



A report from Nesta's Everyone Makes Innovation Policy programme

# Shaping the Innovation Agenda Post COVID-19

Exploring the role of civil  
society in addressing digital  
exclusion using community  
organising methodology

June 2021

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## About Nesta

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She also worked with universities, including Queen Mary University, University of Oxford, King's College London and Southampton University on a number of research projects. Drawing on her experience, Ana was involved in co-designing, co-delivering and evaluating an online community organising training to build the leadership capacity of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# Shaping the Innovation Agenda Post COVID-19

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1

# Introduction

In January 2020, Nesta and Citizens UK established a partnership project to evaluate the role of community organising methodology in enabling inclusive innovation from a grassroots perspective. Through a process of listening to uncover the needs and aspirations of communities in East London, the project aimed to hold innovation places – such as Here East, an innovation hub located in the Olympic Park – to account on issues of jobs, skills and other local opportunities.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown, organisational priorities inevitably shifted, affecting the project's original plans. A new community listening exercise to understand the community's largest concerns about the pandemic, identified digital exclusion – in terms of individual access (to devices, internet and skills) and organisational approach (to online services and developments) – as one of the main priorities to address. The project therefore shifted around these new needs and insights.

This report presents the results of an external evaluation commissioned by Nesta alongside the partnership with Citizens UK. It explores a proof of concept trial to test the potential of a broad-based community organising methodology, used by Hackney and Islington Citizens, a local alliance part of Citizens UK, as a way to democratise innovation policymaking. This is done by considering the needs and aspirations of local organisations – members of Hackney and Islington Citizens – to influence innovation-led developments and articulate learnings.

The report concludes with three main arguments. First, the most important process in applying community organising as a methodology to democratise innovation policymaking is the listening exercise. While the community organising process is applied to different issues and contexts – such as wages, housing or health – in the broad context of innovation policymaking, and specifically here of digital exclusion, the process of listening offers opportunities to understand and consider people's lives and experiences.

Listening exercises are common in many civic organisations, and enable learning from stories, recognition of self-interest,<sup>a</sup> leadership development, and engagement of those most marginalised in the process. They help develop ownership and a sense of belonging, and put trust in the community organising process to achieve change for the local community. This report explores how this listening process was used by Hackney and Islington Citizens and its member organisations as a way to learn about the immediate needs of their constituents following lockdown.

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a. In community organising, self-interest is defined as 'all self-preservation, self-recognition, self-determination and self-respect' combined (Chambers, 2018:14). It considers people's needs, desires and hopes.

Secondly, innovation-led developments and activities in relation to digital inclusion, particularly post COVID-19, are within Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations' experiences. Following the safety and social distancing measures set out by the British government in March 2020, organisations and their members saw a huge impact on the running of their services and activities, and on their lives in general. While some organisations used to innovation and technology are thriving in the new context, many are still struggling to cope. In both cases, technology – used to work, study, stay socially connected and socially active – has positively and negatively affected organisations and their members.

Finally, we argue that community organising activities contribute to developing a type of 'authentic' community engagement that develops people and builds their capacity to participate in public life. Due to lockdown measures, Citizens UK's activities and the activities of their member organisations could not carry on as normal, and throughout the period of this project a new remote, completely digital community organising methodology and process was developed.

It is still early days to definitively say whether the specific innovation activities and outcomes developed in this project help organisations and their members participate in public life in the same way as traditional community organising methodology. What we do know is that innovation activities and outcomes found a way to build the capacity of local people to participate in public life, developing a campaign that is oriented around problem-solving in a pandemic and conducted through novel digital and hybrid community organising processes.

## 1.1 Research design

The design of the evaluation developed from traditional community organising methodology, in collaboration with Hackney and Islington Citizens and its member organisations. The project evaluates:

- The processes involved in applying community organising as a method to democratise innovation policymaking, by considering how Hackney and Islington Citizens responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The acceptability of innovation-led developments to Hackney and Islington member organisations, by reflecting on the organisations and their constituents' experiences of innovation and technology during the pandemic.
- The feasibility of innovation and technology activities to build the capacity of Hackney and Islington Citizens and their member organisations to participate in public life, by studying new skills and learning how to use tools to understand the political dimension of digital exclusion during the pandemic.

Some aspects of the evaluation used the participatory action research paradigm where researchers and the community together investigate the relevant questions while also learning from the process.<sup>1,2</sup> This methodology builds 'ownership of information', demystifying the process and developing collective inquiry and trust.<sup>3</sup> Participatory action methodologies are sometimes described as 'theory that resides in action', using real experiences as a way to construct theory.<sup>4,5</sup>

In the case of this project, data was collected by participant members of organisations, the Hackney and Islington community organiser, and the researcher. Through the community organising methodology processes examined here, Hackney and Islington Citizens engaged with at least five hundred people at different stages, enabling questions of innovation and technology to reach different groups within the local area, include participants at every opportunity, and learn 'what works' in digital community organising methodology.

The methods selected for the evaluation considered the 'cycle of research, action and evaluation',<sup>6</sup> defined by community organising methodology as an opportunity and carried out as follows:

- **Listening campaign:** Three quantitative surveys and eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews

Prior to COVID-19, a survey explored the community's understanding of innovation hub areas and the opportunities for local people. This survey was designed and carried out by two colleges, with assistance from the community organiser, and reached 170 people.

Post COVID-19, three surveys were independently designed and carried out by member organisations of Hackney and Islington Citizens to find out more about the effects of the pandemic on their organisations and constituents. Due to the nature and urgency of the situation, this process preceded any community organising strategy plan, and was the result of deliberate reaction from local organisations to quickly explore COVID-19's impact. Over 200 people were engaged in the process during this new listening phase.

Eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out via Zoom, with Hackney and Islington Citizens leaders<sup>b</sup> involved in the innovation campaign team.<sup>c</sup> The participants interviewed were specifically selected by the community organiser responsible. The sample techniques used convenience and purposive sampling criteria administered by the community organiser, a technique selected due to availability, commitment and level of relationship with Hackney and Islington Citizens. Informed consent (including right to withdrawal and confidentiality) for in-depth interviews was carried out by the researcher.

- **Two Hackney and Islington Citizens executive meetings:** overt observation with fieldnotes

While these meetings were primarily administered and carried out by the community organiser, the researcher was also invited to join them. The findings of the previous surveys and post COVID-19 listening exercises carried out by Hackney and Islington member organisations were brought to the Hackney and Islington Executive meetings as a point of discussion.

These meetings aimed to find out patterns and themes in local people's stories, and the role of the community in addressing the biggest challenges brought on by the pandemic. All member organisations were invited to join the meetings, which happened via Zoom.

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b. In community organising community participants and volunteers are referred to as community leaders or just 'leaders'.

c. The Hackney and Islington Citizens innovation campaign team, established in late 2019, is a team of people made up of constituents from member organisations who care about the impact of innovation in the local area. The campaign team uses community organising tactics to listen to the community and develop policy requests on issues of innovation to bring about change for the local community.

- **Five campaign team meetings, one workshop, one training, and two actions:** overt observation with field notes

This method was guided and carried out by the community organiser with a semi-structured schedule. The researcher was invited to attend these meetings to understand the processes and development of the innovation agenda, using community organising methodology.

The pattern of the meetings, workshop and training attended were as follows:

1. **Meeting 1:** Stories, experiences and the main issues affecting local people.
2. **Issues Workshop:** Understanding the context to develop policy questions.
3. **Meeting 2:** Review issues further to develop policy questions.
4. **Training:** Pilot remote community organising training to continue to build capacity of local leaders in a new format.
5. **Meeting 3:** Power analysis of policy questions.
6. **Meeting 4:** How policy questions are delivered.
7. **Meeting 5:** Planning the action to pose policy questions.
8. **Action 1:** Video letter addressed to the head of local tech companies asking for a meeting.
9. **Action 2:** Meeting between community and tech companies.
10. **Meeting 6:** Evaluation – due at time of writing.

Leaders involved in all meetings and interviews were individuals from Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations, recruited by the local community organiser. The participants involved in the project varied in age, gender, ethnicity, religious and social backgrounds, and there was also variance in the nature, level and number of years of engagement with community organising

The methods selected for this research were reviewed following the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, when a remote approach was adopted. The project used only digital platforms including Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Docs and Jamboard to communicate and gather data.

Notwithstanding its many challenges, the accomplishments of this research are threefold:

- It gives insight into the process of listening to enable communities to develop specific policy asks around innovation and technology issues.
- It explores people's digital experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It contributes to the understanding of remote and hybrid activities, services and methodologies to build people's capacity to participate in public life.

2

# Taking back control of community engagement: Citizens UK and the broad-based model of community organising

Community organising methodology aims to answer five questions:

- Who are our people?
- What are our issues?
- Who are the players that can deliver the change we want to see?
- What public social action can you take to get a reaction?
- Are we willing and able to negotiate for change?

The first two questions are what makes community organising methodology different to other types of engagement, specifically identifying people to listen to and work with.<sup>7</sup> The second two questions look at tactics that people can take to deliver change in their local area. And the final question addresses not the righteousness of the cause but instead the work needed to study power and the self-interest to demand change.<sup>8</sup>

*“Locally, there are areas affected by deprivation, but also seeing increasing levels of gentrification. A lot of that gentrification can be attributed to the rise of innovation places in London, namely Old Street, which is nicknamed Silicon Roundabout for the high number of tech companies and start-ups who have chosen to base there.”<sup>9</sup>*

Questions about the issues people face often reflect their experience of place: place has a profound impact on the identity of people living, working, studying, and associating with civil society organisations there, as well as an influence on the identities and values that people and organisations care about and the nature of the injustices they witness. The influence of technology and innovation developments in Hackney and Islington was no different.



Despite the wealth coming to the area, local people are often locked out of opportunities; any engagement work that is done seems to have little impact on people's lives, leaving communities with a 'high degree of scepticism and anger' about the promises of innovation areas such as the Olympic Park.<sup>10</sup>

To contest this challenge, there is a need for more inclusive policies developed by local communities for local communities. Broad-based community organising is a methodology tested in different contexts across the UK and beyond, where community engagement successfully brings real experiences from local people to demand – and receive – recognition and change.

## 2.1 Broad-based community organising

Community organising – as an action research methodology – is laden with philosophical commitments rooted in the notion of 'change'.<sup>11, 12</sup> It is influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology ethnographic techniques of immersing oneself in different contexts<sup>13</sup> to learn about different social dynamics, and conceptualising urban spaces to bring a sense of space, meaning and belonging.<sup>14</sup> It values civil society through affiliation of civic organisations and institutions that foster recognition, identity, territory and other things natural for the human condition.<sup>15, 16</sup>

This mixture of approaches, in conjunction with the culture of reflection and the importance of geography, develops specific techniques to build capacity by creating a broad-based civic organisation – sitting on the top of other civic organisations<sup>17</sup> – that builds power to demand change.<sup>18</sup> While some civic organisations are insular, broad-based community organising becomes a road whereby local communities can reach the political sphere to negotiate with the state and the market.<sup>19</sup> Through this, broad-based community organising becomes a model of solidarity *"not on sentiment and habit, but on a community of interests"*<sup>20</sup> working from within the community and outside of specific contexts. The model also aims to build community-based manifestos that create opportunities for ordinary people to participate in public life.<sup>21, 22</sup>

The methodology as applied by the charity Citizens UK, where local and national organisations become paying members of the charity, has increased its profile through flagship campaigns such as the Living Wage and Refugees Welcome. Both campaigns tested community organising as an effective model to understand people's needs and achieve change by organising resources and developing strategies to influence policy.<sup>23, 24</sup>

Over the years, Citizens UK has won changes on housing, wages, immigration and homelessness by building power through organising people and applying tension through action.<sup>25</sup> The charity is the largest broad-based community organising alliance in the UK, with over four hundred member organisations across the country and a large concentration of organisations in the capital. London Citizens oversees work across the city's boroughs, each with its own local alliance managed by a community organiser. Hackney and Islington Citizens – where this project is based – has over 25 member organisations: a mixture of schools, colleges, universities, religious organisations and charities. The broad-based community organising model builds a geographically-situated organisational-based network and creates a new community at the political level by collecting member organisations that are subject to a series of internal challenges and creating a shared social network of support and collaboration.<sup>26</sup>

The limitations of community organising methodology include prolonged time and scale – it may take a long time to build the power base to achieve the change needed<sup>27</sup> – and winnable versus worthwhile projects: although many issues are worthwhile, not all are winnable, and there is a craft to creating a truly winnable issue.

Community organising can be regarded as a model of politics that sees itself largely outside the policy debates of mainstream political parties.<sup>28</sup> However, there is a developing trend for the methodology being used by mainstream politicians. It gained widespread attention in connection with the political campaign style employed by US president Barack Obama, a former community organiser, during the 2009 presidential elections, and a similar approach was tested in the UK by both Conservative and Labour parties on ventures such as Locality and Movement for Change respectively.

The Labour Party also used community organising strategies under the leadership of Ed Miliband,<sup>29</sup> employing community organiser Arnie Graf as an advisor, and most notably a few years later under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, setting up a full community organising unit.

## 2.2 Research, action and evaluation: the cycle of organising

Broad-based community organising methodology considers processes of research, action and evaluation,<sup>30</sup> often referred to as the 'cycle of action'. Although the cycle has a framework, it is flexible according to experiences and contexts; it is a craft, not a science.<sup>31</sup> The framework of the cycle of actions is described as:

- 1. Research:** This process includes learning to understand the community context, understanding people's experiences, needs and aspirations, and creating opportunities for participants to join.
- 2. Action:** This process includes the use of diverse methods – such as mapping, focus groups or content analysis – to analyse the community context and people's experiences, informing power analysis and policy 'asks', and creating opportunities for development of participants.
- 3. Evaluation:** This process includes evaluating and learning the process through reflection and, if appropriate, celebration.<sup>32</sup>

The cycle of action has been used by Hackney and Islington Citizens to develop a number of local campaigns, and by Citizens UK more broadly to develop city-wide and country-wide campaigns.<sup>33</sup> While local campaigns include local authority and local organisational policy change, city-wide and country-wide campaigns include organisational, Greater London Authority and Home Office policy changes. The cycle of action is guided by a semi-structured programme of listening, planning and acting, with the intent of involving local people in the process.

### The cycle of action in motion

For this project, the cycle of action was used to understand the role of civil society in the innovation policy-making agenda. In Hackney and Islington, places of innovation have become of huge significance, and civil society has an important role in informing what those places can look like.

Late in 2019, Hackney and Islington member organisations (ELATT, Loughborough University London, Methodist Church in Hackney and Stoke Newington, New Unity, St. John’s Hoxton and Wesley’s Chapel & Leysian Mission) identified as a priority the process of holding innovation places, like the Here East tech hub at the Olympic Park, to account on issues like jobs, skills and opportunities for local people. The alliance designed and carried out a survey (Table 1) to understand how young people felt about the innovation hub at the Olympic Park and the opportunities made available to them.

Over 170 students – 17 to 20 year olds from church youth groups and local sixth forms – engaged in this survey. The results were then analysed in conjunction with local stories, which encouraged Hackney and Islington Citizens to search for further ways to develop a relationship with innovation and technology firms in the area to discuss opportunities for local people.

Through this initial work, Hackney and Islington Citizens developed a strategy to build a relationship with BT Sport, based at the Olympic Park, to discuss opportunities for local young people. Following an action, with local leaders asking for a meeting with the organisation, BT Sport announced a paid work experiences placement programme.

Table 1: Hackney and Islington Citizens' 2019, Colleges Survey

Questions	Results
Did you know there are tech, media art and creative companies in the Olympic Park?	Yes 34.1% No 65.9%
Do you think you can get a job in the Olympic Park?	Yes 41.1% No 58.9%

“This campaign took on one of the biggest media companies in the UK. This campaign organised 70 leaders outside the headquarters of BT Sport, in the Olympic Park. They also designed banners with sixth media students, testimony with ESOL learners and developed young people with interviews with local journalists. As a result, BT Sport will be offering work experience placements paid at a London Living Wage, which is unheard of the creative sector. The winners of TELCO Campaign Action Team of the Year 2019/20 – Hackney Citizens BT Sport Jobs Campaign, which was received by Oran, Head of Sixth Form at ELATT.”



## The 2020 project

The original plan for the 2020 project was to build on the successful story of the above campaign, involving more local member organisations and holding more innovation places to account. In February 2020, as part of the first phase of the partnership between Nesta and Citizens UK, Hackney and Islington Citizens met to launch a listening campaign based on the success of the Olympic Park jobs campaign. The plan was for member organisations to run listening exercises across their constituencies to identify further priorities on the issue of innovation in the local area.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown, member organisations had their capacity and focus switched to a new and rather urgent priority: at this point, Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations simply needed to refocus their efforts to try to address and cope with the pandemic. In some ways, community organising methodology's adaptable nature allows for such unexpected changes; a member of Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission explained that *"we're doing organising to work out what's right for the people we're working with. It's about flexibility; organising is so much about understanding your context."*<sup>34</sup>

In March 2020, organisations made the decision to take a step back, reframing their listening phase to find out the urgent issues experienced for their members at that point and instigating a mixture of surveys, telephone and video conference conversations. The main priorities that emerged were a need to protect community mental health due to isolation and bereavement, and digital exclusion affecting the ability of organisations to successfully deliver their services and engage with local people.<sup>35</sup> The listening campaign process will be explored in more detail in Section 2.3.

## Next steps

The second phase in the cycle of action is a mixture of further research, potential actions, and establishing community needs in order to determine tangible solutions, which stakeholders will be involved, and a plan to achieve these goals. Through this phase, Hackney and Islington Citizens identified digital exclusion as the main issue, and the tangible solutions as:

- Access to laptops and internet for disadvantaged families.
- Support and skills for people to learn how to use technology.
- Adaptation for organisations to switch to digital service delivery.<sup>36</sup>

## Hackney Citizens Twitter account



These solutions required the development of a relationship between Hackney and Islington Citizens with neighbouring innovation and technology firms, and local authorities in both Hackney and Islington.

The group decided to tackle the first problem of access to laptops and internet as the most urgent since it prevents people from engaging at all, creating a Digital Mutual Aid Group and inviting locally-based organisations such as Amazon, Inmarsat, Box, Microsoft Reactor, Plaid, and Community Fibre to get involved. Community organising methodology traditionally uses different levels of tension and agitation to strike a relationship of mutual benefit, using pressure, powerful testimony and vulnerability as strategies<sup>37</sup> – so a digital public action targeted at specific people within those organisations was identified by the local alliance as the best way to develop those relationships.

The final phase of the cycle of action is evaluation. Evaluation happens throughout the process to fully embed learning from the different phases.<sup>38</sup> In this project, evaluation took place after each team meeting, workshop or training, with the community organiser assessing the meeting in terms of its aims and objectives against delivery. The evaluation also gives people an opportunity to reflect and learn from both internal, organisational-facing action and external, policy-facing action.

The evaluation phase was also an opportunity for learning from the community organising process, specifically in terms of what works in remote community organising. A final evaluation of the whole project is also planned, which will identify learning points from the whole process in relation to the outcomes for the local community.

As we've seen, the community organising process enables different ways of participation, includes different voices in the process, and recognises experience as evidence; it is an opportunity to *"build power and energy."*<sup>39</sup> It allows member organisations to investigate the main issues their constituents are facing and develop a plan to address it, as a leader from Hackney and Islington Citizens explains:

*"We listen so that we can scratch where people are itching – because if we don't listen, we end up scratching where they aren't itching. I think you can then have a slightly more targeted delivery of resources."*<sup>40</sup>

For community organising methodology, listening is the first step applied in the process. Listening is the basis from which to understand the context of neighbourhoods and organisations, to grasp the depth and effects of the struggles, and to understand what needs to be changed.<sup>41</sup> Community organisers are trained in listening to the stories of ordinary people, collate information, develop leadership and build relationships. It allows for the experiences to be digested by the community organiser, the people they're working with, and by the whole community.<sup>42</sup>

Listening exercises can be informal, executed through one-to-one conversation and group meetings, or more formal in tone through the use of research techniques such as surveys and questionnaires. Informal methods are favoured as they create excitement and allow people to truly join the process.<sup>43</sup>

"It [community organising] starts with one-to-ones or with a house meeting, which is a group of people talking about what they wanted to change. That usually leads to forming a small team."<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, like all community organising methodology, the process of listening is flexible and encourages member organisations to use techniques that are within their experience.<sup>45</sup> While some organisations learn to adopt this technique for the first time, others already practice it within their own frameworks. A leader for St. John's Hoxton explained how listening is embedded within their tradition:

"My commitment around listening in one-to-ones and in-house meetings is that listening for a Christian is a way of paying attention to somebody: as one spiritual writer Dallas Willard said, 'to be listened to is barely distinguishable from being loved'. So actually, listening is something that God does and is something that Christians should do as they reflect the image of God to one another.

It's a way of loving people well and listening seriously, not just listening with your own agenda but listening to what's really going on in somebody's life. Through listening you learn about gifts, you learn about vocation, you learn about need, and you see the potential, you see the kind of pathways in [someone's] development."<sup>46</sup>

## 2.3 Understanding community priorities during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic saw severe measures of social distancing, inevitably creating challenges for people within communities, civic organisations and businesses. And while some Citizens UK member organisations were trying to cope with the new normal, others were struggling to survive. A community organiser in East London explains the experience of member organisations reacting to the new context:

"At the beginning, every institution was just thinking: 'let me just survive'. They were thinking about how to get out of this thing, they wanted to rescue themselves. Then they thought, okay, we're rescued now, now we need to thrive.

And they came to see that it is themselves who can help them to survive the way they want to survive. So they started seeking more power, they started recognising the power they have, they started engaging themselves with power, and they became more united with different faith groups. It's all been great, great community organising."<sup>47</sup>

A number of organisations involved in the project ran their own formal surveys, complemented by individual conversations. St. John's Hoxton, Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission and the ELATT learning community all wanted to understand their members' needs in order to further shape their services and activities in this new context.

The Hackney and Islington community organiser, Froi Legaspi, explains their overall decision regarding the direction of the innovation campaign: *"some institutions were already in listening mode because of the impact of the lockdown on their business models. So they brought that listening to the wider campaign work."*<sup>48</sup> The results of the formal and informal listening carried out by Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission, St. John's Hoxton and ELATT are explored below.

Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission performed a listening exercise, engaging with 13 respondents, that used pastoral care and a phone survey to check which members needed paper-based resources and who needed to use a phone conferencing method to engage in worship. Results are as follows:

**Table 2: Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission Research, 2020**

Questions	Results
In a typical week, which of the following forms of transportation does your household use?	Bus <b>75%</b> Tube <b>41.67%</b> Train <b>16.67%</b> Cab <b>16.67%</b> Ferry <b>0%</b>
Do you have children who currently use public transport to travel to school?	Yes <b>0%</b> No <b>100%</b>
Do you use public transport to travel to church?	Yes <b>41.67%</b> No <b>25%</b> Sometimes <b>25%</b> I did before COVID-19 but now plan to come by car when church reopens <b>8.33%</b>
Do you hold a blue badge?	Yes <b>0%</b> No <b>100%</b>
Do you have internet access at home?	Yes <b>100%</b> No <b>0%</b>
Does everybody in your household have a separate device (such as laptop, tablet or phone)?	Yes <b>100%</b> No <b>0%</b>
If no, how many people are sharing?	N/A
Has the being on-line required you to buy additional phone credit or pay for higher data usage?	Yes <b>7.69%</b> No <b>92.31%</b>

Although the survey provided some information about people's experiences, the sample was fairly small in relation to the organisation's membership. In fact, it was through one-to-one conversation that issues of the number of devices at home surfaced. One leader explained that *"our youth worker is doing a Listening Campaign with parents and their children, and we've been putting out weekly challenges. It's easier now we're moving towards some holiday, because one of the problems is that if there's one device, parents wanted it for Sunday morning, so you couldn't run Sunday School alongside that because it would exclude people."*<sup>49</sup>

St. John's Hoxton also ran a listening survey with 21 participants, designed to find out what people needed help and support with and to inform fundraising following the pandemic. Participants were asked to tick all of the issues that were affecting them directly or someone they know from a checklist, which you can see below.

**Table 3: Organising Growth and Life Beyond Lockdown Survey – St. John's Hoxton, 2020**

Questions	Results
Concerns about sending children back to schools	17
<b>Not enough technology</b>	<b>16</b>
Struggles with home-schooling	16
Loneliness and isolation	15
Mental and emotional Health	15
Anxiety about the future	14
<b>Poor home internet</b>	<b>13</b>
Experiencing grief due to cancelled events	13
Overcrowding housing	13
<b>Not knowing how to use technology</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Using up data allowance too quickly</b>	<b>12</b>
Poor physical health	12
Unemployment or insecure employment	12
Concerns about childcare	12
High energy bills	12
Food poverty	12
Expensive housing	11
Difficult relationships	11
Bereavement and grief	10
Insecure housing	10
Facing difficulties with public transport to get back to work	8
Not knowing how to get help locally	8
Others	5



As with Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission, the sample size was small in comparison to membership numbers, and again, it was through ongoing conversations and experiences from the church leadership that details of bad quality internet and access to devices came up. A leader involved in the survey explains: *"it's only a 10 per cent sample, but about 70 per cent would consistently describe inadequate home internet, inadequate devices and not knowing how to use their technology was a problem they were facing."*<sup>50</sup>

One of the main issues for the church was to engage their members. *"There's not enough bandwidth in neighbourhoods like ours, because of the population density. Zoom calls kept dropping out and breaking up, we're trying to record segments for our services, we will live stream from the vicarage and the stream withdraws... then you realise that people are not able to do their homework, [have no] access to online schooling, or to their remote working... people didn't have devices. If you don't have a device and you don't have good connection, you can't participate, so we realised there was this awful exclusion going on."*<sup>51</sup> Through this and other similar experiences, St. John's Hoxton and Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission identified digital exclusion as one of the main issues affecting them and their members.

Although ELATT planned to develop an online offer for their educational services, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a process that ordinarily would have taken them at least a year.<sup>52</sup> In short, ELATT realised everything had to go online or there would be no business. They decided to run trainings for teachers and students before and after lockdown, and during the Easter holidays spent time *"working out what to do to be up and running."*<sup>53</sup> ELATT's decision to continue trading was to ensure some stability and well being in the lives of their students through a very challenging time.

*"We really came to the conclusion that we had to keep trading and we had to keep delivering services. A lot of our students are home with their children and worried about their jobs, we wanted to provide them an outlet and give them focus for something they enjoy doing that's also about learning new skills. Apart from the educational aspect, we thought it would help people's wellbeing emotionally to have a focus and to have a trusted face looking after them."*<sup>54</sup>

ELATT understood the changes brought by the pandemic would involve a higher level of online delivery than before, so access to devices and training became an important condition to go forward. *"Whatever happens with [the pandemic], if local people in poverty have to do 80 per cent online, [inclusion] would still not be present like it might have been before March. There's no going back. I think it's impossible that life will ever go back to February, and in many ways why would we want it to? We have to try to make a change for the better."*<sup>55</sup>

ELATT also designed and carried out a survey of their students – but unlike Wesley’s Chapel & Leysian Mission and St. John’s Hoxton, the charity surveyed their students to inform their business model decisions (see below). The survey reached out to over two hundred students to investigate levels of satisfaction with online learning from the different cohort groups. As a result of the survey, ELATT considered different business plan options based on how many services would be delivered online and how many face-to-face.

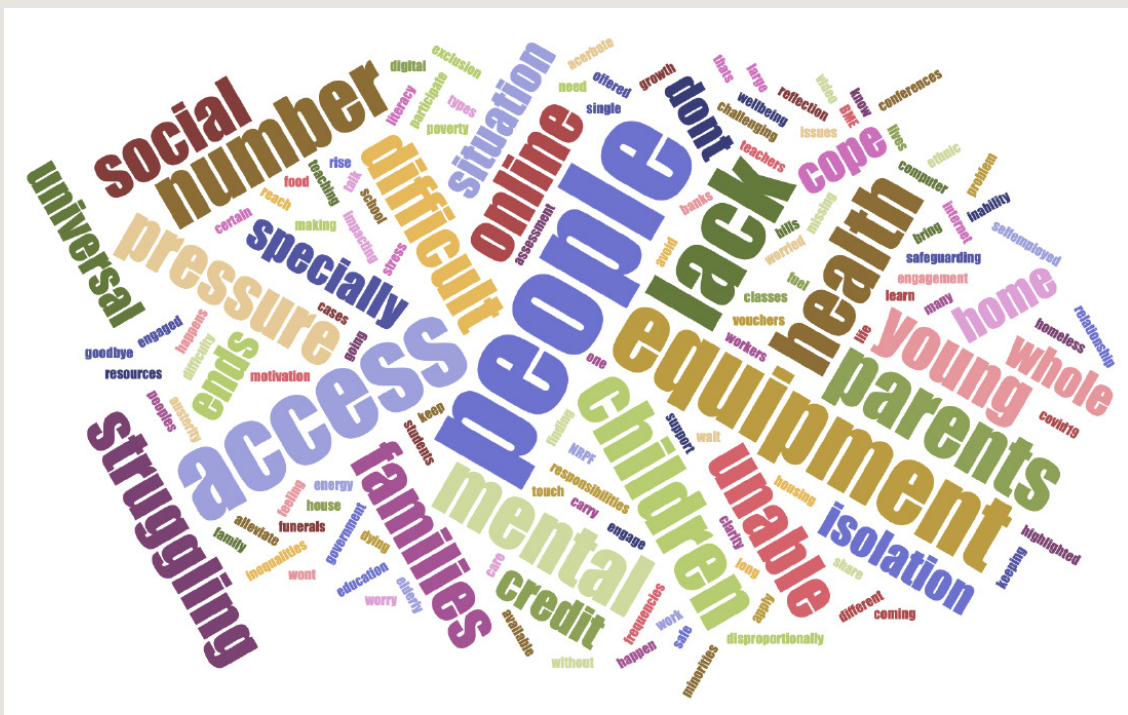
Table 4: ELATT Survey, 2020

Questions	Results
How satisfied are you with online sixth form classes?	Satisfied <b>57%</b> Very satisfied <b>18%</b> Total (satisfied and very satisfied) <b>75%</b>
How satisfied are you with online CV classes?	Satisfied <b>41%</b> Very satisfied <b>54%</b> Total (satisfied and very satisfied) <b>95%</b>
How satisfied are you with online life skills?	Satisfied <b>47%</b> Very satisfied <b>49%</b> Total (satisfied and very satisfied) <b>96%</b>
How satisfied are you with ELATT online learning as a whole?	Satisfied <b>47%</b> Very satisfied <b>45%</b> Total (satisfied and very satisfied) <b>92%</b>
All but <b>10%</b> said they wanted to remain online for at least <b>50%</b> of their studies from now on	

Listening following the pandemic was complex, and brought up many intertwining issues. 26 leaders across 17 member organisations brought these experiences together at the first Hackney and Islington Citizens Executive meeting following the start of the pandemic, on 30 April 2020. The key question they discussed was: *“what needs has coronavirus created or intensified in your community?”* Each organisation answered the question individually, reflecting on their own experiences up to that point.

Issues that arose included:

- Single parents finding it challenging to cope with children at home alongside other responsibilities, children missing school and lack of equipment for students to learn.
- Housing issues.
- Lack of motivation and engagement.
- Stress impacting wellbeing and safeguarding.
- Rise in bills and fuel poverty, vouchers not reaching parents, universal credit, and other money worries.
- Homeless people having no access to equipment, digital inequality, lack of devices, communication online, teaching classes online.
- Mental health, social isolation and keeping in touch.
- Disproportionally large numbers of ethnic minorities dying, inequalities that exacerbate the number of cases of COVID-19 in BAME people.



The complexity of the needs experienced by local people meant that many projects and activities were happening at the same time. But to continue the efficacy of community organising, further work needed to be done to narrow down the main priorities to be addressed. Froi Legaspi explained that the different experiences and listening brought forward by the member organisations “framed a lot of the priorities. But it was in the course of five conversations that we begin to think about... what are the biggest challenges facing the community? The top two were mental health and digital inclusion.”<sup>56</sup>

3

# Community organisations experiences of innovation and technology

Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations and their constituents experienced the opportunities and challenges of technology in three ways: by individual inclusion or exclusion of technology, by organisational service innovation, and through interactions with innovation actors like Here East and Silicon Roundabout firms. Organisations used to local technology firms' methodologies and activities were able to respond quickly and continue their services despite the pressures posed by lockdown, while others found it challenging to cope. Proximity to and previous experiences of innovation and technology activities also had a positive effect on the organisations responses to move online.

As we have seen, the organisations involved in this project are geographically close to the Here East and the Silicon Roundabout innovation areas. Some also had previous engagement with these firms in different ways, including participating in activities or connections with employees or partnerships, which allowed them to successfully cope with the transition of developing their online services. This means they were already in a place where they were thinking about innovation's impact locally, their organisation's collaboration with innovation, and how they could influence what that collaboration looks like. Following lockdown, Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations were able to quickly react to the new rules by re-imagining their service delivery, bringing their constituents on this journey with them as they did so.

## 3.1 Innovation as a neighbour

Broad-based community organising arises from local oriented organisations, making geographical context important for the methodology.<sup>57</sup> Froi Legaspi argues that *"the key thing which is really crucial to community organising is a sense of place, and the way that place intersects with power. These companies can't move to places like Shoreditch and have a neutral effect on the local community."*<sup>58</sup>

Neighbourhood experience influenced the effectiveness of local organisations in coping with lockdown. In particular, proximity to, previous engagement with, and knowledge of innovation and technology (i.e. Hackathons, live streaming of services, STEM education, or UX training) were valuable during the first weeks of lockdown. Most leaders also had a long-standing relationship with technology and innovation, which influenced the way they decided to deliver their services and activities.

All of the organisations involved with this project had an understanding of and confident relationship with innovation. One St. John's Hoxton's leader explains their early engagement with innovation activities and how that influenced their work in the local area.

"When I moved here, I settled in right on the cusp of the whole Silicon Shoreditch, Old Street... this lightning conductor idea about Tech City.

I met up with a little group of Christians who were all working as electronic engineers, programmers, software designers, CTOs, and trying to find some solidarity and some support structures around the Shoreditch area. It was a support group really, for companionship and friendship, prayer and networking. These were Christians who worked in tech who came to work in firms in Shoreditch and found that it was dominated by a very scientific worldview that was sometimes quite hostile to faith.

So we've been involved in tech for a few years, and hosted some tech conferences. I've also been involved with the Church of England digital campaign, I've been working on digi-labs and I've spoken at a few of their events, and we live streamed our Christmas Day service five years ago. So we're no strangers to live streaming services."<sup>59</sup>

Such proximity to local technology projects created opportunities for Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations to develop mechanisms for building relationships of mutual benefit with local tech firms. ELATT developed those mechanisms by building relationships with apprenticeship providers within the tech sector as a way to benefit their students: *"We were talking to Tech City Stars about our courses, about creating what would be a pipeline, a route for them to recruit. They were struggling to recruit and were looking for local people to become apprentices, and our students were looking for jobs. So the idea was that we would prepare our students to move to Tech City Stars."*<sup>60</sup>

While the innovation neighbours influenced the ability of Hackney and Islington Citizens to successfully respond to COVID-19 measures, such geographical closeness also brought negative effects to the local neighbourhood in general (as per the results of the Hackney and Islington Citizens 2019 Colleges Survey, found in section 2.2). In comparing the prospects of London as a tech city to San Francisco, Legaspi argued that:

"There's an agenda to create innovation places which assumes that by hosting these places you bring prosperity to both the government to fund local services but also to local communities. They explicitly say they want London to become the next Tech City, to emulate places like San Francisco. But of course, [they don't] talk about the immense social problems that innovation places in San Francisco has caused to local people to local communities, pushing people out of local neighbourhoods."<sup>61</sup>

Innovation economies therefore provide both an opportunity and a challenge for local people and the community in general. While such proximity allows people and organisations to learn valuable skills from the tech industry, the innovation agenda needs to include the voices of the local community too. As one St. John's Hoxton leader puts it, *"human flourishing is about not just launching a successful start-up and making your first million. How do you make sure that this is serving social needs?"*<sup>62</sup>

### 3.2 Effects of digital exclusion for community organisations

Digital exclusion and mental health were raised as the main issues constituents from Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations were facing. Following this, two teams were set up to pursue the challenges posed by the pandemic; the team that previously identified innovation economies as a priority was now involved in the digital inclusion campaign. A Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission leader explains the many layers, levels and nuances of how people are affected by digital exclusion:

"Families do have laptops and devices, but they don't have one per person and that's causing problems, where it's who gets priority. How does that feed into relationships within the family, where perhaps younger siblings are being told they don't need a computer as much but actually their teachers are saying they do because the devices are in the house.

Also, where you've got people using mobile phones, can they afford the top-up, and what pressure is that putting on families where it's causing financial poverty or digital poverty? You have stuff in relation to church – we will be live streaming stuff, but there are people who don't have access to YouTube and only have it on a phone or in an area where there's lots of people trying to use the internet.

Then there's those who don't have the skills or the ability to access it, and those who have actually fallen through the net if we have, say, an email address, but not a phone number. We don't know if that email address was actually something they were accessing through a library or through a workplace. If they're at home, they may be without access to getting on to that site and so we're not able to contact them. Also [there are] people ending up in poverty because they can't access the support because they're expected to be doing it online."<sup>63</sup>

The issue of digital exclusion also affected different groups of people in different ways. For some, digital exclusion meant lack of access to vital services such as education or benefits, as well as work; for others, lack of opportunity to connect; and for local grassroots organisations it meant *"an existential threat to their business model."*<sup>64</sup>

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### 3.3 From self-interest to community interest: working together for change

The practice of community organising is an example of social solidarity as a practice of 'collective (common) conscience' at a local level, helping to develop an identity, a sense of belonging and care for the local area.<sup>65</sup> Strong social networks, recognition, identity and territory are all significant in developing a sense of belonging in local communities<sup>66</sup> and the habit of solidarity.<sup>67</sup> One Citizens UK's community organiser proposes how community organisers recognise the potential of local leaders:

*"We find out what motivates them, what is the thing that they want to change. What they will learn is how to engage with political leaders or politics in general. We don't campaign for them, they do that for themselves. We're just showing the strategy in planning the route."<sup>68</sup>*

To recognise self-interest is to have a realistic acknowledgement of what drives people in local communities.<sup>69</sup> Self-interest is defined as people and organisations' experiences, aspirations and needs. Learning how to recognise self-interest is a way to recognise the values that drive people: *"you need shared values for people to come together, you need a community of practice for people to want to come together to work for each other."<sup>70</sup>*

Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations therefore considered their own self-interest and the self-interest of their constituents to build a team to work together to tackle digital exclusion. The biggest challenge in bringing different self-interests together is to find consensus and develop a common agenda,<sup>71</sup> the process of which took place through a series of activities designed to guide the desire for change. Leaders shared their values, experiences, needs and aspirations with the rest of the team. The process to finding a common voice was a complex *"series of meetings and workshops to unpack what we meant by digital inclusion."<sup>72</sup>*

Following the listening campaign, initial conversations decided that digital inclusion had two equally important levels: individual and organisational. While the individual level referred to access to technology and devices for individuals, organisational change required support for organisations to successfully deliver their services online. However, during the process of consensus, there was a decreasing mandate for the organisational support part of the digital inclusion agenda and more demand for individual access to digital devices, internet and skills – something that was also seen at workshops created to unpack these issues.

During workshops, two groups set about exploring solutions to each different type of digital exclusion, individual and organisational. At the organisational digital exclusion group, leaders were asked *"What does civil society need to develop COVID-19 recovery plans for their service delivery?"* An overwhelming majority of the answers concentrated on access to devices, better network and skills, including:

- Fibre network installation – connection to community hubs, community fibre to be eligible for community hub offer.
- Outdoor wifi zones, where local estates can also benefit.
- Internet provision to be included in the same category as gas and energy.
- Provide every student with internet access.
- Mutual aid – for access to computers at home, lack of access and skills, and not being able to engage.
- 'Service recipes'<sup>d</sup> in local areas – resources for other organisations that are struggling.<sup>73</sup>

At this workshop, the community organiser recognised there was less energy to think about support for service delivery, as people were reporting solutions in terms of concrete, material things. *"Access to skills, providing laptops and securing internet... what came from that meeting was that it was really clear there wasn't really much of a mandate to think about how we support community innovation."*<sup>74</sup>

Member organisations therefore took the decision to focus on tangible issues of access to internet, devices and skills. On the organisational front, Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations suggested creating service 'recipes' or digital solutions to resource other organisations that were not coping as successfully.

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d. Service recipes are step-by-step guides on how to deliver a particular service.



4

## Changing dynamics: hybrid services and activities

Due to the social distancing measures that took place at the beginning of the project, Citizens UK's activities took different formats, and with that a new way to do broad-based community organising emerged. Hackney and Islington Citizens and its member organisations involved in this project changed their approach to services to continue to function – for them, as noted, this was a comfortable transition, as they were no strangers to the contexts and concepts of technology and innovation. But the same was not true for all organisations within the local alliance and beyond: others struggled to continue their activities and are still learning to cope with the new normal.

And while these organisations were learning new approaches, Citizens UK was too. As we've seen, the inability to meet face-to-face created new ways of approaching broad-based community organising methodology. This was followed by a series of challenges and opportunities to the model, including learning new ways to develop leaders' capacity to participate in public life.

### 4.1 Learning the new rules: organisation's remote engagement

As a result of COVID-19, Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations learned and developed new ways to engage with their members. For instance, St. John's Hoxton and Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission started to run online services for their different groups and prayer services, making conscious decisions regarding what platforms were used and what frequency of contact would enable people to join the services as a way to maintain relationships.

The main challenge for churches was finding ways for their members to participate in responses, especially during Sunday services. An organisation very much comfortable with the use of technology, St. John's Hoxton made informed theological choices that guided the type of software used to deliver their service and enable effective engagement.

"It actually becomes a theological category or an ecclesiastical category congregation list, rather than a parochial one, because what you're effectively doing is saying those people who are within the membership circle can have the link and can come and be on the screen, contributing to the conversation, but people who might just be walking by, as it were, digitally walking by, they won't know, they'll be excluded.

Facebook Live is a much more public platform. What we liked about using Facebook was that we could then have people interacting and encouraging and using the comment thread, and we made a guide in the first week – we came up with a little scheme of emojis. So if you're worshipping and say amen, we would get people to put up emoji in the comment thread."<sup>75</sup>

For Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission, the need to increase the frequency of services guided their decision-making. *"We knew that because people were going to need more content at regular points to help them with routine, we introduced a ten o'clock morning prayer Monday to Saturday, which was a way to check in with them without [actually] checking in with them."*<sup>76</sup>

For ELATT, decision-making was guided by the fact they wanted teachers to continuously support students, ensuring they had a safe job, were able to deliver online classes and had access to online material. Although the transition was hard work, the organisation responded quickly to moving online. *"We made a decision we wouldn't make any redundancies. Whatever happens, no one's losing their jobs. Then we just said to staff: you do everything you can. So, if you're sick, don't work; if you're worried about your parents, look after them, and if you're able to teach, teach."*<sup>77</sup>

The long-term social distancing measure posed more challenges to developing hybrid ways to deliver their services than to simply moving online. While the specific organisations involved in this project found the transition to online comfortable, due to their experiences and aspirations to do so, longer-term business model formats are now the biggest barrier. An ELATT leader explains:

"It's really hard to know quite how to pitch our model because, back in April everything was online. It's either online or we can't do it, so what can we make work online or what do we have to drop? I think the opening up is much harder than the shutting down. So I think we have to kind of recalibrate our message to staff and students. I think that kind of strategy is much more complicated now – not necessarily harder to deliver, but harder to decide."<sup>78</sup>

Amongst all the struggles of the pandemic, organisations are finding ways of coping and in many ways are thriving within their contexts. They are making important decisions about how to continuously and effectively engage with their members every day. These decisions led them to learn new skills, new tools and build their capacity – and that of their members – to find creative ways to engage. This process was an important aspect to allowing new broad-based community organising methodology to work.

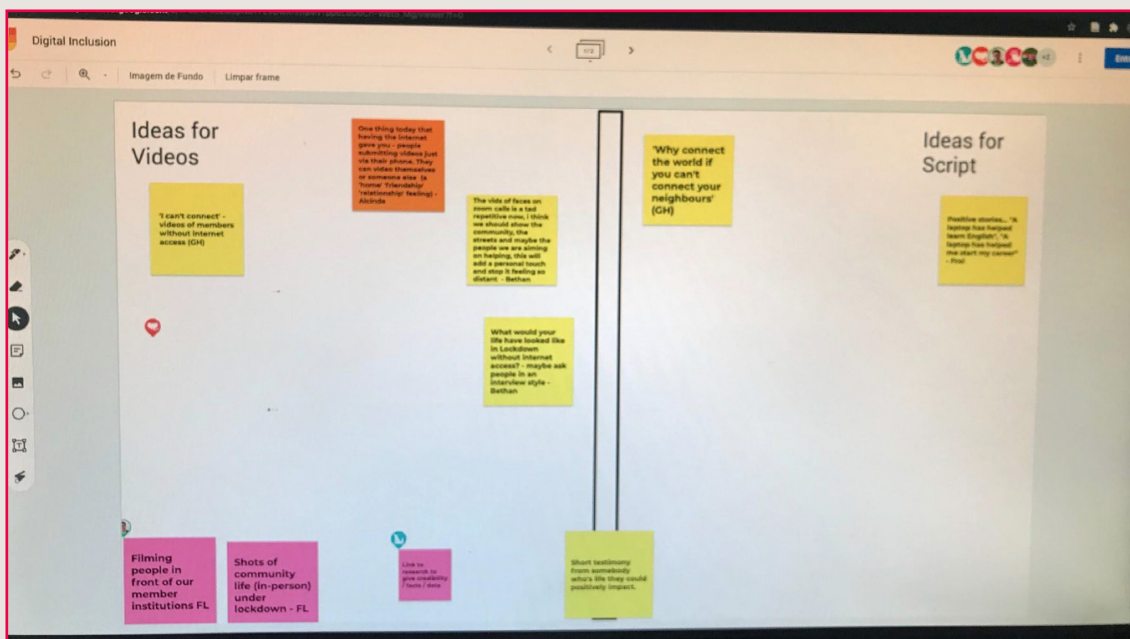
## 4.2 Testing new community organising methodologies

Like their member organisations, Citizens UK also had to learn new skills and tools to bring their activities and services online. While some organisations were comfortable with the move of their services online, welcoming remote community organising as a way to continue with their plans, others resisted the change. *"Institutions like universities, they were quite happy to just carry on, because they were able to, and their whole institution had transitioned. But some of our churches are completely resistant and to this day think that it's unethical to hold organising spaces online because they're not accessible. There's a lot of resistance, saying we should not have training online, we should not have actions online."*<sup>79</sup>

For Hackney and Islington Citizens member organisations, community organising methodologies practiced online had many benefits. Although some leaders expressed having relational, one-to-one conversations via Zoom was a challenge, it enabled participation of people who would be unable to attend in-person meetings due to disabilities, caring responsibilities, transport or weather issues: *"some of our churches have completely transformed because people with disabilities can join."*<sup>80</sup> Online community organising also enabled people in different areas – even abroad – that cared about Hackney and Islington to participate; remote community organising methodology opened the doors to different ways to engage and commit.

As part of this project, all meetings were online via Zoom, with teams using Jamboard to brainstorm and Google Docs to share documents. While some leaders knew these softwares previously, for others it was their first time.

### Jamboard of action planning meeting, 2020



Online platforms enabled more participation of some people due to scheduling, but it has challenged those who experienced digital exclusion. Ultimately, remote community organising offered Hackney and Islington Citizens and their members new tools, offering people new mediums and opportunities to engage in public life.

### 4.3 Online community organising developing people to participate in public life

Community organising methodology uses the cycle of research, action and evaluation<sup>81</sup> to provide organisations with opportunities to develop their capacity to participate in public life. It helps people meet others and work together for the common good. One young leader from Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission explains their development journey with Hackney and Islington Citizens: *"Having loads of different people from different organisations helped me understand how to make positive social change."*<sup>82</sup> All leaders participating in the project stated that through their work with Hackney and Islington Citizens and other Citizens UK alliances they learned new skills, met people that they would not meet otherwise, and participated in a public action on something they cared about.

From the onset, Hackney and Islington Citizens' digital inclusion campaign had the potential to develop leaders throughout the campaign's phases and processes. The opportunities for leadership development happened in this project through sharing stories, participating in training, one-to-one coaching sessions with the organiser, chairing meetings, facilitating workshops and breakout sessions – all via online platforms. Hackney and Islington Citizens were testing these opportunities for the first-time while simultaneously learning from the process itself. An example of how online opportunities enabled people to test participation in a negotiation action is explained below:

*"It can feel safer for people to participate in that way [online], because those women would not have stepped foot in [the] Town Hall, but they did connect from their house. Now they've done that, maybe in the next meeting they will speak out and maybe by the time this is all over, they will have the courage to walk into Town Hall."*<sup>83</sup>

While some aspects of the community organising methodology benefited from online opportunities, others are still to be tested. The main challenges for remote community organising methodology are in relation to how to use online digital platforms for social actions within its limited capacity. Froi Legaspi explains the main challenges of the planned public action on digital inclusion:

*"How does one operate in public life when you cannot gather in public? I think gathering for meetings, relational meetings and workshops online is okay and you can do a lot with that. if you originally intended to do a public action, what does that look like? Or are we not taking public action for as long as a pandemic arises? I don't feel that's a satisfactory answer just to accept that, so we need to find ways to do those universals of organising in a context of seeking justice through public action."*<sup>84</sup>

Hackney and Islington Citizens used a local story of a nurse resident in the borough to share how digital exclusion was a challenge for her. She decided to develop a digital public action – in the form of a digital letter – to ask local tech giants to support their Digital Mutual Aid Group. The digital letter is addressed to Beth Knight (Amazon), Rupert Pearce (Inmarsat), James Wollard (Microsoft Reactor), Christina Louie Dyer (Box) and Keith Grose (Plaid), and wrote asking for a meeting with them. The script from their digital letter reads:

“My name is [BLANK], and I’m your neighbour, living in Shoreditch.

With schools, faith and community groups, we’ve set up a Digital Mutual Aid Group for Shoreditch. We’d like to meet with you or a colleague to discuss the digital divide in our neighbourhoods. Like lots of people here, we love Shoreditch, the nightlife, the friendly vibe, the people. We’re your neighbours, so we wanted to say hello!

Lockdown was a big shock to many of us. Access to food, friends, school and work was hard. But tech companies, like yours, helped keep our neighbourhoods going. Having access to the internet helped me buy groceries for my grandmother, stay connected with my community, attend my English and Maths lessons. But the sad truth is... some neighbours who need a laptop can’t afford one. Some people have 500MB of internet data a month – which is just enough for a one-hour video call.

I’m studying to be a nurse for the NHS. During lockdown, me and my three children had one laptop between us. We’re supposed to study hard to progress. But without laptops and internet, people like me are being left behind. We’ve set up a Digital Mutual Aid Group for Shoreditch, helping our neighbours stay connected with their schools and communities.

But too many are still isolated. That’s why we’re launching the Shoreditch 300 challenge. To help 300 neighbours with laptops and internet for a year, we need to raise £200,000. We’ve raised £50,000 so far and helped 78 people, but more can be done. As your neighbours, we need your help. [BLANK], will you agree to meet with us or help us meet with the right person at your company by the end of 2020? Let’s connect now!”<sup>85, e</sup>

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e. See: <https://www.linkedin.com/embed/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:6738097256311877632?compact=1>

## Hackney and Islington Citizens Digital Inclusions campaign video letter, 2020



The video-letter was publicly shared on Black Friday, 27 November 2020, on LinkedIn. Following the release of the video, both Plaid and Amazon got in touch with Hackney and Islington Citizens with a date for a meeting. On 10 December 2020, the innovation campaign team held two separate meetings, where they discussed the tech company's involvement on the Shoreditch Mutual Aid Group – to supply equipment for local people – and on other aspects of the alliance's priorities (such as local jobs).

Following the meetings, Hackney and Islington Citizens are now in an ongoing relationship with both technology companies. This means the alliance will endeavour to work in collaboration with them to enable positive changes for the local community. Further work is needed to explore the role of civil society in holding innovation places to account.

5

# Recommendations

These recommendations explore the necessity of legitimising digital capital need and opportunities for community organising methodology to further support the role of local communities within innovation policymaking.

## 5.1 Defining digital access needs

This research highlighted the growing demand and need for higher digital capital for households and community organisations to help them cope with their daily activities. COVID-19 revealed the disparity of those left behind – which now includes those that do not have access to technology.

Policies on the number of devices that determine eligibility to device distribution schemes often accounts for one device per household. But the reality is that members of households are sharing and having to take turns to use devices. Subsequently, while COVID-19 will pass, its effects on people's digital needs will continue, and with a large number of private, public, and even social activities moving online, many people will be left behind. Work is needed to inform policy in areas affected by digital exclusion, e.g. education, health and employment.

## 5.2 Long-term challenges for civic organisations

COVID-19 presented an opportunity for civil society organisations to engage with innovation and technology in a way that many have never considered before. Examples of how these organisations were creators of practical and conceptual innovation can be seen in this report. However, the stories explored do not reflect a universal picture of how civil society responded to COVID-19 or its associated lockdown. Rather, a large number of organisations are still struggling and still trying to find their feet in this new normal.

The challenge now is civil society's long-term coping mechanisms, much needed to continue to deliver services, activities and to engage their people. Civil society organisations involved in this project – ELATT, St. John's Hoxton, Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission as well as Loughborough University London, Methodist Church in Hackney and Stoke Newington and New Unity – are innovators of new local digital services and should be recognised as such. They are a powerful asset to civil society and should be given support to share their successful innovation stories.

By doing so, they can contribute and develop pathways to strengthen other organisations that are finding online or hybrid ways to function and challenge the status quo. Long-term lack of opportunities for learning and support for civil society organisations may cause existential threat, which could have a hugely negative impact on local people and communities, especially during and after a pandemic.

### 5.3 Design and Power: A new methodology

Collaborations between service design and community organising can strengthen the engagement of civic organisations in civil society following COVID-19. While a number of private companies and public service organisations sought the expertise of service designers to support their transition post COVID-19, civil society organisations would also benefit from such expertise.

But many do not have access to it. The collaboration between service design and community organising can strengthen civic organisations by supporting organisations to develop effective ways to engage their members and deliver their services. It can also continue to hold innovation places to account by addressing further the issue of digital exclusion. Froi Legaspi sees the relationship between the two as an opportunity to develop designs that are accountable to people in the next step of digital exclusion:

"This intersection between service design and community organising... you could argue that that's the next step. That's the next iteration, because things like digital inclusion are multifaceted, just as with any form of anti-poverty efforts. There's not just one thing. So you can definitely argue that as part of the digital inclusion work.

There's some interesting work to be done to think about service design and organising as a method by which to think about how society organises IT services. How can service design ensure that provision is resilient? What's the role of service design and community organisers to make sure that government digital government services remain accountable to people, so that what they deliver is accessible?"<sup>86</sup>



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