

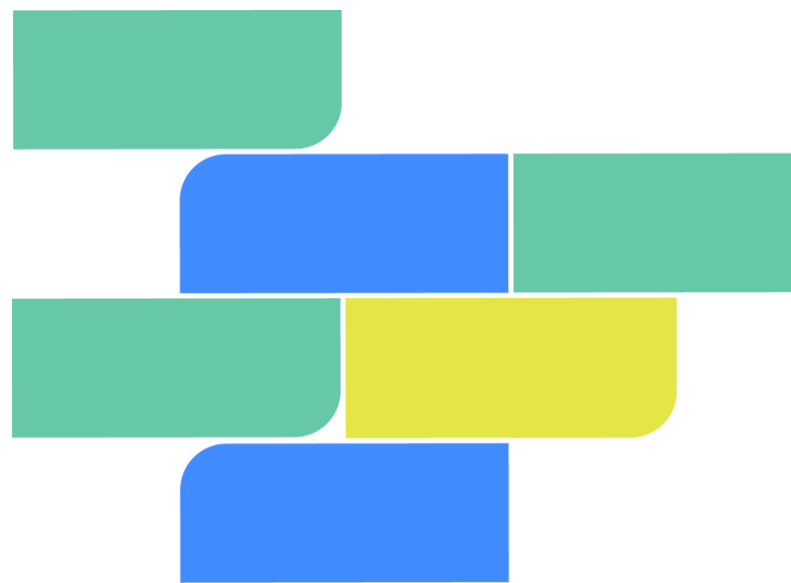


Backing
community
business

Powering Up: Interim Equity & Inclusion Report

Steve Conway

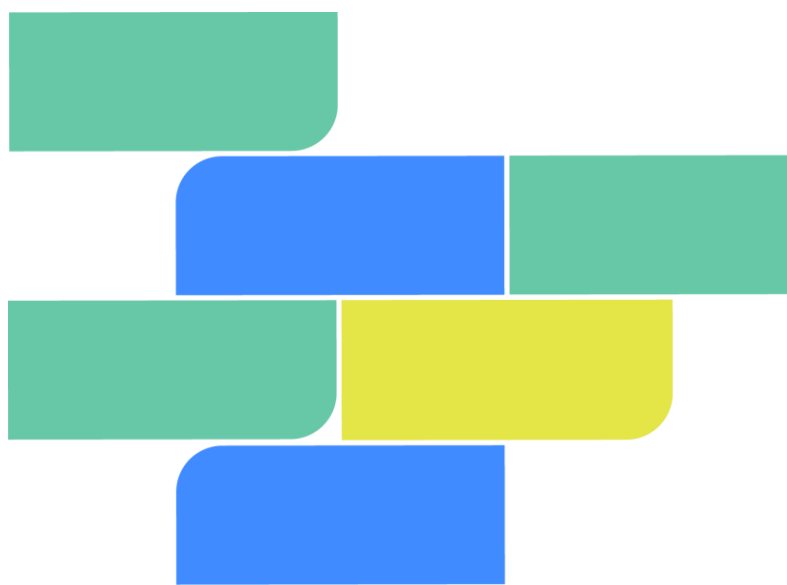
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About Power to Change and Community Asset Services.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Building the “Table”	4
What we mean by Equity	6
What we mean by Inclusion	6
What we did	7
Diversity in the Powering Up Team.....	7
Our Approach	7
Improving access to our programme	9
Our Language	9
Publicising our programme.....	9
Assessing Applications & Making Awards	10
Improving Support to Community Businesses.....	12
Business Centred and Business Led – one size doesn’t fit all	12
The Consultancy Supply Chain at Power to Change	13
A short note on where we were going go.....	14



About Power to Change and Community Asset Services

[Community Asset Services](#)

Steve Conway is a Director and Founder of [Community Asset Services](#), a not for profit worker's cooperative supporting communities, charities and social enterprises, particularly marginalised and economically excluded communities in the north west of England. Community Asset Services also work nationally with local authorities and other statutory bodies promoting safe and sustainable asset transfers to local community led organisations.

[Power to Change](#) is the think-do tank that backs community business.

We back community business from the ground up. We turn bold ideas into action so communities have the power to change what matters to them. We know community business works to build stronger communities and better places to live. We've seen people create resilient and prosperous local economies when power is in community hands. We also know the barriers that stand in the way of their success.

We're using our experience to bring partners together to do, test and learn what works. We're shaping the conditions for community business to thrive.



Introduction

The Powering Up (PUP) programme was a short two-year programme designed to support community businesses across England as they emerged from the impacts of COVID and faced the ongoing economic and social crisis faced in local communities across the United Kingdom. The programme offered deliver capacity building support for the organisation, focused either on Digital needs (Round 1) or Digital and Climate Change (Round 2) and support for the leaders and or team involved through mentoring, coaching, team building or training.

This report is not intended as an assessment or evaluation of the Equity and Inclusion work but documents the actions that were taken, and the reasons these actions were taken, by the Powering Up team during the two rounds of delivery prior to the cancellation of the programme by Power to Change.

Building the “Table”

The initial Powering Up Programme was a co-designed process involving partners involved in delivering support to community businesses and socially, economically and racially excluded communities. Only one of these was led by an excluded and marginalised community group, the Ubele Initiative.

The second incarnation of Powering Up consulted a wide range of community businesses on issues relating to tech use and sustainability, these included organisations led by excluded community groups, covering disability, ethnicity, economic exclusion and gender & sexuality.

To allow participation and facilitate access to this design process community businesses and groups were offered financial compensation. Groups participating included:

Operating within Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Goals

Post COVID and following the death of George Floyd, Power to Change, SIB – The Social Investment Business, and Access examined at how their work could be improved to support Black and Brown and other Global Majority led community businesses. There were five clear objectives:

1. Genuinely engage with minoritised ethnicity community and social enterprises for programme design and systems change.
2. Acknowledge and mitigate barriers to accessing Power to Change’s support.



3. Change our language to be more inclusive and ensure our images and marketing are representative of the places community businesses support.
4. More and better-quality Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) data needs to be collected going forward, particularly across the social investment sector.
5. Sector organisations (including the three partner commissioning organisations) need to continue to be open and transparent in their reporting, in real-time. To further understand discrepancies in terms of values and amounts flowing to 'BAME'-led organisations.

These goals provided a solid framework for the team to work within and helped frame wider organisational "KPIs" (or Key Performance Indicators which are minimum targets for the organisation to achieve) around inclusion for the Powering Team to work towards:

- 63% of CBs supported are in the most deprived 30% of areas, and,
- 26% of supported CBs that are led by minoritised ethnicity community members (2021)

Additionally, the team worked with recognition of the recommendations and information from wider reports looking at the economic, social and racial exclusions within grant making and the wider sector. This included, but was not limited to:

- Understanding the needs of Disabled People's Organisations in England (Inclusion London and the Community Fund 2022)
- Booska Papers (Ubele 2021)
- Exploring Barriers to Funding and Support Experienced by Marginalised Community Businesses Insights, Solutions and Recommendations for Funding and Infrastructure Organisations. (Power to Change, Spark Insights and Locality April 2023)
- How to Make Information Accessible -a guide to producing easy read documents (Change 2021)
- Home Truths - Undoing racism and delivering real diversity in the charity sector (ACEVO, Voice for Change & Community Fund 2020)
- No Going Back, Social Enterprise UK, (Social Enterprise UK, 2021)

The team also actively participated in and supported ongoing research by Spark &Co. and Locality looking at how well we supported marginalised and racialised Global Majority Communities. The report "Exploring Barriers to Funding and Support Experienced by Marginalised Community Businesses" is [here](#)



What we mean by Equity

We understand Equity to mean:

- The actions, approaches processes and policies which identify and work to remove the structural barriers to participation and inclusion in the Powering Up programme to allow us to move towards fairness and equality of outcomes and achievement from our support.

We recognise that the wider social and economic exclusions faced by individuals and communities, and the processes and privileges which lead to this exclusion, are not external to our work despite any protected characteristics carried within the team. We recognise that the intersection of different forms of exclusion can result in unfair and unjust outcomes despite an “Equality” based approach. Equity for us means that the circumstances, needs, strengths and desires of a community need to be understood and assessed and individual solutions found for them; “one size does not fit all” and giving every community business the “same” results in unjust and unfair outcomes for marginalised, racialised and excluded communities.

Delivering an Equitable approach for community businesses also meant thinking about how these businesses were directly supported in the programme and by who. Equity at Powering Up also meant working towards an expanded base of consultants and contractors from a broader and more diverse background.

What we mean by Inclusion

Inclusion is primarily the extent to which community businesses led by people facing social, economic and or racialised exclusion can participate in the programme. For the team at Powering Up participation goes beyond a passive reception of support; it includes the extent to which these community businesses are heard within the programme and able to influence and take part in influencing and shaping the work.

We also recognise that a diverse team does not automatically lead to an inclusive team, we all carry our baggage and knapsacks; transparency and actively working toward supporting participation helps towards inclusion, but real inclusion also requires an examination of power, influence and decision making.



What we did

Diversity in the Powering Up Team

The community connectors team was initially composed of four people. Within this small team there were a range of protected characteristics represented across gender, ethnicity and sexuality. During the final round of awards, the team was expanded to five people, further expanding diversity within the team.

The team was conscious however that holding a protected characteristic did not in and of itself exclude baggage or privilege and throughout the programme we were conscious of the need to work with each other to unpick issues and barriers as we encountered them during delivery.

Our Approach

Whole Team Approach and Responsibility

We recognised that Equity and Inclusion was everyone's responsibility and prioritised establishing a common approach to Equity across the team; we workshopped our ideas and approach with the Power to Change DEI manager and invited the Communications team to our team meetings to share our proposals around information provision and sharing to assist us in delivering Equity and Inclusion.

Continual review and improvement

We recognised that this was an evolving and growing programme, developing learning and implementing changes as we worked with our community businesses. To support this, we:

- adopted a flexible and dynamic approach to reviewing and changing our work, using weekly Community Business Connector meetings to agree next steps and evolving our work to support marginalised and racialised communities;
- Held bi-weekly whole team "circle meetings" with our specialist Digital and Climate leads and ensured that all proposals to the circle were reviewed through a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens.



- worked with our teams of specialist leads (Digital and Climate experts) to share our learning and ensure our approach to Equity and Inclusion was shared;
- involved the DEI manager at Power to Change to explore options within the Power to Change framework, share our approach and learning and drive change;
- held a specific review of all lesson from Round 1 and modified and changed our approach to Equity and Inclusion from the lesson learnt.

Team workshops on equity and attendance at Power to Change presentations and events and participation in impact research with Spark and Co. also contributed to a team approach that was open, iterative, evidence based and aware of the barriers and limitations faced as a team and within the cohorts of community businesses we supported.

There were three elements to our Equity and Inclusion work:

- Improving access to our programme and extending knowledge of the opportunities to a wider range of community businesses;
- Building our skills and experience as a team around Equity through Targeted Universalism;
- Offering appropriate support to community businesses once they were part of the programme.



Improving access to our programme

Our Language

The use of plain English and easily translated materials was an important element in developing a wider awareness of our work and our programme across marginalised and racialised communities. Working with the Communication Team at Power to Change we able to “unpick” elements of the complex language used by the team and develop plain English explanations of the programme. We also requested from the comms team the inclusion of a translation ribbon on the top of the Powering Up information page to allow those with good first primary languages but weaker English to access the information we published. The use of plain English on our website also improved the text to script function for those with visual impairment and those with barriers to reading.

Prior to the launch of both rounds of funding we:

- Reviewed all or written guidance and information to ensure it was accessible, written in plain English and easily translatable. This wasn't always successful, and the team noted on the main Power to Change page overly complex language explaining a community business that took several months to be addressed by the wider organisation;
- Reviewed and improved the application form, simplifying the language and reducing the complexity and detail of the information we requested;
- In the Round 2 assessment we also moved to an explicit question regarding Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, including asking about barriers to participation and organisational DEI goals

Publicising our programme

In the first round of the programme we used partner organisations such as Locality, Ubele, Plunket and our own comms team to share information across their networks about the programme.

We also trailed offering pre-booked pre-application support from the team of Community Business Connectors to anyone interested in the fund. In the first round of funding take up was limited,



twenty-two support calls with only a small number of calls from community businesses led by marginalised and racialised community members.

A Round 1 review identified the need to improve reach and the team worked with Power to Change to extend and improve the contact list held by the Communications team providing details of networks and organisations to target for mailing out information. Additionally, we:

- Accessed and utilised informal networks on social media, such as the Black British Business Network on Facebook, to publicise Round 2 and our pre-application support offer;
- Used viral marketing asking organisations that had contacted us for support to publicise our programme through their networks.

Round pre-application support demand increased, and we offered fifty-eight organisations support, of these we have identified a minimum of 22% were from organisations led by marginalised and racialised community members. Pre-application support itself took an Equitable approach, offering and extending support on a flexible and open basis, inviting all callers to return if needed and offering open access at a time which suited them. Support calls varied from short 30-minute calls exploring eligibility and explaining our programme in simple English, to regular contact calls with organisations thinking about an application; into total we offered around 100 hours support to community organisations thinking of applying.

In Round one we offered a single fixed time pre-application workshop; in Round 2 this was extended to two slots, with an option of a support call to those who could not make the online workshops. In the Round 2 workshops themselves we extended representation and participation; key sections were led by community business leaders from marginalised and racialised communities who were supported to participate through briefings and preparation meetings and, recognising the potential impact on their day-to-day work, we compensated their organisations for their time.

Assessing Applications & Making Awards

The first round of funding was always intended to be a small round during which the team as whole learnt through doing; we supported a small cohort of twenty-one organisations with improving their digital needs and were able to ensure that 90% of these were from areas within the lowest income and most highly deprived communities, and 25% led by racialised community business leaders.

As a team we recognised that holding a protected characteristic did not in and of itself exclude “personal knapsacks”, baggage or privilege and throughout the programme we were conscious of the need to work with each other to unpick issues and barriers as we encountered them during assessment and delivery.



In reviewing the round one application process we recognised this and developed a method to flag all applications from marginalised and minoritised communities. This flag was used during the application to highlight any rejected applications from these communities and these applications were reviewed by other members of the team. All applications marked “maybe” (a term used to indicate the initial assessor was not minded to award but also not minded to reject an application) were sent for full panel review. This change resulted in a small number of applications, two from a total of 170, being sent to panel for full panel consideration.

In the second round the volume of applications was also larger than Round 1, and to ensure assessment quality we invited a digital lead to assist in assessment; this unintentionally resulted in broadening our assessment team’s diversity to include a person with neurodiversity.

Finally, where an application was rejected from an organisation in a marginalised or racialised community, we offered feedback on the application process and an invitation to discuss the application with a Community Connector.

In Round 2 we again met the KPI’s set by Power to Change, but additionally:

- 25% of awardees were led by people whose marginalisation and exclusion arose from protected characteristics other than ethnicity or “race”;
- 40% of the grantees worked intensively with racialised and minoritised communities.



Improving Support to Community Businesses

Our approach and work as a team on Equity was based on, and was approaching, a Targeted Universalist approach. By this we mean we:

- recognise the limitations of an Equality of Opportunity approach to support those facing disadvantage and discrimination, and
- recognised that each organisation we worked with had specific barriers to achieving the goals they identified to us and achieving the broader goal of becoming a sustainable and successful community business.

Business Centred and Business Led – one size doesn't fit all

Each organisation we supported was offered a full and comprehensive assessment by an allocated Community Business Connector; this assessment process was itself reviewed and refined after the first round after discussions with the first round community businesses. The assessment took a participatory and evolutionary approach in that we recognised needs evolve and change over time and our support for the business needed to be flexible and responsive to those changes. Businesses were able to share as much, or as little as they felt necessary to achieve their goals, and ongoing and open access contact with the Community Connector allowed the relationship and trust to build with the programme through the connector.

This assessment process resulted in the business being able to identify a broad set of needs and actions required to achieve their objectives. Support was co-designed and always centred on the business, the business had final sign off on consultancy support briefs (briefs were used to initiate specific delivery of consultancy, IT development of Climate Action) and final selection on who delivered this support.



The Consultancy Supply Chain at Power to Change

The existing pool of suppliers and contractors at Power to Change was, and still remains, limited in its economic, social and cultural diversity. This was recognised early on by the leadership team within the programme and work was underway to broaden the pool of potential suppliers we could use.

Often, this lack of diversity and choice was recognised by Community Businesses themselves, and an option of a “spot purchase” helped address the Equity and Inclusion concerns of the team and development needs of a community business.

A spot purchase allowed a community business to choose a supplier outside of the approved Power to Change supplier list. This process, which involved several steps to avoid conflict of interest, connected persons issues (i.e. a supplier having a direct link to or influence on a community business which allowed financial gain) or fraudulent activity, allowed a broader and more representative supply chain to be used, and was highly valued particularly by marginalised and racialised businesses.



A short note on where we were going go...

At the time of the organisational review the team were looking at several key areas to improve our support for Equity within the sector and within the programme. After the second round of grants (Digital and Climate Sustainability) the team were exploring additional actions to improve Equity and Inclusion in the programme. This included:

- Developing and publishing additional information on our Equitable approach and adopting and working to a “Targeted Universalism” process
- Creating a critical friend role, or advisory panel, to examine the work of the team from a DEI perspective and to make recommendations for improvements, share lessons and learning from outside of the team.

Programme support for Community Businesses

The team were planning two new rounds where we knew impact for marginalised and racialised community businesses would have been greatest:

- ***Financial Sustainability Round:*** we had intended to launch a funding round looking at how to improve financial sustainability within the sector; this would have particularly positively impacted community businesses in marginalised and racialised communities where lower turnovers, higher failure rates and barriers to finance and social investment are so common we don’t need to reference sources.
- ***An Equity and Diversity Round:*** here we were discussing a round to work alongside community businesses that faced racialised barriers to their businesses or where community businesses recognised that they themselves had work to do to improve participation, representation and leadership in their organisations.

Improving representation of marginalised community businesses in our provider chain

Through our work on Round 2 we recognised the barriers faced by consultants and businesses led by excluded community members in accessing contracts from Power to Change. Many of the



providers are white, male and middle class and not representative of the community businesses we support.

Links had been made with networks such as the Black Environment Network, and many of our grantees had chosen to work with locally chosen consultancies or businesses from their own communities. This provided an opportunity for Power to Change to look at diversifying not just participation by community businesses as grantees but also on the provider contractor side.

Improving decision making by involving diverse community businesses in assessment of applications

As we were planning our next round of support for community businesses we had identified funding within Power to Change to test broadening out decision making and participation in the assessment of applications to our programme. These discussions were embryonic and early stage but did have the resources behind them to improve this process and improve Equity in these decisions.



Power to Change

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