



The Young
Foundation



UK Research
and Innovation

Local knowledge, national potential

Lessons learned through the first six months
of the Community Knowledge Fund programme

April 2024



Shaping a fairer future

We are the UK's home for community research and social innovation

The Young Foundation is the UK's home for community research and social innovation. As a not-for-profit, The Young Foundation brings communities, organisations and policymakers together, driving positive change to shape a fairer future.

Working to understand the issues people care about, The Young Foundation supports collective action to improve lives, involving communities in locally-led research and delivering distinctive initiatives and programmes to build a stronger society. The Young Foundation also powers the Institute for Community Studies.

For more information visit us at: youngfoundation.org



Section 1: Introduction

This report provides an overview of activity and emerging insights from Phase 1 of the Community Knowledge Fund.

What is the Community Knowledge Fund?

We know involving communities more meaningfully in research and innovation has many benefits: it encourages conversations and helps spread knowledge, it builds new relationships and ways of working, and it increases understanding of what is important to people. The value of this work is deep and long-lasting; it is a spur and stimulus for change that's rooted in community capacity, and it both demonstrates and builds on the aspiration that exists in communities across the UK to generate new ways of tackling long-standing challenges.

However, there's often a disconnect between the institutions leading research, and the people and community groups working to create change in their communities. There is work to do to bridge the gap and strengthen the connections between communities and the research and innovation system.

Funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and delivered by The Young Foundation, the Community Knowledge Fund opens up opportunities for more people to get involved, and for communities *themselves* to determine, develop and deliver change that is meaningful to them.

From across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, 24 community organisations are being supported to develop and test new ideas and approaches to creating, sharing and using knowledge held within their communities to make progress on local and national challenges.

Alongside funding, The Young Foundation are providing a structured learning and support package. This supports individuals and organisations to build confidence and develop the capabilities necessary to undertake their own research and take action on the issues that they and their communities care about. The insights generated from this will be used to create greater understanding of what equity in engagement means for different communities and help to inform future funding.

By supporting organisations and places to create the right conditions for research and innovation, this programme aims to grow local capacities to pilot new approaches to knowledge creation and strengthen and diversify research and innovation going forward.

This contributes to a broader movement towards a more inclusive research and innovation system, that values community-led research and innovation, and where pathways to connect into it are accessible and open to all.



*With the Community Knowledge fund, UKRI is recognising that communities themselves can be the source of ideas and knowledge that can help address both local and national challenges. We hope the ideas that we fund as part of this call will show that research and innovation really are **by everyone, for everyone**.*

Tom Saunders
Head of Public Engagement, UKRI



Goals of the Community Knowledge Fund and what have we done so far

In Phase 1 of the Community Knowledge Fund, 24 organisations were awarded £10k each to create the conditions for research and innovation and to develop and begin early testing of their ideas. In addition to funding, grantees participated in a bespoke six-month support package provided by The Young Foundation. This was co-designed with grantees to encourage ownership of a growing 'community of practice'. The goal of Phase 1 was to increase the quality and ambition of ideas with the aim of applying for Phase 2 funding to further test and scale ideas showing promise. The support package comprised of:

Whole-cohort learning workshops

Compulsory workshops delivered at the start and end of Phase 1, bringing together grantees and partners to diagnose challenges, consider the conditions needed to create change, showcase progress and problem-solve with peers in real-time.

Thematic learning groups

Opt-in and bite-sized sessions focused on building technical knowledge and skills to support action. These sessions were designed around the grantees' learning goals and skills they most wanted to build. They covered the following areas:

- **Participatory research methods** – developing an awareness of tools for enabling active engagement from a diverse range of people with varying degrees of capability.
- **Community engagement** – building confidence and skills in involving communities in research and innovation processes and projects.
- **The research and innovation landscape** – understanding how power shows up and mapping power over the research and innovation system.
- **Leading change in communities** – building understanding of adaptive leadership approaches and how it can support community leaders to mobilise people through change.
- **Impact storytelling** – sharing tips and tools on identifying, crafting and delivering data-driven stories in ways that increase effectiveness as a communicator.

Coaching

Reflective practice to work through issues in small groups, or one-to-one mentoring for participants drawing on our network of specialist knowledge.


Introduction to Peer Research training from The Young Foundation:

Designed for organisations and practitioners currently working with peer researchers, or those who are interested in managing peer research projects in the future.

Cohort corner

Weekly online space for grantees and funders to share knowledge, updates on progress and connections to wider work that may be of interest.





Section 2: What have we learned?

Community-led knowledge creation requires a collaborative, innovative and flexible approach. The following section shares consolidated insights from Phase 1 participants about the programme's approach, to be used to inform the next phase (and potential future iterations of The Community Knowledge Fund).

Learnings from Phase 1

Shifting the way individuals think about their role begins to shift the system.

There is value in shifting mindsets and ways of working beyond the parameters of short-term funded programmes. Grantees said the programme had an impact on how they approach work as individuals, within their own teams, across their organisations, and with key stakeholders.



Foundations we're laying now to not just go forward for this group, but in our team; we've created a module in our team to train people in this way of working!

Addressing traditional power dynamics by increasing leaders' confidence.

By validating the contributions of community organisations in research and innovation, we are growing the confidence and capabilities of community leaders to challenge traditional power dynamics and model new ways of working and leading.



Learning that 'leadership is an activity, not a position' shaped our project approach. We now lead, but also encourage and allow residents to take the lead where they are best placed to.

Connections are driving progress, but more intentional pathways are needed.

Participants want to 'better understand the system' and engage with and connect their work into wider agendas and areas of research interest. Grantees see connections with the formal research and innovation sector as opportunities for learning. Organisations that are new to research are keen to find more pathways to 'step into research'.



Proud of the connections we've made between the eco-warriors and Uni of Surrey. They've just launched an Institute of Sustainability and there's a possibility that this project will be a part of it and have an exhibit space there. I'm excited for us and these women to claim this place.

Responding to the diversity of communities is important.

Overlooked or underrepresented groups are not 'hard to engage' but are receptive and excited by the opportunity (and resources) to engage in research and 'do things differently'. By building flexible participation structures, new knowledge finds its way into the system.



...our co-researchers contribute about how to make research more inclusive - and amount of knowledge they have about research. In this approach of co-research, collaborative research, you accept that you're not actually in control of what might happen and that's okay.

How do grants for communities to engage in research and innovation benefit from having a support programme?



We know from experience that research is a powerful entry point for making positive social change in communities. Communities who are able to undertake research about the issues they care about create confidence, agency and capacity – not just to initiate change themselves, but to reflect that knowledge back to the many institutions that influence their wellbeing. Through the Community Knowledge Fund, we want to grow a much more inclusive, expansive network of research and innovation in the UK.

Helen Goulden, Chief Executive at The Young Foundation

The Phase 1 learning and support programme was designed to enable grantees to 'opt-in' to thematic learning groups that appealed to their needs, interests and project aims. Despite being opt-in, these sessions were consistently well attended by grantees. High engagement and feedback from grantees in Phase 1 has helped us build understanding about how to design learning and support packages within research and innovation funding programmes that meet the needs of community organisations.

Key learning about designing and delivering research and innovation support packages for community organisations were achieved in these sessions:

Participants appreciate learning being introduced in bite-sized sessions and having the opportunity to work 'in real time', with support on hand.



I really enjoy/approve of the approach to plotting our information in real time. It's useful and easy to do this way.

While sometimes challenging, community organisations value the freedom to set, and work towards, their own goals and appreciate the 'flexible structure' of the Phase 1 learning programme.



I am always impressed by the questions you pose to the group and how they get us thinking in new and inviting ways. I've found this so helpful in then talking to our participants and looking outside of the standard ways of thinking and working and feeling more creative freedom in the process.

Participants find reflective spaces useful in challenging and stimulating their thinking.



...the discussions keep me thinking about my process, discouraging complacency and encouraging me to keep looking for innovation/ further improvement - even in areas of our work that are going well.

Participants value programmes and organisations that connect and convene diverse research expertise, different sectors, across geographies and diverse perspectives.




I think the key for me is to have the support of The Young Foundation, acting as an intermediary, organising these types of events and using 'convening power' to add value to what we are doing.

Participants particularly value – and seek out – opportunities to connect with the formal research and innovation sector and better understand where their work aligns with wider agendas and areas of research interest.



I now see our project has a really unique space to feed into wider areas of research interest at local authority policy level...



A photograph of a young man with dark hair, smiling broadly and looking towards a woman on the right. The woman is partially visible, wearing glasses and a light blue top. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting. A large, semi-transparent dark blue circle is overlaid on the lower left, and a smaller green circle is on the lower right, both containing text.

Section 3: Setting impact goals and measuring progress

During Phase 1, grantees were not expected to explore all avenues of research or knowledge creation associated with their project. Nor were they expected to achieve definitive results. Rather, they should be making progress towards impact goals. They have been supported to take a developmental evaluation approach and consider what their learning and initial findings are telling them across 'ripples' from impact for individuals, to new ways of working within organisations and across places, to creating a more inclusive and accessible research and innovation system. The following impact stories spotlight the breadth and depth of emerging impact.

Impact Story: Climate Hebrides

Supporting community involvement in climate change adaptation within the Outer Hebrides, through interactive participatory mapping activities and supported creative practice.

The Outer Hebrides must adapt to increase resilience to the local impacts of climate change. This project addresses the need for climate adaptation planning through developing and trialling tools and approaches to strengthen the communities' local knowledge base on climate impacts, to inform meaningful collaborative adaptation action. It collaborates with diverse groups through strategic partnerships to amplify the project's impact, driving climate-resilient actions informed by local perspectives.

The project helps identify some less obvious climate impacts for the area - for example, drought impacting salmon spawning and freshwater mussels dying out, threatening the biodiversity of the islands. Phase 1 demonstrates the importance of an accessible and open-source mapping platform, and also highlights that the processes and conversations that happen while people use the map are just as, if not more important.

The team learned there is a strong need for facilitated, locally appropriate spaces for the map to be used, in collaboration with island-specific groups and in a manner that helps groups participate. The project team said:



... The Young Foundation's learning group sessions were incredibly useful and provided not only relevant information but challenges to our thought process. We reached out to groups which we had not previously considered as a result. For example, learning from groups who work with disabled people informed our thought process.



Mindful of the CKF key messages of opening discussions widely, and everyone contributing, we learned from groups previously excluded from climate change discussions. Key groups were Neuro Hebrides, local women led small businesses, Community Land Outer Hebrides, Stornoway Trust, community nurses and people who work for Western Isles Council (the major employer in the local area).

Notable outcomes and impact from this project:

New methodologies, new perspectives: until now there hasn't been a mechanism for capturing the experiences of different communities in the Outer Hebrides to contribute to a collective knowledge base that can inform adaptation action, although strategic partners such as the Western Isles Council strongly highlight the importance of local perspectives. This new methodology is capturing citizens' concerns around climate change at 'my house' level across the Outer Hebrides.

Impact Story: Homebaked Community Land Trust

Research to inform the development of a community-led and area-based retrofit programme, in partnership with local authorities, that addresses the lack of quality and affordability in housing.

Homebaked CLT was created by local people in response to the failures of top-down regeneration. Fuel poverty in the area is double the national average, with homes in the lowest 20% of domestic energy efficiency. The project has worked with five community anchor organisations, engaging locals through public-facing events, one-to-one conversations, and surveys to raise awareness of the benefits of retrofit. New cross-sector connections and strong momentum for an area-based solution has emerged. From feedback and high repeat attendance at their events, the project team recognised that their approach, breaking down silos and encouraging collaboration in driving forward creative and community-led solutions, is highly innovative in the sector.

The project team said:



The CKF workshops have been an invaluable support, ensuring time to step back from the daily aspects of the project to reflect and feedback within a mutually supportive environment, and has built our confidence to make changes leading to a richer and more nuanced project. We particularly appreciated the learning workshops regarding research methods. Whilst we have used similar methodologies discussed as part of co-production processes throughout the lifetime of the CLT, we had not previously framed this as part of a 'formal research' method. Following this we were able to set up a research proposal and methods accordingly.



Liverpool City Council have acknowledged the importance of community leadership and public-civic partnerships in delivering their domestic decarbonisation goals under community wealth building principles, and have invited Homebaked CLT to the table alongside Planners, City Development, Housing Associations...

Notable outcomes and impact from this project:

New partnerships to tackle systemic

challenges: new cross-sector connections and strong momentum for an area-based solution to tackle fuel poverty through an effective roll-out of domestic retrofit.

Organisation capability and capacity:

increased knowledge of formal research methods that the organisation has integrated successfully into their co-production practice.



Impact Story: Children in Wales

Young peer researchers investigating how climate change affects young peoples' health, education, opportunities, and social lives.

Children in Wales is committed to prioritising children's perspectives, breaking down age and location barriers that prevent young people's views and ideas being heard. This project was inspired by young people identifying climate change as a key priority, as well as limited opportunities existing for young people to participate in environmental projects in Wales.

During Phase 1, a climate change group of young peer researchers was established. These 12 young people were supported to complete peer research training, providing them with an opportunity to learn about research methodologies, ethics and analysis skills to inform climate change policy and research. This enabled young people to co-create the conditions for research and innovation, unlocking the collective power of communities of all ages in Wales to tackle climate change. The project had profound impact on both the organisation's staff and the young peer researchers.

Director of CIW, Paula Timms, reported:



The experience was iterative and engaging, enabling exploration of research discussions across the wider UK footprint, confidence and learning about community engagement and peer research was a key takeaway from the experience of attending the workshops and learning events.



We have learnt from our initial research that there is no available off-the-shelf young peer research training and we developed our own bespoke offer. We also confirmed through desk-based research that there is very few opportunities for young people to become involved in environment or sustainability project or research in Wales. Staff across the team benefitted greatly and increased their knowledge about community engagement, other types of community research methods, and research approaches for young people during the CKF workshops and learning events.

Notable outcomes and impact from this project:

More people involved in research:

CIW has piloted their Young Peer Research training course, which they will accredit during phase two enabling more young people to get involved in researching issues they care about.

Increased youth confidence and capabilities:

building young people's knowledge, expertise and confidence in carrying out research with other young people.

Impact Story: Camden Giving and brap

A tale of two cities; exploring resident views about the root causes of racism in Camden and Birmingham.

This project was created by Camden Giving in North London, in partnership with the Birmingham-based brap, to address a shared challenge in both locations – the ongoing impact of structural racism on resident outcomes. The project aims to support residents to play an active role in research and learning about their local area by working with older and younger generations together.

During Phase 1, Camden Giving and brap worked with a diverse group of individuals facilitating discussions on how racism manifests, considering aspects such as geography, employment, housing, education, safety and community infrastructure, including carrying out 'Walking Ethnography' tours. Challenges were identified, such as limited political representation and educational exclusion practices.

The team reported:



The CKF workshops supported us to identify our creative research method, this solidified why participatory research is key in reaching our goals and how walking/learning tours and peer research combined is great for place-based research.

The partnership approach of this project means comparative analysis work and sense-making activities across both places will result in a wealth of community-led knowledge and action useful for a broader range of places interested in tackling systemic racism.



The findings from community research on this project has significant implications for brap's future strategy in Birmingham. It has provided a range of key insights into patterns of recurring racial discrimination across generations in families – and root causes of these (particularly in the labour market and education) where brap can pursue advocacy.

Notable outcomes and impact from this project:

Power of participatory methods to increase resident participation: the project is contributing to a culture of 'whole family' involvement in community research and activism.

Addressing systemic barriers for marginalised groups: University of Birmingham engaged and want to address the attainment gap experienced by local Black and minority ethnic (BME) residents.



Impact Story: Westcountry Rivers Trust

Upskilling and empowering communities to achieve clean and healthy waters by putting people at the heart of citizen science.

Climate change is a serious concern across the southwest, impacting the environment, community, and the economy. With public interest intensifying from media coverage of water pollution issues, Westcountry Citizen Science Investigations (CSI) is addressing shortfalls in government-funded monitoring by empowering communities to collect data, track pollution and take-action over poor water quality.

This project sees Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) build on their existing citizen science model to create new local 'River Guardians' that lead community river groups. Their evolved model will extend the skills of existing volunteers, offer a range of new learning opportunities and promote increased scientific understanding across new communities. The shift to a more networked approach will increase coordinating capacity and encourage self-governance among local communities, increasing volunteer numbers more effectively. This reduces the capacity challenges on the central WRT team and positions local organisers to lead the water quality improvements sought by their community.

The project team said:



The CKF learning groups and workshops have been instrumental in the success of this project. Sharing ideas and learning from others' successes and challenges has helped shape the model we have created, particularly following the themes of leading change in communities, telling our story, and community engagement.



There is a capacity crisis across the environmental volunteering sector, with systems overloaded by appetite and organisations struggling to cope with the demand. The WRT model, and the opportunities created by support from the CKF, will help manage this demand, provide an expanded volunteer journey, increase the number of actions offered by WRT and add new levels of robustness to the data collected.

Notable outcomes and impact from this project:

Rich learning from how to scale citizen science: an innovative, community-led, centrally-supported model of citizen science, based on the 'train the trainer' model.

A more networked approach to scale: methodology is being refocused towards creating and training a network of empowered local catchment communities, with an authentic local voice, rather than focusing solely on individual volunteers.

A photograph of an older man with white hair, wearing a dark blue and green striped long-sleeved shirt, leaning over a wooden garden bed. He is harvesting various types of lettuce, including green and red varieties. In the background, there are yellow bags and a green container. The scene is outdoors with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Section 4: Find out more



If you would like to learn more about the Community Knowledge Fund visit:

www.youngfoundation.org/community-knowledge-fund

To discuss the learning and insights in this report, please contact the Community Knowledge Fund team at:

communityknowledgefund@youngfoundation.org



If you are interested in learning how UKRI are breaking down barriers between research, innovation and society, visit: www.ukri.org/what-we-do/public-engagement/our-strategy

If you have queries about UKRI's public engagement support and activities, please contact their Public Engagement Team at: publicengagement@ukri.org





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