



How funders can effectively support

PLACE-BASED YOUTH FUNDING

Executive Summary

SARAH TAYLEUR
ZUNAIRA MAHMOOD
ANNA HAMILOS

JANUARY 2023

INTRODUCTION

Between May – December 2022, YMCA George Williams College supported Empowering Local as a research partner to explore the role of funders in youth place-based funding, in order to increase understanding of how funders can best support place-based approaches to funding youth provision.

Empowering Local is a growing group of local, regional, and national funders and infrastructure organisations committed to supporting place-based funding of the VCSE sector which meets the needs of children, young people, and communities.

This briefing presents the findings of our research and provides nine recommendations, grounded in evidence, for funders and small trusts seeking to develop their approaches to place-based funding in the youth sector.

THIS RESEARCH HAS TWO CORE AREAS OF FOCUS:

Impact: what is known about the role of funding/funders in place-based approaches/initiatives, and how does this contribute to positive change?

Process: what are the mechanisms and conditions (e.g., readiness) that make place-based funding effective, (in particular embedding youth voice in decision-making and engagement with local, regional, and national organisations)?

The recommendations and information in this work will be familiar to many readers, it therefore aims to focus funder attention and make it relevant to work which focuses on impact with and for young people.



METHOD



THE RESEARCH WAS COMPRISED OF A DESK-BASED REVIEW, WHICH IDENTIFIED 26 RELEVANT REPORTS. THE DESK BASED WORK WAS COMPLEMENTED BY QUALITATIVE WORK WITH BOTH EXPERTISE FROM YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR. THREE CASE STUDIES WERE ALSO DEVELOPED.

Defining place-based youth work

The findings from the research led to the development of a definition of place-based youth work that is based on two existing definitions.

Place-based youth work is a “collective process” focussed on a place that seeks to achieve outcomes that can only be achieved through bold and “collaborative action” (The Corra Foundation, 2018).

AS DESCRIBED BY RENAI SI (2020), WE BELIEVE THAT PLACE-BASED YOUTH WORK IS CHARACTERISED BY:

Duration: it is long-term in ambition and practice.

Focus: it is not limited to a single organisation or service, but rather a collective and interrelated practice.

Approach: it is engaged in building and developing relationships between people and organisations, it is flexible and responsive, and it explicitly engages in questions of complexity.

Scale: it is focussed on geographies that are coherent and understood by those who live in them, and to the systemic challenge.

As such we adopt two of Renaisi’s five conceptions of place (Hitchin, 2021); place as the community and place as a system. These two conceptions are underpinned by a focus on sustaining relationships that create systems change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this research, we have established nine recommendations for funders and small trusts based on themes that emerged from analysis of the data. These are structured around three phases of the funding cycle, represented in Figure 1 below:

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

- Development grants**
- Build trusted relationships before you administer funds**
- Promote collaboration not competition**

DESIGN & DELIVERY

- Funders are accountable to places**
- Wrap around learning**
- Unrestricted, long-term funding**
- Proportionality**

SUSTAINABILITY & EMBEDDING

- Skills and capacity building**
- Embedding Youth Voice**

Figure 1 Recommendations across each phase of the funding cycle



In summary, we are asking funders to do the following:

- 1** Dedicate resources to support communities to build infrastructure so that more organisations working in place have the capacity to receive funding.
- 2** Take the time to build trusting relationships in places before administering funds.
- 3** Ensure your funding mechanisms promote collaboration between organisations and identify opportunities to collaborate with other funders.
- 4** Listen and respond to the needs of the community; align funding to local strategy.
- 5** Be willing to take risks and support a learning culture.
- 6** Provide unrestricted, long-term funding opportunities.
- 7** Ensure that reporting requirements are proportional to the capacity of organisations.
- 8** Help build skills and capacity in the local ecosystem.
- 9** Embed youth voice at all levels of decision-making. The case studies in the main body of this report provide a range of examples of how funders can do this.

Development grants

Place-based funding should be designed to support an initial phase whereby smaller organisations can self-identify whether they require, or could benefit from, any upfront capacity development funding before becoming involved in a delivery partnership. Funding opportunities are often unpursued because the community lacks the resources, skills, confidence, or capacity to apply, so funders should endeavour to support the development of this infrastructure.

“Smaller place-based organisations often don’t feel included in national place-based funding initiatives because they can’t write the kind of funding proposals that larger organisations can.”

Research Interviewee

RECOMMENDATION:

Dedicate resources to support communities to build infrastructure so more organisations working in place have the capacity to receive funding.

Build trusted relationships before you administer large funds

It is important for funders to build relationships and partnerships amongst delivery organisations, service users, and the local community (Renaisi, 2018); funding should then be targeted via these relationships. Funders could invest in resourcing this engagement so that delivery organisations can engage more fully.

“Without relationships, funders will struggle to reach and fund certain communities.”

(Research Interviewee).

RECOMMENDATION:

Take the time to build trusting relationships in places before administering funds.

Promote collaboration not competition

It is important for funders to foster and Invest In collaboration between organisations when they fund, as well as model a partnerships approach to other funders in the ecosystem. Funders can play a role in bringing together local organisations rather than leading to more competition; funders should commit to co-design and collaboration to facilitate the development of local partnerships (Laurence, 2021b). In addition, Interviewees also noted that funding should be approached holistically due to the interconnected nature of young people’s issues. In doing so funding can more effectively respond to the young people’s issues with interconnected services and maximise support available.

“[place-based system change] is not limited to a single organisation or service, but rather a collective and interrelated practice.”

(Hitchin, 2020).

RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure your funding mechanisms promote collaboration between organisations and identify opportunities to collaborate with other funders.

Funders are accountable to places

Place-based funding is effective in supporting youth work if it directly responds to community needs. Funders should not go into an area with their own agenda or preconceived ideas about what should be done or achieved. Rather, funders should have an open mind, talk to people about what is needed, and consider how they can best add value to a place in terms of funding and capacity (Laurence, 2021b) and how to adapt to local need, rather than vice versa.

“Recognise that it is local communities, not funders, who often have the answers.”
(Research Interviewee).

RECOMMENDATION:

Listen and respond to the needs and hopes of the community; align funding to local strategy.

Wrap-around learning

This is about funders supporting learning and facilitating organisations to sustain work beyond the funding and/or support future iterations of funding. Renaisi (2018) and Pritchard et al. (2019), describe the role of funders in building and resourcing space for learning and reflection to be able to be responsive and adapt to what isn't working. Wrap-around learning is also about appropriately capturing impact data and sharing that learning with a wider audience, and using it to inform future phases of funding.

“Arrive gently and stay a while.”
(Research Interviewee).

RECOMMENDATION:

Be willing to take risks and support a learning culture.

Unrestricted, long-term funding

Short-term funding is a mistake that is made repeatedly in youth work. Funding needs to be long-term and flexible to allow organisations to adapt to changing circumstances, and the needs of young people.

“It can be 7-10 years before a place-based intervention can begin to demonstrate impact.”
(Renaisi, 2018)

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide unrestricted, long-term funding opportunities.

Proportionality

It is not realistic to expect smaller organisations or projects to be able to report on the same scale as larger organisations or projects. Requirements should be proportional to the size and capacity of the work.

“Encourage national funders to reduce unnecessary funding application burdens that disproportionately impact smaller organisations.”
(Research Interviewee).

RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure that reporting requirements are proportional to the capacity of organisations.

Skills and capacity building

Funders should seek to build capabilities within the system and, after helping lay the right groundwork and skills, trust the expertise of local people and the process. Funders can support organisations through capacity building to increase readiness. This is especially important when working with smaller organisations who may have varying strengths and levels of confidence across design, delivery and evaluation.

“Sustainability needs to be built in from the start.”
(Lankelly Chase, 2017).

RECOMMENDATION:

Help build skills and capacity in the local ecosystem.

Embedding youth voice

Involving young people at the earliest point in setting strategy and investment priorities right through the grant-making and evaluation processes is important. This should move beyond involvement to co-production; young people we spoke to were very clear that they felt they should play a crucial role in making decisions about how money is spent as they felt funding should be responsive to issues faced by young people. Some important things to consider include valuing young people’s time through payment, being clear about the level of influence they will have, and ensuring opportunities are accessible to those experiencing additional levels of disadvantage.

“You have to be willing to change - otherwise what is the point of youth engagement? Good practice is when you’re willing to take risks, try things, and potentially fail. Young people are going to suggest things that surprise us, but we should be open to that.”
(Research Interviewee).

RECOMMENDATION:

Embed youth voice at all levels of decision-making. The case studies in the main body of this report provide a range of examples of how funders can do this.

“Recognise that it is local communities, not funders, who often have the answers.”



CONCLUSION

These recommendations have been established to provide guidance for funders and small trusts seeking to develop their approaches to place-based funding in the youth sector. As well those who will be shaping the youth sector's strategic and funding decisions.

The research consistently highlights the value of relational approaches based on mutual trust and collaboration between funders, organisations, and communities.

We hope that this research will provide evidence to influence decision-making so that place-based youth funding can be more effective, and provide better and high-quality services for children and young people.



At the heart of this project lie key stakeholders who are and will be shaping strategies and funding decisions for the youth and play sector, including:

- **Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport**
- **National funders, including key trusts and foundations and institutional donors (e.g. The National Lottery Community Fund)**
- **Local funders, including local authorities**
- **Potential and current private sector supporters / businesses, at local and national levels**

THANK YOU

Thank you to our interviewees who took the time to support this research and shared their experiences with us openly.

We would also like to thank Empowering Local for funding this study, and for supporting and enabling this research.

Special thanks to:

- BBC CHILDREN IN NEED
- BLAGRAVE TRUST
- CONNECTED FUTURES
- CORRA FOUNDATION
- DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE MEDIA AND SPORT
- BF ADVENTURE
- EMPOWERING LOCAL
- GRAPEVINE
- IVAR
- JOHN LYON'S CHARITY
- LEADING LINK
- LOCAL MOTION ENFIELD
- NATIONAL YOUTH AGENCY
- POSITIVE YOUTH FOUNDATION
- RENAISSI
- THE YOUNG FOUNDATION
- THRIVING TOGETHER
- UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
- YOUNG MANCHESTER
- YOUNG KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA
- YOUTH CONCERN
- YOUTH ENDOWMENT FUND
- YOUTH FOCUS NORTH EAST
- YOUTH FUTURES FOUNDATION
- YOUTH MOVES
- YPF TRUST

ABOUT US



YMCA GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College now hosts three centres of expertise: the Centre for

Quality Practice, focusing on developing skilled practitioners who can deliver high quality youth provision; the Centre for Youth Impact, which supports organisations to evidence their impact and continually improve their youth provision and offer to young people and communities, and the Centre for Youth Voice, which advocates for and supports a stronger role for the voices of young people in evaluation and continuous quality improvement.