

Call for Proposals: Connected Futures, Action Research for Burnley Partnership

Contents

- 1. Introduction..... 2
- 2. Proposal response process and timetable 2
 - 2.1 Deadlines..... 2
 - 2.2 Application Process 3
 - 2.3 Budget 3
- 3. Overview of requirement..... 3
 - 3.1 Local Partnership summary 3
- 4. The requirements 5
 - 4.1 Iterative Research 5
 - 4.2 Creating a Theory of Change (ToC) 6
 - 4.3 Evaluation framework..... 6
- Next steps..... 7
- 5. Project Management..... 7
 - 5.1 Working with the Burnley partnership 7
 - 5.2 Working with Youth Futures 8
 - 5.3 Working with other partners 8
- 6. Response Format 8
- 7. Quality criteria 9
- Appendix A: Approach to data protection 11



1. Introduction

Youth Futures Foundation is the What Works Centre for youth employment. It aims to narrow employment gaps for young people facing the greatest challenges by identifying what works and why and investing in evidence generation to improve policy and practice.

Connected Futures

Connected Futures is a £16m programme that seeks to change the journey from education to employment for young people facing exclusion and disadvantage. We aim to support the development of local approaches to youth employment that put young people at the heart of the system, from schools and employers to housing, health and care. We want young people to get the right support from the right place at the right time to help them find good jobs.

We are currently funding 10 partnerships, in Blackpool, Brent, Burnley, the East Midlands, Haringey, Hastings, Hull, Leeds & Bradford, Lewisham and Walsall to explore local systems from the perspectives of young people, employers, education and employability services, and other stakeholders. Phase 1 was an exploratory phase, aiming to discover key systemic barriers facing young people, and identify potential opportunities and levers for change. As we come to the end of Phase 1, local partnerships have produced a shared analysis of the problem and begun to foster a shared ambition for change among a wider range of local stakeholders. Young people are at the forefront of the process, setting the direction for partnerships, carrying out research and shaping ideas for future direction. We are now moving to a new phase, in which local partnerships begin testing their ideas to deepen their understanding and strengthen their shared ambition for change. In the future, we intend to make larger grants in support of these ambitions.

As well as funding, partnerships receive support from a dedicated Youth Futures Relationship Manager. We have also commissioned analysis of labour market data and post-16 funding flows to provide partnerships with more granular information on their local context. There will also be a Learning Partner working across Connected Futures to support with synthesis and facilitating networks, including between Action Research partners working with different partnerships.

We recommend reading the following outputs:

[Connected Futures - Youth Futures Foundation.](#)

[Connected Futures: A different approach to funding - Youth Futures Foundation.](#)

[Renaïsi – Insight Report about Connected Futures](#)

2. Proposal response process and timetable

2.1 Deadlines

The deadline for proposals is **12pm on 21st June 2024.**

Proposal timescale	Date
Call for proposals issued	Week of 6 th May 2024
<i>Deadline for submission of questions</i>	5pm on 24 th May 2024
Indication to submit a proposal	5pm on 7 th June 2024
Deadline for submission of proposals	12pm on 21st June 2024
Interview day for shortlisted proposers	4 th and 5 th July 2024
Preferred proposer identified and notified	8 th July 2024
Induction meeting with stakeholders	Week commencing 15 th July 2024

2.2 Application Process

Please let us know if you will be sending us a proposal by **5pm on 7th June 2024**.

The deadline for submission is 12pm on 21st June 2024. Any proposals received after this deadline will not be considered.

Responses should be submitted to: evaluation@youthfuturesfoundation.org

Please note, there is a Theory of Change (ToC) briefing workshop planned for the 18th July that we expect the Action Researcher to facilitate. This will be a session on what a ToC is and how they can be used by the partnership. This workshop will not be building a ToC for the partnership and Youth Futures can support in providing materials if required on facilitating this workshop.

2.3 Budget

The total budget for this project from July 2024 to March 2026 **is in the range of £80,000 - £100,000**. Our projects are structured as a grant. Please refer to our VAT guidance.

3. Overview of requirement

Youth Futures and the Burnley Connected Futures partnership are seeking an Action Research partner to work alongside the Burnley partnership as they enter a new phase of testing ideas and exploring potential solutions for youth employment in the town.

We are describing this as Action Research¹ to make explicit our expectation of ongoing / “live” feedback between the research partner, the partnership and wider stakeholders². We anticipate that the Action Research will be embedded with the partnership and actively contribute to shaping and refining the work of the partnership during the testing phase, as well as generating findings and recommendations for future work.

This research will have three components:

- carrying out iterative research collaboratively with the partnership with a particular focus on the involvement of young people
- developing a Theory of Change to depict the partnership's approach and
- designing an evaluation framework to articulate how the partnership's approach could be evaluated and the evidence potential.

In addition to supporting the further development of work in Burnley, this will help Youth Futures generate insights and evidence for our systems change priority.

3.1 Local Partnership summary

The Burnley partnership is led by Calico Enterprise Ltd, and includes Participation Works North West, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), Base-X and Sajda Majeed, a community consultant. The partnership is working with the Thrive Youth Hub and Burnley Bondholders (a local business consortium) across three areas: education, employment and community. To date

¹ Magenta Book (2020) 'Supplementary Guide: Handling Complexity in Policy Evaluation' Page 52. [Magenta Book supplementary guide. Handling Complexity in policy evaluation.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/912423/magenta-book-supplementary-guide-handling-complexity-in-policy-evaluation.pdf)

² Dick, B (2001) 'Action Research; action and research' in 'Effective change management using action learning and action research: concepts, frameworks, processes, applications' [\[PDF\] Action research: action and research \[On line \(researchgate.net\)\]](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228111111)

young people, through the Rise Up youth leadership group and wider consultation, have participated in research and in discussions shaping the work. The intention is to shift power towards young people to ensure that the system is co-led, personalised, supportive and accessible. An additional focus of the Burnley partnership is engaging young people from Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage communities. The partnership identified three particular target groups: young people who are long-term unemployed, those with Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage and those with experiences of the care system.

Burnley is a market town in Lancashire with a diverse community. Around 15 percent of residents in Burnley identify as Asian. Youth unemployment in Burnley is double (10%) the national average (5%), and, levels of economic activity are higher in Burnley than in other areas in Lancashire. Nearly a quarter of young people in Burnley are in 'elementary' roles, which are typically entry-level jobs requiring minimal qualifications / experiences. A lack of local opportunities and 'tailored culturally responsive support' affects all young people but particularly those with multiple and intersecting barriers. Generational unemployment is a challenge in some areas. The eco-system around youth employment in Burnley is difficult to navigate with ad-hoc youth support that is led by short-term funding opportunities and associated eligibility. Feedback from young people has included the lack of places to go and meaningful things to do in Burnley as well as the need to better engage families in the South Asian communities. There is also limited awareness of the support and opportunities available for young people, families and stakeholders.

During Phase 1, numerous research and consultation projects have been carried out:

- Youth consultation of 700 young people
- Employer consultation
- UCLAN literature review and participatory workshops
- Engagement and consultation with Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities
- Systems mapping
- 3 co-design sessions with key stakeholders
- Local labour market analysis
- Post-16 funding flows analysis

Drawing from Phase 1 research and consultations, the following key aims and lines of inquiry have been identified for the next phase (the latter were devised by the youth leadership group and will remain the focus in this phase):

Thrive in Education – Establish feasibility of local schools/employer partnership and potential opportunities to improve careers and transition pathways.

- How might we have more focus around careers in school?
- How might we make students feel cared for and not like tick boxes?

Thrive in Employment – Test increased employer involvement and pathways that are available to young people ready for work; identify what works for employers and what young people need to gain and sustain employment.

- How might we connect and engage employers together through activities such as job trials, volunteering and work experience?
- How might we bring together young people and employers to manage expectations on both sides to increase youth employment?

Thrive in the Community – Test different ways to deliver in the community and to key target groups (including working with the established South Asian Youth & Community Neighbourhood Partnership to develop culturally appropriate capacity building); identify what works and what is sustainable.

- How might we raise awareness, promote and train schools, colleges, universities and employers about mental health issues?

- How might we improve relationships between the NHS and young people whilst respecting confidentiality?
- How might we enhance a shared space for meaningful activities/events for young people and improve ways of engaging their families, especially those from racially minoritized groups?

4. The requirements

The following information should guide the overall design:

4.1 Iterative Research

Purpose

The purpose of this component is to work directly with the partnership to support each workstream and facilitate generation and delivery of evidence in relation to the key lines of inquiry.

Initial research questions

Due to the iterative nature of this component, it is likely that the Action Researcher & the Burnley partnership will develop these questions over time:

- What are the key features of each workstream that addresses system failures?
- Will these features improve the likelihood of young people securing EET (Education, Employment or Training) outcomes?
- Do young people feel that the evidence generated through workstream activity & iteration align with what they feel is important for young people in Burnley?
- What roles are key in the local system, and what risks are there and how they hold up the system?

Expectations & Outputs

There are four core principles of this component that we expect will shape the approach for this research. These principles were selected to demonstrate the flexibility of this component to support the partnership to develop & refine their understanding.

- **Participatory** – as much as possible, we expect young people to shape the research and collaboratively design creative participatory methods
- **Iterative** – we expect reflection to be embedded in the process to ensure there is opportunity to refine each area and substantiate what areas to take forward
- **Continuous Learning** – this is not just a philosophy of Connected Futures, but a commitment we expect for all those within & involved with the partnership to support collaborative action
- **Creative and explorative** – an open minded, curious approach to the research.

We expect these principles to be embedded in the research, but enacted as the Burnley partnership and Action Researcher see fit.

The outputs from this component are less prescribed. These could be research summaries but the most important output of this work strand is for the voice of (disadvantaged) young people to inform the design of the proposed projects. It may include:

- Visual/interactive feedback
- Digital outputs
- Thought pieces

4.2 Creating a Theory of Change (ToC)

Purpose

The purpose of this component is to create a ToC that illustrates the Burnley partnership's intention to address system failures in Burnley. It will enable robust evidence to be captured for future evaluations & evidence generation. The ToC should be grounded in and reflective of the local context and its demographics and should reflect how pathways to impact could play out differently for different groups.

We anticipate that the ToC will be developed, tested and refined over a series of sessions/workshops with the Burnley partnership. We expect these workshops to help the partnership achieve clarity about the planned interventions, the mechanisms and intended outcomes. An introductory ToC session during the inception stage would be useful for setting the scene and orienting key stakeholders (as previously mentioned, this session is planned for 18th July, and possibly gets delivered remotely). We expect the first ToC workshop to be then organized during the week commencing 9th or 16th September 2024.

Research questions

- What are the intended systemic outcomes of the proposed interventions?
- What is the theory of change for the Burnley partnership?
- What qualitative and quantitative evidence supports the underlying theory?
- What are the mechanisms of change that lead to the intended outcomes of the ToC?
- What is the potential impact of each workstream on each element of the system?
- How does the partnership make collective decisions, based on this evidence?
- Which workstreams and elements of the system should the partnership prioritise to focus on in the next phase?

Expectations & Outputs

We expect that this component also follows the following principles:

- **Participatory** – we expect the ToC to be constructed collaboratively with the Burnley partnership and young people, and the process should be designed to be inclusive
- **Iterative** – we expect the ToC to be built *iteratively* as the Burnley partnership develop their thinking and refine their activities. This should encourage frequent reflection and feedback loops
- **Continuous Learning** – as the partnership work through their thinking, we expect the process of building and refining the ToC to embed learning and encourage further testing. The ToC is a live piece of work that will evolve over time.

A Theory of Change is the only expected output for this component. This should be designed and built collaboratively with the Burnley partnership so we have not defined what it looks like, only request that it answers the above research questions.

4.3 Evaluation framework

Purpose

To assist with future decision making, it is important for Youth Futures to understand the potential of evidencing place-based systems change robustly. Therefore, the purpose of this component is to assess the evaluability and produce a framework that captures which evaluation

approach(es) might be the most feasible to evaluate the Burnley partnership's Theory of Change.

Research questions

- What monitoring data is being collected already by the partners?
- What are the intended outcomes and how can they be measured?
- Which evaluation methods will be feasible for further evaluation? What changes might be required to increase feasibility?
- What capacity building would be helpful across the partnership and young people?

Expectations & Outputs

We anticipate that this will be done mostly through desk research and strongly recommend reviewing the systematic review we have commissioned – currently being internally reviewed. We expect the Action Researcher to workshop their thinking with the Burnley partnership as well as discussions with Youth Futures and relevant stakeholders regularly throughout the project. Once a framework has been drafted, we expect this to be presented to Youth Futures advisory panel of experts in complex and theory-based evaluations. This process exists to support, advise and guide the evaluation framework and offers opportunities to discuss thinking with experts in the field. Once the framework is finalised, we expect that the Burnley partnership is re-engaged and implications of the evaluation options are discussed with them.

Main outputs are:

- Presentation(s) to various stakeholders: Burnley Partnership, Youth Futures, Youth Futures advisory panel
- An evaluation feasibility and framework document that sets out the options for monitoring and evaluating the proposed initiatives

We would need these outputs at a stage for review in November of 2024.

Next steps

Once the Burnley partnership have completed this stage of their work, Youth Futures will make a decision on future funding for the local partnership. This is currently anticipated to be early 2025. The findings of the Action Research will be important factors supporting decision-making – in particular the Theory of Change and the evaluation framework.

However, it is important to be clear that this decision will be made solely by Youth Futures and we do not expect the Action Researcher to participate in the process.

If awarded further funding, the Burnley partnership will enter into Phase Two of Connected Futures. This will give them the opportunity to invest in further developing, refining and delivering their ToC. Based on the evaluation framework, Youth Futures will determine how best to commission an evaluation of this Phase.

5. Project Management

5.1 Working with the Burnley partnership

- Attendance at the fortnightly partnership and project meetings to discuss progress and direction
- Contributing to monthly project management meetings & steering group meetings (provisional dates: 25th July, 22nd August, 26th September, 17th October)
- Actively participating in future stakeholder workshops/sessions (e.g., leading in designing and facilitating, especially the ToC sessions)

- Supporting the partnership to understand and navigate the embedding of the Action Researcher role and how to maximise the benefits of this additional support capacity
- Mobilising in a timely manner to support the partnership who are already preparing to get started on focussed activity for the new phase.

5.2 Working with Youth Futures

We would like proposers to cost for fortnightly update meetings with the Evidence & Evaluation lead for Connected Futures together with the Relationship Manager for the Burnley partnership.

Youth Futures Foundation expects to take an active role in the design and quality assurance of the evaluation framework and outputs. We would like proposers to allow sufficient timescales for the Impact and Evidence Team at Youth Futures to review presentations and reports for this component. This will likely require at least two rounds of review, a workshop as well as an external review.

5.3 Working with other partners

There are a number of research, analysis and learning projects happening across Connected Futures. We are commissioning a Learning Partner to support with the coordination of these activities alongside Youth Futures project managers. The Learning Partner will also create a network of Evaluation and Research partners who are either supporting other partnerships in the Connected Futures portfolio or delivering research and analysis projects. This is an opportunity to share learning and ways of working with peers, as well as troubleshooting issues. This will likely be a bi-monthly or quarterly meeting.

6. Response Format

When writing your response, please follow these formatting guidelines:

- Page limit: 10 pages (biographies can be appended)
- Font size and spacing: Font size 12 or above, line spacing 1.0 minimum.

1. Expertise and experience

- Your experience of effectively engaging and conducting research with young people experiencing labour market disadvantage (especially) due to racialised discrimination, and stakeholders who work with them
- Experience facilitating iterative reflections with stakeholders and refining activity collaboratively and at pace
- Your track record of delivering similar evaluation and research methodologies
- The proposed team and the extent of their involvement in the work and experience of working on similar small local place-based interventions
- Proposed members of the team working directly with the partnership should have lived experience, cultural sensitivity and deep understanding of the local issues

2. Methodology and approach

- Your overall design for delivering a multi-component research project with different stakeholders
- Your approach to delivering action research: a clear explanation of how this will be delivered consistently, and how you will apply high quality, robust methods

- Your approach to building and refining a Theory of Change: a clear explanation of your approach to mapping across all activities to demonstrate evidence potential of Burnley's approach
- Your approach to delivering a thorough evaluation framework: a clear process to demonstrate potential sources you will review and how you will involve various stakeholders, how you will present to different audiences
- A high-level timeline / Gantt chart for research components and deliverables

3. Project Management, data security and risk mitigations

- Your approach to project management.
- How you will work with the Burnley partnership to securely & ethically collect and hold personal data from participants (if required)
- Brief details of any industry standards for this – e.g., ISO 27001 certification and/or in-house data protection/compliance officers, ethical approval committees for research (if required)
- Your appraisal of the risks likely to arise in this research, and mitigations.

4. Costings

- A full budget and costs for the overall research project, including the daily rate for different staff, their projected days on different components, travel costs and non-staff costs such as transcription and participant incentives. All budgets should be inclusive of VAT.

7. Quality criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

<p>1. Expertise and experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ability to meet the desired expertise of the organisation and proposed team as outlined in section 6 b) Ability to meet the relevant experience of conducting research and working with young people and partners collaboratively, as stipulated in section 6
<p>2. Methodology and approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A clear framework that meets the lines of inquires b) Recommended, high quality participatory methods for the iterative research component that suit the partnership's activities c) Clear articulation of how learning will be shared with the partnership, including young people, to draw out evidence potential of the Theory of Change d) Deliver high quality, appropriate outputs that can be shared with a variety of audiences.
<p>3. Project Management and risk mitigations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A clear project timeline with well-phased deliverables and milestones, supported by strong project management protocols b) Robust policies and procedures for collecting and storing personal data from participants c) Sensitivity to potential project risks and clear mitigation measures and strategies
<p>4. Costings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A clearly costed proposal that demonstrates high quality delivery. b) High quality processes, including ensuring sufficient time for analysis, costing for transcriptions and sufficient staff seniority and time to effectively quality assure all outputs.

- c) Proposed costings demonstrate value for money (number of research days, quantity and quality of outputs, appropriateness of proposed team composition and management).

Scoring criteria

Each criterion will be scored out of 5 using the below criteria.

Score	Criteria
0	Totally fails to meet the requirement - information not available
1	Meets some of the requirements - limited supporting information
2	Meets some of the requirements - reasonable explanation and supporting evidence
3	Mostly meets the requirements - good explanation, supporting evidence
4	Fully meets the requirements - detailed explanation and evidence
5	Exceeds requirements - extensive explanation and evidence, adds significant value and where appropriate, provides innovative approaches/ options to fully deliver the stated aims and objectives

Scores will be weighted as follows:

Weighting	
25%	1. Experience
35%	2. Methodology and approach
20%	3. Project Management and risk mitigation
20%	4. Cost effectiveness

Proposers will be given an overall score based on these weightings and highest scoring proposers will be invited to interview.

Appendix A: Approach to data protection

For this project, we expect for there to be data transferred between Action Researcher and the Burnley partnership.

As co-commissioners of this work, Youth Futures Foundation and the Burnley partnership's approach to data protection and GDPR is guided by data protection law and we will apply best practice where possible, operating on a relationship of trust and good guidance.