

Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



#iwill Fund Learning Hub Systems Workstream

Report on the third #iwill Fund Learning Hub Labstorms
The Centre for Youth Impact
January 2021

Introduction

LabStorms were adopted, within the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, to foster ongoing, deeper collaboration between Match Funders, with the aim of enabling a system of effective youth social action funding to be continued beyond 2023. Success for this workstream includes stronger, more enduring collaboration across funders, and a shared sense of common challenges and potential solutions.

This report draws out the key themes from the third round of LabStorms for the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, which took place on 28 October 2020. To accommodate social distancing requirements, this was held online for two hours and involved a smaller group of Match Funders. We would like to thank Robyn Riddoch of the Ernest Cook Trust for leading the discussion and all the Match Funders who participated.

As LabStorms take place under Chatham House rules, the themes and reflections in this report cannot be attributed to any one person or organisation; nor should they be seen as representative of an 'average' or consensus view in the room. Instead, they should be understood as providing kernels of insight and conversation that exist within the Match Funder community. In the sections below, we first provide a summary of the discussions held on 28 October, before highlighting what emerged as the key insights generated from the discussion and identifying some potential opportunities for funders moving forwards.

Please see the end of this paper for an overview of the LabStorms process, what they are and how other Match Funders can get involved.

Discussion: Working with schools during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Ernest Cook Trust was set up in 1952 by the philanthropist Ernest Cook. The Trust is a land-based charity with education as its sole purpose, and provides a range of outdoor learning experiences for children and young people.

The Ernest Cook Trust is a Match Funder for the Green Influencers Scheme, which is designed to engage and inspire young people across England to participate in environmental youth social action. This programme provides funding for a Green Mentor post within an environmental charity: the 'host organisation'. The Green Mentors then recruit young people, primarily through schools, and supports them to undertake environmental youth social action projects within their communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges in engaging young people, many of whom are recruited through schools. This LabStorm focussed on how to best work with schools during the pandemic, with the agility required as England moves within the tiered system of social distancing restrictions and also being cognisant of the pressure that schools are under at this time.

1. Presenting youth social action opportunities to schools

While the benefits of engaging with youth social action within a school setting were clear to the group of Match Funders present at the LabStorm, there was a feeling that during the pandemic, it was viewed as 'burdensome', rather than an opportunity for their pupils that should be prioritised. There are also practical and logistical considerations unique to the current circumstance in the form of social distancing measures, restricted access for visitors, and class bubbles. It is important that schools see the value of youth social action and that these are apparent from the outset.

In promotional material, there needs to be a focus on the benefit to the school as an institution, as well as benefiting pupils and the causes and that they care about. There are Ofsted requirements, such as character development, that can be directly achieved through youth social action. The group at the LabStorm recognised that schools have always had several competing priorities, and this has been amplified since the start of the pandemic. Youth social action providers could do more to present the links between YSA, Ofsted standards, and the curriculum in order to make it easier for schools to understand the full range of benefits of these opportunities.

2. Beginning with a soft start

A lot of anxiety and uncertainty surrounds the pandemic and direction of travel with social distancing. It is not just schools that are nervous about bringing groups together, but parents as well are cautious about their young people interacting with people outside of their households and classroom bubbles. The group considered what a 'soft start' to youth social action could look like.

Participants recognised opportunities for individual learning and individual social action that pupils could take to prepare for larger projects that will be possible when people are able to gather again. Young people could spend several months gaining a deep understanding about the cause they working to impact prior to starting a campaign, for instance, in order to gain the knowledge and confidence to speak to adults about the issue.

While it is not possible for young people to deliver their social action work within community settings at present, YSA providers should look to opportunities within the controlled environment of the school. In relation to the environmental social action, there could be opportunities to work within schools in order to reduce negative environmental impacts such as increasing energy efficiency, improving recycling and food waste management, or tending to a school allotment.

3. Applying a COVID-19 lens to youth social action

The group recognised ways in which a COVID-19 lens could be applied to youth social action when presenting opportunities to schools. It goes without saying that young people have been faced with unprecedented challenges and disruption to their learning throughout the pandemic, and it is projected that the societal impact on employment opportunities will be lasting.

There was appetite from the group to spend more time considering how their social action offers can improve the learning experience for young people during the pandemic from a health and wellbeing perspective, as well as provide them with space to develop transferrable skills that could prove valuable in a competitive labour market.

Along with considering how youth social action can support students, teacher wellbeing should also be prioritised and YSA providers should carefully consider and promote how it can relieve pressure on teachers and enhance curricula.

Feedback and Reflections

To understand how the Match Funders experienced the second set of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub LabStorms, we collected informal feedback after the session on what they were taking away from the session discussion and how effective Zoom was as a platform for hosting them.

Feedback was wholly positive and the Match Funders who came appreciated the time spent working through challenges that resonated with everyone in the group. People felt a sense of camaraderie and comfort in learning together. Zoom worked well and we are looking forward to delivering more virtual LabStorms.

LabStorms Overview

The Centre for Youth Impact is facilitating a series of 'LabStorms' as part of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. By sharing insights across the sector, the LabStorms will also contribute to the sharing of learning, data and insights. Each LabStorm will create a dedicated space for the #iwill Fund Match Funders to come together to collaboratively frame and respond to a problem or challenge that they have identified as pressing in their work.

The first round of LabStorms took place in June 2019 and February 2020, and similar reports^{1 2} were produced to draw out the key themes. The [first round of LabStorms](#) included a session led by the Pears Foundation that focused on understanding and communicating community benefit, and a session led by the Act for Change Fund (a joint initiative between the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation), focused on developing a habit of social action. The [second round](#) included a session led by Premier League Charitable Fund how best embed high quality opportunities for youth voice into youth-led social action, and another session by Young Manchester about the concept of 'place' in youth social action.

What are LabStorms?

LabStorms are collaborative problem-solving sessions designed to help generate and explore actionable responses to challenges with which organisations are wrestling. They are an approach developed by Feedback Labs, a US based consortium focused on identifying the best ways of using feedback to make programmes and institutions responsive to the needs of their constituents.

How do LabStorms work?

Conducted under Chatham House rules, LabStorms are designed to create space for deep discussions between stakeholders who value collective approaches to problem solving. Each LabStorm begins with an individual giving a 15-minute presentation that covers both their work in general and details of a specific challenge that they're facing, with which they would like support and guidance. The presenter sets out what they have tried so far, and two or three specific questions that they would like help with from the attendees. Then, via a group discussion, attendees work together to support the presenter in finding answers or responses to their challenge. This can range from offering specific advice or suggestions to asking open questions in order to help the presenter reframe their questions and find new insight. Whilst the discussion remains confidential, the learning from each session is written up and distributed for the wider community to benefit from.

¹ <https://www.youthimpact.uk/iwill-learninghubpublications/report-first-iwill-fund-learning-labstorms>

² https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/iwill_labstorms_report_round_2.pdf

Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



How can I take part in future LabStorms?

The Centre for Youth Impact will facilitate a round of LabStorms as part of the #iwill Learning Hub approximately every six months until from 2019 until 2021. If you would like to be involved in a future LabStorm, or if you wish to discuss any aspects of this report, please contact Bethia McNeil (bethia.mcneil@youthimpact.org.uk).