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**Network Day**

**November 2024**

**Output: developing the long term offer**

The Network Day was attended by 74 people from funding and funded organisations, equity partners, IVAR and London Funders.

The morning session was about getting to know each other along with contributions on two different approaches to systems change (you can read more [here](https://londonpropel.org.uk/news/reflections-from-propel-network-day/)) and a summary of recent learning (you can see slides [here](https://d1ahhkkpv919ez.cloudfront.net/uploads/2024/12/2024.11-Propel-Network-Day-slides.pdf))

In the afternoon session we introduced the development of a long term offer. We reminded participants of the commitment of Propel: £100m of funding over ten years. With the first grants starting in April 2023, we’re just over 18 months into the programme. Funded organisations will have had a different route through the first three years, receiving a combination of grants over three years to get to this point – Explore and Expand, two and three year Deliver & Develop grants, and some one-year Extend grants. By March 2026, the current cohort of grants will begin to end. The question we’re considered this afternoon is about what happens in the seven years from 2026-2033.

The afternoon focused on three questions about the development of a long-term funding offer, with feedback sought from funded organisations:

* What are the key features of work that enables communities who experience structural inequalities to explore, develop and lead approaches to change (systemic, equity focused work)?
* What would the key features of financial and non-financial support be for systemic, equity focused work?
* Thinking about the upcoming year how could the grant-making process build on what we’ve done so far and push the boundaries of change?

The feedback on each is summarised in the next section.

What happens next? Propel Partners are committed to embedding your feedback in the design of the long term offer. What we heard really clearly was the need to be honest about what is possible, and to be really clear about the offer, the process, and how decisions will be made.

**Funded organisations contributions to developing the long term offer**

**Question 1: What are the key features of work that enables communities who experience structural inequalities to explore, develop and lead approaches to change (systemic, equity focused work)?**

* *An asset based approach :* moving from a deficit to asset model (i.e. not ‘hard to reach’ – look out for the language that organisations use)
* *Understanding the community you are working with/seeking to serve:* respect for the community, historical understanding of the challenges (who has knowledge and expertise, recognising that we are not the first), recognising expertise in the community, thinking about how knowledge and expertise are defined, moving away from colonial and patriarchal models, a good understanding of intersectionality, culturally appropriate approaches.
* *Engaging the community and sustaining the engagement:* meeting beneficiaries on their own terms, making space and time for people to be seen and heard, engaging in ways that work, trauma informed. Paying people for their expertise. Sustaining the engagement through ongoing communication and feedback, being accountable to those you are engaging, and building trust on a strong foundation of shared understanding. Providing platforms to amplify community voice/s, without fear of negative impact.
* *Community-led solutions*: co-created or co-produced, responding as needs change, recognising multiple layers of need, working holistically and always seeking to intervene at the earliest point of need.
* *Reimaging & being radical:* Accepting that things will change, and grieving what hasn’t worked to enable re-imagining. Conscious of and addressing power. Community organizing. Acknowledging structural inequalities, having courageous conversations, thinking with radicalism, reframing the way we see societal problems, and willing to raise big questions about power and democracy. How will funders react to direct action, if that’s where being driven by communities leads us?
* *Articulating shared ambitions/goals, indicators of success:* Being intentional, having ambition. Setting clear goals – knowing what you want to change, but being flexible and learning as you go. Safe spaces should be provided for people to work toward clear goals and missions, with long-term ambitions and strategic goals in place. Measures of success should be defined by communities, but outcomes enable us to know that what we are doing is helping towards our goals. Establishing frameworks to calculate systemic change after ten years is essential. Should include collaborative or collective outcomes.
* *Working systemically (internally and externally):* Being able to work with complexity, addressing complex issues, requires multiple channels for change along with deep roots in communities. Are we talking about enabling the people that we work with? Or about changing wider systems? Or about changing our own organisations? (all/and!) Seeking changes in decision-making frameworks and mechanisms, addressing unequal relationships (with funders too), finding the bridge builders e.g. people in the local authority. We need equity infrastructure organisations to bring independent orgs together, run training and build capacity.
* *Learning and adapting :* piloting, testing, trying and learning. Needs trust between funder and funded and willingness to take risk – be clear about where this risk sits. Making time to reflect internally. Being adaptable. Acknowledging and learning from failure.
* *Collaborative & connected:* Recognise that frontline orgs rarely have capacity for policy & campaigning so look for opportunities to partner with others seeing to achieve similar aims. Policy work alongside delivery – note that funders need to support this. Seeking opportunities to learn from others and to collaborate across social justice orgs and issues. Lots of convening and sharing – creating resources to share. Networking, partnering and influencing will requires infrastructure support. Working across the Propel cohort, seeking to learn from each other. Movement building.
* *Leadership & people:* leadership that is nurturing and supportive. Building new leaders in communities. Lived experience embedded in organisations. Does systems change require new roles in orgs? But need to be careful it’s an organisational approach and not siloed in one person. Orgs that are building their own capacity, and focusing on the wellbeing of their workforce (noting that this needs to be supported through funding and funder behaviours). Where does REST fit in? Deadlines are stressful, staff are under pressure, rest for beneficiaries? A sustainable financial model means orgs have security and can think strategically.
* *Data and evidence:* Data & evidence driven, focus on research and advocacy, robust measurement of impact of addressing a particular need for change, an experience of inequality.

**Question 2: What would the key features of financial and non-financial support be for systemic, equity focused work?**

**Financial support**

Funding designed to support this systemic, equity focused work would include:

* Core funding
* Unrestricted funding /fewer restrictions enabling orgs to respond to emerging needs or opportunities
* Flexible/responsive funding – supporting a test and learn approach
* Full cost recovery – including inflation proofing, realistic salaries to aid recruitment & retention over time, and a budget for operations including tech and infrastructure
* Long term grants with bridge funding between grants if decisions are delayed
* Only ask for outcomes over long period, not short term
* Resource for evaluation by external consultants
* Funding complimentarily rather than competitively – connect grantees with similar interests – group by topic and area and make spaces for connection & collaboration.
* Standardized data collection and reporting across funders

**Non-financial support**

* *Funder behaviours*: offer support during application and dialogue during the grant in terms of changes in the system/environment. Openness between funder and funded organisation - open to hearing about challenges, and to offering appropriate support, being allowed to try and fail. Come out and visit the work, develop trusting relationships with mutual respect, be open to learning and to sharing what you learn.
* *Networking*: bring people together, provide time for reflection, enable collaborating and joint working, share learning between orgs including stories of success.
* *Get involved in systems change*: map funders points of influence and policy knowledge and consider how to use. Access to data sets and access to networks e.g. other funders, corporate, statutory and government contacts. Introductions to others working in the field / or who complement the work e.g. to extend support for young people, advocate to other funders about projects. Super-convening, enabling cascading of convening. Get involved in voice and policy, galvanizing others, influencing.
* *Supporting people*: mentoring, coaching and training, leadership development, CPD. Support for team development including planning for turnover and succession, access to potential trustees. Well-being support including EAPs and prioritizing self care, recognise impact of crises on wellbeing and resilience, create psychological safety by address fear of losing staff / fear by staff due to short term funding. Consider secondments between funders and funded orgs.
* *Support for organisations:* all of the generic funder plus offer was identified as desirable, along with acknowledgment that the generic offer is not always useful. Recognise the low capacity of funded orgs to engage in funder plus options, provide additional support to capacity building and infrastructure organisations. Practical support was also identified e.g. access to rooms & facilities, training on tech and AI, tech e.g. GLA’s support for online portal for volunteers, pro bono / legal aid.
* *Values:* enabling conversations around shared values, promoting ethical practices in funders and funded organisations – e.g. social justice, DEI, ESG (be open and transparent about these). Facilitate discussion on the danger of mission creep in pursuit of funding. Commit to the values of grantees and stand behind them, and reflect on your own (funders) values. Develop good practice charters and codes of conduct, input into the civil society covenant but don’t just mirror government priorities, be willing to ask big questions about power.

**Question 3: Thinking about the upcoming year how could the process build on what we’ve done so far and push the boundaries of change?**

* *Designing the grant offer*: involve beneficiaries in determining priorities, make the process light touch, make it collaborative rather than competitive, a process that allows for different start and finish points
* *Equity:* consider which communities are most underserved, ensure equitable distribution, more representation of equity partners in the delivery of the process, alongside transparency on how they have been selected.
* *Be transparent about:* How the process will work and why funders have designed this process – what are we trying to achieve and what might the obstacles be? Dates and timescales, if the funding is likely to reduce for orgs, the criteria for selection and the rationale that funders apply to project costs.
* *Be realistic (and honest) about:* acknowledging that you can’t fund everyone, that you’re testing a new process. The likelihood of success, the likely size of the grants, how long the process will take and how much it costs (on both sides).
* *Application:* consider no process at all – identify the groups that you want to partner with, and give them what they need ( a pot that enables more flexible, responsive, informed funding. Can funders use existing reports instead of application forms? E.g. annual impact reports. Relationship based - have a conversation with a funder (may need multiple back and forth) – funder to be clear about what is expected, what is likely. Co-design of the application with a funder can build shared understanding of/confidence in the proposal. Option to apply via written / audio / video application.
* *Decision-making:* be timely! Make decisions in time to ensure continuity. Remove fear from the process – offer bridging grants if needed. Not just on paper – include in-person interviews. Bring the funded orgs and beneficiaries into decision making on grants. Draw on expertise of funders who understand the area of work and care about it, map and understand provision and how an org fits into the wider eco-system.
* *Post decision:* Meaningful feedback for all applicants. Think about what else funders can leverage - share unsuccessful applications with other (non-Propel) funders. A grace period post-decision? Plan for the end of funding –have a conversation about managing the closure of projects/work. Have an honest conversation about staff retention. Build a strong eco-system around the process to share the learning.