

Act for Change Fund Learning Partnership

Key Messages

Hannah Borkin, March 2022

Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport



LOTTERY FUNDED



Paul Hamlyn
Foundation



Esmée
Fairbairn
FOUNDATION



About the Act for Change Fund

Renaisi and the Centre for Youth Impact shared the role of Learning Partner to the Fund:

- To support PHF, EEF and their partners to learn how we can, collectively, best build the strengths of young people
- To build a greater understanding of the small but growing “youth-led social change sector”, alongside its context, opportunities and challenges
- To capture and share learning on the benefits to communities and the development of young people’s skills, capabilities and wellbeing.

High-level intended outcomes of the Act for Change Fund:

- More opportunities for young people with experience of disadvantage to lead social change
- A greater understanding of how youth-led social change impacts individuals and their communities (both geographical or community of interest)
- Organisations supporting young people to lead social change are in a more sustainable position.

Key messages emerging from the learning partner activities

Sustainable investment

Supporting young people's social action and change-making in their communities should be seen as investment in long-term activity. The benefits of a longer, more realistic timeframe are fourfold:

- Avoids (or at least anticipates) the possibility of work stop/starting and can seek alternative solutions
- Ensures accessibility, inclusion and opportunities for reflection can be meaningfully embedded throughout
- Supports the young person to carry out the work in a way that isn't detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing
- Enables awareness and political activation to align with ongoing youth work provision/approach, development and leadership.

“Stepping back and creating space is where it’s most powerful.”



The stakes during the inception stage are high

- Allow initial time and space for young people to build trust and belonging with their peers, to learn about histories, their community and society more widely, to analyse and establish power dynamics within the delivery organisation and to develop their own ways of working
- Similarly, allow time for the delivery organisation to develop their cultural competency, knowledge and understanding of systemic and intersectional challenges
- Be clear from the outset about what is attainable in terms of macro change, and work with the young person to meet - or exceed – this incrementally
- Map out pathways to support a pipeline of empowered young people to meaningfully engage within organisations and in their communities as they move forward.

“It is essential for teams and practitioners to be fully immersed in exploring and critiquing the structure around them, so that they can be accommodating and encouraging of young people in displaying their magnificence.”

Support is required throughout the change-making journey

- Be prepared to shift power and allow young people to lead with autonomy, but in manageable increments. Recognise that it can be debilitating and/ or disempowering in instances where young people are offered power beyond their means without support
- Move away from a dichotomy to a partnership / allyship approach and co-identify areas where safeguarding and/or intervention should take precedence over the desire for autonomy, such as online harassment
- A person-first approach is preferred: successful social action and change-making are only possible if youth organisations invest in young people's social and emotional development
- Be as generous as possible in offering opportunities for young people to establish and access valuable networks on a peer or near-peer basis.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Young people require meaningful wellbeing support throughout the change-making journey and at key transition points, i.e. tapering off
- Safeguarding measures need to adopt an intersectional approach to ensure the safety of marginalised young people is understood and supported
- Efforts need to be made to increase young people's sense of belonging by building their sense of agency to carry out the work themselves should they wish to.

Rethinking outcomes?

- This work is not only about activism and 'big' campaign wins, but also personal development and incremental steps along the journey. Supporting young people's wellbeing at the culmination of the project requires reflecting on all outcomes and reframing what we consider a 'success' - especially in complex social change contexts.

“If they're going to socialise, make friends, do public speaking, make a link with other young people from other organisations, there's so much to take from the journey and so many wins for the young people.

It's like they're the outcomes.”

Recognition and remuneration

- Young people with lived experience must be appropriately recognised for their work, and funders should explore where to either draw or shift the line for what is considered ‘work’ as opposed to participation or engagement.



How can funders remunerate young people in a way that is both meaningful and proportionate to the work undertaken?



Are payment parameters (or what ‘counts’ as work) helpful in clearly defining and establishing roles and responsibilities?

“It’s hard to quantify what’s paid and what’s not. It’s a principle thing – we galvanise young people to do a lot of social change work that turns into social change work in their own time. I’m not convinced it’s the best way to do it, but it’s an experiment and it’s better than not paying them at all.”

Funding beyond the initial change-making aims and objectives

- Funders must consider the opportunities for wider impact and additional outcomes/positive consequences, such as infrastructure building for communities that function well, building a sense of belonging for young people, providing skills and creating valuable networks and sharing good practice
- The impact will be felt beyond the individual activity: it will benefit collectives, alliances and movements more widely
- A balance is required between proactive vs. reactive funding, and funders must be prepared to take risks and look beyond the end of the programme
- Further use of devolved funding and funders rooted in localities and communities of interest will also create more flexibility and accelerate change.

What next?

Conclusions from the Act for Change Fund

Key questions and future considerations



Can we consider the full range of outcomes as a result of youth-led social change?



What if supporting youth-led social change is also supporting high quality youth work?



Can we re-frame success in youth-led social change beyond the campaign win (or otherwise?)

Act for Change Fund was a £3.6 million partnership between Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for organisations supporting young people working for change.

The Fund, which ran from 2018-2022, provided resources for young people to challenge social injustice, find ways of overcoming inequality and give voice to issues they are experiencing.

The Foundations worked in partnership with the #iwill Fund (a £54 million joint investment between National Lottery Community Fund and The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport). The Foundations acted as match funders and awarded grants for Act for Change Fund on behalf of the #iwill Fund.



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