The Youth Investment Fund: Learning and Insight Paper Six

Looking back, looking forward: Lessons learnt from conducting a shared evaluation of open access youth provision

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To get involved in shared evaluation approaches for the youth sector, please contact the Centre for Youth Impact: hello@youthimpact.uk, @YouthImpactUK. To find out more about the YIF programme, please contact YIFlearning@thinknpc.org and visit www.YIFLearning.org

Section 1: Introduction

This is the sixth in a series of Insight Papers published as part of the learning project for the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). In this paper we reflect on what we have learnt from the experience of the YIF learning and evaluation project, with a view to informing future open access youth provision learning and evaluation initiatives. This paper will be particularly useful for learning and evaluation teams designing learning, monitoring or evaluation projects for open-access youth provision. The table below shows how this paper (highlighted) sits alongside the other Insights Papers.

What were we asking?	What did we do?	Where can you read the findings?
How can we measure and understand the impact of open access youth provision across YIF funded organisations?	Co-produced a Theory of Change for open access youth provision and developed a shared approach to evaluation	Paper 1: A shared evaluation framework for open access youth provision Paper 3: A shared outcomes framework for open access youth provision YIF shared Theory of Change (Feb 2021) YIF tools and resources (Feb 2021)
How does open access youth provision support young people's development?	Conducted a process evaluation including five in-depth case studies of YIF funded projects	Paper 5: How open access youth provision works, with findings from the YIF process evaluation
What is the quality and impact of YIF open access youth provision?	Trained and supported grant holders to collect five types of data across the YIF projects	Paper 4: Early YIF evaluation results Paper 7: YIF final findings (March 2021)
How can the YIF experience inform future evaluations of open access youth provision?	Interviewed and surveyed grant holders to learn what was good about the learning project and what could be improved	Paper 6: Lessons about how to conduct a shared evaluation of open access youth provision
Can you meaningfully measure the economic value of open access youth provision?	Produced an economic model for feasibility testing	Paper 2: Background to the YIF economic simulation model Paper 8: YIF simulation model (March 2021)

The Youth Investment Fund

The YIF is a joint £40m investment between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund, to expand delivery of open access youth services in six regions of England[1] and to enable funded organisations to invest in their own development to increase their sustainability. The three-year programme (2017-2021) provides new opportunities for young people to get involved in their communities and aims to support the personal development of thousands of young people across England, by building their confidence and supporting their transition to becoming happy, healthy and economically active adults.

The Youth Investment Fund learning project

The funders allocated £1m to a learning project led by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) in partnership with the Centre for Youth Impact and a wider consortium of research partners. The learning project commenced in May 2017 and is due to be completed in March 2021. It aims to:

> Build a base of knowledge and insight into young people's engagement in informal and non-formal provision, and how it makes a difference to their lives.

> Co-develop a shared approach to evaluation that is adaptable and appropriate across all provision.

> Leave the sector with what they need to self-evaluate long after YIF funding has ended.

The YIF programme only covers England, but we believe the learning from the YIF evaluation is relevant across the UK.

Open access youth provision

'Open access youth provision' is broadly defined. They include both traditional youth clubs and more targeted structured provision across a range of areas including sports, arts, social action and

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[1] The six regional areas that received three-year funding from the Youth Investment Fund in 2017 Bristol and Somerset, East London, Eastern Counties, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley and Sunderland, and West Midlands

employability. The main unifying features are that young people do not need to be referred to provision. Access is 'open' and engagement is a voluntary decision by the young person.

Why is this paper important?

Evaluating open access youth provision is challenging because of the varied ways in which young people engage with provision; potential misalignment between evaluation approaches and practice; and the practical challenges of collecting data with and from young people. Shared measurement across open-access youth provision has never been attempted at this scale before, which means little is known about how to conduct shared evaluation projects in this context.

A key part of the YIF evaluation strategy was to build the capacity and capabilities of YIF grant holders to self-evaluate, both during and long after the YIF. We used a variety of face to face and online training events to do this, alongside training resources and learning materials. Given the diversity amongst YIF grant holder organisations, we recognised that they were likely to have varying levels of experience and capacity for evaluation and learning practices. We sought to enable grant holders to build a learning culture within their organisations[2] and to use their evaluation data to learn and make improvements on their work during the lifetime of the YIF evaluation and beyond.

By sharing the lessons learnt in this paper we hope to inform future practice about how to design and implement shared measurement initiatives in informal and non-formal youth settings.

How are the findings structured?

The findings in this paper are drawn primarily from the end of grant survey completed by grant holders and semi-structured interviews, supplemented by findings from our YIF case study process evaluation, additional one-off surveys, and insights from regular, informal communication with grant holders.

Findings are drawn together under three key themes:

- Engagement in the YIF learning project.

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[2] Sharma, S. et al (2019) "Developing a learning organisation." London: NPC

- The YIF Learning Project in practice.

- Evaluation design and methods.

We've included quotes from grant holders, chosen either to illustrate a point made by multiple grant holders or because a quote includes a particularly revealing or distinctive perspective.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the grant holders who took part in the YIF evaluation and in the surveys and interviews which informed this paper. We would also like to thank the funders, the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport and The National Lottery Community Fund for their input and support.

Section 2: Executive summary

Shared measurement in open access youth provision is hard

Collecting five types of data in the largest shared measurement initiative ever attempted for open access youth provision in England proved to be even more complex and difficult than anticipated. The informal nature and variety inherent in open access youth provision makes it impossible to identify a simple 'best practice' way for grant holders to collect data from the young people they engage. In this paper we look back on the nuances and tensions present in the evaluation design with a view to informing future shared evaluations with similar ambitions.

Some data collection should have been mandatory

One such tension was between 'opt-in' or mandatory data collection. The chosen opt-in research design contributed to a shared learning culture and a sense of agency amongst participants but the risk, as we encountered in the YIF learning project, is that too many grant holders 'opt-out' of data collection. In hindsight, collecting data for a small number of core questions should have been a mandatory condition of funding.

Evaluation preparations should have started before service delivery

Time was another key tension. In sectors like open access youth provision, where funding can be scarce and intermittent, there is an understandable rush to start using new funding for service delivery quickly. This meant that many grant holders had been delivering services for a full year before they started collecting data for the evaluation, particularly because we prioritised time for genuine co-production. Some grant holders found it difficult to reallocate resources away from service delivery to prioritise evaluation activities. Grant holders knew there was a learning project attached to the YIF and had met the learning team within a few months of commencing delivery, but it was some time before the final design of the evaluation approach was set. The feedback gathered from grant holders suggests that having a dedicated evaluation budget or a proportion of YIF-funded staff time to support evaluation activities was key to engagement and managing evaluation demands effectively. The lesson for funders is to start the scoping and co-design phase

of the evaluation as early as possible. For evaluators, the lessons are to clearly communicate what resources will be required for data collection and to balance the benefits of conducting a comprehensive evaluation co-design phase with the benefits of rolling out data collection closer to the start of service delivery.

Closely connected to timing is the choice of data collection system. The limitations of the IMPACT system contributed to the lower than expected sample size across different types of data. These problems were addressed, with grant holders who joined the process in the second stage typically finding the system to be reliable, user friendly, and good at presenting data visually. In future, funders and evaluators should prioritise getting a workable system in place as soon as possible.

Contextual variations presented challenges for designing shared measurement tools

Other research design tensions included more nuanced issues such as the extent to which question wording should be fixed or flexible for bespoke approaches. For example, some grant expressed concern that questions were too simplistic for some young people and others reported that the questions were not engaging or accessible enough for younger children or for those with special education needs or disabilities. In future, this challenge could be mitigated by investing more time in testing and refining evaluation tools with young people and potentially by designing multiple versions of each tool (e.g. some questions could be adapted for younger children).

The capabilities and capacities of grant holders were an important factor influencing the research design choices across the various tensions described in this report. The overarching challenge here was balancing the desire to collect comprehensive and robust data with the need to avoid placing too heavy a burden upon an already stretched workforce. One of the most challenging aspects of conducting a shared measurement project in open access youth provision was the variance in 'organisational readiness'. While some grant holders had staff with several years of experience in data collection methods and online reporting, other organisations had 'no real history at the organisation of collecting data this way'. Even though we tried hard to design the evaluation to be as straightforward as possible, it still imposed too much of a burden on some grant holders. Overall, similar proportions of grant holders in the End of Grant survey agreed and disagreed that the evaluation felt like an added burden. Specifically, over half of the End of Grant survey respondents thought that the staff time needed to collect outcomes data was "sometimes a burden" (42%) or an "unmanageable burden" (10%). This insight is important for understanding why some grant holders engaged well and others less so, and why there are certain gaps in the data.

Confidence and pre-existing evaluation processes were two critical factors in determining engagement in the YIF learning project. Counter-intuitively, where both these factors were high, grant holders were less engaged. These grant holders were more likely to have well-established systems and processes, and to have already invested in their own data management system. This made integrating YIF tools and the IMPACT system more challenging. These grant holders were more likely to consider the YIF learning project to be an additional burden they were unwilling to take on, and to opt out of many (if not all) strands of data collection on the grounds that they were already adopting an in-house approach that met their needs (and had been designed for them).

The YIF Learning Project has built the foundations to further develop the youth sector's understanding of what works

Despite the data collection challenges discussed in depth in this paper, the majority of grant holders who completed the End of Grant survey thought that the evaluation achieved at least some of the original project objectives and has led to improvements in measurement practice among the participating YIF organisations. Looking forward, the learning project team hopes that publishing data collection tools, analysis and these insight papers will help future evaluators to design research that further develops the sector's understanding of what works, why, for whom and in which contexts.

Section 3: Method

This paper draws on learning and reflections from across the YIF Learning Project, and particularly on consultation with grant holders in the final year. The three main sources of insights are:

- **End of grant survey:** The final annual survey of grant holders was completed in June 2020. The survey was administered online by NPC using the SmartSurvey platform. The survey included a mix of pre-coded and open-ended questions. 79 people completed the survey, representing 68 organisations out of the 90 grant holders. The survey questions are included in Appendix 1. The analysis for the quantitative survey questions was mostly done at the total level, as the sample was too small to allow granular analysis by region or size of organisation, for example.

- **Grant holder interviews:** The Centre for Youth Impact ran a series of calls/video calls with 37 individual grant holders (each from different organisations) in July and August 2020. The interviewees included a good spread of senior management and front-line staff. Each interview was approximately one hour long and was recorded for note-taking purposes. Participants were assured that anything they said would not be attributed to them or their organisation, so the quotes in this paper are anonymised. The semi-structured interviews were analysed by bringing key quotes and insights into a single document so the research team could conduct a thematic analysis. The interview topic guide is included in Appendix 2.

- **Case study interviews/focus groups:** As part of the YIF case study process evaluation (data collection undertaken May-Oct 2019, report published November 2020), all seven participating organisations were asked about their experiences of the YIF evaluation.

In addition, we also used:

- A one-off targeted survey of grant holders who did not volunteer to be part of outcomes data collection. Out of the 53 grant holders who did not volunteer to be part of outcomes data collection, 16 grant holders completed this survey in February 2020.

- Periodic phone calls, emails and feedback received from grant holders; questions and feedback raised by YIF grant holders during core group[3] meetings; and two webinar presentations on early findings and user feedback.

- Reflections from staff at NPC and the Centre for Youth Impact who worked on the YIF learning project.

Strengths and limitations

This paper was informed by a wide range of sources, which allowed us to triangulate themes. Many of the grant holders we spoke to clearly cared passionately about this learning project. They were generous with their time and gave us thoughtful, detailed and constructive reflections and ideas. A related strength was the variety of participants that we spoke to. The interviewees and people attending webinars were from all six geographical areas targeted by the YIF, and included a full range of individuals from grant holders who had taken part in no strands of the data collection to those who participated in all five types of data collection.

A limitation of this paper is that while all types of grant holder (across different regions and engagement levels) were represented, a disproportionately high amount of the feedback and insights came from the more engaged grant holders (i.e. those who successfully collected the different types of data across the three years of YIF). To help mitigate this, we sent a short one-off survey to the grant holders who had not engaged (or engaged relatively little) with the project to get a sense of why they had not participated and what could have been done differently to get them on board. We also phoned grant holders who had initially volunteered to participate in outcomes data collection, and later withdrew. Views from these organisations are included in this report.

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[3] The core group was a subset of 17 organisations who met with the learning team regularly and advised on various elements of the evaluation design.

Section 4: Findings
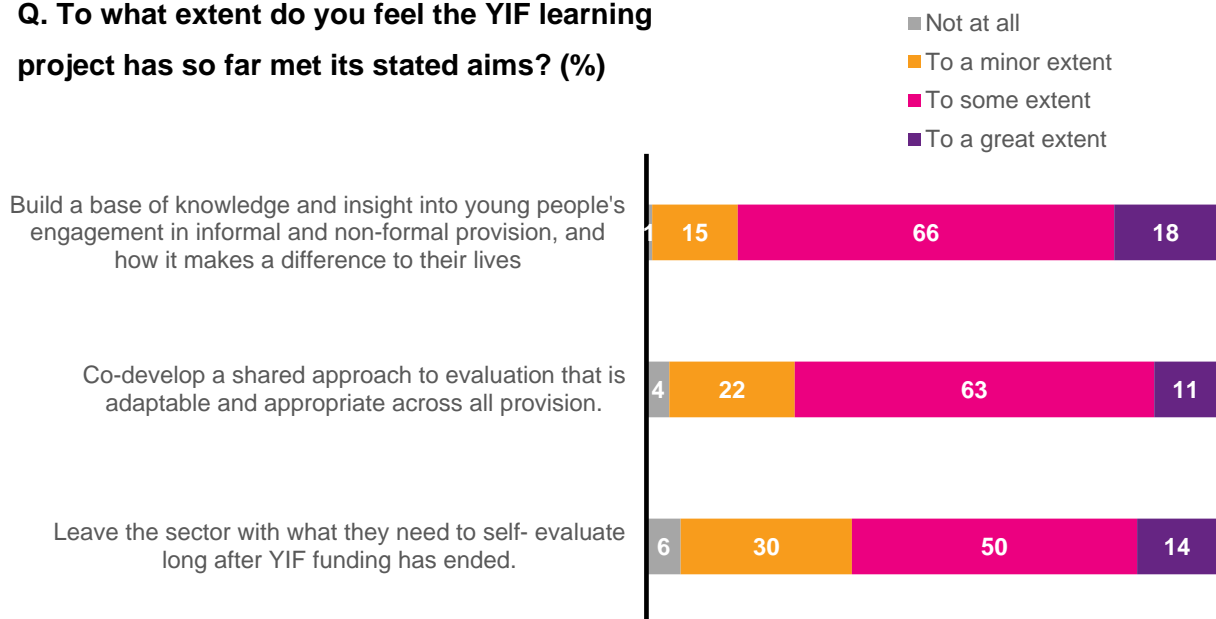
4.1 Engagement with the YIF learning project

4.1.1 Do grant holders believe the learning project met its objectives?

Grant holder responses in the end of grant survey, shown below in Chart 1, provide a sense of their general views about the learning project and the extent to which they feel it met its objectives. Over 90% of survey participants thought the stated aims had at least partially been met; the most frequently selected option was 'to some extent'.

While the pattern of responses was similar across the three core aims, the data suggests that the learning project was more successful in achieving the aim of building knowledge base, with more work required on leaving the sector with what they need to self-evaluate. To support the youth sector with future self-evaluation, the YIF learning project team will share the updated Theory of Change and related resources later this year.

Chart 1, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. To what extent do you feel the YIF learning project has so far met its stated aims? (%)

Legend:
- Not at all
- To a minor extent
- To some extent
- To a great extent

Aim	To a minor extent	To some extent	To a great extent
Build a base of knowledge and insight into young people's engagement in informal and non-formal provision, and how it makes a difference to their lives	15	66	18
Co-develop a shared approach to evaluation that is adaptable and appropriate across all provision. (Not at all: 4)	22	63	11
Leave the sector with what they need to self- evaluate long after YIF funding has ended. (Not at all: 6)	30	50	14

Related to the legacy aim about self-evaluation, we found it encouraging that over three quarters of respondents said that participating in the YIF Learning Project had improved their organisation's understanding of how to measure impact (see Chart 2 below).

Further evidence that the YIF learning project has been beneficial at the organisation level is that over three quarters of the end of grant survey participants said that their organisation had done something differently as a result of data collected through the YIF learning project. Examples included changing which activities were being offered, deciding to increase co-design with young people, and investing in new systems:

"Yes, it [data] helped shape the program for young people. We started to deliver some sessions differently and we have seen how much our young people appreciated the project."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"We have analysed what works best for the organisation…It has allowed us to concentrate on how we use evidence and monitor our delivery more than pre-YIF. As it was just classed as 'something we did' whereas now the organisation is very aware of how helpful it will be going forward. We have installed a new system due to this process."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"We were able to tell a better story about our young people - one that better reflected the changes they made in their lives. We could see how their progress wasn't always linear. We also added more sessions as we could now visually see which sessions were popular and why. We also made links with other YIF funded projects to collaborate on new ideas."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"The five [types] of data have been great way to formalise and measure what we are doing. It gives a good platform of what to collect and more importantly how to use the data for continuous improvement. It has also made us think a lot about the quality of data collection rather than collecting surveys etc without meaningful questions."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"We were already measuring and evaluating before YIF, yet the data needed complex analysis far above anyone's skill level in our small organisation. YIF showed that this could be much simpler."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Our track record in this was fairly sporadic, so the YIF learning project has enabled us to gain more information from young people in order to understand their needs and wants. Critically, with the support of YIF we have been able to interpret this insight correctly and consequently shape our future programmes more effectively and with the young person at the centre of everything we do. We now know that the views of the young people are vitally important when planning youth work."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"[The YIF Learning Project] has been (time) consuming but has also helped [youth workers] to look at sessions in different ways. A lot of coaches do things naturally that they wouldn't have picked up on without the quality feedback, which is a nice validation. Has been a useful way of looking at things more objectively."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"I like that [the YIF Learning Project] has many different strands: reiterates that there is no one tool that can solve everything. Through showing a combination of improved quality, positive feedback, and targeted measure of some outcomes, together they can show something significant."

Quote from a grant holder interview

Chart 2, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. To what extent has participating in the YIF learning project improved your organisation's understanding of how to measure the impact of open access youth work? (%)

Category	Percentage
Very much	19%
Somewhat	58%
Undecided	10%
Not much	9%
Not at all	4%
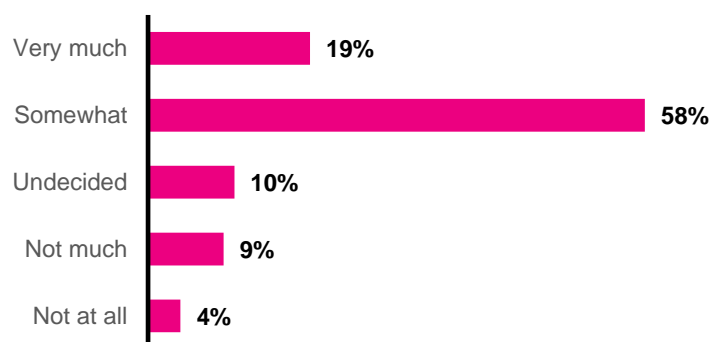
However, while the learning project has had successes at the organisation level, there was a sense from some grant holders that questions around understanding the impact of open access youth provision remained unanswered at the sector level. This was linked in part to the wider legacy being as yet unknown, but also to concerns that this legacy might be weakened by lower

participation in some aspects of the evaluation than we (evaluators and grant holders) had hoped for. The final YIF outcomes data set was not as large as the original project plans expected. The YIF learning team frequently explained data collection issues with grant holders, so there was a good awareness that the quantity of data was sub-optimal from an early stage.

Some grant holders felt that there had been a lack of shared responsibility across the cohort of 90 organisations. They were disappointed with the level of engagement of some of their peers, although they recognised that participation may be more feasible and acceptable for some organisations than others.

The YIF Learning Project was attempting a shared evaluation on a scale hitherto unexplored. This created both excitement and fear around the YIF leaning project. Data collection challenges made some nervous that the evaluation would not be able to provide as compelling and clear findings, with broad applicability with and beyond the YIF, as had been hoped at the outset.

"If you've only got 150 or 200 outcomes [data points], or whatever the number was - and some of them have only got 1 or 2, whatever - it was just like actually, 'who is going to sit up and take notice of this?' [...] I have a fear that it hasn't got enough learning or enough data to get a big enough 'splash' when it comes out. I think it's got a risk of being some great work that gets ignored."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"[The YIF Learning Project] will create some further conversations with the sector. I don't think it will achieve its original aim, but I think it has potential to provoke some further discussions which hopefully will get us a bit further along the journey towards the original aim."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Grant holders and the YIF learning project team are united in thinking that it is important for the lessons learnt from this project to be applied to future long-term measurement of open access youth provision.

"I think the evaluation process was an invaluable tool and I wish the funding and evaluation could have continued to show a longer-term impact on young people."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"I think we have only just covered the tip of the iceberg in terms of learning - I feel evaluation in this sector needs to be consistent over many years to really see the impact."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

In summary, the consensus among grant holders was that the YIF learning project, despite the data collection challenges, has mostly achieved the original project objectives and has led to improvements in evaluation practice among the participating YIF organisations.

Looking forward, the learning project team hope that publishing data collection tools, analysis and insight papers will help future evaluators to design research that further develops the sector's understanding of what works, why, for whom and in which contexts.

4.1.2 What motivated grant holders' to take part in the YIF learning project?

Grant holders were generally highly motivated to take part in the YIF learning project. There were various issues around capacity, skills and the approach to research design (all discussed later in this paper) but grant holders generally could, at least in theory, see the value in taking a shared measurement approach.

Before data collection began, the YIF learning team gave grant holders the choice to opt in or out of the five strands of data collection (user data, engagement data, feedback data, quality data and outcomes data, see Insight Paper 1 for more details). In our recent interviews with grant holders, we asked what motivated them to opt into the strands in which they participated. Perhaps predictably, their motivations tended to be either about 'proving' or 'improving' the impact of open access youth provision.

The **'proving'** motivations were to provide a collective picture of the evidence of the impact of youth provision to present a compelling case for why long-term funding is essential, particularly that which covers core costs. Hopes were high. Recent analysis of local authority data has shown that spending on youth services in England has fallen by nearly £1bn in real terms over the last eight years.[4] Many participants saw the YIF learning project as an opportunity to make a (possibly definitive) case for the value of funding youth provision.

Participants described the challenges of securing funding for open access youth provision and the hope that YIF would "*equip us with those arguments*." The opportunity for a national picture was valued as a way to inform funding decisions so money is directed to '*where it has the greatest impact*'. Others hoped to learn from seeing their own data in the context of the wider cohort.

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[4] https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/youth-services-suffer-1bn-funding-cut-in-less-than-a-decade

"When you get your single largest ever grant coming in and, then you understand right from the beginning that there's a, probably, once in a generation opportunity for a learning set where all these people start at the same time, finish at the same time, and we could collect all this information - yeah, I was just really clear that I wanted people to- for us to input as much as possible and get out as much as possible."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"The sector has always been widely misunderstood on so many levels. To be part of a dialogue that attempts to make open access youth work understood is paramount especially for those not directly involved. It was also a chance to be part of a bigger project and get an idea of where we fit in."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"We wanted to contribute to providing an evidence base for the impact of high-quality youth work, to share our learning, learn from others and improve our evidence and impact practice."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"If there's a way we can evidence youth work better, that it has a value, then I think [evaluation] is a good thing."

Quote from a grant holder interview

The **'improving'** motivations included the opportunity for grant holders to share learning about their experiences of delivering YIF funded activities. They described how it helps less experienced practitioners and builds the overall capacity of the youth sector.

Some grant holders valued smaller geographical clusters within the overall cohort of 90 organisations. Sadly, there was not enough resource to facilitate ongoing learning events throughout the lifetime of the project. We encouraged grant holders to continue their relationships, but only a few proactively did this. Many grant holder organisations said they valued time to just 'be together' with peers. Capacity to create and participate in this sort of space has been another casualty of reduced funding to the sector.

"We found the cluster meetings an important and useful tool to get the necessary information and guidance for the YIF evaluations in the first two years of YIF funding, we feel this would have been useful to have these carry on into the last year as this was also a good way to meet and talk to other projects funded via YIF."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"It would have been helpful to have had more opportunities to meet as a group/local regional network like we did in year 1. These opportunities felt so helpful and useful to learn from each other all working together within the YIF projects."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Linked to shared learning, participants saw YIF as an opportunity to learn about and improve provision in their own organisation. This included understanding the varied impact of different models of provision. Some organisations were motivated by the opportunity to learn how to use robust measurement tools that are suitable for using with young people, and to improve their evaluation practices with the aid of digital platforms and dashboards to record and report data.

"A part of it was developing the partnerships across Liverpool because we're all delivering youth work. There's not enough resource, we're not in competition with each other, it's how we work together to make sure young people have got access and I think being part of them cluster groups because of the whole part of the funding bid was looking at what was out there now, you work together, and I suppose part of the learning was getting them so the cluster were really useful, and now we've got really good partnerships, we've delivered a lot together and opened up our buildings more to other smaller youth providers to deliver, so there's a lot more partnership working across the whole of Liverpool really, cause of the YIF funding, yeah. That was useful."

Quote from a grant holder interview

Regardless of initial motivations for taking part, maintaining motivation meant securing buy-in from staff to take part. Youth workers are often motivated by engagement with young people and creating opportunities for them; the extent to which they see evaluation as important to this varies.

"I know how to do it but at times it takes up capacity which is needed in face-to-face work. We are a very small team and just cannot dedicate the time at the moment."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Grant holders described the importance of "*selling the vision and why it's important*" in getting buy-in. Establishing and maintaining buy-in tended to be easier for the staff working solely on YIF (as opposed to delivery staff who were also responsible for other projects or activities).

"One of the things we are going to need to do over the next few months is make sure that everyone sees it [collecting monitoring and evaluation data] as their responsibility. To do that we need to get them to buy in to why they're doing it. [...] Everybody has a collective responsibility."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"[YIF Project Manager] led on the YIF Learning Project and was very involved, but the evaluation straddled different area teams across quite a large staff team/service and therefore it was quite difficult to get everyone involved/on board - Largely, because I don't think there was the same level of understanding and involvement about in how and why these processes were developed, which were largely developed externally."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

4.1.3 How ready were grant holders' to take part in the YIF learning project?

Shared measurement, to some extent, assumes a shared level of skill and capacity across the many organisations participating. We found this is often not the case.

One of the most challenging aspects of conducting a shared measurement project in open access youth provision was the variance in 'organisational readiness'. While some organisations had staff with several years of experience in data collection methods and online reporting, other grant holders had '*no real history at the organisation of collecting data this way*'.

"There was also quite a distinct difference between developed organisations with like infrastructures a bit like mine, with systems and processes, and people who are trained to use databases and staff like that. There were some other organisations who, with the greatest will in the world and the greatest respect - and God knows what some of them have been like during the Coronavirus pandemic – lack the ability to use computers. [Participate in] academic research when you're still dealing with leaks in the walls, and only having one computer between four of you or something like that? People are prioritising, aren't they?"

Quote from a grant holder interview

"The positive was that [the evaluation] was well resourced, so that we could invest in the staff time that we needed."

Quote from a grant holder interview

Organisational culture played an important role in how 'ready' an organisation was to effectively take part. One participant explained that they chose not to take part in the quality process because it requires a level of trust that, at the time, wasn't present in their team.

"You have to have a real team spirit and the commitment to do better and It's really important that it's not taken as an individual criticism but actually as a wider issue of practice."

Quote from a grant holder interview

As shown in Chart 3 below, 65 out of the 79 End of Grant survey participants (82%) said they had "learnt new things about evaluation and impact measurement" from the YIF evaluation, with just six participants (8%) disagreeing with that statement. We can, therefore, expect that future learning and evaluations involving YIF grant holders will benefit from having a greater collective understanding of evaluation theory, tools and good practice.

Chart 3, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. How much do you agree with the following statement about your experience of the YIF evaluation: "I learnt new things about evaluation and impact measurement" (%)
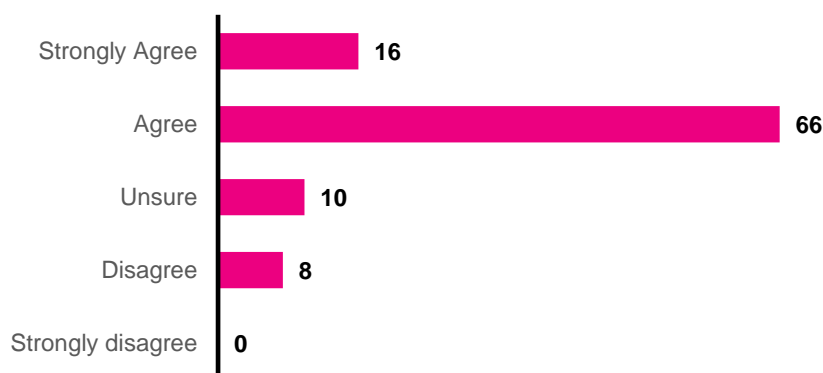
It is likely that much of the learning came from the practical experience of working on the project such as setting up data collection systems or inputting data into the online system. Over the three years of the YIF learning project, formal training was offered to grant holders in using theory of change and the cycle of good impact practice (Year 1), the project data collection tools and evaluation skills (Years 1-2). Between 20-30 grant holders attended each training session. The training was well received and was thought to have improved the capabilities of some grant holders. From the End of Grant survey, out of the 60 usefulness ratings for the capacity training, 49 were "fairly useful" or "somewhat useful". Seven were "very useful", and only four were "not at all useful".

Capacity was another key capability issue. Capacity is about having enough people with enough time to undertake evaluation related tasks, particularly when the time required, and nature of the task is underestimated or misunderstood. We will return to this in more detail in the research design section, but it is useful to first understand the context of the capacity problem.

Grant holders frequently described experiencing disruption due to staff changes or because of a reliance on a stretched volunteer workforce. Unexpected staff illness or staff changes undermined evaluation capacity. For some grant holders, higher than expected numbers of young people taking part in activities meant that resources had to be focussed on ensuring service delivery ran smoothly, at the expense of data collection. One interview participant described how their organisation struggled to take part in the early training and co-design of the shared evaluation framework because they were initially held within working hours and their workforce was predominantly volunteers with full-time jobs, which meant they found it hard to engage in the early stages of the project. This was addressed following feedback.

Some expressed a desire to take part in more strands of data collection where they had capacity to do so. The YIF Learning Project was effectively adding extra demand (in an unfamiliar 'discipline') to an already stretched workforce. In addition, some grant holders thought the learning project team could have provided more clarity at the start of the project about what administration skills would be required for data input.

"With only two employed staff who have seen around 400 young people, there was a lot of data to be collected by a very small team. The evaluation could maybe simplify some of data collection to minimise the workload."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"We have struggled with the requirement to upload data on the Impact system. This is partly because we were without an admin assistant due to illness for much of the first half of this grant. Our capacity for inputting data was really stretched."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"More information about what admin skills would be needed to help provide the data for evaluation would have been useful at the very outset of the projects so that organisations could decide if they had the skill internally or needed additional staffing to deal with the data collection and inputting."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"I guess as we come to an end [of the fund] I feel sad that we didn't fully participate as much in the outcomes or the quality tool. But I think, although it was amazing to have a learning partner and do this, it was also just a big bit of capacity that we probably hadn't' planned for enough."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"We had a lot of young people attending our sessions and found it sometimes hard to input all the time, especially with all the data required. We could have done with an admin person to assist with this and would have welcomed this."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"We were not aware of the level of evaluation involved alongside the grant when we applied and didn't not allocate time/money to the number of webinars and evaluations that were needed."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

At the start of the project, the learning team spoke to grant holders at meetings and on the phone and conducted a survey that included questions about evaluation capabilities. This scoping work enabled the team to anticipate *some* of the capacity and skills issues described above. For example, the anticipated capacity issues informed the decision to design the evaluation as 'opt in' rather than compulsory. However, a much more complex picture has emerged. Our learning and experience suggest 'capability' is a combination of resource, commitment, technical skills and perceived accessibility. Some of these elements are easier to address than others and call for very different types of support, both emotional and practical.

4.2 The YIF Learning Project in practice

### 4.2.1 Did grant holders view the YIF evaluation as an added burden?

A recurring theme in the grant holder interviews and in informal feedback was the extent to which the YIF evaluation placed an added burden on grant holders and young people. Measurement and data collection can be time consuming and labour intensive. Even though we tried hard to design the outcomes survey and approach to gathering data to be as straightforward as possible, it still imposed a heavy demand on some grant holders. For those with limited resources or experience of conducting evaluations, this demand was simply too great even if they had high hopes for the outcome of the evaluation overall.

We asked a question about the extent of the burden in the End of Grant survey. The results were mixed, with similar proportions agreeing and disagreeing that the evaluation felt like an added burden (see Chart 4 below). An important caveat here is that the End of Grant survey participants were mostly the grant holders who had participated in data collection. A short survey of the grant holders who did *not* volunteer to collect outcomes data provided some insights that are relevant here. 10 out of the 16 respondents to that survey said they were already using another evaluation

method/process, so adding YIF data collection was perceived as being an extra burden that they were not willing to take on.

Chart 4, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. How much do you agree with the following statement about your experience of the YIF evaluation: "It felt like an added burden on top of YIF delivery" (%)
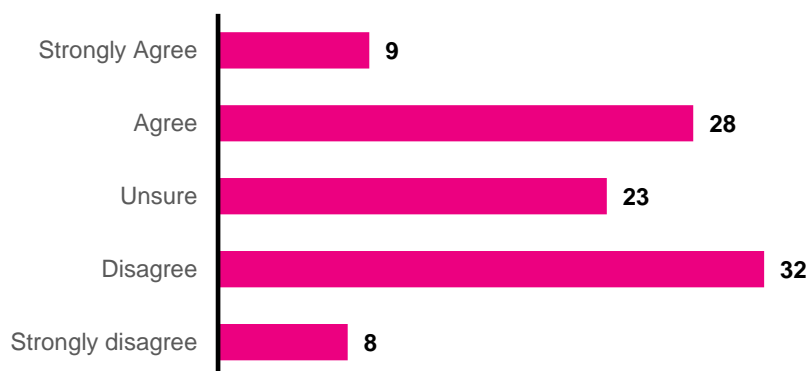
A 'burden' in this context can mean different things, such as too much data to collect, overly frequent data collection, or the time required to collate and enter data etc. Further questioning revealed that certain aspects of the learning project were thought to be more burdensome than others. A key theme in discussions with grant holders was that many organisations found it hard to manage YIF data collection alongside the different data collection requirements from other funders.

This is an ongoing and significant challenge to advancing evaluation practice and insight in the youth sector, particularly in shared measurement initiatives. The design of a common outcomes framework, for example, was a critical element of the YIF Learning Project.

Whilst we worked closely with grant holders to understand the approaches they were already taking to outcomes measurement, it was impossible in practice to design a tool that was the same as those already in use across multiple different settings. This was particularly the case for the outcome measurement strand, where some settings were using distance travelled tools (such as the Outcomes Star), others were using case studies, some were using bespoke tools designed in house, and many were not systematically measuring outcomes at all.

"The YIF funding part funded a number of our youth work roles along with other funders… All these different funders have different requirements and processes for evaluation which makes it difficult to fully embed one evaluation process across the organisation."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Due to capacity, some of the evaluation tools were long winded and took a long time to complete. This would then mean taking time away from actual delivery and work with young people. We also felt that some of the tools duplicated what we already used, and this meant that we were evaluating some things three times."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Balancing [the YIF Learning Project] with other evaluation pressures: measurement should be kept simple and consistent. At the moment we have too many things going on that are not coherent in what we are measuring"

Quote from a grant holder interview

It's worth remembering that about half of grant holder interview participants felt the approach worked well and they did not feel like the YIF learning project was a burden. Several participants highlighted the critical relationship between grant holder perceptions of evaluation, and young people's trust and engagement in the process.

"I think we started out at the beginning of the three years thinking this is going to be a big, big task and it's going to require quite a lot of differences but actually when it came to implementation it didn't really change much about how we operate. Even now, I'm still filling in our own footfall data and that happens in parallel with filling in on the IMPACT platform. So actually, it's not been anywhere near as arduous or time consuming as I think perhaps we thought it was at the beginning."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"The YIF evaluation is helping overall. It's a learning process, allowing [youth workers] to stop and reflect. The challenge is being able to embed that in the organisation in a sustainable way - need to train up more staff, and the process needs to be lightweight and quick enough to fit all their programmes."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"The young people like [the feedback surveys] - they don't always get asked their opinions so it can be a positive experience, giving them confidence and skills to give feedback. This opens up conversations about what impact they can have on their future. They struggle with reading so it ends up being more of a conversation, but that can be really productive. Some young people are reluctant to participate because they are distrustful of authority. But many enjoy it as we break down those barriers… the encourage [to participate in surveys] comes from us."

Quote from a grant holder interview

4.2.2 What were grant holders' perceptions of the volume of data requested?
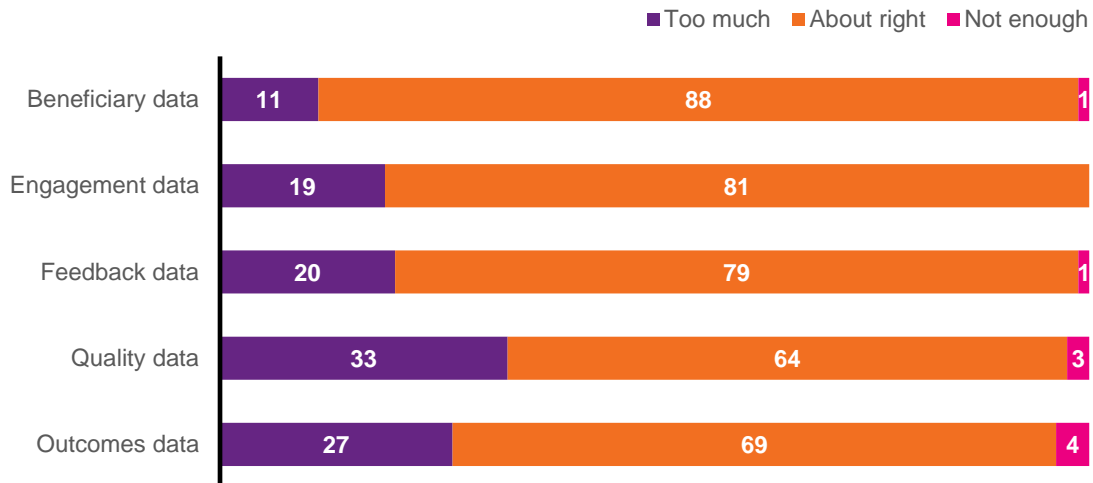
In the End of Grant survey, we asked various questions about how manageable the data collection process was for each type of data. For the question about the volume/quantity of data, grant holders were asked if they thought the data collected for each data type was "about right", "too much" or "not enough". As shown in Chart 5, with every data type most survey participants thought the amount of data they were asked to collect was about right. Noteworthy minorities thought too much data was being collected, particularly for quality and outcomes data. Very few grant holders selected the "not enough" option for any data type.

We suspect some survey respondents interpreted this question as being about the volume of data collected overall, rather than in their setting, and were thus responding to a desirable volume of data for the evaluation rather than 'manageability' in their setting. This could explain the slightly higher proportion responding that the volume/quantity of outcomes data was 'not enough', when we know from talking directly to grant holders that they found this area of data collection taxing. A high volume of outcomes data collected across the project was seen by many grant holders as key to delivering the most compelling results. We communicated regularly with grant holders about our concerns around lower than anticipated data collection but we could potentially have gone further.

Another possible explanation for the high proportion saying 'about right' here is that grant holders were given the option to opt-in to each data type if they thought it was feasible for their organisation. Whilst this limited the potential pressure placed on grant holders, it also created an ongoing tension between fulfilling the high expectations on the evaluation, ensuring the feasibility of data analysis, and managing grant holders' perceptions of and consent for the process.

Chart 5, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. Thinking about the different types of YIF data, how manageable did you find the required <u>volume / quantity</u> of data to collect? (%)

■ Too much ■ About right ■ Not enough

Data type	Too much	About right	Not enough
Beneficiary data	11	88	1
Engagement data	19	81	
Feedback data	20	79	1
Quality data	33	64	3
Outcomes data	27	69	4

For context, the following chart shows the number of grant holders who actually collected data for the different data types:

Chart 6, Data collection by data type (Base: 90)

Number of grant holder organisations collecting each data type

Data type	Count
Beneficiary	83
Engagement	82
Feedback	62
Quality	54
Outcomes	27
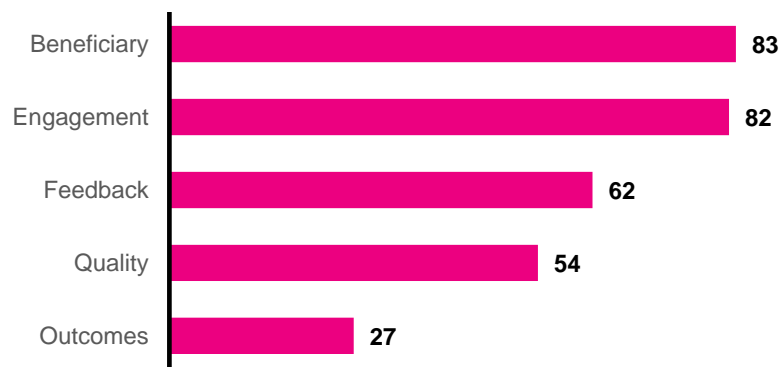
The following quotes from the End of Grant survey highlight some of the consequences of collecting data. Grant holders talked about staff capacity and potentially incentivising data collection short cuts (e.g. asking the same small sub-group of willing young people to take part each time) which could bias the sample.

"Some of the tools felt like duplication and long winded."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"I just found it too much and we in the end started to ask the same 'willing' young people to complete the necessary forms."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Although the team liked the quality data process, the questionnaire itself was very long and to go through both the visit, the write up and the peer discussion did require a lot of staff capacity."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"There is a lot to collect for the quality data, but it was worthwhile."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Elements of the evaluation and information gathering such as the [Programme Quality Assessment] were a fantastic idea and the concept is great but the capacity to continuously use this model was unsustainable."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

### 4.2.3 How did grant holders' experience the frequency of data collection?

Closely linked to volume of data was the question of how often to collect different types of data. The pattern of responses was similar here, with large majorities thinking that the frequency of data collection was "about right" for each data type. Approximately a quarter of survey participants thought the frequency of data collection was too often for feedback data, quality data and outcomes data.

There wasn't much variation by data type; it was generally the same organisations who thought that data collection was too frequent, which suggests it was more about the experience of collecting data rather than the nature or type of data.

Hardly anyone selected 'too rarely'. Interestingly, most grant holders had already adapted the data collection timeframes in practice. Very few stuck to the timing of 'waves' requested by the learning project team.

Chart 7, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. Thinking about the different types of YIF data, how manageable did you find the required <u>frequency</u> of data to collect? (%)
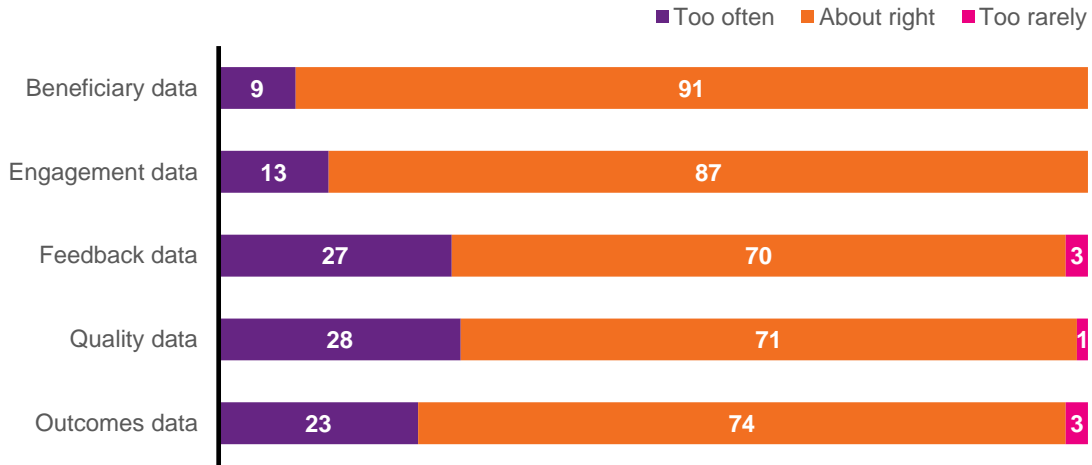
Even though approximately three quarters of survey participants felt the frequency of data collection was about right, we must consider the minority of grant holders who felt it was too frequent. The following two quotes from grant holders give an indication of what happens when organisations are unable to keep up with the required frequency of data gathering in terms of the impact on the robustness of the research method, and indeed the extent to which data can be included in analysis at all.

"The questionnaires seem to come round too quickly for our young people so engagement in this was difficult. We collected this information through our forums and daily end of session feedback instead."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Too much can be overkill and beneficiaries will quickly become 'fed-up' of some surveys etc. The right pacing means you get a good overview spread of information and the beneficiaries will answer openly rather than with simple one word answers that they all copy off each other just to get it done quickly."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

One grant holder thought that overly frequent data collection was a particular problem in informal provision for young people:

"The data which required participation of the young people via surveys was pretty onerous, especially as the surveys were asking the same questions throughout the project. Young people who at first were happy to engage became bored and even though they were told and understood the reasons for being asked they felt that it was starting to become "too much like school" and so we had to step back from asking some of the young people to continue for fear they would disengage with the organisation completely. It should be borne in mind that this is not the only funding source that is asking for feedback information from young people and they quickly feel overloaded with surveys. Some other form of innovative activity to establish the feedback and outcomes data would have helped."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Another grant holder said that both young people and staff found it hard to understand why they had to fill the 'same thing out again' when they had not seen how the previous surveys had been used. This problem was fixed to an extent later in the project when functionality was added to the IMPACT system to let grant holders see their previous data more easily.

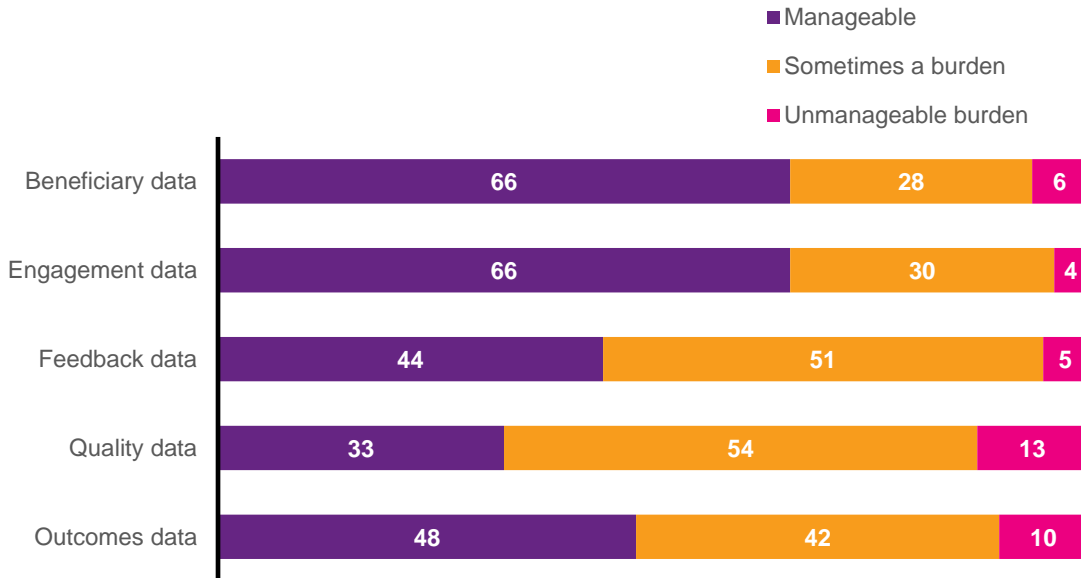### 4.2.4 What were project staff's experiences of collecting data?

The open, informal nature of provision, and the low adult-to-young-person ratio, means that even basic individual data collection can be extremely difficult from a technical perspective. Philosophical objections to evaluation in this context were also raised on the grounds that the necessarily structured nature of data collection is incompatible with informal service delivery. This helps explain why the data collection burden was most apparent when we asked how much staff time was needed to collect data.

As shown in Chart 8, over half of the End of Grant survey participants thought that the staff time to collect feedback data, quality data and outcomes data was "sometimes a burden" or an "unmanageable burden". This insight is important for understanding why some grant holders engaged well and others less so, and why there are certain gaps in the data. Of particular concern here were the 10% of survey participants who thought that the required staff time to collect outcomes data was an "unmanageable burden".

Chart 8, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. Thinking about the different types of YIF data, how manageable did you find the required <u>staff time to collect data</u>? (%)

Legend:
- ■ Manageable
- ■ Sometimes a burden
- ■ Unmanageable burden

Data type	Manageable	Sometimes a burden	Unmanageable burden
Beneficiary data	66	28	6
Engagement data	66	30	4
Feedback data	44	51	5
Quality data	33	54	13
Outcomes data	48	42	10

When questioned about the impact of the burden on staff time to collect data, the grant holders who felt that this was a problem talked about how time spent collecting data meant staff had less time to deliver services.

"Outcomes data required a worker to sit down with individuals and took them away from the face-to-face work so was a challenge logistically, when we gave it to e.g. student placements to deliver their relationships were not as good with the young people and this caused problems."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"When having multiple projects to deliver simultaneously, YIF specific data can be a burden due to lack of capacity."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Survey comments gave some clues on how to mitigate the burden, such as allocating data collection time to specific individuals, thinking about ways to make the data collection more enjoyable, communicating the importance of robust data collection, and increasing collaboration between funders to avoid data collection duplication. It's also clear that perceived manageability was not limited to *collecting* data, but also included collating, entering and uploading it onto the IMPACT platform.

"We had a project manager who was allocated time as part of the YIF project to pull this data [together] so we were lucky we had a dedicated resource."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"In terms of collecting data and doing consultation work, our staff team presently do not enjoy this element of work, see it as a burden and hence why there are difficulties."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"It became manageable after we had worked with the staff on the importance of collecting robust data and giving them the necessary tools to do this effectively."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"With three different funders all wanting similar data but on different databases – it was not viable (to participate fully in the YIF data collection) in terms of staff time or cost."

Quote from a grant holder interview

4.3 The design and method of the YIF Learning Project

4.3.1 What did grant holders think about the timing of the evaluation?

The gap between grant holders beginning service delivery and being ready to start data collection was widely felt by grant holders to have hindered the learning project. For a breakdown of the main dates for the project, please see the timeline in Appendix 1.

Grant holders questioned why the learning project team had not been in place before service delivery started. The appointment of the learning team falling after service delivery had already begun meant that all evaluation design activity had to run alongside delivery with young people, in real time. In many cases, grant holders had been delivering services for a full year before they started collecting data for the evaluation. This meant that many grant holders had already allocated resources to prioritise delivery and found it difficult to reallocate time and prioritise evaluation activities. Grant holders knew there was a learning project attached to the YIF and had met the learning team within a few months of commencing delivery, but it was some time before the final design of the evaluation approach was set.

In sectors like open access youth provision, where funding can be scarce and intermittent, there is an understandable rush to start using new funding for service delivery quickly. However, the lesson

for funders and evaluators is to start the evaluation design phase before the main grants were distributed to grant holders. The YIF Learning Team estimate that starting the scoping and design 6 months before the start of service delivery would have been sufficient to complete enough of the preparatory work (e.g., setting up the data collection system and reviewing survey question options) to enable data collection to start much closer to the start of service delivery.

A timing related lesson for evaluators and funders are to clearly communicate what resources will be required for data collection as soon as possible. This message about resources was included in YIF Learning Team emails, calls and during meetings but arguably more could have been done to convey the importance of this point above other learning project communications that grant holders were receiving at around the same time. Another lesson for evaluators is to balance the benefits of conducting a comprehensive evaluation co-design phase with the benefits of rolling out data collection closer to the start of service delivery.

"I think it was a bit mixed, if I'm honest. I think it took quite a long time for the learning project to get up and running. People were well into delivery before we were absolutely clear on what it was that we needed to collect and how we needed to collect it."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"Although not the evaluators' fault, we weren't told about the process at the start of the programme so hadn't factored in the time or anyone to properly support this work which made it challenging."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"There was clearly a lot of theory behind the approach, with good intention and good practice embedded in it. However, it came six months into the programme, when provision was already heavily up and running - the learning project was then another layer of activity to add in, layering on top of methods already in place. It showed more development than existing approaches, but not totally fit for purpose."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"Whatever learning comes out of it will be really valuable. But I still think you know there's people like myself and others that probably think it's maybe a missed opportunity as well. A lot of that was down to the early planning by DCMS and Big Lottery on how they were going to implement the grant, I think."

Quote from a grant holder interview

A small number of grant holders joined the YIF at a later stage, following targeted activity to distribute funding to geographical 'cold spots'. Notably, one of these grant holders did not perceive that they had faced the same timing challenges experienced by those in the first cohort.

"I think it was useful because right in the beginning we had the webinars, so myself and the manager of the centre, we watched those together so that we could have those conversations and it felt like we went into it with a good understanding of what we had to do. So although we were introducing something new, it wasn't that we just read a letter with 'this is what you've got to do', or got sent a pack, and then obviously you had other people in those webinars so you heard their feedback as well. And because we weren't the first group going through, we heard the experiences of the other providers that had been delivering for a year so that was really useful."

Quote from a grant holder interview

4.3.2 How did grant holders experience the co-design process?

The principles of co-design were an important feature of the YIF learning project. The co-design approach was directly related to achieving the aims of the learning project, particularly in developing a shared approach that was adaptable and appropriate across different youth settings and leaving the sector with the ability to self-evaluate beyond YIF.

In the first year of the project, the YIF learning team organised various co-design activities with grant holders to include as many in the process as possible. For example, the learning project team held workshops about a shared theory of change for the YIF, and hosted meetings to discuss data collection tools and plans. The end of year two survey suggests that this co-design stage was only partially successful. Over half (56%) of the survey respondents thought their organisation "had the opportunity to shape the YIF evaluation approach". However, 19% disagreed with that statement and the remaining 25% were unsure.

We know staff turnover was high for some grant holders, so it may be that some survey respondents joined after the initial co-design phase. The results also suggest that there may have been a significant disconnect between intention and perception. We took care to include *all* grant holders in the co-design process (through open workshops in geographical areas alongside the dedicated co-design 'Core Advisory Group' that grant holders were invited to join), but involvement does not necessarily equal the perception of being able to actively shape the approach.

Grant holders who participated in the co-design of the learning project welcomed the flexibility, and felt it was a good thing that organisations could opt in or out of specific strands of data collection.

One participant described how there were lots of opportunities to contribute, and it was "*nice to know you are feeding into something that is about the whole sector*." Some also thought that being part of the co-design phase gave them an advantage as they had a better understanding of the project aims and processes.

"I was a part of the YIF co-design group helping Centre for Youth Impact and NPC develop the tools and test the models that were used as part of the evaluation programme, and we tested a number of the tools and had strong buy in from the staff team to do so."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Several participants noted that the end products from the co-design process took time to roll out (and, therefore, some enthusiasm and momentum was lost). The feedback measures, for example, were initially developed in summer/autumn 2017, following workshops to design the shared theory of change (September-October 2017). The measures were shared with grant holders in autumn 2017, with training for the grant holders that offered to pilot the measures held in October. Piloting took place in November-December 2017, with data analysis and reflection with grant holders in January 2018. An updated set of feedback measures was developed in February-March 2018, and rolled out across grant holders in May-July 2018 as part of the overall data collection capacity building programme that the YIF learning team delivered with the cohort of c90 YIF grant holders.

The procurement of the IMPACT data system for use by the YIF grant holders for data collection and data sharing was initiated alongside the shared theory of change being produced, and pilot training was given for the quality data strand at the same time. The learning team gave regular updates to the grant holders during January-April 2018 about the planned roll-out of the YIF data collection strands and the amount of time different data collection strands required, an issue that emerged during discussions with grant holders in the data collection capacity building/ training workshops. Despite those warnings, some grant holders still underestimated the staff time required for data collection.

As outlined in the previous section, some participants felt the initial co-design phase would have been more effective if it had started earlier, prior to commencement of the Fund.

"Within the planning of the whole grant process, again, if it could have been done earlier, where grantees could have shaped it a bit more, or they'd kind of looked at all the applications and gone these were all the key things that were common among all the 90 grants. So yeah, so I don't think we got to shape a huge amount, to be honest, but it still worked well for us."

Quote from a grant holder interview

There was a small group of people working for grant holder organisations who felt that they did not have much influence or ability to shape the design of the learning project. In the interviews, the reasons given for this lack of influence were:

- They joined the grant holder organisation after the main co-design work was completed or were in the second cohort of organisations to receive funding.

- The process felt more like consultation than co-design.

- The organisation was understaffed so they did not feel they had capacity to engage in the co-design process.

- The scope for influencing the project lessoned as it progressed.

One participant also noted that the co-design process could have been improved through more ongoing contact and a closer one-to-one relationship with the learning team. They felt that informal conversations about the design of the project '*didn't seem to get pulled together'*.

Another grant holder who was part of the co-design phase suggested that the message about co-design being an iterative process was not communicated clearly enough.

"When co-building anything, it is a work in progress, I believe that most YIF organisations were expecting to have evaluation tools and systems all fit for purpose. I am not sure the message was loud enough or clear enough, as for me, it was. If you are co-building something, in the process of the build, somethings will work, and some things will not!"

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

4.3.3 What did grant holders think about the design of the evaluation approach?

Research methods, and whether the measures used were the best options for young people in the open access youth provision context, were a key theme from the grant holder interviews and informal feedback. This related particularly to the feedback questions and outcomes surveys. Some grant holders believed that some of the tools were not engaging or accessible enough, especially for children with special education needs or disabilities.

It was also felt that the informal nature of open access youth provision can make it hard to use the same methodologically robust surveys that are used in formal education research, both in terms of what constitutes a reliable 'baseline', and in administering standardised questionnaires that are completed independently by young people.

"We really struggled with the pre and post-questionnaire as [the young people] had just started so we didn't want to scare them away with an epic questionnaire and also if they don't come regularly it's hard to keep track of that."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Grant holders had differing views about what made completing questionnaires and surveys most feasible. For some, this was using paper and pen. For others, it was a desire to creatively adapt methods. For others still, it was about using IT and digital methods. We were not prescriptive about methods for completion, nor did we invest heavily in supporting one method of completion over another.

Others raised questions about the language and framing of the measures, with concerns that they were too simplistic for some young people and too complex for others. This was based in part on the age/stage of the young person, but also on the intent of the measure: some grant holders wanted very straightforward questions that would be easy for young people to answer, whereas others wanted more insight into *why* young people felt as they do.

"Having Yes and No answers only provided limited use for our evaluation purposes, we would have preferred a scale that allowed us to see change / improvement more easily."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Children and young people were unsure of the meaning of some of the terms used e.g. gender, ethnicity. Many organisations, like [name of organisation], are running projects across a range of ages (including those under 10) and wish to use a consistent evaluation method across the full group. Therefore, evaluation forms need to use language and terms that are suitable and understood by all participants."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"The biggest issue we found was getting young people to respond to some of the survey questions. We need an easier way - e.g. phone app - that can collect data from young people in a timely way that does not feel like a burden to them. We found the language used in some of the questions was not always understood by the young people."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Some grant holders questioned the fundamental design of the evaluation. They suggested that the nature and impact of open access youth provision calls for very different approaches. In an informal feedback call, one grant holder said that young people often do not understand the impact

of going to a youth club until much later in their lives, so evaluation should focus on a retrospective exploration of impact on young people's lives. This theme was echoed in some of the comments in the End of Grant survey. Doubt over the research methods likely contributed to the reluctance of some grant holders to take part in outcomes data collection.

"I feel strongly that as a sector, we need to be engaging more with young people who left their youth work provider/setting a number of years ago and ask them to what extent they feel that attending their youth provision made a difference to their lives. Many young people are unaware of the impact of attending a setting until many years later, once they have reflected on their experiences."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"It would be useful to keep collecting this data as a longitudinal study, especially in the light of the pandemic... it could potentially highlight the real need for open access provisions that offer multiple services."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

4.3.4 What did grant holders think about managing bespoke vs shared approaches?

The varied nature of open access youth provision created a tension between bespoke and shared research designs. On one hand, the benefit of fully bespoke research means an individual organisation or project can decide exactly what to measure, when and how. On the other hand, a fully aligned measurement system increases the potential for comparison, powerful statistical analysis, and tracking change. Grant holders recognised the benefits of both approaches in YIF and were aware that whilst the youth sector needs a stronger base of common impact data, the diversity of provision and young people it engages also calls for highly flexible responses. The evaluation design for YIF therefore sought to incorporate elements of both approaches, with a mixture of shared evaluation questions and scope to add in bespoke questions. Grant holders also had relative autonomy to determine the optimum approach to collating data, for example through paper-based surveys, 'ball in bucket' approaches, and digital means.

An important advantage of a more flexible approach is that the method can be adapted to suit the needs of the young people with whom the organisations were working. Similarly, a flexible approach provided the scope for including more creative approaches to data collection in the research design, which some grant holders felt were necessary to engage young people.

"As for evaluation working with young people with special education needs, standard evaluations generally do not allow us to show their progress in an accurate and meaningful way."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Make the evaluation more customisable for organisations that engage with young people in various ways in multiple settings."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

One grant holder reported that they had to 'dumb down' their ethnicity data to meet the YIF requirements, which resulted in a less detailed version of what they were already doing.

"The surveys were a bit restrictive… so we will return to devising our own surveys."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

The blended approach to the YIF evaluation design was not without challenge. Discussions with grant holders frequently focused on how to achieve the 'right' balance between standardisation and flexibility.

4.3.5 What were grant holders' perceptions of compulsory vs optional data collection?

An ongoing debate in the YIF evaluation was the balance between making data collection compulsory (as a condition of grant funding) and framing it as optional, where grant holders are encouraged to opt-in to collect certain types of data. Clearly, there are pros and cons with each approach: the compulsory method offers a firmer guarantee of a larger dataset, but could risk alienating grant holders, placing undue burden on staff and creating incentives to falsify data. An opt-in data collection method helps create a shared learning culture and sense of agency amongst participants but the risk, as we encountered in the YIF learning project, is that too many grant holders 'opt-out' of data collection. Participation in the YIF learning project by grant holders was optional, and some saw this as detrimental to its success.

"Make the evaluation compulsory to all grant holders. Making it optional meant we have missed a good opportunity to develop something that could have had an impact on a national level with central government."
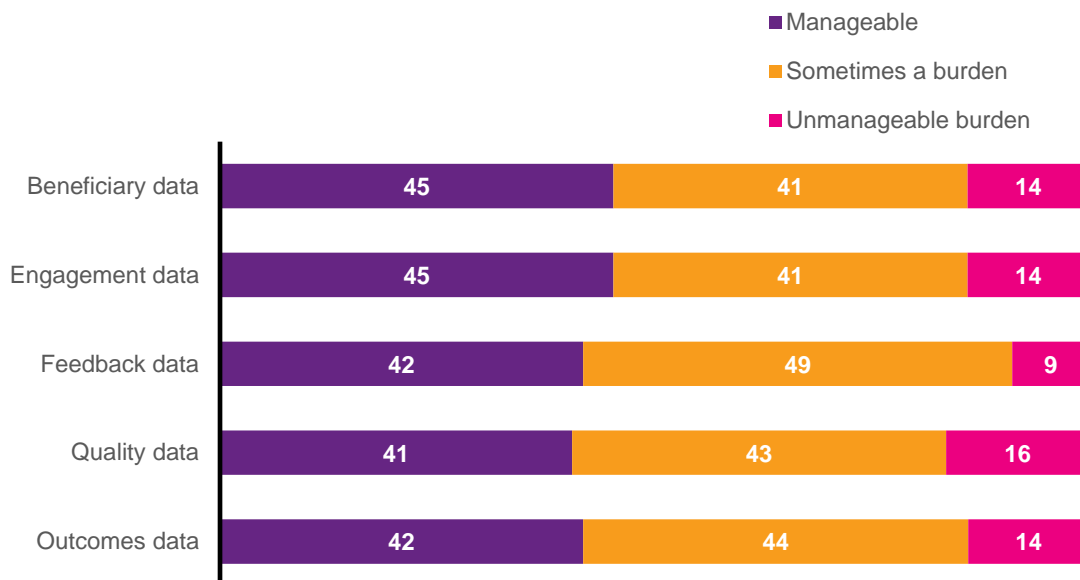
Grant holder

4.3.6 How did grant holders experience data entry and the IMPACT system?

A data collection system can make or break a shared measurement initiative. There were significant limitations to the IMPACT system used in the YIF learning project, which affected both the volume of data shared with the learning team, and the collection of data overall. Consequently, we know that the data collection system limitations were a factor behind the lower than expected sample size across different types of data.

The frustration with the IMPACT data collection system was evident in the end of grant survey results, shown in Chart 9 below, where well over half of participants said the required staff time to input data was "sometimes a burden" or an "unmanageable burden". These issues around data input are important for understanding why some grant holders engaged well and others less so, and why there are certain gaps in the data.

Chart 9, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. Thinking about the different types of YIF data, how manageable did you find the required <u>staff time to input data</u>? (%)

	Manageable	Sometimes a burden	Unmanageable burden
Beneficiary data	45	41	14
Engagement data	45	41	14
Feedback data	42	49	9
Quality data	41	43	16
Outcomes data	42	44	14

In the interviews and in informal conversations with grant holders, issues with the IMPACT system tended to come under the following themes:

- Additional hours/resource needed to manage the new system.

- Managing two systems where an existing system was already in place.

- Challenge of integrating IMPACT with existing system.

- Technical issues associated with the system, such as being timed out.

- Design issues with the system, where it was not user friendly.

- Issues with how the system recorded activities.

- The system was unable to produce summary 'dashboards' or basic analysis.

"The IMPACT platform was problematic and temperamental. There were numerous times where huge amounts of data would be lost. This is hard for staff to take because it takes a long time to upload anyway, to then have to do it twice or three times is frustrating."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"I had hoped that the IMPACT platform would provide a better way of storing this data but found it quite buggy and the reporting side of it very limited, so of little use to us moving beyond the grant."

Quote from a grant holder interview

"We have struggled with the requirement to upload data on the IMPACT system… we have not always found the IMPACT system an easy fit for what we do. Our YIF funding covered a really broad range of services and so we just focused our IMPACT inputting on our In-Schools work. We have managed to enter footfall data for schools work, but not been able to upload survey or benchmarking."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"Balancing [IMPACT] with our existing database has been a challenge. Also, we are not getting instant reporting which is really difficult - so many hours have been put in and it's still not allowing us to answer the question of what difference we are making. Would have also appreciated reporting back for the quality - to really make the most of it, we needed someone external to explain findings and give support."

Quote from a grant holder interview

Several grant holders made the point that there should be an open-source platform for youth organisations to use. An open-source platform would be useful for comparison and developing a shared framework over a longer period of time, and for use with projects with different funders.

"The tools that have been developed are really useful but now the YIF delivery has come to an end they need to be on an 'open source' system so we can continue to use them as quickly as possible."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

However, a minority of grant holders experienced no issues with the IMPACT system. They considered it to be reliable, user friendly, and liked how it provided useful insights/visuals to represent the data. These tended to be the grant holders with more experience of evaluations and/or the grant holders who joined the process in the second stage when some of the earlier problems with the IMPACT system had been resolved.

"Elements of all of the YIF offerings have added massive value to our recording process - we would love to continue with IMPACT and use this as our sole recording tool."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"I think we already used some feedback tools but using the IMPACT tool improved this."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

The YIF learning team also encountered design and implementation issues with the IMPACT system, which broadly fall into three themes: missing data, user-friendliness and complexity.

Missing data: The IMPACT system initially allowed users to upload data from exported data files even where they had important fields missing (e.g. the ID numbers assigned to young people or missing descriptive categories on type of activity). Unfortunately, this problem was not picked up until the project was one year in, which meant a large volume of data had to be manually reconciled or discarded. This wasted much time for all involved and reduced the sample size.

User-friendliness: Some aspects of IMPACT were not user friendly or intuitive. In some places IMPACT did not give the user any indication whether a data upload was successful, in progress or had failed. Users thus attempted uploads multiple times, resulting in frustration, part-uploads and much duplication of data. This led to swathes of data having to be manually reconciled by the learning team.

Complexity: Some aspects of IMPACT were overly complex and not fit for purpose. For example, it was complicated to switch between feedback and outcomes surveys. The result was considerable user frustration with some users giving up and sending paper copies of completed surveys to the learning team. These paper copies were then missing other data points (like date or activity classification) that the system would have provided, again resulting in data loss and

intensive work to manually reconcile data. It was also difficult to retrieve survey data from the system. The internal database of IMPACT had to be rebuilt and then manually filtered and reconstructed. The time-consuming manual parts of this task allowed the introduction of human error.

"The IMPACT system was limited and very time consuming to use, even after it was front loaded at our end."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"The IMPACT tool was problematic for us so although the regularity was fine to provide this data, the issues we had importing data from our existing data was a real challenge and took much longer than we had anticipated."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

4.3.7 How did grant holders experience communication and support from the learning team?

Communication and support for grant holders is a major part of any learning and evaluation project and is especially important for multi-year projects. Responses to the End of Grant survey suggested that the learning project team effectively supported grant holders in the later stages of the project. As shown in Chart 10, 70% of survey participants thought the support from the learning project team was "excellent" or "good" in the 12 months prior to June 2020. Just 6% thought that the support was "below average" or "poor".

Chart 10, End of Grant Survey (Base: 79)

Q. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the support that your organisation has received from the YIF learning project team over the past 12 months? (%)

Rating	%
Excellent	13
Good	57
Average	24
Below average	3
Poor	3
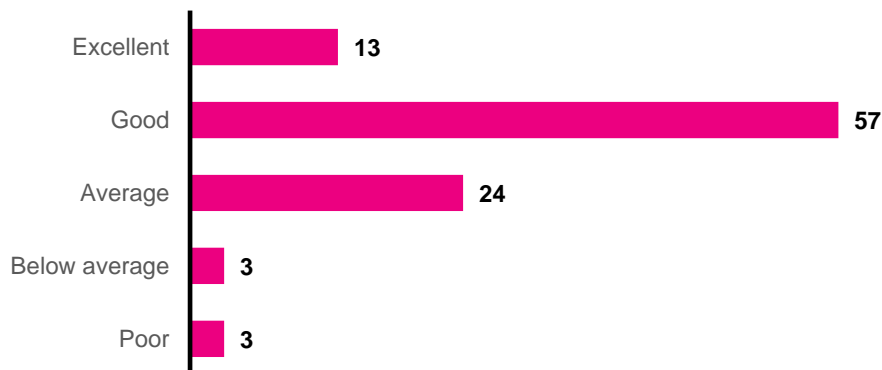
In the informal feedback conversations, some grant holders expressed ways in which they thought communications could have been improved. At the start of the project, communications from NPC and the Centre were not always clearly coordinated and we could have been clearer in avoiding jargon language/reduced, although grant holders thought this improved over time. It was also suggested that an FAQ or 'troubleshooting' webinar would have been useful during the early stages of data collection and input. In fact, several webinars and briefings were delivered at this time, so the perception that they were lacking suggests that communication was not sufficient to all members of the project team, and that some staff who joined organisations later missed these supports.

Views about the quality of support was mostly positive. The support provided by the team was widely praised for helping to break down the required steps into a more manageable process. A few grant holders who did not participate fully in data collection activities said they were frustrated by the fact that the learning project team said that issues with the IMPACT system would be resolved but the issues remained unresolved for longer than expected.

"We asked on several occasions for support with this but feel we didn't really get the support we needed."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"The learning project team did a good job. I cannot think of any substantial differences or changes that they might have made."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

"For us, simply better communication from the start. We had a situation where emails/information were being sent to the wrong person in our setup who in turn had no idea what he was receiving or why and simply ignored it as spam/junk email. This was annoying as at every other point the right people were always being contacted. Communication seemed to improve toward the end of year 2 and into year 3. This was probably around the Learning Project developing itself, however, such things need to be in place from the off."

Quote from the End of Grant Survey

Section 5: Summary and reflections

The YIF learning project is the largest ever shared evaluation of open access youth provision in England. We have experienced all the risks and rewards that come with such an endeavour. We are immensely grateful to grant holders for sharing their experiences and perceptions with us throughout the learning project, and particularly to those organisations involved in the co-design group for working so closely with the learning team to design, pilot and refine tools and measures.

The learning from the project has been extensive, and we are pleased to have contributed so much insight from our collective experience. At the same time, there have undoubtedly been many challenges, where we and grant holders would have liked the experience to have been different.

Managing tensions

The findings set out in this paper focus predominantly on managing tensions present (and in some cases, inherent) in the evaluation design. As a learning team, we knew there were many valid reasons why a shared evaluation on this scale, and in this sector, had not been attempted before.

Tensions in the YIF learning project	
Bespoke approaches	Common measurement
Co-designed	Pre-determined
Opt-in	Mandatory or opt-out
Shared data platform	Individual data collation and systems
Digital data collection	Manual data collection
Starting from a shared perspective	Starting where individual grant holders were at
External expertise	Learning together
Innovation and adaptation	Tried, tested and inflexible
Gathering insight directly from young people	Gathering data from youth workers

From the outset, the learning team was open about the tensions that would arise in the YIF learning project, and our desire to work with grant holders to negotiate and 'design' our way through. However, this approach in itself represented a tension, as there were grant holders who wanted to feel reassured that the learning team had all the answers and had determined a 'best practice' approach through prior experience. Equally, other grant holders wanted to know that the learning team was not simply going to impose approaches on the basis that they had been tried in other settings or contexts. Many grant holders believed strongly that open access youth provision is unique both in practice and ethos, and therefore cannot simply adopt approaches from other areas. In this way, these grant holders felt that the co-designed evaluation approach for YIF that was used was the most appropriate and meaningful.

Many grant holders freely acknowledged the tensions they were holding, for example wanting the most robust self-report data from young people, but also preferring that young people did not have to complete any surveys at all.

In most of the areas of tension set out above, there was no 'right' answer, but a series of trade-offs to be negotiated. In many cases, we discussed these trade-offs openly with grant holders (for example, the ability to amend survey questions to suit individual projects, whilst preferable for youth organisations, would decrease the potential to build a shared data set and undermine validity) and incorporated their views into the design as far as possible.

Inevitably, negotiating trade-offs meant nobody would be completely comfortable with the outcome, and this was often the case! We also found that many grant holders took one view for the learning project as a whole (for example, data collection should be mandatory to increase sample size) but another for their specific context ("mandatory data collection wouldn't work for us because our capacity is stretched"). The frequent turnover of staff (which was a significant factor that we hadn't fully anticipated in terms of its impact on the evaluation) also meant that negotiating tensions needed to be explained on an ongoing basis, rather than focused in the co-design phase at the start of the learning project.

Were we to repeat the learning project, there are undoubtedly some areas where we would shift the balance in managing the tensions, particularly data collection. In practice it will continue to be a negotiated process between evaluators, grant holders and funders, where decisions are made based on contribution to shared objectives and the parameters of the fund in question.

Looking back, grant holders in the YIF could have been more involved in setting the objectives of the Learning Project itself (which were largely determined between the learning team and the funders). They would then have been more empowered to reflect on the impact of balancing

tensions on achieving these shared aims. Grant holders also highlighted their critical role in supporting young people to have the trust and confidence to participate in data collection, further reinforcing the importance of delivery organisations feeling a sense of active involvement and ownership in the evaluation process.

Supporting engagement in the learning project

The YIF learning team was fortunate that engagement with the learning project overall was strong. A co-design group was in place (re-constituted every year to enable new members to join) and met regularly. In the main, surveys were completed and interview invitations were accepted. Grant holders were open and generous in their feedback and had effective lines of communication with the learning project team.

However, it is also clear that we could have done more to enable grant holders to engage with the learning project, both in seeking/accessing support and in understanding the rationale behind the design of the project. Specifically, we could have worked more closely with funders to communicate the intent and expectations of the learning project to the grant holders at the outset, and support them to plan for the resource and time requirements (including the implications for how to allocate funds to activities). This would have been significantly easier had the timelines for delivery and evaluation been better aligned, but there is clearly more that the learning team could have done at various points throughout the project.

Similarly, we could have done more to create tools and resources that were designed to be shared with new members of staff as they joined grant holder organisations, regardless of the point in the learning project, and to support the cascading of knowledge across organisations. Many organisations were only able to send one member of staff to training or meetings, so we could have made it easier for those people to pass insight and instructions on to colleagues. This would also have boosted the longevity of knowledge when individual team members left grant holder organisations part-way through delivery.

Finally, many grant holders wanted opportunities to come together with peers through an open-ended agenda, rather than with training or information-sharing intent. We did not anticipate the strength of this feeling, so focused primarily on learning and capacity building support, meaning that we did not have sufficient budget or time to support simple peer to peer sharing. The impact of greater peer to peer engagement is hard to predict. It may have bolstered perceptions of the usefulness of the learning project overall and may even have increased engagement in data collection had there been grant holder-led opportunities to discuss shared challenges and potential

solutions. It is certainly the case that many grant holders hoped and believed that others were participating in data collection even when they themselves perceived it to be too challenging. Greater peer to peer connections may have highlighted the implications of this perception.

Understanding capacity and capability for evaluation

Our experience in the YIF Learning Project highlights that capacity and capability for shared evaluation are not straight-forward to anticipate. We hypothesised that engagement in the YIF evaluation would be mediated to some extent by organisational size, internal evaluation capacity, pre-existing tools and resources, and historical engagement in similar evaluation activities. We therefore designed our support on this basis. It was true that many of these factors *did* mediate engagement, but not as we had supposed.

The feedback gathered from grant holders suggests that having dedicated budget allocated to evaluation activities or having a proportion of YIF funded staff time to support evaluation activities was key to engagement and managing the evaluation demands effectively. Grant holders who had not allocated a proportion of funding to evaluation in this way were more likely to struggle with the evaluation demands or only participate in some, or none, of the data collection strands.

Furthermore, having confidence and pre-existing engagement in evaluation were two critical factors in determining engagement in the YIF Learning Project. Ironically, where both these factors were high, grant holders were less engaged. These grant holders were more likely to have well-established systems and processes, and to have already invested in a different data management system (platform). This made integrating YIF tools and the IMPACT system more challenging. These grant holders were more likely to consider the YIF learning project to be an additional burden they were unwilling to take on, and to opt out of many (if not all) of the strands of data collection on the grounds that they were already adopting an in-house approach that met their needs (and had been designed specifically for them).

Where grant holders' pre-existing engagement in evaluation was high, but their confidence was low, they were more likely to find the multiple demands of funders an issue, and to question what could be achieved by the YIF Learning Project over and above anything else. They were also unlikely to tolerate additional demands on their staff, whose primary roles were delivery focused.

Conversely, where confidence in evaluation was high but the organisation was involved in limited evaluation in practice, there was a marked preference for bespoke approaches with very unclear expectations for what the YIF Learning Project was aiming to achieve for their organisation specifically.

Where both confidence and engagement in evaluation was low, there were challenges with resourcing data collection/entry, and low tolerance for perceived 'friction' in data gathering. With this more nuanced insight, a bespoke 'diagnostic' process would have been beneficial, along with more tailored messages for each context. We could also have targeted more support to organisations based on their level of confidence, and in recognition of their level of pre-existing evaluation activity.

Where grant holders engaged deeply with the learning project, we believe that this was based on a number of mutually reinforcing enabling factors. Critically, these factors represent something of a hierarchy, where the 'foundational' factors need to be in place first. Without these factors forming a base on which other rest, it's easy for commitment to fall away.

Mutually enforcing enabling factors:
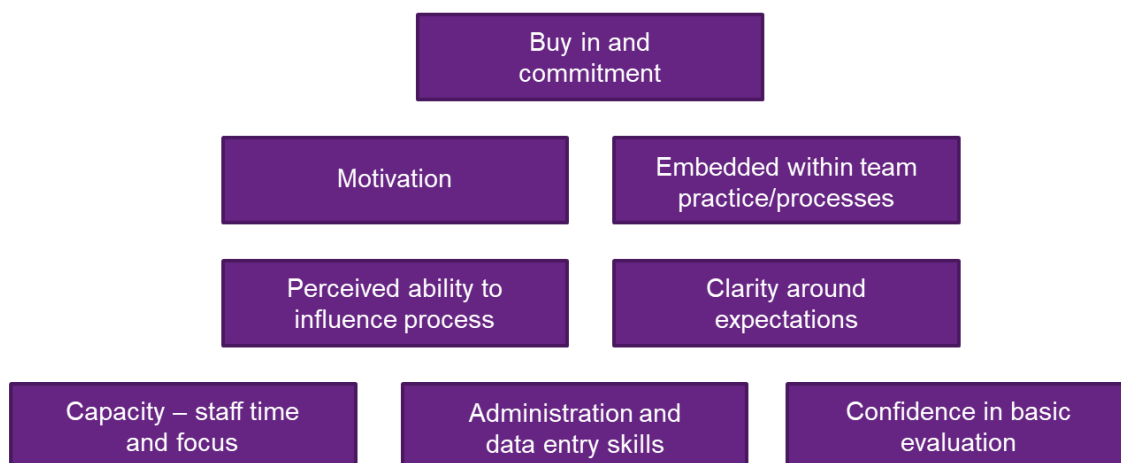
Again, this detailed insight suggests that support and capacity building should be focused on specific areas as a matter of priority, and must sit alongside very practical issues like how funding is used to cover certain functions/roles, and how delivery is designed to incorporate evaluation activity. As the learning team, some of these areas were outside the scope of our influence, but we learned how significant their impact could be.

Still to come

This paper has focused on what's been learnt from implementing a shared evaluation approach in open access youth settings. It has featured extensive feedback from grant holders, and our

reflections on the key themes. In our next insight paper, to be published in spring 2021, we will focus on what we've learnt from analysing all of the data gathered during the shared evaluation.

We will also publish further thoughts on implications for funders, delivery organisations and evaluators, to support future efforts in shared evaluation, which we still believe to be critical in ensuring high quality support and learning opportunities for all young people.

Section 6: Appendix

Appendix 1: Project timeline

- September 2016: The Youth Investment Fund was launched and applications opened.[5]

- 11th November 2016 : the YIF programme closes for applications.

- 13th December 2016: the invitation to tender (ITT) for the YIF Learning and Impact contract for services is announced.

- 20th January 2017: the deadline for submission of bids for the YIF Learning and Impact contract

- March 2017: successful YIF grant holders are announced.

- 27th February 2017: The ITT suggested start date for the YIF Learning and Impact contract.

- April-July 2017: First two cohorts of YIF projects delivery commenced.

- May 2017: The learning project officially commenced with workshops held in six geographical regions.

- W/C 13th February 2017: notification of contract award for the YIF Learning and Impact Contract. 5th May 2017: start date for the YIF Learning and Impact contract for services.

- July 2018: contract for the IMPACT data system to be used for the YIF evaluation was awarded.

- October 2017 – April 2018: Pilot stage for user, feedback, and quality data collection.

- May 2018: Final cohort of an additional five grant holders started YIF project delivery.

- January 2018 – July 2018: Pilot stage for outcomes data collection.

- May – July 2018: roll-out of main data collection for user, feedback and quality data.

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[5] https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/youth-investment-fund

- March and July-August 2019: Roll-out of main data collection for outcomes data.

- March 2020 – delivery begins to draw to a close for a significant number of YIF grant holders.

- March – August 2020: All YIF data collection and data entry ends.

Appendix 2: End of Grant survey

Introduction

The YIF evaluation framework has provided the structure for the largest ever shared evaluation of open access youth provision in the UK to date. It consisted of two key elements:

- A shared theory of change for open access youth provision;

- A shared approach to collecting 5 different types of common data: 1) Beneficiary; 2) Attendance; 3) User feedback; 4) Quality; 5) Outcomes.

We would really appreciate your time in responding to our online annual grant holder survey. The survey seeks your views and feedback on the YIF evaluation over the past 12 – 24 months. The survey is open to more than one response from staff at an individual YIF funded organisation.

The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Your responses in the survey will be anonymous.

Name of organisation

Q.1. What is your role within your organisation?

- CEO / Director / Senior Management

- Service delivery leader

- Service delivery team

- Admin role

- Volunteer

Q.2. How involved have you, personally, been with the YIF evaluation?

- Not at all involved

- Somewhat involved

- Very involved

Q.3.a. How engaged would you say your organisation has been with the YIF evaluation?

- Not at all engaged

- Somewhat engaged

- Very engaged

ASK IF "NOT AT ALL" OR "SOMEWHAT ENGAGED" SELECTED AT Q3a

Q.3.b. You said that your organisation has been *pipe answer from 3a* with the YIF. Why is that?

Open response

Q.4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your experience of the YIF learning project?

- I felt like my organisation had the opportunity to shape the YIF evaluation approach

- I learnt new things about evaluation and impact measurement

- It felt like an added burden on top of YIF delivery

- We'd rather not have been involved in the YIF evaluation if we'd have been given the choice

- It will make a useful contribution to debates about the impact of open access youth provision

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Unsure / Agree / Strongly Agree

Q.5.a. With data collection now complete, the YIF evaluation is due to complete in January 2021. To what extent do you feel the YIF learning project has <u>so far</u> met its stated aims:

- Build a base of knowledge and insight into young people's engagement in informal and non-formal provision, and how it makes a difference to their lives

- Co-develop a shared approach to evaluation that is adaptable and appropriate across all provision.

- Leave the sector with what they need to self- evaluate long after YIF funding has ended.

Not at all / To a minor extent / To some extent / To a great extent

Q.5.b. What could we have done differently or better to achieve these aims?

Open response

Q.5.c If you feel that the aims were not fully met (or more could have been done), what do you feel needs to happen now?

Open response

Q.6. To what extent has participating in the YIF learning project improved your organisation's understanding of how to measure the impact of open access youth work?

- Very much

- Somewhat

- Undecided

- Not really

- Not at all

Q.7. How useful has your organisation found each of the YIF 5 types of data?

Grid question

- Very useful

- Fairly useful

- Somewhat useful

- Not at all useful

Q.8.a. How manageable did you find collecting the different types of YIF data?

List 5 types of data

- Frequency of data collection: Answer options: was about right/ too often/ too rarely

- Volume / quantity of data: Answer options: was about right/ too much/ not enough

- Staff input to collect: Answer options: manageable burden/ sometimes a burden/ unmanageable burden

- Staff input to input (admin): Answer options: manageable burden/ sometimes a burden/ unmanageable burden

Please explain:

Open response

Q.8.b. Which, if any, types of data does your organisation want to continue to collect? Please use the comments space below to explain your reasons.

- *User data*

- *Engagement data*

- *Feedback data*

- *Quality data*

- *Outcomes data*

- *None of the above*

Open text box for comments

Q.9.a. What insights and learning did your YIF data give you about your work?

Open text box

Q.9.b. Did you/your organisation do anything differently as a result of the data you collected for the YIF?

- Yes we did a lot of things differently

- Yes we did some things differently

- No we didn't do anything differently.

If Yes, please provide a short summary of what you did differently:

Open text response

Q.9.c. To what extent was the YIF data useful for your local evaluations?

- Very useful

- Fairly useful

- Somewhat useful

- Not at all useful

Q.10. Do you feel there are any types of data or insight that the YIF evaluation has overlooked?

YES/ NO

If Yes, please describe below:

Open Text

Q.11.a. Have you used or participated in any of the following elements of the YIF learning programme?

YES/NO

- The shared Theory of Change

- The Impact system

- User feedback data collection tool

- Program Quality Assessment tool (PQA)

- Young People's Outcome survey

- Capacity building training – using the tools

- Capacity building training – on evaluation (Y3)

- YIF Learning website

- YIF Learning website – grant holders' area

- YIF Learning website – resources

- Communications and updates (e.g. YIF Newsletter)

- Dashboard reporting

- Other (open)

ASK FOR EACH ITEM WHERE YES IS SELECTED AT Q11a

Q.11.b. How useful did you find *pipe in answers from Q11a*?

- Very useful

- Fairly useful

- Somewhat useful

- Not at all useful

Q.12. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the support that your organisation has received from the YIF learning project team over the past 12 months?

- Excellent

- Good

- Average

- Below average

- Poor

Q.13.a. What, if any, challenges did you experience collecting data from <u>young people</u>? (e.g. user feedback surveys, young people's outcome surveys)

Open response

Q.13.b. What, if any, challenges did you experience in conducting the quality assessment (PQA)?

Open response

Include option 'did not take part'

Q.14. In the past two years, has your organisation created any of the following types of impact stories that could be shared publicly? Please tick all that apply.

- Written case studies

- Video case studies

- Other (please specify)

- None of the above

If Yes, please provide your email below. We will ensure that the answers to all other questions remain anonymous.

End survey

# Appendix 3: Interview topic guide

Topic Guide: YIF Learning project - Interviews with grant holders

Introduction

Introduce self and the Centre

Reminder of the YIF learning project: The Centre is working with NPC to evaluate the
Youth Investment Fund. The learning project aims to:

- Co-develop a shared approach to evaluation that is adaptable and appropriate across all
  provision

- Build a base of knowledge and insight into young people's engagement in informal and non-
  formal provision, and how it makes a difference to their lives

- Leave the sector with what they need to self-evaluate after YIF funding has ended

- It involves seven key strands of activities (talk through visual – copy of the visual will be
  shared with participants for reference)
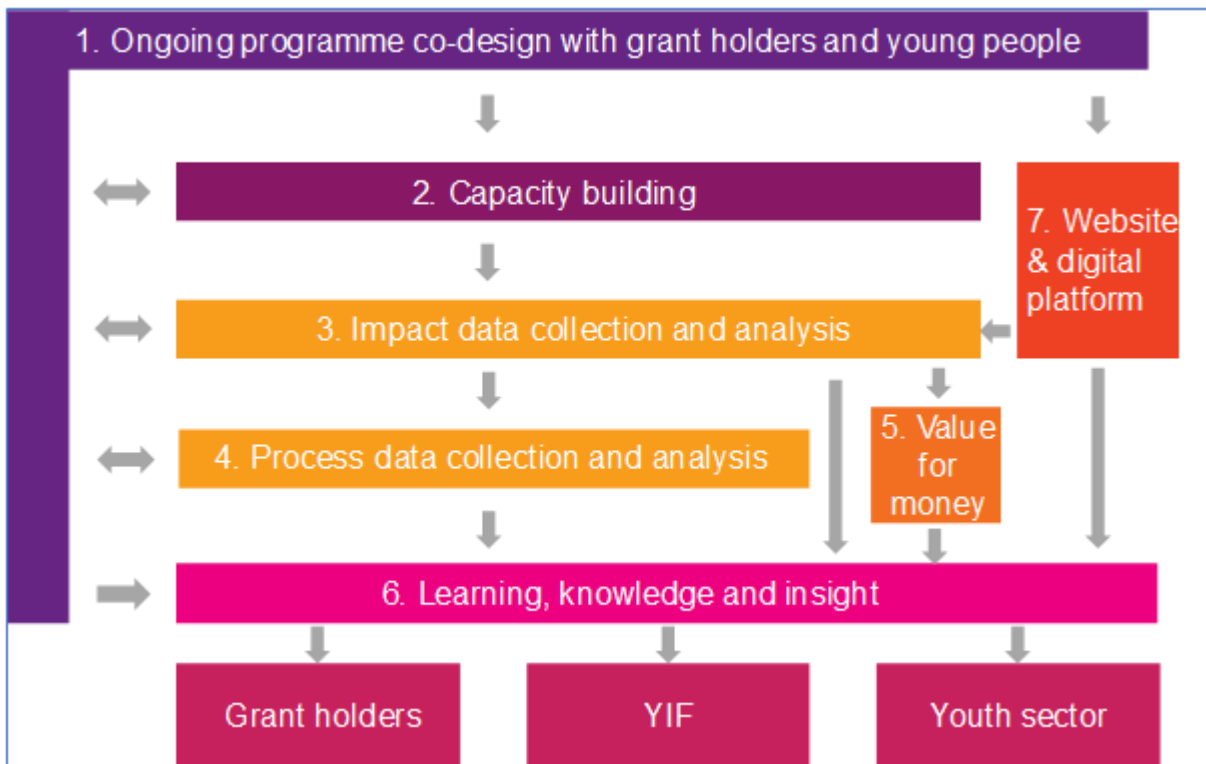
Introduce interviews: We are now in final stages of the learning project, following completion of the fund. We're interested in understanding more about your experiences of taking part in the learning project, and how things can be improved in the future.

Consent: Provide the following information:

- **Voluntary nature of participation:** You can stop at any time (without giving a reason) and opt to not answer anything you don't want to.

- **Recording of interview**: Are you happy for me to record the interview? Only the YIF Learning Team will have access to the recording which will be saved on a secure sharepoint site. We'll use it to make notes so we can engage fully in the conversation. At the end of the evaluation recordings will be deleted.

- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** You will not be named in our write up of the interviews. Comments will be reported anonymously, and therefore will not be attributable to you.

- **Reporting**: We will produce a report based on themes emerging from the interviews which will be shared with the funders and other grant holders. It will also be publicly available on our websites. Additionally, we plan to communicate the findings through other channels such as blogs and social media, and will keep the anonymised data to use for these purposes.

- **Length of the interview**: The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

- **Informed consent**: Do you have any questions about the interviews? Are you happy to proceed with the interview (verbal consent)?

We recognise that there has been staff turnover in many organisations since the beginning of YIF and that may mean you are unable to answer some of the questions. This is fine, we can skip over any questions you feel unable to answer.

Section 1: About your involvement in the YIF learning project

According to our information your organisation was involved in the following elements of the YIF learning project. Check before interview which of the following the org was involved in: core group; beneficiary data; engagement data; feedback data; quality data; outcomes data; case studies.

- Is this correct and were you involved in any other ways (e.g. co-production of the theory of change)?

How did your organisation choose which parts of the learning project to take part in?

- Probe: why the above activities and not others? What were they already doing in terms of evaluation and how did this affect what they chose to be involved in?

Section 2: The learning project in practice

What is your Job Role?

What was your role in the learning project?

Can you tell me about your experience of delivering the learning project activities?

- Probes: Who was involved? What supported you to deliver the learning project activities? Which parts of the data collection were easiest to integrate into your practice? What challenges did you face in delivering the learning project activities? How, if at all, were you able to overcome these? Is there anything about your organisation's culture that helped or hindered the learning activities?

Collecting outcomes data was a particularly challenging part of the YIF learning project. Why do you think we didn't get the quality and quantity of outcomes data that we hope to achieve?

- Probes: what do you see as the value of outcomes data; what are the challenges with collecting this. If took part in YIF outcomes: were there any challenges specifically related to the YIF outcomes approach?

What could the YIF Learning Team have done differently to improve your experience of delivering the learning project activities?

What, if anything, have you changed about your evaluation practice as a result of taking part in the YIF learning project?

To what extent did you feel you were able to shape or influence the learning project?

- Prompts: reminder of co-production activities including theory of change development

- Probes: how effective do you think the co-production approach was? How transparent were decisions about the learning project?

Section 3: Impact of the Learning Project

What did you find most valuable about taking part in the learning project?

- Probe: what, if anything, was valuable about taking a shared approach to evaluation across the YIF funded organisations?

What, if anything, have you changed about your work with young people as a result of taking part in the YIF learning project?

- Probes: did you act on any of the feedback from young people?

What, if anything, from the learning project will you continue to do?

- Probes: are there any types of data you'll continue to collect?

What did you hope would be achieved through the learning project when it began?

- Probes: organisationally, sector-wide / shared-approach?

What do you think has, or will be, the impact of the learning project overall?

Section 4: Future recommendations

If we were to re-do the evaluation, what would you recommend we should do differently?

How can we make the best use of the resources and assets that have been developed as part of the learning project e.g. the Theory of Change, data collections tools, data, reports, the Impact system etc.?

Close

Is there anything else you'd like to add either about the learning project, or the YIF more generally?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank participants for their time and thoughts. Reassure confidentiality. Confirm contact details should they wish to add anything about their comments or in case they have questions about the evaluation later.