



collaborate
for social change

THE CORNERSTONE FUND

LEARNING REPORT

YEAR 2

DAWN PLIMMER
FANNY OLSSON

THANK YOU TO

Funders

City Bridge Trust

The National Lottery Community Fund

Trust for London

John Lyon's Charity

Greater London Authority

In-kind support

London Funders

London Plus

London Councils

The Mercers Company

Lead partners

Race On the Agenda

Superhighways

H4All

Local Village Network

HEAR Network

The Winch

The Refugee Council

Partnership for Young London

Sheila McKechnie Foundation

Community Links Bromley



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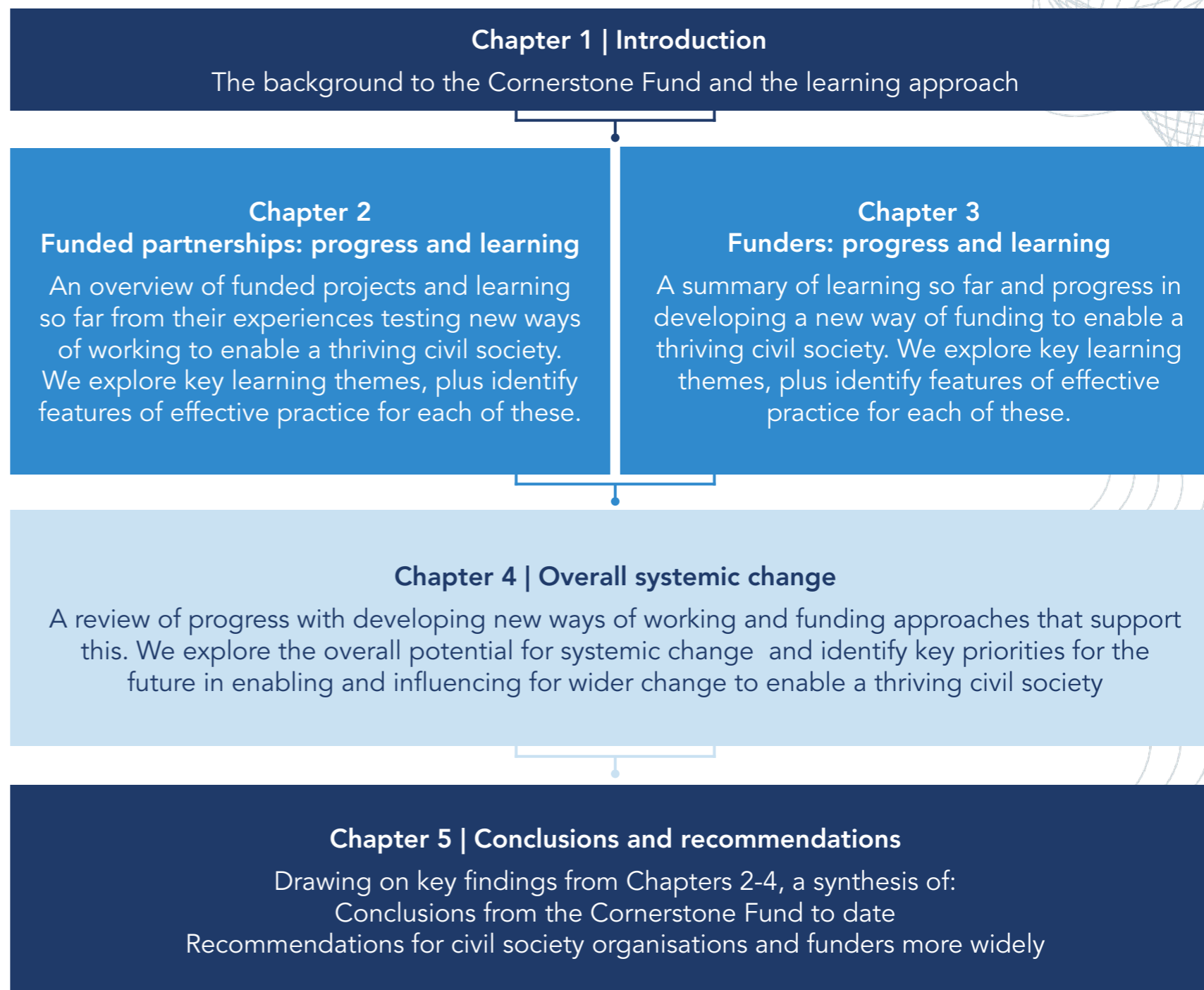
THIS REPORT

Drawing on ongoing engagement with its funders and ten funded partnerships, this report synthesises learning from the Cornerstone Fund (the Fund) from November 2018 – November 2020. Findings are structured in the following way:

Definitions

Throughout this report we use the term 'project(s)' and 'partnership(s)' interchangeably, referring to the 10 funded project partnerships that make up the Fund. We refer to the lead organisations for each project as the 'lead partner(s)' and the other partner organisations as the 'project partner(s)'. The term 'partner(s)' refers to both lead and wider project partners.

We use the terms 'infrastructure' and 'civil society support' interchangeably. These refer to any organisation that provides support to strengthen civil society.



THE CORNERSTONE FUND

The Cornerstone Fund (the Fund) is a funder alliance between City Bridge Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, Trust for London, John Lyon's Charity and the Greater London Authority. The Mercers Company, London Plus, London Councils and London Funders are also involved in the Fund, contributing expertise and in-kind support.

The Fund was developed in 2017 to progress the ambitions of The Way Ahead, a joint initiative by civil society, public sector bodies and funders.¹

The ultimate goals of the Way Ahead are: *"a thriving Civil Society, which is adaptable, resilient, collaborative, sustainable and driven by communities, which will lead to improved outcomes for Londoners."*

THE WAY AHEAD IS BASED ON THREE BELIEFS:

1. That a thriving civil society is good for Londoners;
2. That in order to achieve a strong and vibrant civil society, just like any other sector, civil society organisations need access to appropriate support, as well as a 'voice' within the debates about London;
3. That London faces both challenges and opportunities which mean we need to rethink how that support and voice is best provided to civil society in London.

The First Round of the Fund, launched in April 2018, aimed to contribute to this goal by funding partnership approaches led by civil society support organisations, to bring about systems change to build stronger, more resilient communities and in turn achieve better outcomes for Londoners.

HOW THE FUND WORKS

The Fund adopted a two-stage application process.

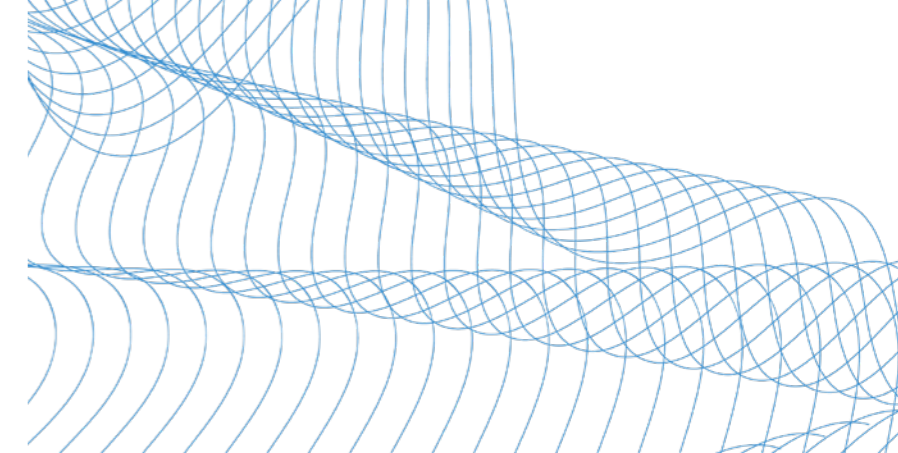
Stage One

Applications were made by civil society support organisations as lead applicants, on behalf of wider partnerships. Applicants submitted an initial proposal and could apply for a development grant of up to £20,000. City Bridge Trust funded all nine of the development grants, with all funders collectively contributing to decision making.

Stage Two

Funders decided, based on the focus of each successful stage 1 project and its strategic fit with their interests as an individual funder, which they were interested in funding. The applicants then worked with their allocated funder/s to develop a full application. Decisions were made by each funder, but moderation and discussion among funders took place to provide peer challenge and share learning.

The funders are now in the process of developing a second round of the Fund to be launched in early 2021.



LEARNING PARTNER ROLE

In November 2018, [Collaborate CIC](#) was appointed as learning partner for the first two years of the Fund, to bring learning to the initiative and generate learning about it.

As learning partner, Collaborate's role is to enable learning and generate insights about the Fund as a whole, not evaluate individual projects.

Table 1: Cornerstone Fund learning objectives

Civil society support organisations and the funded projects	Funders and the funding model	The systemic change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how the civil society support sector understands systems change and their role within it • how they have responded to this opportunity and developed their thinking and practice on systems change • how they have developed partnerships and collaborations (including across sectors) and what this has enabled them to achieve • opportunities and barriers for civil society support organisations to embed Way Ahead approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how funders understand systems change and their role within it • how funders have framed the opportunity and how they have developed their own thinking and practice, alongside supporting civil society support organisations to do so • the process of collaboration between funders together with insights on funding decisions • opportunities and barriers for funders to embedding Way Ahead approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what has been achieved and how • the added value (or not) of collaborations within and across sectors • enabling factors or barriers to deliver systemic change

1 SYSTEMS CHANGE AMBITIONS

At a workshop for Cornerstone Fund projects and funders in November 2018, we explored what systems change is and systems change ambitions for the Fund, to help develop a sense of shared purpose and inform our work as learning partner.

Features of systems change

Funders and funded projects identified what they saw as key features of systems change:

Table 2: What does systems change mean to you?

Component	Detail
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breaking down and working across boundaries• Recognising that no one person/organisation has the answer• Focusing on the change you are trying to achieve, not who does it
Collective understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collective conversations: broaden who defines the issues and how• Develop a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities
Rebalancing power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A more equal balance of power in the funder-grantee relationship• Having a seat at the table to influence from within• Give more power to people and communities to influence decisions• Enable strengths-based approaches that draw on community assets
Understanding the system and our roles in it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing understanding of where different people/organisations can best play a role• Develop our ability to navigate systems and structures• Civil society organisations need to change – can make small changes immediately
New ways of working	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Institutions and leadership need to adapt to address future needs• Comfort with ambiguity, complexity, uncertainty – self-reflection and honesty• ‘Measured excitement’: harness the energy while maintaining stamina and being purposeful about showing the difference systems change can make

Cornerstone Fund systems change ambitions

Based on these features identified, participants then explored systems change ambitions for the Fund, identifying two main ambitions for how the Fund can help achieve the Way Ahead goal of “a thriving Civil Society, which is adaptable, resilient, collaborative, sustainable and driven by communities, which will lead to improved outcomes for Londoners”.

Throughout this report we review progress against these two ambitions.

SYSTEMS CHANGE AMBITION 1

Developing and testing new ways of working (for civil society support organisations) to achieve the *Way Ahead* goal

Key features include:

- Reshaping civil society infrastructure in London
- Collaborating to achieve new approaches/outcomes
- Understanding community needs and how to respond to them
- Giving communities opportunities to participate in and influence decision making
- Promoting cross-sector working

SYSTEMS CHANGE AMBITION 2

Developing a new way of funding to achieve the *Way Ahead* goal, and influencing for the adoption of this practice more widely

Key features include:

- Demonstrating how systems change can be funded
- Understanding what roles different partners can play in systems change and what capacity it takes
- Developing enabling processes e.g. focus on learning, space to take risks
- Creating a movement of people doing systems change
- Influencing wider policy discourse/direction, including encouraging others to fund in this way

LEARNING PARTNER ROLE

The learning approach has had a dual focus on generating insights about progress and learning from the perspective of lead partners and funders, and bringing these two groups together in regular learning sessions to reflect on the insights generated to help shape the ongoing work.

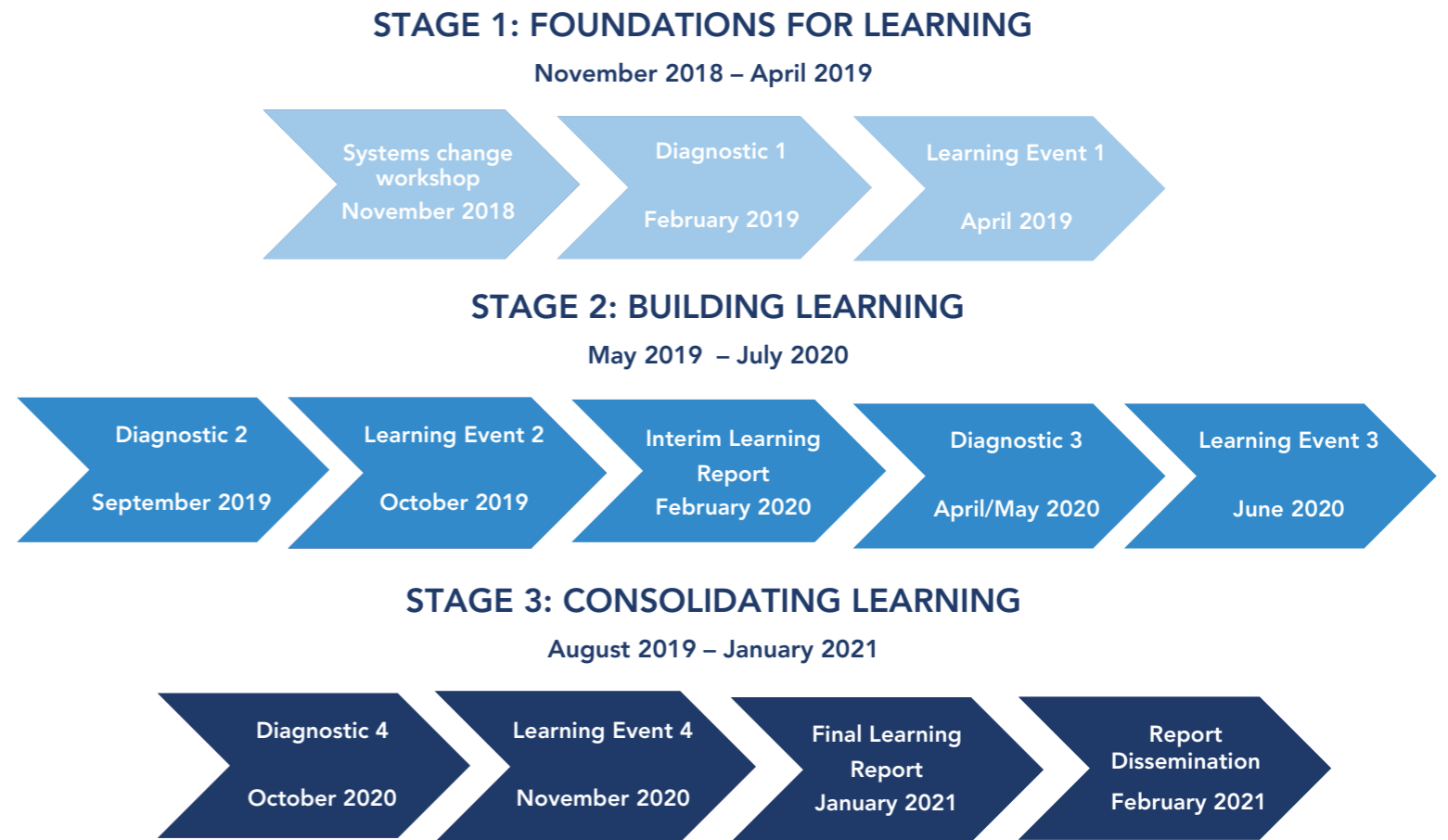
We conducted four phases of engagement, each lasting around six months. In each phase, we checked in with lead partners and funders through surveys and interviews/focus groups, then convened a learning event that brought together project leads and funders. This was supplemented by document reviews, for example, of application forms and monitoring reports.

We adapted the methodology to take into account the impact of the pandemic on projects and funders, resulting in lighter touch engagement during spring 2020.

We attempted to engage with wider project partners (beyond lead partners) in the final phase of engagement in autumn 2020. We conducted light-touch engagement with partners from seven projects (through surveys, plus interviews/attending partnership meetings) but the remainder were unable to engage due to capacity constraints relating to the pandemic.

Gaining insights from wider project partners is a key priority for the next stage of the Fund.

Diagram 1: Learning partner activities and timelines



1 LEARNING FRAMEWORK

As part of our methodology we developed a framework to enable learning on the priorities outlined in Table 1. Developed based on discussions with lead partners and funders, drawing on the Way Ahead outcomes framework and on Collaborate's and wider systems change research², we used the framework to help those involved in the Fund reflect on progress towards the systems change ambitions, understand how change is happening, and identify areas for development.

Systems change typically involves changing deep-rooted mindsets, behaviours, relationships and structures, and therefore tangible outcomes for people and communities may take years to emerge. For this reason, it is important to consider what foundations are being put in place for deeper, broader and more sustainable change. The foundations identified in the framework reflect key conditions for enabling systems change and their presence suggests that positive outcomes are more likely to emerge in the long term.

For the purpose of this report, we have summarised the five foundations under four headlines:

- System Awareness and Behaviours
- Collaboration (encompassing Collective Vision & Purpose)
- Learning and Adaptation
- Power (encompassing both Influencing & Leadership and Voice & Agency)

In Chapter 2 we explore progress and learning for partnerships against each of these areas, and for funders in Chapter 3.

Diagram 2: The Cornerstone Fund Learning Framework

FOUNDATIONS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE



FUNDED PARTNERSHIPS: PROGRESS AND LEARNING



This chapter focuses on progress and learning in relation to the first systems change ambition:

SYSTEMS CHANGE AMBITION 1

Developing and testing new ways of working (for civil society support organisations) to achieve the *Way Ahead* goal.

Collectively, civil society partnerships have made good progress towards this systems change ambition. The space the Fund has provided to explore more systemic, collaborative ways of working was new for many partnerships and in some cases it took time to adjust and take advantage of the opportunities to work in different ways.

For many of the partnerships, Year 1 was focused on developing the foundations for change, and Year 2 on delivery.

Progress so far has highlighted the opportunities presented by taking systemic, collaborative approaches, and specifically the valuable role of civil society infrastructure organisations in a facilitative, connecting role, which was more important than ever in the COVID-19 context.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the partnerships, but as foundations for an adaptive approach had been created from the start, and with continued flexibility from funders, partnerships adjusted their work to respond to the changing context.

This chapter begins with an overview of the funded partnerships (see Appendix for project summaries), exploring the diverse features of the partnerships and summarising some of the key stages of development.

It then explores learning across the ten partnerships in relation to the systems change foundations set out in Chapter 1. For each of the systems change foundations, we set out key learning from Cornerstone Fund partnerships, and identify related features of effective practice. The features of effective practice identify both examples of good practice and areas for partnerships to focus on in the future to embed and sustain their work.

PARTNERSHIPS: AN OVERVIEW

Table 3: Cornerstone Fund partnerships summary

To find out more about each of the partnerships and progress so far, see the appendix.

Project name	Lead organisation	Partners	Lead funder	Grant*	Term
Communicating the Race Equality Message Effectively	Race On the Agenda	BTEG and The Runnymede Trust	City Bridge Trust	£257,100	36 Months
Datawise London	Superhighways	London Plus, DataKind UK, HEAR Network, Coalition for Efficiency and Makerble	City Bridge Trust	£303,600	24 Months
H4All – Stronger together	H4All	Hillingdon Borough Council, Hillingdon CCG, Hillingdon Confederation of GPs, Hillingdon Health and Care Partnership (HHCP)and a range of Voluntary, Community and Third Sector groups across Hillingdon	City Bridge Trust	£336,600	36 Months
London Village Network – Young People’s Foundation Partnership	Local Village Network	Wide range of partners including for example local authorities, City and Islington College and the Metropolitan Police	John Lyon’s Charity	£106,000	36 Months
NetEquality	HEAR Network	Consortium, David Wilcox, Drew Mackie, Inclusion London, Refugee Council and Superhighways	National Lottery Community Fund	£247,137	24 Months
North Camden Zone Community Action Initiative	The Winch	Wide range of partners including for example the local authority, housing providers and community groups.	National Lottery Community Fund and Trust for London	£398,309	36 Months
Refugee Advocacy Forum for London	The Refugee Council	14 co-founding members of the forum	City Bridge Trust	£220,800	36 Months
Setting the research agenda with, and, for young Londoners	Partnership for Young London	London Youth, Centre for Youth Impact, Young People’s Foundations	City Bridge Trust	£138,000	24 Months
The Power Sharing Project	Sheila McKechnie Foundation	Members of the Community of Practice and Core Learning Group	Trust for London and City Bridge Trust	£159,000	24 Months
The London VCSE Health and Wellbeing Transformation Project	Community Links Bromley	Hackney CVS, Metro GAVS, Enfield Voluntary Action and Merton Voluntary Service Council	City Bridge Trust	£191,630	36 Months

*All projects, except from Local Village Network, also received a development grant from City Bridge Trust. These grants ranged from £17,000 to £20,000.

Each Cornerstone Fund project has distinct features and differs in terms of key characteristics including:

- **Partnership size and structure:** the size of partnerships range from small closely knitted collaborations to broader, looser partnerships. Some projects like the Power Sharing Project led by the Sheila McKechnie Foundation consist of a large and relatively loose partnership made up of members of their Core Learning Group; and Local Village Network's work includes partnerships with a diverse range of cross-sector organisations across London. Other collaborations feature a tighter, smaller group of core partners such as ROTA's work with The Runnymede Trust and BTEG.
- **Type of partners:** lead partners in the Fund range from CVSs like Community Links Bromley and H4All to smaller grassroots organisations like LVN and The Winch. The type of partners involved also varies across and within projects, ranging from individuals and small grassroots community organisations to statutory partners.
- **Project themes:** although all projects seek to build a more effective civil society and improve outcomes for Londoners, the focus varies from tackling health inequalities and increasing race equality to increasing youth participation, community-led action, data capabilities and advocacy skills.
- **Geographical reach:** the projects vary in terms of geographic focus. Some are place-based initiatives working in a specific geographic area, e.g. The Winch working on two estates in Camden, and H4All working in one London borough. Other more thematic-focused partnerships such as LVN and Partnership for Young London work London-wide.
- **Project duration and funding:** projects differ in terms of the amount of funding they have requested and the duration of funding - the majority of projects requested funding for three years, but some for just two years.

SUMMARY OF APPROACHES

While the Cornerstone Fund partnerships are diverse in their focus and composition, there are some common themes in the overall approaches they have taken. Key steps (relevant to some if not all projects) include:

DEVELOPING FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

This includes the development stage and early parts of partnership development where the focus was on:

- Mobilising partners, building relationships and trust
- Gathering a diverse range of insights to develop understanding of the system
- Working with partners to agree a shared vision and develop project plans, including identifying where each partner can make the best contribution
- Getting operational foundations in place, e.g. signing partner agreements, arranging a series of partner meetings, recruiting project staff

CREATING CHANGE

The delivery phase, spanning the majority of the project-funded period, including delivery of key activities and building the foundations for long term change:

- Testing and learning through delivery

- Building capacity and ownership with the wider sector through delivering training, co-designing activities, developing toolkits and resources
- Continuing to bring partners together to embed collaboration and refine purpose
- Coordinating partnership development and delivery of project plans
- Influencing key local partners and decision makers to help shift power and demonstrate the opportunities of community-driven approaches

SUSTAINING AND SPREADING CHANGE

Many partnerships are only midway through projects delivery at the end of 2020. Options they are considering to sustain and spread change beyond the funding period include:

- Building ownership among partnership organisations to sustain collaborative working towards shared goals beyond the funded project
- Influencing policy, for example commissioning practice
- Building and strengthening capacity of partners and Londoners
- Developing and improving tools and resources to share with a wider audience
- Securing additional funding to resource ongoing work



SYSTEMS AWARENESS & BEHAVIOURS

While systems awareness and behaviours understandably vary across projects, overall lead partners have reported improved understanding of systems change, greater awareness of the systems they are operating within, and evidence of more collaborative behaviours. The Cornerstone Fund offers a rare opportunity to enable partnerships to invest time in developing systems awareness and behaviours, and clear benefits are already beginning to emerge in terms of enabling collaboration, shared understanding of issues, and joint delivery.

Systemic approaches are more important than ever as inequalities deepen as a result of the pandemic. However, with the crisis creating pressure for short term fixes, ensuring a focus on long-term change, and managing the tensions in this, will be a crucial ongoing role for lead partners.

Features of effective practice

- Understanding the system you are part of (e.g. purpose, actors, relationships, power dynamics, opportunities for alignment) is a key initial step and ongoing priority to enable effective systems change approaches
- Engaging partners in activity to understand the system is an important way to generate new insights, recognise the interconnected nature of the issues you seek to tackle, and build increased trust between partners as a foundation for working together
- Ensure a focus on long term change throughout, rooted in ambitions for systemic change, rather than more and/or better delivery of traditional activities that address symptoms. Holding the tension to maintain the focus on long term change is a crucial role for lead partners
- The importance of convening, facilitating and connecting – all roles crucial to systemic, collaborative working – have been highlighted during the pandemic and will remain more important than ever in the coming years. Civil society support organisations can play an important role in enabling these approaches if resourced appropriately.

SYSTEMS AWARENESS & BEHAVIOURS

A. IDENTIFYING THE POTENTIAL OF A SYSTEMS LENS AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Partners have reflected on the value of approaching their work through a systems lens to better understand the interconnected nature of the issues they are tackling, uncover what approaches and resources already exist, and identify opportunities to align efforts with other stakeholders. The process of understanding the system not only uncovers new insights but is also a way to develop trusting relationships with partners, enabling a focus on shared objectives and development of collaborative (rather than competitive) behaviours.

“I have a renewed appreciation for the different roles a variety of stakeholders play. It can be easy to become single minded in our work to look inwards when setting out to achieve specific goals.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Datawise London used network mapping (see diagram 3) at the start of their partnership in 2019 to identify organisations they as partners were linked with in connection to the project’s aims. They repeated the exercise in 2020, adding new connections that had come about because of their project and the increased joint working it had brought about. These new connections are shown in grey in the diagram.

An improved understanding of the system has in turn enabled partners to identify where they can each add the most value.

“The Cornerstone Fund has shown us how important it is to approach change through a systems lens. The London focus has given us a much more detailed understanding and availability of London-specific resources. Partners are able to take on the ‘right role’, leading when useful, it feels like a really different way of working.”

– LEAD PARTNER

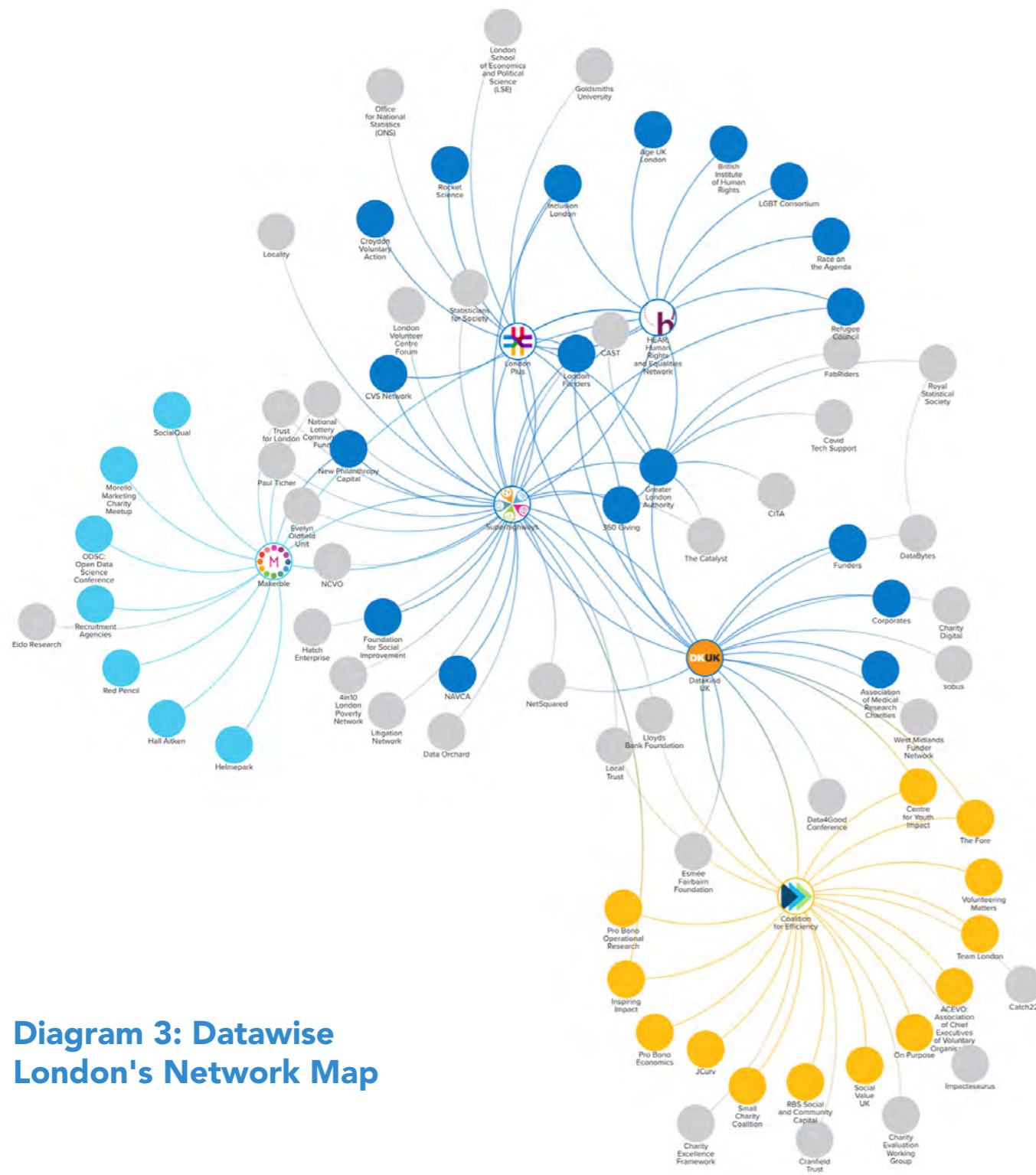


Diagram 3: Datawise London's Network Map

SYSTEMS AWARENESS & BEHAVIOURS

B. UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM IS AN ONGOING PRIORITY

Partners have recognised the importance of not only developing awareness of the system in scoping their work, but continually revisiting this as the context changes to ensure their focus and tactics are relevant.

“Systems awareness was key at the beginning but it is also an area for continuous learning as there are hierarchies about what is going on with COVID recovery plans, new subsystems being created.”

- LEAD PARTNER

“We’re revisiting our understanding of the system. It’s interesting for partners to reflect and revisit some of the content and check we’re in the right place.”

- LEAD PARTNER

In some cases, partners have decided to focus on deepening their understanding of discrete parts of the system as their work evolves. For example, through exploring key strategic priorities with its members over its first year, the Refugee Advocacy Forum is focusing on access to legal advice for asylum seekers and the sustainability of refugee community organisations. Forum members will now work to understand these specific issues in more depth to identify how they can best work together to enable change.

SYSTEMS AWARENESS & BEHAVIOURS

C. HOLDING THE TENSION TO FOCUS ON LONG TERM CHANGE

The systemic changes the Cornerstone Fund projects are seeking to achieve (for example citizen co-production of health and wellbeing services, resident-led transformation of estates, transforming the effectiveness of race equality communications) are long term. While significant progress can be made, these ambitions are unlikely to be achieved within a traditional 2–3-year project timescale, due to factors including the complex nature of the change they are working towards, the shifts in relationships and power that need to happen to enable change, and the impact of external factors on the pace of change (for example COVID-19 and the impact of Brexit and Black Lives Matter on the landscape for race equality).

Some lead partners have highlighted the challenges of maintaining the focus on long term ambitions in the face of immediate pressures, and the tendency of partners to default to a traditional mindset and behaviours of short-term fixes and tangible outputs. Lead partners have a key role to play in holding this tension and advocating for and maintaining the emphasis on the opportunity for systemic change over the long term.

“We have learnt a lot about how to juggle the desire to hold this space in the ethos of systems change and creating a space for learning and reflection, and the desire to create tangible outputs.”

– LEAD PARTNER

“When you are trying to do things in practice, interacting with people, working on system change initiatives, you understand better what to do but you also understand how challenging it is to achieve system change. I understood that people want change but when it comes to work towards it, they seem to hesitate, or they behave in a way that suggests that they would rather prefer a short cut to that change.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Working towards systemic change has been particularly challenging during the pandemic. While in many cases the importance of collaboration has been reinforced, efforts have typically been on crisis response rather than long-term change. Some projects see their work as playing an important role in creating the space for strategic thinking over the coming months to help develop enduring approaches essential for tackling structural inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. The decrease in capacity for civil society organisations, particularly smaller organisations, to engage in these conversations is a key challenge.

“Working systemically in crisis period has not been easy. Trying to bring a systemic approach when people are focusing on emergency funding and food poverty.”

– LEAD PARTNER

SYSTEMS AWARENESS & BEHAVIOURS

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D. SYSTEMS CHANGE IN PRACTICE: MAKING IT REAL

Systems change understanding and practice varies between partnerships, and between individual organisations and individuals involved. Overall, for many lead partners, the experience of working on a system change initiative in practice has been key to developing an understanding of what it looks and feels like, and the potential of what can be achieved.

Partners have gained experience in making systems change an accessible concept for partners, exploring what it looks like at a hyperlocal level, and the value of rooting the work in tangible examples to demonstrate and galvanise people around signs of progress.

“I have learnt about the importance of defining what “systems change” means in a hyperlocal context working in a neighbourhood. For us it is celebrating the small wins and changes in behaviour.”

– LEAD PARTNER

“The biggest achievement so far is being able to communicate with leaders of small organisations and convince them that with their small contributions they can be part of a system change which could potentially result in or achieve a tremendous positive change for their communities. Putting this idea into context and conceptualising this change in terms that can be easily digested...”

– LEAD PARTNER

The complex nature of systems change initiatives and the fact that experiencing what looks and feels different to a ‘traditional’ project is so crucial to making it tangible means it can take a while for new members of staff and partners to “wrap their head around things”, making turnover of staff a particular challenge.

Deepening and broadening the focus on systems change will be a key priority in the next phase of projects’ development, ensuring that planning and delivery of project activities is clearly rooted in long term systemic ambitions.

SYSTEMS AWARENESS & BEHAVIOURS

E. SYSTEMS CHANGE ROLES: CONNECTING AND FACILITATING ARE ESSENTIAL ENABLERS

Lead partners' understanding of their role, and the role of civil society support more generally, in enabling systems change has developed through their involvement in the Fund.

“Our role is to corral everyone into action, bringing people together, acting as the spider in the web”

– LEAD PARTNER

In year 1, we asked projects to describe their systems change role as lead partners.

There is an emphasis on coordinating, connecting, facilitating, convening, creating spaces to bring different perspectives together, influencing, supporting and 'bridging' across different sectors.

“We are asserting ourselves as the lynch pin to the community voice, facilitating the audience so we can 'feed' directly from the bottom up, also placing ourselves in the relevant influential positions to inform decision making in a commissioning context, this is where real, lasting change will take place.”

– LEAD PARTNER

<p>Convene conversations that help civil society understand how it shares power and test practical ideas for improvement – Sheila McKechnie Foundation</p>	<p>Enabling small equality groups to influence change in systems, supporting them to generate and share learning – HEAR Network</p>	<p>Helping to join up youth services by signposting young people to youth services – London Village Network</p>
<p>Facilitating collaboration among partners to allow the effective communication of the work of race equality organisations – Race On the Agenda</p>	<p>Creating a movement of people who want to collaborate. Keeping the momentum going and being relentless in a good way – Partnership for Young London</p>	<p>Connecting data assets across systems and supporting attitude and behaviour change to enable civil society to better shape services – Superhighways</p>
<p>Facilitating the creation of a Refugee Community Organisation (RCO) advocacy forum to enable RCOs to have a voice, engage and influence policy and decision-making processes – The Refugee Council</p>	<p>Provide leadership to the Third Sector to harness their knowledge and skills to influence and create multi-agency support systems for community health and wellbeing – H4All</p>	<p>Creating space for stakeholders to come together around a systemic issue and provide them with the necessary resources to succeed in the collaboration. Catalyst for systems change – The Winch</p>

Partners emphasised that the importance of these roles has been reinforced in response to the pandemic, with civil society infrastructure acting as a source of collective intelligence for the sector, distributing essential information and resources, and connecting and convening people and local groups and supporting them to act. This highlights the importance of funding activity beyond traditional 'delivery' roles such as convening, facilitating and connecting, which are essential for enabling collaborative whole system efforts.



COLLABORATION

This section draws mainly on learning relating to the Collective vision and purpose foundation.

The development of partnership approaches has been an important achievement of the Fund which has incentivised collaboration in a way that the majority of funding programmes do not (and sometimes actively undermine through a focus on the narrow contribution of single organisations).

Developing collective vision and purpose among partners has been a crucial foundation for collaboration, but one that has taken longer than expected to establish. Overall, the investment of time in developing collective purpose has been valuable in helping build relationships and insights that are foundational for working together to achieve systemic change. Projects have taken a range of different approaches to collaboration. The pros and cons of different models of collaboration, and what works in what context, will be an important ongoing area of learning for the Fund.

Features of effective practice

- Intentionally consider what type of collaboration (e.g. breadth, intensity, structure) best fits the ambitions of your work
- Partnership coordination is key in bringing partners together and enabling them to work effectively together – resourcing of this function/role is essential
- Continually reflect on collective purpose to adapt as the context changes, and as you learn through your work
- Carefully consider who needs to be involved, and crucially, how – a participatory process is key to uncovering new insights and developing the trusting relationships essential for collaborative change. This includes engaging people and organisations who have insights and influence on an issue beyond formal project partners.
- Consider what partners need to agree on and what it's ok for them to have different perspectives on - not everyone needs to agree on everything to identify a collective vision and work effectively in a way that draws on each partners' strengths.

COLLABORATION

A. UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM AND THE POTENTIAL OF COLLABORATION

The Fund aims to “support collaborations and partnership approaches to bring about systems change”. As outlined on page 15-16, partnership approaches vary considerably in terms of partnership size, role, extent of collaboration, geographical coverage and focus.

When reviewing their position on the collaboration spectrum (below), projects broadly believed they have adopted a relevant form of collaboration for their purpose, context and current stage. Projects also recognised that they need to think consciously about what type of collaboration is relevant for different stages of their work and that they need to be fluid in their approach. They are likely to move up and down the spectrum at different times depending on the nature of the work, and many projects are multi-layered (meaning lead partners are collaborating with different partners in different ways) and can be working at multiple points on the spectrum at the same time.

Diagram 4: Projects mapped onto the collaboration spectrum.³

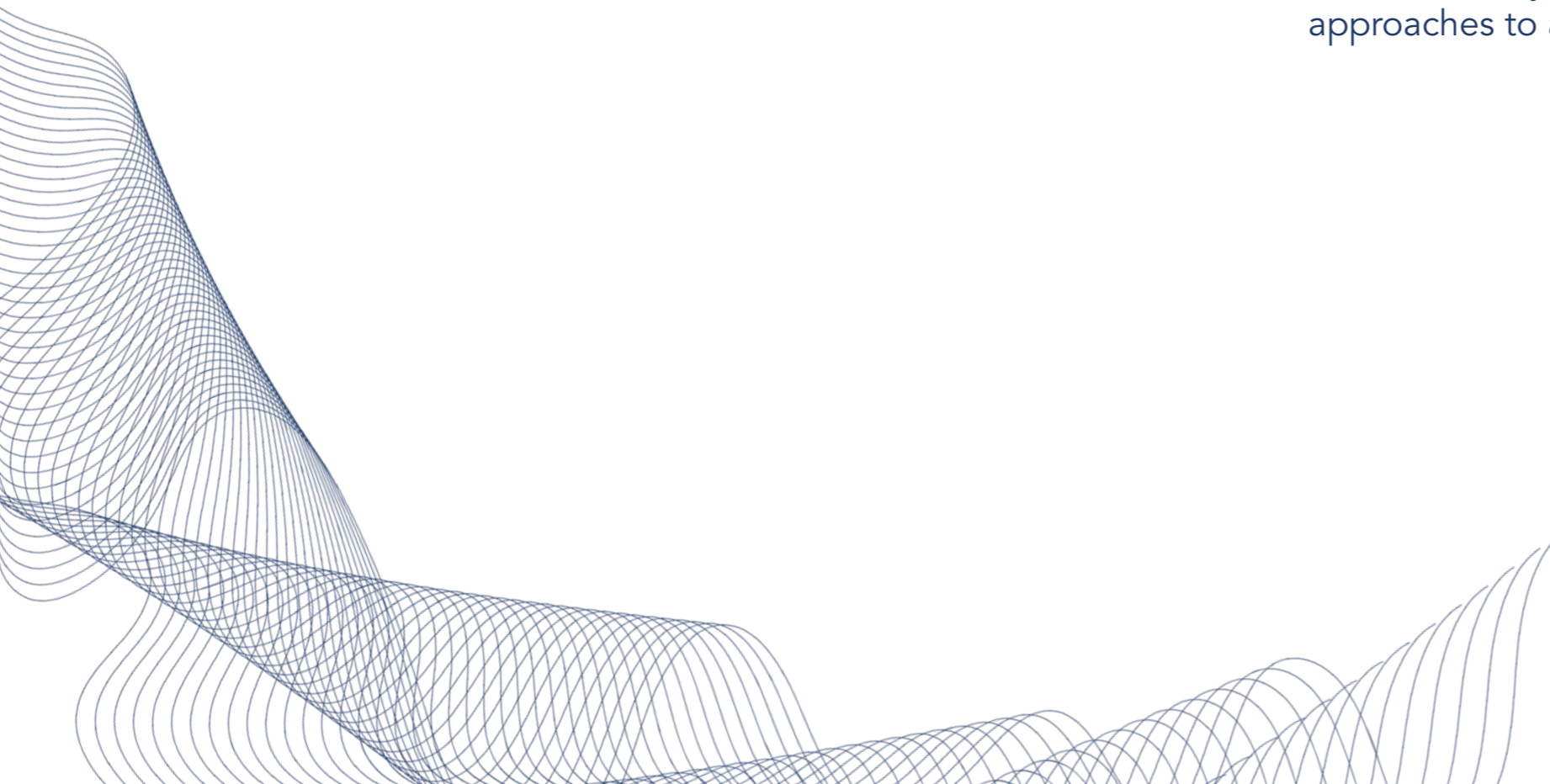


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Some projects identified that they are likely to adopt more intensive forms of collaboration over time. Generally, those who are cooperating or coordinating at the moment anticipated that they will naturally move further towards 'collaboration' as the focus of their work and their partnerships develop. For example, for Local Village Network it has been important to both expand and deepen their network during the course of the project.

Due to the pandemic and desire to focus on more immediate learning, we did not revisit the 'collaboration spectrum' in year 2. Overall, the pandemic had a range of effects on collaboration. In some cases, partnerships worked more closely together, seeing the necessity of more joined up approaches in the time of crisis. In other cases, partners became less engaged due to capacity constraints, for example due to staff being on furlough.

Exploring how partnerships evolve will be a key ongoing area for learning over the next year, including the relative costs and benefits of different approaches to and intensities of collaboration.



COLLABORATION

2
B. DEVELOPING COLLECTIVE VISION AND PURPOSE: A CHALLENGING BUT CRUCIAL FOUNDATION

Developing collective vision and purpose has been a key focus for projects from the start. This has been an important achievement in itself - helping partners to align themselves and identify opportunities to work more effectively together than apart. While partnerships anticipated that this would be an important first step, as with efforts to understand the system, many did not realise how much of an ongoing focus this would be.

In some cases, the time taken to agree an initial collective vision was due to the challenges of developing relationships and trust among new partners and agreeing a shared aim among organisations with very different ways of working. Developing collective purpose has not necessarily been about agreeing on everything, but identifying what common ambition partners have and what roles each can best play in working towards this.

Most importantly, partners have come to see the value in constantly reviewing purpose and strategies of achieving this as a core feature of effective collaboration when tackling complex issues, adapting to the changing external context and what partners are learning.

“We didn’t know at the beginning how the partnership was going to work. During the last six months, everyone has got on the same page. A joint session in May helped – the partnership better knows what each other are doing and have started monthly 30 min catch ups.”

– LEAD PARTNER

In some cases, partnerships have taken a very structured approach to developing a collective vision. The Refugee Advocacy Forum, for example, worked with partners to collectively develop the vision for the partnership, terms of reference, appoint board members and identify advocacy priorities to focus on through a process of voting. The North Camden Zone Community Action Initiative has adopted a structured approach based around appointing community organisers, developing manifestos, then identifying community-based projects to work on with local people.

Other projects have adopted a more organic approach and developed broad strategies for change. For many this approach was required to enable iteration and learning, but a number of partners have reflected that with hindsight they would have developed plans in more detail from the start and refined the focus. Often this is less about agreeing the collective vision and purpose, and more about the challenges of agreeing how they were going to work towards this, with many adopting a process of testing and iteration as described in the next section.

“The biggest challenge was to develop a common understanding of what we wanted to achieve and how to go about it. There was a list of different ideas and ways of implementing them, so ideation phase was a big challenge until we managed to agree on a theory of change with clear step by step implementation.”

– PROJECT PARTNER

COLLABORATION

2
C. DEVELOPING OWNERSHIP THROUGH A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

While partnerships have adopted a range of different approaches to developing their collective vision and purpose, doing this through a participatory approach has been a crucial way to understand the system together, build relationships and trust, and create ownership for delivering on the collective vision.

“Decision making is done by the group – we want them to feel the forum is theirs. By the third year want to be able to pass it on.”

– LEAD PARTNER

One key area of learning for the North Camden Zone Community Action Initiative was the need to involve a range of people and perspectives from the start. In their initial phase of work on the Chalcots estate, the process of developing a manifesto setting out priorities for change focused entirely on the views of residents, with the ambition to then work with local partners to help co-design how these goals could be met. However, they found that this approach could have benefitted from insights from professionals from the start, including building their sense of investment in the approach and identified goals. In their next phase of work on the Hilgrove estate, they plan to take a less ‘purist’ approach, bringing both residents and local organisations together so that collective dialogue can happen sooner, and ownership can be built from the start.

“Through this project we have learnt the need to be adaptive around local engagement strategies and if needs be, to adapt those strategies to ensure widest possible involvement of the sector. We have also learnt the importance of engaging appropriate community leaders early in the process and to ensure that our processes are stakeholder driven. ”

– LEAD PARTNER

COLLABORATION

D. COLLABORATION CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS

Funding for partnerships (particularly focused on long term systemic change), has been a valuable and relatively rare opportunity which has enabled new thinking and practice among Cornerstone Fund projects. However, collaboration is rarely straightforward, particularly as it requires challenging the competitive approaches and behaviours typically driven by funding approaches.

“How we have approached this work has been different because it has been collaborative and partners haven’t been territorial. It’s evolved over time due to the freedom and flexibility.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Challenges

Partnerships have encountered a number of challenges so far relating to collaboration including:

- Navigating the differences between diverse partners to **reach agreement on a common vision** and a common understanding on how to deliver on the agreed ambitions of the partnership
- The level **of time and resource required to manage partnership approaches**, including the investment required in building trust and relationships as well as more time spent on establishment of formal structures for legal reasons

- Difficulties in **building trust and relationships when working remotely**
- **Communicating effectively** across partnership
- Building ownership among the partnership while also knowing when it is necessary to exert authority as lead partner to overcome challenges
- Enabling an inclusive approach that **meaningfully engages all partners while also taking into account the capacity constraints**, particularly for smaller partners
- **Managing changes in partner organisations** including changes in capacity over time, changes in staff and changes in where partnership budget is required.

“The biggest challenge has been the different levels of capacity commitment to the project [as some partners have] different needs and sometimes priorities. This is one of the areas of richness of the project but we have needed to put a considerable amount of time and thought into partnership and capacity building work, which is ongoing.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Benefits

Despite these challenges, overall, the opportunity to work in partnership has enabled many benefits including:

- Improved **relationships and trust** between partners
- Improved **understanding of the system** through bringing together insights across partners
- Improved **understanding of partners' roles** in the system to enable better alignment and address gaps and share resource to increase capacity/improve efficiency towards shared goals
- Ability to engage with and influence stakeholders together, with a **stronger collective voice**
- Increased evidence of **collaborative behaviours** among organisations and individuals involved
- Enabling a more **proactive and joined up response** to external developments
- Increased **sharing of learning**, and seeing the value of this, between partners
- Sense of being **"all in it together"** in tackling the challenges presented by the pandemic
- The ability to create space for different, **more systemic conversations** that build collective understanding and help increase understanding and empathy with others
- **Amplifying the voice of grassroots** civil society organisations and Londoners.
- **Collaboratively working with Londoners** to explore power and systems change

"Through being involved in this project I've learnt a lot about the context of the area and the change that is needed. I learned to step back and slow down my pace, and think more strategically, not steam rolling other organisations."

– PROJECT PARTNER

"Our achievement so far is the design of a prototype of a social network map that has enabled members to know each other better, to work together better, to better share information and resources, to celebrate success together and to engage and influence stakeholders together."

– PROJECT PARTNER

As well as the immediate benefits of collaboration for Cornerstone Fund projects, working in partnership has enabled wider opportunities:

- Building on the strong relationships established to undertake new areas of collaborative work that wouldn't have happened otherwise.
- Broader strategic connections between partner organisations which didn't exist previously.
- Commitment to work collaboratively for the long term, beyond the duration of Cornerstone Fund funding.

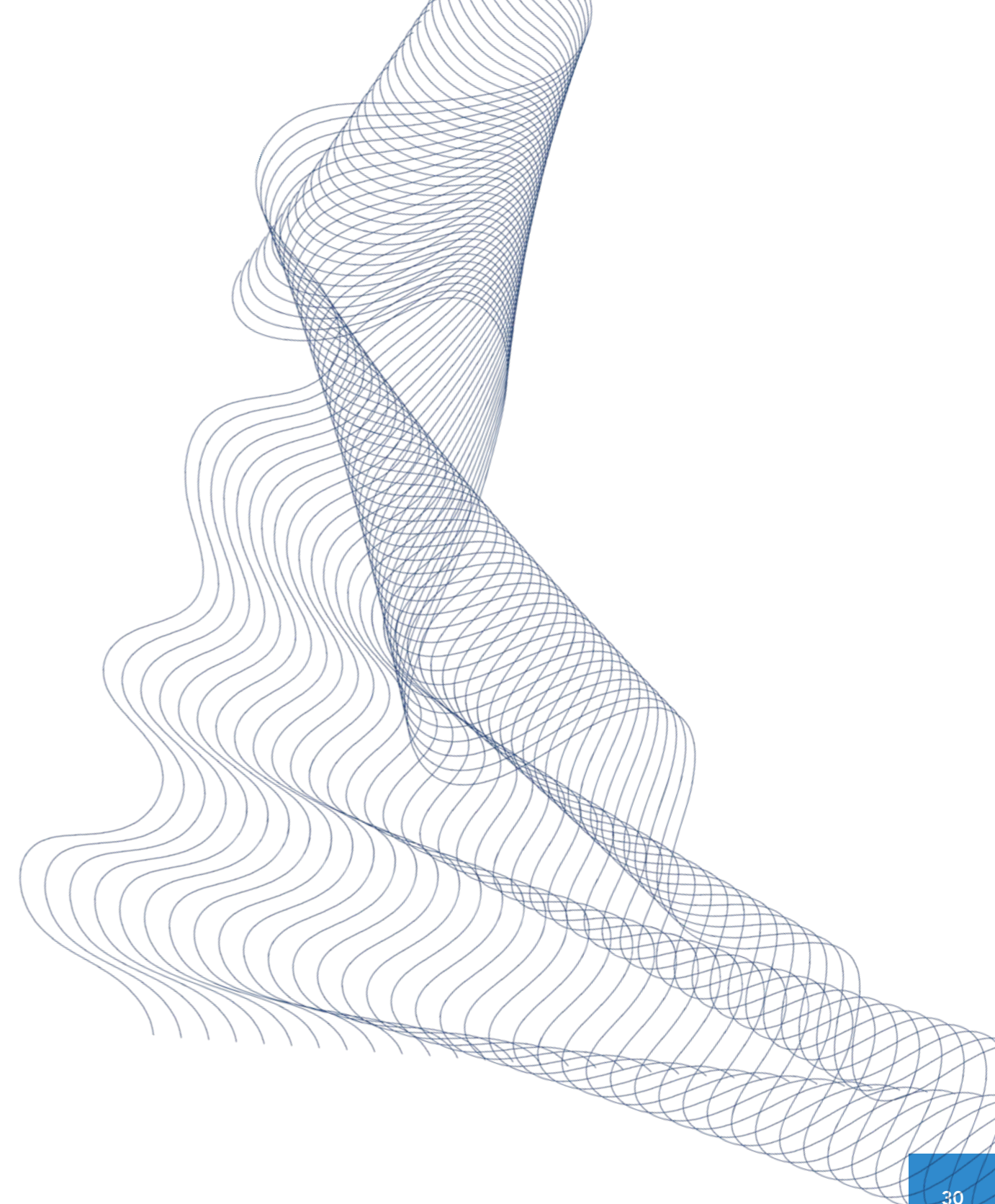
“One of the greatest achievements is bringing a range of youth sector groups together to help shape the data and insight for COVID - without the existing partnerships this wouldn't have happened.”

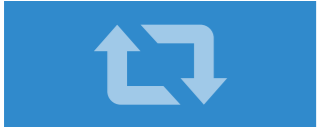
– LEAD PARTNER

“This project has marked a really important and significant step forward in positioning RCOs as true partners in strategic level advocacy activity rather than a supporting role.”

– LEAD PARTNER

The ability to sustain and deepen collaboration will depend on factors beyond the Cornerstone Fund, including the wider context of funding and commissioning, which in many cases pits civil society organisations against each other in competition. In Chapter 4 we explore what role the Fund can play collectively in sharing its learning and influencing for change.





LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

Learning and adaptation has proven to be an even more important feature than partners anticipated at the start and has been a key area in which their practice has developed. COVID-19 has been an obvious driver of adaptation, but importantly, the emergent⁴ nature of the change partnerships seek to achieve has meant this has been a key feature from the start.

The importance of learning has been a key area of development in thinking and practice for many projects. They have embraced the freedom to learn that the Fund provides, have built distinct practice, and identified opportunities to develop this further.

Features of effective practice

- Be prepared to learn and adapt throughout – strategies will only be effective if they shift to take into account changes in the external context, and in response to what partners are learning
- Consider the role of experimentation in helping test and learn when the way forward is not clear
- Invest in developing a learning culture among partners; for example, creating dedicated spaces for partners to share insights and identify how to act on these
- Embracing learning and adaptation requires a significant shift in mindset from how funding programmes are traditionally managed and how organisations are typically held to account. Shared conversations between funders and projects can play an important role in helping 'hold your nerve'

LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

A. CONTINUALLY ADAPTING TO A CHANGING EXTERNAL CONTEXT

Even as they developed their stage 2 applications, examples of the emergent nature of projects' work began to surface as changes occurred in the external environment, which in some cases created a more challenging context for achieving systems change ambitions.

"We haven't changed our plans from stage 1 but we're being forced into being more reactive as a result of the external environment"

– LEAD PARTNER

"It's a very volatile local context to work in... we have had to tread very carefully and it has taken longer to develop... because we want to codesign how it is developed"

– LEAD PARTNER

Changes in the external context have continued to require projects to learn and adapt throughout to seize new opportunities and respond to new challenges, from changes to health structures to changes in the local political context. For example, the CRÈME project has evolved its work to respond to major developments impacting race equality, including Brexit, the 2019 general election, the pandemic and Black Lives Matter. While the overall vision remains the same, developments such as these have required partners to evolve their focus and tactics overtime, often very rapidly. In some cases, the developments have helped

accelerate change, in others they have posed challenges and created setbacks against the overall vision, demonstrating the fact that change is not linear and that many factors are beyond the direct control of projects.

"With so many different moving parts and a variety of partners involved we need to be able to change direction, adapt our approach and often surrender a work stream and start again for the benefit of the project and ultimately for systems change to occur."

– LEAD PARTNER

The pandemic has had obvious impacts on all projects: the need to shift modes of delivery (typically online), to adjust strategies to the needs of Londoners and civil society organisations in the context of the pandemic, and to look ahead to mobilise partners around tackling the systemic challenges that have in many cases been exacerbated by the pandemic.

"Being flexible and learning felt like the natural choice, we are always doing this but we have done it even more during COVID."

– LEAD PARTNER

LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

2
B. THE ROLE OF EXPERIMENTATION

Experimentation is a crucial tool for seeking ways to address complex social challenges. From the start, projects acknowledged the importance of experimentation in iteratively testing approaches, building insights, and shaping their strategy. In particular, experimentation has helped some projects break through a sense of paralysis in not knowing the 'right' option, enabling them to take action and test.

"The issues which arise, and the subsequent interventions, are emergent. We cannot determine what will be co-designed and delivered. It also means we need to experiment with our interventions. Some things will work. Some things will fail. We need funders to allow us to have unknowns in terms of what will be delivered, space to fail and the ability to take risks within proposals for funding."

– LEAD PARTNER

"We had to take an approach of learning and experimentation to figure out what we want to do. This type of approach has been a learning journey for everybody in the project."

– LEAD PARTNER

The role of experimentation in projects varies. In some cases, projects have experimented at the start to help shape their strategy longer term.

"We have treated Year 1 as a test bed, learning more about needs and creating sessions and resources - building in more structured delivery for Year 2."

– LEAD PARTNER

In other cases, projects have experimented at various points when the path forward seemed unclear, while HEAR has adopted experimentation as the key vehicle for its ongoing work:

"We have divided our project into a number of 'experiments', each with its own team of 'explorers', which draw in our grass roots members and expert campaigners from other experienced campaigning organisations, to work alongside us."

– LEAD PARTNER

Importantly, experimentation should be structured to ensure that testing helps explore the questions that are key to advancing practice, and to enable insights generated to be gathered and acted on in a considered and timely way.

LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

2
C. DEVELOPING AND EMBEDDING A LEARNING CULTURE

As well as structured experimentation, the overall development of a learning culture and intentional processes to support this has been an important feature of many projects. For some, embedding learning as a core feature of their practice is new – a realisation influenced by the reality of working on systems change initiatives and the tangible value they have experienced from sharing insights with partners, enabled by the flexibility the Cornerstone Fund offers.

For some partners, there has been a noticeable shift in mindset and behaviours as a result of engaging in open, ongoing learning with peers, which has potential for changing practice in the long term.

“I was previously thinking quite rigidly about the process of changing things, thinking we needed one solution that fits all which could solve all the problems outlined in the bid. I now see that diversity of tactics and entry points is key, and understanding differing needs, approaching things in many different ways, working with people understanding how they work.”

– LEAD PARTNER

“I’ve noticed a big difference in culture and ways of working, for example, the focus on organic learning – there is constant focus on learning and linking up in the network.”

– PROJECT PARTNER

A number of projects have acknowledged the value of coming together as partners to focus on learning, and the opportunities to do more of this in the future to enable and strengthen their work.

“We have seen the value of conversations around learning. Our new approach to partnership meetings focus on this as well as process and operations.”

– LEAD PARTNER

“There is more we could have done to learn from each other. We have a strong story to tell collectively.”

– PROJECT PARTNER

While projects have embraced the opportunities for learning and adaptation the Fund presents, the level of adaptation required has surprised many projects, and it has taken a period of adjustment to trust that funders mean what they say in terms of the scope to change plans. Reinforcing the importance of this practice has been a key focus of joint learning events among projects and funders, with peers sharing the adaptations they are making to their work acting as a key source of reassurance for others. Two lead partners who are partners on each other’s projects highlighted that being involved in each other’s’ work has helped them to hold their nerve as they have grappled with flexibility and adaptability required to work on systems change initiatives. Round 1 projects can play a key role in helping share learning on this with Round 2 applicants.



POWER

This section draws mainly on learning relating to the Voice and agency and Influencing and Leadership foundations.

Shifting power is central to achieving the ambitions of the Fund – to developing a thriving civil society driven by communities. Cornerstone Fund partnerships aim to distribute greater power to Londoners, particularly those facing the greatest inequalities, through increasing voice and agency at multiple levels – by supporting civil society organisations to lead change and in turn support Londoners and by building collective influencing and leadership as a sector/sub-sector.

Shifting power is a key strategy for achieving systemic and lasting change as it seeks to develop the capacity, confidence, structures and relationships to enable long term change that extends beyond the lifetime of the Cornerstone Fund.

The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, making challenging dominant power structures more important than ever. In some cases, COVID-19 has helped get voices heard, in other cases, traditional dynamics have been reasserted.

Features of effective practice

- Put consideration of power at the heart of systems change strategies and consciously reflect on this at each stage
- Create spaces for people (including Londoners, where appropriate) to come together and consider power dynamics and how these need to change
- Consider from the start what resources are required to support the involvement of grassroots groups and individuals
- Focus on opportunities to sustainably shift power through equipping others with the confidence, capabilities and networks to drive change, while also being clear about where civil society support organisations need to play a role in enabling this
- Where shifting power seems unattainable, start with developing relationships and trust among partners – the experience of working together and gaining new perspectives is crucial in enabling change and helping people recognise the opportunities rather than focusing on the threats of shifting power to Londoners
- Identify the wider shifts in mindset, behaviours and structures that are required, and consider how to work alongside others to influence collectively

POWER

2
A. BUILDING VOICE AND AGENCY OF LONDONERS

Some projects are working directly with communities to explore how they can drive systemic change. This includes work to challenge traditional power dynamics through broadening perspectives and understanding, creating new networks and connections, helping Londoners realise they have the agency to lead change, and building the skills and confidence to enable this.

North Camden Zone Community Action Initiative are exploring how to shift power at a hyperlocal level through recruiting and training residents as Community Organisers to bring about change on their own estates.

“On the Hilgrove estate, the Community Organisers interviewed other residents to celebrate their stories, make their community visible, and share their ideas for the changes they would like to see in their local area. This culminated in a physical and online exhibition in October 2020. It has gained traction locally leading into the next phase of the project, where we are co-designing with partners and local politicians a Neighbourhood Working Pilot with the community firmly in the lead.”

– LEAD PARTNER

The Power Sharing Project aims to deepen understanding of how systemic change can be driven by communities by meaningfully involving people with lived experience of poverty and economic inequality in decisions that affect their lives. Hosting conversations about power with Londoners has enabled them to develop their understanding of their own power to drive social change:

“I used to see power as very suppressive... I now see power is about understanding where you are, where you want to go and how others can help you.’ Or, as one person described, ‘Before the session I wouldn’t have thought I had the power to drive change. I always thought that was people in government.”

– PROJECT PARTNER

With both of these projects, there is an emphasis on not only involving and supporting Londoners to get involved in social change and decisions that affect their lives, but also to consider and begin to address the wider structural changes that are needed to enable more of this. This includes broadening the parameters of the conversation beyond a service lens and beyond traditional campaigning activity.

The collaborative process the North Camden Zone Community Action Initiative adopts, for example, creates new spaces for professionals to listen to residents in an informal and open way, including through 'hack' sessions. Over time, they have seen professionals develop new perspectives, look beyond the narrow confines of their role, and explore opportunities more human and empathetic ways of working.

"[When professionals see] that residents are stepping up – volunteering, helping at events – it's new for them and helps overcome cynicism. Celebrating strengths creates a sense of possibility that things could be different."

– LEAD PARTNER

The Power Sharing Project not only involves Londoners in conversations about power, but also civil society organisations to help them understand and explore issues of power within civil society and how key structures, mindsets, language and behaviours in how civil society organisations traditionally operate need to be examined.

"We have learnt that using the language 'lived experience' can move the conversation away from a structural or political analysis of power and social change... We have found it more useful to speak specifically, and without jargon, about the diversity of people's personal experience and expertise."

– LEAD PARTNER

POWER

2 B. SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TO LEAD CHANGE

Many of the projects work to help build the skills, capability and confidence of civil society organisations to enable them in turn to support the involvement of Londoners in leading change.

Training and capacity building support is a key feature of projects, for example, the CRÉME project has trained civil society organisations in effectively communicating about race equality, the Refugee Advocacy Forum project has trained refugee community organisations in advocacy and Datawise London has supported a range of civil society organisations in using data effectively. Importantly, in all of these cases, the training is framed in terms of understanding of how the skills and knowledge developed can be used to enable systemic change.

“The training fostered a belief among members that they did have the capacity – and legitimate role – in activity focused on calling for/creating systemic change... It also helped them to realise that together they have the power to tackle the causes of problems by challenging policy and decisions, rather than dealing with the effects of these policies and decisions in isolation.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Partner organisations have also built skills and understanding as a result of their involvement, including in approaches to engaging with diverse communities, which will inform their wider organisational practice as well as how they influence practice more widely.

“The project’s engagement of local people helped us to remind ourselves and be open to adapting and changing our engagement methods continuously, so it is directed by the need of the stakeholders and not scripted by what was initially outlined or agreed was appropriate within the project plan. The most important thing is getting as many people’s voices heard as possible to ensure the voice is as powerful as it can be.”

– PROJECT PARTNER

POWER

2 C. COLLECTIVE INFLUENCING AND LEADERSHIP

Influencing and collaborative leadership are an important focus for many partnerships. In the case of place-based approaches working in defined geographies, this is typically about advocating on behalf of civil society, and specifically to embed the voice of local people in decision making, for example in relation to commissioning.

In many cases, the pandemic has presented opportunities for the place-based lead partners, such as H4All and Community Links Bromley, to improve their position of influence through engagement in strategic forums with public sector partners. Specifically, this has enabled partners to advocate on behalf of local communities – bringing local intelligence and insight to strategic planning, as well as advocating for and demonstrating the value of more co-produced approaches to working with communities in the longer term.

“COVID has been a magnifying glass for the Cornerstone Fund agenda. We’re now in a much better position to advocate for needs of different communities. Previously the public sector were scared that they had to give up power but now they are seeing the value of hearing voices they would not normally hear.”

– PROJECT PARTNER

While clear challenges with power dynamics remain and will take significant time to shift, overall COVID-19 has helped improve many partnerships’ relationships with statutory partners.

“[We have recruited] 11 health partners alongside the establishment of the Health and Well-being alliance. This progress has been the result of building relationships, informing and promoting a shared vision. This is a promising start on achieving the aims of our programme, establishing ourselves as a trusted partner for the sector and statutory bodies.”

– LEAD PARTNER

For projects focused on specific sectors and subsectors, collective influencing is focused on amplifying the voice of specific groups across London, and in the case of the NetEquality project, bringing together many equalities organisations (including groups focused on hate crime, disability, faith, migrants, older people, plus individual campaigners) to enable a more connected approach to equalities issues across London as a whole.

In many cases, the pandemic has increased awareness of structural inequalities that Cornerstone Fund projects seek to tackle and intensified the need for civil society organisations to advocate on behalf of and amplify the voice of Londoners who have been disproportionately affected. For example, the Setting the research agenda with, and, for young Londoners project has collaborated to develop a collective approach to data across the youth sector:

“The data will enable all partners to review the needs and the services on offer as we move forward, create stronger links with new partners and ensure that young people’s voices are at the core of the recovery work for the region.”

– LEAD PARTNER

POWER

D. SHIFTING POWER TO CREATE FOUNDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Collectively, the Cornerstone Fund projects can help build the narrative and make the case for why a focus on the long term is so essential based on the foundations they have established for sustainable change.

The 2–3-year horizon of the projects can only ever allow partnerships to make a start in working towards their long-term systems change ambitions. But even at this relatively early stage, one key area of progress that should be celebrated is the foundations that have been put in place to share power and enable ownership beyond lead partners and beyond partnerships for the long term.

Examples include:

- Building the capacity, skills and confidence of individuals and civil society groups to lead change and tackle systemic challenges
- Creating networks, forums and structures to build ownership by communities and grassroots organisations over the long term
- Exploring and addressing structural constraints to sharing power, for example, ensuring individuals, grassroots organisations and communities can access funding (as part of the Cornerstone Fund grants) to enable meaningful and equitable participation
- Demonstrating and enabling people to experience new and more systemic ways of working that can serve as a blueprint for wider practice

- Influencing strategic decision making, for example, putting Londoners' voices at the heart of commissioning and of COVID-response planning

“We found that over the course of the training sessions, relationships between the RCO members as peers were progressively built as was the confidence of RCO partners in their ability to do advocacy and influencing work rather than relying on mediation by an organisation such as the Refugee Council.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Shifting power is a complex and long-term endeavour. At this stage, projects have tested and uncovered important opportunities to put Londoners at the heart of driving change, and made important breakthroughs. As work continues, there is much projects can continue to learn from each other and to collectively influence for the wider structural changes needed to enable more community-led approaches.

One key area of interest across many projects (and funders) is how to ensure resource reaches individuals and grassroots organisations to enable equitable participation. A community of practice began forming around this theme but was paused due to COVID-19 – this is a key area to pick up in the future, including related questions of how lead partners manage their power as lead partners and enable resourcing of others, and what changes are required within civil society and funding practice.

FUNDERS: PROGRESS AND LEARNING

03

This chapter focuses on progress and learning in relation to the second systems change ambition:

SYSTEMS CHANGE AMBITION 2

Developing a new way of funding to achieve the *Way Ahead* goal and influencing for the adoption of this practice more widely.

Overall, the Fund has made progress in developing a new way of funding that aligns with the *Way Ahead* goal through developing an approach with the following features:

- Funding partnerships (not single organisations)
- Focus on systems change
- Funding civil society infrastructure
- Prioritising learning and adaption

Delivered through:

- Funder collaboration

While none of these features are new alone, the combination of these features is distinct for the group of funders involved, many of whom see the Fund as an opportunity to learn about more people-centred and systemic approaches to funding as part of broader strategic shifts happening within their organisations.

In many ways the Fund had been testing ways of working that have since become a necessity in response to the pandemic — working collaboratively, taking an emergent iterative approach, amplifying the voice and role of communities, funders joining forces and trusting the organisations they fund to do the right thing in their specific context. The pandemic has therefore presented an important opportunity to accelerate the change those involved in the Fund want to see.

This chapter is split into two main sections that explore learning about:

- Funding collaboration and systems change
- Funder collaboration

For the key themes in each section, we identify key features of effective practice which draw on both areas of strength and areas for development of the Fund. At the end of the chapter, we summarise overall recommendations.

While the Fund has made significant progress on developing a funding approach to help enable the Way Ahead goal, there are areas that can be developed further – both in continuing to learn and develop practice in relation to Round 1, and to inform the approach to Round 2. The main area for development against systems change ambition 2 is influencing for the adoption of this practice more widely, including addressing the wider contextual and structural factors that impact the potential of the work of the Cornerstone Fund.

We identify opportunities for influencing in this chapter, then explore this more fully in Chapter 4, which focuses on the overall potential of the Cornerstone Fund to achieve systemic change.





SYSTEMS AWARENESS AND BEHAVIOURS

Features of effective practice

- Think about systems not organisations as a starting point when developing funding approaches (to examine how change happens and how best to resource this, rather than defaulting to organisational funding as the norm).
- Develop a shared understanding of the ambitions of the funding programme and what systems change means in this context from the start. Review and refine this overtime as you learn where you can make the best contribution, e.g. focusing on tackling structural inequalities and, specifically, the role of user-led organisations.
- Be realistic about the timescales for systems change initiatives to achieve often big ambitions, including the initial time it takes for partners to fully 'understand the system' and develop collaborative approaches. Manage expectations of internal and external stakeholders, while also seeking to learn from and understand the foundations that partnerships put in place before formal 'delivery' starts.
- When funding systems change, funders typically need to play more of a facilitative and critical friend role than a traditional 'compliance role' and invest more time in the relationship – to understand the work, navigate the inevitable changes required to plans, and problem solve together.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS CHANGE UNDERSTANDING AMONG FUNDERS IS ONGOING

Funding for systems change was welcomed by projects as a rare and important opportunity. Some had identified specific opportunities to take systems change approaches before the Fund was launched, but until this point had not been able to find relevant funding streams that supported efforts beyond traditional project delivery by individual organisations.

While projects overall have developed their understanding of systems change through their involvement in the Cornerstone Fund, the sense of having developed understanding of systems change understanding is less strong among funders. A key reason for this is proximity to the work on the ground and the delay in seeing tangible 'impact', given the time the partnerships have required to get foundations in place before beginning 'delivery' compared to traditional service delivery projects.

“The nature of the programme doesn’t give instant gratification – you don’t see the fruit immediately.”

– FUNDER

The pandemic has posed a particular challenge over the past nine months – because funders have been so busy with the COVID-19 emergency response, they have had minimal time to engage with the projects and learn about their progress. Also, learning sessions between projects and funders have been shorter online sessions during the pandemic and, at the request of projects, largely focused on the impact of the pandemic, rather than in-depth exploration of project insights. A key priority over the next year and for Round 2 is to enable greater interactions between funders and projects and create online infrastructure from the start to enable more interaction. This will require funders to invest the time in developing these relationships – and potentially beyond projects they directly fund.

While funders overall did not strongly feel that their systems change understanding has increased, some did identify how learning from the Fund had impacted wider practice.

“[As a funder] we’ve been engaged in looking at systems change, however to date this involved larger national organisations. Cornerstone has allowed us to look at how this operates at a local and often hyperlocal level and from that perspective it has supported us in understanding systems change.”

– FUNDER

B. SYSTEMS CHANGE ROLES: FUNDERS AS AN ENABLER

Funders have reflected on what taking a systems change approach means for how they work, including the need to think about systems not organisations as the starting point and supporting projects’ work by playing more of a facilitative critical friend role.

Below is a summary of what role each funder believes it should play to support the ambitions of the Fund.

Impartial facilitator and partner but to learn in order to improve/grow as a responsible funder in order to help alleviate challenges and unfair/unequal systems in society – Trust for London	To influence and lead the direction of travel for how we work as funders – City Bridge Trust
Enabling organisations and communities and to come together with resourcing, to drive forward what’s important to them – National Lottery Community Fund	Enabling organisation to develop solutions, taking a learning approach – GLA
Sharing best practice and amplifying Cornerstone Projects’ offer, learning and networks – London Plus	System steward, connector and influencer – London Funders

As explored in the Power section below, funders have made significant and valued progress in these areas, and there are opportunities to deepen practice further in future.

3 C. INCREASING CLARITY ON WHERE THE FUND SHOULD FOCUS FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

In terms of systems change understanding, there has been a noticeable increase in clarity about what funders want to fund and focus their attention on over the past two years. Following stage 1 applications to Round 1 of the fund, some funders reflected that the number and quality of stage 1 applications to the Fund had not met their expectations. One potential contributory factor (among others including how far potential applicants and networks were aware of the Fund, and timescales for submitting applications), was how clearly funders articulated what they were looking to fund and potential applicants' understanding of this. The application guidance included references to systems change, 'game changing' initiatives, and replicable approaches (as well as a focus on partnership and civil society support organisations).

Over the past two years, funders have become increasingly interested in approaches that tackle systemic inequalities, including the role of user-led organisations and grassroots groups more generally. Referencing specific relevant examples from among Round 1 projects, and an appetite to build on relevant examples of collaboration that emerged as part of the pandemic response will further help clarify what the Fund is looking to support.

"We should adopt a clearer focus on equity in the [Round 2] funding call. COVID-19 has shone a light on the terrible levels of poverty, food poverty, systemic racism."

– FUNDER

How this focus will impact the number and quality of responses to the funding call remains to be seen, but the tightening of focus is an important step in the evolution of the Fund which has potential to maximise its impact for civil society and Londoners, particularly those who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

There remains some disconnect among funders in terms of how useful they believe it is to focus on systems change in addition to collaboration, if funding infrastructure in itself is funding systems change, and how soon projects can be expected to demonstrate impact for Londoners. Based on learning detailed in this report, whatever the language used, it is important that the focus on long-term thinking and shifting power to tackle structural inequalities is emphasised. This will help ensure that collaborative infrastructure-led approaches meet the level of ambition of the Fund, and adds value beyond the vast majority of service delivery funding available.

Reviewing applications to Round 2 will be a key test of alignment among funders, and the most important consideration is how to ensure clarity of communication and expectations among those applicants invited to develop a stage 2 application.



COLLABORATION

Features of effective practice

- The Fund has made an important contribution to funding and incentivising collaboration – something that is relatively rare and the Fund should advocate for more of
- For both funders and funded partnerships, consider the real costs of collaborating to ensure all involved invest sufficiently in the coordination and facilitation required to enable meaningful partnership
- Given funding for collaboration is relatively rare, the Fund can learn about and share practice on the mechanics of funding collaboration, for example, making the process of developing partnership agreements more straightforward
- There are opportunities for the Fund to understand the benefits and challenges of collaboration beyond lead organisations by engaging with wider project partners. Involvement of project partners was more limited than intended due to COVID-19, but is an area to explore in the future

A. FUNDING COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES LED BY CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AN IMPORTANT BREAKTHROUGH

Funding partnership approaches is at the heart of the Fund. Working towards systemic change requires the contribution of many actors, and the Fund has a specific focus on how civil society support organisations can play a role in nurturing collaborative approaches that support this. Collaboration – particularly among groups that may not traditionally work together – is viewed by funders as a key feature of the future of infrastructure support.

Overall, projects and funders agree that the Fund represents an important recognition of the importance of collaboration and specifically the role of civil society support organisations in nurturing this.

“We took some hefty risks in the field of infrastructure support and many have paid off.”

– FUNDER

“The Fund is a trailblazer in nurturing collaboration, looking at sustainability – needs to be a realistic aim. We know that things can work in isolation, but it is so much more adventurous to work together.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Funders and projects have together reflected on how the pandemic has demonstrated the important role of infrastructure in mobilising and connecting communities and local actors. The Fund has played a role in helping demonstrate the value of infrastructure, and there is appetite to help create a conversation about how it can play an effective role and an understanding of what this takes. This is a key priority for influencing activity.

“The Cornerstone Fund has made a difference for the profile of second-tier support organisations. There is a wider recognition that smaller hyper local organisations need us to support them.”

– LEAD PARTNER

B. FUNDING COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES: INSIGHTS AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

Funders have been able to learn about supporting collaborative approaches, for example, the diversity of approaches, and the resulting

implications for funding. One funder, for example, stated that while it has taken some time to understand the complex and evolving network approach of one of the partnerships it funds, the experience of seeing it develop and the value of the approach means they are more likely to fund these kinds of approaches in the future.

There is also learning about the mechanics of funding collaboration. For example, the most intensive partnership approach among the projects required formal partnership agreement to be agreed with the funders’ legal team – a process that the lead partner found very supportive, but very resource intensive as a small organisation. There are opportunities to share learning about these approaches with Round 2 applicants and more widely to make these processes more straightforward in the future.

Due to COVID-19, as a group, funders and projects did not have the opportunity to specifically explore models of collaboration in year 2. There is an opportunity for Round 1 projects to come together with Round 2 applicants to specifically explore the pros and cons of different models of collaboration, and ongoing learning on this between both groups.

Overall, the Fund has demonstrated the value of resourcing collaboration focused on long term change rather than service delivery, and there is a strong case for continuing this and influencing for more of this among the wider funding community.



LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

Features of effective practice

- Funders' willingness to launch the Fund without knowing all the answers and to develop it overtime has been a breakthrough in terms of funding in a more adaptive and experimental way (which in turn has been a helpful foundation for the COVID funding response)
- Encouraging learning and adaptation is a key achievement of the Fund. This should be maintained and reinforced, with a continued focus on having open conversations between projects and funders collectively about how to enable learning and adaptation, and support each other on this
- Development grants have been a crucial enabler of learning and adaptation, helping partners to deeply explore context, connect with partners and refine thinking. This developmental focus should be maintained throughout to enable partnerships to adapt as the context, priorities and tactics inevitably change overtime
- As the Fund tightens its focus on tackling systemic inequalities and shifting power in Round 2, even greater flexibility is likely to be required
- Realising the learning potential of the Fund requires dedicated capacity for both partnerships and funders – expectations for both could be clearer in round 2 so that organisations can budget for and manage resources accordingly

A. CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND ADAPTATION FROM THE START

Developing the Cornerstone Fund involved funders taking a leap of faith – they didn't know all answers at the start and the willingness to test and learn has been a major breakthrough, particularly given the profile of funders involved. For the majority of funders involved, the risks they took in testing and learning through the Cornerstone Fund have since been vindicated by the ways of working adopted by funders in the COVID-19 response.

As explored in Chapter 2, learning and adaptation has been a continual and important feature of project development so far. Plans set out in applications have changed significantly in many cases, partly due to the pandemic, but in many cases even before it as the reality of working to address complex social issues in ever-changing contexts.

One of the key achievements of the Fund’s approach has been the creation of a supportive environment to enable learning and adaptation among the projects. From the start, funders stressed the need to offer projects flexibility, not be driven by or held to rigid outcomes and targets, and emphasise the value of learning, including from failure.

“Traditionally projects are not allowed to look at process, a lot of the time it’s about outcomes. It can be quite threatening. The Fund is about giving them the luxury to focus on this.”

– FUNDER

“We are providing funding to go on a journey, to enable a process to happen. We need to have a level of acceptance and tolerance [for risk].”

– FUNDER

Funders have acknowledged that not only is it important to share and consider these ambitions between themselves as funders, but to clearly communicate and reinforce these messages in their communications and interactions with funded projects.

“We need to spell out that we are allowing them to test and try, saying, ‘we encourage you to do new things’.”

– FUNDER

B. DEVELOPMENT GRANTS ARE AN IMPORTANT ENABLER OF LEARNING

Development grants are one specific example of new ways of working that projects welcomed. For many, it was the first time they had received a development grant and projects highlighted the importance of these grants in enabling them to deeply explore context, connect with partners and refine thinking.

“The development grant provided the time and space to think”

– LEAD PARTNER

“Development funding was really helpful. It helped align our work with what others are doing nationally”

– LEAD PARTNER

“I liked the approach of the development fund, it allowed us to explore our ambitions. It’s the first time we have had a development grant.”

– LEAD PARTNER

As well as development grants being new for many projects, it was also the first time that many of the funders had offered this type of funding. The value that relatively small development grants had for the Fund projects suggests that this is an approach that funders should share and embed more widely within their wider funding practice as organisations.

C. PROJECT ADAPTATION TO THE PANDEMIC BUILT ON ALREADY ESTABLISHED FLEXIBLE FUNDING APPROACH

Beyond the development grant phase, projects have continued to appreciate the flexibility offered by funders to adapt their approach.

“Funders have been very responsive and supportive generally by not being remote and being flexible”.

– LEAD PARTNER

“Enabling projects that are ‘risky’ and very developmental, where lots of learning and adaption may be needed, and giving the space and permission to do this. Funding an experimental project has enabled creativity that wouldn’t have usually been possible.”

– LEAD PARTNER

The existing focus on enabling learning and adaptation meant that the flexibility funders overall offered in response to the pandemic was a continuation rather than departure from the Fund’s existing way of working. Projects continued to welcome the flexibility funders demonstrated during the pandemic, with many of them agreeing changes to project plans and timescales

“Our Cornerstone Fund funders have been amazing – not added any pressure, being relaxed and flexible.”

– LEAD PARTNER

D. PRIORITIES FOR REINFORCING AND DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF LEARNING

While the Fund overall has clearly committed to enabling learning and adaptation, there are indications that in practice some funders have offered more flexibility than others, suggesting opportunities for greater alignment and peer support among funders around this in future to ensure a ‘fund-wide’ approach. Also, throughout, projects have grappled with and questioned whether funders would support the level of changes required. Some projects noted how different this was to other funding programmes and acknowledged that it took them and their partners time to understand and adapt their practices to make the most of the flexibility offered, and to trust that funders meant what they said. Some projects were unsure if their approach had deviated too much from initial plans and took comfort from hearing from other projects at learning sessions about the extent of changes made across the majority of projects. There are opportunities for funders to reinforce these messages in the future.

Embedding learning and adaptation at the heart of projects requires dedicated focus and resource, as does engaging with wider learning activity for the Fund, for example learning sessions with other projects and funders. In future rounds, funders could draw on learning from Round 1 to make clear that projects should budget adequately for creating spaces for learning and reflection within their projects, and for engaging in learning activity with the wider Fund.



POWER

Features of effective practice

- Shared spaces for funders and funded organisations to come together to learn are important in considering issues of power that are surfacing in projects, and exploring the implications for funding, e.g. in relation to how to ensure Londoners and grassroots groups can be paid for their time to enable meaningful engagement.
- Open, responsive and supportive relationships between funders and funded partnerships are key to create the honesty and flexibility required to enable ongoing learning and adaptation. This challenges the traditional power dynamics between funders and funded organisations, and requires reinforcement from funders throughout.
- There are important opportunities for the Fund to focus on external influencing to tackle wider challenges in the power dynamics in funding and commissioning, and more joined up approaches to tackling systemic inequalities in London more generally (see more in Chapter 4 below).

A. SHIFTING THE POWER BALANCE: CREATING MORE TRUSTING AND SUPPORTIVE FUNDING RELATIONSHIPS

If civil society organisations are to enable more emergent and people-centred change, a shift in power dynamics between funders and funded organisations is required. A key part of our work as learning partner has been to convene shared spaces for funders and lead partners to learn together. This is the first time that many participants have met as part of a learning group that encourages ongoing open dialogue between funders and funded organisations. This in itself is important in surfacing issues of power and discussing the implications of this for how the Fund needs to operate, for example in terms of monitoring and evaluation.

The flexibility offered by funders reflects a different type of relationship between funders and funded organisations than is typical the case. Overall projects have welcomed the new funding approach and the 'new' behaviours of funders, with funders overall seen as responsive, supportive and prepared to have a different and more honest kind conversation.

3
“The relationship with Cornerstone funders feels like more of a dialogue.”

– LEAD PARTNER

“They [the funder] are a learning organisation who are prepared to have good and useful conversations.”

– LEAD PARTNER

Most lead partners appeared to have a sense of the Fund providing added value to their projects through more open, responsive and supportive relationships with funders, and being part of a cohort of funders and projects learning together.

“There was a far closer relationship between funder and applicant from the get-go, which I think really helped to ensure that applications were meeting the desired outcomes for the funder and there was a clear sense of being part of ‘something bigger’ for the grantee.”

– LEAD PARTNER

B. INFLUENCING FOR WIDER CHANGE IN FUNDER BEHAVIOURS

Power dynamics are also an important consideration among funders. Some funders identified that they got involved in the Fund to test new funding approaches as part of a broader shift within their organisations to more people-led and flexible funding models.

“I had a high level of freedom to fund. I have a huge amount of respect for our Board for working with uncertainty and coming at it with a different set of principles.”

– FUNDER

“Bringing funded organisations together... [has] been valuable in capturing learning and understanding the needs of the sector when funding these projects.”

– FUNDER

“Funders need to trust, far more, the organisations we fund - that’s how we learn.”

– FUNDER

Important opportunities to address power dynamics in the future include:

- Continued collective learning among projects and funders on learning about power within projects, and implications this poses for funding. For example, in relation to how to ensure Londoners and grassroots groups can be paid for their time to enable meaningful engagement.
- Focus on external influencing to tackle wider challenges in the power dynamics in funding and commissioning, and more joined up approaches to tackling systemic inequalities in London more generally (see more in Chapter 4 below).

FUNDER COLLABORATION

Features of effective practice

- Funder collaboration can help when developing new funding approaches that may be perceived as risky – it can help funders navigate an experimental approach and push each other's practice
- The relationships and trust built through jointly developing and funding a programme can help enable more funder collaboration in the future – starting somewhere, having a tangible focus and working through practical issues together are key
- The Fund has provided rare opportunities for funders to consistently meet and learn together, and from each other, about funding infrastructure and systems change
- To maximise the benefits of funder collaboration, build and invest in the structures (e.g. regular meetings) and capacity required to learn together from the start
- When funding collaboratively, consider both how to maximise the benefits for funders while also for funded organisations. As part of this, proactively consider how to mitigate the potential for confusion and complication for applicants when multiple funders are involved, e.g. in relation to funding guidance, and the process of decision making.
- Consider external communications from the start – to help bring to life the work of the Fund and give projects visibility and credibility to help secure longer term funding, as well as providing a foundation for wider influencing activity

For many funders, funder collaboration has been the dominant experience of the Fund and something the majority of funders identified as a key achievement of the Fund. Below we explore learning so far from the perspective of funders and funded partnerships, and the role the Fund has played and can play in the future in enabling more funder collaboration.

The Fund represents a broad and diverse example of funder collaboration. Funders and strategic partners engaged in different ways. City Bridge Trust funded all development grants, some funders funded specific projects, while the GLA made a contribution to the overall 'funding pot'. The role of the wider partners, London Councils, London Funders, London Plus and Mercers, also played a valuable role in sharing insights, making connections and contributing to strategic direction.

EXPERIENCES OF FUNDERS

Overall, funders involved in the Fund have had a positive experience of collaboration and are keen to do more of this in the future. Key funder reflections are detailed below.

A. EXPERIMENTING TOGETHER

Funders have valued the opportunity to work together on what has been an uncertain and evolving approach that many viewed as risky. They welcomed the opportunity to work alongside others in navigating the experimental approach and have acknowledged how it has helped push their practice.

“We had license to go for it and take risks. It was uncertain but there was a willingness among funders – we all really wanted it to work even if it was a bit painful. This is ninety percent of the battle.”

– FUNDER

“The nature of the funding, especially trusting without knowing exactly what going to do – this is now part of more funder’s conversations.”

– FUNDER

“The Fund has played a major role in influencing how I work as an individual. It has shifted my mindset to a far more collaborative and co-productive way of working.”

– FUNDER

The interest, appetite, and relationships developed between individuals has been a key enabler of this approach. With a number of changes in staff involved (including the Deputy Director of the City Bridge Trust who led the development of the Fund), over the coming months, it will be important for individuals who have been involved for some time to help articulate the aims and behaviours of the Fund so far. This process can be supported by the clear sense of ambition developing about the future direction of the Fund for Round 2.

B. LEARNING TOGETHER

Opportunities for funders to learn together in practice

Funders have valued the opportunities the Fund presents to learn together and from each other about funding infrastructure and systems change. This is partly about the opportunity the Fund provides for funders to more consistently meet and learn from each other as funders.

“The added value is about the collective willingness to appreciate the importance of system change and the role of infrastructure in system change. This is very powerful if you get the narrative right.”

– FUNDER

“We have benefited from cross funder discussion concerning the future and changing landscape in relation to capacity building support.”

– FUNDER

“It’s been a good and interesting experience so far. You don’t often get spaces whereby a whole lot of funders are discussing individual applications together. It was a rich discussion”

– FUNDER

Maximising opportunities for learning

While funders have gained a lot from working together so far, there is a sense that more can be done to maximise the learning opportunities the Fund offers, and a need to put in place the practical infrastructure to enable this. Funder capacity is a key constraint. Following the decision making on Round 1 applications, funders typically only met to discuss the Cornerstone Fund as part of learning sessions every six months.

“It’s about sequencing - attitude and behaviours first. Then getting the buy in and permission, then you smash your process to bits, you come up with a different process. We need to build in proper time for real reflection and to implement this.”

– CORNERSTONE FUND STRATEGIC PARTNER

Pre-pandemic these discussions began to consider long term strategic ambitions for how the Fund fit into a broader pipeline of funding, and how the Fund could share its learning more widely. At this point, funder capacity was a barrier to act on priorities identified between meetings. The pandemic has had obvious and significant impacts on funder capacity that has made engagement even more difficult.

As the Fund enters Round 2, there are opportunities to develop a pattern of more regular interactions between Cornerstone Fund funders, potentially quarterly meetings that include space to discuss any operational issues and updates, along with a reflection on wider learning, and key actions to be addressed collectively or individually. Meetings should reflect on ongoing learning from Round 1 as well as Round 2.

To date, the Fund has been led by senior leaders within each funder. While it is important that this senior engagement remains at a strategic level, there are opportunities to bring more junior staff into some of the Fund conversations – to share learning more widely and to bring additional capacity for acting on priorities between meetings.

The mechanisms for funder collaboration: making it work for funded partnerships

One of the key challenges from the start of the Cornerstone Fund has been the mechanisms to enable funder collaboration.

There was an assumption by some funders at the start that pooling funding was the ideal approach. However, more recently, particularly following experiences from the London Community Response, funders have reflected on the challenges for some organisations with his approach (for governance reasons) and the benefits that aligned funding could bring in some contexts. For example, if individual funders fund specific projects, it can be easier to get trustees and other internal stakeholders to engage, and therefore to share the learning from the Fund and influence internally in a tangible way.

“We are trying to be collaborative but being restricted by organisational processes.”

– FUNDER

“It would have been better if the funders could have agreed a single application format. We got close to it but not completely.”

– FUNDER

This has implications for how decisions are made and how grants are managed. In Round 1, in some cases, what funders were prepared to fund, and funding decisions, were primarily based on individual funder priorities rather than the overarching goals of the Fund. Clearly there needs to be some alignment with an individual funders’ interests if they are to fund an application through an aligned approach. However, there are opportunities for funders to push each other (within the realities of governance requirements) on this in Round 2 to ensure projects funded are those that best meet the goals of the Fund, and in turn to bring added value for funders beyond what they would typically fund through their own programmes.

The learning from Round 1, the trust developed among funders to date, and the experience of the London Community Response provide a foundation for this that wasn’t in place when the Fund was first launched. Collectively agreeing principles among funders at the start to guide how they approach overall decision making could help support this.

Maximising the benefits of collaborative funding while reducing the potential for confusion and complication for projects is a key priority for funders as they develop Round 2.

C. FOUNDATIONS FOR FURTHER COLLABORATION

One important impact of the Fund has been the foundations it has helped establish for more funder collaboration. Based on the relationships established and processes adopted, a number of funders have gone on to fund collaboratively through the Civil Society Roots Fund. Many have also commented that the trust developed from the Fund helped create positive foundations for collaboration among funders as part of the London Community Response.

“The Cornerstone Fund unlocked our imagination in terms of what could be done.”

– FUNDER

“The strength of relationships have been really important for underpinning the London Community Response. The sense of flexibility from both the Grenfell response and the Cornerstone Fund helped us trust civil society to do what they need to do.”

– FUNDER

“What the Fund has done is highlight the possibilities of collaborative funding, shone a light on the need for larger funders to lead the way with some aspects of systems change and, importantly, for the big funders and organisations to know when to step aside and let communities lead the way.”

– FUNDER

The commitment to launching a second round of the Fund and the active engagement of a range of funders and partners in shaping this at a time of significant pressure and capacity constraints further highlights the value funders have gained, and the potential they see in working together.

“Funders have really come together and it’s really hard to imagine ever going back to funding in siloes. If things go back, we will have failed. It’s a real opportunity to think about what systems change looks like, shaped by learning from the Way Ahead.”

– FUNDER

EXPERIENCES OF FUNDED PARTNERSHIPS

Assessing the added value of funder collaboration must also take into account the impact on the funded projects. Overall, projects have not expressed strong opinions on the value of funder collaboration for the Fund. Some were broadly in favour as it involved funders modelling the behaviours the Fund looks to support, it is an opportunity to engage with more funders, to be considered by funders who an organisation might not have considered applying to through their mainstream funding programmes, and the influencing potential of funder collaboration is recognised. However, some projects have found some of the logistics of the funder collaboration confusing in the early stages, for example, understanding how decisions were being made, how funding timescales align among funders, and what the implications are for organisations funded by more than one funder.

A further area for improvement identified by both projects and funders is communication by the Fund. Although most projects have experienced a positive relationship with their individual funder(s), some identified that communication about what was expected by the Fund in terms of the funding process, decision making, and expectations on monitoring, evaluation and learning could have been communicated earlier and clearer.

“We don’t know the level of collaboration there is between the funders and what level of consistency there will be in decision making with regard to funding applications.”

– PROJECT LEAD

There are opportunities to both maximise the benefits and address the challenges of funder collaboration in the future. The implications for funded partnerships should be a key consideration in this. Below we explore key areas in which projects and funders have identified that the benefits of funder collaboration can be further developed.

3 MAXIMISING THE BENEFITS OF FUNDER COLLABORATION: WIDENING THE LENS

Projects have asked that funders **improve external communications** about the Fund and the work of the projects – to help bring to life the work of the Fund and give projects visibility and credibility to help secure longer term funding.

Projects would also value opportunities to explore with funders how the work of **projects could engage with and influence wider funder activity**, for example, in relation to data, increasing funding of refugee communities, or equalities issues. Similarly funders have identified opportunities and an appetite to explore what it looks like to be a 'systems partner' beyond funding.

"We don't need to be a neutral observer – we are part of the system in many ways."

– FUNDER

There are also opportunities to build on the funding practices developed in the Fund and push these further. Some funders and partners have expressed an interest in funding over longer periods, and exploring the role of core funding, for example, as the Fund develops and particularly as it intensifies the focus on tackling systemic inequalities.

A further area for development is ensuring that funding practice and learning influences the wider funding approaches of those involved in the Cornerstone Fund. While some funders have identified opportunities to influence wider practice internally and examples of this, there is more opportunity to do so in the future.

"As a funder, my organisation needs to make a quantum shift in the way it funds and partners with civil society; the Cornerstone Fund has provided insight and, more importantly, the push to continuously question and challenge ways of working."

– FUNDER

FUNDERS - 3 YEAR VISION

A further area which is key to achieving systems change ambition 2 is influencing for the adoption of new funding practice, systems change, and infrastructure more widely. Lack of funder capacity and the significant disruption due to COVID-19 has been a barrier to this to date. Opportunities for the Fund to influence overall are explored in the next chapter.

To the right is a summary of funders' three-year ambitions for how their organisation can support more flexible, collaborative and systemic approaches. This highlights the importance of influencing practice within their own organisations, and among funders and civil society more widely, including crucially in terms of shifting power dynamics.

<p>Organisations have a stronger understanding of their role in supporting the voice of people who have direct experience to influence policy makers and those with power. We can better identify need and gaps in infrastructure support and are engaging in more strategic joint funding and alliance building.</p> <p>- TRUST FOR LONDON</p>	<p>Trusting funding programmes that enable collaboration are the norm. Organisations are supported to experiment and take risk to achieve social justice.</p> <p>- GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY</p>	<p>Power balance between funder and the funded is readdressed. Funder collaboration has become the norm and there are more streamlined application processes.</p> <p>- CITY BRIDGE TRUST</p>
<p>Local people are directly engaged with civil society and statutory bodies in influencing the change they want to see.</p> <p>- THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND</p>	<p>We will support funder collaboration with expertise and practical tools. Good data and analysis will support collaboration. Funders will be bold and confident about acting together. Civil society will be engaging funders in designing collaboration to address shared goals.</p> <p>- LONDON FUNDERS</p>	

A summary of conclusions and recommendations from this chapter is provided in Chapter 5.

OVERALL SYSTEMIC CHANGE



Chapters 2 and 3 have explored progress and learning among projects and funders in turn. Additional and significant potential value lies in bringing together the perspectives, networks and assets of the 'Cornerstone Fund family' as a powerful force for change. Throughout the course of the Fund, projects and funders have collectively identified key areas they want to explore together and work to influence wider practice.

In this section, we explore reflections from Cornerstone Fund partnerships and funders on the opportunities and barriers to create systemic change to enable Way Ahead approaches. We identify achievements and barriers, then explore key priorities to embed these further, including to influence for the adoption of these practices more widely.

PROGRESS AND BARRIERS IN WORKING TOWARDS SYSTEMIC CHANGE

ACHIEVEMENTS

Lead and partners organisations, and funders identified the following achievements and progress made by the Fund so far.

For civil society organisations:

- Experimenting and testing new ideas and ways of working to strengthen civil society
- Working collaboratively with partners to identify and work towards shared purpose
- Deepening collective understanding of how systemic change can be driven by communities, including through amplifying voice
- Fostering a collaborative process and opportunity to work towards a collective purpose

"[The Fund has] enabled people and organisations to work together in different settings to work towards change. I believe that even if it will take time for change to happen, people who are involved in Cornerstone Funded projects have learnt lessons which they can share and which will certainly be put to good use for the future of the civil society."

-LEAD PARTNER

Funders:

- Experimenting, taking risks and testing collaborative approaches to fund systems change
- Building relationships between funders to enable more collaboration, and opportunities to share learning and influence together

"Funders have led by example in collaborative working, offering the ongoing support and opportunity to share experiences, challenges, and learning with other grant recipients."

- LEAD PARTNER

Collectively, civil society organisations and funders involved in the Fund have made the following progress to creating systemic change:

- Bringing together organisations and funders together to have dialogue and gain a deeper shared understanding about the conditions that will support organisations to achieve these aims
- Demonstrating the value of civil society infrastructure

- Creating a network of leaders to influence for Way Ahead approaches more widely

"The Fund has set the tone for collaboration across the region creating a network of people who can work together and have built trusted relationships."

- LEAD PARTNER

BARRIERS

Lead and partners organisations, and funders identified the following barriers to systemic change.

Within the Fund:

- The pandemic restricted the time and capacity of both funders and partnerships to focus on long term strategies for lasting change
- Funding was over too short a time frame – civil society partnerships need longer term funding to work towards systems change
- Overcoming historic distrust when working with other organisations
- The extent of shared understanding of the aims of the Fund among both projects and funders
- In some cases, the lack of common approaches among funders on what information they require, due diligence, and timescales for decisions

“The timeframe for working effectively in collaboration needs to be longer as it needs to build in time for relationships to develop and for the collaboration to be established.”

– PROJECT PARTNER

“Existing structures, attitudes and behaviours within established civil society, too often they are inflexible, inauthentic and even exploitative. As a result, they are often avoided by people and communities seeking to create change because of the cost in time, emotional burden, agency, and expectations.”

– LEAD PARTNER

The wider external context for civil society:

- Exacerbation of systemic inequalities due to COVID-19
- The ability of civil society to support outcomes for Londoners given the capacity and funding challenges resulting from the pandemic and the reduced ability of some Londoners to volunteer and support their local communities
- Huge pressures on civil society survival in the context of the pandemic in the short term, and ability to meet the needs of people and communities in the longer term
- Funding beyond the Fund typically incentivises competition not collaboration
- Making the case for systems change approaches including long term, collaborative approaches and resourcing of these
- The challenges and resource intensive nature of partnership working
- Working with statutory partners and structures
- Power dynamics between funders/commissioners and civil society, and between civil society and Londoners

COLLECTIVE INFLUENCING: THE POTENTIAL AND PRIORITIES

While the Fund has made important progress towards creating systemic change to enable Way Ahead approaches, there are key areas for development identified throughout this report to develop practice further.

To make further progress on systems change ambitions 1 and 2 will require the Fund to engage with and influence wider factors impacting the ability to embed Way Ahead approaches, including to address the barriers listed above. Some of these are barriers are fundamental – whether linked to the dominance of New Public Management approaches that foster competition and linear thinking (see Exploring the New World)⁷, systemic inequalities in society, and the huge upheaval created by the pandemic.

Yet the Fund has important potential to contribute to making the case for more collaborative, systemic approaches; sharing its learning; and in demonstrating what different can look like. This is more important than ever in the context of the pandemic and the crucial role for collaborative systems approaches as part of recovery. And as a network or ‘family’, the Fund has impressive reach and influence across relevant networks in London and beyond.

Throughout, those involved in the Fund have recognised the potential and imperative to influence together, particularly given the impressive reach and influence of the ‘Cornerstone Family’ across relevant networks in London and beyond. While resource has always been a challenge, prior to the pandemic, funders identified key influencing priorities and plans. This included funders and projects forming subgroups that would explore key shared issues of interest – remunerating individuals for contributing their time, and helping influence the future of the sector’s leadership. These priorities, plans and discussion subgroups were halted due to the pandemic.

Looking ahead, the Fund should consider if and how to respond to the below opportunities and audiences which have been identified to date.

“We need to work together to understand the changing operating context so we can all look at the functions of systemic change that we need to be collectively pushing.”

– LEAD PARTNER

KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFLUENCING

- **Communications:** at the most basic level, ensuring updated information about the Fund and funded organisations is available externally (i.e. on the City Bridge Trust, and potentially other funders' websites). Additionally, there are opportunities to proactively share learning from the Fund and profile funded projects.
- **Capacity for influencing:** considering what capacity is required among funders to support communications and coordinate influencing efforts, and seek to secure the appropriate resource. Much of this could be coordinated by more junior staff members than those leading the Fund.
- **Shaping COVID recovery planning:** many organisations are already involved in shaping London recovery planning and should seek to shape based on learning from the Fund, including key messages on the value of infrastructure, collaboration and long term systemic approaches.
- **Cornerstone Fund Round 2:** the process of launching and delivering Round 2 is a crucial opportunity to share learning to date with potential new funders and applicants, and to influence the shape of future work based on this.

KEY AUDIENCES

- **The wider organisations of those involved in the Fund:** sharing the approach and learning from the Fund with colleagues (in lead organisations and among funders) would have significant collective reach.
- **Civil society:** particularly helping shape and support a more systemic, collaborative approach to the future of the sector's leadership.
- **Funders:** promoting more funding for systems change and collaboration among wider funders, and sharing learning on the benefits and practicalities of doing so. As part of this, considering development of a 'pipeline' of funding that comes before and after the Fund – to seed developmental approaches, and to sustain promising collaborative efforts over the longer term.
- **Public sector:** including commissioners: to demonstrate the value of civil society and infrastructure, and the value of flexible funding, particularly for small grassroots groups.
- **Recovery planning and structures:** London COVID recovery groups.

It will not be possible to do all of this at once. The Fund should reflect on what resource is available, and where it wants to focus its energies.

More widely, this chapter highlights the need to resource learning and influencing activity among both funders and funded organisations a crucial part of enabling systems change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

05

This report has brought together learning about the experiences, progress and learning for partnerships funded through the Cornerstone Fund, the funders involved, and the overall change achieved.

Based on learning and features of effective practice identified throughout, in this chapter we identify key conclusions for partnerships and funders involved in the Cornerstone Fund.

We then identify wider recommendations relevant beyond the Fund – for civil society organisations interested in taking a collaborative systems change approach, and for funders interested in funding systems change and/or funder collaboration.

CONCLUSIONS FOR THE CORNERSTONE FUND

The Cornerstone Fund has been developed through an experimental approach which has resulted in rich learning for partnerships (lead partners and wider partners) and for funders. Below we summarise key areas of progress, learning, and areas for development.

Partnerships

1. Overall, the Fund has made **good progress towards systems change ambition 1 to develop and test new ways of working** to achieve the Way Ahead goal.

For many of the partnerships, Year 1 was focused on developing the foundations for change, and in Year 2 they have begun delivering on their ambitions. The focus of each project and their progress varies, but broadly, important progress has been made in developing an understanding of system, working collaboratively, learning and adapting, and in seeking to shift power to help enable sustainable shifts in involvement and outcomes for Londoners.

- 5
2. The space the Fund has provided to **explore more systemic, collaborative ways of working was new for many partnerships** and for many it took some time to adjust and take advantage of the opportunities to work in different ways. The **'areas of effective practice' we have highlighted throughout showcase both good practice and areas for partnerships to focus on** in the future to embed and sustain their work to maximise the opportunities of a more systemic collaborative approach to help improve outcomes for Londoners.
 3. The **pandemic has had a significant impact on the partnerships, but as foundations for adaptive approach had been created from the start, and with continued flexibility from funders, partnerships adjusted work to respond to the changing context.** This flexibility to learn and adapt is different to funding approaches many partnerships have experienced before, and has been welcomed, with partnerships beginning to recognise and establish structures to capitalise on the benefits of a learning-focused approach.
 4. The Fund has **demonstrated the importance of systemic, collaborative approaches, and specifically the valuable role of civil society infrastructure organisations,** which were more important than ever in the COVID-19 context. Civil society infrastructure organisations have been able to be a source of collective intelligence for the sector, distributing essential

information and resources, and connecting and convening people and local groups and supporting them to act. This highlights the importance of funding activity beyond traditional 'delivery' roles such as convening, facilitating, and connecting which are essential for enabling collaborative whole system efforts.

Funders

5. Funders' willingness to launch the Fund without knowing all the answers and to develop it overtime has been a breakthrough in terms of funding in a more adaptive and experimental way (which in turn has been a helpful foundation for the COVID funding response). Overall, **important progress has been made in relation to systems change ambition 2 – testing new ways of funding.** These include funding partnerships (not single organisations), the focus on systems change, funding civil society infrastructure and prioritising learning and adaptation. Learning for funders about what the funding approach (e.g. the focus on collaboration and systems change) enables for funded partnerships has been more limited in Year 2. COVID-19 has meant that **funders have been able to spend less time than they would have liked on engaging with projects and learning from work on the ground.** Funders engaging directly with and learning from Round 1 partnerships is a priority for the coming year, particularly given the advancing stage of their work.

- 5
6. All funders see the **funder collaboration as adding value to their work** and recognise it as an area of significant progress. It has, for example, enabled other funder collaborations such as the COVID-19 response. There is also a clear appetite from the funders to engage in Round 2 of the Fund.
 7. The pandemic has deepened and increased awareness of **structural inequalities and intensified the need for civil society organisations to advocate on behalf of and amplify the voice of Londoners** who have been disproportionately affected. This reinforces the need for systemic approaches to funding that address underlying power dynamics. The learning that has been generated from Round 1 and the work undertaken in response to the pandemic has helped **refine the focus for Round 2**, which will have a more specific focus on tackling systemic inequalities, including the role of user-led organisations and grassroots groups. This is an important step in **developing clarity of vision**, and for reinforcing the focus on systemic, collaborative approaches that help shift power to enable sustainable change.

Overall change and looking to the future

8. The **'wider influencing' goal of systems change ambition 2 is the area that has received the least focus to date**. This is for reasons including the relatively early stage of the Fund and funded partnerships, capacity constraints, and the impact of the pandemic. The 'Cornerstone family' has impressive reach across relevant networks and an appetite to influence for the adoption of this practice more widely, including addressing the wider contextual and structural factors that impact the potential of the work of the Cornerstone Fund. Opportunities to jointly influence practice across London and beyond should be a focus for the future and will require **funders to create the capacity to coordinate this work**.
9. The Fund is an **important development in funding for systems change, collaboration and civil society infrastructure** but is still relatively early in its development with significant opportunities for future learning – from Round 2, but also as Round 1 partnerships continue to develop and deliver. Creating spaces for collective learning and peer support among partnerships and funders remains valuable and will provide an important foundation for wider influencing to help support the overall goals of the Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5 The conclusions above identify key areas of progress and learning from the Cornerstone Fund so far and set out key areas for further development. Below we identify more general recommendations for civil society organisations and funders interested in engaging in and supporting collaborative systems change approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

(PAGE 71,72)

The recommendations fall under three themes: developing foundations for change, creating change, and sustaining and spreading change.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

(PAGE 72,73)

The recommendations fall under two areas: funding systems change and funder collaboration.

Developing foundations for change

When beginning to think about taking a systems change approach:

- Consider what **partners you need to engage with** – from community groups to public sector organisations. Involving a range of partners from the start through a participatory approach is important to develop a deep understanding of the issue, and develop buy in and collective ownership
- Ensure your **focus and 'call to action'** to partners is framed in a way that is about taking a **systemic approach to an issue and shifting power** – about significant, long term change (including changing mindsets, behaviours and practice), not just about working together to do more of the same
- As a partnership, invest time in **building relationships and understanding each other's goals**, priorities, constraints, and expectations as a foundation for working together effectively for the long term
- Work together to **understand the system** and deepen the knowledge of the interconnected nature of the issues you seek to tackle. This includes ensuring the **voice and experiences of Londoners informs the work throughout**

When the partnership is beginning to take shape:

- Develop your **shared purpose and vision** based on the priorities identified
- Decide **what type of collaboration** best fits the ambitions of the work, e.g. size, structure and intensity of partnership
- Consider **how to resource and coordinate** the work, including roles and responsibilities of different partners. If seeking dedicated funding, specifically seek out funding that will enable you to work collaboratively and learn and adapt

Creating change

When beginning to delivery joint work:

- Create a **dedicated role/function focused on partnership coordination** to help keep plans on track (including ensuring a connection between overall ambition with day-to-day delivery) and enable partners to work effectively together
- Ensure a focus on **long term systemic change, including putting consideration of power** at the heart of the work – bringing the partnership back to its collective purpose throughout to ensure a focus on
- **Develop a learning culture** among partners, for example, creating dedicated spaces for partners to share insights and identify how to act on these collectively, and reviewing strategy regularly as the context changes and based on what you are learning
- Where the path forward is not clear, use **experimentation to purposefully test out approaches**. Be clear about what you are testing, how and when, and how learning will help shape what comes next
- Aim to develop an **open and honest relationship with funders** to enable you to iterate and adapt your approach over time

Sustaining and spreading change

When exploring how to sustain the and influence others:

- Identifying as a **partnership what mindsets, behaviours and practices need to shift**, and modelling these new approaches throughout
- Building the **capacity, skills and confidence of individuals and civil society groups** to lead change and tackle systemic challenges
- **Creating networks, forums and structures to build ownership** by communities and grassroots organisations over the long term
- Exploring and addressing **structural constraints** to sharing power, for example, ensuring individuals, grassroots organisations and communities can access funding (to enable meaningful and equitable **participation**)
- Demonstrating and enabling people to **experience new and more systemic ways of working** that can serve as a blueprint for wider practice
- **Identifying opportunities to influence strategic decision making**, for example, putting Londoners' voices at the heart of commissioning and of COVID-response planning
- **Identifying other systems change initiatives** and working together to share learning, offer peer support, and seek opportunities to influence collectively

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

Funding systems change

When developing an approach for funding systems change:

- Consider **systems, not organisations**, as the starting point from the outset, including **identifying what funding practices need to shift to incentivise** (rather than discourage) systemic and collaborative approaches
- Internally, develop a **shared understanding of what you mean by systems change and the ambitions** of your funding. This includes managing expectations where necessary about the **longer timescales** typically required to work towards systemic change, and the need for a flexible approach. Review and refine your systems change understanding ambitions overtime as you learn
- Consider how best to **identify potential funding opportunities given your ambitions** – through an open application process or through proactively inviting promising initiatives you are aware of. In both cases, **use simple and accessible language and application processes** to ensure you can reach a diverse range of organisations and partnerships doing relevant work but who might not consider their focus as 'systems change'
- If the funding approach is emergent and some elements will be refined overtime, be clear with applicants from the start about what is decided and what questions remain, and **invite their involvement in helping shape the funding approach**
- If possible, offer long term funding (ideally a minimum of three years, and/or identify potential follow-on funding opportunities with other funders) and consider **providing development grants to** enabled organisations to deeply explore context, connect with partners and refine thinking

Funding systems change (continued)

When funding systems change:

- Identify how to **challenge traditional power dynamics** between funded organisations and partnerships, including how to play a facilitative and critical friend role as funder that **encourages learning and adaptation**. This is likely to require **investing more time** in the relationship than for more traditional project funding
- How to **proactively identify and manage any internal challenges** that might pose barriers for the funded initiatives, e.g. internal reporting requirements or payment processes that could undermine collaborative or adaptive approaches. Consider what other funders you can learn from in finding new approaches and influencing for these internally
- **Promote learning between funded initiatives**, including spaces for partnerships to come together to share learning, support each other as peers, and have honest conversations and joint problem solving about what is and isn't working about the funding approach
- Consider how to **share learning and influence practice** more widely within your organisation and externally. Secure internal capacity to support communications, learning and influencing activity

Funder collaboration

- Develop a **shared understanding of the overall aims** of the funding approach, including identifying **specifically how funder collaboration can add value** to this aim. Reflect on this regularly to ensure that funder collaboration is benefitting the overall direction of the work
- Invest time in **understanding where each funder is able to be flexible** and funding approach and where the 'red lines' are to ensure that the collaboration is workable in practice, e.g. what flexibility each funder has on what they fund, how and when they make decisions, their monitoring approach
- Enable each funder to **identify specific areas where they want to push their funding practice** so they can test this out in partnership, maximising the potential for shared learning and sharing any risks
- Clearly set out **roles and responsibilities**, including who will coordinate the overall funder collaboration
- **Build relationships and trust as funders as a foundation** for working effectively together. This includes creating space to get to know each other as funders and individuals
- Schedule a **regular series of funder meetings** in advance for key decision points to enable timely decisions and communication
- Consider the time it will take to engage in meaningful funder collaboration to **ensure each funder has clear expectations and can manage their capacity accordingly** e.g. the time required for joint decision making and coordination, sharing of learning, communications and influencing
- Investing in **shared spaces for funders and funded organisations** to come together to learn, including reflecting on how to maximise the benefits of funder collaboration and manage any challenges
- **Promoting the funding programme and funded organisations** through joint communications
- Reflect periodically on how funder collaboration is working and **opportunities to collaborate on wider initiatives** and/or invite other funders in

FOOTNOTES

1. <https://thewayahead.london>
2. [Collaborate CIC \(2017\), Building Collaborative Places: Infrastructure for Systems Change](#)

[Lankelly Chase Foundation, System Behaviours](#)

[NPC \(2015\), Systems change: a guide to what it is and how to do it](#)

[FSG \(2018\), The Water of Systems Change](#)

3. [The Tamarack Institute \(2017\), The Collaboration Spectrum](#)
4. [Burners \(2009\), Reflections: Ethics and Organizational Change – Time for a Return to Lewinian Values](#)

The concept that “change is not a linear process or a one-off isolated event but is a continuous, open-ended, cumulative and unpredictable process.”



APPENDIX: PARTNERSHIP SUMMARIES

An outline of each partnership including progress up until October 2020



Project name: Communicating the Race Equality Message Effectively

Lead partner: Race On the Agenda

Aim: The aim of the project is to coproduce new ways to connect and build networks for solidarity and campaigning around equality and human rights.

Three-year vision: The project will have an established online presence. The website contains lots of useful content that can be accessed by anyone with an interest in the race-equality sector. Organisations within the sector have their profile raised by featuring on the CRÈME project’s podcast series, and those organisations wishing to upskill are able to access various resources giving them all the information they need. Although originally focused on supporting charities in London, being online, this information will be accessible worldwide, giving some of these organisations a world-wide presence.

Case study: The CRÈME project has promoted collaboration between organisations in the sector. One such example was at the time of the 2019 general election, with a project that was delivered jointly by the Runnymede Trust and Voice4Change, with the input of the CRÈME Project. Together partners crafted a social media campaign to promote voter registration among the underrepresented groups in London. They also promoted and attended numerous election hustling events. This collaboration between the two organisations is continuing with Reframing Race – a project that works with campaigners to build public support for meaningful action on racism using new, more powerful ways of talking about the issues.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector engagement to determine project focus • Establish closer links between partners and agree shared vision • Recruitment of the Project Communications Officer • Focus on communication and needs of partners and setting out how partners will learn together
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver comms and advocacy training to grassroots, both face-to-face and online • Develop an electronic toolkit • Respond to media request
What’s next	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a comprehensive online portal with resources • Deliver 1-1 support • Create a podcast to share expertise, hosting key sector stakeholders

Project name: Datawise London

Lead partner: Superhighways

Aim: Small charities and community groups better use data to shape services and influence change to meet the needs of Londoners. Our mission is to unlock the value of data.

Three-year vision: Small charities and community groups have embedded a data-led approach and can access the ongoing support they need at whatever stage they are at on their data maturity journey, to shape services and influence change.

Case study: A key goal for Datawise London is to better connect existing data expertise with London's smaller charities. Sobus (the CVS for Hammersmith & Fulham) attended Datawise London's launch, and an optional session for organisations to share their data challenges. Sobus mentioned they had access to large data sets that could help their work supporting the BAME community access mental health support services, but they didn't have the skills to analyse or draw conclusions from it.

This seemed an obvious challenge for the partner DataKind UK and their Data Dive programme. Over the following months DataKind UK and Datawise London partner Superhighways worked together to support Sobus define their questions, collect data via surveys, and source and cleanse relevant data sets. 11 months later, they participated in a weekend long Data Dive with over 50 data scientists lending their skills to help paint a picture of BAME mental health within West London, including understanding the prevalence of mental health conditions within BAME communities and exploring where mental health support exists.

Sobus have reported: *"This data analysis has started opening doors and there has been increased interest and further engagement with mental health commissioners, senior officers from the local authority, and voluntary and community sector organisations. We are excited to see a genuine collaborative systematic community focused approach, which will deliver more effective, culturally appropriate mental health services to all communities in future."*

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage with stakeholders to identify partners• Develop a theory of change• Partners signing MoU• Recruitment of Data & Evaluation Advisor• Create project brand and website• Develop face-to-face & online training and test these with infrastructure agencies and other Cornerstone funded projects and frontline organisations
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have more regular partnership meetings• Deliver online bite-sized training sessions during the pandemic and support organisations to move online
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and repurpose project to focus on Covid-19 recovery• Deliver training programme to smaller charities and community groups• Offer intensive 1-1 support (including piloting a Data Cohort programme)• Engage with funders on data gathering and sharing

Project name: H4All – Stronger together

Lead partner: H4All

Aim: Improved third sector role in health systems transformation and population health improvement via third sector development and collaboration.

Three-year vision: An established, mutual productive relationship between the third sector and the health sector, where third sector intelligence is routinely gathered to inform population health commissioning decisions via PCNs. The third sector is embedded in the North West London ICS as a delivery partner and as an equal partner in service design and system recovery.

Case study: H4All's have utilised existing partnerships and become a conduit for facilitating cross sector collaboration, fostering positive relationships between Health and the Third Sector, and now have over 70 local community groups and organisations actively engaged in activity as part of both the Health Partnerships and the wider Health & Wellbeing Alliance in Hillingdon.

A bi-product of their COVID-19 crisis response partnership with the London Borough of Hillingdon, they set up an emergency food parcel and medication delivery hub, raised their local profile and enabled them to form new partnerships with a wider range of health-based services, including the local community pharmacy alliance, and local hospitals.

They are also working alongside a health promotion project enabling them to address the priorities of the community directly feeding into the Primary Care Networks, resulting in a community-based response to reducing health inequalities and directly influencing commissioning.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sector engagement to establish project focus and build momentum• Continued engagement in Hillingdon Health Care Partnership• Recruitment of Community Development Manager and Officer, volunteering Development Officer, and Dementia Befriending Coordinator• Invest in developing strong and supportive relationships and shaping support
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up the Health and Wellbeing Alliance (HWA), including 40 organisations• 11 Health Partners sign MoU• Coordinate the third sector COVID-19 response
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renew intentions, aims and outcomes• Gather citizens views on health provision through the HWA• Develop sector engagement with emerging Integrated Care System (ICS) structures and use our seat on the local ICS Board to promote the third sector's role in systems recovery.

Project name: Local Village Network

Lead partner: LVN

Aim: The aim of our project is to tackle network poverty by giving young people from disadvantaged backgrounds access to better networks. We do this in two ways: 1) Our youth mapping signposting app and 2) Our Power of the Hour which is an assets-based micro-mentoring programme.

Three-year vision: Young Londoners, aged 14-24 having better access to networks, with all youth opportunities on our app. Having our Power of an Hour services as an access point across London.

Case study: The purpose of the project is to ensure that every young adult has access to positive networks and an equal chance to reach their full potential. Funding from the Cornerstone Fund has allowed LVN to create a platform which employs a signposting youth mapping function that helps young people see the wide range of support available, including job and apprenticeship opportunities, local events and other youth services. It now has over 1400 different youth opportunities featured connects.

The app is an incredibly useful tool that allows for pan-London collaboration. It is now being used by the Metropolitan Police Services and some local councils as a tool for positive youth engagement. The MPS will be able to signpost young people to use the application and access opportunities. In addition, they can share the app with organisations that we work with to enable them to sign up and highlight what they do.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further development of the Local Village Network app e.g. higher security• Gather 500 youth services from several London Boroughs to be added to the app• Offer Power of an Hour services through app• Recruitment of Fundraiser
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Train youth practitioners to delivery Power of an Hour• Increase number of youth service on the app to over 1200• Broaden partnership work making links with Mayoral VRU unit and the London Metropolitan Police, to use app for signposting• Recruitment of two volunteers with business experience
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop work with VRU champions• Pilot the LVN Digital Youth Hub Model in Job Centres in 4 London boroughs, where DWP work coaches will signpost candidates 18-24 to Power of an Hour• Explore work with Scotland Yard who are interested in mapping youth systems in London

Project name: NetEquality

Lead partner: HEAR Network

Aim: The aim of our project is to coproduce new ways to connect and build networks for solidarity and campaigning around equality and human rights.

Three-year vision: The project has built a community of equality groups from our four-partner network. Members are collaborating more, as they are able to do so self-sufficiently through the use of digital tools which enable more de-centralised communication between people. Because there are more chances for sharing, spreading awareness and collaboration, there is more solidarity and stronger campaigns.

Case study: Net Equality are using digital tools to help bring people together in a number of ways, supporting co-design and iterative learning. The project is divided into a number of 'experiments', each with its own team of 'explorers', which draw on grassroots members and expert campaigners from other experienced campaigning organisations, to work alongside us.

An experiment is the Campaign Pies. It is a collaborative campaign planning tool, which will enable people to plan, publicise and contribute to campaigns collectively. The experiment seeks to enable multiple groups and/or people to contribute their toppings to different elements of campaigns. The project team collaboratively decided the basic ideas and components for Campaign Pies and put together a trial website and invited Equally Ours and the Sheila McKechnie Foundation to give their expert constructive feedback. Based on this, the tool is now populated with some initial campaigns and can be tested with members to refine and improve it before it launches Campaign Pies next year.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on administrative tasks and discussion with partners about capacity and communication• Partners sign MoU• Recruitment of Project Officer and a volunteer• Develop project pitch, brand and logo• Develop a set of training and information resources on mapping and social network analysis
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partners undertake needs assessments of their sectors• Commission external organisation to support the development of the second year of the project, focusing on ideation and experiments• Develop 'the Learning Space' for projects, partners and external stakeholders• Establish inclusive design activities with an emphasis on co-production• Continue to embed and strengthen the partnership
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undertake work within three workstreams: 1) resource sharing 2) network mapping 3) campaign planning tool• Further engagement with 'end users' of the project resources, e.g., test accessibility and inclusivity of the latest iteration of the social network map

Project name: North Camden Zone Community Action Initiative

Lead partner: The Winch

Aim: The North Camden Zone supports residents to take the lead on improving their local neighbourhoods and the wider system(s) by building stronger neighbourhoods, increasing active citizenship, and enabling resident-led systems change.

Three-year vision: Stronger communities, community-led action, collaboration and partnerships between residents and organisation working together to fulfil the goals determined by the community. Together partners and residents will have taken action against a wider cross-cutting system issue.

Case study: The project has recruited and trained residents as Community Organisers to bring about change on their own estates. The Hilgrove Community Organisers started in July 2020 and have been supported to develop the skills, confidence, autonomy and networks to deliver estate-based initiatives. Humans of Hilgrove is the first project launched, taking into account the constraints of the COVID-19 landscape, and seeks to strengthen and improve their local community.

The Community Organisers interviewed other residents to celebrate their stories, make their community visible, and share their ideas for the changes they would like to see in their local area. This culminated in a physical and online exhibition in October 2020 which included portraits of 17 fellow Camden residents ranging from 13 to 98. The organisers led the planning, execution and communication of the project gaining local and regional press coverage. It has gained traction locally leading into the next phase of the project, where they are co-designing with partners and local politicians a Neighbourhood Working Pilot with the community firmly in the lead.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8 Chalcots Community Organisers recruited and trained• Engagement with residents and stakeholders on Chalcot Estate• System mapping and community-led research to understand the system• Co-design of ideas against community-goals
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver a small grants initiative for Chalcot residents• Publish Manifesto for the Chalcots Estate• Chalcots Community Organisers delivered estate activities and events• Set up the Winch Community Hub COVID-19 response with partners including Camden Council.• Recruitment of 5 Community Organisers on the Hilgrove Estate• Support the development of the Humans of Hilgrove art project
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-design Manifesto for the Hilgrove Estate and develop a neighbourhood plan• Redefine work at the Chalcot Estate in new landscape

Project name: Refugee Advocacy Forum for London

Lead partner: The Refugee Council

Aim: Create open, transparent and structured engagement and influencing mechanisms which enables grassroots refugee-led community organisations (RCOs) to use their knowledge, expertise, insight and evidence to speak directly and engage effectively with policy and decision makers in London. RCOs to achieve positive changes to policy and practice for refugee communities and improve outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers in London.

Three-year vision: RCOs to have a voice; to be able to engage with policy and decision-making processes. RCOs are part of planning processes in local areas, are part of the LSMP, engage with HO, Parliament. All decision makers, services providers, funders are aware of issues facing refugee communities and take informed decisions.

Case study: The project has created the RCO Advocacy forum for London, and its governance structures, and the co-production of a theory of change which includes a strategy to engage with and to influence local, regional and national power structures and decision-making processes on a pan-London basis. They have also been able to increase confidence of co-founding RCO members in their ability to build a unified voice; and the shifting emphasis from operational activities to include more inter-organisational collaborations and more strategic voice and representation to power and funders.

Synergies between forum members have been established and there is an increased willingness to share knowledge and best practice and to communicate with similar organisations as well as with partners; and to create together alliances that will help in amplifying the voices of grass roots refugee community organisations and will lead to improved outcomes for refugee communities in London.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get RCOs involved and introduce idea of systems change in accessible way• Recruitment of 15 RCOs as co-production partners• Deliver advocacy training• Refine purpose for the forum with partners
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop Terms of Reference for forum• Complete year of training with RCOs• Stakeholder engagement incl. GLA• Identify two advocacy projects• Appoint board incl. chair and vice chair
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop plan for and deliver advocacy projects• Recruitment of new members• Train and engage new members in advocacy projects

Project name: Setting the research agenda with, and for, young Londoners

Lead partner: Partnership for Young London

Aim: We have come together with a bold vision for young Londoners. We want to create the conditions for the services and support for young people to be: 1) more informed by research, practice and the experiences of young people themselves, and 2) more joined up through local and regional collaboration; and thus, more effective as a result.

Three-year vision: Youth voice is core in pan-London decision-making, there is a strong collaboration in place profiling youth policy and young people's needs. Young people's voices are core in regional decision-making priorities and there are resource allocated to ensure that they have access the support they need. Insights are being collected to track issues and needs of young people in real time to resolve issues.

Case study: The youth sector has collaborated on a youth sector data standard. Working across London Councils, London Funders, Health, the GLA and wider youth sector partners, which includes the arts and cultural sector, housing sector, voluntary sector and local authorities. This work aims to further develop cross-sector collaboration, gathering insight on both the needs of the youth sector, young people and the support on offer regionally as part of a rapidly changing environment for our response to COVID-19. The data will enable all partners to review the needs and the services on offer as they move forward, create stronger links with new partners and ensure that young people's voices are at the core of the recovery work for the region. The partnership will keep a dynamic view of needs and build new partnerships based on what issues are emerging.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with partners on collective vision and to identify focus of project• Set up research network• Develop plans and engage key stakeholders
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop research networks• Partner with universities and undertake research into open access provision• Some work put on hold due to COVID-19, some rescope and delivered• Work with GLA to take collective approach to data for Young People
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rescope work with partners to enable the work to have maximum benefit for young people in the context of the pandemic and recovery

Project name: The Power Sharing Project

Lead partner: Sheila McKechnie Foundation

Aim: Power and resource are shared more equitably in London’s civil society so that anyone - particularly those with experience of poverty and inequality - can drive social change.

Three-year vision: Civil society to have a more sophisticated understanding of power, and a deeper commitment to transforming unequal power dynamics in pursuit of social justice and social change. People in London with lived experience of poverty and inequality are more able to use their power to influence systemic social change.

Case study: The project aims to host honest conversations about how power could be better shared in pursuit of social change. They have convened a diverse community of practice and learnt about holding the tension between creating space for the learning and reflection required for sustainable systems change, and the desire to create tangible outputs.

The process of holding conversations that bring power into the open has been their greatest achievement. Power is woven through civil society, but people rarely have the opportunity to explore it explicitly. As one social sector leader said: “This is the best and most significant conversation about power with colleagues I’ve ever had. We are all engaged with power, but we just don’t talk about it.” Just as important has been the response from ‘ordinary Londoners’ having conversations within their communities, expressing a new understanding of their own power to drive social change.

Conversations about power are complex, sensitive, and draw on contested concepts. However, their findings suggest that the process of convening different perspectives, without requiring consensus, is in itself fertile ground for developing collaborative, resilient relationships in pursuit of social change.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build Community of Practice (COP) of 248 people• Develop and refine the vision for the project, co-design with COP• Build Core Learning Group (CLG)• Develop comms for project• Focus on defining collective vision and purpose for CLG and COP
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undertake literature review• Commission community researchers to conduct research in their communities
What’s next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review strategy, assessing if focus on ‘thematic deep dive’ (e.g. housing) in the next stage is key to explore learning outcomes in action or if it can include members of the community, regardless of their main area of interest and expertise.

Project name: The London VCSE Health and Wellbeing Transformation

Lead partner: Community Links Bromley

Aim: The aim of our project is to create system change by strengthening the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to effectively engage with health and social care providers and policy makers to improve the co-production of health services.

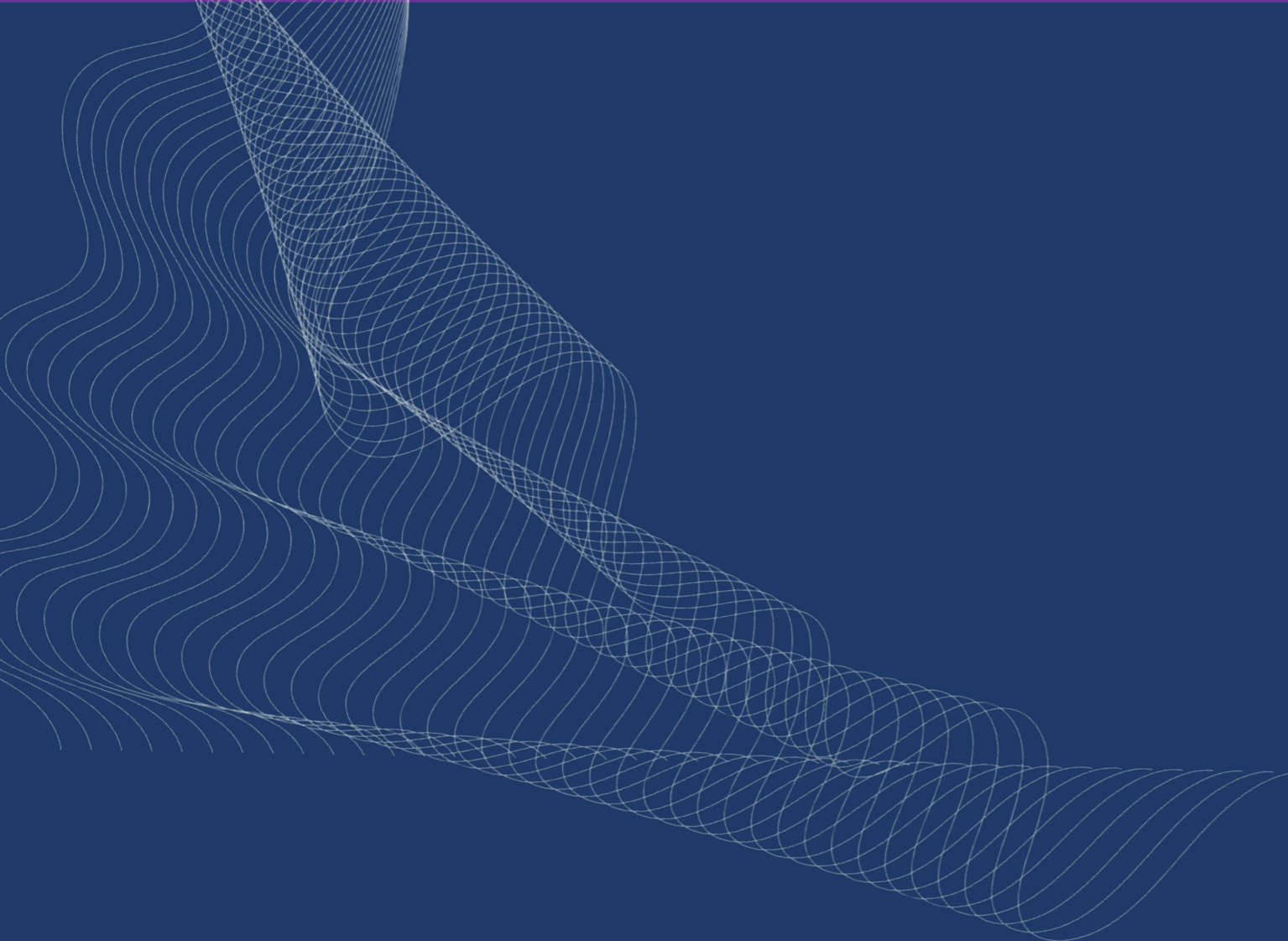
Three-year vision: Policy makers and commissioners consult with the third sector as an integral part of the process of determining policy and funding programmes, which results in additional resources being invested into the sector. Social value is widely understood, well-articulated and helps build a broader, more coherent picture of the impact of the third sector.

Case study: Each partner has distinct areas of focus for example:

- Metro GAVS has co-produced a crisis pathway for people with mental health challenges, through work with care homes and clinicians, undertake user surveys and focus groups. The learning has been shared through the Mental Health Alliance and has deepened the understanding of the needs of long-term mental health patients.
- Enfield CVS has trained 15 VCS Health Champions alongside its efforts to develop social prescribing which has led to increasing statutory partners recognition of the voluntary sector and closer collaboration between the sectors.
- Hackney CVS has engaged the VCS and system leaders, developing an operating model for VCS co-production, informing a business case to secure £300k funding for a Coronavirus test and trace programme.
- In Merton CVS together with the council, has engaged South Asian communities around diabetes and has helped create an 'equal place' at the policy makers' table.

Journey so far

Stages	Key activities
Developing the foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partners map opportunities and their possible contribution• Partners develop a project plan• Form a project board
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up local projects incl. identify local partners, understanding system, delivering training and capacity building support, engaging with statutory partners• Focus on COVID-19 response in individual boroughs• Recruitment of Project Coordinator• Reset partnership
What's next	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review project deliverables, reprofile work and agree revised targets• Coordinate and host quarterly steering group meetings• Share learning to date with stakeholders and project partners including London Plus, Commissioners, funders and the CVS Directors network• Plan an engagement event with Commissioners to share emerging findings



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