

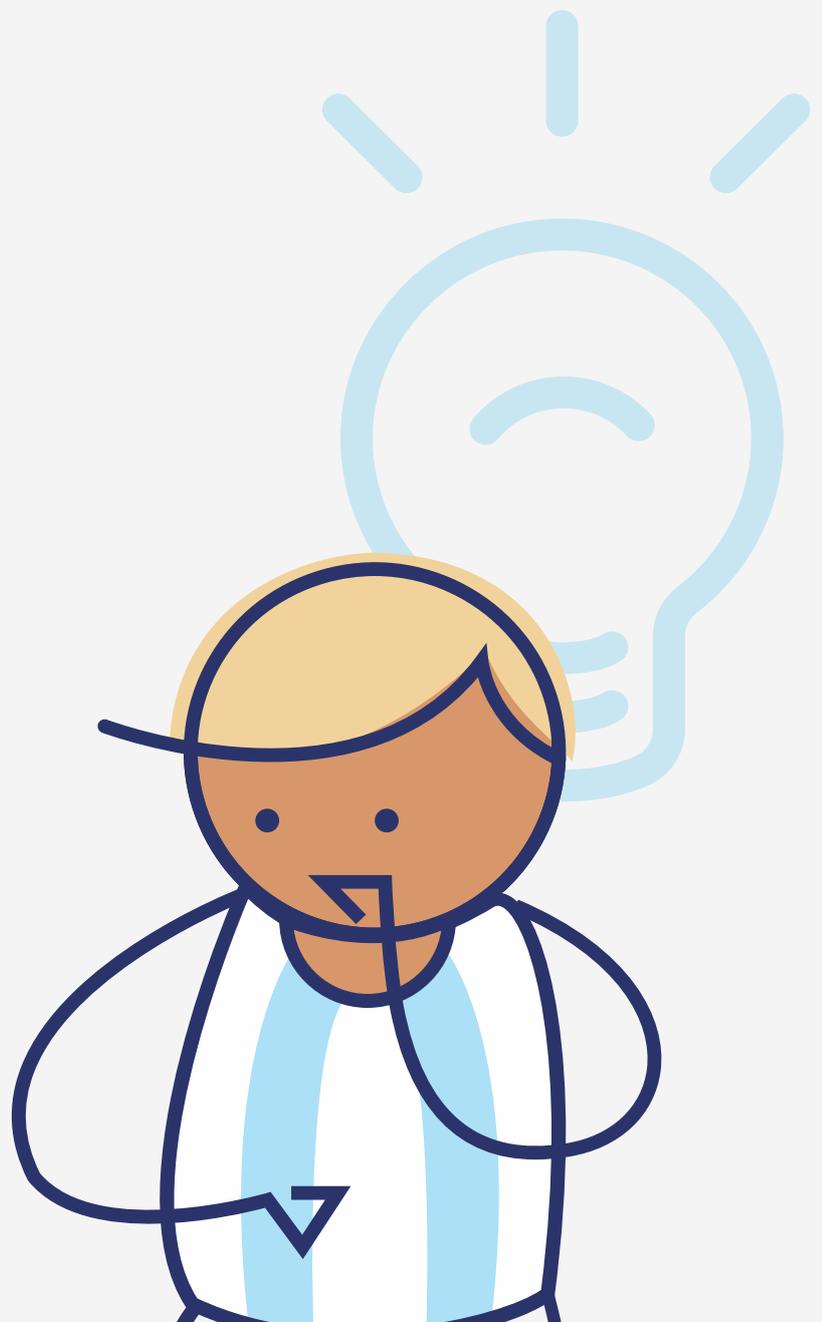
**INSPIRING  
IMPACT**

# End-of-programme evaluation & learning report

Full report

March 2022

Sally Cupitt  
and Jean Ellis





# Contents

Foreword from NPC.....	i
Executive summary.....	ii
1. Introduction.....	1
<b>SECTION 1: THE INSPIRING IMPACT PROGRAMME .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2. The context for the start of Inspiring Impact.....	4
3. Inspiring Impact theory of change.....	6
4. The three phases of Inspiring Impact .....	7
5. Governance .....	10
<b>SECTION 2: PROGRAMME USE .....</b>	<b>14</b>
6. How users were reached .....	14
7. Who Inspiring Impact reached .....	23
8. Views on Inspiring Impact resources .....	27
9. Promoting Inspiring Impact .....	34
<b>SECTION 3: LEARNING FROM DELIVERY.....</b>	<b>37</b>
10. Meeting delivery challenges .....	37
11. Barriers to impact practice .....	45
12. Wider learning .....	47
<b>SECTION 4: OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS.....</b>	<b>51</b>
13. Outcomes for users: Micro level change .....	51
14. Sectoral change over the last ten years.....	62
<b>SECTION 5: THE FUTURE .....</b>	<b>76</b>
15. Future context challenges .....	76
16. Direct support.....	78
17. Impact support structures .....	81
18. Development work .....	85
19. The impact environment .....	88
20. Conclusion .....	91
<b>Appendix 1: Evaluation methodology.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Programme funding (000s)* .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Acknowledgements from NPC.....</b>	<b>97</b>



## Acronyms

Access IMP	Access Impact Management Programme
BAVO	Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations
BCT	Building Change Trust
CES	Charities Evaluation Services
ChEW	Charity Evaluators Working Group
CDHN	Community Development and Health Network
CENI	Community Evaluation Northern Ireland
CVS	Council for Voluntary Services
CVC	County Voluntary Council
ESS	Evaluation Support Scotland
FFI	Fit For Impact
JET	Journey to EmploymenT
MUP	Measuring up (formerly Measuring Up!)
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NPC	New Philanthropy Capital
NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
OBA	Outcomes based accountability
RBA	Results based accountability
SVUK	Social Value UK
ACF	The Association of Charitable Foundations
ACEVO	The Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations
TNLCF	The National Lottery Community Fund
VCE	Voluntary and Community Sector
VCSE	Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise
WCVA	Wales Council for Voluntary Action



## Foreword from NPC

Inspiring Impact was first developed in 2011, when I, along with 29 other leaders in the field of social impact measurement, met at an ‘impact summit’ to discuss what was needed to improve the quality of impact practice throughout the social sector. We set out our vision for a future where a focus on impact was the norm among charities, funders, and social enterprises across the UK, and from this, the idea for the ten-year Inspiring Impact programme was born.

At the time, there had been growing frustration in charity and voluntary organisations at the confusing and sometimes contradictory information about why and how to conduct impact practice. Inspiring Impact was premised on the idea that, by taking a collaborative approach and speaking with a united voice, organisations in the field of social impact measurement could bring more clarity, test new approaches and achieve greater change for the sector than they could by acting alone.

Looking back over the years, Inspiring Impact has helped deliver a lot of the vision set out at that summit in 2011 and the programme has so much to be proud of. Collaboration is never straightforward, and this initiative has been ambitious in bringing together a range of funders, delivery partners and Impact Champions from all four nations of the UK. I have been inspired by the energy, passion and commitment that has been brought by these organisations, as well as all the individuals, charities and social enterprises who have participated in our activities and learning events.

As we bring Inspiring Impact to a close in 2022, NPC – as the lead partner for Inspiring Impact – commissioned an external evaluation of the programme, and the findings are presented in this report. Inspiring Impact was intentionally ambitious from the outset, having tried and tested a range of approaches for improving capacity and skills that had not been tried before in the sector. We are proud of what has been achieved over the past ten years and we believe that a transparent and robust evaluation is vital to capture the depth of our learning, including the various challenges we encountered along the way. We hope that the findings will be shared and taken on board across the sector and applied to the development of future initiatives.

Looking ahead, NPC is committed to building on the legacy of Inspiring Impact and we want to talk to people about the next steps for developing impact practice. If you would like to be involved, get in touch with us at [info@thinkNPC.org](mailto:info@thinkNPC.org).

**Tris Lumley**

**Director of Innovation and Development, NPC**



# Executive summary

## Introduction

### About Inspiring Impact

Inspiring Impact aimed to improve impact practice<sup>1</sup> throughout the UK voluntary sector. Launched in 2012 and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) and a number of other grant funders, the programme ended in February 2022.

Total funding for Inspiring Impact over the ten years was around £2.1m. The programme involved three phases of around three years each, corresponding to TNLCF grant periods. Inspiring Impact was delivered by a consortium. Partners changed slightly over the decade, but the final stage involved Community Development and Health Network (CDHN), Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS), National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), Social Value UK (SVUK) and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

The Inspiring Impact partners created new resources and curated existing ones into an Inspiring Impact website; which was developed and improved on over the programme's lifetime. Partners also hosted a wide range of events and developed and supported impact networks. The programme also trialled other forms of sector support and approaches to impact.

### This evaluation

This evaluation was undertaken in 2021 by a team of experienced independent evaluators, some of whom had previously worked on Inspiring Impact themselves. For data sources, it drew on: programme monitoring data; an online survey in 2021 (280 responses); in-depth interviews with 24 stakeholders. Limitations to the data include potential bias in respondent samples and gaps in programme monitoring data.

## Programme delivery

### The consortium

The consortium was well chosen, bringing together key players in existing impact support infrastructure from across the UK. The programme's four nation approach brought considerable benefits by including local perspectives, promoting the voice of local partners and developing insights into different regional and national contexts.

### Who was reached by Inspiring Impact?

Given the scale of programme funding, the social media reach and reach of events was good. At the time of writing, Twitter followers had reached 4,146, LinkedIn group members 1,400, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Defined as 'the activities that an organisation does to focus on its impact. This can include planning desired impact, planning how to measure it, collecting information about it, making sense of that information, communicating it and learning from it'. [The code of good impact practice \(2013\)](#).



the newsletter distribution list 2,296. From 2018-21, partners ran 102 events, with 2,560 attendances.

The website did well in phases 1 and 2 (43K and 67K users respectively). The number of users was disappointing in phase 3 (37K), given the improved website and the ambition for the resources; the use of the impact diagnostic Measuring up (formerly Measuring Up!), for example, dropped off from 2018.

Throughout its lifetime, the programme disproportionately reached larger organisations in comparison to the UK voluntary sector as a whole. However, the data available still suggests a reasonable participation by organisations under £100K.

## **Funders**

The inclusion of the Association of Charitable Funders (ACF) in the programme was seen as important, with early activity through the Funders for Impact Working Group and integration of Inspiring Impact into its professional development programme. However, there were challenges to the work strand with funders: there was decreasing enthusiasm for the Funders for Impact Working Group; difficulties were experienced in converting principles into practice and developing an effective impact culture.

## **The challenge of a broad audience**

Inspiring Impact was designed initially as a programme open to everyone, which brought both strengths in terms of inclusivity, and challenges, including the size of the potential audience.

Feedback to the programme highlighted the dichotomy between those organisations ready for more advanced impact practice and those that were at the beginning. The programme struggled to deliver services to meet the needs of these multiple audiences. From phase 2, there was an understanding that the programme would focus more on small- to medium-sized organisations and from phase 3 an increased emphasis on making materials accessible.

As highlighted above, even after the decision was made to focus on small to medium-sized organisations in phase 2, there were challenges reaching this audience and larger organisations were disproportionately reached.

## **User views on Inspiring Impact resources**

Our primary data collection and the programme monitoring feedback data available from events shows a high level of satisfaction by people who engaged with Inspiring Impact. Survey respondents found the website in general, and resources library specifically, the most useful resources, followed by the self-assessment tools. Informants also appreciated having curated resources available in one place. That the programme brought key stakeholders together gave credibility to resources produced and promoted.

The successful merger of the Access IMP and Inspiring Impact included a refreshed website with improved functioning and additional digital resources. Making the resources simpler, more user friendly and practical was well received.



Some survey respondents indicated that they had engaged at an individual level with Inspiring Impact over a long period of time, finding its resources a continued source of support.

## **Cascade model**

Inspiring Impact tried to increase programme reach through cascade models, in particular through Impact Champions, subsector partnerships (SSPs) and infrastructure organisations, sharing learning and resources with these groups in the hope they would cascade their learning through their networks.

## **Subsector partnerships**

The SSP model was intended to create examples of good practice that would cascade learning across the sector. There were some very successful examples, such as the infrastructure bodies Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and Sported in Northern Ireland, and Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO) in Wales, that shared learning extensively with their members. However, across the programme as a whole, SSPs sometimes lacked motivation or resources to successfully cascade.

## **Impact Champions**

Event feedback from Impact Champions, as well as responses to surveys in 2018 and 2021, indicated that they valued meeting peers and sharing resources. Some found it difficult to benefit from the network when there were different levels of impact capability at meetings.

The extent of cascading through networks by Champions was not monitored in a way to allow assessment of how far they contributed to reach. Feedback in 2018 suggested that many felt hampered by their workloads, some finding difficulty in transferring learning into their own organisations and into their networks. However, feedback in 2021 indicated that highly engaged Champions may possibly have shared more than was thought. Respondents to the 2021 survey from the wider voluntary sector also reported sharing Inspiring Impact learning with peers.

Impact Champions did not really take off in Wales and there was some reluctance among funders to become Champions. By the end of phase 2, Inspiring Impact stopped running separate events for Impact Champions.

## **Shared measurement**

Inspiring Impact researched and tested out the potential for shared measurement. Tools were developed and tested through interested networks such as the Child Bereavement Network, Mind and Visionary. While the discussion continues, the shared measurement pilots were challenged by a number of practical issues, such as aggregation, compatibility between systems, and compliance with GDPR. While there was some reported interest in England from some sectors, little interest was reported from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, or from funders.



## **The effects of Covid-19**

The Covid-19 pandemic changed some plans for embedding impact in the final years of Inspiring Impact, but also brought benefits. Programme partners adapted quickly and provided some new, well-used services, including an effective new partnership with the Charity Evaluation Working Group (ChEW). More flexible approaches to impact were deemed necessary to focus more on information required for nimble adaptation. There was a new emphasis on streamlining impact practice and utilising data for real-time decision making.

## **What Inspiring Impact achieved**

There is good evidence of change in individuals and organisations as a result of Inspiring Impact. The programme may also have contributed to wider sectoral change, such as greater collaboration between infrastructure organisations.

There are a number of limitations to any attempt to attribute change directly to Inspiring Impact. The programme was built on the foundations of pre-existing work around impact practice and evaluation by consortium partners and others; much of this work also continued alongside Inspiring Impact. In addition, data on change was only obtainable from relatively small samples of those most directly engaged.

## **Outcomes for individuals**

Almost all 2021 survey respondents who had engaged with Inspiring Impact had seen a positive change in their personal impact practice over the last decade – in their motivation, skills, sharing of learning with others, and access to good quality resources.

Survey respondents reported using multiple sources to help them improve their impact work, with Inspiring Impact being one of these. A small minority (5%) attributed their observed changes solely or mainly to Inspiring Impact. The majority of survey respondents reported that their impact practice had changed partly due to Inspiring Impact (64%), while 16% felt their impact practice changes were due to other factors rather than to Inspiring Impact.

Twelve of the 16 Impact Champion respondents were still working on impact within their own organisations and made 'frequent' use of Inspiring Impact resources.

## **Outcomes for voluntary sector organisations**

All survey respondents for whom the question was applicable reported at least some positive change in their organisation in relation to impact practice over the ten years. Of these, 2% attributed these changes solely or mainly to Inspiring Impact. Most reported that their organisational impact practice changed partly due to Inspiring Impact (46%) while another 24% felt their impact practice changes were due to other factors rather than Inspiring Impact; as was expected, Inspiring Impact was one of many sources of support. We found examples of some organisations, like Citizens Advice, for whom Inspiring Impact had been enormously important, adding credibility to developing their impact work.



## Barriers to better impact practice

Organisational barriers to better impact practice at the end of the programme remained similar to those identified before Inspiring Impact started, including lack of staff, time and money, and the complexity of different stakeholders' requirements. Anticipated drivers, such as the importance of impact to obtaining funding or investment, were not always seen as compelling; and some perceived that 'impact' had been oversold as 'a silver bullet.'

## Changes to voluntary sector impact support provision

Inspiring Impact funding substantially added to the ability of already motivated infrastructure and other support organisations to provide training and resources. There has been arguably more legacy in Wales and Northern Ireland than in other countries. For example, Inspiring Impact significantly built the capacity of WCVA to support their members on impact, and to reach smaller voluntary organisations through the Welsh County Voluntary Councils.

Most other consortium partners were already impact specialists, but with additional funding, they were able to do more, with a greater reach, and to a better quality. Working as part of Inspiring Impact also allowed them to adopt some innovative approaches and to generate learning: ESS, for example, was able to do a lot of experimentation around peer learning.

Changes in partner relationships may have had a positive effect in the wider sector. One outcome valued by consortium partners was improved relationships and greater collaboration between them. This resulted in more shared approaches and greater commonality in impact language.

The Inspiring Impact online resources will be incorporated within the websites of the programme partners. Few of the other activities funded under Inspiring Impact will sustain beyond the programme's funding. However, as a result of Inspiring Impact, some partners have new or improved work strands.

## Changes to impact culture

Most interviewees and survey respondents felt there had been a clear increase over the ten years in the sector's understanding of, and buy in to, the need for good impact practice. All interviewees felt that at least some of the positive sectoral changes reported had been contributed to by Inspiring Impact, but it was hard for survey respondents to identify exactly what change was due to Inspiring Impact.

Survey respondents also reported the development of more funder-plus<sup>2</sup> approaches over the decade, and funder survey respondents reported positive change in the level of resources given to evaluation. Some funders expressed more awareness of the bureaucratic burden of complex demands and a greater appreciation of what was appropriate in measurement. The Covid-19 pandemic also provided a chance for funders to reassess the extent to which previous demands

---

<sup>2</sup> Defined as 'any activity which is additional to a grant and the grant-making process', usually to achieve better outcomes. *Beyond money: A study of funding plus in the UK* (2011) IVAR.



gave value relative to time and other resources required.

## Learning

Learning from across the programme was shared and used to adjust or redirect the programme in both the second and third phases. Learning from Access IMP (Impact Management Programme) was also successfully carried over when it merged with Inspiring Impact in 2018, for example bringing a greater focus on peer learning and creating a more interactive website.

There were a number of learning points that emerged from the delivery of the programme.

- It was necessary to design work with and through networks with behaviour change in mind, engaging with the reality of practitioners' lives. This included sharing learning across organisations and building motivation.
- The programme evolved to become more practitioner-informed in terms of expectations and language used, pushing back against rigid standards of evidence and 'proper' evaluation design towards a more pluralistic approach.
- Online resources alone were not enough to deliver change. Both one-to-one and face-to-face contact and support were valued highly, and it was hard to replicate this through online delivery.
- There was a continued demand for subsector specific materials. Subsector working should take account of and build from the existing impact journey within individual organisations and networks, including learning from and use of existing resources.
- Good impact practice is not felt to be critical for organisational survival, as has been argued. New ways to persuade people of the benefits of impact practice may need to be found.
- Meeting the needs of organisations across the voluntary sector was an ongoing difficulty. Despite good attempts by Inspiring Impact to deliver simple and accessible resources, these were still too complicated for some and in a time of crisis, as illustrated by Covid-19, more streamlined approaches to impact might be needed.
- Future programmes of work on impact practice in the sector would benefit from a sharper understanding of whether the focus is on individuals or organisations; is the aim to build the capacity of the workforce, or look for changes in organisations? It could be that a two-pronged approach would be useful, but the two should be distinguished to adjust methods appropriately.

## Future impact needs of the UK voluntary sector

### Direct support

A familiar range of support was requested by informants to help meet their future impact needs, with training, resources and peer support most popular. One-to-one support was frequently requested, although this is costly and may not have benefit beyond one organisation.

There were lots of calls for better support to organisations at either end of the size spectrum, and calls for both simpler tools and for more complex ones. Several informants mentioned the need for 'impact-light' – simple, light-touch but effective and robust impact approaches. Areas



of need included support on choosing tools, including digital tools, and ways to evaluate increasingly online services. Emerging fields of interest include equitable evaluation.

A few respondents noted that in the move to democratise and simplify evaluation, some basic understanding and skills around good research and evaluation practice may have been lost – skills often needed in choosing and applying the right tool.

There was a strong argument from a few interviewees that some voluntary organisations no longer related to generic infrastructure as they had previously; there was not a need to work with and through subsectors. 7% of survey respondents mentioned wanting thematic support, for example in health, youth work or campaigning.

Many respondents felt there was still work to be done to get funders on board, particularly to address quantity, quality and consistency of data requirements.

### **Impact support structures**

Many informants argued there was a need for Inspiring Impact, or a similar initiative, to be continued, to sustain momentum. There was some concern that motivation and capacity building was never complete because of competing organisational priorities and staff turnover; additionally, capacity building needed to keep up with changes in impact practice.

There was concern about a potential loss of consistency and quality in sector support without some kind of body which could coordinate key players, quality control and capacity build, including supporting generic infrastructure organisations. Respondents noted difficulties in the long-term financial viability of such coordinating bodies, as well as the need for detailed gap analysis to avoid potential duplication.

It was felt that any future work should build on Inspiring Impact's successful approach of working with local partners to deliver flexibly to meet local need.

### **Obtaining greater clarity**

Respondents noted that, to build a more sophisticated approach to improving impact practice, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of sectoral need and the needs of different stakeholder groups – in terms of levels of geographical location, impact experience, organisational type and size and different funding sources.

It was felt that, going forwards, a more nuanced understanding of how change happens in people and organisations, over time, was needed to make support more targeted.

A few respondents noted a continued need to think about the purpose of impact practice. For example, it would be helpful to have stronger evidence as to whether the assumption that beneficiaries experience better services as a result of good impact practice is correct.



## **Advocacy role**

Keeping a national focus on impact, and continuing to remind people of the need to do it, was mentioned by many informants as a future need. Finding new ways to motivate people, including 'stronger reward mechanisms', will be important.

There was also a view that there could have been more emphasis on using impact data to build an advocacy role for the wider voluntary sector or subsectors, and that this could be given greater consideration in the future.

## **Continued work with funders**

Funders will continue to be important because of their role in shaping the evaluation and impact environment. Funding for impact practice remained an issue, as was the multiplicity and conflicting nature of funder demands.

## **Conclusion**

Inspiring Impact achieved fairly good reach into the UK voluntary sector, despite the challenges of a very broad intended target audience combined with a relatively small annual budget. It was well liked by its users, and made a significant contribution to improved impact practice in the organisations it engaged with.

Inspiring Impact trialled a range of approaches and created useful learning about what works in impact support. The programme brought greater consistency and collaboration between key players in the UK impact support field, and built the capacity of some providers to offer impact support to other organisations.

The UK voluntary sector still needs support on evaluation and impact, and this need is likely to continue in the future. This support will need to be able to meet the increasingly broad range of needs in the sector.

Ten years on from the start of Inspiring Impact, there is now an even greater range of impact and evaluation support providers in the UK. There is still a need for some organisation or group to develop and improve impact approaches, to coordinate key players and to capacity build and quality control impact support providers. There is also a continued need to make the case for impact and to build on the momentum created by Inspiring Impact and others working in this field.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 About Inspiring Impact

Inspiring Impact aimed to improve impact practice throughout the UK voluntary sector. Launched in 2012 and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) and a number of other grant funders, the programme ended in February 2022. Total funding for Inspiring Impact over the ten years was around £2.1m.

The programme involved the creation of new resources and curation of existing ones into an Inspiring Impact website; the latter was developed and improved on over the programme's lifetime. Partners hosted a wide range of events and developed and supported impact networks. Different forms of sector support and approaches to impact were trialled. Inspiring Impact involved three phases of around three years each, corresponding to funding.

Inspiring Impact was a unique collaboration across the voluntary sector, aiming to improve impact practice throughout the UK voluntary sector. A number of partners have collaborated to deliver the programme, led by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC). Consortium partners over the final phase of Inspiring Impact were Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS), National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Community Development and Health Network (CDHN), Social Value UK (SVUK) and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

Previous consortium partners included Charities Evaluation Services (CES; merged with NCVO in 2014), Building Change Trust (BCT), Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI), the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO), the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) and Substance. For the last three years, the programme was overseen by a steering group.

## 1.2 This evaluation

Funding for Inspiring Impact ended in February 2022. This evaluation is focused on programme learning and how the sector may best be supported on impact practice going forward.

### 1.2.1 Evaluation aims

This evaluation had two aims:

- **Looking back.** To provide accountability and learning to funders, partners and beneficiaries, exploring: what Inspiring Impact did; how well it delivered its work; feedback from users; what changed, for who, as a result of programme activities.
- **Looking ahead.** To provide learning from Inspiring Impact that could be used to shape future impact support for the sector.



## 1.2.2 The evaluators

A team of experienced independent evaluators was commissioned to evaluate Inspiring Impact, led by Sally Cupitt. Sally was joined by Dr Jean Ellis, Shehnaaz Latif and Rahel Spath.

- **Sally Cupitt** has over 21 years' experience working in the UK voluntary sector, undertaking external evaluations and providing capacity building support, including on multiple national impact programmes. Sally worked at Charities Evaluation Services (CES) for 15 years, latterly as Head of Consultancy. Following CES's merger with NCVO, Sally was Head of NCVO Charities Evaluation Services for six years to February 2021.
- **Jean Ellis** worked as a CES consultant from 1995, and from 2013 as an NCVO CES associate. In 2008 Jean carried out the first major research into the development of evaluation in the UK voluntary sector, with recommendations for both policy and practice. Jean has authored publications which have become sector standards and many smaller guides and bespoke publications.
- **Shehnaaz Latif** was Lead Consultant at NCVO CES until March 2021 and before that was part of CES from 2003. Shehnaaz has particular expertise in training and capacity building around all aspects of evaluation and impact practice. Shehnaaz has also worked with a very wide range of funders to develop their impact practice.
- **Rahel Spath** has been an independent data analyst and evaluation consultant to a wide variety of social sector organisations since 2016. She held previous roles at Project Oracle and The Social Innovation Partnership.

Sally and Shehnaaz both worked on Inspiring Impact as part of their former salaried roles.

## 1.2.3 Data sources

Data for this evaluation is based on three main sources (for more detail see [appendix 1](#)).

- Desk research into existing data from the Inspiring Impact programme, including summary reports written by partners for the evaluation.
- 17 in-depth interviews with 24 stakeholders, carried out by video conferencing. Respondents included consortium partners, steering group members, including TNLCF, subsector partners and a number of people who were involved with Inspiring Impact but were not subsector partners.
- An online survey of voluntary sector organisations in September and October 2021, which received 280 responses. This survey was open to all, so may have been completed by some interviewees.

In November 2021 a findings workshop was attended by 12 representatives from consortium partner organisations and the steering group. The workshop examined early evaluation findings, reviewing them for accuracy and completeness. Recommendations for the future were also discussed.

## 1.2.4 Issues with the data

We note three limitations to the data:



- gaps in both quantitative and qualitative data, including a variable amount of detail on specific programme strands, both across time and between different partner activities
- difficulty in interpreting outcomes data because we cannot always be sure that all respondents were able to make a distinction between Inspiring Impact work and impact work outside the programme
- potential bias in respondent samples.

NPC provided helpful summary reports providing a framework of activity and statistics on programme reach, to help the evaluators situate primary findings from the online survey and interview data. However, there were a significant number of gaps in internal programme monitoring data, in particular data for the first six years.

There is learning for us all in terms of maintaining data and managing knowledge over such a long programme, so that it can be interpreted and understood by other people in future. However, gaps in data were compounded by: staff turnover; turnover in programme partners; the closure of CENI in 2020 in which data on phases 1 and 2 was lost; changes in the website, meaning some data is unavailable. Apart from detailed reports from or about some subsector partners, which have been used as case studies, it has been difficult to review much of the delivery on the ground across the four nations. Programme monitoring data from 2018 is much stronger.

We had anticipated that evidence of change in impact practice across the sector might need to consider also the activities to promote impact by other funders, infrastructure organisations and governmental bodies. However, some partner interviewees also noted that it might be hard for some survey respondents to distinguish Inspiring Impact work from other delivery on impact, including that by the partners themselves. In Scotland, for example, where ESS was described by some as being inextricably linked to Inspiring Impact, untangling the Inspiring Impact work from that of ESS's main delivery would be challenging. By contrast, in Wales the Inspiring Impact work was very distinct and easy to distinguish from the work of WCVA. See section 14.4 for more discussion of attribution.

Survey respondents represent a very small sample of Inspiring Impact users. Those responding to the survey were also likely to be more motivated towards impact work than non-respondents, increasing the probable bias in the sample. It was not possible to mitigate against this. Limited evaluation budget meant interviewees needed to be suggested primarily by NPC, the evaluation commissioners, as they had the understanding of, and contact with, key stakeholders.

### **1.3 This report**

- Section 1 describes the programme, what was delivered and learning on governance
- Section 2 describes who was reached by the programme and how, and their views on it
- Section 3 describes learning from delivery
- Section 4 describes the outcomes and impacts of the programme
- Section 5 describes findings on the future needs of the UK voluntary sector around impact.



## SECTION 1: THE INSPIRING IMPACT PROGRAMME

This section describes the context in which delivery of Inspiring Impact started in 2012, and the theory of change underpinning it. What was delivered through the programme, and how it was managed, is also summarised.

### 2. The context for the start of Inspiring Impact

The inception of the Inspiring Impact programme followed two decades during which there was an increasing emphasis on monitoring and evaluation in the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and a development of knowledge and skills to carry it out. Charities Evaluation Services (CES), a joint government and funder initiative, was started in 1990 with an initial UK-based focus on providing resources to develop self-evaluation skills and to encourage a move away from a tick-box approach to reporting. CES was joined during the 1990s by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) and in the 2000s by Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS), both with a similar remit.

This development coincided with, and drew from, a drive to professionalise the voluntary sector, seen also in the development of quality standards and an emphasis on good governance. From 2000-2010, the voluntary sector significantly increased its role in public sector delivery, with a 57% increase in government funding.<sup>3</sup> Government and funders supported big national programmes on evaluation, including the CES National Outcomes Programme (2003-2009), the Performance Hub (2005-2008), the ImpACT coalition (2005-2009), and the National Performance Programme (2008-2011).

While the initial drive to develop learning and improvement through evaluation remained an important theme, the need to demonstrate results and be accountable for commissioned services and contracts led to increasing pressure to develop skills in more sophisticated evaluation techniques, such as SROI, and a concern with measuring longer-term impact as well as individual client outcomes. Effectiveness and efficiency became important drivers throughout the 2008 recession and the subsequent economic fallout. With fewer resources, charities needed robust evidence to compete and to make decisions over strategy, staffing, and priorities.

TNLCF (formerly the Big Lottery Fund, and before that the Community Fund) was a significant funder of outcomes work, while evaluation infrastructure in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland increasingly worked with both independent funders and public sector commissioners on outcomes and the concept of social value. At the same time, there was a further drive to share good practice and tools that could be used across the sector, such as the development of subsector versions of the Outcomes Star, Views and an increasing use of the theory of change.

---

<sup>3</sup> Real terms income from government rose from £11.2bn in 2000/2001 to £17.6bn in 2009/2010, representing a 57% increase in funding. Source: <https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-publications/uk-civil-society-almanac-2021/financials/what-are-the-trends-in-income-from-government/>



Project Oracle, initially emerging from the Greater London Authority's work with young people, promoted a five-level Standards of Evidence Framework.

The arrival of the coalition government in 2010 brought significant changes in thinking, approach, and drivers. Income from government to the UK's charities fell by nearly 9%, or £1.3bn in real terms, between 2010/11 and 2011/12.<sup>4</sup> Overall, public spending fell, with some areas of government spending falling by almost a fifth.<sup>5</sup> With the new government's decentralised approach, previous national outcomes frameworks lost ground, or were defunded, such as Every Child Matters.

Inspiring Impact was established at a moment of hiatus in the voluntary sector, when the sector's existing resources were increasingly in question. It drew together organisations which were already leading on impact, coalescing around a joint programme of activity that continued many of their previous workstreams, such as the outcome champions, shared measurement, and self-evaluation tool development.

Rather than a narrow focus on measurement, Inspiring Impact focused more on 'impact practice': everything an organisation does to understand and improve its impact. This can include planning desired impact, planning how to measure it, collecting information about your impact, making sense of that information, communicating it, and learning from your findings. This provided a needed impetus to continue to integrate impact more fully into other aspects of organisational delivery, such as strategy and planning, governance, leadership, and communications.

From a high point in 2014, trust in charities fell in 2016 and 2018 as several high-profile issues affected charities. More recently the sector has recovered ground, likely spurred by the role of charities and volunteers during the pandemic response.<sup>6</sup>

With a renewed shift to learning and development, a culture of transparency is being adopted with leaders and organisations more openly admitting when things go wrong as part of an important ingredient in public trust.

Although the sector continued to be dominated by small organisations (with 81% of the 166,592 voluntary organisations in the UK having a turnover of less than £100k per year in 2017/18),<sup>7</sup> a focus on impact remained important for demonstrating value for the relatively small number delivering contracts; with government funding continuing to fall as a proportion of the sector's income, charities were competing not just with each other, but with private companies, B Corps, mutuals and cooperatives.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/621-over-1billion-government-income-wiped-from-charities>

<sup>5</sup> Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2015, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/7983>

<sup>6</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1002264/Charity\\_Commission\\_public\\_trust\\_in\\_charities\\_research.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002264/Charity_Commission_public_trust_in_charities_research.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Almanac 2020 (data from 2017/18).



At the same time, there was a significant increase in public giving, with charities and social enterprises needing to tell their story to donors, rather than to demonstrate accountability to funders. As the emphasis shifts further to organisational purpose, they will need to tell the story, not just about what they do and achieve, but also why their model of delivery is worth supporting.

### 3. Inspiring Impact theory of change

The programme theory of change evolved over time, although the theories from all three phases have the same core: changing the UK voluntary sector's awareness, motivation and capability in impact practice. This summary from the phase 2 theory is a helpful overview.



#### 3.1 Key aspects of the approach

The above theory included a number of key aspects:

- the aim of a long-term, permanent change to the capacity of the whole sector
- delivery open to all within the sector
- a focus on evaluation for development, not just accountability
- a focus on wider impact practice, rather than the narrower impact measurement
- delivery of a mix of training, resources and events, all free.

Although the assumptions underpinning the programme were not fully articulated, it is understood that the theory was underpinned by some key ideas.

- It would be more effective to fund a consortium of key players to deliver the programme (rather than funding partners directly) in order to increase reach and consistency.
- The sector needed to be persuaded of the benefits of impact work.
- Motivation would be increased, and behaviours changed, primarily through access to information and resources.
- The sector needed help to identify its needs and then be signposted to support, including having the plethora of available resources brought together under one website.
- The programme should use a mix of approaches to maximise reach across the four nations.
- That the programme would deliver enhanced reach through a cascade approach

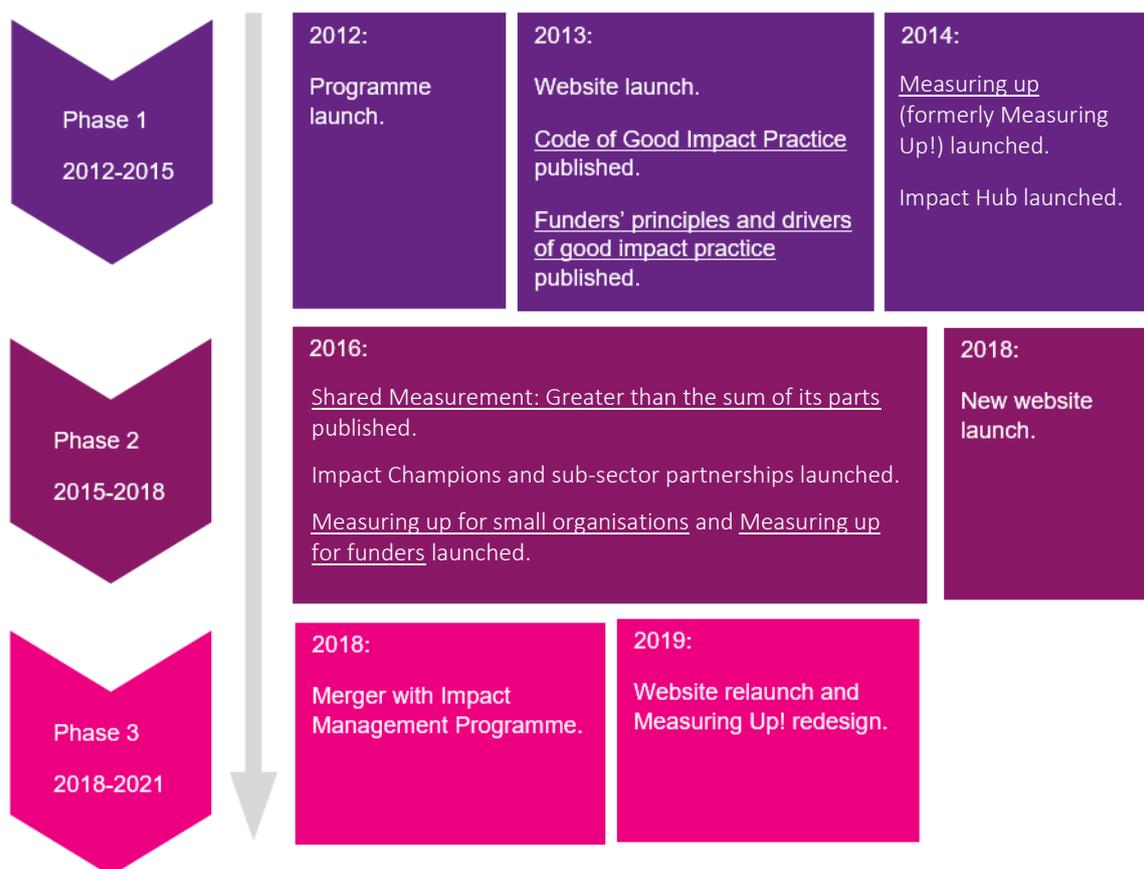


(building capacity in one group, hoping they would spread it through the networks), either through some exemplars (subsector partnerships) or Impact Champions.

- That peer support would be an effective route to change.
- It was important to approach the sector both from the bottom up (via voluntary organisations) and from the top down (through funders, commissioners and leaders).
- That shared measurement would be viable, of interest, and would help make the case for the impact of subsectors.

## 4. The three phases of Inspiring Impact

Inspiring Impact was delivered from 2012 until early 2022. It comprised three phases, as illustrated below.



### 4.1 Phase 1: 2012-2015

In 2012-2015, the initial focus was to develop a range of free, tangible tools and resources for the sector. The first three years were structured around five strands of work, led by different partners.

- **Impact leadership** aimed to help charities and social enterprises know what good impact practice looked like and to encourage good impact leadership. As part of this strand, Inspiring Impact published the *Code of Good Impact Practice* (2013), which set out a



series of principles for organisations to follow.

- **Coordinating support** looked to increase awareness of support available and how to use it. As part of this, Inspiring Impact developed and launched Measuring up (initially called 'Measuring Up!'), a free self-assessment tool allowing organisations to review their current impact practice.
- **Data, tools and systems** created an Inspiring Impact website including an 'Impact Hub', providing access to resources and tools that could be searched according to needs.
- **Shared measurement work** aimed to encourage organisations working towards similar goals to align their measurement and tools. As part of this, Inspiring Impact developed and published a range of resources and guides on shared measurement approaches, such as the 2013 *Blueprint for Shared Measurement*.
- **Support for funders, commissioners and investors** to improve practices and embed a focus on impact into their funding decisions. Resources developed in this strand include the *Funders' Principles and Drivers of Good Impact Practice*.

## 4.2 Phase 2: 2015-2018

In the second phase of funding, the aim of Inspiring Impact shifted to increasing awareness and use of resources, and supporting organisations to develop practice that helped them learn and improve. The programme continued the five original strands of work but also introduced two new key areas of work: the Impact Champions network, and sub-sector partnerships (SSPs).

Impact Champions were recruited to be part of a network of organisations promoting the Inspiring Impact vision. There were 27 Impact Champions by the end of phase 2 of the programme (for more information on the champions, see 6.5.1).

Sub-sector partnerships between 2015 and 2018 were:

- **Visionary** (2015, 2017-18): In 2015, Visionary became a sub-sector partner and worked with NCVO CES and Thomas Pocklington Trust to identify and deliver support needed by the sight loss sector to improve its impact practice. From January 2017-December 2018, five member organisations also worked together to develop a shared measurement framework for charities working in the sight loss sector across the UK. Tailored support was also provided to Birmingham Vision over several months.
- **WCVA** (2017-18): WCVA translated resources into Welsh and created a Wales network, working with 19 County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) across Wales. They delivered training on impact measurement (e.g. theories of change), developed a resource pack with NPC, and supported organisations to implement impact measurement action plans.
- **MIND** (2017-18): MIND worked with NPC to deliver training workshops, develop a shared measurement framework for its children and young people and employment workstreams (piloted by local Minds), and ran mental health Funders Forums.
- **Arts Consortium NI** (2018-19): Worked with CENI to co-design a framework of shared outcomes, indicators and performance measures, to build the impact measurement capacity of arts organisations, and to support them to co-design a local grant programme with local authorities.
- **Child Bereavement Network** (mini-project, March-April 2018): Worked with the



Bereavement Assessment and Evaluation Task Group to bring the adult bereavement sector together to develop a vision for shared measurement.

- **Youth Music** (2017 to 2019): Developed evaluation guidance, a shared measurement pilot, and delivered training to grantees involved in the pilot.
- **What Works Centre for Wellbeing** (2017-18): Ran an evaluation of its microsite, 'Evaluating your impact on wellbeing', which aimed to give advice on planning and delivering a wellbeing evaluation. The evaluation reviewed the site's reach and engagement, in order to make practical improvements.

There were a range of other key activities delivered in this period:

- **NPC published *Shared Measurement: Greater than the Sum of its Parts***. This revisited some of the approaches in the *Blueprint for Shared Measurement* guide, and focused on using shared measurement data to learn and improve. NPC also worked with the Maddox Group to create a set of shared measurement tools piloted by 12 of the Group's charities, with collation and analysis of data in 2018.
- **The development of *Measuring up for small organisations*, and *Measuring up for funders***, through consultation with the sector and funders.
- **Planning for the Inspiring Impact and Impact Management Programme merger**: The Access Foundation Impact Management Programme (IMP) was launched in 2016 and was also managed by NPC. It aimed to build capacity among small charities and social enterprises in England to help them secure contracts through improved impact management. The two programmes had similar intended outcomes and audience and, following a change in direction from the main Access IMP funder, began plans for merger in 2017.

### 4.3 Phase 3: 2018-2021

The third phase of the programme saw the merging of Inspiring Impact with NPC's Impact Management Programme in 2018. The overall aim for this phase of the project was to build online and offline networks and continue developing and delivering online tools and resources to support organisations with their impact practice. One benefit was introducing an external steering group, a structure that had been part of Access IMP. This phase also drew on IMP's focus on peer learning. Some intended work was put on hold in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, while new activities were rapidly developed to meet new needs in the crisis.

Activities in this phase included:

- **Website relaunch in April 2018**, with improved design and functionality, integrating IMP's digital resources, and greater focus on dynamic interactive tools. New content was developed including: the 'Data Diagnostic' (a new self-assessment tool providing tailored guidance on what data to collect and how to use it); updates to the resource library; and 'Impact Stories', showcasing examples of charities experiencing benefits from improving their impact practice.
- Partners from the four nations organised **a range of events** to help organisations in their areas learn (and share learning) about good impact practice.
- **Developing Covid-19 resources**. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Inspiring Impact continued to deliver webinars and peer learning events online and created a Covid-19



support page on the website to signpost organisations to free events and resources. NPC and NCVO also worked with small charities across the UK to write some new 'Impact Stories' on how organisations were adapting impact practice during the crisis.

## 5. Governance

Inspiring Impact was delivered by a consortium, led by NPC. Most consortium partners felt that a coordinating body had been essential to keep the programme focused and coordinated. Many partners noted that some of the outcomes in terms of partner relationships and consistency would not have been achieved without central coordination (see section 14.3).

### 5.1 The partnership

The programme was felt to benefit from experience of partners in Scotland and Northern Ireland in supporting impact practice, bringing fresh thinking, together with experience of the small community and voluntary sector in those two countries and Wales.

Partnership worked at many levels. The core consortium comprised five organisations, with other local partners being subcontracted. This brought challenges, but a consortium partner also described benefits deriving from a 'kind of inclusion of the local perspective, and promotion of local partners' voice and expertise'.

Overall, the 24 interviewees were positive about the programme as a whole. One partner said:

It has been a really positive overall experience. And I greatly appreciated the dedication and thoughtfulness of the different partners, I suppose. ... That's been wonderful to be able to be a part of, so I really appreciate that. (Consortium interviewee)

In general, interviewees from the five consortium partners felt the partnership had worked together well, and that the right people were involved. Some interviewees mentioned the importance of engaging many of the key players in impact work:

[This endorsement] has been very positive in terms of helping the sector understand a sense of 'this is really important because these big organisations all say it', and they all agree on how this should be implemented. (Consortium interviewee)

It was definitely good to have all those organisations together, because they are pretty influential in terms of setting the agenda for practice in the sector. (Interviewee)

Several consortium partner interviewees were impressed that the partnership had held together and remained amicable. The few changes in the partnership over the ten years were thought to have been handled well.

Collaboration between consortium members resulted in tools and resources that emerged from joint production. All consortium partners valued learning from others in the partnership. This



ranged from strategic understanding of what was going on in each other's countries down to the practical details of how to run a theory of change workshop, for example.

A number of interviewees commented that NPC had led the partnership well. After considerable staff turnover earlier in the programme, there was particular praise for the project leads at NPC in phase 3. They were seen as bringing a supportive and collaborative approach, strong project management, and passion and leadership to the programme.

## 5.2 Funding

Total funding for Inspiring Impact over the ten years was around £2.1m ([see appendix 2](#) for a breakdown). Although the programme's ambition was to last ten years, this longevity was by no means certain at the start. In general, funding was for three-year blocks and programme partners struggled to bring in all the additional funding they wanted. For one year the programme was without significant funding, leaving the programme to 'get by on fumes', as one respondent put it. It is possible this funding pattern may have occasionally limited the ability of the consortium to fully plan with a ten-year strategy in mind.

## 5.3 Work across the four nations

The partnership approach, working across four countries and different regions, brought benefits in terms of skills and reach, and improved outcomes in terms of partner relationships and consistency of impact approach (see 14.3.2). It also brought understanding of local context, reach into communities and the ability to deliver in ways appropriate to local need.

### 5.3.1 Northern Ireland

Different arrangements were in place in Northern Ireland for the first two phases of the programme. Endowed by the then Big Lottery Fund (now TNLFCF) to build the sector in Northern Ireland, Building Change Trust (BCT) chose to partner with Inspiring Impact, creating and funding Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland in 2014. BCT then subcontracted CENI to deliver the Inspiring Impact programme. Although funded separately, the two parts of Inspiring Impact worked closely for most of the time, having largely shared goals, shared planning and some shared delivery.

Phase 1 of Inspiring Impact NI, 'Planning for Impact', was a one-year programme with 13 voluntary organisations receiving funding to deliver impact support. Phase 2 was a two-year programme working with seven voluntary organisations and five arts infrastructure organisations.

In 2018, when BCT closed, Inspiring Impact NI became part of the Inspiring Impact UK-wide programme, with Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) as the Northern Ireland partner. CENI remained a partner until it closed in March 2020, with Community Development and Health Network (CDHN) taking over for the remainder of the programme.

We understand that total funding from BCT for the first two years of Inspiring Impact NI was



£688K (of which £188 was from the Department for Social Development). Inspiring Impact then funded CENI and later CDHN for £38K in total (approx. £16K to CDHN).

The withdrawal of BCT funding and the later closure of CENI appear to have led to a loss of momentum in Northern Ireland. One respondent said: 'when BCT went, the appetite went with it'.

Inspiring Impact NI subcontracted to multiple partners. In CENI's phase 2 end-of-project report, they noted that this had created confusion at times, particularly where delivery organisations were targeting the same organisations:

It is possible that one organisation e.g. CENI delivering a Northern Ireland wide programme utilising all the resources available could have had more impact on supporting the sector to embed impact practice. (CENI phase 2 end-of-project report)

### 5.3.2 England

Total funding for England-based programme delivery (NPC, CES, SVUK, NCVO), was £654K. This excludes management costs and funding to England-based partners who were doing nationally relevant work (Substance, ACF, ACEVO).

As well as coordinating the programme and with responsibility for communications and promotion, **NPC** led on shared measurement throughout Inspiring Impact.

**CES and NCVO** were separate delivery partners until their merger in 2014, with responsibility for producing resources, including Measuring up, Measuring up for funders and Measuring up for small organisations. CES was responsible for delivering subsector work with Visionary, while NCVO had responsibility for leadership. In phase 3, NCVO became more of a strategic partner, helping guide the programme and extend reach, also creating several resources during this phase.

In phase 3, SVUK was the primary English frontline Inspiring Impact delivery agent, using subcontracted local partners to help convene and run events.

It's not without its issues, but something that I'm proud of ... was the partner model. For us to even begin to understand and offer services that could speak to and meet the needs of different charities in different localities, doing that in a way that was promoting and including the voices of local partners was a really important part of the programme.

### 5.3.3 Scotland

ESS, the main infrastructure organisation providing evaluation support in Scotland, was a consortium partner throughout the programme, receiving grants totalling £159K. As part of Inspiring Impact, they continued a focus on accessible approaches for small community groups and links with funders, running events and resources.



### **5.3.4 Wales**

In phase 1 WCVA led a subsector partnership, working with 19 Welsh County Voluntary Councils to improve their impact practice (see case example in 6.5.3).

WCVA became part of the consortium in 2018, with funding of £53K in total during 2017-2021, rapidly developing its reach from 97 attendees at events during 2018/19, to 556 in 2021.



## SECTION 2: PROGRAMME USE

This section describes who was reached through Inspiring Impact and how, and their views on the programme. We also discuss the marketing and promotion of the programme.

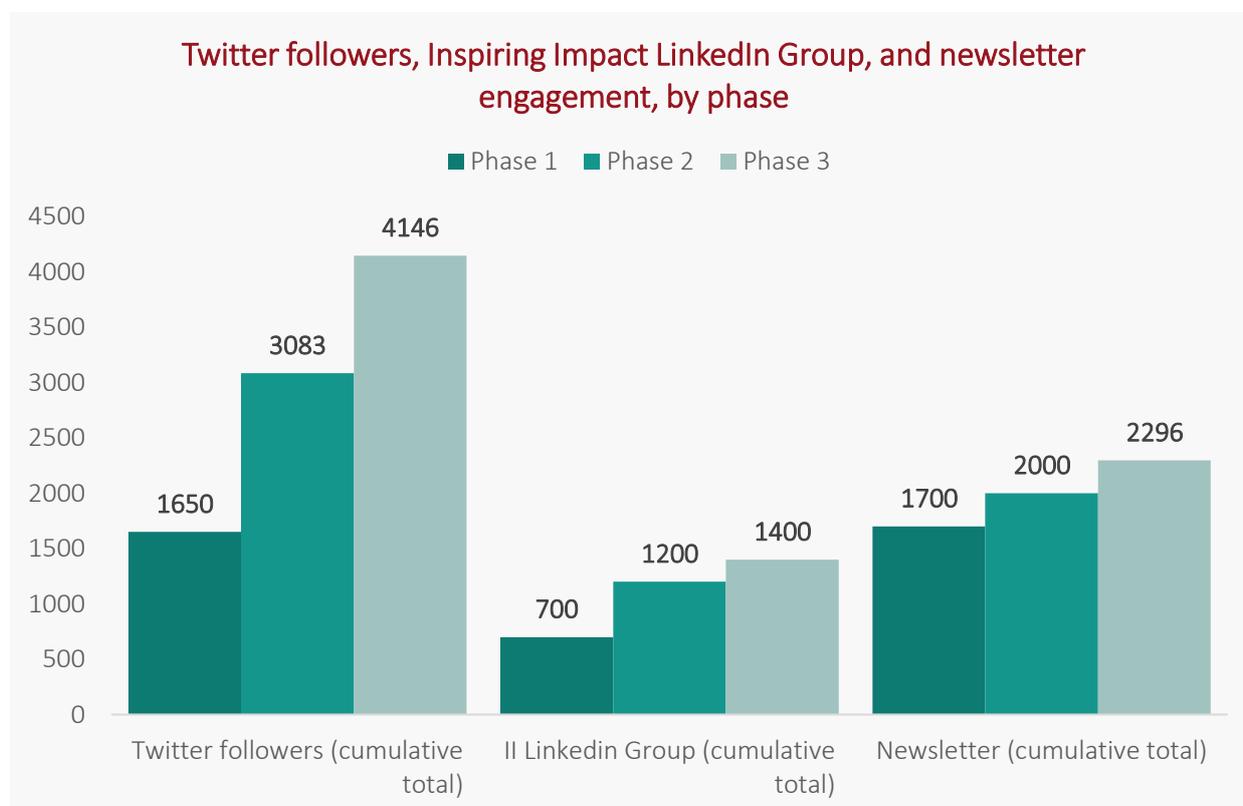
### 6. How users were reached

Given the scale of the funding for Inspiring Impact (£2.1m over ten years, see 14.4.2), the programme's social media reach, and that for events, was good. The website did well in the first two phases, but the number of users was disappointing in phase 3.

The programme trialled a range of ways of cascading learning through the sector. There were some very successful examples of this approach but, overall, results were felt to be mixed, leading to a move away from most cascade models. Our survey showed some evidence that perhaps more learning had been shared through the sector than previously thought.

#### 6.1 Social media

Twitter,<sup>8</sup> LinkedIn and newsletter engagement in Inspiring Impact was good, increasing (albeit relatively slowly) throughout the programme's three phases, as seen in the chart below.

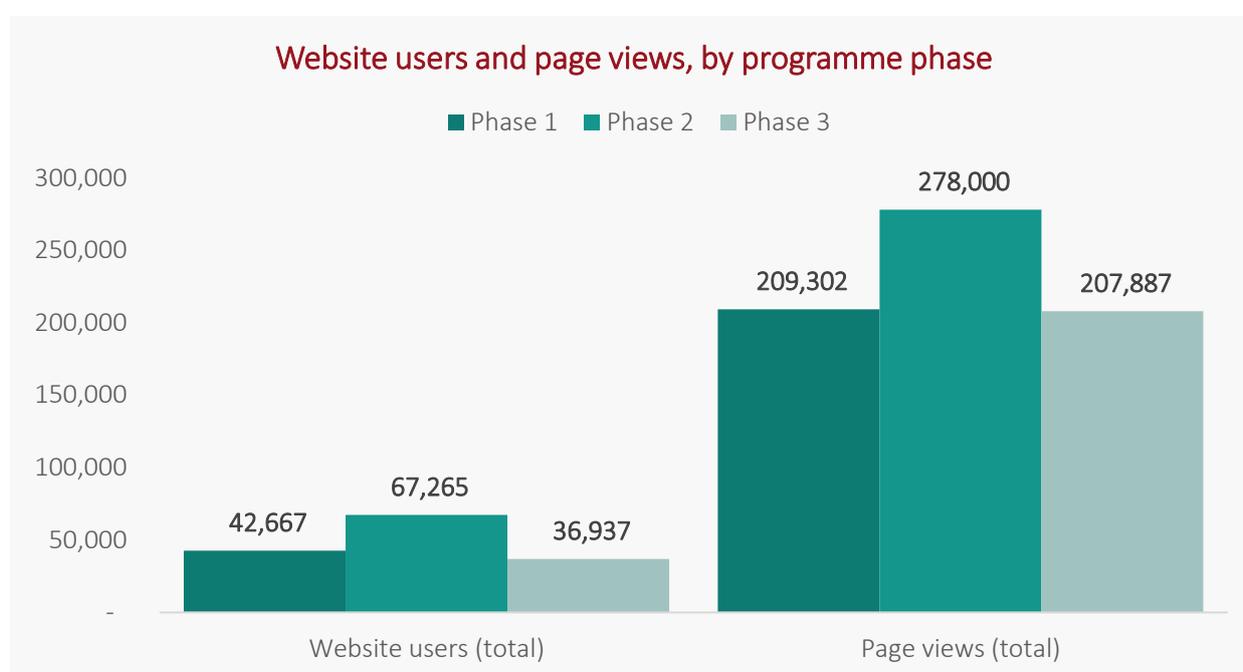


<sup>8</sup> There was also an Inspiring Impact NI Twitter account that closed in 2019.



## 6.2 Website users

The Inspiring Impact website<sup>9</sup> reached around 43K people in phase 1, 67K in phase 2, and 37K in phase 3 (see chart below). Information on the data source is limited but we assume these are unique users.



Monthly averages were 1,580 for phase 1, 1,868 for phase 2, and 1,192 for phase 3 (see chart below).

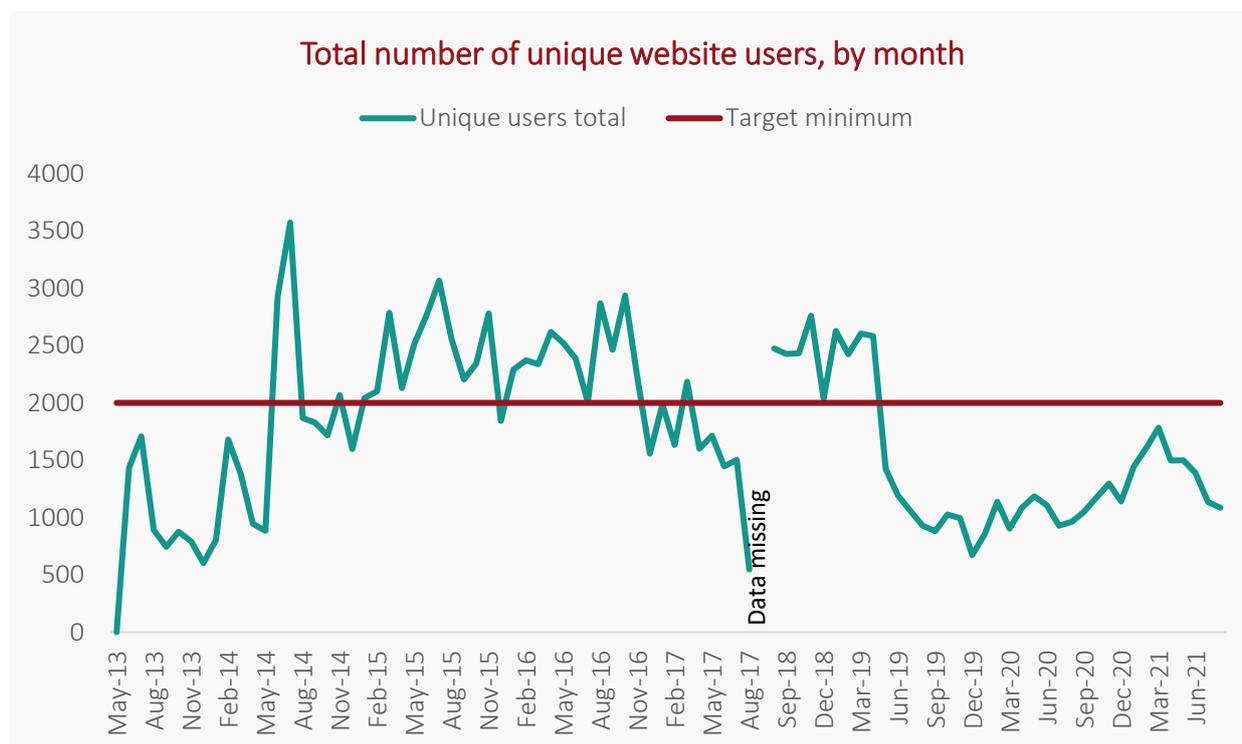
Gathering and comparing web statistics over a long period can be problematic for any programme. Because of the way Google tracking works, statistics cannot be aggregated across the phases without double counting an unknown amount of people.<sup>10</sup> It is also possible that there is within-phase double counting for this reason. There are also other ways in which people may be erroneously counted as new users.<sup>11</sup> Monthly unique users (see chart below) may be more accurate; these also cannot be aggregated across months.

Total unique users were compared against monthly targets which changed over time, from 'over 2,000' to '700 with 5% increase per month'. The monthly total first crossed 2,000 unique users in June 2014, and stayed consistently above the minimum target from January 2015, until December 2016 marked the start of a decline. Data is missing between September 2017 to August 2018, but monthly figures stayed strong above 2,000 from August 2018 until May 2019, when numbers dropped significantly (coinciding with the website change) and consistently stayed below the minimum target from that time on.

<sup>9</sup> There was also an Inspiring Impact NI website. We understand this merged with the main II website in phase 3.

<sup>10</sup> We understand that Google tracking works on a two-year timeframe, so if someone accessed the website once in 2012 and then again in 2015, they would be counted as new visitors each time.

<sup>11</sup> There are also other possible sources of double counting. People are counted as new visitors if they browse incognito, clear their cache, or use multiple devices.



Bounce rate data (how many users leave the site after only viewing one page) and return user data is available from August 2018.

- A target maximum bounce rate of 55% was set for the programme. Bounce rate was mostly under this threshold until February 2021.
- The programme set a target of 20% return users, aiming for a good balance of new and returning visitors. Return users largely remained within 20% to 26% of all users, except between May and August 2019, when they rose to 32% to 33% temporarily.

### 6.2.1 What is 'good' website use?

It is hard to say what is 'good' for website usage: it depends on the purpose of the site, its target audience and its context. It is also true that Inspiring Impact's potential audience is finite and there would be, theoretically at least, a saturation point.

We give two comparisons of website resources on impact:

- NCVO's Knowhow website impact pages: during 2019, there were about 3.8k users, 4.5k sessions, and 18.8k pageviews. These figures may not provide a fair comparison, as the impact pages are hidden within a comprehensive website.
- The statistics from the ESS website may be a fairer comparison. We do not have access to exactly the same data, but in 2019 the ESS website was accessed for 42,452 sessions, or £3.5kpcm.<sup>12</sup> Of these 64% (27,164) were new users, while the rest were returning visitors.

<sup>12</sup> A session is a visit from one person accessing several pages at a particular time.



The Inspiring Impact statistics for website usage do appear relatively low, given the ambition for the resources. In particular, it is a shame that the third phase is so low, given that this phase more or less corresponded to the much improved third website iteration.

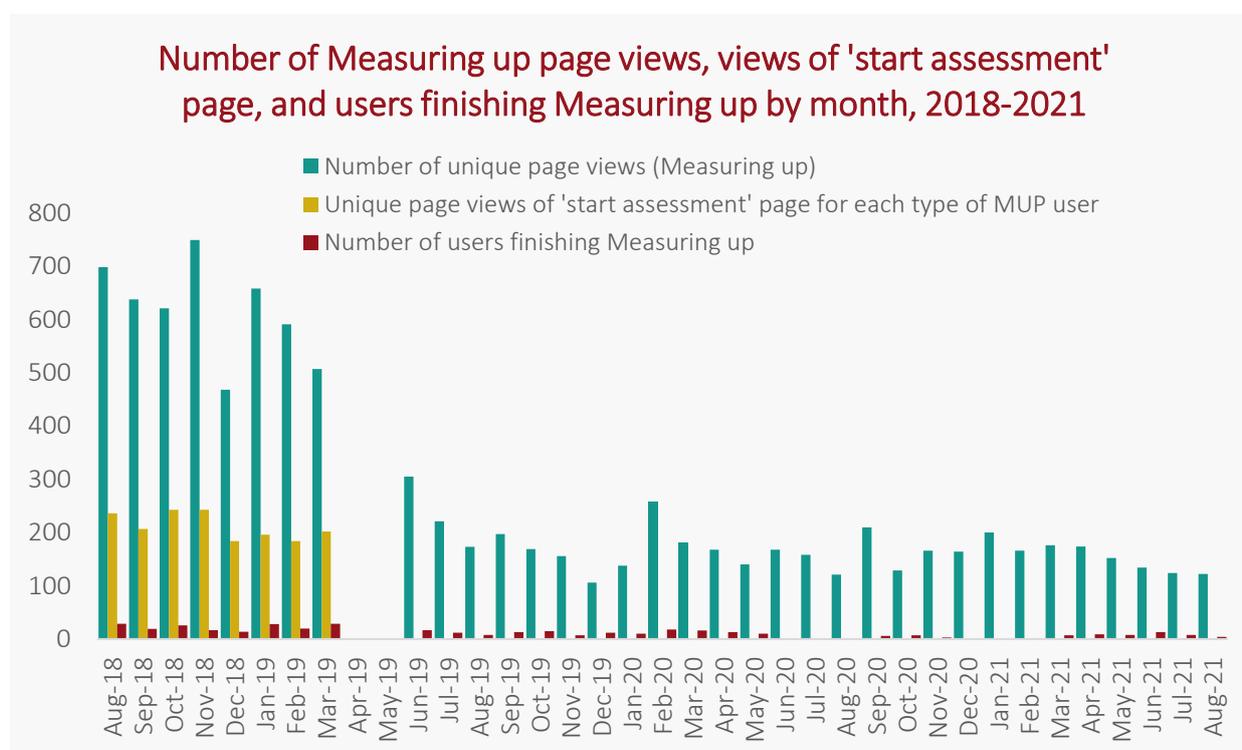
## 6.3 Measuring up

Data on Measuring up (MUP) for the first two phases is patchy and unclear, so we do not include it in any detail here. In the 2018-21 data, data is missing for April and May 2019 (this gap presumably related to the website migration) but, otherwise, monthly data is available.

Overall, engagement with MUP dropped off during 2018-21. The data available for the period 2013-17 indicates a similar trend, with the exception of a spike in use in 2016. Small numbers of people actually completed MUP; from August 18-May 20, on average 16.5 people completed MUP per month; from June 20-August 21 the average had dropped to 4.5pcm. However, feedback from users of MUP was good (see 8.2 below).

The chart below shows the total views of MUP, the 'start assessment' page, and total users finishing MUP. The data indicates that the 'start assessment' page was no longer live from April 2019 onwards.

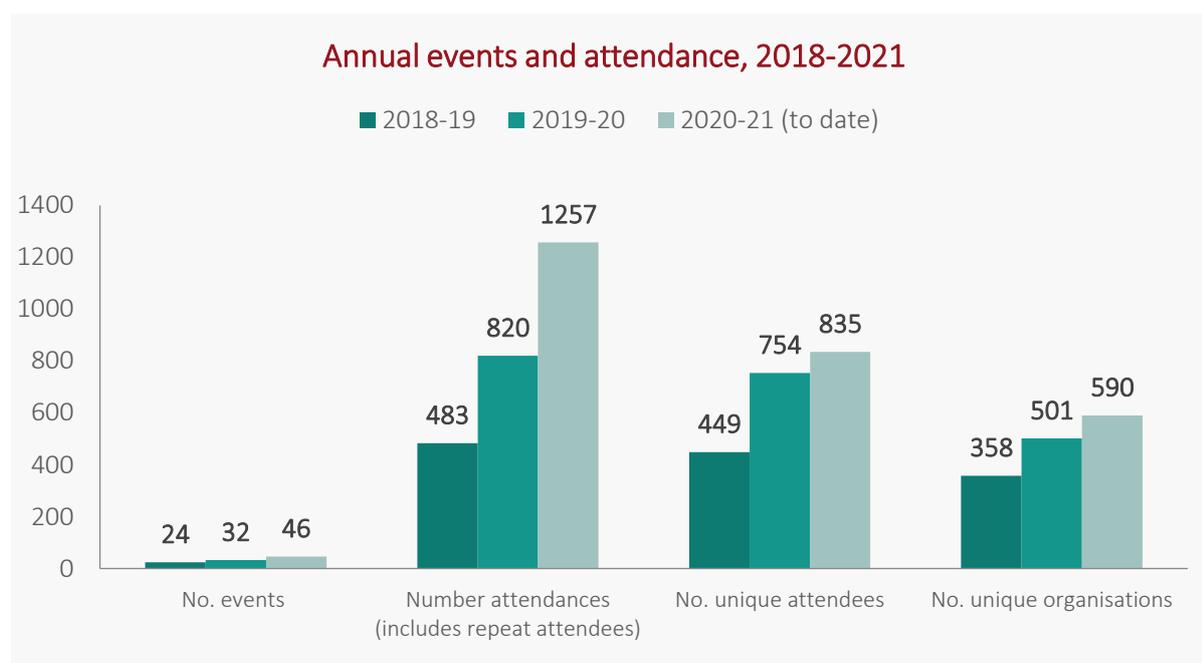
Data available from August 2020 (we assume this is a snapshot; n=97) indicated that those using MUP were small organisations. Only 9% had an over-£1m annual turnover; 48% of users were in the £10K - £100K category; 27% were £100K - £1m.





## 6.4 Inspiring Impact events

Events were run by partners in all countries. Complete data only exists for 2018-21: during this period reach for events was good (see chart below). Over the three years, partners ran 102 events, with 2,560 attendances. These had an average of 853 attendances per year, with an average 679 unique attendees, representing 483 organisations (attendees can overlap each year).



Data from ESS is more complete.<sup>13</sup> In total, during the period 2013-2021, ESS reported 32 events, with 712 attendances by 551 unique attendees from 379 unique organisations.

## 6.5 The cascade approach

From the start, Inspiring Impact tried to increase programme reach through cascade models, building capacity in one group, hoping they would spread it through their networks. In particular this was trialled through Impact Champions, SSPs and infrastructure organisations, sharing learning and resources with these groups in the hope they would disseminate their learning.

Inspiring Impact's monitoring and reporting data on the reach of the programme through cascade-type approaches is very limited. However, the detail available from some SSPs (see case study on Sported below) shows that well-targeted Inspiring Impact resources through a subsector partnership project could result in significant positive outcomes.

Overall, the cascade model had mixed success; the Impact Champions and SSPs were not thought to have cascaded as much had been hoped (see 9.2 for further discussion of this),

<sup>13</sup> Data for phase 1 from NPC appears complete but phase 2 is uncertain. No pre 2018 data exists from other organisations/countries. SVUK and WCVA were only involved later in the programme; all data from CENI was lost when it closed.



resulting in the phasing out of both programmes. However, our 2021 research provides some evidence that perhaps more cascading took place than was originally thought. Champions responding to our survey reported still sharing learning on impact, two years after the champions programme officially closed. Consultants were also using Inspiring Impact to improve their own support on impact to the sector, and voluntary sector organisations in general also reported sharing their learning.

### 6.5.1 Impact Champions

By 2018, there were 27 organisations signed up to the Impact Champion network in England, with anyone from an Impact Champion organisation able to attend network learning events. By December 2021, there were 36 Impact Champions still signed up, although some of these may have been inactive.<sup>14</sup> In Northern Ireland, the Impact Practice Network had 13 members. In Scotland the network was informal, with all events open.

From 2018-19 there were nine events for champions across the programme, with 42 attendances by 23 unique attendees. Attendance was slightly lower than target.

An NPC survey in 2018 provides a profile of Impact Champions, from 13 respondents.

- Eight indicated they were charities, five were social enterprises, and three were trusts or foundations.
- Six were membership organisations or umbrella bodies, five were funders, four were infrastructure organisations.
- All of them were UK based and many operated in more than one region.
- Most organisations were of medium size, with five at a turnover of £100K to £1m and another five at £1m to £10m.
- The surveyed respondents were mostly in a managerial role (six), while five were Chief Executive Officers or Directors, and two were Senior Managers.

It should be noted that the 13 respondents were a limited sample of the total active Impact Champions at that time, as were the 16 respondents to our 2021 survey. A profile drawn from only half or less than the total network can only provide an incomplete picture.

### 6.5.2 Engaging with the network

It was intended that Impact Champions would bring both a deep engagement with their own networks and a dedication to improving impact practice in their sector. Of the 15 responses to an Impact Champions survey in September 2017, two Champions said that until then capacity issues had prevented them from engaging with the Champions network, and another expressed difficulty in using the network to any benefit.

We are very well-disposed towards Inspiring Impact and what the network is trying to do. It's just that, so far, we haven't managed to work out a way that you could help us or vice versa! (2017 survey respondent)

---

<sup>14</sup> Inactive Impact Champions have not been taken off the list.



While some Champions responding to the 2017 survey did find it useful to hear how others engaged in impact practice, there were some reservations expressed about learning through the network when there were different levels of skills.

To be brutally honest, we haven't got a huge amount out of the network so far although we have made a couple of connections at meetings we've attended. (2017 survey respondent)

I can't think of any concrete examples of where we've directly used learning from the network in our organisations. (2017 survey respondent)

Despite this, NPC's 2018 survey of 13 Impact Champions had positive feedback, with many respondents mentioning Impact Champion events, and sharing resources and experiences with each other and other organisations, as the most useful activities. The responses also suggested the importance of partnership and collaboration to the Impact Champions.

Some of the first events I attended felt like they were the most useful, as there were lots of active participants and there seemed to be momentum to work together as a group of like-minded organisations working in different sectors. Latterly the events have been informative, but it has not felt so much as if there was a broader collaborative change agenda in them to me. (2018 survey respondent)

Similar messages were found from some 2021 evaluation informants. In interview, Sported (a subsector partner and Impact Champion) said it had been useful to hear from other organisations and to share learning. As in the 2017 survey responses, they had found that Champions meetings were more useful when attended by participants with a similarly high level of impact capability; some of the more entry-level meetings had been less useful.

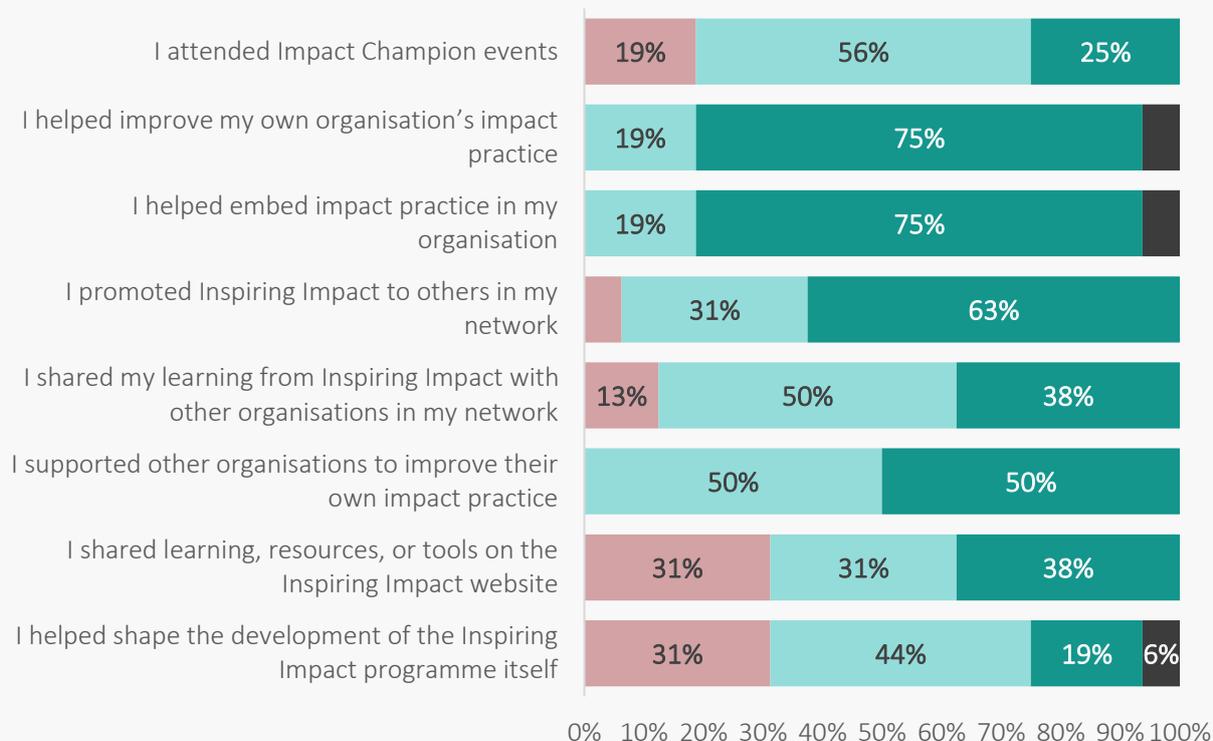
### **Impact Champions looking back**

The 16 Impact Champions who responded to our 2021 survey (who were, we can assume, some of the most engaged) reported a good amount of sharing activity during the programme, as shown in the chart below. Interestingly, only a quarter 'frequently' attended Impact Champion events and just over one-third 'frequently' shared their learning from Inspiring Impact with other organisations in their network – the main intended role for Champions. Half frequently supported organisations to improve their impact practice and three-quarters frequently helped improve their own organisation's practice – activities that many would have already been doing.



### 2021 survey: Impact Champion activities (n=16)

■ Never ■ Occasionally ■ Frequently ■ Don't know



These Impact Champions are still reporting a fair amount of sharing of learning now (see 13.3).

### 6.5.3 Infrastructure users

Programmes of work in Northern Ireland and Wales explicitly focused on infrastructure as a means of cascading knowledge, although this was not the case in Scotland or England. Some participants at our November 2021 evaluation findings workshop reflected that perhaps Inspiring Impact could have engaged infrastructure more. The NICVA and BAVO case studies below demonstrate how effective this model could be for some users.

#### NICVA – working through generic infrastructure in Northern Ireland

Thirteen organisations in Northern Ireland had grant funding through Inspiring Impact (via CENI) to support local groups. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) was one of these groups. NICVA delivered their masterclasses all over Northern Ireland, coordinating with some of the other 13 grantees, for example Volunteer Now.

In phase 1, NICVA cascaded learning to their groups, running one or two half-day sessions a month for a couple of years, with between 12-25 people attending each time. In total, 64 people from over 40 organisations attended, with many repeat attenders. Sessions were held on a range of evaluation topics, with expert speakers and case studies. NICVA referred



participants to CENI for one-to-one support, and supported seven organisations directly. NICVA also themselves participated in peer learning convened by CENI, involving around 15 other key groups, including Sported.

In phase 2, again funded through CENI, NICVA worked with five organisations supported in phase 1 to further embed their impact practice. They also ran five masterclasses attended by 52 people from 45 organisations, focusing on introducing Inspiring Impact and completing MUP.

This work brought about considerable benefits for NICVA, described in 14.3.1.

Some cascading via infrastructure has happened indirectly, with infrastructure users drawing on Inspiring Impact in their work. For example, the Foundation for Social Improvement (FSI) has started offering more impact-focused training courses, at least some of which are based directly on Inspiring Impact materials.

Inspiring Impact was also used a fair amount by consultants; indeed 10% of our survey respondents were from this group. One commented that their own approach was already one of learning and development, but Inspiring Impact had provided valuable resources:

I think Inspiring Impact has been invaluable as a resource for clients, for learners on courses I teach, etc. Without Inspiring Impact I would have had to put together resources myself or link to less accessible and probably less useful ones. (Survey respondent)

#### 6.5.4 Members of the wider voluntary sector

In our survey, apart from the Impact Champions, there were members of the wider VCS who reported a change in the extent to which they shared learning on impact. Of the 127 VCS members telling us about this, 74% said there had been a positive change over the last decade (24% a strong positive change), as compared with 94% of our small sample of Impact Champions.

##### **BAVO – success in cascading learning**

In phase 1, WCVA led an SSP working with the 19 Welsh CVCs to:

- train them as theory of change trainers
- support them to improve their own impact practice.

BAVO (the Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations),<sup>15</sup> one of the 19 CVCs involved in the project, attended around 10 or 11 workshops on impact practice run by WCVA. An interviewee from BAVO found the workshops helpful, if a bit of a ‘mixed bag’. She took information from the workshops into training packages for BAVO’s membership – voluntary sector organisations in Bridgend in Wales; she then ran six or seven sessions over the year

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bavo.org.uk/>



prior to September 2021, each with 12 to 15 people attending.

### Outcomes for BAVO members

As a result of the support on impact given by BAVO staff to members, some have been able to better demonstrate their reach, outcomes and impact when reporting to funders. BAVO has been able to use this information to make the case for further funding for sector initiatives.

### Outcomes for BAVO

The Inspiring Impact support reassured the interviewee that she already had some of the knowledge from previous work with outcomes based accountability (OBA); however, it helped her 'drag it back out'. It also gave her confidence, knowledge and inspiration to put further energy into helping people to understand impact and how to gather the necessary evidence.

*I have been inspired by Inspiring Impact workshops! Yes I am excited, because I think that's demonstrated the value of it really, and the importance.*

She acknowledged she might have obtained the information on impact practice elsewhere by researching around, but not as efficiently as the experience of using the Inspiring Impact knowledge hub. Inspiring Impact had also inspired her to run impact workshops herself.

Knowledge she had acquired through the workshops had also helped her pass on new skills to colleagues in developing BAVO's own case studies, which were needed for reporting to funders.

*So I've been able to utilise some of the knowledge that I've gained, to help others to develop their case studies to understand what case studies are. ... I've delivered internal training for staff around case studies and measuring impact and aspects like that.*

BAVO have also seen an improvement in the quality of the case studies provided by their own grantees, following training on case studies – which will help them when applying for future funding.

## 7. Who Inspiring Impact reached

### 7.1 Size of organisation

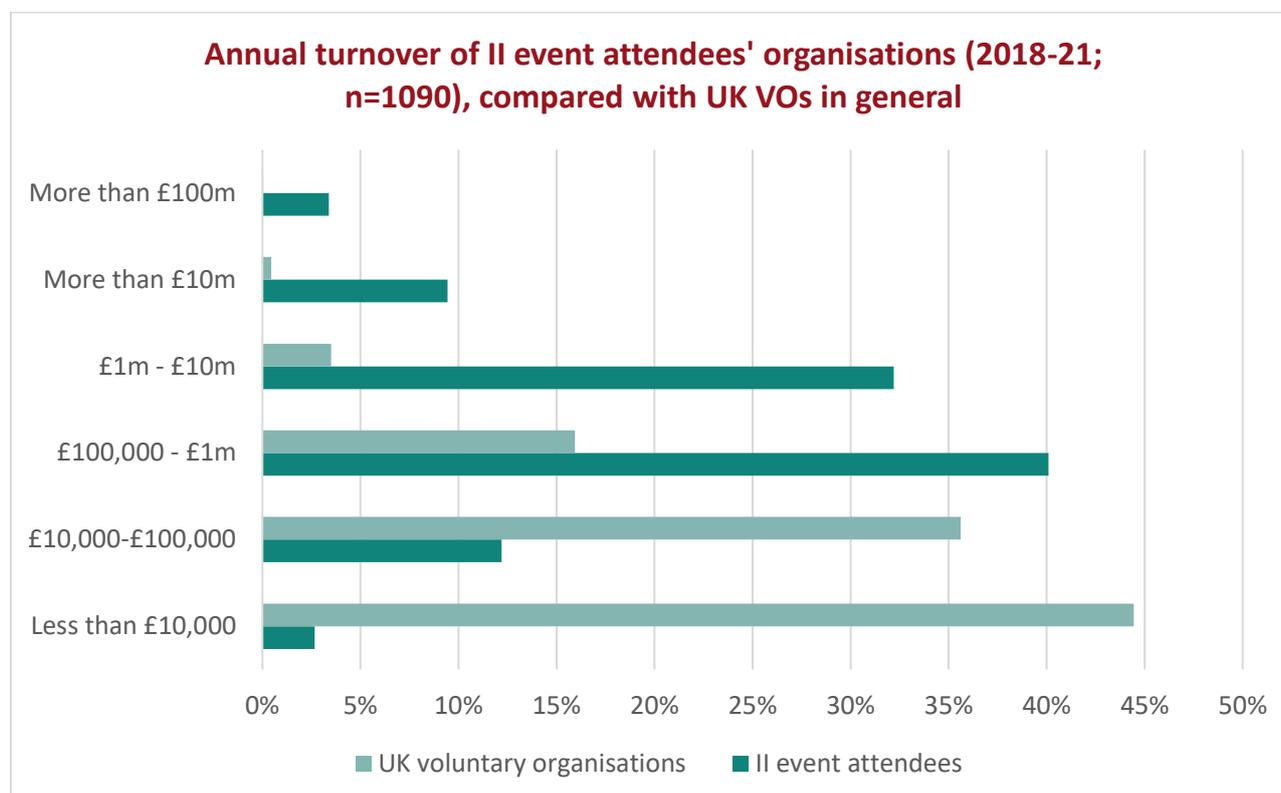
Partner interviewees reported a perception that Inspiring Impact had not reached small organisations. This discussion is hampered by lack of a clear agreement as to the definition of 'small' organisations in this context (see also 10.1.3) and our data is limited. However, compared with UK charities in general,<sup>16</sup> Inspiring Impact events were indeed disproportionately attended by larger charities (see chart below). The participation by so many of the largest charities is

<sup>16</sup> Data from 2018/19, in the 2021 Almanac: <https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-publications/uk-civil-society-almanac-2021/profile/>



surprising.

Despite this, there was a reasonable participation by smaller charities in events: 3% of attendees' organisations were charities under £10K, and 15% under £100K.<sup>17</sup> More participation by tiny charities was perhaps unrealistic given the nature of Inspiring Impact resources.



Data on 97 MUP users in 2020 suggests that 89% of its users had a turnover of under £1m per annum, and 58% under £100K.

## 7.2 Repeat users and self-sustaining networks

In phase 3, effort was put into building self-sustaining networks of people interested in impact. All the consortium partners reported that there was good repeat attendance at events (see 6.4 above); however, most did not sense that a network as such had been created. This was not seen as problematic, in part because any networking activity was seen as valuable, and because networking through Inspiring Impact could feed into existing networks.

I'm okay with that. I think that's, you know, that was a nice idea. But it's probably more important just to say, in this moment, at this time, I've networked with people in the sector, and I've learned something and that's enough. (Consortium interviewee)

We are a relatively small team with a social value focus. So what I'd much rather be doing in my role is feeding in the social value expertise piece into all the existing networks out there that are already supporting people with impact practice.

<sup>17</sup> It is not known if this data includes repeat users. This data was available for charities only.

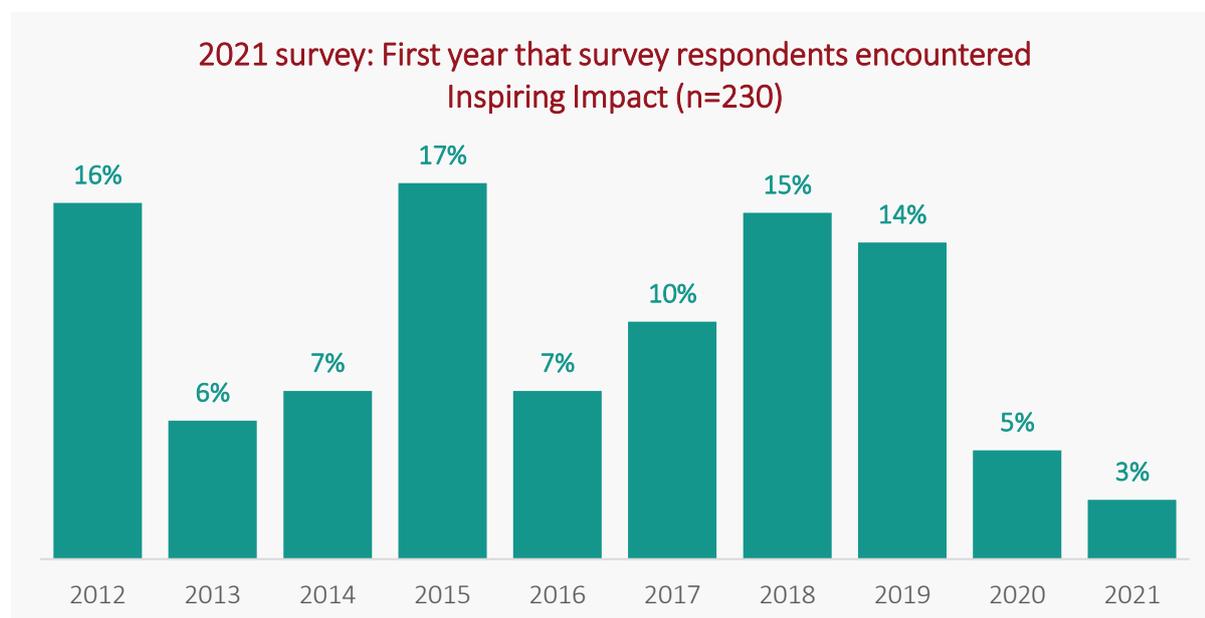


(Consortium interviewee)

WCVA reported having created an impact group for the Welsh CVCs, and an embryonic Impact Working Group for organisations very engaged in impact work across Wales.

While the programme has not built many self-sustaining networks, those responding to our 2021 survey reflected a healthy long-term following among at least some of Inspiring Impact's audience. One survey respondent explained that, for them, the Inspiring Impact website and resources provided both a starting point and somewhere to return to.

Of the 16 Impact Champions that responded to our survey, almost 70% had signed up as a Champion during 2016-2018. In our survey, 16% of all respondents reported first having encountered the programme in 2012 (see chart below).



One survey respondent had been a user of Inspiring Impact since early in the programme, and was still using the materials, which they found 'absolutely brilliant':

I used to explain that Inspiring Impact was funded by BIG Lottery and Cabinet Office back when that was the case. ... The sign up to show commitment as an organisation to the principles was great. I encouraged people to use that in their funding applications. The partner organisations involved and the staff quality really made it. (Survey respondent)

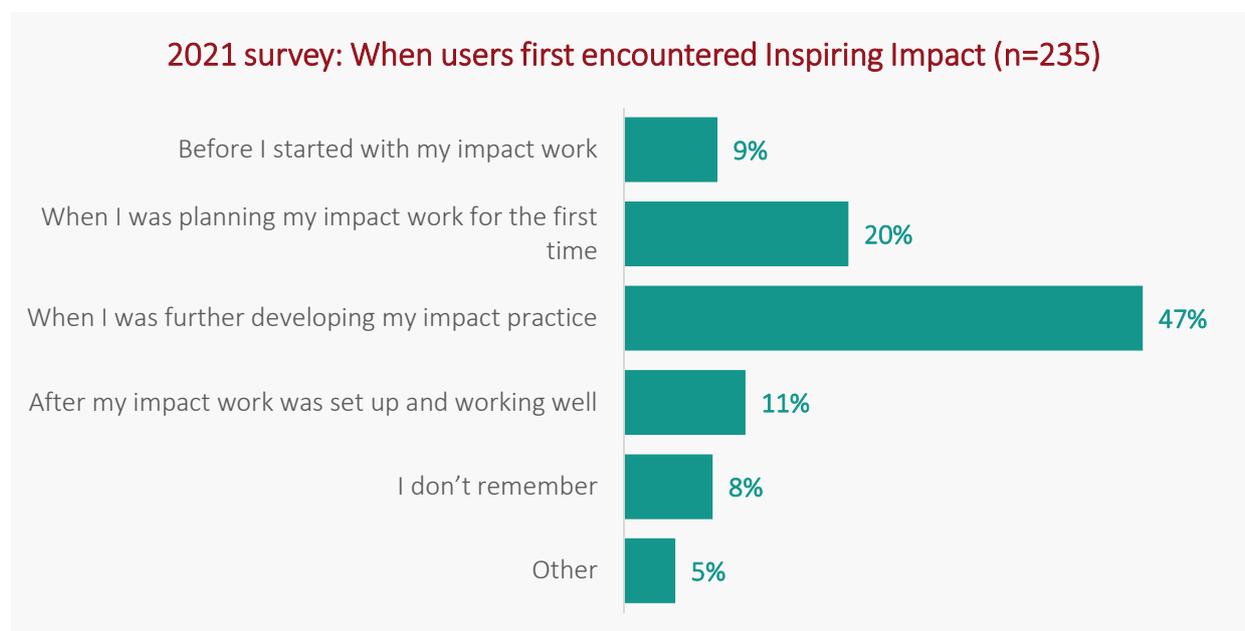
### 7.3 Stage in impact development

Some partners noted that a certain amount of prior knowledge and motivation was required for users to engage with the programme in the first place, and this was reflected by the survey respondent group.

The chart below shows that a minority of survey respondents – just under one-tenth –



encountered Inspiring Impact at the beginning of their impact journey, while the large majority were in the process of developing their impact practice, or their impact work was well established and working well.



## 7.4 Professional evaluators

Several consortium partners reported that evaluation professionals in particular had benefited from their Inspiring Impact events. Data on event attendees, 2018-21, shows that of 1,681 attendees, 8% were evaluation practitioners; a further 5% were in research or policy.

A former member of the Charity Evaluation Working Group (ChEW) reported that the large network of people involved during her time at ChEW nearly all knew about Inspiring Impact. One consortium partner explained that a lot of their peer-learning events were attended by evaluation professionals, many of them benefiting from meeting people they could learn from, and from the reassurance that they were not the only ones struggling with issues.

It is not possible from the available outcomes data, due to small samples, to find conclusive evidence as to whether evaluation practitioners benefited more or less than other groups. However, evidence from a small number of respondent evaluators indicates this may have had a significant effect for them at least.

As a not-for-profit consultancy we've benefited from drawing on the Inspiring Impact resources in our own work as well as directing others towards them. Some of the materials you produced e.g. theory of change were particularly helpful. It also felt good to meet with peers, share good practice, learn and contribute to the case studies.  
(Survey respondent)

In an unsolicited plaudit sent in 2021 to the Inspiring Impact website, a quality and impact manager said:



In the last few years, Inspiring Impact has been a constant guide in my professional journey through the impact world. It has helped to cement ideas, concepts and tools related to monitoring and evaluation, all of which I have used in the impact-related roles I've held. It has helped to clarify terms which are so often shrouded in confusion. When I have felt lost in the processes of monitoring and evaluation, I come back to the trusty four stages – plan, measure, assess, review. When I have felt lost in data, I come back to the five types of data which break it down in such a useful way. In a previous role, I supported small organisations with impact and evaluation, and the resource that I always signposted them to was Inspiring Impact because of the simplicity and clarity of information. Now as I become the 'impact expert' in my new organisation I continue to use Inspiring Impact to help remind me what's important and what best practice looks like. Thank you for creating such a valuable resource!

## 7.5 Leaders

An important part of changing culture was to involve leaders from all parts of the VCS. There are two difficulties in reaching conclusions about relative participation in Inspiring Impact by leaders and by frontline staff: those responding to surveys might not reflect actual participation; secondly, the data available is unlikely to reflect a true picture across the programme, or to identify differences by country or region, for example.

Data that is available on Inspiring Impact events, 2018-2021, shows that Inspiring Impact events overall were attracting a fairly good number of leaders. Of 1,681 attendances during that period (double counting of individuals is likely):

- 2% were trustees
- 17% were directors or CEOs
- 21% were managers
- 28% were frontline delivery staff
- 11% were back office staff, e.g. communications or fundraising.

Most of the consortium partners felt that, in retrospect, Inspiring Impact might have engaged leaders more. Early attempts by the programme to create interest among CEOs were not very successful. One consortium partner reported that, in their country at least, trustees were increasingly presenting barriers to developing impact practice.

## 8. Views on Inspiring Impact resources

Data in this section is all from our 2021 survey unless otherwise stated.

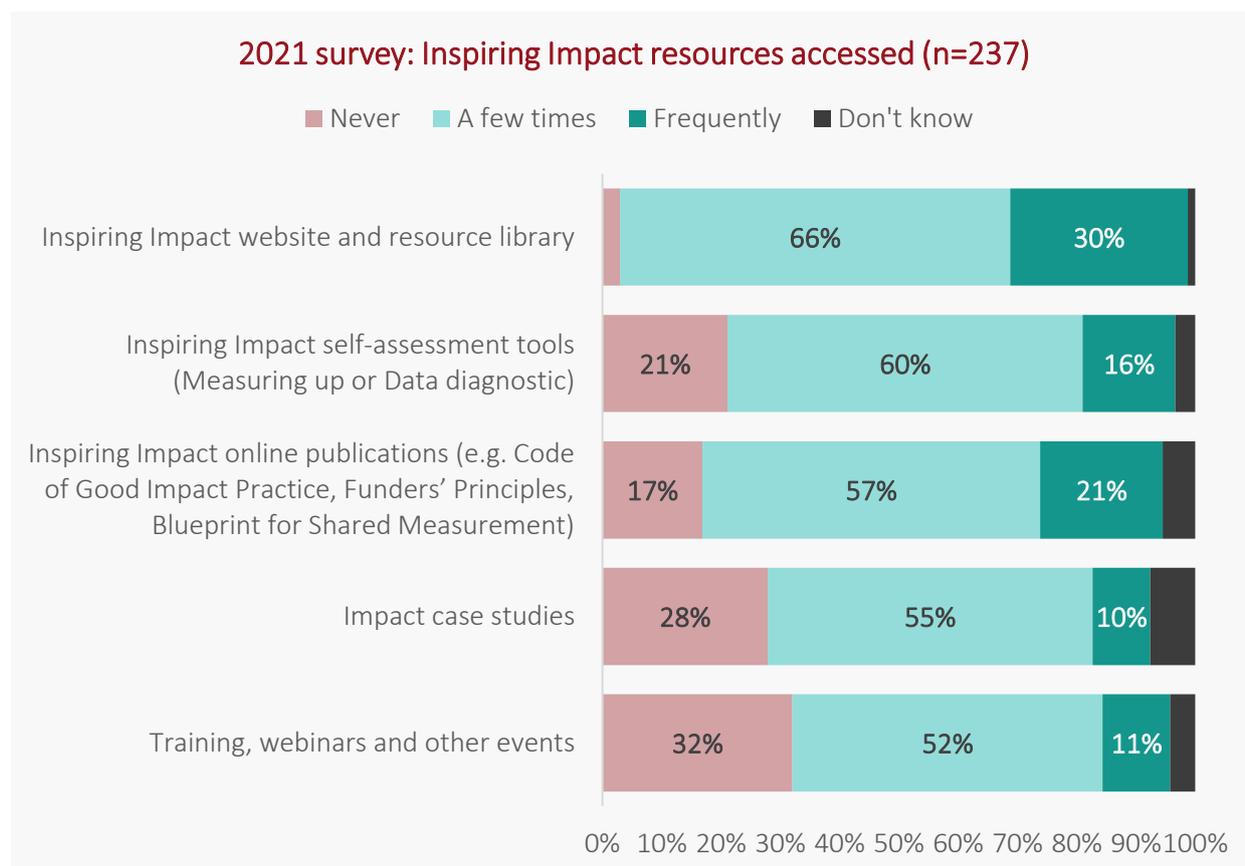
### 8.1 Inspiring Impact resources accessed

Survey respondents reported the website and resource library as the Inspiring Impact resources accessed most often, with 30% accessing them 'frequently' (n = 237). Website data shows that for the period for which data is available, from August 2018, these were the most often viewed



webpages, at least until the Covid-19 pandemic.

The chart below shows that most respondents had accessed the resources ‘a few times’. Apart from the website and resource library as a whole, the main resources accessed ‘frequently’ by survey respondents were online publications (21%) and the self-assessment tools (16%). Training, webinars and other events, and impact case studies were accessed frequently by 11% and 10% of respondents, respectively.



## 8.2 Usefulness of Inspiring Impact resources

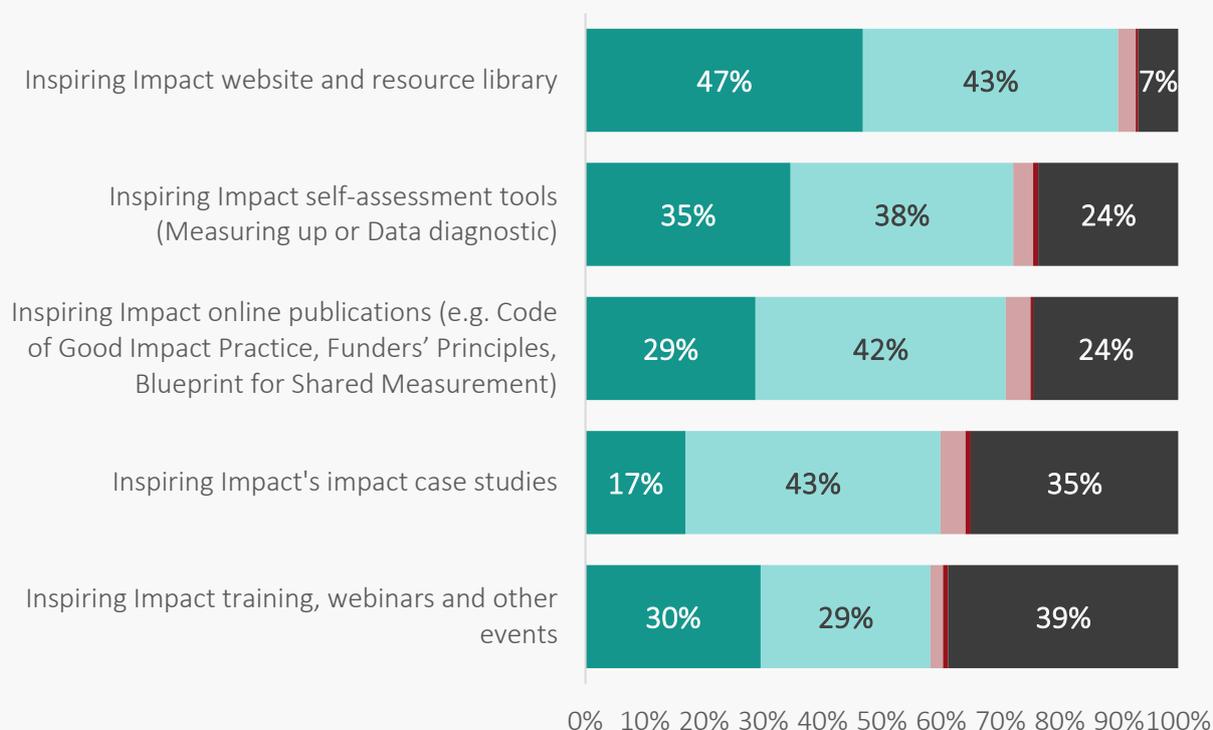
Survey respondents gave positive feedback on Inspiring Impact resources, with the website and resource library rated as most useful, followed by the self-assessment tools (see chart below). One survey respondent had found the self-assessment tools useful for improving data collection and had kept them for use in subsequent job roles:

The self-assessment tools were brilliant for figuring out what data you collected, how much of it and what was missing. It was also a good way of clearly showing where there were gaps and for senior management to understand what was required and why they might not be getting the most out of their impact. (Survey respondent)



### 2021 survey: Usefulness of Inspiring Impact resources (n=237)

■ Very useful ■ Fairly useful ■ Not very useful ■ Not at all useful ■ Don't know



Most interviewees mentioned the Inspiring Impact resources as very helpful (although it must be noted that many had themselves been part of the development of new resources). New tools were developed, which were free, and often simpler and more accessible than those that had existed previously. A respondent who had previously worked for a funder commented:

When I remember 12-13 years ago ... working on the grants programme, where we asked people to measure their impacts, and the resources that we had available to give them were pretty basic in comparison to what's available now. And, you know, the stuff that Inspiring Impact's done has been great in terms of raising the standards.  
(Interviewee)

Some of the interviewees noted liking the website; the initial Inspiring Impact website was mentioned as being hard to navigate, but the new version, post-IMP merger, received praise as being 'attractive and accessible', with one person expressing regret that improvement came late in the programme.

Several interviewees from outside the consortium partnership mentioned that completing Measuring up had been useful to them or their networks, although a couple noted that it was time-consuming to complete.



## 8.3 Comparison to other impact information sources

We asked survey respondents to compare Inspiring Impact resources with other impact information sources, for example in terms of credibility or power to influence.

About a quarter of responses (31) provided comparisons, with NCVO, CES, NPC, and ESS as the most-named. Most of the resources were rated as similar to Inspiring Impact, although some said Inspiring Impact resources were more practical. Other sources sometimes had more specialist appeal, for example, for organisations in the youth sector.

About one-fifth of responses (26) provided comparisons to unknown sources (they failed to name or could not recall the source). Of these, most felt Inspiring Impact resources were clearer or easier to understand and use.

Five did not feel that the Inspiring Impact information hub was better than other resources – two rated it similarly to other sources, and three rated it as worse, indicating that it was not sufficiently supportive in ‘messy’ evaluations, was less relevant to their organisation, or was too simplistic.

### 8.3.1 Accessibility and relevance

When asked to compare Inspiring Impact resources to other available resources, 17 of those responding to the survey question felt that Inspiring Impact’s resources were clearer or easier to understand and use, responding to the challenge of impact practice in small organisations. Seven also felt that their focus on the voluntary sector gave them more relevance.

I found the resources very practical in terms of the approach, rather than just conceptual. They actually supported the journey of change and provided a way to track progress. (Survey respondent)

Inspiring Impact resources made impact measurement memorable. It boiled things down really simply to core principles. I might have forgotten a lot of key concepts without Inspiring Impact. (Survey respondent)

Several interviewees argued that Inspiring Impact had done well in trying to make impact practice simpler and more accessible. One partner felt that Inspiring Impact had a ‘different flavour’, avoiding too much technical language and considering user group needs – this respondent felt this was a change that had come within the programme’s lifetime.

Interviewees, particularly those from infrastructure in Wales and Northern Ireland, were frequently appreciative that resources were free, referring to the small size and under-resourced nature of the VCS.

Despite this, some survey respondents and interviewees felt that more was needed to make resources accessible to the smallest groups:

They could have been even more accessible by taking different forms, i.e. using more videos, images, illustrations, etc. The kind of small community groups I work with often



include people with low literacy, English as a second or third language, neurodiversity, etc. I understand that Inspiring Impact was aimed more at VCSE organisations and hence at professionals but I think there could also have been a section aimed directly at 'Jane & Joe Public' with content in different formats. (Survey respondent)

Some interviewees from Wales or Northern Ireland argued that even the simplest Inspiring Impact resource might be still too complicated for some of their smallest groups. One group of participants in our evaluation findings workshop reflected on the relatively low use of the website and resources. One commented that the website could perhaps be a bit overwhelming for some. Another added that:

We made too many assumptions possibly that people would know how to use it, and that people would know what they didn't know, and that it may have been lacking a diagnostic function to help organisations and people working for organisations find out what they were looking for. Maybe there was something missing there. (Consortium partner)

This is a familiar issue. A funder interviewed about Inspiring Impact in 2017/18 also reported concerns about complexity:

We come across some who are doing fantastic work in the sector and some have catching up to do. We have seen a lot of approaches, ToCs etc but it sometimes feels there's too much jargon and it's too complex for small organisations. (Funder, interviewed 2017/18)

While some respondents were concerned about complexity, perhaps unsurprisingly other survey respondents felt that Inspiring Impact resources were too oversimplified for their subsector:

Inspiring impact resources are really well targeted for smaller voluntary sector organisations, generalists and those getting started on their impact journey. As we have a strong wellbeing focus, we've used 'What works for Wellbeing' as we need to link to and keep in touch with nationally recognised WB scales. As a young people's charity we've also looked to and used the Centre for Youth Impact as again we need to know/follow best practice in working on impact with a YP-led approach and keep in touch with national developments around YP and impact. (Survey respondent)

### **8.3.2 Curated resources**

Some survey respondents and interviewees noted that the curation of resources was helpful. Four survey respondents felt Inspiring Impact was a more comprehensive source than others in terms of variety and having information 'in a central place'.

Our interviewee from ChEW noted that when ChEW started, as a simple peer network, they had nowhere central to signpost people to, so when Inspiring Impact was developed this was a very useful resource for them. Some respondents from organisations involved in supporting other voluntary organisations reported that it had taken pressure off them in their work and helped them support their users:



Having taken on the role as a programme co-ordinator for social investment, I have felt overwhelmed by the layers of infrastructure and direct support available nationally. Finding Inspiring Impact felt like an end to the searching activity as I found what I needed for the programme and its VCSE beneficiary organisations in an accessible resource. (Survey respondent)

The real benefit of being involved in Inspiring Impact was that there was this machine, if you like, that was developing these resources and pulling together these models and toolkits and doing the search engine and doing all of that work. ... I think the real strength of the overall programme was the resources and the information you could look at; you could see stuff in from Scotland or England or across the world. (Interviewee)

This latter interviewee further explained that, although she might have got this information herself, if the programme had not existed 'it would have been an awful lot of work, and I'm not sure that we would have had the time ... because we're such a small team.'

One survey respondent felt curation of existing resources led to some duplication:

I liked the Inspiring Impact branding – but most of the resources were already available through eg SVUK or NPC. (Survey respondent)

Another felt that resources could have been curated better to have more 'really useable tools and benchmarking data,' although adding that it was still the best of what was available.

Using filters still left a pretty long list of resources sometimes and I felt there wasn't really a way to assess them without clicking on each one. Perhaps more user reviews or a fuller explanation on the front page might have helped. (Survey respondent)

### **Credible curation**

Having resources curated by perceived experts in one place was considered helpful. Three survey respondents commented that it had better credibility as it was a product of collaboration between important players focused on evidence-based practice.

Some survey respondents noted the power of the consortium approach, in practical terms, to provide consensus and clarity around otherwise 'nebulous' terminology, and also to give credibility:

Their value lies in the fact that Inspiring Impact is a collaboration of important players, who have all developed the resources together and 'peer reviewed' them. I also know that the resources were extensively reviewed by charities and funders. ... For example the Funders for Impact working group who helped shape the Funders' Principles with ACF ... much more powerful than if one of the partners were going it alone and producing guidance alone. (Survey respondent)

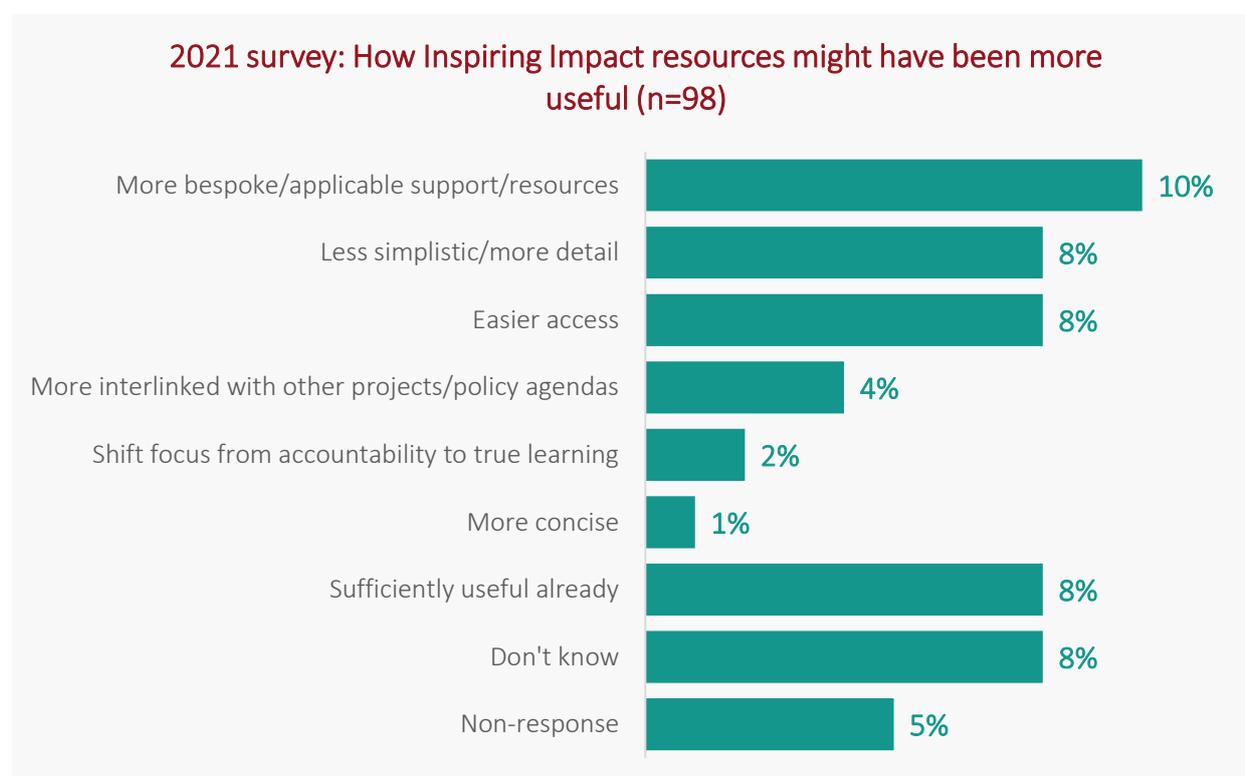
In terms of credibility and power to influence, I think Inspiring Impact is highly rated in both cases – those behind and involved with Inspiring Impact gives it its credibility, as well as the quality of the resources themselves. (Survey respondent)



The resources were well used by my CEO so I assume she trusted the brand. When I was pushing for a rethink of our evaluation process, I would always use Inspiring Impact within my presentations so she could see that advice was coming from a trustworthy source. (Survey respondent)

## 8.4 How might the Inspiring Impact resources have been more useful?

Some survey respondents (98) told us how Inspiring Impact resources could have been made more useful.



8% of survey respondents felt the resources were sufficiently useful for their needs and had no suggestions for improvements (see chart above). Three expressed concern about the resources disappearing. Suggestions for improvement included:

- more bespoke support and resources (including support from consultants and more sub sector specific resources) (10%)
- more detail (including more examples and more advanced materials) (8%)
- better accessibility (including better navigation, more engaging content) (8%).

A number of survey respondents said that while they liked Inspiring Impact resources, they could be more tailored for particular subsectors:

They're clear and attractive but can be a bit simplistic compared to those which have been purpose designed for a particular client and the way they work. (Survey respondent)



For us they are not youth focused enough. The Youth Sector has struggled with impact as so much of our work is preventative and therefore difficult to evidence/prove. We also link with Centre for Youth Impact (YPQI, etc), and NYA for the Outcomes 2.0 framework. These are more youth focused, but also require significant time, resource and capacity to implement fully and effectively. (Survey respondent)

## 8.5 Improvements to the Impact Champions programme

Some Impact Champions expressed regret at the lack of longer-term collaboration between each other, explaining that this might be in part because the organisations did not have much else in common. Some expressed interest in continuing their involvement with Inspiring Impact, especially if more was done to engage people, if contact became more personalised, and if events could be less London-centric. One respondent did not feel that the Impact Champions were utilised sufficiently and that they consequently had not had much positive influence.

The 13 respondents to NPC's 2018 survey of Impact Champions identified learning points from the programme.

- The interconnectivity of the Impact Champion network could be improved, providing more opportunities for collaboration, such as co-delivering at training, workshops and events, promoting each other's activities and collaborating on resource development.
- Better modes of engagement and communication could be employed, including more online and being less London-centric.
- The programme could be more proactive, for example recruiting (big) charities to lead by example and/or spread the word, and signposting Impact Champions more to others to aid their accessibility.
- Impact Champions wanted to feel they were making a difference as Impact Champions (which they did not always feel).
- More resources/ideas for smaller organisations.
- Champions' workloads were often a barrier to more engagement.

## 9. Promoting Inspiring Impact

NPC led Inspiring Impact on communication throughout the programme, with NCVO and CES in the early years also having a role in disseminating information about the programme and its resources. NPC maintained an Inspiring Impact network and a social media presence, including producing regular blogs for the network and for partners' websites.

Inspiring Impact reported, in its 2014/15 annual report, that it raised its profile through stalls and talks at a dozen conferences and events in England and Wales. During the year Inspiring Impact's social media presence had been raised through promoting the programme through Twitter and LinkedIn. By 2019/20 Inspiring Impact reported that its Twitter followers had increased to 3,992, while the LinkedIn group had grown by more than 40 members during the year.



Inspiring Impact's phase 3 had also noted the appetite for impact stories in the sector, and by 2019/20 there were 26 impact stories available on the website.

Despite this, a number of both survey respondents and interviewees felt that Inspiring Impact might have been better promoted and known about. In our findings workshop, one group noted the lack of a dedicated resource to promote the website, which may have been a constraint.

A concern had been noted by one consortium partner as early as year 3 that it was possible that they were speaking only to those already linked up with organisations able to offer them the support they needed, and that there were many voluntary sector organisations that would not have heard about the initiative at all.

In our survey, when asked how Inspiring Impact resources could have been made more useful, the most frequent response (19) was that Inspiring Impact should have been promoted more, and more could have been done to engage people and organisations. Many of them had not known about it or only learned about it by chance. One commented:

Wish I'd know about them sooner. Worked with School of Social Entrepreneurs and it would have been helpful if they knew about this and had recommended it to us. (Survey respondent)

Although there was some perception among survey respondents that there had not been 'enough capacity/investment to really promote and disseminate resources', for others the key issue was visibility of Inspiring Impact among the plethora of other initiatives around impact.

Inspiring Impact was part of a proliferation of impact tools and resources. It was impossible to judge credibility against anything else. I never heard any of our funders (and we have over 25 of them) refer to Inspiring Impact. (Survey respondent)

I think that one of the issues was there are so many resources out there, and this is perhaps just one. When people are working out what approach to use this may not have been prominent enough, or been seen to have sufficient provenance. Perhaps better linking it in to the other materials out there would have been better, and a more joined up approach across the four nations – being Scottish based meant I will always be redirected to ESS. (Survey respondent)

One of the Inspiring Impact stakeholders interviewed between April and July 2017 suggested that communications needed to be stronger. They mentioned the survey to 130 social enterprises and charities reported in *Impact Measurement: Perspectives from the Front Line report* (April 2017)<sup>18</sup> which found that 32% of respondents were aware of Inspiring Impact but only 4% had used the tools and resources. One said that awareness of Inspiring Impact had actually decreased, claiming 'people used to be aware, but then it fell away a little bit. There is lower visibility of the programme now'. The interviewee suggested that Inspiring Impact implement a better communications plan.

---

<sup>18</sup> A Pioneers Post special report 2017, published in partnership with Buzzacott, Matter&Co and The Good Economy Partnership.



Another interviewee, an Impact Champion in the west of England said that organisations were preoccupied with firefighting and fundraising. They wanted Inspiring Impact to be more proactive 'rather than expecting them to come across it themselves'.



## SECTION 3: LEARNING FROM DELIVERY

This section describes: learning from delivery; how the programme met a range of delivery challenges; barriers experienced by users to impact practice; wider learning emerging from delivering the programme.

### 10. Meeting delivery challenges

#### 10.1 Refining the target audience

Initially, Inspiring Impact was aimed across the voluntary sector, with an ambition to include all who should be concerned with impact, including funders.

We said, 'It's everyone!' It's the big organisations and the small, because we want to cater for everyone. ... It's funders, because funders need to be part of the ecosystem. And, you know, they need to be resourcing this practice, but they also need to understand it. It's government because the public sector plays a huge role. And commissioning was in scope too. (Consortium interviewee)

Some interviewees felt this broad scope was important, at least from a tactical perspective, and it brought strengths in terms of inclusivity. However, it brought challenges in terms of breadth of ambition and meeting varied needs.

##### 10.1.1 Breadth of ambition

One consortium member argued that any sense of an impact practice 'movement' or the 'sea change' initially envisioned by Inspiring Impact would be impossible to achieve by a single programme, limited in its ability to reach the sheer numbers of individuals and organisations in the sector. Others argued that the programme would always be constrained by its relatively limited budget. In England in particular, the number of potential users was very high indeed.

I think when we're thinking about sector, capacity programmes or sector transformation programmes, they inherently start with laudable aims that are for everything, but the realistic, you know, approach is to recognise that you're only ever really going to move a portion. (Steering group interviewee)

Some consortium partner interviewees felt that the target audience could have been better clarified and understood, from the start. For example, consortium partners interviewed for the evaluation differed as to whether or not the programme had primarily aimed to reach those new to evaluation. Some felt that Inspiring Impact resources were intentionally entry level, while others argued that Inspiring Impact materials required some prior experience of impact.

##### 10.1.2 Meeting varied needs

Apart from this breadth of target audience, the wide range of stakeholder groups was difficult for Inspiring Impact. As reported in 6.5 above, this affected Impact Champions as well as those



receiving the wider delivery.

Got quite a lot out of it but I'm not sure there was enough distinction in terms of how advanced or experienced Impact Champions were, so some things could be too basic. (Survey respondent)

On the same theme, one consortium partner argued that this had been a persistent problem that Inspiring Impact had not really got to grips with: there were two distinct audiences for Inspiring Impact; people new to impact work, and a much more advanced audience who wanted expert, advanced high-level content.

So everything we delivered, we had people going, 'This is too advanced' and people going, 'This is too basic'. So that was a constant problem, like all the time. And, you know, certainly going forward, I would never deliver like that again. [In the future there should be] one programme for the beginning organisations and one programme for the advanced practitioners. (Consortium partner)

For more on the challenge of varied needs in peer learning settings, see 10.4.1.

### 10.1.3 A focus on smaller organisations

From phase 2, there was an understanding that partners would focus more on small- to medium-sized organisations, in part as a response to the learning from phase 1 about the need to narrow the target audience. This was welcomed by interviewees.

I think we were probably too ambitious to focus on all organisations of every size; I think it's impossible as their needs are so widely different. The big charities have already got their own people, internal systems, internal opportunities, and can pursue this in their way. But for those small organisations out there, they don't have dedicated staff to focus on this and they need to definitively know that they're doing something that has purpose for them, and frankly, is going to help them do what they do better, and help them raise funds to be able to do what they do better. (Steering group interviewee)

[Larger organisations] can crowd into programmes like this, and therefore there's no room for anybody else because they're easy to get to, and perhaps easier to work with. And so, with sharpened elbows, they can kind of crowd in and muscle in and take up all the space. So some way of trying to refocus the effort I think makes sense. (Steering group interviewee)

A steering group member noted that it was unclear between partners what it meant by targeting 'small' organisations; some participants in our findings workshop felt that perhaps the programme had not made it sufficiently clear to the sector that Inspiring Impact wanted to engage with smaller organisations.



## 10.2 Moving away from the cascade model

As described in 6.5 above, Inspiring Impact tried to increase programme reach through cascade models, in particular Impact Champions and SSPs, sharing learning and resources with these groups in the hope they would disseminate their learning.

### 10.2.1 Away from SSPs

From phase 2, Inspiring Impact started to phase out subsector partnerships. There had been a slow start to SSPs, in part because of an initial criterion of match funding, dropped when this stalled the recruitment of partners. Even the 25 days of matched time proved a heavy demand.

NPC reports that government interest at the time gave them the initial impetus for shared measurement and sub sector partnerships – the latter based on a vision of cascading learning through their networks and adapting tools and resources to the specific subsector context. When government interest waned and funding was subsequently reduced, Inspiring Impact was less able to resource subsector partnerships.

The cascade model – building capacity in one group, hoping they would spread it through the networks – had mixed success. We report some real successes in this area (see section 6.5), but overall it did not always work as hoped and the value for the wider sector was not achieved.

One consortium partner reported that the organisations involved in SSPs sometimes lacked motivation and needed more support and more work to maintain momentum than was possible within Inspiring Impact – limited programme resources did not permit further support.

I think the idea was, maybe it was naïve ... that they (SSPs) would cascade Inspiring Impact's resources and ideas through their sub-sector network. ... The idea was that they could develop things, like shared measurement approaches ... but some of them didn't really see it through, and sort of lost momentum as a group and collective. ... We wanted the ideas or approaches to come from them (SSP) and to be sort of bottom-up driven, but we found that you sort of need the continuation of relationships, a lead organisation to coordinate things and to keep the momentum up. (Consortium interviewee)

One consortium partner reported learning that the SSP model was complicated, with too many expectations and assumptions. It was not a model that they would use again.

This idea that you could disseminate to one lot, and then they could disseminate it again, just didn't really [happen], it's too complicated. (Consortium interviewee)

In Northern Ireland, while there was frontline Inspiring Impact activity, there was an explicit focus on infrastructure, anticipating a cascade to the wider sector. However, an interviewee in Northern Ireland felt that any cascade effect was at best temporary:

It did focus in on a set of core partners and organisations and that was the hope was a sort of a trickle down. And of course, trickle down never actually happens in economics or anything else! No, I don't think [trickledown happened here]. (Interviewee)



Cascade models (SSPs and Impact Champions) worked best within Inspiring Impact when: the participants were already on a path of developing their impact; they had dedicated time and resources to engage; they had dedicated time to implement. With such fertile ground in place, the input of Inspiring Impact could have a significant impact in improving their impact work.

### 10.2.2 Phasing out the Impact Champions

The Impact Champions programme was started in phase 1 of Inspiring Impact. As such, it was an early form of peer support that helped shape phases 2 and 3. Some of the Impact Champions enjoyed the programme and reported value from it (see section 6.5.1 above). Monitoring data available on the Impact Champions programme provided some varied response to the network: event feedback from Impact Champions was largely positive; survey responses were limited in number and did illustrate some reservations about being able to use learning from the network.

The lack of data on the extent to which Impact Champions did cascade learning makes it impossible for the evaluation to make any valid assessment. However, as with SSPs, the cascading of information to their networks was felt by consortium partners to be less than had been hoped. Ultimately the programme stopped running separate events for Impact Champions.

NPC reported that, while the Impact Champion events were useful for the participants, as a group they were less successful in cascading information to their networks than had been hoped. As with the SSPs, NPC found they needed more support and motivation than it was possible to provide within the programme. Only those Impact Champions who were already invested in cascading impact practice to networks were really able to run with it.

In Wales, for example, Impact Champions never took off:

We really, really tried and I think the only organisation that signed up was the Co-production Network. ... Some organisations contacted me about it, so they were interested in this, but then they never took it any further. They probably felt it was being asked to do additional work. (Consortium interviewee)

## 10.3 Making impact more user focused and integrated

Inspiring Impact explicitly tried to locate impact work more centrally within the life of an organisation. One interviewee described this move to change how impact practice was perceived:

The move to see impact practice as more holistically embedded in evaluation and planning work within organisations, not seeing it as a discrete function, but being part of a planning and improvement cycle, rather than just a 'measure, prove it and report it'. ... Impact practice for me is only useful if it's done with the intentions of understanding and improving organisational performance. (Steering group interviewee)

One consortium partner noted that as the programme had evolved, it got closer to practitioners in terms of their language, needs and interests:



I think the thing that I'm proudest of is actually the programme has evolved, and it's got closer and closer to practitioners. I think, if you look at the language, in the beginning, we talked about high-quality evaluation and evidence and we were very much on the sort of, highfalutin, you know 'decade of high impact practice'. And then over time, I think it became more and more practitioner informed. (Consortium interviewee)

A consortium partner reported that this approach became even more explicit in phase 3, and with some success.

We started to focus it more on kind of the jobs that people are already doing. So if you're already doing your strategy, how does good impact practice help you to do that? ... And how can we weave this [into jobs needing to be done] and saying, if you do this, it will be easier, basically. And actually, we found that meant that a lot more people engaged with and resonated with us. (Consortium interviewee)

## 10.4 Towards peer learning

Phase 1 of Inspiring Impact focused on building a network of interested people and providing resources. From phase 2 onwards, Inspiring Impact involved a greater emphasis on peer learning. This was influenced both by the Access IMP programme and its strong focus on peer support, and a growing understanding that this was an effective way to help people embed an impact culture in the organisation.

Shared sector interests, the inclusion of a range of levels of participant impact experience and geographical connections were some of the important factors in successful peer learning. One consortium partner also noted that peer learning could be confidence-building for participants: 'giving people the confidence to own it and to give it a go and to recognise they're doing it already – that's been really a real core part of the programme.'

Interviewees were positive about the value of peer learning as a way of meeting some needs that expert input could not meet. A consortium partner explained why peer learning in some respects was more important than learning from experts:

The ability to foster that and facilitate that kind of connection online is much easier than it's probably ever been. So I think people want to hear more from organisations or from people who have done this and done stuff themselves and their experience, rather than necessarily kind of coming along and just hearing one expert talk. So I think that's a shift. ... Having that opportunity to then talk to peers who are going through potentially similar experiences or facing similar challenges and coming up with solutions is incredibly useful, because so often those challenges are very bespoke and can't be captured in a course. (Consortium interviewee)

### 10.4.1 The challenge of mixed groups

As discussed in 10.1.2 above, the breadth of the target audience for Inspiring impact brought challenges in meeting varied needs. This was of particular relevance for peer learning. There were differing views about the mixed levels of experience and understanding at peer learning



events; one consortium partner felt a mix of skills levels to be useful, with limits:

I would say even if you are entry level, having someone else to bounce ideas off can be helpful for problem solving. But yeah, there's a ceiling that you're going to hit quite quickly. (Consortium interviewee)

One interviewee found events they attended where they were clearly the most expert in the room less useful. This point was picked up in a response to a survey carried out by CDHN in 2021:<sup>19</sup>

There are a lot of different levels of expertise – it would be good to create communities where everyone is at the same level and share good practice or link those with experience to those who need support. (CDHN survey respondent)

One consortium partner reported that peer learning was always hampered by mixed skill levels. Many interviewees also felt that it was impossible to run peer learning if all participants were complete beginners.

Feedback from Impact Champions indicated that learning in groups of mixed experience and capacity around impact was not always effective for them. One Impact Champion interviewed in 2017/18 said that she had been to an event that had been ‘a waste of her time because it was at a very different level’ – there were people who were measuring for the first time. She felt there was a need to ‘work out who is at what stage’ and ‘not just throw everyone together.’

Attending as a sole participant with a funder perspective could also be challenging. One interviewee found Inspiring Impact working group sessions in Scotland useful and well delivered. However, although there were some commonalities between participants, they were often ‘wildly different’. As a funder, the interviewee reported that there was also an additional level of thinking required about their impact and how they would measure it. However, there were still benefits:

But it was really interesting hearing challenges that other organisations were experiencing and it was useful having that direct link with ESS. Even though we weren't a direct service deliverer, some of those challenges around organisation culture were the same across the different organisations. (Interviewee)

For this interviewee, a learning point was the desirability of reducing the range of types of organisations and impact skills start points by initial screening; for them, it would be more helpful to have worked with other larger funders.

## 10.4.2 Expert facilitation is needed

One consortium member was positive about working around difficulties through skilled facilitation; they had also learnt to be ‘super-clear’ about participant expectations.

---

<sup>19</sup> ‘Impact Practice and Inspiring Impact in NI’, draft 05 August 2021.



The Impact Management Programme report, March 2021,<sup>20</sup> also stated the importance of the skill with which network meetings and learning meetings were facilitated. One of the biggest challenges of a peer network was, not just getting engagement, but how insights could be translated into changes in organisations.

## 10.5 Covid-19

Covid-19 stalled some of Inspiring Impact's plans for embedding good impact practice and changing impact culture in the last few years. However, the pandemic also brought benefits, including a more flexible and adaptable approach to delivering events (see 15.1 for more discussion on this).

All the consortium partners had to change their delivery during the pandemic and lockdown, both in terms of mode of delivery (to online) and content, primarily to help people manage evaluation in a crisis. This bought new opportunities, for example work with ChEW.

### **ChEW: working with partners to extend reach and enhance services**

Inspiring Impact's work with the Charity Evaluation Working Group (ChEW) was not a designated SSP, but an effective partnership started opportunistically during the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, Inspiring Impact (through NPC) worked with ChEW, a network of voluntary and community sector evaluators, co-producing four events for the VCS. For example, the first one was practically focused on how to continue evaluations and manage research projects, given lockdown restrictions. It was well attended, by around 90-100 people.

When lockdown hit ... we started running a series of events collaboratively together for the third sector, charities, social enterprises to help them keep measuring and understanding their impacts but also to support professionals in those organisations as well. ... So, so that seemed like a natural opportunity, and it came together really well. (ChEW representative)

They might anyway have held the pandemic events, but it was easier with Inspiring Impact, and they had better reach and better speakers: 'You know, I think we would never have pulled that together.'

ChEW reported that working with Inspiring Impact had helped enhance their own support to the 160 organisations in their network.

---

<sup>20</sup> [https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IMP\\_Report.pdf](https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IMP_Report.pdf)



## 10.6 Engaging funders

ACF was an Inspiring Impact consortium partner for seven years, from 2012/13 to 2017/18. Twenty-six foundations participated in the Funders for Impact Working Group, which were involved in developing the Funders' Principles of Good Impact Practice. In the early years, ACF also integrated Inspiring Impact resources into its programmes, including the ACF conference and a workshop for smaller funders; they also integrated Inspiring Impact into five professional development programmes for members and facilitated funder engagement in the development of Measuring up for funders. In phase 2, the focus moved to funders with a known appetite for impact practice and a learning network with structured quarterly events.

ACF reported challenges in the course of year three:

- The expected evidence of funders converting principles into practice had not been found.
- There was a need to deconstruct the principles and address issues of culture change.
- There was a decreased level of enthusiasm in the Funders for the Impact Working Group.

A stakeholder interviewed in 2017/18 queried how strong ACF's presence was, and felt that the lack of proper engagement might have linked to funders' hesitancy around shared measurement.

There was some expressed reluctance among funders to become Impact Champions and a limited number were recruited. In an ACF event, some funders raised questions about how the Impact Champion network might offer something different from ChEW, ACF events and the Funder Network, for example. One funder was concerned that their organisation would not be as 'expert' as other Impact Champions, or they did not want to be seen as making claim to 'perfect' impact practice, or to be seen as 'elite' in any way.

In the final year of engagement as a consortium partner, ACF held 11 events involving 162 participants from trusts and foundations and, reported to the 2017/18 Inspiring Impact annual report that Inspiring Impact had influenced ACF's Stronger Foundations initiative, which had a strand on impact and learning.

The early involvement of ACF was regarded as crucial by consortium partners, noting the importance of tackling impact from top down and bottom up. One felt that Inspiring impact had tried hard to engage funders. However, most felt that the funder strand of Inspiring Impact work had not been as successful as had been hoped. One noted that funders' interest appeared to have waned over the years, despite an increased interest in impact generally.

One interviewee felt that some funders had responded to being told they were 'doing it all wrong' by withdrawing from a focus impact assessment, reacting to an assumption that all funders were doing it in a way that was ill-thought through.



## 11. Barriers to impact practice

### 11.1 Organisational barriers

Barriers to improving organisational impact practice raised through Inspiring Impact are similar to those encountered in the evaluation and impact field over the last few decades. Qualitative interviews in 2017/18 spoke of barriers to using Inspiring Impact resources, including wider culture issues, lack of time and dedicated evaluation staff and practical difficulties of understanding how to get started using the available tools. One interviewee in 2017 said ‘Measuring up really only works if you can change the culture first’ and that ‘the challenge is that people need the time and the opportunity to use them, and the chance to talk about how you navigate them, how you use them.’

The Inspiring Impact 2019/20 annual report expressed a similar list of most common barriers to implementing effective impact practice, including:

- poor understanding of outputs, outcomes and impact
- different stakeholder views and requirements, funder restrictions
- lack of staff, time and money to invest in systems and processes.

The difficulties posed by multiple tools and approaches were particularly evident in Northern Ireland, where the government gave a strong lead on outcomes approaches through OBA. This was highlighted by CDHN in their 2021 report.<sup>21</sup> In the workshop follow-up to their April 2021 survey, one participant said:

It’s really the variances in approaches that can sometimes cause confusion as well as what the funder is looking for as part of their evaluation. (Project worker, charity, £5K to £1m)

The CDHN survey itself was circulated to 198 people, receiving 110 responses. CDHN did not have access to CENI’s contact list, and only about half of the respondents had any contact with Inspiring Impact. Unsurprisingly, given the dominance of small community organisations in the Northern Irish voluntary sector, the responses reflect the same barriers. While some respondents had a well-established practice, for some it was still new. One participant in the follow-up workshop felt they had ‘come late to the party’.

Even thinking about impact and how we report to funders and those who invest in our work and communicating what is required is just quite new to what we do.

Nine out of ten CDHN survey respondents said that lack of staff time was a barrier to impact practice. This was closely followed by lack of funding or resources (86%) and not having the right skills or expertise (80% of respondents).

---

<sup>21</sup> ‘Impact Practice and Inspiring Impact in NI’, draft 05 August 2021.



These same barriers are longstanding, as identified by research by CES in 2008<sup>22</sup> and NPC in 2012<sup>23</sup>. Government, funders and infrastructure and other support agencies were urged to work towards greater clarity and consistency, a proportional approach and sufficient resources, both to increase skills and to allow greater staff capacity to carry out effective evaluation.

## 11.2 Impact may not be mission critical

Some interviewees noted that while many in the sector realised the importance of impact, when push came to shove, it simply was not mission critical; there is no regulatory framework requiring impact work, and ‘this is not a topic that goes viral’. One interviewee felt that the programme had possibly moved away from a focus on impact practice as important in developing more sustainable, well-funded organisations; nevertheless, that dimension was still important.

One interviewee wondered whether the focus in impact practice was still on self-improvement and achieving better services for users ‘rather than what might be seen as the kind of slightly more instrumental things about “this will put you in a better position, this will enable you to get more money, this will strengthen your sustainability, your future.”’

Another, contradictory, view was given by one consortium partner: that Inspiring Impact’s underlying assumption that the funding market would respond to the VCS being better at impact had in fact been incorrect.

It shifted slowly over the years. But these days ... many chief execs would say that being able to articulate your work around, and your strategy around, diversity, equity, and inclusion is more important for getting funding than necessarily having compelling evidence of the impact of your work. (Consortium interviewee)

Another interviewee felt that impact had perhaps been oversold as a silver bullet. They felt that the ‘do impact: get funding’ equation was simply not that simple. Funding decisions are made on more than good evidence. One consortium partner felt this had been a problem for Inspiring Impact:

[Early on in the programme] there was a concern that it just wasn't mission critical to chief execs. It didn't keep them up at night, evaluation and impact practice. ... But I think we just tried to wish it into existence. You know, we just, we thought, ‘Well, yeah, but that shouldn't be the case’. (Consortium interviewee)

(For more on this in terms of future need, see section 19.2.)

---

<sup>22</sup> Ellis, J. and Gregory, T. (2008) *Accountability and Learning*. CES.

<sup>23</sup> Ogain, E., Lumley, T. and Pritchard, D. (2012) *Making an Impact: Impact measurement among charities and social enterprises in the UK*. NPC.



## 12. Wider learning

### 12.1 Designing for behaviour change

One of the lessons incorporated from Access IMP in 2018 when it merged with Inspiring Impact was that if outcomes were about behaviour change as part of the user journey, the content of networks needed to be designed with that in mind. By that time, both Access IMP and Inspiring Impact had found that online resources were not enough. They needed to be embedded in existing networks, engaging as much as possible with the reality of practitioners' lives and building peer support. Often advice was needed on how to use tools. Motivation to change needed to extend internally, while learning took place across organisations.

In its January 2017 subsector partnership review,<sup>24</sup> Sported commented on difficulties in embedding change, even though learners might be individually confident in impact practice:

However impact practice skills and understanding are concentrated in a small group within the organisation; this makes it hard to introduce appropriate behaviours and strategies to the organisation as a whole, eg, engaging frontline staff.

### 12.2 People or organisations

Inspiring Impact users reflected the mobility of people working in the voluntary sector. In our survey, 100 respondents told us about whether they had used Inspiring Impact resources in previous organisations. Around two-fifths (42%) said they had used Inspiring Impact resources in previous roles or organisations, most commonly for promoting or designing impact work.

Inspiring Impact necessarily targeted the capacity of individuals, hoping for effects in improved impact practice in their organisations as they carry new understanding of impact and skills with them. One interviewee, referencing the Scottish experience, noted that even if there were no immediate changes within the organisation, individuals may have benefited. This could be of organisational use later on.

It's a thing that we wrestle with a lot in my organisation. ... Our charitable object is actually to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of charities. We're not an educational charity. So we're not about building the skills of individuals. And yet, of course, everything we do is with people. ... [but] if we were to go back in time, [Inspiring Impact] might have decided to say we simply want to build a workforce. We want to build personnel of people who get it and it doesn't matter if they move across so long as they stay within the charity sector. (Consortium interviewee)

### 12.3 Tailoring delivery and resources to subsectors

In their January 2017 end-of-project subsector review, Sported noted that learners in its FFI project (Fit for Impact: see 13.2 case example) were already familiar with Sportworks, a shared measurement tool developed by Substance and tailored to the sector. The familiarity with the

---

<sup>24</sup> Sported subsector partnership review January 2017, Andrew Weston, Rosie McLeod and Lucy De Las Casas.



Sportworks tool helped learners to engage with the Inspiring Impact programme. This suggested that the pre-existence of tools already tailored to the sector might be regarded as a useful factor in any subsector partnership approach, and that an assessment of such tools should be an explicit part of the project.

At the same time, Inspiring Impact resources were found less accessible than the existing tools, and the Inspiring Impact hub itself was less useful to learners. The Sported review noted:

What it does firmly suggest is that, when looking at future subsector partnership, Inspiring Impact should be aware of which assets it brings, which will be relevant and which may be superseded by support the partner already offers.

Volunteer mentors in the FFI project had found that their individualised approach to organisations worked well. This included visits to identify harder-to-reach parts of an organisation and a flexible delivery to ‘support organisations at very different stages of their impact journey and in very different circumstances.’

One of the strengths of the learning groups and the wider work of FFI was felt to be the creation of a clear sense of community between learners. Future subsector work should consider how to create communities of practice within their network to help maintain and enhance changed impact practice. It was personal engagement and the development of learning clusters which allowed for tailored support to get reluctant members of the organisation to engage with impact practice.

## 12.4 The value of face-to-face interaction

Many survey respondents requested training (see 16.1 for more on this). Of these, some were happy with the current use of online delivery, due to its accessibility. However, some felt strongly that face-to-face sessions remained important:

I think that we need to be aware of goals rather than just letting things happen as they always did. I am not interested in working online, I personally need face-to-face sessions and to engage with others, online doesn't work for me. It doesn't help that the internet connection is so bad. It is always good to gain knowledge and advice about any funding application and how to go about raising funds for specific projects. (Survey respondent)

Respondents to CDHN’s 2021 survey valued the informal interaction and learning that took place in face-to-face sessions.

CENI workshops – the actual face-to-face meetings were very useful, conversations over a cup of tea and talk to someone who is going through a similar journey. This would not be as effective during a Teams/Zoom session. The before and after conversations are just as useful as main training. (CDHN survey respondent)

Sported recognised that it would be hard to replicate on an online platform the value obtained by learners through engaging in informal in-depth conversations with their peers and FFI volunteers. Future subsector work should recognise what could and could not be scaled up: in the case of coaching it would be difficult to effectively scale it up and maintain it in the long-



term while keeping the features that users saw as essential.

## 12.5 Developing good impact practice takes time

Spotted reported that their learners' familiarity with an existing shared online measurement tool helped to build trust and engagement with Inspiring Impact's funded FFI project. This resonates with developments in other sectors. At organisational level, or at subsector and network level, it has taken a long time – up to ten years – to build awareness and confidence in impact practice. The process can include different iterations of training and support, and of models and systems until a 'fit' is found and is embedded.

NCVO reported from their work with Visionary on the importance of recognising that it took time for learners to absorb concepts, with a two-day training needed, although some found it difficult to commit this time.

## 12.6 Shared measurement

Shared measurement was a key strand of Inspiring Impact work throughout the programme, delivering some early research, with new tools added to the shared measurement database and Inspiring Impact resource finder, and two key publications. Tailored resources were piloted and explored with some mixed success; helpful learning has been gained through this process.

An early initiative was the Journey to Employment (JET) framework, published in May 2013, to help charities think through how their work contributed to young people's employability. In December 2013 the JET pack was published to help organisations implement the framework. In year five, a survey of subscribers to the Inspiring Impact newsletter on JET showed that, of 32 respondents, only nine respondents had downloaded and used the JET framework.

In an earlier interview (2017/18), a previous programme partner said that the word 'shared' had always been a bit of a barrier for funders. It was difficult for them to give up their control of how they liked things to be measured:

Inevitably the idea of common measurement systems opens up the fear of league tables, that people will be judged on terms that don't reflect the strengths of their organisations as much as others. The whole thing is an area of challenge that runs from funders right down to small organisations. (2017/18 interviewee)

In a proposal to Inspiring Impact for shared measurement funding support, the Child Bereavement Network reported technical issues that had arisen in the work they had already done on developing a common set of outcomes and tools. These issues concerned:

- compliance with GDPR
- how to accommodate common measures into already established databases/CRMs
- how to aggregate at different levels
- compatibility with existing NHS and other systems.



Practical issues such as these were of importance in implementing shared measurement. Two of our interviewees (see case studies in Youth Music and Sported, 14.2.2 and 13.2 respectively) explained how, after trialling shared measurement through Inspiring Impact, they were moving away from it.

Our interviews suggest that success in shared measurement was influenced by the extent to which a network had a significant driver, such as being under the same funding stream, where there were strong pre-existing relationships, and where Inspiring Impact was able to build on and work with an existing commitment by an individual or individuals.

The Inspiring Impact subsector work with Sported in Northern Ireland on shared measurement concluded that it was not viable at the time. An interviewee explained a lack of appetite for shared measurement in Scotland in terms of people wanting to do it for themselves: 'I think they'd rather reinvent the wheel and then feel it was their wheel, than have it presented to them.'

Shared outcomes [is more of interest]. I think people wanting to talk to each other about what are the right outcomes for my client group. And definitely shared theories of change, trying to get into conversations about contribution. What's my bit of this broader change? (Consortium interviewee)

A key motivating argument for shared measurement now had less weight:

Part of the argument for it was, 'If several of us all get together and pool our data that will influence change.' And sadly, I don't think there's enough evidence that politicians are swayed by a volume of evidence. There's this really interesting, 'Politicians want numbers', but actually they don't; they want stories, and that whole contradiction that goes on. (Consortium interviewee)



## SECTION 4: OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

This section describes outcomes for individuals working in the voluntary sector and for individual organisations, and the extent to which these can be attributed by those respondents to Inspiring Impact. The multiplicity of inputs to changing impact practice in the sector and the difficulty of attribution is discussed further in 14.4 below.

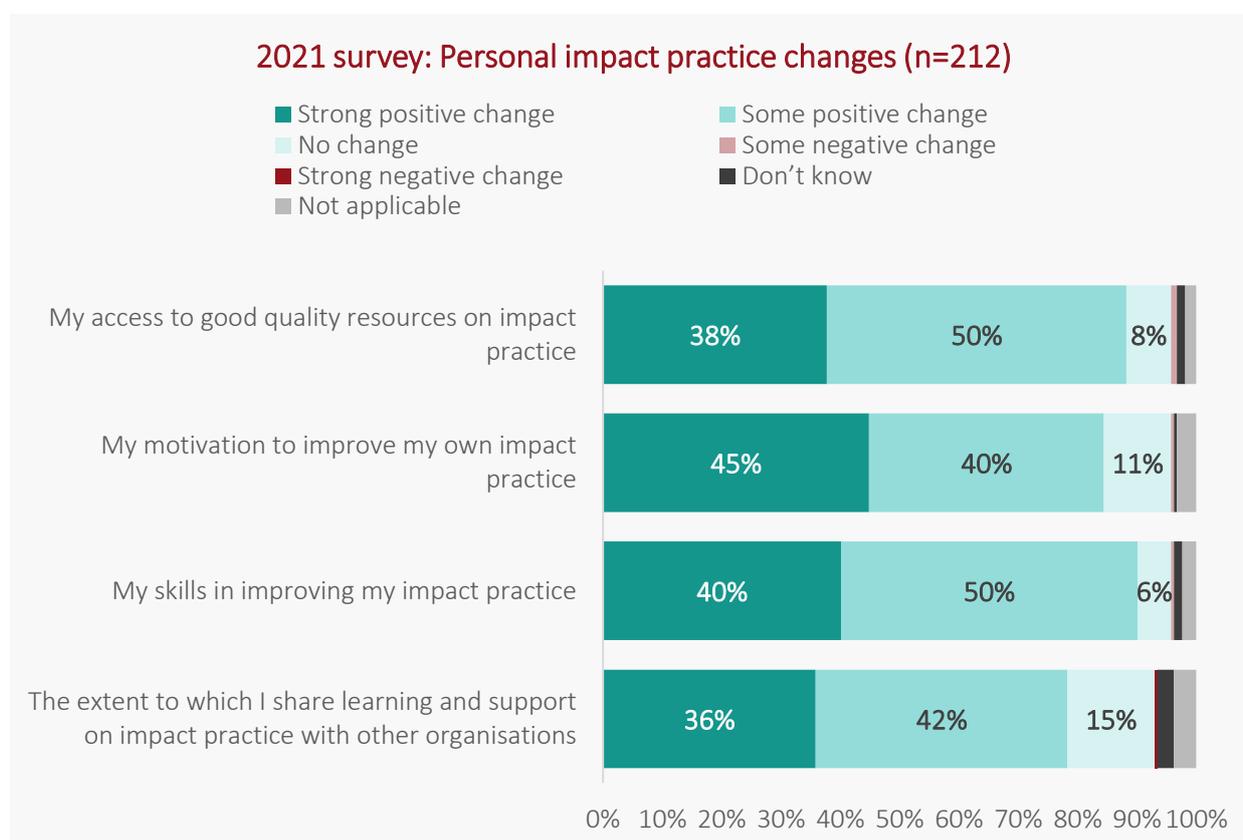
### 13. Outcomes for users: Micro level change

This section draws primarily from the evaluation's 2021 survey of Inspiring Impact users. Almost all respondents described improvements in their impact practice over the last decade. For many, these changes were in part attributable to Inspiring Impact.

#### 13.1 Personal outcomes for users

Among survey respondents who had engaged with Inspiring Impact, almost all had seen positive change in their personal impact practice over the last ten years (see chart below).

A small minority (5%) attributed their observed changes solely or mainly to Inspiring Impact. The majority of survey respondents reported that their impact practice had changed partly due to Inspiring Impact (64%). Another 16% felt their impact practice changes were due to other factors rather than Inspiring Impact.





A very large majority of respondents reported positive changes over the last ten years in terms of their skills and access to good quality resources on impact practice. Similarly, a very large majority reported positive change in relation to their motivation to improve and the extent to which they shared learning with others.

Sample sizes were often too small to make meaningful comparisons, but we did compare personal outcomes reported by: location of organisation; relationship to Inspiring Impact; role type; year of first engagement with Inspiring Impact. Some very small effects were noted in terms of how personal impact practice had changed over the last decade, though these should be interpreted with caution due to sample sizes.

- Interestingly, Impact Champions reported only slightly more positive changes in their impact practice around the four indicators in the chart above than general VCS members – although the sample of Impact Champions was small.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, impact, evaluation or research officers or managers reported slightly more positive outcomes than Chief Executives.
- People who had first engaged more recently with Inspiring Impact reported slightly more positive outcomes, except on the final indicator around changes to the extent to which they shared learning on impact with other organisations.
- Organisations delivering in England rated their outcomes very slightly lower than those who did not, across all four indicators.

## 13.2 Outcomes for organisations

All survey respondents for whom the question was applicable reported at least some positive change in their organisation's impact practice in the last ten years.

Only 2% attributed their observed changes to organisational impact practice solely or mainly to Inspiring Impact. Most reported that their impact practice changed partly due to Inspiring Impact (46%) while another 24% felt their impact practice changes were due to other factors rather than Inspiring Impact (n = 212).

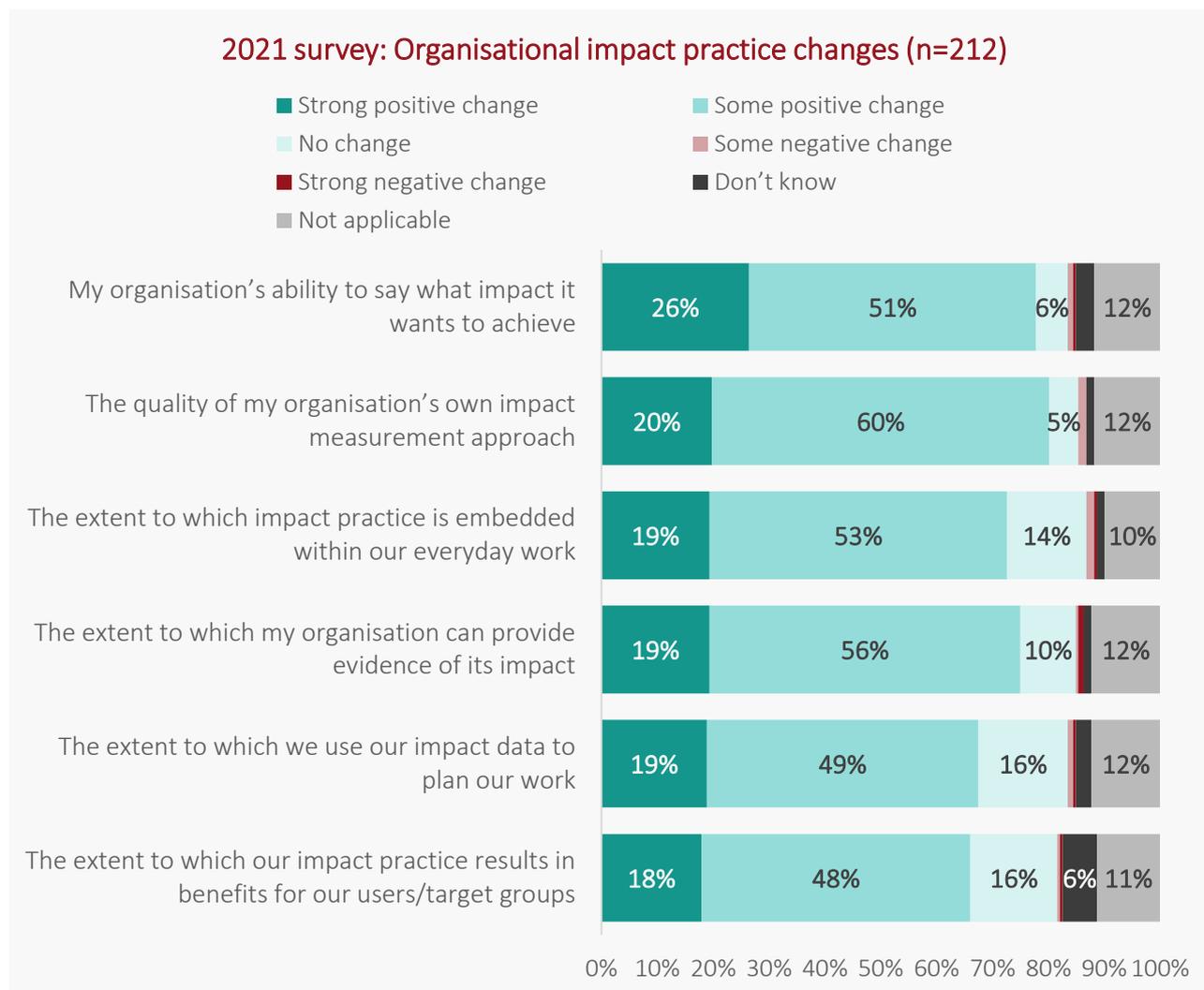
Comparing these findings with those in 13.1, it can be seen that users attributed more of their personal changes to Inspiring Impact than they did changes in their organisations. We do not know the reasons for this – it may be that Inspiring Impact did bring about more changes in individuals. However, a steering group member noted that this finding may also be because it is easier for survey respondents to note and attribute changes about themselves than for their organisations, which will be subject to many different influences.

More change was seen earlier on in the impact cycle (see chart below), with slightly less reported in the extent to which impact practice was resulting in benefits for users. The strongest change in organisations' impact practice happened around their ability to say what impact they wanted to achieve. One respondent reported how they had been supported to better understand 'the impact journey of their work'.

Theory of change has been a huge revelation for our organisation and that has helped us to define why and how we want to influence change in our area of interest with the



groups and people we work with. (Survey respondent)



Assessing levels of good practice can be difficult. A small funder working in both urban and rural areas, interviewed in February 2018, warned that there were difficulties in assessing whether good practice had increased because ‘what you mean by good impact practice and what we mean might not be the same thing.’ As a funder, they said they were not interested in ‘standards of evidence.’

Organisations that are entirely focused on delivery and project work without core [funding] are not in a position to learn from their work, to listen to their beneficiaries. They can't respond. It's not lack of wanting to, it's that they don't have the capacity. ... [Some very small organisations] must be responsive. They tend to learn faster and respond better, it's not necessarily written down, but they tend to be able to articulate their impact.’ (2018 interviewee)

Some survey respondents identified other outcomes of Inspiring Impact.

- Eight felt Inspiring Impact had raised awareness about the importance of impact work.
- Seven felt it had facilitated important networking.



- Five appreciated having resources ready to share with others.
- Four felt it had put them in a better place to acquire funding.
- Two felt it made impact knowledge more accessible.

For one survey respondent, just being reminded about best practice was helpful, even if their capacity was limited:

Inspiring Impact is just a great, all-in-one place to get Impact information and the emails are good regular reminders to have it on the radar. So I find it helpful even if we are such a tiny organisation that we don't gather tons of hard impact evidence. It is an aspirational site for us. (Survey respondent)

Sample sizes were often too small to make meaningful comparisons, but we did compare outcomes reported by: location of organisation; relationship to Inspiring Impact; role type; year of first engagement with Inspiring Impact. Organisations not delivering their work in England (we had to collapse all such organisations together) reported slightly more positive outcomes across all six questions about organisational outcomes than those in England. Impact champions reported slightly more positive outcomes compared to general voluntary organisations, as would be expected. CEOs often reported more positive change than impact officers; more of them reported 'strong positive change' against all six indicators.

### **Sported: Building capacity with Fit for Impact**

Sported is an umbrella organisation supporting community sports groups, with over 3,000 members across the UK. During 2014-16, Sported worked with CENI, through Inspiring Impact, to support 14 Sported members to look at impact practice, to identify needs and interest. The subsequent Inspiring Impact SSP project, called Fit for Impact (FFI), started in 2016, supported by NPC and ESS, who initially gave quite intense support as Sported developed their train the trainer model. After that, Inspiring Impact acted as a sounding board, with a regular check-in as the project progressed.

FFI aimed to help Sported members do better impact practice through eight months of support, with the ultimate aim of building an online platform hosting FFI resources. In autumn 2016, the programme was rolled out across Sported's membership groups. Forty volunteer business mentors were trained to cascade impact learning to groups through one-to-one support. They worked with 30 Sported groups in Scotland, 12 across England and Wales, and four in Northern Ireland as a continuation of the 2014 project there. The programme included information resources, peer learning for mentors and an online platform. As part of the Inspiring Impact project, they supported Sported members to use the Measuring up diagnostic tool, and then offered three levels of training.

The programme has since become an integral part of Sported's everyday work. Fifty-six groups have been trained to date on the introductory module, 41 on the theory of change module and 24 on measurement.

It has become a core part of our offering as an organisation. ... It will continue, with the caveat that we have limited resources in terms of our volunteers, and because it's



not funded, and it is needs led.

## Outcomes for Sported

Sported report their own improvement in terms of measurement, as they have themselves implemented everything that they have advised their groups to do. As a result of Inspiring Impact they have used a theory of change to shape their new strategy and every project they now run has its own theory of change and its own measurement framework.

They have also been able to use increased understanding of their members' intended outcomes as part of their informal advocacy work. Sported reported that this in turn has increased their profile, being seen as leaders in terms of impact across the sector. For example, they had been invited to speak at several government departments.

## Moving away from shared measurement

Part of the purpose of the FFI project was to explore shared measurement for their groups. Groups did not understand Sportworks, their existing free-to-members shared measurement tool; the tool also had some technical issues and there was little take up.

However, although shared measurement across the UK sport for development field has not been entirely abandoned, the project found that it was too fraught with difficulties for the present. The Sported interviewee reflected that the sector might be too varied for the uniformity of shared measurement. For now, they are focusing on bespoke measurement for their groups.

## Outcomes for participating member groups

The interviewee identified three areas of outcomes for members:

- *Planning* around what works and what does not, with an increased understanding of their outcomes. This was partly about supporting groups to take stock of outcomes that went beyond sport, such as health outcomes.
- *Better communications* with both internal and external stakeholders.
- *Funding*: One group had got funding because of their Inspiring Impact work, and then had been able to negotiate funds for a proportionate evaluation of the funded work: with their increased confidence, they took the output from theory of change support to their local council, showing how their work aligned with that of the council:

And the local council gave them a small grant to run a programme that they have been dreaming of for years. ... The funder had asked them to measure fitness levels before and after [a 12-week programme focusing on obesity]. The group went back to them again with their theory of change and said, '*Fitness will change, but not in 12 weeks, and not to the extent that you want to see. And actually the first thing on our outcomes pathway is that we are increasing the enjoyment of kids because we understand and believe that if we can increase their enjoyment, then they're more likely to come back and they're more likely to make better health choices.*'



### Would this have happened anyway?

Sported would have done some of this work without Inspiring Impact. Some of their volunteers are also consultants and were already skilled in impact. However, the funding of a post-holder through Inspiring Impact did help to drive the programme.

Being able to rely on the Inspiring Impact resources, and also being part of a bigger programme that wasn't just sports specific. ... So being able to be part of that wider project that went across sectors that went across everything has been really beneficial. And means that we're not in a little niche bubble.

The interviewee was clear that module one was very clearly drawn directly from Inspiring Impact support and resources; finding resources to which they could signpost that they could locate in one place had been really helpful. Modules two and three were developed more on their own:

It was the Inspiring Impact resources that helped us shape our introductory model. The remaining and the subsequent stuff we've built on has, I guess, relied on Inspiring Impact to a lesser extent, and that's something we probably could have done outside of the support and the programme.

### 13.2.1 Greater buy in

Two partner interviewees reported how work with Inspiring Impact had led to greater integration of impact practice in their own and their network organisations.

One of these, Sported, reported in early 2017 that learners were seeing wider acceptance of impact in their organisations. This was leading to organisations becoming more ready to engage in effective impact and less dependent on one individual or a small number of team members, which in the past had led to burn-out.

Before this we used to do outcomes, but they were by-products; now outcomes are the purpose of everything we do. ... It binds everything together. (Attendee at a Sported learning cluster event)

Another interviewee reported that Inspiring Impact came at a time when they were trying to move from activity to impact-based planning. They reported that using Measuring up had helped their strategic plan to be developed with buy in across staff, and brought a greater awareness both of the planning process and of the importance of measuring impact:

All staff are involved on a quarterly basis of reviewing their parts of the plan and assessing progress against the plan. Overall, there is a greater understanding of the need to record information for each activity. The quality and quantity of relevant information entered on CRM, as a result of greater awareness and understanding of the process has led to a consistent, high standard of information.<sup>25</sup> (Interviewee)

---

<sup>25</sup> Impact Practice – Embedding the Cycle: End of Project Report, Sept 2017.

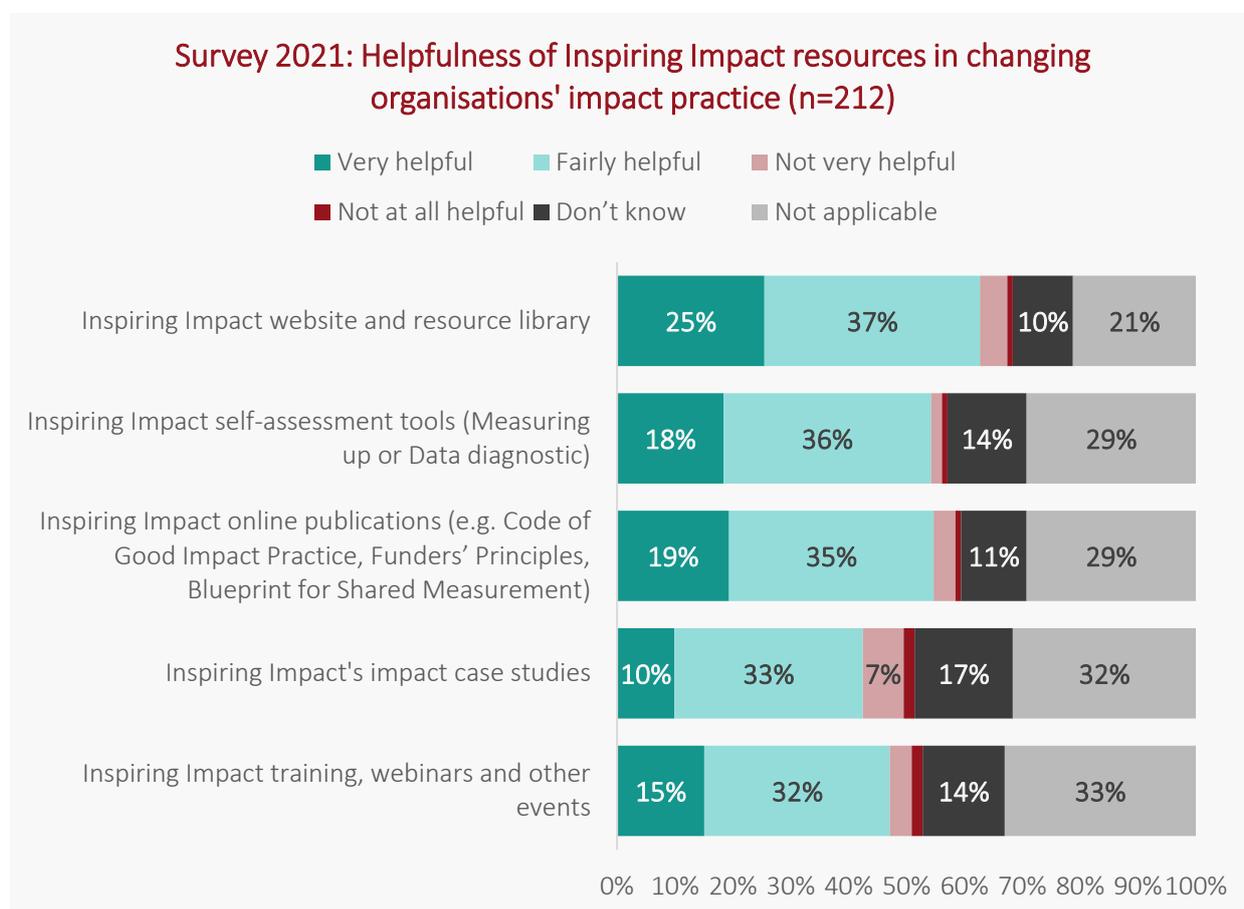


## 13.2.2 What helped make changes

Survey respondents reported using multiple sources to help them improve their impact work, with Inspiring Impact being only one resource.

### Inspiring Impact resources

Asked how helpful Inspiring Impact resources were in achieving positive change, responses were consistent with the resources reported in 8.2 above as being most useful. The website and resource library were the Inspiring Impact resources viewed as the most helpful in terms of changing organisations' impact practice, followed closely by the self-assessment tools (see chart below). Just over half had found the online publications helpful, while just under half said that training, webinars and other events, and impact case studies were helpful. A very small number of respondents had found the resources unhelpful.



Some survey respondents explained how Inspiring Impact's resources had helped to change and improve their impact practice:

I think generally there is an understanding and consensus around improving and proving impact amongst SMT and staff but what the Inspiring Impact Assessment tool allowed us to do was to look at a broader range of areas that perhaps we had not considered. It also showed areas of improvement clearly over a number of years. (Survey respondent)



Respondents reported the perceived credibility of Inspiring Impact's resources as helping to facilitate change (see also 8.3.2 and the case example below). Another respondent felt that their own 'impact narrative' was strengthened as they were better able to position themselves in relation to good impact practice.

Inspiring Impact's resources and tools were very helpful for understanding where our organisation positioned itself in terms of impact practice and making the case internally that it is an important area for the charity to work on. (Survey respondent)

### **Citizens Advice: Inspiring Impact brought validation**

One of our interviewees previously worked at Citizens Advice, where they undertook a whole programme of work to improve their impact practice. To do this, she used Inspiring Impact resources frequently. Inspiring Impact gave her external validation that she could use as a lever, internally, to make change happen.

I actually found Inspiring Impact to be enormously important for the work that I did at Citizens Advice ... because it provided external validation that this was something that was needed and important in a voice that was credible. ... And that then gave me licence to be able to improve ... some of the work we were doing. And then as soon as we started that cycle, everybody loved it, which then meant I got more licence to do more in that space. So it was quite a catalyst.

She had found resources, particularly around the principles of reporting impact, especially useful, helping them to think about and explain what they were trying to achieve and to what extent it had been achieved, and the evidence behind it. She felt that although some of the development in their impact practice would have happened anyway, there were changes to how they approached both service design and communications that had been helped by Inspiring Impact.

### **Other resources**

A significant proportion of survey respondents felt that other organisations' websites and resources contributed to their personal or their organisation's impact practice improvements (61%) (see chart below).



### Other contributors to personal or organisation's impact practice improvements (n=202)



Survey respondents mentioned a range of other resources they had used to support their impact practice, including:

- their own organisation's internal training, knowledge, or experience, such as impact advocates within their team (9)
- new staff with impact skills after expanding their organisation's impact team or budget (5)
- learning by doing and building up experience working with their clients and adapting methods to suit their needs (5)
- their own personal education or knowledge, such as their academic training (2).

### The Robertson Trust: When Inspiring Impact did not fit

The Robertson Trust is a large Scottish funder that became involved as part of a small action learning set run by ESS through Inspiring Impact, meeting once a month for around four months, with take-home tasks.

Despite being quite a large, sophisticated organisation, they had a lot to do around impact culture and understanding before they were ready to access Inspiring Impact's tools and resources. As reported in 10.4.1 above, they experienced challenges in working in a group of mixed skills and types. They found work with another support provider, involving a group of funders focusing on the culture around evaluation, more tailored to their individual needs. Their engagement with Inspiring Impact had been too early in their development.

We needed to get everybody on board before we then started looking at organisation impacts because, again, staff and trustees all had different ideas about what our



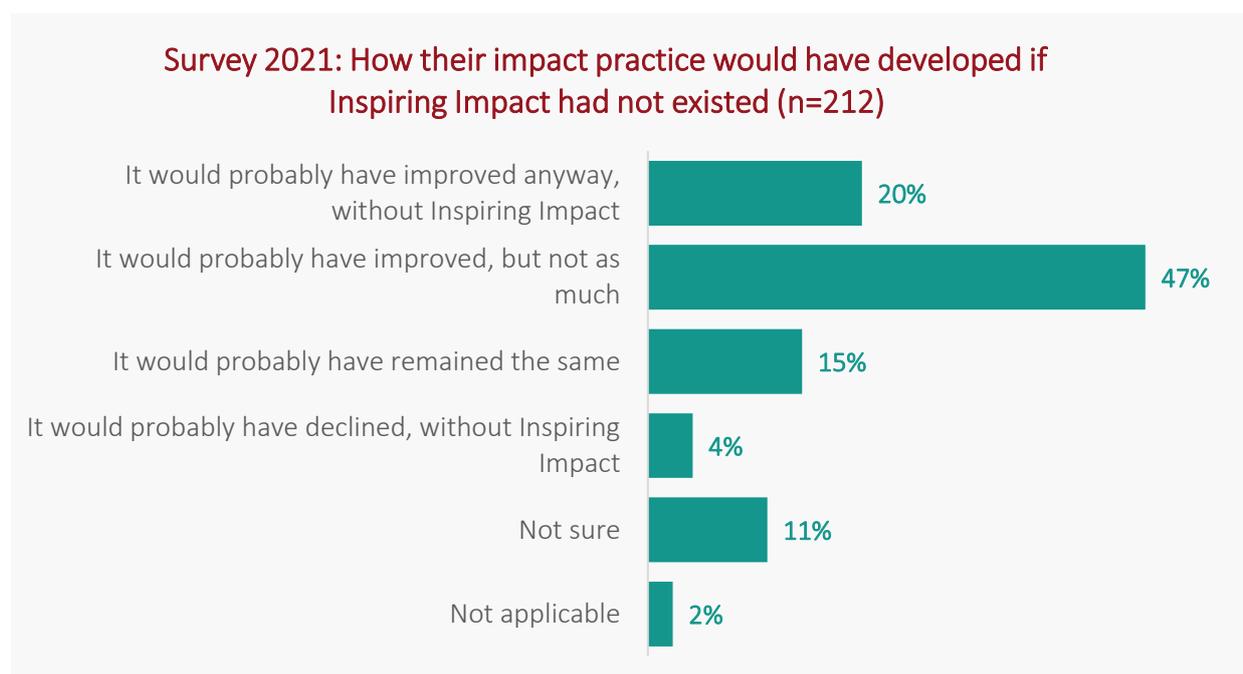
organisation did, what impact meant, how we might measure it. And I think if I engaged with Inspiring Impact with where we are now, it could be more powerful, but I think we just weren't at the right stage for Inspiring Impact.

The involvement of other funders in the other support programme also carried weight with the board and helped them to take improvements to their impact practice seriously.

### 13.2.3 What would have happened anyway?

Nearly one half of respondents (47%) felt that, although it would have improved, their impact practice would not have improved as much without Inspiring Impact, indicating the contribution of Inspiring Impact over and above that of other developments and inputs to organisations (see chart below).

A fifth of survey respondents felt that their impact practice would have improved to the same extent, even without Inspiring Impact. Less than a quarter (18%) felt that there would have been no improvement, or their impact practice would have declined without Inspiring Impact's resources and delivery.



Of 110 respondents who reported that their work on impact would not have been as good without Inspiring Impact, 36% linked this to the quality of the programme's resources. About a fifth (22%,) said Inspiring Impact made it easier to learn or to make progress with impact. The same amount felt that thought leadership from Inspiring Impact had pushed everyone forward.

The majority of those arguing that Inspiring Impact had less of a role in changes explained that other resources were available and sector demand for impact had been growing anyway. Nine said Inspiring Impact had not made a big contribution as they were already doing good impact



work and/or did not need it.

### 13.3 Outcomes for Impact Champions

NPC's 2018 survey of Impact Champions (with 13 responses) indicated that Impact Champions appreciated being part of a network with backup from like-minded people, and sharing their experience with each other. They felt this helped them improve their knowledge about impact practice, and to have a readily available source of information to share with others.

The 2018 respondents also felt that the network was a way for them to demonstrate their organisation's commitment to good practice on impact measurement, and add to its credibility. The resources available through Inspiring Impact were useful for funding bids, to deliver high quality training, and to validate the work they were doing.

It's great to be part of a national network – it adds credibility to our work and advice, and also provides us with up to date information for our third sector users either directly, or via their company partners.

However, as discussed in 6.5.1 above, responses to a survey of Impact Champions a year earlier, in September 2017, illustrated some difficulty for Impact Champions to effectively use learning from the network.

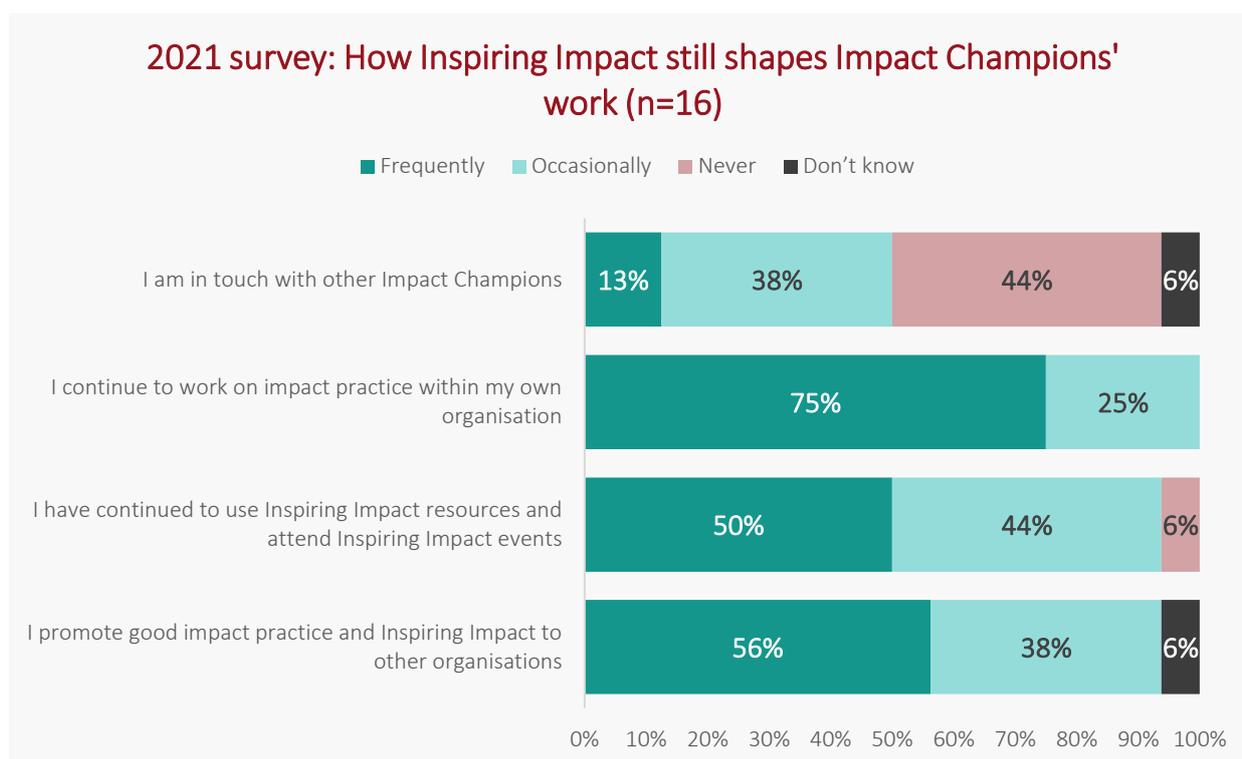
I can't think of any concrete examples of where we've directly used learning from the network in our organisation. More broadly, it's been helpful to hear about what other Champions are up to and how they engage others to develop a better impact practice.

Part of the difficulty was that Champions were at different stages of impact practice, as well as the inherent differences between organisations. One Impact Champion providing feedback to an event in November 2017 said:

Tech section was very interesting but didn't feel appropriate for our charity. Most of the technology discussion was interesting but out of reach.

Similarly, another 2017 survey respondent said that it had been difficult to adapt learning from organisations that were 'significantly bigger than the ones that are in our network.' This also illustrates a problem for the evaluation in assessing outcomes for wider networks without data on how learning was cascaded, or without detailed reporting such as that provided by Sported.

Around two-thirds of the 16 Impact Champions responding to our 2021 survey had signed up as an Impact Champion during 2016-2018. (Of the rest, the majority couldn't remember.) Impact Champions, by definition, were already highly engaged in impact work before signing up to the programme. Unsurprisingly, although the Impact Champion programme effectively wound up two years ago, the 16 respondents still reported a good level of activity in this area (see chart below).



Although only three Impact Champions remained in frequent touch with others, 12 of the 16 reported still frequently working on impact practice within their organisation. Half of them were frequently using Inspiring Impact resources and attending Inspiring Impact events and just over half were frequently promoting good impact practice and Inspiring Impact to other organisations.

## 14. Sectoral change over the last ten years

This section describes changes in the sector over the last ten years, as perceived by respondents. We discuss the extent to which these can be linked to Inspiring Impact in 14.4 below.

### 14.1 Changes in the VCS

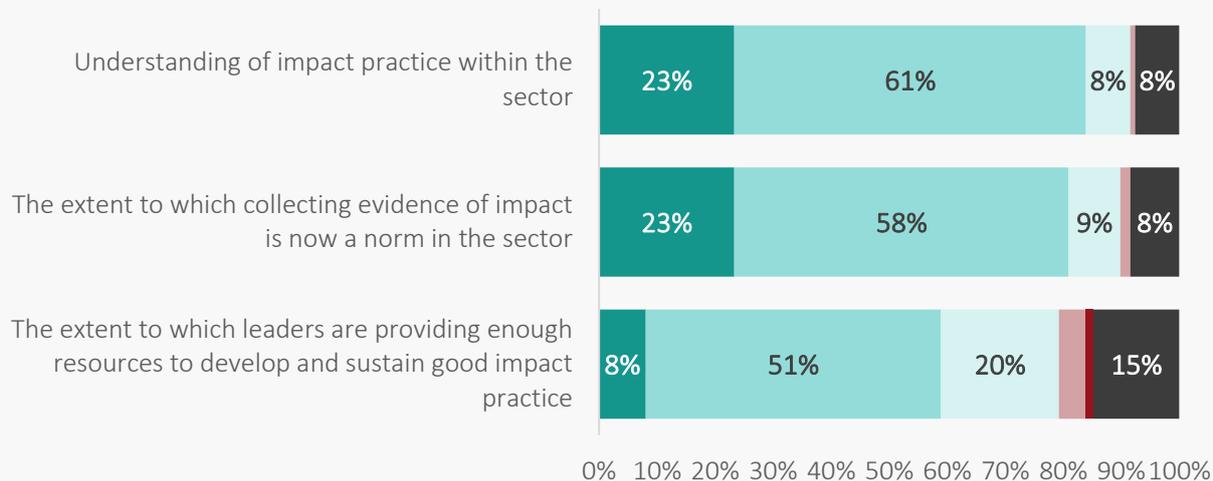
#### 14.1.1 Changes to impact culture

The biggest impact culture changes reported by survey respondents were around the understanding of impact practice within the sector and the extent to which collecting evidence of impact is now a norm in the sector: these were reported by well over three-quarters of respondents (see chart below).



## 2021 survey: Cultural changes in the voluntary sector over the last 10 years (n=236)

■ Strong positive change   
 ■ Somewhat positive change   
 ■ No change  
■ Somewhat negative change   
 ■ Strong negative change   
 ■ Don't know



Most interviewees felt there had been a clear increase over the ten years in the sector's understanding of, and buy in to, the need for good impact practice. This was the case across all four UK countries.

I think there's a better general consensus of understanding of the need for impact. ... I think some organisations have got better approaches to it than others. But it isn't a surprise anymore to talk to any kind of a charity at any level and say to them, you know, can you talk to us about the difference that you've made? ... And a lot of organisations will have some fairly useful, as a minimum, proxies for the difference they're making or a good couple of case studies. (Steering group interviewee)

Interviewees talked about impact being more embedded within organisations. One interviewee noted that most large charities now have impact leads, a clear difference from ten years ago. One funder said there was a greater focus on learning and using the learning as a form of continuous improvement, rather than it being simply for reporting to funders:

It's not just about proving, but it's about learning: what's working; what's not working quite so well, where you can improve going forward. I think that's a really positive change. (Interviewee)

The Welsh consortium partner thought that people in Wales were clearer about the link between understanding and reporting on impact and an organisation's survival. There was also an increased interest in theory of change, most significant change and other qualitative approaches.

Now, I think we say we need to do this to survive. If we still want to be here in five to 10 years, and we still want to have jobs, then we need to demonstrate the impact of what



we're doing. That's a shift. (Consortium interviewee)

### 14.1.2 Level of evaluation practice

There was evidence of both more – and less – sophisticated evaluation practice developing. This may reflect two things: a widening gulf between the ‘rich and poor’ in terms of impact skills; and an intentional move away from over-complex evaluation towards something simpler but still effective.

Both CES and NCVO have found that their consultancy services experience clients with an increasingly developed understanding and use of evaluation. It is possible that this may reflect a widening gap in skills and resources around impact and that more sophisticated skills in impact practice relate to a top tier of charities – those more likely to seek consultancy support.

At the same time, NCVO reported that there was still significant demand for entry-level training. One consortium partner acknowledged that, generally, there was some improvement and there were good ideas about data collection and wider impact practice, but this was not universal.

There are still the people who don't know an outcome from an orange. And lots of really small organisations, particularly the brand new ones, are still not clear.  
(Consortium partner, interview)

### 14.1.3 Move back to simplicity?

Interviewed in 2017/18, a previous programme partner emphasised the importance of doing things better and more efficiently rather than being fixed to models of impact practice; there were many methods to gain insightful learning. His view was that some of these methods were more ‘subjective’ but they were also valid, as long as the approach was clear:

I think it's about sweeping that [‘proper’ evaluation design] away now and recognising there are different approaches relevant to different sectors, relevant to organisations at different points of time, as they work across different initiatives. (2017/18 interviewee)

In our 2021 interviews, one respondent talked about a drive a few years ago to introduce highly technical methods like SROI, to ‘nail the methodology’ and to push the boundaries. His view was that losing some of that ‘methodological evangelism’ was probably helpful. Similar views were expressed by other interviewees, including some funders. There was a sense of moving away from an ‘almost purist methodological battle’ which was not accessible to the wider sector. Arguments long put by the sector for proportionate approaches are perhaps returning to challenge prescriptive models intended to be applied to all. ‘Quick and dirty’ evaluation could be fine if underpinned by good research knowledge.

We've moved beyond that and we're embracing a much messier and pluralistic sense of how we collect data, how we ask questions, how we think about these things, you know, the broader impact practice that that we've described. ... And then trying to think of the ways in which we can communicate that. (Steering group interviewee)

Other interviewees also suggested a possible move back to greater accessibility and simplicity in



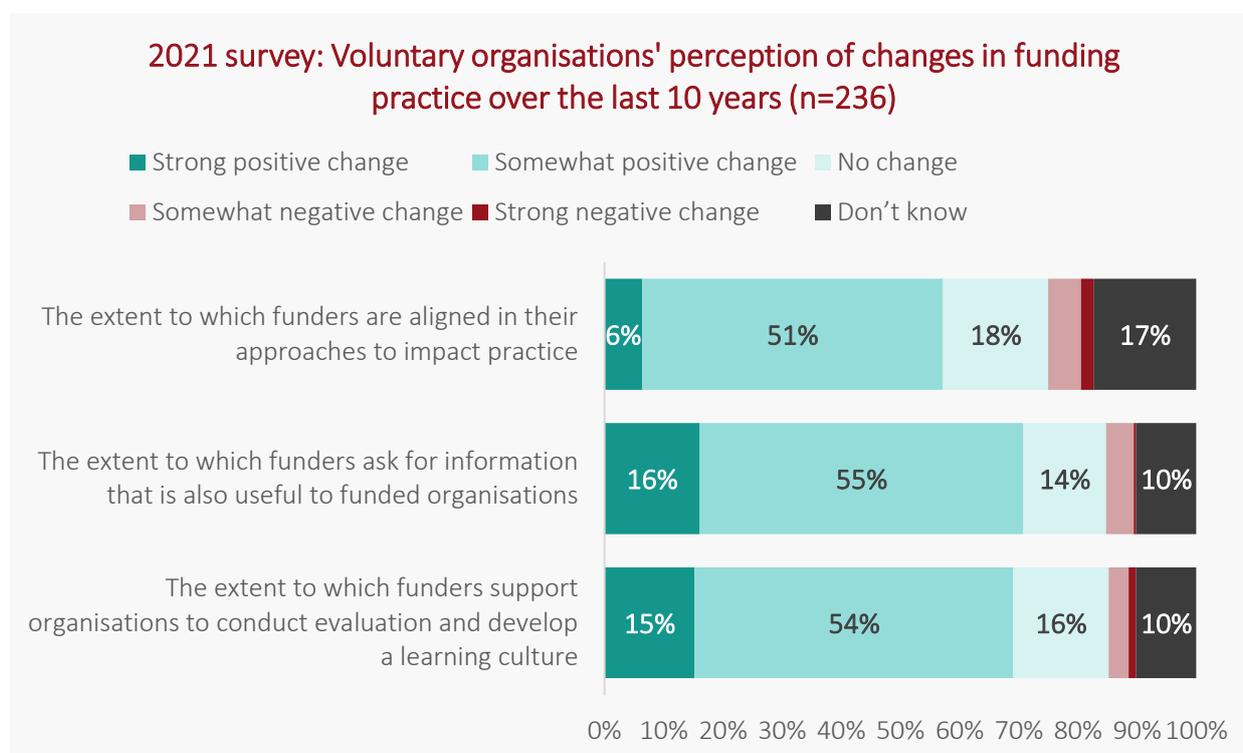
evaluation. This was based on a more realistic assessment of what a large part of the sector could manage and a more pragmatic approach necessitated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Two interviewees were dismissive of standards of evidence, which rated approaches to impact and evaluation according to the degree to which they could be systematised, establish causality and permit replication. One funder discussed a prescriptive approach to evaluation that had gained currency:

They've led to a kind of ... 'theatre of impact measurement' that doesn't relate to work on the ground. ... But there's still this very wide gulf between ... what counts as evidence in the kind of 'what works' circles, and then what happens on the ground in charities in terms of how they learn. ... [Organisations] should definitely extract and synthesise lessons from the literature that support particularly planning and design. But [we should reject] the idea that we should be holding organisations to a standard where they would be contributing [to the evidence base, or] even using the tools from those of evidence gathering and evidence generating exercises. (Interviewee)

## 14.2 Funding practice around impact

### 14.2.1 The sector perspective

Most survey respondents felt that, over the last ten years, funding practice had improved, particularly in terms of funders asking for more useful information and funders supporting an impact and evaluation culture (see chart below).



NCVO reported seeing an increase in **funder-plus** approaches, with funders offering more support to grantees around evaluation and impact, and becoming more interested in learning.

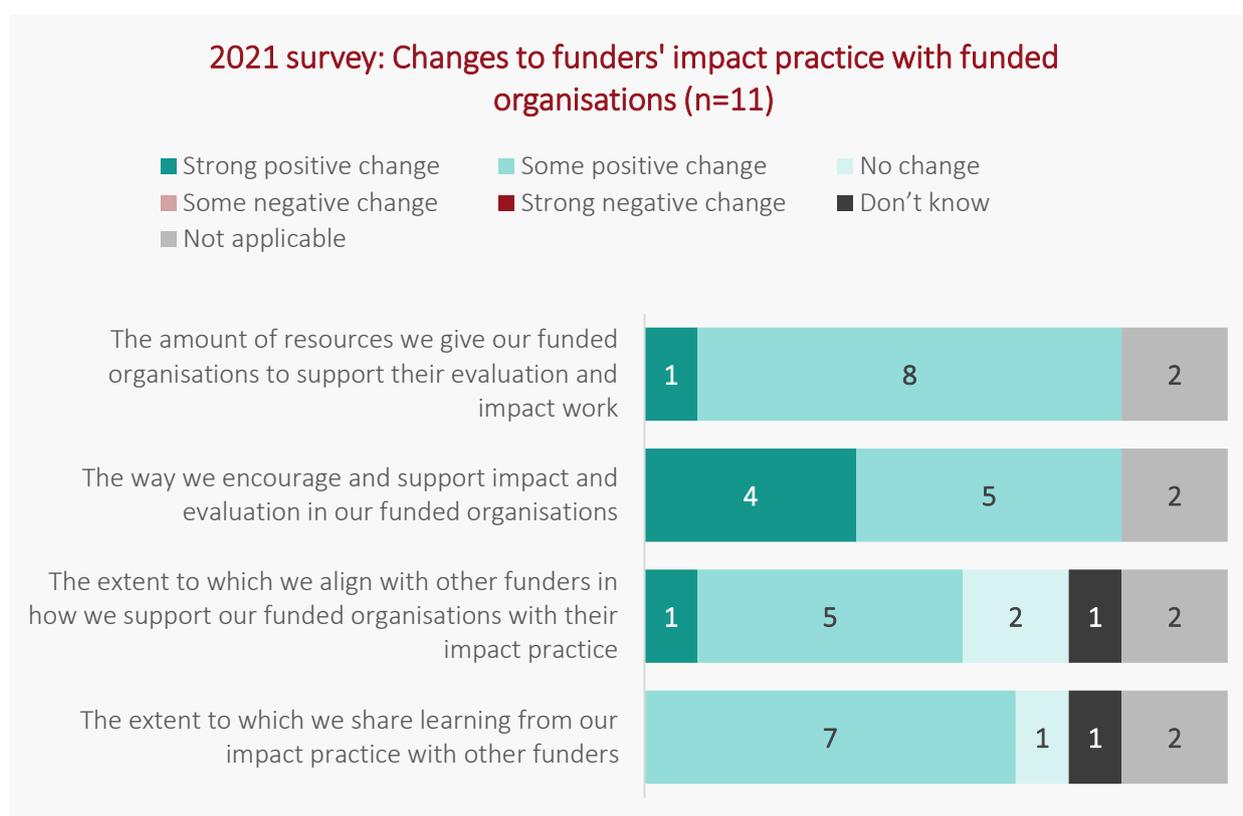


A growing understanding of the disbenefits of the bureaucratic burden of funder demands on charities has led some to simplify their approach.

## 14.2.2 The funder perspective

Our 2021 evaluation survey provided some limited data from 11 funders about changes to their funding practice. Outcomes for their own organisations are reported on 13.2 above. Changes to funder practice due to Covid-19 are explored in 15.1 below.

The largest change to funders' impact practice was in the way they encouraged and supported impact and evaluation in their funded organisations (see chart below). Funders also reported positive change in the amount of resources they gave their funded organisations to support their evaluation and impact work. No negative changes were reported.



The top contributor to funders' impact practice improvements with funded organisations, besides Inspiring Impact, was paid consultancy support (5), followed by other organisations' websites and resources (3), evaluation training (2), peer support (2), free consultancy support (1), and support from funders (1).



## Youth music: Exploring shared measurement

Youth Music is a funding body that aims to get more young people – especially those with less access to such opportunities – involved in music.<sup>26</sup> Youth Music ran an Inspiring Impact shared measurement project with NPC during 2017-19. They worked with ten of their mid-sized grant holders (£30,000 to £150,000), which were given a grant uplift to help them take part.

The grant holders had 1:1 support as well as around three in-person group meetings. At the start, participants were uncomfortable with the quantitative approach to the unique situations of their young people. As a result, they developed a shared interview schedule, and collected data on this; a staff member at Youth Music then analysed the data. Later in the project they all used a shortened version of the Warwick Edinburgh wellbeing scale, some within an interview setting. Again, Youth Music did the analysis, which showed an increase in wellbeing.

### Outcomes for participating organisations

Data from a feedback survey carried out by Youth Music at the end of the pilot was completed by eight of the ten participants. Seven agreed that taking part in the pilot had improved their understanding of the different types of data and their uses in evaluation; six agreed that taking part had improved their understanding of data collection and data analysis.

### Outcomes for Youth Music

#### Learning about data collection

Youth Music were initially surprised that their groups didn't want a quantitative, shared measurement approach.

When we were planning it, we were possibly a bit idealistic, that that would be just received with open arms and nothing but real excitement about the prospect of shared measurement.

The interviewee reported that if they were to undertake the project again, they would have had more open initial conversations:

Rather than designing the pilot project in the way that we thought it was going to run, I think I'd be more open at the beginning and hear from the people taking part about what they want out of the project.

The interviewee also learnt about what was appropriate in data collection with young people in their particular context:

We just had ended up having a really honest conversation about some of the realities of trying to evaluate with young people experiencing barriers in this way. And actually, it was really eye opening ... to hear from people who are actually working

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://youthmusic.org.uk/>



day to day with this. ... They're there to make music. They're not there to fill in forms.

They were giving us that real sort of reality of some of the young people they work with are totally disempowered actually by the situations that they're in, so handing them a piece of paper and asking them to rate themselves out of 10, on something that they actually can't control is really sort of, you know, discouraging almost.

As a result of the Inspiring Impact project, Youth Music learnt that with their wide portfolio and the wide range of young people they worked with, with different levels of experience and ability, a shared measurement approach would not benefit them – ‘quite an important piece of learning.’

Indirectly, it also contributed in some way to Youth Music’s decision to be a more flexible funder.

I don't know if this is an outcome of that project or not, but certainly something that's happened more recently, as a result of listening to grant holders, we've become more flexible in our outcomes reporting. So now people can submit video evaluations to us if they prefer, or presentation deck, something like that

### **Whether funders can claim frontline impact**

Two funders interviewed for this evaluation noted a growing awareness in their own organisations that funders are actually funding changes in funded groups, not those charities’ ultimate users. One explained that they should not ‘participate in a fiction’ that they could demonstrate a causal pathway between their funding and changed lives, particularly given the limitations to the measurement approaches used by charities.

[Most charities] certainly don't routinely take into account counterfactuals or anything else ... beyond the sort of descriptive account of what they were delivering, and perhaps what happened to the people they were supporting. (Interviewee)

David Carrington, the first chair of Inspiring Impact, interviewed in 2017, said that to some extent funders still demanded to know their own impact, but with funding only one ingredient in what happened the question was ‘invalid’ – impossible to answer.

Some funders have accepted the argument that the question, ‘What’s the impact of my funding’ is inappropriate, but that the question should be, ‘How can we help you tell us about the impact of your work?’ Funders are often unwilling to reflect the cost of that in their funding, but there are good examples of where funders accept this is a legitimate overhead.

It’s not known how widespread this understanding is, but it has real potential to influence funders’ requirements of their funded groups in terms of more appropriate and proportionate evidence requests.

## **14.3 Changes in sector support**

There have been a range of changes in UK infrastructure support on impact over the last ten years, although not resulting from, or necessarily even linked to, the programme itself.



However, there is good evidence that Inspiring Impact has directly improved the support to the sector in Wales. Many of the consortium partners across the four UK nations are offering some better services as a result of the programme. Working relationships and collaboration and consistency are improved between the partners, which it is assumed may indirectly benefit the sector.

### **14.3.1 Partners offering new services because of Inspiring Impact**

The Inspiring Impact online resources will continue, potentially incorporated within the websites of programme partners. Few of the other activities funded under Inspiring Impact will sustain beyond the programme's funding. However, as a result of Inspiring Impact some partners now have new or improved work strands on offer to their members or clients: for NPC, new work has emerged around shared measurement; for SVUK it has an increased focus on supporting charities with impact practice; ESS will run some evaluation leaders events.

WCVA and NICVA have integrated impact work into a lot of their other offers, for example their resilience workstream (WCVA) and project management training (NICVA).

Whenever we would do project management ... we will be using a lot of the concepts, a lot of the learning when it comes to talking about monitoring and evaluation, because that's part of the project cycle. ... In a sense, the legacy of Inspiring Impact is living on because we're integrating that knowledge base and resource into the session. ... and it gave us the confidence, I guess, to do that, as well. (NICVA, interview)

We have the capacity now to offer more training around impact and evaluation theory. We offer theory of change training now, which is really popular; we couldn't have developed that without Inspiring Impact. There's actually no way we would have had the capacity, you know, to develop that. (WCVA, interview)

WCVA reported the beginnings of a community of practice in Wales as a development from Inspiring Impact, currently bringing together four of the key players (WCVA, Data Cymru, Co-production Network and Swansea University). It is intended for anyone with a more advanced grasp of and interest in evaluation and impact, rather than beginners.

Social Value UK has created a new permanent role within its staff team, leading on civil society support, and managing Inspiring Impact for the final year of the programme:

Without this programme, even if we had recognised the need, we may not have been able to restructure ourselves to create that support within the team, which we absolutely want to continue with.

#### **Would they have done it anyway?**

In the main, consortium partners were chosen specifically because they were already evaluation and impact specialists, or a move towards this kind of work was already on their radar. Unsurprisingly, therefore, consortium interviewees said they would have delivered at least some of the work funded by Inspiring Impact without the programme.



However, consortium partners reported that Inspiring Impact funding often enabled them to do more activity, with greater reach, to a better quality. By 2011, with grant funding lost, CES's business model was almost entirely income generating. Their development of Measuring up, for example, would never have happened without the Inspiring Impact grant.

Both BAVO and ChEW reported they would not have been able to carry out the work without Inspiring Impact support, or certainly not to the same extent.

### **Encouraging innovation**

Some consortium partners noted that being grant-funded through Inspiring Impact had allowed them to innovate, experiment and try new things:

[Previously] some of the initiatives and ways that we thought we could build evaluation capacity, or develop the movement for good impact practice, we did using a test-learn approach. Which is absolutely fine as we were trying new things, but some proved more effective than others. ... But when we started out, we didn't see it, or design it, as a test and learn approach, and we certainly didn't communicate [that] to our stakeholder. Whereas I think now we'd be more comfortable with that language and explaining this to others. (Consortium interviewee)

It did allow us to do things we wouldn't otherwise have done. ... It was actually quite good as a bit of experimentation. .... For us, at ESS, we were able to do a lot of experimentation around peer learning, which was great. So I think a bit of an opportunity to try something new. (Consortium interviewee)

### **14.3.2 Better joint working between partners**

Partners reported outcomes for their own organisations as a result of involvement in Inspiring Impact. Some of these we report on here, as they may indirectly benefit the sector itself.

#### **More collaboration, less competition**

Working together through Inspiring Impact improved relationships between some of the partners, and developed a mutual respect of each other's strengths, especially where there had previously been more of a sense of competition.

An unexpected outcome of this has been a completely different relationship that we have formed, I think, with [another consortium partner]. I think that it has been very, very positive, not just for us as two organisations, but for how we come together to support the sector on mutual areas of collaboration. ... I really feel that [we] were able to form a very close working relationship on the partnership.

Speaking at each other's conferences, feeding into each other's thinking and joint development of toolkits not only demonstrated a new level of trust, but developed it further because 'we think that in doing so, we will increase or improve the end products that support the sector to do things.' He felt this to be a 'really strong outcome'.

Perhaps having broad programme aims that could be agreed upon, and a neutral online



repository in which partners could share their work and then signpost to, reduced some of the competition.

All five consortium partner organisations interviewed reported doing more collaborative work as a result of Inspiring Impact, many beyond the immediate partnership. This effect was felt by wider partners too.

We built up a really good relationship with another organisation through that partnership. And we then continued to work with them on a number of things. ... It did help me get to know other people and I suppose it was a good model from that point of view, because it's strengthened the infrastructure organisations and therefore would strengthen, ultimately, I suppose the sector as well. (Interviewee)

### **More consistency**

Some consortium partners felt that Inspiring Impact had brought about increased consistency of approach between partners; some noted that this had been an initial hope for the programme. Some participants in our evaluation findings workshop noted that such consistency is important – it feeds into and supports accessibility and engagement, allowing users to feel reassured about what they are accessing.

One consortium partner found the process of creating resources to be valuable in itself, because 'it meant that we were having conversations and figuring things out.' Another said:

Inspiring Impact has been a sort of focal point for a coalescence and a general improvement in the kinds of messages that organisations are producing and talking about. (Consortium interviewee)

This new level of collaboration, and the resulting shared approaches, was one of the benefits of funding a consortium, rather than funding the partners separately. One consortium member argued that such organisations would not have collaborated outside of such a funded consortium:

[In Inspiring Impact] you had the biggest support organisations with a single voice talking about this, both in terms of what [impact] meant, what organisations should do about it, and how they should do it. That I think was very different. And I don't think you could have got that just by hoping that these people partnered and shared some intel. (Consortium interviewee)

## **14.4 Attribution**

### **14.4.1 Amount of infrastructure support**

During the ten years that Inspiring Impact has been functioning, two long-standing evaluation infrastructure support organisations closed: CENI in Northern Ireland and CES in England – although the latter leaves some legacy at NCVO. The network of local infrastructure organisations in England is much depleted. At the same time, other organisations have started offering new services. For example, the FSI has started delivering affordable impact-related



courses. These changes are more to do with increased demand and funding than with Inspiring Impact.

Some interviewees reported an increased number of people freelancing in the evaluation and impact space. Freelance consultants may offer the potential advantage of being on the spot and providing local knowledge and, with reduced overheads, may be cheaper than larger consultancies; at the same time there may be challenges with quality control. While one interviewee thought freelancers were offering increasing quality, others were less sure.

In Wales, there has been an increase in evaluation- and impact-related support infrastructure as a direct result of Inspiring Impact. It was reported by an interviewee from WCVA, and one of the Welsh CVCs, BAVO, that CVCs were doing more on impact directly as a result of that particular subsector partnership.

For WCVA, the Inspiring Impact programme has been transformative. Before the programme, impact was already on their radar, and they would have done at least some of the work anyway. But it would have been 'a lot harder': the resources provided by Inspiring Impact had a role in driving their work forward.

I think we've benefited a lot. ... We've just appointed some impact officers for our grant schemes. I'm going to train them up. ... We've got an impact Working Group. ... We've got an impact group for the CVCs as well.

I was prevented probably from making a lot of mistakes by just learning from the others about what wouldn't work [in supporting people around impact] ... I've gone from someone who, you know, didn't know very much about this to feeling confident to talk about it. ... It's really upskilled us. (Consortium interviewee)

As well as improving their services to members, the programme had improved their own impact practice. The WCVA interviewee said WCVA was 'taking impact more seriously'.

## 14.4.2 Linking sectoral change to Inspiring Impact

Discussion on wider sectoral change in impact practice raises the impossibility of drawing any clear line from the Inspiring Impact programme to any perceived changes: Inspiring Impact was one contributing element in a longer-term trajectory of initiatives and an increasing plethora of resources.

All interviewees felt that at least some of the positive sectoral changes they reported had been contributed to by Inspiring Impact, but even at a micro-level it was hard for evaluation respondents to identify exactly what change was due to Inspiring Impact.

The question 'In your view, what role did Inspiring Impact play in any of the changes around impact practice and impact culture you may have described above?' was answered by 125 survey respondents. While some respondents seemed to interpret the question as 'How did Inspiring Impact play a role?' others answered the question: 'To what extent did Inspiring Impact cause those changes?'. One respondent commented:



It's hard to say. I'm not sure how linked in Inspiring Impact was to funders and wider practice. I think probably part of a wider cultural change rather than instigators of it. (Survey respondent)

This speaks to the difficulty for respondents to attribute the contribution made by the programme to what may have been a lengthy and varied engagement with impact practice over the time period. A quarter of respondents answered that they did not know. However, 29% mentioned Inspiring Impact's provision of useful resources, 23% raising awareness and 25% learning opportunities when asked about the role of Inspiring Impact.

### **Causes of changes in funding practice**

All 11 funder respondents in our 2021 survey described positive changes to their impact practice with funded groups over the last decade. While none attributed their observed changes solely to Inspiring Impact, the majority reported that their impact practice had changed partly due to Inspiring Impact (6). Another four funders felt their impact practice had changed due to other factors rather than Inspiring Impact.

Although changes were identified in the funding world, few interviewees felt these could be safely linked to contact with Inspiring Impact. In part this was because the funder strand of Inspiring Impact did not develop as intended and the engagement with funders was fairly minimal. By contrast, many of the partner organisations involved in Inspiring Impact – for example, NPC, CES and ESS – had worked closely with funders on monitoring and evaluation practice over three decades, both before and after Inspiring Impact's inception.

## **14.4.3 Difficulties with attribution**

### **Scale of Inspiring Impact**

The difficulty of attributing positive changes in impact practice to Inspiring Impact can also be seen in comparing Inspiring Impact's annual budget against those of others operating in the same field.

The total funding for Inspiring Impact over the ten years was £2m, equating to an annual spend of around £200K. By contrast, the annual turnover of ESS – just one of the consortium organisations, and one of the smaller members – is about £400K. Programme partners struggled to bring in all the additional funding for the programme that was wanted. It may be that the ambition for this programme was not underpinned by sufficient resources and there is a danger of trying to judge the programme against an unfairly high bar.

A few interviewees argued that Inspiring Impact was simply on too small a scale, and had had too broad a brief, to significantly impact the entire sector.

It wasn't of sufficient scale to impact the entire sector, and, you know, it would take something quite significant. And to do that it would probably take for government and all the key funders to buy in to this idea that impact practice is a core function of the sector and needs to be integrated into funding packages. (Interviewee)



## Building on long-term previous work

Several respondents noted the long-term foundations on which Inspiring Impact was built.

I have previously had experience of using other approaches eg the CES national outcomes programme (I was an 'outcomes champion') and I see the work of Inspiring Impact as a helpful way of building on and taking further the kind of approach that was used by CES. (Survey respondent)

You have to acknowledge the foundation that it was built upon, I think, because that was what really started lots of this stuff and enabled Inspiring Impact to continue. You couldn't have just created Inspiring Impact in 2012. ... Did Inspiring Impact continue work that had already been in train to support the voluntary sector transform around impact practice? Yeah, yeah, definitely it did. But you couldn't see Inspiring Impact as an isolated programme that started in 2012. I think you have to see Inspiring Impact as a continuation, with broadly similar partners, who had been working on this transformation for the 20 years prior, or at least the 10 years prior to kind of Inspiring Impact's conception. (Consortium interviewee)

The coalition of funders supporting the programme, the organisations involved in it, and the combined weight of messaging around it, building on where organisations, infrastructure organisations, NCVO, CES and the like, have got to in terms of the impact world, I think it built on that. (Steering group interviewee)

## Multiple concurrent impact-related initiatives

The development work relating to impact that had been started during the previous two decades by CES, CENI, NPC, ESS and Substance (among others) continued alongside Inspiring Impact. In our evaluation findings workshop, some participants noted that while the blurred distinction between Inspiring Impact work and partners' other work complicates questions of attribution, it shouldn't be seen as a problem – it reflects a wide network of support available to the sector. And Inspiring Impact never expected to be the sole cause of change.

As well as Inspiring Impact partners, a strong lead has been taken by some funders, including TNLCF and some independent funders, who were providing resources to improve impact practice and promoting learning from impact work.

Independent funders have been a real force for good. ... In Scotland, most independent funders have really shifted away from the dreaded smart outcomes ... they're much more interested in enabling charities to tell their story. Reporting forms are more straightforward. There's more relationship-based grant making ... and even some examples of multiple funders for a single project, accepting one report. (Consortium interviewee)

The Access IMP report in 2021<sup>27</sup> also pointed to the development of interest during the decade in the role of impact measurement in social investment. These included:

---

<sup>27</sup> *Reporting on the Impact Management Programme: a retrospective* (2021). Access and Curiosity Society, [https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IMP\\_Report.pdf](https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IMP_Report.pdf)



- the creation of an Impact Measurement Working Group in 2013, co-chaired by NPC, as part of the G8's Social Impact Investing Taskforce
- the Cabinet Office's Impact Readiness Fund, launched in 2014
- research undertaken into the role of impact measurement and management in social investment, for instance, the Oranges and Lemons report by Investing for Good in 2015
- the Outcomes Matrix, developed by Big Society Capital to help investors and voluntary organisations think about their impact.

Although the UK government lost some of the appetite for outcomes and 'what works', developed previously by New Labour, over the last few years the Welsh and Northern Irish governments have had a particular interest in outcome based accountability (NI) and results based accountability (Wales). Both of these initiatives have, to some extent, had a similar focus to Inspiring Impact.

### **Some change would have happened anyway**

Evidence from CDHN's April 2021 survey of VCS organisations in Northern Ireland also indicates the difficulty in attempting to attribute change to Inspiring Impact. Survey responses showed that 92% agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation was more motivated to understand and articulate impact than it had been five to ten years before, while 86% agreed or strongly agreed that awareness of good impact practice had increased in the voluntary and community sector over that period of time. Yet approximately half of the survey respondents had not been involved in the Inspiring Impact programme.

We have outlined the achievements of Inspiring Impact in bringing about changes in individuals and organisations' impact practice, and its possible effects on the wider sector. For our final section, we look at learning gathered through this evaluation as to what the UK voluntary sector may need in terms of support for impact practice in the future.



## SECTION 5: THE FUTURE

This section describes the future support needs of the sector around impact practice, based primarily on feedback from our 2021 survey and our interviews. As well as telling us about contextual issues, respondents described needs in four areas:

- direct support
- impact support structures
- development work in the field of impact
- the impact environment.

### 15. Future context challenges

Interviewees pointed to two main contextual issues that may affect how the VCS does impact practice in the near future; Covid-19 and the political or legislative environment.

#### 15.1 Covid-19

According to our interviewees and recent partner reports, impact practice in the VCS is thought to have changed during Covid-19, in both good and bad ways.<sup>28</sup>

- An **exacerbation of the existing key barriers** to impact practice: lack of staff, time and resources.
- **Greater focus on digital**, engaging users remotely and collecting data online.
- There has been greater focus on **rapid decision making** and changes required around delivering services, and perhaps more streamlined impact practice. For some interviewees this was really welcome:

Evaluation as a means of making decisions about the future is like, front and centre. ... I certainly wouldn't say 'Thank goodness, we've had a pandemic', but it has really shifted the balance to this is why evaluation matters: it's for real-time decision making.  
(Consortium interviewee)

- The **quality of impact practice may have reduced**. A few respondents felt strongly that the quality of impact practice had deteriorated during Covid-19. One respondent to CDHN's survey, a consultant, felt that 'we are retrograding under pressure of time, funds and the pandemic pause.'
- In a welcome move, many **funders have relaxed their requirements** of funded organisations, and some have used it as an opportunity to reassess their approach. One explained:

[Funders] have used the opportunity of the pandemic to radically simplify the sorts of demands for data and expectations around impact measurement that we might have expected [before] ... from a funder perspective here, a lot of us ... recognise that lots of those models of asking organisations ... to say with high degrees of predictability, who

---

<sup>28</sup> Interviewees for this evaluation; Inspiring Impact's 2020/21 annual report; 2021 survey to Access IMP grantees; CDHN draft report.



the people they serve were, in what way and to what outcomes, were not relevant in the [new] context. (Interviewee)

### 15.1.1 Post covid

At Inspiring Impact's workshop on scenario planning for the future in early 2020, it was recognised that demand around impact was in flux as a result of Covid-19:

- charities would be severely stretched, forced to prioritise target audiences and activities
- there would be an increased impetus to demonstrate value to beneficiaries and evidence would be needed to identify need and for decision making
- small local groups responding to need may have little knowledge of impact practice
- techniques for evaluating online services were not yet clear.

Charities often struggle to plan. One of our interviewees noted that this may have been exacerbated during covid, a change which may continue for some time, which will have a knock-on effect on impact practice as planning cycles become smaller.

Most charities ... don't feel able to do any forward planning, they're almost retrospectively having to try and measure things, but they don't know what they're going to be doing next week. ... In an ideal world ... you're planning what you're going to want to know. And lots just don't feel able to do that. So they're in these really small cycles of continuous improvement, but then what they've learned doesn't really matter anymore, because next week, something completely different has changed and the service has to change again. (Interviewee)

Several interviewees expressed the hope that changes in funder approach would sustain, post-pandemic. Some were also hopeful that the focus on nimble evaluation, focused on rapid decision making, would be sustained. But three noted that there was a danger the sector would not get back to the slower, more reflective impact work.

At some point, we will need to slow down our pace of work and thinking in order to just make better strategic choices based on longer-term pieces of evidence. And so I do think there might be a struggle in convincing organisations to rekindle that kind of longer-term evaluation side of impact practice that I think we've probably not been able to focus on. (Consortium interviewee)

## 15.2 Political or legislative issues

There are potential upcoming changes in the political environment that, while not directly related to impact, may take the attention of voluntary organisations.

- In Scotland, an independence referendum may be on the cards, and there are upcoming changes to charity law.
- Post-Brexit, loss of EU funding may well impact on the voluntary sector, especially in Wales.
- In Northern Ireland, much voluntary sector funding comes from government. If power sharing collapses again, there may be a return to annual rollover funding that makes



work on planning and impact tricky.

The Welsh and Northern Irish governments have, over the last few years, had a particular interest in outcome based accountability (NI) and results based accountability (Wales). According to interviewees, this waxes and wanes. These trends will inevitably have an effect on wider impact practice.

## 16. Direct support

### 16.1 Types support

Survey respondents were asked, in an open question, to describe what support or resources might help them to improve their impact practice in future. A familiar range of support options were requested.

- **Training and skill building** (23 respondents). There were strong views both for online and offline training; many mentioned the benefits of online for financial and geographic accessibility. Two people mentioned wanting training specifically for evaluators, like an 'evaluation NVQ'. Several interviewees also felt that basic skill building for those new to impact would continue to be a need within the sector.
- **Access to resources** (18) and **case studies** (4).
- **Peer support** (17). Many interviewees also mentioned the need for peer support and shared learning going forwards; a cross-fertilisation of ideas and knowledge sharing was important to raising standards of evidence. One interviewee felt that the old model of an 'expert' trainer or consultant was no longer a preferred model, perhaps reflecting a wider societal move away from a reliance on experts. However, several survey respondents noted the need for some expertise in any peer support group (see 10.4).
- **1:1 bespoke support** (11) to put the theory into practice. One survey respondent said: 'it always seemed odd to me that people think evaluation is something anyone can do after reading through resources.' Two consortium partners reported that their Inspiring Impact users were requesting one-to-one follow up support, in addition to the resources and training available under Inspiring Impact, 'to take all the great theory and work out what happens when it hits mucky reality.' In our evaluation findings workshop, some participants argued that the problem with 1:1 support is that it is resource-intensive and yet by definition it only helps a small number of people.
- **Up-to-date information** (8), to be kept abreast of current developments and future trends, to help them improve their impact practice.

### 16.2 Who to target?

#### 16.2.1 Subsector infrastructure

Inspiring Impact worked primarily generically across the charity sector. Capacity building going forward might consider working more with subsectors. One interviewee suggested that future work might 'reconsider the organising principle' that brings people together. They argued that most organisations identify more with their subsector than with the general charity sector.



However, they noted that not all voluntary organisations have such a network and a generic one may still have some utility.

There was a clear interest in thematic areas of evaluation from of survey respondents. A number requested support in specific areas, like health inequalities or policy/influencing work.

The success of the Sported subsector partnership points to the potential success of working with subsectoral infrastructure, when the conditions are right (see 12.3 and 13.2).

### **16.2.2 Funders**

Unsurprisingly, interviewees noted that any future work on impact would continue to need to target funders, because of their role in shaping the evaluation and impact environment. Participants in our evaluation findings workshop noted that while this was important, one challenge was the wide range – and rapidly changing nature of – sector funders, commissioners and investors.

Six survey respondents mentioned that it could be helpful if funders better understood the costs of evaluation. Eight noted that funder data requirements still needed addressing in terms of quantity, consistency and utility:

We have a lot of different funders and it's still an issue that they all ask for different things so it would be really helpful if funders collaborated more, which in turn would help us to streamline what we do around impact measurement and make it much more about what is best for us as an organisation rather than it being driven by funders' demands. (Survey respondent)

Funders sometimes don't help – we've recently had a government department tell us that they wanted us to reduce the amount we proposed to spend on impact measurement, whilst at the same time telling us that they wanted to see much more robust detail about the impact of the work! (Survey respondent)

### **16.2.3 Tailored resources for small and large organisations**

Survey respondents wanted different support for smaller and larger organisations: 11 people requested support for small groups, and a further two mentioned the need for simple and practical tools. Four mentioned wanting more resources on evaluating in large organisations, or in complex situations:

Another major challenge is to develop approaches that recognise and allow for complexity as many of our existing approaches are built from overly simplistic, linear assumptions about how social outcomes are generated. (Survey respondent)

## **16.3 Areas of need**

Respondents described areas they felt the sector would need help with going forwards. Most commonly mentioned were help with tools and digital.



### 16.3.1 Digital

Digital was the support topic most commonly mentioned by survey respondents (11), either the need to evaluate new digital ways of working, or the need to use digital methods in evaluation (11). Interviewees noted that the move to significant online working hastened by Covid-19, combined with developing technology, was thought to bring both challenges and opportunities in this area.

### 16.3.2 Tools and data collection

Several interviewees argued that the voluntary sector would continue to need help with developing and using tools and collecting data. Survey respondents mentioned needing help with data collection (8), validated tools (3), big data (2) and impact databases (2). One survey respondent also noted:

While Inspiring Impact don't advocate for one tool over another, the reality is that tools are used and it would be useful to have a comparison of what the difference is between them and how they can be used and pros/cons of each. For example, more detail on the difference between a logic model and theory of change, what is OBA [outcomes based accountability], how does it differ to logic models and theory of change. (Survey respondent)

### 16.3.3 Basic research literacy skills

Eight survey respondents argued that the quality of impact practice was still low. Interviewees noted that in the move to democratise and simplify evaluation, some basic understanding or the principles of good social research may have been lost, such as the basics of sample sizes or generalisation.

I think any impact work continues to struggle with, I think, some of the fundamentals in social research. ... There are a lot of people that step into impact work, who don't necessarily have an understanding of the foundations of social research. ... [for example] is that actually representative, and how are you then claiming this thing on the basis of that, and have you really considered you know, all of that stuff? (Steering group interviewee)

In our evaluation findings workshop, it was noted that although many survey respondents cited help with tools as a future need, choosing the *right* tool required some research understanding. Such understanding does need to be proportional to the capacity of the voluntary organisation and the nature of their work.

### 16.3.4 Other needs

Other needs mentioned by respondents included:

- **Embedding and integrating:** Several interviewees argued that what the sector needed going forward was support in continuing to integrate impact work into everyday working life and organisational culture.



- **Academic/literature:** Two interviewees argued that the sector needed either better connections to the research literature or better work with academics.
- **GDPR:** Navigating GDPR in impact practice was seen as a need going forward by two interviewees.
- **Equitable evaluation:** A few interviewees noted that there was work to be done around making evaluation more equitable, and developing anti racist evaluation. Some work has already been done in this field by NPC and ChEW, with a lot of resultant interest from the sector.
- **Failure reporting:** One funder interviewee talked about the importance of encouraging honesty from funded organisations about what didn't work, as well as what had worked.
- **Shared measurement:** Interviewees in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland reported that shared measurement was not something of particular interest in, or relevance to, the voluntary sector in those countries. Two survey respondents mentioned shared measurement as being of interest in terms of their future impact needs.

## 17. Impact support structures

### 17.1 More Inspiring Impact?

Continuation of Inspiring Impact, or something like it, or at least access to its resources, was mentioned by 24 survey respondents when asked about their future impact needs. One respondent said that the programme had 'only scratched the surface' and that, although the resources were great, 'not enough people knew about them.'

Having a national 'brand' or initiative like this is great to bring people together, boost momentum, build recognition internally and externally of the importance of doing good impact practice. I feel quite sad that it is ending, I hope the Code stays as a public document that we can stay visibly signed up to. (Survey respondent)

I am no longer working in the voluntary sector, but I would suggest that Inspiring Impact still has a significant role to play in supporting the voluntary sector. Hertfordshire has over 3,000 registered charities, many of which are very small. They deserve national investment in support such as Inspiring Impact to help them continue their services to local communities. To the teams working on Inspiring Impact – you made a positive difference to our project – great job. Thank You! (Survey respondent)

A few interviewees argued that there is a continued need for specialist evaluation infrastructure. A respondent in Northern Ireland described the loss of CENI as leaving a 'yawning gap' in infrastructure to support impact work. One respondent in Wales wanted an 'ESS for Wales'.

#### 17.1.1 Financial viability

Inspiring Impact's scenario planning in an early 2020 workshop raised the question of whether funding for infrastructure support would be a higher or lower priority after covid, given the shift



of focus to frontline delivery. It was becoming increasingly difficult to raise money for capacity building support and it was uncertain how much demand there was for it.

The difficulty with financial viability of evaluation infrastructure organisations was mentioned by two interviewees; one noted that there were organisations in Northern Ireland that might support others, but only if they had a viable funding model. Certainly, the big need for such bodies to also do consultancy, as Charities Evaluation Services and its three sister organisations in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland did successfully in the 90s and 00s, is probably no longer there – there is now a broader market of organisations and freelance consultants filling that need. Further, the experiences of CES showed the difficulties in making such a model financially viable while targeting small and poorly-funded VCS organisations. (The move to many online training offers may mitigate this, of course.) ESS, mentioned by some interviewees as an important and successful part of the impact ecosystem, has a longstanding core grant from the Scottish government; it also does not carry out external evaluations.

It was noted in our evaluation findings workshop that any future plans for impact support in the sector would need to be informed by a very clear understanding of what is already available in each country/region, and what the key players have in their plans for the next few years.

### **17.1.2 Maintaining momentum**

Consortium partners seemed largely accepting of the closure of Inspiring Impact, with one saying that it had run its course. However, some interviewees from external organisations were worried about the programme's closure, particularly feeling that momentum would be lost:

I wish there was another phase. ... the fact that it's kind of started and finished and the impact of it is starting to fade, would have to be thought carefully about. ... It had a very positive impact, albeit it seems to have been temporary. And so I don't see any way other than there needs to be some replacement for Inspiring Impact coming into this space. (Interviewee)

They've spent 10 years really trying to understand the needs of the sector thinking about how they address that need with the services they provide, building up some good networks, so it'd be a shame to come off a cliff edge. (Interviewee)

One of my biggest gripes, and if I'm allowed to say that on the record, is that the legacy of this programme, the 10 years are going to end. ... it will be really disappointing if there's not that legacy piece, if there's not something done with the resources and the expertise that the Inspiring Impact programme has built up. (Interviewee)

### **17.1.3 Capacity building is never done**

Several interviewees made the case that the capacity building job is never complete, at least in part because of staff turnover and changing contexts. One interviewee made a strong case:

Inspiring Impact was always supposed to be a time-bound programme, but it's pouring water into a bucket with holes, and impact practice and capacity building around that will never be finished. And, you know, as soon as you start to turn off the tap, the



bucket starts to leak. So if you come back five years later, obviously, capacity will be much lower. ... I mean, should it be self-sustaining? Eventually? I'm not quite sure that's realistic. ... The capacity that Inspiring Impact built has already leached away, I think... [impact practice] is not something that the sector instinctively does. It's ... the same with financial management and governance and, you know, innovation practices ... that's just the way that skill building works. You know, people come, people go, organisations forget, they have other priorities, they move on, if you don't keep something on top of the agenda it will fall down. (Interviewee)

One participant in CDHN's follow up workshop to their April 2021 survey also emphasised that gains in impact practice could be lost again:

This can't be an end point and it's not something [that] has an end point – that is one of the underlying principles of impact practice.

One interviewee noted that the field of impact practice is constantly evolving and so capacity building needed to keep up with those changes:

So it's an ongoing process, and the sector and organisations and the people in them, and the issues that they're trying to contend with, are complicated and complex and dynamic and therefore capacity is something that you're building across those things. And it's an ever changing, adapting thing. So I don't think there's an end point of capacity built. You can always take stock at a particular time and say, 'oh, perhaps a bit more than last time we assessed this', but I don't think that lends itself easily to this end point of 'capacity built, job done, we move on to something else now'. (Steering group interviewee)

## 17.2 Maintaining quality impact support

Respondents felt there was a need for 'someone' to maintain the quality and consistency of impact support services, for three main reasons:

- quality control
- coordination of other key players
- supporting other infrastructure.

### 17.2.1 Quality control

An interviewee in Northern Ireland, part of the UK which arguably has the least evaluation infrastructure, felt that it was helpful to 'have an organisation as a "go to" for impact, that is knowledgeable and trusted and can help guide us as an organisation and sector'.

In Scotland, a funder talked about the importance of ESS' funder plus support in Scotland, providing a consistency of language and approach. There would be a 'huge hole' if they were not there.

A central body was mentioned by some as useful for maintaining professional standards and a sustainable community of practice for those providing support:



Particularly in working with the charity sector is there a kind of role for Inspiring Impact to convene that or think all that through, in the same way that there's no professional training for grant makers. (Interviewee)

### 17.2.2 Coordination of key players

Some interviewees argued strongly for the need for a coordinating body, or some kind of mechanism, to ensure all the people involved in support services to charities around impact (consultancies, funders, freelancers, infrastructure, membership bodies) could/would talk to each other. This was seen as desirable in terms of consistency of approach and a coherent voice to government and other decision makers. For Sported in Northern Ireland, this was an essential part of ensuring the legacy of Inspiring Impact:

Yes, Sported will continue this [impact practice support]. But it would be a lot stronger and a lot better if we could be working in partnership with other organisations, if there was still that sense of momentum and movement across the sector. And that is going to be a gap without Inspiring Impact. (Interviewee)

A consistent theme throughout this evaluation has been the credibility brought to the Inspiring Impact programme as a result of the consortium approach. Bringing together key players gave the resources and activities credibility for many users, and in some cases at least improved outcomes.

As a first step, evaluation findings workshop participants suggested that the current Inspiring Impact consortium partners might consider how they could continue working together.

### 17.2.3 Supporting generic infrastructure

It was discussed in 16.2.1 above that any future initiative might helpfully work with, or through, specialist, subsector infrastructure. Some respondents also noted that generic infrastructure would continue to need support around impact. Two respondents in Northern Ireland – where there is no specialist evaluation support service to continue the work of Inspiring Impact – talked about the problems with dilution of the message over time, especially when relying on a cascade approach.

An interviewee, who represents an infrastructure body that is cascading impact to its members, felt there was a need for ongoing support for those infrastructure bodies:

We need a refresher. ... Is there some other new way of thinking that we need to be aware of or look at? I can only speak for myself and am probably stuck in what we would have covered a couple or whatever number of years ago when we were delivering Inspiring Impact. (Interviewee)

One consortium partner agreed, and felt that Inspiring Impact should have done this:

The country's full of small- to medium-sized infrastructure organisations. And logic says that basic impact management is something they should be able to support charities with. So if you're a CVS and you support charities with how to run a good trustee board



and how to produce basic accounts, why isn't how to do a bit of basic impact management part of what they do? Because now we're coming to the end of Inspiring Impact, and there's nobody there to pick it up. And I think that could have been foreseen ... there could have been a space within that [Inspiring Impact] for creating a workforce that's able to do a little bit of this. (Consortium interviewee)

The model described above is familiar and can be successful. CES's previous National Outcome Champions Programme did just this in the early 00s – training up outcomes champions primarily in local infrastructure organisations. NCVO also successfully used this approach on a smaller scale with several subsector infrastructure bodies.

## 18. Development work

A range of issues relating to impact were raised that could benefit from some development work. This would enable support providers – whoever they may be – to better meet the impact support needs of the sector going forwards. Issues included:

- the need for a better understanding of the needs of different organisations, in different contexts, at different stages in their impact journey
- agreeing some impact concepts and approaches
- developing resources around exemplars of good practice and 'impact light'.

### 18.1 Different groups, different needs

#### 18.1.1 A more sophisticated understanding of need

Respondents noted that, to build a more sophisticated approach to improving impact practice, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of need across the sector. For most working in the sector, their understanding of need is based on their own network's experiences, or a handful of relatively small scale surveys. This data is necessarily skewed towards more traditional forms of voluntary sector activity, and may miss, for example, tiny community groups.

Traditionally we have usually thought of need in terms of size or turnover of organisation. While this can be a significant factor, it is important not to conflate size with capacity – some very tiny organisations are excellent at evaluation and impact, while some of the larger ones are still at very early stages. It might be useful to also explore the different support needs according to different factors, including:

- **Country or region.** The experience of Inspiring Impact is clear that different user needs, based in different contexts, need different solutions.
- **Levels of experience.** Going forward, new audiences and experienced practitioners will need different things. A range of support 'opportunities across the spectrum' might be needed.
- **Organisational type.** Different types of group need different support; emergent grassroots organisations may need something different from long-established large



charities.

- **Different funding sources.** An organisation reliant on individual giving will experience different push/pull factors in relation to impact practice than those funded by trusts or local authorities. In addition, an interviewee noted that perhaps more impact support was needed by organisations perceived as less 'deserving' causes:

There is often less diversity of funding available to charities working in the spaces of complex social issues, such as substance misuse or asylum and refugee support. These charities get less individual or corporate funding and may therefore receive the majority of their funding via contracts. These contracts regularly require impact evidence to assess performance. This inherently places the hardest burden of impact evidence in the sector on charities who are tackling some of the most complex social issues and have the least unrestricted resources to produce this evidence, and by extension this places a burden on the beneficiaries in providing their information. (Steering group interviewee)

Future possibilities for extending understanding of need might include:

- a much larger-scale survey
- qualitative work to reach organisations not traditionally engaged with impact support services, and survey non-responders, perhaps using a snowball sampling approach
- development of personas, as is common in digital design processes, to help characterise the key traits of a target audience as a route to better meeting their needs.

Participants in our evaluation workshop also noted that respondents to surveys may well be responding in a very immediate sense to their own personal need. Strategic and long-term need will also need to be understood.

### 18.1.2 Better understanding of change

A better understanding of the impact journeys of individuals, organisations, and different groups (like those above) may help target support more effectively.

We understand that lessons from the Access IMP programme were that some organisations struggle to maintain work on impact, with an initial spike of activity sometimes followed by a decline. And it is commonly understood that impact work can be difficult and takes time. One interviewee noted that the programme theory of change (in common with much other sector support provision) assumed that, with motivation and capacity, users would be able to put their knowledge into practice.

There was an assumption here that by increased motivation and increased capacity, people will have increased ability to do things differently. But that is an assumption, because there's a whole number of other organisational or individual barriers that stop that from happening, which are far out of our control. And there's almost nothing that we can really do about that. (Interviewee)

It may be that impact support providers need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of what helps people actually implement impact work. Inspiring Impact, like most other support



providers, has assumed that, given information and skills, people will change their behaviour. As with discussions about climate change and garnering public engagement, perhaps our approaches to impact behaviour change need to become more sophisticated.

### 18.1.3 People or organisations?

It might be useful to decide whether capacity building should focus on individuals or organisations, or both. The two audiences may have different needs. Individuals need skills and tools; organisations need help with culture and embedding practice, and systems that can outlive the individuals that set them up. Inspiring Impact did undertake some work on impact culture, and had more planned in phase 3 that had to be put on hold due to Covid-19. However, it could be argued that Inspiring Impact focused primarily on bringing about immediate outcomes for individuals, hoping the desired change in organisations would follow.

## 18.2 Sorting concepts and approaches

The following concepts and approaches were suggested by interviewees as worthy of more exploration.

- **Outcomes.** One partner felt that the concept of outcomes had been lost in the Inspiring Impact programme, but still had utility.
- **Power in impact.** There is work to be done in addressing power and equity within evaluation, including who chooses which outcomes are important.
- **When impact is not relevant.** A couple of interviewees argued that a full understanding has not yet been reached about when impact might not be relevant, giving examples of capital spending to fix a village hall roof, or a group of seniors running a lunch club.

Two survey respondents wanted to review the purpose of impact practice, to ensure its continued utility:

I'm increasingly thinking about the evolving purpose and need of impact measurement. I am less concerned about practice needs and more about the conversation about what happens next with measurement. What are we really learning from it? How is it most useful to us/the sector? Are beneficiaries really experiencing improvement in services and outcomes as a result of better impact measurement? What should we be measuring really? When and how? (Survey respondent)

How to be more efficient in measuring impact. Collecting data and carrying out evaluation must not take too much time nor resources nor can we drown in reporting and evaluation, deviating our work from our mission. Evaluation must serve our mission, for what it needs to be accurate and efficient and serve a clear purpose. (Survey respondent)

### 18.3 No more resources (generally)

Given the plethora of impact-related tools and resources now available to the sector, it was perhaps not surprising that few interviewees suggested more new resources were needed. There were two exceptions:



- **Exemplars.** One interviewee expressed frustration at the lack of sufficient exemplars of good practice, voluntary organisations who are acknowledged to be good at impact, or examples of good impact reports.
- **Impact-light.** It was suggested by some that there was a need for simple, light-touch but effective impact methods that were still robust. One interviewee argued that Covid-19 had made this need more apparent:

[In an emergency like Covid,] ... that's where, light-touch, readily-applicable methodologies is exactly what the sector needs. They need somebody to say, 'No, you absolutely can think about long-term impact, you absolutely can do this in an emergency. And here's how, and here is the version that won't melt your brain and require you to hire an entire team of impact practitioners.' (Interviewee)

## 19. The impact environment

### 19.1 Funding for impact practice

More funding for evaluation was one of the most commonly mentioned future impact needs, mentioned by 23 survey respondents; two also mentioned the difficulties of evaluation on a limited budget. A further nine said they needed more time for evaluation and impact.

The typical funding pots we receive do not allow for us to regularly engage the tools we would like to in order to capture people's own stories of impact in ways that suit them – eg, visual scribing, vox pop filming. I'd like to see ring fenced evaluation pots to sit alongside project delivery grants, where the evaluation can be co-designed with participants once a project is underway. (Survey respondent)

As part of a national organisation we have relatively good tools to capture impact data. However we don't have the staff/volunteers or resources to develop this further and this comes at a time when funders seem to require considerably more impact evidence. It is a catch-22 situation! (Survey respondent)

### 19.2 Keeping a focus on impact

Survey respondents (n=170) felt that, despite reporting increased prominence of impact measurement within the sector (59%), more work was needed to win people over to focus on impact (30%).

Several respondents talked about the need to keep reminding people of the need for impact work, that it was something that people could forget to do.

For us as an organisation we become busy with all the stuff that we're doing. We need to continually remind ourselves and the sector to focus on impact and embed good practice in this area. In the past there was an organisation, CENI, that did this, now they are gone we need to ensure the messages are being reinforced. (Interviewee)

An interviewee from Youth Music talked about the particular needs of her sector:



I think there's this real resistance to rigid or one-size-fits-all evaluation in [the music and young people] sector, particularly. ... The people who are trying to collect that data from young people are musicians and their artists, they're not researchers, and they're not employed to do paperwork and stuff. (Interviewee)

Inspiring Impact's trajectory has shown that interest in impact could wane without fresh efforts to refocus. The Impact Management Programme also experienced some a tail off in positive response to the two-year programme before its merger with Inspiring Impact in 2018. There were possible reasons for this:

It is reasonable that organisations will need to refresh staff training and budgets for impact work, and feasible that they were either not in a position to do this or chose not to. A second possibility is that organisations' expectations and self-awareness had changed. (Access IMP report 2021<sup>29</sup>)

### 19.2.1 A stronger reward mechanism

In line with a longstanding message about resourcing, several interviewees argued that it would be helpful to identify a stronger reward mechanism; there is no point developing impact skills if it does nothing for those organisations. This may be the case with all aspects of good practice that are not immediately mission critical. Interviewees suggested ways to make a stronger case, including:

- a more explicit link to funding
- a link between impact data and being able to make big societal changes, like improving standards of living
- using impact data to better make the case for the value of the VCS (see 19.4.2 below)
- awards for good impact practice, as have been successfully done before.

### 19.3 Keeping it on the national agenda

A few respondents noted how important it was that leading organisations in the sector, and not necessarily those specialists in impact, need to keep talking about it.

I think there's a risk that organisations stop talking about [impact]. ... And I think that would be a mistake. ... It must continue to be built into the things that we do, like the Governance Code, the things we talk about ... the blogs we write, the story that we tell about these things. ... And that's where I think infrastructure still plays a really important role in narrative building, not necessarily doing all these things ourselves. (Consortium interviewee)

There has been a lot more talk of measuring and evaluating impact over the last ten years. The more things are spoken about the more they become priorities at conferences and to funders and this culture precipitates in to organisations and so staff and managers have these things on their radar more and so feel the desire and push to improve these things. (Survey respondent)

---

<sup>29</sup> *Reporting on the Impact Management Programme: a retrospective* (2021). Access and Curiosity Society, [https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IMP\\_Report.pdf](https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IMP_Report.pdf)



## 19.4 Advocacy

### 19.4.1 Challenging government

Some interviewees felt that there was a role going forward for an organisation to be able to challenge governments around their impact demands. For example, this might arise when governments ask for too much data or the wrong data, or inappropriate methodologies, or methodologies that might have a very negative effect on the very intervention they are trying to support.

An interviewee in Northern Ireland made the case that CENI, through Inspiring Impact, had effectively advocated on behalf of the sector to the Northern Irish government, who were very much sold on implementing an OBA methodology. This kind of advocacy role, challenging the predominant government paradigms, was needed and was useful to explain why a ‘magic bullet’ did not exist. This points to a strategic, influencing role to the future work required on good practice. Another interviewee noted:

I think the role of an entity that is championing and speaking for the sector ... if there is practice which is unhelpful, coming from funders or otherwise, it's harder for individual charities to challenge that because it can feel very exposing. (Steering group interviewee)

### 19.4.2 Using impact findings to advocate for the voluntary sector

Reflecting back, one consortium member felt that Inspiring Impact’s efforts to build an impact culture might have included an advocacy role, to help the sector build a case for the value of its work, using impact data. This was echoed by one survey respondent:

Perhaps if NPC could have waved a magic wand and got more people outside of the sector to care about measuring impact and using it to inform decision making – but when was governmental policy ever driven by uncomfortable truths and long term goals rather than short term sound bites and temporary feel-good fixes? (Survey respondent)

Some interviewees felt that better use of impact data to advocate on behalf of the sector might create greater motivation for impact practice.

[Perhaps] those sub sector partnerships should actually be about the sector building a case for how amazing its work is, how significant the needs are, that are addressed, and how, you know, it should have been an advocacy focus [on resources needed]. ... [That] would have created an entirely different incentive. (Consortium interviewee)

It's my personal opinion that in recent decades the community sector has just become the whipping boy for government. It has too often had to implement the policies that the government has struggled to implement through the public sector. The community groups are beginning to realise that they are separate, discrete and have a very strong unique voice that they can use to improve the life goals and living conditions of people in the communities. So, moving forwards, I think we just need to amplify that.



(Interviewee)

Nine survey respondents mentioned the use of impact data for making the case for a specific subsector:

I'd like to see high quality national research in the areas we work (wellbeing and young people) so that we can look to the wider world to help us to understand our context, emerging issues, helpful methods of assessing how we are doing etc. And crucially to give voice to a national lobby on behalf of our service users. (Survey respondent)

## 20. Conclusion

Inspiring Impact achieved fairly good reach into the UK voluntary sector, despite the challenges of a very broad intended target audience combined with a relatively small annual budget. It was well liked by its users, and made a significant contribution to improved impact practice in the organisations it engaged with.

Inspiring Impact trialled a range of approaches and created useful learning about what works in impact support. The programme bought greater consistency and collaboration between key players in the UK impact support field, and built the capacity of some providers to offer impact support to other organisations.

The UK voluntary sector still needs support on evaluation and impact, and this need is likely to continue in the future. This support will need to be able to meet the increasingly broad range of needs in the sector.

Ten years on from the start of Inspiring Impact, there is now an even greater range of impact and evaluation support providers in the UK. There is still a need for some organisation or group to develop and improve impact approaches, to coordinate key players and to capacity build and quality control impact support providers. There is also a continued need to make the case for impact and to build on the momentum created by Inspiring Impact and others working in this field.



## Appendix 1: Evaluation methodology

### Desk research

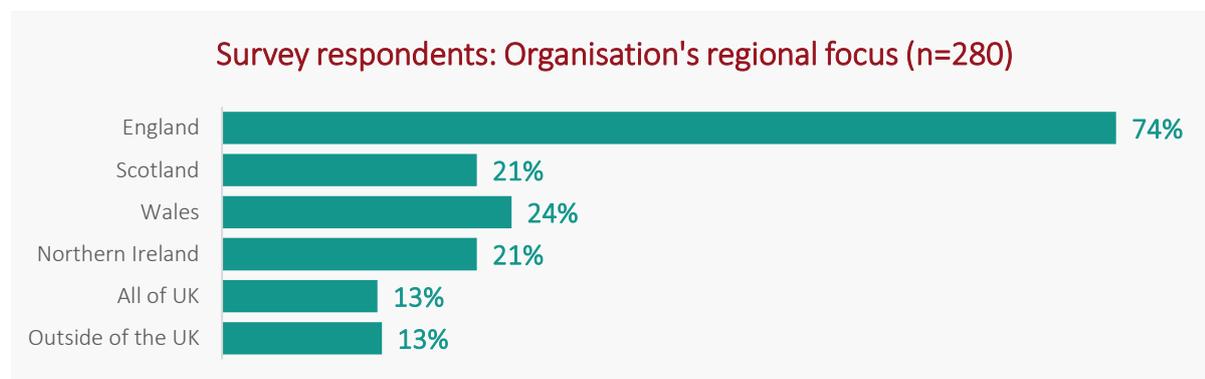
We assessed all existing data held by Inspiring Impact and reviewed all available paperwork. In some cases we analysed pre-existing data. Existing data included project monitoring data, as well as data from previous evaluative exercises, primarily in the form of interviews and surveys.

### Online survey

An online survey was disseminated by the consortium partners in September and October 2021. The survey was open for around three weeks, although the Welsh version was open for less time. In total, the survey yielded 280 responses beyond the initial 'About you' section, of which 225 were complete responses. All 280 are reported on.

It's hard to calculate response rate, as the majority of the people to whom the link was sent could not have been expected to answer it. The main group was the Inspiring Impact mailing list of 8,000 people, held by NPC. In addition, the other five partners distributed the link in newsletters and emails to their networks.

Among the respondents, 13% (36) delivered most of their work across all of the UK. England was the largest focus (207, 74%), followed by Wales (67, 24%), and Scotland and Northern Ireland (both 59, 21%). (n = 280; see chart below)

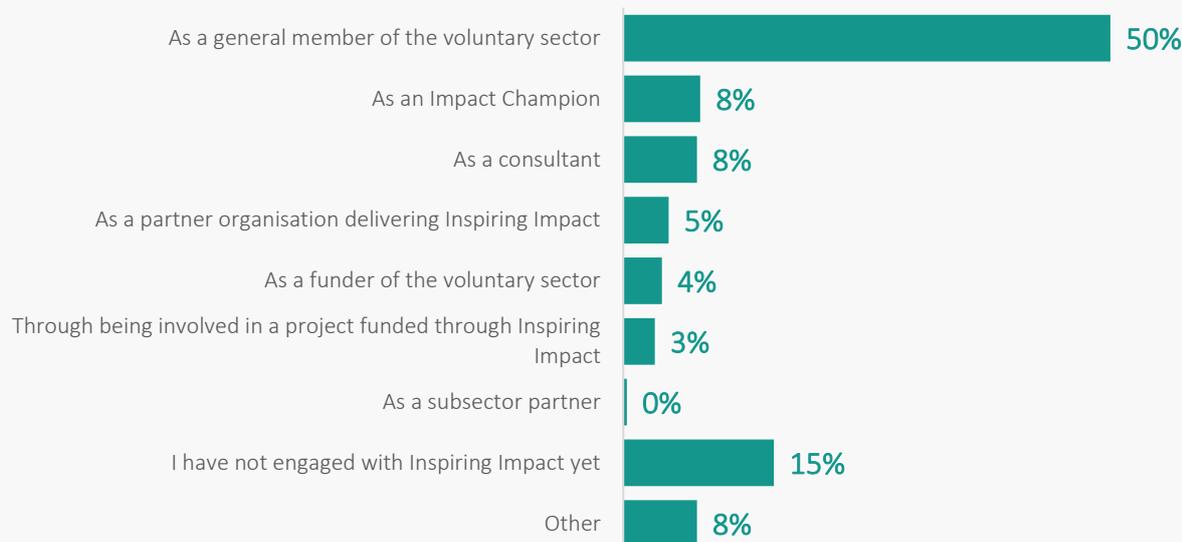


Half of the respondents mainly engaged with Inspiring Impact as a general member of the voluntary sector (50%), while 8% each had engaged with Inspiring Impact primarily as an Impact Champion or as a consultant, 5% as a partner organisation delivering Inspiring Impact, 4% as a funder of the voluntary sector, 3% through being involved in a project funded through Inspiring Impact, and nearly none as a subsector partner. However, 15% had not engaged with Inspiring Impact yet.<sup>30</sup> (n = 280; see chart below)

<sup>30</sup> This group were routed to the questions about changes in the sector, and about future need.



## 2021 survey: Main engagement with Inspiring Impact (n=280)



Of the 280 respondents:

- 66% were charities or voluntary organisations, with 10% consultants, 7% funders, 6% social enterprises or CICs. (n=280)
- Survey respondents are spread across a wide range of sub sectors, with mental health and wellbeing being the most common (41%). (n = 278)
- Respondents represent organisations of all sizes, ranging from less than £10K turnover (5%) to more than £100m turnover (5%). The largest proportion represent organisations of a middling size, with £100k to £1m turnover (28%). (n = 280)
- The largest proportion of respondents are chief executives or senior managers (35%), followed by impact, evaluation or research officers or managers (25%). (n = 278)
- There are three peaks at which survey respondents first came across Inspiring impact – 2012 (16%), 2015 (17%), and 2018 (15%). (n = 230)
- A quarter of the survey respondents' Impact Champions signed up in 2016 (25%), 19% in 2017, another 25% in 2018, none in 2019, 6% in 2020, and the remaining 25% do not remember. (n = 16)

## Interviews

We undertook 17 interviews with 24 key stakeholders, all over Zoom, lasting 1-2 hours. We interviewed:

- 10 representatives from 5 of the 6 consortium partners (ESS, WCVA, NCVO, SVUK, NPC)<sup>31</sup>
- 1 former consortium member
- 4 steering group members

<sup>31</sup> Due to budgetary constraints, we chose not to interview CDHN as they had been unable to deliver much during the pandemic. Instead, we used their recent report 'Impact Practice and Inspiring Impact in NI', DRAFT 05 August 2021.



- 1 representative from TNLCF (also counted above as part of the steering group)
- 4 people who had been part of Inspiring Impact SSPs
- 5 people who were aware of – or had worked with – Inspiring Impact but were not from partner organisations.

This group were fairly evenly split across the four countries of the UK, with at least two interviewees from each country. The group included five funders and a further group of infrastructure bodies that distribute funds.

## Interviewees

Many thanks to the 24 people who took part in interviews for this evaluation:

Name	Organisation	Relationship to Inspiring Impact
1. Steven Marwick	Evaluation Support Scotland	Consortium partner
2. Mair Rigby	WCVA	Consortium partner
3. Alex Farrow	NCVO	Consortium partner
4. Nicola Lynch/ Catherine Manning	SVUK	Consortium partner
5. Karen Scanlon/ James Noble/ Tris Lumley/ Kathryn Dingle/Sarah Williams	NPC	Consortium partner
6. Kate Laverty	ex CENI CEO	Former consortium partner
7. Tamsin Shuker	TNLCF	Funder, on steering group
8. Sally Higham, Rob Macmillan, Tamsin Shuker, Neil Barry		Steering group
9. Alex van Vliet	Lloyds Bank Foundation	Non-Inspiring Impact funder
10. Seb Elsworth	Access Foundation	Past funder
11. Angela Davies	BAVO (Third Sector Support Wales)	Subsector partner
12. Sandra Bailie	NICVA	Involved in subsector partnership
13. Judith Rankin	Sported, since 2014	Subsector partners



14. Katy Robinson	Youth Music	Shared measurement project
15. Stephen Miller	Charities Evaluation Working Group	No formal relationship
16. Cassie Rutherford	Robertson Trust, Scotland's largest independent funder	No formal relationship
17. Paul Braithwaite	Community Foundation NI, key NI funder	No formal relationship



## Appendix 2: Programme funding (000s)\*

Partner	'12-13	'13-14	'14-15	'15-16	'16-17	'17-18	'18-19	'19-20	'20-21	Totals
NPC (programme management)	70	48	20	75	68	47**	94	58	66	545
NPC (outputs and grants to projects)	30	15	15	24	2	64	103	61	45	339
Substance	30	87	5	45	25	26				218
Subsector partners				60	45	80				185
NCVO / NCVO CES	20	15	5	15	27	27	20	20	10	159
ESS	20	15	10	20	18	18	18	20	20	159
SVUK							34	32	24	90
ACF	15	13	5	20	15	15				83
CES	30	16	5	15						66
WCVA						5	18	20	10	53
Independent chair	8	6	5	3	3	3				28
ACEVO	10	7	5							22
CENI							18	4		22
CDHN								16		16
Other	42	8	30	6	6	1				92
<b>Totals</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>2107</b>

\*Reconstructing this budget retrospectively has been challenging, and this is as a result slightly rough. Also, what counts as 'programme management' may be contentious.

\*\* In addition, in 2018 the Access Board approved £100k for the new INSPIRING IMPACT website and the integration of the Access digital resources.



## Acknowledgements from NPC

We would like to thank the wide range of organisations and individuals who have been involved in the Inspiring Impact programme throughout its ten-year history, who have made the programme possible over this time. We are especially grateful to all those who participated in and contributed to this evaluation.

The following individuals have all been independent chairs of the programme and/or members of the steering group:

- Sally Higham (Independent chair 2016-2022)
- David Carrington (Independent chair 2011-2016)
- Anne Lythgoe (Greater Manchester Combined Authority)
- Neil Berry (Access – The Foundation for Social Investment)
- Rob Macmillan (Sheffield Hallam University)
- Tamsin Shuker (The National Lottery Community Fund)

The following organisations were all involved as funders of Inspiring Impact:

- Access – The Foundation for Social Investment
- Barrow Cadbury Trust
- BBC Children in Need
- Building Change Trust
- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
- City Bridge Trust
- Deutsche Bank
- Hewlett Foundation
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Nominet Trust
- Northern Rock Foundation
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Princess Diana Memorial Fund

The following organisations were all involved as partners of Inspiring Impact:

- Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF)
- Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)
- Building Change Trust
- Charities Evaluation Service (incorporated into NCVO in 2014)
- Community Development and Health Network (CDHN)



- Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI)
- Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS)
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
- Social Value UK (SVUK)
- Substance
- Welsh Council for Voluntary Organisations (WCVA)

The following organisations were all involved as Impact Champions or sub-sector partners:

- Action Hampshire
- Arts Consortium NI
- Business in the Community
- Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO)
- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
- Charities Evaluation Services (incorporated into NCVO in 2014)
- Chester Voluntary Action
- Child Bereavement Network (CBN)
- Clarity CIC
- Co-Production network for Wales
- Coalition for Efficiency
- Cornwall Rural Community Charity
- Diana Award
- Football Foundation
- HACT
- Imagine Foundation
- Link Age Southwark
- London Sport
- Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency
- Mind
- Money Advice Service
- MyBnk
- National Autistic Society
- National Foundation for Youth Music
- Northamptonshire Community Foundation
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Power to change
- Royal Society of Edinburgh
- SafeLives
- Scope



- Shine Trust
- Small Charities Coalition
- Social Audit Network
- Social Value UK
- Spirit of 2012 Trust
- Sported
- Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services
- The Reading Agency
- Thirdbridge
- Versus Arthritis
- Visionary
- Volunteer Cornwall
- Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action
- West Dunbartonshire CVS
- What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- Yes Futures
- Young Lambeth Coop
- Youth Music

This is the full version of the evaluation and learning report. [You can access a summary version of the evaluation and learning report here.](#)

