

TLF-podcast-recording

Mon, Jun 05, 2023 2:04PM 20:27

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fund, people, young, organizations, partners, scotland, youth advisory board, funders, listening, kelly, quora, relationships, focus, develop, workshop, challenges, recommendations, learning, involved, grantees

SPEAKERS

Kelly



00:00

Hi, I'm Dr. Hickman dam from the Center for Youth Impact.



Kelly 00:04

And I'm Kelly McFadden, fund manager at Cora foundation.



00:09

We're here today to talk about some of the findings from the listening funds Scotland evaluation. The listening fund aimed to support youth focused organizations to listen to their core constituents, young people. Now, when we say listening, we mean hearing the voices of young people and enabling them to have a greater say, in shaping the provision they receive and be agents of change on issues affecting them. Here at the center, we were evaluating the fund, which had a cohort in both England and Scotland. And the central research question for the evaluation of both cohorts was, what is the impact of dedicated funds support on organization listening practice? Through this question, we focused on exploring both changes for funded partners and young people as a result of the fund, and particular enablers and barriers to meaningful listing practice. You can find out more about the learning for bass valuations by heading over to our website, Youth Impact UK and searching for listening fund. Today, Kelly, who has managed the fund in Scotland and I are here to chat about an additional research question included in the evaluation in Scotland, and the relative novelty of the fund Design and Delivery more generally. So Kelly, to kick us off, could you tell us what that addition research question was, and why it was included? And I'm particularly keen to hear about why that's so important for yourselves as funders to add this in.



Kelly 01:42

Yeah, thanks, Joe. So the additional research question was, to what extent have young people shaped the development of the fund and the actions and decisions of funders themselves? Now, the additional research question was added, because in the early stages, all five funders in the Listening fund Scotland flagged it as a key priority to hear the views and opinions of children and young people to help shape and develop the fund itself. Therefore, it was agreed that a three month development phase would be initiated prior to the rollout of the fund, which aim to listen to youth organizations and young people about what the focus of the funds should be. And can you talk us through that development phase? What did it include? Yep, so we commissioned children in Scotland, to hold two workshops with children and young people. So the first workshop focused on setting the criteria for the fund. For Here we add sexual people who were involved in coming up with recommendations around the font design. And this included aspects such as who would be invited to apply the age range of children and young people involved and the grant size. Now workshop too focused on reviewing the applications. So here we had five young people who were involved in the first workshop. And they considered what was a good or weak response in different areas of the application, we had a focus group with focus groups with two funded partners. And this was to allow in for input from young people already actively involved in participation within youth organizations, with a focus on what listening approaches have worked well in their experience and what has not worked as hoped. We did a survey monkey, which was sent to children and young people across Scotland, via the Scottish youth, Parliament and children in Scotland. And this explored similar topic areas to the first children in Scotland workshop by focusing on the funds application process. And finally, we developed a youth advisory group. Now this was set up over the first year of the fund to enable young people to have ongoing input particularly around the design of partner convening events.



04:10

Thanks for talking us through that, Kelly. And we know that some of these elements were really successful in terms of gaming, young people's input into fun design. So in that first workshop, they put forward six recommendations for applications, five of which were incorporated. And these five recommendations were age range. We're the young people in workshops stipulating that the funders should be open to organizations working with young people from a range of ages, so from five up to 25 organizations size with a cap on annual turnover of 2 million so that both small and large organizations could apply. But would there be a greater focus on smaller organizations? Third was topic area with young people in the workshops not being overly prescriptive. To hear so it was left quite open as to which type of organizations could apply grant size with young people feeling quite strongly that there should be no upper limit on what organizations could apply for through the fund or how much they could apply for. And then finally, involving children and young people from the outset, with there being an overwhelming consensus that there should be input from children, young people in the content of applications. And later on in the application process, organizations were asked to explain how this had taken place. And then, in the second workshop, young people made suggestions around which applications should be approved. And all of the organizations that were put forward by young people in this workshop were subsequently funded. So in terms of inputs into font design, and shaping the decisions of yourselves as funders, this development phase was quite successful. I'm really interested to hear what you learned through this process. Because for me, it feels like something that very much echoed the intention of the fund itself in terms of acting on what we hear from young people.

 Kelly 06:16

Yeah, I agree. And I think that's why initially, the the five funder partners were really keen that this was the route we were going to take. And for us, you know, it was interesting, because it really did challenge our assumptions. I mean, the young people were really keen to be involved in the development of the criteria. And also were keen to be involved in the recommendations. So there was a real willingness from young people to engage in the process. We, I suppose we learn to be more appreciative of the challenges involved in listening to young people's voices understanding that it takes time, it's often resource heavy, there needs to be a focus on structure and delivery. And you also need opinions from a wide range of young people. And another question, another point for us was how do we really maintain meaningful engagement?

 07:09

And is there anything you would do differently next time? And why would you advocate for this approach with other funders?

 Kelly 07:19

Yeah, I suppose the development phase, initially was kind of an afterthought, which added an additional few months onto the lifespan of the fund. Now, this was important because it allows time for young people to to really be involved. And as we've mentioned, develop the criteria, the application process, and also make the final decisions on where the funding would go. And I think in future, this needs to be more intentional ensuring that we build in the time and resource from the outset. I suppose at Quora, it's clear for us that amplifying people's voices to make change is so important and therefore cannot be underestimated.

 08:01

Thanks, Kelly, that's really important learning and kind of advocacy. And it really speaks to your ethos more broadly at Quora in terms of your ambitions to be more equitable, and shift that sort of long standing balance of power between the funder and the funded. And you touched on your previous answer on that challenge of maintaining the meaningful engagement of young people in the fund beyond just that development phase. And this is something at the crux of learning from the fund itself with partners that has come through more generally, how do we maintain that meaningful engagement of young people and listening practices? So can you talk me through the youth advisory board that you set up? What was the purpose of that group? And how did it play out in practice?

 Kelly 08:54

Sure. So the Youth Advisory Board was was developed after the first convening event. So the first convening event was to celebrate the initial launch of the fund, and we had 22 children and young people from across the funded, funded partners attend the event, got feedback from the children and young people highlighted that they wanted to attend more days like this. And this feedback led to the idea of the Youth Advisory Board. With the Youth Advisory Board, we

aimed to get representation from young people across the funded partners. With a wide geographical spread across Scotland. We really wanted to group to help shape the future of the fund by sharing their experiences of being involved with the funding partners with their peers to help highlight learning and provide guidance or best practice. We want the group to be involved in planning the content and the focus of the convening it is. And also we thought it'd be useful to help highlight outcomes, learning for funders and pay others, detailing any kind of key successes or challenges within the funded partners themselves.



10:09

And based on your experiences through this process with the Youth Advisory Board, can you reflect on some of the wider challenges of engaging children, young people at a more strategic level? And do you have possibly any recommendations around this? Yeah, so,



Kelly 10:27

I mean, due to the pandemic, we never got to meet the Youth Advisory Board face to face. So what we found it was it was really quite difficult to build relationships with the members of the group, and also difficult for the members of the group to build relationships with each other because we said that never actually met in real life, I suppose the plus point of virtual meetings was that they allowed us to engage young people from across Scotland. So you know, obviously, geography wasn't an issue. But it was really difficult in sustaining that engagement. And I think the key learning for us has just been that face to face relationships are so important. And they do allow for easier, more meaningful conversations and engagement from young people. The partners also found that relationships were important to this type of more intense listening. So I suppose taking that into account, the recommendations would be one around the importance of relationships to ensure active listening to be successful and to meaningfully engage young people. And the second recommendation would be the need to carefully consider what's in it for the young people. So for example, we intentionally did not go ahead with online convening events due to the feedback from young people, they quite clearly said, wouldn't be something that they would enjoy, and they wouldn't really get anything out of it. You know, they said, they wanted to attend a face to face event because it was a day out. They'd get good scam, and it'd be a chance to chat and meet new people



12:09

to write. I think I think we're probably all done with that



12:14

with online events, aren't we? It's not like not unreasonable. Great, thank you, Kelly. And so I feel like this process of engaging the Youth Advisory Board has been really valuable for core foundation. And it's very much a learning that's important, not only for fun design, but also for frontline organizations around engaging children and young people to inform strategy level decision making. And that is ultimately what sits at the core of listening in terms of allowing

them to shape the provision they receive. So I've mentioned that this ambition to have young people input into fund design is really in line with your ethos at core foundation around seeking to be more equitable in your fund delivery. And some of the feedback we had from funding partners was that they really valued core as approach in terms of fund management, and felt that the listening fund was relatively novel in the way it was delivered. And in particular, they touched on a couple of points here. So the first one being that they felt they could openly discuss their problems, challenges and any changes to their projects with yourself as a fund manager. Secondly, that they didn't feel pressurized by heavy reporting mechanisms that focused on kind of hard outputs, or outcomes. And there certainly was a concern with keeping reporting and evaluation processes, relatively light taps throughout the fund. And finally, partners reported feeling like they are very much part of a learning community with quite a strong peer network across the organizations involved. And there were sort of two elements to this the self assessment, which formed part of the evaluation process that supported internal critical reflection. And anyone interested in the self evaluation tool for organization listening can find it on our website, and also on the listening fund website. So that first first element of internal critical reflection, and then being part of this peer network, which acted as a sort of critical friend for partners. So those two elements of feedback really supported the learning that partners gain through the fund through being part of this learning community. So I wondered if you could talk us through how you guys at Quora create this positive fund environment. And what do you see as the value of this approach?

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Kelly 14:57

Yeah, so Cora's ethos is about And alongside others. And to do this, we appreciate that you have to be flexible. At the heart of our 10 year strategy. It's a strong belief that when people find their voice, that they unlock the power to change, or to make change happen. So we do recognize the importance of voice and recognize the importance of listening. And this includes listening to organizations we work alongside and also listening to the people that they seek to serve. In terms of the listening fund, the pandemic really did hinder some aspects, but also helped develop to their areas. So, for example, we had originally planned three convening events throughout the two year period. And these events were really an opportunity to allow funders, funded partners, children and young people to come together and share their learning. So the second and third event, were not able to go ahead. And at the time had been keeping in touch with partners individually, and had a sense that some were finding it difficult feeling that they weren't really connected to the other listening from partners. So this was when I introduced the coffee mornings. So these were really informal attendance was optional, you know, we had no set agenda. And there were just monthly meetings. And the value of this approach was evident, you know, we saw the relationships formed with partners, we saw the sharing of ideas, such as developing listening policies, developing resources, and it was just a different approach. And what we found is by developing trusting equal relationships, we just learned so much more organizations are more inclined to be honest about the challenges that the first thing, which really helps us as a funder, get a clearer sense of the landscape and the challenges that people face. So you know, we do value relationships, and we understand that we need to invest time in developing those relationships. And as a fund manager, you understand that things change the landscape change changes, the climate, people's needs, etc. And organizations really do need to have the flexibility to adapt and respond to this change. So having a good relationship with the rest trust allows these conversations so grant holders know that they can approach Quora and say, you know, what, this isn't working, and we need to change our plan.



17:31

Wonderful, thank you for just talking us through, I guess, the kind of ideology behind it, but also some of the practical ways that you that you create that environment. And, and for everybody listening, I can't express enough how much those in informal coffee mornings were valued by partners, the positive feedback on them was, was really impressive. And I think it really highlights some of the progress being made in terms of thinking about how we design funds for maximum learning. And that's not just in terms of outcomes, but also in terms of building those networks and relationships that you spoke about Kelly, and supporting and supportive environment sorry, for funded organizations to grow, because that ultimately should be at the core of all funding. And I also think it's quite revealing of some key questions that funders should or could be asking themselves around, how do we create safe spaces for our grantees to share, fail, grow and learn? How do we build more flexibility into our funding packages? How can we better support grantees on their journey of change? And how do we give power over to our grantees and conduct more equitable funding practices? So I think there's a lot of potential in what we can learn from the listening fund around from design and delivery, that just starts to move away from that unbalance from the grantee relationship.



Kelly 19:04

For sure, and there's also an element of practicing what we preach. So where we've been asking organizations to really interrogate their listening practices, going through that journey with them in terms of listening to young people, I think one of the things we're going to be doing is running a webinar to allow partners to share what they've learned around listening to young people and how they've developed their practice. So when colleagues have had a chance to read the final report, and listen to this conversation, your they can look out for that webinar coming in the next few months.



19:38

I think probably one of the most exciting bits there, Kelly is the opportunity to share some more practical tips on top of what you've just shared with this, around how funding partners develop their listening practices, and what they learned through that process. And hopefully that will support the wider sector with some of the insights and tools that have been produced. To the fund. So I really enjoyed this conversation. And thank you so much, Kelly for your time. Oh, thank you, Joe. Do read the final learning reports for the listing fund Scotland and see if anything resonates with your practice. And please keep an eye out for the webinar. So we can dig into some of this learning further.