



**The Young  
Foundation**

# **The Power of Participation**

**Our strategy 2024-28**

# Our foundations

## The history of The Young Foundation is rooted in the life and work of Michael Young.

Since the launch of the original Institute of Community Studies in 1953, to the present day, we have striven to better understand, involve and innovate with people and communities who have been historically marginalised, silenced and under-represented in systems that powerfully affect their life chances and wellbeing. We have supported and incubated hundreds of activist entrepreneurs and organisations to tackle social injustice and challenge inequalities.

Michael Young's approach to creating social change is as relevant today as it was when he was alive. It has been said that Michael *'knew neither what a groove was or the meaning of orthodoxy'*, consistently ignoring the limitations of working within silos, sectors and boundaries. A true, radical entrepreneur, he spotted opportunities and revealed injustices that spurred the creation of entirely new institutions and innovations; meeting unmet needs within the UK and across the world.

Over the last five years, The Young Foundation has continued that legacy, relaunching our new Institute for Community Studies to bring renewed attention to the critical need to support stronger communities and centre their experiences in research and policymaking. Through our Peer Research Network, we have built greater opportunities for more people to become involved in research, driving real-world impact in many key policy areas. Working with organisations across every sector, we have demonstrated the power and potential of centring the needs of communities and marginalised groups in addressing inequity in all its forms.

Over that same period, we have endured a global pandemic, experienced real signs of climate breakdown, seen shortening life expectancy, and continued financial distress at both national and household levels.

Through all this, at The Young Foundation, we continue to reveal discrimination that drives poverty and disadvantage across parts of our population and geography. Our public services are in acute crisis. Public trust is on the floor. The range of challenges we face are many, and deeply knitted together. Consequently, our mental health is often poor, and our resilience weakened. We know that our collective ways of working and organising are completely ill-equipped to meet the challenges of 21st Century society.

## We must be prepared to unravel and reweave for the common good.

Across the UK, we did this in dramatic and effective ways during the pandemic - with people, the state and business working together in entirely new ways, to meet the needs of a country in crisis. But this ebbed when the crisis ebbed. We need to rebuild and strengthen our muscle for long-term, collective action.

That means raising our expectation of participation, empowering radical acts of co-creation across communities, sectors and boundaries. For The Young Foundation, this is a moment to embody the spirit of Michael Young, to build on the collective effort we've seen so powerfully improve lives in recent times of crisis, and to work collaboratively towards redesigning the social contract between people, communities, state and business as we shape a fairer, greener future.



# Our mission

**Everyone in the UK will experience the power of participation to shape a just and fair future.**

**Across The Young Foundation, we will use our capabilities in innovation, research, investment, campaigning, and incubation of ground-breaking initiatives to deliver our mission.**

We will encourage and enable active participation, co-operation and mutual responsibility - words that sound palatable and possibly even comfortable but are revolutionary at their core. This is about reinventing our standard, normal practices and ways of working and being together. It sits beyond the adversarial, egoic approach to *demanding* change, toward collaborative, unbounded approaches to *creating* change.

**This means supporting participation in democracy and social justice, through...**

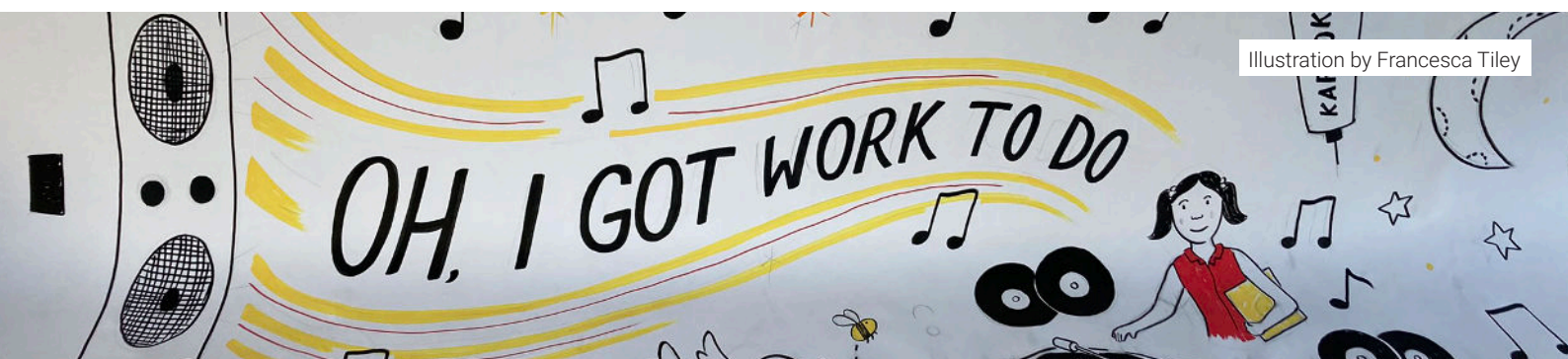
- increasing engagement in our representative democracy, and building more participatory, deliberative and inclusive democratic involvement
- collective action to improve outcomes for low-wage workers, those with poor working conditions, and those who stand to feel the impacts of a transforming economy most keenly.

**This means supporting participation across sectors, through...**

- enabling frontline workers, members of public, businesses and VCSE sectors to explore different ways to create good health and social support services
- private sector organisations working beyond their boundaries to create long-term social change and accelerate a socially just transition to net zero.

**And across communities, through...**

- individuals being involved in activities that support their own – and their community's – agency and wellbeing
- communities working in equitable partnership with public and private institutions to improve lives and neighbourhoods
- community groups taking ownership and governance of assets, utilities and strategies to build prosperity, sustainability and resilience.



## Our focus

**We know no boundaries.** We will remain entirely open about which economic, societal and environmental issues we work on. This gives us the agility to respond to need and circumstance, and to drive participation and innovation across complex, interlocking challenges. There are some issues which we will prioritise in our partnership working, which include:



### Planet

Because achieving net zero by 2050 requires the participation of all UK households, accelerated by policies and support for a socially just transition.



### Place

Because motivation to participate in social, civic and political change is stronger when connected to 'place' and a sustainable future is likely to be a more localised future.



### Prospects

Because collective societal change will be greater if we centre the capabilities and experiences of 'less heard' voices - and support younger people, particularly in amplifying their democratic voice and political participation.



## Who we will work with

We are fortunate to work with a range of incredible partners, who share our commitment to participatory research, innovation, investment and campaigning to rethink ways of living and working. The Young Foundation's business model is completely dependent on the gifts of others; our freedom to deliver radical initiatives and innovation is only as radical as our partners and funders.

Over the coming years, we will set our ambition to a new level, and are particularly interested in working with partners interested in supporting:

- a new initiative from The Young Foundation focused on collective participation in a fair transition to net zero
- innovative coalitions between people, society and the state, to inform new blueprint for civic participation in the 21st Century
- the expansion and evolution of our Peer Research Network, co-creating a national, supporting infrastructure for participatory and community-involving research
- campaign coalitions, advocating the power of more multi-sector *participation in specific policy areas* (such as net zero, education, health)
- the Institute for Community Studies to evidence why, how and in what circumstances increased participation and collaboration delivers tangible results
- sustained investment in radical forms of social and systemic innovation that can be trialled and scaled.

