

Evaluating Media Literacy with a Theory of Change

A guide to using a theory of change
to design and evaluate media literacy
projects and activities.



Introduction 01

How to use this
Theory of Change 02

Theory of Change 03

04

09



Table of Contents

Introduction

This theory of change for media literacy is produced by CEMP, the [Centre for Excellence in Media Practice](#), a research centre specialising in media literacy and media education at Bournemouth University. It has been produced for the [DCMS Media Literacy Programme](#). The [Media and Information Literacy Alliance \(MILA\)](#) acted as critical friends to CEMP for this project, and we also worked with Ofcom and the Media Education Association as key partners.

This theory of change is primarily designed for the evaluation of media literacy research, projects, interventions and educational activities. It can also be used alongside Ofcom's [Making Sense of Media Evaluation toolkit](#) to design more impactful media literacy research, projects and educational activities. The Ofcom resources help with planning a media literacy intervention and they provide a theory of change template at project level, to help plan the logistics, identify the needs of the people involved, the media literacy activities a project will deliver

and the intended outcomes of the project. The CEMP resource helps to locate a project within a broader theory of change for media literacy in society, to evaluate the change a media literacy intervention has made in four related areas – access, awareness, capability and consequences – and / or to plan a project with regard to these broader change objectives. It is also aligned with MILA's five lifelong media literacy aspirations, for media literate people to be informed; empowered; healthy; socially conscious and connected.

Using this theory of change helps us to move beyond seeing media literacy as a solution in itself, so we can evaluate (and design) media literacy interventions with a better focus on specific, positive change for people, families, communities, societies and improving the health of media ecosystems.

This approach to media literacy understands that people have different levels of media literacy

within media ecosystems. These ecosystems can be unhealthy, because of negative activity within them, but they can also be made healthier, just as we can impact positively on the natural environment by taking different actions. As people become more media literate, they develop capabilities to use their media literacy in way which can have positive consequences. These positive changes benefit individuals, families, communities and societies but they also impact positively on media ecosystems.

Thinking about media literacy in this way enables us to design projects, evaluate their impacts and report on outcomes in a more precise way and to focus on the full range of media literacy interventions, from those where online safety is the key objective to those aiming to enable media activism for social change. This theory of change is aligned with the work of DCMS, Ofcom and MILA in the UK, but also media literacy frameworks and approaches mobilised by [UNESCO](#), [NATO](#) and the [European Commission](#).

The theory of change can be used to **evaluate** any media literacy project, activity or educational programme. It can also be used to aid the **design** of media literacy activities. Wherever media literacy is being developed, applied, used to solve a problem, help people, to improve a situation or to make things better in society, this framework can help to

Theory of Change for Media Literacy

Theory of Change: 4 inter-related elements These categories of change can be used to evaluate more specifically how media literacy changes things in people's lives and also to help to design projects, alongside the Ofcom toolkit, with more specific change objectives in mind.

Access

Functioning civil societies require a diverse and pluralist media ecosystem and citizens being literate enough to make informed choices about what to access within the ecosystem, through digital connectivity, technical access and the skills to use the media and the digital technology available to us.

Access involves who, when, where and how we have access to media content, information and digital technologies, and having the knowledge and awareness needed to use it in our everyday life and for citizens, for job, education, work and health.

Capabilities

This is where we use our media literacy more actively for particular purposes in our lives, rather than as passive consumers of it.

Media literacy capabilities range from access changes, the application of critical or mindful decision-making when consuming information, the use of fact-checking of information or sources, more informed attitudes to sharing content and information, or getting directly involved in the ecosystem as creators of media content.

Increases in media literacy can also lead to new capabilities for using engagement through digital media and technology and increased employment through the gaining of creative and/or digital skills.

Awareness

Media literacy enables people to have a critical awareness of how media and information

are constructed, for example in terms of how diverse it is, who owns it or who controls different media sources and how digital and social media is governed, designed and manipulated.

Media literacy also involves awareness about the role of data and algorithms in our everyday life and with regard to citizens, for education, work and leisure.

Consequences

Media literacy can contribute to significant changes in our lives and the media ecosystem in our lives and the media ecosystem.

Consequences may include engaging with misinforming, producing media content and/or reporting on online information, sharing trustworthy content, and expressing opinions.

People who are marginalised in the media, data activism or more critical and mindful non-action to not share and misinforming channels and settings.

Media literacy interventions should focus on how people (including the general population, children and young people, but also media practitioners) can

only develop, increase and use their media literacy skills to improve their lives but also to contribute to a more positive and just society in the ecosystem.

Capabilities

To apply the inter-related change elements to media literacy projects, interventions and activities, we need to identify the difference media literacy makes to people's **knowledge** about media and information; the media literacy **skills and competences** people develop or increase; how being media literate enables people to be involved in dialogue about media, information and the online environment; how media literacy impacts on people's **attitudes** and **societal norms** and then, ultimately, how media literacy leads to changes in people's **behaviour**





Capability

★ People become more resilient to online risk and harms, data exploitation and misinformation over time, through preventative media literacy.

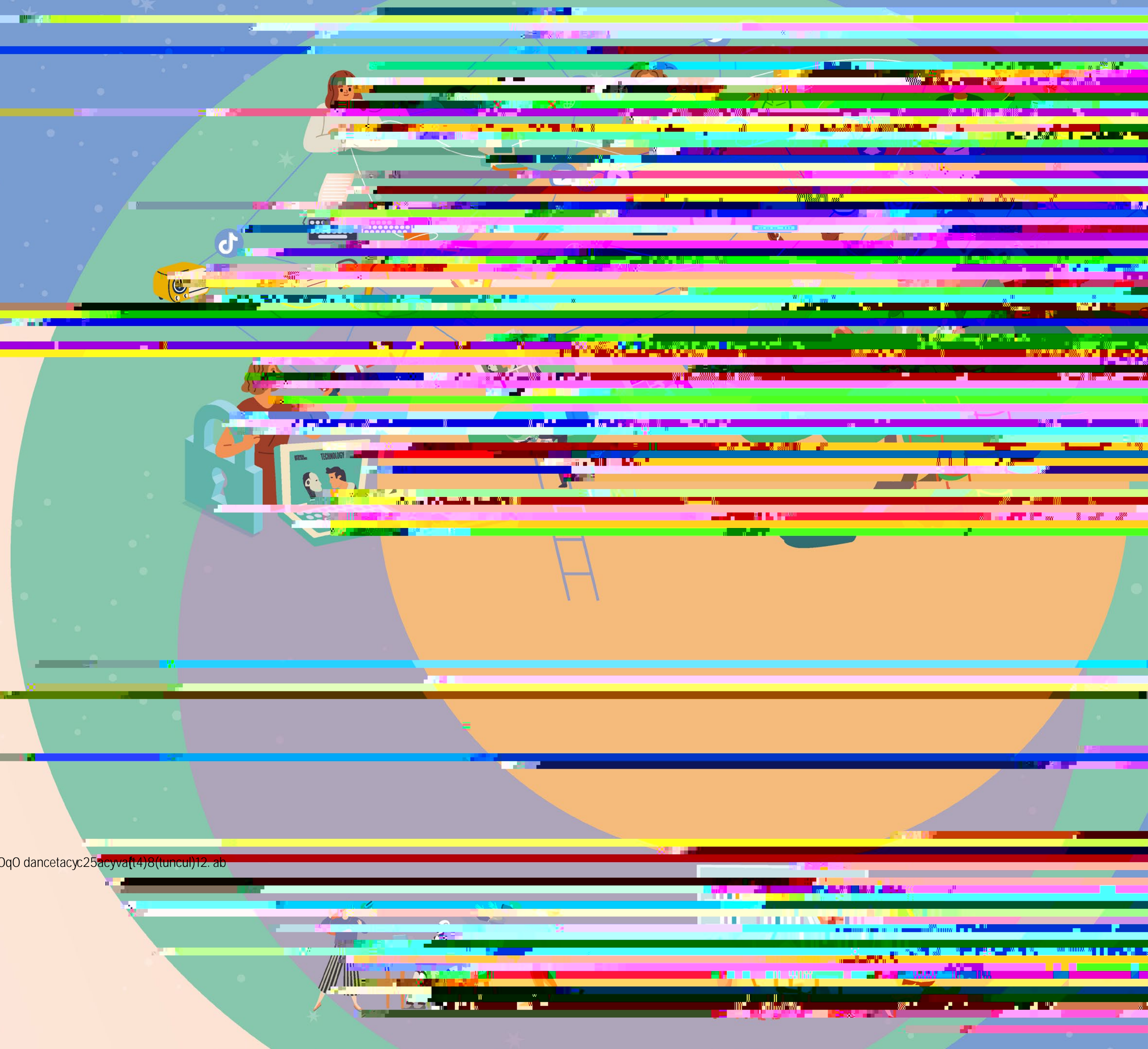
★ People use their media literacy for civic engagement, in a functioning democracy.

★ People use their media literacy to improve their lives.

★ More resilient and media literate publics makes the relationship between online platforms, media, users and audiences healthier and more balanced.

Use these descriptions as criteria for change brought about by media literacy projects, interventions or activities.

Attitudes and Norms	Behaviour
People think of themselves as media makers / information providers.	People assess and deal with resilience to online risks, data exploitation and media content abundance.
People see the connection between their media literacy, their health, democracy, educational and economic opportunities.	Media literacy enables people to engage in civil society and / or to campaign in digital media contexts as a 4 T9e to engage in civil society6-2porenociet7ocie 51.759 ISQ0 engag (,)40q0 engag (,)40q0 dancetacyc25acyva(t4)8(tuncul)12. ab





Evaluate a Completed Project – example and template

Project Example: *Reaching out Online*

This example uses the theory of change approach and template to evaluate a completed project.

This is a project about the uses of social media in health promotion, linking media literacy to health literacy.

The project was funded by the [Cultures and Communities Network +](#).

How to use the template

Use the inter-related element descriptions to identify the kind of change a project has made or has the potential to make. Some projects might create change across all four elements, others might only impact on one.

This will depend on scale, intentions, funding and scope. In some cases, change will be more evident in projects that focus more on one element with deliverable outcome than others which are more ambitious but may lack realisable impacts.

Think of this as a sliding scale or continuum.

When the relevant elements are identified, use the criteria in the change objectives table above to identify evidence of change or the potential for change for each of the four elements.

Shade out the cells which are not applicable.

Title of Project: Reaching Out Online			
	Evidence of ML leading to change	Potential for ML leading to change	Nature of evidence of change or potential for change (latent or manifest)
Access	The study found evidence of online outreach addressing community access gaps (but these were not changed by the project itself). Change to media access was therefore observed, but not directly generated. The findings offer a new context for the existing field of online communities at the access level.	Hard to reach groups were reached and trust was built through online culture building.	Project report with statistical evidence (manifest).
Awareness	New awareness of needs were identified for online culture as urgent to address and of multi-literacy strategy as essential. New context for existing field of online communities also at the level of awareness.	New knowledge was generated about effective methods for media / online health literacy outreach and also new awareness is provided to challenge unhelpful 'digital quick fix' ideas.	Project report – key issues section (manifest new awareness and latent change as a result).
Capability	Dialogue observed by the study, not generated by the project, between outreach workers and those at risk – this generates new evidence of online culture building trust, leading to new kinds of media capability, less gaps (but not directly generated by the project) an informal hard to reach groups and gaps		

Evaluation Template

Title of Project:			
	Evidence of ML leading to change	Potential for ML leading to change	Nature of evidence of change or potential for change (latent or manifest)
Access			
Awareness			
Capability			
Consequences			

Design a New Project – example and template

Project Example: *The Third Space School Librar , Digital Literac & Improving Mental Health*

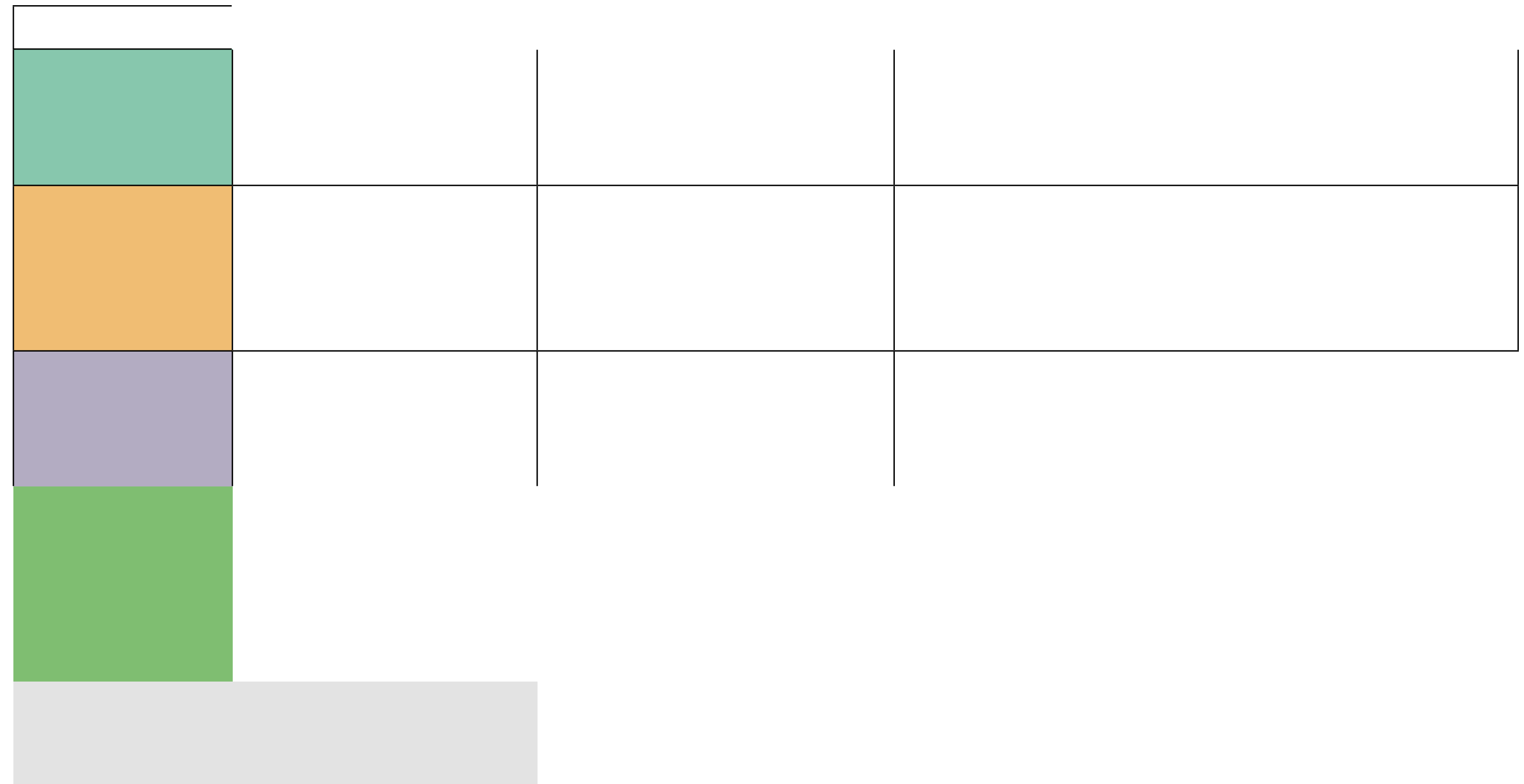
This example shows how the theory of change template and guidance can be used in combination with the Ofcom Toolkit to design a project with a more precise set of intentions for creating change through media literacy).

Programme Outline

*Activities combine workshops in the school library and independent work.

This is a media literacy intervention with 14-15 year olds in a school library, aiming to boost wellbeing and provide resilience to challenging digital experiences with regard to mental health.

The project is funded by the [e-nurture network](#).



Project Design using Ofcom Toolkit in combination with the CEMP Theory of Change

	Needs	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Access	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health need to develop digital literacy so they can make different decisions about what to access and how within their digital lives.	'Digital Me' workshop and independent activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital Wellbeing Surgery Burst Your Information Bubble 	1 workshop delivered, 1 independent activity completed by 8-12 participants. Learning demonstrated through the independent activities and the workshops.	Participants use increased digital literacy to plan different access choices in their digital lives to improve their mental health. <u>Measured by</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work produced Reflective exercise / survey Focus group 	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health are more reflexive about their digital habits, how the digital environment relates to their wellbeing, why a healthy digital ecosystem is good for everyone & what they can do to be more resilient within it.
Awareness	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health need to be more critical in their digital lives through digital literacy.	'Digital Mindfulness' workshop and independent activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lateral Reading Digital 	lives to improve their mental health.	Measured by	Measured by

Change Objectives highlighted = within scope

Design Template

	Needs	Inp			

Project team

Professor Julian McDougall - Professor of Media and Education (Project lead)

Dr Karen Fowler-Watt - Associate Professor of Journalism & Global Narratives

Dr Isabella Rega - Associate Professor in Digital Media for Social Change

Professor Scott Wright - Deputy Dean for Research and Professional Practice