

WAKEFIELD DISTRICT FUNDERS FORUM



2025

REPORT

Learnings from a year of collaboration between local and national funders working in Wakefield District.

ABOUT THE FORUM

A Brief Introduction

The Wakefield District Funders Forum is pleased to reflect on a year of progress, partnership and learning. Formed in 2019 in response to National Lottery research highlighting regional funding disparities, specifically that Wakefield received less than 50% of the regional average per head, the Forum continues to work collaboratively to address these inequalities. The National Lottery Community Fund remains one of the largest funders in the district, and during this time we have seen meaningful movement toward closing the gap.

MEMBERS

Our regular membership continues to grow and strengthen, with active participation from

Nova Wakefield District
Prosper Wakefield District
Community Foundation Wakefield District
Wakefield Council
The National Lottery
Vico Homes
Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Creative Minds
Young Lives Consortium
Yorkshire Sport Foundation
The Community Investment Gateway

Together, we aim to build collective understanding, reduce duplication, and enhance equity within funding processes across the sector.

We have also welcomed several guests this year including representatives from Groundwork Yorkshire, The Centre for Social Justice, Yorkshire Funders and a host of other grant making Trusts and Foundations.



THEMES



SPRING

Artifical Intelligence

Focusing on AI and the future of funding.
Read more on page 5.

SUMMER

TNLCF's New Mission

Focusing on The National Lottery Community Fund's new community missions.
Read more on page 6.

AUTUMN

Best Practice

Focusing on sharing best practice and reflecting on funding approaches.
Read more on page 8.

WINTER

From the Frontline

Focusing on the voice of lived experience.
Read more on page 9.

AI & THE FUTURE OF FUNDING

We began the year with a forward-looking training event focused on the uses of AI in grant making and the funding cycle.

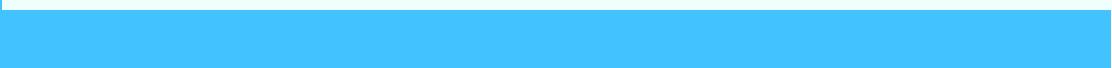
Notably:

- 75% of attendees had never used AI in any part of their grant process before.
- Initial feelings toward AI were frequently described as Nervous, Unsure and Cautious.
- Following the session, 100% of participants reported increased understanding of AI and its application in the funding cycle.
- The most common post-session feelings shifted markedly to Excited and Interested.

This demonstrated not only a significant knowledge shift but also an appetite for innovation. As a Forum, we remain committed to exploring technology that supports fair, equitable processes and reduces the resource lost through unsuccessful applications.



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UNDERSTANDING TNLCF'S NEW MISSION

Our summer meeting focused on The National Lottery Community Fund's new community missions and how they will be used to determine funding priorities and make decisions relating to grant awards.



To extend this learning further across the VCSE sector, we arranged a popular *Meet the Funder* event, enabling groups to hear directly from TNLCF and ask questions.

The impact of this session was summarised powerfully by one attendee:

"The meeting was fantastic and extremely useful... Off the back of this presentation from Beth, it is very clear where we can improve our application moving forward. Very informative, extremely valuable workshop – thank you for arranging."

The Funders Forum remains committed to developing bid writing skills, building a stronger evidence base and ensuring that wherever possible Wakefield receives a fair allocation of regional and national funds.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

Collaboration is at the heart of our work, and this year the Wakefield Bed Poverty Campaign stands out as a leading example.

The campaign was led jointly by Prosper Wakefield District and Community Foundation Wakefield District, with support from Funders Forum members, local businesses and the VCSE sector. It raised £124,000 and provided beds for nearly 1,500 children who previously lacked a safe, comfortable place to sleep.

This work demonstrates the power of shared priorities and collective investment.

**PROVIDING BEDS
FOR NEARLY 1,500
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PLACE TO SLEEP**



SHARING BEST PRACTICE

In the autumn, the Forum turned its focus inward, sharing best practice and reflecting on how our funding approaches can better support the VCSE sector. Discussions centred on building stronger, more equitable relationships with grantees, making more purposeful use of data and learning, and reducing unnecessary complexity in applications and reporting.

Across the session, members explored culturally competent practice, the importance of recognising power dynamics, and the value of prioritising support over scrutiny. We also considered how clearer communication about data requirements, shared reporting approaches and proportionate expectations can reduce burden for applicants. Conversations around streamlining processes highlighted practical steps such as multi-stage applications, clearer criteria, alternative formats and the use of simple, accessible language.

Collectively, these discussions reinforced our shared commitment to funding practices that are transparent, proportionate and rooted in trust.

SHAPED AN HONEST DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW WE CAN REDUCE BURDEN, ESPECIALLY FOR SMALLER ORGANISATIONS

FROM THE FRONTLINE

Our final session of the year centred on the voice of lived experience. Amy Hardman, an experienced and respected local VCSE leader, shared candid insight into the pressures of running VCSE organisations, juggling multiple grants, and managing multiple funder relationships.

Around the challenges of finding suitable funding opportunities, Amy shared that she appreciates “visible” newsletters and updates from Funders Forum members including Wakefield Council’s Weekly Funding Updates and Yorkshire Sport Foundation’s Newsletter. She supplements this with a paid platform to do some of her own research, but Amy says the key to developing a diverse funding profile is building and maintaining positive relationships whilst acknowledging how resource intensive this can be.

Amy also highlighted the value of collaboration in developing impactful projects and securing funding. She spoke of how “pilot” projects had built an evidence base, paving the way for larger funding applications and more long-term delivery. Studio Shadwell

Amy’s reflections shaped an honest discussion about how we can reduce burden, particularly for smaller organisations, and how our practices can better serve those delivering community impact.

A YEAR OF GROWTH, LEARNING AND SHARED PURPOSE

Alongside facilitated meetings, members have continued to collaborate throughout the year, participate in funding panels and share knowledge, resources and learning from across the sector. We are proud of our collective progress and even prouder of the work that has resulted from it.



Special thanks to Wakefield based businesses Handlesbanken and OE Electrics for their support and allowing us to use their fantastic meeting facilities in 2025.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we move forward, we aim to expand the network further and strengthen our community of funders.

Our ambition is to contribute to a more strategic and joined up approach to funding for the VCSE sector in the Wakefield District. Whether that be through improved scheduling of grant programmes throughout the year, promoting local streamlining approaches such as Yorkshire Funders Common Application and Monitoring Form. Or continuing to explore the use of data generated through shared tools such as MyCake to compliment complement local knowledge, plot trends and maximise the value of assets available.

We will continue to make the case for multi-year funding and funding for core costs.

If you or your organisation is involved in VCSE funding and would like to contribute to this work, we'd love to hear from you.

Together, we can continue to grow fair, accessible funding for the Wakefield District.



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