



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

CCIN innovation funding – 2021/2 Policy Labs

Expression of Interest – Policy Lab CCIN Funding 2021

CCIN Member Organisation submitting application: Cheshire West and Chester Council

Name of CCIN Lead Councillor/Officer: Morgan Jones, Strategy Manager

Partner organisations: Cardiff, Cheshire West and Chester, Greater Manchester, Kirklees, Knowsley, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Newcastle, North Hertfordshire, Oxford, Plymouth, Red Quadrant, Rochdale, Southampton, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Tameside, Workers Educational Association

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1. What is your idea?

Provide details of what your proposed project is, the story of how you identified the need or opportunity for the proposal and how the money will be spent.

Understanding the Digital Divide

Tackling Digital Poverty and the Digital Divide by building a more robust data picture of who is experiencing digital exclusion, where they are, what their barriers are to accessing services and social contact online, and the interventions that would most effectively support them to become more digitally engaged.

The shape of digital exclusion varies across local authorities and there can be no one-size-fits all solution. While the impacts of digital exclusion on individuals are understood, at present there are few means of understanding its causes and measuring its distribution across an authority. This presents a challenge to those seeking to address digital exclusion as it is unclear what solutions are required and where.

The best data available from the ONS only offers a borough-wide picture, or a national picture when seeking to understand digital exclusion among certain demographic groups. Attempts to understand the internal geography and demography of digital exclusion have so far been made through modelled data, which only provides estimates on the shape of digital exclusion in a given area. This data can at best provide estimates for 'who' and a 'where' for digital inclusion, but it is not yet linked to a 'why'.

The project will seek to refine understandings of this existing data and explore possible methods of improving each council's understanding of the 'who' and 'where'. To address the question of 'why', this project will consult with all residents through a resident consultation programme entitled 'Let's Talk Digital', working alongside the VCS and community groups to understand barriers and how residents believe those barriers could be addressed.

Our consultation questions will be shared and other councils will be invited to share results with the Network if they chose to replicate them.

Understanding the Digital Divide will produce a two-step toolkit, including a guide to existing data, allowing councils to create a clear baseline of who in their borough needs help and where they are, and tailored recommendations, enabling councils to assess the needs of their residents and prescribe remedies. The money will be spent in communicating the learning from the Policy Lab and developing a toolkit product which is clear, accessible and can be easily communicated.

2. Who will you work with?

*A key requirement of Policy Lab Funding is that you work in partnership with other CCIN members. We recommend engaging a minimum of **three** other CCIN members (Affiliates and Associates should bid alongside Full Council members) to create a working group to support the development of your project.*

Cheshire West and Chester will work alongside colleagues from Cardiff, Greater Manchester, Kirklees, Knowsley, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Newcastle, North Hertfordshire, Oxford, Plymouth, Red Quadrant, Rochdale, Southampton, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Tameside, Workers Educational Association. Given the numbers of members who have expressed an interest in this work we will need to agree an approach to clarifying who will directly involved in developing the toolkit, who will act more as a guidance and sounding board and who is more interested in accessing the final toolkit.

3. What are the outcomes you hope to achieve?

What are the outcomes you hope to achieve through this project and how will you know if your outcomes are achieved? What is your measure of success?

Covid-19 has demonstrated that digital exclusion is a significant challenge for our society – it is important that we tackle it in the most effective way possible. The outcome of this project shall enable councils to confront digital exclusion in a manner which corresponds best to the needs of residents.

The project shall create a toolkit for councils seeking to reduce digital exclusion. Engaging with existing data, the outcome of the project will be to empower councils to understand digital exclusion in their areas and, working in partnership with the VCS and learning providers, to prescribe remedies suited to their needs.

Key outcomes:

- Resident consultation, with questions available to be reproduced, informing future delivery and strategic planning – ‘Let’s Talk Digital’
- Improved understanding of available data on digital exclusion and exploration of further data gathering exercises.
- Learning and intelligence to inform adult learning within future digital inclusion programmes.
- Learning and intelligence used to inform targeting of access to digital learning within community venues
- Lessons learnt report – shared with all CCIN Members to enable sustainable, cost-effective, long-term solutions. This shall include a case study of the use of data to locate one cohort (e.g. the unemployed) and the application of learned remedies to their digital exclusion in a given borough.

4. How does your project support the aims and objectives of the Co-operative Councils’ Innovation Network?

The Co-operative Councils Innovation Network aims to frame the debate on the future of sustainable solutions to public sector challenges. Our work will ultimately improve outcomes for communities by enabling members to develop radical innovation in policy and practice, sharing best practice and learning,

and enabling innovators to chart new territory together. Please provide details of how your project will support this aim.

Local government was struggling prior to COVID-19 to deliver services due to decades of austerity. Lack of funding may have encouraged innovation and radical re-thinking, to enable local government to continue to deliver its statutory services, however, the austerity has also stifled the ability for local government to resource the Officer time to review non-statutory services as well as look for new digital solutions to reduce long-term, systemic issues.

As the country continues to move forward through the COVID-19 pandemic, it is incredibly clear that digital exclusion is a significant issue for our most vulnerable residents, which can no longer be put to the bottom of the 'to do' list.

Sustainable solutions, enabling members to develop radical innovation in policy and practice, and enabling innovators to chart new territory together: Digital exclusion is prevalent in the minds of many local authorities, yet the path to a solution is not always clear. The insight gathered will enable local government to implement effective and sustainable solutions to support vulnerable residents to reduce the digital divide through innovative partnership delivery, alongside the VCS and learning providers. The lack of concrete data is a key barrier to the progression of a successful digital innovation programme. In contributing to the breaking down of this barrier, the project shall empower councils across the country to rethink digital inclusion and how it applies to their residents.

Improve outcomes for communities: as a result of the project, local government will have the tools to target residents most in need of digital inclusion and enable them to become digitally active and access the training and support required.

Sharing best practice and learning: a full report and case studies will be shared across the CCIN network.

5. How does your project demonstrate the Values and Principles of the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network?

Our Network is based on the Co-operative values developed by the International Co-operative Alliance: "self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity... honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others". Further details about the CCIN's Values and Principles is available [here](#). Please provide details of how your project will demonstrate the CCIN's Values and Principles.

This project will demonstrate the CCIN's Values and Principles as follows:

Self-help: help local government to understand the best possible way to work alongside the VCS and Learning providers and deploy their resources to encourage residents to engage in digital technology to improve their lives and prospects.

Self-responsibility: help local government to share an appropriate message with residents, using the correct communication methods, tone of language and engaging campaign to increase adult digital learning, with residents learning because they want to learn, driven through enthusiasm and aspiration – driven by a want to improve their lives, health and wellbeing.

Democracy: local government will continue to work in partnership with residents, community groups and the VCS to ensure the voice of residents is heard and learning applied to affect real change. The digital divide is still there – we are doing something wrong, vulnerable residents continue to be vulnerable and those residents are usually digitally excluded, only through walking their walk and talking their talk can real change come about.

Equality: everyone involved, everyone's voice heard and included to inform change – through the proposed consultation campaign 'Let's Talk Digital'

Solidarity: working together, side by side – local government, VCS, residents

In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

6. How will you share your learning with the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network?

Learning will be shared through:

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- **comprehensive report alongside 'quick-read' case studies – all will be available on the CCIN website**
 - **online workshops / webinars – sharing presentation materials**
 - **presentation at the CCIN's annual showcase event**
 - **A submission to the digitalinclusionkit.org website, established by the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government for the sharing of digital inclusion best practice.**
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