What next for Civil Society Futures.

Sep 2019
**About this report**

Civil Society Futures was an independent inquiry that ran from 2017-2018, generating a national conversation about how English civil society can flourish in a fast changing world. The Inquiry was funded by eight foundations: Baring Foundation, Barrow Cadbury, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, City Bridge Trust, Esmée Fairbairn, Lankelly Chase, Lloyds Bank Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Additional research support was provided by NCVO.

The Inquiry’s findings were reported in November 2018: https://civilsocietyfutures.org/final-reports/

The report provides an overview of subsequent scoping work to identify opportunities for building upon and taking forward the Inquiry’s recommendations in the future.

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Introduction

Context for the Inquiry

The Civil Society Futures Inquiry took place during a period of significant change and uncertainty within England. Rising poverty and persistent inequality within England, the crisis of Universal Credit, austerity, the rise of automation, decreasing trust in institutions and scepticism about established democratic processes and the ongoing effects of climate change and damage to the natural world set the context within which the Inquiry was operating. The Inquiry took place at a time of reported deep divisions within England too. Divisions between the north and the south of the country are well documented, but so too are divisions between generations, between those with wealth and those without, those with high incomes and those with low incomes. There was also increasingly a recognition of the very real divisions between the cities of England and the towns and of course between new immigrant and established residents. The 2016 EU Referendum result has only served to harden these divides and has introduced a level of tribalism and precariousness into the social and political contract that has not been seen for many years.

The changes, divisions and uncertainty that characterise wider society in England are all readily seen within civil society. Distribution of charitable funds remains hugely uneven. Charity income is concentrated in southern England and metropolitan areas and a disproportionate chunk of that income resides within a small number of very large charities. There is a growing gap between large, established organisations and smaller ones – with fewer mid-sized organisations in between. Similarly, there are tensions and competition between institutions of civil society that can restrict connection and collaboration across the country.

Focus for the Inquiry

In order to respond to (and not replicate) some of these broad trends of inequality and division, the Inquiry was deliberately broad in its scope, adopting an 'opt-in' definition of civil society. We described civil society as ‘all of us’. When we act not for profit, when we organise ourselves outside the market and the state, we are all civil society. We were open to contributions from arts organisations and major charities, from community groups and emerging networks, from social enterprises, housing associations, professional associations, and trade bodies, from universities to playgroups. But we intentionally focused in addition on the local and the overlooked within civil society, recognising that bigger, more established organisations, especially those working at national level, had more opportunity to contribute easily.

The Inquiry also focused intentionally upon the future. We sought to understand what the big issues are that civil society will be facing in 10-15 years’ time and how civil society can flourish. In focusing on the future, we were very conscious that future trends can often be found at the margins of current activity. We heard about challenges civil society will face in the future, but we also heard about exciting and inspiring approaches to working differently and changing mind-sets that could shape the future of civil society. Our aim was to listen attentively to people and to understand what people thought the future holds and how civil society could prepare itself to get there.
**Process of the Inquiry**

The conversation was guided by an independent panel of people, bringing a unique set of skills and perspectives, with Julia Unwin as Chair. It was powered by a collaborative team of individuals, bringing skills from four unique organisations: Citizens UK, Goldsmiths University of London, openDemocracy, and Forum for the Future. The Inquiry was funded by The Baring Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Lloyds Bank Foundation, City Bridge Trust, Lankelly Chase Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Research support was also provided by NCVO.

Through community events right across the country, academic research and online debate, Civil Society Futures created a space for conversation among those involved in all forms of civil action – from informal networks to vast charities, Facebook groups to faith groups. The diagram below provides a description of the Inquiry’s journey.²
What we found

As the Inquiry progressed, we focused on four areas that emerged as particular issues of interest:

| The places that matter | Local places matter to almost all of us, perhaps even more in a digital age – to meet real people, talk eye to eye. Place matters just as much to young people as older generations. Healthy civil society is rooted in places and even big organisations need local networks of engagement. But – as the Brexit vote showed – people in many places all across the country feel unheard, neglected and ignored and are hungry for a new vision and the power to make it happen. |
| Reimagining work and purpose | Dependable, well-paid, meaningful work continues to reduce and the combination of technology and globalisation is bringing more change — shifting our relationship to work and workplaces, impacting our sense of belonging, affiliation and loyalty. Can civil society help people and can communities be heard and take charge of creating a ‘human’ future for work? Can civil society provide relationships and activity that give other ways of finding purpose and affiliation? |
| Belonging and identity | We all want to belong and to be treated fairly and equally by others in society. Relevance and meaning in our lives come not only from relationships, expressing our own identities, and being heard, but being also part of something bigger. This is central to civil society’s purpose in an increasingly changing, global, individualised and digitalised world. Many feel our society has become too much about individuals, about competition. |
| How we organise | There are changes taking place within civil society and challenges to the ways in which we organise and grow just as small charities have disproportionately seen their funding reduced. So, we witnessed the growth of new networks and movements, and different sorts of organisations. From the largest bodies to the smallest community group there are changes in the ways we organise and manage both growth and change. Big changes are needed to allow smaller groups and more informal networks to flourish — but the established institutions also need to change fast and, most profoundly, learn from challengers and the best of what’s new. |
The Inquiry’s report contained a range of recommendations that aim to support civil society to flourish in the future. A central recommendation was a proposed ‘PACT’. The PACT is a framework for strategic planning and organisational development that will enable groups and organisations to consider their priorities, and to re-think their behaviours and attitudes in ways that can support them to adapt to the future.

What has happened since the Inquiry was launched and why is this report needed?

When the Inquiry reported in November 2018, the response within civil society was divided. There were those who felt that the report had focused too little on the changes that needed to be made by government, while others accepted our clear view that it was time for civil society to pay more attention to its own behaviours, attitudes and practices if it is to live up to its enormous potential. Equally, there were those who felt the recommendations were too diffuse and non-specific. Put simply they believed that while the diagnosis was about right, the prescription was ill defined and abstract.

And of course, there were many who welcomed the challenge and have been hungry for more engagement and more thinking. From housing associations to community organisations, from grant making foundations, to social enterprises, from universities, cathedrals and a host of other
organisations there has been demand for a change to meet the challenges ahead.

Nine months on and already we are seeing signs that a wider change is in the air. A proposed community wealth fund, a multi-billion pound national endowment to support the most deprived communities, has the potential to enable every community to better share in the country’s wealth. The world of philanthropy is focusing more on community-based approaches, distributed decision-making and devolving power to those who will benefit from support. The New Local Government Network has set out a ‘Community Paradigm’ that encourages local authorities to hand over significant power and resources to communities. Central Government is investing some £160 million in its Community Housing fund that will encourage community-led housing over the coming years. The Government’s Communities Framework includes proposals to enhance local connectedness and local control, promote shared community spaces, and build a more inclusive economy. And Labour’s civil society strategy sets out plans to bring about a shift from ‘paternalism to participation’.

Various movements in other fields are seeking to shift power to communities too. The increased uptake of ‘asset-based’ approaches to community development is one such example. Social Care Futures is a growing movement that brings together people from across society to move away from institutional practices and give power to people and communities to define their own vision for the future of social care. Losing Control is bringing together like-minded people across sectors to find ways to ‘let go’ of power in order to unleash social change. Similarly, we are seeing visible signs that international movements for global social and environmental justice challenges are shaping new, more accessible forms of activism on our streets. Black Lives Matters and the #metoo campaign are just two examples. Tens of thousands of children took days off from school in 2019 to protest about inaction on climate change. And while the impact of movements like these is becoming more evident, a range of organisations and movements are beginning to recognise that the future of our democracy lies in more devolved, bottom-up approaches to decision-making.

What we are witnessing is a new form of radicalism. In the face of continuing political uncertainty and crisis, imminent financial dislocation and possible recession, many institutions and organisations are rethinking their priorities and ways of working. There is both urgency and intent in all these initiatives. A strong sense that turning to government, or to national political leaders, is not appropriate at the moment. A recognition of the power and capability within communities and the ability of communities to identify and find solutions and at the same time a recognition, that it is only fundamentally different ways of working which will fit society for the major challenges it faces. These challenges were described by the Inquiry as:

- rebuilding our dented democracy using the tools of participatory and deliberative democracy that a truly connected and engaged civil society can deploy
- re-stitching our social fabric, building connections and trust between and within communities, and focussing on the capabilities and strengths of those communities
- responding to the catastrophic impact of climate change and environmental degradation. This has, in the short time
since we reported, moved very strongly up the agenda, with a long overdue recognition of the economic and social justice elements of climate change impacts.11

These challenges have only grown since we reported, but simultaneously the development of new radical and community-based responses have coalesced and have deepened, making a new and more profound response possible.

Reenergised and renewed civil society is crucial to responding to these challenges. The work of movements and networks like Extinction Rebellion have had their impact and have challenged existing long-established organisations to identify new ways of working together. So too have the networks of parents of children with disabilities organised to advocate for a better, safer and more personalised response to their children’s care and education. Across the country movements of people are taking action, making demands and making social change happen.

In summary, the changes we have witnessed in the past year have only reinforced the importance of the PACT and the need to develop behaviours and attitudes that will support civil society to adapt to the future. In order to drive forward some of the ambitions of the Inquiry, we recognised that as part of this scoping phase we would need to focus on some particular themes, recognising that much of the rich material in the Inquiry’s main report would be readily addressed by others. Naturally, we chose to work with a wide group of organisations seeking to develop the PACT in practice. We also focused on four additional elements that would help to create an environment in which the behaviours and attitudes identified in the PACT could flourish most powerfully. In particular, we decided to progress work on developing and framing a People powered grid, on leadership, on race equality and on working across the ecosystem that surrounds and supports civil society. The following chapters summarise our findings and recommendations from this scoping activity and set out ideas for further investment and activity in the future.
The PACT

Introduction

One of the fascinating things about the inquiry process was travelling the country to see how civil society is making a difference in different areas. Just as local challenges are unique, the responses from community groups have been similarly varied.

But the Inquiry found that some challenges are often shared and felt right across civil society. People told us that they’re worried about the future – worried about how communities are changing, worried about the impact of automation on their jobs and livelihoods, worried about climate change, worried about how little opportunity they have to have their voices heard.

Civil society is uniquely placed to help people and communities respond to these challenges – but there’s a snag. Trust in charities is declining, spaces for civil society to engage people are becoming less common, many feel civil society isn’t representative of our diverse communities, and many organisations and groups are competing with each other, rather than collaborating.

How can we re-energise civil society in light of these challenges? The Inquiry proposed that rather than only make demands of government, regulators, and funders, we, as civil society, need to turn the mirror on ourselves. We need to ask ourselves some difficult questions.

Questions like: how can we share decision-making with people who have traditionally not had a voice? Who are we really accountable to in our work: government, funders, or communities and people? How do we earn the trust of the communities we serve? And how will we bridge divides across race, gender, generations and social class?

We summed up these ideas in the form of four commitments we think 21st century civil society should aspire to:

- **power** – sharing power and using the power we have to help everyone play a full part in the things that matter to them
- **accountability** – being accountable to the people and communities we serve
- **connection** – broadening and deepening our connections with and between people and communities
- **trust** – staying true to our values and investing the time and resources in activities that will help build trust in the sector

These principles form the basis of the PACT – a framework which the Inquiry offered as a map to guide us all in the future.

Current practice and emerging opportunities

As discussed in the previous chapter, we received a great deal of positive feedback on the PACT when launched last year. In particular, many told us that they feel the PACT speaks directly to some of the most important challenges that England faces: increasing inequality; declining faith and trust in the institutions that serve us; exclusion of minority voices within established democratic processes; and growing division and segregation between us.

Over the last six months, we have noted that there are opportunities to raise awareness
about the PACT and to generate shared understanding about the urgent need for civil society to adapt for the future. We found that the challenges the PACT speaks to remain central. Even though Brexit has dominated political debate, it is becoming increasingly clear that – whatever the outcome of the Brexit process – civil society will need to play an ever more central role in responding to divisions within the country and in building the economy in ways that are fair and sustainable.

Many recognize that we are at a crossroads. Civil society has an important opportunity to shape the kind of country we want to be in the future. Yet, in order to do that well, civil society will need to share a compelling vision for its future too. A vision that recognizes civil society itself plays an active role in both maintaining and challenging the status quo. A vision that encourages organisations to behave and think in ways that are consistent with a shared set of principles that guide the wider sector.

Encouragingly, we have seen widespread reference to the vision offered by the PACT across various forums and conferences in the sector this year. We have spoken to organisations and networks that want to use the PACT to shape their strategic planning processes and board discussions. We have also noticed a wide range of complementary initiatives and visions for the future of civil society which speak to similar principles of behavioural and attitudinal change for the sector (e.g. Small Charities Coalition, NCVO Ethical Principles, Catalyst, Better Way Network, Losing Control, the Calouste Gulbenkian Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations). The synchronicity with other initiatives and movements can be seen as an indication that the Inquiry and the PACT captured what is needed and what is possible for the future of civil society. If the ideas contained in the PACT are adopted widely by civil society in the future (irrespective of what those ideas are called or who ‘owns’ and takes credit for them) we would see this as important and transformative for civil society.

Yet in this context of varied initiatives and visions for the future, we also wanted to explore the value (if any) of supporting and encouraging greater uptake of the PACT specifically in the future. For many, a unique benefit of the PACT was its behavioural and attitudinal change focus, its simplicity, its amenability to be adapted to suit different contexts and its relevance to challenges different parts of the sector are facing. As an example, social housing associations told us how they want to be more accountable to tenants and more connected to other local community groups that are also supporting their tenants. Charities told us how they want to diversify their membership base and to use their power differently to better hear the voices of people from traditionally excluded groups that haven’t traditionally been involved in their charity’s work. Networks told us about how they wanted to have better conversations between network members on areas of disagreement and to build trust between different parts of the sector.

More development is required to build examples of the PACT in action, approaches to measuring progress on the PACT and communities of practice that are supportive of the PACT’s ambitions. Indeed, some suggested there is a risk that, without this additional development activity, organisations may adopt the language of ‘sharing power’ and being ‘more accountable to communities’ without necessarily changing their practice.
There is clearly a demand from different parts of civil society for further work to embed PACT as a tool for organizational/movement change. Yet, at the same time, we have stressed that this should not be about ‘spoon-feeding’ the sector. When we interviewed people and convened a group to ask about how we could take this forward in the future, many participants also stressed that work on the PACT within their own organisation would need to start with them, as leaders, taking accountability for their own practice and development. External support will be required to create the right kind of environment for that to happen, but ultimately, each organisation will have their own journey they are leading and will continue to lead that journey themselves.

We recognize that the sector won’t meet the challenges of the PACT framework overnight and this is a long-term process. However, with the right push and investment, the PACT could be a trusted framework for widespread change and could complement a range of other initiatives (such as the Catalyst programme that aims to improve the use of digital and connection across the sector).

We also recognise that there is a wider audience for the work on the PACT and alongside working with the PACT Pioneers we also recognise that we need to develop a simplified version to enable groups – boards, leadership teams, alliances, user groups – to make a start in reviewing were they are and what changes they can make.

What follows is an overview of proposals we have developed to build on these emerging opportunities. The proposals focus particularly upon supporting practical adoption of the PACT across different parts of civil society and generating momentum and future interest in adopting the PACT widely across the sector.

Conclusions and recommendations

As mentioned above, in order to explore these opportunities further, the Civil Society Futures team convened a group of people interested in participating in a ‘PACT Pioneer’ programme.

Participants were invited via an open call for expressions of interest. We also directly approached organisations, movements and networks within civil society working in different parts of the country and from different sizes, working with different groups to help us build a mixed and diverse group. We currently have a group of 15 charities, networks and movements from across civil society that are interested in participating in a PACT Pioneer programme.

We explored different options for running a Pact Pioneer Programme with the group. Participants expressed a preference for a programme applying the PACT in their own organisation and also build communities of practice through sharing learning and peer support. We interviewed and held a group meeting with potential participants to find out more about their plans and to talk about the types of changes they would like to see in relation to their own leadership/organisation as they go through a PACT action learning process. This information was then used to develop a proposed action-learning programme and was shared with the group for refinement. We outline below the core components of the proposed Pact Pioneer Programme.

Aims

- to provide participants with a learning environment and support to implement the PACT in their organisation in a way that is meaningful for them
• to use learning from the programme to test and develop the PACT further as a contribution to organisational/movement development
• to encourage wider uptake of the PACT across civil society in the future

### Principles

The proposed programme would adopt the following core principles:

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<th>Experimental</th>
<th>Participants need an opportunity to try out new things, not be afraid of failure or sharing where things didn’t go well</th>
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<td>Practical</td>
<td>Participants need to be supported and sometimes guided to think about what they can practically test and try out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>There should be respect for difference, recognising that everybody has a different journey to take – non-judgmental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>Participants should be able to connect with each other easily and learn from each other (e.g. via technology/convening relevant sessions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Participants commit to sharing their learning with each other and externally (but recognising that participants may not want to share some things)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starting with ‘I’</td>
<td>We need to be able to commit to working on these issues as individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part of something bigger</td>
<td>The programme should also seek to build constituency and support for the PACT outside the group within wider civil society and the ecosystem that supports it via communication, marketing and sharing impact</td>
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### Activities

The PACT Pioneer programme would use an action learning approach to support a group of people and organisations who are interested in grappling with some of the challenges associated with the PACT for a period of 15 months and sharing their learning with each other and the rest of civil society.

In practical terms, this would involve:

• developing initial guidance areas, questions, tools and measures for further testing by participants
- convening a range of meetings and learning sessions for participants
- capturing learning from participants and sharing this more widely with the sector
- providing in-house support for participants
- using learning to refine the PACT and associated guidance, tools, questions and metrics
- undertaking communications activities to generate interest in the PACT and improve take-up across civil society in the long-term

Outcomes

By December 2020, we will have:
- tested the application of the PACT in a group of organisations and movements across civil society
- developed a range of questions, metrics, activities and practice examples that can be used to support implementation of the PACT
- built momentum and interest across other parts of the sector in adopting the PACT
- identified an organisation(s) that are willing/able to house activities that encourage learning about the PACT and its adoption across civil society
A People Platform

Introduction

The concept of a national ‘people power grid’ was outlined in the Civil Society Futures report, and in an accompanying blog, published in November 2018:

*What kind of infrastructure will we need for the future? Yes, we need an industrial strategy, what about a social infrastructure strategy? And in particular a strategy to bring about a society which connects us better, and which humanises the way we do things, and which allows more people to exercise more influence and take more control of the things that matter most to them. I believe the next big infrastructure project must be to establish a national people-power grid, operating universally across the country but owned and controlled within our communities.*

Some suggestions were made in the Civil Society Futures report of what a national grid might include, for example ‘people who connect people’ such as community connectors and community organisers, as well as community hubs of many types, where associational life can flourish. And the scope included digital platforms to help people come together, to generate constructive solutions, and to learn from the experience of others, exchanging skills and knowledge.

The report suggested the grid would need to tap into self-interest as well as altruism. It would need to promote solidarity, taking steps to understand why some people are kept out, becoming curious about what others are thinking, making time to talk about tensions and disagreements, discovering unexpected shared interests.

Current practice and emerging opportunities

As part of a subsequent scoping study from February to July 2019, we reviewed the existing social infrastructure.

We noted that across the country we have an established though not comprehensive network of local infrastructure organisations, notably Councils of Voluntary Service, Volunteer Bureaux, and Rural Community Councils.

There are also a variety of community-based agencies, some of which have a broad purpose to connect and advance the whole community (community centres, settlements, development trusts) while others are organised primarily around a particular identity (faith, disability, age, gender, ethnicity, etc) or a type of activity (enterprise start-up, advice and legal help, education, arts, sports and leisure, etc).

At national level organisations such as NAVCA, ACRE, NCVO and Locality work to support and strengthen various elements of this local infrastructure, and there are many others operating nationally but with a more specialist function. To give just a few examples:

- Association of Chief Executives (ACEVO)
- Co-operatives UK: supporting co-operatives, community share issues, etc.
- Timebanks UK, Tempo: promoting time-banks, time-credit networks.
- Community Catalysts: supporting micro entrepreneurs in the social care field.
- Sheila McKechnie Foundation: supporting campaigners.
• Plunkett Foundation: supporting community-run shops and pubs in rural areas.
• School for Social Entrepreneurs, UnLtd, Clore Foundation, Acevo: supporting start up or more advanced social sector leaders.
• Company of Community Organisers, and Citizens UK: supporting community organising.
• Community Shares Unit, Just Giving, Space-Hive, etc – supporting crowdfunding and community share issues.

While the availability and quality of the existing infrastructure is highly variable, and in recent years there has been a damaging tendency to focus more on shortcomings than on strengths, it is also true that despite a chronic shortage of resources some excellent work is done by many of these agencies. Indeed, we concluded that any attempt to build a ‘people power grid’ would fail, and indeed create real damage, if it did not recognise the variety and worth of what already exists, while at the same time remaining open to, and indeed seeking out, fresh ideas and practices.

One notable recent attempt to improve social infrastructure was the Way Ahead initiative in London. In 2016 The Way Ahead report by London Funders and others called for a new system of support for civil society in London, involving independent funders, specialist and local support agencies, local authorities, businesses, etc. As a result of this, with support from City Bridge Trust, a new Hub for London (now called London Plus) has been set up, to play a co-ordinating and convening role.

At a more local level, Every One Every Day is a five year programme run in Barking and Dagenham by Participatory City, designed to make it much easier for everyone to get involved in local activity that they enjoy and benefit from. But examples like this are few and far between.

Conclusions and recommendations

Two workshops in May and June 2019, as well as a series of interviews with a variety of different national and local agencies, considered whether a major concerted effort to invest in a people power grid could be viable and whether it could add value to what already exists, and if so where the concentration of effort should lie, and what the operating principles might be.

It was noted that many infrastructure projects, in all sectors, have been costly failures. It is therefore important to learn from the mistakes of the past. For example the Capacitybuilders ‘Change Up’ programme was set up in 2006 with £231m of government funding. This was an important injection of funding but was criticised for inflexible rules about how the money could be spent, failing to stimulate fresh practice, and also for serving vested interests of providers rather than necessarily providing useful help for frontline organisations or communities.

Nevertheless, while there will be risks, among those consulted the overwhelming majority concluded that there was an opportunity to achieve something worthwhile and important:

• There seems to be a widely shared view that meaningful mass participation, through civil society activity, both at grassroots community levels and in bringing about wider systems change, is central to producing a more hopeful future. Only in this way, it is felt, can we reduce the widespread sense of
powerlessness in society, and build confidence that people can come together and tackle the unfairness, division, inequality, and inertia that holds society back.

- A big shift in inclusion and agency, and putting ‘communities in the lead’, are things which do not happen of their own accord. They require sustained development and support systems, not least in the earliest stages, but also at every stage, capable of operating in some cases over a long period.
- There are many good things already in terms of social infrastructure, but they are not enough. We need to do more, to raise our game.

The recommendation from the scoping study was that a viable plan of action would be as follows:

a) To redefine the initiative as a ‘People Platform’.

b) The main focus of the People Platform would be:
   - To develop a clear story about the benefits of better connected communities, within place and across place, as a foundation for self-organised and self-directed action, and for bringing about a more inclusive and a more hopeful future for society.
   - To build shared knowledge of the methods that can be used to increase community connectivity, within place and across place.
   - To build a community of people who want to apply the methods, on their own terms.
   - To promote inclusion as a primary purpose, with an initial emphasis on ‘left-behind’ communities.

c) The design principles should include the following:
   - It should seek to strengthen rather than weaken those who are already operating in this space, or who could be.
   - It should develop a distributed ownership and leadership model which is driven by and accountable to people operating at community level.
   - It should eagerly embrace online technology.
   - The design needs to be driven by principles of equity: inclusive, reaching out, building belonging. It should operate universally, allowing everyone to engage and contribute. It must provide investment for those who are most marginalised with delivery methods that remove barriers to participation and improve things for everyone.
   - It must provide safe space for challenging conversations. And promote honesty about practice.
   - It should stimulate an improvement culture where failures can be used as a source of learning.
   - It should operate on a peer to peer basis. Horizontal not vertical, supporting not competing. Encouraging people to invest time in giving things away, not hoarding. Open source.
   - The focus should be on outcomes not institutions, mission not organisations. It should allow local assets to be revealed and mapped, according to thematic areas of interest. It should help with understanding our history but not be constrained by it.
   - It will need to create space for emergence. An iterative approach, facilitating and enabling rather than providing solutions. It will need to encourage exploration, humility – extending an invitation to join a journey
d) A 16 month-mobilisation phase was proposed, to include:

- Investigation of current practice across England, and the organisation of a series of events to bring people together to explore and understand different models.
- Action research, using local community researchers, in a sample of local areas to map community connectivity, and to identify what would make the most difference.
- Further discussions with existing infrastructure agencies, to identify how (and whether) a People Platform can be designed which will meet the objectives and design principles above, including strengthening rather than weakening their own ability to contribute support.
- Development of a project design panel, consisting of a spectrum of people with experience of building community connectivity.
- Subject to the above, development of a clear ‘Story of Change’, and a costed operational plan to establish and deliver a nationwide People Platform, which allows for adaptability, emergence, and learning by doing.
- Identifying and securing the finance or other resources needed to move into a build and implementation phase.

e) The principal outcomes from the mobilisation phase, if successful, would be:

- A deeper understanding of how to build more connected communities in which many more people feel able to participate;
- A commitment by a group of infrastructure/support agencies to align efforts to provide better support for this area of civil society activity;
- A strong story capable of attracting more people into a shared effort;
- A plan for an enhanced nationwide effort, informed by front-line experience.

It was envisaged that the work could be hosted and overseen by a national agency, or collaboration of agencies, that can demonstrate willingness to act according to the design principles set out above.
Civil society and race equality

Introduction

In her opening statement as Prime Minister in 2016 Theresa May committed to address the ‘burning injustices’ that characterise the United Kingdom. Despite the production and sharing of data on race equality through a Race Disparity Audit since then, progress to encourage public sector organisations to ‘explain or change’ race inequalities within their purview has been limited. There is a pressing need to galvanise efforts across sectors. Systemic patterns of race inequality have continued and in some cases worsened in the UK over the last decade. Babies of Black Caribbean and Pakistani descent are still twice as likely to die in their first year compared with Bangladeshi or White British babies, for example. Gypsies and Travellers and new migrants are much more likely to face negative attitudes and some social groups face much higher barriers of discrimination and inequality in the world of work and education.

Civil society has an important role to play in responding to this. The Inquiry’s report on race equality said that despite racism being high on the public agenda, too often, civil society’s response to this topic has been muted or insufficient. To address this, yes, it will require active participation and investment from Government and business. However, as the Inquiry report argued, civil society also needs to get better at talking about race itself too. It needs to find ways to become more connected, more able to draw upon its collective assets, and more able to support a diversity of voices and a new generation to contribute to efforts to end racism and discrimination.

In particular, the Inquiry’s report recommended five key areas for future development:

| Vision and impact | Confusion and disagreement around what constitutes ‘progress’ on race equality and an absence of a clear and ambitious vision for progressing race equality within civil society is a major barrier to progress. We need to speak clearly about what we are trying to achieve and to assess impact more closely. |
| Power and representation | Increasing the ‘representation’ of ethnic minority people within civil society is important but not enough. We also need to enable BME people to feel they have power and leaders across civil society need to use their power consciously to enact non-discriminatory behaviours and support efforts on race equality. |
| Accountability and responsibility | We cannot expect BME organisations and people alone to hold the responsibility for work to progress race equality. There needs to be more shared accountability for progress on this topic across civil society and from all players in civil society. |
| Connection and identity politics | Work to progress race equality can operate in silos. Activities need to be better connected with each other, with more diverse parts of the population and with wider social justice movements. |
In the remainder of this chapter, we identify emerging areas of activity that respond to the areas for development described above. We also identify challenges to progress and opportunities for further development and investment.

**Current practice and emerging opportunities**

**Vision and impact**

There are a number of examples of work to coordinate agenda-setting for race equality within civil society such as the Coalition of Race Equality Organisations\(^1\), Race Equality Funders Alliance\(^2\) and Reframing Race\(^3\). Yet, mainstream civil society has not yet become fully activated on this agenda. A key challenge for the future will be – how do we take these conversations beyond those spaces into wider civil society?

A shared understanding of vision and impact would help to galvanise efforts across civil society. Yet consideration needs to be given to who shapes that vision. People who have experienced racism have an important role to play in shaping that vision and describing what ‘impact’ should look like. But we need to go beyond tokenism and include a range of voices that bring expertise in this field. We will also need to develop a compelling vision that can engage public opinion across society and can withstand the vagaries and changing winds of turbulent party politics in England.

We will need to develop a learning culture on this topic, the same type of learning culture and courageous discussions we have begun to see on issues of safeguarding within the sector. Honesty about failure and a willingness to learn and change approaches will be key. There is still a fear about admitting previous approaches have not worked because it may lead to reputational damage and charges of racism. However, it is even more damaging to continue activities that we know are not making the kind of long-term impact that is needed.

Judgements about what future impact should look like need to involve reflection on what has happened in the past. As we recommended in the Inquiry’s original report, a good place to start will be with organisations assessing the impact of their own previous activities upon race equality. We have seen limited work of this type within civil society to date. In the future, we will need to think more clearly about how we are judging the impact of the activities we use to progress race equality. What are the benefits and limitations of such approaches? As an example, are those activities transactional (’ticking the box’) or transformational? We offer the diagram below as an example of a way into discussions of this type:
### Transnational activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations of approach</th>
<th>How impact is judged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Collecting data</td>
<td>• Not intended to affect organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increasing representation</td>
<td>• Not intended to change behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Revamping policies and procedures</td>
<td>• Responsibility for activities/interventions lies mostly with groups who are racialised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establishing support processes (e.g. staff networks or mentoring)</td>
<td>• Individual progress (despite the odds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Putting in place champions or ‘heroes’</td>
<td>• Increased representation</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Public recognition of the charity’s new initiatives and activities</td>
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</tbody>
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### Transformational activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations of approach</th>
<th>How impact is judged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Learning and self-interrogation (e.g. work on prejudices and bias)</td>
<td>• Changes in how people feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationship-building and honesty</td>
<td>• Less fear and lack of confidence on this agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflection on leadership behaviour and consequences</td>
<td>• Reduction in discriminatory behaviours (and impact of these)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Co-design work with people who have experienced racism</td>
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### Power and representation

A number of emerging initiatives seek to address the underrepresentation of BME people within civil society and to strengthen the role of BME leaders within the sector. This is a really positive sign of change. As an example, the Institute of Fundraising’s ‘Manifesto for Change’ aims to address underrepresentation and progression. ACEVO and IoF launched a set of leadership principles to improve racial diversity in the charity sector. NPC undertook a review to understand how we can increase diversity and inclusion in the charity sector. Across emerging initiatives, there is a strong focus on increasing the representation of BME staff in leadership positions. This is important given the statistics on this topic.

In the Inquiry report we urged civil society organisations to also go deeper and consider issues of organisational culture that can restrict BME people from having power, from having a voice and being able to act with agency within the sector. Ultimately, our ability to live with ethnic diversity, interact with it, work alongside it and benefit from it will be the true test of better sharing of power in the future. There are some signs that civil society is beginning to engage with these
broader issues of organisational culture, but the conversation is not widespread.

During this scoping phase we have seen also seen a growing interest in organisations using ‘unconscious bias’ training to explore issues of power and privilege. As the Inquiry report argued, this is an important first step. However, it is not a silver bullet. Unconscious bias training alone will not overcome biases, though it can raise awareness and trigger reflection. There is a need to accompany bias training with frameworks to hold leadership and others to account for progress on equality and continuous learning. This will be integral to civil society’s ability to maintain relevance within our changing society. It will help civil society to ensure it is reaching the diverse groups that require support within our society. It will also help to attract a new generation who are actively looking for inclusive environments in their work and are voting with their feet and moving between jobs and sectors if they don’t find it.

**Accountability and responsibility**

In the Inquiry report we argued that there needs to be a wider cohort of civil society (beyond race equality organisations) taking responsibility for work on race equality. During the scoping phase of the Inquiry, we have met many ‘mainstream’ charities who have this issue on their agenda (e.g. many of the proposed PACT Pioneer programme participants mentioned in chapter 2 aim to focus on this). We have also seen charities standing up and taking accountability for previous inaction on issues of racism. This is an emerging field and becoming more common, which is very positive.

Yet, there is also an ongoing risk that civil society organisations will rely too heavily on those who have experienced racism to take responsibility for action on this agenda. A recent, powerful article by Fozia Irfan about charitable trusts and foundations calls for greater recognition that expertise lies ‘not within our sector and our donors, but with the communities themselves’. And yes, it is important those voices are heard but, Fozia’s article also emphasises that those working within civil society and the ecosystem that surrounds it also need to take personal responsibility for their own development on this agenda too. We cannot outsource responsibility for this agenda to BME communities. A recent report by the Grant Givers Movement has emphasised the need for this type of individual learning and development within charitable trusts and foundations.

In particular, taking responsibility for action on race equality requires taking accountability for our own role within wider systems of discrimination. This is important because referring to a ‘system’, in a way that ignores our individual role in maintaining or benefitting from it makes it harder to discuss race inequality meaningfully. The ‘system’ is seen as too hard to change, not connected to ‘me’. And certainly, recognising the role of structural discrimination in society is not easy. Within civil society there are many signs of resistance to becoming aware of wider systems that maintain the status quo (and our individual role within this). For example, people we have spoken to described belief systems they have heard like: ‘race is a topic that isn’t relevant to white people’, or ‘our charity does good things, how could we be contributing to inequality?’

Yet we need to become more able to spot the beliefs that distance us from taking accountability for our role in systems of discrimination. In particular, we need to recognise our individual role and our potential to either maintain or change the ‘system’. This is particularly important if we
have power and benefit from that system. We can choose to take accountability and show we are aware that we may benefit from those systems and use our power to bring attention to this – or we can choose not to. Not talking about injustice perpetuates systems of discrimination and inequality. We risk maintaining a bystander culture on issues of racism if we do not. Taking responsibility for progress on race equality is integral to our progress as a society and should not be seen as something optional that a charity can choose to do.

Connection and identity politics

In the Inquiry report, we argued that there should be greater recognition of the siloed nature of work on race equality. There needs to be greater connection with other areas of social justice (such as food poverty) and of the intersections with others forms of inequality. There are some emerging examples of debate and practice on this topic. For example, we have seen calls to broaden access to environmental justice movements in Bristol.\(^{26}\) In Birmingham, we have spoken to the Active Wellbeing Society who are undertaking work to include non-traditional groups in environmental activism too.\(^{27}\) We have also seen increasing levels of conversation about how the race equality movement can broaden its appeal and engage with new generations and with a wider cross-section of society.

So there are emerging discussions and networks that aim to build collaboration. However, if we are to collaborate better, leaders, including trustees, will need to think differently about who else they see as ‘leaders’ within the sector.\(^{28}\) Issues of status feature heavily here. How do we avoid pigeon-holing those who work on issues of race equality as only being able to do that and not able to take the lead on collaborative work? We don't generally value emergent leadership if it is not communicating in the way we are used to. Effective collaboration requires good leadership and an ability to see the leadership and growth potential of traditionally excluded groups.

In addition, the ecosystem that supports civil society needs to enable that collaboration to flourish. Existing systems that support civil society can (albeit inadvertently) make collaboration on this topic harder. As an example, charitable trusts and foundations can mirror some of the dynamics of identity politics within wider civil society. Charities have needed to distinguish themselves in order to survive and inevitably funders have distributed grants to support them. But what would better collaboration look like on this agenda? How could funders support this in a way that enables cross-sectoral action (across different fields of equality and different areas of social justice)?

Trust and history

Finally, a key route to the connection and collaboration we have described above is developing trust. In the Inquiry report, we argued that this is an important issue in the context of work on race equality because there is a lack of trust and a scepticism and apathy about whether collaborating with others will lead to lasting change. Time needs to be spent building relationships, including work to understand the impact of previous experiences of exploitation and lack of progress on this agenda.

Of all of our recommendations in the Inquiry report, we have seen least progress on this one. Some organisations are beginning to engage with discussing the impact colonialism has had on their charity’s work for example. This is really positive work but there needs to be more. Similarly, we have
seen less work on the issues of ‘allyship’ that we identified in the Inquiry’s report.

Better, progressive allyship is needed within civil society and those working within civil society would benefit from support to become better allies. The Anti-Oppression Network defines allyship as:

*an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group*  

There is no shortcut to this work. In order to be done well, it requires an ally to recognise that they – themselves – also feel the negative effects of racism within society. If I am part of a system that routinely favours one group over another, then I am losing out. I am not exposed to the breadth of society. I am limiting my thinking to those like me. I am not exposing myself or my organisation to a diversity of views that could challenge and benefit who I am and the directions my organisation could take to progress its agenda. I’m not really interested in change. I’m comfortable and enjoy living in a society where inequality impacts upon the health, safety and progress of us all. An ally needs to believe that it is wrong for society to be established in this way and that they and others would benefit from improving it. An ally needs to feel that sense of injustice in the same way they may feel injustice and a desire to improve society that drives them in their charity’s mission. Being an ally is not about ‘saving’ BME people. It’s about saving our society from the enduring legacy of racism.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

As this chapter has suggested, some of the suggestions we made in the Inquiry’s report are already emerging within civil society in England. Yet, there is still much work to do. This scoping phase has helped us to identify three further areas where development will be particularly beneficial:

**Leadership**

Firstly, we need to build upon efforts to support leaders to reflect upon their behaviours and attitudes in order to make a bigger impact on issues of race inequality. Particular themes for development include collaboration, allyship, taking personal and organisational accountability for progress on race equality and using a leader’s power to share influence and resources and to elevate the voices of traditionally excluded groups. The PACT Pioneer programme (see chapter 2) proposes to address these issues directly and many potential participants have requested work on this.

**Measuring progress and accountability**

Secondly, there are opportunities to develop new measures that can capture progress on race equality across civil society. In the NHS, initiatives like the Workforce Race Equality Standard have been used to develop a level of consistency and urgency in monitoring change within NHS organisations. There are opportunities to introduce something similar that speaks directly to issues that the sector is facing. This will help to introduce common measures of progress and a level of external scrutiny and accountability for progress on this agenda.

**Impact and design/funding of new initiatives**

Thirdly, charitable trusts and foundations would benefit from reflection and support to think through the impact of efforts to progress race equality and their role in measuring progress. We were therefore pleased to see that as part of their [Stronger Foundations project](https://www.acf.org.uk/projects/stronger-foundations) ACF (the Association of Charitable Foundations) there has been a
focus on examining, discussing and debate on challenging questions about foundation practice around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Funders have a particularly important role in setting the drumbeat to which the sector marches on this topic. Other civil society organisations that undertake such work also have a responsibility to think through what ‘better’ would look like and should do that in partnership with funders. Progress will be limited if new initiatives are inscribed within a paradigm of thinking and action that reinforces the status quo (e.g. a focus on ‘transactional’ activities that tick the box vs. more ‘transformational’ activities).

We have had more than five decades of race equality practice within civil society since the introduction of the first Race Relations Act. Yet, we have a tendency to undertake activities that replicate previous practice (despite limited progress on this agenda). Civil society (including funders) would benefit from reviewing the impact of previous practice and, where possible, the impact of interventions over time so that we can assess sustainability and change. Race equality has historically been a highly politicised field of practice within civil society that is influenced by the changing winds of party politics and public policy. Yet we need to think more long-term. We need to be more interrogative, more open to learn and more courageous in basing our decisions on evidence of impact in the future.
Leadership

**Introduction**

In painting a picture of new emerging challenges, and a very different operating environment, the Inquiry did draw attention to the different qualities and styles of leadership that will be necessary to perform effectively in a fast-changing environment. But we also identified new and different forms of leadership and the need to think differently about where leadership exists and operates in a more networked environment. In particular, there are core inter-generational questions about leadership and the ways in which the next generation is enabled to lead effectively.

The Inquiry also called for *wider* changes in how we think about leadership across the sector and beyond. It called for a new culture and generation of leadership that adapts to the challenges of our fast-changing society. What sorts of leadership – paid and unpaid – does civil society need at all levels to rise to these challenges? Where are the opportunities to nurture, support and grow those types of leadership in the future? What sort of environment would support this development?

Over the last six months, we have spoken to a small group of individuals and organisations active on this topic to help us build on the Inquiry’s original findings around these questions. In particular, we engaged with a group of leadership development providers (ACEVO, Association of Chairs and Clore Social Leadership) and we interviewed leaders within civil society and in the field of recruitment. The remainder of this chapter outlines what we heard from those who kindly offered their time and expertise. In the time available there were many voices we were unable to hear. However, we hope our findings will promote further dialogue and action on this important topic.

**Current practice and emerging opportunities**

Recent years have seen a strong interest in supporting and improving leadership within civil society. Both the Government’s [Civil Society Strategy](#) and Labour’s [Civil Society Strategy](#) focus on leadership. The National Lottery Community Fund has adopted an explicit commitment to encourage [generous leadership within civil society](#). The Sheila McKechnie Foundation’s ‘[Social Power’ project](#) calls for bolder leaders willing to realise the sector’s potential by challenging the status quo and finding common purpose with others. [Clore Social Leadership’s ‘Talking Leadership’ research](#) recommends harnessing leadership development opportunities that are present within the sector. Similarly, national leadership development providers are exploring new ways to collaborate and develop leadership programmes that respond effectively to local issues (such as the [HEY 100 programme](#)).

Across civil society, austerity and increased complexity of providing services to the public has meant that leaders have needed to find new ways to adapt and collaborate. Declining faith in the country’s democratic structures has prompted a search for civil society leadership that is inclusive and gives a voice to those who feel ignored and unheard. Similarly, reduced trust in charities has coincided with increased scrutiny of civil society leaders’ values and ethical practice and increasing demands for accountability. Alongside all of this, there has been an...
increased interest in broadening the concept of what it means to be a ‘leader’ within civil society. Initiatives focused on youth social action, the introduction of an apprenticeship degree in social change for the voluntary sector, calls for more diverse and inclusive recruitment and promotion practice within the voluntary sector are good examples of this.

But we also heard that there are a number of challenges that stand in the way of us building a new culture and generation of leadership that adapts to the challenges of our fast-changing society. These boil down to three key topics: ‘who is a leader?’ ‘what types of leadership are valued?’ and ‘how are leaders supported in the current environment?’

Who is a leader?

Many told us that a typical image of ‘leadership’ within civil society is senior leadership by paid staff within well-resourced charities. Yet people are effecting change and taking action at local and national levels in unpaid roles without ‘formal’ leadership training. How do we help those leaders to be the best at what they are currently doing? Access to support for leaders of this type is patchy across the country (see chapter 3) and there are some initiatives at a national level that are responding to this (such as Local Trust’s Community Leadership Academy35 and NLCF’s Leaders with Lived Experience programme36).

Similarly, we heard that the leadership role of trustees is implicit and not actively developed. Attention is often upon the governance and oversight role of trustees. Yet trustees play a pivotal role in setting a vision and creating and sustaining culture, values and behaviour within charities. If, as a trustee, you focus upon and reward CEOs for increasing the market share of the charity rather than contributing to the future of civil society as a whole, then one shouldn’t be surprised if that is what the CEO and their senior management team prioritise. In a context of declining trust in charities and the need to collaborate and think beyond organisational/sectoral interests, there is an emerging consensus that supporting and developing the leadership role of trustees will be pivotal in the future.

We also heard about equality and diversity challenges within the sector. People from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, disabled people, women and young people can face significant barriers in access to leadership roles. In addition, leaders with non-traditional leadership styles can face significant opposition and barriers to career progression. We heard how recruitment practices need to go beyond the traditional ‘written application’- ‘psychometric test’- ‘panel interview’ paradigm if it to enable those with alternative, more facilitative, collective leadership styles to demonstrate these successfully.

Yet, more will be required if we are to change who is seen as a ‘leader’ within the sector. In particular, those who have powerful senior leadership roles within the sector will need to use that power to elevate minority voices within society. This is not the same thing as mentoring or positive action. Those leaders with power and authority will need to really see and hear others from diverse backgrounds, with different ideas and styles as ‘leaders’ and will need to take action to share their resources, knowledge, networks and influence with those leaders in order to enable them to flourish.
What types of leadership are valued?

If we are to support civil society to respond to new demands associated with future changes in society (such as greater impetus to connect with other organisations, greater calls to share power and voice with people civil society organisations work with) then new types of leadership are likely to be required for this transition. Many we spoke to felt that the prevailing understanding of leadership within the sector tends to run counter to that. Leadership traits that are valued often focus on individual heroism. A leadership that is directive and hierarchical. With a shift in the voluntary sector towards professionalization, compliance and reliance on structure, this desire for command and control is perhaps unsurprising. Similarly, there has been increasing recognition of the role leadership and organisational culture within the charity sector can play in sustaining bullying and unsafe working conditions.37

It is important to note that there are already examples of different types of leadership in action and this must not be framed as a leadership deficit. Rather it is about supporting changes to ensure maximum effectiveness in the future. Alongside the Civil Society Futures Inquiry, a number of studies and initiatives have begun to map what the future of leadership needs to look like.38 Through our conversations with people active in this space over the last few months, we have heard that future styles of leadership within civil society need to be ‘generous’, ‘open’, ‘distributive’, ‘inclusive’, ‘values-based’, ‘authentic’ and ‘compassionate’.39

Different leadership development providers within the sector operate within a competitive marketplace, each with their own definitions of these leadership styles. Each have their own lists of leadership skills and competencies that they use to structure their support offer. Opportunities to harmonise and offer a shared vision of future leadership are likely to require long-term investment and relationship building. We also heard that traditional models of leadership development that invite people from across civil society to attend a national programme with a fixed set of leadership criteria and competencies should not ignore other emerging approaches to leading within civil society that will require support in the future. The adaptation of leadership to local context and to emerging challenges and opportunities offered by digital technology and global interconnectivity will be central to this.

Some interviewees stressed the risk of civil society leaders ‘talking the talk’ of generous and distributed leadership, but not ‘walking the walk’. If a wider constituency of civil society leaders are to go beyond the rhetoric and sustain that practice, new styles of leadership will need to be valued more across civil society, funders and government. As suggested above, agreeing a definitive, shared list of leadership competencies and traits across leadership support providers is unlikely to effect the shift required on its own. There is no ‘one way’ to become a leader. What emerges is the need for greater sign up to and consistency in the overall values that civil society shares. A set of values that encourages and enables leaders to see their collective role in the success of civil society and to think beyond their own organisation and core drivers of sustainability and growth.

The aftermath of World War II provided a catalytic moment for the establishment of the NHS based on values of collaboration,
respect, compassion and free access. The Civil Society Futures Inquiry has argued that we need to see our current pre-Brexit England as a catalytic moment to inspire a whole generation to get behind the project of transformation within civil society too. We need to coordinate our efforts on a wide range of issues urgently – democratic health, climate change, poverty and inequality. A shared set of guiding principles for civil society (the PACT is but one example of that) would help to set the tone for future efforts to build and sustain leadership in the sector.

If we are to go beyond the rhetoric of generous and open leadership and if we are to live by these principles across civil society, then this also needs to be seen as a long-term goal requiring individual investment. Leaders within civil society mirror the society we seek to change in many ways. We often externalize the inequalities and biases of the ‘system’ as though they are not present and maintained through interactions with our colleagues, as though they are outside of our own charity’s engagement with the people it supports and our wider sector. The fact that charities also focus on ‘good causes’ (and leaders are associated with those) can make self-awareness and development on these topics for leaders even harder.

Indeed, efforts to improve leadership practice are not often judged in terms of impact upon people who use a charity’s services. Improving leadership practice needs to be framed (and judged) in terms of improving outcomes for the people that civil society organisations work with (as opposed to mainly improving career prospects and profile of leaders). When leaders do access development and support it can be seen, at times, as a magical experience where one goes away for a week and is transformed. Yet, in reality, effecting these changes in personal attitudes and leadership behaviours will take many years/never end. Leaders will benefit from individual work as well as collective learning and sharing of practice across the sector in the future, but the impact and purpose of improving leadership practice needs to be clearer and in the service of those that civil society organisations support.

How are leaders supported in the current environment?

Finally, configuration of the current environment and ‘market’ of leadership development support emerged as a challenge for future efforts to build a new culture and generation of leadership within civil society. Low take-up of leadership support across civil society was seen as a major reason for lack of progress (recognising that there are exceptions to this trend). The barriers to accessing and taking up support are complex and interrelated. The high cost of external leadership support is one barrier. A lack of clear progression pathways for leadership support (and associated gaps in information about which types of support opportunities would be most relevant for leaders) is another. Geographical disparity in access to leadership support is a particular area of concern. Civil society leaders often face barriers in linking up with others in their local area – or beyond – to learn from each other. In addition, some felt that the way leadership development is viewed within the sector can put people off participating. As an example, leadership development is often seen as being about individual career development, rather than about helping that organisation to achieve better results for the people that it works for. Similarly, those who may need support may not access it because
they do not conform to established views of what a ‘leader’ looks like within civil society.

Leadership development providers that we engaged with were acutely aware of these challenges and were already working to address them. But these providers also recognised that the challenges they face are complex and system-wide. Competition within the market of leadership support has historically precluded referrals between organisations and collaborative work (though there are some important exceptions to this). There is a growing recognition that responses to the challenges described above need to be collaborative and will involve people thinking differently about their role and how they work together. Through this scoping phase, a range of providers/membership organisations in the ‘leadership’ space came together with a desire to work collaboratively – something that has not happened routinely in the past. There would be benefit in supporting that type of activity in the future, along with funders and existing civil society leaders in different parts of the country.

Conclusions and recommendations

Who is a leader?

We need to broaden popular conceptions of who is a ‘leader’ within civil society. The leadership of people in unpaid roles, community activists, middle managers and trustees needs to be recognised and supported. As an example, trustees’ contribution to organisational culture and their oversight role on issues of equality, safeguarding and dignity at work is often under-played and needs to be supported and developed further.

There are a number of promising activities emerging that will help to improve the diversity of leadership within the sector. Yet leaders that hold the power within civil society will also need to think differently about how they, themselves, use their power to make space for emerging leaders and new voices within the sector. The success of leaders should be judged in terms of whether they have enabled others (from different backgrounds to them) to flourish as leaders. CEOs and trustees should be enabling emerging leaders from outside their established networks to have a say. This is partly about the numbers and changing the diversity of boards and senior leadership teams. But more than that, it is about traditionally excluded groups feeling they have power and choice to act in ways that they (and the communities they serve) value. We heard through the Inquiry that younger people and other emerging leaders often know how they would like to lead – they believe that they just need access to power, resources and networks held by the establishment if they are to do that effectively. As some of the young people we engaged through the Inquiry said: ‘trust young people, listen carefully and act with them’. But we also know that without the right culture of generous, open, inclusive leadership – which involves mutual support and shared learning – there is always a risk that old models will re-assert themselves.

Recruitment of leaders

Approaches to recruitment of leaders within the sector are in need of updating. For years, traditional approaches have worked in recruiting particular types of leaders. Yet, as the environment changes, new types of leadership are needed. We need to explore new approaches to recruitment practice that support a diversity of leadership styles and backgrounds. We have been feeding our findings into an emerging initiative led by
Green Park (Recruitment Agency), which is convening a range of thinkers in this area to develop new approaches to recruitment.

**A shared vision for civil society**

We need some body to hold and promote a clear vision for the future of civil society and for some body to be the beating heart of the values that shape (and will shape) our sector. We have proposed a PACT Pioneer group to begin to build and share examples of practice and leadership approaches that could support the sector to embody those values in the future. Yet, we also need a diverse collection of civil society organisations that can work on and model collaboration. This group should include leadership development providers, but should also include membership bodies, charities, social enterprises and funders. They will need to engage with issues of competition and differing ideas about what those values that drive the sector should be. The desire for one organisation to 'own' this process will be natural. Yet, like the NHS, this process will need to be in the service of something that is bigger than each of those organisations. This group will publicise and carry the flame of shared values in the future. It will help to change the narrative of what is valued within the sector and what is needed if civil society is to be impactful and sustainable in the future. As we have argued in this chapter, in the long term, these broader changes in attitude are key to driving new types of leadership behaviour and creating the right environment for new types of leader to emerge.
Civil Society Futures deliberately concentrated on what civil society can do to change itself, whilst recognising that it does not exist in isolation and is part of a broader environment – a large and complex ‘ecosystem’ that surrounds and supports it.

Civil society is shaped, influenced, supported and formed by the environment in which it operates and in turn has an impact on that environment. Increasingly, civil society, government and businesses need to work together for a thriving society. Each also has a direct interest in doing so.

The ecosystem within which civil society operates has a critical role in enabling civil society to thrive. The actions of government – from the operation of the benefits system, through to the funding settlement for local authorities, and policy on social care – fundamentally shape the environment within which civil society works. Austerity and the reduced capacity of local authorities have had, and will have, a major impact. Equally, the operation of the markets, from the precariousness of employment through to the state of our high streets, shapes and affects what civil society is able to do.

There are other actors within the ecosystem too, many of whom are also part of civil society, including funders, commissioners, national bodies and leadership support groups.

Throughout the Inquiry, stories, both good and bad, came to light about the ways that different actors work together. People spoke of blurred boundaries, and mutual support, as well as challenges, and the impact of decisions that have then directly influenced the outcomes of civil society.
We concluded that *if civil society is to renew itself, the ecosystem will need to change and that our PACT represented the critical enablers of the systemic change that is needed.*

**Current practice and emerging opportunities**

As part of a subsequent scoping study from February to July 2019, we looked at the ecosystem of which civil society is a part to identify what change in the ecosystem is happening and to identify where more support and/or action might be required to help drive the changes represented by the PACT.

During this scoping study, we held over 40 meetings and conversations with actors across the whole ecosystem including: local, regional and national government; regulators; funders, investors and commissioners; national, regional and local infrastructure organisations; and other thought leaders and think tanks.

*Building connectivity and collaborative leadership*

Without exception all those spoken to are supportive of the need to urgently reshape the ecosystem and keen both to play their part in that reshaping and, importantly, wanting to be part of a movement that is grappling with the considerable challenges that working with PACT entails.

Indeed, many of these actors are already actively working to bring about that change.

We found that there were many conversations happening (mostly in isolation) around *who* and *how* might it be possible to stimulate something bigger happening: “*a network of movements*”?

This on its own is not sufficient to make the changes required and there is a strong recognition that a **critical next phase** is building a connected movement between civil society change-makers, local authority “radicals” and enterprise disruptors, who together can both mutually reinforce each other but can also be considerably greater as a collective than the sum of the individual parts.

As a recent Civil Society Futures blog noted:

*Surely this is the time to be building a movement for change? A movement that builds on and connect the networks, collations and collaborations (the social infrastructure) necessary to create a great Power shift; enable an Accountability revolution; build deeper closer Connections; and re-establish meaningful and lasting Trust.***

*A movement, that connects public sector radicals grappling with these changes – highlighted so well in *The Community Paradigm* by Adam Lent & Jessica Studdert from NLGN – with the hundreds of change-makers from across the civil, enterprise & business communities that gathered together under the flag of *Losing Control 2019* a few weeks ago.***

*We know that across the country our communities want change, they know that the “system is broken”, they want to take back control and gain power and control over their futures.*

*We know that across the country, within our communities, there are entrepreneurial people that are stepping up to these challenges as Paul Taylor highlighted in his recent blog. If we don’t develop different relationships, we’ll lose our legitimacy.*
We also found that the ecosystem and the PACT are seen as being intrinsically linked. Genuine adoption of the principles and values explicit within the PACT is seen as a key way that other system actors (e.g. charitable trusts and foundations, the market and the state) can support the renewal of civil society.

We found that whilst there is a strong recognition that the need for change in civil society is both essential and urgent, it is crucial not to lose sight of the reality that what the PACT is seeking to do is to change personal and institutional values, beliefs and behaviours that have formed over decades.

**Messy space**

We found that this growing movement of people who seek change is operating in a complicated and messy space, with people in movements, alliances, initiatives or on their own forming an emergent new social infrastructure. This is a social infrastructure that is working to shift and disrupt power and is grappling in varied and different ways with challenges around accountability, connectivity and trust. We also found that there is no easily accessible knowledge map of who, what and where these different movements, alliances and initiatives are.

**Great stuff is happening…**

We found evidence that the Civil Society Futures Inquiry’s recommendations are speaking to the way different actors within the system are changing:

- **Central Government** By deeds and their results: strengthening our communities and nation – the government’s vision for stronger communities – and regulators regulating charities in line with changing needs in society. We know that central government is thinking afresh about the Voluntary Sector Compact and CSF have been encouraging them to think about this in the context of the PACT
- **Regional and Local Government** Mayor of London’s work with Civil Society the work of NLGN on the Community Paradigm and their follow-up work with Local Trust on Community Commissioning
- **Markets** The Bank of England’s thinking on shaping the fourth industrial revolution and the relationships between BIDs and Civil Society
- **Movements** of activists and disruptors such as Social Care Futures Losing Control CTRL Shift an emergency summit for change and Better Way network
- **Funders** the work of ACF’s Stronger Foundations project, the London Funders Review of Reviews which puts the principles of the PACT at the heart of enabling a people-centred civil society in the capital and Local Motion which sees six funders joining forces in a commitment to support communities in a more radical, joined-up way
- **Infrastructure** from the exciting new initiative to put social purpose and ambition at the heart of the digital revolution The Catalysts through to the development of a new strategy for NCVO

But despite a wealth of initiatives, overall progress remains piecemeal and frustratingly slow. The Carnegie UK Trust 2019 Enabling State progress review indicates that England is falling behind the other UK nations in important areas such as bringing about a shift from silos to working together, and from targets to outcomes.
Conclusions and recommendations

At its heart Civil Society Futures sets out a clear call to action to everyone in civil society – people, organisations and institutions – to commit to building a movement through a shared ‘PACT’. A movement that builds on and connects the networks, coalitions and collaborations (the social infrastructure) necessary to create a great power shift; enable an accountability revolution; build deeper closer connections; and re-establish meaningful and lasting trust.

Acting in a PACTful way is about enabling a fundamental shift of power from institutions that hold and hoard it. It is about much more shared and distributed models of decision making, control and leadership. So whose role is it to take the lead? Clearly it’s everyone’s. As such, surely the last thing we – Civil Society Futures – should be doing is trying to impose a leadership framework? However, without a little bit of grit there would be no pearl in the oyster, so perhaps our role should be seen as disruptive, throwing in that bit of grit at just the right time. This scoping study has identified three challenges that will need to be addressed if we are to build the type of shared movement, with a supportive ‘ecosystem’ described above.

Building connectivity and collaborative leadership

Firstly, we found that there is a strong appetite to seize this moment in time to build on the foundations provided by Civil Society Futures, and others, to support the growing movement of pioneers and disruptors who are making change across the system(s) happen.

We found that there are (currently) very few spaces across sectors, systems and movements for conversations that lead to collaboration and change. There is also very little resource available to support this.

Our first recommendation is that appropriate hosts need to be identified and resourced to support the practical activities and actions needed to enable the connectivity and collaborative leadership to be built and sustained.

Messy space

We found that the growing movement of people who seek change are operating in a complicated and messy space whilst forming an emergent new social infrastructure. We think that it would be helpful, as this new social infrastructure develops, if there was a shared understanding and knowledge of some of the key ‘building blocks’ of this new social infrastructure, so that the work needed to support it could be taken forwards in complementary ways rather than just in isolation.

We have identified four elements of this new social infrastructure:

- enabling people to do things which they enjoy together with others
- enabling people to co-produce services and shape decisions about how resources are allocated to improve communities
- enabling civil society and cross-sector collaborative working and sharing (data, digital, identification of common design patterns etc.)
- enabling funders to understand their place in the funding ecology and how their funding can align and enable leverage of other resources (including the shift towards funding platforms and
social movements rather than focusing on service delivery)

**Great stuff is happening…**

We found that great stuff is happening. Civil society is starting to renew itself; the ecosystem is starting to change and the values and behaviours explicit in our PACT are starting to be seen in the changes that are happening.

We know that what the PACT is seeking to do is to change personal and institutional values, beliefs and behaviours that have formed over decades. We know that this change is both essential, urgent and not easy. And it needs to be nurtured, supported and protected.

Civil Society Futures was a time-limited activity with no ongoing organisational form and no desire to create one. So, our final recommendation is to identify hosts that are committed to carry the torch for the PACT, and act as its champion and guardian and create…

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**The future together**

[Diagram showing individuals, organisations, civil society, shifting power, revolutionising accountability, creating deep connections, building trust, transforming civil society, transforming society]
Conclusions and next steps

A roadmap for the future of civil society

The excerpt below is from Roukagia Afan who contributed to the Inquiry’s findings through a two-day workshop to explore how civil society needs to change in the future:

As a Muslim woman of colour should I dare think that I am capable of being the leader that I know I am destined to be? I won’t even ask if I should as they claim we now live in a democracy. But how could that be close to the truth when we feel chained down by society?

Young people – from Gloucester to Liverpool to Manchester – all had a common and urgent message. Young people can contribute to and lead the future of civil society. But they did not want to be wheeled out to share their good work with others if they were not also going to be listened to and engaged with in the long term. They wanted to feel a stake in the future of civil society and to be accepted and valued for who they are. They wanted to see more than tokenism when they are asked to speak and to share their views and they want to see real change and for power and resources to be shared with them.

As the Inquiry’s report in 2018 argued, the ways in which we currently organise civil society, the ecosystem that surrounds it and our own individual behaviours and attitudes, are not always supporting the change that these young people are describing. Yet, as this scoping report in 2019 has suggested, we can see signs of change that we need to learn more about and nurture and we can see opportunities for change that will require more concerted effort and investment.

As we draw the scoping phase of the Inquiry to a close, the need to grasp this nettle is becoming more urgent. With financial uncertainty and the ongoing effects of austerity, organisations are thinking differently about how they work. Civil society has an opportunity to step up to the plate as faith in our party political system declines. Communities across the country are finding answers to some of these challenges. People, sometimes part of bigger global movements, are starting to take power and bypass traditional forms of charitable organisation to effect the change they want to see. However, there is also a growing realisation that civil society and the ecosystem that surrounds it will have to think and work differently to nurture and harness these seeds of change.

Civil society’s future success won’t be measured in terms of how large organisations are, how much their turnover is, or how many paying members they have. The future impact and sustainability of civil society depends upon our ability to support each other. It depends upon our ability to connect civil society across the country in ways that address inequality and the postcode lottery, poverty and exclusion many face and will continue to face for many years as our country faces possible recession and political turmoil. It depends upon our ability to recognise the leadership potential of others (who are not like us) from across our diverse society. We need to invest in relationships and connection across civil society now. But the types of leadership that are supported, the ways that we organise and the types of values that drive the sector’s behaviour can run contrary to this vision. This is something we can address, but it will be challenging. It will involve, in some cases, a recognition that we – individually – may
have a role to play in changing that status quo.

**Turning that roadmap into a plan of action**

The Inquiry’s findings offered a roadmap as well as a number of specific recommendations to creating the type of environment we describe above in the future. We don’t underestimate the size of the challenge. The PACT is seeking to change personal and institutional values, beliefs and behaviours that have formed over decades. Yet, this scoping report has identified many examples of where change is already happening. This report has also identified opportunities to fill in aspects of the roadmap offered by the Inquiry’s findings report in more detail and has recommended where to place investment in the coming years. In summary, the report has made the following recommendations:

- To run a **PACT Pioneer Programme** that will test and develop the PACT as a contribution to organisational/movement development and that will encourage wider uptake of the PACT across civil society in the future

- To lay the foundations for a **People Platform** that will connect communities within and across different parts of England and will ensure more inclusive engagement with social infrastructure

- Many forms of inequality require attention within civil society. However, we have noted how **concerted and meaningful effort on racism and race inequality** is required if we are to improve the future impact and sustainability of civil society and if we are to improve our lives in England as a whole. In particular, leaders require support. We need to measure progress on race equality and hold civil society to account for that progress. We also need to think more carefully about the type of impact we want to have and to use this to guide the design and funding of new initiatives. It is not enough just to fund activity on race equality if it isn’t leading to the systemic change we need in the long term.

- We need to **think differently about leadership within civil society**. We need to broaden popular conceptions of who a ‘leader’ is. We need to support and value new types of leadership. We need to design new approaches to recruitment that enable those best placed to lead the future of civil society to flourish. We also need to create an environment that values and supports these types of leadership in the future through a broader movement that can model collaboration. This movement should include leadership development providers, but should also include a range of civil society organisations and funders.

- Finally, there are **important developments within the ecosystem that need to be nurtured and supported**. These activities should be connected more effectively across different sectors and there is a need for investment in practical activities that enable connectivity and collaborative leadership in this regard. There is also a need to identify hosts that are committed to carry the torch for the PACT, and act as its champion and guardian within civil society and in other sectors (such as government and charitable trusts and foundations) in the future.
In the coming months, one of our first jobs will be to seek investment for progressing this work. We have already begun this process for two sets of recommendations in particular (the PACT Pioneer Programme and People Platform) so that we can maintain momentum with interested partners in the coming months and years. In addition, as this final phase of the Inquiry comes to an end we hope to find a host organisation to oversee the progress and future implementation of the Inquiry’s findings and recommended activities and we will announce our plans in due course.

Though each set of recommended activities in this report stands separately and is relevant to different sets of stakeholders, they are also deeply connected. The actions we have proposed are underpinned by a ‘whole system’ approach. Change is required across the ‘system’ if we are to create an environment in which civil society can position itself to respond effectively to the future challenges identified by the Inquiry (whether that’s declining trust in charities or people’s alienation from established democratic processes).

Indeed, these are challenges that civil society will not be able to respond to on its own. Many of those we spoke to during the inquiry and in this subsequent scoping phase have warded against piecemeal, one-off responses to challenges of this type. Coordinated responses across different sectors are required. As an example, the PACT Pioneer Programme we have proposed will be enabled significantly if charitable trusts and foundations and government also embody, champion, and reward the behaviours of the PACT when working with civil society organisations.

A whole-systems response will also require civil society organisations, networks, and movements to acknowledge the changes they themselves may need to make in order to progress the activities we have recommended in this report. Developing a better response to race equality, developing a better relationship with government on issues like democratic engagement, asset transfer and funding will require self-reflection and development across different sectors. Making recommendations for government or charitable trusts and foundations to address these things on their own is unlikely to result in the progress required.

But civil society cannot outsource the work and the changes in behaviour they may need to engender either. If we want change across the system, we all need to change.

So we finish where we started – with a challenge: what are you prepared to do differently to uphold the principles and values civil society has stood for for so long? This report already contains some examples of how organisations are doing things differently. We hope you’ll join them in shaping a new future for civil society and the people we serve.
END NOTES

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Civil Society Futures.
The independent inquiry