



A report from Nesta's Everyone Makes Innovation Policy programme

Democratising Innovation Policy

How community organising
can help build a more
inclusive economy

December 2021

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Executive summary

Innovation policy has wide-ranging and profound effects on our lives. It shapes how we work, communicate, manufacture goods and wage war, as well as how we respond to global threats such as climate change and pandemics. Yet decisions about what problems to focus on, and with what distribution of benefits and burdens, tend to be made by a small scientific and technocratic elite, with those most affected rarely involved. Previous Nesta research has found that while people think the public should have decision-making power in innovation, most believe they currently have none.

For the 2020 round of Nesta's Everyone Makes Innovation Policy programme, which tested new ways of involving the public in innovation policy decisions, we were looking for a partner who could help redress the balance and promote people power in innovation policy. This search led us to Citizens UK, the leading practitioners of community organising in the UK – a method that builds power amongst communities to campaign and win on issues of shared concern.

The community organising method involves three main groups of actors on a local level – professional organisers, community leaders, and power holders – and consists of three main steps: a research or 'listening' phase where community leaders consult their members to identify areas of concern; an action phase, where organisers and leaders work together to develop a campaign strategy, engage with power holders, and stage public actions; and an evaluation phase, when campaign teams reflect on wins and losses.

We launched our partnership with Citizens UK in January 2020, supporting a professional organiser in East London and Birmingham to work with member organisations to build a citizens' agenda around local economic and industrial policy. We also commissioned evaluations to study the process, experience and outcomes of the projects in each location.

In East London, the initial scope centred around an innovation hub, Here East, exploring the potential for more reciprocal relations between the hub and the local community. In Birmingham, meanwhile, the project built on Citizens UK's long standing work with ethnic minority micro-businesses in deprived areas of the city, specifically supporting the development of a business leadership group.

Projects in both locations were rescoped to better meet community needs following the onset of the pandemic. In East London, the team coordinated a digital mutual aid group, calling on local power holders and businesses to help with access to devices and reliable internet. In Birmingham, we shifted to exploring how Citizens UK could help its members with regard to business support and commercial opportunities during the pandemic period.

The innovation policy prompt brought many issues and ideas to light. Community members raised and explored a wide range of topics related to innovation, including access to innovative jobs, digital exclusion, service innovation, and inclusive business support for migrant entrepreneurs.

Both projects achieved substantial wins. In East London, the digital mutual aid group secured funding from crowdsourcing and local corporations including Amazon to deliver on plans to support community members with devices and digital skills. In Birmingham, the business leaders group successfully bid for a local authority contract to create public health videos in community languages, featuring community members in familiar locations as a way of making the content more relatable to the target audience.

The community organising method enables different forms of participation than traditional public engagement activities, addressing the balance of power on a local level by recognising shared concerns, developing community members' leadership skills, and bringing members and power holders together in collaborative as well as confrontational modes.

It also creates links between decision-making institutions and communities that would otherwise be hard to form, and provides a way for communities to use their experience and knowledge to shape responses to innovation-related questions locally. The local aspect is something to stress as a key strength and as a consideration for how it might be applied in innovation policy, where decision-making remains fairly centralised.

Potential applications of community organising in innovation policy

We identified several use cases for community organising across the innovation policy landscape:

- **Local and regional government** could improve the reach and impact of place-based agendas and business support activities, develop more inclusive procurement practices, and enhance their awareness of emerging social issues and priorities.
- **University departments, research institutes and think tanks** could develop research partnerships between community organisers and researchers to improve scoping, framing and impact of research and develop their roles as civic institutions.
- **Innovation developments such as hubs and science parks** could improve community relationships, develop routes for local talent to access opportunities, and enhance the potential for innovation activities to support and strengthen the local business community.
- **Service design community** could form mixed methods partnerships with civil society organisations to improve service delivery, as well as work together to hold government to account on delivering accessible digital services.

1

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has reminded us once again that we are members of communities. From the very local level to the international, and for better and worse, our actions affect each other. When the pandemic hit, we saw mutual aid groups spring up across the country to make sure neighbours had enough food, could access their prescriptions, and had someone to talk to in a time of isolation.

Now, as the conversation orients around recovery, it's imperative that local and national plans take into account the resources that exist within communities: for solving problems, finding new ways of working, and implementing systems that, rooted in deep knowledge about the local economy and community, have greater chance of long-term and meaningful impact. Taking these resources into account is the necessary first step. Sharing power and control is how transformation will happen.

1.1. Governance: a key dimension of inclusive innovation

In 2020, Nesta worked with Citizens UK to explore the potential of broad-based community organising as a method of including more people in the process of making and influencing decisions about innovation and how it is supported. This process can also be referred to as 'democratising innovation policy'.

This partnership was set up as part of Nesta's work on inclusive innovation,¹ which has looked at who gets to benefit from government investment in innovation, and how policies and institutions can be improved so that risks and rewards are more equally shared. We argue that, if innovation is to benefit everyone, society as a whole has to have the opportunity to shape the priorities and processes of innovation policy – they cannot just be led by a small group of scientific, technocratic or business elites.

For this reason, we see governance as a key dimension of inclusive innovation policy. In 2018, we launched a programme called Everyone Makes Innovation Policy,² which in its first phase supported experimentation with creative public engagement methods through small grants. The research partnership with Citizens UK formed the second phase of this programme.

1. See: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/inclusive-innovation>

2. See: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/call-for-ideas-how-to-involve-the-public-in-developing-innovation-policy> and <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/everyone-makes-innovation-policy>

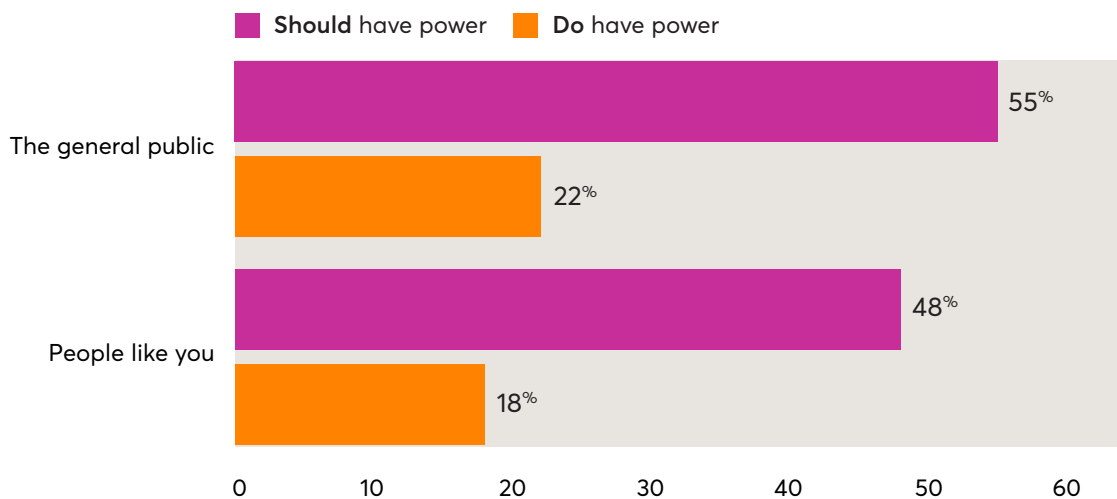
1.2. Innovation and public engagement

Previous Nesta research³ has found that most people in the UK believe the public should have decision-making power over innovation, but only about a fifth think they currently have it. In terms of the outcomes people want to see from innovation, the leading priority is improving the economy, which people express in terms of concerns such as job scarcity, homelessness, and the cost of living.

Figure 1: Public perceptions of decision-making power in innovation (Nesta, 2020)

The public feel they should have decision-making power around innovation, but most believe they currently have none.

Those who believe each group currently has/should have decision-making power over innovation



Q10. How much decision-making power if any, do you think each of the following groups of people currently have over innovation? Q11. How much decision-making power, if any, do you think each of the following groups of people should have over innovation? On a scale of 1–7, where 1=no influence and 7=a lot of influence. (Total do/should have power = 5–7). Base all respondents (n=3,838).

3. *Is the UK Getting Innovation Right? A survey of perceptions of the impact of innovation and technology* (2020) Nesta: London.

Innovation can play a role in increasing economic activity and improving societal outcomes, but as a force is not always directed towards the issues that stand to benefit society at large. In places that have high levels of research and development activity, such as San Francisco in the USA⁴ or Cambridge in the UK, the presence of innovative businesses and research organisations does not manifest in improved economic security or quality of life for most people – the kinds of things people care most about addressing.

Some initiatives do exist within current policymaking practices for giving people more decision-making power. Public engagement invites citizens to learn about, be consulted on, or in rarer cases participate actively in policymaking on a particular issue. It is an increasingly popular idea in UK science and technology policymaking, and there are many high-quality examples to point to. Established in 2004, the UK government's Sciencewise programme has supported over 50 public dialogue projects on science and technology issues, and beyond government the Royal Society has led work to explore and inform public attitudes to machine learning and AI. Meanwhile, the Ada Lovelace Institute convened a Citizens' Biometrics Council in 2020 to deliberate on the place of technologies such as facial recognition and digital fingerprinting.

However, such processes are usually conducted on the terms of the powerful institution, not of the people they engage. While citizens are invited to discuss and deliberate, they do not usually set the questions that are posed, or the timing and location of these discussions – which, in turn, can exclude those working irregular hours or with caring responsibilities.

4. Berkes, E. and Gaetani, R. (2019) *Income Segregation and Rise of the Knowledge Economy*. Rotman School of Management Working Paper No. 3423136, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3423136> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3423136>

2

Overview of the partnership with Citizens UK

Our work with Citizens UK set out to explore whether and how community organising could provide a way to turn engagement in innovation policymaking from a 'top-down' to a 'bottom-up' process led by citizens themselves. We wanted to find out what citizens' own priorities were in relation to innovation, and what could be achieved when people have more control over the terms of these discussions.

Specifically, our goals were to:

1. **Bring more and different people into decision making around innovation, amplifying the voices that decision makers do not usually listen to.** We wanted to give space to communities working with Citizens UK to articulate and advocate for their own needs and interests with regard to innovation-led development and local economic strategies.
2. **Support Citizens UK alliances to extend their capabilities and experience into a new thematic area** – innovation-led development and local economic strategies – and put them in a position to continue organising around these themes after the project's conclusion.
3. **Explore the potential of broad-based community organising to open up participation in innovation policymaking,** generating learning for the innovation policy community for the case for more democratic decision making.



Hackney Citizens Accountability Assembly in May 2019, with Mayor of Hackney Philip Glanville and local community representatives

2.1. Citizens UK and broad-based community organising

Our partner in this project, Citizens UK, is the leading exponent of the broad-based community organising model in the UK. Established in 1989, Citizens UK works by building alliances of existing civil society institutions in a particular borough, city, or region; each institution is a subscription-paying member, and are typically educational institutions, faith groups, residents associations, migrant community organisations, or trade union branches. Citizens UK consists of 17 such chapters across England and Wales, with a combined membership of over 450 civil society organisations.

A key orchestrating role is played by a professional community organiser, responsible for training members to carry out 'listening campaigns' inside their institutions and across their neighbourhoods, identifying issues affecting the everyday lives of community members. Meetings (which are open, scheduled to accommodate participants' availability, and set up to meet needs such as childcare and disability access) are then held at a local level to select those issues of greatest shared interest across institutions.

These issues are then made the focus of campaigns to put local or national decision makers like local government or employers under pressure to address them. Campaigns frequently tie into the political calendar and take the form of 'accountability assemblies', where rival political candidates are publicly presented with a local citizens' manifesto and asked whether, if elected, they will commit to working with the local alliance to deliver it.

'Asks' are often illustrated through storytelling by institution members of their personal experience of the problems being addressed – for example a low-paid worker who worships at a member mosque, or a student from a member school who is worried about knife crime. This community organising process can be regarded as a form of participant-led action research.



London Citizens Mayoral Accountability Assembly in April 2016, with Sadiq Khan and over 6000 community representatives

While alliances run their own campaigns at local level, they also come together for bigger campaigns with bigger targets, such as all London boroughs coming together to hold an assembly with the Mayor of London or alliances across England and Wales coming together for assemblies with Prime Ministerial candidates.

Citizens UK has enjoyed considerable success, most notably through the Living Wage campaign. To date, over 5000 organisations have become accredited Living Wage employers, putting over £1 billion back in the pockets of low-paid workers. Other examples include successful demands for Community Land Trusts – leading to pledges of over 1000 permanently affordable homes in London – and achieving a cap on the cost of consumer credit.

2.2. Organising around innovation policy issues

Broad-based community organising has tended to focus on everyday issues of immediate concern to ordinary citizens in low-income neighbourhoods such as low pay, unemployment, and poor housing. Our partnership aimed to explore whether the model also offered potential for addressing less 'obvious', but increasingly looming, issues around the innovation economy and industrial policy. For example, decisions about infrastructural investment, research funding, and the diffusion and regulation of emerging technologies, as well as trends such as automation and casualised work, have enormous implications for the ability of local economies and communities to thrive.

The project launched in January 2020, supporting a professional organiser in both East London and Birmingham to work with member organisations to build a citizens' agenda around local economic and industrial policy. In both places, there was already momentum and interest in exploring these themes. In East London, the initial scope centred around an innovation hub, Here East, located in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP), and the potential for closer and more reciprocal relations between the hub and the local community. This drew on previous success for Citizens UK's East London chapter, when they secured commitments from BT Sport, a media business based at the Here East development, to offer work experience paid at the London Living Wage to local young people.

In Birmingham, meanwhile, the project built on Citizens UK's long standing work with ethnic minority business leaders in deprived areas of the city. Citizens UK Birmingham has developed a strategic relationship with the Centre for Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) at Aston University Business School. CREME practises 'engaged scholarship'⁵ around issues faced by ethnic minority business leaders in the city, such as exclusion from existing business support offers and from public procurement opportunities.

5. 'Engaged scholarship' makes research relevant to practitioners by bridging research with practice, involving intended beneficiaries from the outset and combining academic and community knowledge. For CREME, engaged scholarship is one of three guiding principles that govern its work, and consists of *"applying the insights and findings from our high quality 'internationally recognised' research to 'real' business issues, such as capital and finance, supplier diversity, wages, migration policies, technology and social inclusion."* (Aston University website, see: <https://www2.aston.ac.uk/aston-business-school/research/research-centres/CREME/about>).

Nesta's support in Birmingham provided further resources for Citizens UK Birmingham to develop its campaigning in this area, and specifically to support the development of a business leaders group to advocate on behalf of the wider community. We initially envisaged that this project would focus on advocating for ethnic minority-led enterprises to have access to opportunities created by the Commonwealth Games in 2022 – but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdown in March 2020 changed these plans considerably. Citizens UK management advised that all activities be paused; with mayoral elections in both London and the West Midlands postponed, significant target events were removed from the community organising calendar.

In East London, the original Here East campaign came to a halt as chapter members tackled more immediate concerns. Member organisations instead initiated a listening campaign which surfaced digital exclusion as a high priority – an existing issue exacerbated in the new normal of the pandemic, where education, work and social life had moved online. A team consisting of several churches and a college led a campaign around digital mutual aid, calling on local power holders and businesses to help with access to devices and reliable internet for households and civil society organisations in East London.

In Birmingham, the focus of the work shifted away from the Commonwealth Games towards the immediate opportunities and challenges posed by the pandemic. Instead of the initial plans, the focus was instead on how Citizens UK was able to help its members in pandemic response, particularly with regard to the business leaders group and their engagement with business support and commercial opportunities during the pandemic period.

Nesta commissioned external evaluations of both projects, which are presented alongside this report. Evaluation teams worked closely with the organisers in each location to understand and observe the approach and gather rich data from observation and interviews with Citizens UK members. The evaluation reports detail the process of community organising around innovation issues in the context of the pandemic, the experiences of those involved, and the outcomes from the activities. We present a summary of these findings below.

3

Findings

3.1. What are the processes involved in community organising around innovation policy?

Community organising is a method that consists broadly of three steps:

1. A **research** phase, referred to as 'listening', consisting of formal (surveys, questionnaires) and informal (one-to-one and group meetings) methods of learning about community members' contexts and experiences.
2. An **action** phase, during which campaign strategy is developed, 'asks' are conceptualised and strengthened through engagement with relevant stakeholders and experts, and public actions are planned and staged.
3. An **evaluation** phase, when campaign teams reflect on wins and losses and celebrate if appropriate.

In developing campaigns around innovation issues, community organisers used the various tools at their disposal to identify community priorities, cultivate effective leadership for campaigns, and finesse relationships with power-holders such as local councillors, metro mayors, employers, and business groups.

Forming leadership teams

The first task is to form the action team for the campaign – a group of member organisations who have a particularly strong affinity with the subject matter of the campaign through the type of work or activity they carry out or the sorts of experiences that characterise their constituency. The action team is responsible for activities such as: conducting 'listening campaigns' within their organisations to gather information and testimonies around particular issues; identifying shared concerns; working with the professional community organiser to develop asks and campaign actions (e.g. letters, petitions or protests); and meeting with power holders and decision makers.

In the case of the East London digital exclusion campaign, the action team (known within this campaign as the 'innovation action team') consisted of three local members: St John's Hoxton, East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT), and Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission. St John's Hoxton and ELATT in particular brought existing experience and knowledge of tech and innovation: St John's Hoxton is a church whose congregation includes local tech workers with a critical interest in the direction of innovation activities in the area, while ELATT is a college specialising in media and technology training, and had been involved in a previous successful campaign for work experience to be offered by media companies at the Here East development.

Citizens UK Birmingham is rare among the chapters of Citizens UK in having prior experience organising local small business leaders. The chapter started work on this strand in 2015, forming a partnership with CREME⁶ to co-produce research on the particular needs and opportunities of migrant-led micro-businesses. This is ongoing work, and a sub-group of business leaders receive bespoke business support as well as help in advocating for their needs to power holders (e.g. engaging with the local Chamber of Commerce). There was therefore already a group of Citizens UK members in Birmingham who had engaged in organising activities around local economic and industrial policy – and it was this group that led the activities on micro-business engagement with the economic activities of the wider city.

Capacity building

Within the member organisations active on a particular campaign, Citizens UK takes steps to build civic leadership skills. Developing skills in public speaking, chairing meetings, storytelling and power analysis (where members map local and national decision makers in order to identify appropriate targets for asks) enables members, referred to as leaders, to be effective advocates for their communities when engaging with decision makers. At mayoral assemblies and other meetings with power holders, presentations are often made by those underrepresented in our democracy, such as women, people of colour, and children.

During the pandemic, Citizens UK in Birmingham supported members of the business leaders group to reorient their services to community needs. In several cases, this enabled members to secure funding from local government and foundations in order to fulfil a local community need – coordinating the micro-business community to bid for and secure a contract with the local authority to create videos to deliver public health messages about COVID-19 in community languages, for example.

This was a project that allowed business leaders to collaborate in a consortium for the first time on a task that would bring real benefit to their community, an orientation to local social good that has been identified as a characteristic of migrant-led businesses in Birmingham and elsewhere.

Listening

Central to the organising process is the listening campaign: the method by which action team members learn about how particular issues are affecting their constituents and develop a plan to address them. The process usually comprises one-to-one and group meetings, surveys and questionnaires, and takes place over the course of about one month. Citizens UK members are trained in listening methods, and it is individual organisation leaders who conduct the listening campaign rather than the professional local organiser. This enables a large amount of data and stories to be collected, and relationships between leaders and their students, congregants, workers or members to be built.

6. At the time the partnership was formed, CREME was based at Birmingham Business School, but moved to Aston University in 2018.

This process was used in both phases of the East London project, prior to and during the pandemic. A listening campaign conducted amongst students enrolled at ELATT showed that just a third were aware that media and technology companies were located at Here East, within their own borough. Nearly half nevertheless believed that they could secure a job on hearing about the types of activity that took place there. This informed a campaign for work experience for local young people at BT Sport, which was successful in achieving an offer from the company for placements paid at the London Living Wage.

In February 2020 a new round of listening was initiated to build on the success of the BT Sport campaign and deepen local engagement with Here East. A launch meeting at Here East itself (hosted by Loughborough University London, a Citizens UK member and resident of Here East) brought together representatives from two colleges, a secondary school, a church, and two charities including Nesta in its capacity as project funder and partner. Participants were trained in listening methods and set a plan to conduct listening campaigns within their organisations over the next month, with the aim of surfacing further priorities concerning Here East.

With the onset of COVID-19 and March 2020 lockdown, activities paused and Citizens UK members came together locally to launch listening campaigns in light of urgent challenges. Leaders circulated surveys to identify the top-of-mind issues for members in the early stages of the pandemic, when differences in living situations, livelihoods, income and access to data and devices created disparities in people's abilities to adapt to life under lockdown.

Informal discussions followed up on key concerns raised in surveys, and community interest coalesced around the issues of mental health and digital exclusion. A further workshop on digital exclusion found that where some organisations leaned towards a focus on service design and adapting their activities towards online and hybrid models, others were adamant that the lack of adequate data and devices to carry out work, education and social life should be the priority.

In Birmingham, previous listening campaigns and a general listening mentality provided a strong basis for the organising activities during the pandemic. Business support partnerships between Citizens UK and CREME had been ongoing for five years, and activities were based on iterative listening campaigns amongst business leaders in three deprived areas in Birmingham: Lozells, Small Heath and Sparkhill. The culture of iterative listening, which sees the professional organiser speak on a regular basis with leaders from member organisations who in turn gather rich, personal and detailed information from within their own organisations, was a benefit in the face of the COVID-19 crisis in two ways: firstly, leadership was aware of their community context and the needs and opportunities likely to arise; secondly, communities were quick to engage in coordinating efforts due to existing foundations of trust and communication.

Both projects demonstrated how the listening process can bring in a broad range of voices through the mechanism of trusting relationships. This means that decisions taken between appointed leaders at the chapter level have a strong democratic mandate and are rooted in grassroots experiences.

Mediating and engaging with power holders

Engaging with power holders is a key activity of Citizens UK, which it performs in a variety of ways. These can range from informal and formal meetings and roundtables with delegations from local chapters to actions designed to demonstrate communities' concerns and asks to the presentation of asks to candidates for political office.

Often, campaigns draw on strategic mediating organisations to supply context, clarify goals and support their advocacy. As noted, Citizens UK Birmingham has a long-standing relationship with CREME at Aston University. From 2016 to 2019, CREME and Citizens UK worked in partnership with NatWest and the Growth Hub at the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) on the Business Leaders Project to address a gap in culturally appropriate business support for migrant-led small businesses.

Where NatWest and the Growth Hub provided bespoke training to members of the business leaders group, CREME generated learnings from the partnership, helping to evaluate what works and identify priority areas of focus. CREME is therefore a key mediating organisation, able to broker relationships between innovation establishment actors like GBSLEP and the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and the supposedly 'hard-to-reach' communities in Lozells, Small Heath and Sparkhill.

Citizens UK consistently plays a role as a mediating organisation, brokering relationships with power holders and bringing members together to achieve shared goals. For example, the Birmingham organiser used these mediating skills in convening a group of business leaders to bid for a local authority contract to produce health advice videos in community languages, and to set up a roundtable with a senior council official to help business leaders understand how to apply for financial support during lockdown. Power holders are also invited into the community to join member meetings and celebration events and to take neighbourhood walks through community spaces to build familiarity.

Finally, campaign teams use actions – demonstrations, letters, marches, public performances – to get the attention of power holders and articulate their asks. For example, in East London, members drafted a video letter to businesses based in Shoreditch including Amazon, Microsoft Reactor, Inmarsat, Plaid and Box to outline their experiences of digital exclusion and suggest how these businesses might help.

The video was framed as a 'neighbour-to-neighbour' request, naming individuals at each business to maintain informality and increase the potential for direct positive engagement from target businesses. This framing collapses contextual details and power structures (for example the fact that businesses such as Amazon have profited massively from the pandemic, in part through the exploitation of workers) into the simple 'neighbour' relationship, suggesting a dynamic of positive obligation rather than exploitation or oppression and therefore encouraging businesses to engage.

Thus, broad-based community organising employs a range of approaches in engaging with power holders, treading a line between collaboration and antagonism. This balance helps to ensure that groundwork is laid for campaign success whilst safeguarding against the cooptation of communities' concerns.

3.2. How do members relate to innovation policy issues?

Both projects demonstrated that Citizens UK members see aspects of innovation-led development as relevant to their lives and experiences. Members raised and explored a wide range of topics related to innovation, including access to innovative jobs, digital exclusion, service innovation, and inclusive business support for migrant entrepreneurs.

In the first East London phase, members were keen to get involved in the activities of QEOP and Here East. They saw local innovation-led development as a potential source of training and jobs, especially for young people, and wanted to create more links between firms moving into the new development and existing communities. While some institutions at QEOP were interested in forming such links – Loughborough University London, for example – others appeared more disconnected.

When campaigning shifted towards digital exclusion, community conversations most often went towards practical concerns such as securing access to devices, internet connections and sufficient data. However, amongst a group of organisations that were more engaged with technology and innovation already, conversations moved towards ways of delivering their services in an online or hybrid mode, developing a local support network of digital champions and reaching out to more resource-rich local organisations to negotiate longer term solutions with regard to access to devices, data and digital skills.

What is clear from the East London experience is that members are keenest to engage with issues of innovation and technology as they touch lives locally. Normative assessments of what innovation 'should' be doing or where it should focus often arise, but members see it as their role to campaign on opportunities and changes that would improve things locally. This has implications for the use of the method and the types of context in which it should be used, as discussed below.

As mentioned, Citizens UK Birmingham is rare among the UK chapters in having prior experience organising local business leaders. There was already a group of CUK members in Birmingham who had engaged in organising activities around local economic and industrial policy, meaning that the project had fairly specific subject matter from the outset – namely achieving inclusive business support for migrant micro-businesses in deprived areas of Birmingham.

Partly due to the effects of the pandemic (and perhaps the type of businesses in the leaders' group), activities in Birmingham during the partnership did not directly touch the realm of economic and industrial policy in the sense of developing specific asks in this area. However, the evaluation report presents a case study of a shared project for the business leaders during the pandemic: delivering a local public contract to produce public health videos in community languages. This demonstrates how they perceive their responsibility for social outcomes locally.

3.3. What are the outcomes from community organising around innovation policy?

As outlined, the success or failure of this project did not depend on tangible 'wins' from campaigns, especially given the disruption caused by COVID-19. Rather, the key factor was the generation of learnings about community organising as a method when applied to innovation policy.

However, in both locations, community organising resulted in recognisable achievement on the part of community groups. In the case of East London, achievements were more directly the result of campaigning activities, whereas successes in Birmingham demonstrated the range of support and coordination that broad-based community organising can offer.

In East London, the innovation action team developed a digital mutual aid group' charter, based on the following principles:

As neighbours in and around Shoreditch, we believe:

- Tech for Good means equitable opportunities.
- Our organisational values mean that we should help our neighbours in times of crisis.
- Access to and ability to use internet-enabled technology are essential to ensuring:
 - › No-one's educational opportunity shall be limited.
 - › No-one should be inhibited from working remotely.
 - › No-one should be isolated and socially excluded.

These principles were to be realised through two main courses of action: the Shoreditch 300 Challenge and the Digital Citizens Challenge.

The Shoreditch 300 Challenge aimed to provide 300 local households with internet-enabled devices. Members calculated that they needed £200,000 to support 300 people for a year; having raised £50,000 through crowdfunding, which supported 78 people, Hackney and Islington Citizens identified local actors who could help them meet their target. They then produced a video letter in December 2020 calling on representatives of local businesses and startups to make financial and equipment contributions, and invited them to commit to meetings before the end of the year. At the time of writing, the team has secured £20,000 from Amazon.

The Digital Citizens Challenge committed to appointing staff and volunteers as digital skills champions within member organisations, ensuring that devices were set up for community needs such as video conferencing, and providing digital skill support to community members as needed.

The main outcome of the Birmingham project was the delivery of the public health videos in community languages. This output was of great use to the local community (as well as across the diaspora and within migrants' countries of origin),⁷ and showed signs of a model of small business engagement with the local economy through public procurement opportunities – something that is otherwise very rare, especially for migrant micro-businesses. The development of the leaders group into a consortium may also be an outcome with long-term impact, enabling smoother engagement with local or regional government due to their more coherent presentation as a consortium.

The projects also had an effect on mindset. Community organising works partly by facilitating groups to recognise their shared interests, and to understand the power they have when they act on these as a collective. We saw the effects of this in both locations, as members in East London discussed larger gains to be won – for example from potential campaigns around broadband as a public utility – as well as actions they could work on as a community, such as establishing a Community Fibre⁸ deal or developing 'service recipes'⁹ to share locally. In Birmingham, too, the leaders group proved that they were able to achieve together what they would not have had the resources or credibility to achieve individually.

7. The Birmingham evaluation report provides further details of how the videos were disseminated and the potential impact of their international reach through diaspora communities.

8. See: <https://communityfibre.co.uk>

9. Step-by-step guides for delivering digital services, developed by organisations so that others can learn from their experience and design and deliver similar services more easily. See: <https://www.thecatalyst.org.uk/blog/service-recipes-our-new-tool-to-help-you-learn-how-other-charities-deliver-services>

4

Conclusions: How can community organising make innovation policy more inclusive?

Having observed both projects and their outcomes in context, we can identify several ways in which the community organising method can bring value to innovation policy and advance a more inclusive agenda. As a form of governance, community organising has the potential to bring about progress on other dimensions of inclusive innovation: direction and participation.

4.1. Direction: addressing societal challenges and the needs of excluded groups

Both projects demonstrated that community organising can support nuanced conversations about innovation issues, enabling communities to recognise what is achievable locally and what might need to be escalated into a longer term or broader campaign.

Members in East London decided to focus on solving the immediate access problem facing households, whilst recognising that the community could also turn its attention to developing service recipes to support innovation in civil society organisations locally, or join other voices in campaigns for more open access to broadband services. We see this in the achievements of the business leaders group in Birmingham, too, who have established a long-term alliance to use their business activities to further the common good in their communities. This potentially puts them in position to benefit from procurement opportunities at the city level, enabling development of local economies in deprived areas.

This is an exciting prospect, suggesting that the initiation of further community organising projects and partnerships across the country could lead to a proliferation of local innovation actors and advocates and a gradual shifting of innovation priorities to match societal ones.

4.2. Participation: increasing the participation of marginalised social groups, disadvantaged regions, low-innovation sectors, and civil society and social economy organisations in innovation

Community organising enables discussions to continue over time, and to shift and change in response to external events. This is potentially particularly relevant for engagement around questions relating to innovation-related investment and technological change, as the implications of these for communities might develop and change over time – for example, as investment in bringing innovative businesses to an area changes the nature of the local labour market.

This method can create links between decision-making institutions and communities that would otherwise be hard to form. Community organisers build up networks and relationships over months, years or even decades. It is this foundation that enabled, for example, Citizens UK Birmingham to mobilise its members to meet challenges posed by the pandemic so rapidly and effectively, and to access programmes run by major institutions such as NatWest.

In this way, community organising can provide a way for communities to use their experience and knowledge in shaping responses to innovation-related questions in their areas and enabling those who have particular experience of an issue to lead on the campaign and form the action team. Where mainstream public engagement methods are often measured by how demographically representative the cohorts they engage are, community organising works partly because members come to the process with contextual knowledge and are encouraged to develop this into an agenda. For example, congregants at St. John's Hoxton already had experience of the innovation economy through their work and were thinking about how it could be oriented towards social good, and this served as impetus and background to their campaigning activities.

The methods of community organising also facilitate the formation of deep networks that support democratic decision-making. While, for example, a survey conducted by a government department aims to consult a cross-section of society, listening campaigns are carried out by embedded leaders within organisations, unearthing rich insights and ensuring campaigns are grounded in the detail of members' experiences. This was seen in the way leaders in East London considered the various potential avenues for a campaign around digital exclusion, before coalescing around the focus on access to devices, data and skills.

4.3. Limitations

Some of community organising's key strengths clash with features of the innovation and industrial policy landscape as it is currently structured. Decisions about research and development spend, for example, are heavily centralised, with priorities largely set by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and funding administered through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) at a national level. While industrial strategy in recent years has become more mission-driven and oriented towards societal goals,¹⁰ using

10. *The Industrial Strategy* published in 2017 was structured around four Grand Challenges (Artificial Intelligence, Ageing Society, Clean Growth, Future of Mobility), consisting of missions focusing on a specific problem within the challenge areas. The 2021 Innovation Strategy retains an emphasis on missions with the promise to launch a new Innovation Missions Programme around a new set of priorities.

AI for diagnosis, prevention and treatment of chronic diseases, and improving healthy life expectancy, there is a great deal of focus on the high-tech and little attention paid to the contribution and development of local economies that are often reliant on 'foundational' businesses.

Citizens UK has developed broad-based alliances in 17 locations across England and Wales (four in the North of England, three in the Midlands, two in the East of England, one in Wales, and seven in the South including London). The organisation has chapters in all six mayoral combined authorities. This coverage is impressive and ever-increasing.

This is the result of long-term efforts to foster alliances, appoint sufficient staff, and conduct iterative listening campaigns. Broad-based community organising takes time to do well and achieve results, and would likely be most effectively addressed towards innovation policy issues in areas where strong alliances (in particular those with members with existing interest in the subject matter) are already operational.

4.4. Where is the place of community organising in innovation policy?

There is a range of institutions across the innovation policy and economic development landscape that may find it useful to develop the sort of partnership we created with Citizens UK.

Examples of use cases for community organising include:

- **Local and regional government** could improve the reach and impact of place-based agendas and business support activities, develop more inclusive procurement practices, and enhance their awareness of emerging social issues and priorities.
- **University departments, research institutes and think tanks** could develop research partnerships between community organisers and researchers to improve scoping, framing and impact of research and develop their roles as civic institutions.
- **Innovation developments such as hubs and science parks** could improve community relationships, develop routes for local talent to access opportunities, and enhance the potential for innovation activities to support and strengthen the local business community.
- **Service design community** could form mixed methods partnerships with civil society organisations to improve service delivery, as well as work together to hold government to account on delivering accessible digital services.

The organisers we worked with were keen to stress that it is desirable in some ways for the method to remain fairly niche, and taken up only where there is genuine alignment in vision and values between institutions and community organisers.

Since the point is to put power into the hands of communities, partnering organisations need to be open to challenge. This will not always be comfortable, but as these projects show, the experiences can be mutually beneficial. For example, Birmingham City Council were able to successfully commission public health videos with the business leader consortium.

In the Nesta project team, we were fairly open as to the scope of the project. While we set the frame of innovation policy issues, we were keen to enable communities to define topics of concern for themselves – in fact, as discussed above, one of our research questions was concerned with how members related issues to their lives. Where we offered guidance or steers it was mainly with regard to the evaluation activities of the project, rather than the organising process. We provided information on the innovation policy landscape and reflections on campaign activities when invited to do so by organisers.

For all the organisations that might engage with community organising in policy development, or as a form of participatory research, perhaps the greatest benefit is enlarging your understanding of the issues you work on day to day. This is an opportunity to understand how policies and programmes are experienced on the ground, and engage with fresh framings of problems that have come to be understood in particular ways in 'expert' circles.

We hope that this report and the accompanying evaluations provide insight into the method of community organising and its potential for furthering an inclusive economic agenda by centering community priorities.



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