

"A WONDERFUL YEAR"



STORIES OF CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

The Challenge and Change Fund is designed by young changemakers for young changemakers. It funds young people directly, supporting them to create the change they want to see. It prioritises young people who are emergent and have lived experience of the injustices they are trying to change, supporting youth led collectives, social enterprises, movements and CICs across England. The Fund is guided by the direct experiences, knowledge, insights and visions of young people who are working to create meaningful and lasting change.

In 2022, The Blagrave Trust began a process of storytelling to support Challenge and Change Partners to reflect on their journeys and learning, help them to communicate their activities and visions and build momentum in support of their work. In collaboration with the second cohort of Challenge and Change Partners, the Blagrave Storyteller co-authored profiles about each Partner's lived experience, work, visions for the future and the lessons they have learned as they navigate changemaking in different geographical and cultural contexts, shifting political and funding landscapes and within their multiple and complex personal identities. These stories have been published on the Blagrave website alongside several articles offering learning and a guide for young changemakers, 'This Is How We Do It', co-produced by the Partners during a roundtable discussion in September 2023.

The aims of the storytelling process were fourfold:

1. To draw attention to the specific approach of each Partner and explain why this needs greater investment;
2. To educate readers about the issues upon which the Partners were acting;
3. To illustrate why the Challenge and Change Fund is uniquely effective;
4. To draw learning from the Partners with the aim of improving and informing the work of the Fund and the Trust.

This report is for use by the Fund. It presents more comprehensive and/or sensitive feedback from the second cohort of Partners about their engagement with the Challenge and Change Fund and the Blagrave Trust. The insights and feedback in this report are supplementary to that which has been published in the Partner profiles, learning articles and changemaking guide.

SUMMARY

As part of the storytelling process, Partners reflected on what they are doing to create social change, how they think change happens and the role of lived experience in driving their work. This report details their learning and feedback about the process of applying for and managing grants, their relationships with The Blaggrave Trust and each other and their thoughts about the funding landscape, more broadly.

This learning was retrieved through a process of co-production which involved a standardised interview process at a location and time of the Partners' choosing, clear boundary setting and a continuous process of feedback and consent. The feedback contained in this report has been offered by the Partners on the condition that it will be anonymised.

Overall, the Challenge and Change Partners expressed that their experience working with the Blaggrave Trust through the Challenge and Change Fund were broadly positive and they offered detailed and constructive suggestions for how this could have been improved. They thought that the application process was mostly or very **accessible** and **straightforward**. They felt greatly **supported** and praised, at length, the sustained and personalised support they received from the Youth Led Change Lead, Rochell Rowe, in particular. The Partners had varying views on the training they received and expressed that the training sessions were **informative** but, sometimes, **too advanced, not advanced enough, too broad** or **too specific**, depending on the age and stage of their project. The Partners had differing reflections, too, about their experiences accessing and spending their grants. For example, some of those who used the money management platform Open Collective enjoyed the **transparency** it afforded them, while others did not enjoy this aspect. Roundly, those who accessed their funding through a process of reimbursement found this to be **practically problematic**. The impact of the grants was overwhelmingly described as being **transformational**, with more than one Partner describing the funding as **life changing**. Feedback about The Blaggrave Trust and the Challenge and Change Fund was uniform: the Partners frequently described the Trust and the Fund as being **unique, trauma-informed** and **open to learning**, showing **uncommon faith in young people** and operating a **modest, trust-based monitoring** system. Partners who had interacted with other funders were invariably critical and offered comprehensive suggestions for reforming the funding landscape, citing the **short-termism, racism, ageism** and **inaccessibility** they encounter when trying to engage traditional funders.

1. APPLICATION

“Coming from an activist background and having seen really long, intensive applications and budgets, the application was, for me, really easy and straightforward. There were no questions about ‘what are your KPIs, what are your deliverables, budget breakdowns, outcomes, trajectory?’ Overall, Blgrave is amazing. I felt so comfortable applying for this funding, which has never been the case before.”

Partners described the process of applying for a grant from the Challenge and Change Fund as mostly or very accessible and straightforward.

Most Partners found out about the opportunity through their mentors or organisations to whom they were already connected, and often very shortly before the deadline, indicating that any late promotion of the opportunity was effective. Partners described the questions in the application as being simple to answer and well structured and the process as being enjoyable, overall. One Partner, who had never written a funding application before, said:

“All the questions were quite short which I think is actually harder but better because it’s easy to talk for ten minutes about a topic but when you’re asked to condense it down, it allows you to be clear about what you’re going to do.”

Another Partner who has made numerous funding applications before and since applying to the Fund said:

“It was sufficiently thorough because, sometimes, it can be really drawn out and there are loads of stages. I liked the fact it was just an application and then they call you up and say ‘you’ve got the funding!’ Sometimes you have an interview and then they ask for a more detailed proposal and it’s just quite taxing and doesn’t acknowledge that we actually have lives on top of this. I liked it quite a lot....I also loved the fact that individuals could apply because that’s not really the done thing within the funding sector.”

Several Partners also discussed boundaries and recognised the inherent tension between creating funding opportunities specifically for leaders with lived experience and asking them to describe this experience, noting that they could not assess in the application process the extent to which they were expected to share their experiences, and how those assessing the applications would reward them for sharing or oversharing.

“To some extent, it’s kind of invasive, like ‘prove to us you’ve suffered enough’ and I imagine that there’s a bunch of young people who poured out their suffering for their application but didn’t get the money and that’s kind of draining and unfair. Obviously, for the young people reading those applications, they’re also reading all this trauma and then they have to carry that away and feel guilty about not giving everyone the money.”

“I would make it optional to bring in your lived experiences or just remind people to maintain their boundaries as it doesn’t affect how much funding you get. I often feel like oversharing my lived experiences to people who say they value lived experience is what might get me an opportunity, even when I might be uncomfortable doing so, so it’s a tough one. I was once at an interview and they asked me to tell them about a time I faced racism. I thought, what a stupid question. I was younger and I really wanted the position but, after the interview, I felt so irritated and angry. So with the question about lived experience, I wonder if it could become, ‘tell us about your approach and views and if you want to bring your lived experience into it, that’s fine’. It’s important for funders to move away from organisations that don’t understand lived experience leading this work, but do we set people up with the expectation that you have to prove you deserve to be in certain spaces by constantly reliving things?”

Partners generally felt that the timeline for delivering their project was difficult to anticipate but felt reassured, once they had been inducted, that they would not be expected to adhere, strictly, to the timelines they proposed in their applications. This was of particular concern to those using co-design models or working with schools, for example.

Many Partners commented that the application stage was an early indicator of how unique a funding programme Challenge and Change is, noting that they were impressed by the Fund’s willingness to award grants for ideas and to individuals. They also enjoyed the variety of formats in which they could submit an application. One Partner suggested that, given how unique the Fund is and the demography of the applicants, the Fund might want to award a standardised amount to successful applicants. She said:

“You could request a grant between two and ten thousand pounds. If I was filling this out when I was 18, I would have asked for two thousand because I wasn’t that confident. I don’t know whether there’s certain demographics that are more likely to ask for less or more, but communities that tend to be disadvantaged don’t ask for much.”

Partners also appreciated the speed and quality of the responses they received to questions they had while preparing their applications. One Partner mentioned that, at this stage, they had a conversation with Blagrave which revealed a learning point the Fund may want to consider. They said:

“I was asked how much I could commit to the project because my other campaign had also applied for funding. To some extent, I find it comical but it’s just a testament to how much injustice I experience because of my identity, which is not my fault...we also spoke about not giving too much funding to London because everything is so London-centric but, at the same time, I felt like it’s not my fault I live in London.”

Several Partners noted with surprise the short period between submitting their applications and receiving news that they’d been successful, and valued the personal care they were shown by being told over the phone.

One Partner suggested introducing a second stage to the application process to include a conversation that “humanises the process”, during which the Fund could also assess the general support needs of applicants. He also suggested that inviting audio and video applications as a default format may allow applicants to represent themselves more authentically than in writing.

Several Partners questioned if their previous experiences in the funding sector or access to a mentor had given them an advantage over other applicants. Their comments, on the whole, reflect a broad variety of perceptions of what would have constituted a strong application. A few notable comments about this include:

“Because I worked in the sector, I understood what lived experience was. If I hadn’t, I might not have answered to the best of my ability. Similarly with the budget.”

“Because I had a mentor, I knew how to approach it. If I’d done it on my own, maybe I would have got it but I know it was stronger because of my mentor.”

“I had to ask for support from one of my colleagues at the time because I knew she’d done a lot of our grant applications. I talked her through my idea and then said what I wanted and she said ‘okay, when you’re making a budget, these are the kinds of questions you should be asking yourself’. And if it hadn’t been for that, I don’t think I would have been able to answer that question.”

“I don’t think a lot of young people would necessarily even have the skills because what young person really know about indices and data. Luckily, I’m a bit of a data and sociology nerd.”



2. GRANT MANAGEMENT

"Honestly, it felt so satisfying to know that someone believes in this work that I want to do. When I first applied for the grant, I had a loose concept of what I wanted to do; kind of still do. And that's what I love about Blaggrave: there's no pressure. Financially, it's been a game changer because I'm getting paid to do what I love."

Partners described the experience of working with Blaggrave to deliver their projects as a period of intense learning which was enjoyable, overall. They felt Blaggrave was a collaborative, supportive, flexible and trusting funder with authentic intentions. Partners expressed that they would have benefited from ongoing training opportunities and more options for accessing the funding.

2.1 Partner events were a highlight

"I feel like there's lots of different support available and I feel like the day we met up, the training day, was one of the most inspiring days of my life because, being a young founder, a young CEO, it's just older people around you so it was nice seeing other young people, like-minded young people, who had really amazing ideas and everyone was so open."

Every Partner who attended the 'welcome day' broadly described the experience as enjoyable, inspiring and motivating and were grateful for the network that the Challenge and Change Fund has built. They noted the attention to detail, specifically the food, the booklet summarising each Partner's project, the care in arranging travel and accommodation for people with various needs and the excellent facilitation. A few Partners, including those working outside London, mentioned that they much prefer in-person meetings to Zoom meetings, despite the cost to their time. Several of the Partners spoke about the community that has emerged as a result.

"One of the main things is that you're able to gain a network and the community aspect. When you're starting a business, it's a very lonely process and these events remind you that you're not the only one going through the things you're going through as well because there's quite a few people you connect with who you might not know you need until you need them. Even just being able to converse with people, hear their ideas and thought processes and see what they're doing is very useful later down the line."

“The good thing about Blaggrave is that with the funding, they created a community of other people doing other projects across the country. We can talk about our ideas and share different things and support each other. There was a girl in the group who helped me come up with the base plan for my logo and other people in the group said that if I needed a space, I could use their spaces for workshop delivery so it really set up a good community.”

One Partner described the second event as a “regrounding or a little summit,” and several Partners suggested that these events should be scheduled more frequently, particularly for the benefit of Partners working alone in a region, as one Partner noted. Another Partner suggested that there should be fewer sessions and workshops so that more time is created for Partners to talk to each other. About the second event, one Partner commented:

“There was a panel of other young people that had been grantees and it was really inspiring. I think it was useful to listen to other people who have been funded or are currently working on their own project. I thought that was really, really great.”

2.2 Partners had mixed reviews of the training sessions

Where some Partners were focused on infrastructure, others were working on their strategies or programme delivery at the time they were awarded their grants. Partners listed their training priorities as sustainability and fundraising, operations including using CRM and managing data and mailing lists, understanding business tools, legal obligations and the different kinds of organisations that they can incorporate, running community groups, charity law and Trustee recruitment.

Some Partners felt the training sessions were not specific enough or relevant to their project; others felt the sessions were hugely beneficial and practically useful, while others were overwhelmed. Some comments include:

“I attended all the training sessions apart from one and they have been really good but it’s a shame that turnout has been low because one of them was quite interactive. You can watch them back and I found that really beneficial.”

“The training side was wonderful. They offered so many sessions but I didn’t go to all of them as some of them I didn’t see as necessary for my organisation.”

“Blaggrave did a session on laws but that was quite frightening and I didn’t feel empowered to take on that knowledge. We want to succeed but it’s so scary because we don’t want to do anything illegal just because we don’t know what we’re doing. I’m struggling even though I’m from a youth work background and I need that support to be confident to be accountable.”

“There was a lot of training available early on but I feel like now we’re at the later stages, it’s less available. Maybe if they had one or two sessions a month, that would be helpful to our professional development.”

“The training was really, really, really helpful. I feel like they were only as helpful as the person receiving them made them helpful. It was up to you to engage, for sure. The finance policies and the safeguarding one were excellent because it’s things you don’t think about as well. Even if it’s too advanced for where you’re at, it’s going to be useful and you can’t rely on the universe to give you that information when you’re ready.”

“Blaggrave did a budgeting workshop and it was OK...it’s something I’ve learned from my day job so I didn’t need to do that workshop at all...I understand that for some of the other people receiving the funding this is stuff that they’ve never done before but to me I was like, ok cool, I wish I would’ve got something more.”

2.3 Partners struggled to manage and access their funding

Partners shared numerous difficulties they encountered in accessing and spending their funding, including paying themselves, whether for practical or psychological reasons. Some of those who used Open Collective or relied on fiscal hosts described the process of spending their grant as frustrating and precarious, at times. Partners were generally happy with the variety of arrangements available through which they could receive their grants and were surprised and grateful to receive an increase in their grant amount in response to the cost of living crisis.

Open Collective uses a reimbursement-based process in which users have to pay for goods and services before reimbursing themselves or being reimbursed by someone else through the platform. This process could be particularly problematic for Partners with low incomes or who are not allowed to work, such as refugees and asylum seekers, who are also unable to open a bank account. Several of the Partners hugely valued the transparency that Open Collective afforded their project. One of them commented:

“I think for transparency, Open Collective’s been amazing, especially in activist spaces. I personally do take issue with the reimbursement aspect of it because let’s just say I wanted to buy a laptop for £2,000. I can’t buy the laptop for £2,000. I don’t even make £2,000 per month. But let’s just say I did. I now have to spend £2,000 and wait for you guys to approve it to get my money back to actually pay my bills and sustain myself. But I put updates on there all the time so people can see what’s been happening and, obviously, the page can stay up even after the Challenge and Change funding has gone so people can still donate and if I get any more funding then I can just manage it through there.”

Discussions around spending and transparency were typically where insights about race first emerged in the storytelling process. One Partner summarised a common anxiety among some of the Black Partners:

“I am so worried about someone saying she’s stealing that I really break it down on Open Collective about my hours and rate. I’m aware that, being working class and being Black, people think you’re going to try and take money. You need to be open to public scrutiny and it can really go left if people think you’re mis-spending money.”

“Especially being a Black person being given a substantial amount of money, and also I’m not great at maths, I always worry with money and when I need to organise this or organise that, even the way of reporting what we’ve spent what on. It’s weird when you start an organisation and you have to pay yourself, (Blagrave) said, ‘make sure you pay yourself’, but I’m always like, am I doing fraud if I pay myself? Am I going to go to prison? It was nice to have that reassurance that no, you’re not going to go to prison for paying yourself for your own time.”

Other Partners were less comfortable by how exposed their projects were on Open Collective.

“I chose not to go with Open Collective...they seemed great, but it felt very invasive for me to have all of our finances on a website and full transparency. It felt like a lack of trust... In my reporting, I’ve been able to give the organisation that are fiscally hosting me a breakdown in a style that’s more suited to me and I felt like, initially, everyone was pushed to go for Open Collective...Once I said ‘no’ to it, I did get the vibe of frustration and there was a reiteration that Open Collective was still one of the best ways and other people have done it, but I felt that it just didn’t suit my project or me. When it came to wanting to receive my

money directly, maybe because I'm an individual, it was very difficult and I was told I needed an organisation to host me, and I felt like I wasn't trusted in that sense."

Partners who have a fiscal host shared mixed experiences of accessing their funding. One Partner found it helpful to have an experienced organisation manage their finances. They noted that their host was very transparent and processed payments quickly. Others had more strained relationships with their fiscal hosts, as one Partner explained:

"I think understanding what it meant for them to hold the money would've been great. There was a time I submitted an invoice for a reimbursement and wasn't paid."

Another Partner added:

"Although my fiscal host is lovely, it was difficult to get them to send me the money when I needed to pay for stuff. Sometimes I needed to pay people and it took a while. I would've preferred to be able to do it myself, directly, rather than being in the middle."

One Partner experienced a delay in receiving the grant directly from the Fund.

"The main issues I've had have been payment times, getting payments later than scheduled. When you're planning your personal life around stuff and you're expecting money at a certain time, it can really throw things off when you get bills and you're behind on payments. Systems for that need to be better but I also understand, as somebody who's running an organisation myself, that the sector or industry is very bureaucratic...consistency is more important than anything because it creates trust. Paying people on time is better than paying people loads. I trust that Blaggrave's intentions are in the right place and these things happen. As long as they don't happen again, it's fine and they've assured me that they're working on it."

For some Partners, the support they received from Blaggrave to move their finances from their previous fiscal host to Open Collective was a liberating experience.

"We wanted to try and see what life would be like beyond (our previous fiscal host) and finances is quite a scary thing, especially when you're so young."

Because we're handling huge amounts of money for the first time, everything seems really difficult until you get the hang of it and so it's nice to be able to get the hang of it now. It was just empowering, actually....We wouldn't really have thought of it if we weren't afforded the financial freedom that Blgrave offered us."

2.4 Partners appreciated the Fund's flexibility

Almost every Partner said they had benefited from the Fund's flexible approach and understanding about their changing timelines and shifting priorities. Blgrave was commonly described as a trusting, 'hands off' funder that truly understands the lives of and competing demands on young people. Many Partners had experienced or heard of more transactional funding relationships and the Fund was described favourably in comparison. As one Partner said:

"To be honest, what I put in my application is quite different to the work that I'm carrying out now, so I like the fact that you're able to have the freedom to change the goals you've set... Blgrave are always coming across as genuinely asking how you're doing and how things are going rather than trying to see where you're at from a reporting or funding point of view. With the cost of living crisis, they increased the funding as well and I was shocked when I read that email."

Another Partner commented:

"They understand it's not a steady thing: it's up and down. In terms of the funding support, it's great. I didn't have too many check-ins but I actually preferred it that way because it made me feel like I had the power to just get on with it."

2.5 Partners felt supported beyond measure

The Partners were universally complimentary towards Blgrave's Youth Led Change Lead, Rochell Rowe, and felt supported practically and emotionally. In particular, they praised the punctuality, consistency, transparency and care with which they were treated by Rochell throughout the programme. They frequently noted the value added to their experience by having one specific person at the Trust with whom they could build a relationship and access continuous support, including support related to accessibility and safeguarding. Blgrave was generally described as a proximate funder

specifically because of this support. One Partner suggested that Blaggrave staff attend training on care experience to ensure their work continues to be informed by best practice. Several of the Partners have suggested that future programmes offer additional types of 'in-house' support, particularly support related to financial planning and sustainability.

Below are just some of the many pieces of feedback about the support that Partners received:

"The first person I contacted was Rochell who has been absolutely amazing. She's been great. She's been awesome. All props to Rochell. She's really personable and makes me feel at ease. I personally feel like I can talk to her and she puts humanity into the job."

"Blaggrave and, especially, Rochell have been very supportive as the programme went on. One of the reasons I was able to bounce back from a setback is actually Rochell. She checked in on me and gave me hope in the fact I could bounce back. She said, 'the reason we gave you this funding is to have the resources to try different things. It's ok to fail as long as you try.' I took that to heart and have tried lots of big things. They're the most understanding funders I've encountered so far."

"They're really supportive. They've really listened to the challenges that have come across the movement and with setting up as an organisation... I don't know if that's because we've been really open and transparent with them or vice versa. The whole time, whenever we've had an issue about something, if Rochell hasn't known how to deal with it she's just been like, 'I have no idea what to do here, give me a week and I'll get back to you,' and that's really refreshing because it means we can be as open and honest with her as she is with us and Blaggrave as a whole."

"Rochell has been an amazing human being from the start...You don't expect that from a funder. You don't expect that personal connection."

"Rochell is amazing. That's all I can say. Without her, I don't know where we would be. I was able to go to her and say I'm struggling... that was amazing."

"It's really helpful to have someone who you can go to but that's also rooting for you. To have that sort of support has felt really comforting."

“Rochell, whenever I email about something, is always super helpful, sends over opportunities or stuff that she sees... It was really nice because it felt like she really did try to get to know me and my project and what I needed and had recommendations even in terms of people I should speak to and connect with.”

Several Partners expressed their desire to access a similar level of support but with a specific focus on finances and sustainability. One Partner also suggested that Blgrave should facilitate a regular collaborative learning space. Four of the Partners made the following additional suggestions:

“Maybe having a person like a financial adviser add support... to advise them how to manage their money or if they have any questions about what they want to do.”

“A lot of us are new to this whole funding process and running our own businesses and projects. A lot of us don't understand where we're going to get the next funding from. And I feel like in this process, (it would be good) if a part of it was dedicated to showing us... here's the steps you can take to put yourself in the best position to get more funding once this process is done.”

“How do you ensure you're not putting changemakers in a precarious situation where they've given us this vibe that it's really flexible, not too challenging to get funding in the sense that we just had to complete the application...it's not necessarily representative of a lot of organisations in the funding space and I wonder if they've actually prepared us for what the funding space looks like.”

“In terms of ongoing support, I really desperately need support registering (as a CIC)... I wish I was a bit more prepared about how to do it... so I guess more coaching on how to actually register your company would be really, really great. It's hard to know exactly what (the other Partners are) doing unless you knew them before so maybe they could have a group where everybody says, 'I'm trying to be a CIC' or 'I'm trying to be a charity' or 'I'm just trying to do this as a one-off thing' and you can go into those groups and say 'I'm willing to collaborate.’”

3. IMPACT

“Having that financial compensation is amazing because it’s like the first time I’ve properly been paid for my campaigning work in my life and I’ve been doing this for about ten years at this point.”

Partners unanimously agreed that the support they have received from Challenge and Change has been beneficial, with most describing the funding and their relationship with the Trust as transformational.

For many of the Partners, the programme enabled them to pay themselves for their work for the first time, or to pay another member of their team to absorb some of their responsibilities, increasing their capacity and also, crucially, improving their mental health. Every Partner used the funding to realise an idea or scale an existing project. It enabled the Partners to establish themselves, their approach and their credibility in their communities or movement ecologies and many of the Partners experienced a significant increase in confidence as a result. One Partner said:

“It’s opened a lot of doors. Even if we’re talking about the money specifically as a business, project, organisation or whatever you want to call it, being able to walk into a room and be like ‘I’m funded by this Fund’ gets people looking at you like ‘okay, let me hear what you have to say, I like what you’re trying to do,’ before they’ve even heard your idea. They already like what you’re trying to do so it kind of helps push you in the right direction a bit more and compound things a bit because, without that, I remember trying to tell my ideas to people before and tell them what we’re trying to do but then there’s nothing tangible that they can see. There’s no partnership or social proof... in terms of the money, it’s also just helped get things faster because money obviously talks, as they say. I’d say it frees up a bit of your time as well. For example, if you’re someone who’s constantly working and you want to do youth work, there’s no chance for you to go and do that without losing out. When you do have the funding, it does give you a lot more time to sit back, cultivate your ideas and put things in place on your own time and I think that’s very important as well.”

Several of the Partners who are in full time work and education have been able to compensate themselves for the first time. Some Partners were able to leave their jobs or reduce their hours to focus on their social change work. They said:

"I find having the money validating, being paid is amazing and just having the freedom to do work and not have to meet specific deadlines and targets is absolutely amazing because it goes against every concept of doing your job. In my day job, I have a project plan, I have deadlines and I have to get certain work done by certain times to show my Manager. I don't have to do this with the funding. It's given me such freedom and, obviously, there are moments where I'm more relaxed than others but... I know, once this is done, this is going to be amazing. And I couldn't have done this without this funding."

"One of the main things is that I was able to pay myself for the work I was doing, which makes a huge difference, especially being a student. This work can take up a lot of time."

"It really made a big difference because then it just shifted me from having this idea to actually being able to actively work on it and compensate myself but also other people that were getting involved... I was able to remunerate people for their time and contributions thanks to the Fund. It's not to say that it would have been impossible but it would have taken much longer."

"The funding paid for the start of us really doing this work... It's been really helpful because we've been able to hire more people. We're literally financing curious people to do work. It's really made a difference in us being able to function and be in those spaces, access training so we can function in our roles and do our work."

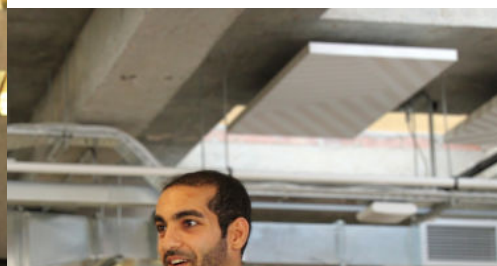
More than one Partner felt the impact of receiving funding from Challenge and Change in their personal lives.

"That funding is what meant (the organisation) could hire someone like me so I'd say it was life changing on a personal level. I was able to leave a job where I was working ridiculous hours. I was up at 4.30 am and finishing work at 9.30pm so my husband and I were up at ridiculous hours trying to navigate that and having a year old baby. Blgrave being able to give us this funding has meant that I'm about to have a normal job title, I'm able to work from home and actually see my daughter grow up."

"I went to Manchester and Birmingham (to speak at conferences) and I had to book a hotel and train myself. I couldn't do that if I didn't have the funding, so I would have had to reject the invitation to speak if I didn't have the support. I don't have any family support or anything else and this support is the biggest

thing. This year, especially with the cost of living, I've been struggling with transport and going to my placements outside of my city and living. So how Blagrave has helped me is personal, educational and societal. They have helped me with my personal growth... helped with my education so I can stay on top of my studies and not worry about money all the time and helped me to accept the big opportunity of helping society and helping others up."

"It really meant a lot to me, this funding and this project. All of us were doing different things but now we have a place to start... We have the anger and we have the power to do it and for me it means a lot. I just want to say thank you to Blagrave."



4. THE BLAGRAVE TRUST

“It really felt like Blaggrave didn’t treat us like children. It felt like from the start to now, they understood that we know what we’re talking about. It felt very supportive and like they’re proud of us and that we are trusted.”

When reflecting on their initial interaction with Blaggrave, many Partners observed that they had never heard of the Trust or the Challenge and Change Fund until immediately before they made an application for support. They generally expressed their surprise that funders like Blaggrave exist, and highlighted the Trust’s uncommon values and approach to grantmaking.

When asked for their general feedback about the Blaggrave Trust and its approach, Partners expressed, at length, their gratitude for the freedom, faith and trust that they were afforded through the Challenge and Change Fund. Partners viewed Blaggrave as an ally and believed they had gone some distance towards ‘closing the social gap’. Several Partners expressed their hope that Blaggrave would maintain a relationship with them as an ally and funder. Some comments included:

“One thing I like about Blaggrave is that there’s not a lot of strings attached to that funding and there’s not a lot of requirements. That is what deters young people away: all the requirements or experience needed. You won’t have that straight away. That approach puts us in a position where we can say ‘this is what I want to do’ and run with it.”

“I want to say thank you for allowing us to have freedom. I think that sets Blaggrave apart from a lot of other funders.”

“Thank you for having faith in young people because it’s something that’s very lacking, especially from a lot of funders, and keep doing what you’re doing because it’s helping to transform a lot of young people’s lives.”

“It goes beyond financial security and it’s a lot more profound in the sense that we’re just empowered in the work we do. This is probably one of the first times where we don’t feel like we’ve been taken advantage of by a big organisation.”

“Maybe now they’ve built a bit of a relationship with me, so they have a bit of an idea of what I want to do, if they have specific funds or people that they think

would work for me, being guided to those. Also, even a specific conversation or meeting...that's about next steps or...if there are ways you can work with them in future as well, that would be cool."

"The thing for me now is the 'after' part. I would still love to be able to have conversations... with them to know how to continue from here. I dont want to wait until after the money has run out."

"I'd like to come back and I'd like Blaggrave to be with me in the long term. I got a great experience from it, and I'd quite like to keep that."

"I think giving young people a platform to share their experiences with each other is another way that Blaggrave just shows that they're not hogging these people once they've gone through their processes. They're really willing to push their ideas and ensure that they keep getting bigger and better... The fact that on the day of the first Challenge and Change meeting, the CEO, Eli, was there and I wasn't expecting to meet the CEO and I think other people weren't either. I thought it was really cool that he was just chilling with everyone in his jeans and making conversation and it really set a culture of getting to know us as individuals, which has been really great."



5. FEEDBACK FOR FUNDERS

"We're all still doing everything for the first time. Although it's been three years since we started the campaign, it's all quite new to us, in a way. Everything that we do is for the first time."

Partner insights and recommendations for funders were heavily focused on impact and sustainability.

Many Partners who had experiences applying for or exploring funding from more traditional charitable funders felt that the demands were unrealistic on young applicants and organisations to prove their theories of change, capacity or the viability of the projects. They felt that they had the skills, support, networks, lived experience, present capacity and a sound theory of change to deliver impactful work, but just needed someone to invest in them. Several Partners also felt strongly about the lack of feedback they received from funders in response to unsuccessful applications. They frequently commented on the lack of clarity around eligibility and observed that the demand for measurable outputs and outcomes does not account for the nature of community work and co-design and complex demographic identities.

"Young people just need you to work with them. When you target, you limit. Targeting is limiting. Everyone should be able to access something and if they do it to the best of their ability, you can help them through the process."

"Be more up front with what you're asking for. A couple of times, I've got through to the third round and then a funder has said that my project isn't eligible but I've been using the same language the whole time, it's just getting more specific.... if you were being more upfront to begin with, I wouldn't spend hours and hours submitting an application that isn't actually applicable to me."

"I got some feedback from a funder (who had asked for specific demographic projections) telling me 'you can't say that 80% of people involved are going to be Black.' I acknowledge that and get, logically, practically, why that's a thing but...so many young people that are perceived as Black are actually mixed race... I cannot guarantee the percentage of Blackness that will be within (my project)... In the UK, it seems like if you're not white, they put you in Black or Asian, which is so non-specific, country-wise but also continent-wise... I have been seeing a few more funding opportunities that are specifically for Black

people but then it's hard because if being mixed race doesn't apply to that work or for me, specifically...where do you go from there?...Mixed literally means more than one. Of course, there's going to be no way to list (who will be involved in my project)."

"A lot of Black organisations don't apply for funding. Period... in the most deprived areas and I've seen it in London, too. They don't apply for it because it's almost like a trap. They apply for this funding but they feel so held back to independently grow an organisation because there's always some kind of stipulation... you know the most about your community and you've got the real life experiences but when you're trying to do certain things, funders can go 'no, you can't do that'. I think some organisations feel like they hit a point of growth where it's like, we can't apply for funding anymore because we want to do this but it's not in the broader psyche of the sector to accept or fund the things we're doing... Blagrave has done a really, really good job of that but I wish funders in general knew that as well."

"Arts and culture is the biggest sector that we have to start with, because I'm blaming the funders for the reason why a lot of our organisations exploit POC communities and POC artists. Everybody is talking about BLM and all of the activism of (Covid-19) lockdown but where is the funding to diversify the arts? You have to work with POC artists, they have to work with POC communities and all you have to do is reach out... Some of these organisations don't even deserve to communicate with communities because they've treated some communities terribly. And I think that's where I blame the funders... you've made pots of money hard for community groups to get and you've made applications a bit too complicated... it's really breaking down and restructuring the fundamental values that your organisation was built on. If your organisation is built on colonialism and built on colonial values, your staff, that colonial gaze, is still a part of your organisation, even if you don't know that."

"I've lived in (my area) all my life... and there's so much that I would love to do, but even I'm finding it hard to justify (to the standard required by some funders) why I want funding for a community project, why I want to work with young people."

Many Partners spoke about how inaccessible they found the funding landscape; observing, in particular, that they often did not know where to look for funding. Often, they were unaware of online tools and resources that do exist for finding suitable funding opportunities.

"I think it would be good if there was one space that several funders could put money into... and then you could log onto that site and there's a list of funders for all over the UK which you can narrow down... so you're not spending hours trying to find funding. That would be absolutely blissful."

"I look at a lot of funders' websites and they're like, 'we don't want you to reach out to us. We don't take unsolicited requests,' and I'm like, ok, that means you're either funding people you already fund or based on the networks you have. So how likely is it that you're lessening the barriers that young people or minoritised communities are facing?"

"A lot of people don't know about funders and what they have available so they need to advertise for people from low income backgrounds and people in estates. A lot of people have good ideas. There's a lot of creativity in areas like this but they don't have an outlet. They need to advertise in the right places and there'll be change in this world."

Several Partners spoke of the chronic short-termism in the UK funding sector and the lack of understanding demonstrated by funders about how change actually happens on any level, from community development to legislative changemaking. They argued that consistent, multi-year funding is the only way in which funders can expect projects to make meaningful and long term change.

"Me and every other person setting up something needs consistent funding... getting a big lump sum is amazing and you can do a lot with that but, the following year, you've got nothing... I need to be able to give more of a commitment and without funding, it's just not possible. Funding opportunities that are over three years are more appealing because you know you're safe for three years and it gives you more time to build and grow."

"Respectfully, funders are idiots if they think that the little amount of money they're giving to one specific group of people in one specific timeframe for some work is going to have a giant impact to change the wider issues that have been happening for decades, centuries.... They're applying a perspective of getting results and bringing about change immediately and if you know anything about campaigning, if you know anything about activism, you're in it for the long run... The work I'm doing is a drop in the ocean of the actual work that needs to be done...if you're in this to do this work and do it properly, you're

not going to get results immediately... If I could be doing this work full time, I would be. I wouldn't have to go and look for another job because I need to earn a certain amount of money to sustain myself and my family."

"It's been six months- what's six months in the course of the sixty years that the movement has been going?"

Some Partners spoke of the need for greater listening and investment in individuals, particularly young people. They said:

"Funders need more people like the Blagrave Storyteller to hear our stories and share our stories. We can't do as much as you can...so we need more people like the Storyteller."

"It'd be great to see more funders fund individuals because what was so unique about this pot of funding is that it was funding individuals and it was funding ideas."

