

Youth Engagement and Leadership

As this is a golden thread that runs through our work it's important to define what we mean; what our aspirations are and where there may be limits or specificities relating to particular areas of grant-making and support.

Principles:

We want young people and in particular those who experience disadvantage, discrimination or particular challenges such as growing up in the care system, to

- be listened to on issues that matter to them
- influence and have greater control over the decisions that affect them
- shape the services they need
- gain decision-making power over resources (including philanthropic)
- hold other power-holders to account

We believe this is important because we are driven by values of equity, inclusion and accountability. That is, we believe in a sector or society where no one is excluded from creating a better world by dint of their background or opportunities. And we know that solutions to issues that young people face, be they local, regional or national – policy or services, will be more effective if they are designed and led by them. Finally, we also recognize that through history young people have been at the forefront of social change initiatives, and that this is as necessary now as it has ever been.

We believe the Blaggrave Trust has a role to play because:

- Youth engagement and leadership has already evolved to be a key part of Blaggrave's added value in the eco-system – no other funder is investing or prioritising this in the way we are – we want to build on and retain this growing specialism with confidence
- We see we have a role to play in influencing wider change on this – both by funding work that others are not funding, and by sharing learning and modelling a different type of philanthropy that itself embraces and acts upon these ideas.

In practice, these principles and the extent to which some or all of them are realised through our funding, will depend on the nature of the partner we are

funding, the work they are doing and the young people they are working with. We recognize that there is no one size fits all answer. We also understand that intergenerational approaches to social change are as crucial. We centre young people themselves in our work as Young Advisors, on our Board and in our staff team, and they will at all times help us to deepen our understanding, and avoid tokenism in our decision making.

What we are willing to fund

The Trust will support organisations and initiatives that ensure that **young people have agency and decision-making power**. We recognize that commitment to youth leadership is **cultural** as well as being reflected in whether specific structures and processes are in place to support youth leadership.

- Young people working alongside adults in different ways, e.g. in co-production models, working together as equals. This might involve young people defining the questions and/or the solutions, whilst being supported and empowered by professionals advising and skilling them up re where power lies and how it can be influenced.
- Organisations that are actively reaching beyond to young people who do not have a voice at all, and building their agency and leadership to effect change over the long-term
- Young people who are themselves leading movements and/or collectives to create structural change where they are seeking to be representative of wider concerns and wider positions held by young people affected by a particular issue.
- Young people who have set up charities or CIC's themselves with and for young people
- Work that is embedded over a decent period of time to create meaningful change – that is, not one-off one-year initiatives

In working with organisational partners and potential partners, the Trust is particularly interested in evidence and feedback from young people themselves about the extent to which they feel they are engaged or able to take a leadership role, including by understanding:

- Young people's belief in the genuine commitment of the organisation to youth engagement and leadership
- Young people's roles in formal governance structures where they exist
- Young people's roles in developing, reviewing and evaluating strategy

- How well processes support and enable young people's meaningful participation in decision making, including around how resources are allocated
- How well young people's diverse needs and interests are centred in the values that the organisation seeks to uphold, and how well these values are enacted in practice
- How well the organisation seeks to learn from young people and adapt according to young people's feedback
- The extent to which commitments to young people extend to all young people, with a particular emphasis of amplifying the voices of otherwise marginalised groups

Potential partners will need to show how well they exhibit behaviours, and have policies and practices, that enable youth engagement and leadership, as well as how they intend to improve¹.

Things we might be alert to and not fund might include:

- Youth participation practices that allow young people to contribute when it suits adults running the organisation, but excludes young people from a seat at the table when it doesn't
- Young people from privileged backgrounds leading campaigns or organisations but who are not working alongside and sharing power with others in an equitable and inclusive way
- Organisations that gather feedback from young people but have no mechanism of acting on that feedback or sharing it back to young people, or who consult whilst retaining the right to judge the feasibility of what they hear
- Initiatives where certain young people are chosen as spokespeople and informants, but where there is insufficient diversity, equity and inclusion evident in those choices
- Organisations of significant size and scale, where this work has not been prioritized previously and therefore proposals are unlikely to create real shifts in practice

¹ Taken from Adams and Coe 2019 and the definition of youth leadership - research undertaken on behalf of the Blaggrave Trust

The Trust is looking to support and enable young people to create change.

In supporting youth-led change initiatives, the Trust will be clear and transparent about its own agendas and priorities, including when and how these are influencing its decision making.

Finally, Harts ladder of youth participation is well known in the youth sector. Blagrove is primarily interested in funding initiatives that clearly sit in the top 3 rungs of the ladder.

