



Invitation to Tender

Online Excellence Programme

Independent Evaluation

Online Excellence Programme

Introduction

Samaritans, working in collaboration with social media and digital sector partners, are delivering the [Online Excellence Programme](#) which aims to develop a hub of excellence in suicide prevention and the online environment.

The programme takes an industry wide approach to provide consistent guidance for the whole sector, a focal point for businesses and subject matter experts to convene and develop best practice, share learning and expertise, and provide central services for guidance and reporting for other professionals and organisations.

Samaritans are seeking experienced evaluators and/or researchers to apply and carry out an independent evaluation of our Online Excellence Programme. This consists of a Research & Insight Programme, Industry Guidelines for sites and platforms, an Online Harms Advisory Service, and a hub of co-produced online safety resources.

This document provides background to the project and information about Samaritans. It also includes requirements of the evaluation, key milestones, budget, ethical considerations and how to apply.

Background

Samaritans' vision is that fewer people die by suicide. Samaritans' mission is to provide a 24-hour confidential service ensuring there is someone there for anyone who may need someone, by giving people ways to cope and skills to be there for others, and by campaigning to make suicide prevention a national and local priority. Services are based on five core values, which are listening, confidentiality, people make their own decisions, being non-judgemental, and human contact.

In addition to the services provided, an important part of Samaritans' work is understanding and challenging the social elements that impact suicide through research, policy and influencing.

Project Overview

The internet can be an invaluable space for individuals experiencing self-harm and suicidal feelings. It provides opportunities to access information, find options for support, and a platform to speak openly about difficult feelings that can be challenging to discuss face to face. However, it can also carry potential risks by presenting opportunities to access graphic content, details around methods of harm, and content that glorifies or promotes self-harm and suicide. Access to such content can be distressing, triggering and may encourage, maintain, or exacerbate self-harm and suicidal behaviours.

To make the internet a safer place for vulnerable users, the Online Excellence Programme aims to:

- 1) reduce the likelihood of accessing harmful content relating to self-harm and suicide
- 2) increase opportunities for vulnerable users to access support online.

Objectives

To achieve the aims of the programme, the key objectives are:

- (a) To improve cross-sector engagement by providing opportunities for stakeholders to debate the key issues and help ensure a consistent voice from stakeholder groups to inform good industry practice.
- (b) To deliver a comprehensive Research & Insight Programme to develop the evidence base around the impact of self-harm and suicide related content online.
 - Improved understanding of the content most likely to cause harm or benefit and for whom.
 - Improved understanding of the impact of discoverability of content and support on users.
 - Improved understanding of how users interact with self-harm and suicidal content.
 - Improved understanding of the impact of removing or blocking content on vulnerable users.
- (c) To develop, maintain, and disseminate best practice industry guidelines for sites and platforms on managing self-harm and suicide related content using safe and sensitive approaches.
- (d) To launch an Online Harms Advisory Service to support:
 - sites and platforms to manage self-harm and suicide related content – this can range from reviewing platform policies to developing bespoke user resources.
 - professionals working in the space to respond to online issues relating to self-harm and suicide – such as concerns over online content, reporting suicide challenges/viral online content, developing resources, and supporting projects.
- (e) To develop and launch a hub of online safety resources to help users (and the people they may engage with) have the tools and knowledge to stay safe online when engaging with self-harm and suicide related content. Key audiences will include young people (aged 18-25 years old), parents and practitioners.
- (f) To develop and launch an online social media campaign to help users to stay safe online when engaging with self-harm and suicide content, aimed at young people aged 18-25 years old.
- (g) To develop a Theory of Change for the programme, and where needed work in consultation with Samaritans Online Harm programme team and senior staff.

Evaluation Remit: guidelines and requirements

Samaritans wants to commission external independent evaluator(s)/researcher(s) who must be highly skilled and experienced in developing a Theory of Change and evaluating complex projects, preferably with knowledge of online harms and vulnerable groups at risk of suicide. Bids are welcome from individuals, agencies, and multidisciplinary collaborations. Commissioning an external evaluation reduces any risk of bias which may exist if this project was being evaluated by internal employees at Samaritans.

Aims

1. To evaluate the impact of the Online Excellence Programme across its different elements, including:
 - the impact of cross sector engagement
 - the impact of the Research & Insight Programme
 - the impact of the [Industry Guidelines](#) on companies and consumers

- the impact of the [Online Harms Advisory Service](#) on consumers
 - the impact of the [online safety resources](#) aimed at online users and parents of young people
 - the impact of the online safety social media campaign aimed at online users ages 18-25 who might be engaging with self-harm and suicide related content.
2. To develop a Theory of Change for the programme.

Indicative methodology:

This evaluation should implement mixed method approaches to understand the impact of the Online Excellence Programme. We invite applicants to propose the most suitable approach to the study, using novel approaches where possible that explore not only reach but also resulting behavioural change.

Once commissioned, the external team will be provided with background documents to help inform the study including:

- A Product Initiation Document providing an overview of the Online Excellence Programme
- Summaries and details of all outputs to date
- An existing evaluation framework for the programme listing all objectives, outputs, outcomes, current data on reach and evaluation data collected so far
- Access to existing data files on reach and evaluation data.

Samaritans staff in the Online Harms Team who deliver the Online Excellence Programme will also support the project team and the facilitation of the research in gaining access to existing evaluation data, helping to set up internal processes for data collection, gaining access to key stakeholder groups and facilitating access to Samaritans lived experience panels. Samaritans staff in the Online Harms Team will also expect to be engaged in developing the Theory of Change, and the commissioned external team will be responsible for planning and facilitating any meetings and discussions to achieve this.

Lived Experience

Samaritans promotes the inclusion of people with lived experience in all our commissioned research. Samaritans has a Lived Experience Panel which the commissioned agency will be able to engage with, along with our two Samaritans’ Online Harms Advisory Groups who can help to inform and shape the evaluation. Applicants should outline how they intend to involve people with relevant lived experience throughout the project, over and above as research participants, ideally at all stages from research design through to analysis and interpretation.

What are the key questions we need to answer?

Outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively have we improved cross-sector engagement by; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) providing opportunities for stakeholders to debate the key issues b) helping to ensure a consistent voice from stakeholder groups to inform good industry practice.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective has the Research & Insights Programme been in developing the evidence base and understanding around self-harm

		and suicide content online and disseminating these insights to key stakeholder groups?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective are the Industry Guidelines in helping platforms to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) improve their knowledge and understanding of the impact of self-harm and suicide content online b) reduce access to harmful content online c) increase access to supportive opportunities for vulnerable users d) improve platform confidence in responding to self-harm and suicide content in a safe and sensitive way.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective is the Online Harms Advisory Service in helping platforms to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) improve their knowledge and understanding of the impact of self-harm and suicide content online b) reduce access to harmful content online c) increase access to supportive opportunities for vulnerable users d) improve platform confidence in responding to self-harm and suicide content in a safe and sensitive way.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective are the online safety resources in; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) improving users' understanding of how to post about self-harm and suicide safely online b) increase likelihood of a user posting in a safe way c) increased awareness of how to find safe spaces online for support.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective is the online safety social media campaign in; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) improving understanding of how to post about self-harm and suicide safely online b) increase likelihood of a user posting in a safe way c) increased awareness of how to find safe spaces online for support.
Impact		Has the programme reduced the likelihood of accessing harmful content relating to self-harm and suicide?
		Has the programme increased opportunities online for support for vulnerable users?
		What, if any, factors outside the programme have contributed to or hindered success?
		What are the remaining gaps to us help us achieve our desired impacts?

Deliverables

The table below outlines the deliverables expected from the evaluation.

Title	Online Excellence Programme: Evaluation Report
Purpose	To produce evaluation reports that address the key questions and provide evidence of impact of this programme. The final report should also suggest areas that would benefit from further investigation, research or training.
Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Theory of Change document for the Online Excellence Programme An interim report from initial data A final full report that includes an executive summary and infographics. An accompanied PowerPoint presentation summarising the key findings that can be presented to key stakeholders.

Sign off and dissemination	The document(s) will be endorsed and signed off by Samaritans. The report will be made available to Samaritans to disseminate internally and with key stakeholder groups.
Dissemination	The findings will be disseminated within Samaritans along with government and digital sector partners without any limitations. The project team may want to write further publications or present the findings from this report more widely. This may be done collaboratively or as separate organisations, and only with approval from Samaritans.

Budget

The budget for this work will be set at a maximum fee of up to **£50,000** including VAT. Please include your best quote for this piece of work with your submission. Criteria for payments will be agreed via contracts.

Key Milestones

The proposed milestones below include stage 1 and stage 2 of data collection, due to an interim required in September 2022 to meet the needs of the programme. Applicants will need to provide a more detailed plan considering the key milestones below.

Date	Activity
20 th May 2022	Submission of proposals
w/c 30 th May 2022	Successful applicant notified
June 2022	Terms agreed and contract signed
June 2022	Contract start date
June 2022	Meeting – overall plan and stage 1
July 2022	Ethics application and submission
July 2022 – September 2022	Stage 1 data collection
October 2022	Meeting - Interim findings and planning for stage 2
October 2022	Draft interim report submitted to Samaritans for comment
October 2022	Final interim report submitted to Samaritans
November 2022– Mar 2023	Stage 2 data collection
April 2023	Meeting – stage 2 findings and agreeing outputs
May 2023	Draft of full report submitted to Samaritans for comment
June 2023	Final full report submitted to Samaritans
June 2023	Meeting – summary of findings Presentation to key stakeholders, including Samaritans
June 2023	Contract end date

Ethical considerations

Whilst the methods/methodology would need to be agreed with the commissioned evaluator(s)/ researcher(s), Samaritans Research Ethics Policy must be considered and adhered to. This is essential if any part of the evaluation methods involve working with vulnerable groups around the sensitive issues of emotional health and suicide. Samaritans Research Ethics Process will be followed in line with research governance in Samaritans; this will involve applying for ethical approval to Samaritans Research Ethics Board (SREB). Ethical issues will therefore need full consideration.

Contract

The successful applicant(s) will be required to enter into a contract with Samaritans, within Samaritans' standard terms and conditions. This will include conditions such as: 1. Completion of the services within the timeframe specified. 2. Reduction of payment or non-payment for work not completed. 3. The work cannot be sub-contract to a third party without the prior written consent of Samaritans. 4. Agreed input from Samaritans during reviewing and editing stages. 5. Terms related to intellectual property. Once the contract is agreed and signed, the successful applicant(s) and Samaritans will be required to adhere to all terms and conditions.

How to apply

To be considered for this work, please submit a document outlining:

- Background of you/your organisation
- Previous experience and examples of evaluation work. Include anything specifically relevant to this project
- Previous experience and examples of project managing complex and multi-component programmes, outlining your approach to engaging/working with Samaritans project team.
- Previous experience and examples of including people with lived experience in research/evaluation work.
- Methodology, outlining why you are proposing these methods
- Ethical considerations and practices
- Proposed timelines, including key milestones to take account of the dates included above
- Breakdown of costs
- Two references

All criteria listed above are weighted equally and must be addressed in the proposal submitted. While the proposals should be comprehensive, they should also be concise, and ideally no more than 10 pages. A short summary of each member of the research team's relevant experience should be included as part of the proposal.

All applications must be submitted in writing by **5pm, 20th May 2022**. Samaritans may contact the applicant to clarify aspects of the submission. Samaritans reserves the right to invite shortlisted applicants to an interview to discuss their proposal in detail, however the decision may be taken based on the written submission. The successful candidate/organisation will be notified the week commencing 23rd May.

Please apply to Lydia Grace (Policy & Research Programme Manager – Online Harms), using the email address l.grace@samaritans.org

Further information

For any further information please contact Lydia Grace on email: l.grace@samaritans.org or Tel: 0748302790

