'educational outcomes', 'learning outcomes' or 'student outcomes'. They all mean the same thing and are used in two slightly different, but interconnected ways, both of which we look at in this handbook:

1. The specific *targets, objectives or standards* that schools and other educators set for students. What children are expected to know or be able to do as the result of a course or phase of study.
2. The *educational, personal and social results* of what students study. These include exam results, employability, life chances, civic participation, health and wellbeing.

Not everything in arts and cultural learning is designed to lead to measurable outcomes for children. This handbook is about how we can get better at understanding where it does.

Where does evidence come from?

Experimental research

What does it tell me?
If an activity has contributed to outcomes.

How is it developed?
Testing activities under controlled conditions, to compare their effects with what would have happened otherwise.

Qualitative research

What does it tell me?
How and why activities work so that approaches can be improved and/or repeated, where they have been successful.

How is it developed?
Asking open questions about people's experiences or observing them as they participate.

Practice

What does it tell me?
Why activities or approaches are taken regularly, even if there is no scientific evidence for their effectiveness.

How is it developed?
Values, habits and traditions, professional and participant opinions. 'Hunch'.

The 'evidence base'

The 'evidence base' = the evidence that governments, practitioners and consumers use as the basis for their decisions.

Over the last few years, governments have put increasing importance on using evidence from experimental research and evaluation (i.e. things that have been rigorously tested to see if they work) to support policy and practice decisions in education. In 2013, the UK government established a network of What Works Centres, organisations that sift through research from around the world and commission new research to get evidence of effective practices.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is the What Works Centre for schools and early years education in England and almost a third of schools in England have been involved in EEF-run evaluations of different education activities.

Despite the increased value being placed on evidence-informed policymaking, there's not much proof that policymakers base their policies on evidence. The RSA's own research in 2017 suggested that arts and cultural learning practitioners aren't consistently using reliable evidence about effective practice to support their decisions, either.[4]

What does it mean to say that something 'works'?

Although it sounds simple, proving that one thing causes another is very difficult. To do it, you must satisfy three conditions:[5]

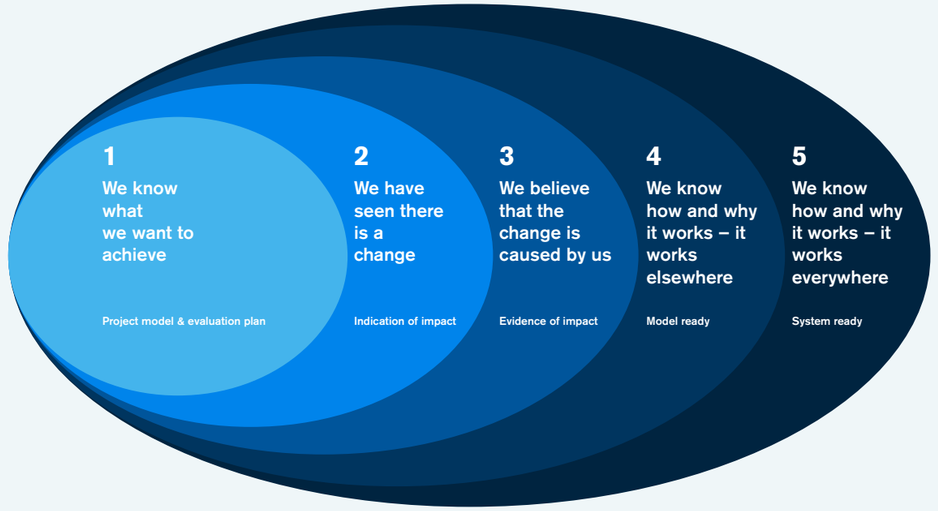
	In English this means…	How do I get that kind of evidence?
1. The cause is covariant with the effect.	E.g. if your project improves confidence, then… – children who take part will be more likely to be confident than similar children who didn't *and* – similar children who don't take part will be more likely to lack confidence.	Compare children who do take part in an activity with similar children who don't (otherwise known as a 'control' or 'comparison' group).
2. The cause always precedes the effect.	E.g. if your project improves test scores, then… – children's test scores will always increase after they take part And not – that children already likely to score highly on tests were the ones taking part.	Monitor closely who takes part to know how well they do on this kind of test before and after you have worked with them.
3. That all alternative explanations have been ruled out.	E.g. if your project improves test scores, then… … those students who take part and go on to score highly in tests aren't also the ones doing extra revision classes after school!	Try out the activity in lots of different places and have lots of control groups in different places to find out if it is your project or other factors that are making the difference.

How much of a difference can I claim to be making?

Even if we know that an arts and cultural learning activity has worked *somewhere*, it doesn't mean we can be certain it will work *everywhere*. If an activity has been effective in producing an outcome, it could be because of something inherent to the artform, but there might also be other factors that were critical to its effectiveness, e.g. the skills of the practitioner or the prior knowledge and experience of the children taking part. Seeking understanding about how much an outcome results from your efforts, rather than from the arts *per se* is a critical part of evidence-rich practice.

Several organisations trying to encourage research and evaluation have produced 'standards' against which you can assess how much you can claim about the difference you've made, depending on how you have evaluated it.

Among the more accessible of the evidence standards is the one produced by Project Oracle and now used by the Centre for Youth Impact. It presents a journey that organisations can go on to increase the level of causality they can infer. At standards one and two, the emphasis is just on developing a theory of how an activity leads to change and to identify appropriate evaluation methods for testing that theory. To achieve the higher standards, there are specific approaches you must use. For example, to achieve standard three, you are required to have "at least one rigorous evaluation using a comparison group".[6] However, Project Oracle are clear that there is a lot of value in good practice at standards one and two, and that this isn't 'trumped' by bad practice at standards three, four and five.[7]



The Project Oracle Standards of Evidence

Source:

Gathering appropriate evidence to design projects for impact

There is a lot of research out there that relates to your practice. Planning how to search through it and knowing what good quality evidence looks like will help you find appropriate evidence to support your programme design choices.

Act like an Evidence Champion

Key skills	Actions
Finding credible evidence of what's worked elsewhere.	▪ Plan searches for evidence. ▪ Look for evidence in trustworthy places. ▪ Be open to evidence from outside your artform. ▪ Check the evidence for: *impact* how much difference has been made by the approach in question? Does that seem like a lot or a little? *Validity*: do the tests used to measure impact give us an accurate picture of what's happened? *Credibility*: does it provide the full story? How impartial was the evaluator? Do the findings make logical sense?
Applying evidence when planning my work.	▪ Check the evidence for *Relevance*: does the evidence relate to what I want to do and the contexts in which I work? ▪ Ask for help: researchers are often happy to talk about how their work might support your decision making. ▪ Join forces: find others who are interested in the same activity, outcomes and 'mechanisms of change' – the critical factors that enable your activity to lead to outcomes.

Key skill

Finding credible evidence of what's worked elsewhere

Why do I need to be good at that?

- **Running an activity?**
  You should be confident that it's a good idea for children and young people to get involved.
- **Designing an activity from scratch?**
  You should find out if anyone else has tried something like it before. This might also help you make the case for trying something new to funders and project partners.
- **Improving an existing activity?**
  You can get ideas from others who are trying to achieve similar outcomes or have used a similar activity to achieve different outcomes.

How do I... find evidence of what's worked elsewhere?

Searching might feel daunting, but your history of using online search engines has probably made you more expert than you think. Here's how to start your search:

1. **Pick a search engine dedicated to searching research and evaluation:** Google Scholar is a dedicated, free search engine that only searches scholarly literature. There are others, like Web of Science, that do a similar job, but you might have to pay to use them, unless you're attached to a university.
2. **Look specifically for information that can support your decisions:** You aren't looking for general information to help you campaign for the importance of the arts. Aim to find evidence that is relevant to what you are doing and the context in which you are doing it.
3. **Think outside of the box:** Useful evidence can come from outside your artform, or even from outside the arts. For example, try looking at education or psychology research for findings that might be pertinent to what you do.
4. **Follow this process to find the best results** (and remember where you found them!):

1.
Ask yourself what you want to know
– Narrow down your area of interest to target your search: dance impacts → dance impacts in education → improvised dance impacts in primary education

2.
Create a clear search question
– 'How do improvised dance activities contribute to educational outcomes for primary school children?'

3.
Break your search question down and flex its language to include synonyms and different spellings. Use a '?' for words where there are multiple spellings: 'col?r' will search for 'colour' and 'color'
– 'Improvised dance' could be 'dance', 'danc?', 'improvi?ation', 'improvi?ed movement'
– 'Activities' could be 'lessons', 'classes', 'activity'
– 'Educational outcomes' could be 'learning', 'development', 'achievement', 'attainment'
– 'Primary school children' could be 'elementary', 'primary', 'infant', 'junior'

4.
Limit your search
– How far back in time will you go? All time? From the year 2000? The last four years? Bear in mind that educational contexts change over time.
– What will you prioritise? E.g. how closely the research matches your search question? How trustworthy the source is? How relevant the research is to the context in which you are working?

5.
Be selective about what you choose to read
– Quickly filter out irrelevant returns from your search (this will probably be quite obvious!).
– Avoid the temptation to cherry pick research where the findings support your beliefs and to ignore those that don't. Prepare to challenge your assumptions!
– Note down the search terms you used, the titles, authors and 'abstracts' (summaries) of the papers you find.
– Give their usefulness and quality a grade for when you're returning (for further information on judging research quality, see the next subsection about trusting evidence).

6.
Ask for help if you're unfamiliar with the language of academic research
– Discuss with colleagues in the sector e.g. by joining your Local Cultural Education Partnership. See more at: www.artscouncil.org.uk/children-and-young-people/working-partnership
– Get in touch with the authors of the research: researchers are often happy to talk about how their work might support your decision making. They might even be looking for collaborators…

Need a shortcut to useful evidence?

Research on the impact of arts and cultural learning:

These websites all pull together research studies that have been filtered for quality and/or to demonstrate impact.

- Kings College's *Culture Case*: culturecase.org
- National Endowment for the Arts' *ArtsEdSearch*: www.artsedsearch.org
- DCMS' *Culture and Sport Evidence* (CASE) programme: bit.ly/2ssTGpo

These 'evidence reviews' summarise a whole range of existing research, to make some big claims about what we do/don't know about the impact of arts and cultural education:

- National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) and RSA review of the effects of arts education *Arts in Secondary Schools: Effects and Effectiveness*: bit.ly/2QQASKw
- University of Durham and the Education Endowment Foundation's systematic review, *Impact of arts education on the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of school-aged children*: bit.ly/2bvquEm
- OECD systematic review, *Art for Art's Sake?:* bit.ly/2SXODcl

Research in education:

These have information about what approaches have been shown to work, some of which might be pertinent to your approach, even if they don't refer to the arts.

- The Education Endowment Foundation's *Teaching and Learning Toolkit*: bit.ly/2TWpn6l
- Behavioural Insights Team's work on influencing behaviour change: bit.ly/1RZutLh

How do I... know if evidence is trustworthy?

Not all evidence is the same. A recent review of evidence for the impact of the arts on children's academic achievement argued that even some studies making it past the quality threshold for inclusion were affected by the bias of the researchers.[8] Even if they are from a trustworthy source, many studies are based on research with such small numbers of participants it's hard to be confident that what may have worked somewhere is likely to work everywhere.

This checklist will help you separate out trustworthy research findings from spurious ones. When it comes to designing your own evaluation, it's also a good list to check whether your own evidence is likely to tell the story you want.

1.

Truth value: How much truth is there in the findings?

Has a 'validated tool' been used to measure outcomes? Is it the right tool for the job?

Why this is important: Validated tools are ways of measuring outcomes that are tested by academics, meaning that their results are more likely to be accurate. Just because a tool is validated, doesn't mean it's appropriate for every activity.

E.g. children involved in a drama programme designed to improve how they express their ideas in their writing will sit a validated test that measures general improvement in writing (e.g. SATs). Researchers could use the results of that test to determine if the programme has made a difference. However, if the test gives as much weight to grammar and spelling as to the strength of ideas, its results might disguise the true difference the drama programme has made.

Did the researcher spend extended periods of time with participants in the places where the research was taking place?

Why this is important: The researcher can understand those contexts in more depth, reducing the likelihood of overclaiming the significance of any chance results or missing any unplanned outcomes.

Triangulation: Did the researchers get similar results from several different data sources?

Why this is important: Basing analysis and findings on more than one data source makes mistaken claims of impact less likely. Sources could be different people, e.g. students and their teachers, and/or different methods, e.g. surveys, tests and observations.

2.

Applicability: Would the same thing happen in the real world?

Has the activity been tested in real world contexts (i.e. not in the lab)?

Why this is important: Lab tests might not be able to replicate the complexity of delivery in an education setting.

Does the report include an explicit and detailed description of the social and cultural context in which the research has taken place? This is what social scientists refer to as a "thick description".[9]

Why this is important: Thick descriptions help you to judge whether or not it could transfer to your context.

Was the 'sample' of participants in the research selected at random or on purpose? (see links on page 17)

Why this is important: It might be too difficult to study every participant for a piece of research, so researchers choose a selection – or 'sample'. If the sample is large, selecting who to study at random makes it more likely that what is true for the sample also applies to the whole population. Where the sample is small, selecting *at random* has a smaller chance of representing the whole. Instead, *deliberate selection* ensures that a wide range of personal attributes are represented. Sampling this way makes it easier to spot if the findings relate to the participants in your work.

3.

Neutrality: Do the results come from the data? How impartial is the research?

Reflexivity: Has the researcher acknowledged how their beliefs, values or preconceptions might have affected the research? Have they detailed the methods used to overcome them?

Why this is important: Unacknowledged biases may lead to important evidence being overlooked and false conclusions being made.

Transparency: Have the raw data been made available? Is there a description of how data have been collected and analysed?

Why this is important: You may not agree with someone else's interpretation of the data. Note: this isn't always possible, especially with large, qualitative data sets.

Standardisation: Are the tools/measures standardised or are they unique to this study?

Why this is important: Using widely-referenced, standardised tools – e.g. national exams; the Warwick-Edinburgh wellbeing scale – makes it easier to compare findings from different studies.

4.

Consistency: Do the same results come up repeatedly with the same/similar participants?

Have the results come from multiple tests?

Why this is important: Getting similar results when a test is repeated reduces the likelihood of a chance result. Participants might take a test more than once, or the activity and testing might have been conducted with different groups of participants and produced similar results. Results from one-off projects aren't invalid – but they aren't as persuasive as results that come up time and again.

Do people agree?

Why this is important: If the subjective judgments of multiple researchers, teachers and participants align the likelihood of bias is reduced.

Evidence Champions:
Use these checklists to help plan your own evaluations!

Key skill

Applying evidence when planning my work

Why do I need to be good at that?
Once you've found evidence that an approach has been shown either to work or not work, you can use it to shape your own activity. That might sound straightforward, but:

- What if the evidence challenges your beliefs or your professional experience? Do you change your mind and go with the evidence or do you trust your instincts?
- What if the activity that was the focus of the research and/or its participants are very different to how you work or who you work with? Do you assume that the findings can transfer to your work, do you ignore it?

How do I... apply evidence when planning my work?

1.

Use your judgement; don't jump to conclusions

Reports won't necessarily tell you whether an activity *causes* an outcome, they might just tell you if there is a *correlation* between engaging in activity and experiencing a particular outcome.

Take, for example, the results of a study in US schools:

"We find that cumulative credits in the arts are consistently associated with reduced dropout [from school] ...Our results provide evidence that the arts are a potential lever in education reform"[10] *[our emphasis])*

Sounds like getting arts credits stops kids dropping out, right? Well, not quite. Because this evidence is correlational, not causal, you could also present the findings to say:

Research shows that children who stay in school are more likely to get a credit in the arts.

Saying it like that makes it sound really different, doesn't it? Because the evidence is of a *correlation* it means that you shouldn't automatically infer that doing the arts *causes* you not to drop out of school, only that there appears to be a connection.

2.

Look for similarities between your work and the approach that has been studied

You can apply evidence from elsewhere more easily if it relates specifically to what you want to do. Try looking for similarities in one or more key areas:

Activity
What the teachers/practitioners do, what participants do and the artefacts that are produced through the process.

Outcomes
The things that change for the children and young people taking part.

Mechanisms of change
The 'active ingredients' in the activity, or what it is about the activity that leads to the outcomes.

E.g. a drama workshop (*activity*) may aim to improve children's literacy (*outcome*), but for it to work, the workshop must include: children developing sense of empathy with a character in a story, describing an incident to the class and writing it down (*mechanisms of change*).

3.

Join forces with colleagues who are interested in the same things

Practitioners, Cultural Organisations, Schools, Independent evaluators
Arts Council England supports local Cultural Education Partnerships that bring together arts and cultural organisations, schools and colleges and local authorities with the aim of improving cultural learning provision for children and young people. Partnerships are often characterised by a desire to identify shared outcomes to meet the needs of young people in their area.

Teachers
Join in with teacher-led networks like ResearchEd or the Chartered College of Teaching, which provide links to some of the best recent research and colleagues interested in impact and evidence-informed practice.

Sector Support Organisations
The RSA and several Arts Council Bridge Organisations are building a network of Evidence Champions. Ninety artists, educators, evaluators, cultural organisations and funders are developing their evidence-rich practice and helping spread the word about its value. They convene online and in regional hubs to support practitioners across England.

Funders
Paul Hamlyn Foundation work with education research organisation CUREE and grantees across a portfolio to build evidence together around a particular question, such as "how can learning in the arts be embedded in the curriculum?", a focus of the recent *Teacher Development Fund.*

Case study:
London Bubble's 'Speech Bubbles' project

Speech Bubbles is a small group drama intervention developed to give children's stories time, respect and an audience. It aims to generate 'self-confidence, self-expression and positive relationships'.[11]

The programme designers sourced evidence to help them understand how they might use drama and storytelling to improve children's wellbeing, confidence and communication. They looked at a range of research in different areas of education, child development and arts practice.

They sourced *evidence about specific component parts of their approach*, including an Open University evaluation of the storytelling technique that is central to Speech Bubbles. Researchers had found that the 'technique provided a motivating environment for the development of children's communication' and that it 'contributed to the children's sense of agency'.[12]

They also found *evidence that helped them understand more about the needs of the children they wanted to work with* and how they might identify the children who might benefit most from their approach. This included research indicating that 62 to 95 percent of children with behavioural difficulties have co-occurring moderate to severe language difficulties.[13]

A Public Health England report identifies good communication skills as a protective factor for children's mental health, and suggests poor mental health has a negative effect on, among other things, educational attainment and social relationships.[14]

Useful Links

- A short film explaining when to use *random* or *purposive* sampling: bit.ly/2FytP83
- Information about the Arts Council's *Cultural Education Partnerships*: bit.ly/2RRzVWU
- ResearchEd - a grass-roots, teacher-led organisation for research-informed practice: researched.org.uk
- Chartered College of Teaching – supporting teachers to work with the latest evidence and research: chartered.college
- The RSA's Cultural Learning Evidence Champions Network – the inspiration for this handbook: bit.ly/2QV8OFG
- Evaluation report on the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Teacher Development Fund: bit.ly/2BxxX5p

Lead:

Taking collective ownership of project evaluation

Evidence Champions make sure that everyone involved understands how an activity is expected to make a difference. Finding out through evaluation whether those expectations are realistic is a collective endeavour, never the sole responsibility of one or other stakeholder.

Act like an Evidence Champion

Key skills	Actions
Showing how my work is expected to make a difference to participants	▪ Plan your activity focused on how it responds to participant needs and the realistic difference you expect to make (*outcomes*). ▪ Explain how your activity plus the correct working environment can lead to the outcomes, i.e. build a 'theory of change' for your work.
Getting the scale and scope of an evaluation right.	▪ Be clear about why you are evaluating. ▪ Develop evaluation questions with everyone involved. ▪ Plan evaluations in line with the scale of: the activity, the (potential) significance of your findings and your budget. ▪ Be clear about what is to be evaluated and what will not be evaluated.
Engaging clearly, confidently and sensitively with evaluation participants and partners.	▪ Agree project outcomes with your partner school/cultural learning organisation. ▪ Be clear about what the evaluation processes are and how participants' information will be used and kept safe. ▪ Respect the needs of participants. ▪ Make sure that external evaluators get to know the activities fully.

Key skill

Showing how my work is expected to make a difference to participants

Why do I need to be good at that?
The arts and cultural learning sector is good at knowing who takes part and how accessible (or not) participation in the arts is for disadvantaged children, ethnic minority groups etc. Improving access is important, but if we're interested in improving the *effectiveness* of arts and cultural learning programmes, only having data about who took part won't tell us what kind of difference it has made.

To keep learning and improving, you'll need to think about how your work is expected to make a sustained difference to those who take part. It might be increasing their knowledge, improving skills or enhancing personal development. Being specific about the benefits, or 'outcomes', you're aiming for won't rule out the possibility of unexpected ones being achieved.

How do I... show how my work is expected to make a difference?

1.

Identify participants' needs: Start your planning focused on how your activity will respond to participant needs and the difference you can realistically expect to make ('outcomes'). You might be able to identify this from the existing research and from engaging with your stakeholders.

Does anyone need the arts? Whether or not anyone needs to engage in the arts and culture is a moot point. Since you will be working by using arts and culture anyway, it's worth thinking about other participant needs that activity in the arts might help to address.

2.

Describe how your approach will work (create a 'theory of change'): Most organisations working to make a difference to the lives of children and young people have their own theory about how what they do leads to the changes they want to see. Our friends at the Centre for Youth Impact say that if you don't have one, explaining your work to others can feel a little like this:

Explaining the difference between *magic* and why what you do is supposed to work is called a 'theory of change'. When you evaluate the impact of your activity, you are effectively testing your theory of change to find out if it was accurate.

Whether or not your theory of change ends up being accurate, the process of creating it can be very useful. It helps you, your colleagues, partners and participants to reflect on what you do and explain it to others.

What's in a theory of change?

Activities	+ Mechanisms of change	→ Outcomes	→ Aim
What you do and for whom, when you do it perfectly. No detail is too small.	What it is about your approach that makes the difference: what participants need to experience; what approaches practitioners need to take and the contextual factors you need to succeed.	The *values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviours* that your work develops amongst participants (and for which you and others will hold you accountable). This is the change that will result directly from what you do. It can be small and incremental.	Your ultimate ambition for change. This can be a big change: e.g. eradicate poverty, rid the world of inequality. This is a change that others may also be contributing to; you don't have to achieve it alone (or be held accountable for it). It's what drives you to do what you do.

Step by step: Create a theory of change

1.
Work together

Bring all relevant stakeholders together to workshop your theory of change.

2.
Aim

Define the ultimate aim(s) of your work and keep it/them at the forefront of your minds as you build the model. Different people might have different aims. That's OK: it won't stop the process working.

3.
Activities

- Work project by project. If you run lots of different activities, take them one at a time, don't try to do it all at once.
- List all the key activities that you deliver for participants in each project. Work through these chronologically so you don't forget any!
- Include details on who should/shouldn't take part.
- Be as specific as you can (the more detail the better).

4.
Mechanisms of change

List the things that make what you do 'work' for participants, e.g.

- Emotional effects or responses: what do participants need to feel?
- Relationships: do participants have to work in a particular kind of group? How should they relate to the practitioner?
- Environmental factors: is a classroom OK, or do you need a music studio with specific equipment?
- Regularity of attendance: do participants need to complete a course, or can they drop in and out?
- Facilitators' skills: what do they need to be able to do for the activity to work?

5.
Outcomes

- List the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviours that children and young people develop through your work.
- You will be accountable for achieving these so be realistic about what your work can achieve and what it can't:
  - Don't list outcomes you wouldn't want to be held responsible for.
  - Consider how much you think an outcome is likely to develop.
  - Make sure there is consensus about what the outcomes are.
- If there are lots of outcomes, think about which is/are the most important. It will help you focus your evaluation later.
- Make sure everyone agrees which outcomes you will hold yourselves accountable for.

6.
Check your assumptions

Search for evidence from elsewhere that can tell you more about:

- Whether your theory of change is likely to be accurate (see pages 10-17 on sourcing appropriate evidence).
- Where you might want to focus your evaluation (see page 27-29).

You might find it easier to do this on your own, once you have agreed your theory of change.

7.
Review and revisit

Return to your theory of change from time to time during the project and at its close. Amend it to make corrections and add detail.

Case study:
Tees Valley Music Service's 'First Thing Music' project

The theory of change diagram on the next page represents First Thing Music, one of the projects evaluated as part of the RSA and the Education Endowment Foundation's Cultural Learning Fund trials. You'll notice that they have labelled mechanisms of change differently. The diagram separates out "moderating factors" (contextual mechanisms of change) and "mediating mechanisms" (experiential mechanisms of change). Notice also how detailed these sections and the 'activity' sections are. The more detail that is specified at this stage, the easier it will be to know if the conditions for achieving impact have been achieved when the activity is delivered.

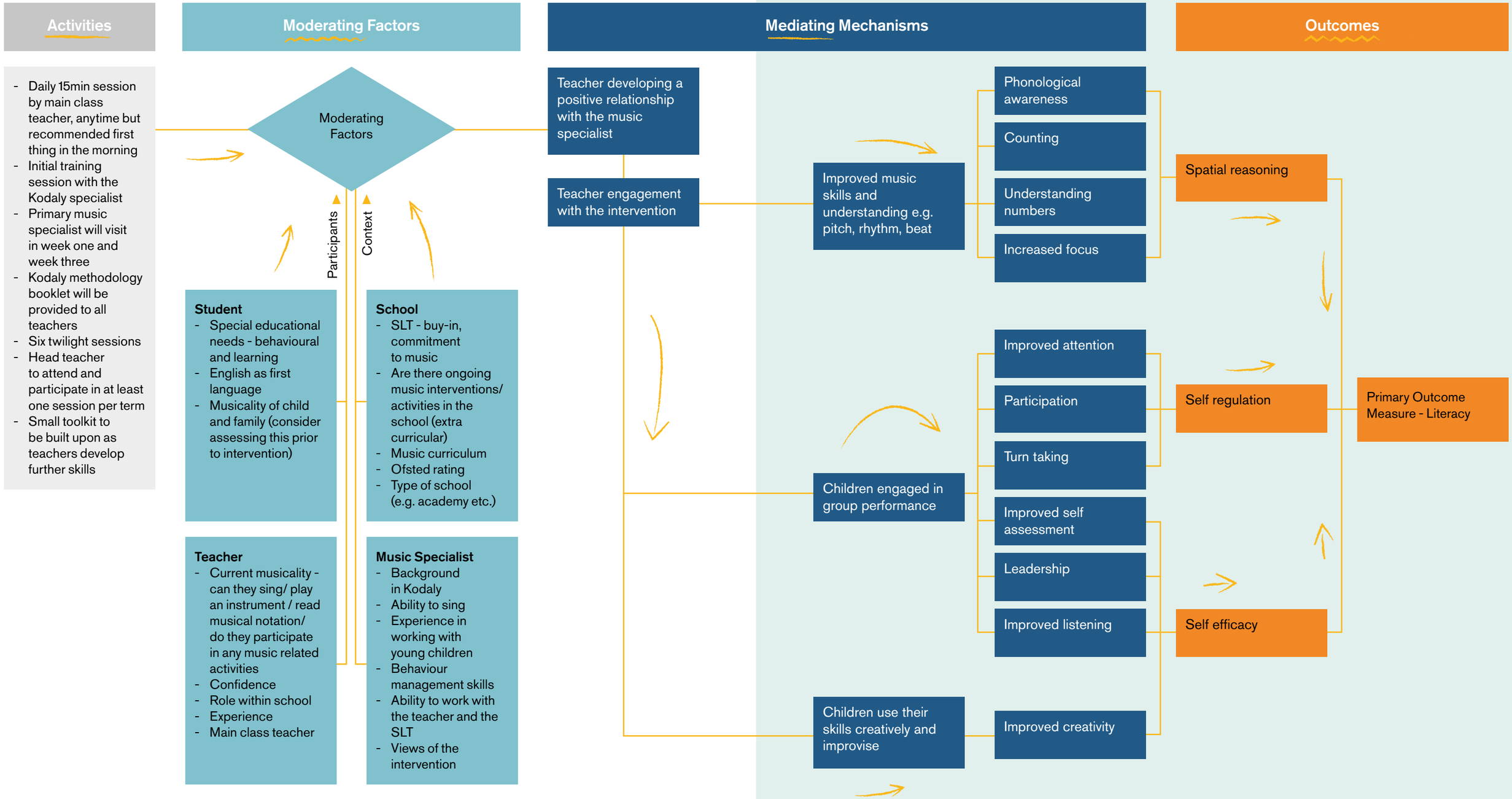
This theory of change provided a basis for the impact evaluation question for the trial:

Does First Thing Music improve reading attainment over the course of one school year for Year One pupils?

It also provided the basis for the process and implementation evaluation questions (for more on process evaluation see page 24):

1. What are the mechanisms that are taking place in the intervention and to what extent are they bringing about change?
2. To what extent does initial teacher confidence to deliver music lessons affect implementation, and how is the training adapted to support their needs?
3. What influences teachers' willingness to engage in music, and what music expertise do the teachers possess?
4. To what extent can the time be created for the intervention every day?
5. To what extent does the intervention differ from the music experience of those in the control group in class and around school?
6. To what extent does the intervention vary across schools, and does this affect implementation?

First Thing Music: Theory of change diagram



Key skill

Getting the scale and scope of my evaluation right

Why do I need to be good at that?
Trying to evaluate every possible element of your work all at once is difficult, time consuming and inevitably expensive. Fortunately, you don't have to do it all at once. Evidence Champions are decisive about what they want to learn from an evaluation; this is known as setting the appropriate 'scope'. It helps them identify the right approach, an appropriate scale of activity, and an appropriate budget. There's lots that practitioners can do themselves, but sometimes it's useful to invite an external evaluator in for support.

How do I... get the scale and scope of an evaluation right?

1.

Be clear about why you are evaluating: What do you (and your partners) want to know about your work? How will this evaluation help you to improve your effectiveness? There's lots of useful advice on setting useful evaluation questions online; see the links on page 25.

2.

Develop evaluation questions with everyone involved: Activity designers, delivery partners, funders, participants can all be involved to make sure that efforts are targeted for maximum effect.

3.

Distinguish 'process evaluation' and 'impact evaluation' questions:

- *Process evaluation* questions ask about how well your activity is being delivered: e.g. 'Have things gone to plan?'; 'Have we reached the people we hoped to reach?'; 'Have participants experienced the things we intended them to?'
- *Impact evaluation* questions ask what happens as a result of the activity: e.g. 'How much have participants learned?'; 'Has the wellbeing of participants increased?'

If you are trying to improve your effectiveness, the two types of question support each other: if you discover you've had an impact, but you don't know whether things went to plan, it will be harder to repeat your success.

4.

Plan a reasonable budget for your evaluation: Don't expect evaluation to happen without proper resource – whether that's your time or someone else's. What you want to know, how certain you want to be, how complex your activity is, and a host of other things will affect the cost of your evaluation. How much is reasonable varies with the significance of your result. Ask yourself how many people might be affected by what you find out? Follow the links on page 25 for more information on budgeting an evaluation.

5.

Know when to do it yourself, and when to employ an independent evaluator: Self-evaluation is good for estimating impact and making quick decisions about how to improve. However, it can be time consuming and the credibility of your findings is limited. An independent evaluator can provide more credible evidence of impact and objective insight into how and why projects are/ are not working effectively. However, costs may well be higher, so look to budget £300-£800 per day.

Key skill

Engaging clearly, confidently and sensitively with evaluation participants and partners

Why do I need to be good at that?
When we asked practitioners, schools and funders about how they worked with partners on impact evaluation, there were strong feelings that:

- Arts organisations didn't feel comfortable talking to independent evaluators.
- Schools didn't want to get involved with project evaluation.
- Funders were ambivalent about evaluating impact, sometimes just happy to hear good news stories and sometimes more interested in who took part, rather than in the difference that was made.
- Nobody took a lead on the evaluation until after the project had finished.

Evaluation works best as a collaborative exercise, where everyone knows exactly what they are doing and why. Going it alone can lead to confusion and barriers to collecting information that will enable an activity to be evaluated successfully. Evidence Champions need to feel able to speak frankly and with purpose about what everybody's role is.

How do I... engage clearly, confidently and sensitively with evaluation participants and partners?

1.

Involve everyone:

- Make sure that when you create your theory of change for your activity, you do it with your partner school/cultural learning organisation/grantees/ participants.
- Provide timely and clear communication about what everyone will be required to do and when.

Check out the conversation templates at the end of this Handbook for guidance on how to broach this difficult topic successfully.

2.

Be transparent:

- Explain to others why you are evaluating, what the processes are and how participants will be involved.
- External evaluators should spend time getting to know the activity, staff, artists and participants.

3.

Engage respectfully with evaluation participants

- Seek informed consent for participation and explain how you will use participant data, who else will be able to see it and how you will keep it safe. Avoid any misunderstanding about what you are collecting and why and be prepared to make sure that children are kept safe. There are links to useful guidance on conducting research and evaluation with children and young people below.
- Allow participants to opt out at any stage.
- Scope access requirements to make sure evaluation participants can take part.

Useful Links

- Better Evaluation has some useful guidance on setting evaluation questions: bit.ly/2FlrHdh
- The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has good advice on budgeting for evaluation: bit.ly/2TSii6C
- The British Education Research Association (BERA) has guidance on ethics for research in education (including evaluation): bit.ly/2tbF4vo
- The NSPCC has useful advice on keeping children safe when conducting research: bit.ly/2T768qN

Learn:

Collecting accurate evidence of what you have done, the difference you have made and how you might improve

Learning is about improving through evaluation: gathering data from your work, analysing and reflecting on it before making changes. Evidence Champions make sure that evaluation is useful to themselves and their collaborators, not only to stakeholders they are accountable to (funders, inspectors, governors, trustees or others).

Act like an Evidence Champion

Key skills	Actions
Planning evaluations that tell me about the difference my work makes to the people taking part.	▪ Go beyond monitoring who takes part and how often. Ask searching questions that test your theory about how you make a difference.
Collecting data about participants, activity and outcomes that can tell me about the difference my work makes.	▪ Collect both quantitative data (numbers, objective facts) and qualitative data (narrative, subjective experience) about participants, activities and outcomes. ▪ Use a range of simple data collection methods. Look for 'standardised' and 'validated' tools for collecting data.
Using the data I collect to give me an accurate picture of what happened and how much participants have benefitted.	▪ Make comparisons between what participants were like at the start and the end; between what happened to those who took part and those who didn't. ▪ Don't be afraid to ask for help with analysis (the process of determining what story your data tells you). Getting the most out of your data can be difficult.
Making conclusions that are backed up by evidence and avoid bias.	▪ Distinguish between facts, participant responses and your own interpretations. Start from a position of doubt: is the evidence convincing to you? ▪ Differentiate between claims of *correlation* (e.g. as the amount of music in the class increased, so did attainment) and claims of *causation* (e.g. my music project improved pupil attainment). ▪ Applying what you learn to the development of your projects to ensure that they are even more beneficial to participants in the future.

Key skill

Planning evaluations that tell me about the difference my work makes to the people taking part

Why do I need to be good at that?
Arts and cultural learning can lead to a range of outcomes. Some you won't have predicted, some won't happen for everyone. You shouldn't ignore these in your evaluation (and next time you are running your project they might even be more meaningful outcomes to evaluate), but keep your evaluation focused on the outcomes you had planned for in your theory of change. (see pages 18-21)

How do I... plan an evaluation to get evidence of the difference I have made to participants?

1.

Use your theory of change:

Only ever focus evaluation questions on the activities, mechanisms of change and outcomes included in the project's theory of change. There's lots of useful advice on setting useful evaluation questions online. See the links on page 33.

2.

Evaluate the process, not just the outcomes:

Distinguish *process evaluation questions* (i.e. what happens during the activity) from *impact evaluation questions* (i.e. what happens as a result of the activity). The two make helpful partners: if your *impact* evaluation indicates that you have made a difference, evaluating the process can help you understand how it has come about.

3.

Make a comparison with what might have happened anyway:

Lots of factors in addition to your activity will contribute to the outcome you are working towards. Your drawing project might improve children's manual dexterity, but so might their colouring books, guitar playing, knitting, etc. To know how much *you* are contributing, you need to compare your participants with other, similar children who aren't taking part. Some people worry about selecting children who are actively *not* going to take part, but you could always use a group you are going to work with in the future. See page 33 for links to cultural learning organisations who regularly use comparison groups in their evaluations.

4.

Be precise:

Evaluation plans should articulate precisely and succinctly what activities or outcomes are to be evaluated and what will not be evaluated.

Key skill

Collecting data about participants, activity and outcomes that can tell me about the difference my work makes

Why do I need to be good at that?
To understand the difference you are making, you will need different kinds of information, or 'data'. That includes data about who's taking part, how they engaged with your activity and what they thought about it as well as data that might tell you about the difference it has made.

There are two main categories of data:

1. **Quantitative data** can answer questions of who, what, where and how many? It can communicate facts clearly and simply.
2. **Qualitative data** can help you understand participants' experience in greater depth and provide insight into your mechanisms of change.

Underneath those two main headings, you should also think about different types of data that can help you evaluate better. The charity sector support organisation New Philanthropy Capital has a simple way of separating these out into five main types:[15]

Data type and what is it?	Why should I collect it?	What should I be doing?
User Data Information about who is taking part in your activities.	User data can tell you: - If you have reached the participants who you think can benefit from your activity. - If groups of people with similar characteristics benefit more than others.	Try to collect user data from everyone taking part, e.g. - Information about age, sex, income, ethnicity (this can also help you measure diversity and inclusion in your organisation). - Information about learning needs (are they on target; at an appropriate reading age; confident to speak in class). - Information about previous experiences.
Engagement Data Information about how well you continue to engage participants.	Engagement data can tell you: - If you've delivered what you have promised. - How regularly participants attend or return to your activities. - What kind of activity they engage in most often.	Collect engagement data as a regular part of your routine. Connecting it to user data will help you derive more insight from it. You can do that by using: - Registers of attendance. - Recording repeat visits.
Feedback Data What participants (and others) think and feel about your activity.	Feedback data can tell you: - If participants are experiencing what you hoped. - If participants have enjoyed taking part. - If staff think that things are going to plan. - What improvements or changes participants and staff might like to see. What we heard from practitioners: - Feedback data and outcomes data are often conflated, but relying on feedback to demonstrate that you have achieved an outcome is not particularly reliable. Participants might either not have noticed the difference it has made or overrate it.	Getting feedback from a wide range of participants, staff and stakeholders should be a regular part of your routine. You can collect it using: - Surveys, questionnaires, interviews etc. - Mentions on social media. - Conversations, management meetings, board meetings.
Outcomes Data The difference your activity has made to participants in the short term.	Outcomes data can tell you: - If your activity has made a difference to participants. - What aspect(s) of your work is/are making the difference.	Collecting outcomes data is likely only to happen occasionally. Collecting it can be done through a wide range of approaches, which will give you different levels of accuracy and reliability (see page 30).
Impact Data The difference your activity has made to participants in the long term.	Impact data can tell you: - If the outcomes you achieve have led to wider change in the lives of your participants.	Impact data will be collected through validated or standardised tests, usually by an independent evaluator. You might only collect this kind of data in exceptional circumstances.

How can I... collect data that will tell me about the difference I am making?

1.

Use data that already exists:

What do you or your activity partners already know about participants? Do you have data on age, gender, ethnicity, progress, attendance, behaviour and attainment of students? Ask what data your project partner(s) already collect and consider how they can be used in evaluation.

2.

Consider when you collect data as well as how you collect data:

Collecting data at multiple points in time will help you understand changes occurring over the course of your project and may help pinpoint elements of your project that are crucial (or indeed not at all important!) to bringing about change.

3.

Using surveys? Remember the following:

- Surveys are relatively cheap and easy to use but may not give you very rich or reliable data about your project.
- There may already be surveys that have been written and tested (in some cases by academics) that you can use. The EEF's *SPECTRUM* database is a useful source of validated tools to measure social, psychological and emotional change in children and young people (see links on page 33). Using validated surveys can save you time, improve the reliability of your results and make it easier to compare your results with those from elsewhere.
- If you choose to design your own, bear the following in mind:
  i. Ask participants to respond on a scale, e.g. of one to nine or from strongly agree to strongly disagree to get useful quantitative data.
  ii. Open questions give participants an opportunity to explain their response to a scale question or to give deeper insights into their experiences.
  iii. Creating versions of the survey for different stakeholder groups can provide more certainty about outcomes. E.g. if students' responses about how their confidence changed over the course of your activity match their teachers' responses, you can be more confident in your results.

4.

Using interviews and focus groups? Remember:

- Interviews and focus groups are mostly used to collect qualitative data, but structured interviews can provide quantitative data by asking each participant the same set of questions and having a fixed list of options (multiple choice or a scale).
- Keep questions *simple and easy to understand.* Test your questions with a couple of non-participating children or young people to ensure that language is appropriate.
- *Record interviews.* When listening back to them you can categorise participants' responses by giving key words, phrases or attitudes in their responses a 'code'. This will help make it easier to identify regularly occurring responses. Watch out: one hour of interviews can take between two and 10 hours to transcribe, depending on the quality of the recording and the number of participants!
- *Focus group composition.* You may decide that it is most important that the group roughly represents the diversity of children and young people you work with. You will also need to consider how they are likely to interact, to make sure that nothing impedes the conversation.
- *Focus group facilitation quality.* Running a focus group requires a skilled and experienced facilitator. You must provide sufficient structure to ensure that you gather the data needed, while allowing space for group members to lead the conversation in the directions they choose.

Key skill

Using the data I collect to give me an accurate picture of what happened and how much participants have benefitted

Why do I need to be good at that?
Turning 'raw' data into knowledge that you can apply to your future work, or share with others, is called analysis. Presenting data without proper analysis can be confusing or misleading.

How do I... use the data I collect to give me an accurate picture of what happened?

1.

Make comparisons:

- Compare participant data collected at the start (baseline) and endpoint of your activity to ascertain change over time. It's common to see evaluation reports based on data only collected at the end of a project, where participants have been asked about outcomes. If we don't know what participants were like at the beginning, how can we know if the answers at the end show a change?
- Compare your participants with children who are not participating. Because children experience many things that contribute to the outcomes you are working towards, you need an idea of what progress might have happened if they hadn't participated in your activity. A similar group of children - or *comparison group* - gives you an idea of what that might look like.

2.

Look for patterns or trends:

E.g. percentages, averages or how often the same answer was given in a survey.

3.

Don't be afraid to ask for help:

Extracting knowledge from data can be difficult, especially if you have large or complicated data sets. Organisations like DataKind and Pro Bono Economics (see links on page 33) can put you in touch with volunteers who help you analyse the data you collect. Have you got a corporate sponsor? They might have data analysts who could volunteer to help. Make sure you have asked participants for consent before sharing their information with third parties!

Key skill

Making conclusions that are backed up by evidence and avoid bias

Why do I need to be good at that?
To improve your activity based on knowledge of *what* has worked, rather than what was *expected* to work.

In our enthusiasm to champion the place of arts in education and in the heat of project delivery, it's tempting to take any indication that an activity has made a difference as being true. However, to claim that your activity contributes to outcomes, you need to make sure that your conclusions about the effectiveness of your work stem from the evidence and avoid any bias, conscious or unconscious, that might distort them.

Only making conclusions if they are backed up by evidence makes it more likely that you, and others, will learn from your evaluation. If you suspect you are making a difference to an outcome, but your data doesn't agree, don't despair. It could be that your theory of change was wrong, but it might also be that your evaluation approach isn't able to give you the evidence you need (see section on 'validated and appropriate tools' on page 14).

How do I... make conclusions that are backed up by evidence and avoid bias?

1.
Don't take things at face value:

Distinguish between *facts, participant* responses and your own *interpretation*. Start from a position of doubt: is the evidence convincing to you? Is there another plausible explanation?

2.
Take care when using 'creative' evidence:

Avoid presenting photos, video, diaries and participant-created artefacts as evidence in themselves. Effectively, they are 'raw' data that need to be analysed to provide evidence of change and which otherwise could be misleading.

Describe how this data has been interpreted and compare your interpretations with interviews with practitioners/participants/other experts. Be clear about when you are using this kind of data to promote your work and when you are using it to understand the difference you have made.

3.
Be modest:

- Noticed a difference? Resist the urge to claim it as your sole achievement. What else has been going on that might have contributed to any outcomes?
- Only noticed a small difference? That is fine. Making a difference is hard, so don't feel like you have to inflate the scale of your achievements.
- Noticed a *correlation* (e.g. as the amount of music in the class increased, so did attainment) but not sure about *causation* (e.g. my music project improved pupil attainment)? That is fine, too. If you regularly see a correlation, it could be promising evidence of a causal relationship, so use your report to argue for experimental research to investigate it.
- Not noticed any difference? That is disappointing, but still needs reporting. Do you have a theory about why you haven't been able to notice a difference? Answering the questions below could provide ideas for changes that might help you increase your impact next time:
  - Is it possible that the tools you used weren't the right ones to measure the difference you have made?
  - Was the activity delivered differently *this time* compared to previous occasions when you have made a difference? Think about your mechanisms of change: were they all in place as you had intended?

4.
Be prepared to draw challenging conclusions:

Consider whether you might need to:

- Alter existing activities or provide something altogether different.
- Reconsider project outcomes or the level of expectation for how much change it will deliver.
- Reconsider who should participate to ensure that you reach those who will benefit.

Useful Links

- Want to get your evaluation questions right? Try Better Evaluation's guidance: bit.ly/2SYlygI
- People United is a charity that explores how the arts can inspire kindness, community and social change. They regularly use comparison groups to evaluate the difference they make to participants. You can read their evaluation reports here: bit.ly/2TTHOby
- The EEF's SPECTRUM database has a wide range of validated tools that can help you measure a range of non-academic skills accurately: bit.ly/2TYpcHK
- DataKind and Pro Bono Economics both provide volunteers to help social change organisations use participant data to improve their effectiveness: datakind.org | probonoeconomics.com

Share:

Supporting colleagues and peers across the sector to improve

If we share our approaches to evaluation and the detail of what we learn from our work, we can keep improving the effectiveness of our work and enable more participants to benefit. We can also make it easier to align what we do with other colleagues.

Act like an Evidence Champion

Key skills	Actions
Supporting my organisation to be more evidence-rich.	▪ Make an organisational commitment to evidence-rich practice. ▪ Remind colleagues how evidence-rich practice can meet their priorities too. ▪ Regularly review the skills of everyone involved in evaluation.
Reporting on your work to support others' learning, not only to demonstrate where you have been successful.	▪ Plan out how you're going to report on your work and make it accessible. ▪ Get clarity on what's expected of everyone involved. ▪ Report the difficult stuff as well as the successes.
Encouraging others to be more evidence-rich.	▪ Explain your approach, not only your results. ▪ Join forces. ▪ Take every opportunity to bring up evidence-rich practice in your conversations with funders, arts organisations, schools, evaluators and practitioners.

Key skill

Supporting my organisation to be more evidence-rich

Why do I need to be good at that?
Having the support of everyone in your organisation will help you integrate evidence and evaluation more deeply. Being clear with colleagues about what your evaluation processes and expectations are will give them confidence that evaluation is worthwhile.

Remember: Evidence-rich practice is a collaborative endeavour. Your 'organisation' might be a collective one: a local Cultural Education Partnership, a professional association, a trade union.

How do I... support my organisation to be more evidence-rich?

1.

Make a commitment:

Develop and publish an organisational commitment to using evaluation to improve and provides clarity of roles, responsibilities and expectations. See our template commitment on page 40.

2.

Get colleagues on board:

Align your evaluation objectives with your organisational development/improvement plans. It can help colleagues to see how what you do helps them, especially if education or the arts are only a small part of what your organisation does.

3.

Review your skillset:

Engage in ongoing reflection on evaluation skills and areas for development for self, colleagues and partners. There's a whole world of (often free) online training, guidance and advice online – see the links on page 37.

Key skill

Reporting on your work to support others' learning, not only to demonstrate where you have been successful

Why do I need to be good at that?
Reports are a useful way to summarise what has been learnt from an evaluation and to communicate it to others. It's tempting to report what happened and what was successful, and to leave out the tricky bits. Sometimes (we imagine) that is what project stakeholders prefer to hear and sometimes it's hard to admit that we haven't achieved what we'd hoped.

However, only reporting successes means others can't learn from what you did, and you won't be able to demonstrate your commitment to learning and improving your own work. It might seem counterintuitive, but being open about what's been difficult and what you have learnt demonstrates to funders and others your commitment to better outcomes for children and young people.

How do I... report on my work to support others' learning?

1.
Think about who's reading it:

Plan out how to communicate the results of your evaluations, using language that stakeholders and non-experts will understand. Where can you publish or share your findings beyond your own website?

- Try connecting to subject/industry associations: ask to present your findings, ask them to share your research on their social media channels.
- Host your own public event: perhaps with your project delivery partners (in school or at your funder's offices), or with your Cultural Education Partnership. Try using online conferencing tools to bring in a wider audience.

2.
Be clear about expectations:

Funders, grantees and evaluators (internal or external) should ensure clarity of reporting expectations before a project begins. Everyone should agree to publish the report, whether or not the activity leads to positive impact.

3.
Be comprehensive:

Include in your reports:

- What you hoped to achieve.
- What you did.
- What you monitored.
- Whether you have had an impact and the evidence for that.
- What you have learnt.
- Any changes you will action, or that you recommend for partners or others working in this area.

4.
Include the numbers *and* the stories:

Report quantitative findings to explain your impact and qualitative findings to bring the story to life. Resist the temptation to exaggerate.

Key skill

Encouraging others to be more evidence-rich

Why do I need to be good at that?
Anyone who has ever approached impact evaluation knows that it can be complicated, confusing and hard work. It's much easier when we work together, but lots of practitioners, teachers and school leaders, evaluators and funders feel like they fall into habits that prevent evidence-rich practice. If arts organisations *don't* evaluate, schools often feel grateful for the 'data holiday' and don't pursue it. If arts organisations *want* to, they aren't always sure what data they can ask for from schools or how to commission an independent evaluator effectively. Funders too often hear unevidenced claims of impact and worry that they aren't getting the full picture from grantees. Becoming evidence-rich is about supporting one another.

How do I... encourage others to be more evidence-rich?

1.
Explain your approaches to evaluation:

Help others to learn from how you approached evaluation, not just what your findings were. This can help encourage others to use similar approaches that will make comparing outcomes easier.

2.
Join forces:

Become an active member of a professional association, Cultural Education Partnership, or other practitioner network. Be clear about how you want membership of the network to support your evidence-rich practice and ask for that support. There's a link to information about professional networks in arts and cultural learning below.

3.
Explain the benefits of evidence-rich practice:

Make public, in your reports and in your conversations with partners, funders, grantees, how evidence and evaluation have impacted on your strategic decisions and activity design.

4.
Have those difficult conversations:

Every activity is a new opportunity to demonstrate to project partners, funders, grantees and participants, your commitment to evidence-rich practice. Don't forget to use our conversation guides! (see page 42-48)

Useful Links

- Reviewing your skillset?
  - Inspiring Impact supports people who work for charities, social enterprises and funders to improve their activities and share what works: inspiringimpact.org
  - Advice and insight from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations: knowhow.ncvo.org.uk
- Looking for professional networks in the UK? The Cultural Learning Alliance has a comprehensive list: bit.ly/2FHinpT
- The Cultural Learning Evidence Champions Network aims to enable the development of knowledge and exchange of ideas to support and increase the use of evidence-rich practice. Its members are from across the cultural learning sector, with varying levels of expertise in evidence and evaluation drawn from its different stakeholder groups. To access videos and blogs that might help you on your 'evidence journey' or to find out how to get in touch with our Evidence Champions, visit: bit.ly/2QV8OFG

Go forth Evidence Champions!

How we made the handbook

Consultation and research

This handbook has been informed by feedback from cultural learning practitioners, collected through surveys, workshops, a literature review and interviews with expert practitioners:

- August and September 2017: survey of more than 100 cultural organisations working with schools about their evaluation priorities and practices.
- March 2018: a question in the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Teacher Omnibus survey asked about how schools work with arts organisations. 1,195 school leaders and teachers responded.
- February and March 2018: workshops across the country in partnership with seven Arts Council Bridge Organisations consulted representatives of the cultural learning sector on our proposed design of an Evidence Champions network. 120 arts practitioners, educators, researchers, funders and policymakers took part.[16]
- October 2018: eight workshops across the country launched the Evidence Champions Network in eight of the Arts Council Bridge Organisation regions. 90 members work across the cultural learning landscape.[17]
- A literature review and a series of expert practitioner interviews to uncover approaches that have supported a shift towards greater use of evidence in sectors including youthwork, international development, medicine and education.[18,19,20,21]
- We have tested our findings (and this Handbook) with the Learning About Culture Project Advisory Group, Research and Evaluation working group, the Communications and Engagement group and the Evidence Champions Network. Members are drawn from: cultural learning organisations, schools, funders and sector support organisations, evaluators and researchers and government department representatives. We would like to thank the members of these groups for their valuable contributions.

Our consultation and research revealed an appetite among arts and cultural learning practitioners to improve, but not quite so much certainty about how to get there. Rather than simply reporting what we found, we wanted to frame this as a guide that might support networks of practitioners and maverick changemakers to do their bit.

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Appendix 1

Template Evaluation Commitment for Cultural Learning

Making a commitment to meaningful evaluation can improve conversations about evidence-rich practice within your organisation. Your commitment should articulate how meaningful evaluation can support your whole organisation's priorities, developmental goals and sustainability. This template provides a starting point for your conversations with colleagues and for developing your organisation's commitment to evidence-rich practice.

Remember: evidence-rich practice is a collaborative endeavour. Your 'organisation' might be a collective one, e.g. a local Cultural Education Partnership, a professional association, a trade union.

Date approved:

Date for review:
(3yrs from approval)

About this document

This organisation is committed to understanding the difference we make to the lives to children taking part in our activities and to continual improvement of our work. The design of our activities and any claims we make claims about our impact are supported with evidence from evaluating our work. This document provides a framework to allow the organisation to evaluate proactively, meaningfully and collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders.

1. Why we evaluate

a. The purpose of evaluation is to:
   i. understand more about and improve our different activities.
   ii. ensure accountability to all our stakeholders.
b. So that we can use our evaluations to improve, they seek to understand both our *processes* (the activity we deliver) and *outcomes* (the difference our activity makes to participants).

2. Involving activity partners and other stakeholders in how we evaluate

a. All stakeholders involved in an activity will be encouraged to contribute to the development of an activity's *theory of change* and the design of its evaluation.
b. All stakeholders will be provided with timely and clear communication about the requirements of their involvement in the design or delivery of an evaluation.
c. We will comply enthusiastically with reasonable requests for involvement in evaluations led by our activity partners.

3. Improving our capacity to evaluate effectively

a. We ensure that trustees or governors, senior management, other staff and freelance practitioners understand and support the principles of Evidence-Rich Practice and the role of evaluation in improving effectiveness.
b. Staff roles and responsibilities for evaluation are specified in job descriptions, personal development plans and in relation to individual evaluations.
c. Staff will be trained in evaluation approaches and methods appropriate to their roles, e.g.
   i. Programme managers must ensure that appropriate evaluations are conducted for each of their programmes
   ii. Programme staff and freelance practitioners are responsible for participating actively in integrating evaluation and programme activities.

4. Managing evaluation activity

a. All programmes of activity will conduct evaluations and report impact annually.
b. Sufficient and ringfenced financial and human resources will be allocated to evaluation. The cost should be commensurate with the scope and scale of the evaluation, but approximately 3% -5% of total costs for the activity.
c. A realistic timeline for evaluations, scheduling key milestones and including contingency for unexpected delays will be agreed between all stakeholders.
d. Staff and freelance practitioner activity schedules will incorporate sufficient time to accomplish evaluation activities.

5. Designing and delivering evaluation

a. Where possible, evaluation designs will include qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.
b. When selecting methods for data collection, we consider the following:
   i. Reliability and validity
   ii. Appropriateness to what is being evaluated
   iii. Accessibility for participants
   iv. Cost.
c. Evaluations will follow the NSPCC's guidance for safeguarding children, available at: learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1504/research-ethics-committee-guidance-applicants.pdf
d. Explain to participants/their carers/ grantees why you are asking for data, what the processes are and how the information they provide will be used.
e. Evaluation data will be stored securely, in line with current legal requirements (e.g. GDPR).

6. Learning from and sharing insights derived from evaluation

a. Every evaluation design will include a written plan for how results will be shared with stakeholders, peers and the public as well as for how we expect to use them to improve.
b. Every evaluation report will include:
   i. *Expected outcomes*: what we and/or our partners hoped to achieve by delivering the activity
   ii. *Activity*: what work was delivered
   iii. *Evaluation design*: data that was collected; what was monitored/ measured and how
   iv. *Outcomes*: the difference that the activity has made to participants
   v. *Learning*: what has been learnt from the evaluation and how it may be used to improve practice; how future evaluation of the activity might be used improve understanding further.
c. Whether evaluation has been conducted internally or by an independent evaluator, reports will follow the principles of:
   i. *Credibility*: presenting logical conclusions based in evidence
   ii. *Honesty*: providing the full story
   iii. *Integrity*: acknowledging possible biases
   iv. *Utility*: emphasising learning for our organisation, activity partners and the wider sector.
d. In addition, when evaluation is conducted by an independent evaluator, we commit to the principles of:
   i. *Independence*: that the evaluator will be free from any pressures exerted by stakeholders when making decisions relating to the evaluation
   ii. *Impartiality*: that the evaluator will maintain an objective view.

7. Reviewing our approach to evaluation

a. This evaluation commitment will be reviewed at least every three years.
b. The quality of our evaluations and the extent to which we have learnt from them will be reviewed at least every three years, with external oversight where practical

Appendix 2

How do I… raise the topic of evaluation?

Having conversations about evaluation can feel awkward, not least if you're a novice, but it's always much better to discuss it than not to. Evaluation should help you understand your work better and keep improving. Lots of people working in arts and cultural education – arts organisations, schools, funders and independent evaluators - have told us that they find it hard to discuss evaluation with their collaborators. It often means that conversations don't happen at all, leading to crossed wires and unsatisfactory evaluations.

Who's Talking? Schools & cultural learning organisations/ independent artist practitioners

Some cultural learning activities with schools are well-established programmes, with clear and well-evidenced theories of change. Other times, the activity is new, untested and entirely bespoke. Either way, it's important that you discuss the difference you expect your work together to make for participants and how you will go about assessing it. Depending on how new, how well tested and how bespoke the activity is, the questions below might be answered best by the school, the cultural learning organisation or by you both together.

Many schools work with independent artists directly, rather than via an organisation responsible for managing the programme. If that applies to you, this template can also inform your conversations about evaluation.

Before a project begins

Talk about project design:

1. How will the activity respond to the needs of the students in this school?
2. What difference is the activity expected to make for students and/or teachers ('outcomes')?
3. What makes us think that the activity will lead to these outcomes (i.e. existing evidence)?
4. What will students miss out on by taking part in the project?
5. What will the school and the cultural learning organisation put in place to make sure the project can work as intended ('mechanisms of change')?

Talk about how the evaluation will happen:

1. What do we want to learn from the evaluation? Can we align these objectives with the school's development plans?
2. Why do we need to collect participant data? What data will be collected, how and by whom? How will it be analysed and by whom? What existing data can be used?
3. How will data collection costs be met?
4. How and when will requirements and timing of any data collection be communicated?
5. How can participants opt-out if they want to?

When the project is underway

Evaluation reporting:

1. How will we share the results of the evaluation, and what tone do we want to strike?
2. Commit to sharing findings, even if the expected outcomes have not been achieved.
3. Agree to report on what we hoped to achieve; what we did; what we monitored; any impact observed and anything we learnt.

Who's talking?
Cultural learning organisations & independent evaluators

Cultural learning organisations: Thinking about commissioning an independent evaluator?

Evaluators: Working with a cultural learning organisation, perhaps for the first time?

Lots of cultural learning organisations and evaluators have told us that they struggle to get the most out of working together. Often, cultural learning organisations aren't sure what to ask for or how to ask for it. Based on our evidence-rich practice guidelines, here's our advice for ensuring clear expectations and meaningful results.

When you're commissioning an independent evaluator...

Invitations-to-tender should detail:

- The activity being evaluated
- What you want to learn through the evaluation
- Required evaluator credentials: e.g. knowledge of particular approaches; DBS check
- Who will read the report, what they want to know, how you intend to reach them
- Timescale for selection
- Schedule of milestones: agreeing evaluation design, data collection and reporting
- Maximum budget

When you've selected an evaluator you want to work with...

Briefs should detail:

- What's working well/less well in the activity
- How you currently collect participant and engagement data
- How you expect the evaluator to get to know the activity, staff, artists and participants
- How you expect participants to be involved in the evaluation
- How you will expect to learn from and share the results

Both parties should work together to make sure that the evaluation is...

- Independent
- Impartial
- Credible
- Honest
- Useful

Help each other to achieve this by:

1. Creating a shared understanding of the project and how the evaluation will be delivered

a. Ensure the evaluator gets to know the activity, staff, artist practitioners and participants.

b. Ensure that both parties are clear about what is in and out of scope of the evaluation.

c. Agree a realistic timeline for the evaluation, scheduling key milestones and including contingency for unexpected delays.

2. Planning how to involve stakeholders in designing the evaluation

a. Invite stakeholders to contribute to the design of evaluation objectives, approaches, reporting and dissemination.

b. Align evaluation objectives with stakeholders' organisational development/improvement plans.

c. Provide stakeholders with timely and clear communication about the requirements and timing of any data collection.

3. Ensure that the data that underpins the evaluation is as good as it can be

a. Arrange for the evaluator to spend sufficient time observing activities to be able to understand them and the contexts in which they are delivered.

b. Agree how the evaluator will use different data sources to get more reliable information about the same activity/outcome.

c. For impact evaluation agree how a baseline will be established, against which impact will be assessed and discuss the possibility of establishing a comparison group of non-participants.

d. Evaluators should explain the rationale and limitations of the chosen approach to sampling.

4. Support the cultural learning organisation's approach to self-evaluation

a. Evaluators should explain why any validated instruments for measuring outcomes have been selected and how they have been used.

b. Evaluators should support artist practitioners and/or cultural learning managers to use structured observation.

5. Commit to transparency

a. Agree to report on what the activity hoped to achieve; what happened; what was monitored; any impact observed and anything that can be learnt.

b. Agree to share reports with stakeholders and to make them publicly available, whether or not findings reveal positive impact.

c. Evaluators should acknowledge any potential bias.

Who's talking?
Grantee & funder

Grantees and funders should approach their conversations about evaluation mindful that evidence-rich practice is a collective endeavour. Different funders' requirements will have different standards for evaluation, but cultural learning organisations' commitment to careful analysis, accurate reporting and sharing their learning make evaluation meaningful for both parties.

Funding for children's participation in the arts isn't always connected to learning and developmental outcomes. The following guidance relates to cultural learning activity, in particular (but not limited to) that which takes place in schools, where the focus of funder, grantee and beneficiary is on students' learning and development.

Application processes

Conversations about evaluation often take place via formal application, rather than face to face. Both funders and grant applicants can use the application process to demonstrate their commitment to evidence-rich practice by:

1. Declaring your interest in understanding how children's learning and developmental outcomes are improved through the proposed activity/grant-making.

2. Including (grant applicants) or requiring (funders):

a. A description of why the activity is expected to make a difference. For new projects, this might come from wider research evidence. For existing projects, this could include a theory of change for the activity, developed with stakeholder insight, and (for existing programmes) evidence from previous delivery cycles that the programme contributes towards participant outcomes.

b. An evaluation plan that goes beyond using participation data (i.e. who/how many people took part) to demonstrate impact.

c. A ringfenced and budget for evaluation that realistically reflects the costs required for conducting a meaningful evaluation.

3. Being modest about the potential for impact:

a. Funders: encourage applicants to be specific about the outcomes they expect to contribute to and to be reasonable in their expectations for impact.

b. Applicants: be precise about how much progress towards an outcome you expect to be able to achieve and the basis for your expectations (e.g. research evidence, your own data). Be confident about the value and challenges of trying new approaches and of making incremental steps towards your goal.

When agreeing the terms of your relationship:

1. Discuss how the skills and experience of both funder and grantee can be used to support each other to become more evidence-rich organisations. Where possible, funders can offer support for grantees to share and develop Evidence-Rich Practice together.
2. Discuss how the approach to evaluation of the funded programme will support learning for funder, grantee and beneficiaries. Remember that different objectives and priorities can co-exist but should be aligned.
3. Create a realistic timeline for the evaluation, scheduling key milestones and including contingency for unexpected delays.
4. Discuss how funder and grantee will:
    a. Decide on appropriate evaluation approaches, methods and tools, including whether you will use an independent evaluator.
    b. Provide timely and clear communication about the requirements and timing of any data collection and reporting.
    c. Maintain ongoing dialogue about the progress of projects against plans, being clear that deviations are not necessarily a threat to continuity of funding.
5. Agree how and where the results of the evaluation will be reported, committing to transparency and to including the following in the report:
    a. What the programme hoped to achieve.
    b. What activity was delivered.
    c. What the evaluation questions were.
    d. What elements of the programme (e.g. users, engagement, feedback, outcomes) were monitored and how you selected your sample for evaluation.
    e. Whether the programme has had an impact, describing how your data and analysis provide evidence for any claims.
    f. What has been learnt.
    g. Any changes to the programme that will be made and recommendations for partners or others working in this area.
6. Agree that the purpose of the evaluation is to learn and improve and that a result showing positive impact cannot be guaranteed.

Who's Talking?

Artist practitioners & cultural learning organisations

Artist practitioners can play an invaluable role in collecting information about how students engage with activities and how they may be benefitting from participation. Engaging them effectively in evaluation can enhance the learning that both organisation and practitioner derive from it.
Artist practitioners should be clear about their responsibilities and participation in evaluation should be recognised as part of their work, not incidental to it.

When introducing a project or activity, make sure that you are both clear about:

1. How participants are expected to benefit ('outcomes').
2. Whether there are any expected benefits for practitioners.
3. How the activity is supposed to make a difference, and who has responsibility for ensuring that those 'mechanisms of change' are present in the activity (practitioner, cultural learning organisation, school, etc.).

At the start of any work together:

1. Discuss the evaluation experiences of both the practitioner and the arts organisation.
2. Identify any areas of shared understanding and opportunities to learn from each other.

When introducing a project evaluation, make sure that you are both clear about:

1. What the cultural learning organisation, school and funder want to learn from the evaluation.
2. What will be evaluated and what will not be evaluated.
3. What the practitioner's role in the evaluation will be:

a. What kinds of data they must collect, how and when they will collect it and whether the cultural learning organisation needs to provide the artist practitioner with training to do that effectively

b. How they are expected to reflect with colleagues (other practitioners, teachers etc.) on the activities and the difference they are making and if that needs to be captured
c. How much time practitioners are expected to spend on evaluation activities and how they will be compensated for it
4. Whether the practitioner will be observed, by whom and how that data will be used.
5. Programme managers and practitioners should review their evaluation approaches regularly, together.

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