**London Funders Insight Meeting:**

**How do we measure the building of strong communities?**

**Data Insights - February 2022**

**What is a strong community?**

London, with a population of over 9million[[1]](#footnote-2), is often seen by outsiders as one vast city. However, those of us who live and/or work here know that in reality it can often feel like hundreds of small towns and villages. But, how do we define communities and what makes them strong, and how do we strengthen the ones that aren’t?

[New Local](https://www.newlocal.org.uk/) sets out that strong communities can be described as those which are better connected, better organised and more participative.[[2]](#footnote-3) They have set out seven features of a strong community:

* Connected
* Organised
* Participative
* Active
* Resourceful
* Accepting
* Fair

[Hertfordshire Community Foundation](https://www.hertscf.org.uk/) states that “the strength of our communities affects all aspects of our life from our health and wellbeing to our local economy and environment. Whether based on geography or brought together by a shared cause they provide us with a sense of connection, an ability to influence (and be influenced) and a channel through which to contribute. Strong communities possess the local knowledge, passion and perspective to create community cohesion and resilience as well real and lasting change.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

**What does this mean for London and its future view on communities?**

As London looks at recovering from the pandemic, how do we strengthen our communities? Many organisations have been asking themselves, their stakeholders and Londoners what the future looks like, and how it can better serve the capital’s communities.

[London Futures](https://www.centreforlondon.org/reader/greater-london-a-new-vision/), the project from Centre for London, has been looking at long term strategic approaches to the city. Their report found that Londoners are highly concerned about personal safety, health and protection from future epidemics. Londoners also prioritise housing and homelessness, as well as a recovery that delivers jobs and economic growth after the pandemic. There was also a strong consensus that more needs to be done to make London fairer.[[4]](#footnote-5)

[London’s Giving](https://londonsgiving.org.uk/)’s report on the ‘Power of People, Partnerships and Place’[[5]](#footnote-6) defines place as:

“a geographic community who come together to think about how to make their area better.”

But they are also about place in other ways – about ensuring all sectors and all people have a place at the table where decisions are made, about challenging what values are deemed worthy to bring to that table and creating welcoming places that celebrate our diversity. The report makes clear, when we view the idea of ‘place’ through this lense we can truly create a sense of belonging for everyone in our community and therefore build its strength.

[The London Recovery Board](https://www.london.gov.uk/coronavirus/londons-recovery-coronavirus-crisis/london-recovery-board) has named one of their missions [‘Building Strong Communities’](https://www.london.gov.uk/coronavirus/londons-recovery-coronavirus-crisis/recovery-context/building-strong-communities) with challenge that ‘All Londoners to be able to play an active role in their communities; making London a more equal and inclusive city post covid-19”. The ‘asks’ that have been produced are:

* All communities - particularly the most disadvantaged with the greatest health inequalities - can get the support and services they need. They should also have more control and choice over those services
* Londoners can build and maintain relationships and be active citizens
* London’s civil society is strong and resilient. It reflects and champions London's communities and can meet future shocks. Organisations can access resources and support to meet new/changed demand and provide essential services
* Sustainable and strong partnerships between funders and voluntary and community sector organisations
* Continuing risks that arose during the crisis are addressed
* Public service partnerships proactively include the voice of older Londoners in future planning

**What are our members doing to build strong communities and what data is out there?**

The [Civic Strength Index](https://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/publications/london-civic-strength-index/) (as we will hear more on in the session) co-designed and co-created with Londoners, was developed by The Young Foundation and funded by the GLA. It’s designed to help London boroughs and organisations support discussions about the strengths of their communities and consider how build on them.[[6]](#footnote-7) Through this report, they define civic strength as:

“Civic strength exists when communities are supported by robust public and social infrastructure to build strong relationships and feel able to meaningfully engage in the issues that matter to them.”

Helen Goulden, CEO at The Young Foundation, says: “The new Civic Strength Index gives Londoners a deeper understanding of the unique strengths in their communities. I hope this valuable tool will be used to support and inform action to improve the lives of all Londoners.

This picture is made of data around three key areas; ‘relationships and social capital’, ‘democratic engagement’ and ‘public and social infrastructure’ and collated data from various platforms such as the Charity Commission, 360Giving and the Community Life survey[[7]](#footnote-8)

In wave 5 of the [London Community Response](https://londoncommunityresponsefund.org.uk/) (LCR) funding for large grants was focused on three renewal missions: Building strong communities, New deal for young people and Robust safety net.

**136** grants worth **£4.96m** went to the Building Strong Communities mission, **44%** of the total Wave 5 grants. Below you can see this by organisational theme and turnover. On average the most grants went or organisations with turnovers between £75k and £200k as the priorities were to fund smaller organisations, equity led organisations and those that had strong established connections with those at high risk of negative impacts from covid-19.

From London Funders [annual member audit](https://londonfunders.org.uk/latest/news/findings-our-member-audit) we can see that nearly all of our members are funding work in communities in some way (some specific examples in the further reading below). Most connected to making communities stronger would be ‘People and Communities’ which **27%** of our members fund, but also **3%** of our members funding ‘Volunteering and Social action’ and ‘Community resilience, integration and cohesion’.

Looking on Grant Nav[[8]](#footnote-9), by searching the term ‘community’ (a very broad term encompassing everything from foodbanks to local football teams and gardening to homelessness outreach) shows that in the last three years (2019 – 21) over **7,500** grants have gone out in London. Over **66%** were small grants between less thank **£10k**, with **44%** being between **£5-10K** and **75%** of the organisations having a turnover of less that £1m.

On the basis of the data above we can see funders are paying attention to smaller, grass roots organisations that are working for and by the communities they serve.

**Further reading and recommendations**

Building Strong Communities fund - <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/apply-building-strong-communities-fund>

Young People’s Foundations, John Lyon’s Charity - <https://www.jlc.london/jlc-extra/sector-capacity-building/young-peoples-foundations/>

[Young People’s Foundation (YPF)](https://www.jlc.london/jlc-extra/sector-capacity-building/young-peoples-foundations/) were set up as a response to the ingoing pressures of the Children and Young People’s sector. Based in their local communities, each YPF’s services are led by their members and based on the needs and assets of their area. Together they share a common goal – to help create and champion a more impactful, co-ordinated and sustainable sector to ensure all young people have access to quality support and opportunities.

Cornerstone Fund – <https://www.citybridgetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/grant-making/infrastructure-support-london/>

Five of our members[[9]](#footnote-10) have worked together on The Cornerstone Fund[[10]](#footnote-11) where their vision is for London to be a city where all individuals and communities can thrive. The mission is to reduce inequality and grow stronger, more resilient and thriving communities for a London that serves everyone. After round one, they shared their learning with recommendations for civil society organisations, funders

Every One Every Day, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham - <https://www.weareeveryone.org/>

Every One Every Day is a network of 1000s of people living in Barking and Dagenham who are working together on different neighbourhood projects around the borough to make everyday life better for everyone

Civil Society Roots - <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/civil-society/civil-society-roots#acc-i-64955>

The funding is for groups that are led by and for communities impacted by structural inequalities. This includes Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Londoners, Disabled Londoners, LGBT+ Londoners, Women and Older Londoners.

The 10 boroughs targeted in this round of funding are Bromley, Enfield, Harrow, Havering, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Newham, Redbridge, Sutton, Wandsworth.

1. <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/londons-population> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/articles/strong-communities-features/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.hertscf.org.uk/shares/01Aug17151322HCF_StrongCommunities_05_web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.centreforlondon.org/publication/greater-london-a-new-vision/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://londonsgiving.org.uk/introducing-place-based-giving/news/power-people-partnerships-and-place-new-report-launched-londons> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/publications/london-civic-strength-index/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://i3w7d2w8.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Civic-Strength-Index-Final-Report-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://insights.threesixtygiving.org/file/0195b7a83703d40a53aa2043be901d3c> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. City bridge Trust, the GLA, the National Lottery Community Fund, Trust for London and the John Lyon’s Charity [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://www.citybridgetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/grant-making/infrastructure-support-london/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)