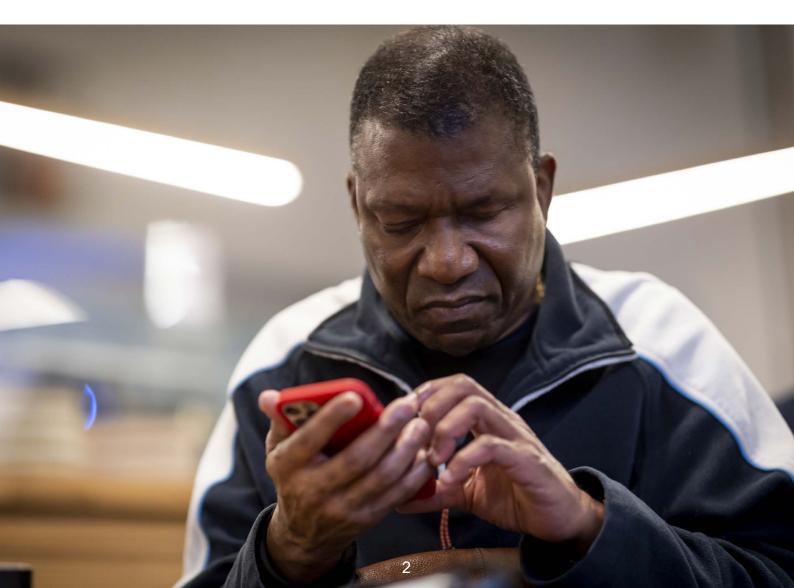
Leeds Older People's Forum

> A guide to supporting older people to keep safe online through building digital media literacy skills

More older people are developing digital skills yet may be at risk if they go online without building knowledge around digital media literacy. Fears around safety can also prevent people going online in the first place. This guide offers practical suggestions and tried and tested resources to help community-based organisations support older people to build the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to stay safe online.

What this guide contains:

- 3 Background and purpose of the guide
- 4 Before you get started: identify the potential need
- 5 Before you get started: review your capacity to deliver the activity
- 6 Getting started: preparing to deliver your activity
- 8 Running the activity and supporting people to learn
- 12 Designing sessions so people continue to apply what they have learned
- 14 Exploring ways to continue your activity
- 15 Measuring the impact of your activity



Background and purpose of the guide

This guide offers resources and practical suggestions on how to support older people to improve their <u>digital media literacy skills [Box 1]</u>. It is designed to be used as a reference point, which can be adapted to meet the needs of your community. While the guide is aimed at community-based organisations – it will also be useful to anyone interested in supporting people to stay safe online.

The guide draws on learning captured through "Be Online Stay Safe" (BOSS) a project led by Leeds Older People's Forum, with partnership support from 100% Digital Leeds and funded through the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. BOSS was delivered through five community-based charities across Leeds, and targeted older people at greatest risk of online harm - including those who speak English as a second language, are on a low income, and/or are outside of a formal education background.

Through BOSS, <u>LOPF has produced a range of materials</u> to support organisations to deliver training and support around digital media literacy skills. These can be used as standalone resources or can be incorporated into digital sessions already offered.

BOX 1: What is digital media literacy?

Digital media literacy refers to the ability to identify reliable sources of online content and protect against its harmful aspects. Some examples include keeping personal information safe and looking out for mis/ disinformation. People of all skill levels can benefit from support to remain safe online including:

- Those who use digital tools and services for some purposes, but not others due to fear of being scammed or experiencing identity theft (e.g., they use social media but will not purchase items or do online banking)
- Those who feel confident online but are vulnerable to scams/misinformation due to a lack of knowledge and skills around media literacy (e.g., they enjoy browsing the internet but struggle to distinguish between genuine or "fake" news or how to identify high quality online sources)
- Those with very low digital skills and limited online experience who require support to build this in parallel to digital media literacy (e.g., they want to learn how to send text messages and emails, or play online games and ensure they do so safely)

Further resources

- **Department for Science, Innovation & Technology**, 2023, Media literacy uptake amongst 'hard to reach' citizens, available <u>here</u> (accessed 11.04.23)
- Ofcom, 2021, Ofcom's approach to Digital Media Literacy, available here (accessed 11.04.24)
- Leeds Older People's Forum, Digital Literacy Resources

Before you get started: Identify the potential need

Find out what people want

Ask people what services they use already, what they would like to learn about, and what they perceive as the main barriers to doing so. This information can be gathered through setting up an information session, conversations via activities you already run, or a "shout out" to current service users. Those who are interested can be asked to <u>complete a short document</u> to help you assess their digital skills, online confidence and what they would like to do. This information can also be used to show potential funders what support people need

Consider who you can support

If resources allow, consider running separate activities aimed at different skill levels. If you are looking to run single sessions, these should ideally be informed by the needs of your service users. Two approaches you may wish to consider:

- Bring skills and literacy together. This will ensure the activity is suitable for those with lower digital skills. You can also invite people who are more confident online – but ensure the materials and environment allows them to learn at their own pace, and perhaps ask if they are willing to offer support to their peers. As most people supported through BOSS fitted into this category - this is the main focus of this guide.
- Support those who are more confident online to build literacy as an additional skill You might consider this option if you already have support or a signposting option in place for those who need to build more basic skills.

The approach you choose will depend on what you have in place. If the activity is aimed at all skill levels, this will normally require smaller groups with staff or volunteers on hand to provide additional support where needed. This will help ensure that the person leading the session can spend less time providing one to one support.

If you have very limited resource, one option is to explore potential interest in finding out more about digital literacy through an established group (though bear in mind people will likely be at different starting points, so recruiting volunteers to help could be an option).

Things to consider

'Finding the hook'

The starting point could be finding out what people enjoy and what their needs are – and then use this as a "hook" to show them how getting online could enhance an enjoyable activity or meet a need more quickly or easily (with added reassurance that they will be shown how to do this safely).

Utilise a trusted space

Offering a service in an environment that is familiar, comfortable and trusted can be as important as the support offer. Encourage staff members, volunteers and digitally confident service users to promote the importance of learning online safety across other activities and events.

Group sessions will not be sufficient for some

Those with low-level skills, or additional barriers will likely need additional one to one support outside of group sessions. Take steps to review needs at the start of sessions to make sure needs can be met.

Before you get started: Review your capacity to deliver the activity

Find out what help is available

Explore what resources are available in your area and nationally to help you deliver an activity. There may be funding opportunities to help you finance costs such as recruitment of staff or volunteers to deliver the support, developing materials, or to track progress. Other sources of support may include provision of equipment or data (for those who may need it), and training resources to help upskill staff and volunteers. A good starting point is your local authority or digital inclusion service.

Utilise your existing assets

Consider if you can embed digital literacy into your existing service offer, capacity and workforce, such as an activity coordinator.

Recruit volunteers to support you

Volunteers can ensure people have access to individual support if they get stuck. Look to promote through existing volunteers and service users who have some experience and interest in digital. As sessions progress you can ask those who have been supported to stay on and help others – this has the added benefit that they will have familiarity with how the sessions are run. It may be helpful to produce a role description, which can set out required skills, what is expected, and how to avoid potential pitfalls. A <u>role description and code of conduct</u> was created based on learning through BOSS – this can be useful for those who have less experience supporting people to build digital media literacy skills.

Things to consider

Volunteers and staff may lack confidence in some areas of digital media literacy

Volunteers and staff will likely require training and ongoing support to ensure they can support people to increase their digital literacy safely. Encourage volunteers and staff to ask for help if they get stuck and ensure they don't feel pressured to offer help if they are unsure about something or if it is outside of their knowledge or skill set.

Look to recruit volunteers who speak the community language of potential participants

Though translation tools can help those who speak limited English, answering specific questions and clarifying topics which are unclear will be difficult without ensuring someone who speaks the same language is on hand to provide support.

Make the purpose of the activity clear to staff and volunteers

Reassure volunteers and staff that they are there to support people and are not expected to "fix" problems that someone may present with. They should instead signpost or suggest ways in which the person can seek help or advice.

Consider how you will deliver training and support

As well as supporting staff and volunteers around digital media literacy, some may need training or refreshers on basic digital skills, and more general digital inclusion awareness. There are options to support this in a relatively inexpensive way, such as accessing free online resources, or linking in with a local digital inclusion organisation. Where possible, set up training prior to the sessions taking place, so volunteers and staff feel prepared from the start.

Getting started: preparing to deliver your activity

Choose a venue which has an established local presence

Running sessions in a location which is easy for your community members to access and is familiar and trusted will increase confidence and motivation. If you do not have access to a local venue, look to work with a partner who has built a presence in the community you wish to reach.

Support people to access the sessions

You may consider starting sessions later so free bus passes can be used, consider if there is resource to cover refreshments or transport costs for those who need taxis For those who struggle to access equipment or data, find out what schemes are available in your area, such as donating refurbished devices, or signposting to a service which provides free data (such as the national databank, hosted by the charity Good Things Foundation).

Check that the learning environment is suitable

Areas you might consider are: how you will limit background noise, is the area well-lit and free from distractions, is seating arranged to encourage interaction and participation. Ensure that batteries for provided equipment are charged and that WiFi access is available. As a rule, smaller sessions, which support up to 5 people work best – particularly where the skill level is low (though numbers can be increased if there are others on hand to help).

Find out what people hope to gain

This could be a quick conversation or a simple form prior to sessions starting – which can complement any earlier work carried out to establish who the activity is aimed at. For example someone might want to use Facebook, but is afraid of setting up an account, or is unsure how to spot adverts or news stories that are low quality or fake. Others may wish to try online banking but are fearful of what happens to their financial information and worry about getting scammed. This exercise can help you identify what people are interested in learning about, and help you decide how to plan your sessions.

Gathering knowledge about what people wish to learn can help you choose which areas to focus on when <u>developing supporting materials</u> (see BOX 2).



BOX 2: Developing supporting materials

- Compile a list of terms that will come up during the learning sessions –such as 'phishing' 'scam' 'viruses' (you can get these online – such as on the Age UK website).
- When developing handouts, break down complex areas into smaller, more manageable parts through step-by-step guidance – with room for people to write notes that they can refer back to. You could refer to the workbooks developed through BOSS, or use an AI chatbot tool to help you come up with suggestions on what to cover.
- Translation tools (BOSS used Google Translate) can help you to translate materials into someone's native language – though you should ensure that terms related to digital literacy are sense checked with staff and volunteers who speak the language.
- Look for and print out useful online sources such as the leaflets on how to protect against scams (such as those created by Independent Age, see below).
- Using a "workbook", such as the ones created by LOPF [NAVIGATE], can help you structure sessions, as long as they are user friendly, offer space for people to write clarifications where needed and allow people to progress at their own pace.

Things to consider

The support doesn't have to take place on digital devices

Though online sources can be introduced, many older people like to have materials that they can write on and refer to offline at a time that suits. BOSS participants enjoyed interactive paper-based exercises – such as printing off online articles around price comparison and checking product reviews.

See what external expertise is out there to support sessions

Staff should not feel pressured to lead every session, as they may find it overwhelming to familiarise themselves with the various elements of digital media literacy. Invite speakers who specialise in particular areas of digital safety to carry out a one off session. This can be relatively inexpensive as some (such as banks) can normally provide this free of charge. You can get in contact with banks, police community support officers and your local AgeUK who may offer online safety talks.

.

BOSS CASE STUDY:

Building confidence and positive attitudes toward online banking

Staff did not feel confident explaining to participants how banks kept their personal details safe online, so either visited, or invited staff based at high street banks to deliver one off awareness raising sessions. A bank which used an interpreter who spoke the native language of participants was well received, as was providing the opportunity for people to ask questions, hear the experiences of others and access tailored one to one support if needed. This activity helped build trust through demystifying how banks stored information, reassuring participants that robust security measures were in place to protect their money.

Running the activity and supporting people to learn

Ensure content meets the need of different learning styles

You may find it helpful to refer to an established learning model, such as the VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) model of learning.

Visual learners understand and remember things through reading or seeing pictures. You should incorporate images such as photographs, diagrams, charts.

Auditory learners learn most effectively through listening and will respond well to verbal presentations and written materials.

Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn something as an active participant. Taking a hands-on approach with interactive activities and exercise will satisfy this.

BOX 3: VAT Model of Learning

Visual Learners

- Use visual aids (diagrams, videos)
- Use screenshots to accompany instructions
- Allow learners to experiment with the device interface themselves while observing demonstrations.

Auditory Learners

- Demonstrate the steps needed to navigate phone or tablet interface
- Use podcasts or recorded tutorials that learners can listen to at their own pace.

Kinesthetic Learners

- Incorporate hands-on activities where learners can physically interact with devices
- Organise small-group activities where learners can problem-solve together





Create a 'social' rather than a 'classroom' space

For some older people, a formal classroom environment (such as setting up tablets and having chairs all facing a whiteboard at the front) may discourage participation. Building in activities which aim to be fun and don't feel like formal tests can help people feel able to open up about experiences and ask questions without feeling "silly". You can incorporate structured tools – such as workbooks, as long as these are used flexibly.

Make exercises relevant to interests

Design exercises that are relevant to people's day to day lives. This can make abstract concepts more concrete and easier to understand and help to stimulate discussion and build learning, as people test themselves in areas that are familiar to them.

BOSS CASE STUDY:

Designing culturally relevant content

Participants enjoyed taking part in exercises which incorporated cultural references that they were familiar with, stimulating discussion and helping people to remember what they had learnt. Older Irish people who attended an activity felt they had become more attuned to scams through being shown an image of the pope – and being asked what signs might suggest it was a fake image. A South Asian group became more familiar with critically assessing product reviews through discussing an advertisement for turmeric, which many used themselves.

Encourage people to learn together

Building in elements of peer support can help keep things informal and enable those with low digital skills to increase confidence through peer support. This might include people with higher digital skills supporting their peers during sessions, or those with lower skills sharing stories about how they overcame an online literacy related challenge (BOSS found that many participants valued the opportunity to support each other).

Build in "quick wins"

To help build confidence early on, start sessions with something small which people can use straightaway. This might include checking if a website or phone number is safe or testing the strength of passwords using an online tracker. These exercises help to raise awareness of the importance of keeping safe online – and support people to take affirmative action.

BOSS CASE STUDY:

Building skills and knowledge to strengthen and protect passwords

Participants were more likely to retain information when something was relatively simple to learn, useful to them, and could be used straight away. A good example of this was being shown how to use an online password tracker, which offered a quick way to test the strength of passwords. The session also raised awareness of the consequences of using passwords that could be easily guessed and offered advice on how to increase password strength. This led to a number of people reportedly taking action to develop stronger passwords. A few participants were concerned about remembering passwords that could not be easily guessed but felt motivated to identify ways to do so – with one intending to use an online password management system once she had built up her digital skills.

Provide positive reinforcement and constructive feedback

Look at ways to build in encouragement to ensure motivation is maintained. Celebrate small victories and progress. BOSS participants liked receiving a certificate at the end of sessions.

Blending literacy and skills training

For those with low skills, look to incorporate activities which bring skills and literacy in tandem. For example, show people how to search for something through Google – then follow this by showing them how to identify safe websites or look out for fake stories.

BOSS CASE STUDY:

Accessing online games safely

Participants who enjoyed playing games were shown how to access their favourites online and download and play them safely. A participant who was recently widowed had been too fearful to try online games – as she was unsure how to handle advertisements and pop ups that would appear on the screen. After being shown how to safely manage these, she is no longer afraid of downloading and playing online games and does so frequently.

·

Things to consider

Start with the positives of being online

People may feel overwhelmed or experience fear if they are provided with too much information. It can be useful to break down initial fear of digital through carrying out an activity where literacy is not the focus. This might be showing someone how to check the results of a favourite sport, listen to a favourite song or share photos downloaded onto a phone.

Start the activity by reminding everyone to stay on topic

Fostering a more social space increases the risk of discussions veering off the purpose of the sessions. If someone goes off topic a lot try to refocus them to prevent them from taking time from others who are there to learn.safety talks.

Give regard to the information provided on shared devices

If you provide digital devices for use during sessions, it is important to consider potential safeguarding issues. Ensure people remember and know how to delete any personal information inputted during sessions. It may be safer to discourage people from adding in personal information such as emails or passwords.

Some people will require additional support to follow sessions

People with a language barrier, low literacy levels or additional barriers can be more likely to be vulnerable to online scams. These people may require more targeted and hands on support to clarify points, answer questions and ensure they can participate in practical activities. People with language barriers may require someone to translate information into their own language, and help to use a translation app.

BOSS CASE STUDY:

Using translation tools

A translation tool (Google Translate) was used to develop and translate handouts and practical exercises into community languages. Bilingual staff and volunteers were on hand to sense check content, clarify points and answer questions. Participants were also supported to add the translation app to their own device and were shown how to use it during sessions. Participants fed back that having access to a translation tool helped them to assess online content more critically and to feel more confident protecting their privacy through understanding content written in a language they were less familiar with.

Staff or volunteers delivering the support don't have to know everything

Encourage staff or volunteers to be open and say if they don't know the answer to a question and don't feel pressured into providing a response that may impact on online safety if they are not confident. This can help people feel more reassured that they don't have to know the answers. To help aid learning – set out how to find out the answer together.

You may not get it right first time

There is no "one size fits all" approach that can work for all groups. Approach the activity as an opportunity to learn as you go along, testing and adapting materials, learning style and environment as you get to know people's needs and capture their feedback. Ask for honest feedback on exercises and learning activities – as this will help to improve the activity for them and others.

Further resources

- 100% Digital Leeds, Digital Inclusion: Support for Organisations, available <u>here</u>). Offers information on digital inclusion support, with links to free online training resources. <u>https://</u> <u>digitalinclusionleeds.com/support-for-organisations</u>
- AbilityNet, My Computer my Way, free guides which walk through how to ensure devices are more accessible to different needs, available <u>here</u>.
- **Age UK**, Step by step digital instruction guides and glossary of online terms, including those relevant to literacy, available <u>here</u>.
- Barclays Digital Wings, free training resources to support essential digital skills and financial literacy, available <u>here</u>.
- **Digitalunite**, 400+ how-to guides to support digital skills, including internet security and managing money online, available <u>here</u>.
- Good Things Foundation, National Databank, available <u>here</u> and Learn my Way bite sized free digital skills training for beginners, available <u>here</u>.
- Independent Age, resources to protect against scams, available <u>here</u>.
- **Take Five**, offers advice to help protect against financial fraud, available here.
- VAK, learning model here

All accessed 11.04.2024.

Running designing sessions so people continue to apply what they have learned

Keep sessions relevant to people

People can be more responsive if they can see how getting online can fit into their lives and be of positive benefit. Framing around interests and usual activities, be that finding out information about a hobby, or booking health appointments or online shopping - means people can see where it can be applied and make a positive difference to their lives.

BOSS CASE STUDY:

Accessing health related information online

Many participants were interested in accessing health related content and services, but were unsure how to identify safe apps, websites or clickable links provided by health service providers. A few had been signposted to poor quality information through using search engines. Led by this feedback, a dedicated session was run which focused on getting online for health purposes, with one to one support provided to download NHS apps where needed. Participants were also encouraged to ask questions, with volunteers on hand to show people how to access information on their own devices. People reported feeling better able to critically assess health content and identify genuine websites and apps - giving them the confidence to manage their health needs online.

Incorporate practice and recap into the activity

A good way to ensure people have retained and are using skills learnt is to start off sessions by getting them to practice what was taught during the previous session. Those with very low skills may benefit from the opportunity to revisit the same skills across a number of sessions. Recap sheets with step-by-step instructions can be used to support this task, which people can take home and use as a reference point in case they get stuck

Encourage learning beyond the training sessions

An effective way to help people retain what they have learnt is to encourage them to practice and use their new digital literacy skills outside of sessions

BOX 4: Practicing digital literacy beyond sessions

- Show friends and family members what they have learnt or raise awareness of something picked up during a session – this might be telling a friend how they can be more confident that a website is safe.
- Encourage people to take their own notes Some BOSS participants appreciated being provided with, or being encouraged to bring a notebook so they could write down information in a way that was easy for them to digest – in some cases people were supported by a volunteer or the coordinator to write things "step by step".
- Allow people to learn on devices they use already: If you run sessions alone, it may be easier to start beginners off using the same device (if this option is available). Once people become more confident (or there are volunteers on hand to help), you should encourage people to bring their own tablet or Smartphone. If people are supported on devices they use at home, this will increase the likelihood that they will feel confident applying what they have learnt outside of sessions.

Extend support once people have completed the activity

Depending on what resource you have available, set something up to help address any questions or that allows someone to check on something they have forgotten. Suggested ways to do this are in BOX 5:

BOX 5: Extending digital literacy support

- 'Refresher' sessions,
- Setting up a regular drop-in,
- Providing staff contact details so people can access light touch support where needed
- Signpost people to other relevant opportunities in the local area that they might be interested in going to,
- Offer additional one to one sessions for those who could benefit from tailored support (resources permitting),
- If you incorporate one off events with "experts" to discuss particular digital safety topics, look to invite former participants to attend so they can refresh their knowledge and ask questions.

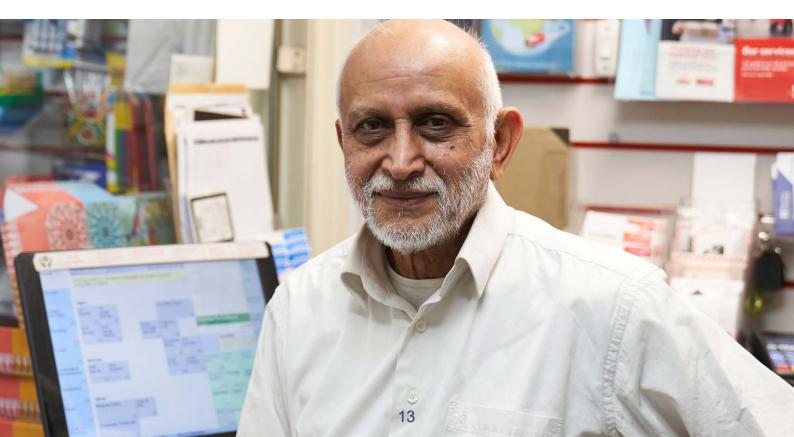
Encourage people to set up their own "peer" groups

A good way for people to refresh and build their own skills is to encourage them to keep in touch, share stories or resources they have found, and troubleshoot. Those who have completed the activity can be encouraged to share tips and give encouragement to their peers.

Things to consider

Meet people where they are now and support them to that level

Don't try to show people things that they won't use (e.g. If people don't feel ready or are not interested in shopping online, don't show people how to do this safely).



Exploring ways to continue your activity

Support digital literacy through other services you offer

As being online is increasingly becoming a part of everyday life, digital literacy skills will be of benefit to those who access other activities you run. Some ideas are provided in BOX 6:

BOX 6: introducing digital media literacy across activities

- Show people who attend a regular non-digital activity how to find additional resources online (such as food recipes, sewing patterns, hobby discussion forums - covering how to identify safe websites and avoid mis/disinformation),
- Introduce an exercise during a coffee morning or lunch club that people can apply quickly, such as how to block an email or develop strong passwords,
- If you run activities which focus on digital skills look to include literacy in these (e.g., when showing people how to set up email, cover ways to deal with spam or phishing emails).

Cascade learning across your organisation

Show other staff and volunteers how they can help people to remain safe online by sharing learning, such as introducing them to free apps and resources that will be helpful to them when supporting others. A good example of this is how to download and use a translation app, which can be used to communicate more effectively with service users who speak different languages. You could explore adopting a "train the trainer" approach, by supporting other staff to run digital literacy sessions (see below for resources that may help you achieve this).

Explore opportunities to collaborate and share learning outside of your organisation

Find out about activities and initiatives that are going on in your local area that you can tap into and explore ways to share learning and avoid duplication. For example in Leeds, there is a citywide Digital Inclusion Network which provides access to a range of resources that can be accessed via a shared portal, with communication around potential funding avenues.



Measuring the impact of your activity

Through BOSS, LOPF has started to build an understanding of what can work when supporting older people to build digital media literacy skills. As an area that is fairly new, it is necessary to continue learning about the best ways to support different groups of older people to stay safe online. Setting out to demonstrate the impact of your activity can also help make a case to potential funders through showing the difference that your activity is making.

Set out what your activity is looking to achieve and how you will measure this

Setting out clear and measurable goals will help you to track the impact of your efforts and tailor your offer so it achieves what it sets out to. There is not necessarily a right or wrong way to measure how your activity is working, you might carry out interviews, ask questions during group sessions, or use a survey to gather feedback. The approach you choose will depend on factors such as available resources, size, vision and potential requirements of a funder. There are resources available that can help get you started, such as advice on developing a plan or "theory of change" [some suggested resources are below].

Gather feedback about how your sessions are run

Look to gather information about what people think of the activity, are there different ways to deliver it, are the materials suitable? Which parts of the activity worked well or less well? Some questions to consider are "Did this session/activity work for you" "How could we have done this differently" "Were the handout/slides clear?"

Consider ways to capture what people have learnt

Even if people are very positive about the activity – it is important to ensure it is doing what it sets out to do – which is to improve digital media literacy skills (the 'impact'). A good way to track how your activity is supporting people to learn is to check how they are getting on over time. For example you might ask people to complete a short set of questions or a quiz at the start of your activity – and then ask them to complete it again after a period of time has passed (or once the activity has finished) (LOPF have developed some suggested questions – NAVIGATE TO WEBSITE).

Things to consider

Keep it manageable

There can be a temptation to take an ambitious approach when looking to measure the impact of your activity. Consider the time and resource that you have available, and plan how to capture learning accordingly. It may be that you choose a few areas in which your activity will lead to change. This can be small, such as it leading to people developing strong passwords or taking actions to identify whether a website is safe – and setting up measures to check if this was achieved and if yes, how and for whom.

Encourage people to provide regular feedback

Talking to people as they progress through the activity will provide lots of useful information and help you to apply learning and adapt your approach where needed.

Help people understand the value of gathering feedback

Let people know that the purpose of gathering feedback is to help improve activities through understanding which approaches work and removing those that don't.

Don't forget to gather feedback staff and volunteers

Those directly supporting activities are well placed to offer lots of insights based on working closely with people.

Use your learning to help others run similar activities

If you use the workbooks and resources from this BOSS project, LOPF would welcome feedback. This will contribute to improving this resource and will be of benefit to organisations who wish to support digital literacy skills in the future

Further resources

- 100% Digital Leeds, Step by step guidance for those looking to build in digital inclusion across a whole service, available here.
- Ofcom, 2023, A toolkit for evaluating media literacy interventions, this provides templates for an evaluation framework and theory of change, with tips for interviews, focus groups, surveys and quizzes, available here.
- **NPC**, Theory of Change in ten steps available <u>here</u>. •

All accessed 11.04.2024.

Acknowledgements

(LOPF, 100% Digital Leeds, Sarah Alden, Imogen Blood & Associates, the 5 delivery partners who contributed to the learning)

Photo credits

All images courtesy of Centrefor Ageing Better

Leeds Older People's Forum

Leeds Older People's Forum Joseph's Well, Suite C24 Leeds LS3 1AB





╇

hello@opforum.org.uk



- @LeedsOPF
- facebook.com/leedsolderpeoplesforum