



A Proposal for Collaborative Action for Recovery (CAR)

November 2021

Why collaborate?

“We have a responsibility to act – we can’t not do this”.

The covid pandemic sparked an extra-ordinary year of collaborative action by London’s funders in response to the needs of communities. The London Community Response (LCR) brought together 67 funders from across sectors and geographies, who, through five waves of funding, distributed over 3,400 grants with a value of over £57.7m to community organisations. With a commitment to prioritising the communities most affected, and a close relationship with equity infrastructure organisations, over 75% of the grants in Waves 3, 4, and 5 (distributed from July 2020 to March 2021) went to organisations led by and for those communities (BAME, Deaf and Disabled, LGBT+ and women).

It is clear from the LCR experience that collaboration at pace and scale is entirely possible, (albeit with heroic levels of time and commitment from all concerned), and that it is possible to shift the dial on long-standing issues, as we have started to do on funding with a focus on equity and justice.

With our learning partners, Reos Partners and The Social Investment Consultancy, London Funders published a series of reports on the processes that support collaboration, embedding equitable approaches in funding, and supporting innovation in civil society. A fourth report looked to the future, setting out four possible scenarios for London’s communities in the years following the crisis, and considering the implications of each for funder practice and behaviour. <https://londonfunders.org.uk/resources-funders/london-funders-publications/our-blog/london-community-response-learning-reports>.

Looking to the future, the London Recovery Board’s Vision and Missions, which have combined civil and civic leadership (both regional and local) to develop shared ownership of problems and solutions, provide an opportunity for long term collaborative action by funders in London, and have been the focus of a number of funder workshops and engagement events over the last six months which have explored this potential.

This paper sets out an outline proposal for collaborative action that is primarily long-term and systemic, but continues to allow for crisis responses where needed, as London moves beyond the covid crisis. We want to keep the best of funder practice and behaviour from our work together on the LCR and build on it for the long term.

How this proposal was developed

In autumn 2021 a group of members and partners was convened by London Funders for a series of workshops to explore Collaborative Action for Recovery in London (CAR), building on the experience of the London Community Response.

The members were chosen to reflect the diversity of sectors involved in funder collaborations through the pandemic, building on the extensive experience and insights shared by the wider group of funders and partners which have shaped the LCR learning reports which have been at the foundation of our thinking. The group included::



Our shared ambition for collaborative action

The CAR Group propose that collaborative action at scale would enable funders to:

- build a platform to act collectively on issues that are bigger than any one of us - drawing on the relationships between us and the assets of us all;
- prioritise equity, inclusion and social justice – our shared ‘north star’ - addressing structural inequalities for Londoners for transformational change;
- develop bold, innovative and creative programmes – sharing risks together to learn, unlearn, and achieve more;
- achieve system-wide impact – through civil society, the public sector and business, focusing on solving big problems and delivering impact at scale; and
- deliver both crisis and long-term funding – with strong and collaborative civil society as its legacy.

Proposed principles on which to build collaborative action

The CAR Group explored a long list of potential principles. The following have emerged as the most challenging for funders to build programmes and process around, and therefore the ones where the greatest opportunities to test ourselves arise:

- **Systemic** – engaging with the whole system around an issue, tackling root causes not just symptoms, building a shared understanding of how systems can change.
- **Bold** – experimenting and taking risks together, influencing wider ways of working.
- **Flexible** – recognising that the future is uncertain, that funders and grantees are on a learning journey together, trusting grantees to respond to changing challenges and opportunities.
- **Sharing power** – recognising that everyone has something to contribute (money, knowledge, networks and reach), investing in people’s capacity to co-design, embedding participation in decision-making from the start, building trust and confidence.
- **Equitable** – unlearning old ways of working, biases, and lenses on the world, ensuring that design, process and decision-making are inclusive and take account of the diversity of the sector and of communities.
- **Non-partisan** – recognising both civic and democratic leadership, combining the convening power of politicians with wider participation and voice.
- **Long term** – investing beyond political and institutional cycles, providing stability for civil society partners and seeking to make transformational change.
- **Accountable** - jointly accountable to each other and to the communities we serve.

Note that for public articulation, further explanation of the principles may be required.

Proposed focus for collaborative action

The CAR Group share a desire to help London recover from the covid crisis, not to build back the same as before, but to build a fairer, greener and stronger city for all Londoners. London’s Recovery Board and Missions offer an opportunity for funders to collaborate around short and medium terms aims that already have cross sector ownership and structures to engage with and listen to Londoners and London’s civil society. The advantage of linking the initial focus of collaborative action to the Missions is the wide engagement that has already taken place to develop shared intelligence on the issues and understanding of potential solutions.

The nine Missions are [here](#). Missions that are of particular interest to the CAR Group members (and the majority of London Funders' members according to the data mapping we have undertaken on funder strategy priority areas) are:

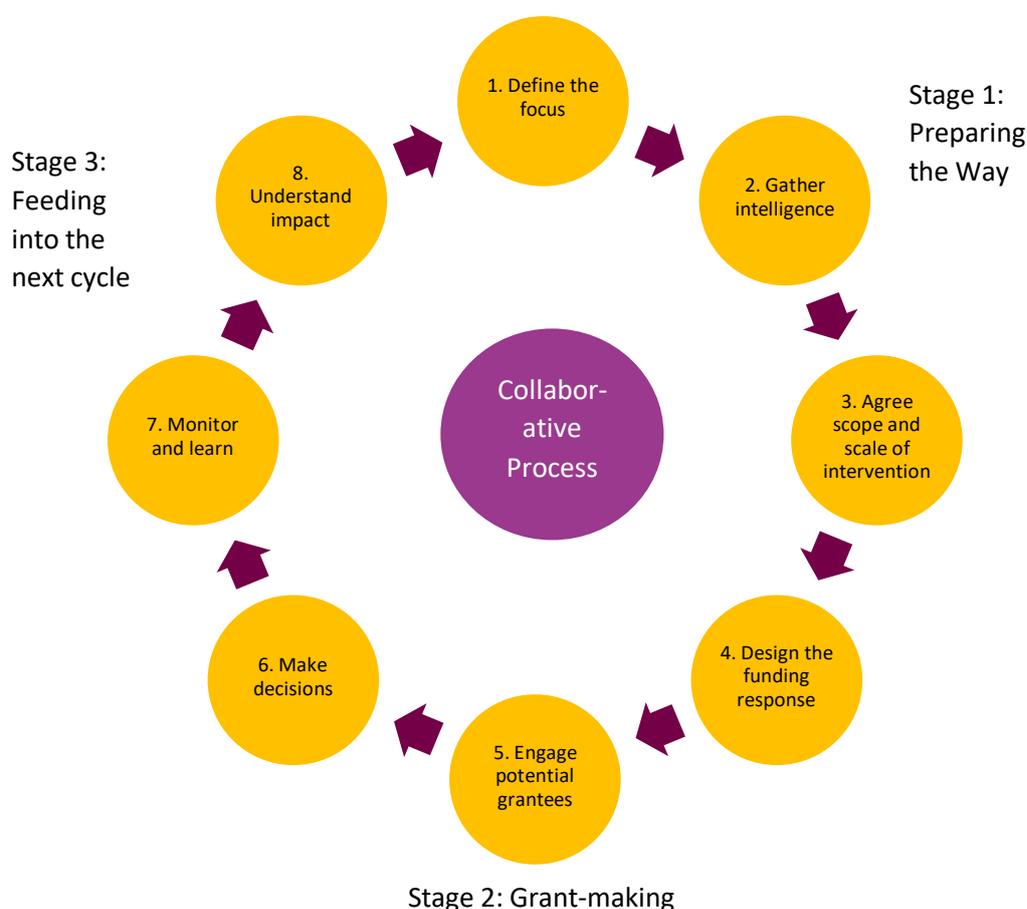
- A New Deal for Young People;
- A Robust Safety Net; and
- Building Strong Communities.

Collaborative funding programmes could be themed around different missions and launch at different times, or have an overarching theme linking to the overall vision for London's recovery, and have more than one theme sheltering beneath it (as per the LCR Wave 5, where applicants to the Renewal funding programme then identified one of three missions to which to link their work). Either approach would allow funders (both CAR Group members and others) with specific interests or geographies to pool or align their funds as best suits their priorities.

Funders may also decide to launch explicitly long term (ten year?) funding programmes that are explicitly linked to the missions in the initial timeframe but continue after that to build on the relationships and learning that have been generated.

Process for collaborative action

The CAR Group have considered the following stages of collaborative process:



This cycle of collaborative action has three clear 'stages' on which to develop and test bold and creative funding approaches informed by the principles. This requires involving partners from across sectors and from civil society in each stage, being clear what is being asked of them, and how that will be resourced. That may be different at each stage, for example:

- Stage 1: Some of Stage 1 has already been done through the development of the Recovery Missions and by other civil society and cross-sector infrastructure partnerships. Could additional processes engage more people with lived experience in defining the issues and potential solutions?
- Stage 2: This requires co-designing funding programmes with other funders and potential grantees, responding to the appetite for long term and flexible grants, recognising that there are opportunities for participation in decision making at multiple stages and being clear how this can be effectively supported.
- Stage 3: Bring learning partners in from the beginning, designing an iterative learning approach that enables funders and grantees to learn together, acting systemically alongside each other to develop a shared understanding of impact, seeking to influence practice and behaviours across sectors.

A structure to support collaborative action

Alongside providing a way of pooling funds and aligning funds and supporting transformational programmes and process, the structure needs to be explicitly and visibly shaped by the principles and needs to provide:

- A way of bringing together different parts of 'the system' (systemic, non-partisan) alongside enabling communities to participate in co-designing programmes and decision making (sharing power);
- A way for funders and civil society to take risks together in funding approaches and behaviours (bold) and respond to a dynamic environment (flexible) without being risky in itself; and
- A way of unlearning old ways of working (equitable) and learning and sharing how change happens (long term).

We see the structure or 'vehicle for collaboration' as providing a range of functions:

1. Develops shared understanding of need and solutions – drawing on all sources of data/intelligence, valuing expertise from funders, communities and partners– to deliver strategic and effective interventions.
2. Provides an easy and effective way to bring together funds for both urgent and long-term issues, including 'capturing and smoothing' (across time, issues, geographies) funding of various kinds and timescales.

3. Tests and models new and exemplary practice in grant making – including involving communities in grant making – which in turn help to influence and shape the practice of participating funders and partners.
4. Builds tools and systems to support better ways of working – including a platform to make the fundraising and reporting process simpler for civil society and funders, balancing the power relationship and increasing effectiveness.
5. Invests in learning, unlearning and in sharing learning about how change happens in order to develop the practice, behaviours and culture of funders, partners and civil society.

These functions overlap in that each influences the next, reflecting the systemic ways of thinking and working that are at the heart of this work.

Whilst all of these functions can be carried out by funders working individually but in a collaboration, the significant added value of doing this together would be enabling people to step outside of their normal ways of working, and genuinely embrace the potential of this opportunity.

Delivery considerations

Through discussions at the workshops it was clear that London Funders was regarded as playing a helpful role in bringing funders together to collaborate, building on the LCR, and London Funders has therefore continued to provide support to develop this thinking.

As we look to the next stage of development we need to consider how best to resource this work, so that the ambition to bring all partners together equally can be delivered in parallel to the core work of the London Funders team – at a simple level this may be through a shared “brand” (as was done with the LCR), through to potentially considering a “vehicle” to provide appropriate governance and structure to the collaborative work.

Discussions will be held with partners to explore the best solutions for delivering the ambitions outlined in this paper, alongside noting any time or resource considerations for partners so that we can deliver for London’s communities together.