



SHINE's Approach to Evidence and Impact

SHINE's vision is that there are no barriers to learning for children from low-income backgrounds in the North of England. We achieve this by developing and funding innovative and sustainable programmes that work to improve educational outcomes for children living in areas of deprivation in the North of England.

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 will be 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 organisation or school 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 will focus 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.
- As the innovation develops further, SHINE and the grantee will increase expectations around the quality of data and the level of analysis. A comparison group should be used to analyse the difference made to participants by the project at an appropriate stage of development.
- The diagram below draws on NESTA's standards of evidence and provides an indication of the level of evaluation expected at each grant stage ².

Stage of idea (funding per year – these are indicative amounts)	Quality of evidence
Very early stage idea, initial small grant	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	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 starting to be shared more widely.	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 several other settings.	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	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 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?

A meeting or call will be set up after the Theory of Change workshop to:

- Discuss any follow up needed from the Theory of Change workshop.
- Ensure that SHINE and the organisation 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; and
- Discuss any difficulties arising as project development starts, again exploring whether SHINE can be of support in any way.

Reporting to SHINE

We ask grantees to send us a brief update in February 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 will 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 and the evaluation parameters agreed at the start of the academic year.

We will also require some quantitative data:

- Contextual and demographic data (e.g. schools, students, parents, teachers depending on your project focus)
- Attendance and engagement data
- 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.