

**INSPIRING  
IMPACT**

# End-of-programme evaluation & learning report

Executive summary

March 2022

Sally Cupitt  
and Jean Ellis



# 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 bought 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



*“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.”*

# 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.

<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).



## 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.



Launched in  
**2012**



Total funding  
**£2.1m**



Ended in  
**2022**

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

# 4,146

Twitter followers

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.

# 102

events


From 2018-21,  
102 events with  
2,560 attendances



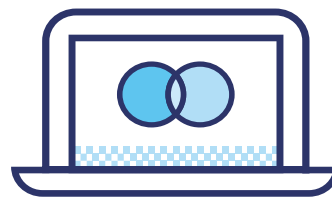
## User views on Inspiring Impact resources

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.



*“Informants ... appreciated having curated resources available in one place. That the programme brought key stakeholders together gave credibility to resources produced and promoted.”*



## 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.

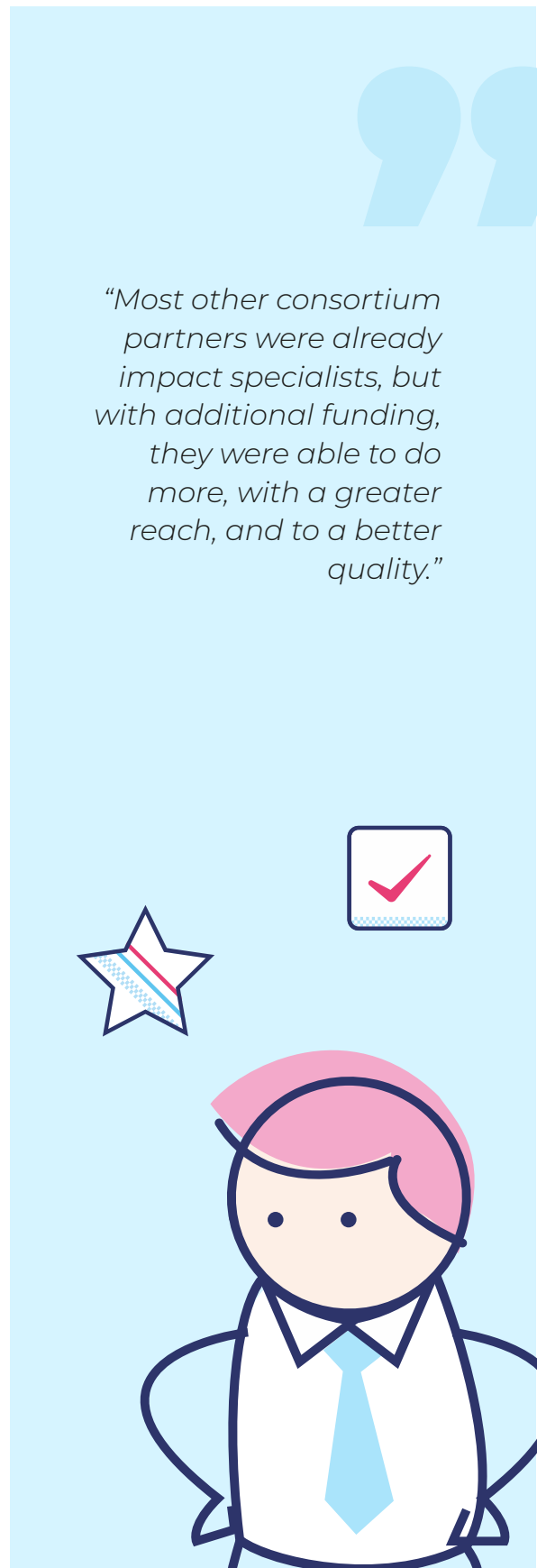
The Inspiring Impact online resources will be incorporated within the websites of the programme partners. Few of the other activities funded under Inspiring Impact will sustain beyond the programme's funding. However, as a result of Inspiring Impact, some partners have new or improved work strands.

## 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 gave value relative to time and other resources required.

<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.*



*“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.”*



# 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.

# 7%

of survey respondents mentioned wanting thematic support

*for example in health, youth work or campaigning*

## 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.



Better understanding of sectoral **need** and the needs of different stakeholder groups



Make support more **targeted**



Find new ways to **motivate**



## 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

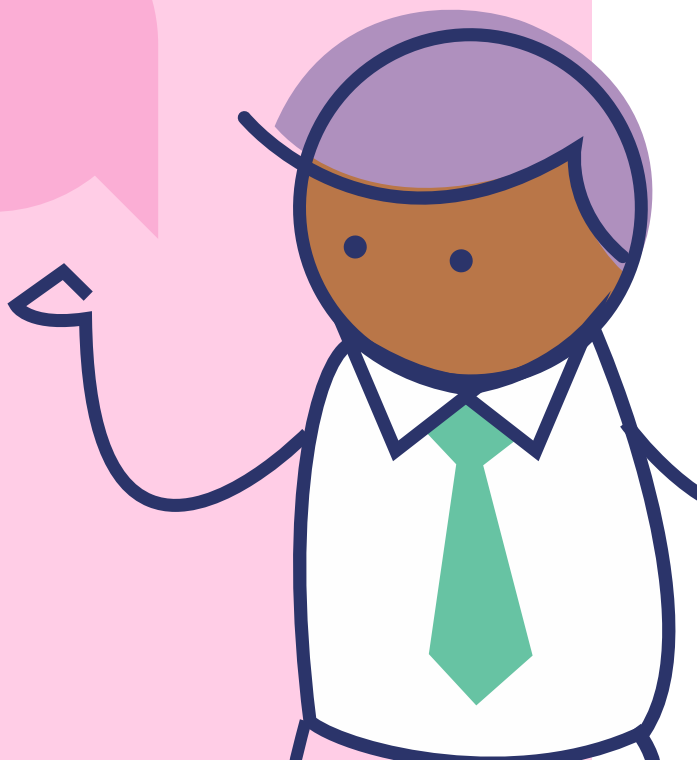
Inspiring Impact achieved fairly good reach into the UK voluntary sector, despite the challenges of a very broad intended target audience combined with a relatively small annual budget. It was well liked by its users, and made a significant contribution to improved impact practice in the organisations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

*“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.”*



# 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)

## Acknowledgements from NPC

- 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 a summary version of the full evaluation and learning report. [You can access the full evaluation and learning report here](#), for an in-depth look at the history of the programme, the findings from the evaluation, and the details of the evaluation methodology.





**INSPIRING  
IMPACT**