



The #iwill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Event November 2021 Exploring Community Benefit and the Quality Principles February 2022

Introduction

This paper shares insights from presentations and group discussions from an #iwill Fund Learning Hub event for Match Funders on 30 November 2021. The discussions at the event were on community benefit, and the quality principles. There were presentations from The Ernest Cook Trust, the Act for Change Fund, and Spirit of 2012 on aspects of community benefit.

Some Match Funders felt that trying to capture the community benefit of youth social action in its totality would be disproportionate. Instead, it was suggested that funder and delivery organisations should prioritise their learning and measurement on the aspects of youth social action that they most want to understand.

Examples of how Match Funders measured community benefit are outlined in more detail in the following sections and include:

- **Direct community benefit:** The Ernest Cook Trust's Green Influencers Scheme asked volunteers to predict ongoing benefits which may be about their own increased chance of volunteering or pride in their community.
- **Societal benefit:** One match funder reported asking community members whether the perceptions of young people had changed. The Act for Change Fund, which is concerned with outcomes of societal benefit, attempted to capture reach and influence by asking young people: "who has heard you? Who has listened?".
- **Reflexive benefit:** The Act for Change Fund assessed reflexive benefit by asking young people: "has it made a difference to you? How and in what ways?". Peer-to-peer interviews before and after a project could also be used to understand how to create reflexive benefit and whether it has been created.
- **Organisational benefit:** The Great Action Plan perceived organisational benefit through being better connected to more partner organisations. Recording new relationships that are created through youth social action may be one way to measure organisational benefit.

Top tips for measuring community benefit

- **When measuring direct community benefit,** it can be helpful to consider who else is involved in the social action, such as a pool of volunteers from the wider community. In



this case, it can be useful to ask volunteers to predict ongoing benefits which may be about their own increased chance of volunteering or pride in their community.

- **When measuring the reflexive benefit**, it can be useful to facilitate peer-to-peer interviews before and after a project to measure the benefits for young people involved in youth social action.
- **When measuring societal benefit**, it can be useful to ask community members how their perceptions of young people had changed. Likewise, it can also be useful to ask young people how their perceptions of other members of the community had changed. Similarly, for understanding social benefit a focus on reach (who has heard you?) and influence (who has listened?) can help to show where youth social action is having an impact.
- **When measuring organisational benefit**, it can be helpful to consider the following: (a) improved reach and young focus of the organisation (b) a better understanding of local and young people's needs within the organisation (c) the establishment of new or enhanced relationships with other organisations and (d) increased or strengthened networks with partners and local agencies.

Top tips for using the quality principles to support youth social action

The quality principles can be useful for:

- setting criteria for funded applications and assessing applications;
- defining what 'good' looks like in youth social action;
- and discussing the design of activities so that the prioritisation of quality principles is transparent.

Match Funders suggested that to be genuinely put into practice, these principles need to be considered from the start, and built in throughout an opportunity.

Match Funders suggest that it would be helpful to evolve these quality principles to describe what quality looks like from the perspective of young people.

Deepening our understanding on community benefit

In previous #iwill Fund Learning Hub work we have established that community benefit is diverse – youth social action can lead to different types of benefit for people and communities beyond the young person, and these may be realised immediately after the social action takes place, or over years. Below is our Community Benefit framework:



Outcome Category	Specific Outcomes include
Direct Community Benefit	These include outcomes to the 'beneficiaries' of volunteering, mentoring, local environmental work or campaigning
Societal Benefit	Benefit to society as a result of young people taking part in social action – e.g., more civic engagement in the population
Reflexive Benefit	Benefit to young people as a result of changes brought about by youth social action - e.g., changes brought about by campaigning, or by improved public spaces
Organisational Benefit	Benefit to social purpose organisations which enable youth social action - e.g., youth social action helps them create more impact on their goals and strengthens the organisation

In Data Reviews and beyond we have given examples of community benefit created by #iwill-funded delivery, and we have also shared some of the challenges associated with defining and measuring it.

The presentations and discussion on 30th November provided further insight into how to define, design for, and measure community benefit, as well as providing some examples of community benefit in action.

Direct Community Benefit – what we learned

Outcomes for direct 'beneficiaries' are hard to predict at the beginning of a funded programme of opportunities for three reasons:

- projects are not pre-defined and much is determined by young people when projects are underway, as a key way of enabling youth leadership;
- different stakeholders will perceive different benefits, which may only be identified in evaluation at the end of a project;
- it can also be hard to say where direct benefits of a youth social action opportunity end and wider benefits begin.

All of these things can make measurement difficult – if we're not sure what to expect, what should we measure to find out if our expectations were right or not? However, the presentation from the Ernest Cook Trust shared examples of how measurement can capture that which is predictable, and that which is not.



The Ernest Cook Trust's Green Influencers Scheme supports young people to design environmental social action projects which should directly improve their local area but also engage a wider pool of community volunteers. The numbers of community volunteers and their hours are measured, as are direct benefits provided by the young people's action. Volunteers are also asked to predict ongoing benefits which may be about their own increased chance of volunteering or pride in their community. Learning from this evaluation can help to plan intended benefits for future projects – but room should still be left to capture unpredicted benefits.

It was also noted by the Act for Change Fund that where a direct intended outcome is societal change (such as on climate change or LGBTQ+ rights), it can be hard to quantify how much change is 'enough', and longitudinal measurement is expensive and not always appropriate.

Societal benefit – what we learned

The societal benefit of youth social action is easy to understand – whether young people are becoming politically active, making new relationships in their community, or developing the habit of volunteering, it can be hypothesised that this is beneficial for society widely in developing young people's capacity, and activating them to play a part in wider society.

It seems to go hand-in-hand with intentions around outcomes for young people. If individuals can be supported to develop new skills, knowledge, and a belief that they can play a different role in their community, then this will be to their benefit, and to society's in general.

However, it is also one of the more challenging benefits to measure – capturing sustained change in young people's attitudes and habits over time is expensive and lengthy, and attributing any change to particular experiences would be very difficult. In this way, it has a lot in common with capturing the direct community benefit outcomes of campaigning social action. The Act for Change Fund, which is concerned with both the outcomes of campaigning and societal benefit, are engaged with attempting to capture the reach (who has heard you?) and influence (who has listened?) of their funded work which they felt was proportionate and useful, and we hope to be able to share insights from this work in future outputs.

Another Match Funder reported looking at how community member's perceptions of young people had changed, and how young people's perceptions of other members of the community had changed – positive change in these would suggest increased feelings of belonging to, or trust in, their local community, or wider society.

It was also noted that for the societal benefit of youth social action to be felt, society had to be able to continue developing, and involving young people – but this is not always in the hands of young people, delivery organisations or even funders.



Reflexive Benefit – what we learned

This type of benefit can be relatively proximate or close in time to the opportunity, and relatively simple to capture in terms of evaluation. The Act for Change Fund spoke about the work of Coventry Youth Activists campaigning to end disability hate speech online and increase disabled young people's access to social spaces. These changes could benefit many young disabled people, but they should also benefit the young disabled activists themselves, and this can be assessed by asking them: 'has it made a difference to you? How and in what ways?'. Another tracked whether support services impacted by the youth social action opportunity are better informed about, and accessed by, young people.

Reflexive benefit is a possible, or even likely, feature of any youth social action where young people draw on their lived experience to identify and act on an issue which affects them, and others like them. Peer-to-peer interviews before and after a project could also help to understand both how to create this impact, and whether it has been created.

Organisational benefit – what we learned

Previous #iwill Fund Learning Hub work has captured anecdotal experiences of organisations about the benefits to their mission and functioning of working with young people for the first time. But we have not previously heard about the benefits to organisations already working with this group – organisations with a traditional youth work focus, which make up a great number of the organisations funded by the #iwill Fund.

Spirit of 2012 shared recent research that precisely tried to separate out the benefits to organisations from benefits to young people. They found that youth work organisations perceived most frequently (a) an improved reach and youth focus (b) a better understanding of local and young people's needs (c) the establishment of new or enhanced relationships with other organisations and (d) increased or strengthened networks with partners and local agencies. Other benefits were also described.

The benefit of organisations becoming more youth focussed was echoed by the Act for Change Fund who reported that hosting changemaking youth social action had made organisations more inclusive – as well as courageous in aiming to achieve their mission. The Great Action Plan also perceived organisational benefit through being better connected to more partner organisations.

These insights deepen our understanding of what can be the benefits to organisations (and their missions) in enabling youth social action. These are an important factor for organisations and

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funders in deciding whether to start, or continue, enabling youth social action. We would benefit from further understanding of how these benefits can be realised – e.g., how can enabling youth social action best strengthen relationships with local agencies? It should also be noted that this can have a mutual benefit for those agencies – reminding us of how difficult it can be to draw a line at which the community benefit of youth social action ‘stops’.

It was noted that asking local partners, or community organisations if they are concerned about whether youth social action opportunities continue would be one way to determine what the effects of youth social action has been on the wider community.

Wider learning on community benefit

Organisations and funders can identify and describe community benefit when they look back over a delivery period, but it is often different to what they would have predicted and challenging to quantify. Unlike outcomes for young people, community benefit (particularly beyond direct benefit) is not ‘week-by-week’ change but change that can only be seen over time.

Achieving community benefit is not necessarily correlated with size. In theory, more young people taking part should mean more outcomes for young people, but Match Funders were less sure this was the case for community benefit, noting that one relatively small action or connection could create an outsize ‘amount’ of benefit – but again, this might only be recognised in hindsight.

Match Funders felt that community benefit was altogether less predictable than outcomes for young people. It was felt that a failure rate around both direct and indirect community benefits should be expected, and indeed welcomed as a sign of innovation and commitment to learning.

It was also felt that trying to capture community benefit of an opportunity in its totality would lead to trying to ‘measure everything’, which would be disproportionate. Instead, funder and delivery organisations should focus on what they most wanted to understand as a result of youth social action funding and use methods (likely quantitative and qualitative) which could help them identify both expected and unexpected effects over time.

Deepening our understanding of the Quality Principles

In previous #iwill Fund Learning Hub reports we have captured insights about how the six Quality Principles (QPs) of youth social action are being interpreted in practice – these insights come through interpretation of Match Funder reports and evaluations.

Principle	Examples
Be youth-led	How youth-led a particular opportunity is depends on the age and experience of participants as well as the nature of the activity but most commonly 'youth leadership' looks like deciding the cause or shape of the activities, less frequently about assessing where funding should go, or being involved in evaluation
Be challenging	This can be around enabling stretching activities (which is itself sometimes a <i>mechanism of change</i>) but may also involve providing safe challenge to young people on their ideas and plans, particularly for how they will bring about community benefit.
Have social impact	Youth social action is still developing proportionate but meaningful ways of evidencing community impact, but we know this is a prime motivator for young people's participation.
Allow progression	Many funded evaluations assess young people's willingness to participate again, which is usually high – however progression routes need to be built to support this.
Be embedded	Over half of funded activity is delivered through schools, and there is evidence that this is a particularly effective route to engaging young people, particularly those less likely to participate.
Enable reflection	Digital or part-digital models have enabled more reflection by making it easier to schedule small group or 1:1 conversations.

Our break-out discussions sought more examples, as well as insights about (a) how Match Funders use the principles in their work and (b) perceptions of which principles were more or less prominent in youth social action opportunities.

Insights from break-out groups

The principles were frequently used, and useful, when Match Funders were beginning their #iwill Fund work, to set criteria for funded applications and assessing applications. Particularly for organisations with no track record of enabling youth social action and bearing in mind that 'youth social action' covers a broad range of activities, these principles allowed them to set out their understanding of what good would look like.

Additionally, the principles were used when looking at the more granular *design* of opportunities, to understand how particular activities could be as high-quality as possible (i.e., how were they



integrating the principles?). Sometimes, during this process it emerged that one quality principle would need to be prioritised over another.

One example of this was a tension between 'youth-led' and 'challenging'. Challenge often had to be brought by adults and this could feel like it was undermining youth leadership or being overly discouraging. However, it was considered worthwhile to address this tension. The Great Action Plan gave the example of young people creating, and setting goals, for global-level projects which were 'too big'. Supportive challenge from adults helped them to create community-level projects which were still genuinely youth-led but which the Great Action Plan could help enable.

'Challenging' also overlapped with 'social impact', with Spirit of 2012 describing how young people on the EmpowHER project had to research and listen to their community beneficiaries before beginning a project – so they had an informed view of what could be impactful, rather than just their own ideas.

Comic Relief shared the example of young people often wanting to lead, and work, on issues which drew on their lived experience and could be very sensitive. Adults had to balance this desire with the need to provide enough support for young people to work on these issues, in a way which did not harm their wellbeing.

Match Funders agreed that some quality principles felt more 'front-of-mind' than others - particularly youth leadership, which is exemplified to a greater or lesser extent in every funded opportunity and has perhaps influenced the greater enabling of 'youth voice' in the activities of many funders.

It was questioned whether this was because youth leadership felt more important than others, was easier to understand, or easier to demonstrate? By contrast, it was noted that 'progression' and 'reflective' could end up being seen as add-ons that could be considered at the end – and were perhaps neglected as a result. But Match Funders suggested that to be genuinely put into practice, they needed to be considered from the start, and built in throughout an opportunity.

There was lively discussion around 'progression'. Match Funders reported that it could be difficult to balance resources between making the current opportunity really rewarding for young people – which felt like the priority - and helping them find and engage with progression routes.

Match Funders repeatedly said that progression tended to look 'internal' i.e., young people were encouraged to do more with the same organisation rather than signposted to an external opportunity. For all but a few organisations, this will limit how many young people can progress, and it may be that greater linking and 'transitioning' between organisations could build more or stronger progression routes.

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Finally, one Match Funder noted that for grantees trying to reach more excluded or disadvantaged groups the principles can feel a bit irrelevant. They are more concerned with safeguarding, retention, and engagement. Finally a concern was raised that the quality principles are 'funder language' – how would organisations enabling youth social action, and young people delivering it, describe what quality looks like now?