



**COMMUNITY
FUND**



Share Learn Improve: Growing Together

A Good Practice Guide

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What is Our Bright Future?

Our Bright Future is an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors. This £33 million programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund is formed of 31 projects across the UK which are running for up to five years. Each project is empowering young people aged 11-24 with vital skills and experience and improving their wellbeing. At the same time, those young people act as catalysts for delivering change for their local environment and community; whilst contributing to a greener economy.

Findings included in this document were included in the mid-term evaluation report which was published in July 2019. The purpose of the mid-term report was to state what had been achieved since the beginning of the programme and to identify key lessons to drive improved performance. The report was intended to promote learning and to support the future delivery of the programme, as well as allowing the programme to share findings with others. It is hoped that the collective evidence base can inform similar programmes in the future and provide evidence on how young people can improve their local environment, which can be used to inform wider policy and practice.

A copy of the mid-term evaluation report is available on the Our Bright Future website: ourbrightfuture.co.uk/about/our-impact/



Share Learn Improve (SLI)

SLI is a function of the Our Bright Future programme. It aims to **facilitate knowledge sharing and learning to develop best practice, add value to programme delivery and strengthen impacts and outcomes**. SLI is an integral element of the programme and ensures that the 31 projects can share best practice and learning through a continuously evolving process drawing on input from individual projects, evaluation findings, horizon scanning and trend spotting across the whole programme.

In order to deliver an effective SLI strategy, a full-time coordinator was employed from the start of the programme. **Having a dedicated member of staff for this element of the programme was invaluable**. At the start of the programme, time was needed to refine the strategy and SLI delivery model, build relationships, trust and broker connections. Following a continuous needs assessment process, the SLI Coordinator was able to introduce project contacts to each other where there was a common interest or learning opportunity. This enabled projects to work together, sharing approaches and providing valuable learning opportunities through exchange visits with young people and staff.

SLI is an inclusive, collaborative process to ensure projects feel part of the wider programme and are confident that their needs and issues are captured and addressed. Project input is coordinated via surveys and questionnaires, quarterly and end of year reports, the project online community and through discussion with the SLI coordinator.

There has been an **effective and continuous process of consultation, reflection and action** to respond to the needs of the portfolio and to address issues. The quarterly reporting by projects ensures a regular review of SLI offerings and feedback about events and resources are collected and used to improve delivery.



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Annual all-project two-day seminar

Ideally open to at least two staff and youth representatives from each project and held in different regions/countries each year. A mix of programme information and updates, project speakers, external and keynote speakers and breakout sessions. The additional networking time that a residential event creates helps to strengthen relationships between project staff and there tended to be a rise in reported cross-project working in the months following these events.



Regional and thematic workshops

Open to staff and youth representatives, workshops are conducted twice a year with approximately three to four workshops in each round spread across the UK. These are predominately about project sharing and learning and topics are chosen based on project feedback and requests collected through the reporting forms. Workshops sometimes incorporate a thematic element dependant on programme and project needs at the time.



Webinars

These are scheduled on an ad-hoc basis. Topics are identified using feedback and recommendations from evaluation findings, project reports and project discussions.



Good practice guides and lessons learnt

These are produced using learnings from the programme evaluation and lessons learnt from project reports.



Project Support Network

The Project Support Network provides support, advice and guidance on areas of need as identified by a project seeking support.



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Online community

The Our Bright Future online community (known as The Green Room) is the main tool of communication for cross-project and programme-wide communications. The Green Room is used to facilitate knowledge sharing and learning and to promote the sense of belonging to a collective movement rather than an individual project. It contains the following areas:

- member profiles/biographies containing name, role, contact details, organisation and project name
- updates area containing current news, project and programme updates
- Project Support Network area containing biographies and skills profiles of members of the network
- interactive events calendar
- conversations area where projects can host useful discussions
- knowledge bank containing useful documents, web links, video clips and the project skills bank
- Youth Forum updates page including good news stories, useful documents and the updates allowing all staff to see the information relayed to members.



Informal shared learning between projects

Share Learn Improve encourages projects to share ideas and ask each other's opinions and help. Projects are encouraged to ask each other questions, share templates and ideas. This element is similar to the Project Support Network but is more informal, can be a one-off interaction or ongoing dialogue between two mutually supportive projects rather than a discrete piece of work. This informal learning generally takes place through phone calls or email.



Project exchange visits

Projects are encouraged to plan and carry out exchange visits with each other. These have been undertaken in a variety of ways; some as staff training and development exercises others as an opportunity for young people to develop new skills, gain experience or visit a completely different area to where they live. The Share Learn Improve function holds a central travel fund that projects can apply to for support with exchange visit travel and accommodation costs, thus removing a key barrier and facilitating greater interaction across the programme.

What are the benefits?

Key outcomes of a partnership approach have been **learning, knowledge exchange** and **relationship development** between organisations. Our Bright Future funding and learning opportunities have **developed collective practitioner skills, experience and knowledge** of how to facilitate and support environmental activities with young people. The SLI face to face workshops and annual programme seminars have been particularly valued in terms of learning and building relationships amongst portfolio organisations and amplifying best practice approaches across the programme. **It is felt that changes reported by organisations in both the environmental and youth sectors have come about much more rapidly than they would have without the programme.**

Examples



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The success of My World My Home has been recognised within Friends of the Earth to the extent that a new Youth and Families team has been created to build on its success. In addition, Friends of the Earth's board unanimously approved the appointment of a youth board member in autumn 2018.

By January 2020, of the 31 lead project organisations, 10 had made a change to their governance structure or working practices as a result of the programme, five of these included the recruitment of young trustees. In addition, three organisations have formed youth forums or councils and young people now sit on all cross-cutting groups inside Yorkshire Wildlife Trust from health and safety to HR.



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The National Union of Students (NUS) became involved in environmental campaigning and The Wildlife Trusts became more youth focused.

The National Youth Agency, who had not worked on an environmentally focused project prior to Our Bright Future, is actively incorporating environmental elements into future programmes



The programme was reportedly influential in some of the consortium members securing the delivery role of the Nature Friendly Schools (NFS) project, one of three projects within the Children and Nature Programme (a flagship of the 25 Year Plan). Partners have subsequently helped NFS to shape its delivery, processes for sharing learning, online learning portal and Our Bright Future was frequently referred to in set up meetings.

This is no doubt because of the broad range of experience and knowledge represented in the portfolio [SLI] is seen by project managers as a valuable resource and learning opportunity. There are many examples of outcomes resulting from the interaction of projects. These include, sharing of and improvement to internal policy documents (e.g. relating to health and safety and safeguarding) and sharing of best practice, including approaches to increasing accessibility, particularly for young people from under-represented groups or with additional needs

Examples

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust and vInspired shared hints and tips on The Green Room about how best to engage audiences through social media.

North Wales Wildlife Trust and Hill Holt Wood shared experiences of how best to engage with harder to reach audiences on the Green Room.

Hill Holt Wood and NYA jointly applied for grant funding (Dream Fund – Postcode Lottery). Although they were not successful, this represented the start of further joint working, including a young person from Hill Holt Wood applying for The Environment Now programme and successfully starting her project 'Operation Sawdust'.

"We've definitely benefitted from the expertise of other projects, and particularly those who have more experience of working with harder to reach young people or those who are less naturally inclined to want to be involved in projects such as ours".

Project Manager

Furthermore, several project managers indicated that **progress in new ways of working has been faster compared to projects trying out new ways of working in isolation**, with projects inspired and given confidence to try new things which they otherwise may not have put into practice or known about. For example, this has included projects working with new target audiences, delivering activities in a different way, or trying out new approaches or systems such as delivery of accredited qualifications.

There are examples of projects supporting one another through **joint-delivery, cross-referrals** between partners, and **delivery of training** to other projects in the portfolio. These have happened as a result of SLI events and project to project visits, which were seen by project managers as valuable for two core reasons: creating a positive feeling of being part of a larger movement; and sharing ideas and learning.

Examples

One of Hill Holt Wood's Growing Up Green's (GUG) Youth Forum members supported another young person from Tomorrow's Natural Leaders (TNL) when he visited for a day of consultancy. The two young people worked together on a green-roofed bike shelter design that the TNL participant has been awarded funding for and he also received advice on developing his design concepts and practicing on software available at Hill Holt Wood.

The Programme Manager from YDMT's Green Futures project has been supporting one of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Tomorrow's Natural Leaders with her project after meeting at the Youth Forum event. She was supported to apply for further funding through the North Yorkshire and York Local Nature Partnership and was successful. As part of the successful bid, YDMT is also facilitating the filming of a group of young people on an expedition, for use on the participant's website.

Groundwork London was invited by a member of the NUS Sustainability team to talk at a meeting of the Greener Jobs Alliance. They used this to look at opportunities, share information and good practice.

Project managers report that Our Bright Future funding has been instrumental in supporting delivery organisations to **upskill staff**. Skills development has reflected the programme outcomes and **brought together the youth work and environmental sectors**. At a programme-level, SLI has enabled organisations to develop specialist skills related to youth work (e.g. non-confrontational behaviour management). Some organisations are working in this area for the first time and this expertise is, in turn, influencing organisational policy and practice relating to young people.



Centre for Sustainable Energy

Examples of SLI Workshops/Training

- Safeguarding workshop — delivered by a safeguarding specialist
- Evaluation good practice workshop — delivered by the programme evaluators
- Managing challenging behaviour webinar — delivered by an external specialist
- Ecotherapy webinar — delivered by staff from one of the 31 projects delivering ecotherapy as part of its work



"We get the learning from the network. When things aren't going as you expect, you find out about the experience on other projects and that they are experiencing similar challenges."

Project Manager

"We wouldn't have been able to learn about it so quickly. We wouldn't have adapted [the project] in the same way, with such an environmental focus or so quickly. Our understanding of the green economy and employment opportunities has changed. We have passed this on to our young people."

Project Manager

There is also now evidence of formal working partnerships developing as a result of introductions through Our Bright Future... Those who shared examples felt that these collaboration opportunities would not have existed in the absence of the programme.

- One example reported by the programme team was NUS developing a new relationship with Friends of the Earth, who were each launching national campaigns on plastics reduction. Despite having a history of working within different sectors and on different agendas, it was reportedly recognised that this shared focus might increase the momentum of the respective campaigns. Since then, the two organisations have begun working jointly on a number of initiatives including submitting a brief for the Welsh Baccaulaureate to involve elements of the projects in the accreditation's community challenge section. NUS are further focusing on working more closely with The Wildlife Trusts on its Wilder Future campaign. Three projects located in close proximity to each other have also developed an ongoing relationship, with repeated visits by young people and reciprocal support at activities and events.
- *"It's really allowed organisations to work together that would otherwise not be anywhere near each other. It's been amazing in that way. Having the National Trust, The Wildlife Trust and Friends of the Earth in one room, you can't do that very often. There's cross-working spontaneously, lots of call out for collaboration which definitely wouldn't have happened without the programme."*

Programme team interview, 2018



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Top Tips for SLI

It is critical to embed the SLI framework into a programme from the very start, with a full induction built into the programme for all project managers to attend.

Have learning mechanisms and feedback loops in place to maximise lesson learning and communication across the programme.

Include sufficient resource to deliver face to face events and to cover costs of external speakers and trainers.

SLI must be flexible, adaptive and have an evolutionary approach to respond to changing needs across the programme.

Include additional support such as central funding pots that projects can apply into removing barriers to engagement from a financial perspective.

SLI must have an inclusive, participatory approach with buy in from all programme functions.

Share Learn Improve — A Framework for Good Practice

It is recommended that, wherever a multi-organisation-based programme begins within a fixed term funding period, a framework for cross programme learning and delivery is introduced.

A framework for cross programme learning and delivery could add value to the life of the programme, catalysing networks and shared learning faster than without such a mechanism, maximising the impact of the programme's objectives.

There are eight key elements for a successful Share Learn Improve strategy:



1 Ethos embedded across all partners from the very start of the programme. SLI should be built into staff time for all projects and included in induction processes; to raise awareness of the function and ensure time is protected for staff to attend SLI activities. Where possible, sharing should be led by the partners themselves, identifying key lessons they wish to share.

2 Online community open to all staff. This could be a simple website which staff would access by creating a personal log in and would be a platform to share resources, initiating and participating in discussions and populating content. Use of this would be built into induction process and all staff encouraged to utilise it.

3 Face to face learning opportunities. Presuming that the programme partners are UK wide, these activities should take place at set times throughout the calendar year and may include workshops, annual seminars and regional networking. The opportunities are most beneficial when they rotate around UK locations, avoid being London or England centric and are hosted by partner organisations where possible.

4 Strategy remains flexible and reactive to needs of programme. This should be reviewed on an annual basis, to continuously evolve delivery. The SLI strategy should include horizon scanning and trend spotting across the partner organisations, reacting to feedback and input from staff and consider the external context. It should also cover legacy and an exit strategy to ensure that learning assets are not lost.

5 Central coordination role, to ensure the development of activity, facilitating events, administering the online community and responding to the needs of the programme partners. The coordinator has a unique overview of the programme and can therefore connect partners or troubleshooting where the need arises.

6 SLI linked with other programme functions. SLI should work closely with any other programme functions that are in place (such as evaluation) to maximise the impact of the strategy and help steer its direction.

7 Internal support network available. Partner organisations would be invited put themselves forward to provide specialised support to other partners, based around their skills areas. This would be fee-paying support and partners would be linked up dependent on the request, and could consist of anything from desk-based research, reviewing of documents, site visits etc. This network helps to maximise the benefit from the wealth of skills and expertise across the programme, and increase cross-working.

8 Activity suite available. This would set out a calendar of events (as mentioned above) and annual priorities to be shared with partners; the themes of which will be decided as the programme progresses.