Exploring Barriers to Funding and Support Experienced by Marginalised Community Businesses

Insights, Solutions and Recommendations for Funding and Infrastructure Organisations.

April 2023

Contents:

Introduction to the research

This report, produced by Spark Insights and Locality, and commissioned by Power to Change, explores the experiences of community businesses and organisations led by or supporting people experiencing marginalisation on the barriers and solutions to accessing funding and support.

> *Spark Insights* is the research, training and consultancy arm of Spark & Co., a community business supporting racialised people in the UK to navigate and access support through an online platform and tailored educational programmes. The development of this research was supported by Locality and their expertise of community businesses and organisations.

> *Locality* is the national membership network supporting local community organisations to be strong and successful. They provide specialist advice, peer-learning, resources and campaigns to help every community thrive, including to take over and run assets for the benefit of local people. They believe that when communities come together, they can transform lives and build a fairer society.

> *Power to Change* is the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.

In this report, we will explore the key findings from the research conducted into the barriers experienced by community businesses led by and/or supporting people experiencing marginalisation, and set out potential solutions and recommendations for Power to Change as well as the wider funding, capacity building and infrastructure sector.

Our interest in understanding the experiences, challenges and realities of people and communities experiencing marginalisation is in part inspired by the current state of the sector. or example, the Booska Paper[1] exposed structural racism in the VCSE sector, and the SEUK's State of the Sector 2021[2] report highlighted disparities faced by Disabled and organisations led by racialised people when accessing funding.

---

[1] The Ubele Initiative, Booska Paper, (The Ubele Initiative, April 2021)

[2] Social Enterprise UK, No Going Back (Social Enterprise UK, 2021)

The research approach is rooted in the belief that it is critical to develop a robust understanding of the experiences of community businesses led by and/or supporting people experiencing marginalisation in order to develop effective solutions to tackle the barriers identified in meaningful and sustainable ways. In order to create a more equitable playing field, a deeper understanding supported by effective action is required to deliver impactful solutions. The collective belief of Spark Insights, Locality and Power to Change is that this research is an important continuation to the equitable development of the sector.

Overview of the research approach

The research team conducted an evidence review to establish a baseline of understanding, and qualitative interviews to unearth nuanced and up-to-date insights. The research aimed to capture insights from two primary audiences: community businesses led by and/or supporting people experiencing marginalisation, or funding, capacity building and infrastructure organisations.

This approach enabled the research team to develop a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of organisations on the demand side (those seeking support and funding) as well as on the supply side (those providing support and funding).

1. **Evidence review**: A data and document review of existing materials and research was conducted to assess and understand the existing data and insights. A full list of the evidence reviews can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.
2. **Qualitative research interviews**: The evidence review informed the development of interview discussion guides, allowing the research to focus on understanding nuance and complexity, and developing fresh insights. Tailored interviews were conducted with 27 community businesses and 10 funding, capacity building and infrastructure organisations. A full list of organisations involved in the research can be found in the appendix at the end of the report.
3. **Roundtable discussions:** Interview participants were invited to roundtable discussions, enabling them to engage in dialogue with peers, share common or differing experiences, and give feedback on potential solutions. Two roundtables were held (one with community businesses and organisations, and one with funding, capacity building and infrastructure organisations). Discussions were tailored to the different audiences.
4. **Power to Change internal staff survey:** A short survey was distributed to Power to Change staff and 19 responses were received. Four internal staff sessions supported the research.
5. **Analysis:** A thematic analysis was conducted of the insights from the interviews and roundtables, enabling the development of thematic areas regarding barriers and solutions.

Evidence Review

Insight one: Striving for equity: an uneven playing field from the get go

Persistent and severe underinvestment into community businesses supporting people experiencing marginalisation, alongside the impact of austerity measures and increased demand on stretched services, has resulted in community businesses struggling with financial sustainability, dependent on volunteers and small teams, and ultimately striving for equity.

> *"Persistent severe underinvestment - and the lack of equity in funding and procurement streams had left the sector in a state of mere survival."*
>
> **- No more blank pages**
> **Locality quote from Black South West Network (BSWN)**

Insight two: Placing equal value on lived experiences: the battle between authenticity and tokenism

It is estimated that only one in ten funders work collaboratively and equitably with people with lived experiences. Lived experience is still seen by funders and organisations as marginal rather than central. This results in lived experience insight being treated as an advisory tool, which further reinforces tokenistic approaches like focus groups or consultation sessions. Lived experiences will only effectively support funding decisions if taken seriously, and approached with consistency and commitment.

> *"There is a clear lack of lived expertise in leadership teams. CEOs are rarely connected to their cause, and usually come from privileged backgrounds. This embeds a culture in which lived expertise is not understood as central and strategic but as 'advisory'...the sector now broadly understands that lived experience is important, but even when action is taken, people with lived experience are often viewed more as 'informants' than change makers and leaders of change"*
>
> **- How does the charity sector think about diversity?**
> **Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)**

Insight three: Changing exclusionary behaviours – pre-existing stigma and bias exists

Leaders and staff from marginalised backgrounds reported feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome when entering spaces and places which were not part of their ordinary communities. There seemed to be a sentiment expressed that people felt 'not good enough' to apply to certain programmes or opportunities.

Funding and capacity building programmes are perceived to have an entrenched and hidden 'code'. This refers to decision making, nuances that aren't transparent or communicated clearly, and dynamics that require pre-existing relationships to be aware of. These 'codes' often lock out people from marginalised backgrounds.

Funders and infrastructure organisations are at risk of further perpetuating wider systems of oppression with their behaviours without consistent, dedicated and embedded approaches to anti-oppression and anti-racism work.

> *"There was a general sense of being unwanted or unwelcome in certain spaces which was often discussed in direct association with gentrification, a commonly recurring theme across interviewees"*
>
> **- "We are ghosts": Race, class and institutional prejudice**
> **The Runnymede Trust and Centre for Labour and Social Studies**

Insight Four: Rebuilding and redesigning: existing processes and approaches aren't equitable

Leaders experiencing marginalisation feel the system is not designed to support them. Whilst people can be upskilled, evidence collected showed the sentiment there will not be progression until systems are designed to include people experiencing marginalisation, regardless of how much capacity building is delivered.

Leaders of community organisations led by people experiencing marginalisation are facing additional pressure to support the development of the anti-racism movement in the sector. Alongside the increased demand on services, people experiencing marginalisation leading community organisations expressed deep levels of burnout, fatigue, exhaustion and reported feeling secondary trauma.

"This funding approach burns out good people and dissuades others. It conveys the message that seeking solutions to societal problems is only for the better resourced, the white and the middle classes."

- Shared Futures: Funders, Funding and the BME Third Sector
The Runnymede Trust

Summary of key insights from community businesses

In the section of the report, we explore the key insights gathered from the community organisations we spoke with:
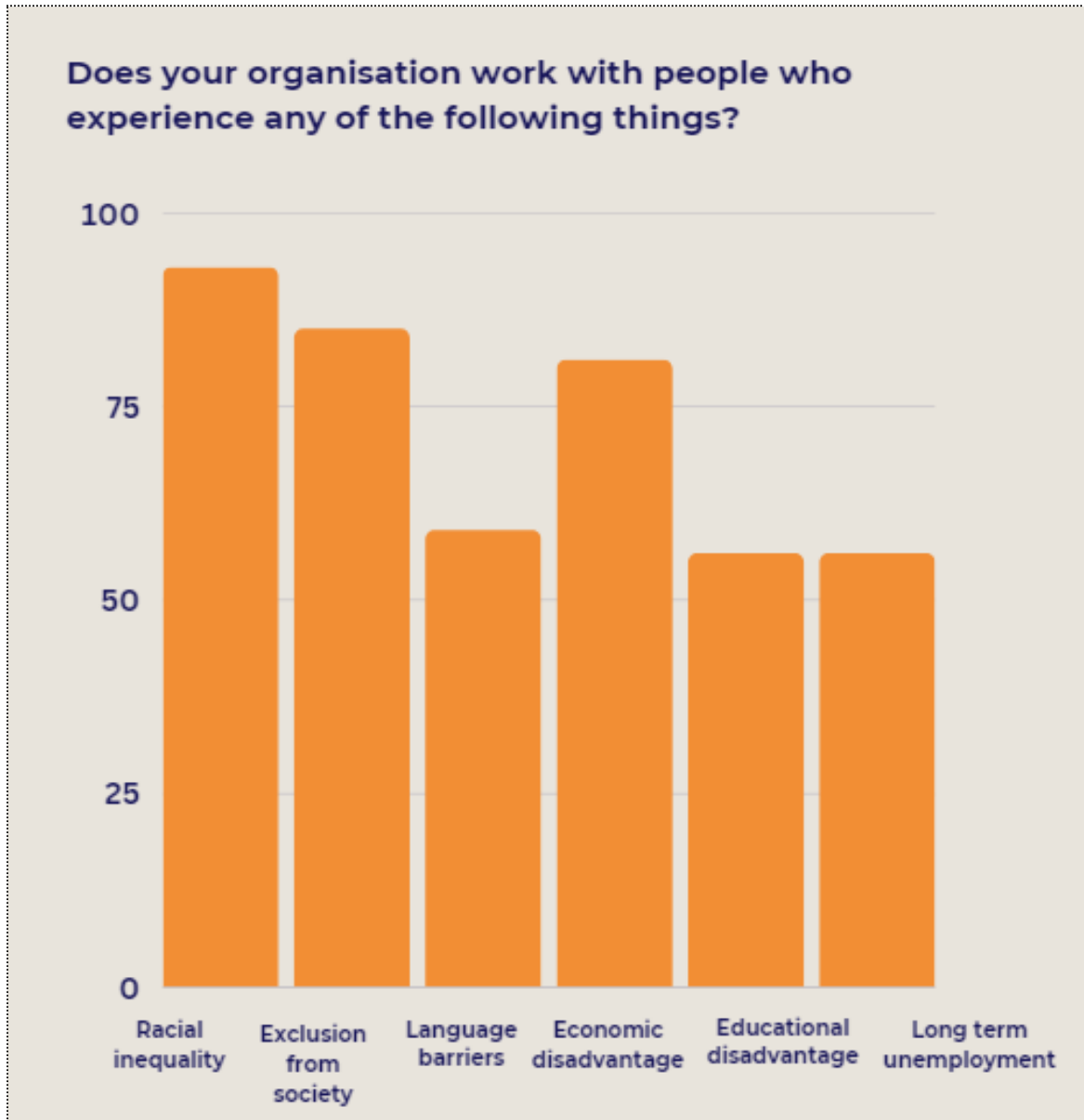
1. New capacity issues in a rapidly changing world

2. Community organisations are evolving to support each other

3. Funding is a "two-way street"

4. There's no excuse to not meet a community where it is

5. Current funding processes uphold barriers to entry

Prior to the interviews, community businesses interested in the research were asked to complete a pre-interview survey in order to determine their eligibility for the research. This survey asked respondents about their organisations, the nature of their work, if they had previously received funding from Power to Change, legal structure, location and various other details. Insights from the screening survey regarding the 27 community businesses who took part in the research interviews are outlined in the following pages.

Pre-interview survey insights from community businesses

Insight 1: does your organisation work with people who experience any of the following things?

Does your organisation work with people who experience any of the following things?

| Category	Value (approx.)
Racial inequality	~93
Exclusion from society	~85
Language barriers	~58
Economic disadvantage	~80
Educational disadvantage	~55
Long term unemployment	~55

- Whilst community organisations we spoke to had links to their local area, only 55% felt they could be defined by this link. Community organisations expressed that they were better defined by their link to a particular community, cause, faith group or characteristic.

- Community organisations also expressed some level of discomfort in quantifying who they worked with and the experiences of the people they work with.

- This was in part because much of their evidence for this response was anecdotal [data collection viewed as being invasive] and in part due to a sentiment of wanting people in their communities to be recognised as nuanced individuals.

Pre-interview survey insights from community businesses
Insight 2: has your organisation been awarded funding from Power to Change before?

Has your organisation been awarded funding from Power to Change?

Application awarded 7.4%

Application rejected 33.3%

Never applied 59.3%
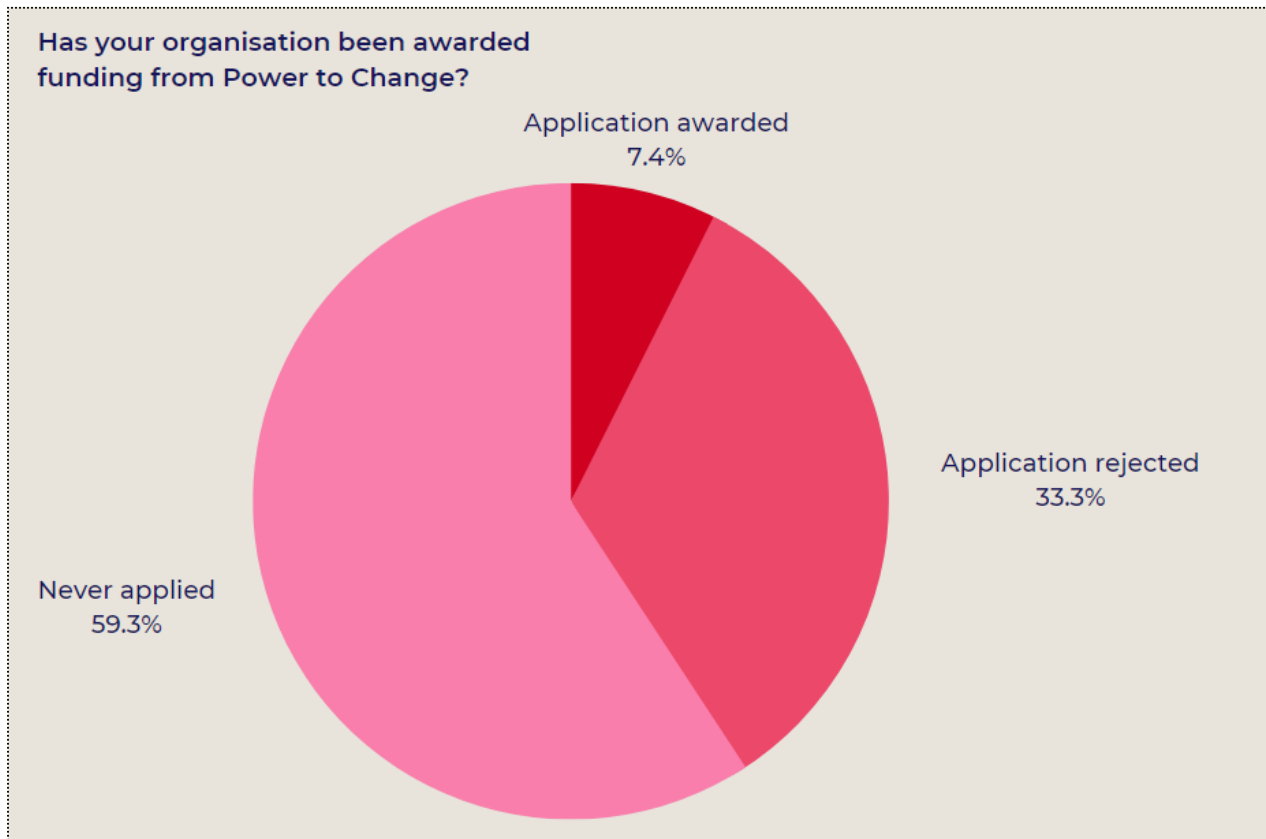
- Nearly 60% of the organisations we spoke to had not previously applied for funding from Power to Change. Many of those who had not previously applied were not aware of Power to Change

- 33% of organisations had previously applied but been unsuccessful

- Just over 7% had previously applied and been awarded.

Pre-interview survey insights from community businesses
Insight 3: what legal structure does your organisation have?

**What legal structure does your organisation have?**
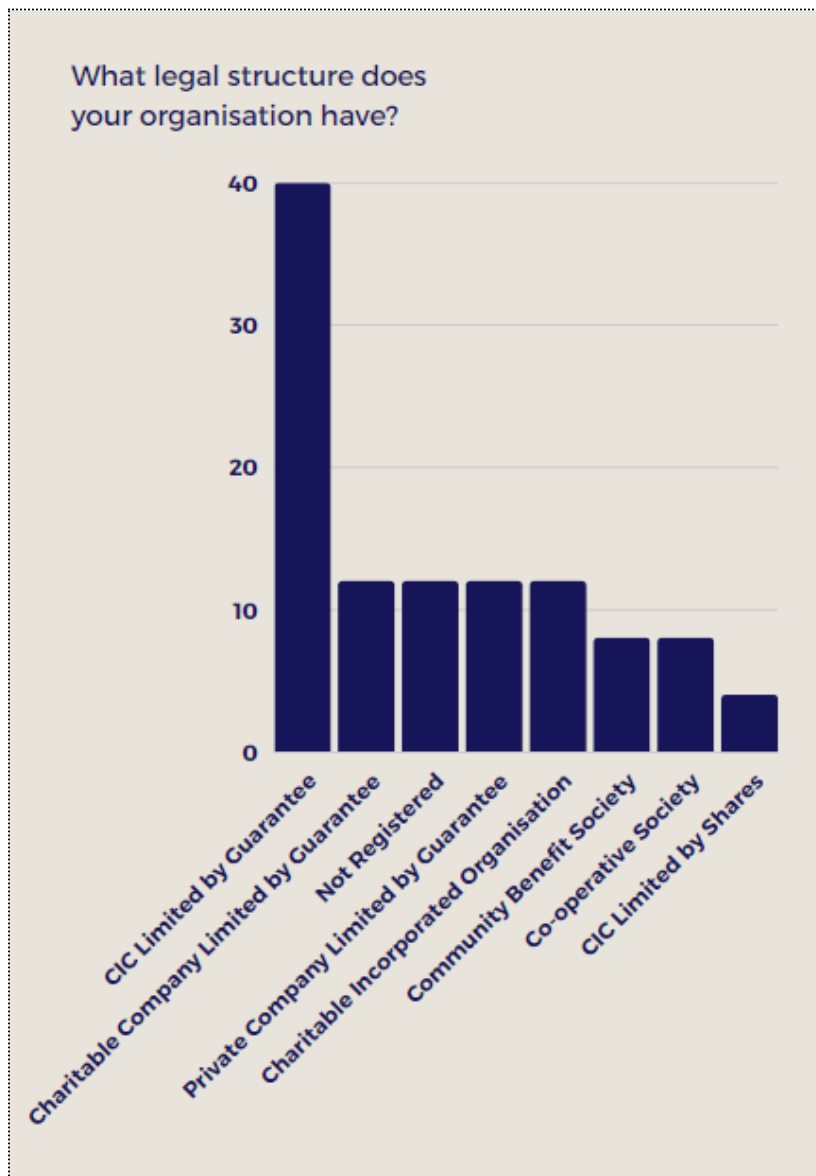
- 40% of organisations were community interest companies limited by guarantee

- Through the course of interviews, this emerged as the preferred legal structure due to its relative ease in setting up and comparatively manageable amount of administrative responsibilities

Pre-interview survey insights from community businesses
Insight 4: where is your community organisations' work primarily based?

Where is your community organisations work primarily based?
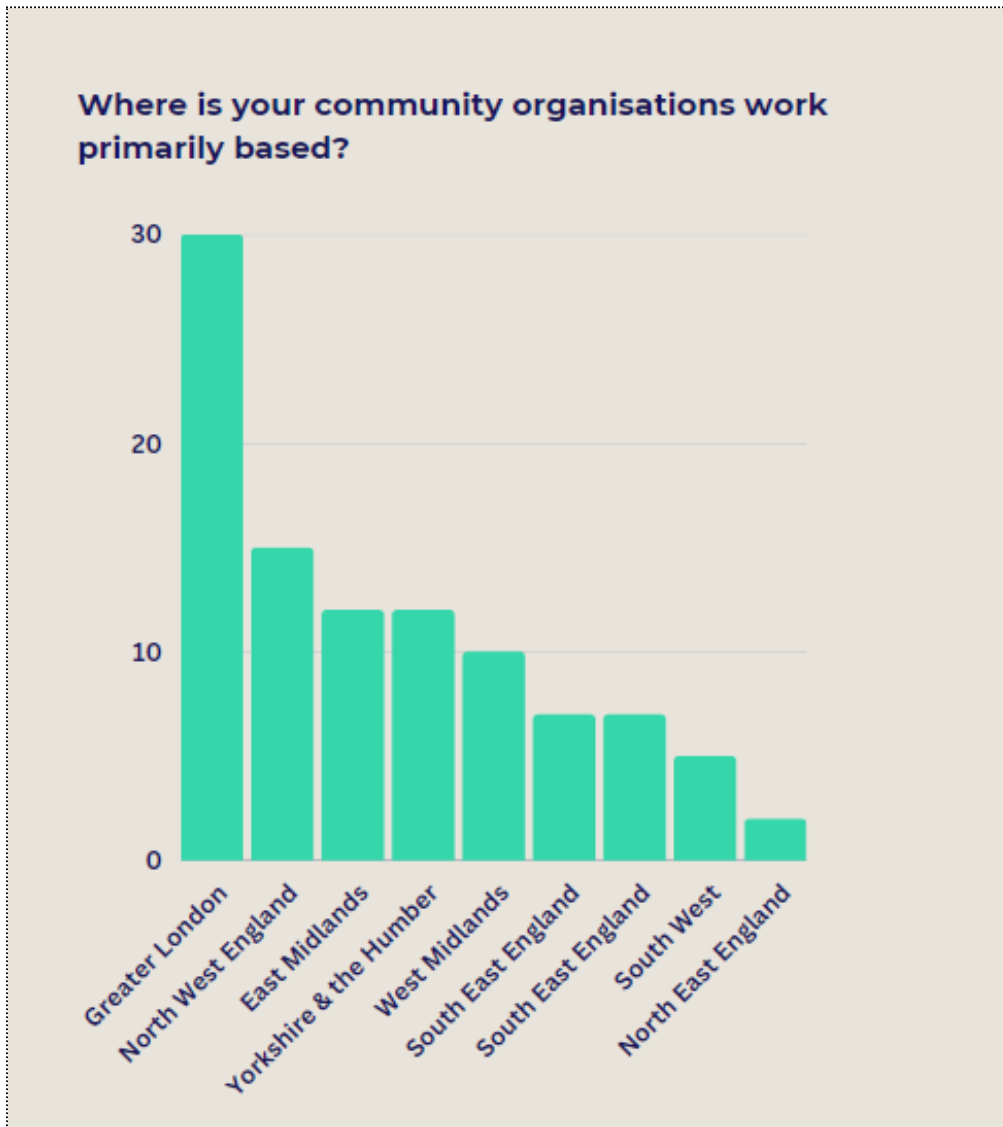
- 30% of the community organisations we spoke to were based in greater London.
- Most organisations tended to have their work concentrated in urban centres.

Insights from community businesses

Insight 1: new capacity issues in a rapidly changing world

Community businesses and organisations are no stranger to capacity issues, with burnout and limited resources in the sector being the subject of much research over the years. In 2021, research by The Runnymede Trust said that current funding models are especially detrimental to organisations run by those from racialised groups, "where their senior members of staff labour as multi-skilled, multi-talented, multi-purpose leaders, working from dawn till dusk".[3]

Our interviewees expressed that existing capacity issues around time and staffing are becoming increasingly difficult to manage. This is not helped by current funding systems due to a culture of dependence, competition and a wider "hustle culture" where those leading organisations are often juggling paid employment alongside running their organisation. Interviewees stated that this current model exploits people's passions, whilst forcing them into a project-based way of working that does not allow for flexibility nor long-term growth.

1.1. A stretched community — A climate of increasing workload, decreasing resources

> *"I've got this really great idea... I have to work this bulls**t job because I have to get this bit of money and to ensure that I can feed myself or I can clothe myself, which is a joke. Not a f***ing funny one. It's disgusting, is what it is."*
>
> - **Nikhwat Marawat, The Delicate Mind**

The cost-of-living crisis has pushed many into taking on extra work in order to survive. Research published by Royal London in autumn 2022 found that 5.2 million workers across the UK had taken up extra jobs in order to keep up with the cost-of-living crisis, with an additional 10 million planning to do the same.[4] Those running community organisations often set them up alongside other employment, and it is nearly impossible to get start-up costs for a new organisation. The

---

[3] The Runnymede Trust, *Shared Futures: Funders, Funding, and the BME Third Sector* (The Runnymede Trust, December 2021), p.9.
[4] Kate Ng, *Millions of Britons take second jobs to cope with soaring cost of living, report says* (The Independent, 27th September 2022).

community is stretched, often undertaking a day job to survive, and leaving individuals to do work for their organisations unpaid in evenings or weekends.

Spotlight: The Delicate Mind

Nikhwat Marawat is currently the sole director of The Delicate Mind. The organisation has no employees, and whilst he has volunteers, nobody works on organisational processes with him. Marawat told us that he was barely making minimum wage through funding at the early stages of his venture, and could only afford to run The Delicate Mind because he was living with his parents. Marawat stressed that those who had full-time jobs couldn't necessarily afford to work in this way.

Marawat also spoke of the dangers of "hustle culture", working an additional work day on top of a full time job, often meaning someone is working from 10am to 2 or 3am. This is often not acknowledged by funders in demanding application forms, or reporting structures, and reveals an apparent lack of understanding of the lifestyles that leaders of community organisations may have. The only remedy to this is funding, in Marawat's words: "One of the most important things that we need when we run organisations is time. And why... funding is really important."

Lack of funding, especially in the current financial climate is what leads people to work multiple jobs in order to sustain themselves whilst balancing running an organisation. Similarly, Fiona Berry at Hull Sisters has a full-time role alongside her work for the organisation, and still has to work a minimum of five to seven hours a week for Hull Sisters. Appropriate funding for core costs is lacking, as Nikhwat Marawat said: "If you give like one dude or one person, even just £12,000, and say, go and get yourself a part time employee, go and get yourself this person - that will make all the difference."

Nasim Qureshi at Inspired Neighbourhoods said the two main ongoing challenges for his organisation were skills and capacity, echoed by June Gomes from Community Enterprise Engine, whose organisation was left dormant for four years whilst working other jobs to sustain herself.

Many organisations are led by one unpaid person. For example, Vanessa Boachie from Inside Out Well-being told us that, "I'm the same person that is, you know, doing the workshops, I'm doing social media, I've got like 10 different hats that I'm wearing. So taking that time out to do an application, which I'm not sure whether or not it's going to, you know, be accepted. It does, again, feel quite tedious."

For Black Butterfly, all of the directors are volunteers, all working other jobs, including internationally. As a small, community-led organisation, it is able to be agile, responding to community needs and emergencies with speed. During the pandemic and since, they have become a vital resource for certain, so called, 'hard-to-reach' communities with which the organisation has built trust and provides a social service. Dawn Dublin used the example of needing to respond to a boat arriving on the shore before the police, and the inability to plan for when this may happen. Similarly, Imran Akram from The Bipolar Lift said that despite working with over 160 bipolar sufferers, they only have one full-time staff member funded by the Lottery, and desperately need another full-time salary.

There are also capacity issues regarding the training aspect of certain funds, something mentioned by both Made in Hackney and Brighton and Hove Black Anti-Racism Community Organisation (BARCO). There is a desire to undertake such training and professional development, and an understanding of their value, but a lack of time and resources to take it on. As Imran Akram from The Bipolar Lift highlighted, there is also a need for mentoring alongside funding to cover it.

> *"It really frustrates me that people often say there's loads of funding out there, but where is it?"*
>
> - **Shani Dhanda, Asian Woman Festival**

One example came from Jabez Lam from Hackney Chinese Community Services. Lam described the way they often spread themselves very thinly as an organisation in order to support the community across issues including, but not limited to, "housing advice, on immigration advice, or benefit rights, or anti-racism victim support - but all those things we do, but none of them are on a surface level - so have become 'jack of all trades' with low expertise on anything apart from our own community".

Another example came from Evie Muir from Peaks of Colour who, in the beginning, said she "had to be really strict with all these various opportunities that would come in, because I just simply didn't have time. I like not getting paid for it. And I didn't want it to become a job. And I still don't know if I do to an extent". Muir said she still needed to be paid herself, as well as having a volunteer coordinator and an accountant, both paid roles. When asked what made her feel excluded from funding

opportunities, Muir said that it was not being allowed to spend money on people's time or salaries, and that "this is the key thing… especially in the early stages".

Capacity issues extend to finding out about opportunities in the first place. Central hubs, such as 360 Giving, were described as "hard to use", whilst other require a membership which, in the words of Fiona Berry from Hull Sisters, "is annoying, because if you're looking for grants you kind of need the money - so why are you charging us?" Shani Dhanda from Asian Woman Festival was one of many who described looking for opportunities as a "full-time job" in itself.

The reliance on volunteers also poses capacity challenges for the organisations we spoke to. Bud Johnston from Brighton and Hove BARCO told us how sometimes they rely on volunteers to carry out some of the work, but volunteers don't stay, making it difficult to continue the work of the organisation. The only solution to this is core costs, which can employ people to undertake the work they currently rely on volunteers for. This is especially critical as, in the words of Johnston:, "As the organisation grows, the problems have". As the organisation becomes more known, they have more people wanting to volunteer, but they do not have the resources or capacity to train them, give them laptops or working space, or pay for their Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

This was also raised by Fiona Berry from Hull Sisters, seeing money spent on DBS checks as money that is then "funnelled away from the work that we're trying to do". Peaks of Colour currently has nine volunteers, but Evie Muir still must do most of the work herself. Mo Blue of Let's Keep Growing also spoke to the challenges of volunteers, as her community of volunteers are often on benefits. Whilst the organisation would prefer to create paid roles, they struggle to gain clarity from funders regarding who can be paid from their pot of funding and have found that funders often do not have a clear answer regarding remunerating those on other types of benefits.

Another impact of the cost-of-living crisis was described by Fiona Berry from Hull Sisters. They used to receive free food from a well-known charity to offer in a food bank. They were recently informed that they now have to pay £3,000 annually if they wish to continue receiving it. Hull Sisters helps 140-150 families a week, and now can't match that with local donations, meaning all these families will be left struggling. The burden remains on the community organisation to fill in the gaps of local government for little to no funding.

1.2. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on community businesses

The cost-of-living crisis is exacerbated by the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A few organisations we spoke to had received pandemic funding, but much of that had since disappeared. For example, Nicole Robinson-Edwards from Her Path to Purpose CIC said that around the pandemic, and just after, they found more funding pots for Black communities, but these have slowly stopped.

For others it was the general environment that made things difficult. Rossana Leal from the Refugee Buddy Project said how "Covid-19 also made our worlds really small. And even our echo chamber can be quite toxic", the challenge now being entering into a space that hasn't thought about the refugee and migrant crisis. Speaking about an event in 2022, Leal said: "Lockdown had really, really, really taken away a big world from us… it was the first time I felt that there was that I'd forgotten that there was a giant world out there that hadn't heard about refugee and migrant rights". The social impacts are not helped by the economic reality of the pandemic, as Frances Humber from Made in Hackney described the impact of the "Covid years followed by a recession year".

> *"We're going into a really, really horrible political climate, in terms of racial justice, and refugee and migrant rights. And we're going to need to be supported 100% by organisations that can fund or give guidance, or support organisations like ours, because it's going to get more and our work is going to get more and more difficult… We need funders to understand that we are going to need all the help. So much more help in the coming years, because it's not going to get more progressive."*
>
> **- Rossana Leal, Refugee Buddy Project**

Lizzie Jordan from Think2Speak spoke of a high success rate before the pandemic, but due to the impact of Covid they had to pivot their work and offer, and now their numbers don't look great to funders post-Covid. In fact, a lot of organisations have popped up during Covid around mental health and are all speaking to the same issues but applying for the same funding, making it seem that everyone is working in isolation.

Fiona Berry from Hull Sisters spoke about the physical impact of the pandemic, as her organisation was evicted from their premises during the pandemic, and received no support from Hull Council. They had to approach the Women's Equality Party for support in lobbying the council, who eventually gave them a property which is "not

fit for our needs in the slightest... it had been unoccupied for at least 10 to 15 years, so maintenance issues galore."

Indeed, post-pandemic politics has not helped these situations. Further to Berry's issues was the change in local leadership, "which has changed from Labour to Lib Dem, we hoped that that would make a difference — there is no women's strategy. There is no strategy for BAME people despite Hull being a city of sanctuary. Our interactions with the council have been arduous, challenging. In some interactions, it's been quite racist and sexist".

1.3. Inadequate funding amounts are creating a culture of dependence

Many interviewees spoke about the "culture of dependence" on funders created by the cycle of applying for "little and often". It was perceived that the amount of money available from funders has gone down since the pandemic.

Dawn Dublin from Black Butterfly likened the reliance on small funds to Oliver Twist: "Please sir, can I have some more?" describing a drip-feeding process from funders higher up the funding chain. Dublin went on to express: "We don't want to be funding dependent and we don't want to do the 'jazz hands' to make funders see us over another organisation. Funders should be helping us to be more self-reliant, to help build community wealth and improve wellbeing. If we could change anything about the funding system, it would be for funders (in a non-extractive manner) to help us set up our own locally held, community development funds, so that we can redistribute money more responsively and equitably."

What was especially concerning was that some interviewees expressed that they are too afraid to raise their issues with these funders as they do not want to "bite the hand that feeds them". They are dependent on funders and support organisations for their very existence, and as there are currently little to no spaces for constructive feedback and discussion, they remain silent, working in processes that are not built for them.

1.4. Funding processes and structures reinforce a culture of competition

Current funding structures are framed as a competition, not as a space for potential collaboration which could offer potential for more impact.

> *"Question yourselves - why is funding structured this way? You might be dealing with the symptoms rather than the problem. The problem doesn't go away and needs something innovative."*
>
> - **Reina Yaidoo, Bassajamba CIC**

Many interviewees commented on the culture of competition. For example, Fiona Berry from Hull Sisters said: "Because all of us are in exactly the same boat. We're all fighting over the pennies and the pounds that we can get access to, particularly in the situation that we're in now. Because obviously, it's winter, energy bills through the roof. So yeah, lots, lots of us are all in the same boat." For Nicole Robinson-Edwards from Her Path to Purpose, this manifested in having to look into multiple streams of income due to the inability to rely on grants as a result of the competition between marginalised groups for targeted funding.

This sense of competition was the key deciding factor for Sandra Salazar D'eca from GoGrowWithLove: "I find the whole process daunting... it feels like everyone is going for it", while Rossana Leal from Refugee Buddy Project described it as "this horrible competition". Another organisation described this as a sense of "everyone fighting for the same pot", and an unsustainable system.

1.5. Rigidity of funding is a blocker to building sustainable community businesses

> *"Please don't fund the short term. It has to be sustainable and longer term. Because when you can't employ staff, it has a rubbish impact. Yeah. You're ready to leave the job as soon as you start. Ah, you know, it's a lot of waste of money. Yeah. And yeah, so that's very, very important."*
>
> - **Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods**

Community businesses expressed a sentiment that the majority of funds offered project-based funding, which is neither long-term nor covers core costs. Akram from The Bipolar Lift said that whilst "a few hundred pounds helps, often what is on offer, it does not make much of a difference. In order for a project to be viable, organisations require tens of thousands of pounds."

The rigidity of project funding often means that organisations need to break up the work they do and sell it to different funders in different ways. Frances Humber from Made in Hackney spoke of the need to fund a whole strategy through larger, multi-year, flexible funding, much like investing in a business. Daina Anderson Mpunzi from Open Lens Media said that there was "no long-term funding", and that 12 months of funding would never be enough time to truly see if a project was going to work.

Nicole Robinson-Edwards from Her Path to Purpose CIC also spoke of the limitations of the "12 month grant", this time discussing how you are always looking for the next grant before the first has even finished. For organisations like this, it appears that funders do not realise what it costs to live today, let alone know how to work sustainably as an organisation if you are banking on sporadic funding. Indeed, as Reina Yaidoo of Bassajamba CIC said, you cannot create structural change if you are working on a project-based focus.

> *"So many organisations are closing down because they can't cover the rest of the wages."*
>
> **-   Anonymous**

This rigidity of funding also doesn't leave space to respond and adapt to the needs of a community. Sonia Tyrna spoke of the wish to not need a full plan before applying for funding, as "sometimes you have to wait for the conversations and the work to start to make the change".

1.6. Funding criteria are in desperate need of reflecting the intersectionality of people and communities served by community businesses

There has been a notable pivot in funding approaches following the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement during the pandemic. However, there was a looming sense of dread for many community organisations that we interviewed that ring fenced funding for racialised or other marginalised groups would shrink and disappear once public focus moved elsewhere, and that it could often unintentionally create additional barriers. A lack of intersectional understanding, as well as rigid criteria, upheld barriers to community businesses accessing funding and support.

Organisations described being ineligible for funding opportunities when their work focused on a specific racial group as opposed to everyone. Inside Out Well-being was

rejected from a fund for "community-based projects'' for not being "diverse enough" and "too focused on a particular area". Vanessa Boachie, the founder told us: "In the feedback, they said that they were looking for projects that would be inclusive to all members of the community. So I think everyone, as opposed to people from racialised communities."

The acronym BAME does not reflect 10.9 million people; funders lacked knowledge of people from different minoritised ethnicities as well intersecting identities, such as those with mental health conditions and disabilities. Brighton and Hove BARCO described being declined funding for focusing on a specific ethnic group and not all the boxes of "BAME".

Spotlight: Hackney Chinese Community Services

Jabez Lam from Hackney Chinese Community Services described how the organisation has pivoted from working with only the Chinese community, to including the whole of the East and South-East Asian (ESEA) community. However, since this change, Lam said that "we found ourselves spending more time explaining what is the community, more than what is our work".

Lam told us that in his experience, more than 90% of public funding for the ESEA community goes solely to the Chinese community exclusively. Whilst funders ask about the population of ESEA people in the UK, they are unable to even quantify this as they are not reflected in the census, which results in further challenges in communicating and quantifying beneficiaries. As a result, Lam felt that "there is a general misperception of the community – or they are completely ignored, or the misperception is 'they're doing okay' or the perception that they are "academically, socio-economically better off".

Lam also told us about a time in 2019 where a funding officer from a regional authority asked him: "Excuse my ignorance, but what is East and South East Asian?", he told us that this was a very good demonstration from someone from "supposedly a progressive authority... at least he is honest enough to ask that question, how many pretend they know and just to be polite?" He felt that funders must go beyond what is readily publicly available (e.g. in census data) to develop a nuanced and deeper understanding of different minoritised groups.

Lam suggested a solution as funders doing "a lot of research, a lot of academic research... I think that is part of the reason why we consciously have adopted the position to transition from Chinese to the ESEA community as one identity, as we

start to realise and learn from the experience of Black community. When you talk about the Black community you don't distinguish whether they come from Africa or Caribbean, we need to do the same for the Asian community."

Chronically Brown, an organisation that works with Disabled South Asians, expressed that funders often don't understand the intersection of why they only work with Disabled South Asians, and the specific challenges experienced by this community. They were rejected in the past for funding because they wanted them to work with all "BAME" people, instead of the specific demographic they do work with.

The Bipolar Lift also described their challenges in communicating with funders as a result of a general public misunderstanding of bipolar disorder; "If I was an organisation just called the mental health charity, they'll be throwing money at them. But there is a pressure from funders to fit their language and descriptors of a community, instead of understanding the nuance and need identified from within the community itself".

June Gomes from the Community Enterprise Engine also gave an interesting example of tribal communities within Sudan; when two Sudanese organisations applied for funding, they found that it was often assumed that they were doing the same work. However, due to the tribal nature of Sudanese society in the UK, they are all different community groups, doing different work.

Community organisations also expressed that funding for certain types of services were more readily available than others for different racialised groups. Shani Dhanda from the Asian Woman Festival told us how they struggled to find funding opportunities for South Asian groups, especially women, that weren't focused on domestic violence. They expressed this to be a huge barrier as firstly, it limits resources for organisations tackling people experiencing other issues and secondly, it pigeon holes certain ethnic groups into service provision in a specific area due to lack of funding elsewhere. Yasin Bojang from Home Girls Unite said that when she first started applying for funding it was difficult to find funders who understood who they supported, they didn't have the space due to word limits to explain who their niche group was. The organisation now only works with funders who they don't need to explain their audience to.

Insights from community businesses
Insight 2: community organisations are evolving to support each other
In the face of these challenges, organisations are being forced into evolving to support one another, and fill in the gaps that funders and governments alike are leaving for them.

2.1. Communication and knowledge-exchange
A recurring theme was the trust that communities had within themselves to receive recommendations and information on funding and support opportunities. Hillna Fontaine from Mabadiliko CIC told us that she relied on social media such as WhatsApp groups to find out about opportunities, where the community has built "a movement to inform each other about what's going on". Many organisations told us that "word of mouth" was the most common way they found out about organisations, including one organisation that described these networks as "people looking after each other". Other notable examples were The Other Box, a closed, community-run Facebook group where people share jobs and support opportunities, which currently has 4,222 members.

Keshwala told us that she had set up her own community support group on WhatsApp for opportunity sharing, "So there's not a scarcity of like, information... And it's not something that you need to keep hush hush, because then you won't be able to go up. It's like, no, we can all kind of access and utilise these resources that are hopefully designed with us in mind." She described the importance of sharing knowledge, she also runs "chit-chats" for those in the community; "Like if you know what stops you from going for something, or if you know what doesn't really attract you or deters you, then you can also do that when you have power to extend it as well". There was a commonly expressed feeling that if an opportunity has been recommended by someone within the community, it is trustworthy and that they are more likely to be successful in accessing support.

2.2. Partnerships

"What we've realised is actually partnerships work, so bringing different people together."

- **June Gomes, Community Enterprise Engine**

Also stemming from a perceived lack of trust in community organisations, many feel pressured to partner in order to access funds or support. Brighton and Hove BARCO worked with Brighton Fringe Festival in order to access bid-writing support, whereas for HomeGirls Unite, partnership feels like the "best way forward".

Organisations are often not eligible for support due to their financial status or banking status, which is further discussed in insight three below. Community groups and some funders have created their own partnership systems in order to support one another to access funding. Dawn Dublin from Black Butterfly remembered an application process during the Covid pandemic that acknowledged that bank accounts were harder for newer organisations to set up. In that instance, applicants were given the option to piggyback on a local charity, which could hold funds for them: "They took in the information that we (the attendees) had given in some of the online meetings... they very quickly pivoted to ensure that funding could get to smaller organisations which they could see were doing something. That for me was like, wow... you've heard us, understood and changed, and that barrier is now gone."

Others who often work in partnership were Let's Keep Growing and Inspired Neighbourhoods, creating new collaborations to go for joint funding. This was echoed by June Gomes from Community Enterprise Engine, who saw the potential in partnerships beyond funding, bringing people, businesses and ideas together. The Delicate Mind have had two successful funding bids so far, one being a fund delivered through their city council, and the other being grant funding through a foundation. Nikhwat Marawat told us that he had partnered with the council in the former, and a figurehead organisation in the latter, which enabled him to receive these funds.

Another example came from Home Girls Unite, who partnered with the Mayor's Office, the main attraction being a partnership and the prospect of growing together. The relationship has continued for some time, beginning with a programme they ran in 2017 on upskilling people in social action, and now have quarterly events on different things businesses require. The difficulty in forging these partnerships, in Yasin Bojang's opinion, is finding people who understand their work

and are aligned. They are looking for more grants, but see partnerships, such as the example above, as preferable to them.

Corporate partnerships were also raised by some of the interviewees. The relationship between The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network CIC (TERN) and a corporate sponsor was shared as an example of partnership working; this relationship was forged through a key contact at the organisation, who then moved to another organisation, and instigated a similar relationship with TERN there.

This is not always an easy decision, however. Neelam Keshwala told us that DON'T SLEEP ON US needs multiple strands of income due to the lack of grants available to them, such as brand sponsorship, government funding, private funding, and investor funding, to name the ones she listed alone. However, brand funding to her is indiscreet, and there is a real need to align with the brand. Keshwala told us how she feels it is tricky to tread the line of not selling out or selling off; "nobody would say or think that but in its purest form, to me, it's purely designed to".

This isn't always as benevolent as two organisations partnering to achieve something together by pooling resources. Let's Keep Growing described a recent attempt to apply for funding with a grant funder to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. However, the feedback informed them "There had to be an element of professionalism within it… so that made it difficult". The local artists they were working with didn't count, despite Mo Blue informing us these individuals were hugely popular in the local community, and instead was forced to find a "professional somebody to support the application". They were ultimately unsuccessful in this application.

Another example came from Dawn Dublin from Black Butterfly, whose organisation was asked by the local authority to partner with an out-of-town organisation in order to apply for a share of a larger pot of funding. The larger organisation was deemed by the local authority to have the capacity to access the funds and deliver, but they lacked Black Butterfly's local networks, community-centred projects or reach. However, once Black Butterfly had secured the funds, they were sidelined from ongoing conversations between the local authority and the organisation. In the words of Dawn Dublin: "They needed us, and yet excluded us."

Dublin also spoke of the response by funders to the 2020 global racial reckoning and Black Lives Matter campaigns, when various organisations were seeking to partner with us, following knee-jerk funding pots for racialised groups: "we'd never felt so popular, but also somewhat dirty because we were being used" to access money. Those people knew how to access the money, but needed an organisation like ours for the diversity tick-box — an issue created by funders, but never properly followed up. We turned down those 'opportunities', but out of all the funds for racialised

people that came into our area, only a very small percentage actually went to Black-led organisations and social enterprises.

Hillna Fontaine from Mabadiliko CIC also told us about a time they received a tender through the NHS. The NHS required them to use an NHS email address, not only did this take "ages to set up", but Fontaine told us how she tried to tell the NHS that the community would be alienated by the email address due to the distrust of the service within the community.

Fontaine said it made Mabadiliko appear as if they were "jumping into bed with" the NHS, an institution the community her organisation serves does not trust. Another example came from an offer they received to train White counsellors "culturally" in order that they could replace Black counsellors, an offer Fontaine had to reject.

Insights from community businesses
Insight 3: Funding is a "two way street"

A theme that emerged from our interviews was the extent to which community organisations also want to know if funders are right for them. When asked how they decided whether the opportunity was right for them or their organisation, 15 out of the 27 organisations interviewed said that connecting to the values of the funder was critical.

3.1. The funder has to fit the organisation

> *"I don't think that organisations that are institutions that are rooted in even larger archaic structures, such as the government or whatever, will need to really be thinking about this, because they're like, we don't even want to be accessing them, we kind of just want to be accessing the ones that we can see their bank statements... it's gonna be easier for us... And then fund stuff that's already been getting funded. Because we can see that they're doing really well with it."*
>
> **- Neelam Keshwala, DON'T SLEEP ON US**

There is no single answer to the type of funder that organisations in the community prefer when looking for support, but there were near-unanimous questions that they asked.

The most common concern was matching the priorities, objectives and values of the funder to their own work. Questions like: Is it intersectional? What do they stand for? Are they clearly set out to racialised communities? Or, are their values in any way harming the community they are trying to serve? For some it is more subtle, through language used, but for others, it can be determined by looking at the previous work funded, and the demographics of previous recipients of support.

For Evie Muir from Peaks of Colour, it was absolutely vital that the funder fit a decolonial model. Muir acknowledged, however, that "there isn't a guidebook on what that is", so "if it doesn't sit right with me, I'm not gonna go for it". When asked how she decided whether the opportunity was right for her or her organisation she said, "a mix between outcome and effort – and integrity of the organisation." One thing was clear, the possibility for a good match almost always begins with acknowledging groups and using the correct language.

"If I saw a page that said this is for community groups that are working with refugee and migrant rights, or are led by the refugee and migrant labour movement. If I saw that, and it was specific to us, I would jump at that. Yeah, I would jump at that. And I'd feel recognised, at least."

- **Rossana Leal, Refugee Buddy Project**

As Jabez Lam from Hackney Chinese Community Services also told us, there is often not enough interest in the background of the community. Instead, there is a focus on the problem and how you as a community organisation will address the needs.

3.2. Transparency

"I'd like your money but I don't really agree with what you're doing for the world."

- **Anonymous**

Organisations will often invest time and energy into researching the origin of money offered by a funder. This can be as clear-cut as not being traced back to slavery, as

mentioned by Evie Muir from Peaks of Colour, but for others it is more tied in with the reputation of the funder and their values, mission and community focus. One organisation, who wished to remain anonymous, specifically mentioned not wanting to take money from supermarket and high street retail banks. Bud Johnston from Brighton and Hove BARCO told us about the "internal ethos" of the organisation and how they prioritise having control over funding that comes from taxpayer money so that they can put it back into the community.

Transparency extends from where the money came from, to the format of the application process. Simin Wadiwala from Out of Town Housing Co-operative described the need for transparency around how much money is available, and how many applications can be chosen. The search for transparency also relates to the very workings of the funder.

Dawn Dublin from Black Butterfly, said that she would like "really to know how they [funders] changed within their organisation" in response to social movements and racial disparities, beyond simply ring-fencing certain funding pots, and actually challenging their own organisational behaviour and internal culture.

There was a sense of dread amongst community organisations interviewed that funders are working with racialised communities now that there is a "hype", but that holes will be left in the funding and support landscape once "they hype dies down." Furthermore, funders often ringfence funding around themes or "topic of the month". In reality, these don't always reflect the community or support truly innovative work. In fact, communities notice this timing, and some interviewees noted that funding around Black History Month or other months reads as tone-deaf, as the reality is that these issues are all year around.

3.3. Makeup of funding organisation

"At the moment it's very White, older people, and in some circumstances they're not really connected to people's lived experience."

- **Fiona Berry, Hull Sisters**

Another key aspect of transparency and fit was the importance of the makeup of the organisation offering support. Almost half the organisations we spoke to mentioned the importance of seeing diversity in the selection panels and in the leadership of funding and support organisations.

Specific groups mentioned were Black and Brown individuals, as well as women. An all-white funding or support organisation is perceived as exclusionary, and for Nicole Robinson-Edwards from Her Path to Purpose, they look very different to the communities they want to support and it "doesn't sit right with me". The community needs to be part of making strategic decisions too, in order to support funders to have the understanding they need to make well-informed decisions. White-led organisations were perceived as not having the knowledge of the work that community organisations do, and lacking lived experience.

> *"And I think generally across the board for grassroots community organisations, there is this dilemma of integrity, of whether we accept money from white-led funders or not, and how much energy we have to figure out if they're safe and if we can trust them or not."*
>
> - **Evie Muir, Peaks of Colour**

Lizzie Jordan from Think2Speak told us that a certain funder had turned them down due to being "too LGBT", leading to a battle of conscience – should they apply? Is this right for them? Some community organisations felt that some funders were still too conservative, with the board's approach to funding revealing this, hence the need for some community groups to dilute their work in an application, or "tone themselves down".

Think2Speak were put into a position where they had to "erase their identities". In order to access the funding, they reframed their work as being for children and families as opposed to LGBT causes. This problem is echoed by community organisations working with the Traveller community, who felt unable to speak about it due to the risk of losing funding.

Insights from community businesses
Insight 4: There's no excuse to not meet a community where it is

Whether it's the size of their office or the number in their bank account, the way they speak or the words they use, there are countless things that make community organisations feel like they operate at a different level of society. These organisations have spent decades trying to reach up to funders, yet our interviewees raised one thing almost unanimously – a desire for funders to meet them where they are.

A lack of human contact with decision makers in funding and support organisations poses a barrier to many organisations, and makes others feel excluded. Once organisations feel connected to a funder enough to apply, many realise they are in fact ineligible.

Company registration, bank registration, turnover and disclosing addresses are all factors that further restrict the ability of many organisations working in the community to access funding. Many spoke about "track records", and what counts as evidence of an organisation's work. In terms of impact measurement, community organisations expressed feeling "distrusted", and pressure to report their impact and work in ways that "fit the funder".

4.1. Finding out about funding

> *"Just because I'm a member of a community and I care about it, I need to develop a relationship with people. I can't just assume because I'm part of a space, that people are gonna come towards me. I have to show up. I have to show face and I have to be present... that's how you build trust."*
>
> - **Nikhwat Marawat, The Delicate Mind**

Human contact was the most commented on aspect of finding out about funding and feeling confident enough to apply for it as a community organisation. For example, Sandra Salazar D'eca from GoGrowWithLove said that human contact was the "main barrier" in applying for funding. She expressed the importance of talking through your application with a person, and how, since being set up in the pandemic, she has only been in touch with "a human" when doing a funding application once.

Whilst some spoke of the funds that were "by invitation only", many had never had a funder approach them, and one organisation didn't even know funders could reach out to applicants at all, and was stunned into a confused silence when our interviewer mentioned it. Nasim Qureshi from Inspired Neighbourhoods made the point that not only does it aid in relationship- or rapport-building, but that it is a great time-saver also: "Either you send them an email and make an appointment, or you give them a ring and have a quick chat. I think that cuts out a lot of wasted time."

The value of names was also evident. Frances Humber from Made in Hackney commented that a simple name at the end of a funder's email response was useful: "I just want to be treated like someone doing my job on the other end." Similarly, Farrah Rainfly from Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society said that she felt "instantly included" when an email asking for help or support is responded to by "a real person to speak to". She spoke of her "favourite funder", who used to have fund managers who got to know the community. However, recently their fund manager left the fund, and now said the funder has removed "all community visits". This human contact humanises both sides of the funding process, creating a conversation that feels more like people trying to work out what is possible, as opposed to re-enforcing the power imbalance.

4.2. Eligibility criteria - company registration

"We are communities, not corporate."

-   **Neelam Keshwala, DON'T SLEEP ON US**

The eligibility criteria is another key example of communities not being met by many funders as they are. A frequently cited hurdle was company registration. It was universally acknowledged by interviewees that community interest companies (CICs) struggled to be accepted by other funders. In the words of Nasim Qureshi from Inspired Neighbourhoods; "people just prefer charities and not Community Interest Company, which we are. That puts us out of quite a lot of time."

Four other organisations said that they were not accepted as a CIC for the majority of funding pots. Neelam Keshwala from DON'T SLEEP ON US noted that even when applying for funding for which CICs are qualifiable, she wasn't eligible without two company directors, a responsibility nobody in the community wanted. Furthermore, Keshwala noted that she didn't know that for some funds, you need a values

document, as well as a structure and Companies House registration. Not knowing all this initially caused a sense of fear, stopping her from applying for things.

Imran Akram from The Bipolar Lift commented that he has to go "out of [his] way" to Google which organisations *do* fund CICs, saying it "would be much easier and accommodating if I was a charity, because I'm a CIC there are a lot of barriers I need to overcome – it's quite hostile at the moment". The Bipolar Lift does not even qualify for tax relief as a result.

Shani Dhanda from Asian Woman Festival posed a further challenge around whether it was worthwhile to incorporate at all. Asian Woman Festival became a CIC but Dhanda found it "didn't make a difference" as they received just as little funding as when they were unregistered. This resulted in a sentiment of questioning if it was worthwhile to register at all if CICs still weren't accepted by many funders.

For many, despite opening more doors to funding, becoming a charity is not appealing. Imran Akram went on to say: "And to be honest with you, I mean, I liked the setup that we've got with the CIC. And I don't want to become a charity, I don't want a board of directors and trustees and all sorts of stuff. I don't want that headache, I want the flexibility to be able to do what we need to do in terms of providing the right service for our clients. So I think that's what puts me off." For others, even becoming a CIC is not an easy decision. Yasin Bojang from HomeGirls Unite spent "months" trying to understand if becoming a CIC was right for them, and even once deciding to do so, her co-founder had to do a lot of this work as she understood the process better. Similarly, Nikhwat Marawat from The Delicate Mind said that he had to become a CIC in order to accept donations despite being initially against it: "there's no level of fluidity", you have to fit in with their model of operation.

It is not just the CIC structure that excludes many. Black Butterfly was excluded from some funds by being a company limited by guarantee, whilst Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society was ineligible for others by being a community benefit society (CBS). Dawn Dublin stated that the governance structure of the organisation meant it was susceptible to judgements by funders, based on 'how they look', whether, or not, they 'look good enough'. Dublin shared: "We chose specifically not to become a charity and we needed to set up fast during the Covid pandemic, so a company limited by guarantee was the right fit. However, we work in solidarity, cooperatively, and though we wanted our governance to reflect this, we found it difficult to get the support required to change our company documents accordingly. As a result, the organisation faced barriers to funding "because we didn't (and still don't) look like a conventional charitable organisation" - as defined by funders.

Dawn Dublin stated that the governance structure of Black Butterfly meant they were susceptible to judgements based on "what we look like, whether or not we look 'good enough', who's involved". Dublin wanted to become more of a co-operative, wanted their governance to show that they are based in the co-operative mentality, but couldn't make this work in the Companies House model. As a result, Black Butterfly was "blocked" from funding, "because we don't look like a conventional charitable organisation".

With all these bureaucratic "must be's" and "must haves", it is unsurprising that many continue to grapple with the concept of being a "charity". Neelam Keshwala from DON'T SLEEP ON US said that if she were to start the process again, "it wouldn't have a charitable lens. It would be a business that operates as a business and that does good. It might be a B-corp…we exist in a capitalist society, we might as well use that." She has since deregistered as a CIC, and has lost even more funding as a result. Yet she made it clear that she would only re-establish with an accountant to do accounts every month, as she felt she wasn't built for the admin herself.

The reliance on company registration status for qualification excludes non-traditional structures or organising. A key example was Out of Town Housing Co-operative. Simin Wadiwala said the very nature of the organisational structure "can make it quite hard to access support knowing that you will have to go to an expert and explain everything". There are currently only two banks in the country that will consider housing co-ops, Triodos Bank and Ecology Building Society. As Wadiwala said: "On our own… it's really hard to work out if you're eligible or not, and what we could sensibly use it on, what the funders want".

For others, their status depends on a registered and fixed address, which many organisations do not have, but for different reasons. Hull Sisters only has a two-year lease from council so can't plan ahead or apply for long-term funding, whereas Let's Keep Growing began their organisation working on a project to improve a local alleyway. As Mo Blue said: "We were working in the alleyway, we didn't have an address", so it was impossible to apply for funding.

> *"It was mind blowing … the legal side of everything, the responsibility of everything."*
>
> **- Mo Blue, Let's Keep Growing**
>
> -

4.3. Eligibility criteria - finances

Another aspect of the eligibility criteria which excluded many of the organisations we interviewed were financial requirements, namely bank accounts and turnovers.

Dawn Dublin noted that even more recently Black Butterfly had applied for local funds of £5,000 to support a successful high-street regeneration/community kitchen project, but that funds were withheld until their accounts at Companies House were filed. As a result, staff were unable to run their mutual aid / organic food programme for several months. Dublin said: "I understand at a national level that a funder might question the late filing, but not at a local level, where you should be able to see the work that we do. Shouldn't they at least have offered options, like holding funds, or direct payments to local farm suppliers, rent, etc?"

Another theme that arose was the struggle to set up a bank account in the first place, both Black Butterfly and DON'T SLEEP ON US commented on how this was especially challenging as an organisation set up during the pandemic, where banks faced a massive backlog.

Setting up a bank account is not a simple task for many community organisations. Jabez Lam from Hackney Chinese Community Services relies on accounting volunteers from within the community, whereas Dawn Dublin from Black Butterfly is still searching for an accountant who faces the marginalisation that the organisation tries to tackle. Brighton and Hove BARCO had several attempts at opening a bank account before being successful. Evie Muir from Peaks of Colour still has no bank account, as it is waiting to find an ethical one. Muir said: "We've proven that we don't need to be a charity, have a bank account... and, you know, take money from white funders that are top down and colonial. You know, we don't need to follow the status quo in order to exist", and yet is still restricted from funding when the "only route posed to you is to follow the status quo". Furthermore, both registering as a company and with a bank account is something people have to take responsibility for, often having to make their home address public. This places a pressure on the community, and for an organisation like Let's Keep Growing, "nobody else in the group feels able to do that, it has to come back to the one person", which is Mo Blue in this instance.

> *"They say you can only go for 25% of your income or you need to have an income threshold of £500,000 or something to apply for certain funds."*
>
> - **Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods**

Another frequently raised aspect of financial eligibility barriers was turnovers, and whilst sometimes this was simply not making enough money in a year, for others this was more complex.

Spotlight: The Bipolar Lift

The Bipolar Lift's turnover seems different depending on where you are in the financial year, and can often give an inaccurate indication of turnover. For The Bipolar Lift specifically, if Imran Akram applied for a fund in December, and the funder checked the accounts, they would only see a turnover of £40,000. However, in reality, The Bipolar Lift has turned over double this, but that won't be clear until February accounts are submitted.

Another funder, for example, requires a CIC to turnover over £100,000 a year, but The Bipolar Lift is "hovering" just under. Akram doesn't want to push himself to get a higher turnover, instead, he says, he wants to push himself to serve his community more.

For Made in Hackney, a mid-scale charity turning over £600,000 to £700,000 per year, both small and large funders overlook their size. This has forced them to continue to apply for grants of £10,000 to £20,000 increments, which is "exhausting".

For Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society, Farrah Rainfly said the one thing that made her feel excluded was being required to have "xx amount" of turnover. Another organisation raised a different issue; they recently received some larger funding amounts, which made the organisation look bigger than it is in reality, excluding them from funding they really could have done with.

Finance in general is alienating for many, especially those without a background in this field. Isobelle Ford from The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network CIC (TERN) was once asked by a funder to measure 'portfolio at risk' and wasn't sure how to show this. Another time she was asked why TERN had changed their accounting period and she didn't feel clear on an answer. She said that this made her feel she "wasn't qualified to do this" and made her struggle with her confidence in running a community organisation.

4.4. Eligibility criteria — a track record

Our interviewees believed that funders are overly reliant on numbers and big names in determining an organisation's "track record". For some, it is the age of their organisation that means they do not have a sufficient "track record". For example, for Nasim Qureshi from Inspired Neighbourhoods; "We're only an 11-year-old organisation. We can't have 25-year, 40-year relationships". Qureshi raised the futility of trying to compete with organisations with "decades more worth of relationships". For Imran Akram from The Bipolar Lift, this meant that he felt "like there are bigger organisations… that they would rather fund because they've been out there for longer, even though we are working with more bipolar people than they are".

Capital is too often judged fiscally for these organisations. For example, social capital was frequently raised by interviewees as being undervalued or misunderstood by funders. For DON'T SLEEP ON US, this meant not just judging an organisation based on how many "big name organisations" they have worked with. Shani Dhanda from Asian Woman Festival commented on how they were being asked for information on track records that they "didn't even have yet" due to their age. And yet, the value of previous funding was perceived to be over-emphasised by funders. For the Refugee Buddy Project, this had very real consequences, as receiving lottery funding "allowed us to bring in other money, because suddenly we were treated seriously". Another organisation stated that once they received funding they believed more would come, but it never did.

> *[organisations], who say they're doing this kind of work, but aren't, or are doing it without any contribution of the actual communities. It's really performative.”*
>
> **- Evie Muir, Peaks of Colour**

A track record may also be sporadic, with "gaps" in years, which funders often ask organisations to explain. However, community organisations cannot work 24/7, 365 days a year. Neelam Keshwala from DON'T SLEEP ON US asked organisations to recognise that people "wake up and feel differently", or may go a year without applying for something. As Evie Muir from Peaks of Colour said: "None of this should be rushed. And none of it should be rigid and stuck in stone. It's about adapting and being flexible. And, you know, if it means that we might have to do less one year, I'm comfortable with that… it doesn't mean we're not serving our community, if we do less, it doesn't mean we should feel guilty about if we have to do less, or if we have to adapt, we've currently just put a statement out of we're going into hibernation for winter…You shouldn't have to be on full steam all the time in order to be able to do the work that we're doing."

4.5. Lack of trust

> *"The trust isn't always there for communities when we don't have like reputation or like anything to say, like, 'we've done this successfully'."*
>
> **- Anonymous**

Something raised by many interviewees was the perceived lack of trust funders have in community-based organisations and the way they work. This often makes organisations feel pressured to fit their work to the funder. Whilst Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society shared their rule with us: "Don't apply if it is not the right fit. Never make an application fit the funding." Three other organisations described this pressure. For Muir from Peaks of Colour, this manifested as frustration: "I don't have to jump over backwards, kind of twist what we're already doing into language and criteria that they want. Yeah, then perfect. If it's something where, yeah, I'm having to, I do not want to be spending days on any funding bid."

Reina Yaidoo from Bassajamba CIC said it was common for them to fit their application to the funder. Rossana Leal from the Refugee Buddy Project expressed a similar sense of frustration in response to a specific application from a well recognised grant funder, where the applicant has to frame their work into the funders three theme areas and their business objectives; "Why are you making me tell you where I fit into that? Surely you should be telling me how you fit into that?"

This distrust extends to quantifying hours in the application process. Black Butterfly were once told not to state everything they were doing in their application, as the funder wouldn't believe they could achieve it all. "I just kept thinking – but what do you think it's like for us when we're just running all the time doing so many things? And now you're telling us, don't tell them about all of the things that you're doing because they won't believe that you're able to do that… that for me was gutting… we're doing so much stuff, but we can't even apply for funding".

Similarly, Frances Humber from Made in Hackney has to put in less admin and labour costs in applications. Using a cooking class as an example, she described how it starts looking like a very expensive project if you put in all the hours staff will work to make it happen, it "looks like a very expensive cooking class" if you put in full costs of people's time. Humber went on to question funders: "If you would give £1 million to a £10 million charity, why wouldn't you give £100,000" to them, a £600,00 to £700,000 charity? "The logic doesn't make sense to me." It really feels "like they don't trust you, or that you don't deserve it."

This can lead to a sense of shame for smaller-scale community organisations, as Simin Wadiwala from Out of Town Housing Co-operative described: "As a small organisation when you're going out looking for funding, it's almost quite, like, embarrassing, like shameful to have to try and continuously justify, like, I'd like some money. And I, this is why we want some money."

> *"I want funders to trust us, what we're doing."*
>
> -   **Simin Wadiwala, Out of Town Housing Co-operative**

Trust doesn't cover numbers, but also the practice of an organisation. This appears to be another instance in which larger organisations, with longer histories, are favoured. Evie Muir from Peaks of Colour said that "there's a really interesting narrative in the outdoor sector that any outdoor group that doesn't train its volunteers are negligent. But legally, we're not. And funders in this space don't train their volunteers and

teams. But there's this thing where if you are a person of colour (POC), grouping outdoors, you should be trained. This is like the narrative, that for me, that feels extremely colonial."

> **"People of colour and Black-led organisations need to be treated with respect, the work we do needs to be funded and respected."**
>
> - **Nicole Robinson-Edwards, Her Path to Purpose CIC**

Community organisations feel that there is a devaluing of their work and skills. Those we interviewed knew their worth and what they had to offer as individuals, as organisations, and as communities more widely. Neelam Keshwala from DON'T SLEEP ON US shared the example of a Zoom group she has run for South-Asian women over 65 since the pandemic. Keshwala wants to organise a trip within the UK for these women, but in order to apply for women- and girls-specific funding, she requires company registration and three months of bank statements, wiping out many collectives like herself. Keshwala said: "I just can't even apply — it's a community, let's calm down." Moving on to discuss her other options, she said, "But again, like, I don't want it to feel charitable... if [the older women] found out that I had crowdfunded for it, they'll be like, well, we're not a charity case."

> **"You know the reason we're not up there with you is because of discrimination. Not because we don't have the skills or capability or the motivation, just not given the opportunity."**
>
> - **Hillna Fontaine, Mabadiliko CIC**

Insights from community businesses
Insight 5: Current funding processes uphold barriers to entry

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the process of applying for and receiving funding itself was commented upon by every interviewee. It became clear that the process was not perceived as simply a challenge, but from application to evaluation, it was a central aspect of upholding barriers to accessing funding and support.

Conversations around the application process can be divided into three key themes; time taken, language used, and format. Regarding the format of applications, a theme that emerged was around the poor experiences of Neurodivergent people and those with mental health problems, with interviewees expressing how funding applications contributed to exacerbating their symptoms.

Following the application process, interviewees touched on responses from funders, both time taken to hear back and the nature of such responses. Naturally, some rejection is to be expected in the funding sphere, however the slow response rate and language requires active rethinking.

Next, this theme will analyse interviewee feedback regarding the evaluation and monitoring processes, and how the labour required for these excludes certain groups. Finally, we will analyse discussions around 'tick-boxing' [also commonly known as box-ticking] around marginalisation. Often used in applications for funds that are 'ring-fenced' for certain groups, interviewees responded to the reality of this during the process, and how it excludes many.

5.1. Application process – time

"I haven't really had a great experience. Overall, I think if I was to look at it on a scale between, let's say, zero and ten, zero being absolutely terrible, ten being absolutely amazing - I would put down four... and the main reason - because of the time it takes."

- **Vanessa Boachie, Inside Out Well-being**

14 of the 27 community organisations said that the time taken to complete often "long and tedious" applications were a barrier to accessing funding. One reason for this is due to the pressure it places on those leading organisations. Almost all the interviewees had other jobs, and worked for the organisation they were representing as a volunteer. Not only this, but a large proportion were also the sole employee/volunteer, as Neelam Keshwala, DON'T SLEEP ON US, said: "I don't have a team of people to apply for funding... I do everything from start to finish", around full-time employment in another organisation.

Frances Humber from Made In Hackney reflected on applying for a grant from a funder. She had applied three times, was rejected every time, and said the application "gets harder" every time. Humber said: "I would never tell anyone to

apply", both due to the time it takes, and the money they offer, which is marketed as "transformative". For Humber, it seemed they "genuinely believe" £30,000 is transformative when in reality it barely covers one person's salary for a year.

One community business interviewed said that "no one tells you how time consuming it is, it's like someone tells you and then you have to triple it. And then maybe it's that we also have found it not to be kind of accessible".

When interviewees were asked to share specific examples of time intensive applications, various well-known funders were cited as examples of upholding barriers to accessing funding through time consuming application processes. Rossana Leal from the Refugee Buddy Project said "Who the hell does this? How much time? Can anybody? …It's absolutely horrific". Similarly, Vanessa Boachie from Inside Out Wellbeing spoke of a moment in time where she decided to use her personal income. "I stopped doing that application and literally just thought you know what, let me just go to my savings, use that, and do the event", rather than go through the "unsustainable" process.

5.2. Application process – language

A general consensus emerged from the interviews regarding language - if you know the language you are more successful. Words like "decipher" and "translate" were common in describing how interviewees approached supplier's "overwhelming and off-putting" language, which was often described as "clinical", or "a different language" altogether.

Sandra Salazar D'eca from GoGrowWithLove told us that from her experience "language will tell funders whether or not that particular organisation has gone for funding before", as those who have been successful in the past will know how to tell funders what they want to hear. In contrast, "organisations like myself don't have time to say pretty words, or buzzwords - we just need the money to get the work done". Indeed, Imran Akram from The Bipolar Lift believed he had been unsuccessful in funding applications in the past due to being "too relaxed with my answers", having assumed that as it was "for community organisations" he could write with ease.

Acronyms and abbreviations were raised by interviewees a number of times. Hillna Fontaine from Mabadiliko CIC said; "I think there is laziness… a lack of awareness that this isn't our language… Why do you think that we should understand that acronym?" This makes them feel that suppliers are only speaking to those who are already receiving funding. Sukhjeen Kaur from Chronically Brown said that often you

were left to google these abbreviations and acronyms, and when multiple definitions are brought back by the search, you have to "guess" which is right.

This is especially critical for new organisations, as Sandra Salazar D'eca said, "there has to be a bit more clarity and support, no need to have so many words… We just want to get the work done. And you need the currency to get that to get that done." Organisations are already tight on time, and then have to invest resources into learning a language not native to them or their practice. Firstly, there is the literal sense of applications being in English.

However, there is another side to this, where the style of English used feels like the language of a different social group entirely, reinforcing hierarchical structural systems and inequalities. Mo Blue from Let's Keep Growing described a time she was at a meeting for those working in the local community: "Here I am, sat next to maybe sometimes a professor, or a doctor. Yeah, I just, if I can get out of a meeting like that, I will always get out of it… Because I just feel like I sometimes just find it overwhelming. They often use language that I don't understand, and I can't relate to. And I often feel like well, who wants who's interested in what I've got to say, you're a doctor, you're a lecturer, you're a professor, you're a consultant? Yeah, I just find it, I just find it overwhelming. And very often, I don't understand what you're saying, I don't understand the language".

Many interviewees commented on supplier use of "buzzwords". Not only were suppliers seen to be using these words incorrectly, but many saw it as "performative", "inauthentic" or "co-opted". Nasim Qureshi from Inspired Neighbourhoods referenced a time where he was in touch with a "tiny group in Bradford, and they called me and they said 'What is community cohesion?' Right? Yeah. They didn't get it until I explained to them. They said, 'Oh, we do that every day.'"

The most commonly referenced "buzzword" was "BAME", with almost one third of participants commenting on their aversion to the term, where communities themselves use "racialised" or "Global Majority". Neelam Keshwala from DON'T SLEEP ON US stated that a term like "BAME" "screams government, screams not of the community".

Other "buzzwords" commented on were:

- **Community** – "What does that mean exactly?" (Inside Out Well-being)
- **Hard to reach** – "We are this 'hard to reach' community but actually we have no problems in reaching the communities that we work with" (Refugee Buddy Project). "I hate that phrase with a f*****g passion... it shows to me that you just haven't made the effort or energy to go into whatever community you're trying to work with". (The Delicate Mind)
- **Local** – "Local to who? To what? You can have a locally-based organisation that's remote". (Inside Out Well-being)
- **Innovative** – "What does it mean? Is that related to technology? Or do you mean... a new process?" (Anonymous)
- **Able-bodied** – Shani Dhanda from Asian Woman Festival commented how not only should this be "non-Disabled", but made it obvious which organisations aren't keeping up with the language.
- **Diversity** – There is a difference between those that have "a piece of paper... or a policy" and organisations that have it "in our everyday practice, this is our ethos". (Refugee Buddy Project)
- **Sufferers** – Instead of people "living with" mental health conditions (The Bipolar Lift)

Language is fluid, and communities are ever evolving - just one look on social media or research papers will show you that a term used by the communities one year may change the year after. This is often in response to this very issue, community language being co-opted by organisations which use this same language to perpetuate structural inequalities, but other times as communities evolve in how they wish to self-describe.

5.3. Application process – format

"I can't work the system and my brain just shuts down."

- **Neelam Keshwala, DON'T SLEEP ON US**

> *"The minute I see a funding application something happens to my body. Too much, it's just too much."*
>
> - **Sandra Salazar D'eca, GoGrowWithLove**

Public discourse is focusing more on how we as a society need to become more literate in adapting in order to become more inclusive to groups facing barriers, and we have seen a recent surge in conversations around Neurodiversity. Two of our interviewees spoke about the experience of having ADHD specifically. Neelam Keshwala from DON'T SLEEP ON US said that she was more likely to go for application systems that felt "less conventional or Neurotypical". One interviewee also described how those with ADHD "can't read people's minds", and how the way they write in applications is seen as "flowery and lacking hard facts and stats, but that's how they communicate".

Shani Dhanda from Asian Woman Festival took this conversation to those with disabilities more widely; "For people who are Disabled or are living with chronic health conditions or energy limiting conditions, these [funding applications] are f***ing so energy intensive". She noted further that more often than not, the format of online applications is hard to read for a screen reader. Excluding vast numbers of potential applicants. This also extends to those who have poor mental health. Nikhwat Marawat, The Delicate Mind, spoke about the funding process as "the best way I can describe it is painful, it's a very painful process".

> *"Annoys the hell out of me when the application I can't see the questions, and you have to trawl through the question and press 'Next' to find the next question, and you then think, oh, previous question I shouldn't have written that I should have written into the next one. Right. And you've wasted so much time."*
>
> - **Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods**

The format of the application process also raised technical issues for many. For example, many applications do not allow you to see all the questions before you go through the form, meaning you end up repeating yourself. Furthermore, this means

you are reliant on the online funding system, which, as two interviewees mentioned, will often crash, meaning you lose all your work.

> *"I would really like to see a recognition and a step change in how the funding process and application is done, because it hasn't been changed for however long. It's very white-businessy-centric, yes."*
>
> - **Fiona Berry, Hull Sisters**

5.4. Application process - qualitative vs quantitative data

> *"We create and share spaces with the local community - creating value in people and places. The ripple effects of what we do, how we make you feel seen, are much bigger, it's, you know, unquantifiable...and for me, that has the most importance; your lived experience, the memories we create together and how we make you feel, all of this adds to your sense of wellbeing, creating beneficial ripples and impact in the community. How do you explain that to a funder that wants quantitative data?"*
>
> - **Dawn Dublin, Black Butterfly**

Many interviewees spoke about not being able to report or describe their work, reach and impact in the way that suppliers required due to the lack of quantitative data. It was clear that data-driven applications do not accommodate the way community organisations work. Often this is due to the nature of the work itself, Vanessa Boachie from Inside Out Well-being spoke about the challenge of "translating" something personal like mental health into a paragraph for a funder. Another example came from DON'T SLEEP ON US, who have had over 160 responses over the years about how community has helped them "find their identity", yet found it hard to write up such impact from feedback forms into boxes that require numbers.

Dawn Dublin from Black Butterfly, went further by saying that there are funds for which the organisation will not apply "because they [funding bodies] were asking the wrong questions... "We understand that people need that information, but you can tell from the questions that are being asked, that it's data driven." This notion of the

"wrong questions" was echoed by Jabez Lam from Hackney Chinese Community Services: "I often find the question irrelevant - they ask the wrong question".

A common theme was that community organisations recognise their skill as storytellers (Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society, DON'T SLEEP ON US, Open Lens Media, GoGrowWithLove), and that this storytelling will often translate better verbally as opposed to being written down. Even when it is written down, there is the sense that it is not what funders are looking for.

Community organisations see the value in telling the stories of those who they have impacted, one shared with us: "Large numbers don't always mean a massive impact". Community organisations often work on the basis that impacting one person meaningfully is better than interacting with "five who will forget in five minutes".

"It seems also to be about showing enough numbers. And not as much focus as like the experience of an individual so to speak."

- **Anonymous**

5.5. Uneven playing field

"Fundraising feels like a game still... and you can see some groups benefit because they know how to play the game better than others."

- **Frances Humber, Made in Hackney**

Previous studies have highlighted the lack of equity in the application process, and this continued to emerge in the analysis of interviews. Whether through the staff makeup of an organisation, such as relying on volunteers, or the experience level of organisations of different scales, it was a clear barrier that many faced. In fact, over 75% of interviewees referenced the inequality they perceived between organisations applying for the same pots of funding. This can be separated into two categories; those who could afford to pay someone to write bids for them, or those who had previous work experience in this field.

> *"The skills of writing applications and bids is the key and they can't afford it. Right. They don't have it in house because it becomes senior posts who are really good at this. And they are, they are difficult to then pay for those skills to put the applications in."*
>
> **-   Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods**

On the potential impact of professional bid-writers supporting applications, one Founder expressed "you're going to be miles ahead of all the other people who are doing it, after the community work at night-time."

This was echoed by Fiona Berry of Hull Sisters, who said that "the fact that, in some cases, your best shot is to hire a business, a bid-writer to help you write your bids isn't sustainable for people in the organisations that need access to those funds…You've got a range of people with a range of different abilities that need to be catered for, because they're the ones with the lived experience supporting people". Yet suppliers appear to preference professional bid-writers, as they speak the language of the funding world.

> *"Most funds automatically feel exclusionary to people from marginalised backgrounds who don't have lawyers on hand, or like professional grant writers on hand."*
>
> -   **Simin Wadiwala, Out of Town housing co-operative**

If an organisation cannot afford a bid-writer, supplier systems favour those who have past experience in fundraising or business. In fact, 6 of the 27 interviewees had this experience, and felt more at ease and confident in the system as a result. For example, Imran Akram from The Bipolar Lift said that he had been in the sector for 20 years, so not only understood processes but also terminology.

Jabez Lam from Hackney Chinese Community Services said that this resulted in a "chicken and egg" situation, where organisations required professional development

to be able to write funding bids successfully, but required funding to do the professional development.

> *"I don't find it too intimidating because I - look at my white hair - I've been around for a while, working for local authority and the community sector so I learned the jargons and the bureaucracy.*
>
> *And then when I work with, for example, our funding working group, quite a few of them are second generation ESEA, galvanised by the anti-racism... for them often they have to "guess" those questions, what are they really looking for?"*
>
> **- Jabez Lam, Hackney Community Chinese Centre**

The result of this is that funding targeting specific communities, ironically, becomes inaccessible to those very communities because the application process prioritises 'correct' language use and omits vital lived experience of the applicant. This means, in the words of Dawn Dublin from Black Butterfly: "The money is always swirling around above us, instead of actually getting to us." This sentiment was echoed by The Delicate Mind and The Bipolar Lift.

> *"When we're looking at smaller organisations, and you say you want to be inclusive, then you have to understand we don't have that person in place... And if you're asking us to jump through the same hoops we're not going to stand a chance" - "you know we're not resourced in the same way" - "Don't treat us the same as MIND... yeah we're doing a lot of similar work, but we have different expertise... I can't compete with MIND."*
>
> **- Hillna Fontaine, Mabadiliko CIC**

5.6. Funder response to applications

Nobody expects to be 100% successful with their funding applications, yet what was interesting was the language used by interviewees to describe unsuccessful applications, almost always referenced as "rejection". Two organisations placed their "rejection" rate at over 80%. Fiona Berry from Hull Sisters described this process as

"soul destroying", having been unsuccessful in every large funding application over the last 18 months. Berry also highlighted that some of the successful funding grants received by the organisation pay in arrears; for small organisations with little spare capital, this makes it difficult to actually spend the money that has been awarded and deliver the project. Reina Yaidoo said that Bassajamba CIC had stopped applying for certain funding sources completely due to the constant rejections.

With certain funders not even offering a response if unsuccessful, it is hard to improve upon applications. One example came from the Asian Woman Festival, who had planned an event in September, and applied for funding in March that year. They never heard back and were forced to cancel the event.

Response time was frequently commented upon; Frances Humber from Made in Hackney said that it was "so hard to understand why they make you jump through so many hoops to get a no that takes 6 months". Even if successful, the wait times are a challenge for organisations. Dawn Dublin of Black Butterfly, spoke about a time that the organisation applied for Covid Emergency funding for racialised communities which arrived almost six months later. She said: "I remember thinking, "That's crazy! What is that?".

With language like "jumping through hoops" being used, it seems that there is a perceived emotional and physical labour inequality, where the amount of time and effort put in by community organisations is not matched by funders. This is seen most clearly in the feedback given by organisations. Two organisations gave almost identical quotes. Frances Humber from Made in Hackney was describing how, despite the pandemic proving that organisations had the money to give away, and could do it more easily if they wished, that the emails had gone back to saying that funders were "overwhelmed with applications".

Similarly, Fiona Berry from Hull Sisters said that "the response is basically, the cut and paste: 'we've been inundated with applications', or 'you weren't successful at this point' type of thing... So it would be nice if funders could give a little bit more feedback and to say why".

5.7. Evaluation and monitoring

There was an interesting conflict that emerged in perceptions and experiences around evaluation and monitoring processes. Interviewees said that it appeared that funders were not monitoring closely where their money was being spent in white-led organisations, but also over-managing the spending of organisations led by or supporting those experiencing marginalisation.

For the first point, two organisations said that there were often "big claims" about funding racialised organisations, but none of the communities that they were in touch with or aware of were getting the funding – begging the question – "Who *is* getting it?" This is part of a wider theme of funder transparency, touched upon previously.

For others, it can feel like once the grant process is complete, the funder "disappears" (Her Path to Purpose CIC). Inside Out Well-being gave an example of a funder who "pulled out" after years of supporting them specifically due to their work with racialised people, leaving them "in limbo… in a bit of a weird financial position because of promises that they had made".

The evaluation process is often a workload that many organisations cannot afford to take on, whether through lack of time, resource or knowledge. Lizzie Jordan from Think2Speak said that whilst she was confident going for funding, it was "the rest of the work", the risk and evaluation processes, that put her off applying. Frances Humber from Made in Hackney said that this often "just seems very counterintuitive to make a smaller charity work harder than a bigger charity that's got more resources". Humber gave the example of a "social value calculator", something she is doing now to report back on funding received previously. She believes this can scare people off applying, recognising that she only understands it because of her past experience as a full-time funding officer. Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society said that they have often pushed back on funders regarding "complicated financial reporting". Other organisations have attempted to follow these systems. Her Path to Purpose CIC spoke about a time they received funding for around £1,000 in the past, and had to constantly "report" and "check in", concluding that this "wasn't worth the money". In fact, funders are often unclear about what evaluation and monitoring will consist of, meaning organisations do not account for this in their budget on application.

> *"You have to become an accountant to adhere to reporting."*
>
> -   **Bud Johnston, Brighton and Hove Black Anti-Racism Community Organisation (BARCO)**

5.8. Box-ticking lived experience

> *"I don't like having to identify myself and my characteristics."*
>
> - Lizzie Jordan, Think2Speak

We have seen a rise in "ring fenced" funding, specifically for those experiencing one or more forms of marginalisation. However, this often excludes organisations due to the rigidity of the boxes they are forced to tick.

For Made in Hackney, this looks like requiring trustees with lived experience. However, trusteeship does not equate to direct involvement. Furthermore, not only are their beneficiaries across a range of disadvantages, but they try to shield their beneficiaries from these sort of intrusive questions. Even Frances Humber's colleagues did not necessarily wish to disclose their "lived experience" to one another, let alone be "part of box-ticking" for funding. This was echoed by Bud Johnston from Brighton and Hove BARCO, who stated that they have not applied for funds if the information they are requesting feels "too intrusive".

The complexity also extends to requesting information around beneficiaries. For Mabadiliko CIC this is especially critical. Mabadiliko works in anti-racism training, and thus the 'beneficiaries' are white. Despite being Black-led, as the beneficiaries are not Black, it is "not what the funders want to hear" and excludes them from many funding pots. Jabez Lam from Hackney Chinese Community Services experiences barriers in applying on behalf of the East and South-East Asian (ESEA) community, who are either "Chinese" or "Asian: Other". Lizzie Jordan from Think2Speak similarly commented that it was not only the boxes they tick, but also the bias against travellers, including derogatory thoughts and opinions, that served as a barrier to her organisation.

Summary of insights from funding and infrastructure organisations

Whilst there is an existing body of evidence regarding barriers experienced by community organisations or individuals experiencing marginalisation (some of which was explored in our evidence review), there is less evidence on the barriers experienced by funding and infrastructure organisations in responding to and developing effective solutions to tackling these barriers.

Many of the barriers community organisations expressed during the course of this research have, the vast majority of the time, arisen due historic underinvestment and the long-term systemic perpetuation of barriers resulting due to policies and practices implemented by funding and infrastructure organisations. Our research found that often funders are responsible for perpetuating identified barriers, at times unintentionally, and at other times due to a lack of knowledge, ability, motivation or resource to implement meaningful and impactful change.

In order to develop recommendations, the research team felt it necessary to understand the experience and positionality of funders and infrastructure organisations who ultimately play a key role in enabling solutions to be developed and implemented.

In the section of the report, we explore the key insights gathered from funding and infrastructure organisations and share recommendations:

1. Alignment of an organisation's DEI strategies and approaches to its mission and values is essential to developing meaningful interventions

2. Building confidence, knowledge and credibility is essential for staff in the funding and infrastructure sector, to build individual capacity, both for staff with and without lived experiences

3. The call for more flexible and patient capital remains strong, funders need to work meaningfully and at pace

4. Support community businesses to develop social capital

5. Addressing limitations around data collection and management

6. Developing trust with community business and building effective partnerships go hand in hand.

Insights from funding and infrastructure organisations

Insight 1: Alignment of an organisation's DEI strategies and approaches to its mission and values is essential to developing meaningful interventions

In essence, the alignment of equity, diversity and inclusion strategies and approaches to an organisation's mission and vision may seem like a logical place to start in order to build a strong foundation for developing meaningful interventions.

Our research found organisations that clearly aligned their DEI strategy and approaches to their mission and vision were able to clearly articulate what their DEI approach was, why and how it was developed, and how progress was measured.

On the other hand, organisations who didn't have clear alignment between their DEI strategy and their vision and mission were generally uncertain or unclear about the effectiveness of their approach or the roles of their colleagues in implementing DEI approaches.

Where this was the case, interviewees expressed discomfort when asked questions about their equity, diversity and inclusion strategies, or about their organisational approach to this work. Seven out of ten interviewees expressed at one point or another during the interview that they may not be the right person to answer questions on this topic, but were unable to articulate who would be the right person to speak with. This was indicative of a wider challenge of individuals within funding and infrastructure organisations feeling unsure regarding their personal responsibility, confidence and skills, which is explored in the following section of this report.

Whilst each organisation was at a different point in the development of a strategy, those that were able to make the connection to their mission and values were able to speak more coherently about their individual and organisational position. For example, The Young Foundation expressed: "Our entire mission is creating a fairer future, so we say it's almost like the thing that drives us. Even though we do research, checking and challenging, whose voice are we not hearing? How involved are people to varying degrees? And what might get in the way?"

In examples shared by funding and infrastructure organisations where there was connection to the mission, this translated into motivation to take action. In these instances, there were also more robust measures for tracking and managing accountability in place.

"Tackling inequality is like North Star. It's what we believe we're here to really do, you know, through providing grants and finance to socially focused organisations, we believe that is contributing to tackling inequality.

So how we do that is really important, because obviously, if we're not reaching people from different communities in that process, then we're just not going to meet our aims and our mission. We do have a clear strategy on that."

- Social Investment Business

Recommendations:

Organisational mission and values centred and embedded in the development of any such plans, as well as communicated with the staff and stakeholders. Any plans and strategies need to be able to answer the following questions:
- How does this enable us to deliver on our mission?
- What values are we living or reflecting by doing this?
- Who needs to know and understand this, and how do I communicate it effectively?

For organisations who have already embarked on delivering work in this area, we would strongly recommend looking at your organisational mission and values as a North Star when approaching complexity or tension. Where there is confusion or a lack of understanding regarding an idea or approach, review how it relates to the mission and values.

Insights from funding and infrastructure organisations
Insight 2: Building confidence, knowledge and credibility is essential for staff in the funding and infrastructure sector.

Individual staff capacity needs to be developed to start implementing solutions to the barriers that community businesses experiencing marginalisation face. Capacity can be developed by building confidence, knowledge and credibility. There was a consensus among infrastructure and funder interviewees, including those with lived experience of marginalised and those without, that capacity building is important.

If we start with the definition of the word itself, there were a range of perspectives around what the word "marginalisation" actually meant. A small number of interviewees (three out of ten) felt clear and comfortable on their organisational definition of the word, and across the board it was acknowledged that there is often a difference between a personal and individual understanding versus an organisational position. Funding and infrastructure organisations we spoke with recognised that individuals within their organisations had differing knowledge levels, motivations and starting points regarding topics related equity, diversity and inclusion, "I think everybody that is involved brings their own perspectives and experiences, that personal point of view or marginalisation that they have felt," (Plunkett).

Individual experiences of caring for and supporting friends or family members experiencing marginalisation were often cited as influences or drivers of their motivation and engagement with the topic. In contrast, people also expressed tension that arose within their organisations as a result of individuals having different lived experiences and levels of understanding regarding marginalisation. Some people expressed that personal connection had influenced their approach or understanding of marginalisation, but recognised the limitations of that in a workplace context.

> *"I benefit from having family and personal insights into some of the gaps and issues… it doesn't necessarily help me in my day-to-day work to address some of the issues, because I feel I don't have answers in terms of what you then do about this."*
>
> **- Social Enterprise UK**

There was also recognition that colleagues with different backgrounds and experiences held different viewpoints. One of the key challenges experienced by funding and infrastructure organisations was getting staff on the same page in terms of priorities and establishing a starting position, which in turn became a blocker to making progress.

One anonymous interviewee told us: "Some members of the team find some of this stuff a little bit more challenging. They sometimes have what I might describe as perhaps more conservative, and with respect, more old fashioned views on some of this stuff, and have found some of this conversation a bit tricky to get on board with". An example of this in practice was around choosing engagement or outreach

priorities. For example, one organisation described the complexity and tension that surfaced internally when discussing whether to focus on ethnicity or socioeconomic backgrounds.

> *"I think that just opened our eyes to different types of diversity. And we have to be just quite careful with how we reach out and that we don't put a label on things too much, because that might put people off, but also when things do come forward, that we can then bend our support."*
>
> **- Co-operatives UK**

Many organisations interviewed recognised the limitations of personal knowledge, regardless of lived experience. Those without lived experience also expressed discomfort and felt they lacked credibility.

There was a strong consensus that taking steps to build knowledge (for those without lived experience), confidence (for those with it) and credibility (for those across the board) is integral to equipping individuals to engage meaningfully in organisational approaches developed to tackle systemic barriers.

Intersectionality emerged as a recurring theme on the demand side when community businesses were asked about barriers and where funders needed to develop their knowledge. There were numerous examples given of how funders who had not designed and built application processes or criterias for intersectionality had perpetuated barriers.

The knowledge gap funders had on this topic in particular was felt by community businesses and evoked frustration. Evie Muir from Peaks of Colour spoke of how living on intersections of multiple identities often made her feel like she has to over-tailor her application: "In many cases, those specific funds force you to negotiate your identities in a way that just exist in in the outdoors, as the people who you are".

Nikhwat Marawat spoke of the "too short-lived" public consciousness following the murder of George Floyd as an example, saying it was better to say nothing, or do nothing than have an ill-informed opinion that is merely following the trend: "You don't have to be the Foreign Office, you don't need to have an opinion on everything".

Hillna Fontaine from Mabadiliko CIC spoke clearly to the lack of an intersectional approach from funders causing these gaps and oversights:

"The big funders where the money is out, the culture is not inclusive. There are a lot of organisations who believe they can be the change, there's nothing that could be the change, that they know what's needed … but they have all these blind spots."

- Hillna Fontaine, Mabadiliko CIC

Recommendations:

1. **Develop an internal understanding of current level of knowledge and comfort.**
2. **Deliver targeted support for staff based on current levels of knowledge and comfort**. There is a need to develop knowledge and understanding of intersectionality, positionality and equity.
3. **Understand lived experience of staff and how it manifests in a work environment**, as well as where staff lack lived experience and how this might affect credibility.

Insights from funding and infrastructure organisations
Insight 3: the call for more flexible and patient capital remains strong, funders need to work meaningfully and at pace

"Is it unrestricted? Is it restricted to certain things? Am I allowed to say certain things? How much are they then controlling the messaging of something versus me just paying for it myself, and doing my own thing."

- Neelam Keshwala, DON'T SLEEP ON US

The community businesses we spoke with described how rapidly and frequently their work and approaches had to pivot or adapt to rapidly changing policies and

environments. Community businesses remained focused on responding to the needs of their community, and expressed frustration that current funding structures are too rigid to allow for the continued flexibility so many require, and funders simply take too long to respond and adapt.

For Nikhwat Marawat from The Delicate Mind, trying to find the right funder is "really difficult" as unrestricted funding, or any form of flexible funding, is not accessible or available. When we asked Nasim Qureshi from Inspired Neighbourhoods how he decides if funding is right for him and his organisation, he said that "first and foremost" it was how restrictive the funding was.

For others, it is the emphasis on project delivery that restricts innovation and early stage set-up phases, which many described as "stifling". This was explored further previously, but is worth mentioning here due to its intersection with the very identities of community organisations as "on-the-ground" and "of the community".

As Sukhjeen Kaur from Chronically Brown told us, it feels like funders like to fund the same work, in the same places, by the same people, as opposed to giving someone a chance to try something new. For Frances Humber from Made in Hackney, it felt like funders had never been on "the other side" to truly understand the funding process, and it is this lack of understanding that can make the experience so draining and limiting for community organisations.

In interviews with funding and infrastructure organisations, there was a recognition that the sector could be slow to respond. There were various factors cited as contributing to slowing down funding from reaching community businesses, including restrictions and reporting requirements around spending public funding, due diligence processes, trustee and senior level decision making capacity.

The current decision making processes and criteria for funding may suit the needs of funders and their evaluation process, but it inhibits the nature of the work of community organisations. As community businesses operate in an incredibly precarious climate, it is essential that funders are able to distribute funding and ensure it reaches communities as soon as possible to do this. In order to do this, there must be both understanding of and motivation to systematically tackle blockers to work at pace in the specific case of engaging with community organisations led by or supporting people experiencing marginalisation.

Recommendations:

1. **Develop** a comprehensive understanding of barriers to distributing funding.
2. **Audit** systems and processes that inhibit funding being distributed effectively at pace.
3. **Identify** where process improvements can be made to tackle these identified barriers.

Insights from funding and infrastructure organisations
Insight 4: Support community businesses to develop social capital

Alongside capacity restraints and challenges with turnover and legal structure, social capital emerged as one of the most pressing issues for leaders of community businesses who experience or work with people experiencing marginalisation. Nikhwat Marawat from The Delicate Mind told us: "What I suppose has prevented me in the past, time and time again, is social capital. And social capital is really hard to build, because you have none, obviously, when you start. When I started out, I was just some idiot with an idea. Now I've become an idiot with track records".

Community businesses highlighted that they did not have the networks of relationships amongst grant funders, social investors, commissioners and decision makers to the same extent as organisations led by people who were able to access social capital with ease, or had been functioning for much longer. For example, Inspired Neighbourhoods described their situation: "We're competing with charities who have 20, 30 years' worth of relationships under their belt".

Community organisations identified that a lack of social capital affected their ability to:
- Submit successful grant applications due to not having relationships with grant managers
- Access local authority or NHS contracts due to competing with organisations who have established relationships with commissioners
- Navigate procurement processes successfully, again due to more established organisations having relationships with decision makers
- Community organisations expressed that they would greatly benefit with support to build social capital.

Recommendations:

Our suggestion would be for organisations to take a two-pronged approach:

1. **Firstly, audit and evaluate where social capital gatekeeping may be occurring** within internal systems and processes e.g. supply chains, procurement processes, preferred supplier lists, "go-to" organisations, preferred publicity and advertising methods for opportunities. Once this audit has been completed, establish a framework for reaching a wider pool of people and organisations.
2. **Secondly, supporting the development of social capital for community businesses** led by/supporting people experiencing marginalisation through targeted support, access to networks, opportunities, and contacts.

"Fundraising feels like some sort of game of who do you know. Either you have the kind of relationships needed, and you can see that some groups are able to benefit because they can play the game better than other groups."

- Isobelle Ford, The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network CIC (TERN)

"You know if they could take some of those relationships they have and help us get a foot in through the door, that would be helpful."

- Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods

Insights from funding and infrastructure organisations

Insight five: Addressing limitations around data collection and management

Funding and infrastructure organisations we spoke to acknowledged the various limitations around data collection and management. A strong recurring theme was the lack of metrics and performance indicators regarding the effectiveness and outcomes around equity, diversity and inclusion measures.

Interviewees shared limitations around data collection and management which broadly fell into three categories:

- **Uncertainty around what data to collect**, perhaps rooted in the lack of understanding around intersectionality and positionality, there was often confusion around what data to collect and how this would inform or change approaches.
- **Lack of knowledge on how to frame questions and response options.** Another area where organisations expressed discomfort was around how to ask questions in data collection forms and processes, both in terms of the correct framing for the question and the correct wording for the response.
- **Lack of clarity on how to balance data with lived experiences and frontline insights directly from communities.** For example, Social Enterprise UK shared an interesting challenge: "Data takes you so far, it can be useful... it can't be a purely neutral, data driven thing though. There always has to be an element of it which is interpersonal. There's no amount of data that tells you, for example: "Would X individual be competent and confident enough to talk about the great work they're doing in front of X audience".

"There's lots of data collection and impact reporting. But actually, do you really understand, at a visceral level, what communities are grappling with? And what's happening on the ground? What's really, really taking place, what the needs really are outside of what the report has told you?"

- Social Investment Business

Recommendations:

1. **Establish and agree an internal starting point for data collection**, underpinned by best practice on what to ask, how to ask it and what response options to provide.
2. **Develop a system for reporting, reviewing and sharing data** in order to build comfort levels around organisational capability to measure and manage such data.

Insights from funding and infrastructure organisations
Insight six: Developing trust with people and communities and building effective partnerships goes hand in hand

A recurring theme with both the supply and demand side was trust. Whilst community organisations strongly expressed the desire to be trusted, funders and infrastructure organisations recognised the existing dynamics were not designed to create and foster this trust.

There was emphasis from the supply side on the importance of being intentional, and developing long term relationships, and a deeper understanding of people, communities and the different types of marginalisation.Organisations on the supply side were also aware that often language used in the sector was exclusionary and detrimental to creating trust.

"You've got to build the relationships and you've got to create that kind of trust. So that organisations feel able to come and talk to you when things are going wrong."

- Social Investment Business

"Organisations can be trusted to know where they need the funding. I think there's this real disparity of power between the funders and the organisations. It's like you're begging to be allowed to do the things that you know need to happen."

- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

"I've heard some people from marginalised communities report a lack of trust between their community and funders, including public sector funders, because they've been let down in the past."

- Power to Change internal staff survey

There was general consensus amongst interviewees that an area of success and best practice in building trust was around building partnerships. Interviewees acknowledged that there were different types of partnerships that were essential to develop:

- Specific expert partnerships with infrastructure organisations who have knowledge, reach and engagement working with particular people and communities experiencing marginalisation
- Collaborative partnerships with other funding and capacity building organisations in order to share knowledge and best practice
- Delivery partnerships allowing organisations to work together on specific programmes or funds.

"That partnership works by trying to understand needs, and having the flexibility to respond. We go in, of course, with an assumption of what the need for a specific programme will be. But it's that flexibility in the design and delivery – that is the most successful element."

- Access - The Foundation for Social Investment

"We gathered information that enabled us to kind of really see where the gaps have been previously. We've been able to be more intentional about how we target funding programmes. since then. So I'd say, since then, we've actually developed greater partnerships with other organisations."

- Social Investment Business

Recommendations for Power to Change

The research enabled the development of tailored recommendations for Power to Change, based on their current approaches and practices, the scope of their funding and their definition of community businesses.

Many of these recommendations will be relevant for other funders and organisations supporting community businesses, and organisations and individuals experiencing marginalisation.

These recommendations are:

1. Messaging
   1.1. Use of language and plain English
   1.2. Evaluate use of "community" and "locally rooted"
   1.3. Images and videos
2. Targeted capacity building
3. Building and enhancing working relationships with anchor organisations
4. Embedding inclusion and simplicity into application processes
5. Internal representation
6. Knowledge sharing

Recommendations for Power to Change

Recommendation 1.1. Messaging: Establish use of plain English

Community organisations felt that the language used online and in application processes shows if a funder is working to be genuinely inclusive and holding space for complexity. Neelam Keshwala from DON'T SLEEP ON US said that it is clear to her if an organisation or fund is thinking about those who are Disabled, queer etc. as they not only use that group's language, but allow for the potential that the language may change year-on-year.

> *"If an organisation or a fund is quite clearly thinking about people who are Disabled, and so using the Disabled community's language. If they are thinking about people who are queer, and so using the queer community's language. If they're thinking about people of colour, and using the language that people are using on the ground at that moment in time. Language evolves and they need to evolve."*
>
> **- Neelam Keshwala, DON'T SLEEP ON US**

For The Bipolar Lift, Imran Akram described those looking to fund or who have funded general "mental health" organisations as a "red flag", as it can seem like they are just trying to look good but don't understand the true nuance of how vast that category truly is. One thing many interviewees mentioned was a heightened

awareness of "performativity" from funders, and virtue signalling in the inclusion of marginalised groups on the terms of the funder. Mabadiliko CIC hoped for a shift from the language of "giving back", moving away from simply financial support and a move to "enable us to help ourselves".

Whether it's the language used to describe certain groups, or the process itself, many interviewees felt there were constant "assumptions" being made about their communities without being spoken to, or included in the set-up of these processes.

One of the strongest themes from the research was the use of language. Whilst the internal staff survey indicated that there was a genuine appetite to reach and meaningfully engage with people and communities experiencing marginalisation, and that there was intentionality behind more recent communications, the research highlighted that language was still one of the most exclusionary elements.

> *"I think they need to change their language. They just need to be clear in what it is that they want from you. It's so complex. Tell me what I have to do to get the funding, tell me what things I can use that funding for."*
>
> **- Mo Blue, Let's Keep Growing**

We would suggest that Power to Change establish the use of plain English across its communications, as well as make a conscious effort to eliminate jargon and acronyms wherever possible. Some examples include:

- Community cohesion
- Community integration
- Community share issue
- Financial capabilities
- "A step-by-step explanation of how to use CSE's DIY energy survey tool".

> *"They can fall into using acronyms and traditional Eurocentric terms which may not be understood by minoritised groups. I've got this tiny group in Bradford. And they called me and they said, what is community cohesion?"*
>
> - **Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods**

Recommendation 1.2. Messaging: Evaluate definition of "community" and "locally rooted"

There were examples where terminology used was unintentionally reinforcing systemic barriers, such as "locally rooted". Many organisations we spoke with did not resonate with this term despite being locally rooted, because they felt their tie to a community group was stronger. They did not feel comfortable defining themselves by their tie to place in isolation. Community organisations had a preference for defining their link to a locality and the particular community they served.

Other examples of exclusionary language included the acronym NEET (not in education, employment or training) and ex-offender which is not person-centred. There was a strong preference to see language that evolves and is asset based (focused on what a person has, rather than doesn't have).

> *"Community businesses may ask themselves: 'Is this an opportunity for us?' as the definition of a "community business" can unwittingly exclude. Often Black and Disability led organisations have communities of interest instead of/as well as locality, with greater emphasis and visibility on the former."*
>
> **- Power to Change, internal staff survey**

Recommendation 1.3. Messaging: Re-evaluate use of photos and tap into the power of videos

During the community roundtable exercises, participants noted that often people who were "visibly diverse" were often in passive roles e.g. serving others, being talked to, or learning from others. Participants commented that there were very few images showing people experiencing marginalisation in assertive, or leadership roles.

It was also observed during the same exercise that there could be more representation of different types of marginalisation across the Power to Change website, including some that are less visible but can be captured through photography e.g. people with caring responsibilities, Disabled people, Black men, the LGBTQIA+ community.

Below: Examples of images from the Power to Change website (April 2023) that participants identified showing visibly diverse people in serving others or in passive roles.

Our recommendation would be to do an image audit, add alt text for photos that include a description of the image and its source, and incorporate more images that do not reinforce existing power dynamics.

Participants also felt that there was a great opportunity to incorporate videos as a tool to better engage with people and communities experiencing marginalisation.

Some examples given with:
- Short and clear videos that show how to submit an application
- A step-by-step video that shows how to use a programme's eligibility tool (e.g. on the Leading the Way programme)
- Case study videos that show how people and different communities applied for and used funding

- Webinars, as well as webinar videos on the relevant programme pages, were well received and encouraged.

Recommendations for Power to Change

Recommendation 2: Support community businesses with capacity building in three core areas

Whilst there were a number of areas that community businesses expressed a desire to receive more support in, there were three core areas where community businesses felt there were lacking due systemic barriers and their experiences of marginalisation.

There was a strong and clear desire to see targeted support in three key areas:

1. **Early-stage set up:** what you need to know, consider and have in order to set up a community business. Many community businesses described how they have set up their organisation in response to a community need or driven by a lived experience. Leaders of such organisations described their painful experiences of setting up and starting up, some even almost giving up. Many founders have not come from a professional background that supported them to start up, several continue to work in other jobs alongside their ventures.

   Community businesses we spoke shared a range of experiences, from fears in their membership of any government institutions (including Companies House) to concerns about disclosing addresses and setting up bank accounts. Support and signposting around the early-stage considerations that are relevant and tailored to people experiencing marginalisation would be welcomed.

2. **Legal and governance requirements**: What do they mean, what are the risks, how do you choose one? In addition to the early-stage set up, fear around legal and governance requirements was a key barrier. This includes things such as accounting and reporting deadlines (one community business even described closing down as they could not afford to pay an accountant, and was fearful of taking on the responsibility of annual accounts). Support and resourcing capacity building in this area would make a significant difference.

3. **Financial management:** What financial documents do you need and how can this be done? Building on accounting requirements, another key blocker for

organisations was developing budgets, financial modelling, cash flows and profit and loss accounts.

These topics were seen as the most pressing for community organisations; there was a sense that not being supported in these areas was at best holding community organisations back from delivering on their mission, and at worst contributing to their closure.

It was stressed that support needed to be accessible, relatable and inclusive. Inspired Neighbourhoods described how this needed to be a two-way process: "And again, it's about information and resources, isn't it? Yeah. And if you don't have that, it's not good. It works both ways. The funders have to be open and accessible. At the same time, communities need to have those skills to be able to set it up, look for funding, get it you know".

> *"Power to Change recently had one fund available where they had extra support. And I looked at the people who would provide the business support. And all I could see was completely white organisations. And I just knew that I wouldn't feel comfortable with that organisation, it wouldn't be the right fit for us."*
>
> -   **Farrah Rainfly, Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society**

Recommendations for Power to Change

Recommendation 3: Building and enhancing working relationships with anchor organisations

Smaller community organisations we spoke to described "anchor" organisations as a vital source of support. Anchor organisations were described as acting as custodians for smaller community organisations. .There is an opportunity to engage with anchor organisations who both work directly with communities experiencing marginalisation, and support community organisation leaders.

Several organisations gave examples of how this could work:
- Enabling anchor organisation to act as interpreters/translators
- Resourcing anchor organisations to support with applications

- Equipping anchor organisations to support impact/outcomes measurement and management.

> *"You can support anchor organisations to be able to use interpreters, or provide the support to local organisations that can happen. I mean there are 160 languages in Bradford, which one are you going to do?*
>
> *So it's an impossible task. What you can do is put one line in there to say, if you have difficulty with the language, we can find an anchor organisation in your local area to support you."*
>
> **- Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods**

Engaging with and proactively enabling/supporting anchor organisations that support smaller community organisations has the potential to be an important step in building the infrastructure of support for community organisations led by or working with people experiencing marginalisation.

Anchor organisations need to be resourced and equipped to continue developing the vital support they currently provide.

There is an opportunity for Power to Change to identify anchor organisations that work directly with specific people or communities or are linked to programme areas/themes, and proactively build relationships with them.

> *"We are an anchor organisation. A number of organisations come to us who don't have bank accounts, we hold money for them.*
>
> *A number of organisations who don't have commercial skills or english as a first language, sometimes you explain to them in their native language, what it means. And, now we even say why don't you make a little video of your work? And you can put a link in the application?"*
>
> - **Nasim Qureshi, Inspired Neighbourhoods**

Recommendations for Power to Change

Recommendation 4: Embedding inclusion and simplicity into application processes

Community organisations led by Neurodivergent people, Disabled people or people with chronic illnesses all expressed a desire to see application processes that were better built to be inclusive for people with accessibility requirements. There was not a particular format that people preferred to communicate in, but rather a strong desire to be allowed to choose what format worked best for them. For example, interviewees expressed a preference for being able to choose between submitting a video, a voice note or a written application.

Our recommendation for Power to Change would be to expand options for how people can apply, allowing applications via different formats, recognising that accessibility requirements often lead to different preferences, and these are rarely static.

> *"Make things as intersectional as possible, because when you focus on creating solutions for Disabled people, for next time, that is a solution for everybody. You'll reach so many more people as a result of that, too."*
>
> - Shani Dhanda, Asian Woman Festival

> *"Even just the accessible part of choosing the way you want to apply to something. I've only ever seen that once."*
>
> - Sukhjeen Kaur, Chronically Brown

> *"I think our application processes are often too long and convoluted. In comms, we do our best to communicate programme requirements and recruit, but the eligibility criteria can often be so niche that it may exclude marginalised people."*
>
> - **Power to Change, internal staff survey**

Throughout the research (during the evidence review, as well as interviews and roundtables), community organisations expressed a strong desire for in-person or human contact.

Interviewees expressed that often, the needs their community had were complex or that the outcomes weren't what they anticipated them to be. In addition to this, where individuals had personal or lived experience they struggled to communicate with funders due to the personal link to their work. Current application processes are not equipped to welcome these complexities.

We would recommend and encourage incorporating webinars and in-person visits where possible. Webinars were welcomed as a step that allowed funders to resource this interaction.

> *"Come into the community, come and just sort of talk to people, have a walk around, get in touch with the local community groups and say this is what we do, this is where we can help."*
>
> - Mo Blue, Let's Keep Growing

> *"Sometimes it can be quite challenging to articulate something that is so personal, I guess, in the scope of what we're doing."*
>
> - **Vaenssa Boachie, Inside Out Well-being**

Simplicity needs to be centred in application processes. Community organisations we spoke with described feeling overwhelmed at the amount of information and

documentation needed to submit applications, this was especially pronounced for interviewees who were Neurodivergent, Disabled or living with a chronic illness.

We would recommend reviewing current application processes and reducing the number of questions, the information volume and documentation needed. In this instance, simplicity and care go hand in hand. Community organisations are struggling to operate in the current environment; every question asked and document request made contributes to the feeling of overwhelm, and further strains capacity.

Recommendations for Power to Change

Recommendation 5: Improving internal skills and representation

From staff at Power to Change and community organisations, there was a desire to see better representation internally. Decision makers and staff need to both better understand and better reflect the communities Power to Change is aiming to serve. Whilst it was acknowledged that steps had been taken to improve recruitment processes, there was a desire to see more improvement as well as metrics on internal staff makeup in place for this.

Community organisations expressed the importance of transparency around what the internal makeup of the staff team was, as well as the measures being taken to address any gaps. **We suggest that Power to Change publish data on the internal makeup of the organisation, as well as steps and measures that are being taken to support existing staff as well address any gaps.**

We would also suggest adding easily accessible team profiles/bios which include a person's interests and passions, as well as any relevant information on their work tackling marginalisation (be that in their current role, or through other positions they hold or have held). This would serve to humanise the current staff team.

Staff who do not have lived experience of marginalisation also need to be supported to develop their confidence and knowledge, and ultimately their ability to be effective allies.

Working in partnerships with external organisations and individuals with lived experience or expertise needs to be balanced with **developing the knowledge and confidence of the internal staff team in order to ensure institutional knowledge and sustainability is embedded as part of this work.**

> *"Access to these groups can be difficult. I'm aware that I am white and represent a white organisation, so building that trust is important but might not always be possible."*
>
> - Power to Change, internal staff survey

> *"Another challenge is that we are a white, privileged organisation staff-wise. I think we should better reflect the communities we are trying to serve. I would like our staff recruitment and internal monitoring practices to be able to monitor and improve our own staffing."*
>
> - Power to Change, internal staff survey

When asked: "What is one thing in your practice that you know is limiting community businesses and organisations which are led by and supporting marginalised people from accessing support or funding?", Power to Change staff shared:

> *"I think it's difficult to provide a really comprehensive answer as in many cases we don't know what we don't know. We are continuing to learn and interrogate ourselves, but I think the 'not knowing' is often the biggest challenge."*
>
> - Power to Change, internal staff survey

> *"The perceptions of others, cultural assumptions and bias, class position of decision makers."*
>
> - Power to Change, internal staff survey

Recommendations for Power to Change

Recommendation 6: Knowledge sharing and learning within the sector

Whilst there is still work to be done, our belief is that in many areas, Power to Change is leading the way and has the potential to continue doing so. A key strength of the organisation is the genuine appetite and interest in engaging with people and communities experiencing marginalisation, as well as a focus on taking meaningful action.

There is a pivotal opportunity for Power to Change to share learnings, approaches and reflections in order to support the sector to develop best practice, and as an act of signalling and influencing the sector. Some examples of how this can be done are publishing blogs and data, creating peer networks or sharing knowledge through webinars and workshops.

Appendix

Evidence Review

1. Reclaiming the Future: Reforming Social Investment for the Next Decade. January 2022, Adebowale Commission.
2. Home Truths: Undoing racism and delivering real diversity in the charity sector June 2022, Acevo.
3. UNDERSTANDING IMPACT FOR COMMUNITY BUSINESSES. 2022, Power to Change.
4. Does Grant funding exclude those it is designed to help? January 2021, Sported.
5. Booska Paper: Exposing Structural Racism In The Third Sector. April 2021, The Ubele Initiative.
6. Minoritised Ethnic Community and Social Enterprises. August 2021, Power to Change, Social Investment Business, Access - the Foundation for Social Investment.
7. No more blank pages. 2021, Locality.
8. Hidden Leaders: disability leadership in civil society. February 2020, Acevo
9. Diversity and inclusion in Third Sector leadership - why is it not happening? October 2020, St Chad's College, Durham University.
10. Muslim Charities Forum Neighbours Next Door Report. 2020, Muslim Charities Forum.

11. We are all ghosts - Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice. 2019, The Runnymede Trust
12. Disabled Peoples Organisations and Social Investment. November 2018, Disability Rights UK
13. Funding for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. 2015, Baring Foundation
14. Ubele Initiative / Locality: A Place to Call Home: Community Asset Ownership in the African Diaspora Community. 2015, The Ubele Initiative
15. How does the charity sector think about diversity? Acevo

Community Organisations

Thank you to the 27 community organisations whose time and insight supported the development of this report. Interviews were conducted throughout autumn and winter 2022, the list below is chronological.

1. Inspired Neighbourhoods, Nasim Qureshi
2. The Delicate Mind, Nikhwat Marawat
3. DON'T SLEEP ON US, Neelam Keshwala
4. Inside Out Well-being, Vanessa Boachie
5. Refugee Buddy Project, Rossana Leal
6. Black Butterfly, Dawn Dublin
7. Made in Hackney, Frances Humber
8. The Bipolar Lift, Imran Akram
9. Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society, Farrah Rainfly
10. Out of Town Housing Co-operative, Simin Wadiwala
11. Mabadiliko CIC, Hillna Fontaine
12. Brighton and Hove Black Anti-Racism Community Organisation (BARCO), Bud Johnston
13. Hull Sisters, Fiona Berry
14. Open Lens Media, Daina Anderson Mpunzi
15. Her Path To Purpose CIC., Nicole Robinson-Edwards
16. Hackney Chinese Community Services, Jabez Lam
17. Think2Speak, Lizzie Jordan
18. GoGrowWithLove, Sandra Salazar D'eca
19. Asian Woman Festival, Shani Dhanda
20. Peaks of Colour, Evie Muir
21. Let's Keep Growing, Mo Blue
22. Bassajamba CIC., Reina Yaidoo
23. Collaborative Future, Sonia Tyrna
24. The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network (TERN), Isobelle Ford

25. <u>Chronically Brown,</u> Sukhjeen Kaur
26. <u>Home Girls Unite,</u> Yasin Bojang
27. <u>Community Enterprise Engine,</u> June Gomes.

Funding and infrastructure organisations

1. <u>Access - The Foundation for Social Investment,</u> Ana Van Bilsen Irias
2. <u>Co-operatives UK,</u> John Dawson
3. <u>Social Enterprise UK (SEUK),</u> Emily Darko
4. <u>Social Investment Business (SIB),</u> Lisa Raftery
5. <u>Locality,</u> Carole Reilly
6. <u>Plunkett Foundation</u>, Chris Cowcher
7. National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (<u>NAVCA),</u> Alex Boys
8. National Council for Voluntary Organisations (<u>NCVO),</u> Viki Ward
9. The <u>National Lottery Community Fund,</u> Helen Jones
10. The <u>Young Foundation,</u> Daniel Farag.

Glossary

Anti-oppression: Anti-oppressive practice is an interdisciplinary approach primarily rooted within the practice of social work that focuses on recognising and ending oppression.

Anti-racism: An intersectional approach to policy and active practice of opposing racism and promoting racial equity.

DPO: DPO is an acronym for Disabled Peoples Organisations. DPOs are led, directed and governed by Disabled people for Disabled people and have an implicit or explicit commitment to the social model of disability and promoting/advancing the human rights of Disabled people.

Demand side: Charities, social enterprises, community organisations or community businesses.

Diaspora: A group of people who spread from one original country to other countries, or the act of spreading in this way.

Equity: Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting. Equity is the process of ensuring that processes and programs are impartial, fair and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual.

Knowledge equity: Beliefs that some forms of knowledge may be perceived to be better than others establishes an inequity, knowledge equity is the process of addressing this imbalance.

Lived experience: Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events and experiences.

Racialised: The process or act of being "raced" or seen as someone belonging to a particular racial group. NB: Spark and Co. often uses this word instead of acronyms like "BAME" or "BME". Find out why here.

Supply side: Social investors, grant funders, infrastructure organisations, capacity building organisations.