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# Creating Places for Everyone

Supporting place-based and community-led racial justice

 Esmée  
Fairbairn  
FOUNDATION

 **locality**  
the power of community

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# Executive summary

In a world of increasingly toxic division, it is more important than ever that we commit to anti-racism.



Creating Places for Everyone investigates the specific role of **place-based community organisations in the pursuit of racial justice**. It starts from the recognition that community organisations with a geographic focus – and their representative bodies like Locality – have often understood issues of race and ethnicity as part of a broad social justice mission, rather than as explicit concerns of their work.

This needs to change. We cannot achieve Locality’s organisational vision of “**a fair society where every community thrives**” without understanding the structural inequities that stand in the way and actively seeking to dismantle them.

This document therefore represents a line in the sand for Locality.

It clarifies **our principled stance**, that you can’t have social justice without racial justice – and that places can only thrive when every group within them thrives. It explains how social infrastructure created by and for racialised communities is crucial for this. As are strong, representative, and inclusive community “anchor” organisations that bring groups together within their neighbourhoods.

It then sets out how we will put this principle into practice, building our developing organisational commitment to anti-racism into a clear, **practical support offer** for our members, spanning the full range of our organisational activity.



## About Creating Places for Everyone

Creating Places for Everyone is based on in-depth research with Locality members across the country, supported by expert partners. This includes:

- **A Steering Group of people from racialised communities working for Locality members across England**, who shaped the research and ensured lived experience of racial discrimination was at the heart of the project.
- **Expert support from [New Ways](#)** – an anti-racist behaviour change consultancy – who acted as a critical friend throughout, providing training and helping facilitate the research activities, as well as supporting analysis and insight development.
- **Interviews with 15 Locality members**, representing a broad range of organisation types, in different contexts and at different stages in their racial justice journey.
- **Deep-dive case study research** with four of these members in different places.
- **Facilitated peer-networking**, to bring our four deep-dive case study organisations together to learn from each other.

## Our research themes and findings

We have explored the relationship between place-based community organisations and racial justice through **five research themes**. These emerged through our interviews with Locality members and sessions with our Steering Group, and provided the focus for our deep-dive case studies and peer-networking:

- a) Inequalities in public service provision,** highlighting “cycles of exclusion” where public services fail to adequately identify and meet the needs of racialised communities. Community organisations play an essential role addressing these stubborn inequalities, either filling gaps themselves or partnering with the public sector to shape more equitable provision.
- b) Meeting diverse community needs,** exploring how community organisations often provide services which are universal and open to all, but can inadvertently reinforce inequalities. More targeted services that proactively tailor support for specific racialised groups can be necessary to avoid exclusion.

**c) Inequalities in funding,** reinforcing the well-established picture that while all VCSE organisations struggle to secure adequate funding, embedded systemic racism means this is particularly acute for organisations led by and for people from racialised communities.

**d) Allyship among community organisations,** understanding that racial justice can’t just be seen as the preserve of community organisations led by and for people from racialised communities. There is a crucial role for the multipurpose community organisations who make up the bulk of the Locality membership, most of whom have predominantly white leadership teams. This includes embedding anti-racism in their own activities as well as providing wider allyship.

**e) Connection, understanding, and belonging within places** emerged as a growing concern across our research, with a rise in community tensions around the country. Community organisations are uniquely placed to both tackle racial inequalities and bring people together, but lack support as they increasingly find themselves in the eye of societal storms.





## A typology of community organisations

Building on these insights, we have developed a broad typology of the Locality membership. While not intended to be neat or definitive, this typology has helped us shape our support offer so that it is relevant to organisations working in different contexts:

### 1. “Community organisations led by and for racialised groups”

These are community organisations that are set up with the goal of supporting a particular racialised community within a place. Their work will often have developed beyond this foundational purpose, but they can be described as being led by and working in a place-based way for that specific community.

### 2. “Multipurpose community organisations working in diverse neighbourhoods”

These are generalist community organisations that are set up for and focused on supporting place-based communities, which are working in neighbourhoods that are ethnically diverse or home to a predominantly racialised population.

### 3. “Multipurpose community organisations working in predominantly white British neighbourhoods”

These are generalist community organisations that are set up for and focused on supporting place-based communities, which are working in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of white British residents.

## Our support offer

Working across this broad typology, we have developed an organisation-wide response to what we have learnt across the Creating Places for Everyone project.

It aims to address the challenges presented in each of the themes from our research by harnessing the breadth of what we do – from strategic leadership and policy influencing, to practical support and programmes – in support of racial justice. It tries to think precisely about optimising our impact – what our specific role is in supporting our different types of members, and where we can make best use of our resources to do so.

It starts with our new [membership charter](#). To join Locality, we ask members to agree to a set of values and commit to our vision of “a fair society where every community thrives”. In line with our “principled stance” developed in this report, we have redeveloped this to make clear that you can’t have social justice without racial justice. This is something that all new members will be required to endorse – and something that across 2026 we will ask existing members to re-commit to.

“Support needs to provide the capacity to innovate”

The detail of our support offer is informed by three principles:

### 1. The importance of strategic headspace to enable a culture of anti-racism

Community organisations are operating in conditions of “permacrisis”. Support needs to provide the capacity to innovate, stepping away from day-to-day delivery pressures to develop leadership in anti-racism.

### 2. Using racial justice as a lens through which we see community development work

Anti-racism for place-based community organisations does not mean developing a new set of services or approaches. The broad range of activities is the same – what needs to change is the stance we take when designing and delivering them.

### 3. We need to do different things to support different members in different ways

Locality’s strategic framework organises our activity across four different areas: direct support and advice; membership network for connection; tools and resources; influencing and campaigns. Across our typology, different parts of this offer will be relevant in different ways, and the role we play will vary.

# The Creating Places for Everyone Programme

We have brought these principles together into the Creating Places for Everyone Programme. This matrix demonstrates how we plan to deploy the full range of Locality’s support offer in a tailored way across our three-part typology of community organisations.

Our aim is to outline the broad areas of support, recognising that this is not a fixed typology and there will be overlapping support needs for organisations across the areas.

We recognise that – as a national infrastructure organisation – we are in a position of relative power and privilege. We have resources we can deploy in support of the goals we have defined in Creating Places for Everyone. However, those resources are finite and some of what we want to do sits outside of what we can do within our existing projects and budgets.

Our support matrix therefore sets out:

- **Things we can and will do using our own existing resources**
- **Things we are committed to raising external funding to enable us to provide**

Typology of community organisations	Locality member support area			
	Direct support and advice	Membership network for connection	Tools and resources	Influencing and campaigns
<b>Community organisations led by and for racialised groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Working in collaboration and resourcing as expert partners on Locality’s membership-wide anti-racism support programmes</li> <li>■ Targeted practical support for operational areas of historic exclusion: e.g. community assets, commissioning, access to grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Providing access to peer support from fellow leaders from racialised communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Targeted resources for operational areas of historic exclusion: e.g. community assets, commissioning, access to grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Using our national platform and relationships with policymakers and funders to dismantle systems of exclusion, in particular, creating more equitable funding systems</li> <li>■ Providing a platform and raising profile with decision makers</li> <li>■ Showcasing impact and value through policy work and a dedicated communications campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Multipurpose community organisations working in diverse neighbourhoods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Targeted programme of support to embed anti-racism in operations, from governance to services to partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Providing access to peer learning from leading community anchors developing anti-racist practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Webinars and toolkits on how to embed anti-racism in operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Showcasing good anti-racist practice and the importance of inclusive community anchors in policy work, via a communications campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Multipurpose community organisations working in predominately white British neighbourhoods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Targeted programme of support to build inclusion and bridge divides, building capacity and capability to work across racial and cultural lines and embed inclusion in increasingly hostile conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Providing access to peer learning to share challenges and build collective strength</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Webinars and toolkits on bridge building, community cohesion and anti-racism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Producing a policy evidence report on community organisations’ bridge-building role to inform policy debates and ensure community organisations are central to any government cohesion strategy</li> </ul>

## Our use of language

There are many different terms used to describe people, groups, ideas, and concepts in the area of racial justice. Some are more contested than others – all language is subjective and its meaning evolves with context and use.

We must also be conscious not to let debate over language distract from tackling the substantive impacts of racism.

While we don't expect everyone to use the same language, it has been important for this work to ensure we use a consistent terminology to avoid talking at cross purposes with others.

Here, we lay out the core terms we use and what we mean by them.

### Describing people who experience racism

Following discussion with our project Steering Group and in line with Locality's previous use of language, we have decided to use the term "**racialised**" to describe those who experience racism.

As described by our friends at [Spark](#), this term "describes the process in which a group of people are defined by their race. Processes of racialisation begin by attributing racial meaning to people's identity." This then affects how they experience systems like housing, employment, education, health, etc.<sup>1</sup>

### Justice, equality and equity

At various points in this report, we refer to the concepts of "racial justice", "race equality", and "race equity".

By "**racial justice**", we mean the long-term systemic change to ensure race no longer predicts life outcomes. This includes through the dismantling of the systems in our society (like those mentioned above) that perpetuate racism, both separately ("systemically") and together ("structurally").

By "**race equality**", we mean the equal access to and enjoyment of rights, opportunities, participation, and services, and the outcomes that flow from these, regardless of race.

This is distinct from "**race equity**", which describes the fact that different groups start from different, unfair positions because of systemic and structural racism, and the taking of targeted action to achieve fair outcomes.

### The focus and leadership of community organisations

At times throughout the report, and with a particular focus in the typology of organisations and our subsequent support offer in chapter 4, we refer to community organisations based on their focus on racial justice issues and / or the ethnicity of their leadership.

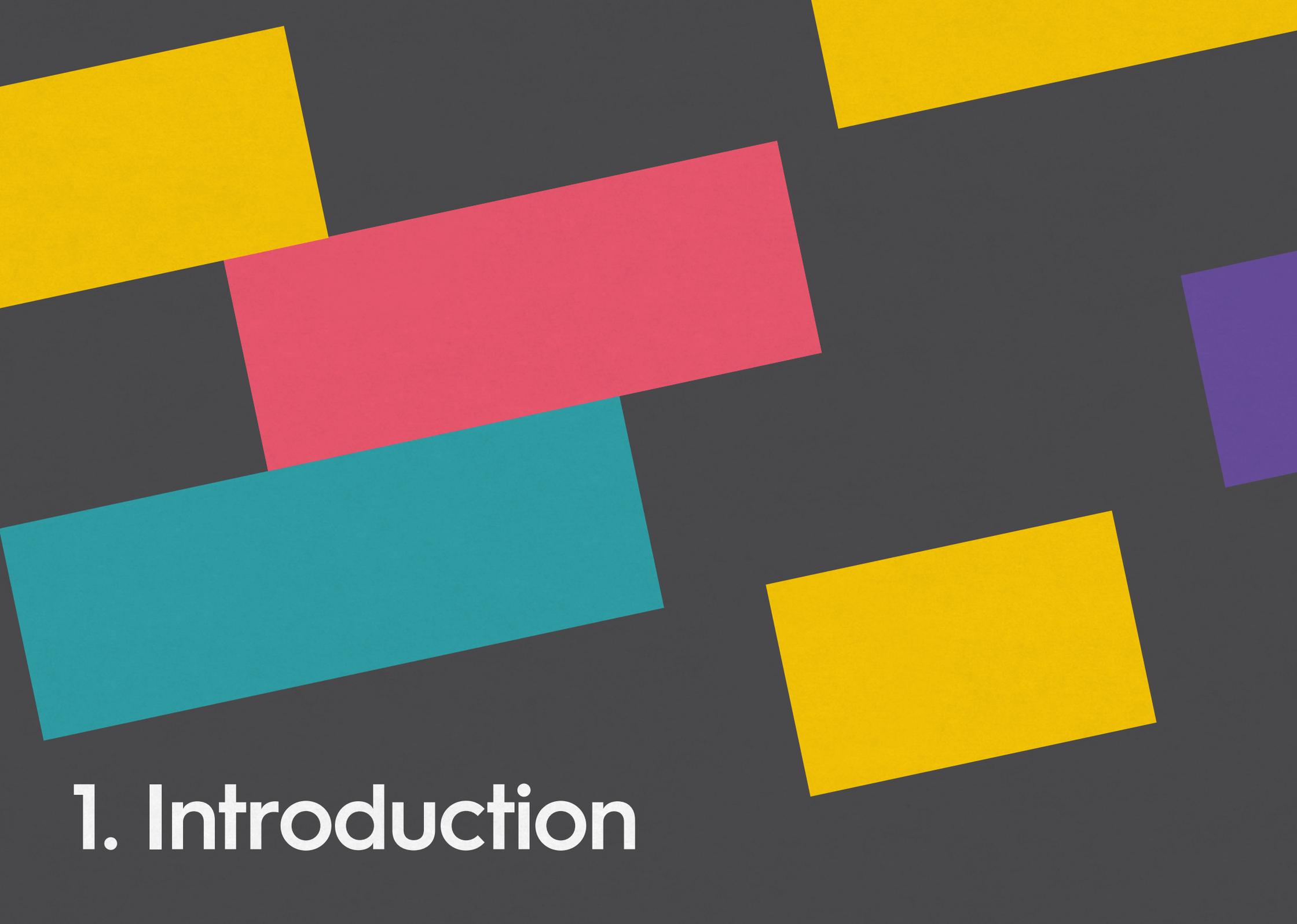
For example, we refer to "**organisations led by and for racialised groups**", often shortened to "**by-and-for organisations**". By this, we mean community organisations that have been set up by those from, and with the goal of supporting, a particular racialised community within a place.

Elsewhere, we refer to "**organisations with predominantly white leadership**", often shortened to "**white-led**". By this, we mean community organisations whose senior leadership and Board are composed mostly or entirely of white people, wherever they might be working.

### Community cohesion

We sometimes use the term "**cohesion**" when referring to the shared sense of connection, understanding, trust, and belonging between different groups within a place.

This term is sometimes contested, with negative connotations for some when used too vaguely or as a euphemism for assimilation of racialised communities without a necessary focus on justice for those groups. We explore its merits and limitations within the context of our research further on [p. 42-43](#).

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# 1. Introduction

When we look out the window, we see an increasingly troubled world. Division, fragmentation and disconnection: these have become the defining features of our times.



We can see this in the statistics. The numbers of us who are chronically lonely,<sup>2</sup> who don't know our neighbours,<sup>3</sup> or who think our country is divided,<sup>4</sup> have all been on the rise.

We can see it on the streets too, most notably in summer 2024, when racist and xenophobic riots took hold in communities across the country.

At Locality, we have always been clear that our members are an antidote to division and a huge source of hope. The network of community organisations we support provides tireless inspiration, building belonging and creating connection, often in the most challenging of circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

We have been less clear, however, about their specific role when it comes to racial justice. There has been

a tendency, across the community sector and wider policy world, to draw a hard distinction between communities of place and communities of identity.

This has sometimes led community organisations with a geographic focus – and their representative bodies like us – not to foreground issues of race and ethnicity; to see them as tacitly covered by a broad commitment to social justice, rather than an explicit concern of their work.

Now more than ever, this needs to change.

As we set out in this report, we cannot achieve our organisational vision of “a fair society where every community thrives” without understanding the structural inequities that stand in the way and actively seeking to dismantle them. We need to put in lights that you can't have social justice without racial justice.

## Anti-racism now

This is the foundational argument of our Creating Places for Everyone project. And back in 2020 – when we first challenged ourselves to develop clearer thinking about the particular relationship between place-based working and racial justice – it felt like there was gathering momentum behind this view.

The experience of the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd manifested structural racism’s deadly consequences and shocked many into action.<sup>6</sup> There was a widespread recognition that simply “not being racist” wasn’t enough; we needed to adopt an explicit position of anti-racism. This meant getting serious about equity over equality: actively seeking to tackle historic and embedded disadvantage, rather than simply treating everyone the same.

That was then. This report has been produced in a very different context. Across the world, the far right is on the march, political debates are increasingly extreme, and racist and xenophobic voices feel emboldened.

“Community organisations are uniquely placed”

That makes Creating Places for Everyone even more important. Conducting the research over the past 18 months has inspired us to sharpen our focus, raise our ambition, and challenge ourselves further.

We know that Locality members are crucial to the strength of our communities, the health of our society, and the future of our democracy. They are working in neighbourhoods that are increasingly experiencing division. They have all the qualities we need to bring our places back together. But it’s incredibly difficult work, and not something individual organisations can be reasonably expected to shoulder on their own.

So, through Creating Places for Everyone, we have set out to understand the specific role of place-based community organisations in the pursuit of racial justice, and the different perspectives and practices across our membership. How can place-based working support or restrict an anti-racist approach? What are the opportunities and challenges for place-based community organisations?



From this position of understanding, we have sought to define Locality's specific role. How can we most effectively act as a catalyst for change, championing and facilitating anti-racist practice across our membership?

We started by forming a Steering Group of Locality members from racialised communities. Everyone has a role to play in racial justice, regardless of their background. But people with lived experience of racial discrimination have a particular perspective that we wanted to centre and create a safe space for at the heart of the project.

We then spoke to a wide range of Locality members working in all different types of places – from organisations led by people from racialised communities whose foundational purpose is racial justice, to multipurpose community anchor organisations, working in post-industrial, predominantly white working-class communities. Through guided interviews, we sought to understand their missions and local context, and where racial justice sits in their work.

We explored our findings from these conversations in four “deep dive” case study areas, reflecting the broad spectrum of Locality's membership. This enabled us to engage organisations at all levels, from Board members to service users to external partners. We were also able to bring these organisations together to learn from each other's experiences.

This report sets out what we've learnt. It provides:

- a framework for how place-based community organisations can drive equity, inclusion and connectedness in their neighbourhoods, with anti-racism the “lens” to examine everything from service design to building management to community engagement
- a practical support offer to guide Locality members in this endeavour, whatever their starting point. This seeks to harness the full range of our strengths as an organisation: our ability to influence policy and shape debates; the skills and capacity of our expert staff; and the allyship, experience and solidarity of our wider membership network.

A line in the sand

## A line in the sand

We see this work as a line in the sand and a crucial moment for Locality. It is a significant milestone in our own journey, which began with a Board-level commitment in 2020 to shift ourselves from a non-racist stance that simply seeks to do no harm, to an active anti-racist position that allies ourselves with others to challenge all forms of discrimination.

This provided important strategic direction, stepping up our work on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We conducted an equalities audit, created a comprehensive DEI action plan, set up an internal working group to challenge and monitor progress, and integrated DEI into our business planning process.<sup>7</sup>

We also built race equity into our delivery work – for example, prioritising community groups led by and for people from racialised communities in recent grant programmes and encouraging funders to mainstream the approach in programmes we run on their behalf.

We took a crucial step in publishing “**No More Blank Pages**”, which took a critical look at what Locality has done to support racial justice.<sup>8</sup> The title came from one of our members who contributed to the research. It captured the frustration felt by participants that by-and-for organisations were tired of doing the heavy lifting for the sector. They repeatedly pointed out structurally racist and historic problems only to be shown “blank pages” for delivering solutions, with the inference they were solely or primarily responsible for doing the work themselves.

Since then, we have been working to fill that page. We have worked closely with **New Ways** as a strategic partner to develop and clarify a broad vision for our work on anti-racism. This involved a series of workshops with staff and trustees to examine our approach and set out a more structured set of goals to provide clarity in setting priorities and action.

This work led to the creation of a vision document which set out six key themes for our focus:





Creating Places for Everyone now provides significant practical focus to take forward. We begin by setting out our “principled stance” which sits behind this shift and frames everything that follows. We outline our detailed findings and what we’ve learnt through the experience of conducting the research. We conclude with our practical support offer for Locality members.

Our report’s primary aim is to share this with Locality members. We also hope it will inform anti-racist practice across the wider community sector, as well as providing learning for government, funders, and other system partners.

We want to highlight the backing we have had from [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation \(EFF\)](#). Reports like this normally include pro-forma recognition of their funders in an opening acknowledgements section. We want to bring this into the content of the report – because EFF’s partnership has been transformational.

When we began planning this work way back in 2020, we struggled to resource it. Funders – understandably – wanted to support the racial justice sector to lead racial justice work. This meant that we began to conduct the work ourselves, using our own resources. But as explored in more detail on [p. 69](#) (“Learnings from our experience of conducting the research”), this inevitably meant we didn’t have the capacity to conduct it properly or build the trust necessary to avoid reinforcing issues highlighted by No More Blank Pages.

So we are proud of our partnership with EFF, which recognises that there is a need for organisations like Locality to show leadership in this space. We are hugely grateful to them for enabling us to work closely with our members to understand and define exactly what that role should look like.

# Our principled stance

This research has informed some key principles that underpin our stance on racial justice as the national member network for community organisations. These will provide the basis for all our work at Locality from this point on and define Creating Places for Everyone's practical support offer for community organisations.

At Locality, we believe that social justice can only be truly achieved when it is felt by everyone in the places they live.

Place-based social justice demands that:

- everyone has a say over the decisions that affect their place
- wealth flows into – and is shared fairly among – the whole community
- all people can access services that equitably meet their needs
- everyone is welcome and able to take part in their community, build relationships, and feel that they belong
- all groups within that place are supported to build their capacity and capabilities at the grassroots, share their strengths, and collaborate to solve local problems together.

This is our vision of a fair society where every community thrives, as set out in Locality's strategic framework.<sup>8</sup> And for us, supporting our membership of over 2,000 local community organisations to be strong and successful is key to achieving it.

These organisations are essential agents of change, uniquely placed to address the profound challenges people face in the places they live.

These places – be they streets, neighbourhoods, housing estates, villages – may not have a precise definition or size. But they exist at a level we all recognise – where, on a day-to-day basis, people get the support they need to live good lives, feel belonging, and connect with others.

But the communities that make up our places are not homogeneous. In fact, on average, our members support 13 different but intersecting population groups, cutting across characteristics like gender, age, ethnicity, social background, sexual orientation, income, deprivation, disability, health conditions, and more.<sup>10</sup>

As such, local people will experience their places in unequal ways. Within the context of the already disadvantaged, under-invested areas of the country where most of our members are based,<sup>11</sup> this inequality can have its most acute impact on the quality of life of marginalised groups.

This is particularly true for racialised communities. Inequality remains pervasive in their local, day-to-day experiences of education, employment, housing, healthcare, and many other areas that determine people's health and wellbeing.<sup>12,13</sup>

As a result, **we must accept the fundamental position that there is no social justice in our places without racial justice.**

From this starting point, we can begin to create places where all residents are able to participate in and benefit from civic life, and where, as a result, cohesion between all groups can grow strong.

When racialised communities can access the support they need to thrive, they can better take part in local life, develop shared aspirations with their neighbours from white communities, and build their strengths to turn them into reality together.

This is key to a sentiment we heard many times across the country in this research – that we are all better off when groups come together in their places.

Indeed, we all deserve to fulfil our individual “right to contribute” to our community for the benefit of everyone, and to feel the agency, belonging, and dignity that flows from this. Racial injustice, however, actively undermines trust, participation, and shared ownership of place.

**This is why everyone benefits from tackling racial injustice. Places can only thrive when every group within them thrives.**

To enable racialised communities to thrive within a place, it is important that they are supported to form groups, organisations, and other social infrastructure that provide safe space to bond and grow. These are key to effectively addressing their needs through culturally competent services based on the community knowledge and trust they possess.

But this should complement – not replace – a broader social infrastructure that brings groups together within their place. If we experience our places solely through the lens of separate groups and fail to nurture space for them to connect, the social fabric of our communities will only weaken.

**We believe that strong, representative, and inclusive community “anchor” organisations are key.** They should play a central role in nurturing local people from all backgrounds to share a sense of belonging, investment, and pride in their place, so that it may thrive.



## Putting this stance into practice

In taking this stance, we must recognise that local people, communities, and their organisations operate within a wider system that often works against the achievement of this vision of justice and cohesion by replicating racist practice, reinforcing racism, and widening racial inequality.

These systemic challenges must be unlearned and dismantled. Until they are, a status quo will remain in which:

- gatekeepers in more established institutions – often but not always within the public sector – control decision-making power with little involvement of communities
- wealth – if any flows in at all – benefits only some of the area and its community members
- services are designed by officials away from local places and people, and are delivered by large, distant organisations for the lowest cost and in a standardised, culturally incompetent way

- there is little support for building connection and belonging within places, with political and media narratives and pressures on people to just survive – not thrive – combining to keep individuals and communities separated
- groups within communities are not supported to develop at the grassroots and in collaboration with others but are either ignored or kept in siloes.

So, **our vision of a fair society where every community thrives is only possible by actively dismantling racial injustice.**

We believe it is the duty of local, regional, and national system bodies – be they local or combined authorities, the NHS, government, funders, etc. to work hand-in-hand with the community sector to change this. This means resourcing and enabling community power to sit at the heart of our places and their services, infrastructure, and economies.

And this means both recognising racial justice as fundamental to social justice, and advancing place-based, community-led efforts through direct action, intentional deference, or deliberately dismantling structural barriers.

For by-and-for organisations, this means we must understand and tackle inequalities in funding, patterns of exclusion within local systems, and the lack and misuse of data about the people they serve and the impact of their services.

And we must recognise the impact these inequalities have on those organisations – the burnout caused by navigating a system that is stacked against them through bodies that may gaslight them about the inequalities their communities face and block their role in solving them.

Within the wider community sector, we must strive for equity in how we run our organisations – how we approach governance; how we use our income; how we engage and represent our communities; how we support, develop, and provide allyship to the groups within them; and how we design and deliver our services.

Organisations within the sector in positions of relative power and wealth – including us at Locality – must challenge ourselves to put racial justice at the heart of everything we say and do in pursuit of our ultimate vision of place-based social justice.

“Places can only thrive when every group within them thrives.”





## 2. Our research

## Aims

The central research question of this project can be split into two parts:

- a) What is / should be the role of place-based community organisations in pursuing racial justice?
- b) How can Locality support these organisations to play this role?

In posing these questions, we set out to explore the different perspectives, positions, and practices across our membership. Throughout the project, we considered how these could be illustrated across a typology of organisations, what they may mean for the development of their racial justice work, and how Locality could best support it.

## This research and intersectionality

It is relevant here to mention the question of intersectionality and this work. Intersectionality describes the way in which social categorisations such as race, class, gender, and disability overlap or individuals or groups to create interconnected systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

While our broader diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda captures all forms of discrimination, we have chosen to prioritise our work on tackling racism and racial injustice, along with ableism and disability injustice.

The social categorisation that this research focuses on is race, the drivers of racial injustice at place-level, and the community-led approaches to tackling it.

As such, we acknowledge that we won't have captured the full impact of intersectionality in the research themes we explore, and the organisations and communities that we have worked with.

## Supporting partners

We delivered this project with the invaluable support of several partner organisations.

New Ways – an anti-racist behaviour change consultancy – has provided expert support as a critical friend, helping us to shape and deliver the research activities, analyse the findings, and facilitate conversations with stakeholders.

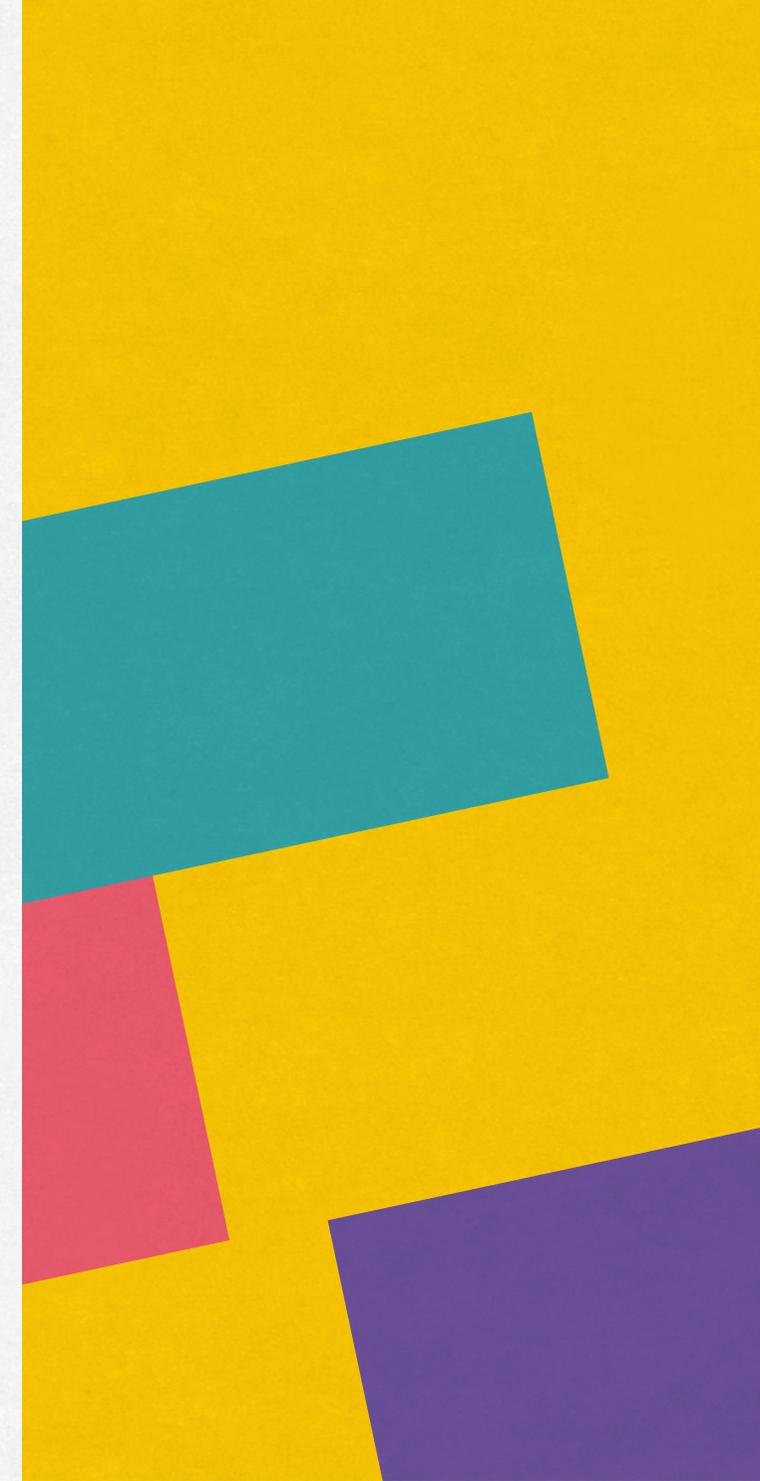
More broadly, the research has been overseen by a Steering Group of people from racialised communities working for Locality members across England. Based on their on-the-ground experience of place-based, community-led racial justice, these individuals provided strategic oversight, direction, and input into decision-making for the research activities and outputs of the project.

Some of these organisations also took part in the research as subjects.

### Steering Group members:

- [Black Butterfly](#) and [African & Caribbean Heritage Food Network](#), Hastings
- [Colindale Communities Trust](#), Barnet
- [Deeplish Community Centre Association](#), Rochdale
- [Highfields Community Association](#), Leicester
- [Just Solutions 123...](#), Kensington and Chelsea
- [Northern Community Network Ltd](#), Burnley
- [SOAR Community](#), Sheffield
- [The Race Equality Centre](#), Leicester
- [The Winch](#), Camden

As well as supporting the co-production of the research, both the Steering Group and New Ways have also been crucial to determining the actions that we have committed to take in the future.



# Methodology

We began the project with a review of the findings and outcomes of previous related activities we had delivered on the theme of place-based, community-led approaches to racial justice.

These included desk research, interviews with experts from national organisations with a racial justice focus, and member and staff engagement sessions.



## 1. Guided interviews

We initially spoke to 15 Locality members from a wide range of places and contexts across the country.

The 75-minute interviews were based on a topic guide exploring their perspectives and experiences of place-based, community-led racial justice working through several potential lenses. These included their:

- organisational history and mission
- local cultural / social / historical / demographical context
- services and activities
- experience of their local “system” and system change
- impact and challenges
- organisational policies
- partnership working.

Our aim was to gather as broad a set of perspectives as possible through talking to those with different characteristics, locations, and areas of focus.

Based on our collective understanding of the Locality membership, we approached organisations we believed could provide helpful perspectives as we sought to grow our knowledge, develop our research focus, and challenge our assumptions.

As such, our aim was not to single out any one organisation for a perceived focus – or lack thereof – on racial justice issues.

## 2. Deep-dive case studies

From our guided interviews, we identified five key themes for further exploration through deep-dive case study research with four organisations.

The four organisations selected – listed below – represented a range of places, organisational types and focus, and activity on racial justice from across the Locality membership.

### Deep-dive research participants:

- **Back on the Map** – a community anchor organisation in Hendon, Sunderland, that grew out of the last Labour government’s “New Deal for Communities” programme. It has since evolved into a trusted local institution providing vital spaces and services for the community.
- **Halifax Opportunities Trust** – a community anchor organisation serving the culturally diverse Park ward of Halifax and the wider borough of Calderdale. Its services include employment, training, enterprise, wellbeing, and integration-focussed language, citizenship, and skills programmes.

- **Northern Community Network Ltd** – a community organisation serving the South Asian community in the Daneshouse and Stonyholme area of Burnley through advice, education, health, and other services.
- **The Winch** – a local youth charity and community anchor organisation in north Camden, London, working with children, young people, and their families from diverse backgrounds to tackle the systemic challenges they face.

By conducting more in-depth research with these organisations, their communities, and local partners, we aimed to ensure both a broad and deep understanding of the shared issues and differing contexts of our membership base.

Through both online and local in-person engagement, Locality researchers ran research activities with management and delivery staff, trustees, volunteers, service users, and local community members. They also spoke to the organisations’ partners and local system bodies, such as local authorities, Integrated Care Boards, local VCSE infrastructure bodies, and funders.

The research activities conducted in this stage included one-to-one interviews, small group interviews, and focus groups.

## 3. Facilitated peer networking

Towards the end of our deep-dive case study research, we brought together leaders from the four participating Locality members in two peer networking sessions led by trained facilitators.

As place-based community organisations in varying contexts, providing a range of services and activities with different levels of focus on racial justice, these sessions aimed to support them to:

- reflect** on the research, and challenge, support, and learn from each other
- consider** the impact of the project for their organisations, what practical support Locality can provide for its members in this area, and how we can work together to change systems.

As well as supporting the development of these organisations and their leadership, these sessions also produced valuable additional research findings.



# 3. Our findings

The insights presented below offer a rich qualitative understanding of the challenges involved in pursuing racial justice at the local level and how these challenges can be addressed, particularly highlighting the vital role of community organisations.



The findings are organised around the **five themes** initially identified through the first phase of guided interviews. These were then tested and refined with the Steering Group and further explored during the deep-dive case studies phase.

The five themes are:

- a) Inequalities in public service provision
- b) Meeting diverse community needs
- c) Inequalities in funding
- d) Allyship among community organisations
- e) Connection, understanding, and belonging in communities

The content reflects insights drawn from multiple stages of the research, as well as meetings with Steering Group members and peer mentoring sessions. While it is not possible to capture the full breadth of knowledge gathered, here we distil the key findings and illustrate the most significant lessons emerging from the project.

Some findings may be familiar, reflecting racial inequalities that are already widely reported and experienced – particularly disparities in access to public services for racialised communities and inequalities in funding for by-and-for organisations.

These insights provide the foundation for developing Locality’s programme of action, where we will leverage our platform and work with members to address and dismantle barriers to racial justice in the places they work and nationally.

## a) Inequalities in public service provision

### Cycles of exclusion

Our research reinforces the widely documented finding that public services frequently fail to identify and adequately meet the needs of racialised communities across areas such as health, social care, and welfare.<sup>14 15</sup>

These patterns arise from structures, systems, and practices that perpetuate exclusion, highlighting the ongoing presence of institutional racism in the authorities and organisations that preside over them.

An example of this cycle we heard repeatedly centred around how exclusion drives underreporting of problems and leads to inadequate service provision for racialised communities. Underreporting is driven by a range of factors, including language barriers, cultural differences, lack of trust, fear, limited understanding of available services, experiences and expectations of being misunderstood, and feelings of shame.

When racialised communities are excluded, data quality suffers, and authorities fail to understand the nature of challenges and people's needs. This means services are often not designed to address either. This results in loss of trust and confidence, and the cycle repeats.



## The vital role of community organisations in addressing inequalities

While the responsibility for breaking this cycle ultimately lies with public sector authorities, community organisations play an essential role in helping to address inequalities. Many act as a first point of contact for people from racialised communities, building strong and trusted relationships within their communities.

Community organisations often support individuals to navigate complex public service systems – for example, by helping them to understand their welfare entitlements or access health checks. Through this close engagement, community organisations develop a detailed understanding of the challenges their communities face.

With the benefit of this knowledge and close relationship with their communities, community organisations are often well-placed to gather intelligence for public sector partners to plug gaps in their understanding.

This could include gathering case studies and personal stories from regular service users, as well as collecting perspectives from the broader local community through community organising. The case study on [p. 32](#) provides a strong example of the former, with an organisation

helping their local authority better understand the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse.

Some community organisations are addressing inequalities by partnering with the public sector to shape service provision. One such organisation runs a project with schools aimed at reducing exclusion rates among students from racialised communities. The organisation adopts a clear systems-change approach, training school staff to challenge stereotypical assumptions and to work more effectively with these young people experiencing distress.

It is sometimes more effective, however, for community organisations to step in and address gaps in provision themselves – they are adept at tailoring services to be more accessible and attuned to the needs of their communities.

Many organisations have demonstrated this through the delivery of “community champion” services, which have become increasingly widespread since the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> We discuss these points in more detail in our report, “[Creating inclusive services](#)”, highlighting the different roles community organisations play to ensure services are inclusive and culturally competent.

### Good cross-sector collaboration is patchy

There are good examples of public sector partners working well with community organisations, recognising their unique value and positive contribution. Many public sector bodies, working under capacity constraints and without proximity to communities, acknowledge that community organisations are often better placed to help break the cycle of exclusion.

The overall picture, however, is that this good practice remains patchy across the country. Alongside positive examples, our research found that many by-and-for organisations have encountered systemic challenges restricting their ability to influence decision-making and shape service provision.

Several organisations described operating on the margins of local systems and being left to manage rising demand alone. Despite being trusted by the communities they serve, their insight is overlooked by the very systems meant to work alongside them.

We heard that in some areas, systems and processes are inflexible or insufficiently responsive to building strong partnerships, reflecting pressures such as established routines, capacity constraints, or differing organisational priorities.

Whatever the obstacles, the case study on [p. 32](#) shows that a strong partnership approach is both possible and effective. This underscores how the quality of local relationships and structures can either enable contribution or significantly constrain it.

### Barriers to community organisations doing more of this type of work

Most community organisations recognise the importance of addressing inequalities in public provision, but they also highlight significant barriers to doing so effectively. Public sector authorities need to establish clear processes for using data provided by community organisations, grounded in two-way dialogue, mutual trust, and clear understanding about how the data will be used. Likewise, community organisations should be clear about the actions they are recommending based on their insights.

Organisations also raised concerns about their capacity to engage meaningfully, noting that much of this work is unpaid and adds to existing pressures. Public sector partners should consider how they can bridge gaps in understanding by investing in local partnerships that support this work. The involvement of community organisations should be part of a proactive co-design of inclusive services, adequately resourced to enable their contribution, rather than relying on them as a reactive “fix” for systemic shortcomings.

## Case study

# Breaking the cycle: supporting Bangladeshi women experiencing domestic violence and abuse

**Shantona, based in Leeds, was established in the late 1990s by local women seeking a safe, independent space to support their community.**

The organisation provides culturally tailored services for women from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including refugees and asylum seekers. Shantona addresses domestic violence and abuse, mental health and wellbeing, child sexual exploitation, and advocates to help clients access mainstream services.



The organisation engages in preventative work, supports women through the criminal justice system, and works in partnership with other local and national organisations to promote gender equality.

Shantona collaborated with their local council to improve understanding of domestic violence and abuse within the Bangladeshi community. Mainstream services had previously underestimated the scale of the issue and, in many cases, were unaware it existed.

Cultural taboos, stigma, and religious misconceptions mean that women in the community are often less likely to report abuse, leaving gaps in service provision. To address this, the organisation collected data, stories, and case studies directly from the

community to evidence the need for targeted, culturally competent support.

As a result of these efforts, the council recognised the gap and concluded that existing services were unlikely to adequately meet the needs of Bangladeshi women experiencing abuse. They explored options and decided to roll out a specialist service, leading to Shantona securing funding to deliver this work.

Through the service, staff work closely with women and girls to explore and challenge religious interpretations and feelings of shame surrounding domestic violence and abuse, empowering them to seek support and assert their rights. Co-production and community engagement ensure the service is shaped by the experiences of the women it supports.

This case demonstrates how organisations like Shantona can fill critical gaps in public provision, advocate for systemic change, and ensure the needs of specific communities are recognised and addressed. By combining culturally sensitive practice with partnership and advocacy, Shantona shows the impact of local expertise in breaking cycles of exclusion and supporting vulnerable women.



## b) Meeting diverse community needs

### Different approaches across the sector

Our research highlighted broad differences in how community organisations shape their service provision. While some adopt a universal approach designed to support anyone in the community, others focus on tailoring and / or targeting services to make them more accessible, relevant, or focused on specific racialised groups.

These differences often reflect each organisation's history, mission, and underlying ethos. Larger community anchor organisations – those serving wide and diverse neighbourhoods – typically prioritise universal provision open to all residents. By contrast, organisations founded to challenge racial inequalities tend to see targeted, culturally specific support as fundamental to their purpose and practice.

### The case for targeted and tailored service provision

As outlined in our “principled stance”, there is a clear and pressing need for services to respond effectively to the needs of racialised communities. Our research found that universal services, while intended for all, can inadvertently exclude certain groups due to their design.

The case study on [p. 37](#) provides a clear example: mainstream gyms and fitness classes, often designed for mixed-gender participation, can exclude many women from racialised communities whose cultural or religious practices make such environments inaccessible, preventing them from accessing the health and social benefits of physical activity.

In some cases, meaningful engagement is only possible through a targeted approach, where a service is intentionally designed for a specific group and access is limited to enable participation. These services often arise out of necessity, addressing barriers that universal provision cannot adequately meet, and are frequently essential for promoting equity.

While targeted approaches are sometimes necessary, adapting universal services can also be helpful to engage racialised communities and promote equitable outcomes – essentially tailoring universal services rather than adopting a targeted model.

As illustrated in the case study on [p. 37](#), our research found examples of organisations doing this. These included proactively engaging with spaces frequented by underrepresented groups, recruiting diverse local staff, and drawing on their combined cultural knowledge and experience to shape and deliver services.



### Concerns with targeted / tailored approaches

While targeted and tailored services are an essential tool for community organisations, some had concerns about their use, particularly around limiting access.

A few research participants, particularly those working in larger community anchor organisations, explained how they felt this approach could reinforce social silos, segregation, and stigmatisation in the community. They described how they would much rather places and spaces serve as a means of bringing people together and cultivating greater cohesion.

These concerns should not be overstated, as participants' views were generally thoughtful and nuanced. Even those more sceptical of targeted services acknowledged that they are sometimes necessary, with differences largely relating to when and how broadly they should be applied.

Nevertheless, it is important to address these concerns and emphasise that targeted or tailored services are an essential part of an organisation's overall approach, strengthening its effectiveness. The crucial point is that universal services, open-to-all, are often already excluding various groups, albeit unintentionally, due to their design. It's about stepping back and considering, on a case-by-case basis, where something different might be needed.

Our research also finds that targeted and universal approaches can be complementary. Some organisations

reported that their targeted services help reduce social segregation and enhance the effectiveness of universal services by building people's confidence and connecting them with broader community services and activities. In this way, they can serve as stepping stones to wider integration. Again, the case study on [p. 37](#) clearly illustrates these points.

Context is an important consideration, as our research indicates that targeted services can sometimes unintentionally heighten community tensions. This is particularly true in disadvantaged areas with limited access to public services.

Research participants from an organisation in a post-industrial area affected by riots in summer 2024 reported perceptions that resources were concentrated on racialised communities, leaving other groups, especially disadvantaged white communities, feeling overlooked and underserved.

Rising hostility toward racialised communities is hugely concerning and can make this work challenging, carrying potential risks for organisations and staff. Implementing targeted services in this context requires care, sensitivity, and clear communication to avoid misunderstanding or reinforcing prejudice.

While some organisations are already taking steps to challenge prejudice, as discussed under theme (e), many will understandably need support to start this work or build on what they are already doing.

## Opportunities to go further

Our research indicates that the sector could go much further in identifying where different approaches are needed to engage racialised communities. This is particularly true for larger community anchor organisations in predominantly white areas.

Greater attention is needed to the ways in which universal services – designed largely with the majority population in mind – can unintentionally exclude. Many organisations recognise their limited reach and want to address, it but are unsure how to begin. As one participant put it, “we don’t know what we don’t know.”

There is good sense in a pragmatic approach, drawing on a blend of methods rather than relying on any single model – an approach sometimes described as “targeted universalism”.<sup>17</sup> As a starting point, organisations could enhance service monitoring, and proactively engage with racialised

communities and by-and-for organisations to identify gaps and solutions. This includes looking beyond overall footfall to assess the diversity of participants – most importantly, considering who is not showing up.

## Systemic challenges

Finally, it’s important to acknowledge the systemic challenges constraining choice to pursue targeted / tailored approaches, as some of the participants in our research reported finding it much easier to secure funding for universal services than for targeted services.

We heard repeatedly that funding opportunities – particularly from the public sector – are often not suitable, lacking the flexibility to tailor or target provision. Hence there is a clear need for Locality – and the wider sector – to advocate more strongly for a cross-sector collaborative approach to shaping funding opportunities, as we have done extensively through our [Keep it Local campaign](#).

## Case study

# Targeted services to address racial inequalities in physical activity

In a diverse urban area such as Birmingham, health inequalities have remained largely unchanged for nearly two decades.

Local physical-activity services, while officially open to everyone, have often been designed with a narrow user group in mind – typically men – making them less accessible to many women from racialised communities.

Community organisation **Sähēli Hub** identified a clear gap in provision for South Asian and Muslim women, particularly those of Pakistani heritage, who were among the least likely to participate in physical activity.

Mainstream gyms and classes were largely mixed-gender, which many women found unsuitable due to cultural or religious beliefs. As a result, women who could benefit most – particularly those living with or at risk of long-term health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or musculoskeletal issues – were effectively excluded from services intended to be universal.

Sähēli Hub responded by engaging directly with women in the community, listening carefully to their needs, preferences, and wider life circumstances. These conversations highlighted that women-only sessions were essential to enable participation and support women to build confidence in managing their physical health.

In response, the organisation developed women-only physical-activity sessions, including aerobics, Zumba, walking, cycling, swimming, and multi-sport classes. These activities are designed not only to improve physical and mental wellbeing and support the prevention and management of long-term health conditions, but also to help women establish routines, reduce social isolation, and increase confidence to engage more fully in family, community and public life.

Sessions are delivered at Sähēli Hub in Balsall Heath and in other local community venues, creating familiar and accessible spaces. Instructors are recruited, supported and trained from within the communities being served, ensuring cultural understanding, building trust, and enabling participants to feel safe discussing health needs and limitations related to long-term conditions.

The impact has been significant. Participation increased, and women reported greater confidence, motivation, and improved ability to manage their health through regular physical activity. Many also described wider benefits, including stronger social networks, improved mental wellbeing, increased independence, and greater readiness to pursue learning, volunteering or employment opportunities. The sessions created opportunities for women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to meet and interact, fostering social bonds, community cohesion, and supporting integration.

Sähēli Hub treats these targeted sessions not as an alternative to universal provision, but as a first step. Some women, once confident in these tailored settings, go on to participate in mixed-gender or wider community activities, training, and even employment – a “stepping stone” approach to inclusion. This demonstrates how adopting a targeted approach can help secure more equitable outcomes for all groups.



## c) Inequalities in funding

### Equitable funding as a cornerstone of racial and social justice

The equitable flow of money within an area is crucial to place-based racial and social justice. This is the foundation on which everyone's needs are met and all communities thrive. Community organisations set up by and delivering services for racialised communities must be empowered with the right resources to do their work effectively. As we set out in our "principled stance", racial justice – and social justice more broadly – cannot be achieved without this.

### The uneven funding landscape: systemic barriers for racialised community organisations

In the current funding landscape, VCSE organisations of all types face challenges securing enough income to cover all their costs and achieve their goals. Nevertheless, it was a very common finding of our research that by-and-for organisations appear to struggle more than most. This is consistent with wider research highlighting inequalities in funding and precarious conditions for VCSE sector organisations led by racialised groups.<sup>18</sup>

By-and-for organisations participating in our research tended to be relatively small, born from grassroots initiatives to address racial inequalities in their local area. They typically described huge challenges securing adequate funding to maintain their services.

This contrasted quite significantly with the picture presented by larger, more well-established community anchor organisations (often not led by people from racialised communities). While these organisations also face challenges, they were more likely to report a good track record of securing funding and owning assets.

By-and-for organisations commonly reported receiving an unfair share of funding, not only compared to large, national VCSE organisations, but also to local community anchor or infrastructure organisations.

Many feel they are not valued by funders, both at the local and national level – with the lion's share of funding instead going to the "usual suspects". It is difficult for by-and-for organisations to compete with larger organisations, often with predominantly white leadership, who have more capacity, better resource, and (in the case of national VCSE organisations) professional fundraisers. Some of the by-and-for organisations we interviewed said that they hadn't received any funding at all from their local authority.

It is very common for larger VCSE organisations "parachuting" into the local area to ask for help from by-and-for organisations in engaging the people they support. This is usually to secure higher participation rates for a funded programme. These requests are often made without fair, or any, remuneration. Many by-and-for organisations feel that there is no genuine, meaningful attempt to work together – instead feeling that the request is a tick-box exercise to meet a diversity quota.



The restrictive nature of many funding opportunities is also a problem, where various stipulations don't fit the needs of their organisation or the community they serve. There is not always a recognition that services might require more time – and hence cost – more where they are serving people from racialised communities facing additional complex problems and barriers. Many also highlighted the lack of core funding as a key concern, threatening their sustainability, and putting them in a constant fight for survival.

It was striking how tired and exasperated these organisations felt about the current funding landscape – particularly public funding. Some reported completely giving up on working with local public sector organisations, seeing them at best unhelpful, and at worst antagonistic. Others recognise as the injustice but explain how they must take the opportunities available out of necessity for the people they support. Some are looking at other options for income generation to reduce their reliance on a system that simply doesn't work for them.

### What drives inequalities in funding

Understanding the root causes of funding disparities is challenging, as motivations are not always transparent and definitive evidence can be hard to obtain. However, our research has helped to illuminate several underlying factors.

There appears to be a widespread, limited understanding of what is required to address racial injustice among funders. Community organisations

consistently described a disconnect between the perspectives of some funders and the lived realities of those supporting racialised communities on the ground. As one interviewee observed, some funders may be unaware of the need to adapt their approach, which becomes apparent when they are “asking the wrong questions,” reflecting a fundamentally different worldview.

It is important to note that many trusts and foundations have pivoted toward racial justice in recent years, with high-profile national examples including [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#), [Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales](#), [Lankelly Chase](#), and [Tudor Trust](#).

However, notwithstanding these prominent examples, the experiences of community organisations participating in this research suggest that many are not yet meaningfully engaged with racial justice. Similarly, while participants highlighted instances of local authorities taking positive steps by setting strategic priorities to address racial injustice, these examples were often overshadowed by the more common experience of receiving little or no support from system partners.

The impact of this disconnect can be seen in concrete cases, such as one community organisation that had long struggled to secure funding for their Asian Women's Centre. After removing the word “Asian” from the name, their application success rate reportedly increased by 70 per cent. They suggested this might reflect “internalised biases,” though this is difficult to determine with certainty. As noted in theme (b), some view targeted services as potentially discriminatory or as encouraging silos and stigma – factors that may have worked against their funding success.

Another example came from a white-led community organisation working with a by-and-for organisation. The latter had experienced multiple funding rejections. On one occasion, the white-led organisation submitted an identical bid to one previously submitted by their partner. While the partner's application had been rejected, the grant provider responded positively to theirs and invited further discussion. The interviewee strongly believes this highlights the potential for bias in funding decisions, reinforcing systemic barriers that limit access for by-and-for organisations.

It was felt that these experiences may result from an absence of relevant lived experience guiding decision-making processes. This reflects the cycles of exclusion discussed in theme (a): if decision-makers do not actively engage with racialised communities, they are ill-equipped to understand their realities and the challenges they face.

Discriminatory perceptions around trust and risk also emerged as a key issue. Leaders of by-and-for organisations widely reported that many funders do not trust them to manage funds or deliver effectively. While these organisations are often small and grassroots, with less experience in certain areas, this perception of higher risk is frequently misplaced.

Such lack of trust is often ill-judged, disrespectful, and at times discriminatory, reinforcing racial inequalities rooted in historic underinvestment. It also allows funders to “remain blameless” or shift responsibility elsewhere, justifying their actions as meritocratic.

In some cases, it seems there is simply an absence of political will to adjust policies and practice to create a more even playing field – as reflected in our case study on [p. 43](#).

It was also worrying to hear widespread concerns from these organisations about the risks of speaking out about these issues. There was a common feeling that standing up for their communities and taking a more critical stance has jeopardised their funding, ultimately punishing the people they serve – a chilling “catch-22” situation familiar to the wider VCSE sector.

### **What funders can do to support by-and-for organisations**

As noted above, a growing number of funders have signalled racial justice as a priority and are being more intentional in both who they fund and how funding is delivered. But while some funders are undertaking important work in this area, the ongoing challenges faced by community organisations supporting racialised communities indicate that progress needs to go further and move more quickly.

The experiences of research participants suggest that many trusts and foundations are not yet engaging meaningfully with racial justice. The research also points to the significant role that system partners could play in strengthening support for community organisations working with racialised communities. While experiences

varied, some organisations expressed strong concerns about the limited support available to them, particularly from their local authorities.

Even where good practice exists, there remains a collective responsibility to reflect on what more can be done and how progress can be deepened and sustained.

The research identified several ways in which funders could strengthen their support for community organisations working with racialised communities, which highlight and build on emerging good practice from funders.

To help community organisations led by-and-for racialised communities overcome funding challenges, funders of all types should develop a deeper understanding of these organisations and apply a racial justice lens to funding processes, removing unnecessary barriers to participation.

This could include establishing lived-experience panels or introducing anti-racist policies to guide assessments and procedures. In addition, organisations expressed the need to advocate safely, for example when raising concerns about unfair funding decisions or local policies, in spaces where they can do so without fear of reprisal.

The research also highlighted how supporting people from racialised communities often requires additional resources, given the sharp inequalities they face, and the complexities of navigating systems not designed with them in mind.

Funders can help prevent these inequalities from being reproduced within partnership or consortium arrangements. For example, they can encourage collaboration across the local VCSE sector, ensuring lead bidders include by-and-for organisations where appropriate, and providing these organisations with sufficient resources to deliver their roles effectively.

A recurring theme from participants was the responsibility of system partners to engage proactively with by-and-for organisations. This involves mapping where organisations are based, understanding the communities they serve, and recognising the challenges they face, followed by tailored offers of support. Examples include investing in capacity-building initiatives to address historic underinvestment or providing long-term grant funding to help organisations sustainably reach and support specific racialised communities.

System partners can also support community ownership and sustainability for by-and-for organisations, helping them build the independence and stability to thrive without over-reliance on inequitable funding arrangements – reflecting the strength and resilience seen in many well-established community anchor organisations.

This can involve embedding racial justice into asset transfer policies, e.g., offering equity-focussed funding and capacity-building support for community asset management, or providing measures such as peppercorn rents, long-term leases, or reduced business rates.

## Case study

# Navigating funding inequalities in a marginalised community

One of the organisations participating in our research reported that their ability to serve their communities has been severely constrained by a lack of funding and support from key partners, particularly the local council.

Founded to support South Asian migrants, this small community organisation has long helped clients navigate the complex landscape of public services and understand their rights.

Originally a grassroots network, it developed expertise in welfare and immigration advice, becoming a trusted source of support for disadvantaged communities. Today, it continues to serve a diverse neighbourhood with a majority Asian population, one of the most deprived wards in the town, facing complex disadvantages such as health inequalities, poverty, and limited access to quality public services.

Despite its critical role, the organisation has repeatedly struggled with a lack of funding and support. Operating with only one paid staff member, it faces the constant challenge of trying to meet community needs on a shoestring budget.

At times, the organisation had sufficient funding to expand its services, allowing them to support a wider range of residents, including an increasing number of Eastern European families. However, when those funding streams ended, staff and capacity were lost, leaving the organisation unable to fully deliver its services.

While the organisation has received support from the [National Lottery Community Fund](#), which has been helpful, there remains a long-term absence of core funding, preventing sustainable planning and expansion.

The organisation's attempts to advocate for resources have often been met with frustration. Despite demonstrating high levels of need, including stark local health inequalities, council

engagement has been limited, reflecting a broader lack of political will to understand and respond to the realities of racialised communities.

On rare occasions when the organisation successfully secured additional funding for their community, they faced active opposition from some within the council, illustrating the systemic barriers they must overcome.

They highlight a culture of gatekeeping with links based on preferred partners rather than merit. Funding allocated to local groups often bypasses this organisation in favour of established providers who lack deep engagement with their community, leaving the neighbourhood under-resourced.

Through persistent advocacy and campaigning, the organisation is beginning to gain traction with local partners. An NHS advisory group has been established to address racial inequalities, and the ward has been designated a priority area with increased engagement from local partners.

Despite these developments, the organisation's small team continues to face burnout and emotional exhaustion, constantly going the extra mile to support residents without sufficient resources to expand their workforce.

Their experience highlights both the human cost of funding inequalities and the critical need for long-term, core funding and genuine engagement from public sector partners to deliver meaningful change in marginalised communities.

## d) Allyship among community organisations

### Organisations with predominantly white leadership can make a real difference

A core aim of this project is to encourage more community organisations with predominantly white leadership (white-led) to step up as active allies in the pursuit of racial justice.

There is much that all types and sizes of white-led organisations can do to support racial justice locally. And there is a particular role for those larger, multipurpose community anchor organisations who tend to be white-led. They are likely to have greater reach and influence in local systems and, when representative and inclusive, serve a crucial role as the local social infrastructure that brings groups together.

On local influence, these organisations are well placed to build meaningful partnerships with by-and-for organisations and to negotiate with the public sector to help secure fair funding for their subcontracted work. This helps to address the systemic inequities in funding explored earlier.

Similarly, local VCSE infrastructure organisations can use their convening power to foster collaboration across racial divides and identify where support for racialised communities is lacking. They are well-placed to encourage a local sector-wide effort to work collectively in pursuing racial justice

On representation and inclusivity, we know that there is an under-representation of leaders from racialised communities in the VCSE sector.<sup>19</sup> While the leadership of place-based community anchor organisations is likely to reflect the historical demographics of the area, it's important to ensure it remains reflective of newer members of the community.

Regardless of an organisation's size or influence, white-led organisations' engagement in racial justice work is invaluable. Each can make a meaningful contribution – even in predominantly white areas – and they are uniquely positioned to influence and inspire their peers, helping to build momentum and strengthen the broader movement for change.

Ultimately, solidarity across the community sector is essential. By-and-for organisations should not be left to tackle racial injustice alone – and many have told us how much harder it is to confront systemic inequities without active support from their wider community partners.

A key aim of the research was, therefore, to explore not only what can be done to advance racial justice, but also how white-led organisations are responding, what motivates them to act, and what barriers prevent them from going further.

## Positive action being taken – but not going far enough

Community organisations – regardless of who leads them – are guided by social justice; it is central to their ethos. Our research highlights several good examples of white-led organisations responding to the needs of racialised and refugee communities.

These include creating specialist services or making extra efforts to engage underserved groups, driven by a natural desire to respond where need arises. Examples range from support groups for Eritrean refugee mothers and singing groups for Ukrainian refugees, to shared activities that bring diverse groups together. We also saw these organisations working with by-and-for organisations to help them gain representation and connect with wider local networks.

However, the sector's efforts are not yet going far enough. Some organisations are not engaged with racial justice at all, while others deliver one-off services without a wider, sustained organisational commitment. Many could deepen their impact by making racial justice an explicit part of their broader social justice mission – applying a racial justice lens to their work, identifying community needs, and actively challenging systemic inequity.

Encouragingly, some organisations are beginning to recognise this and are on a journey to strengthen their anti-racist “muscle” – see the case study on [p. 48](#).

## What is stopping further action

Our research explored motivations and attitudes to get a better understanding of what stops more organisations taking further action. Again, while these may be familiar to all types and sizes of white-led organisations, we found them to be particularly relevant to community anchor organisations.

### Universalism limiting true inclusion

Many larger community anchor organisations emphasise a strong commitment to diversity and universalism, often expressed as “our doors are open to everyone.” While well-intentioned, this universalist approach can inadvertently limit true inclusion and needs to be scrutinised if promoted as an anti-racist approach. Without a race-conscious lens, organisations may miss opportunities to diversify their client base by identifying engagement gaps or addressing cultural barriers that prevent some groups from participating.

This is also reflected in the preference for broadly inclusive activities over targeted services for racialised communities. Organisations often aim to avoid stigma, segregation, or increased prejudice, while fostering community cohesion. These concerns are understandable, but as we explored earlier, targeted services are also important. They help engage underrepresented groups and can serve as important stepping stones toward broader integration and participation in the wider community.

### Awareness gaps

Many lack awareness of the challenges faced by racialised communities, often due to limited engagement with them – a dynamic that can perpetuate exclusion. One organisation captured this well, reflecting that their clientele was less diverse than it could be and acknowledging, “we don’t know what we don’t know” – highlighting gaps in understanding their local community.

We spoke with another organisation who admitted that racial justice is not a current priority for their trustee Board, as they operate in a predominantly white area and it may not feel relevant. However, they may not realise that living in such areas can be isolating for racialised communities. Proactively reaching out and showing interest can significantly support people who are facing greater challenges around belonging, discrimination, and feeling welcome.<sup>20</sup>

Racism at systemic and structural levels – such as the funding inequalities highlighted earlier – is often less visible, leaving many under-informed. While people may be committed to being anti-racist in interpersonal interactions, they can remain unaware of broader societal inequalities. Without regular engagement with racialised community members, the challenges they experience often go unrecognised.

### Fear of “getting it wrong”

Some community organisations are hesitant to engage in racial justice work, citing fear of “getting it wrong,” feeling judged, or lacking space to make mistakes – often influenced by a politically charged climate.

Support is needed to help organisations move beyond these concerns, which can prevent them from taking necessary action to tackle inequality in their areas.

Constructive challenge need not provoke defensiveness; organisations can start with embracing allyship and exploring how to act meaningfully in the context of their work. Mistakes are part of the process – racial justice is complex, but honest intentions and a learning mindset are crucial for making progress.

### Limited headspace and resource constraints

Participants also reported that day-to-day pressures leave little time or mental space to engage with racial justice issues. Participation in this research was described as a welcome opportunity to pause, reflect, and consider these challenges more deliberately.

Many organisations are stretched thin, prioritising immediate service delivery and the constant struggle to secure short-term funding, which can make addressing systemic inequities feel secondary.

Several organisations expressed a strong desire to do more but highlighted limited resources and a difficult funding landscape as presenting significant barriers. In particular, there is little support for staff and organisational development, or long-term asset-based community development – activities that could provide the foundation for meaningful racial justice work.

Without additional capacity and funding, organisations struggle to develop new approaches, extend outreach, or embed equity in their day-to-day operations, despite the recognition of its importance.

### **Competitive funding**

The competitive nature of funding often disadvantages racialised communities. Larger organisations face incentives to retain funds rather than support smaller, grassroots led by-and-for organisations – even when doing so would better serve these communities. Competition can undermine sector solidarity, leaving limited funds stretched thin and creating pressure to bid for resources regardless of adequacy.

This environment can result in performative or tick-box approaches to racial justice, where organisations prioritise securing funding and meeting targets over challenging systemic inequities or delivering meaningful impact. By-and-for organisations noted that performative work often takes priority over genuine engagement with racialised communities.

## Case study

# Embedding racial justice in a community anchor organisation

**Back on the Map is a large community anchor organisation with a mission to regenerate its local area, empower residents, and strengthen social cohesion through improvements to housing, commercial property, and community infrastructure.**

Operating in a predominantly white area – where 84 per cent of residents identify as white – they have long been mindful of the need to promote diversity, inclusion, and racial justice.

To proactively challenge prejudice and segregation, particularly toward migrants, Back on the Map runs initiatives such as catered welcome events for refugees, which introduce new arrivals to the wider community and help build early connections.

These efforts became especially important in the wake of the 2024 city riots. The organisation also works closely with by-and-for organisations and networks, contributing to wider work on diversity and inclusion across the voluntary and community sector.

Despite these initiatives, the organisation recognises there is more to do to advance racial justice. Staff are aware that people from racialised communities may feel intimidated entering community spaces dominated by white faces and are therefore exploring more tailored approaches to engagement.

While robust equality, diversity, and inclusion policies and procedures are in place, the organisation is reflecting on whether these go far enough in practice. It is learning from other organisations about how to apply a racial justice lens to strategic decisions – such as the siting and design of new youth justice facilities – to reduce cultural barriers and improve accessibility.

The organisation is also working to address systemic inequities. For example, some refugees and asylum seekers who attend welcome events wish to volunteer but lack the documentation required to complete DBS checks. Staff have raised this issue with statutory partners in an effort to influence policy and practice.

While this has not yet resulted in statutory reform, pragmatic workarounds – such as enabling individuals to shadow DBS-checked volunteers – allow them to participate safely and meaningfully.

This case study demonstrates the organisation's proactive and reflective approach to racial justice. It combines direct community engagement with efforts to influence systemic change, while recognising that this is an ongoing journey and committing to continuous learning and improvement.





## e) Connection, understanding, and belonging in communities

### Threats to cohesion

Community cohesion is essential for thriving, multicultural societies that are safe, inclusive, and prosperous for all. But a sole, disproportionate, or superficial emphasis on cohesion initiatives will not solve the symptoms of structural racism like those we have explored above.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the term “cohesion” itself is sometimes contested (see “Our use of language” on [p. 10](#) for further discussion).

As set out in our “principled stance”, we believe that cohesion based in justice relies on removing the barriers that prevent people from fully participating in civic life and accessing its opportunities. Addressing racial inequalities is central to this goal, providing a stronger, more durable foundation for individuals to feel that they belong so that they can thrive, connect, and contribute to resilient communities.

However, this vision of a flourishing society is challenged both by persistent racial inequalities and by segregation and rising community tensions.

In some of the places included in our research, community organisations described an increasingly hostile climate toward racialised communities, including reports of rising hate crime.

These tensions were often fuelled by negative media coverage and misinformation on social media, particularly concerning asylum seekers and refugees, with access to housing and public services acting as key flashpoints.

In some cases, the sudden arrival of new groups without prior engagement or effective communication with existing residents also heightened local tensions. Such dynamics have left many people feeling isolated, vulnerable, and excluded – eroding trust, deepening divides, and weakening social cohesion.

Some reports noted segregation in certain areas, with communities “keeping themselves to themselves” and leading parallel lives. Yet, recent research suggests that segregation is not necessarily increasing across the country.<sup>22</sup>

While a more cohesive future requires us to address the inequalities entrenched in our society, we must also find ways to build bridges between different groups. We must create opportunities to bring people together, challenge misunderstandings, and rebuild meaningful connections across communities.

## Bridge building

Community organisations are uniquely placed to build bridges – they are trusted, connected, and embedded within their communities.

In early 2020, we published research which showed how community organisations act as “cogs of connection”, connecting all parts of their community.<sup>23</sup> This role was put to the test by COVID-19, and our report “[We Were Built For This](#)” highlighted how community organisations led the local response, connecting up street-level activity.<sup>24</sup> We recently launched our [Connectors-UK programme](#) to build on and amplify the sector’s vital work bringing people together from different walks of life.<sup>25</sup>

Many organisations – particularly larger community anchor organisations operating in diverse areas – see bridge-building as central to their mission. Their aim is to strengthen networks, create spaces where people can come together, and broaden understanding of the perspectives present in society.

Our research highlighted numerous examples of this in practice. Community organisations brought people from different backgrounds together around shared activities such as breakfast clubs, gardening,

music, and residents’ groups to discuss and act on local issues. They also organised celebrations of important dates, such as International Women’s Day.

These organisations often work deliberately to make their activities inclusive. For instance, a local youth music charity in a predominantly white area – committed to fostering connections – is diversifying its programme by encouraging facilitators to explore a wide range of musical genres, with the aim of engaging young people from racialised groups.

Similarly, another organisation promotes inclusivity by celebrating cultural events such as Eid, hosting open community gatherings that welcome everyone and share culture rather than emphasising divisions.

These activities – which unite people through shared interests and common goals and recognising strength in diversity – align closely with established expert guidance.<sup>26</sup> We have provided a case study on [p. 55](#) to showcase more good practice.

Given the current climate of increased and more visible racist and xenophobic action within communities, however, we must also recognise the safeguarding needs for any organisation running cultural events and community gatherings.

“This work requires ongoing recognition, care, and support”



## Countering prejudice and division

Community organisations are responding to rising prejudice and division in a variety of ways. The case study on [p. 48](#) showcases the example of Back on the Map running catered welcome events for refugees in an area affected by the 2024 riots. This provided a space to bring people together, challenge negative misinformation about refugees who have arrived in the area, and foster shared understanding. Having gathered insights on community tensions even before the riots, the organisation's deep local connections allow it to act nimbly, collaborating with partners to respond effectively.

Other organisations are taking a more direct approach, working to shift local narratives about racialised communities. They challenge racism, stereotypes, and exclusion by highlighting both the contributions these communities make to society and the hardships they face – including discrimination, poor working conditions, and socioeconomic

inequalities. Some focus on sharing personal stories that counter negative media portrayals and explain the real reasons people come to the UK.

Others take a quieter approach, initiating local conversations to gradually change perceptions and planting seeds to challenge misinformation on social media.

Many are actively confronting stereotypes and prejudice within their own communities, demonstrating what's possible at the local level. Being deeply rooted in the community gives them credibility and trust. While some try to counter discrimination online, they find person-to-person engagement far more effective.

One organisation described how it actively works to diffuse tensions in this way, trusted by local people who look to them for honest information. Another shared how they successfully persuaded several individuals not to join the 2024 riots through direct, personal dialogue.

## Targeted support

It's also important to again highlight the vital role that targeted services play as stepping stones into wider community life. For example, many community organisations run resettlement and integration programmes for migrants new to the area, offering tailored advice and support on learning English, understanding civic life and participation, and finding employment.

## The need to go further

While there is much excellent work already underway, the scale of the challenge means the sector must go further. Organisations that prioritise bridge-building need to ensure they are doing so as fully and effectively as possible. This includes being intentional in engaging groups who are less visible or connected, or those who experience discrimination and prejudice, and examining where cultural or structural barriers may be limiting participation.

At the same time, organisations should remain alert to where new or deepening societal divisions are emerging and take an active role in bringing people back together. This reinforces our broader argument about the need to apply a racial justice lens to all aspects of this work.

White-led organisations have an important role to play, as by-and-for organisations cannot address these challenges alone – linking back to theme (d). Many organisations serve as community anchors with the reach and infrastructure to bring large numbers of people together, but some are not yet fully engaging racialised communities.

## Working through challenges

It is important to recognise that this work is not always straightforward. Creating spaces that are both visibly and genuinely inclusive, while actively challenging prejudice, is essential but often complex, sensitive, and at times divisive. It requires ongoing recognition, care, and support.

One organisation in our research described how some local residents felt their community organisation should be led by a white leader, and how the current CEO – who is from a racialised background – is frequently asked at meetings which racialised community she represents. This example illustrates how underlying community tensions can easily be projected onto the work of community organisations themselves.

Such challenges are likely to intensify if society becomes more fragmented and community tensions continue to

rise. To respond effectively, organisations will need clear guidance and sustained support – particularly from those with experience and expertise in this area.

The current funding landscape also presents significant challenges for this work. As we have argued elsewhere, funding is too often directed toward short-term service delivery rather than the patient, long-term process of community-building.<sup>27</sup> Yet effective bridge-building takes time, responsiveness, and deep engagement: listening carefully to residents, showing genuine interest in their lives, working through difficulties together, and collaborating with – rather than working for – communities.

For organisations without substantial earned income to buffer against these structural constraints, an important starting point may be to identify funders who are explicitly aligned with racial justice and equity goals. Such partnerships can provide both the financial support and the shared values needed to take meaningful first steps toward sustainable, inclusive community development.

These points also highlight the crucial role of political leadership in addressing these challenges – both by countering the prevailing climate of hostility with more positive and unifying narratives, and by providing the sustained investment needed to support the long-term work of rebuilding community connections.

## Case study

# Building bridges in a diverse community

Several organisations in our research demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering community cohesion.

One large, well-resourced community anchor organisation, located in a diverse area, exemplifies this commitment. With a clear mission to build a vibrant, multicultural community, cohesion is a frequent topic of discussion at Board level, and it informs their day-to-day work.

The organisation operates in a complex environment and the local community, which primarily comprises residents of Pakistani and Muslim heritage, experiences ongoing racism both directly and via local online forums. Recently, racist discourse has become noticeably louder and overt.

Despite these challenges, there is significant mixing and inclusivity within community settings in the area. However, divisive media narratives and social media posts have led residents to question their previous strong sense of belonging in the wider area, leaving some feeling “othered” or fearful.

In response, the organisation takes deliberate steps to bring people together, emphasising shared experiences and commonalities without imposing an agenda. Activities are designed to foster exposure and understanding in subtle, meaningful ways.

For example, they run arts and crafts sessions which are aimed at providing new social connections for isolated adults and which are not aimed at any particular demographic group. Community events, such as those based at the organisation’s community garden, have been particularly successful in engaging residents from across social “divides” and creating informal, social spaces to meet people from all sections of the local community.

A key strength of the organisation is its diverse staff team. An inclusive recruitment policy ensures

the workforce reflects the communities they serve, enabling the organisation to model multiculturalism in practice.

Staff diversity also enhances responsiveness to different cultural needs. The organisation actively supports this through structured cultural induction: when a new team member joins from a different cultural background, they give presentations to the team explaining cultural practices, festivals, and traditions, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

The organisation is also taking proactive steps to create inclusive spaces within the community. They are investing in local buildings to ensure they can be used for a range of purposes that serve all residents. Their inclusivity programs, including ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes, support new arrivals in learning English, connecting them to the area and to other groups in the community.

Partnerships are another cornerstone of their approach. By collaborating with a wide variety of local organisations, they are able to reach and engage the diverse communities in their area, extending the impact of their bridge-building work.

This case demonstrates that even in areas facing societal divisions and tensions, community organisations can play a vital role in bridging differences, fostering understanding, and creating inclusive spaces where everyone feels they belong.





# 4. Our actions

Clearly, the findings of the research present significant challenges to overcome in the pursuit of place-based, community-led racial justice.



But in working with our members, we have been struck by two things in particular. First, a clear commitment and determination to tackle these challenges head on. Second, a recognition that Locality can play a significant support role in this collective endeavour.

So here we set out what that looks like in practice and what we can do to embed racial justice at the centre of our network's mission to create a fair society where every community thrives.

We have said this report is a "line in the sand". So what does the other side of that line look like? How will we move our "principled stance" from words on a page to credible actions that are commensurate with the scale of our ambition?

## Towards a typology of community organisations

Throughout this research we have considered whether it is useful to establish a "typology" of community organisations and racial justice. This recognises that there is a spectrum of practice, and organisations are at different starting points on their racial justice journey.

As such, it is not helpful for us to think about any practical support Locality might provide as a "one size fits all" approach. Action needs to be tailored to the varying needs of community organisations and the nuances of their neighbourhoods.

For example, an organisation working in a post-industrial, predominantly white working-class community with a white leadership team is likely to require very different support to a by-and-for organisation which has racial justice as its founding mission.

We have not sought to formalise a detailed and definitive typology. Neatly categorising community organisations is neither possible nor desirable, and any boundaries are likely to be very blurry.

However, we have found the concept of a broad and loose typology helpful in shaping our approach to Creating Places for Everyone. This has helped ensure we include the full breadth of the Locality membership in our research activities, as well as shaping our support offer so it is relevant to members working in different contexts.

Overall, we can see three broad organisational “types” across the Locality membership:

**1. “Community organisations led by and for racialised groups”**

These are community organisations that are set up with the goal of supporting a particular racialised community within a place. Their work will often have developed beyond this foundational purpose, but they can be described as being led by and working in a place-based way for that specific community.

**2. “Multipurpose community organisations working in diverse neighbourhoods”**

These are generalist community organisations that are set up for and focused on supporting place-based communities, which are working in neighbourhoods that are ethnically diverse or home to a predominantly racialised population.

**3. “Multipurpose community organisations working in predominantly white British neighbourhoods”**

These are generalist community organisations that are set up for and focused on supporting place-based communities, which are working in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of white British residents.

# Our support offer

Using this broad typology, we have developed an organisation-wide response to what we learnt across the Creating Places for Everyone project. It aims to address the challenges presented in each of the themes from our research by harnessing the breadth of what we do – from strategic leadership and policy influencing, to practical support and programmes – in support of racial justice.

It tries to think precisely about optimising our impact – what our specific role is in supporting our different types of members, and where we can make best use of our resources to do so.

## Locality membership charter

It starts with our new Locality membership charter. To join Locality, we ask members to agree to a set of values and commit to our vision of “a fair society where every community thrives”. In line with our “principled stance” set out in this report, we have revised this statement and developed a new charter. This makes clear that an explicit and foundational principle of our network is that you can’t have social justice without racial justice.

The full charter is available on [Locality’s website](#). This is something that all new members will be required to endorse, and something that across 2026 we will ask existing members to sign. We are committing to at least 75 per cent of our paid members having done this by the end of 2026.

## Our core support principles

Creating Places for Everyone has provided us with a rich body of learning on which to base our support offer. On [p. 65](#), we set out the detail of this in a matrix: how Locality will take anti-racist action by supporting the breadth of our membership – across the three categories – in different ways.

There are three critical principles that sit across this matrix that we want to foreground in our approach to support:

### 1. The importance of strategic headspace to enable a culture of anti-racism

Previous Locality research has highlighted the importance of strategic headspace to enable community organisations to think beyond day-to-day delivery and make longer-term shifts.

We first recognised this in our research into the impact of the pandemic on community organisations’ business models. “[Navigating the Storm](#)” found that the support provided by government and funders in response to Covid-19 – from furlough to unrestricted core funding – had provided organisations with the “capacity to innovate”.<sup>28</sup> It enabled many Locality members to pivot their activities, diversify their business models, and repurpose services in a moment of great disruption and change.

The need for this kind of capacity has only increased in the intervening years, with community organisations operating in conditions of “permacrisis”. Our Connectors-UK programme has highlighted how organisations are spending more and more time firefighting, providing crisis support and picking up the pieces of public sector failure. This makes it harder than ever to think long-term and develop new approaches.

Central to our support offer is therefore to provide members with this strategic headspace: the capacity to innovate and become leaders in anti-racism. We heard from participants in Creating Places for Everyone – particularly our deep-dive case study organisations – that being resourced to be part of the project had been invaluable.

They were provided with a structure and space to think deeply about their own organisational stance and practice when it comes to racial justice; to be considered and intentional. They had access to peers working in similar contexts and with different experiences, to bounce ideas off and share

challenges. They also had the opportunity to engage their wider staff teams in conversation about how anti-racism might or might not sit within different teams and deliberate together as colleagues.

It is incredibly difficult to find this kind of strategic headspace in the crisis conditions community organisations operate in. So a foundational principle of our support is to do what we can to provide it.

## **2. Using racial justice as a lens through which we see community development work**

It has been striking that when we discuss anti-racism with community organisations, we are not talking about introducing a new set of services or approaches. The broad range of activities is the same – what needs to change is the stance we take when designing and delivering them.

For example, many if not most Locality members run a community building. This will be central to their work and purpose – where they bring people together, provide services, and often how they earn income.

But clearly this building can be something that includes – where all parts of the community feel welcome and like it is a place for them – or excludes, with certain community members feeling sidelined or othered.

For example, one participant working in a long-established community centre in a white working-class area reflected how their neighbourhood’s demographics had changed, and they knew they weren’t reaching all parts of the community. And, as described above, another stressed the importance of organisations understanding how intimidating it can be as a person from a racialised community to come into a community centre which is full of white faces.

A foundational insight for our support is therefore that we need to mainstream racial justice deep within existing community development, not develop new strands of work or services. This means using racial justice as a “lens” through which we see the core activities of community organisations – from governance and managing buildings, to providing services and engaging communities.

## Case study

# Community organisation's "JEDI" Framework: embedding racial justice in everyday practice

**The Winch is a local youth charity and community anchor organisation in north Camden. It has developed a Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) framework that offers a powerful model for community organisations seeking to take a more intentional and systemic approach to racial justice.**

Building on the familiar DEI model, JEDI places "justice" at its centre. This requires the organisation to confront the harmful effects of structural inequities and racism, and to recognise how people's life chances are shaped by overlapping forms of marginalisation based on race, gender, ability, sexuality or religion. This commitment is woven into their mission to ensure that every child and young person has a genuine chance to succeed.

One key example of applying the JEDI approach is a mentoring programme run in partnership with local schools, aimed at reducing rates of exclusion among at-risk children.

The Winch used the JEDI lens to evaluate whether the programme was generating system-level impact – for example, influencing workforce development and school practices to give these students a greater chance of remaining in education. This assessment led to the implementation of staff training to help teachers avoid stereotypical assumptions about racialised young people experiencing distress and to engage with them more effectively, thereby making the system more just and responsive.

The Winch also applies the JEDI framework to a range of other operational decisions and service design processes. For example, it guided the redesign of

a service for care-experienced young people from racialised communities, integrating a focus on cultural awareness and identity.

Similarly, the framework informed an organisational decision not to move to a new building. Applying the framework found that, despite its practical flaws, the existing building was the place their community called home. It was central to the trust and relationships that had been built up with the racialised and marginalised young people the organisation supports. The new building, despite its practical benefits, risked jeopardising this.

Applying a racial justice lens in this way can also involve navigating difficult decisions. Discussions during our peer-mentoring session highlighted the real trade-offs involved – for example, choosing to avoid or decline funding from organisations whose values conflict with anti-racist commitments – and emphasised strategic approaches to managing risk.

The JEDI framework demonstrates how a structured and practical racial justice lens can help community organisations scrutinise their own operations, challenge systemic inequities, and strengthen service design. It shows that pursuing racial justice is not a peripheral aim, but an ongoing discipline that shapes culture, decisions, and the wider pursuit of system change.



### **3. We need to do different things to support different members in different ways**

At Locality, our strategic framework sets out how we aim to support our members across four different areas:

**1. Direct support and advice** – we have a regional staff team providing “boots on the ground”, offering practical support for community organisations at all stages of their journey. We engage communities, support community development and community organising, build local collaboration, and inspire and support new organisations.

**2. Membership network for connection** – we enable community organisations to learn from their peers around the country and adapt to emerging challenges in real time.

**3. Tools and resources** – we provide easily accessible help for early-stage groups, as well as advice for established organisations to develop, thrive, and build resilience.

**4. Influencing and campaigns** – working with members to shape “upstream” conditions, so they are working in a more supportive external environment and spending less time responding to system failure.

Our aim is to use these functions to do all we can in our power to address the challenges to place-based, community-led racial justice and outlined in our research themes. However, across the typology of community organisations we have defined, we recognise that different parts of this offer will be more relevant to different members in different ways, and the role we play will vary.

For example, we know that the by-and-for organisations in our membership are not looking to us for expertise in anti-racism. Quite the reverse: Creating Places for Everyone has benefited hugely from their experience, via our Steering Group in particular. However, it is clear there is a significant support role we can play through our influencing role, harnessing our national platform and relationships with policymakers and, in particular, with funders, to proactively shape policy and dismantle systems of exclusion. We can also provide targeted support for areas of historic exclusion, like community ownership or public sector contracting.

For multipurpose organisations working in neighbourhoods that are ethnically diverse or home to a predominantly racialised population, there may be particular opportunities for peer learning. We know we have some members in this category who are at the leading edge of anti-racist practice

(see the case study on [p. 62](#)). As well as Locality providing direct support, a key opportunity is for members to connect with and learn from peers who have developed their own approaches.

We see a significant opportunity in Locality providing direct support for multipurpose community organisations in predominantly white areas. These are organisations who, due to their community and context, are likely to have done the least thinking about anti-racism.

However, they are also the organisations who are increasingly at the forefront of the most toxic debates and challenges around community cohesion. We therefore see ourselves as having a particular role and responsibility to provide our members working in these places with the right support – and that we are perhaps uniquely placed to do it.

Crucial to tailoring our support offer will be strengthening our data collection. In order to continue to diversify our membership and ensure the right support to the right organisations, we need as detailed as possible understanding of who our members are, the communities they work in, and the demographics of their leadership teams.

## Summary of our matrix of support

We recognise that, as a national infrastructure organisation, we are in a position of relative power and privilege. We have resources we can deploy in support of the goals we have defined in Creating Places for Everyone. However, those resources are finite and some of what we want to do sits outside of our capacity within our existing programmes and budgets.

This matrix sets out the summary headlines of our support offer – further details are provided in the section that follows. These are broad areas of support – and in line with this not being a fixed and finite typology, there will be overlapping support needs for organisations across the areas. Throughout, we will bring groups together to share experiences and learn from each other. However, our aim here is to give clarity about what the main planks of our support offer will look like.

In particular, the matrix sets out:

Things we can and will do using our own existing resources

Things we are committed to raising external funding to enable us to provide

Typology of community organisations	Locality member support area			
	Direct support and advice	Membership network for connection	Tools and resources	Influencing and campaigns
Community organisations led by and for racialised groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working in collaboration and resourcing as expert partners on Locality’s membership-wide anti-racism support programmes</li> <li>Targeted practical support for operational areas of historic exclusion: e.g. community assets, commissioning, access to grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing access to peer support from fellow leaders from racialised communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted resources for operational areas of historic exclusion: e.g. community assets, commissioning, access to grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using our national platform and relationships with policymakers and funders to dismantle systems of exclusion, in particular, creating more equitable funding systems</li> <li>Providing a platform and raising profile with decision makers</li> <li>Showcasing impact and value through policy work and a dedicated communications campaign</li> </ul>
Multipurpose community organisations working in diverse neighbourhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted programme of support to embed anti-racism in operations, from governance to services to partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing access to peer learning from leading community anchors developing anti-racist practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Webinars and toolkits on how to embed anti-racism in operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Showcasing good anti-racist practice and the importance of inclusive community anchors in policy work, via a communications campaign</li> </ul>
Multipurpose community organisations working in predominately white British neighbourhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted programme of support to build inclusion and bridge divides, building capacity and capability to work across racial and cultural lines and embed inclusion in increasingly hostile conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing access to peer learning to share challenges and build collective strength</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Webinars and toolkits on bridge building, community cohesion and anti-racism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Producing a policy evidence report on community organisations’ bridge-building role to inform policy debates and ensure community organisations are central to any government cohesion strategy</li> </ul>

## Our programme of support in more detail

The matrix above demonstrates how we plan to deploy the full range of Locality's support offer in a tailored way across our three-part typology of community organisations. Here we pull out and provide more detail about our key commitments, including how we plan to resource them and how they respond to our research insights.

### The Creating Places for Everyone Programme

This new programme will bring together our direct support offer for members. We will seek to work with funders and partners to resource a major Locality programme support programme.

The programme will be co-designed and co-delivered with by-and-for organisations within the Locality membership.

The programme will have three strands, providing tailored support across our typology:

- Providing **by-and-for organisations** with targeted practical support for operational areas these organisations have been historically excluded from, e.g., grant funding support, commissioning and

contract readiness, community asset ownership, community enterprise, leadership and governance, navigating statutory systems, building statutory partner relationships, impact measurement, marketing and communications.

This responds to the research insight that our role here is not to be experts in anti-racism – we want to work with the by-and-for organisations in our membership as expert partners in our wider support programme. However, there is a clear role we can play in targeting support in the areas of community development where we are expert towards the areas where our research has highlighted persistent inequalities. We will co-design with our by-and-for members exactly what this support should look like to ensure it is as effective as possible. This will also be foundational to diversifying our membership and increasing the number of by-and-for organisations in the Locality network by ensuring we have a clear and practical support offer.

- Providing **organisations working in diverse neighbourhoods** with targeted practical support to understand how to adopt anti-racist practice in their operations, e.g., organisational structure, diversity of leadership and governance, activities, service delivery, allyship, community engagement, development and leadership, local partnerships, asset use, external positioning, etc.

This responds to the research insight that it is important to use anti-racism as a lens to view all aspects of a community organisation's operations. Alongside the peer-learning group set out below, we will provide Locality members with a mix of small grants and support days to facilitate the "strategic headspace" necessary for organisations to review their services, structures and behaviours, and create action plans.

- Providing **organisations working in places with a predominantly white population** with community cohesion and bridge-building support, understanding how inclusion and anti-racism can be embedded in increasingly hostile conditions. Where necessary, this work will support these organisations to build their capacity, capability, and confidence to work across racial and cultural lines, including by developing local partnerships, offering "targeted universalist" services to racialised groups locally, and building and maintaining cohesion between local groups.

This responds to the research insight that "bridge building" is of growing importance, and that some Locality members find themselves in the middle of increasingly toxic debates. We will harness our position as a trusted expert voice with these organisations to provide tailored, one-to-one support, responding flexibly to each community's unique circumstances and supporting them to maximise the unique role these organisations can play in their neighbourhoods at this critical time.

We will seek funding to enable our regional staff team to offer this flexible support direct to community organisations across these three strands.

Alongside this, we will harness our existing member support package. This will include three specialist peer networking groups:

- **Leaders of Colour Group** – we established this group in response to “No More Blank Pages”, to provide a networking space for Locality members from racialised communities for peer learning, personal development and capacity building. Learning from the Creating Places for Everyone Steering Group, we have recently trialled running this as a more formal peer mentoring programme that uses action learning sets to facilitate meaningful growth. We will continue to resource this group and adapt it to evolving needs. This will ensure leaders of by-and-for organisations have a safe and supportive space, rooted in empathy, trust and empowerment, which can help equip them with tools and strategies to address leadership challenges.
- **Embedding Anti-Racism Group** – we will support a new peer learning group, targeted at supporting multipurpose community organisations to develop their anti-racist “lens”. This will be an opportunity to share good practice, such as the “JEDI” approach and discuss shared challenges. It will focus on understanding specific experiences of making the shift from a generalist position of social justice to a proactive anti-racist stance, and what it looks like to use anti-racism as a lens to shape community organisations’ activities.

- **Building Bridges Group** – we will support a new peer learning group, targeted at multipurpose community organisations who are working in majority white British neighbourhoods and who are at the sharp end of some of the most toxic debates our country is experiencing. This will be a safe space to learn and unlearn, building strength and solidarity to grow inclusion and tackle racism in places which are increasingly being defined by division. It will also help to create allyship with wider racial justice movements.

### Creating Places for Everyone Campaign

Alongside our practical support programme, we will also build a dedicated campaign to sit above our work on the ground. This will aim to engage more communities and build allyship, as well as creating a more supportive external environment.

The key planks of this will be:

- **A high-level funder roundtable**, where we will bring together major trusts and foundations, to share the findings of our Creating Places for Everyone research. This will involve Locality members involved in the research telling their stories direct to funders, highlighting systems of exclusion. We would seek to work with participants to co-create and publish an action plan for how to address the barriers we set out in this research.
- **An anti-racist review of our policy influencing strategy**, applying the “anti-racist” lens to it

in the same way we recommend community organisations do to their operations. We have already embedded equity goals into our advocacy work as part of our DEI action plan. This will go further to build in the learning from Creating Places for Everyone, reviewing our key organisational policy asks and how we provide a platform for by-and-for organisations, as well as operationalising a complementary Board-level commitment Locality made in January 2026 to prioritise community connection-building as part of a strategic refresh. We will report and make recommendations back to the Locality Board on this in summer 2026.

- **A communications campaign** to engage our whole network, focused around our new membership charter. The campaign will publicly champion the role and contribution of place-based community organisations, sharing voices from the research and good practice. In particular, we'll seek to tell the stories of the often overlooked

by-and-for organisations and the huge value they bring, along with the role of multipurpose community organisations in creating cohesion.

- **A policy evidence report** on the bridge-building role played by community organisations. This reflects the increasingly urgent nature of the issue and its growing political salience. Our research tells us Locality members are vital, but their role is underappreciated by policymakers. We will therefore work with Locality members to develop a compelling evidence base that can strengthen policy commitment to resourcing community organisations' role in any government cohesion strategy, programmes or policy development.
- **A data review**, with a full Locality member survey to deepen our understanding of our membership demographics. This will help inform our tailored support programme set out above, as well as providing a comprehensive baseline for diversifying our overall membership.



# **Addendum:** Learnings from our experience of conducting the research

# As well as the findings of the research activities themselves, we have captured our own learnings during the process of conducting the research.

While our journey in anti-racism continues, we hope these will be of interest to those in the community sector and beyond who also wish to take further steps in their understanding of, and action on, racial justice.

## 1. The importance of dedicated resource

We first embarked on a research project of this type in summer 2022 but we were unsuccessful in securing external funding for our original proposal. Because the work remained an organisational priority, we decided to continue with it in a reduced form under our existing resource.

By the end of that year, we had called a halt to the project. In an attempt to do the work in this way, we had run into several significant challenges.

Central to these was the inability to properly co-produce the work with our members. Instead, we tried to do much of the thinking about the framing and focus of the research before we ever engaged with them.

This led to push-back from members, particularly those representing racialised communities, about our baseline understanding of the subject matter, how the project related to their lived experience, what it was trying to achieve, and how much impact it would actually have.

In some cases, this reinforced scepticism that – because we hadn't historically shown enough willing on the topic of racial justice – we weren't the right organisation to be doing this work. This included our ability to deliver it meaningfully and with due attention to its sensitivities and the potential trauma experienced by those taking part.

We knew that we needed more time and space to allow us to properly co-produce the project from the start, and that this would require more substantial, dedicated resource.

As such, we redoubled our efforts to find external funding for the work. After a further 18 months, we secured it with the support of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Among other things, this resource allowed us to do the following to help ensure the project was co-produced, well considered, and clear in its purpose, relevance, and impact:

- Bring in the support of New Ways as an expert and trainer in anti-racist behaviour change and a critical friend in the development and delivery of the research
- Resource the Steering Group of Locality members to bring on-the-ground experience to the purpose and direction of the research and our understanding of its findings
- Resource a broad range of organisations to participate in the initial guided interviews stage of the research
- Resource the four deep-dive case study organisations to support their own expanded involvement in the research and the engagement of their staff, service users, community members, funders, and local partners
- Resource those four organisations to also take part in the facilitated peer networking to develop their own leadership in racial justice work and provide further research insights.

## 2. The power of a relational, conversational approach

We aimed to conduct this project in a way that, as much as possible, built trusting relationships with participants. We did so to understand their key experiences and motivations and explore the issues most relevant to them, their organisations, and communities.

For example, we began our work with the Steering Group not by jumping straight into the detail and decision-making of the project, but by inviting members – including Locality and New Ways staff – to share the background, identity, and experience that brought us together on this piece of work.

Creating space for simple, relational conversations and story-telling was valuable as an entry point into determining the focus on the research together. This also helped us to establish a clear purpose and way of working for the group that gave it real efficacy.

Equally, taking a similar approach to the guided interview stage of the research ensured our line of questioning and the extent of information we sought to gather did not become overwhelming.

While we based these conversations around a topic guide of key themes and questions, we treated this not as a strict interview script but as the strands of a “vine-swinging” approach – identifying and grabbing hold of the most relevant experience and issues for each participant to move through the interview in the narrative particular to them.

The creation of relational, conversational spaces was also important for the facilitated peer networking stage of the project. Participants mentioned the value of having the time to, among other things, reflect on their participation in the research and consider and discuss its ongoing relevance to their organisations.

### 3. The value of a patient, flexible funder

Being relational takes time. As does being rigorous and intentional in the development of each stage of the research. But, as we moved through the project, we noted the importance of such approaches and made them central to our work.

The upshot was that what was originally mooted as a nine-month project became a 18-month one. But rather than seeing this as significant “slippage” in the workplan, we are immensely grateful for the patience and flexibility Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and their agreement that the most important thing was that we did this work properly, not quickly.

Having this freedom allowed us to be nimble and responsive to the realities of delivering a multi-stage research project with a broad range of participants and stakeholders. And it meant that, as findings and trends emerged, we could come back to our Steering Group and to New Ways to think carefully about how these should inform our next steps.

## 4. Understanding the best use of our resource

Taking our time allowed us to develop and deliver a comprehensive programme of research, collecting a huge amount of rich data and varied insight.

That's not to say that we managed to do everything we wanted and to the level we'd ideally have liked. In a perfect world, we'd have been able to resource the Steering Group to work in even greater detail with us. And we'd have spent longer with our deep-dive case study participants becoming more embedded in their organisations and communities.

But we can't do everything. Indeed, in determining both the focus and themes of this project and the

actions we have committed to deliver in its wake, we have had to eschew further research into, e.g., the systems of exclusion facing by-and-for organisations, their impact, and the funding inequalities they face.

These are all extremely important topics. However, given our key role to support local community organisations to be strong and successful, rather than conducting further research we believe we must now focus on turning our deep learning from this project into strategic leadership, policy influencing, and tailored practical member support in support of racial justice.

## 5. Increasing our organisational confidence in anti-racism work

The focus, approach, and activities of this project have undoubtedly increased our confidence in our organisational understanding and delivery of anti-racist work.

Having struggled with the first iteration of this project, as described above, one of the greatest drivers of this confidence has simply been the starting of meaningful, resourced work.

It has been invaluable to be able to immerse ourselves in those relationships and conversations with such a broad range of stakeholders and have the space to carefully consider their implications.

We must express particular gratitude for the support of New Ways in training Locality staff in facilitating these conversations thoughtfully and confidently.

While we are eager to move from this research into practical action, we are also keen to emphasise the importance of this learning phase. It has been crucial to underpinning our conviction in the next steps of our anti-racism journey, evidencing the value of the actions we have now committed to deliver.



“There is no social justice in our places without racial justice”



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Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful. Our national network of over 2,000 members helps hundreds of thousands of people every week. We offer specialist advice, peer learning and campaign with members for a fairer society. Together we unlock the power of community.

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation aims to improve our natural world, secure a fairer future and strengthen the bonds in communities in the UK. We unlock change by contributing everything we can alongside people and organisations with brilliant ideas who share our goals. The Foundation is one of the largest independent grant-makers in the UK. In 2025, we provided £52.9m in funding towards a wide range of work in support of our aims. We also provide social and impact investment for organisations with the aim of creating social and environmental impact.

Find out more about our Creating Places for Everyone at [locality.org.uk/creating-places-for-everyone](https://locality.org.uk/creating-places-for-everyone)

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