

# Alliance for Youth Organising Origins

## Background

The Alliance for Youth Organising was built out of five years worth of work to better understand the challenges and opportunities in the youth organising sector. Over the past five years NEON, the Blaggrave Trust, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Chrisann Jarrett, Jim Coe, Natasha Adams and more recently the Civic Power Fund have convened hundreds of young organisers and intergenerational allies to seek their perspectives.

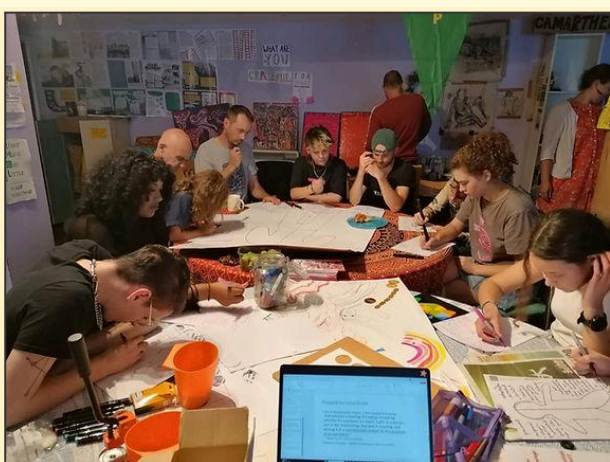
This document includes a summary of what these convenings told us. It builds on four formal publications, which are included in the bibliography. It also synthesises feedback from a survey shared across the field in late 2023, which 58 people responded to. And it includes the feedback you shared with us in February 2024.

This document should serve as background reading to inform the shape of the funding opportunity the Alliance will now work together to develop.

*You have a commissioning budget of £200,000 in 2024 and £100,000 in 2025 (although we are working hard to increase this) to invest in the infrastructure that will respond to these challenges and opportunities.*

## What are the major challenges facing youth organising?

1. **Lack of physical spaces for youth organising** - but deciding how to create these spaces is not straightforward.



*“Access to community space is foundational for building relationships and creating the kinds of foundations movements need to take root. However... when prompted to imagine the kinds of spaces people want in their community, many were not sure or felt overwhelmed by the question.”* **NEON, Youth Organising Movement Builders 2023, Blaggrave Trust Final Report**

**Image:** The RYSE Website

2. **Lack of practical support for young people engaging in changemaking and activism.** Shifting power and resources is part of this, so that the people who know best have the power to build the systems they need.

*“At the moment the space feels fragmented and people doing this work can feel isolated if they are not in an organisation that is specifically specialised in this work.”* **Youth Organising survey, 2023**

3. **Lack of leadership pathways for young organisers** - there are very few formal roles or opportunities for young people to pursue organising as a career and life choice.
4. **Young people eventually stop being young**, their priorities and networks changing. Sustaining the energy and action they create is vital.
5. **Lack of funding for youth organising**. We continually identify that network building requires long-term investment and funding. Yet the funding available is short-term and small scale - even the funding for the Alliance is far from enough.



**Image:** Migrants in Culture for the Civic Power Fund

6. **Rather than pursuing systemic, intersectional solutions so many programmes for young people pigeonhole them into their specific, visible experience.** Young people are rarely supported or given the space to build something new and transformative together.

*“My input is only valued in a specific pocket”.* **Alliance for Youth Organising retreat 2024**

*“The ground is fizzy and fractured. How can we make it fertile?”* **Alliance for Youth Organising retreat, 2024.**

7. **Closing civil society space and state violence that fragments communities is making it harder and harder for young people to organise.**

*“Money and Power. A lack of long-term, sustainable financial resource alongside a narrower and narrower route to power. Those in power are closing down legitimate ways to raise awareness and make change (e.g. introducing new/different rules around protesting)”.*

**Youth Organising survey, 2023**

*“Young people strongly voiced their concern that the government doesn’t care about their political views or consider the long term impact of policies on their future”.*

**Jim Coe and Natasha Adams, 2019**

## **What are the major opportunities in the youth organising space?**

### **1. Centering young people is non-negotiable.**



*“Young people as a citizenry must be engaged in finding solutions and changing oppressive systems.”*

*“They will witness in real time the passing of these legislations and be left with the consequences of them”* **Chrisann Jarrett, 2022**

**Image:** WeBelong Website

### **2. Youth organising offers a triple benefit to young people, communities, and society.**

*“Grounded in racial, gender, disability and economic justice, youth organising is the process of engaging young people in building power for systemic change while supporting their individual and collective development. Proximity to the issues is key, so lived experience is essential. It is youth-led, but elders can play a role through sharing their knowledge, expertise and networks.”* **Alliance for Youth Organising Terms of Reference, 2023.**

### **3. The visible passion, skill and determination of young people.**

*“The fire in the hearts and bellies of young people. They are not afraid to push back, to stand up for what they believe in, and to challenge the status quo. And quite often, they have the best solutions to our societal problems.”* **Youth Organising survey, 2023**

*“Everything. I am excited by the way youth campaigners see how housing connects to health, health to climate, how systems fit together. I am excited by the way that campaigning is seen as continuous with politics. I am excited by the way we build alliances across identities and let campaigning be joyous and disciplined.”* **Youth Organising survey, 2023**

4. **International Solidarity** - the interconnectedness of our times creates a vital opportunity to learn from and connect to movements outside of the UK.

## The key principles of youth organising

1. **It is youth led.**

*“Establishing a structure, networks, partnerships, funding and governance for young people to have a strong voice and agency in their communities and in local and national policy-making. In my view, this should ultimately be youth-led, with older or more experienced (and/or well-networked and connected) stakeholders providing support, connections and mentoring to help establish the structure and organisation. The ultimate goal should be for the activities and involvement of the older generation of stakeholders to recede as the youth leadership grows in strength and becomes more established in its own right.” Youth Organising survey, 2023*

2. **It is led by and rooted in the lived experience of young people facing injustice.**
3. **It is intersectional** - we must respect and learn from our shared struggles.
4. **It is intergenerational** - we can learn from and build solidarity with our elders.
5. **The organisations and spaces that hold youth organising should be generative and centre collective care.**

*“It is life affirming, rooted in justice, led by experts by experience and focused on regenerative hood futures.” Youth Organising survey, 2023*

6. **It is rooted in a specific vision of the world** - together we are striving for a just, equitable and working together to overturn the systems that stand in the way.



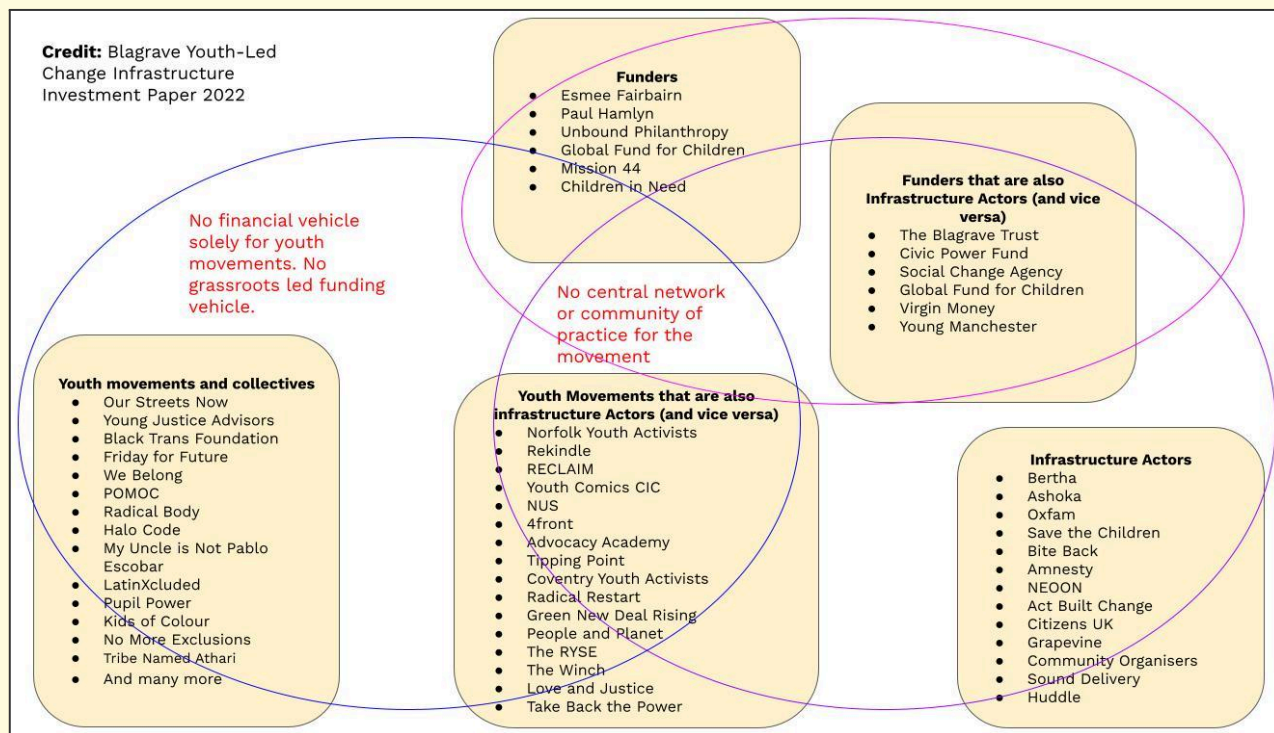
*“young people in the lead, working together for system change, collectively building community to tackle the issues which are their highest priorities: eg overcoming climate denial, anti-racism, culture change through creative arts, votes at 16, protecting nature” Youth Organising survey, 2023*

**Image:** The Advocacy Academy Website

7. **It develops young people as individuals, so they can transform their own lives alongside their society and their community.**
8. **It builds up young people as leaders.**

## Youth Organising Mapping

This section summarises the key youth organising mapping commissioned to support the development of the Alliance. The first image is from a Blagrove Trust Report mapping the key infrastructure gaps. The second image looks at the key types of youth organising avenues that show up as part of the ecosystem. The final one maps known youth social change groups against the Ayni Institute Movement Ecology framework. These latter two were developed by NEON.



**Credit:** NEON Youth Organising Movement Builders Report

### The Youth Organising Ecosystem

- **Youth Leaders** - young people either occupying a leadership role or leading on a project or campaign that has some link to the youth organising space
  - *E.g. youth MP, youth activist, youth founder*
- **Youth Spaces** - physical provision with a progressive or radical approach to their work with young people
  - *E.g. The RYSE, The Winch, Rekindle*
- **Alumni Campaigns** - groups, organisations and campaigns that have been set up by young people having gone through some form of youth organising programme
  - *E.g. Halo Collective, LatinXcluded, Pupil Power*
- **Arts Spaces** - arts organisations providing specific programmes or schemes of work that provide some transformative element for the young people they work with
  - *E.g. Company Three, The Big House, Comics Youth CIC*
- **Youth Arms** - existing movement organisations and groups that have dedicated programmes of work that are led or shaped by young people
  - *E.g. Green new Deal UK, XR Youth, FLAME, Amnesty UK*
- **Organising and Capacity Building** - groups and organisations that are dedicated to building Youth power in some way, generally led by skills, knowledge and capacity development of young people rather than issues based.
  - *E.g. Advocacy Academy, Love and Justice, Take Back the Power, Young Trustees Movement*
- **Elders** - actors within the movement who do not define as young people, but are regarded as leaders or key people
- **Issue based campaigns** - groups and organisations who work around the intersection of youth and a specific issue
  - *E.g. Tribe Named Athari (fka BLM London), NUS, No More Exclusions, Young Minds*

<b>Challenging Dominant Institutions</b>	Amnesty UK British Youth Council Climate Ed Elect Her European Youth Forum Friends of the Earth Gendered Intelligence Global Justice Now (Our Future Now) Green New Deal UK Hope for the Future Just for Kids Law	National Society of Apprentices National Union of Students National Youth Agency No More Exclusions People & Planet Students Organising for Sustainability Students' unions Teach the Future The Centre for Education and Youth The Centre for Youth Impact	The Children's Society The Manchester Centre for Youth Studies (Manchester Met) The West Yorkshire Regional Youth Climate Committee UK Citizens (Stand Up Stand Out) UK Student Climate Network UK Youth UK Youth Climate Coalition United Friends and Family	University of Sunderland Students' Union We Belong Who Cares Scotland XR Youth Young Minds Young Trustees Movement Young Womens Trust Youth Access (Our Minds Our Future) Youth Politics UK Young People's Foundations Trust
<b>Personal Empowerment</b>	4 Front Project 84 Youth Act Build Change Colours Youth Network Comics Youth CIC Company Three Coney Grapevine	Healing Justice London Just Like Us Kids of Colour MAP Maslaha Nijjor Manush Polish Migrants Organise for Change	Reclaim Restless Development Take Back the Power The Advocacy Academy The Big House The Foyer Federation The Gap The National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs	The Verbatim Formula Ubele: Young Emerging Leaders Network Voices that Shake
<b>Building Alternatives</b>	FLAME Red Sunday School Rekindle Ryse	The Free Black University The New School The Warren The Winch		<b>Credit:</b> NEON Youth Organising Movement Builders Report - Mapping the Movement Ecology, 2022

## Approaches to resourcing youth organising infrastructure

This table starts to capture a very early practical framework for thinking about the funding opportunity. A lot of intention and care would have to go into developing these ideas and ensuring they speak to the Alliance's key principles.

<b>Funding approach</b>	<b>Problems it would seek to address</b>
<b>Find and fund organisations building and holding youth power</b> - <i>E.g. an open funding opportunity to resource key organisations directly</i>	1) Lack of physical space 3) Lack of leadership pathways 4) Young people eventually stop being young 5) Lack of funding for youth organising
<b>Find and fund organisations providing vital organisational support</b> - <i>E.g. governance support, legal support, campaign support, organising training</i>	1) Lack of physical space 2) Lack of practical support 7) Closing civil society space
<b>Find, fund, create, nurture and nourish networks for youth power</b> - <i>E.g. commission actors to create places and spaces for young organisers to come together and learn from each other; resource capacity to capture the lessons and continue to hold space to deepen relationships and learning</i>	6) From fractured and fizzy to fertile 1) Lack of physical space 2) Lack of practical support 3) Lack of leadership pipelines 7) Closing civil society space
<b>Find, fund, create, nurture and nourish the movements where young people are in the lead</b> - <i>E.g. fund individual leaders, fund</i>	7) Closing civil society space 2) Lack of practical support 5) Lack of funding

<i>specific campaigns, fund specific moments or opportunities, explicitly resource collaborations</i>	1) Lack of physical space 6) From fractured and fizzy to fertile
<b>Create and resource new leadership pathways for young activists and organisers</b> - <i>E.g resource specific training opportunities, internships</i>	2) Lack of practical support 3) Lack of leadership pipeline 6) From fractured and fizzy to fertile

### Key questions for the Alliance

*You have a commissioning budget of £200,000 in 2024 and £100,000 in 2025 (although we are working hard to increase this) to invest in the infrastructure that will respond to these challenges and opportunities.*

1. What does success look like?
2. What opportunities should we design to achieve this?
3. What is our role in creating networks alongside funding?
4. How do we bring other organisations and individuals into this space?
5. How will we make decisions about who receives funding?
6. How will we hold ourselves accountable to our Vision, Mission and Values?
7. How will we hold the funders to account to resource this work and shift power for the long-term?
8. What tools, knowledge and insights do we need to make these decisions?
9. How will we measure impact?

### Bibliography

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