

Learning and Evaluation Framework for the Future Communities Fund

1 Aims of the Future Communities Fund

The Future Communities Fund (FCF) is the Co-op Foundation's first strategic fund launched under its ['Building communities of the future together' strategy](#).

FCF has two strategic priorities, which are:

- i. youth activism and shared power; and,
- ii. diversity, equity and inclusion.

Funded Partners were selected because their activities aligned with these priorities. FCF aims to provide funding that is participatory, unrestricted, long-term, trusting, accessible, supportive, and facilitates cooperation.

FCF is a five-year programme that will run from 2023 to 2028.¹ It aims to achieve the following impact:

- Young people and organisations have more power to build fairer and cooperative communities.
- More diverse, equitable and inclusive fair communities, that prioritise youth activism, shared power and transparent governance.

For more details on FCF, please see the [Co-op Foundation's website](#).

In developing FCF, the Co-op Foundation worked with a panel of young people, the Future Communities Collective, to develop a detailed Theory of Change (ToC). This ToC was used to design the FCF programme. Whilst the evaluation approach set out in this document is not theory-based (thereby creating space for unanticipated and emergent findings), we will reflect on the ToC at the end of the evaluation to assess whether the initial assumptions held true in practice. The basic logical assumptions of the ToC are:

The Coop Foundation provide multiyear unrestricted funding and learning support to Funded Partners.



Funded Partners become stronger organisations.

Funded Partners are more able to support and give voice to young people, including those from diverse backgrounds.

Funded Partners and young people have more power to build fairer and co-operative communities.

¹ Ten Funded Partners have received grants for five years ending in 2028, with a further three receiving three-year grants ending in 2026.

2 Learning Partner purpose

As the Learning Partner, IVAR will support the gathering and analysis of information (i.e. research activities) that, once reflected upon and intentionally used, will help FCF Learning Participants make informed decisions and achieve FCF's desired impact



3 Glossary of Terms

Glossary of key terms used in this document	
Evaluation	A systematic assessment of policies and programs with the aim of determining their effectiveness and informing decisions about their future.
FCF Learning Participants	Everyone involved in FCF learning activities, including the Co-op Foundation, Funded Partners and Young Researchers.
Funded Partners	The 13 organisations that the Co-op Foundation has funded as part of round one of FCF.
Future Communities Collective	A panel of young people who helped the Co-op Foundation shape its vision for fairer, more cooperative communities. The panel led on allocating FCF funding.
Learning	The consideration of mission-critical questions - about both strategy and practice – which lead to action.
Young Researchers	The young people recruited from the Funded Partners to engage in the research activities included in this Framework.

4 Our Learning Culture

FCF learning activities will be governed by a set of principles that will determine our learning culture. These principles are informed by the Co-op Foundation's FCF strategy and by Funded Partners' desired approach to learning (as communicated at FCF's first annual learning event in April 2024).

The FCF learning principles are:

- **Acceptance:** Accepting that FCF Learning Participants will be at different stages on their learning journey.
- **Co-creation:** All FCF Learning Participants should be involved in designing the learning and evaluation framework and research processes.
- **Beneficial:** FCF Learning Participants will only be asked to engage in learning activities when there is a clear purpose and benefit to them.
- **Participatory:** Research should be done 'with' people as active contributors to the process, rather than doing research 'on' people. This includes involving young people in the design and implementation of learning activities, wherever practicable.
- **Transparent:** All dealings with research participants should be transparent, with explanations given for what data is being collected and how it will be used.
- **Meaningful:** Qualitative research methods will be favoured over quantitative ones because they capture participants' perspectives in a way that is meaningful to them.
- **Sharing:** FCF will seek to share, distribute, and embed skills and knowledge among all FCF Learning Participants.



5 Ways of Working

At the first learning event in April 2024, the Co-op Foundation, Funded Partners and IVAR agreed on ways of working that would sustain and invigorate the learning partnership. These ways of working are:

- Create a space that is comfortable and at ease.
- Non-judgemental, open-minded.
- Honest and transparent with our opinions.
- Being brave! Be confident to say yes to offer/help.
- Share opportunities and best practices.
- Mindful of participants' stretched capacity.
- Keep formal platforms to communicate with each other to a minimum and support informal spaces to share and connect (to keep momentum between events).

These ways of working have informed the design and development of this learning framework, and we will revisit them at the beginning of all future FCF Learning Participants meetings.



6 Ethical considerations

All research and learning activities undertaken shall be performed in accordance with the following ethical standards:

- **Informed consent:** Potential research participants must be given sufficient information to allow them to decide whether or not they want to take part in the research study.
- **Safety and security:** Researchers and research participants should not be put in a situation where their participation in research might harm them.
- **Confidentiality:** The identities of research participants will not be revealed and what is said to researchers will only be shared within the IVAR research team.



7 Framework for collecting information

The framework for collecting information has been structured in line with the four levels where FCF is expected to have an impact:

- Funder behaviour
- Impact on Funded Partners
- Impact on young people
- Influencing the practice of other funders

For each level, the framework poses an overarching learning question with a series of sub-questions to guide research activities. The learning questions have been compiled with reference to:

- The original FCF Theory of Change, which was developed by the Co-op Foundation and the Future Communities Collective between January and June 2023.
- The original FCF learning questions, which were developed by the Co-op Foundation and the Future Communities Collective between July and August 2023.
- Feedback from Funded Partners regarding their learning and evaluation practices, as gathered at the first Annual Learning Event in April 2024.
- A Pause and Reflect meeting between the Co-op Foundation and IVAR in May 2024.
- Feedback from Funded Partners on an initial draft of the Learning and Evaluation Framework at an online learning session in July 2024.

The overarching learning questions are designed to be broad and open-ended, allowing space for research to uncover unexpected findings. The sub-questions similarly include a set of general questions that are not prescriptive of the changes we expect to see, although they also include some questions that specifically address FCF strategic themes around 1) youth activism and shared power and 2) diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The framework goes on to identify the support that IVAR will provide FCF participants to help them think about the learning questions. It also includes details of the information that will be collected to help answer the learning questions and the timings for this.

Based on the framework presented, a schedule of events for 2024/25 is provided in Appendix 1.

7.1 Funder Behaviour

The Co-op Foundation's behaviours and actions will have a major impact on how the FCF functions. It will shape the funding experience for Funded Partners, which, in turn, will influence the impact that FCF has on Funded Partners and the young people they support. Therefore, understanding the Co-op Foundation's behaviours is crucial to the learning programme.

Activities	Main learning question	Learning sub-questions	IVAR Support	Information collection	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Internal learning • Using a learning partner 	What behaviours are required for the Co-op Foundation to be an open and trusting funder in the field of youth participation?	General <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What behaviours and skills does the Co-op Foundation need to adopt as it engages in unrestricted and participatory grant-making? • How can the Co-op Foundation build strong trusting relationships with its Funded Partners? • How can the Co-op Foundation integrate participatory approaches into its work? 	IVAR will support the Co-op Foundation through periodic Pause and Reflect meetings and by producing an FCF learning report each year.	Reflective memos by Co-op Foundation staff (see explanatory note below). IVAR will conduct annual semi-structured interviews with Funded Partners (see section 7.2), which will include questions on their interactions and experiences with the Co-op Foundation. Written reflections from the Pause and Reflect meetings.	Ongoing In the autumn of each year After each meeting

Explanatory note

Reflective memos: Members of the Co-op Foundation's FCF funding team will be encouraged to write reflective memos throughout FCF's duration. Memo entries should be made after a key event or if something happens that warrants a moment of reflection. By writing these memos, team members can reflect on their experiences and actions as funders and consider what they have learnt. These memos can also be submitted as research data for analysis by IVAR. Further guidance on writing reflective memos is available from the University of Cambridge at: <https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/reflectivepracticetoolkit>

7.2 Impact on Funded Partners

Assessing the impact of FCF on Funded Partners will be a central feature of our learning.

Activities	Learning questions	Learning sub-questions	IVAR Support	Information collection	Timing
Multi-year unrestricted funding	Has multi-year unrestricted funding made a difference to Funded Partners and, if so, how?	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What has FCF funding enabled Funded Partners to do that they couldn't have achieved without it? How do Funded Partners perceive that young people are benefitting from any organisational changes made? <p>FCF themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have Funded Partners strengthened young people's involvement in organisational governance and leadership and, if so, how? Have Funded Partners made opportunities for young people's involvement more equitable and inclusive and, if so, how? How does involving young people in governance impact an organisation's ability to deliver its mission successfully? Have Funded Partners encountered any barriers or challenges as they try to involve young people more? 	IVAR will facilitate quarterly informal peer support sessions at which Funded Partners can share their experiences of what is working well and what challenges they are facing.	<p>Notes from annual catch-up conversations between a member of the Co-op Foundation's funding team and Funded Partners. These meetings will discuss recent highlights and successes, significant organisational challenges, and what the Co-op Foundation can help with. These meetings will not affect the annual release of grant payments. With the Funded Partners' permission, notes from these meetings will be made available to IVAR to help them prepare for their interviews (see below).</p> <p>IVAR will conduct annual semi-structured research interviews with Funded Partners. The interviews will principally address learning questions about what difference FCF has made to Funded Partners, although they will also cover Funded Partners' perceptions of the Co-op Foundation as a funder (see section 7.1 above).</p>	<p>In the spring / early summer of each year</p> <p>In the autumn of each year</p>
Learning Partner support for learning and evaluation	Has IVAR's support made a difference to the Funded Partners, and if so, how?	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What difference has IVAR's support made to the Funded Partner's knowledge, skills, and capacity especially around learning and evaluation? 	IVAR will host quarterly learning, which will help Funded Partners explore different approaches to learning and evaluation.	Feedback forms from learning sessions, which the Co-op Foundation will distribute and collect.	Per session

7.3 Impact on Young People

Understanding how FCF affects young people is arguably the most important aspect of this framework. However, it is also the most challenging question to answer, especially because the Co-op Foundation does not wish to impose requirements on how Funded Partners capture the difference that their work makes to young people. It is accepted that Funded Partners will employ a variety of different approaches to understanding the impact of their work.

Activities	Main learning question	Learning sub-questions	IVAR Support	Information collection	Timing
Multi-year unrestricted funding to organisations that support diverse young people.	To what extent have young people benefitted from the activities and services delivered by Funded Partners and, if so, how?	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What difference has engaging with the Funded Partner made to the lives of young people? <p>FCF themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What roles are young people taking in Funded Partners and how are they benefitting from them? Where young people take on leadership roles, what training and support have they received and how have they benefitted from this? What barriers have young people faced in accessing and performing leadership roles, and how did they overcome them? 	IVAR will support Funded Partners through quarterly learning sessions to explore and develop their impact practices so that they can capture and communicate the difference that their activities and services make for young people. This support will build on Funded Partners' aspirations (as noted at the Annual Learning Event in April 2024) to develop learning practices that are meaningful, participatory and beneficial to young people, and incorporate creative methods.	<p>Young Researchers will undertake research projects to address whether and how young people have benefited from FCF. For more details, see Appendix 2.</p> <p>Funder Partners will submit to the Co-op Foundation any evidence that illuminates the impact their activities and services have on young people. These submissions need not be produced specially for the purposes of FCF and do not have to address the FCF learning sub-questions. Funded Partner submissions can be delivered in any format. For example, they could be in the form of an impact or annual report, reports prepared for another funder, case studies of young people, or young people's stories. Formats can also include written, video, audio, or any other creative output.</p> <p>IVAR will conduct annual semi-structured interviews with Funded Partners (see section 7.2) which will include questions on how they think FCF has impacted young people.</p>	<p>In 2025 and 2027</p> <p>Funded Partners can make submissions at any time throughout the duration of the FCF funding, with at least one submission each year.</p> <p>In the autumn of each year</p>

Opportunities for young people to learn and network with their peers.	Have young people benefited from their involvement in FCF and, if so, how?	General <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How have Young Researchers benefitted from their involvement in FCF learning activities? What connections do young people make with their peers from other Funded Partners? 	IVAR will train and support the Young Researchers and give them the opportunity to learn alongside young people from other Funded Partners.	IVAR to perform a focus group session with the team of Young Researchers once they have completed their work.	At the end of the Young Researchers' project.
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7.4 Influencing the practice of other funders

Drawing on the work of FCF, the Co-op Foundation and Funded Partners would like to encourage other funders to adopt more open, trusting and participatory approaches to funding. Influencing other funders to change their practices raises the prospect of creating a more favourable funding environment for organisations working in the field of youth participation.

Activities	Main learning question	Learning sub-questions	IVAR Support	Information collection	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding to infrastructure supporting unrestricted funders e.g. IVAR. Networking activities. Dissemination of learning and evaluation. 	To what extent is FCF helping to change the funding practices of other funders and, if so, how?	General <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What influence is FCF having on the practices of other funders? Are other funders changing the way they evaluate the impact of unrestricted funding? FCF Themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are other funders of youth participation adopting more participatory approaches? 	Writing and publishing research reports from the FCF programme. These reports will include, as a minimum, a report on the impact assessment practices of other unrestricted funders and the annual learning reports Working with the Co-op Foundation and Funded Partners to write and publish blogs that seek to influence other funders.	Data from the IVAR and Coop Foundation's website on the number of report downloads and blog page visits. Collate comments made by funders on published reports and blogs, either directly to IVAR or in the mainstream or social media.	Ongoing Ongoing

8 Data Analysis

8.1 Thematic Analysis

As set out in the framework above, the information collection activities will generate a lot of (most qualitative) data. To make sense of this, IVAR will perform preliminary analysis each year, shortly after completing all the semi-structured interviews with Funded Partners. IVAR will use thematic analysis to perform this review². The data analysis will code data inductively to draw out key themes in relation to the learning questions.



² Braun and Clarke (2021), *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: SAGE Publications.

8.2 Share and Build Sessions

Once the thematic analysis is complete, IVAR will convene an online meeting of the Funded Partners and the Co-op Foundation to share the preliminary analysis (with all data anonymised), and reflect on, discuss, challenge and add to these insights. In those years when Young Researchers have been active (i.e. 2025 and 2027), the Young Researchers will also attend this meeting to share their research findings and engage in the discussions. The share and build sessions will also provide an opportunity to discuss the form and content of the annual learning report.

The meeting will likely involve more than 30 attendees, including the Young Researchers, one staff member or trustee from each Funded Partner, four Coop Foundation staff members and four IVAR facilitators. We will use break-out groups to ensure everyone can contribute to the discussion.



9 Annual learning reports

9.1 Planned reports

IVAR will produce an FCF learning report in February each year. The reports will address the learning questions noted in the tables above.

Provisionally, the reports will cover the themes listed below, although these could change as the programme progresses:

- 2025 – This learning report will primarily focus on the impact of FCF on Funded Partners and address the learning questions set out in section 7.2. Subject to Funded Partner consent, the report could include a case study of each organisation.
- 2026 – This learning report will include a mid-term evaluation of impact across all four levels. It will draw on all research data collected and the findings of the 2025 cohort of Young Researchers.
- 2027 - The theme of this learning report will be determined later, giving FCF Learning Participants a chance to reflect on what has been learnt in the previous years and choose a pertinent theme.
- 2028 – This learning report will include a final evaluation of impact across all four levels. It will draw on the research data collected and the findings of the 2027 cohort of Young Researchers. It will also reflect on the initial assumptions for the FCF Theory of Change and assess whether they held true in practice.

The annual learning reports will be made available for discussion at the FCF annual learning event in March each year, which will be attended by all FCF Learning Participants and possibly the Young Researchers and Future Communities Collective. IVAR will record feedback and make final adjustments to the reports.

All learning reports will then be published externally by IVAR to share learning more widely and influence other funders.

9.1.1 Evaluation of impact

As noted above, the annual learning reports will evaluate FCF's impact in 2026 and 2028. The evaluation will be structured using the learning questions across all four levels of impact. As noted above in section 7, these questions have been designed to be broad and open-ended, allowing space for research to uncover unexpected findings.

Since FCF was set up using a Theory of Change developed by the Future Communities Collective, the 2026 and 2028 annual learning reports will provide a useful opportunity to reflect on whether the FCF programme outcomes were as expected. This will be done by comparing what emerges from the inductive thematic analysis (see section 8.1) to the original Theory of Change.

Appendix 1: Schedule of events for 2024/25

Event type	Time	Date	Where	IVAR	Coop Fndn	Funded Partner	Future Comms Collecti
Peer learning session	10.30am	27 June 2024	Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Informal peer support drop-in session	10.30am	19 July 2024	Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Peer learning session	10.30am	10 September 2024	Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Informal peer support drop-in session	10.30am	24 October 2024	Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Research interviews with Funded Partners	Various	01 November 2024	Online	Yes	No	Yes	No
Peer learning session	10.30am	10 December 2024	Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Informal peer support drop-in session	10.30am	28 January 2025	Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Share and build session	TBC	TBC - Jan 2025	Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Annual learning event	10.30am	25 March 2025	TBC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Appendix 2: Explanatory note on the involvement of Young Researchers

In 2025 and 2027, Young Researchers will be given the opportunity to investigate whether and how young people have benefitted from FCF. They will be asked to address the research question: *have young people benefitted from the activities and services delivered by Funded Partners and, if so, how?* The Young Researchers will be given significant control and freedom to shape how they conduct their research projects.

IVAR will provide each cohort of Young Researchers with the training and support necessary to perform their research project. The support will be tailored to meet the needs of the group of young people recruited. Due to budget constraints, IVAR will not have the capacity to provide 1-to-1 support to individual young researchers, except in exceptional circumstances. IVAR will provide some form of certification for the young people who take part.

The process by which IVAR will support young people is set out in the table below.

Stage	What's involved	Approximate timescale
Young Researcher recruitment	<p>A team of young people will be recruited in 2025 and 2027. The aim will be to recruit a team of around 12-15, recognising that some young people may drop out during the project.</p> <p>IVAR will work with Funded Partners to recruit young people - e.g., promoting the opportunity and supporting young people to apply - although there should be no compulsion to participate.</p>	Jan-Apr
Young Researcher training and developing a research plan	IVAR will provide up to three research training sessions to the Young Researchers. The training should enable Young Researchers to make informed choices about their research project. As part of this training, IVAR will support the Young Researchers in developing a research plan.	May - June
Obtain Funded Partner agreement	Since the research will almost certainly involve gathering research data from young people, Funded Partners will need to agree to the Young Researchers recruiting research participants from among their service users. Funded Partners will also need to ensure that appropriate safeguarding and after-care measures are in place for the young people who participate in the research. IVAR will share the Young Researchers' plan with Funded Partners and seek their agreement to what is proposed.	July
Data collection and analysis	Young Researchers will perform fieldwork to gather research data and then analyse it. IVAR will support the Young Researchers to do this.	Aug - Sep

Young Researchers produce a final research product.	Young Researchers will produce their own research output. This can be in a format of their choosing – e.g. a written report, podcast, video, etc. IVAR will support the Young Researchers in doing this.	Oct – Dec
Young Researchers attend the share and build session and the annual learning event to present and discuss their findings.	The Young Researchers will be invited to present their findings to the FCF Learning Participants at a share-and-build session. Young Researchers could also be invited to the annual learning event, although this decision can be taken nearer the time, taking into account the preferences of the Young Researchers and the practicalities around organising the events.	Jan - Mar