

EPRA Media Literacy Taskforce

Top tips for evaluating your media literacy projects

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Most NRAs have undertaken work in media literacy, either on a statutory basis, or by association and partnership with relevant organisations in their own country. Media literacy initiatives can take many forms and multiple aspects. Some are small and targeted at a particular aspect of media literacy (e.g. digital skills or news literacy) or at a particular population (e.g. children or young people). Others are wider-ranging and involve multiple stakeholders across a range of sectors.

Whatever the context or the scale of the media literacy initiative or event, it is useful to evaluate it. Evaluation serves a number of purposes. For example, it can outline whether the resources put in the project (either people, financial, timelines, scope, etc.) were adequate. Additionally, evaluation will help establish how these resources contributed or hindered the delivery of the project. Evaluation helps answer simple but key questions such as 'What worked well, what didn't work so well and why, what would we do differently next time?'

This paper contains two sections. Section 1 describes the Kirkpatrick Four-Level Evaluation model which we have found useful in trying to design an evaluation framework for our media literacy initiatives in Ireland.

Section 2 lists a number of Top Tips for evaluation.

Section 1: The Kirkpatrick Evaluation model

There are plenty of evaluation frameworks in existence, and all of them might play a useful role in your event or initiative. However, learning and development specialists, corporate trainers, instructional designers and performance consultants routinely invoke [Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model](#) as the go-to metric for evaluation purposes. While this model was primarily designed for learning and development initiatives, its simple and tiered approach to evaluation makes it a useful tool for evaluation in many other contexts, including media literacy ones.

The Kirkpatrick model is extensively used in learning and development settings, and it is a useful framework to consider evaluating media literacy initiatives, as it recommends a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to assess the event or initiative. As an example, all evaluation methods that have been used for Media Literacy Ireland are based (sometimes loosely!) on the Kirkpatrick model and this paper outlines how the four levels of the Kirkpatrick model may be adapted for use in a media literacy context. The four levels are called Reaction, Learning, Behaviour and Results and I give some further details about each level below.

Level 1: Reaction

The first level measures how participants react to the initiative or event. Obviously, we all want participants to feel theirs was an engaging and relevant experience, and ideally that it can be brought back into their workplace. A quick survey that features a range of questions including open-ended questions is useful here.

As an example, the following questions are a sample of a survey used by Media Literacy Ireland for one of their large network event. Questions to participants there included:

- How would you rate this event?
 - Excellent
 - Very Good
 - Good
 - Fair
 - Poor
- How would you rate the content and the speakers?
 - Excellent
 - Very Good
 - Good
 - Fair
 - Poor
- Which of the following elements did you find most interesting / useful / inspiring?
 - List various elements of the events
- How well organised was this event?
 - Extremely organised
 - Very well
 - Well
 - Not so organised
 - Not at all
- How would you rate the venue?
 - Excellent
 - Very Good
 - Good
 - Fair
 - Poor

The key takeaway here is that gauging participants' reaction is a useful first step for evaluating the success of your initiative. But it is only a first step, and additional metrics should be incorporated in order to provide a more robust evaluation strategy.

The Reaction survey should ideally be collected on the day or very shortly after the event itself. What you are looking for here are people's immediate reactions and feelings to what they have just seen or participated in.

Level 2: Learning, Thinking, Reflecting

The second level measures more deeply participants' thoughts and views after the event. It could be new knowledge, or new skills. In media literacy terms, it is also likely to be new thinking and reflecting. Tracking these is important, because it provides useful information and guidance to improve future events.

Going back to participants via a survey is a useful and effective way of gathering this information. Questions asked here are more open-ended than in Level 1, and tend to ask of participants a deeper level of thinking and reflecting.

Such questions could include the following:

- What would you change about the event you attended/initiative you participated in?
- Have you any questions, queries or concerns that you would like to share?

Of course, other methods of evaluation may work well here too. For example, if time and resources permit, a focus group exercise could be of great value, or a small targeted consultation with a particular group or a wider sample of participants. The method is up to you and your resources!

Level 3: Behaviour

In learning and development, in the third level, L&D specialists will examine how the learner applies the knowledge, skills and attitudes toward on-the-job performance. This is always a challenge for L&D because behavioural changes take time and generally require observations from many people (e.g. manager!) and not just the participants.

In media literacy, this level of evaluation is likely to be even more complex to undertake. However, as an NRA involved in media literacy though, you may be able to include observational elements over time. For example, you might be able to see that a reluctant stakeholder/group of stakeholders who has complained or engaged negatively now changes their behaviour and becomes a champion of the media literacy initiative he/she was involved in (that's the ideal scenario!). You might also see more complaints, or more questions about a particular initiative. In evaluation terms, complaints are good (!) as they are an indication that people understand better and are more empowered to raise questions and issues.

Level 4: Results

Level 4 is the final Kirkpatrick level of evaluation. In learning and development, this final level measures the extent to which the training achieved key business goal (e.g. improving customer service calls, decreasing compliance violations, etc.).

As applied to media literacy, results can only be assessed provided the desired impact of the media literacy initiative was clearly articulated at the start. It is important for the media literacy initiative or event to inscribe itself into a clear framework of reference. In Ireland, the BAI Media Literacy Policy provides this framework, and the work of Media Literacy Ireland should be clearly linked back to the provisions of the policy. For us, it is too soon to see whether we have the impact we outlined in our Policy, but the work is nevertheless ongoing.

Section 2: Top Tips for Evaluation

Top Tip 1: Be Selective and Stay Realistic

Media Literacy is a wide topic and a moveable one. It is unlikely that you will be able to capture everything about everything. Rather think about what is realistic and achievable with the resources you have. This might mean you can only select one thing to explore in depth (e.g. the growth of your network, or the attendance at your events). That's fine, then do that.

Top Tip 2: Know what you want your initiative to do

Always think about the desired impact of your media literacy initiative. Aim for your evaluation to answer these questions:

- What happened that wouldn't otherwise have happened?

- What difference did it make – to us and to our participants, partners or colleagues?
- What did we learn from this?
- What do we intend to do next?

Top Tip 3: Use a mix of techniques for evaluation

As discussed above, a wide range of techniques enables you to gather a large amount of information. For example, surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, targeted consultation can all be used and should include quantitative and qualitative information. Quantitative methods lead to facts and figures; qualitative methods capture experiences and personal impacts. Don't forget to use open and closed questions. Closed questions allow you to create statistics to show particular patterns of what's happening. Open questions mean people can say what's really important to them. Mixing these allow you to cross-reference your findings so that you can develop a clearer understanding of what is happening.

Top Tip 4: Analyse your results and apply this new knowledge

Now that you have your results, you should have some quantitative information (for example on the number of attendees), and some qualitative information too (for example, some useful feedback on what people would like you to do next). Use this! It is golden information and will allow you to tailor your initiatives to the needs and expectations of your stakeholders. If you do this, you should normally see some positive results (for example, a higher number of attendees, valuable comments, etc.).

Analyse the information you have. Statistics and conclusions are just the start, keep going until you know: *'why is that important? What does it show or prove?'*

Tell people what you found out and the lessons you have learned. Consider how it will inform future plans and strategies going forward. Reflect on how you might do things differently next time.