

Art Works for Change

A playbook for educators to evidence the value of arts-based education for and with young people

Summary

The *Art Works for Change* playbook for educators has been developed for use by those involved in arts-based education, offering practical, creative, and ethical tools that help educators plan, evidence, and communicate effectively the value of their work. Even though arts-based education has widely been considered to help create powerful changes in young people's lives, these changes are often hard to explain, hard to evidence, and easy to overlook in systems that tend to prioritise test scores and short-term outputs. The *Art Works for Change* playbook has been designed as a guide to clearly and credibly describe the value of educators' arts-based work by using two complementary approaches: Theory of Change (ToC) and Social Return on Investment (SROI). Together, these approaches help demonstrate how change happens and communicate why that change matters.

The guidelines and methods proposed in the playbook are grounded in authentic practice and have been shaped by the experiences and voices of young people, educators, artists, and other stakeholders involved in the CLiViE project. They are based on the acknowledgement that young people gain more than creative skills in arts-based education: they build confidence, learn to work with others, and discover new ways of expressing feelings and ideas, while learning to see the world from different perspectives. They are also likely to do better in school, particularly in problem-solving, communication, and critical thinking. The playbook addresses anyone who wants to demonstrate the value of arts-based education in support of young people's wellbeing, learning, identity and personal growth: educators, community organisations, and artists using arts-related and cultural practices to build social connection and a sense of belonging. The playbook offers inclusive, participatory ways and accessible tools to communicate the impact of arts-based projects to funders, project partners and other stakeholders.

Issues

Arts-based education is often perceived as auxiliary rather than essential. Its value is rarely captured in policies, funding decisions, and formal evaluations. Issues include:

- Measurement challenges: Benefits like self-esteem, respect for others, or a sense of belonging are difficult to quantify, leading to under-recognition in policy and funding.
- Inequitable access: High-quality arts experiences aren't evenly available.
- Short-term funding: Limited budgets and short project cycles restrict long-term impact and sustained evaluation.
- Perception gaps: Arts-based learning is often undervalued as compared with core subjects, despite strong evidence of its wider benefits.

Approaches that include young people's voices help show the difference arts-based education can make. Valuing arts-based education means recognising it as a core social, cultural, and civic practice that shapes how individuals relate to themselves, others, and society.

Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a method to explain how and why arts-based activities make a difference in young people's lives. It connects activities to outcomes and intended impacts. By making these links visible, the value of arts-based activities can be demonstrated as a core of young people's learning. Creating a ToC is like drawing a roadmap that shows how activities will lead to impact (e.g., students' cognitive or behavioral developments). It helps understand whether the activities are moving toward the intended goals.

ToC also helps express how activities connect to a broader vision. It helps to identify potential risks in the planning stage by making assumptions visible, enabling educators to address and avoid potential issues.

Key Findings

The *Art Works for Change* playbook has been designed as a guide for educators, community organisations and artists to clearly and credibly describe the value of their arts-based activities with young people.

The playbook applies two complementary approaches: Theory of Change (ToC) and Social Return on Investment (SROI). Together, these approaches help demonstrate how change happens and communicate why that change matters.

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SROI is a useful way to understand and show the value created by arts-based education, especially the changes that are overlooked or hard to measure. While a ToC helps explain how change happens, SROI helps explain why that change matters by giving it social value that can be clearly communicated to others.

The playbook provides educators with an in-depth step-by-step guide for the development of a ToC and SROI for arts-based activities.



Social Return on Investment

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a useful way to understand and show the value created by arts-based education, especially the changes that are overlooked or hard to measure. While a ToC helps explain how change happens, SROI helps explain why that change matters by giving it social value that can be clearly communicated to others. SROI recognises that outcomes such as confidence, belonging, and wellbeing are real and important, even when they don't have an obvious price tag that might appeal to policymakers or investors.

ToC and SROI can be used together because they offer complementary ways to understand impact and express value. ToC provides a structured way to define the long-term social changes aimed for and to demonstrate how arts-based education can contribute to those changes. SROI then builds on this foundation by focusing on how those outcomes can be evidenced, understood, and valued from the perspective of those who experience them.

The *Art Works for Change* playbook proposes a ToC in six steps that works backwards from the intended impact through to the outcomes, activities, and conditions needed to make the change possible. A step-by-step guide helps to ensure that arts-based activities are designed to lead to meaningful change by: 1) identifying the context and conditions of the project, 2) defining the intended impacts, 3) defining outcomes in terms of cognitive, behavioral and social improvements, 4) defining the outputs as the tangible experiences and products leading to the intended outcomes (e.g., workshops, artworks etc.), 5) determining the educational activity and resources in terms of creative and cultural practices clearly connected to the outputs and supporting the outcomes and impact, 6) completing the ToC by bringing together context and conditions, impact, outcomes, outputs, and activities into a single, coherent model.

SROI can build on the impacts identified in the ToC logic model by showing how these social, emotional and cognitive benefits for young people can be evidenced, understood and valued from the perspective of both those who experience them and external stakeholders. While SROI uses currency to indicate the 'benefits to costs' being created by a particular activity, SROI is not about money, but about value.

The *Art Works for Change* playbook provides a SROI guide in five stages: 1) deciding the scope and identifying the stakeholders, 2) mapping the outcomes and inputs, 3) evidencing outcomes and understanding value based on transparent assumptions, 4) establishing impact while considering attribution, drop-off, and deadweight, 5) completing the SROI calculation by dividing the total value created by the total cost. The playbook contains a ToC and SROI template, and provides suggestions for communicating the value of arts-based activities. It also includes a list of further resources and case studies from the CLiViE project conducted in Czechia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

Conclusion

The *Art Works for Change* playbook for educators provides an in-depth step-by-step guide for the development of a ToC and SROI enabling educators to measure and communicate the value of their arts-based activities. It also includes tools, examples and a list of further resources to this end.

Methodology

The playbook has been developed with inputs from CLiViE partners and other stakeholders by means of initial trials and a structured template in which they shared reflections, practical insights, and their experience using ToC and SROI in arts-based work with young people. Examples of these have been included as call-outs, guidance, and highlighted case studies. In addition, a feedback form was used to collect their comments on the draft playbook's clarity, usability, design, and relevance to strengthen the final version.

Reference

Anna Keune, Harper Staples, Santiago Hurtado, Gülşah Zeynep Yiğit, *D6.2 Art Works for Change: A playbook for educators to evidence the value of arts-based education for and with young people*. TU, Munich, 2026.

Policy Takeaways

Even though the *Art Works for Change* playbook primarily addresses educators, community organisations, and artists directly involved in arts-related and cultural practices, its use in communicating the value and impact of arts-based projects benefit researchers and policymakers for greater uptake and decision-making.

Issues impacting project proposals:

- *Measurement challenges:* Cognitive, behavioral and social benefits are difficult to quantify, leading to under-recognition in policy and funding.
- *Inequitable access:* Quality arts experiences aren't evenly available.
- *Short-term funding:* Limited budgets and short project cycles restrict long-term impact and sustained evaluation.
- *Perception gaps:* Arts-based learning is often undervalued as compared with core subjects, despite strong evidence of its wider benefits.

The Cultural Literacies' Value in Europe (CLiViE) project develops and applies a Theory of Change (ToC) methodology and Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework to increase our understanding of the value of cultural literacy through arts-based education on social cohesion.



For further information see <https://www.clivieproject.eu>