#iwill Fund Learning Hub

Quality Practice Workstream

Final Impact Accelerator Summary Report:

How can we enable quality youth social action?

The Centre for Youth Impact
May 2022

Introduction

This report summarises learning from the Impact Accelerator, a 12-month learning programme that sits at the heart of the Quality Practice workstream of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub.

It provides eight key recommendations for funders and delivery organisations that wish to embed continuous quality improvement in their work, in order to support more robust, data-driven, and high quality youth social action opportunities for young people in the UK and to build on existing strengths within the sector. The recommendations relate to the design, delivery, evaluation, outcomes, and sustainability of youth social action opportunities.

For more information on the Impact Accelerator programme specifically, please see the previous six reports linked in the Appendix.

DESIGN   DELIVER   LEARN   OUTCOMES   SUSTAIN

What information does this report draw on?

Support for 30 organisations delivering youth social action through the #iwill Fund between 2018 and 2021.

Meetings and workshops with 56 staff and volunteers involved at various stages of youth social action delivery, from direct work with young people, to senior management and trustee roles.

Dedicated improvement work on youth social action provision taking place in over 11 different settings across England, including: youth clubs; community spaces; primary, secondary, and community schools; FE colleges and sixth forms; social care settings; community spaces; charities; faith venues; and sports clubs.

Projects reaching over 50,000 young people through social action opportunities.

About the recommendations in this report

These recommendations are not generalised: not every one will be applicable to every funder, to each funded organisation, or to all funding arrangements. Guidance is provided on when the recommendation might be deemed relevant and applicable, including prompt questions for funders and grantees to explore.

Recommendations are grouped by the stage of funding (start of funding, during funding, or end of funding) although it is worth noting that effective quality improvement relies on embedding 'learning behaviours' and feedback cycles throughout every stage of delivery and the funder/grantee relationship.

A summary of all recommendations can be found on the next page.

Case studies and quotes from organisations participating in the Impact Accelerator programme are included to demonstrate the recommendations in action. They represent practice and experience at the time of participation, between 2018 and 2021.

START OF FUNDING   DURING FUNDING   END OF FUNDING

END OF FUNDING

Recommendation Eight:
Ensure learning and insights are captured at the end of delivery, focusing either on development or legacy

Recommendation Seven:
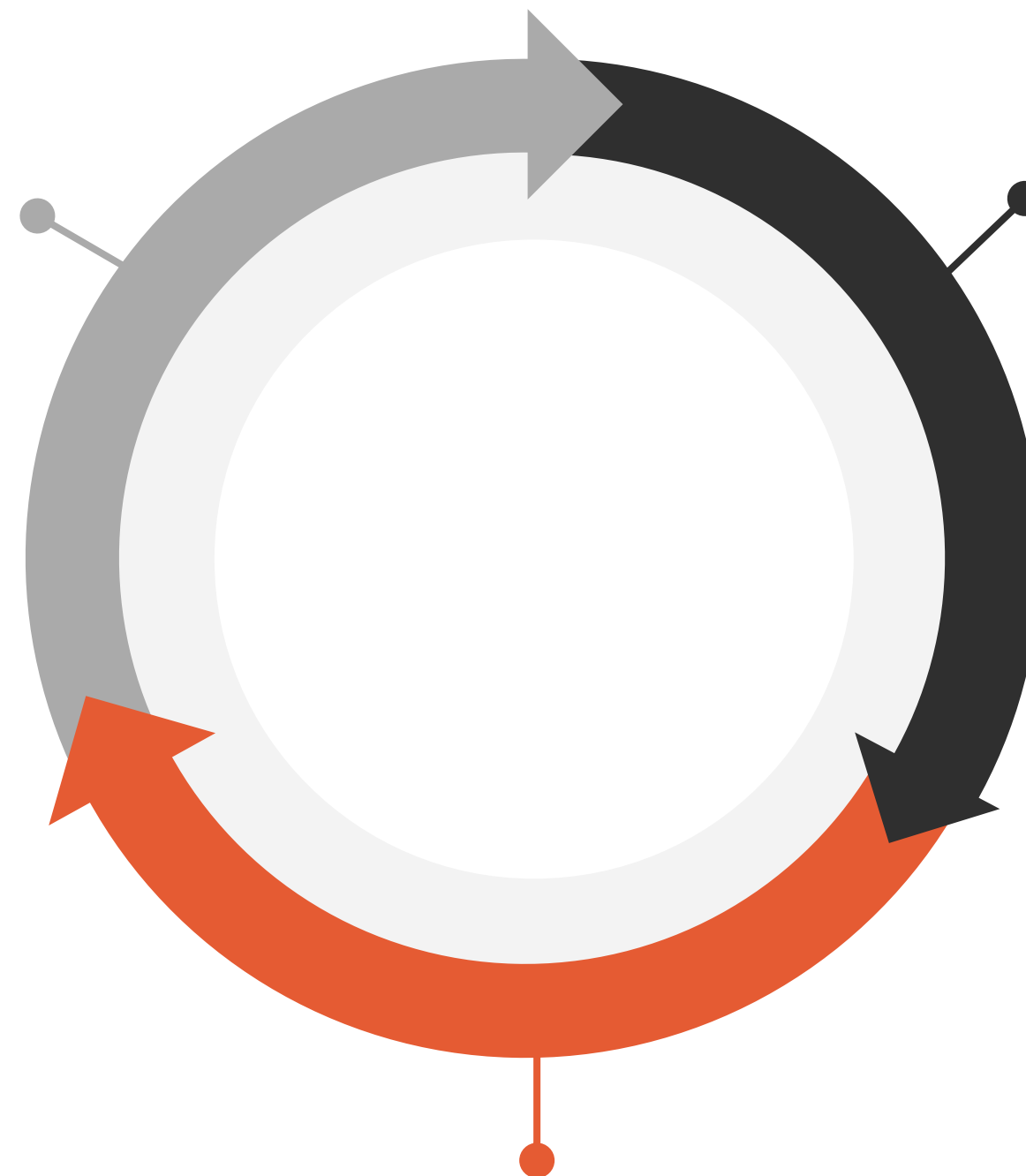Treat evaluation and learning activities as an organisation-wide process

Recommendation Six:
Understanding the benefit of quality improvement won't come through outcomes measurement alone

Recommendation Five:
Work with organisations to identify where support and capacity building will be most valuable

DURING FUNDING

START OF FUNDING

Recommendation One:
Establish clear aims for the youth social action opportunity that is being funded

Recommendation Two:
Support high quality activity design

Recommendation Three:
Have open and honest conversations about how much an organisation can invest in quality improvement for their youth social action opportunity

Recommendation Four:
Explicitly fund and embed cycles of learning and improvement into grants for youth social action

Start of funding

The #iwill Fund has:

- Brought [new organisations into youth social action delivery](#) and increased support for those already delivering
- Invested in building a larger body of evidence and research specifically for youth social action.

To increase the quality of youth social action at scale and build on existing strengths within the sector, funders and organisations should continue to draw on and contribute to this research and evidence base as effectively as possible.

There are several ways in which to approach this at the start of a funding relationship.

START OF FUNDING

DURING FUNDING

Supporting quality improvement of youth social action, throughout the funding cycle

END OF FUNDING
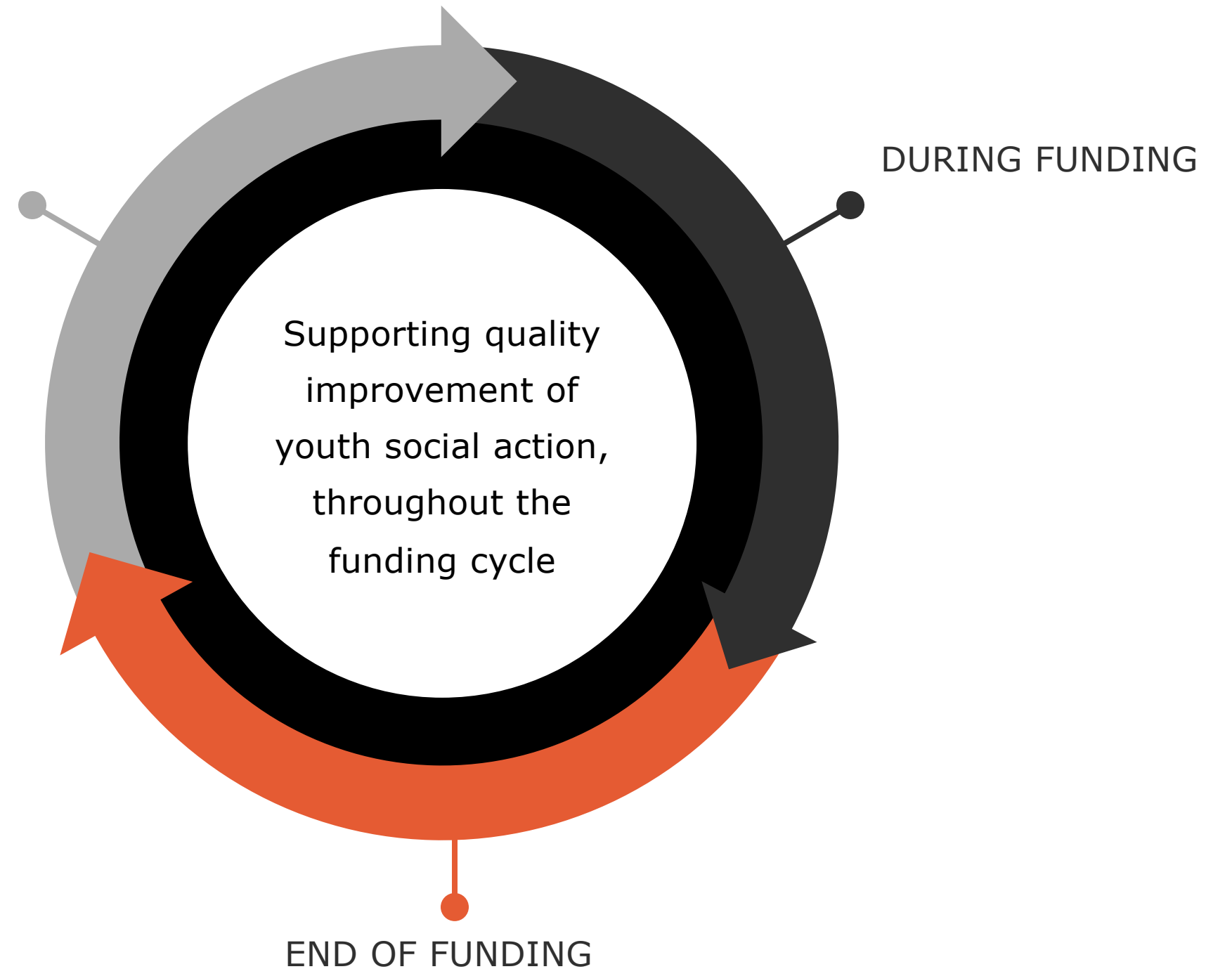
1. Establish clear aims for the youth social action opportunity that is being funded

Why is this important?

- The 'double benefit' of youth social action means that there will often be multiple aims for young people and communities – clarifying priorities will help organisations to ensure that delivery and evaluation is focused and meaningful when these priorities inform exactly what the organisation is doing, why (identifying a clear need that links to their aims), and focusing its measurement accordingly
- Aims for young people and communities might also be intertwined or even in tension – clarifying the aims will help to surface and explore this
- The youth-led principle means that aims for the community may also be influenced by young people's interests and priorities (aims for community benefit may change as young people's ideas and thinking evolves, or with different groups of young people) – understanding where there is flexibility for this will help to ensure consistency in delivery
- Aims also relate to the targeting of specific young people and communities - for example, young people who are socio-economically disadvantaged. Clear aims that relate to target groups can help to increase participation and engagement, by focusing outreach and relationship building on these specific groups.

Work on **theory of change** can help both organisations who are new to delivering youth social action, and those who already support it.

Establish clear aims for the youth social action opportunity that is being funded

For **new delivery organisations**, this work will help to:

- Specify clear aims for target groups of young people and communities, and explore how these aims inter-relate
- Identify specific and critical components of their social action delivery (e.g. intended impact for young people or communities involved, and the specific mechanisms that they expect will contribute to that change)
- Map these components across to a wider organisational theory of change or aims.

Questions to explore:

- Why is the organisation looking to support or offer youth social action now?
- What role could social action play within the wider organisational mission and vision?
- How might the activity contribute to any intended outcomes that the organisation already has for young people, communities, and/or specific issues?

For organisations that **already support youth social action**, this work will help to:

- Specify clear target groups of young people and communities that are intended to benefit, why, and how
- Identify gaps in impact measurement plans
- Identify areas where prior learning can be applied
- Clarify what they hope to learn from future delivery
- Strengthen their existing theory of change.

Questions to explore:

- How is the organisation drawing on data and learning from past activities to inform their new project/activities?
- How can existing social action be leveraged for greater good?
- How could monitoring and evaluation practices be developed to strengthen confidence in delivery?
- Which specific elements of the theory of change does the organisation want to test and why?

To support this work, funders could:

- Provide theory of change workshop/s
- Ask organisations to identify at application stage which components of their youth social action offer will support the applicant's wider organisational aims and outcomes
- Support organisations to reflect on how previous delivery has shaped their aims and plan for the funded work.

Work from the #iwill Fund Learning Hub on outcomes frameworks for young people and communities can also help grantees and funders to establish and articulate aims for each group:

- Community Benefit and Youth Social Action
- Youth Social Action and Outcomes for Young People

It is worth noting that organisations within the #iwill Fund often developed an understanding of the potential impact or influence of youth social action only after delivery had begun – so aims will need to be revisited as part of any ongoing learning and improvement process (see New Directions for Youth Social Action, page 11).

The youth-led nature of youth social action also means that aims and outcomes often evolve as young people's learning and awareness grows, and their relationships with issues that matter to them shifts and changes.

"Our previous theory of change was focused on [our] Youth Engagement Programme overall (an element of which is focused on [our] Activist programme), but it did not evidence the causal links between activities, outcomes, impacts and long-terms goals. Moreover, it placed more emphasis on measuring participation and service design outcomes, **as opposed to outcomes related to social and emotional capabilities.**

Working as a group (involving staff who deliver the programme, the Director responsible for its delivery, and an evaluation practitioner) we completed an initial theory of change workshop, followed by a series of review and development meetings with the Evidence Team at YoungMinds. Facilitated by our Director, we started by articulating the ultimate impact and long-term goal(s). It was clear that there were three core stakeholder groups beginning to emerge (the Activists, YoungMinds as an organisation, and wider society/community) highlighting the 'double' or 'triple' benefits. We then mapped the outcomes across each stakeholder group. By working backwards, we were able to explore the preconditions and outcome chains which needed to be in place in order for us to achieve the ultimate goal. This helped us to pose difficult questions to ourselves and **describe what we are here to do and what we are not.** We reframed the activities so that they **describe what actually happens as an Activist in order to draw out some of our USPs (unique selling points)** and (hopefully) make it more obvious how outcomes are being brought about. We also added in some assumptions and mechanisms for change which are based on some of the existing evidence base. The final stage required us to link the stages together. The peer review work completed by our research associate has added further scrutiny and challenge, and is helping to stretch our thinking by placing more weighting on particular activities and outcomes and understanding the '**active ingredients'** and '**core/flex' elements.**

– YoungMinds

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Although not in our improvement plan, our research associate highlighted that there was an opportunity to better articulate how EmpowHER links to UK Youth's wider work in order to join-up cross-departmentally and have greater, sustainable impact. This external feedback acted as a catalyst for the development of a National Programmes Theory of Change, linking to our organisational Theory of Change. This was something we had considered doing previously but had not prioritised – the external viewpoint was the nudge we needed to get going with a first draft which we hope will be valuable for staff, partners and supporters alike.

– UK Youth

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2. Support high quality activity design

Why is this important?

- To ensure that the six Quality Principles are embedded throughout programme design
- As the youth-led nature of social action means there can be more flex in activities, it is important to know which elements are 'core' for intended impact
- To ensure delivery is informed by robust, useful, and well-informed theories of change that are participatory, evidence-informed, aligned, and precise (see recent guidance from the #iwill Fund Learning Hub)
- Being attentive to the 'basics' of programme design (before attending to other areas such as outcomes measurement) has been a key recommendation from the Impact Accelerator programme.

The Design questions in the Confidence Framework can help organisations to think through their activity design and lay strong foundations for high quality delivery:

- Have you identified a particular group of young people/communities that you want to benefit from your activity? What do you know about need and demand amongst this group or community?
- How do you describe the details of what activities your offer involves? What is core and what is flexible?
- How developed are the materials and resources required to support the activities involved in your offer?
- How have you described the 'mechanisms of change' for your offer?

A note on targeting young people and/or communities

By ensuring that there is a clearly defined target group of young people and detailed descriptions of all activities to be offered, staff or volunteers will know what they are supposed to be delivering, how, and with whom – as well as what space there is to flex or adapt.

Some organisations – such as those taking an open access approach, or working in school settings across whole class groups – might interpret their model as being non-targeted and thus 'undefined'. However, we would argue that this is a form of targeting, and that the 'definition' lies in a confident justification of being 'open'. Targeting might also be found in the geographical areas in which the programme or organisation is operating (e.g. the activity is 'open to all young people in geographical area X').

Organisations should be able to say something about what need and demand looks like, even if that is just the number of people within a certain age range in their geographical area based on census data.

Targeting doesn't mean "closed", or early intervention, high need, or deficit. It just means being defined and clear about who you're working with and why. This matters for fidelity; you can't check that you are sticking with your intentions if you haven't defined your intentions.

It also supports organisations to increase the equity of their provision; ensuring that they are being proportionate in the openness of their offer. The #iwill Fund's [investment drivers](#) are a good example of this in practice, with a continued focus on reaching young people from less socio-economically affluent communities and particularly those facing increased impacts and vulnerability as a result of COVID-19.

Dedicated design work in the early stages of funding can help to fill any gaps or lack of clarity in activity design, which will in turn increase the quality of delivery.

It will also highlight where there are similarities and future opportunities for shared learning across funded provision.
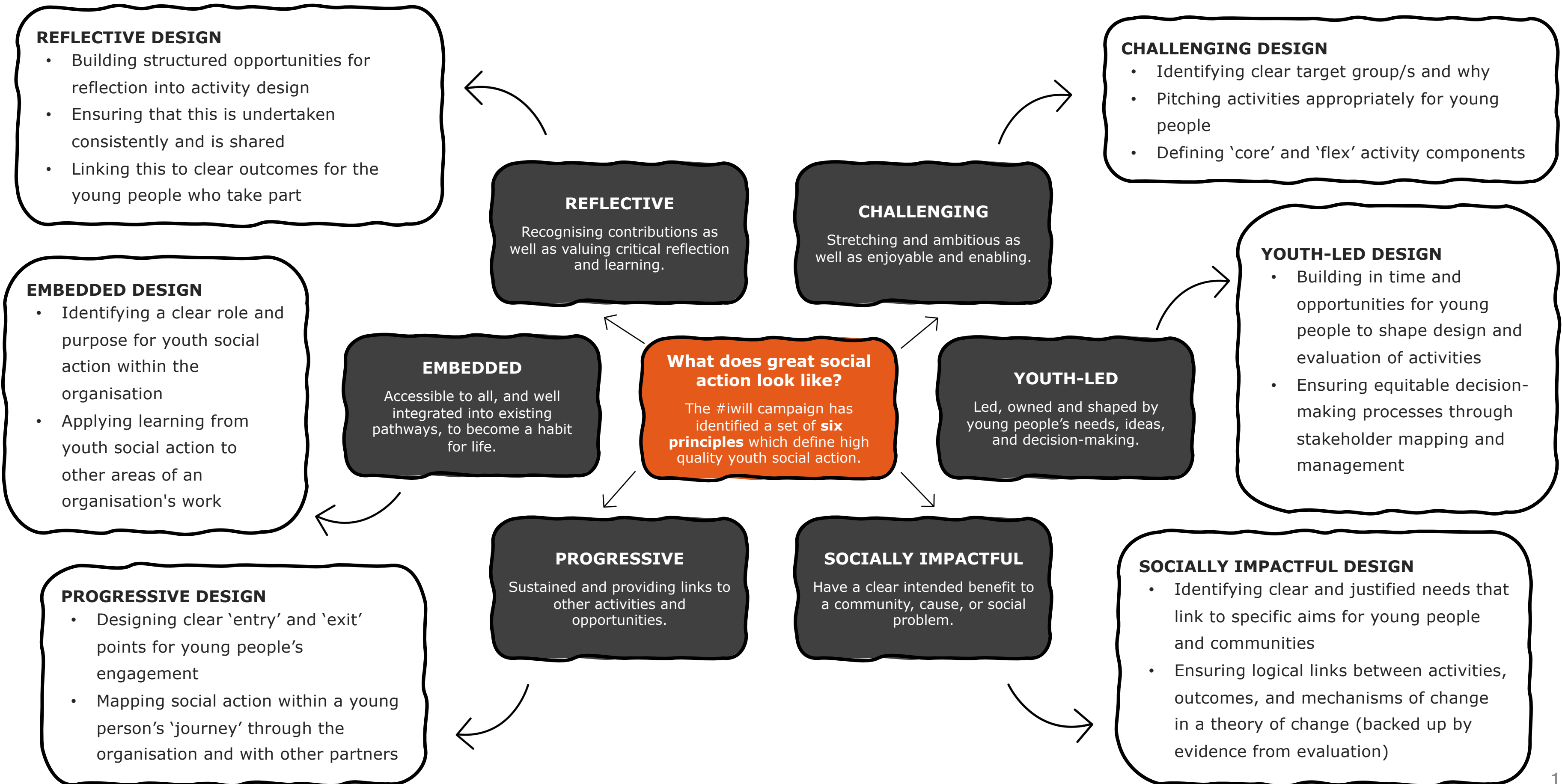
To support this work, funders could:

• Ask questions about activity design to identify where future support needs might sit
• Build in dedicated periods of time and/or support to work on activity design at the start of funding
• Support grantees to work towards common language and shared understanding of their work
• Connect different organisations for peer support and learning around programme design later on in the funding cycle.

It is worth noting that delivery timelines (e.g. where activities are dependent on school terms) could mean that delivery needs to start very soon after - or even before - funding is in place.

In this scenario, funders could support organisations to embed short 'test and learn' cycles, with time and resource to act on learning and develop programme design in between phases of delivery.

The following page details how investing in high quality activity design will further support the six principles for high quality youth social action, as well as high quality delivery and evaluation.

How can high quality design support the 6 #iwill Fund quality principles?

REFLECTIVE DESIGN
- Building structured opportunities for reflection into activity design
- Ensuring that this is undertaken consistently and is shared
- Linking this to clear outcomes for the young people who take part

CHALLENGING DESIGN
- Identifying clear target group/s and why
- Pitching activities appropriately for young people
- Defining 'core' and 'flex' activity components

EMBEDDED DESIGN
- Identifying a clear role and purpose for youth social action within the organisation
- Applying learning from youth social action to other areas of an organisation's work

YOUTH-LED DESIGN
- Building in time and opportunities for young people to shape design and evaluation of activities
- Ensuring equitable decision-making processes through stakeholder mapping and management

PROGRESSIVE DESIGN
- Designing clear 'entry' and 'exit' points for young people's engagement
- Mapping social action within a young person's 'journey' through the organisation and with other partners

SOCIALLY IMPACTFUL DESIGN
- Identifying clear and justified needs that link to specific aims for young people and communities
- Ensuring logical links between activities, outcomes, and mechanisms of change in a theory of change (backed up by evidence from evaluation)

REFLECTIVE
Recognising contributions as well as valuing critical reflection and learning.

CHALLENGING
Stretching and ambitious as well as enjoyable and enabling.

EMBEDDED
Accessible to all, and well integrated into existing pathways, to become a habit for life.

What does great social action look like?
The #iwill campaign has identified a set of **six principles** which define high quality youth social action.

YOUTH-LED
Led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas, and decision-making.

PROGRESSIVE
Sustained and providing links to other activities and opportunities.

SOCIALLY IMPACTFUL
Have a clear intended benefit to a community, cause, or social problem.

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[It's] nice to understand the depth you can go into before you start the project. [It was] really good to learn that extra level of insight […] it opened my eyes to a whole new way of planning. We've [now] got the most robust programme of planning and design for our Youth Ambassadors than for any other project, which I think is really good! [We have] gained a much clearer picture from the beginning of what needs to be put in place to get the successes/impacts later on. It [also] means that we can be very confident with a brand new programme, because we have thought it all through, and thought about it from all aspects and new ways of looking at it as well.

- KRAN (Kent Refugee Action Network)

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N-Gage is a youth work provider based in Manchester, with only a small number of full-time staff. Its Transform Programme is designed for young people to make a difference within their communities. This could include litter picking, planting, intergenerational activities, and fundraising.

The organisation's initial self-assessment highlighted low levels of confidence, as there was little codification and therefore evidence of how activities related to intended outcomes. The focus of their Improvement Plan was the development of a youth social action programme and associated evaluation approaches.

Throughout the improvement phase of the Impact Accelerator, N-Gage had the opportunity to learn from other social action providers, including training run by Envision. The research associates from Envision delivered a workshop on programme design for N-Gage, enabling them to better define some of the core elements of their potential youth social action opportunity, including a structure for sessions, intended outcomes for young people, budget and basic evaluation processes. Envision was able to provide examples of key materials (for example, session plans and a young person's reflection log) and industry-standard measurement tools.

N-Gage also connected with the Co-op College as part of the peer support offer of the Impact Accelerator. This supported them to learn about social action in their region more specifically, and accelerate their learning journey in the area of social action. As part of their journey, N-Gage is exploring how youth social action can work in a detached youth work setting, which will also support their aims around engaging young people who may not attend centre-based provision.

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3. Have open and honest conversations about how much an organisation can invest in quality improvement

Why is this important?

- When youth social action is not an organisation's core activity, it can be tricky to prioritise intensive improvement work
- However, dedicated quality improvement efforts will only be effective if staff have the time, resources, and motivation to engage and act on improvement goals
- Improvement efforts will be more valuable if they have longevity beyond the grant funding period.

When considering the best way to commit to and embed quality improvement, and what can be expected from those involved, funders and organisations should consider the context for the youth social action opportunity.

Questions to explore:

- How long does the organisation intend to offer social action for?
- Are there opportunities to apply learning from this activity to other projects or activities across the organisation?
- Will delivery staff have time to step away from direct delivery with young people to reflect and act on learning from data?
- Which other staff need to be involved from the organisation? (see also **Recommendation 5**).

Funders and organisations should seek to engage staff at various levels in these important conversations - from those delivering the activity on the ground, to senior leadership.

This table offers guidance on how different contexts (and therefore capacity) might influence priorities for improvement work.

All suggestions assume some basic work has been completed on a theory of change for the activity. For more information on how to approach theory of change, please see the [Appendix](#).

If the context is…		It could be beneficial to focus improvement efforts on…
A short-term or pilot youth social action activity, with intention to scale and/or deliver the model through other partners in the future	→	Codifying activities; clarifying core and flex; creating templates and resources for delivery; developing implementation fidelity tools (such as a manual)
An existing youth social action activity that is already running and will continue to run after funding	→	Consolidating and updating theory of change to draw on data and learning from previous delivery; embedding more advanced measurement tools and processes to explore whether the activity is achieving its aim/s, and is offered 'as intended'
An organisation that wants to learn from youth social action delivery and embed a social action 'approach' more widely across their work (e.g. increased youth leadership or a new focus on community impact)	→	Deep dives into specific mechanisms of change that support outcomes for young people, communities, and/or causes; updating and aligning theories of change across other organisational activities

Youthscape's Open House project provides targeted work with socially isolated young people through a community cooking programme. A key priority for the organisation was to prepare Open House for scaling nationally - so that it might be delivered by other youth workers across the country in the future. Initial improvement work on developing their theory of change and evaluation plan - including identifying which components were core and which were flexible - was essential groundwork for this scaling plan, which would involve creating a manual and guidance for high quality delivery.

"[I] have been working on the Open House national resource throughout the Impact Accelerator programme, and input from The Centre for Youth Impact has helped with thinking about what is core and flex in the programme and how to ensure quality youth work when it is delivered by other organisations."

Project with intention to scale and deliver the model through other partners in the future

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We have reviewed and are now more confident in our theory of change. We are also more conscious of the need to evidence our theories of change and understand the evidence behind funders' funding criteria. We have embedded the learning we have generated from both primary and secondary evidence into the design of new programmes, we have used the secondary evidence gathered in new programme bids to prospective funders, [and] we have included secondary evidence in our impact report, which has given it greater credibility and us further confidence in our findings.

Exploration of the enablers has identified that the fundamentals of youth work are a significant driver to improved wellbeing, which supports our wider aims and activity.

We have been inspired by the research associate's work to review how we collate, search for and store secondary evidence. We currently do not save in one location in our system and there's no awareness of what we already have on file other than what's in previous funding bids or reports, so we conduct desk research more frequently than necessary and don't have a broader understanding of what evidence is available with which to develop new programmes.

- Impact Accelerator participant
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Existing programme that will continue to run after funding

Football Beyond Borders (FBB) chose two specific programmes to put through the Impact Accelerator programme. Their objective was to better understand the impact of their work for both the individual and community. This was important because FBB's social action work was not embedded in the organisation's existing theory of change. Social action programmes were led by a specific member of staff, and social action was very much seen as an additional component or strand of work. Their initial calibration of the Confidence Framework focused solely on their social action scheme of work. However, throughout their work with the research associate allocated to FBB, this approach was challenged:

"The thinking of how we see ourselves as a youth social action organisation has changed. Youth social action is now more inextricably linked to outcomes, rather than a standalone strand of work. We are inherently a social action organisation as we are a platform for young people's voices to be heard on the issues they care about".

The Impact Accelerator journey started with FBB describing social action as adding value to their sport for development approach. This changed throughout the first two phases of the Impact Accelerator process:

"When we met with our research associate, the philosophical positioning of youth social action within FBB was difficult to communicate, so it pushed our timescales back. However, with the help of our research associate, we have learnt that social action isn't an end in itself, but is a means to an end for our young people to develop a sense of self and agency over the world around them. We have also learnt that youth social action is much more localised and will always start with issues our young people feel passionately about".

Organisation that is looking to learn from youth social action and embed the approach more widely

During funding

Maintaining structure, support, and accountability for quality improvement once delivery is in full swing can be difficult, especially when resources are tight or delivery is disrupted due to organisational churn, financial instability, or other external factors (such as a pandemic).

However, there are several actions that funders could take to help embed ongoing quality improvement in practice.

START OF FUNDING

DURING FUNDING

Supporting quality improvement of youth social action, throughout the funding cycle

END OF FUNDING

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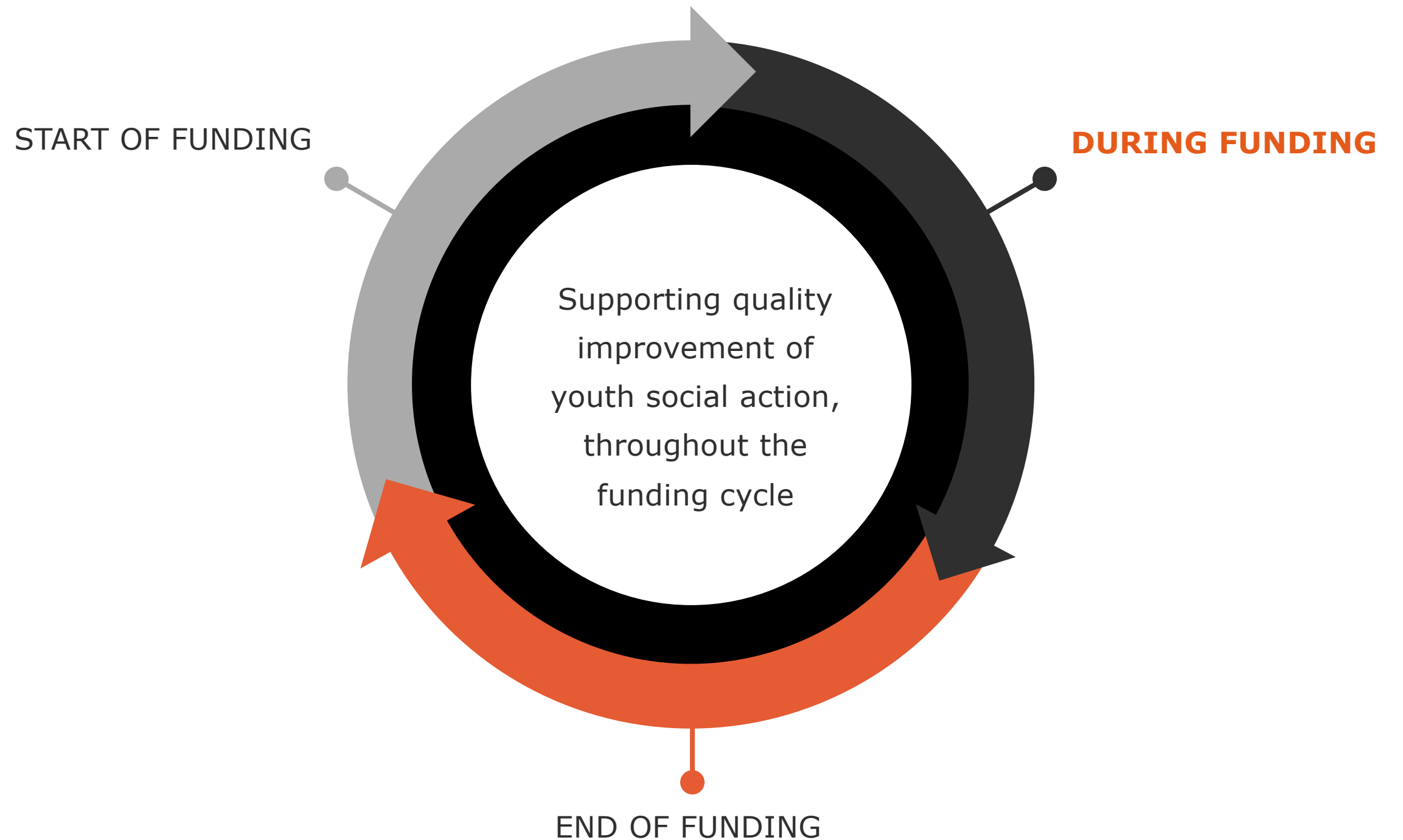
4. Explicitly fund and embed cycles of learning and improvement into grants for youth social action

Why is this important?

- Where organisations are exploring new impact areas (e.g. for young people or for communities) there is likely to be a lot of new learning and adaptation happening very quickly – it is important to capture and act on this
- It supports *reflection*, which is a key #iwill quality principle and an important component in continuous learning and improvement cycles
- Whilst many organisations already engage in reflective practice, acting on this (i.e. using data to make changes) on an ongoing basis can be a challenge, as cited by several Impact Accelerator participants
- Organisations need support to embed continuous improvement loops, and funding could support organisational time to focus on this more fully.

"The bit that still needs thinking is a continuous improvement loop…[We] really don't know what this looks like."

"[I am] unsure about how to embed that overall development cycle into the organisation so that it's not all driven by [one person]."

Providing support and structure for organisations (and multiple people within them) to collect data, analyse it, reflect, and then take action for improvement will ensure that the sector continues to strengthen over time. Embedding these behaviours within organisational practice is a long-term endeavor, but funders can play a key role in systematising this.

Explicitly fund and embed cycles of learning and improvement into grants for youth social action

'Grantees demonstrated challenges in organisational capacity to engage with ongoing, systematic improvement work that is driven by data. Grantees need to have more time for learning and reflection, ensuring that learning affects decision making, to become more evidence based as an organisation, to build engagement with (and acting on) data into staff expectations, and to establish more systematic approaches to using data.'

#iwill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Workstream Data Review 5, Dartington Service Design Lab, May 2021, p.13.

> The examples on the following page demonstrate how structured support, accountability, and more time and headspace for improvement work can help to increase quality of provision.

By supporting continuous improvement cycles, funders will also model the six Quality Principles in their own work: being challenging, progressive, enabling reflection on the social impact of an activity and, where feedback from young people is prioritised, ensuring youth voice is embedded within improvement efforts and funding processes (see #iwill Fund Learning Hub Labstorm on 'Youth Voice').

Funders could further support this priority by being transparent in their own continuous improvement practices – for example, by demonstrating how they are using data to inform decision making and, crucially, how they **engage those who have contributed to the data with the process** to ensure that data it is meaningful and supporting feedback loops.

Explicitly fund and embed cycles of learning and improvement into grants for youth social action

"Had we not had more support from the Centre, [we] would have shelved this work for a period of time, but now it is more important than ever. It's been very inspiring! Which is great. The theory of change feels far more embedded than it ever has. [We are] at the beginning of our journey, we understand very clearly that this isn't something that you do, this is about organisational behavioural change.

- Make Some Noise

[The challenge for improvement work] is internal resources. When you jump into the Impact Accelerator programme you're all in. But the reality doesn't allow for that 'all in'. I think all of us in this line of work are stretched to our capacity, but we recognise that this [structure] provides more capacity, and more boundaries, and more support for us, but it's hard to work backwards…[The Impact Accelerator] gave us as practitioners that golden ticket, or that backing, to say what was important. We felt it was important but being on the programme, it gave us that push and that drive to actually say, internally, this is what's important - this is what we need for it to be effective, successful, all these things.

- Just for Kids Law

[Covid meant] we had an absolute pause because we couldn't do anything - it was really nice to have time to focus on the programme and reflect on it. [It's] better than putting it to the back of your mind and saying 'we can't think about that.' [Usually] we never have any time to reflect and look at things.

- Impact Accelerator participant

5. Work with organisations to identify where support and capacity building will be most valuable throughout the funding period

Why is this important?

- Organisations will have varying levels of confidence and existing strengths in different areas of design, delivery, and evaluation, depending on how established their youth social action opportunity is and internal capabilities
- Building on **Recommendations [Three](#) and [Four](#)**, specific and intentional capacity building will further help to ensure that any improvement efforts are well spent, tailored to the organisation's specific context and needs and, therefore, impactful.

Capacity building can cover a range of different organisational areas, which will also influence which staff members are involved.

These areas could include: organisational learning behaviours and culture; programme design (e.g. theory of change, core and flex); awareness and understanding of the evidence base for youth social action and the organisation's particular model/approach; delivery mechanisms (e.g. implementation fidelity, staff training and support); and technical skills (e.g. specific data types and tools).

Questions to explore:

- What stage of delivery is the activity at? (e.g. a new pilot or repeating a tested model)
- At what stage is the organisation's [data maturity](#)? (i.e. how they use the information they collect to learn and improve)
- What capacity is there for delivering, scaling, and sustaining the activity beyond the grant period?

Work with organisations to identify where support and capacity building will be most valuable

Funders and organisations can also explore opportunities to bring young people into capacity building activities, further increasing the extent to which the design, delivery and evaluation of social action is led by young people.

One organisation on the Impact Accelerator did this by:

- Inviting their Youth Ambassadors to training in the core concepts of programme design
- Working with staff from the Centre for Youth Impact to provide young people with access to session slides and resources in advance of the workshops
- Going over key content with young people, bringing concepts to life using examples from their own work.

The Ambassadors were then provided with certificates of participation to provide a record of their skills development.

> *"[It was] really important for us that staff didn't just do it, but that young people were engaged throughout. [This means that] they have the ownership over it, it's their project."*
> **KRAN (Kent Refugee Action Network)**

Work with organisations to identify where support and capacity building will be most valuable

In addition, the Confidence Framework can be used as a diagnostic tool to identify an organisation's strengths and areas for development, as well as **what type of capacity building support may be most valuable.** There are five sections, but most organisations will need to start by focusing on the first three:

1. Design
What is the project, programme, or activity you are offering, exactly, and how have you documented this?

2. Deliver
What systems and processes do you have in place to track whether you are delivering your offer or programme as you have designed it?

3. Learn
How do you gather, analyse, and act on evidence about whether your offer is working as intended, and share what you are learning?

4. Outcomes
What evidence do have that your offer improves outcomes for young people and/or communities?

5. Sustain
How will you secure the resources you need to sustain your offer for the longer term?

Work with organisations to identify where support and capacity building will be most valuable

To use the Confidence Framework tool, organisations should:

- Allow and protect time to build familiarity with the content before going through each question thoroughly;
- Engage multiple staff members to ensure all knowledge, understanding, and 'evidence' for self-assessment is captured;
- Take it one step at a time – there will always be plenty of opportunities to improve; and
- Consider top priorities and start there when developing a plan for improvement.

Additional guidance for organisations wishing to use the Confidence Framework tool can be found in the [final report for Impact Accelerator Cohort Three](#).

How confident are you that you can define what delivering your service with 'high quality' looks like?

Defining high quality will support your staff and volunteers to deliver a consistent, effective service for young people. This definition should be bound up with your theory of change: your activities and mechanisms of change should set out what high quality looks like. For example, if you offer kayaking for young people, you will need to have enough safe, working equipment for them all to get involved, ensure that staff are trained in the safety procedures, and are skilled in creating an environment in which young people can challenge themselves with support, and reflect on the process. You can find more information about defining quality on pp. 14-18 of the Asking Good Questions guide: https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/asking_good_questions_-_guide_and_workbook_v1-2019.pdf

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not confident at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very confident

The following two pages suggest a wide range of different areas that could be addressed through capacity building activities and support. They are aligned with the Framework but do not rely on using the tool, and essentially offer a 'menu' of capacity building options that organisations and funders could choose from, depending on the organisation's specific needs and context.
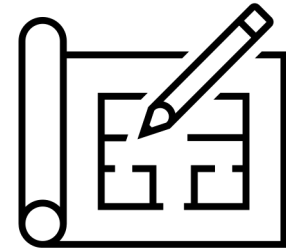
DESIGN

- Training in: theory of change; evaluation planning; 'core and flex' in programme design; identifying target young people or communities and understanding need and demand; when and how to use outcomes measurement
- Guidance and support to define 'high quality' (e.g. signposting to different quality definitions, frameworks, models, and marks)
- Access to a database of relevant research and evidence
- Feedback, templates, and peer learning to develop activity materials and resources.
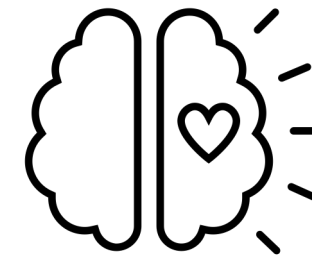
DELIVER

- Feedback, templates, and peer learning to develop manuals and implementation fidelity tools (e.g. checklists)
- Staff and volunteer profile templates
- Staff and volunteer training and support plans
- Templates and guidance for setting targets, e.g. for engagement or feedback
- Support with stakeholder engagement plans; training in stakeholder management.

Potential supports for each area of the Confidence Framework

OUTCOMES

- [Outcomes framework 2.1](#)
- Access to a database of relevant research and evidence
- Resourcing robust outcomes evaluations.

LEARN

- Change management training; dedicated support for staff leading on building a 'culture of learning' at their organisation
- Training focused on different types of data (user, engagement, feedback, quality, outcomes)
- Facilitated peer/learning networks
- Youth voice/engagement/leadership training and support
- Funder monitoring that focuses on learning indicators (see page 33).

SUSTAIN

- Unit costing (e.g. understanding the cost of delivering the offer or project)
- Support with development of business and/or fundraising plan; signposting to other funding opportunities
- Resourcing robust and comprehensive evaluations that consider multiple data types.

Potential supports for each area of the Confidence Framework

6. Understanding the benefit of quality improvement won't come through outcomes measurement alone

Why is this important?

- It is unlikely that quality improvement will lead to immediately improved outcomes for young people or communities
- Changes in young people's skills, knowledge or circumstance can be [tricky to measure](#) within the context of youth social action
- The same can be said for [community outcomes](#), especially where the intended target community and benefit is determined by young people and may vary
- Focusing on other areas (e.g. programme design or staff training and support) can lay foundations for more robust, evidence-informed activities
- These areas can also support with meeting the six Quality Principles (e.g. engagement data could show how social action is integrated into existing pathways for young people).

To support this work, funders could:

- Replace traditional requests for outcomes data with a series of '**learning indicators**' that demonstrate how the organisation is increasing confidence in delivery through data-driven decision making
- Work with grantees to gather more data about quality, fidelity and engagement, which is more likely to align with consistent and 'faithful' delivery.

Learning indicators to explore:

- When and how does the organisation's team come together to reflect?
- What data do they look at to support that process?
- Can the organisation describe something they changed as a result of learning from their data in the past six months?
- How does the organisation record and share learning across its staff and teams?

"

[The improvement work that we've done] has been a great support when introducing the programme to young people and also other staff within the organisation, as well as outside partners. It clearly sets out what is undertaken as part of the programme and the intended outcomes. When working with young people this is especially helpful, as it means they can see a full picture of what they are engaging in and also have an informed choice in regard to retention.
 - Positive Youth Foundation

[Now we have] lots more consultation, [the] team feel far more engaged than ever before, [and there is] far more understanding of mechanisms and why we do things. [Senior management team] talk a lot more about how the team [is] involved and aware of strategic decisions.
 - Make Some Noise

With the theory of change, introducing mechanisms of change and the accountability line was really powerful, a game changer. There is something very liberating about admitting that you can't know everything but saying "this is what we do have control over and we can evaluate it". The mechanisms of change say "these are the things that that we can control and are important". Delaying the session was the right thing to do and the whole team session ended up being really powerful. The external facilitator was helpful; [it meant we could] have someone holding the conversation without being precious about it.
- First Give

"

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7.   Treat evaluation and learning activities as an organisation-wide process

Why is this important?

- Social action is often just one activity that an organisation offers, or it could form part of a wider offer for young people
- Focusing on improving only the youth social action offer could therefore be disproportionate to an organisation's capacity and resources
- Learning from youth social action can also be valuable to inform other activities (see)
- Quality improvement requires engagement from across the organisation in order to be effective and productive, especially when it throws up bigger, strategic questions that extend beyond youth social action
- Meaningful measurement is more likely to take place if embedded within an organisation's wider measurement plan, with data contributing to the broader learning objectives.

Funders could support organisations to engage multiple team members in the process of improvement work, for example through:

- Dedicated coaching and support for 'improvement leads' who are making a case for change within their organisation
- Facilitating appropriately pitched opportunities for more staff members to participate in improvement work (e.g. a group theory of change workshop)
- Providing change management training
- Seeking engagement and agreement from an organisation's senior leaders - including encouraging them to enable staff to have time away from delivery to do improvement work.

"

[A highlight has been] bringing delivery staff on the learning journey and fostering [a] positive culture for improvement work. It has helped to bring YoungMinds on a journey internally, getting different teams onto the same page about what the programme does. That internal communications piece has been particularly helpful.
- YoungMinds

We are in the process of developing a theory of change for the organisation as part of our five-year strategy; this will underpin everything we do. We will continue to develop our projects in the same fashion we have with [the Impact Accelerator], ensuring quality and impact is key from the outset. As part of our project team meetings we have included both quality and impact measurement into the agenda [and] we are working on quality assurance in all of our work beyond that of the projects. All project staff are [now] trained on impact measurement for the project, [and] we secured funding to scale up the project, we recruited staff members with the skills and experience to deliver the project.

[…]

The organisation is more focused on impact measurement. Our organisation is more confident sharing the impact of our work through a variety of tools. Activities are more focused [and] when working with partners, training is provided to ensure we are all on the same page in relation to monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement.
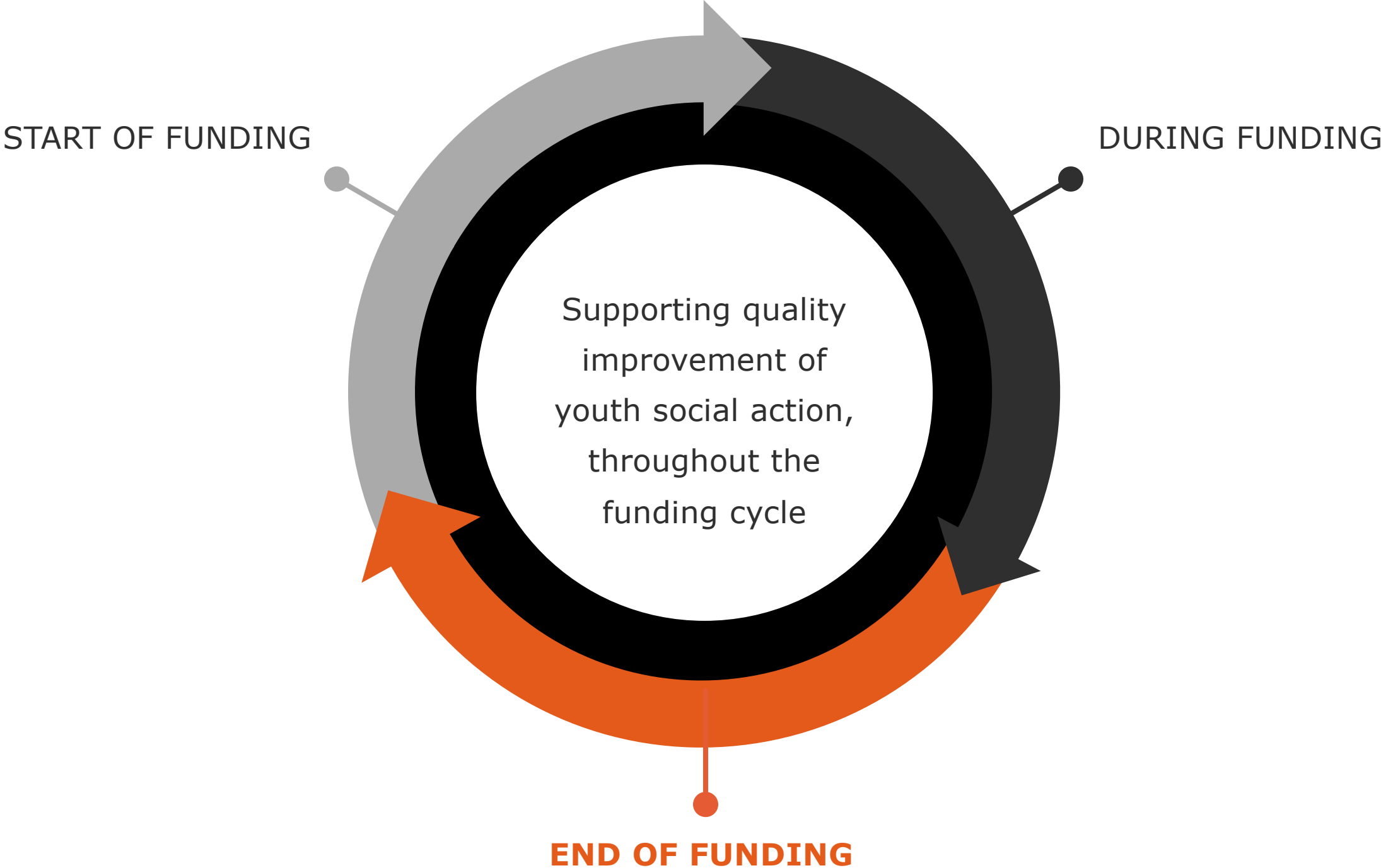**- Co-operative College**

"

End of funding

Learning and insights should be captured by delivery organisations and funders at the end of a funding period.

This is relevant both when funded youth social action activities are continuing and when they are not.

START OF FUNDING

DURING FUNDING

Supporting quality improvement of youth social action, throughout the funding cycle

END OF FUNDING

8. Ensure learning and insights are captured at the end of delivery

Why is this important?

- When an organisation is confident that it can continue offering its youth social action opportunity (and has spent time attending to to activity design, delivery, and learning processes) there could be opportunities to scale or replicate the activity across settings - either its own or those run by partners
- Youth social action might also be a short-term activity for an organisation. When this is the case, organisations should consider and prepare for the activity's legacy in order to ensure that learning from delivery is not lost, both within the organisation and more widely.
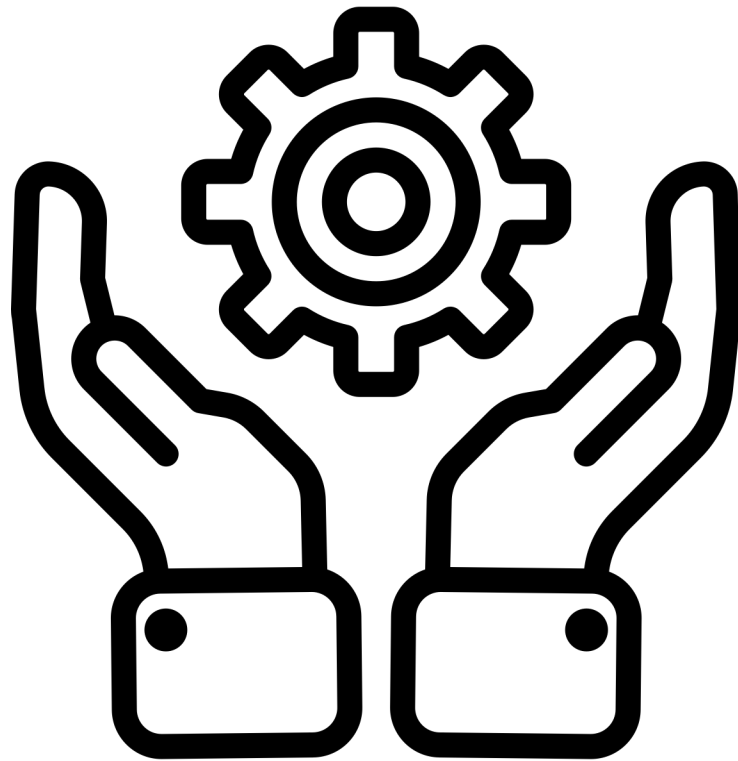
For organisations who **will be continuing delivery**, the Outcomes and Sustain sections of the Confidence Framework pose key questions to consider for the next stage of delivery.

Questions to explore for organisations continuing delivery:

- Is there a well-designed evaluation that evidences positive change and the clear contribution or role of the project/programme, alongside tools and resources that would enable the project/programme to be offered in the future, faithful to its design?
- Does the organisation have a business or fundraising plan for the activity?
- Is the organisation confident that the youth social action opportunity contributes to its overall mission or purpose, and how?
- Is the organisation confident that there is a model for scaling or replicating its youth social action opportunity?

For organisations that will **not be continuing to offer the youth social action opportunity**, funders could support organisations to further codify, manualise, and disseminate resources for the activity so that other partners may pick it up and offer it in the future.

It could also be valuable for organisations to spend time on the core components of their youth social action delivery that have contributed to any positive change for young people, communities, and/or causes - to see if these components and any learning might be applied to other areas of the organisation's work (or to work by other organisations supported by the funder, now or in the future).

Both of these scenarios will support funders and delivery organisations to learn from delivery and increase the base of evidence and learning about what makes youth social action effective.

We are working towards how we can look at adding [mechanisms of change] in other strand areas when our programme finishes. This will help staff development, especially when bringing new programmes to the table. [...] It has been helpful to drill down into "why we do what we do" and how we can carry that through into further funding bids. We are also discussing how we measure each mechanism of change…We've done all this work on youth voice and are not letting it go even though we don't have funding for it! It's embedded into each strand now: the model of how we use social action as a tool for personal development will stay within the organisation. We are also beginning to think more broadly about what and how we might measure work across the organisation. The Centre for Youth Impact has helped us think outside the box and to begin a process of developing something that will be very useful long term.

- Positive Youth Foundation

We realised that 90% of the mechanisms and outcomes could be applied to our over 25 [other] programmes as well. The learning from the [youth social action] theory of change will also continue to be embedded in our organisational theory of change.
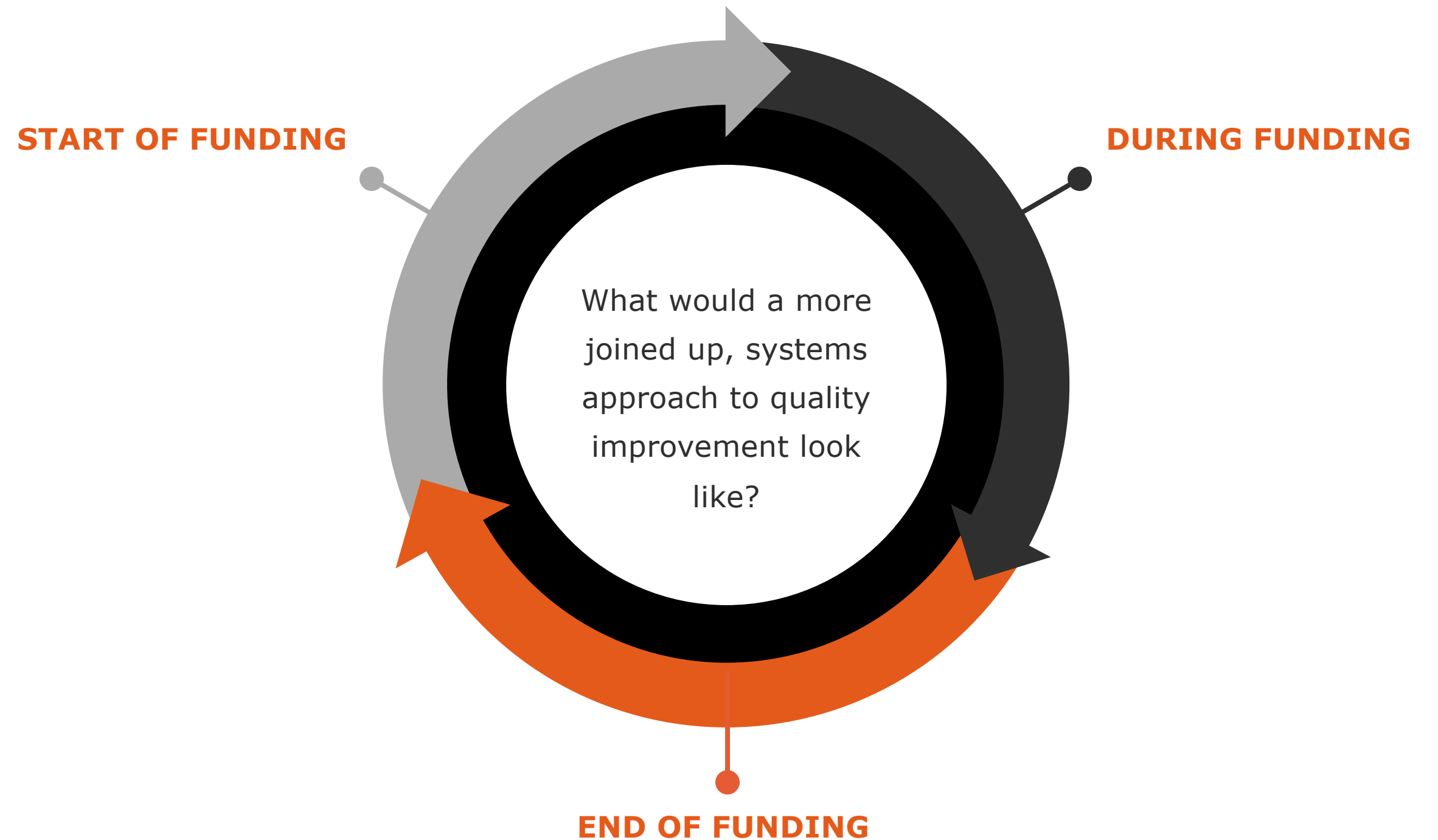
- Cardboard Citizens

Working together

Organisational change takes time and patience, and concerted support and challenge – both internal and external – is required to establish a durable and powerful culture of learning.

On the following pages, we share a final reflection on how funders could work together to support meaningful quality improvement at a broader scale.

START OF FUNDING

DURING FUNDING

What would a more joined up, systems approach to quality improvement look like?

END OF FUNDING

9.   Working together to improve the system for improvement of youth social action provision

Learning from the Quality Practice workstream of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub strongly indicates that it is beneficial to provide organisations with structured support and feedback on quality.

This includes:

- Low stakes self-assessment and calibration against a common framework and using common language;
- Coaching to identify improvement priorities and pathways; and
- Dedicated capacity building and training in core areas of design, delivery, and evaluation.
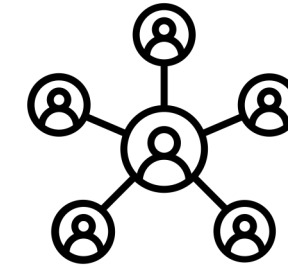
However, as we have noted in previous reports, providing resources and training in isolation is no panacea. To be most effective, continuous quality improvement needs to go beyond one or two specific projects or staff members.

We need a consistent approach across the sector, along with wide scale culture change in how continuous quality improvement is resourced and valued.

The model on the next page is taken from an article about creating learning systems in healthcare in the UK[1], however the key elements required to design learning systems that support continuous improvement resonate strongly with our learning from the Impact Accelerator. These elements are:

- Shared purpose;
- Shared language of improvement;
- Autonomy;
- Collective leadership;
- Connections and relationships;
- Data and measures to understand variation; and
- Infrastructure to support the learning system.

On the next page we reflect on how these elements relate to the recommendations in this report, and how they could contribute to a more joined up approach to continuous quality improvement for youth social action.

[1] *Shar, Amar, Quality improvement in practice—part 1: creating learning systems, British Journal of Healthcare Management,* [*https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/full/10.12968/bjhc.2021.0032*](https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/full/10.12968/bjhc.2021.0032)

DATA AND MEASURES TO UNDERSTAND VARIATION (2, 4, 7, 8)

Adopting common approaches to measurement, such as a focus on young people's socio-emotional skills development and other outcomes detailed in the #iwill Fund Learning Hub Sector Evidence Plan

AUTONOMY (3, 5)

Being led by delivery organisations when identifying priorities for improvement and capacity building

Creating an environment of 'low stakes accountability' where teams are collectively accountable to each other for identifying where and how they can improve; improvements are attainable; and resources and support are available and perceived to be worthwhile

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT THE LEARNING SYSTEM (2, 4, 5, 7)

Providing tailored and appropriate support for improvement as part of the funding process, in a way that aligns with (and ideally supports) an organisation's broader aims and deliverables across different funded workstreams

SHARED LANGUAGE OF IMPROVEMENT (1, 2)

Working together to build confidence in design, using common language and consistent frameworks for core concepts such as theory of change

SHARED PURPOSE (1, 3, 5, 6)

Ensuring clear and mutual intentions for improvement efforts, avoiding duplication across funded streams and ensuring the best use of time and resources

CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS (5, 8)

Working together to identify opportunities for peer learning and sharing of emerging evidence and insights across portfolios of work

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP (5, 7)

Supporting individuals at all levels of delivery to develop skills and access opportunities to contribute to continuous quality improvement

Conclusion

We hope that these recommendations will be helpful to any funders and organisations seeking to embed continuous quality improvement in their work.

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub Quality Practice workstream provided a unique opportunity for structured quality improvement of youth social action provision, through the Impact Accelerator. Whilst the programme itself has come to an end, we believe these key takeaways will help to ensure that quality improvement efforts can continue to take place in a way that is meaningful, impactful, realistic, and engaging for all involved. This includes young people, community members, staff and volunteers at delivery organisations, and funders.

APPENDIX

Useful resources

- #iwill Fund Learning Hub Theory of Change guidance
- Detailed theory of change guidance from the Centre for Youth Impact, including a downloadable toolkit
- Confidence Framework Guidance and forms
- Centre for Youth Impact Data for Decision Making, providing practitioners and managers working with young people with guidance to find relevant data to inform activity design (and save time from hunting for data that doesn't exist)
- #iwill Fund Learning Hub papers on:
  - Community Benefit and Youth Social Action
  - Youth Social Action and Outcomes for Young People
  - New Directions for Social Action
- Previous Impact Accelerator Insights Reports:
  - Cohort One – Initial Insights Report
  - Cohort One – Final Insights Report
  - Cohort Two – Initial Insights Report
  - Cohort Two – Final Insights report
  - Cohort Three – Initial Insights Report
  - Cohort Three – Final Insights Report

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Theory of change

The following pages demonstrate how youth social action opportunities can be described and explained using a theory of change, **drawing on examples from organisations who have offered youth social action as part of the #iwill Fund**.

For detailed guidance on how to build a robust and well-informed theory of change, see:

- Theory of change guidance for organisations enabling youth social action
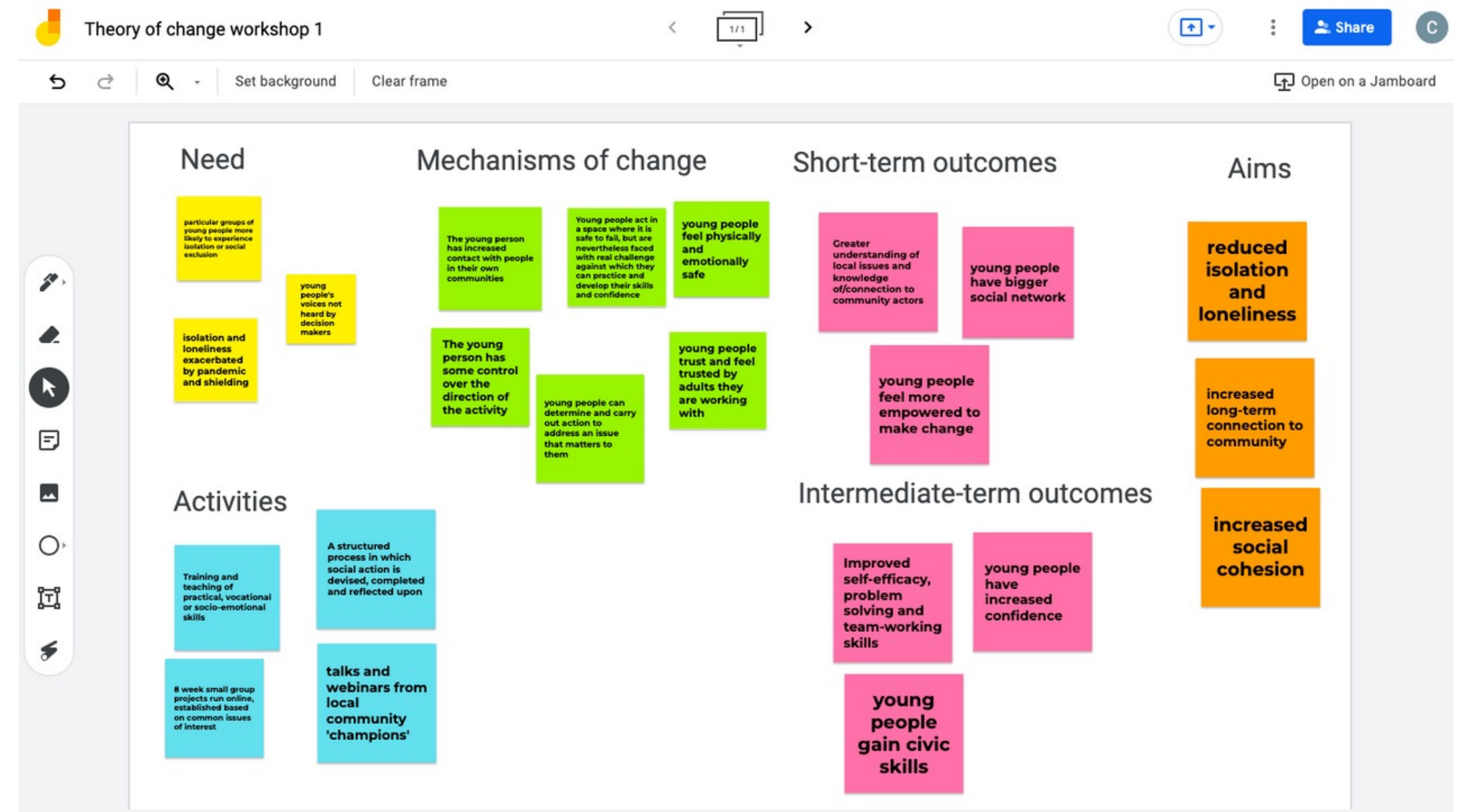- Theory of change guidance for funders and grantees
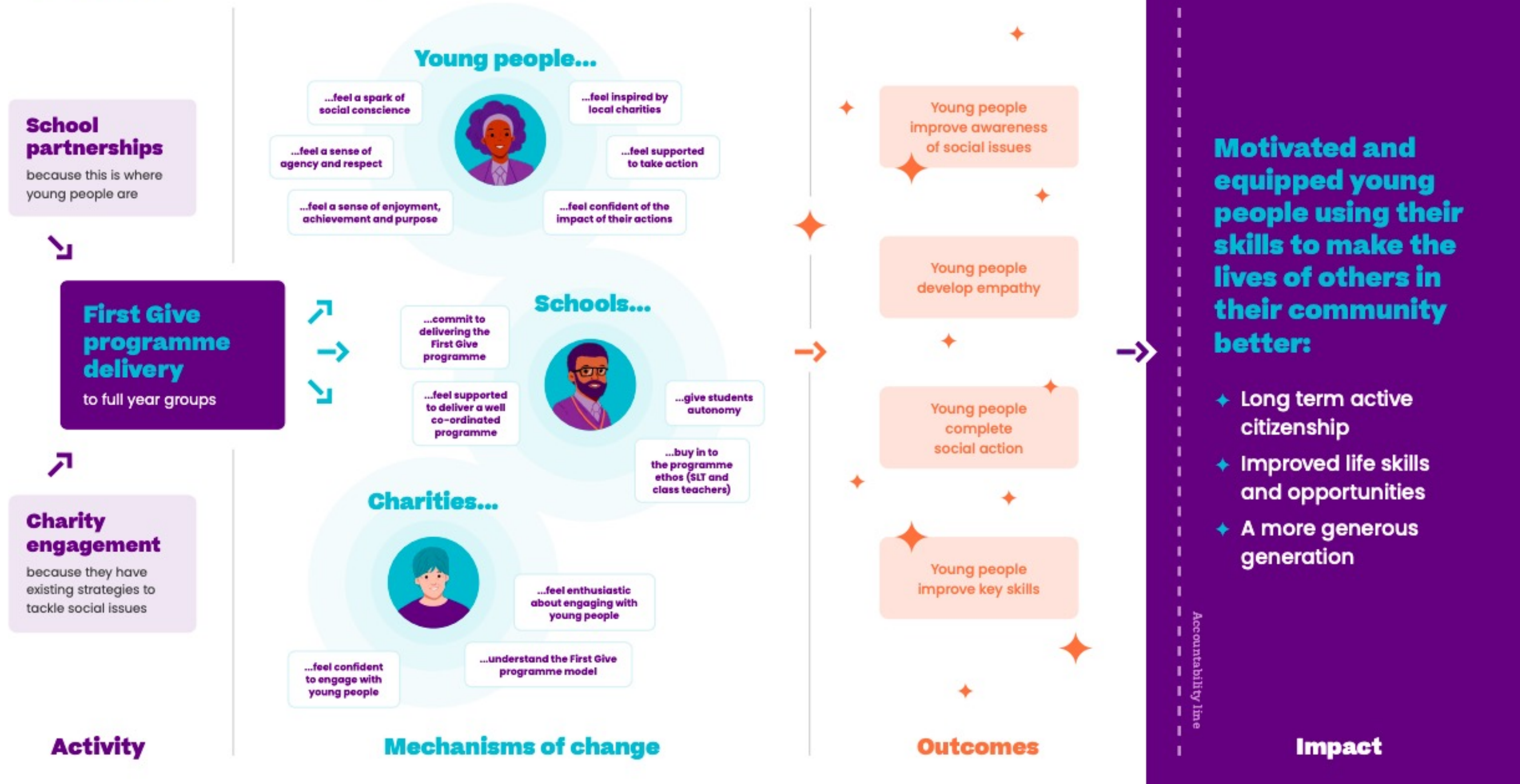

Image demonstrating a Google Jamboard being used to draft theory of change components in a workshop.

Example theory of change 1 (version 1) – developed during the Impact Accelerator

This was further developed by the organisation after the Impact Accelerator programme, along with a comprehensive evaluation plan
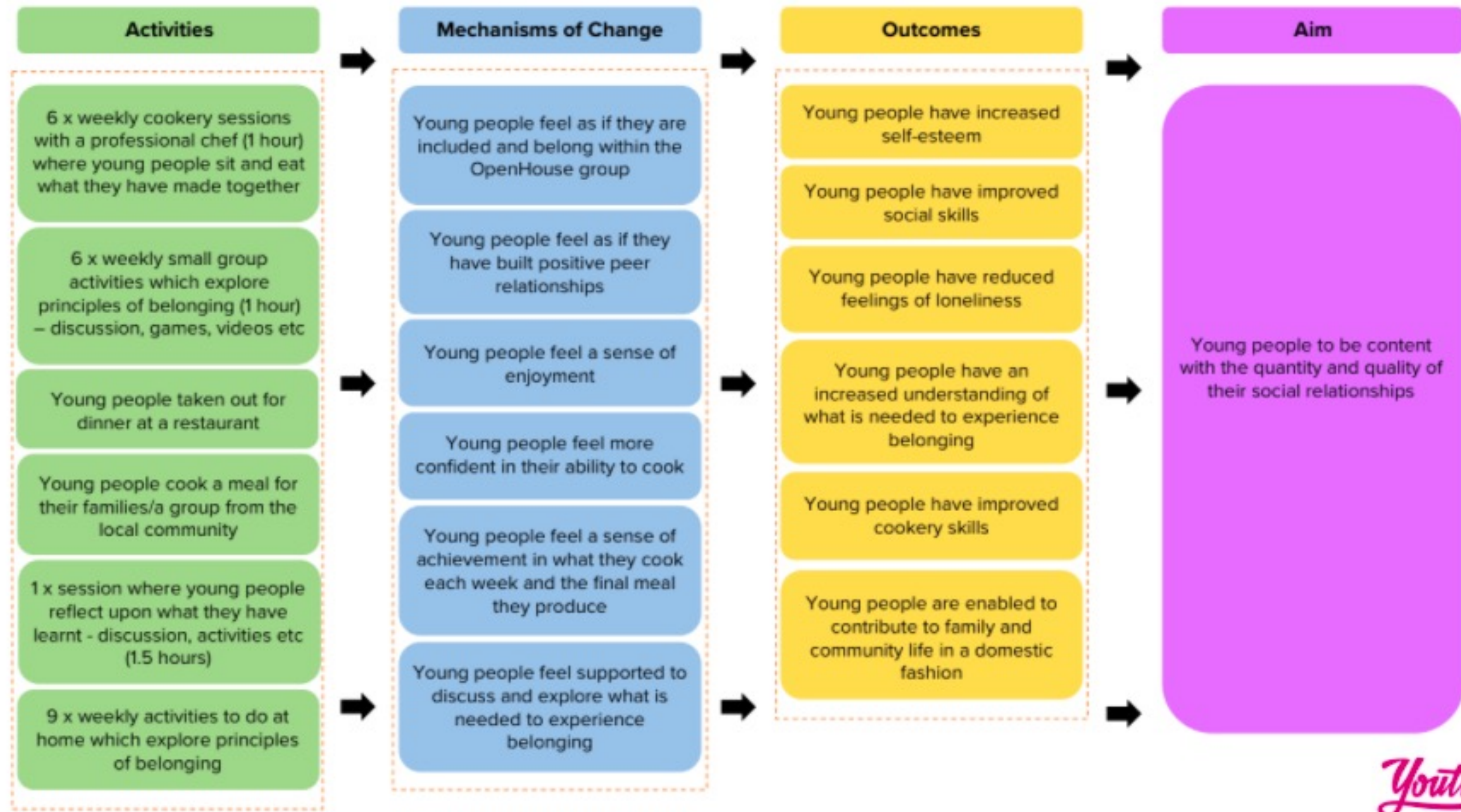
First Give Theory of Change

Inputs	Activity	Mechanisms of Change	Short term outcomes	Medium term outcomes		Impact
• First Give central team • First Give facilitators • First Give lead and class teachers • First Give programme resources • First Give website and Teacher Hub • First Give Board of Trustees • Funding for First Give grants • Charity representatives	**First Give programme delivery** (with full year groups in curriculum time): • Teacher support (PC, CTB, MPC, troubleshooting) • First Give facilitated sessions (Assembly, PSW, Final) • Teacher led lessons (1-8) • Students learn about social issues • Students research local charities • Charity meeting • Students plan and carry out social action projects • Students create, practice, and deliver presentations **School recruitment activity** **School retention activity** **Programme Improvement activity**	**Young People** *(we believe young people are vital in driving social change and improvement)* • Young people feel a spark of social conscience • Young people feel inspired by local charities • Young people feel a sense of agency and respect • Young people feel supported to take action • Young people feel confident of the impact of their actions • Young people feel a sense of enjoyment • Young people feel a sense of achievement and purpose	• Young people improve awareness of social issues affecting their community • Young people improve awareness of how charities help people in their community • Young people are more confident in their ability to help others in their community • Young people develop key skills[5] • Young people increase empathy	• Young people are more motivated and equipped to make the lives of others better • Young people are more likely to take action[6] to collectively or individually support causes they care about		
		Schools (we work in partnership with schools because this is where children/young people are, and with full year groups to ensure all young people have the opportunity to participate) • Schools commit to delivering the First Give programme • SLT buy into the programme ethos • Class teachers buy into the programme ethos • Schools feel supported to deliver a well-coordinated programme • Schools give students autonomy	• Schools support and encourage their students to tackle social issues • Schools engage with members of their local community/charities/the wider parent body	*To be finalised in line with strategic and programmatic planning, but will be around the role schools play an in addressing social issues*	---------- ACCOUNTABILITY LINE ----------	More people habitually take action, collectively or individually to support causes they care about.
		Charities (students work with charities because they have existing strategies to tackle social issues) • Charities feel enthusiastic about engaging young people • Charities feel confident to engage with young people • Charities understand the First Give model	• Charities receive awareness of their cause and work • Charities receive funding and other support towards their work through youth social action • Charities receive funding through First Give grants	*To be finalised in line with strategic planning, but will be something to do with charities doing more to engage young people*		
		These elements are within First Give's sphere of control				

[5] We have identified 5 key skills which we believe First Give develops in young people: Presentation skills; Teamworking skills; Leadership skills; Research skills; Project Planning skills. These are the skills we measure, however we are aware that young people will develop additional skills through participation.
[6] By "take action" we mean to take practical action to make a positive change in society, for example donating money, campaigning, fundraising, raising awareness or volunteering

OpenHouse Theory of Change

Activities

6 x weekly cookery sessions with a professional chef (1 hour) where young people sit and eat what they have made together

6 x weekly small group activities which explore principles of belonging (1 hour) – discussion, games, videos etc

Young people taken out for dinner at a restaurant

Young people cook a meal for their families/a group from the local community

1 x session where young people reflect upon what they have learnt - discussion, activities etc (1.5 hours)

9 x weekly activities to do at home which explore principles of belonging

Mechanisms of Change

Young people feel as if they are included and belong within the OpenHouse group

Young people feel as if they have built positive peer relationships

Young people feel a sense of enjoyment

Young people feel more confident in their ability to cook

Young people feel a sense of achievement in what they cook each week and the final meal they produce

Young people feel supported to discuss and explore what is needed to experience belonging

Outcomes

Young people have increased self-esteem

Young people have improved social skills

Young people have reduced feelings of loneliness

Young people have an increased understanding of what is needed to experience belonging

Young people have improved cookery skills

Young people are enabled to contribute to family and community life in a domestic fashion

Aim

Young people to be content with the quantity and quality of their social relationships

Youthscape

Example theory of change 2 – developed during the Impact Accelerator

FBB
FOOTBALL BEYOND BORDERS

PRINCIPLES OF OUR APPROACH:

THEORY OF CHANGE
FBB SCHOOLS

ASSETS			ACTIVITIES	MECHANISMS OF CHANGE			LONG TERM AIMS		OUR ASSUMPTIONS	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT OUR ASSUMPTIONS
Our Participants	But, our participants	With us, our participants	To do this, our participants take part in...	Through these activities, our participants	This progress means our participants...	Which means our participants...	So that our participants....	Which will mean that...	We do this because...	We are confident this will work because...
Love football	Struggle to focus in a classroom	Develop core SEL skills and re-frame their attitude to learning	Football themed, SEL Curriculum	Use their passion for football to produce public products that they are proud to share	Improved behaviour for learning		Achieve the GCSE grades and social and emotional competencies to make a successful transition into adulthood	Our participants go on to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of their community	Students will engage with learning if they see the purpose of it and are passionate about the subject matter	1. Premier League Reading Stars 2015-16 evaluation 2. Sharp - Playing for Success Academic Review 3. Contemporary Educational Psychology: An empirical basis for linking social and emotional learning to academic performance - January 2019 4. EEF Review: Combining learning with sporting activity
Love to play games	Struggle to regulate their emotions	Develop core SEL skills and build relationships	Reflection-focused, game based football	Have fun and play out dealing with positive and negative emotions in a safe context					Football represents a safe place to test out and reflect on positive and negative emotions	1. Smyth - Sport and Thought: Football as Therapy 2. Sallis et al - A Review of Correlates of physical activity of children and adolescents 3. Coalter - Education and life long learning: summary
Are popular and influential	Behave disruptively	Hit their targets, receive praise and earn rewards	Remarkable trips linked to school engagement and behaviour	Develop positive habits and positive group norms and move from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation	Improved Self-Esteem	Behave better and stay in school			Clear, fair and consistent targets and rewards are an effective route to creating behavioural change	1. Sandford et al - The Role of physical activity/sport in tackling youth disaffection and anti-social behaviour 2. EAST Behavioural Insights 3. Premier League Reading Stars 2015-16 evaluation 4. Daniel H. Pink 'Drive'
Want to change and succeed	Have experienced trauma and ACEs	Process and understand their past experiences	One to one 'Football Therapy' with BACP qualified counsellors	Learn to identify and share their emotions and develop coping mechanisms					Boys need support to identify and share feelings. Masculinity is part of the problem	1. Croydon Thematic Review of Vulnerable Adolescents - March 2019 2. DfE guidance - Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools - December 2018 3. Dubois-Comtois et al., Child and Adolescent Behaviour, "Attachment Theory in Clinical Work with Adolescents" 4. Cooper - Counselling in UK Secondary Schools - September 2019 5. Zlotowitz et al - Service users as the key to service change? - September 2015
Know lots of people in their community	Don't take part in formal activities outside in holidays and evenings	Spend their free time with positive role models	Holiday and evening education programmes	Have exciting learning experiences and make new friends	Improved Attitude to Learning				Frequent, explicit links between different activities is the most effective way to encourage transfer	1. GLA: A Public Health Approach to Reducing Youth Violence, July 2018 2. The cost of school holidays for young people from low income families, Stewart et. al, May 2018 3. Timpson Review of School Exclusion, DfE, May 2019

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