



PITCHING IN

LESSONS ON SHARING POWER
FROM CREATIVE CIVIC CHANGE



CONTENTS

03	Foreword
04	About this report
05	The Creative Civic Change Communities
06	Community Leadership & Permaculture
08	A Glossary of terms
09	Who are the Community Leaders? A poem
10	Curiosity
14	What is Community Leadership? A poem
15	Relationships and Connections
21	Sustainability
25	Diversity and Creativity
29	What are the impacts of this approach?
33	Recommendations
36	A Creative Civic Change Ecosystem for Community Leadership
37	Other models and approaches to Community Leadership



FOREWORD

EVERY so often a programme with which one has become involved as consultant, critical friend or evaluator enters one's heart and impacts on one's thinking in a special way.

Creative Civic Change (CCC), still in its formative stages when I was invited to contribute to its design and development in 2018, has been such an initiative. Not only because it puts community leadership at its very core but also because of the challenge it offers funders, artists and arts organisations to share power, value everyone's expertise and, in doing so, create more reciprocal ways of engaging communities within the creative process.

Three years into the programme, it is thrilling then to read of the contribution that creative exchange has made to CCC's thinking around leadership.

While artists were able to offer those values of 'perspective, openness, enquiry' and 'constructive critique' which inform their practice, engagement with CCC's principles of co-creation and co-production has encouraged them to take more risks, step back and make space for different voices to be heard.

The creation of space for others is one of the CCC 'attributes' of leadership which thread their way powerfully through this report, along with a sense of humility and a recognition of the role of mutual respect in building trust.

Equally important is the recognition that leadership is not necessarily something residing in any one individual, but rather something supported by an 'ecosystem' of partners, individuals, funders and other networks.

In highlighting the ways in which the existence of this ecosystem offers community leaders a sense of agency and possibility, this report does not shy away from the very real systemic issues, from poverty to health inequality, faced by many of these communities.

What it celebrates instead are the ways in which the programme's co-designed projects have recognised community assets and placed them at the forefront: encouraging communities to dream collectively and determine the change they wish to bring about. In doing so it has offered co-active models of leadership where power is something to be distributed and shared rather than controlled and owned, and 'power-with' seen as infinitely preferable to 'power-over'.

Chrissie Tiller
Creative Consultant
March 2022



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Published in March 2022, this is the third of a series of reports sharing the learning and outcomes of Creative Civic Change, compiled by the project's independent evaluation team of Sarah Boiling, Anousheh Haghdadi from Beatfrees Consulting, and Amanda Smethurst. This report is focused on Community Leadership - what it looks like, how you can make it happen and what difference it makes.

The report is based on workshops and interviews with the 15 CCC projects, along with information provided in their regular reports. It also contains two poems created in response to community leadership workshops. Unless noted otherwise, quotes in the report are from CCC project workers.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed their time and insights to creating the report.

Creative Civic Change

Creative Civic Change (CCC) is an experimental funding programme delivered by Local Trust, The National Lottery Community Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Modelled on the Big Local programme, CCC offers flexible, long-term funding, in-area mentoring and a substantial peer learning programme to 15 communities across England.

Licensing

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial ShareAlike 4.0 Licence. More detail can be found here <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en>

Design and illustration

Illustrations by Sarah Palmer, REMAKe, Grimsby, and design by Arthur Stovell, Urban by Nature, London



THE CREATIVE CIVIC CHANGE COMMUNITIES

1. **Whitley Bay**
2. **Creative West End Morecambe**
3. **Kensington Vision Liverpool**
4. **The Portland Inn Project Stoke-on-Trent**
5. **REMAKe Grimsby**
6. **Greater Creative Blackwell**
7. **Hard Times Require Furious Dancing Birmingham**
8. **Creative Kingswood and Hazel Leys Corby**
9. **Filwood Fantastic Bristol**
10. **Urban by Nature London**
11. **Tilting the Mirror London**
12. **Creative Newington Ramsgate**
13. **Par Bay Creatives Cornwall**
14. **Good Stuff St Leonards**
15. **Nudge Community Builders Plymouth**



COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & PERMACULTURE



Three big questions underpin this report:

1. How are CCC areas putting communities in the lead?
2. What helps and what gets in the way?
3. What are the impacts of this approach?

Community leadership is at the heart of Creative Civic Change. But both 'community' and 'leadership' are complex, contested and often sticky ideas.

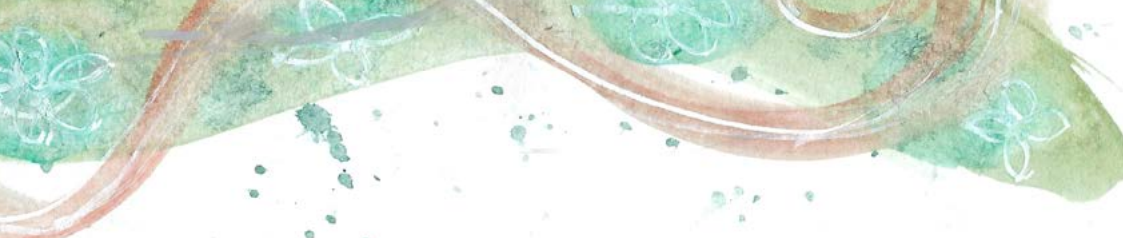
This is what we heard when we convened a conversation between the evaluation team, project leads, and poet Jayne Hipgrave (Par Bay Creatives). In a conversation rich with metaphor and imagery, one concept particularly stood out:

The idea of the ecosystem seemed to capture two of the stickiest issues around community leadership - the dynamic nature of community, and the distributed nature of leadership. The terms 'leader' and 'leadership' did not sit well with project leads who saw leadership as distributed throughout the community,

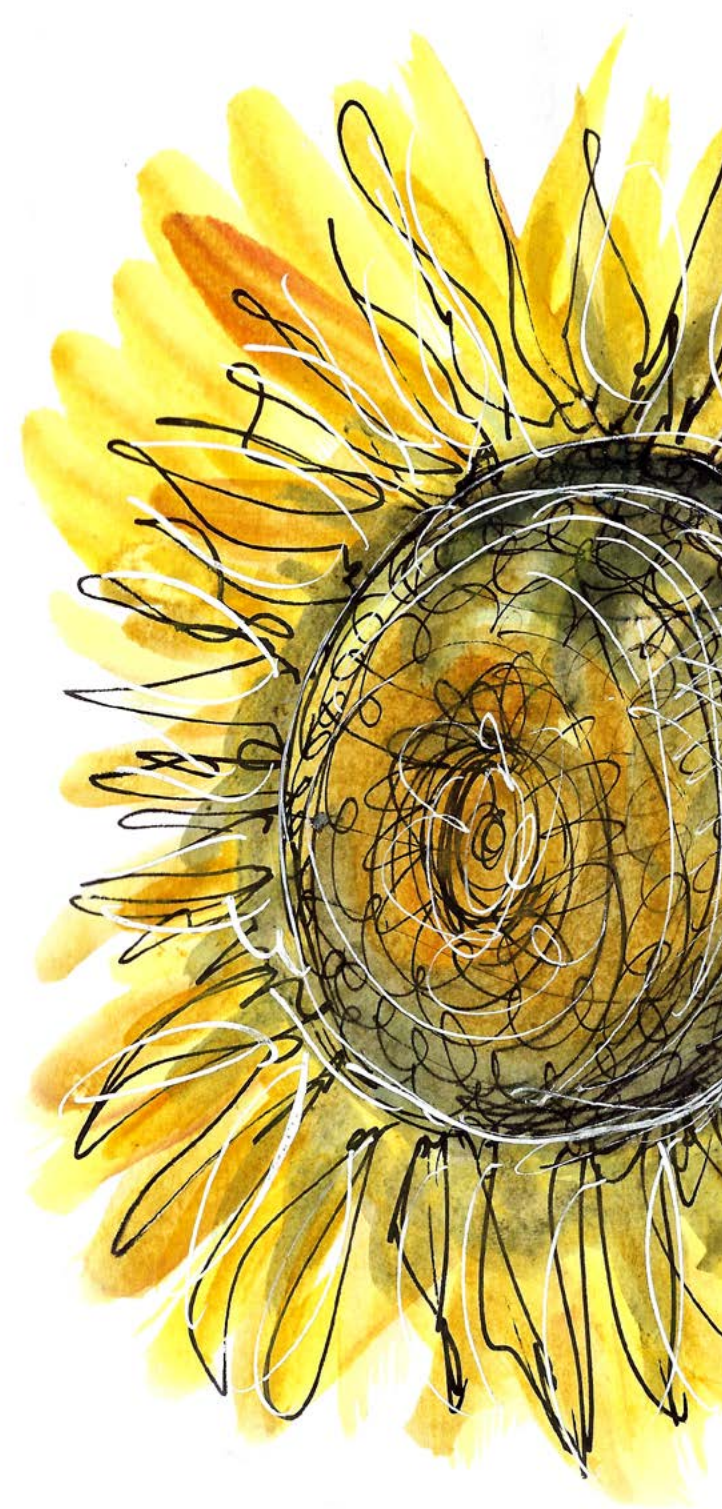
with different parts each playing a role, and interacting and impacting upon one another.

The more we heard from projects about the power of relationships, the resources needed, and the value of listening and observing, the more we realised that the Creative Civic Change approach, generally, and in terms of community leadership in particular, has a lot in common with the principles of permaculture.

So, in this report we have taken the liberty of clustering the twelve principles of permaculture into four broad themes - Curiosity; Relationships and Connections; Sustainability; and Diversity and Creativity - that seem to us to reflect what is interesting about the Creative Civic Change approach to community leadership.



Permaculture is a philosophy that focuses on designing human systems based on natural ecosystems, developed by David Holmgren and Bill Mollison in the 1970s. The philosophy and the principles - broadly about working with, rather than against nature - have been adopted and adapted in many contexts beyond their original horticultural focus, including community development, sustainable business growth and individual wellbeing.





A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Big Local

150 communities across England each awarded £1m (funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, and managed by Local Trust) to spend - at their own pace and based on their own plans and priorities - over 10-15 years.

CCC

The Creative Civic Change programme, or an individual project within it.

Critical Friend

An independent support person for each project, paid for by the central CCC programme budget and chosen by projects. Each Critical Friend flexes their role depending on what is needed, but generally they are a sounding board, listener, supporter and coach. Some Critical Friends are also artists.

Ecosystem

in the context of this report, a connected network of different people, organisations and activities that interact with one another.

Local Trust

One of the funders of the programme, and the organisation overseeing and administering the programme.

Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO)

The 'host' organisation that holds the funds for each individual CCC project and has ultimate accountability; some LTOs also deliver their CCC activities, some are more hands off.

Peer Learning

Regular facilitated sessions (on-line and face to face) for the projects to reflect on their learning and provide support to one another.

Support Programme

A programme of specialist advice, group sessions and one to one support provided and funded by the central CCC programme budget, based on the needs of the CCC projects.

Working Group

A group of residents and workers who lead each CCC (usually a mixture of paid and voluntary roles).

Jayne from Creative Par Bay was inspired by a community leadership discussion amongst the projects.



WHO ARE THE COMMUNITY LEADERS?

A Poem by Jayne Hipgrave

The community leaders are
The actors who act without all the talk,
The practical people with confidence, connections
and a can-do attitude,
The ones with experience and skills.
The 24hr listeners,
The situation assessors,
Reporting the issues,
Managing the fallout and mopping up spills.
They care about the place and its people,
Meeting the community in their own surroundings
face to face and on their own terms,
Talking to everyone with an equal respect
'He's my neighbour - not a druggie'
Taking the small but important things on board
like silently separating out halal food to help create a join.
Language needs to change
To break the chains of formality and institution
'leader' connotes misuse of power
which leaves a sour taste and such a waste
of missed opportunity just from avoiding the label.
Let it be about COMMUNITY.
Let them be the experts
that DO.

CURIOSITY



Our first cluster of permaculture principles is around curiosity.

Understanding communities as ecosystems brings their dynamic nature into focus. Whereas in permaculture this is about standing back and observing nature's own patterns before designing a solution, in CCC areas this process was more dynamic and relational, working through a constant feedback loop of:

- **Observing & listening;**
- **Designing from shared vision and values; and**
- **Seeking further feedback through formal yet flexible governance structures.**

All CCCs have put communities in the lead by investing in a long-term, caring, yet curious conversation. Asking always: What's needed? What's wanted? What's working? What's changing?



LISTENING


Before embarking on their activities, all Creative Civic Change projects spent six months listening to their communities to understand what was needed and wanted and what was important, along with identifying and mapping existing activities and organisations. Based on these conversations they worked alongside residents to agree shared values, principles and aims for their project - creating the overall 'pattern' for their work.

One project described this as "For us, shared values have been particularly important, including 'ensuring community voice is at the heart of our project structure'; clear shared aspirations, our shorthand is 'brown signs and blue plaques'; and an attitude which is 'can do'."

The 'details' are provided by the various activity strands (creative workshops, environmental improvements, collective celebrations etc) that are flexible, iterative and responsive.

This listening and consultation wasn't a one-off, it is ongoing; whether it's informal anecdotal feedback or more organised creative consultation moments, CCC projects are constantly gathering feedback from their communities.

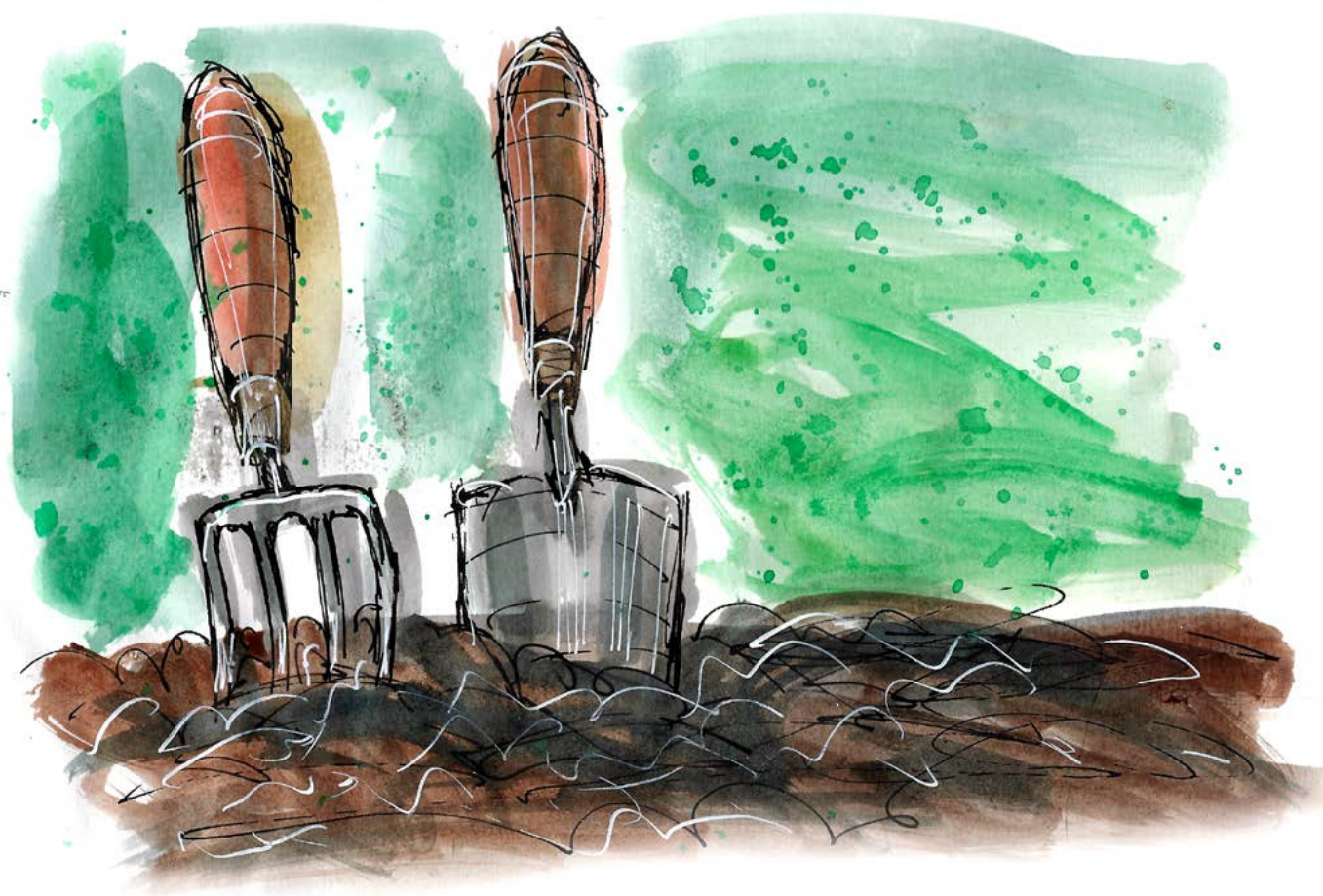
"What we're trying to do now is use the people that we work with and the stuff that happens and trying to just be a little bit more spontaneous and responding, collecting what people say and responding to that and using that as our guide to what we do next."



"Our decision making is informed by our much broader reach in the community. So we sound out people in daily conversations we have locally - this applies to staff, [working group] and the board - we all listen and share what we are hearing or noticing. So we don't do a lot of formal consultation but this does give us a really strong collective gut instinct."



WORKING GROUPS



CCC projects have also created a more formal framework for this to happen, in the form of Working Groups, described as “a space where people feel safe and heard, seeing everyone as a leader.”

Many of these groups were formed in the consultation stage and have continued to work together in various formats. Working Groups vary in their exact make up but generally include local residents who may also be artists, paid workers, or representatives of other community groups.

Creating the right conditions for these groups to lead is the responsibility of paid workers, and all describe their approach as facilitating rather than leading the Working Groups.

"Last night, my voice was hardly there, it was lovely. I was sat down. [name] came, with a massive new interpretation board, sat down next to the artist, next to our interpretation specialist who he's working with, and then he presented it to the group. And it's like I just bought those connections together."



There isn't a 'one size fits all' model of Working Groups across the programme; most include some combination of the following responsibilities, but flexed in a way that suits them:

Taking a leadership role

This is variously described as 'holding the power', 'pulling the programme together', 'overseeing projects' and 'leading on projects'.

Being a bridge between the project and the community

This is about listening to needs and responding accordingly, and promoting and communicating the project activities. Variously described as 'representing' the community; being a 'knowledge hub' of what is happening locally, and being 'the eyes and ears of the project'.

Decision making

Including commissioning artists, being a formal selection panel, and agreeing expenditure.

Providing accountability

Holding the project to its original aims, acting as the governance body for the group and identifying risks.

Establishing ways of working

In the early stages, working together to agree principles and ways of working.

Acting as a sounding board

To discuss particular themes and to explore opportunities.

Practical delivery of projects

On the ground involvement in project activities, as leaders and as participants.

Questioning

Described as 'asking good questions' around value for money, local resonance and connectivity of proposals.

Providing mutual support for one another

Especially important since Covid as people have struggled with the personal impacts.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP?

A poem by Jayne Hipgrave

Jayne from Creative Par Bay was inspired by a community leadership discussion amongst the projects.

Community leadership is Drive,
It's chance, it's the power to empower,
to influence, enable and instigate.
It's sharing a common vision,
supporting behind the scenes,
the ability to respond, be agile and activate.
It's being open to a different approach,
holding and cherishing things,
It's a game of Hungry Hippos
- but keeping the balls in play and valuing all
to make sure that everyone wins.

It's stepping back
When the Trust has to trust the grass roots
and be resident led.
It's messy, it's picking up the pieces,
It's keeping it fair and always being there
to resolve differences without stepping on toes.
It's recruiting volunteers without taking
advantage and providing opportunities for
communities to do things on their terms.

It is not the segregating hand of hierarchy
held fast with just one word.

Aren't the leaders at the bottom?
Are not the volunteers the experts in their
own communities?
Leaders through their ability to enable others
- their capacity to produce participation?

The advocates and campaigners,
- the bait for new recruits and growth?
Laying foundations for a looser fitting
architecture to accommodate diversity?
Taking power back from the word 'leader'
and holding Big Locals together?
So be aware of power,
Reflect on it all the time,
Dissipate its concentration
and connect the wider dots.
Feed the roots,
Nurture and nourish,
Remove the walls
and flex the formal structures
allowing communities the space to flourish.

Get into your submarine and gather ideas
from the sea bed of dreams
Looking, searching, outwards and upwards
Before strategizing to stargazing heights.
Create a framework that has space for others
Build relationships
Build confidence
by trusting people to run with their ideas.

Share the keys,
Share the shoes and watch the shift
As community initiative sparks into life.



The state of dreams

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

Our second cluster of permaculture principles is relationships and connections.

Thinking about communities as ecosystems helps us to see that leadership is not about individual leaders or bureaucratic structures, but relationships and connections between people.



These relationships are the cornerstone of sharing power. Visible in the work of CCC projects are:

- ‘Holding the space’ so that people can build their own connections.
- Creating a supportive environment that builds trust and confidence.
- Working flexibly so people contribute in the best way for them.

All Creative Civic Change areas have put communities in the lead by spending time and energy to create and maintain relationships. Trying to share power equitably is also difficult, requiring existing ways of working to be unpicked and re-made.

TRUST

Investing time and energies in the early stages to create connections, to build trust (between working group members and across the wider community) and shape principles and ways of working together has created a firm foundation for CCC projects respond to the challenges they have faced.

What builds trust?

Transparency, especially around money. In practical terms this means Working Groups understanding how much things cost and who and how much people are being paid; it means having clear and agreed processes around who and what gets funded and how these decisions are made.

Doing what you said you would also creates trust. A Critical Friend reflected, “I think there is a general suspicion of people’s motivations and ‘what they’re getting out of it’. Good record keeping, sharing minutes, being clear about the purpose/drivers of the work all help allay any suspicions... proving yourself also helps. The longer-term commitment and delivering on what’s promised also goes a long way in generating trust.”

“A big moment was sharing the keys to the space with community members - that made them feel really trusted - what we thought of as a small act became a momentous gesture.”

CONFIDENCE

It takes confidence to step into a leadership role if it's something new for you. CCC projects are dedicated to supporting people to find their voice and develop the confidence to take on 'leadership' roles in the projects, whatever that looks like for them.

A Critical Friend described this as "there is something about supportive routes in, being given guidance or support to develop so that individuals are comfortable and can feel confident in their roles in sharing power. It's not always about having those people who readily see themselves as leaders and comfortable with the idea of power sharing, it's also about supporting those who might not readily see themselves in this role. This might be about skills, decoding jargon, familiarisation with processes or just being kind and welcoming that can help equip people to share power in this place."

Practically, CCC projects provide the following support for people involved in their projects:

- Personal and professional development opportunities; such as Local Trust's Community Leadership Academy
- Creative input; encouraging and supporting Working Groups in critical thinking and positive challenge, and embedding creativity into the groups ways of working
- Support of peers in the other CCC projects; as relationships have developed members of the different projects are supporting each other in an informal and ad hoc way
- Encouragement of the 'professionals' involved in the working group
- Resources to realise their ambitions; for example funding and allocated time from paid workers





FLEXIBILITY

Not all residents who contribute to CCCs are members of a Working Group, and providing a variety of different ways for people to contribute – on their own terms – is important. One project lead commented “I’m keen to see how the emerging leaders could potentially go on to work in this field. Sometimes, though people have made it clear they don’t want that level of commitment, they like the flexibility.”

Whilst another noted that “many residents are not so ready to vocalise their ideas in formal meetings” so informal settings to encourage people to offer ideas, have chats with artists, work better.

The role of the Working Groups has also flexed over time, sometimes because members wanted a different kind of role within the project, and sometimes in response to Covid. Some have shrunk in size as members have preferred to be involved in more creative and practical activities, others have evolved.

One project described “The working party’s role has stretched and grown many times to what it needed to be. Initially the working party role was designed specifically to be a community governance group. Then the pandemic hit and all activity strands were co-created together. Each working party member worked in their village, most giving up their driveways and gardens as hubs when our scarce community buildings were shut. Our role as an LTO has

blurred and flexed to support the working party and the project needs too, sometimes stepping up higher and stepping in behind the scenes much more than we ever planned for. We have co-created together through it all and the learning has been massive for us all.”

One Working group changed their name from the Working Group to Sparks as they didn’t want the level of responsibility and sense of ‘work’ - that is already provided by the Board and staff of their lead/host organisation.

The project lead noted: “We really wanted to support their contributions, perceptions and local intelligence as the most important thing and we wanted to free them up to feel they could contribute freely in that way. This also seems to have encouraged other local people to step forward which is great.”

Projects also take a flexible approach to ‘meetings’ themselves: one project uses informal moments in the community centre café to have discussions, sometimes this means they don’t need to call a formal meeting; whilst another includes creative activities in their Working Group meetings. During Covid, one group that had moved their meetings to online, organised dinner deliveries to members’ homes to try and recreate the social sharing food together ethos of their meetings; whilst others used WhatsApp and Facebook to keep people involved and get their views.

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP ALSO BRINGS CHALLENGES

Power – where it sits and who uses it

The notion of who has the power is a constant theme in CCCs. Whilst Working Groups provide the structure for leadership (and therefore power) it doesn't always go smoothly. There can be tensions around who is 'really' making the decisions. One group commented "I'm not sure that people who are the residents are empowered to challenge. So I would hate to think I was manipulating anyone. But actually, if you present information in such a way that it almost feels really good. It feels a bit of a *fait accompli*, I'm not sure how much challenge you get. I think maybe we're just good at being sensitive and knowing what it is people want and like."

Whilst in another, there is an imbalance of power between one of the partner organisations - who are very much driving the project forward - and the other partners, who have more of a 'sign off' role rather than as idea generators themselves. These community partners are keen to let the arts organisation 'get on with it' but this isn't the ethos of the programme.

Another project found that their Working Group had evolved into a 'governance' group, that they needed to 'report' to and as a result they felt scrutinised and judged rather than supported.

The relationship between power and responsibility is also complex, with many Working Groups enthusiastic about designing programmes, making creative decisions and bouncing ideas around but less keen to take on financial and other responsibilities. One project reflected "no one wants to be the bloody trustee of the money...no one wants to be in charge."

CCC projects' relationship with their LTO or Locally Trusted Organisation is important, these are the people with ultimate responsibility for the project, and their approach can have a significant impact. Some LTOs are also facilitating their projects and their Working Groups, whilst others have a more distant and overseeing relationship. In one project the LTO struggles to understand and value arts and



creativity as a response to social problems – and this means the working group encounter blocks and challenges to their own decision making.

Covid has, once again, intensified these challenges; as Working Groups had to meet digitally; it has in some places meant that power became concentrated in paid workers - which felt uneasy to many projects.

“During the initial Covid-19 response meetings, we (as an LTO) did initially have to ‘step up’ to a place which felt more of leadership than facilitation, which felt foreign to us as strong champions of co-production. Culturally we have built a working party where we sit at the table in what is felt to be a flat hierarchy as enabler, but at this time our expertise was needed to allow the generation of possibilities, potential and facilitation.”





Adapting to this different way of working

A situation where communities themselves rather than professionals, experts or artists lead and make decisions isn't the usual way things are done - in community work, and (especially) in arts and culture - and it is hard. One CCC project summed this up as "experts on tap, not on top."

Whilst another elaborated:

"The CCC programme has entirely changed the way that we put communities in the lead. It is a wholly new way of working for the LTO and throws our 'usual' creative process on its head... Rather than the usual method of working with an artist on an idea and then getting participants on board with it, the ideas are driven and decided by the community."

This different way of working can be difficult for everyone; for some residents to be open to creative risks, and for artists to step back and not let their creative ideas dominate. Managing this balance was described by one project as:

"One thing we struggle with is getting the balance right between being brave, surprising and different, with responding more directly to what people say they want. This is getting better as we build more and more trust though."

It can also be hard for professionals to step aside and give power and responsibility to residents. One Critical Friend described a situation in which they thought a member of a Working Group who is a resident was ready to step into this role, but there was resistance from the organisation facilitating the project "I think there's more stepping up that [name], for example, could do, if there was some stepping aside in relation to the actual structures of how it runs...there's a bit of 'stay in your lane', in a lovely way..."

One project has addressed this head on by paying (and supporting) two community members to facilitate their project. This hasn't been without its challenges but was described in the following terms by their Critical Friend "The two of them in particular, are extraordinary. If you put them in a situation where they could thrive... it would really be amazing, because they both have the ability and tenacity and skills to run things and, you know, drive things forward. And really understand the detail and nuance of community work as well as the wider picture."



SUSTAINABILITY

WHAT NEEDS TO BE IN PLACE?



Our third cluster of permaculture principles is around sustainability.

This is particularly challenging in Creative Civic Change areas, where the broader ecosystem - especially of funding - is distributed unequally.

CCC areas have identified some key principles that should underpin sustainable community leadership, but are often difficult to implement in the context of the projects:

- People are the most important resource - value and invest in them
- Work at a pace that won't burn people out
- The broader funding ecosystem needs to change too, valuing the small and slow as much as the big and flashy

Money


A number of CCC projects reflect that the funding they allocated to their lead organisation or LTO to support this process has been stretched.

“The LTO has not allocated enough time or space towards training the groups to do practical stuff that is needed (budget, marketing, branding, admin) so often ends up doing it.”

Whilst a Critical Friend commented “there is no doubt that having a budget gives you clout. It isn't all about the money, but having the resources to make things happen definitely helps bring people to the table, and to have an influence within traditional power structures that exist within the community.”

Time

Three years feels like a short time to create and embed a community led way of working and bring about the kind of ambitious changes that CCC projects are working towards.



One Critical Friend described this in terms of “Persistence, demonstrating commitment, the value of your word; all things that take time. This hasn’t been about a ‘layer on top’ it’s about being embedded within the structure of the community, this takes time and will continue to be an on-going process.”

On a practical level, people’s available time to get involved also makes a big difference. Many CCC projects talk about how their community members are juggling many responsibilities – work, caring, studying – which leaves little time to contribute to the project. As a result, Working Groups can become unbalanced, dominated by those with more time.

Project workers’ own time is also stretched, and many are working way beyond the hours they are paid for. One project commented “Ideas

are plenty, but the capacity of the team is limited” whilst another described the situation as “It’s taken the elastic band approach to funding. It’s like we’re all paid one day a week, but actually that one day a week isn’t one day a week, you know it, we stretch it to break point so that we’re there.”

Another added “For us as an LTO, I wouldn’t want to count the amount of time we’ve put in voluntarily to make all the additional work happen to be completely honest... it’s a bit scary.”

People

We have already described the various ways that local residents are at the centre of the Creative Civic Change approach; as well as committed community members, this approach

also needs paid workers with the right skills and approach to make this happen. Project workers in CCC areas describe these attributes as:



CONNECTING THE DOTS
HUMILITY
COURAGE
ENABLING OTHERS
COMPASSION
INVISIBLE
POSITIVE
SHARING SPACE
COLLABORATIVE
PATIENT
GENEROUS
RESILIENT
RISK-TAKING

WHAT MAKES THIS HARD?



Outside forces that deplete these resources

Systemic issues, beyond people's control, can deplete these human resources. Structural inequalities around poverty, housing and health impact people on a personal level across all of the CCC areas, and whilst all projects have made significant progress in creating positive social change in their local areas, it isn't their responsibility to solve these wider social challenges.

Communities can be transient; some CCC areas have a number of residents who are asylum seekers, who, when their status changes need to suddenly move; others have a hidden homeless community of 'sofa surfers' who can't stay in one place too long. Some CCC areas are the focus of so-called 'regeneration' schemes that can displace existing communities and erode community histories.

A number of residents involved in Creative Civic Change work have underlying health conditions that mean they need to step away from being involved, or limit what they can do. Many households are in a precarious financial position, juggling multiple jobs with caring responsibilities, and managing as single parents - invariably women.





One project worker summarised this as: “The biggest challenge to ensuring the community is in the lead is poverty. People lack money and basic resources. Many of them live in appalling housing conditions. The average reading age for adults on the [estate] is eight. There is also an itinerant community, on-going issues of violence, drug trafficking and homelessness. The material conditions are absolutely dire... Huge numbers of residents and families are not able to meet even the most basic needs... Given the material reality, it is a small miracle that we are able to engage the participants we have, and we will continue to work with them to try to effect change and to ensure that their voices are front and centre.”

Notions of volunteering and expecting people to work for free

One of the original principles of the CCC programme was that decision making should be in the hands of resident volunteers - rather than paid professionals. Over time, it has become clear that the distinction between these two groups is blurry, and rightly so. Many groups have found ways to offer opportunities and employment to local people through this programme but many have found

being equitable with these relationships difficult, within the budget they have available.

One project has grappled with this and decided not to work with people in a voluntary capacity, reflecting “It’s really difficult and messy - how you manage and recruit volunteers, getting people to work for free is always taking advantage - how do you manage? Its a tricky way to go so we don’t do it”.

Whilst another reflected “Another challenge to the partnership model of governance is costs. Our CCC budget doesn't allow working group members to be paid... this highlights the broader issue within governance of CCC projects of who gets paid (and by extension, who is considered professional/expert).”

Managing the ‘messiness’

Flexibility and relational approaches can be hard to manage, as inevitably, life gets in the way. Some groups have become fragmented as people have moved away, or not been able to take part, and having different people drop in and out because of their personal circumstances means it can be hard to maintain momentum.

People are people, and differences and disagreements happen. In one CCC area there have been disagreements about different creative approaches, and in another, personal relationships were severely strained. Covid has also created its own challenges: some groups have struggled to get their Working Groups up and running again after a hiatus; some groups shrunk, with paid workers being in the majority; and some groups didn’t engage at all, for example in one CCC project, a group leading one of their creative activities were convinced that Zoom was spyware, so the opportunity to explore how their ideas might develop was lost.

The move to digital interactions because of the pandemic has meant that inevitable human behaviour around conflict has probably a greater impact than if people had been able to meet face to face.



DIVERSITY & CREATIVITY



CENTRING MARGINALISED GROUPS AND VOICES

Our fourth cluster of permaculture principles is around diversity and creativity.

Ecosystems are most vibrant at their edges; and this is the space where diversity and creativity flourish.

When CCC areas have been able to adopt the principles that follow, they have found bold, brave, and surprising ways to respond to the community's needs and desires. However, this has not been possible in all areas - not due to a lack of interest, but due to the multiple practical barriers that marginalised people face in taking up invitations to lead.

All CCC areas that we spoke to recognised the importance of diversity in their Working Groups. In particular, they emphasised that community leadership is about making space for people who are often not recognised as 'community leaders'. In different areas, these unrecognised leaders included: the working class, young people, people of diasporic heritages (formerly referred to as 'BAME'), LGBT+ communities, and more.

CCC areas have adopted a number of different approaches for including these marginalised voices in their Working Groups:

- 'Invisible' leaders
- Deliberately centring marginalised voices in the working group
- Using 'open call' type meetings to share information about the project and invite people to join in

One project lead reflected "I knew a lot of people at the time were doing lots of different

things in the community in silos, which wasn't joined up and was deserving to have bigger and better opportunities that creativity could drive. There has always been unsavoury politics across different 'doers' in the community and nothing had been done before as a collective project... The first meeting when I brought all of them together in a room I was absolutely terrified it was going to be an explosive one! But I had to follow my gut in the knowledge that ultimately we had the same values in that we all wanted to make change for our community".

Although most areas felt that their Working Groups were broadly reflective of their areas, centring marginalised voices meant, in some cases, that groups weren't 'representative' of communities in a formal sense. This is something that CCC projects that have taken this approach are actively reflecting on:

"So if you were to look at it, in some ways, it represents [the community] ... in other ways, maybe it doesn't, because I don't think there's one white heterosexual male in the Working



Group. So in that way, probably doesn't represent the town.”

“[Our working group] has become, I suppose, a group that is predominantly still totally diasporic ... And moving forwards... is this okay, for this project, just to be like, Afro Caribbean, South Asian representation? Yeah... so there's nothing in there that would exclude people, but the project does speak to certain people specifically.”

All areas highlighted the barriers that people face in taking up leadership invitations. Many struggle to maintain involvement by young people, for whom ‘time poverty’ is a particular issue, as they try to balance study, social and family commitments. Some acknowledge their working group isn’t as ethnically diverse as their local area. For example, two areas commented that they have significant Polish communities locally, but the working group are all White British; another described their Working Group as “four middle-aged bald guys. Literally just different levels of weight”. One project is aware that their working group isn’t as diverse as their community, or their staff team, and is making efforts to address this.

This again highlights why it is so critical for there to be informal opportunities for people to make their voices heard in other ways:

“One of our principles is to have our Working Party group as diverse and representative of our community as possible because we don’t want to ‘do to’ our community, we want to ‘do with’. But, realistically the voluntary commitment for the working party is a lot to ask of these individuals, many cannot afford to volunteer. This is why we ensure that when we’re co-creating projects we seek out and listen to voices in the community that aren’t as prevalent as we’d like in our working party.

Many of these conversations that flood in are informal and are with individual working party members. We believe this is how they mostly prefer to communicate because it’s safe, quick, direct and they feel it less of an exercise because their voice is actually physically heard.”





BRINGING TOGETHER DIVERSE EXPERTISE

Although all projects work closely with artists (including some project leads and Critical Friends) to deliver their programmes, only a small number have regularly brought artists and community members together to creatively ‘jam’ ideas. These projects shared two common features:

- Recognising and valuing the different kinds of expertise that everyone was bringing
- Investing extra time in communication - recognising that ‘artistic’ and ‘community’ languages may be different

In the Working Groups, artists have helped with constructive critique and giving people the

confidence to be comfortable with disagreeing. One artist/Critical Friend provides ‘hover over’ sessions to encourage members to see the bigger picture.

Another reflected:

“I think the qualities, both personal and in artistic practice, of perspective, openness, enquiry and critique have helped to shape conversations and provided an example of working that is positive and beneficial. The artists have helped the community to have different conversations, often in different places, and also in different ways. Their role has also been about provoking debate and raising questions that aren’t always easy to discuss.”



Similarly, community members have become increasingly confident in sharing their expertise with artists. For example, one project wanted to respond to food insecurity, but weren’t sure of the best way to go about this, so asked their Working Group ‘Was it a food bank or something else?’ The collective decision was ultimately a creative and educational approach, working with local partners to distribute healthy recipes and ingredients. From this starting point, a local resident is now leading on this area of the work, and attending the Community Leadership Academy.

In some areas, the lines between residents and artists have become increasingly blurred as residents start to think of themselves as creatives.



FINDING WAYS TO DREAM COLLECTIVELY

One key area where these factors can be seen is collectively developing a bolder community imagination. Undertaking creative visits, meeting in inspiring places, and collaboration and mentoring between CCC areas has offered inspiration for Working Groups to build greater ambitions.

In one project, young women from their Working Group visited *Bring the Paint* in Leicester, and were inspired to instead of simply painting boards in the windows of the old social club as was the plan, to paint the whole wall instead (which the project facilitator then successfully fundraised for).

One project has gone as far as imagining 100 years ahead; one of their project leads explains “During the lockdowns, people in our neighbourhood became interested in their back yard spaces, recognising that though small, these small outdoor extra rooms could provide a green haven during the pandemic. For some people, it was the first time they had thought about growing anything. This led us to work with a Beekeeper and Biodiversity specialist who got us thinking about how our small yard spaces contribute to local ecologies, and how our decisions can impact on those ecologies. We started developing a 100 Year Plan for our neighbourhood, which has been so meaningful, as we aim to recover as a community from the past two years”.



WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF THIS APPROACH?

ON INDIVIDUALS, RESIDENTS & ARTISTS

We have seen the impacts of using a creativity driven approach to community leadership at different levels across the Creative Civic Change programme.

It has enabled residents to realise their leadership potential

Throughout CCC projects people are supported and encouraged to move from being participants to leading their own creative groups and activities. Project leads describe:

“So then she started showing me on a phone, all these photographs of things she’d made... And so she got a small sparks grant...she’s thoroughly organised, although she said she could never run a workshop, because she’s “not proper”. So she can do it here because she feels comfortable. She knows that it doesn’t have to be perfect.”

“One of the working party members, she’s been coming to the artist workshops. And she started doing stuff in schools, herself and her group. So there’s been loads of domino effect”

“We have learned that our organisation is good at supporting ideas, developing skills and working with residents to take the lead on matters that are important to them. Nana and Nana’s Kitchen, Kerry and her poetry, Ken and his clay pizza oven.”

People are also supported to develop their own projects, independent of the CCC project. In one area a member of the Working Group was helped to develop a regular community market, that now has its own working group, and another ‘spin off’ group is focused on local planning issues.

Individuals have also taken on paid roles in CCC projects. As we have seen, one project recruited community members from the start to be project leads, and another has recruited local residents into a number of part time roles focused on communications and engagement.

In some cases this leadership has been informal; in one CCC project, a mural celebrating the railway heritage of the area went through a number of iterations – all prompted by local people pointing out how the painting needed be - to ensure it was accurately depicting the type of locomotive that would have been used, on that line, in those sheds.





Another group talked about how realising that artists are actually ‘a bit like you’ can be inspirational.

“People are thrilled to bits when they find the artist they have been working with actually lives near them, isn’t miles away, and is making a living doing something like this.”

A Critical Friend elaborated “I think the artists have raised the visibility of a different type of professional employment for what might be the norm or expected in this locality, even though the majority of the artists are local residents. They have demonstrated a different idea of ‘what’s possible.’”

It has demonstrated the power of collective leadership

Residents have recognised what they can achieve working together. One project lead commented “One of the working group members shared a WhatsApp message of appreciation saying ‘I have never been in a group like this before, it’s brilliant what we’re doing together for all of the community, what a group we make together!’. This was one of the proudest moments for me to date and proved to be a domino effect with other members sharing their appreciation messages for others in the group too.”

Whilst another reflected “We recently described this as being ‘ripples of agency’- and those ripples create a wave – and this can be so powerful – and helps us all to recognise how we each take a lead and are not being led.”

It has developed people’s cultural capital

Principles of co-creation run throughout the Creative Civic Change programme (and will be explored in more depth in a future report); one project described what this means to them “Residents have to have a stake in it. They have to own it. And go, I made this. I did this. So that artist over there might have helped me, supported me, or whatever. But I did that. That’s my words in that song. That’s my poem. That’s my seagull that I’ve made. Whatever it is... if they’ve had such a huge stake in it, that it really matters to them. And it changes them in some way, even if it’s only a very tiny way, but it makes a positive change.”

It has prompted artists to change their approach

CCC projects describe how, whilst it has been hard for some, the opportunities they have created for artists to work alongside communities to co-design creative solutions, has encouraged the artists to reflect on their practice and think differently about how they work with communities. The next CCC Learning Report will explore this area in more depth.



IT HAS IMPACTED ON THE CCC PROJECTS THEMSELVES

Many projects talk about how their own practice has been changed as a result of taking part in the CCC programme.

In terms of bringing people to decision-making at an earlier stage

“It has changed everything. It is like nothing the working party or the LTO has ever had the opportunity to do before. Starting with the process of listening to the residents to then weaving this into various project strands has been organic... This programme has taken the agency and power of the community to an unfamiliar level.”

“Involving community partners and local people in co-design workshops from the start, to give them input into all design and practical decisions. Giving other local residents a chance to vote and feedback on any potential ideas being taken forward. It is so important to have local residents embedded in local organisations.”

In terms of their own learning around time and relationships

“What the LTO has realised is that with this kind of work you're playing the long game... For now, the focus is on letting things happen and keeping channels of communication open and of course building up trust!”

“I think it's a very slow process. If powerful people are really serious about really changing lives, and really putting support in and making meaningful radical lasting change, there has to be a long-term time commitment. And we're talking decades, literally, I mean, minimum 10-year commitment.”

“I think the big learning for me is I understand now why projects fail, why a lot of my projects in the past have failed. And I've learned that everything, everything is about relationships. If you don't have those relationships, you don't have anything at all.”





ON OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND DECISION-MAKERS LOCALLY

CCC projects are increasingly having an impact on stakeholders in their local area (and beyond) who are witnessing this different approach to power and decision making. One project reflected “Through CCC we are also able to step back, recognise the work and research we are doing as important city wide and further – and open up this learning as a resource – so that others can be inspired to take the lead in their communities. One example is our public business plan – and also, opening up sessions such as the ones on Neighbourhood Planning.”

During Covid, one project was approached by a funder who wanted to ensure their money was reaching directly into communities where it would make the most difference, to help distribute their funding. Whilst another project has seen their local Parish Council adopt some aspects of their working group practice at their own meetings.

In one area, the CCC project is now part of city-wide conversations about culture; sitting ‘at the table’ alongside much larger and more ‘established’ organisations.

CCC projects have also had a role in amplifying voices of residents; one group are now involved in planning conversations with the local authority and other stakeholders, and a local authority officer in another area commented:

“Because you are trusted in the community, the residents then have that link to the city council – THAT is half the battle. It means we can get through to people. It’s absolutely fantastic what you have achieved – there is nothing as community embedded as you are in the city. Right in the heart of, and established in, the neighbourhood.”



RECOMMENDATIONS

FOSTER CURIOSITY

A key learning from this report is that putting communities in the lead is not just about formal governance structures, but also about fostering long-term, curious but caring, conversations that involve genuinely listening.

Funders, community and arts organisations should:

Value and resource long-term conversations in communities

- Offering a funded and supported consultation period at the outset of programmes, and making resource available for further consultation.
- Investing in paid resource, such as community development workers, to hold conversations and develop relationships.
- Explicitly incorporate these types of conversations, including informal conversations and feedback, in evaluation processes. Re-value the anecdotal and the small stories. (e.g. CCC evaluation reports ask 'How are you putting communities in the lead?').





Adopt an 'Action Research' approach

- Make space to explicitly discuss and value sticky issues, challenges and so-called 'failures'. In the CCC programme, this space is created through a variety of Peer Learning contexts that create space for people to honestly share their experiences. This space is also reflected in CCC evaluation reports.
- Funders and evaluators in particular need to continuously affirm the importance and value of this approach.

PRIORITISE CONNECTION

A second key learning from this report is that community leadership is not just developing an asset pool of individual leaders, but about building relationships between members of the community, who all act as community leaders in their own ways.

Funders, community leaders and arts organisations should:

Invest in value-led governance and systems

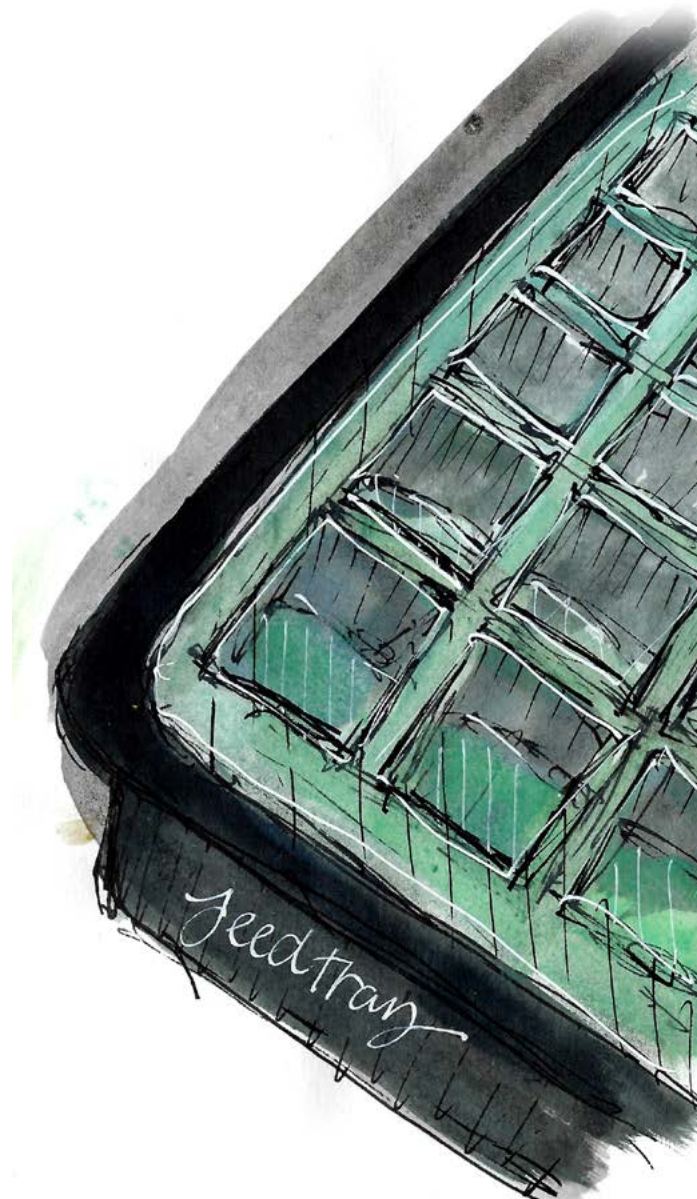
- Explicitly make connections between shared values and governance systems - for example, by creating and sharing value statements or

working agreements together with the policies and processes generated from these values.

- Key values from this report include transparency, flexibility, trust, reciprocity (everyone has something to give, everyone should benefit) and mutual support and inclusivity. These values should not be prescribed, but could be offered as a starting point for discussion within a process where values for each project or organisation are agreed.

Build responsive support structures

- The CCC approach to support - set out in the Creative Civic Change ecosystem on page 36 - has been very effective. Almost every element of the support was flexible in terms of delivery. For example, the Peer Learning programme increasingly used an 'open space' format to allow for projects to discuss and respond to issues that were important to them.
- An area where the CCC approach could be further developed is in facilitating connections between CCC projects and other local/ regional organisations. This has happened organically in some areas, but there could be more explicit encouragement for CCC projects to use their support budgets to support other organisations in their local area.



RE-THINK SUSTAINABILITY

This report has identified the huge amount of energy and resource it takes to put communities in the lead. Rather than think about sustainability in narrow terms of organisations becoming financially sustainable, this report identifies the need to think about how the infrastructure supporting community leadership becomes sustainable.

This might include:

- **Budget for 'hidden' costs** - supporting projects with their budgeting and planning in the early phase - to take account of the costs of creating and sustaining connections with people.
- **Making budgets more transparent** - e.g. publishing simple pie charts of how projects spend their money, encouraging people to report on 'for free' hours.

EMBED DIVERSITY & CREATIVITY

A final key learning from this report is that diversity (in its broadest sense) fosters creativity (also in its broadest sense). In particular, we have identified that magic can happen in the witches' brew of dialogue and challenge between artists and community leaders (recognising these are often one and the same!).

- **Longer-term funding** - offering three-year funding has been transformative for CCC projects. However, almost every project noted that this feels like 'the beginning'. Further work needs to be done to identify funding pathways that continue the CCC journey.
- **Reducing bureaucracy** - one key drain on people's time and energy is bureaucracy. CCC projects have invested time in simplifying processes as much as possible - with the application processes and evaluation reports for example. Consider what information is genuinely needed, and different formats that can be used to gather that such as voice notes or films.

Programme designers and funders should:

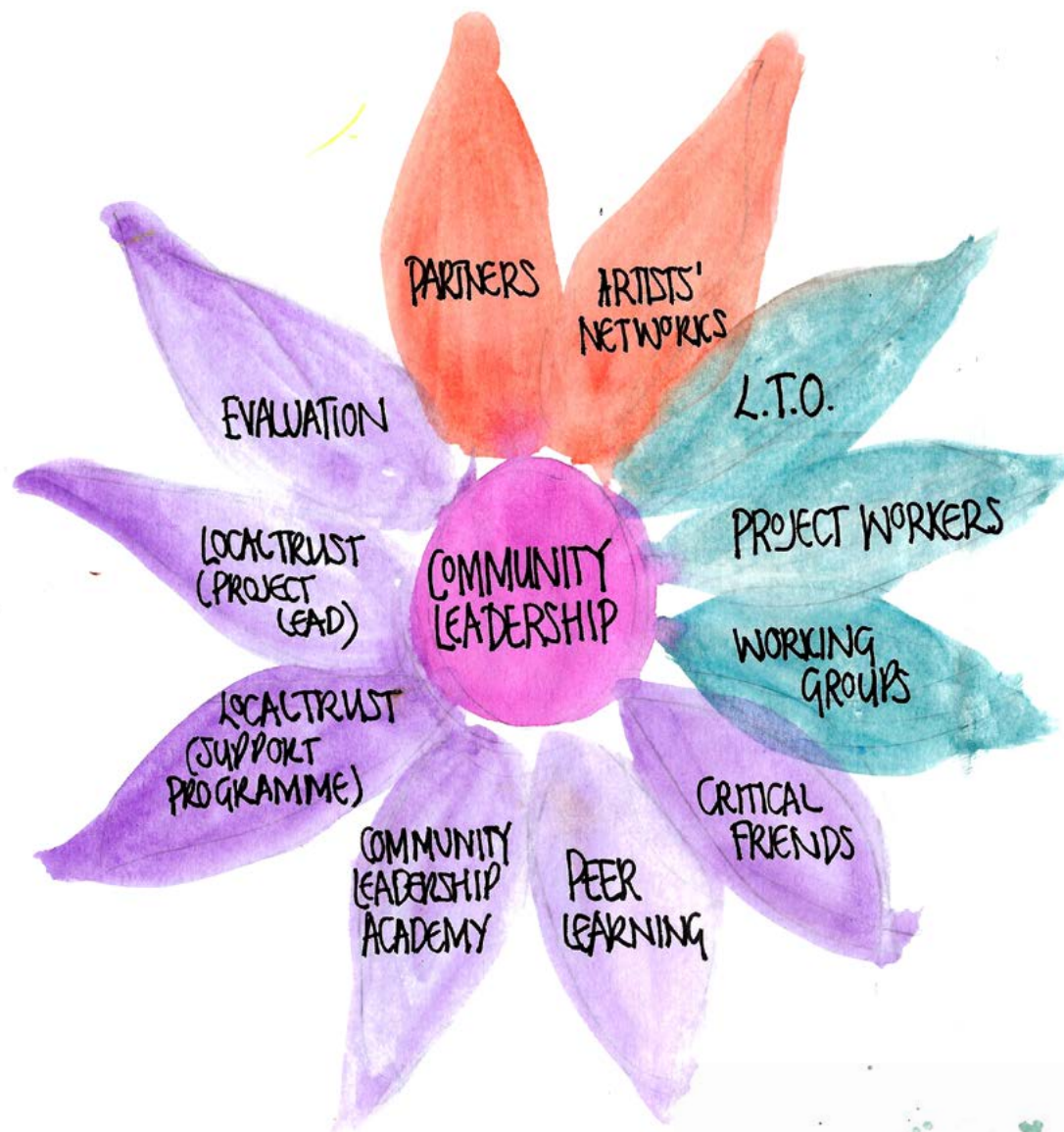
- **Champion innovative solutions to barriers** to inclusivity in community leadership roles. This could include, for example, ensuring that there are activities for children/ childcare available for evening meetings; providing dinner; offering licences, data and devices to those participating online; using WhatsApp

and Facebook Messenger; providing informal coaching and mentoring. It's also important to recognise that these are legitimate ways of spending budgets.

- **Explicitly embed artists' time and contribution** within project plans and budgets; identify artists with relevant community-focused practice, and support them to work alongside 'leaders' wherever they sit within projects.



A CREATIVE CNIC CHANGE ECOSYSTEM FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP



Community leadership doesn't happen in isolation. While it requires individuals at its heart who are committed to creating space, that have the confidence to "step back and step up", and develop a shared vision, It is also enriched by being part of a wider ecosystem that feeds and supports this leadership process.

By its nature, an ecosystem will vary, depending on who and what it contains, and the role they play, for examples the individuals, communities, funders, and partners, an example of this can be seen on the left.



OTHER MODELS AND APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

To find out more about how to put communities in the lead in your context, and be inspired by other approaches, we recommend the following:

Chrissie Tiller

Power Up

<https://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/power-up/>

Mark Robinson

Multiplying Leadership

<https://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/multiplying-leadership-in-creative-communities/>

Mark Robinson

Tactics for the Tightrope

<https://www.thinkingpractice.co.uk/tactics-for-the-tightrope/>

Helen Goulden

Leading Change: Why now is the time to invest in community leadership

<https://bit.ly/3uNNjOL>

Angus McCabe, Rob McMillan and Mandy Wilson

Big Local: Reflections on community leadership

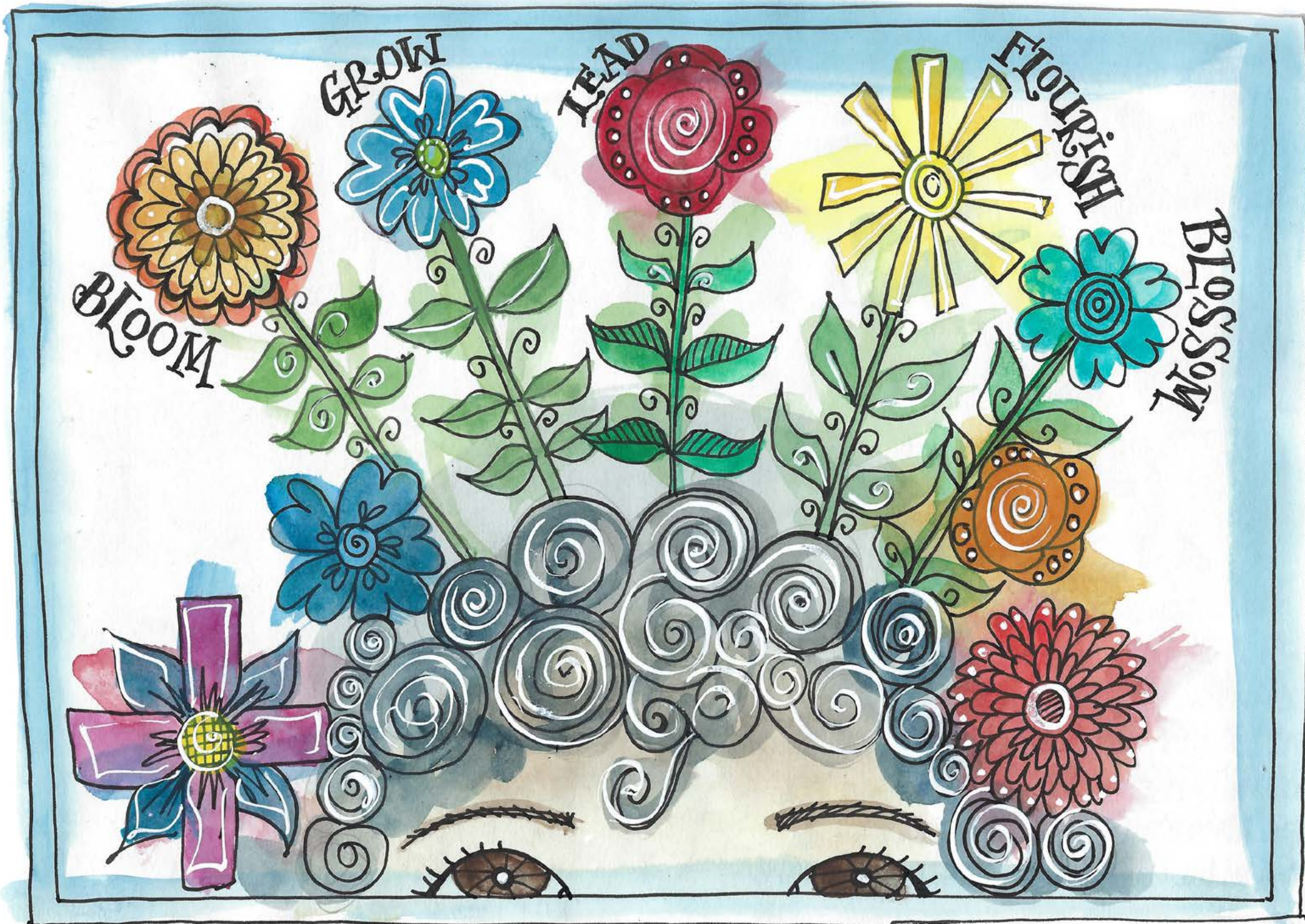
<https://bit.ly/3HRXJ3L>

British Council

Active Citizens Programme

<https://active-citizens.britishcouncil.org/>





BLOOM

GROW

LEAD

FLOURISH

BLOSSOM