

How to Communicate Learning Responsibly



A learning summary from Comic Relief's Change Makers Programme



#4 in a series of key takeaways for practitioners & funders
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Introducing Change Makers

Change Makers was a £9.1 million programme run by Comic Relief in the wake of the 2019 Coronavirus disease pandemic. It provided up to five years of targeted funding for 20 different partnerships, totalling 45 individual organisations.

From 2020 onwards, the pandemic shifted the voluntary, community and social enterprise landscape. It has been estimated that charities lost up to £4 billion in income over a few short months at the start of the pandemic, and that a third of charities had decreased access to their volunteers. This direct impact on charities, combined with the general population's restricted ability to access support and need to socially isolate, had a disproportionately negative impact on some of society's more vulnerable populations, whose personal situations had been exacerbated by COVID-19 and their routes to support decreased due to the more unstable charity sector.

Change Makers sought to address some of these challenges and support organisations who work

to tackle some of the serious issues that saw increased strain and demand during the pandemic. This list included racial inequality, homelessness, early childhood development, forced migration, domestic abuse and mental health.

The long-term funding Comic Relief provided, as part of its 2018-2023 strategy, gave stability in an uncertain environment. It enabled individual organisations and partnerships to work at a systems change level, exploring the social and structural changes needed in the aftermath of COVID-19 to best support vulnerable populations who had been overlooked or under resourced at local, regional and national level.

Crucially, each of these grants sought to achieve change which would outlast the funding provided by Comic Relief.

FUNDING THEMES

- 1** Gender Justice
- 2** Safe Place to be - Forced Migration
- 3** Safe Place to be - Homelessness
- 4** Children Survive and Thrive
- 5** Global Mental Health

KEY STATISTICS

- 20** Partnerships funded
- 5** Years of funding
- 9.1** Million pound programme
- 45** Organisations

Working with organisations across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

NPC's role as a learning partner

NPC were engaged at the start of the Change Makers Programme as an evaluation and learning partner. As part of this work, we co-designed 5 learning questions with the Funded Partners, to frame their collective insights and takeaways.

Learning summary series

1. Building understanding

What do we need to understand about our organisation and the context it exists within before we can create meaningful change (e.g. influence policy and structural decisions) for a broad audience?

2. How to collaborate

How can we create and maintain collaborations with individuals, charities, politicians, service providers and other stakeholders that are effective in creating the long-term change we are seeking?

3. How to monitor and evaluate impact and attribute success

What does short and long-term change look like for our grant? How can we measure and present our achievements in robust, interesting and proportionate ways?

4. How to communicate learning responsibly

How do we tell honest stories in accessible language and formats to our stakeholders whilst maintaining privacy and sensitivity? How can we develop a culture of data curiosity and acceptance of outcomes in a resource-stretched environment?

5. How to centre lived experience

How do we develop and maintain positive relationships with all those with lived experience, including with project staff, service users and other stakeholders? How can we enable open communication within these relationships without putting pressure on them in the context of an ever-changing political landscape?

What this learning summary covers

This is the fourth of five learning summaries in our series and focuses on the Funded Partner's findings on how to **communicate learning responsibly**. It follows naturally in the delivery cycle from our third learning summary focused on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), with our specific learning questions as follows:

"How do we tell honest stories in accessible language and formats to our stakeholders whilst maintaining privacy and sensitivity? How can we develop a culture of data curiosity and acceptance of outcomes in a resource-stretched environment?"

To answer these questions, NPC has grouped Funded Partner learnings under **four headings**:

- Communications for **influencing and collaboration** – two of the three primary reasons for communicating, alongside accountability to funders.
- The importance of **knowing your audience and which messages resonate**.
- Centring lived experience in communication by **participants telling their own stories**.
- Supporting a culture of **data curiosity and acceptance**, with a specific focus on how funders can do this in their funding programmes.

This piece will explore each of the above themes in turn, presenting practical takeaways for both practitioners and funders.

Communications for influencing and collaboration



Clear Purpose

It is important to first clarify the multiple purposes of communication, including influencing stakeholders, supporting collaboration, and ensuring accountability.

Dedicated Resource

Communication requires dedicated resource, including time and budget to translate insights into accessible formats.

Effective Influencing

Effective influencing integrates evidence, lived experience, and clear calls to action, and is built through ongoing relationships, not one-off moments.

Power & Voice

Power dynamics shape which voices are heard and must be consciously managed to avoid tokenistic communication.

When examining Funded Partner reflections on communicating learnings on their Change Makers projects, we identified three primary purposes for communication:

- 1. Influencing key stakeholders**, which was a primary aim of most of the systems change initiatives delivered by Funded Partners.
- 2. Collaborating with partners** (i.e. organisations or practitioners who shared Funded Partners' goals and/or social missions).
- 3. Accountability to funders**, primarily to Comic Relief via six-monthly reporting.

This section presents key learnings about the first two purposes – influencing and collaboration – with accountability to funders addressed later under 'data curiosity and acceptance.'

It is important to first clarify the multiple purposes of communication

Funded Partner communications often had multiple purposes, such as supporting peer learning, and building legitimacy with stakeholders to influence. Practically, this meant sharing evidence, showcasing impact, and inviting system stakeholders into their work. It was important to recognise these different communication functions, which means distinguishing between communication for collaboration or influence, and deliberately tracking how communication contributes to outcomes such as new partnerships or shifts in engagement and perception.

Midaye

Midaye Somali Development Network works to support migrant communities living in West London who do not speak English as a first language. They run a variety of holistic support services, helping individuals to succeed, thrive and invest in a shared future.

The Journey of Hope programme supported migrant women living in West London to access targeted mental health services. This included challenging the taboos surrounding mental health in the local community via training, counselling, and sharing best practices with similar organisations. Their first phase of the programme sought to build a credible evidence base about their specific delivery model to secure buy-in – first across other grassroots community organisations, and second amongst the established mental health service providers in their area.



"An important part of this will be our support for other voluntary sector organisations that have been learning from us, and which are excited to see some of the impact we have been able to achieve amongst their own service users. We will proactively engage with mental health professionals, inviting them to observe and participate in our work."

Effective communication requires dedicated resource (particularly for translating insights into usable forms)

Funded Partner reflections point to communication not as an add-on to a delivery, but a distinct area of work that requires time, skills, and budget. Practically this means allocating considerable resources to translation activities

such as editing, formatting, and producing accessible outputs, recognising that without this investment, collaboration and influencing were constrained. This includes taking the time to understand who is able to engage with communication outputs, where barriers exist, and whether insights are reaching key decision points in a timely way.

“Knowledge sharing and exchange will become more pivotal to the project as it progresses, so communication needs around the programme’s outputs are critical in planning and delivery. We have therefore adjusted our budget (under Direct Project Costs) to allow for a communications budget to fund communication needs of the programme e.g. research translation, proofing, copy editing, presentation formats etc.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Effective influencing integrates evidence, lived experience, and clear asks

Many Funded Partner communications brought together lived experience, robust evidence, and clear, actionable recommendations within a single, coherent narrative. These different elements were typically woven together rather than presented separately, allowing decision-makers to connect human stories with broader data and concrete actions.

“We are proud that the recommendations of our Walking Inquiry are clear and powerful, and we took the message of how much detention costs to Labour Conference... At the same time as maintaining strength in our messaging, we balanced this with using empathy and storytelling to show the human impact of policy.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Effective influencing is relational and sustained, not driven by one-off moments

Funded Partner reflections revealed a pattern of influence emerging through ongoing engagement rather than single events or campaign peaks. This included building relationships over time with stakeholders across different parts of the system, such as community stakeholders, fellow practitioners and national decision-makers. In-person meetings – such as learning events, reflection sessions, and site visits – were particularly important in creating opportunities for influence. Practically, this requires understanding who is being reached, at what level of influence, and whether engagement leads to ongoing relationships, rather than focusing on isolated high-profile moments alone.

“Partnership with mental health professionals includes bringing them along for the journey and allowing them to see and experience the work at the coal face. Professionals who were willing to visit and participate in our work became enthusiastic supporters. They also learned some valuable lessons in how to shape and develop their own practice.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Power dynamics shape whose voices are heard

While centring lived experience was key to much Funded Partner communication, it also raised important questions about power, ownership, and representation. There is a risk that lived experience is communicated in ways that are extractive or tokenistic, or that knowledge is co-opted by more powerful actors. In addition, access to senior decision-makers remains uneven, with grassroots organisations often finding it harder to reach those with direct influence over policy and resources. Funded Partners were keenly aware of these ethical issues, with care taken to look beyond surface-level participation to support individuals to retain ownership and recognition, and to understand how to reach those with decision-making power.

“An important project we have run this year is an images project designed to challenge visual stereotyping of people who are homeless in the media. This has so far involved seven people experiencing homelessness working with a photographer to produce a set of stock images which more accurately reflect the realities of homelessness, and the diverse cross-section of society homelessness reflects. With the consent of these participants, four of the images were used for the first time on the front cover of a widely publicised report by one of our team on the role universities can play in ending homelessness. In consultation with 48 people with lived experience of homelessness, we are updating our language guide which supports those who write or speak about homeless to use non-stigmatising, person-first language.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

2. Reaching the right audience with the right message



Audience Insight

Communications are most effective when grounded in a deep understanding of audience context, motivations, and beliefs.

Channel Strategy

Different communication channels serve different purposes, and messaging should be tested and adapted.

Message Framing

Framing and accessibility shape how messages are understood, while trade-offs exist between clarity and nuance.

Measure Impact

Resonance should be measured through actions and behavioural change, not just reach.

Communication was key to the systems change initiatives at the heart of Change Makers projects – especially for influencing key stakeholders. This meant that it was extremely important for Funded Partners to build an understanding of which messages resonated with key audiences. This section presents four reflections on knowing your audiences, and the importance of iterating and refining communication approaches over time.

Messages resonate when they are grounded in understanding and continuously adapted

Funded Partner communications were felt to be more effective when practitioners actively built insight into their audiences and used this to refine their approach, rather than relying on assumptions. Resonance of communications was often shaped by wider contextual factors such as political climate, existing beliefs, and the priorities of decision-makers, and it was important to build an understanding of this context. This often

happened through a combination of deliberate engagement (e.g. gathering feedback directly) and informally tracking what works in practice, and evolving messaging in response.

Communication channels shape how issues land

Funded Partner reflections point to the way a message is delivered being as important as its content. Funded Partners used different communication channels to serve different purposes: reports and briefings provided evidence to build credibility, storytelling and creative outputs generated an emotional connection to an issue, and events brought together key stakeholders for learning and influencing. Practically, this requires carefully distinguishing the purpose of each approach, and tracking which channels are most effective for reaching specific audiences and contributing to desired communication outcomes.

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

GDWG

GDWG works to improve the welfare and wellbeing of people held in detention, by offering friendship and support and advocating for fair treatment. Their Refugee Tales outreach project organises walks in solidarity with refugees, those who have sought sanctuary, and people who have experienced immigration detention, supporting people to share their stories about immigration detention to raise awareness of their experiences.

The project included hosting a Walking Inquiry into Immigration Detention to coincide with and complement the Public Inquiry into mistreatment at Brook House Immigration Removal Centre. It progressed from hosting workshops and designing creative outputs into high-profile advocacy moments, including a parliamentary reception and a touring exhibition reaching audiences across the UK. A key learning from the project was the strong influence of platform and venue on how messages land, underscoring the importance of selecting communication channels strategically.



“We are interested to learn what format of information-sharing is most engaging to spread awareness among the public, and to deepen understanding among our own community. So far, we have found that short films produced by a filmmaker with lived experience of detention have been well-received and are an effective way to spread messages to new audiences. Films are accessible for people with little English, and visuals bring an added richness to content and enable people to form a visceral connection with a theme.”

Framing shapes how messages resonate and are understood

Funded Partners sought to frame messages to align with audience values, beliefs, and mental models, which made them more accessible and easier to understand. This included simplifying complex issues or adapting language and visuals to increase resonance. These approaches also introduced trade-offs between clarity and oversimplification, with Funded Partners therefore making conscious choices about how to balance accessibility with accuracy and nuance.

“Using social media can be helpful but there’s also pressure to distil topics to sound bites. Also, the challenge of using imagery on social media that captures public attention but isn’t ethical or positive representation.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Resonance is evidenced by action

Ultimately, the resonance of a message is best understood through what people do in response – such as sharing content, continuing conversations, or engaging further – rather than through exposure alone. Practically, this required Funded Partners to identify and track behavioural indicators of engagement (e.g. participation in processes, follow-on activity) over simple metrics like views or attendance.

3

Participants telling their own stories



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Storytelling impact

Storytelling can help achieve positive change externally – such as influencing stakeholders – and for participants themselves (e.g. building confidence, skills, and agency).

Inclusive formats

Multi-format storytelling increases inclusivity and participation (e.g. short films, written outputs, social media).

Ethical practice

Ethical considerations are critical, as consent, ownership, and wellbeing must be actively managed.

Co-production

Co-production strengthens impact but requires additional time or resource and clear planning around trade-offs between speed, inclusion, and quality.

Communication within Change Makers projects was not only about influencing external stakeholders, but also about who gets to shape and share those messages. Participant-led storytelling was a powerful tool for both driving change and enabling personal development for people with lived experience. This section presents key reflections on how participant-led storytelling can be inclusive, impactful, and ethical, while balancing the requirements of meaningful co-production with practical constraints.

Storytelling can facilitate both external influence and personal transformation

Storytelling on Funded Partner projects typically served a dual function. Externally, it was used to influence decision-making and public narratives around social issues. Internally, it could be transformative for participants, supporting the development of confidence, skills, agency, and identity. There were many accounts from Funded Partners of participants moving from feelings of marginalisation to taking on roles as speakers, creators, or leaders, making storytelling both a means of broader change and means of achieving outcomes for individuals. Practically, these involved participants designing approaches, producing content, and leading outputs or engagement activities.

RECLAIM

Several Change Maker initiatives sought to achieve both individual and systems-focused outcomes by supporting service users to become campaigners, influencers, and drivers of change themselves. One such example was the work of the RECLAIM Project, a Manchester-based youth charity that supported working-class young people in their efforts to build a fair and just. RECLAIM reported both the direct influence of the campaigning activities led by young people, as well as the impact of storytelling for the young people themselves.

One such example was of a young participant, shy and lacking confidence, with limited time for personal development due to caring responsibilities at home, who joined the programme at age 15. They particularly engaged with the issue of period poverty and menstruation stigma, designing and leading a campaign to increase access to free period products in schools, deliver peer-led awareness sessions, and push for improved menstrual health education. By the end of the programme, they reported improvements in confidence and leadership skills.



"[The participant] has spoken in the House of Commons about the importance of oracy and emotional literacy for working class young people, she was invited to lunch with the Manchester Lords Mayor as a special guest and has just won a Manchester Buzz award for her Outstanding Achievements with her campaign 'Let Periods Flow'. In her end of project assessment, she said she sees herself as a campaigner and she can now confidently talk to adults about the things he wants to change in the world."

Multi-format storytelling enables broader and more equitable participation

Storytelling became more inclusive and impactful when participants could engage through a range of formats, such as film, photography, writing,

public speaking, and creative arts.

Funded Partners offered multiple formats that allowed individuals to express themselves in ways that suit their strengths and preferences, and helped overcome barriers related to language, literacy, confidence, or access.

Young Changemakers (UK Youth in partnership with The Diana Award and Centre for Mental Health)

Young Changemakers is a programme led by and for young people from Black and Black-mixed heritage communities to reimagine mental health support and services. As part of the project, young people were recruited as peer researchers, engaging them in various research projects designed to enhance their skills.

A [guide to peer research](#) was produced to both showcase the benefits of involving young people in peer research, and to offer practical guidance on how to do so effectively. The section on disseminating findings includes many practical recommendations on participant-led communication, including exploring diverse dissemination methods beyond traditional reports and briefings, such as using storytelling, animations, performance and visual media; collaborating with participants to share research findings within their networks and among their peers through social media such as TikTok; and presenting research findings alongside participants to a wider audience.



“To effectively engage young people in peer research, researchers should involve them not only in the research process but also in disseminating findings. This involves sharing the findings of the research with stakeholders and new audiences who can create change.”

Ethical practice is central and requires ongoing reflection, including surrounding emotional impact, consent, and anonymity.

There was an inherent tension between enabling authentic storytelling and protecting participant wellbeing. Funded Partners were keenly aware of exposing participants to vulnerabilities, such as receiving social media abuse, retraumatising individuals recounting difficult experiences, or overburdening participants with requests for time or appearances. Managing this tension between storytelling and wellbeing required active, ongoing reflection on ethical decision-

making, with Funded Partners regularly reflecting on how to balance authenticity with responsibility over time.

“We have learnt that demand for insight from our reporters is high (such as invitations to attend events or media opportunities), and that we need to carefully manage requests for their time to ensure it’s used as effectively and impactfully as possible.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Co-production must be adequately resourced

When communication is co-produced, it becomes more participatory, iterative, and meaningful, and a powerful way to build connection and extend reach. It is also slower and more resource-intensive, and introduces ethical considerations around representation, ownership, and the risk of extractive practices. Several Funded Partners reported that co-design processes take longer than expected and require additional training, mentoring, and facilitation to support meaningful participation. It is best therefore to carefully plan participation, and to document the trade-offs being made between speed, inclusion, and quality.

“We have recruited a diverse group of people as reporters, based right across the UK and with a wide range of experiences. We have worked hard to ensure all reporters have access to training, mentoring and progression support to maximise their involvement and the impact of the project... A focus on co-producing many elements of the project, delays to recruitment, and long-term staff absence have made it challenging to deliver everything we set out to achieve. However, we are pleased with the progress we have made in building a team of reporters and developing the processes needed for them to produce high-quality reports.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

4. Fostering a culture of curiosity and learning



Psychological Safety

Honest learning depends on psychological safety and openness, enabling organisations to reflect on what is not working.

Adaptive Funding

Flexibility from funders supports adaptation and experimentation in delivery, which is important for achieving ambitious outcomes.

Meaningful Data

Data becomes meaningful when it is linked to clear questions and decisions, and assumptions are actively tested against evidence.

Trusted Relationships

Relationships shape how data is used, and trust-based environments enable honest conversations and shared learning.

Continuous Learning

Embedding learning requires time for reflection and iteration, and continuous feedback loops, not one-off reporting cycles.

Critically examining data and assessing outcomes were key to many Funded Partner projects. Most were trialling new or novel approaches, often with an explicitly systems-focused component (e.g. influencing key stakeholders), and therefore needed to reflect and adapt regularly for their delivery to be impactful. When looking what can be learnt from Funded Partner experiences, it would be unfair however to put the onus solely on delivery organisations for creating a learning culture – especially in a resource-stretched environment where delivery organisations are incentivised to highlight previous successes to acquire funding.

In reviewing Funded Partner reflections, it became clear that the funders themselves – in this case Comic Relief – are crucial to helping foster a culture of curiosity and learning. This section presents five key reflections on the subject, with our recommendations explicitly targeted towards funders, and how they can support delivery organisations to develop learning cultures that ultimately support their work to be more impactful.

Psychological safety and transparency enable honest reflection

Funded Partners were most able to engage honestly with data and evidence when they felt psychologically safe and able to speak openly about challenges. This includes being able to say openly to Comic Relief when something did not work, when plans needed to change, or when assumptions were wrong, without fear of judgement or penalty. Strong learning cultures prioritise openness by actively encouraging organisations to acknowledge limitations, gaps in reach, and areas where capacity or approaches have fallen short. This kind of honesty supports better decision-making over time, particular in a context where Funded Partners – often more accustomed to service delivery approaches – were attempting ambitious systems change initiatives. Comic Relief was consistently praised for helping to foster psychological safety and transparency, with Funded Partners able to tell them where things had not gone to plan, and what they were going to adapt about their delivery going forward.

“Comic Relief would listen if we went to them and said ‘this thing’s not working, we want to change this, we want to measure this differently’ and it was always ‘OK, tell us. We’ll listen. You’re the experts. We’re not going to dictate what you should do and how you should do it.’ And that’s I think a lot of the time the most important thing as long as we could justify what we wanted to do and why... you could reach someone and people would reply to emails and come in to meet us as well, it makes a huge difference.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Implications for funders

Funders should seek to create deliberate spaces where funded organisations can openly discuss what has not worked. Funders should also track whether people feel able to raise challenges without defensive framing and encourage reporting that includes limitations and setbacks as a core part of learning about delivering ambitious projects.

Flexibility creates the conditions for learning and adaptation

Learning-oriented practices rely on flexibility in both funding and delivery. Funded Partners were more able to explore, adapt, and improve as they were not constrained by rigid targets or pre-defined outputs to be delivered regardless of context. This approach was particularly helpful in a Change Makers context where many Funded Partners were trialling new delivery models aiming to achieve often diffuse and long-term systemic outcomes. Comic Relief’s flexibility allowed them to revisit outcomes and refine approaches based on emerging evidence.

“The funding has been flexible in a way that I’ve not experienced before. It’s meant we could be honest in coming back and saying ‘this one didn’t work out, or this thing didn’t work out and this is why, so we probably achieved a little less than we hoped here’ and we felt like we could say that, which is really brilliant.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Implications for funders

Funder MEL requirements should avoid overly fixed indicators and instead include explicit points where outcomes and measures can be revisited. Funders should also create space for organisations to justify changes in approach based on evidence, positioning adaptation as a sign of good learning practice rather than failure.

Implications for funders

MEL approaches should anchor data and evidence collection in clear learning and decision-making questions. They should also embed structured reflection points that encourage funded organisations to compare assumptions with evidence, and to regularly sense-check their strategies in light of what they are learning, beyond simple tick-box reporting.

Purposeful and critical use of data and evidence drives curiosity

Evidence becomes meaningful when it is clearly connected to real questions and decisions, such as how best to refine delivery to achieve stated outcomes. Data and evidence curiosity therefore depends on actively challenging assumptions – those aiming for systems change need to intentionally reflect on what they expected to happen, what actually happened, and what this reveals about their strategy. For Funded Partners, this included recognising when they were not best placed to deliver certain approaches, or when capacity constraints limited what could be achieved, or when a particular approach was not fit-for-purpose.

Relationships and behaviours shape the extent to which data is used

How data and evidence is used is often driven by relationships and behaviours on top of formal plans or systems (e.g. MEL frameworks). Open, trust-based relationships with funders, mission-aligned partners, stakeholders to influence, and programme participants make it easier to discuss findings honestly and explore their implications for future action. In these contexts, evidence becomes part of an ongoing conversation rather than something collected and reported at fixed points (e.g. meeting mandatory funding requirements). This relational dynamic supported both curiosity and learning on Change Maker projects, as people felt more able to ask challenging questions, test new ideas, and reflect honestly together.

Sister Circle

Sister Circle is a women-led charity that supports women in challenging circumstances to empower themselves and lead healthy lives through service provision, advocacy and peer support. Their Little Cues, Big Difference programme saw them trial longer relationships between expectant mothers and peer supporters in their existing Maternity Mate model – one-to-one pregnancy, labour and postnatal support that aims to secure the best possible start for mother and baby.

This trial period included forming a 'community of ethics' with two primary aims: (1) identifying and engaging with ethical issues arising from delivery, starting with mums' narratives of their own experiences rather than general principles, and (2) embedding critical thinking in Sister Circle and its programmes, equipping both



volunteers and mums to reflect ethically on their own practice and act on this learning by modifying delivery where necessary.

"We have learnt, if the right context is set where the agency of the women is respected and they have a chance to say what would be useful to them, they are willing to engage, share data and receive feedback that can support them to strengthen the bond with their babies and actually do something with the data and feedback."

Implications for funders: Funded organisations should be supported to develop MEL approaches with regular opportunities for dialogue around data and evidence, normalising it rather than relying solely on formal reporting cycles. They should also focus on tracking behavioural change for key stakeholders – funded organisations, participants, partners and stakeholders to influence (if this is an aim of funded projects) – to understand how data and learning is used to influence what people do differently going forwards.

Time and ongoing practice are essential to embedding learning

Even where there is a strong appetite for learning, time and operational pressures can significantly constrain data curiosity. In the reactive or ‘firefighting’ environments – underpinned by a consistent need to acquire new funding – there is often limited capacity for reflection, experimentation, and iterative improvement. Developing new, evidence-led approaches, especially in an unpredictable systems change context, requires time to research, test, reflect, and adapt. Without this, learning risks becoming episodic – confined to occasional reporting moments – rather than embedded in day-to-day practice. The strongest examples of data use amongst Funded Partners were therefore those where learning was continuously integrated into delivery, with regular feedback loops that informed ongoing decision-making. In these cases, learning became a habit, rather than an episodic activity.

“We have also learnt that our overall approach requires time – time to research, plan, develop, reflect and implement new ways of doing things. This can be very challenging in a sector which feels very reactive and responsive to ‘firefighting’ rather than reflective, iterative ways of working. While this is understandable given the issue of violence affecting young people that we work around, it presents challenges to creating innovative ways of working and best practice.”

– Change Makers Funded Partner

Implications for funders: Funders should explicitly recognise reflection and learning as resource requirements, not optional extras on top of mandatory reporting. They should support funded organisations to build continuous feedback loops into delivery and track how frequently and effectively teams adapt their work in response to new evidence.

CONCLUSION

This piece has explored Funded Partners' learnings on how to communicate learning responsibly, with specific focus on influencing and collaboration, understanding audiences, enabling participants to tell their own stories, and fostering a culture of data curiosity and openness.

Across the various delivery approaches funded by Change Makers, communication often served multiple purposes simultaneously – supporting collaboration with partners, building credibility with funders, and influencing key stakeholders as part of systems change initiatives. The most effective approaches combined clear purpose with targeted resources, recognising that meaningful communication is relational, sustained, and grounded in evidence (especially lived experience).

Funded Partners demonstrated that responsible communication requires actively understanding audiences and adapting messages to contexts, while maintaining clarity and accessibility without compromising nuance. Participant-led storytelling was central to Funded Partner delivery, both as a means of influencing external stakeholders and as a catalyst of individual outcomes (e.g. confidence, skills, agency, and identity). These practices required careful attention to ethical issues, power dynamics and representation, and needed sufficient resourcing to ensure they are participatory, safe, and impactful.

Comic Relief in their role as funder was key to developing a culture of curiosity and learning around evidence, which was especially important for Change Makers projects attempting systems change initiatives that were novel, ambitious, and rife with obstacles. Where trust, flexibility, and openness were fostered and maintained – particularly in relationships with funders – Funded Partners were better able to share challenges, adapt their delivery, and ultimately grow their impact over time.



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