



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

Achieving equity in place-based research, innovation and public engagement

Summary report

September 2019

Introduction

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) commissioned the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement ([NCCPE](#)) to undertake a rapid review of how university research, innovation and engagement might be better aligned to the needs of areas of the UK experiencing significant disadvantage in its different forms. The review has explored:

- The state of the art in current thinking and sense making about ‘left behind places’
- The key interventions being made, and by whom
- How HEIs / researchers might contribute to the needs of these places and support partners working there
- Potential partners or initiatives that research funders and HEIs may wish to work with in this area

The review was conducted between May and June 2019, and included:

- A synthesis of existing knowledge/practice
- Interviews with stakeholders and experts
- A stakeholder workshop held on 17th May 2019 in Birmingham

This report summarises the findings from the review.

We would like to thank the many people who contributed their time and expertise so generously to this project.

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Executive summary

This is a crowded space. 'Place' is an increasingly important principle for a range of policy interventions, including within research and innovation and in economic and community development.

Our review identified three important areas of challenge in developing effective place-based approaches to research and innovation:

- **Citizen / community-led working:** interventions at a community level often 'do to' communities rather than engage publics actively in their shaping and delivery. There is an important opportunity to develop our understanding of how to conduct research and innovation in citizen-centric ways. This goes beyond the provision of research to communities, to explore how researchers can create the conditions for communities to articulate and address the research innovation challenges they want to address, and build community leadership, resilience, inclusion and equity.
- **Being sensitive to inequality:** viewing communities through the lens of fairness and equity reveals profound structural inequalities, for instance in how place and poverty are inextricably linked. This is compounded by lack of investment in these communities, including lack of research and innovation funding. We need to better understand how research and innovation funding can be targeted to contribute value to places experiencing significant disadvantage.
- **Working in system-oriented and collaborative ways:** the causes and impacts of disadvantage are complex, as are any attempts to address them. Researchers should not 'go it alone' in seeking to address them, but need to work collaboratively with others. There is an opportunity to better embed collaborative practice in research culture, at different geographic scales, and to clarify how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can work more productively with a host of types of organisation committed to achieving social outcomes.

There was broad support for investment in activity that:

- **Targets communities experiencing deprivation,** to support place-based research and innovation partnerships in these places.
- **Factors in 'cold spots' in the UK** where there are low levels of investment in research. However, it should also be open to innovation in all areas of UK that experience disadvantage, and be sensitive to the different contexts in the four UK nations.

- **Invests in co-production methodologies** that address power imbalances in relationships between universities and communities and stakeholders.
- **Builds on the assets in communities**, and adopts effective community development principles.
- **Learns from these approaches** and utilises the learning to generate culture change within HEIs, partner organisations and funders, by embedding new ways of developing, designing and delivering research, innovation and knowledge exchange that is sensitive to people, place and inequality.
- **Aligns strategically with key national and regional bodies** to maximise opportunities and impact, for example by aligning with and leveraging social and philanthropic funding.

These kinds of activities would contribute to a range of **useful outcomes**. These would have broad support from experts and stakeholders working in this field, and would contribute to the existing knowledge base:

- Gather evidence of how place-based research partnerships can help to address social issues and inequality, drawing on expertise, resources and assets in communities and universities
- Consolidate and apply learning about how you address power imbalances between research institutions and communities
- Clarify the culture shift required to act on this understanding, within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), within communities and within research funders thereby informing future investments in place-based research.
- Mobilise synergies with other place-based work at local, regional and national scales, and create stronger connections with other actors working to address inequality

The definition of place

Our review identified a number of different ways in which ‘place’ might be defined and a meaningful geographical scale identified for projects. These include:

- Projects or interventions that work closely with local communities (e.g. specific neighbourhoods, or wards, including those that are rural or remote from the university)
- Interventions that focus activity in towns
- Interventions that work at a city or regional scale.

Language and terminology emerged as a sensitive topic during the review, particularly use of terminology which implies a deficit in communities which are experiencing consequences

of inequality. There was consensus that the term 'left behind places' was problematic, although some of the work done to explore its meaning and application was helpful.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) was identified as a useful and pragmatic way of identifying areas experiencing significant, relative disadvantage.

Frontiers of policy and practice

Our review has identified the following as being particularly productive areas to focus future place-based research and innovation policy and practice:

- Co-production, and other '**engaged**' **research methodologies** such as participatory action research
- Activity to build **capacity and trust**
- Work that **strengthens regional or local partnerships** for research equity

Risks with focusing on research and innovation in isolation from other university functions were identified by a number of our interviewees, as for many communities experiencing disadvantage other interventions will have more immediate appeal and benefit. These wider civic investments might include activity in the following areas:

- **As an employer:** Offering employment opportunities and development schemes to local residents. See for example the [Works](#) at University of Manchester.
- **Real estate development:** Using real estate to develop local economic growth.
- **Incubator:** Offering services, spaces and support to start-ups and community groups to facilitate commercialisation and social innovation
- **Network builder:** Fostering the health of local ecosystems through capacity building, facilitation and advice.
- **Workforce developer:** Offering personal and professional development to the local workforce, as well as continuing adult education and graduate employment.
- **Purchaser:** Redirecting institutional purchasing power towards local business.
- **As an educator:** Providing opportunities for continuing professional development and adult education.
- **As a service provider:** Enabling students to work as volunteers supporting community groups or via placements with SMEs etc.

The review also identified a range of **priority issues** linked to place and equity, which funders and universities could helpfully seek to address through their investment in research and innovation:

- **Health and wellbeing:** Access to good quality services, such as Health, Education, Transport, Housing, Employment etc.

- **Income and poverty:** Including in-work and out of work poverty. The lack of secure employment and opportunity.
- **Democracy and power:** Community governance, alienation from policies, and politics a sense of being ignored or put to one side.
- **Connectedness and belonging:** Often associated with social capital, it is noted that investment in social action can foster belonging. Fragmentation and divisions of distrust within communities.
- **Spaces:** Forums and spaces that facilitate exchange, interaction and shared commitment to goals.
- **Participation and social action:** Building on people's ideas, creativity, skills and knowledge. Ensuring these are continually harnessed and involved in social change.

There was broad agreement that in framing their approach to place-based working, institutions should:

- Ensure they are they alert to the **complex interdependencies** of social issues
- **Articulate the rationale and assumptions** underpinning their current / proposed activity
- Show consideration of the **wider 'system' of support and infrastructure** (including social infrastructure) that is already in place
- Consider **which roles they might** play within this wider ecosystem (e.g. contributor, leader, expert resource etc.)
- Articulate **who they have consulted** in developing their project, and who they are planning to collaborate with in delivering it
- Detail how they are planning to take account of **the complexity of people's lives and identities** and how they will provide them with **opportunity and agency** to help direct the activity
- Articulate **their aims and expectations** about the impact they might achieve, over what timescales
- Describe their approaches to **learning, evaluation and capturing impact**
- Clarify how they will ensure that **the costs of community partners and collaborators** will be reimbursed

The report

The rest of the report provides context and evidence that underpins these findings. It is organised in three sections.

The first section explores the **policy landscape**, and summarises ‘state of the art’ considerations about place, inequality and the role of research and innovation viewed through these lenses.

The second section explores the **practice landscape** and summarises key approaches and types of intervention being deployed to address poverty and inequality. It identifies lessons learned about ‘what works’ and widely agreed good practice principles.

The final section explores lessons learned about how to **fund place-based working**. It identifies a series of critical choices and decisions which need to be considered in investing wisely in this kind of work.

This report does not explicitly seek to explore the wider causes of poverty and deprivation and how this might inform our understanding of place. We do however draw extensively on the expertise of many organisations that have been working to identify and address these causes.

1. Key policy drivers for place-based research innovation

This section explores the **policy landscape**, and summarises ‘state of the art’ considerations about place, inequality and the role of research and innovation.

It looks in particular at:

- **Poverty and inequality:** what we know about poverty in the UK and the regional distribution of inequality
- **Left behind places:** the utility and appropriateness of this framing and how it might be used in focusing activity and future investment
- **Place-based innovation:** how a ‘place’ lens is being used to inform research and innovation policy

Poverty and Inequality

The UK is one of the most regionally unbalanced countries in the industrialised world (Philip McCann, 2019¹; The Equality Trust, 2019²). Studies have shown that wealth, access to secure employment, health and high levels of education is unevenly distributed across the UK with some regions in the UK falling behind at a faster rate than others (JRF, 2016³). It has been highlighted that the widening differences between regions is being accelerated by systemic issues in areas such as education, employment and migration. For example, in Blackpool (currently one of the most deprived regions in the UK), declining housing costs, ensure that many of those that can move away, tend to do so in order to achieve better living standards, whereas those who are being priced out of other areas, tend to move into the region. Blackpool is therefore a net importer of ill health, unemployment and precarious labour, and a net exporter of good health and skilled labour (Sarah O’Connor, 2017⁴).

In recent years the UK’s high degree of regional inequality has been identified as a contributing factor to slow growth rather than its outcome (Cigano, 2014⁵; IMF, 2017⁶;

¹ UK2070 Perceptions of Regional Inequality and the Geography of Discontent: <http://uk2070.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/01-McCann-UK-Regional-Inequality-Debates.pdf>

² The Equality Trust <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/scale-economic-inequality-uk>

³ Uneven growth: tackling city decline: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uneven-growth-tackling-city-decline>

⁴ <https://www.ft.com/blackpool>

⁵ Cigano, F. (2014) ‘Trends in income inequality and its impact on economic growth’, *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 163, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxrjncwvxv6jen>

⁶ International Monetary Fund (2017) *Fostering Inclusive Growth: G20 Leaders’ Summit, July 7-8, 2017, Hamburg, Germany*, available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/np/g20/pdf/2017/062617.pdf>.

Stiglitz, 2015⁷). Alongside this, it has been suggested that regional inequality is as important as interpersonal inequality (Rodríguez-Pose, 2017⁸), not least because people's perceptions of their prosperity and quality of life are influenced by their awareness of the experiences of others in close proximity to them, thus leading to the emergence of 'geographies of discontent' and are having profound impact, bringing new challenges for both national and local governance (Los et al. 2017⁹; McCann 2018¹⁰)

Responding to these trends, and a growing risk that the UK is [becoming one of the most unequal nations on earth](#), the Institute for Fiscal Studies has recently launched an ambitious study of inequality, covering health, wealth, opportunity, political participation and living standards alongside income. The initial briefing sets out some of the patterns and trends in inequality, how these issues are generated and perceived, and the implications for policy¹¹. Alongside other lenses (i.e. looking at inequalities within families, gender, generations) the role of geography is prominent in the initial framing. The difference between London and the rest of the UK is highlighted.

The most deprived areas of the UK tend to be coastal regions and old industrial areas. These areas have been left out of the developments of 1970s/1980s, specifically the shift towards a knowledge-based economy, that values 'highly skilled' and educated workers, alongside changing patterns of trade and leisure. However, regional differences particularly between the North and the South are also often highlighted in the research we reviewed for this report. For example, ten of the UK's top twelve struggling cities are based in the north, and outside of London and the South, productivity levels are akin to poorer regions in Central and Eastern Europe or Southern regions in the United States (Philip McCann, 2016¹², JRF, 2016).

'Left behind places'

When we began this review, the phrase 'left behind places' was gaining considerable traction. We uncovered widespread discomfort with the various connotations of the phrase, both in the literature and in the professional judgement of people we interviewed, but there was a broad consensus that it usefully focuses attention on specific communities and issues of deprivation and disconnection, a frame which has been largely absent in policy, both in HE and more widely.

It is a frame commonly used to describe areas of the country that are expressing neglect by politics and politicians and often strongly associated with places that voted to leave the

⁷ Stiglitz, J. (2015) 'Inequality and economic growth', *Political Quarterly* 86(S1): 134-155.

⁸ Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés (2017) The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 11 (1). pp. 189-209. ISSN 1752-1378

DOI: 10.1093/cjres/rsx024

⁹ Los, B, McCann, P, Springford, J, Thissen, M (2017) The mismatch between local voting and the local

economic consequences of Brexit, *Regional Studies*, 51:5, 786-799, DOI: [10.1080/00343404.2017.1287350](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2017.1287350)

¹⁰ McCann, P., 2018, "The Trade, Geography and Regional Implications of Brexit", *Papers in Regional Science*, 97.1, 3-8

¹¹ <https://www.ifs.org.uk/inequality/chapter/briefing-note/>

¹² McCann, P. (2016) *The UK Regional-National Economic Problem* (London: Routledge).

European Union (see for example: John Harris, [Britain's insecure towns aren't 'left behind'. They hold the key to our future](#)).

As part of this work sought to identify some of the latest thinking and analysis on places that had been defined as 'left behind'. A number of people we consulted pointed us to the work done by Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) to develop a method for identifying the characteristics of a 'left behind' place which, even if one rejects the label, provides a powerful lens for surfacing significant structural inequality through a geographical lens¹³. The OCSI report summarises 'left behind places' as those that suffer the dual disadvantage of: high levels of deprivation and socio-economic challenges and lack the community or civic assets required to enable them to respond to these challenges (places to meet, community groups able to apply for funds, small scale investment in and support for community activities and action). The evidence suggests that these places are falling behind faster than other similarly deprived areas, however the research has only taken place in England.

Using a methodology that draws on (i) geographical units of analysis and combines with (ii) domains and indicators that measure community assets, they have developed a community needs measure. This in turn is combined with the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to identify left behind places as the wards that score amongst the 10% most deprived against both measures. Using these measures they found in left behind places there are significantly fewer job opportunities compared to other deprived areas, that unemployment rates rose faster in the aftermath of the recession suggesting a more fragile employment economy and that these areas are falling behind other similarly deprived areas on key measures including reductions in child poverty, health outcomes and adult skill levels. Other characteristics included:

- Relatively youthful population, growing at a slower rate than other similarly deprived areas
- People living in places left behind are less likely to be from an ethnic minority than the national average
- More than 1/3 of households are headed by a lone parent, notably higher than the national average
- More than 50% live in rented accommodation
- Substantially fewer jobs than in other similarly deprived areas
- Lower qualifications than other areas, with a higher proportion of people engaged in low skilled labour
- There are higher levels of benefit claimants and child poverty is falling behind other deprived areas
- People living in left behind places are likely to manifest more health problems than other areas.

¹³ Stefan Noble, OCSI, and Margaret Bolton, Local Trust, outline findings from the first draft of OCSI's research exploring "left behind" areas and ask for your feedback on the analysis:

<http://localtrust.org.uk/library/blogs/what-does-being-“left-behind”-mean-in-practice>

In total 150 wards were identified as being left behind using this measure. The geographic spread of these wards is shown in the table below and highlights vast differences between London and the South West compared with other regions of the UK.

| Region | Number of wards left behind | Place |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| North East | 16 | Former mining communities and fringes of Teesside |
| North West | 31 | Outlying areas of Manchester/Merseyside + fringes of Lancaster mill towns |
| Yorkshire and Humber | 25 | Outlying estates in larger cities and towns |
| East Midlands | 17 | Away from cities in some of the larger towns |
| West Midlands | 27 | Outlying housing estates in larger towns and cities |
| East | 19 | Seaside towns and Thames Gateway |
| South East | 13 | North Kent coast and fringes of Portsmouth |
| London | 1 | Gooshays on the outskirts of Romford in the borough of Havering. |
| South West | 1 | Littlemoor on the outskirts of Weymouth |

The review identified risks in HEIs prioritising ‘left behind places’ as defined by OCSI. Whilst there is clearly potential to work with these communities, further research is needed to ascertain the capacities that these communities have to work with universities, and to better understand the wants and needs of these places defined as left behind. One organisation - the Local Trust - is looking to mobilise a wide range of national funders to bring the resources of these funders to places left behind, and one could envisage a strategic partnership between research funders and other social funders around these places emerging as part of a wider and concerted effort. With the right preparation and strategic partnerships in place an adapted model such as the [Community University Partnership Initiative](#) may be appropriate to help facilitate connections.

For now however, concerns were raised about the universities ‘swooping in’ to places left behind without due consideration of these places, their capacities and assets.

Place-based innovation

Identification of growing inequalities, and the increasing attention being paid to ‘left behind places’, has led to a greater recognition of the role of place in research innovation policy, alongside more traditional focal points such as economic development. Whereas R&D related policy of the past decade has tended to concentrate state investment in a few priority areas of excellence (often referred to as the golden triangle), we are seeing more urgent calls for a shift towards policy that recognises place and social inequality within innovation ecosystems.

These shifts are highlighted in the Industrial Strategy. Whereas once it was thought that adopting place-sensitive policies would come at the expense of economic efficiency, policy makers are now more alert to the risk of failing to address regional imbalances and the long term consequences of not doing so. The need for the UK to tackle major regional imbalances was clearly highlighted in the Industrial Strategy Commission¹⁴ and then later, ‘place’ has become one of the five foundations of the UK’s Industrial Strategy¹⁵. The strategy explicitly seeks to help underperforming areas, acknowledging the trade-off between economic efficiency and the equitable treatment of communities.

It is right that the new strategy should seek to improve this imbalance. An industrial strategy should not seek to do everything everywhere, but it should seek to do something for everywhere. There should be nowhere where industrial strategy makes no impact at all, even if the requirement to focus means that some places receive more attention than others.

The UK needs to have more ambition especially for tackling our major regional imbalances. One test of success for the approach we recommend is that in ten years’ time the wellbeing of people and the resilience of local economies right across the UK should be improved.

Excerpt from Industrial Strategy Commission

The launch of the new UKRI Strategy includes a commitment by government to allocate a further £4.7 billion for R&D funding, (part of a wider strategy for the UK to reach a total R&D expenditure of 2.4% of GDP by 2027). This has brought to the forefront questions over the geographical distribution of UK research, innovation and engagement activity, and how far UK research and innovation is maximising its contribution to the social, cultural and economic health to all parts of the UK (Richard Jones, 2018¹⁶; Tom Forth, 2018¹⁷). Both government R&D spend and private investment are considered to be important aspects of the picture. The tendency in the UK to focus public investment in a relatively small part of the country – London, the Southeast, and East Anglia – has been highlighted, and contrasted with strategies used in other European countries such as Germany, where state R&D spending is seen as one crucial way to boost underperforming regions. Several of our interviewees made the case for greater regional distribution of R&D spend, stressing:

¹⁴ <http://industrialstrategycommission.org.uk>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/the-uks-industrial-strategy>

¹⁶ <http://www.softmachines.org/wordpress/?p=2212>

¹⁷ <https://www.tomforth.co.uk/boostingrd/>

- its importance for economic development and the need for more evenly distributed wealth and prosperity;
- its value for new innovation (i.e. regional innovation hubs can specialise in certain areas or work in ways that may not be possible in London) and the distribution of innovation (i.e. regions can benefit a greater absorptive capacity for new areas of science and technology, applying and adapting innovation for local use); and
- its contribution to better informed research and equity in research (i.e. if depression is acutely concentrated in the North East, but much of the research takes place in the South, are we excluding people who need to be involved in our research (see for example Pidd, 2019¹⁸).

It is now more frequently recognised that the creation of new knowledge and innovation must take place in cooperation with other key players, businesses, the public sector and civil society; and that there must be a regional and spatial diversity to these actors. The recent drive in state research funding and investment to address societal challenges (i.e. health, food security, climate change etc.) has prompted a convergence between the local and the global. Societal challenges offer a radically different framing for the way we fund research and innovation and our understanding of how innovation occurs is shifting from a linear ‘science-push’ model, towards innovation ecosystems model, in which it is more widely recognised that our problems require a responsive approach to the contexts wherein those societal problems exist. They necessitate a richer variety of innovation-related activities such as building up human capital, adopting and modifying new technologies, strengthening networks and providing gearing between key technologies and traditional sectors. These activities help strengthen capabilities and the diffusion of innovation and are therefore contingent upon the growth and development potential of a regional economies and innovation systems (See for example: [John Goddard – The Industrial Strategy and the role of Civic Institutions](#))

Useful focal points for research and innovation activity

Our review identified three important areas of challenge in developing effective place-based approaches to research and innovation:

- **Citizen / community-led working:** interventions at a community level often ‘do to’ communities rather than engage publics actively in their shaping and delivery. There is an important opportunity to develop our understanding of how to conduct research and innovation in citizen-centric ways. This goes beyond the provision of research to communities, to explore how researchers can create the conditions for communities to articulate and address the research innovation challenges they want to address, and build community leadership, resilience, inclusion and equity.

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/may/06/most-depressed-english-communities-in-north-and-midlands>

- **Being sensitive to inequality:** viewing communities through the lens of fairness and equity reveals profound structural inequalities, for instance in how place and poverty are inextricably linked. This is compounded by lack of investment in these communities, including lack of research and innovation funding. We need to better understand how research and innovation funding can be targeted to contribute value to places experiencing significant disadvantage.
- **Working in system-oriented and collaborative ways:** the causes and impacts of disadvantage are complex, as are any attempts to address them. Researchers should not 'go it alone' in seeking to address them, but need to work collaboratively with others. There is an opportunity to better embed collaborative practice in research culture, at different geographic scales, and to clarify how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can work more productively with a host of types of organisation committed to achieving social outcomes.

2. The response of civil society organisations, universities and other key actors

This section explores the **practice landscape** and summarises key approaches and types of intervention being deployed to address poverty and inequality. It identifies lessons learned about 'what works' and widely agreed good practice principles. It also identifies some of the key issues and challenges faced by disadvantaged communities.

It explores activity in different domains, including:

- **Cities, towns and communities:** using geographic communities as a focal point for intervention
- **Community development methodologies:** exploring tried and tested approaches to working with communities (rather than imposing solutions on them)
- **Meaningful measures:** using indices of multiple deprivation and other frameworks to understand local areas and target resources.

There are a host of initiatives underway currently which are seeking to address issues linked to place and to acknowledge and address the needs of communities experiencing particularly intense disadvantage and inequality. Many of these are informed by long traditions of community development. Some of this work tackles the issue of 'left behind places' head on, for example [Big Local](#) (Local Trust) is working in radically different ways to work with communities who have been bypassed by existing social, civic and economic development. Our interviews and desk research have identified a number of relevant approaches:

- Initiatives that inform understanding around place¹⁹, and place-based approaches²⁰.
- Research-informed evidence intended to influence policy or shift paradigms, including for example work around inclusive growth²¹.
- Methodologies that relate more broadly to community development work and activism such as asset based approaches to development²².
- Approaches to measurement and evaluation, such as embedding wellbeing at the heart of policy development²³.

¹⁹ See flourishing towns: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/theme/flourishing-towns/>

²⁰ See for example IVAR: <https://www.ivar.org.uk/research-report/working-in-place/>

²¹ See for example: RSA Inclusive Growth Commission <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/inclusive-growth-commission>, and Joseph Rowntree Foundation: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/cities-towns-and-neighbourhoods/inclusive-growth>

²² See for example: <https://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/LOCALITY-LOCALISM-REPORT-1.pdf> and <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/completed-projects/ethics-participatory-research>

²³ See for example Carnegie's work on measuring wellbeing:

<https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/project/measuring-what-matters/> and embedding kindness in policy decision making: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/project/kinder-communities/>

We summarise these different approaches below.

Lenses on place

A challenge in this area is deciding how to define place, and draw geographical boundaries around interventions. This could be at a variety of scales – specific communities of place; wards; towns, areas of cities, whole cities or city regions.

Our review explored how different ‘lenses’ on place provide different ways of analysing and sense making about the causes and impacts of inequality, and the potential contribution of research. In the previous section we explored how the OCSI work on ‘left behind places’ which utilised ‘wards’ as a meaningful geographical frame. Below we explore work by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Carnegie UK Trust to investigate the impact of inequality through the lens of declining cities and of towns. We then move on to explore work which is focused on specific communities of place, and how these might be supported better. All provide useful insights to inform how interventions might be designed and delivered.

JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION – DECLINING CITIES

Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s work on [declining cities](#) analysed the fortunes of 74 cities and developed an index of ‘relative decline’ based on changes in employment rates, levels of highly-qualified workers, the number and type of full-time jobs, net migration rates and population change. They identified three categories of cities that are experiencing relative decline:

- i) **Core cities:** Principal cities within a region that can act as a catalyst for other areas, for example Liverpool, Glasgow and Sheffield;
- ii) **Over-shadowed cities:** Cities that are near to other higher-functioning cities such as Bradford (Leeds), Stoke (various) and Sunderland (Newcastle);
- iii) **Free standing cities:** Typically smaller than core cities and more regionally isolated, for example: Dundee, Hull and Newport.

With each of these types of cities they recommend different approaches to address the decline. For example, within **core cities** the focus should be on inclusive growth and encouraging the work of anchor institutions to collaborate – examples would be the way universities are working with other actors in [Bristol’s One City Plan](#) or in [Newcastle City Futures](#). In **over-shadowed cities** they recommend the development of distinctive complementary economic roles and strategies. The contribution of Keele University to develop the [Keele deal](#) appears neatly aligned to this context.

JRF’s categorisation could help to encourage intelligent and place-sensitive response from HEIs, for instance universities in thriving cities could be encouraged to think intelligently about who they target – i.e. communities in left behind or peripheral towns. Whereas universities located within declining cities may legitimately use the fund to work at a wider strategic level.

CARNEGIE UK TRUST - TOWNS

Carnegie UK Trust's work with towns provides another useful framing device to guide how universities might focus their work with both towns and cities. Recognising that two in five people live in towns, and yet towns are often marginalised in development policies and debates, the Trust is seeking to play a leading role in supporting the development of town's policy and innovative practice in our towns. In their advocacy and policy work they highlight the lack of funding for towns and that the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), the Local Industrial Strategies (LIS), the Stronger Towns Fund and the Future High Street Fund (in England) are all developments that need to be turned into opportunities.

[*New Powers, New Deals: Remaking British Towns after Brexit*](#) highlights the link between a longstanding neglect of towns in policy and investment and the Brexit vote, with towns more likely to vote leave than cities. However, the work we wish to highlight is [*Time for Towns: A New Agenda for UK Towns*](#) and [*Turnaround towns: International Evidence*](#).

Common to both these pieces of work are principles which could provide useful criteria for assessing quality approaches to place-based working:

- **Enabling local leadership.** This finding highlighted the need to foster a different kind of leadership around catalysing change, through fostering connections across boundaries including cultural, economic, and spatial.
- **Cross sector collaboration.** Reflecting a strong theme in our discussions, this finding highlights the role that institutions like the University need to play in enabling or being part of cross sector partnerships and collaborations.
- **Being flexible and finding the right path to success.** The report speaks of 'wayfinding' and discovering ways to work together towards success that is defined collaboratively, as opposed to working towards rigid outcomes and measures.
- **Committing to the long term.** The research helpfully brings to the fore salient points around the time it takes to create change on a systemic level. Many of the success stories of turnaround towns take place over a time frame of thirty years. This will be challenging to accommodate in programme with such a short timeframe.
- **Enable places to tell their own story.** This includes empowering places to develop and harness data.

Time for Towns and Turnaround Towns both provide a lens which is particularly pertinent to work done at a more institutional level between key players including other anchor institutions, whilst also being applicable to grassroots research activism.

Community development approaches

In this section we focus on work with 'underserved' or disadvantaged communities, and what are widely accepted to be good practice principles and methods for working at this scale. This kind of work is fraught with risk and challenges. A common trope is of the researcher or other well-meaning social actor / agency swooping in and extracting data or imposing external agendas, and then disappearing. This kind of behaviour is vividly highlighted in the recent book 'Poverty Safari'.

'Truth be told, much of the work carried out in deprived communities is as much about the aims and objectives of the organisations facilitating it as it is about local needs. And notably, the aim is rarely to encourage self-sufficiency. Rather the opposite, each engagement and intervention creating more dependency on outside resources and expertise, perpetuating the role of the sector as opposed to gradually reducing it'

(Poverty Safari, p.80)

Described below are examples of organisations who are attempting to break this mould.

LOCAL TRUST – COMMUNITIES: PERSPECTIVES ON POWER

This work sets out what needs to happen for [communities to feel powerful in 2020](#). The report identified five key issues that consistently surfaced in dialogues held with communities, issues that communities themselves felt held them back:

- **Poverty:** Including in-work and out of work poverty. The lack of secure employment and opportunity.
- **Transience:** Challenges in the housing market and how this was shaping communities.
- **Fragmentation:** Divisions of distrust within communities
- **Isolation:** The decline of public spaces, and where people can meet to collaborate and work together as well as social isolation.
- **Democracy:** Alienation from policies, and politics a sense of being ignored or put to one side.

LOCALITY

Central to much of the work on communities is thinking critically about power and reframing what makes a powerful community. Locality is the national membership network for community organisations and support community organisations to be strong and successful, to meet local needs and to give people a purpose, good places to live and good health. Their 2017 commission on the Future of Localism was a 9 month review exploring how to reinvigorate localism and unlock the power of community, and was chaired by Sir Bob Kerslake (who also chaired the recent UPP Civic University Commission).

[People Power: Findings from the Commission on the Future of Localism](#) highlights fundamental issues in the way that power imbalances are maintained within work with communities. The report begins by identifying the sources of community power, which all represent potential areas of focus for new interventions:

- **Community governance:** Which is connected to other forms of governance (local and regional for example)
- **Economic power:** Assets and resources under local control
- **Connectedness and belonging:** Often associated with social capital, it is noted that investment in social action can foster belonging

- **Spaces to be together:** The actual forums and spaces that facilitate exchange, interaction and shared commitment to goals.
- **People’s ideas, creativity, skills and knowledge:** Ensuring these are continually harnessed and involved in social change.
- **Equality in participation and voice:** Transparency and addressing barriers to participation. It is suggested that local governance needs to be non-hierarchical.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Access to good quality services, and recognising that local participation can promote health and wellbeing.

In recognising these assets of powerful communities, the report makes a number of recommendations which enable them to be strengthened. There are implications here for how funders seek to devolve power and resources to local areas and strengthen the capacity of community organisations to work collaboratively with other institutions such as universities. These can be summarised as:

- Linking community governance with higher tiers of governance and paying attention to the interplay between these.
- Fostering local leadership around place. Establishing trust and devolution to communities, working with local leaders as facilitators of communities.
- Ensuring localism is not just the preserve of wealthier communities. Support capacity building, community development and sustainable spaces for collaboration.

[Locality’s Economic Resilience](#) framework encapsulates these ideas into a set of principles to help funders ‘keep it local’. They identify seven characteristics of a resilient local economy.

CITIZENS UK – COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Several of our conversations focused on what was seen as the incompatibility between research excellence and community need. A number commented that despite some good intentions universities were just not well suited to working with communities on immediate needs and priorities. There was at times a healthy scepticism about partnering with universities, and also about research funders and their commitment to local action.

Our conversations with Citizens UK were informative in this regard. Their community organiser approach is constantly wrestling with power dynamics and how you shift power to communities, and they are already working with several universities. We were signposted to work with [Kings College London](#) giving parents the power and tools that come with the Citizens UK method of community organising. The programme enables them to improve the chances of their own children accessing higher education as well as tackling wider educational inequality in their communities. We were also signposted to a productive partnership with [Queen Mary University](#) on the [Living Wage Campaign](#).

The community organiser model could be an invaluable lens to explore further as a route to developing research innovation partnerships at a local level. University of Birmingham’s College of Social Sciences have for example, recently become a principal member of Citizens UK:

Birmingham, demonstrating a commitment to using community organising to generate collective power for social change. [Dr Jason Pandya-Wood's](#) emerging work funded by Big Lottery into the expansion of Citizens UK broad-based organising may be of further relevance here. He is also developing proposals to investigate the relationship between 'compassion' and social policy.

Teaching, Adult Education and Community Dialogue

There is a significant body of work and practice related to 'engaged' teaching and learning strategies. This ranges from students [working as volunteers in communities](#) or co-producing learning with community groups through the provision of services such as research, business consultancy and website design (see for example: [Skillsbridge](#), [Interchange](#), or [live projects](#)), through to adult education programmes designed to widen access to higher education amongst non-traditional entrants (see for example: [Enliven](#), [University of Bristol's BA English Literature](#)). Our interviews with stakeholders stressed the connections between this work, and the research interests of many of the academics leading it. [Sharon Clancy's work](#) at University of Nottingham was signposted to us, as an example of how learning and in particular adult education can be made part of the process of social change itself.

People frequently stated that universities need to think holistically about how they meet needs of communities, and balance meeting those needs with other responsibilities around the production of world-leading knowledge and education. Several people reflected that research innovation partnerships don't often meet the immediate needs of a community, and therefore the provision of community spaces, student volunteers, education and consultancy are all part and parcel of mutually beneficial research partnerships.

Co-Production and 'engaged' research practice

There are a variety of practices from within the HE and research sector which model effective approaches to co-production with communities. We briefly outline some of these here.

Interventions to try to build collaborative capacity and scaffold productive interactions between universities and communities, at national, regional and local levels:

- [AHRC Common Cause](#) programme
- NCCPE [Community University Partnerships Initiative](#)
- NCCPE [Community Partner network](#)
- [Keele University's Deals](#) and [Newcastle City Futures](#)
- Brighton's [CUPP help desk](#) and [Ignite programme](#)

And there are various long traditions of activist research practice and co-production, for instance:

- Durham University [Centre for Social Justice and Community Action](#)
- Newcastle University [Institute for Social Renewal](#) and [School of Public Health Research, Fuse](#)

All make clear how challenging it can be for communities to collaborate with universities. These challenges cannot be wished away, and require heightened awareness and concerted attention from HEIs if they are to realise effective projects.

The NCCPE's [Community Partner Network](#) identified a range of challenges, which echo across all the programmes, specifically:

- negotiating different cultures
- agreeing and managing expectations
- power and equity
- funding and capacity
- communication

Network members identified a list of concrete issues to watch out for: a useful reminder that despite good intentions, community-university partnership working can be fraught and frustrating.

These included:

- Bureaucracy – universities are large institutions and can be unwieldy to work with easily
- Incomplete information about what universities could potentially offer means community partners cannot 'trade' in order to get the best out of the partnership and vice versa
- Universities can sometimes think they don't need to offer anything in return, or offer too little
- Universities don't always try hard enough to support community ideas, overcome obstacles or adapt agendas to better meet community interests
- Expect barriers to securing funding - little or no funding for the community partner, problems with payments because there is no budget code and so on
- Expertise can be valued differently - textbook knowledge vs. grassroots experience
- Academics can appear threatened by non-academics knowing more than they do

The RCUK **Connected Communities programme** was a sustained investment that explored how community and university expertise can best be combined. It demonstrated the potential of such partnerships, and its [final report](#) identified four recommendations which usefully inform work in this area:

- Develop the infrastructure needed to create high quality collaborative research partnerships
- Recognise that time is to collaborative research what a supercomputer is to big data
- Take explicit steps to mitigate the risk of enhancing inequalities through collaborative research and partnerships
- Develop sustainable institutions and practices able to meet the desire for public learning

The interviews identified a number of key challenges in securing Research Council Funding for co-produced research. These included:

- The low likelihood of success in receiving funding from research councils vs the time it takes to put together a proposal
- The slow turnaround time in response to a submission, and difficulties managing expectations from community partners

- The time and resources it takes for partners to co-produce an application vs the likely success rate
- The perception that UKRI and other research councils did not rate co-produced research as being excellent or world-leading
- The funding applications and processes being seen as unsympathetic to the emergent and messy nature of co-produced work.

A number of suggestions were made about how these challenges could be addressed:

- Research funders signalling that co-production was a key part of the approach that they are looking to fund.
- Providing funding to partners to co-develop a proposal
- Undertaking ongoing capacity building work to learn about ‘what works’

A number of people pointed us towards the [Common Cause Project](#) and its ‘fair research’ principles. Funded by the AHRC, Common Cause was a two-year research project looking at BME community-university partnerships. The project identified a set of ten principles (based on ‘fair trade’ principles) to focus attention on tackling the key obstacles to effective collaboration with smaller civic, voluntary, cultural and community organizations, groups and individuals. The principles are designed to support funders, universities and community partners to develop non-exploitative and productive research partnerships:

| | |
|--|--|
| A commitment to strengthening the partnering community organisation | Any partnership between a university and a community organization or group should be premised on leaving that organization stronger than before the participation. |
| A commitment to mutual benefit | There should be sufficient time in the development process for the project to identify each partner’s needs and concerns and to clearly articulate the mutual benefit for each partner prior to projects being funded. |
| A commitment to transparency and accountability | Transparency and accountability need to operate at multiple levels, from the institutional level to the individual project level, encompassing creative, business or research objectives, bid-writing, budgeting, ethics and project management. |
| Fair practices in payments | This means that the process for payments is clear and transparent, ensuring that payment is made in a timely manner, and in advance if necessary given the needs of the project. |
| Fair payments for participants | This means agreeing payments for participants commensurate with the costs they will face from not engaging in other activities. |
| A commitment to fair knowledge exchange | This means that no single partner will be expected or entitled to bear the full weight of theorizing or interpreting the work of the project, and that all partners will seek to build dialogue across different sets of knowledge and experience. |

| | |
|---|--|
| A commitment to sustainability and legacy | Project participants will be expected to develop plans for longer-term legacy and sustainability by agreeing how data and outputs from projects will be protected, shared and accessed over the long term, and by whom. |
| A commitment to equality and diversity | All communities have multiple identities, and the intersection of those different identities should be considered wherever relevant. While this principle is targeted at project partnerships, it also applies to universities and community organizations separately, encouraging them to actively promote equity and inclusion and engage in dismantling structural racism and discrimination. |
| A commitment to sectoral as well as organisational development | Fair research partnerships are understood to be making a contribution to the wider knowledge landscape and the public good. This means paying attention to questions of documentation, archiving, attribution, communication and publishing. |
| A commitment to reciprocal learning | Fair research projects will be expected to contribute to the wider knowledge base about how to build better university–community collaborations, and to reflect on and document what has been learned about partnership processes during the project |

There were also several examples from outside of the Higher Education sector. Scotland in particular has a vast expertise around embedding co-production in policy. See for example:

- [The Scottish Co-production network](#) which share evidence and resources. The [many shades of co-produced evidence](#) teases out the challenges and opportunities around co-producing evidence. A [similar network exists in Wales](#).
- **What works Scotland** offers a [body of work](#) around co-production in supporting effective public services.

Meaningful places and meaningful measurement

In this final section we explore approaches to targeting projects and interventions in areas experiencing disadvantage and deprivation.

There have been several attempts to develop heat maps of poverty and isolation. Examples that we uncovered through this work include:

- [Joseph Rowntree’s Disconnection Map](#): this interactive map shows areas that are amongst the most deprived and disconnected in the UK
- [Commons Library Local Health Data](#): draws on analysis of 2017/18 data from England’s GP practices published by NHS Digital and enables users to select a constituency and a health condition
- Aforementioned work from [Local Trust on left behind places](#).

The [Thriving Places Index framework](#) was another set of place-based measures that were identified through the scoping. It measures the local conditions for wellbeing, and whether those conditions are being delivered fairly and sustainably. It consists of a broad set of indicators

grouped into these three headline domains, from datasets produced by established national data agencies such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Public Health England (PHE) and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). These headline elements support a broad dialogue about whether an area is creating the conditions for people to thrive, within environmental limits and in a socially just way and help us to produce an easy to understand scorecard. The custodians of the index – [Happy City](#) - say that it can be used to:

- **Understand** what needs to be in place to create a fair, sustainable area that supports both individual and societal wellbeing
- **Compare** how areas are doing across different dimensions or compare different areas with your own to get a comprehensive sense of how things are going
- **Focus** on what would have the most impact in improving wellbeing and celebrate what's already going well
- **Share** ideas and inspiration for change across different sectors, organisations, groups and communities.

The thriving places index is being looked at by Power to Change and Big Lottery Fund, and provides a unified and generally accepted set of measures, which organisations working within place can mobilise around. It is sometimes used in conjunction with [Happiness Pulse](#) which helps to measure change at an individual level. Both the Happiness Pulse and the Thriving Places Index have been selected through a competitive tender as one of a handful of measurement tools being signposted to [Big Local](#) communities. One drawback is that the framework is only available to use in England and Wales, one interviewee suggested it was not well aligned with frameworks of wellbeing approaches that have been adopted in Scotland as focussed on the individual. Finally, it doesn't currently dig down into the same level of granularity as the IMD.

Carnegie UK Trust have been influential in developing frameworks for measuring and embedding wellbeing in policy. They note that cities and regions face a particular set of challenges when they develop wellbeing frameworks. In partnership with the OECD Regional Development Policy Division, Carnegie Associate Pippa Coutts has developed [straightforward guidance for cities and regions](#) that want to develop their own wellbeing frameworks to measure progress and prioritise precious resources. She notes that wellbeing frameworks provide an opportunity to move away from an inputs approach to an outcomes focus that shows the difference made by policy, programmes or services.

While all of these frameworks provide subtlety and nuance, many people pointed us towards the [indices of multiple deprivation](#) as a pragmatic way of identifying areas experiencing disadvantage and inequality. The Science and Technologies Research Council has used the indices to target some of its funding schemes, including the Sparks and Wonder awards:

Specifically, STFC are interested in supporting audience-driven engagement that works with audiences, particularly those 8-14 years old and their families and carers, from the 40% most socioeconomically-deprived areas of the UK. STFC define the 40% most socioeconomically-deprived areas of the UK as those areas listed in the bottom two quintiles of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation for the respective part of the UK. ([PE Spark Awards](#))

The current English IMD measures income deprivation, employment, health, human capital, crime, housing and living environment, through ten sub-domains and a total of 37 variables that are taken as proxies for these domain areas. It has been noted that the IMD can be used spatially to target specific areas, and used flexibly in order to fit bespoke hypothesis of social change. A key advantage of the measures is to help to identify geographical areas where the combined conditions are so poor that they are likely to disadvantage individual households or people. It was also noted that there are [separate indices in use in Scotland](#) and [Wales](#) and Northern Ireland, key differences exist within both the indicators, data sources and weightings used within the framework, (e.g. income deprivation is weighted at 22.5% in England, 23.5% in Wales, and 28% in Scotland).

3. Funding place-based working

This final section explores | lessons learned about **how to fund effective place-based interventions** in other sectors. We explore the implications for wise investments in place-based research and innovation.

Approaches to funding placed-based approaches and complexity

In the past five years there has been a significant shift towards place-based policies in a number of spheres: including place-sensitive health services in the NHS (NHS, 2014²⁴), amongst health and social care more broadly (Kings Fund, 2015²⁵), in local governance and community development (Improvement Service, 2016²⁶; Lankley Chase, 2017²⁷) and more recently in the Industrial strategy²⁸.

Amongst this flurry of place-based activity several actors have been drawing out key learning about how you fund place-based approaches. We describe below some examples of work that are particularly relevant to developing place-based research/innovation partnerships.

BIG LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND – PLACE-BASED WORKING AND FUNDING

In their work [Lessons and opportunities for place-based working and funding](#) the Big Lottery Community Fund draw out a number of [salient points](#), though it is important to keep in mind these are predominantly drawn from place-based social funding as opposed to research funding.

Key lessons include:

- Operating in a more local way using regional hubs with the right knowledge and networks to distribute funding, rather than having one big national organisation ‘swooping in’ to communities. This lesson chimes with many of the lessons learned from University-Community partnerships with universities working through local contacts and networks to help build relationships with and work with communities (see for example AHRCs [Creating Living Knowledge](#) report).
- Know the history, background and context of a place. Including for example:
 - Take plenty of time to get to know an area, meet people in public spaces undertake community listening exercises.

²⁴ NHS (2014) Five Year Forward View: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/5yfv-web.pdf>

²⁵ Kings Fund (2015) <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/place-based-systems-care>

²⁶ Improvement Service (2016) Place-based approaches to joint planning, resourcing and delivery:

<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/research/place-based-approaches-report.pdf>

²⁷ Historical review of place based approaches: <https://lankleychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Historical-review-of-place-based-approaches.pdf>

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/the-uks-industrial-strategy>

- Identify local assets and systems, don't just rely on data.
- Define boundaries of place that have meaning for local people, but don't ignore the wider context – boundaries may have different meaning for some communities.
- Take time to understand local power dynamics, political agendas and cultures.
- Be aware of the reputation and 'baggage' that you and your partners may carry locally and how this might impact on people's readiness to engage.
- Understand that areas with transient populations can pose particular challenges and require constant attention.
- Ensure there's accountability between, and to, local partners, not to you as Funder.
- There are no easy answers on whether to target work in cold spots or where there's some pre-existing capacity.
- Invest in people and relationships
 - Be aware that whilst starting with strong local leaders is essential, this may also perpetrate 'hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'. Some funders take or encourage more radical approaches to find unusual suspects.
 - Relationship with Big Lottery are more than just about money and should also build social capital. Examples given include training and development (for example working with local community researchers, who can then rapidly report on what matters to people living in a place).
- Work with others to build a shared vision for change
 - Funders must listen deeply, facilitate effectively and challenge appropriately
 - Work on what is possible, build local assets and invest in potential
 - Make collaboration an essential component of funding applications. You may want to build on the work of existing partnerships or use the funding to incentivise new networks and consortia.
 - Agreeing the right lead organisation is vital – it doesn't always have to be the obvious choice.
- Start small, try different things
 - Short-term projects can act as a catalyst and build foundations as well as gaining traction and buy-in to address bigger or more complex challenges sustainably.
 - Funders must not judge the tastes of local people. "If you give decisions to the community they will choose things you don't like and that has to be ok"
- Allow for variation
 - Scaling or moving a successful approach from one area to another will not necessarily be straightforward, expect to adapt and change to the local circumstances.
- Be realistic and make space for learning and reflection
 - Things will go wrong, long-term funding allows time and space to regroup and rethink when this happens.

- Space and time to learn and reflect is essential to success but don't expect this to come good overnight.
- Place-based working should also lead to changes in how funders work, including their internal processes.
- Keep looking for change
 - Allow stakeholders to understand not just the “what” of change, but the “how” of change investigating qualitative, process-related issues, and not just quantitative outcome measures, can also reveal what might be driving “implementation gaps”—the relationships, day-to-day politics, power structures, or other factors that might be posing a detrimental effect on progress. This kind of qualitative information is vital for finding ways to improve a place based initiative mid-stream, and for teasing out lessons for funders about how to construct initiatives going forward.” (Cytron, 2010)

These findings provide useful prompts for research funders, and for HEIs seeking to develop projects in this area:

For research funders:

- Start small and try different approaches.
- Ensure that lessons from one area are not super-imposed on another area.
- Allow space for reflection and honest sharing of what is and what isn't working.
- Visit the places that are in receipt of funding and to get to know the places and people in more detail and listen to their stories.
- Acknowledge that whilst starting with strong local leaders is essential, this may also limit reach into communities. Invite radical and creative approaches to find unusual suspects.

For HEIs:

- Take plenty of time to get to know an area, meet people in public spaces and undertake community listening exercises.
- Define boundaries of place that have meaning for local people – but don't ignore wider social context.
- Take time to understand local power dynamics, political agendas and cultures.

Finally, it is important to note how many of these findings emphasise the importance of interventions being planned and implemented over long time scales.

COLLABORATE – FUNDING COMPLEXITY

This work draws on research interviews with charitable foundations and public sector commissioners. It reflects on how these funders are operating under increasingly complex and restraining circumstances. The findings emphasise a shift towards funding and performance management strategies that are more ‘deeply human’ – invested in our ways of being and relating

to one another; and more profoundly systemic – drawing out cross boundary ways of thinking, understanding and acting in situations. The report '[A Whole New World: Funding and Commissioning in Complexity](#)' foregrounds three dimensions of complexity which are pertinent to more effective funding:

- The complexity of people's lives: for example the richness of their identities, assets, histories, relationships and the challenges that they face
- The complexity of the issues that funders and commissioners are concerned with: for example, that substance misuse, mental health and homelessness are frequently interconnected and interdependent
- The complexity of the systems that respond to support people: the enormous range of people and organisations who make a difference to the lives of others. This facet of complexity includes the systems, structures and processes which deliver support or seek to solve problems.

These lessons can usefully be applied by HEIs to how they design and plan possible research interventions:

- If they are seeking to address a specific issue within a place (e.g. mental health) are they alert to the complex interdependencies of this issue with others, or are they approaching it in isolation?
- Are they planning their intervention with due regard for and consideration of the wider 'system' of support and infrastructure that is already in place, or are they 'going it alone'?
- Who have they consulted in developing their project, and who are they planning to collaborate with in delivering it?
- How are they planning to take account of the complexity of people's lives and identities and to provide them with space and agency to help direct the activity? How will they avoid doing 'unto' communities?

The report emphasises a new paradigm emerging where funders have come to think differently about how they work. For example:

- **Shifting to broad outcomes:** Rather than measuring a narrowly defined set of outcome metrics, funders reported being far more flexible in their approach to outcomes.
- **Recognising interdependence:** working with the fabric that links individuals, organisations and system structures together.
- **Developing trust:** Trust seems to be the foundation on which a successful complexity-friendly funding culture is built. Funders identified that it enables more honest conversation, and therefore shared learning.
- **It's not cosy – it's challenging:** a key aspect of the investment in positive relationships is that it creates a culture which encourages and enables challenge and honesty between actors.

IVAR – PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO FUNDING

IVAR's [Working in Place: Collaborative funding in practice](#) distils many of the principles outlined above into a very practical funding framework for place-based collaborative working. They have identified twelve prompts for funders who are considering funding place-based approaches:

- **What does place mean?** For instance how do you want to define place and on what scale: streets, neighbourhoods, towns, regions etc?
- **Why are you considering a place-based approach?** For instance to target a specific issue, to address cold spots, to test a model or approach etc.?
- **What contribution are you seeking to make?** For example are you looking to provide funds for services, investing in systems change etc.?
- **What is your attitude towards risk and uncertainty?** For example are you prepared to support an exploratory approach and invest in the time it takes to build shared perspectives across?
- **What is your position on impact?** What balance do you want to strike between funding tangible outcomes opposed to emergent ones?
- **What is your existing knowledge of this area?** Do you have a track record in place-based funding? What approaches, people and institutions do you need to learn from?
- **What duration of involvement is required?** Effective funding over multiple years can build confidence in communities. What is your commitment to a specific place and what are the implications of this for the relationships you build?
- **Where will control sit?** Who will control and define the framing, delivery and success measures?
- **What will your role be?** What will your relationship with place be? What balance will you strike between being at arm's length or being embedded within a place? What are the implications for your learning about place?
- **Who will you need to work with?** Place based approaches are often about drawing on local knowledge and sharing power.
- **What kind of relationships are required?** Where will stand between contractual grant making approaches or relational approaches where you are working with places?
- **What commitment of staff and trustee time is needed?** Place-based funding takes time and is often more resource intensive than other approaches. How will you ensure you invest appropriately in the approach?

They have used these prompts to develop a framework to help people plan projects and surface their assumptions. An example of two such prompts is provided below:

Why are you considering, or using, a place-based approach?

Our research has found six overarching (and often overlapping) drivers for choosing to work in place:

1. To target a particular issue
2. To address cold spots
3. In response to changes in policy/external context
4. To test a model or approach
5. As a way of targeting areas of high deprivation
6. Because you are by definition a 'place-based funder' with a specific geographic remit/focus

What contribution are you seeking to make?



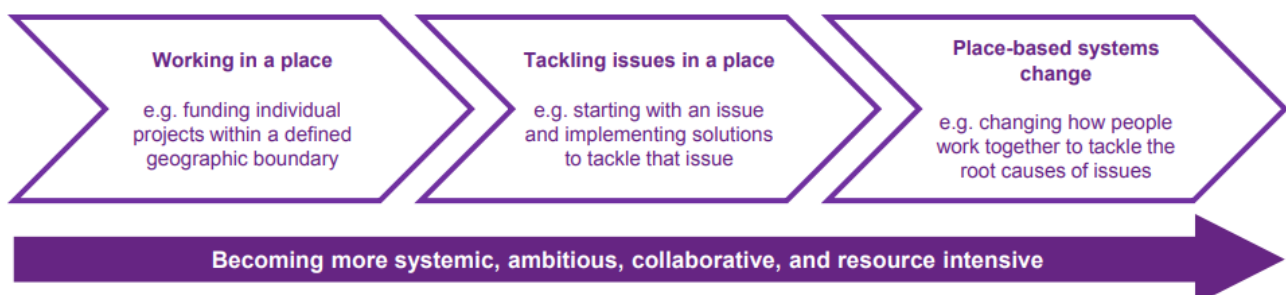
Understanding the contribution you hope to make will be closely linked to why you wish to work in a place-based way. Think about what you hope will happen. For example, are you looking to provide funds for services/projects that support people in the area, or are you looking to make investments towards systems change?

From **Working in Place: Collaborative funding in practice Learning from five case studies (IVAR)**

NPC'S FRAMEWORK FOR PLACE-BASED FUNDING

The charity consultancy NPC has developed a [Framework for Place](#). The framework shares common characteristics that they have identified from their consulting and think tank work, to guide funders and practitioners who are developing place-based projects.

Their '[Framework for Place-Based Funding](#)' describes a spectrum of approaches to place-based funding, represented below:



They note that the further to the right of the spectrum an initiative sits, the more resource intensive it tends to be. They have also concluded that the most ambitious and systemic approaches tend to be best suited to hyper-local approaches, rather than across larger geographic areas.

The framework also identifies 6 'pillars' of place-based funding (see below), which align strongly with the findings of the other projects described above. These pillars are common characteristics of effective place-based funding approaches. They note that the characteristics furthest to the right (which reflect the most ambitious and most systemic approaches) tend to be the hardest to achieve.



The framework identifies the key characteristics of successful work under each pillar, and provides ten examples of projects which exemplify good practice in place-based working.

Specific challenges in funding research and innovation

In reviewing this work, and through our consultation, we have identified a number of challenges for funding research and innovation projects in this area:

- **Geographical proximity:** Should universities be encouraged to only work with places that are local to them?
- **What does 'place' mean:** neighbourhoods, communities, wards, towns, cities, regions?
- **Recognising the time needed for genuine co-production:** investing in communities for the long-term, making sure this work builds capacity and leaves a positive legacy
- **New partnerships or existing:** focusing on the development of new partnerships or encouraging people to deepen and learn from existing relationships?
- **How central is research:** To what extent should the focus be on creating new research, mobilising existing research or meeting community need?
- **Institutional support:** What is needed in terms of institutional buy-in and commitment to enable individual projects to thrive?
- **Assessing projects:** What criteria should be used to assess projects in this area?

We expand on three of these challenges below.

What is genuine co-production and what is possible within shorter time frames?

The core aim of encouraging ‘engaged’ research practices such as participatory action research is that people who would be research subjects in more traditional approaches become producers of knowledge in research processes, in policy development, and in moving towards positive social change (Chambers, 1998; Whyte, 1991²⁹). Experts we consulted with were keen to stress that such practices usually require long time scales, and significant expertise. However, they did suggest a range of methods and models which could generate real value for communities and researchers within shorter time scales and act as stepping stones on a trajectory towards co-produced knowledge and social action.

Suggestions included:

- Research sprints: a collaboratory where academics and non-academics immerse in each other’s work. See for example [place-makers spaces](#), University of Brighton.
- Funding partners to go through a process to explore whether working with the university was right for them.
- Co-location: funding a research associate to do capacity research within local organisations
- Use creative methods to stimulate conversations and understanding, for example:
 - Participatory visual techniques – such as the use of community mapping, rich pictures, or utilising digital platforms for people to visualise their environments – see for example: [UCLs Mapping for Change](#), or NESTA funded [‘heat seeking’ quests](#).
 - Maker spaces – see for example University of Brighton’s [mini creative community festival of making](#).
 - Re-imagining public space as a tool for listening and consultation – see for example using architecture as social intervention - [Oxford Brookes School of Architecture](#)
 - Use of play and other interactive methodologies to engage people in local issues through play see for example the work of [Jana Welder, University of Manchester](#) or [Playable Cities](#) – examples of which include: [the ballot bin](#).
 - Arts and science collaborations, using a variety of methods including storytelling, forum theatre, data-visualisation. See for example work at [University of Manchester](#), the [Cabot Institute](#) etc.
 - The use of narrative and story-telling, supporting communities to tell their own stories around place. See for example [Hulme, Sweet Hulme](#)

Community Costs

Feedback from the literature and from consultees emphasised the need for projects to include provision for community costs. This includes expenses such as travel, room hire; and some have

²⁹

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275084714> [Contact zones Participation materiality and the messiness of interaction](#)

suggested community staff buy-out. Often community researchers are expected to be volunteers, however when many are living in poverty, payment is a key enabler. University of Bristol have developed this [guide to paying community researchers](#), drawing on learning from the [AHRC Connected Communities programme](#). Dr Sally Lloyd-Evans work with the [Big Local Whitley Community](#) provides a further example where this is taking place:

For individuals on low/no incomes and small community organisations, there would be neither the time nor the resource to participate in research projects without funding. For these groups, the possibility of budget to cover travel expenses, an honorarium for their time, and child care costs, are essential pre-requisites for research participation. In these instances, very small sums of money can make a very significant difference to who is enabled to participate in research...

Whitley Big Local Research Team, 2015

Assessing projects

The literature that we reviewed and our interviewees identified various useful criteria which might be utilised to guide an assessment of quality project proposals. These include:

- Ensure applicants are alert to the **complex interdependencies** of social issues.
- Require them to specify **the rationale and assumptions** underpinning their current / proposed activity.
- Expect them to show consideration of the **wider 'system' of support and infrastructure** that is already in place.
- Invite them to consider **which roles they might** play within this wider ecosystem (e.g. contributor, leader, expert resource etc.).
- Expect them to articulate **aims and expectations** about the impact they might achieve, and over what timescales.
- Ask them to articulate **who they have consulted** in developing their project, and who they are planning to collaborate with in delivering it.
- Expect them to detail how they are planning to take account of **the complexity of people's lives and identities** and how they will provide them with **opportunity and agency** to help direct the activity.
- Look at the **diversity of the delivery** team – including issues of intersectionality.
- Expect to see thoughtful approaches to **learning, evaluation and measuring impact**.

Annexes

Annex A: Contributors to the review

| Name | Role | Organisation |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| David Wolff | Director, Community University Partnership Programme | University of Brighton |
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| James Goodman | Director of Partnerships | Local Trust |
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| Karl Wilding | Director of Public Policy and Volunteering | NCVO |
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| David Pye | Programme Manager, Research | LGA |
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Annex B: Mapping geographical proximity between universities and 'left behind places' in North West England



Key:

Shaded blue areas represent regions identified as being 'left behind' see - OCSI, 2019 - Developing a measure of 'left behind' areas, Local Trust available: <http://localtrust.org.uk/library/blogs/what-does-being-“left-behind”-mean-in-practice>

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