

Call for Proposals: Learning Partner for Connected Futures



Contents

Introduction.....	2
1. Proposal response process and timetable	3
1.1 Deadlines	3
1.2 Budget.....	3
1.3 Overview of requirement.....	3
2. Role requirements of Learning Partner.....	4
2.1 Purpose of the Learning Partner	5
2.1.1 Synthesis and creating outputs	5
2.1.2 Creating & facilitating networks.....	6
2.1.3 Coordinating research & analysis activities	7
3. Project Management	8
3.1 Working with Youth Futures Foundation	8
3.2 Working with stakeholders	8
3.3 Deliverables and Outputs	10
4. Response Format	11
4.1 Quality criteria.....	11
Appendix 1: Connected Futures	13



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 is a £21m 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 the right jobs for them.

Connected Futures is taking a new approach to funding. We've funded:

- Partnerships across sectors not individual organisations
- Process not outcomes – partnerships received initial funding to explore the problem, develop youth voice and involvement, and mobilise stakeholders around a shared ambition for change
- Relationships – each partnership has a dedicated Relationship Manager to support and guide partnerships through the process.

We began the programme with funding for 7 partnerships in Blackpool, Brent, Burnley, the East Midlands, Hastings, Hull and Lewisham, to explore local systems from the perspectives of young people, employers, education and employability services, and other stakeholders. Recognising that relatively few of this first wave of partnerships focused on young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, or were led by people from these groups, we subsequently expanded the programme to include 3 experience-led partnerships, initially in Haringey and more recently in Bradford / Leeds and Walsall.

Priorities for the next stage (2024 – 2026) of the programme include:

- Supporting initial partnerships to move on from the discovery phase into prototyping / testing, and later through to full delivery
- Supporting new, experience-led partnerships to progress from mobilisation through to full delivery
- Commissioning independent evaluations to capture the impact of systems change activities as well as outcomes for young people
- Development of further research and new programme activities
- Capturing learning and insight from places and partnerships, and feeding this into policy and employer engagement

You can find more information on Connected Futures in the [appendix](#).

The Learning Partner will sit across the Connected Futures partnerships, supporting all stakeholders; Action Research and Evaluation partners, Youth Futures and local partnerships to learn and think systemically, while facilitating these stakeholders to produce outputs and build up a narrative on systems change in the youth employment space.

Resources you may find helpful:

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

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

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

[Launch of Hamara local partnership funding](#)

[Report on discrimination faced by ethnic minority young people in the labour market](#)

1. Proposal response process and timetable

1.1 Deadlines

The deadline for proposals is Friday 16th August at 12pm

Proposal timescale	Date
Call for Proposal released	8 th July 2024
Deadline for submission of questions	22 nd July 2024 at 12pm
Q&A document published	26 th July 2024
Indication to submit a proposal	31 st July 2024 at 12pm
Deadline for submission of Proposals	16th August 2024 at 12pm
Interview day for shortlisted bidders	27 th August 2024
Preferred bidder identified and notified	29 th August 2024

Any proposals received after this deadline will not be considered.

Proposals should be submitted to: evaluation@youthfuturesfoundation.org

1.2 Budget

The total budget for this project from August 2024 to July 2026 **is in the range of £300,000 - £350,000**. Our projects are structured as a grant. Please refer to our VAT guidance.

1.3 Overview of requirement

Youth Futures are seeking a Learning Partner to work across the Connected Futures programme during this next stage. There will be three main components of the Learning Partner role:

- 1) **Synthesis and creating outputs:** Identifying key learnings from local partnerships and bringing these together to create internal and external facing outputs for various audiences
- 2) **Facilitating learning networks:** Holding themed networks, one with local partnerships and another with Action Research and Evaluation partners to support them to work through the systems change process
- 3) **Coordinating activities:** Supporting Youth Futures to coordinate research, evaluation and data analysis activity across the programme

We would like bidders to consider the best approaches to facilitate and support Youth Futures, local partnerships and Research & Evaluation partners in an engaging learning process. We are flexible and open-minded about the approach, understanding that learning is ongoing for all stakeholders.

We expect bidders to have a strong foundational knowledge of systems thinking, appreciative inquiry and other storytelling techniques to bring to life the work local partnerships are delivering to bring about systems change in their local areas.

2. Role requirements of Learning Partner

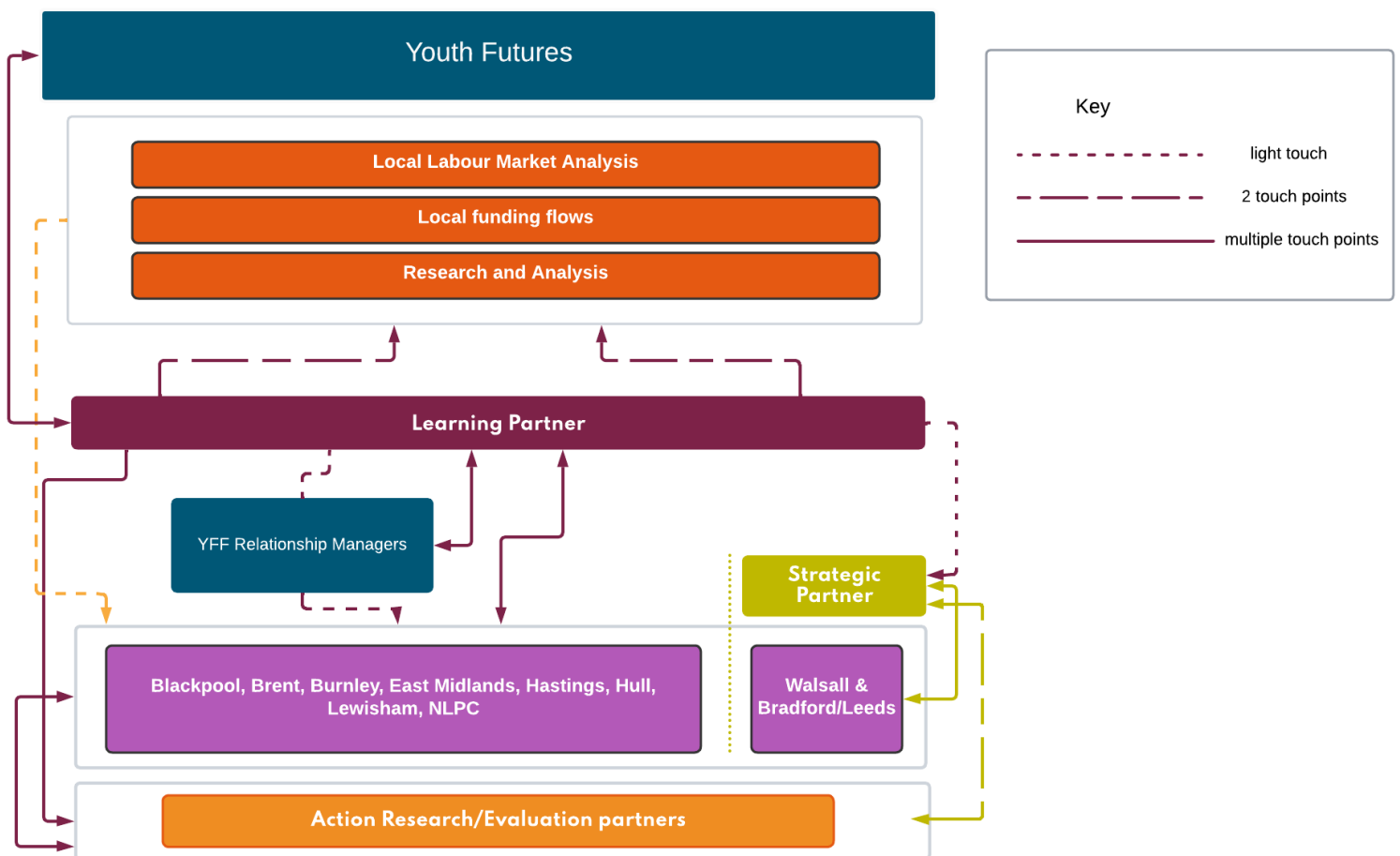


Figure 1: A diagram illustrating the relationships the Learning Partner will hold with multiple stakeholders across Connected Futures

2.1 Purpose of the Learning Partner

The Learning Partner will be working across the entire Connected Futures programme (see Figure 1 above) and these principles will guide their approach:

- **Responsive:** capturing learning and building a narrative as local partnerships iteratively learn at pace.
- **Collaborative:** facilitating spaces for local partnerships and Action Research/Evaluation partners that are co-owned to enable deep learning and further collaboration across stakeholders.
- **Flexible:** considering multiple avenues that learning can be used or applied in different scenarios.
- **Proactive:** listening to and mobilising opportunities to create outputs and share learning with different audiences.

The following three components should instruct the overall design:

- Synthesis and creating outputs
- Creating and facilitating networks
- Co-ordinating research and analysis

These are explained in detail below.

2.1.1 Synthesis and creating outputs

The purpose of this component is to work with all stakeholders to identify key learning, support with synthesising and produce these into outputs. The aims of this component are to:

- Synthesise learning from across the Connected Futures portfolio that captures evidence being identified and generated through place-based systems change work.
- Communicate this learning and engage different stakeholders with thematic synthesis.
- Facilitate and advise both Youth Futures and local partnerships on mobilising the learning gathered to gain stakeholder investment at a local and national level.
- Work with the Connected Futures Youth Steering Group to support them in identifying and producing outputs (either collaboratively on the above two aims or supporting them to produce their own outputs).

Expectations

Local partnerships identified the following objectives for this component:

- Audiences of Connected Futures are routinely and actively informed and engaged with the programme.
- Young people have a vehicle to use their voice to reach a wider audience.
- Local partnerships can see their work represented and can generate investment from stakeholders.

Youth Futures are publishing learning and interacting with audiences to gain investment in systemic change in the youth employment space.

We recommend a mapping exercise with Youth Futures during set-up to identify and document key audiences, as well as information needs and drivers¹. We also advise considering the vehicles for sharing outputs and formats preferred by different audiences to ensure outputs are accessible and appropriate. More information on audiences can be found in section 3.3. In terms of frequency, we recommend budgeting for an output every other month as a minimum. We don't expect the content to be planned at this stage and suggest a quarterly reflection meeting with Youth Futures to discuss upcoming activity, identify learning and plan future outputs.

Local partnerships were consulted for suggestions for content and output types. Their suggestions include:

Types of content:

- Links to local and national policy
- Focus on place-based systems change as a means of holistically addressing barriers for young people
- Youth-led with young people sharing their perspectives and insights
- Showcasing employer engagement to focus on the extent different employers are committing to system change
 - What sector do they operate in?
 - Opportunities available/ provided by employers
 - Change in process and procedures

Types of outputs:

- Partnership case studies
- Infographics to engage audiences at different levels of the systems
- Sharing of tools and resources, podcasts, webinars, etc to share learning amongst partnerships
- Accessible, without use of jargon or too theoretical

2.1.2 Creating & facilitating networks

During the Discovery and exploration stage, local partnerships benefited from a quarterly learning network, facilitated by the Learning Partner, Renaisi. This has been a space for the local partnerships to come together as a network to learn and reflect. These virtual meetings were themed to focus on a topic such as peer research or understanding systems change. They were well attended by the partnerships and sometimes partnerships delivered presentations, or they had external speakers. Youth Futures and the local partnerships would like to retain this space for the purpose of discussing learning, challenges and provide a safe space to engage as a peer group.

¹ [Evaluating Partnerships: Gathering, analysing, and communicating data | LinkedIn](#)

We would also like for the Learning Partner to facilitate a space for the Action Research, Evaluation and Research partners to learn and reflect. Similarly for the local partnerships network, this would be a safe space to engage as a peer group.

The aims of these networks are to:

- Provide members a space to openly discuss their experiences of working systemically.
- Enable members to collaborate on identifying issues and solutions.
- Ensure members can input to upcoming outputs and flag upcoming opportunities.
- Inform Youth Futures on how support can be structured and offered to stakeholders.
- Bring in external expertise on themes important to members for reflective practice.

Expectations:

Local partnerships identified the following objectives for this component:

- Network members can gain insights that inform their work.
- Network members implement solutions to challenges.
- The Learning Partner generates learning that informs outputs.
- Partners and Youth Futures improve support offered to local partnerships.

We recommend these networks should meet quarterly as a minimum, and similarly to the prior component, reflect on the themes/topics of these meetings regularly to be responsive to need.

It is important to note that young people are considered members of the partnership but may require additional support to access and participate in these networks. Connected Futures has a Youth Steering Group, who meet quarterly, which the Learning Partner could attend routinely to ensure outputs and content are accessible to this audience, and at times, informed by young people.

2.1.3 Coordinating research & analysis activities

Youth Futures is commissioning several research and analysis activities which will variously interact with the Connected Futures partnerships over time. We are currently in the process of mapping these out fully, but current core elements include:

- [A Rapid Evidence Assessment on employer practice in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\)](#)
- [A qualitative study to cross-examine the above evidence with employers](#) experience in Connected Futures local partnership areas of Leeds, Bradford, Walsall and London
- Local labour market and funding flow analysis

Each Connected Futures partnership also has a commissioned independent Action Research or Evaluation partner. We would like the Learning Partner to coordinate partnership involvement in the above to maximise their participation

while avoiding duplicative asks, squeezes on capacity and missed opportunities for data capture.

Expectations

We have the following objectives for this component:

- Local partnerships access support from Action Research/Evaluation partners that is timely, appropriate and learning focused.
- Local partnerships contribute to research and analysis activities that are timely, appropriate and learning focused.
- Research and Analysis partners are identifying and generating evidence in collaboration with the local partnerships.
- Youth Futures and the Learning Partner are supporting all stakeholders to engage and produce evidence to boost systems change efforts.

This will be an ongoing process and we recommend regular meetings with the Connected Futures team at Youth Futures and research and analysis partners to map out activity.

3. Project Management

3.1 Working with Youth Futures Foundation

The Learning Partner will work closely with Youth Futures to deliver the components of this work, especially [2.1.1](#) and [2.1.3](#). This will involve working with the Evidence and Evaluation Manager as the main contact, engaging with the Head of Connected Futures as well as Relationship Managers on a regular basis. We recommend budgeting for fortnightly catch-up meetings and quarterly planning meetings as a minimum.

3.2 Working with stakeholders

There are many stakeholders to work with on Connected Futures. Outlined below is our judgement of how these relationships should be managed to enable the principles. We expect the Learning Partner to work with the local partnerships in line with the aims and objectives of the components, however the following guidance may be helpful.

Working with local partnerships

You will have multiple touchpoints with the local partnerships which cross over all three components. These interactions will mostly be direct with the partnership but may sometimes be facilitated by the Relationship Manager or Action Research/Evaluation partner if appropriate.

Likely interactions with local partnerships for each component of this work include:

2.1.1 [Synthesis and creating outputs](#)

- Supporting them to promote their learning to stakeholders
- Collaborating with them to produce outputs
- Facilitating collaboration between the youth steering group and local partnerships and/or between local partnerships to create outputs

2.1.2 [Creating & facilitating networks](#)

- Taking suggestions for topics of network meetings
- Following up with them on discussions from the network meetings
- Empowering them to openly discuss challenges and solutions
- Ensuring the network meetings remain a safe space for them

2.1.3 [Coordinating research & analysis activities](#)

- Supporting them to identify risks and issues with scheduling
- Informing them of upcoming opportunities
- Collaborating with them to overcome challenges

Working with partners

There are several partners that Youth Futures have commissioned to support the local partnerships deliver systems change.

Action Research Partners were commissioned to support the initial local partnerships as they moved into the phase of developing and testing their ideas. These partners support the local partnerships work directly, to iteratively test their solutions, build a Theory of Change and Evaluation framework.

Evaluation Partners are being commissioned to support the experience-led local partnerships. They will be delivering the same components as the Action Research Partners over a longer period of time and will also be supporting the partnerships to build their evaluation capacity and understand concepts around systems change.

The appointed Learning Partner will have multiple touchpoints and work closely with Action Research and Evaluation Partners across the three components of this work.

3.1.1 [Synthesis and creating outputs](#)

These partners will play an important role in helping local partnerships realise and capture their learning on a regular basis. They'll also be supporting the Learning Partner to understand this learning and synthesise to generate interesting learning outputs.

2.1.2 [Creating & facilitating networks](#)

These partners will be key members of the network for partners, contributing to discussions and sharing learning with their peers. The Learning Partner will draw out learning across these partners to synthesise learning across research and evaluations.

2.1.3 [Coordinating research & analysis activities](#)

These partners will share upcoming activities to support the Learning Partner and Youth Futures coordinate activities across the portfolio of partnerships.

A **Strategic Partner** has been commissioned for the experience-led local partnerships to support them build up their infrastructure and capacity to deliver systems change initiatives.

This partner will likely have a lighter touch relationship with the Learning Partner, focusing on [2.1.1](#), contributing to outputs when it relates to the experience-led partnerships.

Research and Analysis Partners are being commissioned to deliver a range of support to all partnerships so they understand, and have the evidence to support the need for systems change and inform their delivery (section [2.1.3](#) for examples).

These partners will have two touch points with the Learning Partner, namely [2.1.2](#) as members of the peer network; contributing to discussions and sharing learning with their peers. They'll be the most involved with [2.1.3](#), sharing upcoming activities to support the Learning Partner and Youth Futures coordinate activities across the portfolio of partnerships.

Additional commitments

Connected Futures is an ambitious attempt to develop clear and robust evidence of what works to support young people from marginalised backgrounds into good jobs. As such, we anticipate that these commitments will likely involve co-planning, attendance and facilitation of sessions at events, up to 4, during the lifetime of the project.

3.3 Deliverables and Outputs

There will be multiple deliverables expected of the Learning Partner. Please consider that these outputs may be carried out collaboratively with local partnerships and will require review before publication if specific to them, so this should be considered when costing and planning time. Further guidance and key considerations for outputs are below.

Audience: There is a wide range of stakeholders involved with the youth employment sector (e.g. young people, employers, charities, employer intermediaries), research and evaluation sector, those working in policy (at a local and national level) as well as Youth Futures and local partnerships, so outputs should be considered in relation to reaching these audiences.

Creativity: As Connected Futures is an ambitious and innovative fund, we would expect outputs to be creative and innovative to engage audiences and generate conversations about systems change.

Frequency: We would expect outputs to be released frequently. We advise an output every other month for [component 2.1.1](#), a peer network meeting every other month for [component 2.1.2](#) and quarterly meetings to plan upcoming activity with Youth Futures for these components.

Coverage: Local partnerships cover most areas of England, so we recommend that outputs created could be specific to them (considering the geographies as

well as partnerships), as well as more general outputs about working on systems change and the overall approach to learning.

Youth Futures is keen to facilitate and publicise these outputs, so we welcome conversation to utilise our network of funded partners, policymakers, What Works Centres and youth voice groups as required.

4. Response Format

When writing your response, please follow these formatting guidelines:

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

Please submit your proposal to evaluation@youthfuturesfoundation.org by 12pm on the 16th August 2024.

If you have any questions, please submit these by 12pm on the 22nd July 2024 to evaluation@youthfuturesfoundation.org

4.1 Quality criteria

Responses to this Call for Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. Expertise and experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Recent and / or extensive track record of the organisation and proposed team in conducting local system change and / or place-based approachesb) Comprehensive experience of working as a Learning Partner or in a similar role, with local partners based in areas of deprivation.c) Examples of creative outputs that the organisation and proposed team have produced to engage different audiences.d) Experience in centring lived experience in research and learning processes. This could include (but not limited to) ensuring diversity within the proposed team/partnership, including consultants who have lived experience of barriers faced by young people.
2. Methodology and approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) High quality, appropriate methodologies that maximise learning fulfilling the Learning Partner principles.b) A clear articulation of how the proposed approach for 2.1.1 meets the objectives, and delivers high quality, appropriate outputs that can be shared with a varied audience.c) A clear articulation of how the proposed approach for 2.1.2 meets the objectives, and creates a safe space for local partnerships and partners to learn & develop.d) A clear articulation of how the proposed approach for 2.1.3 meets the objectives, and enables a wealth of research and analysis to happen without causing burden for stakeholders.

3. Project Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A clear project timeline with well-phased deliverables, acknowledging the complexity of systems change work and working with local partnerships at different stages b) A clear articulation of how different disciplinary teams / organisations with the Learning Partner(ship) will work together (<i>and articulation of how these teams / organisations will work together if delivering more than one lot if relevant</i>) c) Sensitivity to potential project risks and clear strategies to support the mitigation of these.
4. Costings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A clearly costed proposal that demonstrates high quality delivery, time with each local partnership and to facilitate the peer learning network b) High quality processes, including ensuring sufficient time for relationship management and to effectively quality assure all outputs c) Proposed costings demonstrate value for money (number of 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 proposal aims and objectives

Scores will be weighted as follows:

Weighting	
20%	1. Experience
30%	2. Methodology and approach
30%	3. Project Management
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 1: Connected Futures

This Appendix aims to provide context for the Connected Futures programme.

When we mapped existing systems, young people made it clear that the services that are meant to help are failing them. The onus is on them to navigate support and push for what they need. Too many services fit the young person to their predetermined offers, rather than the other way around. Young people find themselves pulled in contradictory directions, driven by the targets and incentives of different services, not their needs or aspirations.

Young people at most risk of becoming NEET face multiple barriers, whether due to characteristics such as disability or ethnicity, or adverse experiences such as being in the care system. Through Connected Futures, Youth Futures seek to reorient the system around young people, so that they get the right support from the right place at the right time to help them into good jobs.

We are currently funding 10 partnerships across England, supporting them to progress through three distinct phases, developing models to deliver systemic change. These phases are:

- Discovery and exploration of the issue
- Developing and testing solutions
- Implementation, delivery and evaluation of a systemic intervention.

Partnerships are at different stages within this process, with our new experience led partnerships currently beginning to embark on their discovery and exploration phase.

Our initial 7 Connected Futures Partnerships have undertaken an 18 month phase of discovery and exploration to learn about the problem and develop a shared understanding of the issues, barriers and systemic opportunities in local areas to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the 'problem' and how this impacts young people.
- Centre youth voice and youth leadership in the exploration process.
- Understand where things go wrong and why drawing on a range of evidence and learning.
- Engage and mobilise a range of system stakeholders around the issue.
- Begin developing plausible solutions with young people and key stakeholder to test within the system to overcome the issues identified.

We are now coming to the end of this exploratory phase, making larger grants to allow partnerships to develop and test potential solutions. Ultimately, we are looking to create new models that can tackle key barriers facing young people, and be adopted into policy and practice more widely – the equivalent of a “No Wrong Door” for youth employment.

Within the development and testing phase, partnerships will:

- Learn about the feasibility of their approach to generate change in the system
- Look for early signs of gaining traction with stakeholders in the system.
- Refine solutions based on a 'test & learn' approach.
- Gain commitment from stakeholders through the delivery of new approaches

Partnerships who are in the development and testing phase are paired with an Action Research/Evaluation Partner, commissioned by Youth Futures. This partner will enable partnerships to learn using real time evidence to understand and embed learning in the partnerships ongoing testing. The Action Research/Evaluation partner will support the partnerships in developing a Theory of Change to understand their approach. They will also appraise the partnership's evaluation options and develop an evaluation framework aligned with the Theory of Change.

By the end of partnerships initial discovery phase and the development and testing of their solutions, we expect local partnerships to have:

- A clear, commonly understood and widely shared analysis of what's going wrong and why.
- A clear, commonly understood and widely shared vision of change and what good would look like.
- Active involvement from young people facing disadvantage in shaping and pursuing this vision.
- Stronger partnerships and relationships across sectors, and more people and organisations committed to working together to achieve this vision.
- A collective roadmap for change, including delivery plans and resource requirements.

We will invest in partnerships who can demonstrate the above to deliver a systemic intervention in their area and evaluate this over 2-3 years.