youth futures
FOUNDATION

Case Study 4: Supporting capacity building of frontline organisations

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This case study forms part of the youth employment infrastructure research and evaluation project[1] carried out by RAND Europe in 2021-22 on behalf of the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) (see Annex). It aims to understand how infrastructure organisations (IOs, see Box 1) in England support frontline organisations (FOs) through capacity building, the challenges and facilitators involved, the impact on FOs and their work, and any lessons learnt. FOs are organisations that deliver services directly to or campaign or advocate for or on behalf of young people.[2] For the purpose of this study, this includes charities, social enterprises, education or employment providers working with young people.
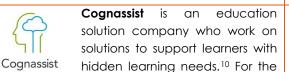
This case study draws on three semi-structured interviews, one with an IO[4] (Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)) and two with FOs who have previously received capacity building support capacity from IOs (Cognassist and Proudtobeme – see Box 2)[5]. In addition, it draws on information from interviews conducted throughout this study with one IO (Money4You)[6]. Those interviews did not focus specifically on capacity building but provided relevant information for this case study. Cognassist and Proudtobeme were identified as organisations who had previously received support from AELP (Cognassist) and Money4You (Proudtobeme). The interviews were complemented by a targeted review of relevant literature (see References).

Box 2. Who's who?

The **Association of Employment and Learning providers (AELP)** is a national membership body representing some 800 organisations that deliver training and vocational learning.[7] For the purpose of this study, we understand AELP as an IO.

Money4You is a UK charity focusing on supporting BAMER-led[8] organisations to increase their resilience and sustainability as an organisation.[9] For the purpose of this study, we understand Money4You as an IO.

Cognassist is an education solution company who work on solutions to support learners with hidden learning needs.[10] For the purpose of this study, we understand Cognassist as a FO.

Proudtobeme is a social enterprise that supports BAME[11] girls in receiving opportunities they otherwise may not. They provide training and mentoring to these girls.[12] For the purpose of this study, we understand Proudtobeme as a FO.

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[3] RAND (2022).
[7] AELP (2022).
[8] Black, Asian, Multi-Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER)
[9] Money4You (2022).
[11] Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME).

Support for FOs through capacity building

IOs support FOs by offering services and information that FOs may not have access to otherwise. This support is understood as capacity building and intends to improve an organisations sustainability or to increase their size or reach.[13] IOs mostly deliver this support by providing training, resources, networking opportunities and mentoring.[14]

The interviewees and literature highlight different areas in which IOs may support FOs in building their capacity, such as providing support to receive funding,[15] creating opportunities to make connections with policymakers and funders,[16] providing support with digital communications and developing an online presence[17] and support in administrative areas, such as HR roles.[18]

This support will look differently for every IOs, but also for each FO receiving it. This is due to the different needs of FOs and expertise of the IOs.[19] Both Proudtobeme and Cognassist explained that due to the nature of their work it can be challenging to find the right IOs for their needs.[20] Proudtobeme also mentioned that sometimes they need to engage with multiple different organisations to receive the support they need.[21]

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[6] Cited in this case study as interviews with an IO.
[7] AELP (2022).
[8] Black, Asian, Multi-Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER)
[9] Money4You (2022).
[10] Cognassist (2022).
[11] Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME).
[12] Proudtobeme (2022).
[13] NCVO (2017).
[14] Two interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[15] Two interviews with IOs and one interview with a FO. See also Foster-Fishman et al. (2007).
[16] Two interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[17] One interview with an IO and two interviews with FOs. See also Foster-Fishman et al. (2007).
[18] One interview with a FO.
[19] Two interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[20] Two interviews with FOs.
[21] One interview with a FO.

Training and mentoring activities

Two IOs included in this case study provide training activities to FOs to build their capacity. Money4You provide the training programme AVOCADO+, which is a set 12-month programme with different courses ('bootcamps') each month that focus on a variety of areas of support for the FOs. This programme aims to build the business resilience of FOs by providing holistic and targeted support to each of the participating organisations.[22] For an example of the types of courses provided, see Box 3. A different organisation, AELP, provides training through a series of events, workshops and webinars that can be booked by their members and non-members as required. Members usually receive access to these events for free or at a discounted rate, while non-members do not have access to all events and will pay a higher fee than members. These events, workshops and webinars cover a range of topics of interest to FOs and are reviewed based on feedback from participating organisations.[23]

> **Box 3. Sample of bootcamp plans by Money4You.**
>
> The classes delivered in the 2021 edition of AVOCADO+ were:
>
> 1. Choosing the Best Legal Structure for Your NonProfit
>
> 2. Class of 2021 Induction
>
> 3. NonProfit business essentials: Leadership, Governance and Business Planning (including budgeting and forecasting)
>
> 4. Project design (incl. theory of change) & Fundraising Product Innovation + Budgeting
>
> 5. Fundraising Strategy & Case for support
>
> 6. Intro to Grant Makers & Prospect Research
>
> 7. Effective Bid Writing techniques
>
> 8. Fundraising from Events & Communities
>
> 9. Corporates and Major Donors
>
> 10. Financial Literacy and Annual Reporting for Charities.

Areas of interest include funding, policy, safeguarding and Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)[24] regulations.[25] This type of capacity building requires (continuous) commitment at specific times from FOs, which sometimes poses challenges to their participation.[26] To mitigate this other forms of capacity building have gained importance such as virtual hubs (s. more information on hubs below).[27]

Through the AVOCADO+ programme, Money4You also offers mentoring support to the FOs going through the training. As part of the programme, each organisation is assigned a dedicated consultant who aims to build resilience and provides targeted support for the duration of the programme.[28] These meetings are one to one meetings between the consultant and the organisation. The organisations can submit business plans or bid writing activities to the consultants, which will then be discussed in these meetings.[29]

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[22] One interview with an IO.
[23] One interview with an IO.
[24] HM Government (2022).
[25] One interview with an IO.
[26] One interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[27] Two interviews with IOs.
[28] One interview with an IO.
[29] One interview with an IO.

Sharing resources

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms and **virtual hubs became were used more commonly**.[30] The transition to remote working and remote service delivery during the first lockdown in spring 2020 created several challenges for FOs. AELP created SectorShare[31] in response to these challenges experienced by their members. To support FOs, AELP started to pool resources that already existed within the sector and created an online platform, which was free to access for everyone. SectorShare was designed as a collaborative space for alternative learning providers where all organisations signed up for the platform can upload and download resources.[32] The resources originally added to the platform were existing resources curated by AELP and included their own work and external resources. In addition, all organisations with access to the platform are able to add resources they developed or found helpful.[33] Money4You uses a platform called BAMER Hub, which provides resources to members. It was created to support those organisations who are not able to participate in the AVOCADO+ programme but who still want to take part in capacity building. The platform includes recordings of the AVOCADO+ bootcamps and the digital resilience check, which is a self-assessment tool for FOs to reflect on area(s) where their organisation might need support. Based on the outcome of the digital resilience test the FOs receive curated content to support them.[34] This form of support is more flexible than formal training because organisations are able to access resources when they need them and when they have the time to do so. It is, however, not tailored to the organisations as much as taking part in the AVOCADO+ programme.[35]

Facilitating networking opportunities

Both IOs in this case study specified that networking opportunities (amongst FOs as well as between FOs and funders and policymakers) are a key feature of their capacity building work.[36] At AELP these networking opportunities aim to facilitate sharing of good practices between FOs, policymakers and funders. They also provide a space to have different stakeholders in a room together to discuss emerging topics and challenges.[37] An example of the latter was the Green Skills Summit AELP organised in February 2022 to discuss the growing need for green skills with a variety of stakeholders, including policymakers.[38] For Money4You, the facilitation of networking between funders and FOs is particularly important, as many of the FOs they work with may not be known to the funders and/or might not be aware that they could be eligible for some funding programmes.[39] One of these networking opportunities is called a 'Dragons Den' Den where FOs going through the AVOCADO+ programme

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[30] Two interviews with IOs.
[31] Sectorshare (2022).
[32] One interview with an IO.
[33] One interview with an IO.
[34] Interview with an IO.
[35] Two interviews with IOs.
[36] Two interviews with IOs.
[37] One interview with an IO.
[38] One interview with an IO.
[39] One interview with an IO.

are able to pitch their programmes directly to the funders and are able to see how funding decisions may be made.[40] Money4You also uses their alumni network of people who have participated in the AVOCADO+ programme to identify other forms of support that would be helpful to FOs.[41]

Money4You and AELP both hold regular short briefing meetings for their networks where different topics are being discussed and information is shared with participants. These briefings often related to policy or funding topics and usually include a relevant speaker from the formal or informal networks of these organisations. Having access to a broad selection of stakeholders ensures that these briefings are kept interesting and informative to their networks and members who attend.[42]

Approaches to facilitating capacity building of FOs.

Providing insights into the needs of relevant stakeholders, or providing skills that FOs may not have, was seen as an effective approach by all interviewees.[43] Through their roles as IOs, AELP and Money4You have insider knowledge of target groups of FOs and policy or funding landscapes. They also have skills, or access to skills training that FOs may not have.[44] Cognassit stated that to provide their services to other organisations and to offer young people access to the relevant resources they need a good understanding of the stakeholders, such as relevant education providers and policymakers, they could work with. Through AELP, Cognassist received more information and help to identify relevant stakeholders, learned about the specific needs of stakeholders and more.[45]

Cognassist and Proudtobeme also highlighted specialised staff support is an important way in which IOs help them.[46] This is especially the case for smaller organisations, who often face difficulties accessing certain areas of professional expertise, such as communication, human resources (HR) and research within their own staff.[47] For Proudtobeme, this included a consultant who worked directly with them through the mentoring part of the programme run by Money4You.[48] Proudtobeme highlighted that this support can be useful in all areas from communication to HR.[49]

Similarly, **having a direct contact point at the IOs is helpful for maintaining close working relationships** and for FOs to receive the maximum benefit from capacity building measures.[50] For Money4You, this was done through the consultants and contact points within their own organisation.[51] Cognassist reported that they have one member of staff at AELP as their direct contact.[52] AELP also reported that maintaining

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[40] One interview with an IO.
[41] One interview with an IO.
[42] Two interviews with IOs.
[43] Two interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[44] Two interviews with IOs.
[45] One interview with a FO.
[46] Two interviews with FOs.
[47] Two interviews with IOs.
[48] Two interviews with FOs.
[49] One interview with a FO.
[50] Two interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[51] One interview with an IO and one interview with a FO.
[52] On interview with a FO.

a close and continuous relationship with their members is one of their key priorities. This includes calls to all members every six months and for members to have direct personal email contacts for staff, including senior staff. This personal relationship helps with engagement and making sure that the support is relevant to their membership.[53]

Facilitating the sharing of good practice and encouraging peer-learning was seen as a helpful approach for capacity building by AELP and Money4You.[54] For AELP and Money4You, this form of learning is important as people in similar situations may have specific insights or experience that may help others.[55] This approach was also highlighted as a good practice in the literature.[56]

Using partnerships were named by Money4You as a good practice for capacity building measures. As part of their capacity building work, Money4You cooperates with the Computer Science department of City University[57] in a programme called Tech4Good.[58] In this programme, City University students get to work on real life projects by helping the organisations Money4You work with on IT challenges. This may include restructuring or creating websites or general web presence or other forms of IT or digital support. Through this cooperation Money4You can enable support in areas they would normally not be able to provide, and FOs can benefit from more services through one programme.[59]

Impact of capacity building on FOs

Impact of networking enabled by IOs

The impact of networking on participants may be difficult to define, capture or attribute. Yet, in the context of this case study, making new connections, and strengthening existing connections were highlighted as important activities that make a positive difference to the work of FOs. This section discusses some of these stakeholder views on the impact of networking, with the caveat that evidence of the long-term effects are yet to be documented.[60]

All interviewees reported that establishing connections between FOs and policymakers and funders is one of the key outcomes associated with capacity building.[61] AELP and Money4You both highlighted that this is the part of their role that their members are most interested in.[62] AELP stated that they are a catalyst for the development of relationships between their members and key stakeholders.[63] For example, Cognassit confirmed that they have been able to utilise AELP's connections and that AELP have been helpful in contacting and meeting with policymakers. Cognassist also highlighted that sometimes they would not have been able to identify

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[53] One interview with an IO.
[54] Two interviews with IOs.
[55] Two interviews with IOs.
[56] Foster-Fisherman et al. (2007).
[57] City, University of London (2022).
[58] Money4You & City, University of London (2021).
[59] One interview with an IO.
[60] Foster-Fisherman et al. (2007).
[61] Two interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[62] Two interviews with IOs.
[63] One interview with an IO.

certain stakeholders without the support of AELP.[64] Proudtobeme reported that they were repeatedly rejected by one funder without receiving any feedback on how to improve their bid. Through networking facilitated by Money4You, they were able to speak directly to a member of staff from the funder and get feedback on their bids and hear why they had been unsuccessful in the past. Receiving this kind of feedback was reported as very helpful, as Proudtobeme would have been unlikely to identify the area of improvement on their own.[65] Proudtobeme also explained that through the training programme of Money4You they were able to receive comprehensive support across a variety of areas of development and gain skills in different areas through one programme.[66]

Cognassist also explained that IOS play a crucial role in amplifying their work throughout their networks and to other stakeholders. The reach that organisations like AELP have is much wider than Cognassit's own network, which increases the reach of Cognassit's work.[67]

Impact of training and sharing of resources provided by IOs
The impact of training and resource sharing enabled by IOs are often not systematically measured or defined. Capacity building measures generally seem to include some form of training or sharing of resources. As there is no one way of providing training or resources, the impact of individual measures differs. It is, however, generally understood that this capacity building support is beneficial to FOs and increases their resilience. While this section discusses some stakeholder views, more long-term evaluations of impact are needed.[68]

Saving time and financial resources of FOs was highlighted as an impact of training and resource sharing by two IOs and one FO.[69] Both AELP and Money4You reported that offering online resource hubs and other support facilitates easier access to information for FOs as it can be found in one place rather than FOs needing to search for them.[70] This was confirmed by the interviewee at Cognassist, who stated that easy access to resources meant they could spend more time utilising the resources in their work rather than spending time on finding resources and support.[71]

For Cognassist, the research expertise and capacities at AELP increased the use of data collected by Cognassist. As the amount of data collected by Cognassit's grew, it became increasingly difficult for them to use the data to its full potential with their the inhouse capacity. Through analysis and research support from AELP, Cognassist was able to make more use of the data they collected and reach more stakeholders through the AELP network.[72]

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[64] One interview with a FO.
[65] One interview with a FO.
[66] One interview with a FO.
[67] One interview with a FO.
[68] Minzner et al. (2014).
[69] Interviews with two IOs and one FO.
[70] Interviews with two IOs.
[71] One interview with a FO.
[72] One interview with a FO.

Proudtobeme stated that one of the key outcomes associated with the capacity building support they had received from Money4You was increasing the confidence of their staff in their day to day work and to grow the organisation.[73]

Key challenges and facilitators related to capacity building

There are a number of challenges faced by either IOs or FOs in respectively providing and taking part in capacity building activities:

- Key challenges for IOs include:

  - **Resources**: Some of the most successful capacity building measures for FOs, is the support that is the most resource intensive for IOs.[74] This can also be seen through some of the work mentioned as good practices by the IOs and FOs.[75] Here, one-to-one engagement with a consultant[76] or direct and personal contact was mentioned as the most helpful approach, which requires time and skilled staff from IOs.[77]

  - **COVID-19 and shift to remote working:** At the beginning of the pandemic, IOs had to adapt their activities to the pandemic. This included developing their online offer and adapting formats to work within lockdowns. As the pandemic went on, the interest in online activities decreased, which meant that the approach had to be further adapted and refined.[78] AELP noted a 'webinar fatigue' among their membership, noting high attendance at in-person meetings once these were introduced.. They noted the need to consider the right balance between digital and in-person meetings going forward.[79]

- Key challenges for FOs include:

  - **Lack of resources**: Proudtobeme highlighted that as a small organisation with no full-time staff it is difficult to find a suitable staff member to participate to the extent required by some capacity building measures.[80] AELP mentioned that they have seen a relative increase of organisations that have had to withdraw their membership due to financial reasons rather than for other reasons, such as no longer needing services or not having enough time.[81] Cognassist mentioned that especially for training programmes it is sometimes difficult to match availability of their staff to scheduled training sessions, meaning that they sometimes miss out on opportunities.[82]

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[73] One interview with a FO.
[74] Wells & Dayson (2010).
[75] Interviews with two IOs.
[76] One interview with an IO.
[77] One interview with an IO.
[78] Two interviews with IOs.
[79] One interview with an IO.
[80] One interview with an IO.
[81] One interview with an IO.
[82] One interview with a FO.

- o **Broad capacity building measures**: A challenge reported by Proudtobeme is that many capacity building measures provided by IOs are targeted at quite a broad audience. This is often due to IOs not having enough staff and resources to have smaller and more targeted programmes for different types of organisations. [83] The literature suggests that this challenge for IOs causes significant issues specifically for micro-organisations who may need a very different type of support compared to larger FOs. [84]

- o **Lack of awareness**: This is often a reason why FOs may not take part in capacity measures. Proudtobeme highlighted that sometimes it is difficult to be aware which measures will be helpful for them and targeted enough for them to benefit from participation in the measure. [85]

At the same time a number of factors make providing capacity building easier:

- **Demand:** Interest of the FOs in the capacity building offered by IOs was named as the main facilitator.[86] Offering services targeted to FOs with similar service users (i.e. young people or employment support) or specific types of organisations (i.e. micro organisations, BAME led organisations) that may not find support elsewhere makes the capacity building work of IOs more relevant to these organisations.[87] For AELP, by providing services to a specific group of organisations (independent learning providers) they are able to target their training, resources and other support specifically to these types of organisations, which increases the benefits for their members participating organisations.[88] Proudtobeme highlighted that the reason they participated in the Money4You capacity building work was that it was specifically targeted at BAME organisations, which made them feel like the support was going to be more targeted and useful to them.[89]

- **Networks of IOs:** Having access to the networks and connections of IOs increase the value of the support offered to FOs.[90]

- **Trusted relationships:** Cognassist specified that knowing an organisation will deliver the work and support they promised in a way that is helpful to the organisation encourages FOs to participate in capacity building work.[91] For Proudtobeme, finding a programme that was specifically targeted at

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[83] One interview with a FO. See also Donahue (2011).
[84] Donahue (2011).
[85] One interview with a FO.
[86] Two interviews with IOs.
[87] Two interviews with IOs and two interviews with FOs.
[88] One interview with a FO.
[89] One interview with a FO.
[90] Two interviews with FOs.
[91] One interview with a FO.

organisations like theirs made them trust that they would receive valuable support .[92]

Lessons learned for providing capacity building by IOs

1. The main lessons reported to us by the interviewees are that the **different forms of capacity building have different purposes and require different level of engagement of the FOs**. For example, training programmes might require longer commitment at specific times while using resource sharing hubs can be more flexible based on the specific needs of the organisations. Offering these different types of support means that more organisations' needs can be met. Targeted support for a specific type of organisation or a specific sector also increases the benefits to the FOs that take part in capacity building.

2. **The opportunity to network is one of the reasons that FOs are attracted to IOs.** IOs can be a good link between FOs and other stakeholders facilitating interactions and relationship building. Additionally, the networks of IOs seem to allow for more access to information and the possibility to share FOs' work more widely.

3. **Different approaches seem to work particularly well when engaging with FOs**. Building a strong relationship between IOs and FOs, often with a known contact within the organisation, can increase engagement and allow organisations to benefit more fully from the support on offer. Providing expertise that may be difficult to access for FOs and finding the right balance between online and in person offers were also named as factors that increase engagement.

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[92] One interview with a FO.

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Annex. About the youth employment infrastructure research and evaluation

Support for young people in England has gone through substantial changes over the last several years, in part due to underfunding, structural changes and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes have had profound effects on youth employment, especially on young people from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds, who have been disproportionately affected.

These effects have also been felt acutely by organisations which help young people into employment, education or training, including by IOs (third sector organisations which provide services to FOs working directly with young people).

RAND Europe has been commissioned by YFF to conduct a study on IOs. The study draws on a theory-based approach and mixed methods including interviews, surveys, case studies and workshops to:

- Show how IOs support the youth employment sector and effect change

- Support IOs to improve practice and delivery to stakeholders, and

- Improve the evidence base of what works by sharing good practice between IOs.

The research questions are:

1. How do infrastructure bodies support the needs of organisations working towards youth employment?

2. How do IOs effect change (at regional, national and systemic levels)?

3. How do IOs network and collaborate?

4. What impacts do IOs have on the youth employment organisations they support, and young people?

5. How can IOs be better supported by policymakers and funders to improve youth employment outcomes?

The case studies contribute to research questions 2-4. They focus on different roles IOs may play, namely: (i) effecting change in policy and practice; (ii) embedding and championing youth voice; (iii) supporting data collection, analysis and learning; (iv) capacity building; and (v) enabling networking and collaboration. This case study examined capacity building activities offered by IOs to FOs.

For more information about this research, please visit:

https://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/evaluating-englands-youth-employment-infrastructure.html

This case study is part of the of evaluating England's youth employment infrastructure, 2022.

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