

CIVIC FUTURES

The Story So Far

A review of the Civic Futures Fellowship
and its learning 2019-23

June 2023



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INTRODUCTION

The following report offers a reflection on the first 3 cohorts of the Civic Futures Fellowship; commissioned by the Community Engagement Team at the Greater London Authority and delivered between 2019-23 in partnership with Koreo, the Young Foundation, and Dark Matter Labs.

Against a backdrop of Covid-19 and ongoing, inter-linked crises, Civic Futures has been an ambitious attempt to develop collective wisdom in the pursuit of a better future for London and the communities that call it home.

By the end of 2023, the programme will have worked with 85 civic leaders through a project which combines leadership development, personal and collective inquiry, and civic experimentation. The project has enabled personal transformation, connected people from different parts of the city and civic system, and created the conditions for projects which have grown well beyond the programme. The next iteration of the programme will launch at the end of 2023.

From a comprehensive review of programme materials, a survey of all Fellows, and more than a dozen interviews with Fellows from across the 3 cohorts, this report will lay out the shape of the programme and its influence on the Fellows that have taken part, as well as the system(s) they operate within.

In this document, you'll find an executive summary of findings, an outline of the Fellowship and its delivery, a review which explores Fellows' reflections alongside the experiments and projects that emerged from the programme, and a reflection from the delivery team.

Thanks for reading.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review tells the story of a project that's been highly valued by people taking part in it over its first 3 years.

- 85% of survey respondents strongly agreed the programme had been a meaningful learning experience for them.
- 92% said they would recommend the programme to someone else¹.

Through interviews, Fellows have reflected on the programme as being:

- A rare, effective space for learning and leadership development for leaders working in civil society.
- A connecting space where Fellows have benefited from a vibrant peer group, building strong relationships.
- A sense-making space allowing quality reflection, supporting the development of their work and leadership.
- An experience that's played an important role in their development, often at points of personal transition and against a background of significant disruption.
- A valuable space that's given them licence to explore and experiment, and confidence in their own contribution.

There are points of learning which can support further development of the programme, notably the need to manage expectations around the nature of the experience and find balance between practicality and theory.

It's clear that even at this relatively early stage there's a story to be told about the Fellowship's broader influence.

Most clearly:

- Fellows have applied their learning to their roles and organisations, influencing policy at a community and borough level. This has brought intentional learning and reflection into their organisations, influencing the shape of projects they're part of.
- The projects encouraged experimentation and innovation by offering funding to Fellows. This has supported activities including community engagement through local news; community leadership in Redbridge; mental health provision for voluntary sector workers in Barnet; and learning inquiries into the role of artists in city governance and civil society infrastructure.
- Finally, it's clear that Civic Futures has played a role as a reference point and catalyst for other projects.

Combining the findings from this comprehensive review, the document ends with a set of suggestions for any future iteration of the programme.

Those suggestions include:

- A tighter thematic focus for the programme around decision-making, recognising the thematic consistency in the programme to this point.
- An open cohort that combines civil society and local government with the scope to enable experimentation and learning.
- Leaning into the practical nature of the programme and the collaboration fund/bursaries that support it.
- Clarifying ongoing GLA engagement for Fellows.

1. Based on a survey of all Fellows, from 15 responses.

ABOUT CIVIC FUTURES

“Transformative social change has always started in and with civil society.

In a world which often risks being captured by the past, we need a civic society which can be both fiercely independent in organising itself, and also truly interdependent with all those seeking to build a shared future. In London, this civic society is already around us. It is represented by the people working tirelessly to serve their communities, by the city’s highly effective activists and organisers, its radical artists and curators, as well as by the individuals and networks exploring new ways of caring for each other and the world around them. Deeply embedded in communities across the city, this civic society has a unique role to play in bridging us to new and unknown tomorrows.

To support that urgent work, Civic Futures starts by asking how we can build shared wisdom in making the transition to a better future. How do we best bring together some of the amazing people active across London to learn from and support each other in building that future?”

Project Background

Civic Futures was commissioned by the Community Engagement Team at the GLA in 2019. It was formed during a period of profound change for the city, as part of a wider ambition for better engagement with London's civil society across City Hall.

The programme was prompted by The Way Ahead report in 2016. This made the case that the 120,000 organisations and 3 million volunteers representing London's civil society are vital in contributing to the vibrancy and resilience of the city. To ensure civil society can overcome the significant challenges facing the city, its leaders must receive the necessary support for their own development, access to networks, and a voice in ongoing conversations about London.

Originally conceived as an advisory group, it developed into a more ambitious project intended to build leadership capacity in civil society and make a systemic contribution to culture and capacity within the GLA itself and across the city.

In that context, this project was intended to build capacity within civil society to:

- create systems change and lead the sector in meeting the challenges facing London
- help the GLA to engage with groups working across London and build its understanding of the work, opportunities and challenges facing civil society
- support the personal development and capacity of London's civil society workforce, benefitting the organisations they work for and the groups they serve.

Suggested outcomes were stronger partnerships across civil society in London, stronger partnerships between City Hall and London's civil society, and an increased understanding of civil society support and development.

Delivery Partnership

Civic Futures has been designed and delivered in true partnership between four organisations

**GREATER
LONDON
AUTHORITY**

The GLA Community Engagement Team: The Greater London Authority (the GLA) is the devolved regional governance body of Greater London. The GLA's Community Engagement Team's mission is to bridge the gap between City Hall and London's communities. The team delivers a range of programmes and projects aiming to support Londoners to have a voice in City Hall and an opportunity to shape the future of London.

KOREO

Koreo is a learning consultancy dedicated to imagining and building a just and regenerative world. Since 2009, Koreo has worked alongside leaders in communities, supported household name charities to shift culture towards learning and transformation, and brought together networks to collaborate across organisational, sectoral, and geographic boundaries.

**THE
YOUNG
FOUNDATION**

The Young Foundation are experts in understanding the changing role of communities in the 21st century. As a UKRI accredited Independent Research Organisation, social investor and community development practitioner, the Young Foundation combines skills and expertise to develop better-connected and more sustainable communities across the UK.

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Dark Matter Labs is a strategic design practice focused on institutional innovation in an age of interdependence. They work with partners, clients, and collaborators across the world, researching and developing new institutional support frameworks for collaborative system change through cutting-edge research, strategic design and organisational innovation.



Civic Futures Fellows

Thanks to ambitious framing, and following a series of community-led campaigns asking for nominations as well as direct applications, we were overwhelmed by the number and range of people who expressed an interest in Civic Futures each year. Humbled by the applicants' talent and work across the city, each year has involved an in-depth selection process with all the project partners, identifying 25-30 people to take part in the Fellowship.

The make-up of the group has changed, trialling different approaches to collaboration between civil society and local government leaders. However, each group of fellows has been a vibrant and diverse mixture of activists, artists, funders, curators, educators, politicians, organisers, civil servants, connectors, technologists, carers, archivists, and people playing hybrid roles across those categories and London's civil society.

Fellows are outlined on the following page, organised alphabetically by year, with their organisation at the time of applying, and their current organisation in brackets where relevant:

Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Bushra Ahmed West Croydon Voice	Afsana Salik Citizens UK	Angie Farrance GLA Culture team
Christina Sealy Talent Rich	Ajay Pabial Art Clubbers	Cat Millar Pecan's Women's Service
Edward Saperia Newspeak House	Aleska Chlebos Kensington & Chelsea Mutual Aid	Diana Chowdhury Mental health advocate
Eli Manderson Evans Ten Years' Time (Blagrove Trust)	Alison May Lambeth Council	Emily Collins-Ellis I.G. Advisors
Ellie Hale Catalyst	Chelsea McDonagh The Traveller Movement (the Young Foundation)	Faheem Khan Future Leaders UK
Farah Mohammoud YouPress	Chloe Harvey Southwark Council	Floree Zama-Neagra National Park City
Jim Minton Toynbee Hall	David Floyd Social Spider CIC	Geraud de Ville de Goyet Barking & Dagenham Giving
Joyce Black Heroes Foundation	David McEwen Unit 38	Gus Alston Stonegrove Community Trust
Karen Chillman Croydon Voluntary Action	Deborah Hayman-Nkhoma Community Southwark (Pecan)	Hannan Ali City Bridge Trust
Krissie Nicolson East End Trades Guild	Dilwara Khatun Redbridge Council	Hilary Powell Artist, Optimistic Foundation CIC
Laura Kerry & Morag McGuire Artillery Arts	Grace Williams Old Oak Park & Royal Park Development Corporation	John Chan Ghost and John, Hidden Keileon CIC
Leroy Decosta Simpson	Jabez Lam Hackney Chinese Community Services	Kaltun Abdillahi Samafal Families Association Ltd
Mama D Ujuaje Community Centred Knowledge	Jane Brueseke Waltham Forest Council	Katy Griffith Southwark Council
Mei Lim Reach Academy	Joon Lynn Goh Sex with Cancer (Migrants in Culture)	Laura Vicinanza Inclusion London
Mel Hudson Slade Green Big Local	Laurie Belgrave The Chateau	Leslie Barson Granville Community Kitchen
Natasha Friend Camden Giving	Liam Weeks Greater London Authority	Natt Day UCL Partners
Ned Glasier Company Three	Mike Wilson Pembroke House	Nishma Jethwa The Rights Collective
Nicholas Okwulu Pempeople	Mohammed Mukit Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea	Peter Baffoe South London Mission
Nile Bridgeman Saqqra	Nii Anum Paniym City Church	Rebecca Towers We Walworth
Poulomi Desai Usurp Arts	Noel Hatch London Borough of Newham	Sarena Kamala Shetty Participatory City Foundation
Tobi Kyeremateng Black Ticket Project (Freelance)	Sabeha Miah Sustrans (St Hilda's Community Centre)	Sonja Baralic Lambeth Council
	Sara Conway Barnet Council	Sripriya Arai Sudhakar Tower Hamlets Council
	Shadi Brazell Greater London Authority (Ealing Council)	Tamara Kahn Tower Hamlets Council
	Sue Agyakwa Bromley-by-Bow Centre	Troy Norbert Queen's Crescent Community Association
	Tahira Bakhtiari Harrow Council	Vanessa Castro Advocacy Academy
	Tess Lanning London Borough of Barking & Dagenham	Viveca Cameron CraftA
	Vanessa Robinson Greater London Authority	Xia Lin Toynbee Hall

A Sample of Fellows



Ed Saperia (2019 Fellow) is the Dean of Newspeak House and Director of Nesta's Civic AI Observatory. Newspeak House is an independent residential college that studies, nurtures and inspires emerging communities of practice across civil society and the public sector in the UK, while the Observatory is a partnership between Nesta and Newspeak, focusing on immediate practical insights on AI for digital leads.



Jim Minton (2019 Fellow) was the CEO of Toynbee Hall when he took part in Civic Futures in Year 1, moving on to become the CEO of the Mayor's Fund for London. Jim was previously a Director at London Youth and before that a senior civil servant at the UK Home Office. He's chair of trustees at youth refugee charity, Dost, and a board member of Collaborate CIC.



Mei Lim (2019 Fellow) is the Director of the Reach Children's Hub, which provides an integrated pipeline of support for children, young people and families in Feltham. Mei has over 13 years experience working across all phases in education, and joined the Reach Children's Hub in 2019 to develop a complementary model that works alongside schools to support children and families.



Chloe Harvey (2021 Fellow): After more than a decade in the voluntary sector (mainly in North-West England), Chloe joined Southwark Council in 2019 as the External Opportunities Lead for Children and Adults. This role looks to the community, innovation programmes, thought leaders, and best practice to find opportunities for new approaches to improve outcomes across social care and education.



Laurie Belgrave (2021 Fellow): Laurie is a performer, artist and cultural producer working primarily in South East London. He's the founder of The Chateau, an LGBTIQA+ bar, cultural space and performance collective for SE London. Housed from mid-2018 in an ex-religious-themed cocktail bar in Camberwell, The Chateau sought to challenge the narrative of decline in LGBTQ+ venues, bringing positivity to the scene through radical queer programming in a unique and inclusive space.



Sue Agyakwa (2021 Fellow): A proud Londoner of Ghanaian descent, Sue has worked in east London for many years. While in the Fellowship, she was at the Bromley by Bow Centre. There she designed and delivered a range of inclusive community-based arts and cultural programmes, from opera to gardening and an All Women's Disco. She's passionate about working with people and peers to bring about good change.



Vanessa Robinson (2021 Fellow) is an entrepreneur; a researcher passionate about digital and innovation; and a proud Latin-American woman born in the Brazilian Amazon region, celebrating the ancestry of her indigenous, black, and Lebanese backgrounds. She's a Principal Project Officer at the Greater London Authority (GLA), working on the delivery of strategic Mayoral programmes, and chairwoman of the Latin-American Women Resources Services (LAWRS).



Jabez Lam (2021 Fellow) has been active in Chinese community affairs since mid-1976 and is a fierce advocate for equality and diversity, campaigning for the Chinese community by working with local government. He's helped found a number of Chinese community centres in and around London and is currently working at the Hackney Chinese Community Services.



Floree Zama-Neagra (2022 Fellow) works with purpose-led organisations and grassroots movements with the hope of contributing to a fairer regenerative world that serves all beings on the planet. She currently works with 150 London National Park City volunteers and partners from across sectors to make London greener, healthier, and wilder.



Nishma Jethwa (2022 Fellow) is the director and co-founder of The Rights Collective, a radical South Asian collective based in the U.K. For the past five years, she has been working within movements to lead and support grassroots organisational and community development, build and deliver training curricula rooted in feminist and anti-oppression practice, and frame programs to advance gender justice, labour rights and feminist tech.



Sripriya Arai Sudhakar (2022 Fellow) is an architect, urban designer and urban planning professional with over 20 years' experience in the built environment. She is the Head of Regeneration in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets responsible for setting up the regeneration team and developing a programme that works across council services to deliver regeneration outcomes in the borough.



Troy Norbert (2022 Fellow) is the Head of Youth Services at Queen's Crescent Community Association and Gospel Oak Action Link (GOAL), school Governor at Canons High and board member for Ignite Youth. His role involves supporting and empowering children and young people across the Gospel Oak neighbourhood, which includes the parts of the Kentish Town and Gospel Oak electoral wards.

Project Design

The delivery of Civic Futures has been guided by a set of design principles, defining what the partnership considered essential for a successful programme.

These principles have evolved each year, with the more consistent themes including:

- **Equity:** recognising the need to equalise the Fellowship, prioritising accessibility, and providing bursaries for people outside organisational structures.
- **Fellowship:** recognising the importance of connection and relationships, with the aim to build fellowship across organisations, sectors, and the different programme cohorts.
- **Emergence:** recognising the power of the project being co-developed by the partnership and everyone participating in the programme.
- **Tangible:** recognising the need for Civic Futures to generate ideas and practical experiments, and creating the scope for learning to be shared and explored beyond the fellowship itself.

Working with these design principles, and responding to our learning each year, we've deployed a range of learning methods to build a learning community:

- The heart of the project has been a series of group workshops, where participants were offered space for collective inquiry, sensemaking, reflection and experimentation in the interests of shared learning and collaboration. Group work happened primarily with all Fellows together, but also included action learning, peer coaching, and shadowing opportunities.
- Alongside group work, we've worked with people

on their own personal development, offering 1-2-1 coaching sessions with a Koreo coach. This involved a 360 process of self-reflection and feedback and individual participant support through the programme from a named programme coach/manager. on their own personal development, offering 1-2-1

- Finally, the project has increasingly offered space for experimentation and learning through funded learning experiments or 'probes'. These were built from shared conversations during the programme and collaboration between Fellows.

Methods were stitched together into a programme journey, which has remained relatively consistent throughout (despite Year 1 being curtailed due to Covid-19). Following a process of design between partners and a recruitment/selection process to identify Fellows, the project worked through 5 stages:

1. Onboarding and connection, through which people were welcomed onto the programme.
2. A period of provocation: participants were offered opportunities to engage with a range of perspectives on social change and leadership from the programme partnership.
3. A period of inquiry: participants worked together and with the programme partnership to explore personal and collective leadership inquiries, with the aim of finding common themes, issues and opportunities.
4. A period of exploration & experimentation: common themes surfaced equitable, collaborative experiments.
5. A process of reflection to review learnings and impact.

Programme Evolution

The above demonstrates there's been continuity through the first three years of Civic Futures' approach and partnership. However, the programme also evolved to meet a combination of external circumstances, challenges, and learnings from the experience of delivering the project in partnership with participants. There are 3 areas of evolution to highlight:

- **Thematic Focus:** There's been an evolving approach to the thematic focus of the project. The first iteration was a fully open call for people seeking to collaborate on better approaches to civic life in the city. The second, responding to Covid, was themed around the GLA's recovery agenda, and was organised around the Mayor of London's 9 Recovery Missions. Following several conversations between partners and the GLA, the third reverted to a more open offer while making it clear that the thematic focus of the programme so far had been on fair decision-making and community participation in public life. A thematic focus for a possible fourth cohort could be informed by the insights found through this piece of work.
- **Make-up of the Cohort:** Linked to the above, each year has seen a different approach to the make-up of the Fellowship. In the first year, the programme was exclusively on offer to people who were playing a leadership role as part of civil society (professionally or as a volunteer). This decision led to a number of conversations in Year 1 about who wasn't in the room, in particular the sense it had reinforced boundaries between different parts of the system rather than breaking them down (an 'us and them' dynamic). The second year ringfenced 15 places for leaders from civil society, and 15 places for people in local government. While this led to encouraging collaboration between different parts of the system, the distinction broke down quickly as it became clear participants were wearing multiple hats. This meant they had multiple perspectives and routes into the system. As such, the third cohort has been an open cohort, welcoming people from all civil society and local government backgrounds.
- **Contact Time & Format:** Reflecting the below note about Covid-19, it's fair to say the programme across the 3 years has been dominated by

a need for flexibility. The opportunity to work with people face-to-face has been limited, initially by lockdowns and more recently by school and rail strikes. As such, the amount of time the group have had together physically has varied wildly from year to year. Conversations and feedback received through this review suggest while there's some benefit to working virtually, as a whole there's a desire to work face-to-face in a programme offering so much in terms of personal connection and support.

Covid-19

The above demonstrates there's been continuity when telling the story of Civic Futures across the 3 years, it's impossible not to see it as having been dominated by Covid-19 and the disruption it caused for the project, the participants, and the communities they were serving. In terms of programme delivery, the first cohort of Fellows was initially paused and subsequently stopped halfway through its year. The second cohort was required to meet virtually for more than half the year. The third cohort was the only one not to be interrupted by lockdowns, although it has been affected by industrial disputes. But the impact has been more fundamental in terms of working with people whose communities have been impacted by the resulting crises of public health, racial inequity, cost of living, and more. This affected people's ability to commit to the project, as well as their own personal health and well-being.



REVIEWING THE FELLOWSHIP

Overview

Koreo was commissioned to undertake a review of the first 4 years and 3 cohorts of Civic Futures.

This included: conducting interviews with 15 Fellows across the cohorts; a survey open to all participants; and reviewing the materials and projects either produced by or influenced by the Fellowship.

Working from the data produced through that process, this review is split into 3 categories:

1. An exploration of the impact on participants and their reflections on the experience.
2. The wider influence of the project from Fellows applying their learning, experimentation, and how it's influenced or catalysed other projects.
3. Reflections from the delivery partnership of designing and facilitating the programme and what we have learnt through that process.

Fellows's Experiences

As this project was aimed at individuals operating within London's civic system - and that it combined both the inner and outer work of social change - it's inevitable the impact of Civic Futures is most easily understood through the experiences of individual participants. Understanding how those Fellows understood the space they were being invited into, how they experienced it while they were part of it, what influence it's had on them and their practice, and how they reflect on having finished it, has been central to this review.

From these reflections, we've separated the findings into 6 headlines:

- the unusual space created by the Fellowship
- the relationships and networks that enabled it and sat at its heart
- the value of the reflective space it created
- the licence and platform the Fellowship gave Fellows and their work
- the growing confidence it gave people
- the different things people used the space for.

An Unusual Space

Fellows described Civic Futures as creating a rare space for learning and development, offering something they hadn't seen or couldn't find elsewhere.

"I wasn't looking for something [like it] because I don't think there's much out there like it."

— Year 1 Fellow, Charity Leader

"It's with real people in real contexts, in real sites of governance and decision-making. I don't know anything like it. You get traineeships where you can go into a department or you can work somewhere, but that's very individualistic. There's nothing like the collective learning process that Civic Futures is."

— Year 2 Fellow, Artist & Organiser

Although we heard this from across the cohorts, it was particularly true of people based in civil society and especially those who were operating outside of organisational structures (e.g. volunteers, artists, organisers). For those people, there was a perceived lack of space for peer support and learning with others leading or operating in similar environments. In particular, there was a lack of structured space to engage with people from other parts of the sector(s) they worked within.

"As a community organiser, there wasn't an access point to work with local government. Most of the time you're challenging policies. As an artist as well, there's even less opportunity to contemplate using a creative lens to questions of governance and city stewardship. Because of my experiences with migration, I was always interested in that other area. Those programs don't really exist for artists or community organisers. The approach of getting rid of that binary – of people working inside government and outside government – to make a change, and what happens when you bring those two sides together, was really useful."

— Year 2 Fellow, Artist & Organiser

It's striking how many people applied to the programme without a clear sense of what was on offer or what the space would look/feel like. Whether they were nominated by someone else or applied themselves, Fellows spoke about seeing the space as unusual and a step into the unknown. Reference was made to the open invitation and its big, expansive ask, the fact it was a new programme, and the consistent aim for the programme to be delivered emergently.

"I liked the collective leadership program terminology very much and there was a particular language that was used that just felt very different and really not corporate. It felt open with all of these possibilities. A particular line I pulled out as well said: how can we build shared wisdom in making the transition to a better future? That term 'shared wisdom' – it sounds good. I want some of that!"

— Year 1 Fellow, Civic Technologist & Educator

"I remember it being really vague in some ways because it didn't say what the programme would look like, or what the workshops would be exactly, or what the intended outcomes were. It seemed almost like a more abstract aspiration of people working together and creating change. For me, that was really intriguing."

— Year 2 Fellow, Social Entrepreneur

That emergent approach was recognised and valued by participants, who commented on the ability to shape something open as well as the responsive way the partnership team worked. There was also a tension for Fellows who wanted a clearer journey and outcomes:

"It is great that the Programme has been able to flex and adapt to the various challenges presented by each cohort. This is testament to each organisation remaining responsive and sensitive to the dynamics arising from a diverse group of people and conditions – and as such is to be congratulated."

— Year 1 Fellow, Civic Technologist & Educator

"That was a big thing for me. It was a co-design program. It wasn't 'these are the rules and you're gonna stick to it'. This was the first cohort and you were very open and honest, you didn't know where it was going to go or what it was going to do."

— Year 2 Fellow, Social Entrepreneur

It's notable that while people have seen this as a useful space for personal development, almost no one has explicitly used the language of 'leadership development'. This is interesting in the context Civic Futures was originally commissioned as a leadership development offer, having been conceived as an advisory panel. It only slowly became the more open, inquiry-based programme it is now.

Relationships & Networks

One of the original intentions behind Civic Futures was to build stronger connections between different parts of civil society and to encourage collaboration. That intention has broadened to include people working in local government. The focus on the value of connections has been consistent and one of the primary benefits of the programme from the perspective of participants.

58% of survey respondents strongly agreed that they connected with people from London's civic system that they wouldn't have otherwise, with that percentage increasing to 83% for cohort 3.

Fellows joined the programme looking to connect with other changemakers, with perspectives and positions from different parts of the civic system, and with the GLA and other government actors. The programme delivered on this, and there was widespread comment on the quality and range of people in the room, the value in the diversity of thought and identity, and the quality of the discussion as a result.

"Primarily, the thing I got out of Civic Futures was the group of people and the network it connected me to. It really inspired me. That was the key for me. Reflecting back on the feeling of Civic Futures, I think about the inspiring moments I spent with incredible people doing incredible things in this city."

— Year 1 Fellow, Charity Leader

"I can think of loads of experiences I had, whether that would be visiting Sue's amazing place in East London and having an incredible time in the café there, or one-on-one conversations I had in various networking and social scenarios. I visited Javez's amazing community centre in Hackney, five minutes away from where I lived for five years but never knew existed. I sang karaoke and I ate Chinese food with the regulars there! These experiences were really formative - inspiring me about what's possible and the incredible work done in London. I was then seeing the work I do in a more connected way to other community leaders, for want of a better word, and local government leaders and seeing how the work intersects and can be a more collective effort."

— Year 2 Fellow - Community Organiser

"I was a little bit siloed into working on LGBTQ+ issues and within a very specific community, which

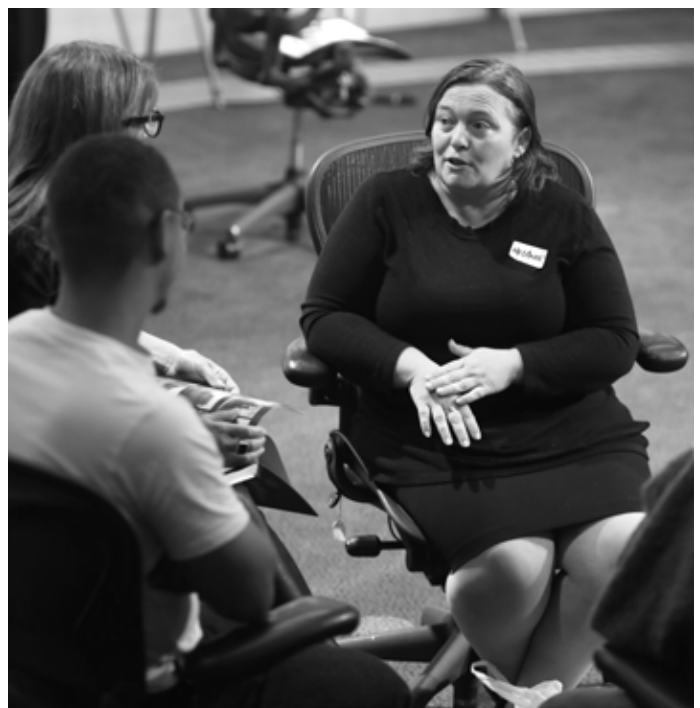
has very specific issues. Being connected to all these other amazing people doing amazing things made me realise that those issues are more broadly connected across a number of different sectors within London. Reflecting on it gave me a sense of more of a path towards action to do something about those things. We had so many conversations – almost exasperatedly so – around all these ideas and it's not that something concrete came out of that but it gave me a sense of ways I can navigate that path a little bit more."

— Year 2 Fellow, Cultural Producer

At the same time, there was a sense there could never be enough connection. There was significant frustration that the programme had become virtual for much of the pandemic:

"The program for our year was really impacted by the pandemic. I didn't connect with the group as much as I hoped to, because it was all over Zoom. By the time we did in-person stuff, we were already trying to go into probes. I don't know how the other groups were, but I felt like the missed opportunities are not having deeper relationships with the fellows, which I think is a massive shame. It was an exceptional time that we were part of so it was slightly compromised."

— Year 1 Fellow, Charity Leader



Although the thematic focus of the programme shifted across the 3 years, Fellows commented on how aligned interests were among Fellows. Relationships within the cohort felt the most fruitful when looking at collaboration and practical action, particularly through the learning probes in year 2, or the action learning sets of year 1.

"For me, the learning [was] in seeing the world from a different pair of eyes, and that was particularly in the action learning sets. I found them very moving and valuable in terms of how I thought about the world and how I thought about what the challenges were. There were people around the table who had a lot of lived experience, and that was, when I boil it down, the most valuable thing. To be equal with people who are living a very different life to you was really important"

— Year 1 Fellow, Education Leader

Overall, there was a sense that people were meeting 'fellow travellers' who they'd stay connected to and collaborate with over the long term. This is something that's already proven to be the case in some parts of the network.

"In a professional sense, they're people I'll consider friends forever. For as long as I'm in this space and doing these jobs, they're people I'll respect and think, 'Wow they might help with that or they might have an insight into that'. That's amazing. There are a few things in my life that have been like that, but not many in my professional life that have been so like that."

— Year 1 Fellow, Charity Leader

This can be seen where there were Fellows from one borough across all 3 cohorts who could either build on each others' work or connect with each other. In Barnet, Councillor Sara Conway's involvement in year 2 led to Will Cooper's involvement in Year 3 and provided an opportunity for ongoing investment in community engagement with and through the council. Sara's comment:

"This has literally shaped the policy of a different area and council. In Barnet, we're in quite a lucky and unique space. I was on the program for one year and then one of the officers leading this whole area of work locally, Will, is on the program this year. That's been wonderful. I don't think our strategies would look the same if both of us hadn't been part of this."



Connection Into the GLA

Although the thematic focus of the programme shifted across the 3 years, Fellows commented on how aligned interests were among Fellows. Relationships within the cohort felt the most fruitful when looking at collaboration and practical action, particularly through the learning probes in year 2, or the action learning sets of year 1.

"It gave a sense of agency in terms of access to the powers that be within London. I felt quite disconnected from decision-making within local government which had an impact on the work I did, the space I ran, and my community. It opened up how I can access those people I need to enact this thing or this project or try and find funding. The network through Civic Futures and having a direct connection with the GLA means I'm more able now to access some of those decision makers that before I didn't feel able to. I have all these connections through...Civic Futures I can reach out to. Being on Civic Futures gives me a bit more of a seat at the table, I suppose."

— Year 2 Fellow, Cultural Producer

"I don't think we've fulfilled our potential in the sense of being that support to the GLA I think the program was set up to be. Now I know some of the cohort have gone to do some work for the GLA. I always thought as Civic Future fellows, I don't really think we had a lot of communication after we were done and the second cohort came along. There's still an opportunity for the GLA to reach out to the fellowship as a whole and see where they can pull in people who have that experience and start to build on it. I would like to see that happen."

— Year 1 Fellow, Activist & Campaigner

Value of Reflection Space

One It's clear from this review that Civic Futures produced significant value for Fellows who were looking for well-facilitated spaces through which they could reflect on their evolving practice as leaders. The project offered 3 key avenues for reflection:

- A 360 feedback process for self-reflection and peer feedback.
- Three 1-2-1 sessions with a coach.
- The shared reflection and sense-making spaces that the programme offered.

All 3 of these were noted as having brought value, particularly to those Fellows who didn't have access to this kind of space through the community/organisational structures they were already part of.

The coaching provided a valuable solo space to work on personal inquiries and development:

"I got quite a lot out of the coaching. Those sorts of things are an investment and often it's not the sort of thing you can afford to do. I had a great coach, had some great conversations and I was thinking a lot at the time about my own leadership development, and other leaders that I was working with. I found having that one-to-one space and opportunity to do that really great."

— Year 1 Fellow, Community Educator

"Remembering the coaching that came as part of civic futures, which now feels like so long ago, I was really struggling and grappling with a lot of big questions at the time, personally. I was questioning my next steps for [my organisation] and what to do now it didn't have a home anymore. The coaching was really helpful in stepping through that with me. It didn't quite get me to where I needed to go decision-wise, but it was an important step along that journey."

— Year 2 Fellow, Placemaker

The 360 feedback process was an unusually open opportunity for feedback which many people found confirming as well as developmental;

"The 360 audit was the first time I've ever done that. That was really fantastic. Having that kind of personal strand."

— Year 2 Fellow, Artist & Organiser

The range of reflective spaces in the group sessions provided new perspectives and an opportunity to make sense of one's own work:

"[It was] amazing and beautiful to have a space to open questions up and have a much slower pace - and be able to delve into some provocations, especially at the beginning. It was a privilege to have the space to think about things in a different way and be introduced to different concepts and meet an amazing group of people. I didn't think I could be refreshed on a Zoom call but I think I was! It always felt like it would be too much and then there's this really wholesome, amazing space."

— Year 2 Fellow, Cultural Producer

Our understanding of the reasons this aspect of the programme was valuable is:

- It was a good reflective space, something that didn't feel particularly available or accessible elsewhere.
- It was on offer from an independent source.
- It was happening with a group of unusually diverse perspectives in the room as part of group conversations.

Fellowship as Licence & Platform

Civic Futures has provided a platform for Fellows to explore, inquire, and experiment on themes that feel important to them. In some cases it's given them a licence to do that which was previously lacking.

Being able to describe yourself as a Civic Futures Fellow was seen to be valuable, and something Fellows use on CVs, social media etc., and as part of job applications. Whether through the connection with the GLA or because of the experience itself, the label is seen as credible and useful.

There was also recognition that the nature of the space allowed more expansive conversations than is often enabled within everyday work/volunteering. Fellows found this positive and valuable, although there was frustration at the difference between the energy created through Civic Futures conversations and the scope to take that energy back into organisational contexts.

"My work is very focused on the micro and actually just to come out to a London level felt like a really good influence and a shift from the

day to day. With hindsight, by lifting out of [borough] that was really good for growing my confidence as a leader and understanding what was important to me in this work.”

— Year 2 Fellow, Cultural Organiser

“My particular work is really place-based. You’re so focused on a place in the community. It’s so important to have those opportunities to look out and find out what other people are doing and be connected to something more broadly.”

— Year 2 Fellow, Local Government Community Worker

It was interesting that those involved in the learning probes in Year 2 described the programme as giving them a licence to explore. We’d expect the same to be true of Year 3, which were just starting at the time of writing.

“The probe opened this Pandora’s box of questions that feel quite crucial to answer. It’s changing my practice and the way I’m working on projects, the way we approach architecture, and even how to see the role a designer or a community might have. It’s impacted the way that I speak to other people who’re trying to achieve something similar.”

— Year 1 Fellow, Architect & Writer

Inevitably, and as with many programmes of this nature, how much people got out of these opportunities often related to how much people put in:

“On reflection, I’m really aware that I don’t think I invested in building relationships with people. There are probably a couple of reasons for that. I do think the COVID disruption for our particular cohort probably didn’t help with that. But then I also wasn’t active on the WhatsApp group. People do use it, people do connect and reach out to people and I just didn’t do that. I also know that from previous networks that I’ve been in, where I know I invested in it and got a huge amount out of that and continue to do so almost 20 years on. So I think there’s a real opportunity there. I just don’t think I did and that’s because I didn’t make the most of it.”

— Year 1 Fellow, Community Educator



Value of Application vs Abstraction

Through this review it's been interesting to reflect on how Fellows valued different parts of the programme.

The most consistent challenge, and one that was referenced frequently, was questioning how relevant, helpful and/or accessible the more conceptual, abstract or theoretical parts of the programme are. The provocation series in particular was mentioned here. This gathered input from partners but extended to some of the theories/frameworks shared. The programme journey itself was referenced, which prioritised reflection and provocation in its early stages.

"There's this constant tension in the civic innovation space where it sometimes gets a bit lost and it's really



hard to know how to bring it back down to earth and root it in the real frontline experience, which is brutal and messy and hard to find. The shininess of academia and theory hits the reality you're trying to implement stuff with real people and spiky challenges. [Civic Futures] exists where at least these things can meet each other and try to find some way to learn from each other and be together. They're both important and both need to inform the other."

— Year 2 Fellow, Social Entrepreneur

For some this provided an interesting challenge to react to, for others it felt familiar and interesting but not what they needed, but for many people it felt abstract to the point of off-putting. In these cases, it was felt it didn't add to the understanding of their work or the value of the space. It likely contributed to some Fellows experiencing a lack of clarity on the programme and its purpose, possibly contributing to a small number disengaging from the project.

"It exposed me to a lot of stuff I wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise. If I'm honest, I found that a little intimidating at times. I'm generally a doer. I struggled with how cerebral some of the conversations were and how academic it was at times, as I wouldn't describe myself in that way. I've worked on the front line in the voluntary sector for a really long time and it was a see-and-do type of existence. This was a completely new space for me to occupy. There was a certain amount of discomfort but also there were real spark moments. There were moments where I was able to connect the idea, sparked by Civic Futures, with the action and that's quite important for me otherwise I struggle."

— Year 2 Fellow, Local Government Director

"Certainly, in the year we were doing it, elements of the abstract were just a bit too abstract. If the abstraction had been taken down to thinking things through, with different ideas and different detail, but with a focus on what are the challenges facing London? I think that could have been very good. Some stuff went quite a long way beyond that often in a range of weird and wacky directions. I might well have enjoyed that in an evening course that I chose to study personally, but I'm not sure how relevant it was to our work."

— Year 2 Fellow, Community Journalism Director

Wider Influence & Impact

With two cohorts now having completed the project, we're able to look beyond the individuals who have taken part, and start identifying some of the programme's significant and wide-ranging influence: With questions about the wider impact and how to tell its story a regular part of programme partnership conversations over the first 2 years, we're now able to identify some of that broader influence, and are understanding it in three parts:

1. The direct application back into role or context by Fellows.
2. The experimentation and subsequent learning that was supported by the programme.
3. The projects for which the Fellowship acted as a catalyst or reference point.

Application Into Role

The clearest impact the project had was its influence on the way people approached their work, and the principles/values they introduced as a result of that participation. According to those interviewed, this related particularly to community engagement and the importance of equitable approaches to that engagement. This was partly influenced by the content of the programme, partly by the exposure to new ideas, but also the perspectives from different parts of civil society.

Ajay Pabial's [Year 2 Fellow] work at his organisation Art Clubbers is indicative of the way the programme influenced organisational practice:

"What came out of Civic Futures was we introduced a monthly session called CLIMB, which is Creating Lasting Impact by Modelling Better - going back and reflecting on our relationships with funders, organisations and partners, clients to identify if they align their values, or our values if we're going to have a working relationship".

Another example might be Sara Conway's [Year 2 Fellow] opportunity to apply her learning directly to her role at Barnet Council. Sara was an opposition councillor while on the project but came into power after her year on the programme. As a result, she was able to introduce a lot of community engagement thinking to the council's work. She reflects, "Barnet

would simply not have a community participation policy or evolving practice like this had I not been on the Civic Futures programme". [News story here.](#)

As the above example suggests, the ability to apply learning back into role depended somewhat on personal access to infrastructure and resources. The people who were able to make the quickest impact through probes/projects etc were the people in positions that were able to draw on more organisational/institutional support. Anecdotally, these people were likely to either be Fellows in local government or larger organisational settings, or people who had formal leadership roles in organisations, whatever their scale.

Another example of that, outlined in more detail below, might be WeWalworth at Pembroke House. WeWalworth was a rich conversation in many sessions, led by Year 2 Fellow Mike Wilson, partly as it already had significant funding from central government that enabled the conversation. "I kept bringing WeWalworth into it. I'm already doing a probe which I want to work on so I'm just going to use this as an amazing opportunity to ask people for their input, road-test some ideas."

Funded Experimentation

The Years 2 and 3 of Civic Futures have been able to draw on a collaboration fund to support Fellows in working together on themes emerging from the project. Recognising this fund offered small grants as opposed to project funding, activity was framed as learning 'probes' or 'experiments'. These aimed to create learning and insight through supporting experimentation and innovation. Three of the probes that emerged from year 2, and demonstrate the range of action, are outlined below:

Local News & Engagement in Waltham Forest

Led by David Floyd from Social Spider and Jane Brueske from Waltham Forest Council, this experiment explored a new model for engagement and interaction between decision-makers and communities, supported and amplified by community-based media. Through this pilot, Waltham Forest Echo published an initial

article focusing on the GLA's role in recovery - with a particular emphasis on work supported locally in Waltham Forest.

This was followed by a second article featuring the responses of people from a range of communities in Waltham Forest, giving both their views on the GLA's recovery activity and their wider perspectives on what recovery means for them. The probe experimented with a peer approach to youth engagement, working with young people to explore recovery and GLA activity around it. In doing so they generated a range of insights on the topic as well as ongoing discussion.

For Waltham Forest this was a new way of engaging people - and especially young people - around social issues. Social Spider are now exploring the value of deepening engagement through community-based media with the GLA's new Head of Communications.

Jane's reflection on the project included that "it was quite unique and unusual, particularly to work with the paper. The street-based team came under local authority, so they hadn't had that chance to work with an independent newspaper...that partnership was quite unique where our guys were able to go and get that information quite easily. I think it was groundbreaking - maybe that sounds too dramatic - but it was quite innovative!"

Mental Health Provision In Barnet

This probe, led by Sara Conway, Labour Councillor in Barnet Council, centred around a continuing theme throughout the Fellowship: the trauma people experienced during the pandemic and the space needed to aid recovery. It had a particular focus on the people in the voluntary sector who've been doing the work of holding/serving/caring for others.

The aim was to work with local mental health providers to explore the potential for, approach to, and nature of systemic intervention in this space, and to create something that tested it meaningfully. Partnering with Mind in Enfield & Barnet, a short programme was developed to examine: how the wellbeing of voluntary sector VCSE leadership could be supported; what resources existed and what the barriers for usage were; what the relationship between the wellbeing of leaders and front-line delivery was; if a set of tools be developed to support leaders on a wider basis; and if those tools could act as a catalyst to provide support to the wider sector.

The probe increased well-being, confidence and knowledge among participants, and generated an appetite for ongoing partnership. The partnership is currently exploring funding to develop the programme further.

Provocation/Inquiry Projects

Two inquiries/provocations built on themes discussed during the programme were led by Joon-Lynn Goh (Migrants in Culture) and David McEwen (Unit 38), and included input from multiple Fellows.

Joon-Lynn's project focused on the capacity for radical imagination and creative collaborations in stewardship, incorporating a series of interviews and a 'learning lab' delivered in multiple settings - including the GLA. David's focus was on migrant infrastructure and organisations and again was produced through a combination of interviews and research.

As a collaborative learning inquiry rooted in interview and exploration, these probes were different to other more applied projects. As such their value was more grounded in the distribution and ultimately application of the learning that they probes produced. Joon-Lynn and David have since produced a pair of written reports to be shared publicly as well as being presented at the Civic Futures provocation series in November 2023.

Reflecting on the work, Joon-Lynn noted, "When you interview 10 people, you're seeing patterns and some of it can be very affirming of what you're trying to do. They were encouraging and made me have more faith in deep change that can occur from genuinely community-led solutions, rather than more superficial centralised decisions. It affirms for me that this is a space really to work from. Of course, it involves other civic actors but this is a really good and urgently needed centre to take"

Fellowship as Catalyst /Reference Point

There were also examples of Civic Futures being a starting point for other projects, or a reference point in design/delivery.

WeWalworth

As referenced earlier, WeWalworth is a project of community engagement and collaboration between civil society, local government and central government. It was created to build on the unprecedented level of collaboration and coordination in Southwark during the pandemic. Hosted by Pembroke House and funded through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities's Partnerships for People

and Place programme, it aimed to explore ongoing opportunities for partnership and problem-solving in the borough.

Its design was influenced by Pembroke House CEO Mike Wilson's participation in Civic Futures, who'd secured funding early in his time on the programme. It became a focal point of conversations in the second year of the programme as it tackled building an infrastructure for equitable community engagement and civic collaboration. Having intentionally focused on the theme of food and community, partly as a response to the open nature of the Civic Futures experience, the project is now working with its second cohort of participants.

Speaking about the influence of Civic Futures on the project, Mike said: "It was amazing because Civic Futures had created this space where you could... have the space to think about things in a different way. It also created this group of people with very different expertise coming together, from vastly different backgrounds and different perspectives, central and local again. But it would struggle to have that sense of: what are we going to work on? It was [participant], who really crystallised it in our imagination. She came up with the idea of a 'neighbourhood lab', where we're bringing in the conditions for people to learn what it means to collaborate long term, but focusing it on a place. That's what we meant by taking a Civic Futures-type approach - by focusing it on a neighbourhood and on the things that matter to the people in that neighbourhood. That's how things like the barbecue project surface - taking something like food as the theme and asking, 'What are the things that people care about?'"

Redbridge Community Leadership

One Civic Futures project ultimately led to the commissioning of a new community leadership programme in Redbridge, influenced by the Fellowship's design and approach. The project was hatched by the second cohort's Dilwara Khatun (Redbridge Council) and Ajay Pabal (Art Clubbers & Leyton resident) as a learning probe to examine how Redbridge Council could create a space for civic discussion and leadership that included the council but also addressed inequitable power dynamics. They actively involved the 'unusual suspects' from across the borough, which led to practical action and change in the relationships between actors in the borough. Delivered as a one-day event in collaboration between the council and Art Clubbers, it led directly to Redbridge Council commissioning a new programme of community leadership to support and connect

civic action in the borough. The commissioning of that work and the nature of the brief were influenced by both the experimentation funded by Civic Futures, but also by Dilwara's participation in the programme.

Greener Together

Greener Together began following a conversation between Year 1 Fellows Eli Manderson-Evans (Blagrove Trust) and Nile Bridgman (Saqqra) and the GLA's Environment Team. Connected through Civic Futures as part of a shadowing exchange, a partnership was formed through which the project accessed funding and delivered a pilot programme in Newham. This explored community-led approaches to sustainability and place-making. The project was responsible for the community-led and sustainability-focussed development of the Alma Street area in Newham. Now a sustainable organisation led by a resident since the early stages of the project, Greener Together shows a potential model for community-led futures. It also provided rich learnings on the challenges of collaboration between government and communities, particularly in relation to outcome measurements and expectations.





PARTNERS REFLECTIONS

As a design and facilitation partnership, Civic Futures has tested us at every stage. It has pushed our practice on in terms of holding a meaningful space for emergent learning and action.

From addressing early questions on equitable spaces to managing uneven participation, from Covid constraints to managing the different requirements and expectations of a diverse group of participants, there've been a number of significant challenges requiring the approach to change.

Thinking about this process as a whole, and reflecting on conversations with the GLA as well as within the partnership, we've distilled a few reflections from the delivery team:

Project Framing:

As a partnership, we've been committed to working emergently together and with participants. This tone was established by the team at City Hall, with a decision to move away from an advisory group model towards something much more open.

Farah Elahi, who has been alongside the project from the beginning on the GLA side, describes that shift: "We decided that we didn't want to do the traditional advisory group because we didn't feel it would elicit the type of connection and collaboration we were seeking with civil society. That's where the idea of the fellowship came about. We didn't necessarily have a clear idea of what that would look like. We put some high-level quite broad spec out for something that will help bridge that gap, and create space, initially with the focus on civic leaders, the space for civic leaders to come together and connect but also a space for learning and connection."

There's no doubt this approach has made the programme richer for everyone, influencing access and cohort, learning content and topics, and the introduction of experimentation funding. It's also made it more challenging to deliver, with the programme harder to articulate in the first years and the expectations of participants therefore harder to manage. Having been defined as a cohort-based learning programme, Civic Futures started with a big, open, ambitious invitation that connected the project with a macro story of social change and London's future.

A Big, Open Invitation:

Participants responded to that invitation and our sense is that it has defined the programme starting point and experience across each of the 3 years. Originally framed by Dark Matter Labs, its ambition spoke to a particular kind of changemaker and a rich and varied group. Its open nature encouraged people to come into the programme with an open mind, embracing an emergent approach of working together, leading to all the work that followed.

Given the project was initially conceived as an advisory board, that feels particularly significant. Where the project hasn't worked well for people has often been about a discomfort with this way of working, a lack of clarity over what they are joining, or because they came with a specific organisational agenda (for example securing funding for a project or seeking a specific audience within the GLA).

Access & Equalising Space:

The conversation about how to create an equitable space that allowed everyone's full participation was explicit right from the beginning of the pilot year. In particular, this was about recognising the differences between people working/volunteering beyond traditional organisational structures. That year (2019) we introduced a bursary to support people to attend sessions, recognising the power imbalances at play, and also began supporting travel costs. This has continued into years two and three.

It's worth noting there's ongoing challenge from civil society participants on the size of the bursary, the psychological contract of the programme, and how it can appropriately recognise the different starting points of participants. That's fed into wider conversations around power and equity in collaborative conversations, with civil society leaders voicing concerns where the playing field has felt uneven. There have been questions of access, from who can afford to participate to the accessibility of combining in-person and virtual learning spaces. This is only part of the conversation around equity and inclusion but has been an ongoing conversation in how the programme can actively reset the expectations about who has the power in these spaces.

Broadening the 'Practical':

As referenced above, we've consistently met scepticism for anything that isn't immediately transferable to practical action. That's particularly true for frontline workers in civil society settings. We understand the impulse and urgency people feel around issues they and their communities face, and have sought to keep action and reflection in a creative tension, recognising both are required for change. We've held our belief in the value of reflection and exploration, something recognised and appreciated by some of those we interviewed. We've also regularly needed to challenge an understanding of what constitutes the 'practical', and support people in valuing time in the uncomfortable space of not knowing. How we can do that ahead of people joining the programme, as opposed to when they are already part of it, is a question for us to answer for future years.

Balancing Inner & Outer Work:

Building on the above, there's been a consistent theme throughout the delivery of the programme around practising different ways of being with change and transformation, and the need to hold a space for different levels of change. Farah noted, "One of the deep learnings has been there's not this separation between the system and the individual. It's not there's these liberated individuals that go into these shackled organisations. We are these institutions. We are the system. In transforming ourselves, we transform these organisations. How does Civic Futures offer an opportunity to gain a perspective that allows you to challenge internally in a way that transforms the system but not as something that's separate from the need to transform yourself?".

Consistent Theme, Varied Action:

Despite an open invitation and different thematic approaches over the 3 years (open, recovery missions, etc.) there's been a remarkably common theme to the conversations across all 3 cohorts, particularly given there was little attempt to consolidate themes or actively shape them. Despite that, the theme (interactions between communities and different parts of the public system) was applied and thought about very differently across the different groups. This led to a wide range of action from locally rooted projects to more expansive inquiries. We've reflected on the opportunity to be more confident about the theme of the programme in future years, while also being more intentional about shaping the constraints around the learning the project supports, in order to make them easier to develop.

The Importance of Cohort Make-Up: The success of a project like Civic Futures will always depend on who's in the conversation and what they contribute to it. We've been incredibly fortunate through Civic Futures to work with a range of talented leaders and activists who've challenged us and each other to make the most of the space. The relationships formed have been the magic of the project and why people continue to engage with it.

It's also been a rich source of learning for us. We recognise that by only bringing together civil society leaders in year one, we exacerbated a sense of local government being 'other' as opposed to everyone being in the work together. Farah articulated this well in conversation, saying the first cohort of civic leaders

“could quite easily go into an ‘us and them’ and it was much harder to challenge them to think more broadly about the value proposition that exists across all sectors rather than in sizing. One of the big learnings from the first cohort is that everyone needs to be in the room - the whole system needs to be in the room as much as possible in order to facilitate that kind of systemic reflection”.

Equally, we recognise the distinction between civil society and local government in year 2 didn’t stand up in the context of people wearing multiple hats through their work. Finally, we’ve been struck every year by the value brought to the group by the artists and creatives who’ve taken part, and who’ve been particularly adept at working in the spaces of possibility and uncertainty.

Connection into the GLA:

We’ve been grateful to the Community Engagement team at the GLA for their commissioning of, and partnership through, this programme as a whole. Farah and Ayesha in particular have given input that’s been formative in pushing the programme forward. From the participant point of view, that connection into the insight of the GLA team and the power of City Hall to open doors or facilitate activity, is a major part of the appeal of the project. We’re not surprised that across the years there’s an opportunity to work out what engagement Civic Futures Fellows should or shouldn’t expect with City Hall following their participation in the programme, particularly in terms of access and/or influence.

Reflecting on the genesis of the project as an advisory board, we think this is worth considering and addressing in any future iteration, particularly given the investment in developing the network. This is one of the reasons for additional funding to develop the Fellowship Network: partly to support ongoing collaboration between Fellows and partly to ensure ongoing, better connection into the GLA. That work is currently ongoing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the impact and learning from the first 3 years of the programme, we would make the following suggestions for any future iterations of the programme.

1. Tighter Thematic Focus:

We suggest there be a clear thematic focus around community involvement in decision-making, and to seek people, projects, and organisations who are positioned and motivated to learn from each other in experimenting with new approaches and ways of being around this specific topic.

2. Open Cohort:

We suggest we actively recruit across civil society and local government across London, aiming for a mixture across these groups, without attempting to achieve a certain proportion of either group. Instead, we suggest we're motivated to find people in a position to support meaningful experimentation in community settings and introduce a more robust selection process to help us do so.

3. Collaboration Fund:

Building on the learning from Year 3, we suggest that the collaboration fund is a clear, public, and confident part of the programme offer in future years. In doing so, we contextualise the programme around the potential for experimentation from the beginning.

4. In-Person Delivery:

Now that we're able to make commitments to in-person delivery and unlikely to be undermined by lockdowns, we suggest we return to full-day learning sessions over the course of 9 months, with 6 months of experimentation time.

5. Applied, Contextual Work:

Bearing in mind the constant challenge of abstraction and application, a tighter thematic focus will allow us to move more quickly into the practical, experimental parts of the programme. Having said that, we suggest remaining confident in the need for personal reflection and inquiry. For any future iteration, we suggest we maintain both the 360 and the coaching elements of the programme for individual reflection and development. We also suggest reintroducing action learning as a way of supporting people to connect with each other over the content of their work, and to surface more learning about different perspectives on the civic system.

6. Clarify Bursary:

To fully address questions about participation for civic leaders, we propose increasing the size of the bursary but reducing the overall number available, making it clear on what basis we're offering that bursary (e.g. balancing the nature of the offer, the investment in an individual it involves, and the time involved for individuals).

7. Formalise GLA Engagement:

Finally, we'd suggest formalising how the wider GLA engages with the programme, how it aligns with other projects including the London Engagement Collaborative, and the further opportunities for civic leaders who've participated in the programme to further engage with City Hall.

THANKS

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