



London Community Response

**Learning, Unlearning
and Thinking Scenarios
for London's communities
in 2023 and implications
for funders**



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WHAT IS THE LONDON COMMUNITY RESPONSE?

The London Community Response (LCR) is a collaboration of 67 funders, powered by London Funders – the membership organisation for funders of London’s civil society. Responding to the covid-19 crisis, funders involved in the LCR have been working together to provide coordinated funding to support groups responding to the needs of the capital’s communities

The single application point for charities and community groups has enabled organisations to access funding from multiple funders in a fast and efficient way. It has been designed based on insights from groups working with Londoners, to ensure that it is flexible and responds to needs as they emerge over time.

One year on from its inception, over £55m has been given out in grants through the LCR - with investment moving from crisis response in the early days of the pandemic, to building towards the recovery and renewal of civil society.

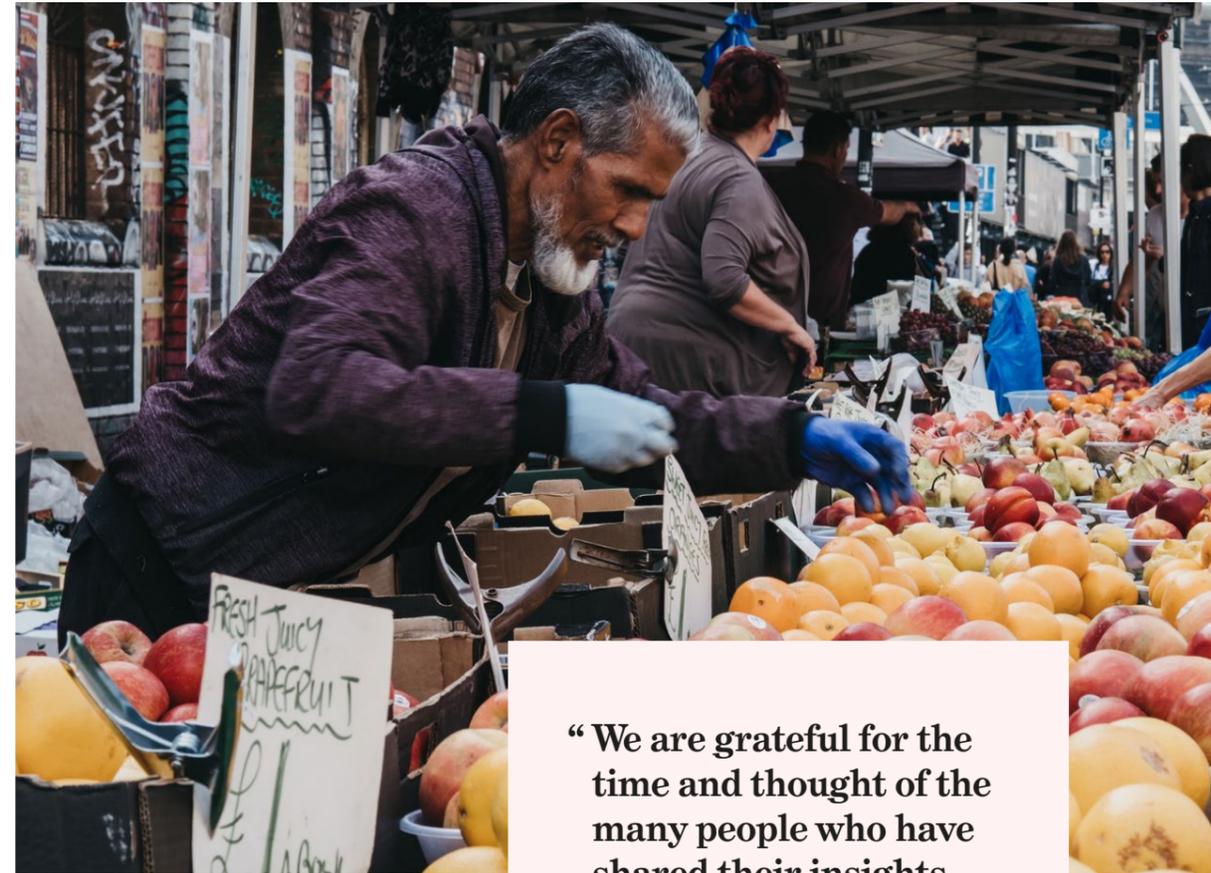
Working together, funders recognised that the social, economic and health consequences of covid-19 have disproportionately impacted those already-marginalised in society. The LCR funding programmes have prioritised supporting groups led by and for Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, LGBT+ communities, Deaf and Disabled people and/or women.

Learning Partners

To support the process of learning, unlearning and thinking for the future, London Funders appointed two Learning Partners - Reos Partners and the Social Investment Consultancy – to work independently, but alongside, the LCR partnership. Working together, both organisations have focused on the experiences of working across sectors, and have sought to capture how best London Funders and the wider LCR collaboration can influence the funding sector to maintain new and better ways of working in the ‘new normal’.

We had four questions to answer together:

1. How can we build on the experience of the LCR to enable future collaboration?
2. How can the experiences of civil society groups inform future ways of working?
3. How can we continue to strengthen our approach to equity and inclusion?
4. What should the key areas of focus be as we look towards renewal?



“We are grateful for the time and thought of the many people who have shared their insights and ideas to help us to construct these scenarios and consider their implications for funders.”

This report is our answer to question four, and was written and illustrated by a team from Reos Partners world experts in scenario planning. In their words, **“transformative scenarios aren’t about predicting the future, they’re about creating it.** While most scenario planning methodologies focus on adaptation, transformative scenarios seek to not only understand or adapt to the future but also to shape it. The structured yet creative process helps diverse actors to see the different futures that are possible and discover what they can and must do.”

We are grateful for the time and thought of the many people who have shared their insights and ideas to help us to construct these scenarios and consider their implications for funders. We also welcome your feedback on how they can be made more useful in informing action today to help in transforming the city into a place where all Londoners can thrive.

PURPOSE



This report asks what might the needs of London's communities be over the coming years and how might they be served?

Our scenarios tell stories of four possible futures for London's communities in the year 2023. The purpose of these scenarios is not to predict the future, but rather to shed light on the threats and opportunities facing London's communities. They are meant to be:

- **Credible;**
- **Current;**
- **Challenging;**
- **Clear.**

The aim of this report is to inform both what London Funders' members should focus on as they look to renewal, and how they can better fund in a rapidly changing and unpredictable future. The scenarios were created to answer our pressing

questions, but we believe that they provide useful insights for funders across the sector.

These scenarios were informed by:

- **Survey responses from over 500 grant recipients and 36 funders;**
- **Interviews with five key stakeholders working with London's communities;**
- **A review of several other scenarios, including Centre for London's "London at a Crossroads" publication;**
- **A participatory workshop with ten funders;**

Two participatory online workshops were held:

- **with LCR's Strategic Partners, Equity Partners and the London Funders team;**
- **with 40 of LCR's grant recipients, and the London Funders team.**

In these workshops, participants were asked to consider how to bring about the desirable elements, and how to avoid and mitigate the undesirable elements, of each scenario. The results of this process are set out underneath each scenario. Note that civil society identified a need for core funding across all of the scenarios.

The scenarios

Each of the four below scenarios for the future of London have implications which affect how funders should work in the coming years. They are:

- **Building back the same**
- **Building back better**
- **Building differently**
- **Not building back**

BUILDING BACK THE SAME



This scenario looks at the possibility of going back to the way things were - rebuilding the economy, yet not fully recovering as a society. The government is focused on reclaiming Central London's prestige as the bustling capital and economic centre of Great Britain.

tone

This scenario is characterised by polarity, division, siloed thinking, greed, economic stability, and capitalism. In this scenario there are a few who are thriving, many who are surviving, and some that can barely survive.

central themes

Economy;
Governance,
Poverty, Inequality, &
Food Security;
Education.

A high-quality public health response resulted in voluntary mass immunisation and returned safety, ease, and a semblance of life going back to normal in Central London. With shifting power dynamics and cuts in funding provided to local authorities, the central government holds more power and decision-making. This has created a top-down structure which permeates society.

The desire to return Central London to the thriving place it once was has meant prioritising the economy, and quickly bringing back tourism – this comes at the expense of supporting outer London. The

capital has defined itself as a special trade zone and a closed ecosystem which is offering enticing tax breaks which attract big global companies. Because of this, there is a move towards reducing “red tape” which leads to reduction in regulatory enforcement and subsequent environmental and health impacts.

Property values are at an all-time high, due to the many businesses moving in. At the same time, conditions are more unequal and unjust, with a few people reaping the benefits of this revived Central London and most left behind.

There is notable division and clash in thinking amongst generations. Older generations find comfort in the return to stability and a feeling of normalcy. Younger generations, whose education, employment, and future opportunities have been significantly impacted are vocal about wanting social, economic, and educational reform.

A geographic divide has also begun to separate the wealthy, who remain in Central London, from lower income groups who have been pushed to the outer boroughs of the city. This results in significant tension between “the powers that be” and young, BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic), Deaf and Disabled,

and LGBT+ communities who want and are pushing for change.

In this scenario, the economy is seen as the foundation of society. It is the glue that holds government and society at-large ‘together’. This results in a governmental, economic, and financial focus on what’s working and performing well, and a predominant pattern of steering away from challenge or change. Lack of attention to equity and equality perpetuates existing gaps and challenges in society. As the government continues to look past investment in education and opportunity for youth and vulnerable groups, revolt and revolution are on the rise.

What should funders do?

To avoid the harmful elements of the scenario world of ‘Building back the same’ and advance a future that meets the needs of all of London’s communities, this scenario would require funders to:

- Carefully target resources (using data to do so) to support young people, BAME, Deaf and Disabled, LGBT+ communities and women;
- Invest in local, grassroots and by-and-for groups – making it simpler so that smaller groups can engage;
- Recognise that the money alone does good things, but it also creates credibility and opens spaces for dialogue and action to happen;
- Invest in campaigning, lobbying, advocacy and systems change alongside direct delivery;
- Amplify the work of civil society – telling Londoners about the work of civil society (e.g. through the media) to champion the work and raise awareness. Work in collaborative, pro-active ways - building on what funders have built through the LCR and not returning to old ways of working. Use funders own networks and knowledge to connect people together, matchmaking smaller organisations as they may not be aware of others working in similar ways where they could be stronger together and deliver more impact;

The scenario could also provide funders with more resources (as their investments or income streams would do well) but would require them to be more thoughtful about how that money is invested and about who holds power/makes decisions.

BUILDING BACK BETTER

tone

This scenario is characterised by trust, collaboration, strengthening of relationships, and stepping forward for the good of the whole.

central themes

Governance;
Poverty, Inequality, &
Food Security;
Arts & Culture;
Economy.

This scenario focuses on connection and regeneration. Covid-19 was a catalyst for change and brought about a mobilisation of grassroots efforts to address ongoing inequality, social injustices, and political reform. Citizens, especially the younger generations, are mobilised to address these challenges. An activated population pushes older generations and the government to step out of their comfort zone and to move forward, together.

In this scenario, people are seen as the foundation of society. After going through a period with no wage increases, economic slowdown, unemployment, increasing poverty and inequality, and pressure on essential workers in the health system, these systems are rebuilding and regenerating. Society works together to build forward better by collaborating and rethinking how society operates. It is a reorganisation of the economy, a shift in the public and government thinking, and a reinvestment in London's small businesses and arts and culture scene.

Following the crisis, there is a general recognition that more money is needed for the public purse. A progressive taxation for the NHS is introduced. The social safety net is stronger than before and benefits all. There is serious discussion around a Universal Basic Income in Parliament.

Digitalisation is being embraced as a strategy for connection and rebirth. Investments are being made in training and skill building for youth and people at risk of unemployment, and new business and livelihood opportunities are emerging. London is also making itself a hub for green and circular economy businesses, investing in sustainable networks and innovations.

At the same time as people shift to shopping online and from local delivery providers, retail shops in Central London are closing. This leads to a tax for online businesses being introduced. The government is also getting stricter with companies that avoid taxes. This is backed up by the public opinion polling showing that the population support taxing the wealthiest people and companies.

While the high-tax environment causes some to leave London, new initiatives are developing to attract investment and encourage small start-ups and the art sector to re-enter the centre with affordable work places. New affordable housing initiatives are emerging as well, as property becomes more affordable. Although not as profitable as it used to be, London is redesigning its city centre.

“While the high-tax environment causes some to leave London, new initiatives are developing to attract investment and encourage small start-ups and the art sector to re-enter the centre with affordable work places.”



What should funders do?

To avoid the harmful elements of the scenario world of “Building Back Better” and advance a future that meets the needs of all of London’s communities this scenario would require funders to:

- Build on the trust they have in civil society to understand and deliver what is needed, which could be through more flexible funding models;
- Invest in the ability of civil society and communities to collaborate, innovate and design solutions that work;
- Invest in digital and in arts and culture (providing the spaces where collaboration and innovation could happen);
- Put more money into community spaces and venues to make sure that they survive;
- Invest in democratic engagement, voter registration and campaigning (which we recognise is not a comfortable place for many funders);
- Ensure that quieter voices and smaller charities are heard and that those at the top listen to what they have to say.

This scenario implies that independent funders may have less resource, but that public sector and business funders may have increased funds available, so to respond to the scale of the challenge/opportunity, everyone would need to work across sectors, going beyond what they already do.

BUILDING DIFFERENTLY.

tone

This scenario is characterized by growth and learning in the face of challenge and crisis, and optimism for the future.

central themes

Governance;
Housing;
Economy;
Poverty, Inequality,
& Food Security

This is a story about regeneration that happens when systems collapse. The global pandemic, failing central government, increasing populism and struggling economy bring London's communities moments of despair as well as opportunities to a different future.



“Parents now play the vital roles of primary care providers, educators, and full-time earners for their households if they are fortunate enough to keep their jobs.”

The government responded poorly to the covid-19 pandemic and was unable to rein in the crisis. All communities, regardless of income level, were unable to fight off the effects of the pandemic, though vulnerable communities were more heavily affected. The social, economic, and healthcare systems have been overwhelmed to the point of breakdown, and the quality of life in Central London has been drastically degraded.

There is still a primary focus on covid-19 across the healthcare system and the NHS struggles not to collapse against the weight of this persistent reality.

Digitalisation is being embraced as a A housing and food crisis plagues Central London's communities. Environmental issues are pushed aside, being considered less urgent than other crises. Education now takes place strictly online, which has

made access to education more unequal than ever. The digital divide and inequality feed a student rebellion in favour of educational and social reform. Training and employment opportunities for youth are slim, unemployment rates are high, the economy is in a dire state, and Britain's status on the global stage is falling quickly.

Parents now play the vital roles of primary care providers, educators, and full-time earners for their households if they are fortunate enough to keep their jobs.

In the face of these trying conditions, citizen-led, issue-focused collectives are working on dealing with the pressing challenges of the city. Local authorities are working collaboratively to address their communities most central needs: food, shelter, and safety.

There has been a slow transition of power as local, decentralised entities and community-focused initiatives have engaged in efforts to fill the gaps that the central government could not. Many of the abandoned buildings and vacant public venues are being taken over to support these efforts. The voluntary and community sector are drivers of energy, direction and change.

In this scenario, opportunity and transformation are seen as the foundation of society. A more diverse and inclusive

citizen-led form of governance is emerging, with all levels of government welcoming citizen engagement and devolving power to the most local level. People are coming together to support each other, listen to each other, and make decisions together in order to address their most basic needs.

Civic engagement is very high, and the organisations that are thriving are those that provide people with opportunities to steer the organisation and get involved. Old ways of doing things are being replaced with new pathways forward, and there is an energy of change and systems transformation moving through people and their communities.

What should funders do?

To avoid the harmful elements of the scenario world of “Building Differently” and advance a future that meets the needs of all of London’s communities this scenario would require funders to:

- Invest in grassroots, hyperlocal, mutual aid and movements rather than organisations, enabling communities to deliver change themselves;
- Provide funding in a way that enables marginalised voices to be included and amplified. In this scenario digital access is key, and so funding will need to focus on digital inclusion, for example, by providing free WiFi for all, with support to access the skills and hardware to benefit from it;
- Share power on decision making, making the funding process more participative and inclusive, whilst ‘holding’ a shared sense of the big picture;
- Get serious about sustainability – longer-term funding for organisations, and for infrastructure, networks and partnerships that connection organisations across the system;

The key words in this scenario are participation and complexity. This requires both good infrastructure support and a willingness to let go.

“Invest in grassroots, hyperlocal, mutual aid and movements rather than organisations, enabling communities to deliver change themselves”



NOT BUILDING BACK

tone

This scenario is characterised by fear, uncertainty, loneliness and isolation, mistrust, misinformation, and despair.

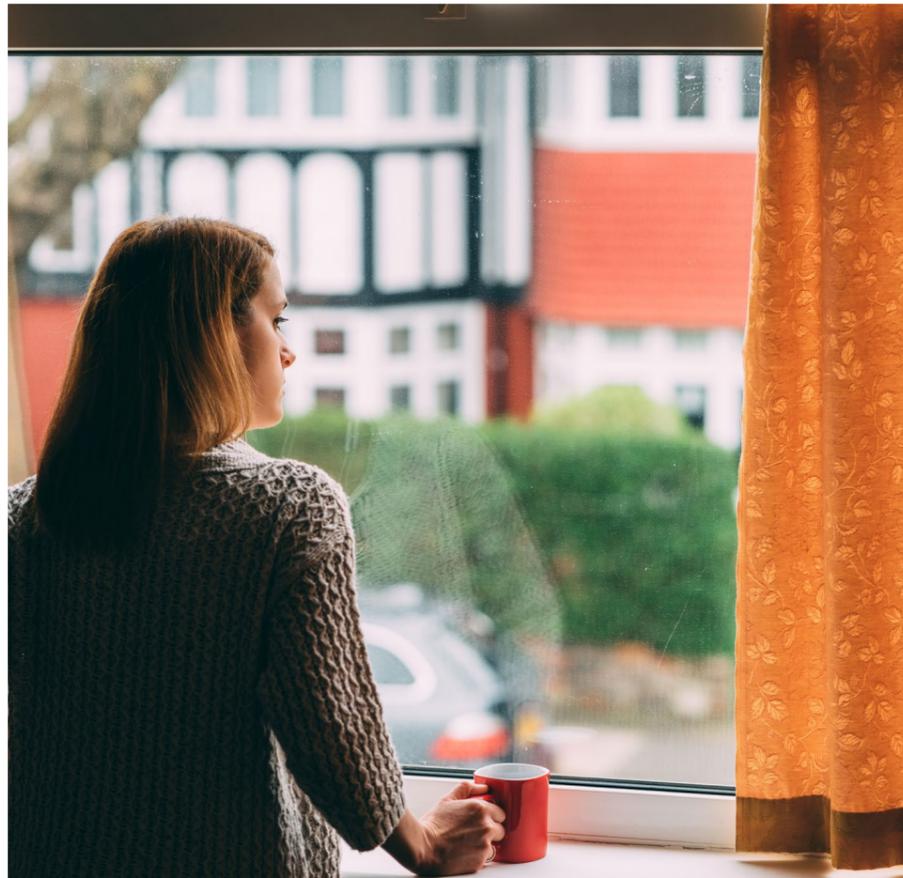
central themes

Economy;
Mental Health;
Crime;
Poverty, Inequality,
& Food Security.

This is a story about isolation and a mental health crisis that resulted from an uncontrolled global pandemic and economic downturn. While Britain as a whole has been steadily recovering, London continues to be a hot-spot for covid-19, and regularly sparks flare-ups in other parts of the country.

The state of the economy has continued to drive unemployment rates up. Those who have jobs, are overworked. People are plagued with vicious cycles of misinformation from the media. The state of not only London, but of the nation and the international political and economic landscapes weigh heavily on the minds of government and citizens alike.

Growing concern over the state of public health and efficacy of care leaves little room to address social or environmental issues. Within healthcare, burnouts are the norm and there is high pressure on the NHS to meet the rising demand and provide quality services.



The economic downturn has impacted nearly everyone. The wealthy are a little poorer, though far less affected than others due to the safety that their privilege provides them. Education is primarily online and high-quality private education providers have emerged and are providing good quality online education at all levels, but it is accessible only to those with resources.

The lives of socially excluded people have been most impacted. **They are considerably poorer, they face the highest rates of unemployment, and their access to essential resources and care is precarious.** The feeling of scarcity and desire to find someone to blame leads to increasingly anti-migrant attitudes. This leads to new laws and policies that crackdown on immigration and limit access to health care and housing for non-British citizens

In this scenario, power and rank are seen as the foundation of society. Those who held power in pre-covid times are clinging on to it and focused on maintaining comfort for themselves. Those without it have been overlooked and continually disadvantaged. This struggle for power and resources has resulted in riots, looting and vandalism, and higher crime rates across the city, and Central London is nearing a state of emergency.

People are leaving the city in search of higher quality lives for themselves and their families outside of London. With a growing trend towards de-urbanization, there seems to be a distribution of strength happening outside of London.

What should funders do?

To avoid the harmful elements of the scenario world of “Not building back” and advance a future that meets the needs of all of London’s communities this scenario would require funders to:

- Focus on crisis support for the communities most affected by the pandemic enabling organisations to think differently and to change the way they work to equip the people they work with to face an uncertain future;
- Articulate shared goals between funders and civil society. Build connection and relationships between communities and groups of organisations as well as investing in communication and voice from the sector;
- Allocate a percentage of funds to prevention, early action, and addressing root causes;
- Continue to make quick decisions based on a good understanding of community needs;
- Act as holders and sharers of data and intelligence, using it thoughtfully to achieve more impact;
- Mainstream long term, agile and adaptable funding, with one application to multiple funders, and light touch reporting;
- With less money in the system funders will need to think more strategically about what they will not fund;

Given the scale of need funders would need to get comfortable with acting fast, staying flexible, taking risks and trusting grantees. Funders would also need to work collaboratively to stay strategic.

CONCLUSION

We hope that by reading through these scenarios, and the strategies that funders would need to consider in response, that our members will be able to consider the variety of different ways in which London's civil society could develop as we move on from the immediate crisis. This report looks ahead to 2023, but we know that how Londoners are supported in the upcoming months and years will have an impact on the city in the decades to come.

It is likely that a future London will have a combination of building back the same, building differently, building back better and not building back. However by presenting these four scenarios as distinct and separate entities, we are aiming to help funders from across sectors to think about their own unique role in the capital's recovery.

London Funders will be working with our members to look at how we can respond to the changing needs of our communities – if you're not already a member, you'll find information on how to get involved on our website at www.londonfunders.org.uk



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