



SHINE's Approach to Evidence and Impact

Our mission is to raise the attainment of children from low income homes. We do this by identifying, funding and supporting teachers and schools with innovative solutions to educational challenges. We invest in early stage ideas and then work closely with grantees to understand their impact and scale-up the most effective approaches. SHINE values a hands-on, partnership approach with our grantees. We provide support in impact measurement, helping our grantees to progress through the stages of an evidence journey.

SHINE's Principles of evaluation

Working in partnership

- SHINE wishes to work in partnership with the teachers and schools we fund. In addition to the funding we provide, we aim to support our grantees in managing their impact through advice, training or other capacity-building support or through funding for external evaluation costs.
- We are clear at the application stage about our expectations around evaluation. While SHINE has developed our own approach to evidence and impact, we are also clear that our grantees are leading the evaluation of their own projects and we respect their professional judgement. We hope, however, that by working in partnership we can achieve greater outcomes for children from low income families.
- Where a funded school or organisation has commissioned an external evaluation of a project, SHINE is prepared to work closely and appropriately with the external evaluator.

Importance of Learning

- In supporting early stage ideas, we want to work closely with grantees to understand their impact and test out routes to scale for most effective approaches. We therefore want to build in resources to ensure learning and reflection happens effectively, whether that is building in feedback loops to make practical improvements and real-time adjustments or about using evaluation data to make more strategic changes.
- We evaluate our own grant-making practices through seeking regular feedback from applicants and grantees and commit to adjusting our practices based on feedback.
- Our approach to evidence is based on the notion that learning about what doesn't work and why is as valuable and important as celebrating success

Realistic and proportionate evaluation

- Our approach to evaluating grants focuses not just on what outcomes are produced from interventions, but also how these outcomes are produced and the contextual factors that affect these outcomes. We feel this approach suits the kinds of projects SHINE funds: new or pilot projects or programmes and initiatives looking to scale.¹
- SHINE’s expectations around evaluation are in keeping with the size of the grant, the capacity of the grantee and the stage of growth of the innovation.
- For early stage ideas, we will support grantees to collect data to help them have a sense of whether intended outcomes are being met, however SHINE and the grantee will be comfortable with question of attribution being unproven at this point in their evidence journey. Ideally, a comparison group will be tracked simultaneously to analyse the difference made to participants by the project.
- As the innovation develops further, SHINE and the grantee will increase expectations around the quality of data and the level of analysis – see the diagram below, which draws on NESTA’s standards of evidence².

Stage of idea (funding per year – these are indicative amounts)	Quality of evidence in evaluation of grant
Very early stage idea, initial small grant (c. £5K)	Grantee can clearly articulate a theory for how their project will work in different settings to achieve its anticipated outcomes.
Early stage idea, fairly small grant (c. £10-20K)	Grantee collects data which shows positive change in relation to planned outcomes, but they cannot prove this was as a result of their project (attribution).
Idea has been piloted in at least one setting and is on its second or third grant (c. £20-40K)	By using a control or comparison group, grantee can begin to show that change is a result of their project. Data supports underlying theory of change for how and why change happens.
Idea is well developed and started to be replicated in other settings – second or third grant (c. £40-100K)	The above findings are confirmed by least one external evaluation. The evaluation shows not only that change has occurred, but also that how these changes came about and the contextual factors that affect these changes.
Idea is well established in several different settings (£100K plus)	External evaluations in more than one setting show how positive change can be achieved and replicated in different settings.

¹ For a good introduction to realist evaluation see: <https://www.odi.org/publications/8716-realist-impact-evaluation-introduction> or Pawson R. and Tilly, N. (1997), Realistic Evaluation. London, Sage.

² [Puttick, R. and Ludlow J. \(2012\), “Standards of Evidence for Impact Investing”, London, NESTA](#)

Starting the evaluation journey with SHINE

One member of SHINE's grants team is appointed as the nominated lead contact for each funded project.

At the start of a grant, all SHINE grantees will be provided with a Theory of Change handbook and invited to attend a Theory of Change workshop, where they will develop or refine their overall theory for the change they want to see as a result of their project and start thinking about how they will know if that change is happening.

We are interested in supporting grantees to explore the underlying theory of how their project will work in different settings to achieve its anticipated outcomes: what needs to be in place for the project to work well, what are the contextual factors which can influence this positively and negatively, and what are the outcomes, both intended and unintended?

Further support will be provided to grantees following the Theory of Change workshop including:

- Telephone support on further development and refinement of the theory of change for the programme.
- Workshops and peer support on evidencing impact.
- Follow-up communication to ensure that SHINE and the grantee are clear how project will be evaluated, bearing in mind any evaluation frameworks that the grantee already has in place, and how duplication can be avoided;
- Discussion of any difficulties arising as the project progresses, and exploring how SHINE or our networks can be of support.

Reporting to SHINE

Taking inspiration from [NPC's Ideal Evidence journey](#), SHINE subscribes to the view that monitoring is routine and evaluation is occasional.

We ask grantees to send us a brief update in January and April focusing on: progress against agreed key milestones or key mechanisms (referring to their Theory of Change), such as numbers of students on roll or numbers attending if outside of the school day. In addition, grantees are asked to update us on any particular or unexpected challenges or successes relating either to the project or the funded organisation.

At the end of the academic year, grantees will provide a narrative report focused on evaluation against their theory of change.

We will also require some quantitative data:

- Contextual and demographic data (number of students and schools, age, disadvantage)
- Attendance data
- Overall outcomes data relating to attainment if required as part of the project's theory of change (this may include comparisons to the baseline assessment data, national averages or other cohorts)
- Financial report: each year, the grantee will submit a simple financial report showing actuals against budgeted income and expenditure (referring back to the original proposal), explaining any variances over 10%. If the grantee produces audited annual accounts, these will also be reviewed annually.

Grantees (particularly those grants over £15K) will have a call or meeting with their main contact to discuss the report and look at revisiting and refining their theory of change as a result of these findings, with external support where needed.