RENAISI & THE SOCIAL INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP

Principles for Funding Place-Based Systems Change Sustainably

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With thanks to our Community of Practice and all survey participants. Additional thanks to our interviewees →

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Introduction

In this paper we introduce a new framework for funding place-based systems change, which aims to shift us towards funding and investment approaches which respond to the scale of ambition held by those pushing for inter-generational, transformational change in their places.

Understanding place-based systems change as an **ongoing process** that requires cultivation of trusting relationships, deep understanding of a place and intentional efforts to shift and create new constituencies of power, narratives and structures, forces us to see that it cannot be achieved through designing the perfect programme. We must collectively turn our efforts towards redesigning the ecosystem in which this work exists, **including the funding landscape that places draw on** to continue working towards long-term transformation.

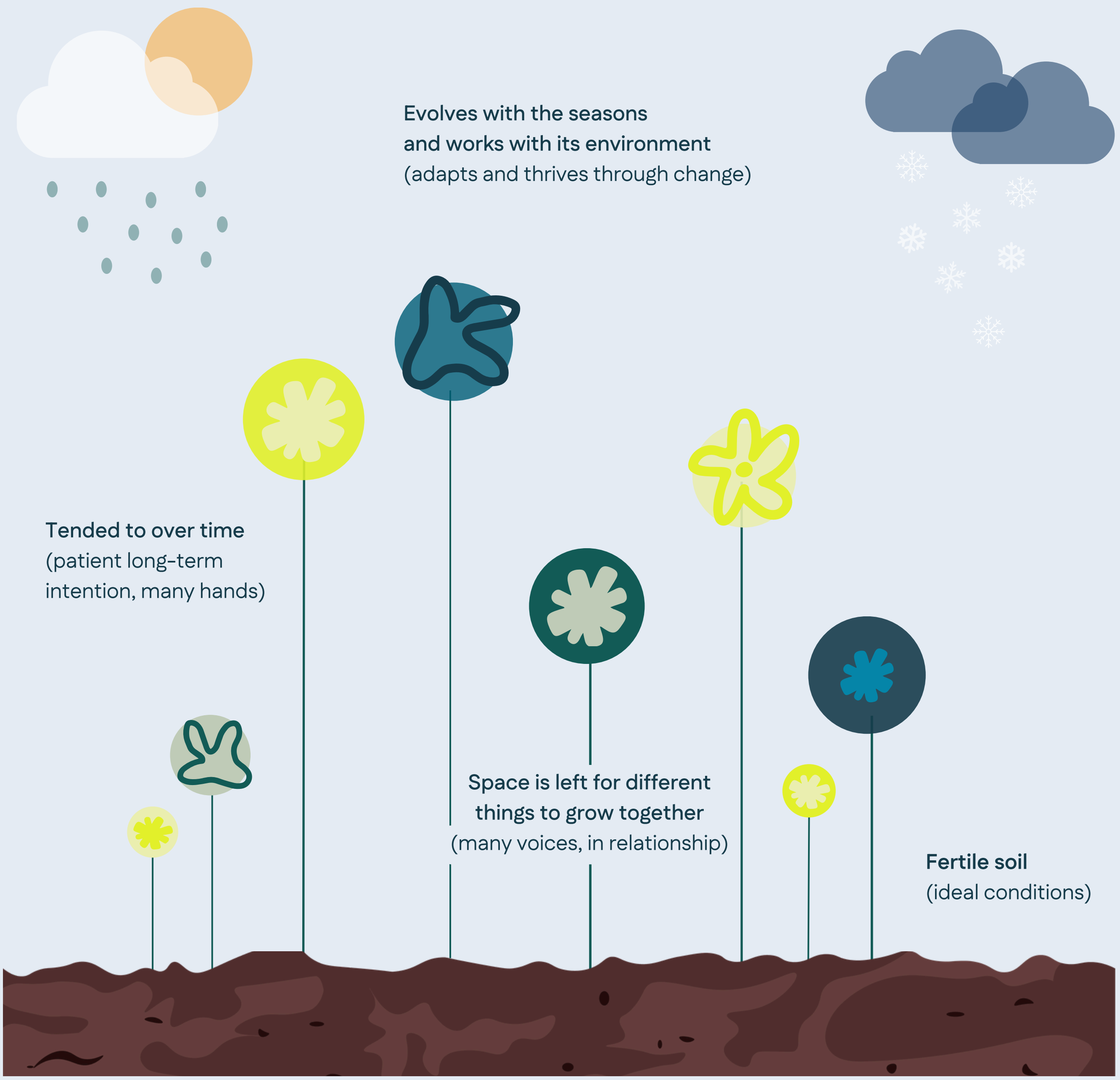
A central finding of our research with organisations delivering, funding and supporting place-based systems change is that the way social change is resourced is never neutral. It has deep and lasting impacts on the potential for work to be place-based and systemic. Both our interviews and survey revealed a widespread view that developing an ecosystem which effectively resourced place-based systems change would require both relatively simple and radical shifts to the principles that currently shape funding and financing decisions. Participants shared that the **time** that funding is committed for, the assessment of risk, the types of **evidence and monitoring** required and the degree of **restriction** around what it can be spent on all have deep influence their ability to pursue place-based systems change. The funding mechanisms that place-based organisations and partnerships draw on affect whether work can be collaborative, participatory, adaptive and focused on long-term change — or whether it is pushed towards short-term delivery.

Alongside this, participants highlighted the importance of a certain **mindset** for place-based systems change, pointing to a need for **bravery and imagination** and recognising this work should be guided by principles of **social justice** and ambition for **inter-generational change.** Our research also revealed the need for funders and investors to recognise the **depth and scale of commitment** involved in supporting local systems change. This points to the need to collectively work towards principles for funding place-based systems change which reflect a new normal, while working within – and around - the current paradigm.

What does sustainable mean in this work?

A sustainable garden is supported by fertile soil (ideal conditions), tended to over time (patient long-term intention, many hands), space is left for different things to grow together (many voices, in relationship), evolves with the seasons and works with its environment (adapts and thrives through change).

Sustainability for the garden therefore means meeting today's needs without exhausting the conditions that make future growth possible. It is about balance, regeneration, and patience. A gardener who strips the soil for a quick harvest may get short-term results, but over time the garden weakens. A gardener who composts, protects biodiversity, and plans for different seasons builds a garden that can endure over time with the right weeding, watering and responsive care. So, using the metaphor: **becoming sustainable is not just keeping the garden alive today. A sustainable garden is not one that you can plant then abandon forever. A sustainable garden will be cared for in a way that means it can continue to flourish tomorrow, next year, and for many seasons after that.**

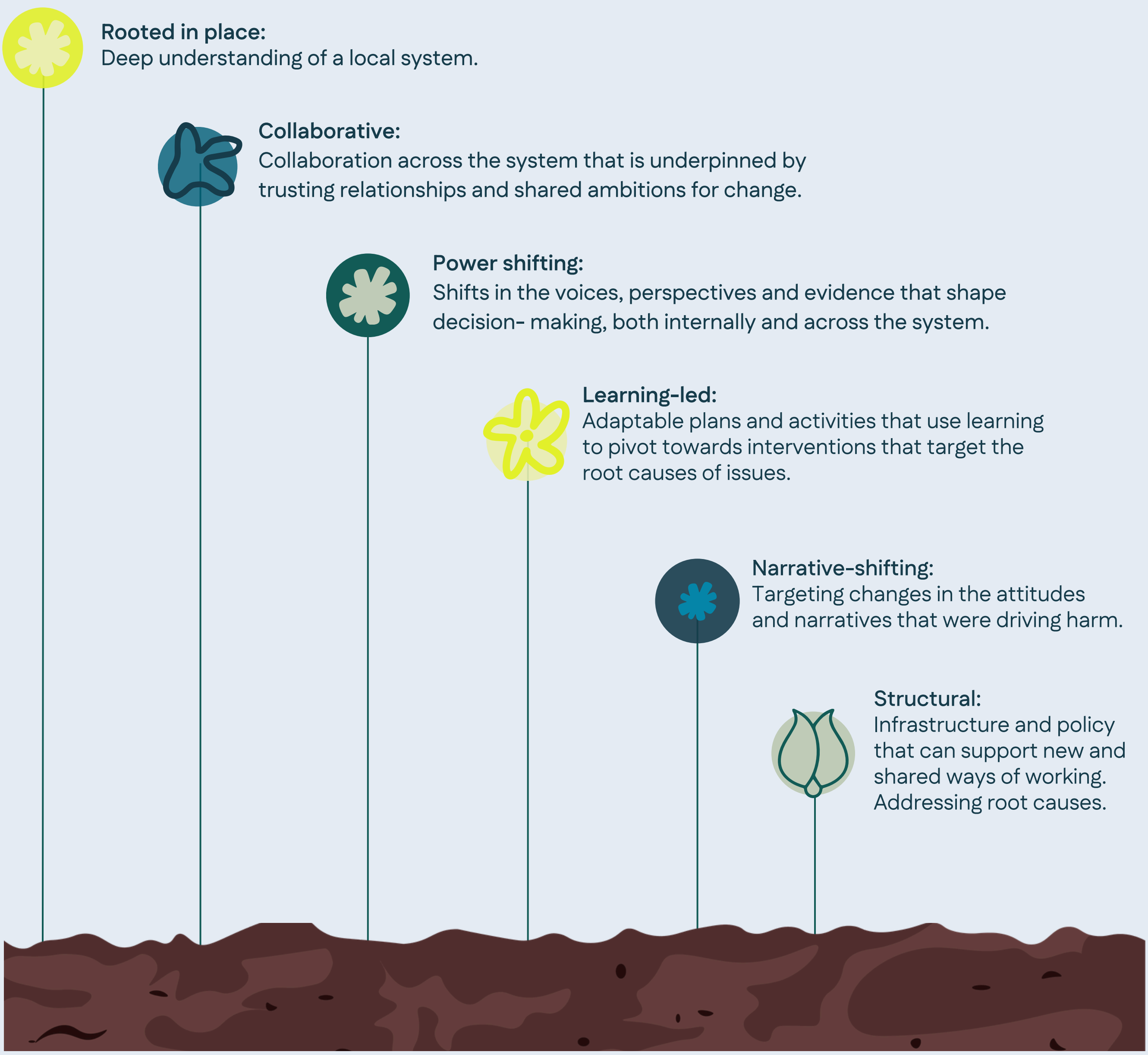


Why a garden?

We have used the garden metaphor rather than a meadow or a forest, to denote the fact that it is still essentially a system designed and maintained in part by human intervention, contained within a larger environment. It is not wholly wild, but tended to, pruned, and nurtured into shape with intention working together with the ebb and flow of natural cycles. Finally, even the most skilled gardener cannot create a garden that continues to grow without input; this is work that takes ongoing cultivation and attention to support its flourishing.

In the same way our inquiry has shown that sustaining place-based systems change requires ongoing work and strong foundations. It cannot be achieved through designing an initiative that will have unchanging impact after funding comes to an end but through building long-term resourcing streams that enable organisations and individuals to do work that is rooted in connection to place, trusting relationships and an intention to shift power, narratives and structures locally.

Our indicators: practices that enable place-based systems change



Rooted in place:
Deep understanding of a local system.

Collaborative:
Collaboration across the system that is underpinned by trusting relationships and shared ambitions for change.

Power shifting:
Shifts in the voices, perspectives and evidence that shape decision- making, both internally and across the system.

Learning-led:
Adaptable plans and activities that use learning to pivot towards interventions that target the root causes of issues.

Narrative-shifting:
Targeting changes in the attitudes and narratives that were driving harm.

Structural:
Infrastructure and policy that can support new and shared ways of working. Addressing root causes.

Principles for Funding Place-Based Systems Change Sustainably

BRAVER Principles

for funding and investing in place-based systems change for sustainability

The **BRAVER principles** offered in this paper reflect the insights we uncovered through this inquiry. The principles represent new underlying norms that, if adopted, could have ripple effects across how funders and investors perceive their role in supporting social change and the role of money in shaping how a system functions beyond its purchasing power.

They are intended as a device for thinking and design, not a fixed formula.

We think that the principles are inter-connected and most effective when considered together, helping funders, investors and public bodies make more coherent choices about how they resource change or adapt their practices. Equally, we offer these principles to support those delivering place-based systems change to as they work though funding strategies and discussions with potential funders and investors, in the hope that they will strengthen their case for a different funding approach.

Using the BRAVER principles

For thinking and design, not a fixed formula. Offering a way of aligning resourcing approaches with how place-based systems change really happens: over long-time horizons, through relationships, and under conditions of uncertainty. The principles are interconnected and most effective when considered together, helping funders, investors and public bodies make more coherent choices.

The BRAVER principles are intended to prompt reflection and coordinated action across the ecosystem of organisations resourcing place-based systems change approaches, recognising that systems change is possible through aligned shifts in mindsets, practice and structures. We have suggested actions which could build more alignment with these principles and potentially catalyse change. The actions are offered only as limited illustrative examples to spark thinking for different actors, not definitive rules or prescribed mechanisms.

These have the potential to rapidly accelerate change if adopted widely and at scale. These are more complex to embed in practice.

The minimum foundational principles for funding and investing in this work. They are already practiced in many pockets. Widespread adoption of these principles will have the potential to vastly improve the conditions for those doing this work.

B

Beyond the short term: Support long-term, intergenerational change by valuing slow progress, collaboration, learning, and structural shifts that strengthen places for all future generations.

R

Reflective: Resource continuous reflection, experimentation, learning and adaptation, recognising progress is non-linear and requires patience, humility, collective sense-making and action together.

A

Aspirational: Enable places to imagine and organise around better futures, so funding supports transformation, not just incremental fixes to present challenges.

V

Voice: Sustain change by shifting power, legitimacy and decision making toward locally rooted, marginalised voices, enabling participation, leadership and narrative change.

E

Exposure to risk: Treat uncertainty as shared, not localised, by holding risk collectively so communities can learn, collaborate and adapt without bearing consequences.

R

Relational: Fund relationships, shared infrastructure and alignment across systems, so places build trust, collaborate effectively and pursue collective stewardship over competition.

B Beyond the short term

Why it matters

Place-based systems change requires shifting away from a focus on short-term impact. Place-based systems change seeks to influence multi-decade, intergenerational change. The impact of work can take a long-time to materialise, with periods where progress is relational or structural rather than immediately visible. Approaching social change with these timelines in mind should be encouraged, rather than punished by funding and investment approaches.

It is only through adopting an intergenerational approach to social change that you can truly work systemically, building towards structures that will uphold a better system for future generations while accounting for the historic context that has entrenched the current system. The adoption of this funding principle would support all of the practices that we know enable place-based systems change: enabling more rootedness, collaboration, learning and shifts in power, narratives and structures.

Actions that could build this

1 Philanthropic funders aiming to support place based systems change could design funding approaches which enable places to plan with a focus on intergenerational change.

This design principle would normalise **funding a place for 10+ years,** adopting a staged approach where the type of grant, volume, number of recipients and duration might shift over time through ongoing conversation with partners in the place. A philanthropic funder aiming to support place-based systems change should see themselves as **partnering with a place in a long-term journey**. While the funder might only be there for part of that journey, its approach to funding should ensure activities are not shaped by a need to prioritise evidencing immediate results over long-term change. This could be implemented through long-term funding commitments. It also could include funders taking on an **active role in supporting place-based organisations to engage other funders and investors** so one funding period can smoothly transition to other, equally appropriate sources of funding. Community organisations, national charities and infrastructure bodies have all made calls for long-term funding.[1]

This research has made clear that a failure to normalise this is incompatible with the aims inherent in place-based systems change. This is in alignment with the calls made by the **Mycelial Network** for long-term core funding for Community Asset Developers.

2 Public sector and philanthropic funders could consider covering core and revenue costs for organisations to cover salaries for critical roles for multiple years.

Many of the most boundary pushing and yet under resourced organisations and collaboratives doing this work face burnout, low salaries, and a high degree of precarity while committing considerable discretionary effort and commitment to the work. These are often people of the community they are based in – hyper local and rooted. Sustaining this work means providing sustenance for those that drive it, which could look like **covering core costs and encouraging fair pay** for challenging and often all-encompassing work.

1 The case for long-term funding is set out well in the Institute for Voluntary Action Research's report: Time to end the dominance of short-term grants: The evidence for multi-year funding. Available online here.

3 **Beyond this, funders and investors could explore the development of new place-based endowments by devolving or granting funding to place-based organisations.**

Building on the suggestion above, this approach entails a long-term or permanent shift in wealth to a place that enables local actors to collectively manage an endowment to support ongoing place-based systems change practice. Focussing on developing **new endowments in cold spot areas** where investment is limited and untouched by time limited programmes such as Pride in Place (as is the case for many "doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods" to **JRF's latest research**)[2] or the future Community Wealth Fund, or with weaker social infrastructure, could support the process of improving outcomes for places and people most impacted by systemic failure. Place based giving funds and community foundations can be effective vehicles for the development of place-based endowments, with Barking and Dagenham Giving[3] providing a strong example of how to ensure these are managed by the local community.

Devolving funding to community asset development organisations can also be an effective way to meaningfully resource place-based systems change, as has been called for by CIVIC SQUARE and Dark Matter Labs in their ask for those in philanthropy who want to support regeneration to move to "real world endowments."[4] Lankelly Chase is an example of a funder exploring this approach to supporting systemic change, having committed to permanently redistributing its assets to communities over five years.[5] However, there is a risk that longer-term, significant transfers of money to places could entrench marginalisation if there funding goes to organisations perceived as more "established". Mitigating against this will require dedicated funding towards organisations led by marginalised communities, recognising that historic marginalisation from access to funding and finance[6] is likely to be perpetuated in decisions around where to place devolved endowments or capital.

4 **Social investors could consider more ways to raise awareness of how to access patient capital.**

This would be particularly valuable at early and mid-stages of place-based systems change initiatives, to **prevent premature value extraction and destabilisation** at points where change is beginning to emerge. We know that it often takes 10+ years to see place-based systems change have impacts that are felt across the population in a place. Because of this, patient capital from investors that share the values and vision for the work and PBSC approaches can be catalytic for those doing this work. It allows place-based partnerships and organisations to focus time on building stronger plans for sustainability and maturation of the work, instead of frequent fundraising rounds year-to-year.

5 **Place based organisations could be better supported to reframe the role of income generation and investment in their journey.**

This is about **power shifting through knowledge transfer and access**. It entails supporting place-based partnerships to consider investment and income generation as part of their collective, long-term resourcing strategy. This must recognise that for some communities, historic 'failure' or structural barriers to accessing adequate and appropriate finance may foster hesitance to seek out certain forms of financing. Social investors could account for this by investing time and expertise in transferring gatekept knowledge, access and skills so that place-based organisations can make informed choices about their long-term resourcing approaches. Both the Bristol Local Access Programme and Kindred, in Liverpool City Region have demonstrated that improving access to social investment requires relational capacity building.

2 **Joseph Rowntree Foundation**'s March 2026 research explored the Pride in Place funding formula and high-need area targeting methodology. The research concludes that some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods are untouched by Pride in Place funding
3 Read more about Barking and Dagenham Giving's community-led investment approach here.
4 This call is made in the paper Endowing The Future co-authored and co-built by CIVIC SQUARE and Dark Matter Labs. Available online here.
5 More information on Lankelly Chase's transition is available on its website here.
6 Further detail on the historic underfunding of charities led by racially minoritised communities is available in **Voice4Change**'s report here. The Pathway Fund also summarises key statistics on the marginalisation of black-led social enterprises from access to finance in its strategy here.

R Reflective

Why it matters

Place-based systems change never follows a predictable path. The journey will twist and turn in ways you have not planned for and sometime feel like it's moving backwards before it goes forward.

As described in our section on the practice of being "learning-led," navigating this reality requires continuous reflection and sense-making. This builds places' understanding of the root causes of systemic issues and how to embed change. Resourcing place-based systems change therefore means resourcing places to collectively test, experiment, pause, learn and adapt. This requires shifting away from assessing organisations based on their ability to "get things right" the first time. It balances encouraging ongoing action with patience and humility.

Actions that could build this

1 When aiming to support place-based systems change, philanthropic funders and investors could rethink asking for evidence of short-term impact as a criterion for future funding.

This implies **moving away from proof-of-concept** or **pilot models** that position place-based systems change work as "provable" or quantitatively measurable in 1-3 years. While there may be evidence of change in the early years of a partnership's place based systems change journey, such as shifts to local relationships or decision-making processes, the need to evidence success to a funder drives places to overclaim impact and holds back the potential for genuine reflection on what is not working and learning about how to adapt. At Renaisi-TSIP our experience of how place-based systems change was evaluated by funders led us to develop a model for evaluating place-based change that articulates the types of change that one might expect to see at different stages in a place-based systems change journey and highlights that it can often take up to 10 years to begin to see sustained population-level change in a place.[7]

2 Public sector, philanthropic and private funders could pivot away from funding strategies that seek to direct and claim impact.

Resourcing place-based systems change requires viewing your investment as a tool that will play **a contributing role** to place-based systems change, rather than investment driving your own outcomes. Funding and investment strategies that impose predetermined outcomes and types of impact on those they fund hold back the potential for organisations to learn, adapt and determine their path in order to change collaboration with the system in their places.

3 Public sector, philanthropic and private funders could invest in the development of learning infrastructure at a national level and within places.

Nationally, this includes **investing in social sector infrastructure organisations that can convene peer-to-peer learning spaces** that support collective reflection and problem solving across place-based organisations alongside organisations that can build the capacity of places to develop their own learning and reflection processes. Two strong examples of work to build the learning infrastructure for place based

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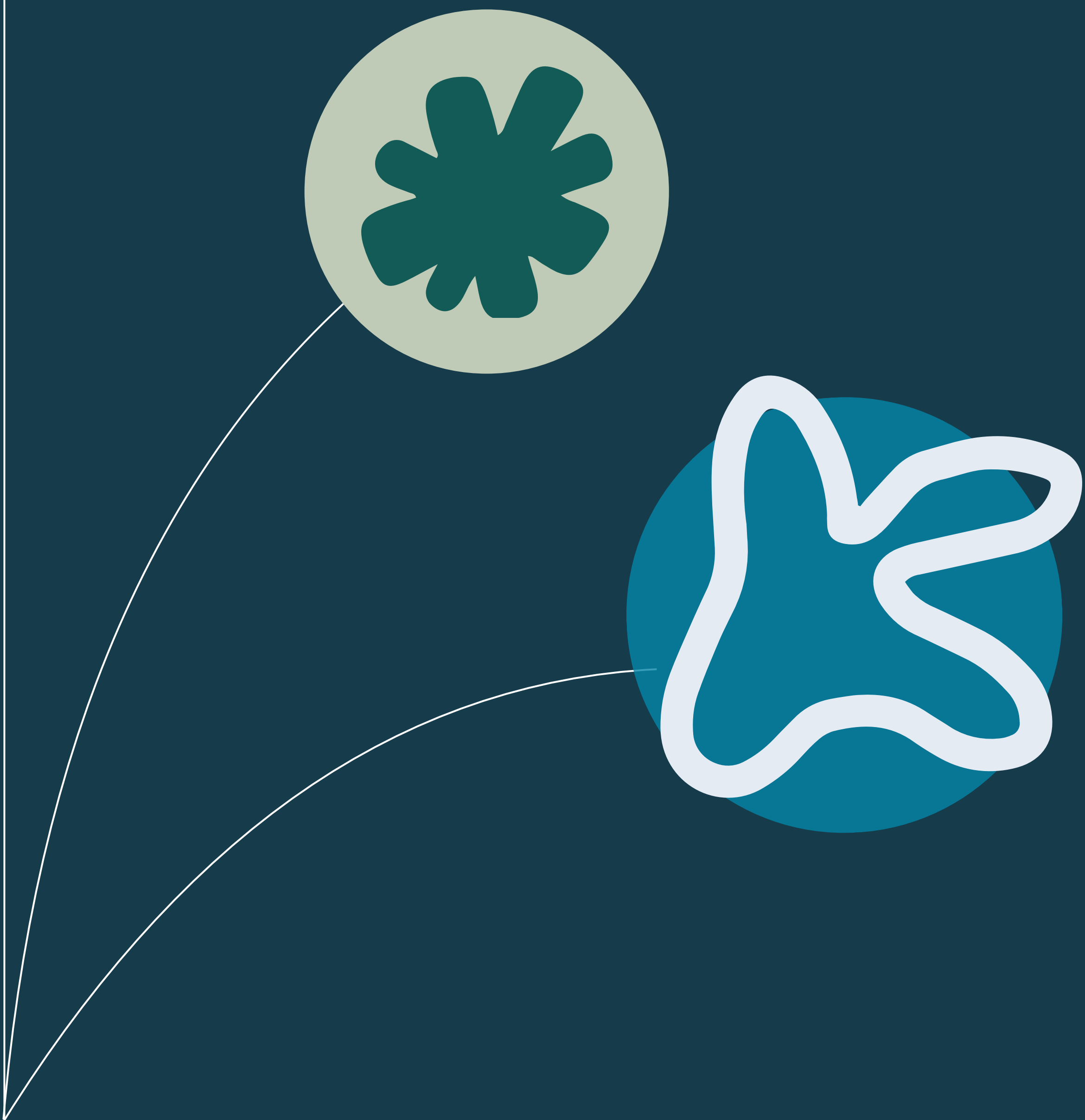
7 More detail on Renaisi's model for evaluating place-based systems change is available on our website here.

systems change are Place Matter's work building a Stewardship Group on Evidence in Place based Change[8] and the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON)'s call for the creation of a Neighbourhood Analysis Excellence Centre[9]. Locally, implementing this principle would include resourcing the development of data infrastructure for places to understand the ongoing impact of their work, such as through enabling access to local administrative data from statutory services and funding participatory data collection that understands qualitative experience of change in a place. It also includes ensuring places have learning partners that can hold collective reflection spaces, build capacity around data collection and embed learning approaches.



8 For more information on this group and the research that is being commissioned through it, check out Place Matter's website here

9 ICON calls for a 'Neighbourhood Analysis Excellence Centre' (NAEC) to be able to gather information at hyper-local level on a regular basis as part of its Neighbourhood Policy Green Paper Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal: Proposals for Change. The full paper is available online here.

A Aspirational

Why it matters

Place-based systems change depends not only on responding to present challenges but on expanding what people in a place believe is possible. The individuals and organisations driving this change need space to imagine and organise around different futures. Without that, funding can lock places into a focus on incremental change and 'sticking plaster' responses rather than transformation. Funding and investment must actively encourage aspirational imagination as a critical driver of change. Doing this enables ongoing place-based systems change practice that aims at shifts in power, narratives and structures.

Actions that could build this

1 Philanthropic funders could resource creative visioning and narrative work as core elements of place-based systems change work.

This includes funding processes that enable communities, institutions and partners to **articulate shared ambitions for change,** grounded in lived experience and local context. It also includes supporting creative and participatory approaches — such as arts-based, cultural and storytelling methods — that surface alternative futures and challenge dominant deficit narratives about places. This work, which has also been called for by CIVIC Square and Dark Matter Labs in their previously mentioned paper, Endowing The Future, is currently being actively resourced by Joseph Rowntree Foundation, who believe that building "imagination infrastructures" is critical to systemic change.[10] These forms of work should be treated as foundational to systems change, rather interesting add-ons.

2 Public sector, philanthropic and private funders who aim at place-based systems change could coordinate funding processes to open up space for organisations to engage in aspirational imagination alongside crisis response.

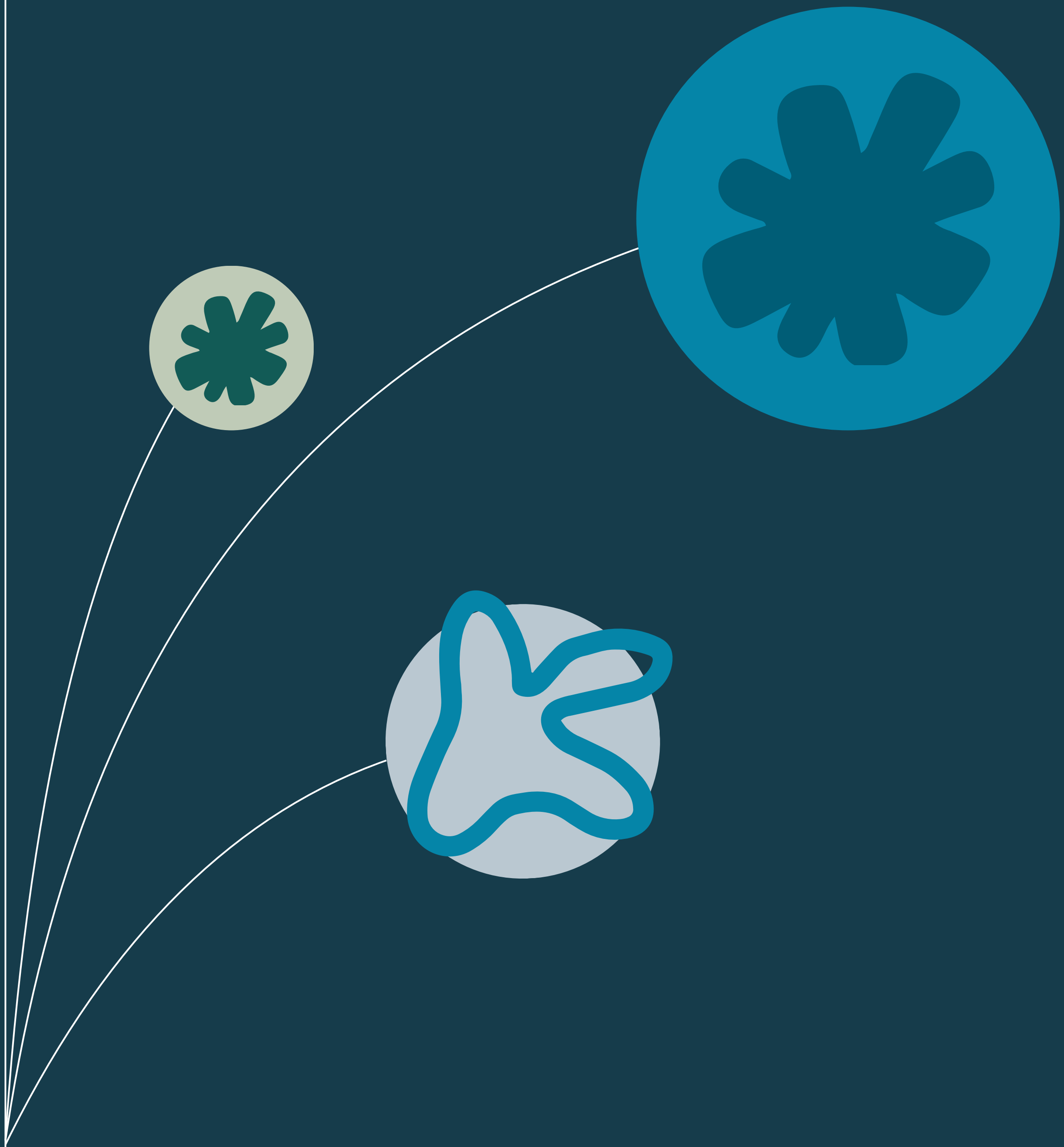
Many place-based organisations are full of people who give their time, expertise and care to support change well beyond that which they are financially compensated for. But our inquiry has shown that far too often this additional time goes to fundraising and reporting rather than collective organising. **Aligning funding timelines, reporting cycles and expectations across multiple funders and investors** would limit the time that place-based organisations have to devote to resource management – freeing up staff capacity to engage in the collective work that will nurture their passion and commitment to change. Creating this space enables places to respond to urgent need while continuing to work towards fundamentally different futures.

3 Philanthropic funders aiming at place-based systems change could adopt an asset-based approach, partnering with places because of a belief in the aspiration and imaginative capacity of those there, rather than targeting according to need.

Many organisations delivering frontline, crisis-focused services for their communities are well placed to collectively organise around alternative futures, but a need to amplify local needs and deficits works directly against this instinct. This does not mean that funders should not take an equity approach in targeting places

10 More information about JRF's imagination infrastructures work is available on their website here.

that have been systemically marginalised by global and national economic systems and choices, but rather it means that **funders should not conflate process of marginalisation** that places may be experiencing **with a lack of assets, aspirations and capacities** in a place. Adopting this approach to funding will encourage places to nurture their own visions of the future, as they no longer need to pitch their needs and weaknesses as a criteria for funding. Paul Hamlyn Foundation has adopted an asset-based approach in its funding to organisations working with young people, believing that this practice is a critical part of supporting marginalised young people to imagine better futures.[11]



11 To understand more about Paul Hamlyn Foundation's asset-based funding check out their website here.

V

Voice

Why it matters

Sustaining place-based systems change requires intentional shifts in who holds power, influence and decision-making authority. As described in our section on power shifting a practice that is critical to place-based systems change, this is essential to ensure that place-based systems change work is rooted in the lived experience and aspirations of those currently marginalised by the system, not solely those for whom it is already giving disproportionate power.

Place-based systems change requires investing in shifting whose voices are heard and given the legitimacy and power to shape the direction of social change. Those funding and investing in place based systems change must be ready to both give over some of their power to local decision-makers to ensure their voices shape delivery, alongside supporting places to actively shift local hierarchies around participation and leadership. Adopting this principle in resourcing place-based systems change directly supports what we already know to be critical to place-based systems change practice – it shifts power and narratives.

Actions that could build this

1 Public sector, philanthropic and private funders who aim at place-based systems change could embed real decision-making authority around how change is resourced with those in place.

This requires **devolving decision-making power on local funding** to those in a place. For philanthropic funders and social investors this could happen through long-term, flexible, funding commitments that do not have set outcomes for delivery or repayment. It could be implemented by developing local funding pots, such as through the creation of a place-based social investment or grant making fund, where allocation decisions are made by those in the place.

From a public sector perspective this requires devolving decision-making around allocation of public funds to those in a place. This devolution of decision-making must go beyond the local authority or parish and town council but to residents and community anchor institutions, as is being called for by We're Right Here in their proposal for community powered neighbourhood governance[12] and legislated through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill[13]. Ensuring these mechanisms have permanence and power, where communities are not just consulted but have long-term formal authority over priorities, resources and direction is critical to resourcing place-based systems change. Pride in Place is promising on this front, but it will also be critical to ensure that devolving decision-making to a place does not treat that place as a homogenous entity and therefore marginalise diverse voices in that place without truly shifting power locally.

Tackling this risk in devolving decision-making to a place will require intentional efforts to engage residents and community leaders from communities experiencing systemic marginalisation, including racially minoritised communities, working class communities, Disabled people, trans people, those with experience of the criminal justice system amongst others.

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12 We're Right Here's proposal for A Blueprint for Community-Powered Neighbourhood Governance is available online here.
13 The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill will require all neighbourhoods to 'make appropriate arrangements to secure the effective governance of any area of a specified description that falls within the authority's area (a "neighbourhood area")'. The Bill is currently in its final stages of passing through the House of Lords. Information on its full passage is available here and detail on the bill itself is available here.

3 **Public sector and philanthropic funders could invest directly in organising and the development of participatory decision-making structures as essential infrastructure for a place.**

This includes **funding the development of mechanisms such as resident-led governance structures, participatory budgeting, delegated commissioning, or community ownership models** to ensure places are equipped to ensure that place based systems change is being driven by a diversity of voices from across the place. These activities are foundational to durable systems change and should be recognised and funded as such. As described above, this funding will have to be intentionally targeted at communities experiencing systemic marginalisation to ensure it does not result in an exclusionary flattening of the place. Alongside this, funders should invest in social sector infrastructure organisations that can build capacity for participation, including training on community organising, direct democracy and community asset management.

Examples of this include the Ubele Initiative's Agbero 2100 programme[14] building the capacity of Black and racially minoritised community-led organisations to take on local assets and the newly formed Civic Power Fund[15]. Funders should see building and shifting power to communities in places as a goal in their efforts to resource place based systems change.

14 Agbero 2100 supports community leaders to challenge systemic racial inequality through the development of sustainable infrastructure, thriving community assets, robust intergenerational leadership, and flourishing local enterprises. More information on Agbero 2100 is available online here.
15 The Civic Power Fund is a new fund for grassroots community organising. Read more on its website here.

E

Exposure to risk

Why it matters

Place-based systems change always involves uncertainty. The critical question is who carries the consequences when things do not go to plan. Too often, communities and local organisations absorb liquidity risk, reputational risk, performance risk, and the burden of navigating incompatible reporting and accountability demands. Those resourcing place-based systems change cannot succeed if risk remains individualised or pushed downstream to those working in a place. Shifting this individualised exposure to risk into collective risk holding recognises that uncertainty is not a failure of delivery, but a feature of place-based systems change. This is critical to enable learning-led and collaborative practice, which is critical to place-based system change. Without this shift, place-based systems change is constrained by fear of failure and premature value extraction.

Actions that could build this

1 Funders and investors could design agreements that share or distribute responsibility and risk.

Traditional funding agreements, loan agreements and terms are based on the premise of a top-down bilateral relationship between the recipient of money and the provider of money. Put simply, encoded in this legal framework is a relational reality; accountability flows in the direction of the provider rather than purpose. Place-based systems change approaches involve many actors and aim to direct accountability towards a shared mission and communities in a place, who hold the true risk of failure. There are a steadily growing number of tests that explore how to work within current legal parameters but imaginatively around the constraints to **create agreements that better reflect distributed accountability, risk spreading, and multilateral governance** where funders, investors, residents and civic actors carry risk relative to their capacity to absorb it. This is an idea that has been explored deeply by Dark Matter Labs alongside legal services professionals and others to prototype workable possibilities.[16]

2 Funders and investors could reduce the use of punitive clauses, rigid milestones and automatic withdrawal triggers that undermine adaptive work.

Legal and contractual terms should support flexibility, iteration and learning, rather than enforce false certainty. Collective risk holding requires aligning around the purpose of the work and **accepting that failure and adaptation are essential** to deep change.

3 Investors could further spread existing tools that are effective in supporting different phases that place-based systems change work may progress through over time.

This can include blended finance (commonly philanthropic grants with unsecured repayable capital), working-capital buffer loans (offering organisations additional high-liquidity resource to manage cash-flow crunches) or forms of patient follow-on funding (investors offering additional capital to support an organisation through multiple stages of development and minimise the gap between fundraising rounds). **Increasing the prevalence of tools that structure finance in a way that minimises the need for community organisations to carry liquidity, operational, performance and system level risk simultaneously will rebalance risk exposure for places and community organisations.** This is particularly important where place-based systems change work is focused on building social infrastructure, community assets, and local leadership where underlying processes require time to mature.

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16 You can read more about Dark Matters' Beyond the Rules project and Many-to-Many systems here

R

Relational

Why it matters

Place-based systems change emerges through networks of relationships, shared infrastructure and alignment around common goals. It requires viewing yourself as part of a system and developing plans with a deep understanding of how the actions of one individual or organisation has ripple effects across others. This inquiry has surfaced that resourcing place-based systems change requires shifting from an individualised to a relational approach to funding. Without this principle, funding and investment can fragment local coalition building. It can incentivise competition over collaboration, duplication over alignment, and delivery over collective stewardship. When this happens, places are left with activity but little trust and meaningful connection.

Actions that could build this

1 **Public sector and philanthropic funders could invest in relationships as infrastructure for place-based systems change.**

This includes funding time, space and facilitation for collaboration across communities, sectors and institutions. **Relationship-building, coordination and trust-building should be recognised as core work, rather than assumed as unpaid or incidental to delivery**. Programmes such as Big Local, Empowering Places and Place-based Social Action and critically, the Relationships Project[17] have all demonstrated that investing in building connection and trust at a local level brings improvements in people's experience of a place. ICON's calls for a Neighbourhoods Mobilisation Formula, which would ensure that a proportion of expenditure in any new national programme would go towards investing in neighbourhood-level social infrastructure needed to enable places to benefit from national programmes, would embed this principle into public sector funding.[18]

2 **Public sector, philanthropic and private funders who aim at place-based systems change could support shared assets and collective stewardship models in places as platforms for place-based systems change.**

This can include **community buildings, shared data platforms or joint delivery vehicles** that anchor long-term collaboration. These shared infrastructures provide continuity, reduce fragmentation, and create practical foundations for collective action in a place. Organisations, collectives and campaigns including Locality, the Ubele Initiative, Power to Change, We're Right Here, Plunkett and the Mycelial Network have all been making the case for investment in community asset ownership as a platform for place-based systems change.[19]

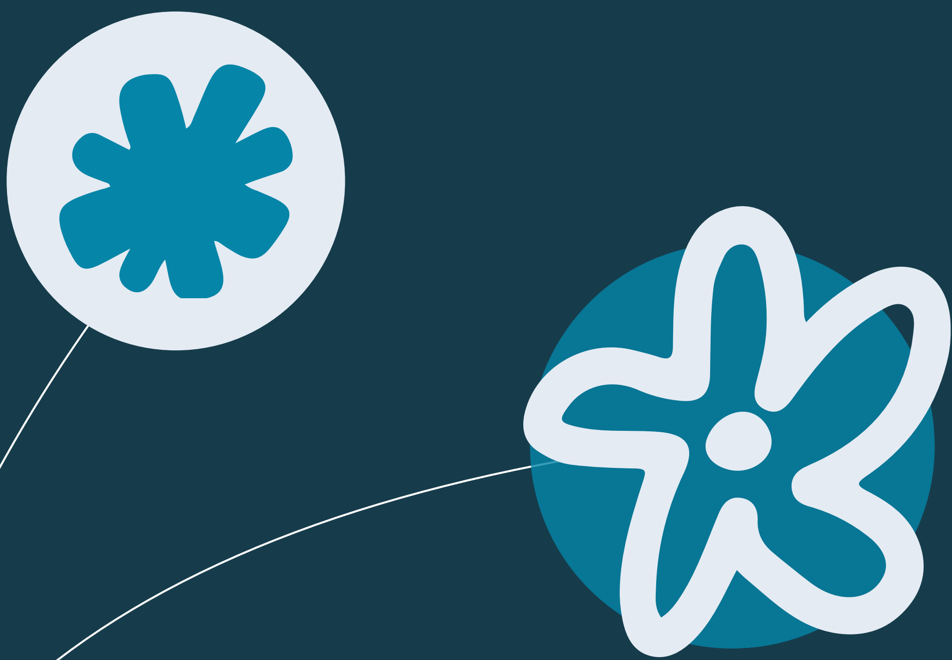
17 The Relationships Project has brought together evidence around the importance of relationships in social change in its report, Putting Relationships First The case for relationship-centred communities, organisations and systems available online here.
18 This call is made in ICON's Neighbourhood Policy Green Paper Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal: Proposals for Change. The full paper is available online here.

3 **Funders and investors, including local and combined authority commissioners, could aim to support place-based organisations to collectively work as an ecosystem driving change, rather than competing delivery agents.**

This requires approaches that are grounded in partnership, reciprocity, shared accountability and respect for local knowledge and leadership over externally imposed strategies. It requires pivoting away from top-down competitive commissioning to participatory commissioning and consortium based delivery models. Based on learning from the Commissioning with Communities Programme delivered by Collaborate, the Ideas Alliance and the Co-Production Collective, Collaborate has recently developed a toolkit setting out how local authorities can make their commissioning more relational.[20] This call for a shift towards an ecosystem approach to commissioning is a critical element of Community Wealth Building.[21]

4 **Funders and investors should align public, philanthropic and private resources around place-defined priorities.**

Reducing fragmentation across funding streams enables places to focus on collective goals rather than navigating competing requirements. **Alignment supports coherence**, strengthens collaboration, and allows collective momentum to build and be sustained over time.



20 Collaborate's Human Learning Systems: Commissioning Toolkit is available online here.
21 Community Wealth Building, defined by CLES, is an economic strategy focused on "increasing the flow, circulation and democratic ownership of wealth so local economies generate real benefits for people" which includes using commissioning and procurement to ensure that public sector funding strengthens the capacity of local organisations. More information on CLES' Community Wealth Building Approach is available here.

Principles for Funding Place-Based Systems Change Sustainably

Join us?

BRAVER Together

This paper is offered as an invitation rather than a prescription.

The series that we have shared on sustaining place-based systems change represents the findings of six months of intensive, collective exploration aimed at clarifying the messy funding systems that organisations are drawing on and battling against in their efforts to drive place-based systems change and illuminating the potential for an ecosystem that would enable and nurture this work.

In this final paper we have presented this offering developed through drawing on all the wisdom shared with us throughout this process – into BRAVER principles that we believe could support transformation of the funding and investment ecosystem.

We don't present these as a finished model to be adopted wholesale, but as a starting point for collective action learning about how funding and investment can more faithfully support the realities of place-based systems change. There are many across our ecosystem already imagining, testing and demonstrating how these principles could be realised in practice. Embedding these principles will look different in different contexts, and will require experimentation, reflection and collaboration across funders, investors, public bodies and those rooted in place. We invite others to join us on this journey — to test, challenge and evolve these ideas in practice, to share learning about what enables long-term, just and transformative change, and to work together to reshape the conditions for our garden to continue to flourish over generations.

We also call on funders and investors to support the work that is already happening in place amply and courageously.

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RENAISI & THE SOCIAL INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP

Principles for Funding Place-Based Systems Change Sustainably

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