



# MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

AN EMERGING  
APPROACH TO  
PLANNING FOR  
IMPACT AT  
SCALE

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“VISION WITHOUT ACTION IS  
JUST A DREAM, ACTION WITHOUT  
VISION JUST PASSES THE TIME,  
AND VISION WITH ACTION CAN  
CHANGE THE WORLD.”

Nelson Mandela



## FOREWORD

As funders we have all been making grants for many years to help organisations tackle ingrained social issues. While the groups we support help individuals and communities to make positive changes in their lives, there are often blockages and disconnects that make it impossible for them to effect how things are done at a wider societal level. In these situations there is often a structural breakdown. The 'System' for social change may need refocusing and a new energy generated to help 'rethink' how a given issue could be addressed.

We felt that we needed a new approach to address these sort of issues, alongside traditional grant making. We are a collaboration of six foundations and Social Finance working together as the Impact Incubator to test a new model of working.

For five years the Impact Incubator has been working to address difficult issues e.g. mental health inequality, domestic violence, children leaving care, refugee integration. These are issues that often fall between the cracks and across the remits of different organisations and need collaboration to establish better joined up approaches.

Many of these issues exist in an environment of fragmentation where coalitions of the willing need to be at the heart of making progress. The Impact Incubator builds these, raises ambition around addressing an issue and generates momentum for change.

This report is a first step in sharing the Impact Incubator approach and learnings over the last few years. It is still work in progress, but we hope that by sharing our learning to date openly others can build on our approach.



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# 1 Introduction

I have spent years frustrated at missed opportunity.

How often do you see an approach that works, but that only exists in one location? This problem hit home for me when I led the set up of the first Social Impact Bond (SIB). The Peterborough SIB was designed to help prison leavers get the right support to break the cycle of reoffending. This new SIB model captured the headlines, and provided the right incentives and funding to enable a response everyone knew was needed.

That response, which we called The One Service, made less of a splash.

The One Service drew on best practice from across the criminal justice sector. Working with people in prison and post release, it provided space to build longer-term relationships, and supported families where needed.

In short, this pioneering approach made a real difference for people who had slipped through the cracks of public services for their whole lives.

When you talked to those involved with the One Service – from our statutory partners to the men leaving prison – you could *feel* that it was special. And when we received the results of the evaluation, everyone's instincts were confirmed. It had reduced re-offending by over 9% in contrast to a national control group. And yet, the programme was only delivered in Peterborough – and has not yet scaled its impact in the UK criminal justice sector.

If we know it works, why isn't it everywhere?

## SCALE STARTS NOW

I have spent a long time reflecting on what I've learnt from this (and many other) setbacks, and responding to these lessons. One of the most important adjustments we've made at the Impact Incubator is to plan for scale from the start.

It takes many years to know if you achieve scale, so we're still in the process of testing this way of working. But we're sharing our thinking now so that others setting up new social initiatives can build on and challenge our thinking.

Before we get into the detail, let's step back and answer a simple but fundamental question:

### **What is scale?**

For us, scale means reimagining the way we address an issue to create a dramatic increase in the number of lives we transform. It's not about rolling out a particular model or an organisation, it's about breadth of impact.

In this guide, I want to share how we have been thinking about and working towards scale at the Impact Incubator. In addition I have described the Impact Incubator approach that these principles are based on and some of the tools we use in this work.

As will be clear through this document, in our experience, change is a collaborative process. The responses we have built and change that has happened are the result of the work of many people with diverse backgrounds and skill sets coming together from different sectors and organisations. What I have shared is our reflection on the process of change, but we are only one part of the story.

We have created a learning website to house the breadth of insights from our partners and others working to make change happen:

<https://learning.socialfinance.org.uk/>

The website is a place for people to share their news and views and we hope that the conversation will be useful for everyone working to bring about social change.

**Emily Bolton,**  
**Founder, Impact Incubator**



A photograph of a meeting or workshop. In the foreground, a woman with long brown hair is seen from behind, wearing a dark, ribbed top. In the middle ground, two women are seated at a white table. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a black sleeveless top; she is writing on a piece of paper with a black marker. The woman on the right has dark, curly hair and is wearing a brown patterned top; she has her hands clasped on the table. On the table, there is a clear glass bottle of water, several glasses, and a black marker. In the background, other people are visible, including a woman with blonde hair in a black top and a man with dark hair. A white speech bubble is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text: "SCALE ISN'T ABOUT ROLLING OUT A PARTICULAR MODEL OR AN ORGANISATION, IT'S ABOUT IMPACT."

SCALE ISN'T  
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## 2 The Impact Incubator's five principles of change

When reflecting on our work over the last few years in the Impact Incubator, I can see it underpinned by five principles:

1. Understand the problem and seek to address the barriers to change at every level.
2. Achieving impact at scale is a huge ambition and it needs to be shared from the outset.
3. Design for scale from the start.
4. Create a model to adapt – and learn as you go along.
5. Hold on to your transformation vision – and be agnostic about how you get there.

I have outlined how our approach<sup>1</sup> to change embodies these principles below:

### PRINCIPLE 1: UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM AND SEEK TO ADDRESS THE BARRIERS TO CHANGE AT EVERY LEVEL

When you design for scale, you first need to understand the problem of why change isn't happening. What keeps the status quo in place? It's important to really dig deeply into this question. We've found barriers at many levels:

#### **For the person living with the issue:**

- Internal barriers, and those they experience when they engage with formal and informal support.

For example young people who are leaving the care system talk about the variability of support they receive, their lack of agency and their lack of understanding of what support is available. Understanding and addressing these core issues will be central to creating any lasting change.

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<sup>1</sup> We share the approach in detail in the next section, where we look at how to bring these principles to life.

### For the 'system':

- Incentives and accountability structures can often be a barrier to the change we're working towards.

We've seen this in our work to support better outcomes for young people at risk of being excluded from school:

Schools are evaluated on their academic results. But they are not accountable for the outcomes of young people who are excluded. And this combination can lead to perverse incentives in the system, where it may actually be worth excluding a "disruptive" young person who is likely to achieve poor exam results to stop the pupil from bringing down a school's overall academic attainment and the attainment of the pupils who remain. Currently the school has no accountability for the outcomes of that young person.

- Funding can be another source of barriers in the system. We ask: How does the funding work around the issue? Who does the funding come from? How does the funding flow? What sort of services does it support? Do the existing funding priorities, flows and specifications create barriers to change?

### For society:

- Existing social narratives affect how we all behave. So it's helpful here to understand whether any prevailing social narratives are a barrier to change.

In our work with Drive partners to respond to high risk perpetrators of Domestic Abuse, we recognised that the existing social narrative placed a huge responsibility and focus on the victim. The question everyone asks is "Why doesn't she leave?"

We felt that a critical part of achieving change at scale would be to challenge this narrative. The Drive partnership has consistently focused on moving the debate from "Why doesn't she leave?" to "Why doesn't he stop?".

In our experience, we've found it helpful to first understand these barriers and then design a response and approach to address them. We believe this increases our probability of achieving impact at scale by addressing barriers at every level.<sup>2</sup>

## PRINCIPLE 2: ACHIEVING SCALE IS A HUGE AMBITION THAT NEEDS TO BE SHARED FROM THE OUTSET

In our experience if the ambition of the work is scale then the end goal is always bigger than any one organisation. For us, this means our aim is never about scaling a particular model or an organisation, it's about ensuring that we address an issue in a very different way. It's about creating a step change in the number of lives transformed. And that can only happen if it is a *shared* ambition – and the plan to achieve it is developed and owned in partnership with others.

“Co-development” is one of the buzzwords of our sector. But that's not what I mean!

What I'm talking about is building deep and genuine partnerships with people from different sectors to understand the problem, develop the answer and make it happen.

There must be four things at the heart of any coalition for change:

- A shared vision of how the world will be different.
- Shared ownership of the plan for getting there.
- A relationship of mutual respect and trust.
- A willingness of very diverse partners to roll up their sleeves and push things forward.

Our work on scaling community sponsorship of refugees started with this. We launched **Reset** to help capacity build those active in growing sponsorship. But the 18 months prior to launch were focused on the groundwork: this time was largely spent in discussion, dialogue and joint working – with a diverse range of organisations – to establish common ground and a shared scale of ambition for what sponsorship could become. At Reset's launch, 11 organisations formally backed its

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2 You can find out more on how we do this in Practical Tools - 1: Understand the Change that is needed at every level, p. 27.

vision, but many more were already part of what remains a shared journey towards ambitious growth.

Similarly the *Drive* partnership has been enabled by a large coalition for change. Today it's underpinned by over 30 partners with varying levels of engagement. And it has been the collective effort of all of these people and organisations, that has enabled us to make progress and unblock the barriers to change at the local and systemic levels.

Every day I'm reminded of the importance of partnership. None of us has all the answers and we can learn so much from each other. We can achieve far more together than we can alone.



IT'S ABOUT  
CREATING A STEP  
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TRANSFORMED.

## PRINCIPLE 3: DESIGN FOR SCALE FROM THE START

This may sound obvious, but this mindset pushes you to very different choices.

What do I mean? In much of our work at the Impact Incubator, we work with a range of local partners in one specific place. That's important for lots of reasons: our approaches must be grounded in reality, we really need to understand the issue, and we want to develop a response together with people living with the issue, community members, local partners and funders.

But if we just design a model that works for one specific place, there is a danger this will remain another beautiful example of “what could be” – with no hooks to enable it to scale beyond its original location.

That's why every design choice we make has two prerequisites. Above all, it has to meet the needs of people living with the issue. But we also want to ensure that it has the potential to deliver sustainable national change. For each issue we work with, we create a plan for scale from the outset. This isn't a specific route map – more a clear logic for how to get from what we're creating today to national change.

Here are five ways that we've found to design for scale from the start:

### **Work deeply in more than one location to create the initial response**

This approach has been critical for us in developing *Leaving Well*, a digital tool to support the transition of young people out of care.

Here, our initial development work focused on three Local Authority areas. In each one, we worked deeply to understand the *needs and challenges* of a young person leaving care and the barriers in the system. We then continued to engage with young people and their personal advisors in those locations every two weeks as we developed the digital tool.

By following this process, we not only created a digital tool that is targeted and effective, but also developed a model that can apply to many more locations.

## Develop the sustainability plan

Sustainability and scale go hand in hand.

It's hard to create national transformation in an issue without a plan to ensure the impact is sustainable. We spend a lot of time thinking about ways in which funding can be sustainable, but we're open to a range of routes to sustainable change. Others could include behaviour or policy change.

When we're designing the financial model for a pilot, we incorporate the plan for long-term sustainability. And if our goal is for the service to be commissioned by government in the long term, we ask ourselves these four questions:

- Is the route to scale about bringing in new resources or switching existing resources to something that works better?
- Is the price point per person something that government would ever pay?
- Is there an appetite from commissioners or policy makers for tackling this issue? Do commissioners understand the need or see it as we see it? If there isn't understanding or an appetite for tackling this issue, could we create one?
- Do we understand (and can we explain) whether this is value for money using the **definition** that public sector commissioners use?

At an early stage, we also look to design the project funding so that it doesn't just focus on delivering the pilot effectively, but also any longer-term scale ambition. For example, when we developed the Drive pilots, we intentionally brought together three different sorts of funders that don't normally work together:

- Local commissioners ensured that this work was valued and embedded in the local area.
- The Home Office, through the Police Innovation Fund, made sure that the work was linked in to the wider Home Office innovation agenda.
- Philanthropic funders were able to fund the measurement and management infrastructure.



Different funders have their own requirements about what their money can be spent on and the time periods for funding. However, we have found that very different funders can align behind a shared vision and by blending their funding you can achieve more than any one party could achieve alone.

## Understand the operational platform for scale

Think from the outset how your model could operationally scale. First, ask yourself: is there existing infrastructure that can support scaling?

When we developed the *Drive* model with our partners Respect and SafeLives, we were keen to attach the model to the MARAC network across the country, which is working to identify and provide support to high-risk victims of domestic abuse. This network provided a good foundation for scaling a model and ensuring that any work with perpetrators went hand-in-hand with support for victims.

Another good question to ask yourself: can you build efficiencies of scale into the model?

For example, this led us to deliberately designing *Leaving Well* as a digital tool. It meant there was a relatively low cost roll-out to other Local Authorities, which we hope will enable them to adopt it more easily.

## Set up governance and leadership for scale

Think carefully about governance structures early on – and how they can work to support your theory of scale. From experience, we know there is rarely one right answer. What's more, it's always more complicated than the natural tendency to simply try and retain control.

In *Drive*, we were aware that progress would only be made if we worked together and built on the strengths and contributions of different organisations. The three core partners are bound by a formal partnership agreement. But the glue has been the regular, sustained investment in relationships – with monthly partnership Boards between the strategic leaders, consistently prioritised by everyone over the past four years. These relationships have been important locally too. *Drive* has local champions who are building the local relationships needed to make the response work. These have been critical in keeping up the momentum behind this work.

In **Reset**, our work helping to scale the community sponsorship model of refugee resettlement, we chose a different approach. Reset brings together the passion and connection of community groups with the expertise of the refugee sector. Given the vast range of partners and the very specific capacity building function of Reset we created a new charity, Reset Community and Refugees rather than a partnership. This meant creating an independent Board, which we supported with advisory groups to ensure connection to the ‘frontline’.

### **Understand whether the story needs to change**

We have found that in some issues that we work in the story that we tell each other is part of the problem. It is one of the things that justifies and reinforces the way things are today.

I mentioned earlier that one of the barriers to achieving a change in response to perpetrators of domestic abuse was the existing narrative that places responsibility on the victim for leaving rather than the perpetrator for committing the abuse. The Drive partnership’s work to respond to perpetrators has both looked to develop a new model of working as well as change the story on domestic abuse.

### **PRINCIPLE 4: CREATE A MODEL TO ADAPT - AND LEARN AS YOU GO ALONG**

You may feel confident that you have developed an incredibly robust model, but let’s be honest: none of us knows all of the answers when we start.

That’s why we think it’s important to be constantly curious and willing to question our original assumptions to ensure the project stays on track to deliver the big vision. That applies both to the culture of working, but also to the formal learning mechanisms put in place when we design the response.

This often includes two important elements:

## Data and measurement infrastructure

We've found lots of value in using case management systems to aggregate operational metrics on a real-time basis. It can help you understand the emerging needs, how well they are being met, and whether there are operational challenges.

This use of “management information” for ongoing feedback on the intervention (and whether it's meeting needs) is essential if you want to adapt and evolve your response based on actual data, rather than anecdote.

For example, *Black Thrive* is currently establishing a shared measurement system to collect a range of metrics on race, mental health, education and criminal justice. This measurement system will be central to informing the ongoing priorities in Lambeth. And it will also shine a light on areas that need to be addressed beyond Lambeth to achieve national change in the issue.

One small note of warning. With any management information system, there's always a risk that, over time, the things you're measuring can become more important than the purpose. Chasing metrics should never compromise the underlying story. In *Black Thrive*, the partners are very clear that – alongside quantitative data – there also needs to be regular qualitative feedback, where the voices of those with direct experience can be heard.

## Time to step back and reflect

Building in regular moments to step back and reflect on operational learnings has been very important. These help inform how the model should evolve, and identify the wider strategy for scaling impact. We do it at project board meetings, operational groups with service leads and away days.

The *Leaving Well* team does this very regularly through a weekly 15-minute “stand up”. In these discussions, they reflect on the previous week and ask “What went well?”, “What could have gone better?” and “What questions do we have going forward?”

## PRINCIPLE 5: HOLD ON TO YOUR TRANSFORMATION VISION – AND BE AGNOSTIC ABOUT HOW YOU GET THERE

We've found it really important to remain rooted in the original ambition for the work, and your vision of transformational change.

It can be surprisingly easy to lose sight of the reason you set out on this journey in the first place once you get into the day-to-day work of mobilising a new service, managing funding and funders, and operational management.

One practical way to keep this discipline is to have regular strategy discussions that reaffirm the original vision, reflect on what you have learnt, and pull back to how you are working towards the original change you envisaged.<sup>3</sup>

The flipside of sticking fast to your original vision is being dispassionate about your organisation or the model you develop.

We've probably all experienced times when our (or others') organisational interests may conflict with the mission of the work. But the truth is that we should all be working to do ourselves out of a job. While that's not realistically likely to happen, we cannot be in a situation where we want funding to continue for our organisation rather than because it is good for the people we work for. A good example of how you can manage this risk through how you set up a response is *Black Thrive*. Here, it was important that the response was owned by all stakeholders in Lambeth – not just one organisation – and that it led to behaviour change in organisations and the community far beyond the Black Thrive team. To achieve this, Black Thrive was created as a time-limited initiative with a coordinating team housed within Healthwatch Lambeth. That means there's no new organisation that needs to seek ongoing funding. In this way, it would be a great outcome if Black Thrive no longer needs to exist because the change is embedded across Lambeth.

We've found that this ethos needs to be baked into the culture of a partnership, and the design of any organisational or funding model. The values behind the approach of social change and any collaboration for change are key. These values affect our behaviour and choices.

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<sup>3</sup> We have laid out our quick approach to building a shared vision for change with a diverse range of partners in Practical Tools 2: Approach for understanding the shared ambition, p. 31.

We pulled out the values that guide the Impact Incubator approach:



We are **optimistic**

We believe it is possible to improve our society and people's lives



We are **ambitious**

We challenge ourselves and others to tackle the most difficult issues and achieve change at scale



We are **entrepreneurial**

We are creative in making and seizing the opportunity



We are **collaborative**

We know systemic change requires bold partnership and empowers others



We are **tenacious**

We are loyal to the issue, focused on developing solutions and persevere to deliver outcomes



We are **curious**

We question and are actively seeking new ideas to learn and adapt



We have **humanity**

We see and treat people as whole people - all of our partners and our team

To ensure these are living we have quarterly reviews across the team where we reflect on:

- Where we have chosen to do something because of the value.
- Where we have chosen not to do something because of the value.
- Where we observe others demonstrating the values.
- Where we are struggling with values.

We see values as something that only exists if we are collectively acting in a way that reinforces them.



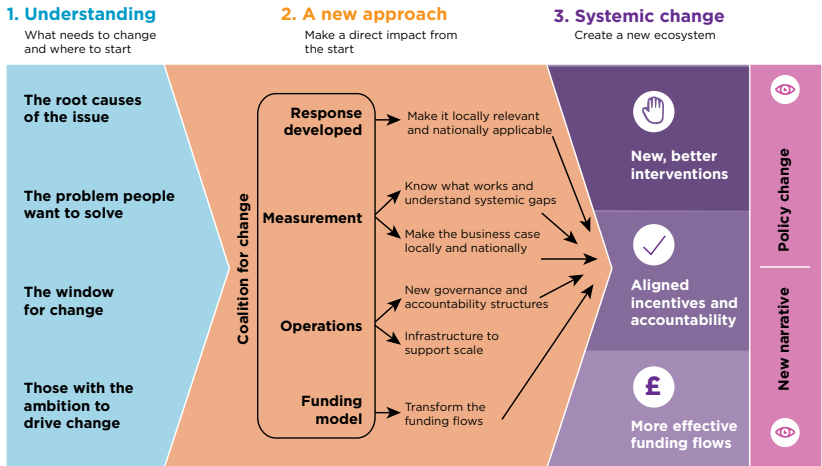
IN OUR  
EXPERIENCE  
CHANGE IS A  
COLLABORATIVE  
PROCESS.



# 3 Impact Incubator Approach

We’ve talked about the principles for scale. Now it’s time to look at the practice of how we bring these principles to life. I have outlined below the Impact Incubator approach of moving from a blank piece of paper to our ambition of “systems change” or a transformed social issue.

Here’s a snapshot of our three step process for planning to scale impact:



© Social Finance

## STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING

The first step is about grounding your approach in deep understanding. That means knowing the issue at its core, the context in which the work takes place, and building a foundation for action and driving change.

At the Impact Incubator, we typically break this down into **four components**:

### 1. Uncover the root causes of the issue

To do this, we often use the ‘Five Whys’ approach. It’s a bit like talking to a toddler, but it really works! By asking “why” five times, it reminds you not to take the first answer at face value. We need to dig below the surface and understand the root cause.

For example, when we first researched black mental health inequalities, we spent a long time connecting with people and reviewing papers to look below the surface. The initial answer was that there's a very different uptake of preventative and acute mental health services for black communities when you compare them to national averages. That's true but to create something that could move the needle, we needed a far deeper understanding.

## II. Understand the problem people want to solve

It's not just the issue itself. You also need to understand the context of the work. That's why we think carefully upfront about the problem that different stakeholders experience and want to solve. Often, we're partnering with people from very different constituencies. And we've learned that – if we all want to drive change forward – it's essential to understand the problem that each group wants to solve and explore where these overlap.



What are the intersections between the ambitions of each stakeholder? This is where you'll find the opportunity for action. Remember, this isn't about narrowing your thinking to just a thin subset of need. Instead, it's about being clear on the common ground where you can build a shared ambition – even if the goal is to expand that common ground and maximise the change.

One of the ways we do this is to build a shared vision for change with a range of cross-sector partners.<sup>4</sup>

### III. Find the window for change

We have found that it is really important to understand the wider environment you are working in and identify where there is a window of opportunity for change. This could include spotting policy openings, funding and societal changes or a new energy for change. This window is the hook you can build other work off and is a really helpful focus.<sup>5</sup>

### IV. Identify those with ambition for change

We've found that building a foundation for change to happen requires a balance of rigour and entrepreneurialism. So much of the change that we've been part of has come from people – regardless of sector – with a drive to achieve better outcomes for the people they work for. If you want to catalyse change, it's important to forge a deep collaboration with these people and bring in their expertise on the issue. In this first phase of work we spend a lot of time engaging with, connecting and starting to build relationships with people who want to make change happen. This is the foundation of longer-term collaborations for change, which in our experience last for years.

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4 We have laid out our approach to doing this in Practical Tools 2: Approach for understanding the shared ambition, p. 31.

5 We have spent a lot of time reflecting on what we look for and how we do it. We have shared the detailed approach in Practical Tools 3: Spotting Opportunities for change, p. 35.

## STEP 2: A NEW APPROACH

The understanding from Step 1 enables us to build a response that can drive change at scale. Here, we're focused on meeting the direct needs of people living with the issue, and creating the potential to lead to national change.

Here is how we structure this new approach:

### I. Build a coalition for change

This is the spine that the rest of the work is built around. We've found that having partners with shared ambition lies at the heart of really understanding the issue, iterating where a new answer could lie, and building momentum behind working in a new way.

For example, with the **Drive** project, we created a partnership with Respect and SafeLives – two national charities working with perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse respectively. This was central to our work and ensured we had a breadth of expertise at the table. But from early on we broadened the partnership to include Police and Crime Commissioners, statutory stakeholders in local areas, other charities, and academics in the sector. All of these partners have been a critical part of the progress we have made.

### II. Identify a new response

We've found that a new response is often needed to disrupt the *status quo*. This is based on a deep understanding of the need, barriers to change, and research into national and international best practice in addressing the issue (or similar issues). The process of developing a new model is very open and iterative, and typically involves a range of stakeholders.

When developing **Black Thrive**, we held a series of open meetings with over 100 people in Lambeth – from the community, with lived experience, from the council, mental health trust, CCG and police. We worked together to understand what was needed, and to test and develop the answer. It didn't happen overnight – it took almost two years of collaboration to shape the approach that is in operation today.

As we develop this new response we find it crucial to both recognise and meet the local need but also ask "What is the route to transform this issue nationally?"

### III. Focus on the operations

The first stage of delivering impact at scale is to identify an approach to improve lives. But all of your research and development will be worthless if the operational delivery isn't robust. From our experience, the difference between a great programme and a poor programme is often down to the operations.

That's why we always:

- **Involve** – or bring in if required – the right leadership that wakes up every morning committed to transforming the issue.
- **Map out and cost** the right management structure to support them, so they can pull the operational learnings up – and consider how they relate to the big picture.
- **Build** internal and statutory governance structures – ensuring these are accountable and plugged in to other services.
- **Create** a good measurement infrastructure, so that the model can adapt as we learn.

### IV. Measure, measure, measure

We spend a lot of time thinking about how best to measure our work to plan for scale. We see data and measurement as a day to day management tool – as a Sat Nav to course correct, gather insight on the operations and systemic gaps and start to build on what is working.

There are three main questions that this measurement answers:

- **What are we learning – and can we evolve and adapt the model?**  
Here we use management information systems to provide ongoing dashboards that give updates on how the response is working. We can use this data to highlight gaps, evolve the operating model and reflect on what we need to do to achieve impact at scale.
- **Is the new model working?**  
Because if it isn't, we should change it – or stop and use the resources for something more effective.
- **How do we prove it works?**  
This is central to our plan for scale. Who needs to be convinced that this new response works in order for them to adopt it? Is it

a commissioner, policy maker or regulator? And what data or evidence do they need?

To answer these last two questions, we generally commission an independent evaluation. This can tell us if the model is working and give commissioners or policy makers the input they need to build a business case or value for money argument.

## V. Find the funding

The final, critical element we consider is the money, which is so often the barrier to making something happen. We work to develop a funding structure that supports the delivery of the response but also supports the plan for scale.

It may be that we are trying to evidence a new way that the sector can be funded through new models of commissioning, new routes to pool budgets across departments, or ways to blend funding from a range of different constituencies who are all able to fund different elements of the answer.

It may also be important at this point not just to fund a pilot but also to evidence how different funding flows can enable the delivery of a new response. In part, this is what we were able to show with the Peterborough Social Impact Bond. It was extremely powerful to show that funding linked to outcomes freed up frontline delivery to adapt, learn and have a longer-term relationship with people leaving prison. This was critical if we were to meet their often complex needs, rather than simply deliver a service.

## STEP 3: SYSTEMIC CHANGE

We are some way from reaching “the end game” in any of the issues we work in. It takes time and it’s hard. That’s why it is the focus of much of our work today.

But even if we haven’t written the final chapter, we are keen to share what we have learned on this journey.

By planning for transformative change from the start, we’re hoping to significantly increase our likelihood of success. And in a decade’s



time, we hope that we and our partners can step back and reflect on a different world. A world where:

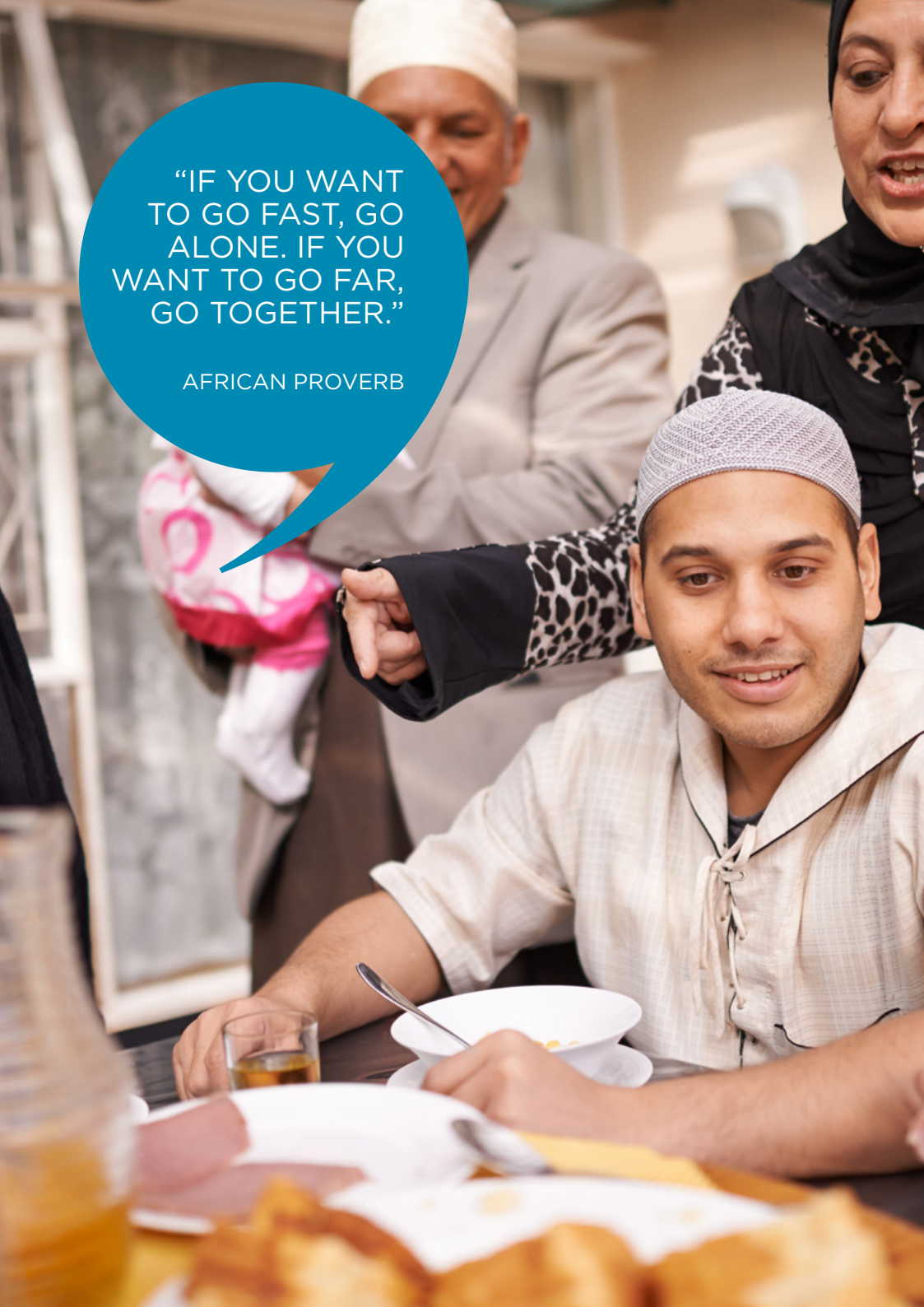
- **Society** thinks differently about an issue.
- **Money** flows to interventions that work and empowers those on the frontline.
- **People** living with some of the most difficult issues have agency and the support they need.
- **Incentives** align everyone's interests towards an improved social good.

We know that this will require approaches and responses that go beyond many of the things we start. And it will need others to work with us.

For example, we've worked hard to grow community sponsorship as a form of refugee resettlement because we want to improve the integration outcomes of refugees coming to the UK. We strongly believe sponsorship can be part of that solution, but we've also started work on the wider funding flows that exist to support refugee integration.

Equally, as our work on the **Drive** programme starts to grow, the Drive Partnership is looking beyond just the programmatic model we created. We want to work with the other partners to look at how we can embed the principles and learning from Drive into the wider system.

The problems that we're all working on can't be solved overnight. But I hope that – together – we can end the frustration of missed opportunities and instead make real progress in transforming some of society's most difficult social issues.



“IF YOU WANT  
TO GO FAST, GO  
ALONE. IF YOU  
WANT TO GO FAR,  
GO TOGETHER.”

AFRICAN PROVERB

## 4 Practical tools to use in the process of change

### 1: UNDERSTAND THE CHANGE THAT IS NEEDED AT EVERY LEVEL

“Systems change” is another of the social sector buzzwords of our time. It intuitively makes a lot of sense – many of us working in this sector see the need to transform the issues we are working on. We recognise that often the problems and answers lie beyond the programme we are running. However, it is hard to work out where to start in dealing with the tangle of the “system”.

But what do we mean by “system”? In reality, there are many systems that affect individuals and communities, whether formal structures and processes such as those for planning or health, or less tangible systems such as class attitudes or cultural identity. Often these interact and it is necessary to work with multiple systems to effect change in a social issue. For the purposes of this document, we use the word “system” as a shorthand for the wide range of people, communities, formal and informal policies and processes that need to be brought together in order to achieve lasting change.

#### Break it down

Through our work over the past five years, we’ve observed that in order to transform issues you need to work at the top, middle and bottom of the system. What does that mean?

- **The bottom** – the heart of this work is delivering long-term improvement for people living with the issue. To do this effectively you really need to understand the issue, what it means for people living with it and those working on the frontline.
- **The top** – you also need to understand the environment in which you work. The policy environment, how the funding flows, the accountability structures and the barriers to change in the system.
- **The middle** – it is helpful to understand either:
  - Why the needs of those living with the issue are not being reflected in the policy and funding environment.

OR

- Why policy and funding streams that have been structured to meet a social need are not driving the change they hoped for.

Is there infrastructure missing? Do people have the same knowledge and understanding of the issue?

We've worked in a number of sectors where we've seen that the change people are aiming for is blocked by not working at one or more of these levels. Below are some examples.

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### **EXAMPLE ISSUE: Mental health inequalities for black communities**

We started working with a range of partners on the issue of mental health inequalities for black communities in 2014. However, this is an issue that has persisted for decades. In 2002 the report *Breaking the Circles of Fear* emphasised the lack of trust between black communities and the mental health system. Over a decade later, the 2014 Lambeth Black Health and Wellbeing commission echoed similar concerns. We wanted to understand why the change many people had been working towards wasn't happening.

It wasn't due to lack of attention or programmes. Previous local interventions showed success for some people, but had been unable to create an impact in the system. National system-wide initiatives weren't able to enact a joined-up response.

Both types of response were rooted in working at one level rather than equally engaging with, and spanning, both the grassroots and policy environment. As a collaborative we felt that a new response was needed with equal ownership from communities and public services. This led to the creation of *Black Thrive*, which is working towards systemic change at multiple levels.

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## **EXAMPLE ISSUE:**

### **Community Sponsorship uptake**

In our work to support community-led refugee resettlement (known in the UK as ‘Community Sponsorship’), we found a huge energy to support refugee families often emanating from faith groups and through local organising networks. There was also a positive policy environment with legislation in 2016 to enable local groups to take the lead on resettlement. Despite the desire for change from both communities and government, community sponsorship was still nascent.

What was missing was the “middle” infrastructure – to enable community groups to learn how to work with refugee groups and to navigate the Home Office approval processes. A partnership from the refugee, faith and community sectors helped to establish *Reset* – a new charity working to catalyse the growth of community sponsorship.

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## **Ask the right questions**

We are constantly reminded in our work of the need to work across all three system levels. But where do you start? It’s paralysing to feel that you need to start everywhere at once.

What we look to do is understand the barriers for change and opportunities at each level by asking the right questions.

### **Bottom:**

- How do people living with the issue define success?
- What are the challenges that people living with the issue face today?
- What are the problems front line workers would like to solve?
- How do individual local contexts affect the experience of those living with the issue?
- Where are there gaps?

### **Middle:**

- What are the sector dynamics? How do people work together? What are the relationships between actors all working to achieve the same mission?
- What are the information flows? How much information flows between people experiencing the issues and those delivering support, funding or making policy? Does the picture that emerges from the data tally with the bottom up view?
- What are the practical challenges that people face in delivering their mission?

### **Top:**

- How does the money currently flow to address this issue? Who are the funders? How much funding is there? What are the constraints put on it?
- What is the current policy environment?
- What is the rationale for the current *status quo*?
- What has been learnt from previous policy initiatives?
- What credence or influence does the existing evidence base hold for those with power?

The answers to these questions lie in a diverse research and engagement process - really listening to those living in communities and affected by the issues we are working on, reviewing past and present policy papers, engaging with those working on the issue from the voluntary and statutory sectors. We use the answers to these questions to help us identify where to start. We may start at just one level, but we'd continue to engage and observe what is occurring at the other levels as we go and consider how to build responses that can play into the other levels.

We've found that this is a great way to kick off an approach that works on all three levels as we go through the process of change – we hope you do too.

## 2: APPROACH FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SHARED AMBITION

It's always easy to get bogged down in “what” you're doing and forget about the “why”. And that's a problem. I've noticed that if we focus on the “what” – my organisation, model or programme – it's clear to see why we are different from others. But this can miss the far bigger point: we are all working to achieve a very similar social change, and if we're going to get there we need to work together.

To address this, we've found it useful to step back from the day to day and reflect on this all-important “why”. The big vision. How the work each of us is doing is contributing to getting there. And the gaps that still need to be filled.

### How to find your “why”

Here's an exercise we often use at the start of our work. It helps us understand the wider vision – our shared ambition for the changes we want to happen. It's relatively quick and helps everyone understand the boundaries of an issue, the main challenges and where we should be heading.

We facilitate a workshop with a diverse group of experts on a social issue. This can include community leaders, policymakers, front-line workers, people with lived experience, commissioners, academics, philanthropic funders and people from business. This diversity of expertise and insight is key – because, as individuals, we only see part of the issue.

In the workshop we ask three questions:

1. What's our vision for the world in 20 years' time?
2. What are the barriers to getting there?
3. What would overcome those barriers?

Visually, we structure the responses to these questions in concentric circles on a flip chart, as shown in the diagram overleaf.



## **1. Vision for the world in 20 years' time**

The first exercise can be very energising. Participants are asked to describe how the world would look in 20 years' time if we all achieved our missions.

We make it clear that this exercise is a thought experiment – and that means money, politics and places should be no object. Otherwise, we've found that these practicalities can limit people's ambitions and keep them mentally grounded in today's reality. Instead we want them to paint a vivid picture of how the world could look for:

- People living with the issue.
- The services that support them.
- The wider system.
- Society.

For example: at a recent workshop on how to improve quality of life in later life, one of the visions to emerge was of a society with



stronger intergenerational connection and no intergenerational conflict (emerging from a concern about tension between young and old in the current division of public and private resources).

I've facilitated these exercises in many different social issue areas. What always surprises me is that often those partners who seem very divided in their day-to-day work actually share a very similar vision of the world they are working to create. I've also been surprised at how reaffirming it is for all of us to really visualise the world we are working to create.

## **2. Barriers to getting there**

The second exercise focuses on the middle circle and relates to the vision that has been collectively agreed and written in the centre circle.

In this exercise, we ask the group to come back to reality. We ask them to think through the most pressing barriers to making this vision real for:

- People living with the issue.
- The services that support them.
- The wider system.
- Society.

These barriers span the practical and systemic. They also vary hugely by issue.

People living with an issue aren't a homogenous group. We look for common themes, but this is also a starting point for much deeper research and engagement.

For example, one of the themes coming out of the workshop on how to improve quality of life in later life was the desire for older people to have agency in the support they receive – to be active and a contributor, rather than a passive recipient of support.

In another example, the societal barriers we mapped in the workshop exploring perpetrators of domestic abuse included the stigma of asking for support as a perpetrator – and a wider narrative that places responsibility with the victim for leaving the perpetrator.

I'm always surprised at how quickly you can create an initial map of the barriers once you have the right breadth of expertise around the table – and create an environment in which people can build on each other's knowledge.



LUCK IS WHAT  
HAPPENS WHEN  
PREPARATION MEETS  
OPPORTUNITY

SENECA

### **3. Potential ways to overcome the barriers**

The final exercise looks at the outer ring of the circles – working on the routes to overcome those barriers you’ve just mapped out, so that you can make the vision in the centre circle a reality.

We ask people to brainstorm how the barriers could be overcome, over the next 20 years. This longer time horizon makes the process of change feel more achievable.

This exercise can unleash real creativity from the group. I’ve found that radical thinkers exist in every sector. And some of the ideas and areas of focus that emerge through these discussions act as a useful jumping off point for working to achieve the transformative change we’re aiming for.

This exercise is part of a wider process of change. To ensure it’s valuable to the participants, we write up and share the learnings with all attendees.

We believe that change is a collaborative journey. And this exercise is a useful starting point in collectively agreeing on the end point of the journey. It helps you find your bearings together, understand the major obstacles, and plan your routes to get there.

## **3: SPOTTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE**

Can a small organisation with limited resources achieve transformative social change? Yes, it can. And one of the best ways is “opportunity spotting”.

Think of this as scanning for potential. Which are the social issues with a window that might be slightly open for change? It’s here that you could widen the space – and make real progress. Focus your resources on these issues and you’ll have a better chance of making an impact beyond your programme.

### **Stop kissing frogs**

Over the past five years, the Impact Incubator has worked to drive transformative change in nine issue areas with a range of partners. And we recognised early on that identifying the right opportunities was a critical part of our research into an issue.

The problem is that it often felt like more of an art than a science. Initially, we found it hard to decide what was (and what wasn't) a real opportunity. There have been lots of "false dawns" and we've kissed our fair share of frogs.

In autumn 2018, we sat down with our partners to record what we've learnt about spotting good opportunities for transformative change. We don't claim to have produced the definitive guide. But we'd like to share what we've learned, so that others can use and build on it.

So, how did we demystify this 'dark art'? The result is a new framework for opportunity spotting based around five dimensions:



## 1. Think policy and legislation

Look out for any changes in policy, the law or regulation. It can often be the tipping point for creating a new environment that's riper for change – and when the interests of parties across sectors start to align. For example, we started looking at how to develop a new response to perpetrators of domestic abuse after Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary wrote a report focusing on the police response to domestic abuse. In some police forces, this commentary from the regulator led to a greater openness to prioritise work with perpetrators of domestic abuse and a real ambition for change.

## 2. Feel the social pulse

When the public's perception of an issue shifts, everything can change. Suddenly you might find a greater political will to act, a community-wide energy for change and new social boundaries of what's acceptable.

For example, news coverage of the refugee crisis – and in particular the focus on Alan Kurdi's death in Turkey – led to a wave of compassion for refugees across the UK in 2015. And because communities wanted to respond to the refugee crisis, this created a real opportunity for change. For us, it created the space to work with partners in a new way to create **Reset** – which gives communities the opportunity to help refugees build a home and stable life in the UK through sponsorship.

When we launched **Drive** as a new response to perpetrators of domestic abuse, the BBC radio series, *The Archers*, was (coincidentally) featuring a long-running story line about domestic abuse. This meant there was far more public interest and an openness to what we were looking to achieve – changing the narrative from “Why doesn't she leave?” to “Why doesn't he stop?”

## 3. Spot new “solutions”

In some issues we seem to have been working for decades without delivering real change. And a common barrier here is the difficulty of showing what's a good use of public money. But we've found that this dynamic can be shifted when a new “solution” emerges. It can give everyone hope that change in a difficult issue *is* possible.

There could be a model that's been piloted locally, has a track record of working in another country, or an approach that's worked for another

issue. For example, the **Reset** model works to support the growth of community sponsorship. But it's not a shot in the dark. Community Sponsorship is a model with a 40-year track record in Canada and it's provided a useful precedent for the UK.

#### 4. Change in funding

One of the barriers to change is a lack of funding. We have seen that a window for change opens when funding constraints are loosened – whether through new markets or new government funding. These include government innovation funds designed to stimulate new initiatives or provision in a sector.

Remember that new markets can also open up opportunities for innovation and new models of working. For example, the feed-in tariffs offered on solar panels created a new market not just in the for profit sector but also for community entrepreneurs, such as Good Energy, wanting to reduce fuel poverty in a sustainable way.

Perversely, a tightening of resources can also create opportunities. When the status quo is stable, there is little incentive to change, but as the old adage goes 'necessity is the mother of all invention.' There are of course dangers here, and across all our work we steer away from situations where the primary goal is simply cost savings. However, reduced resources can encourage an openness to new ways of working.

#### 5. Find your energy for change

This last "opportunity" is really hard to define. But it shouldn't be overlooked.

Here at the Impact Incubator, we're lucky enough to work with expert partners in many different social issue areas. And what we have found is that sometimes there's a real drive and dynamism for change either in a sector or from a particular individual.

For example, when we started research into the issue of black mental health inequalities, we met Councillor Jacqui Dyer who was leading the Black Health and Wellbeing Commission in Lambeth. She had deep understanding of the issues and a real passion to effect change in this issue.



We hoped that by working alongside her we could support her in realising her and the community's vision. This ultimately developed into **Black Thrive** – a deep partnership between the community and system in Lambeth to transform mental health outcomes for the black communities.

### Using the Opportunity Framework

These five dimensions often work together to open up a window of opportunity. Sometimes it comes down to a blend of luck and years of preparation and hard work on an issue.

But if luck is hard to bottle, we've found that scanning the landscape with these dimensions in mind is a really helpful way to prioritise your efforts for maximum reward.

To make it easier to spot and track opportunities, we've categorised opportunities across these five areas into a framework which has been designed to help structure internal decision-making processes.

We use this decision-making process at different times. It's helpful when we're starting a new area of work but also for scanning the landscape over time. This way we can ensure that we're tracking changes in the 'weather' and adapting to consider the external environment – not just the work we are doing.

We hope this will also be useful to other organisations thinking about where to focus, how to prioritise resources and how to spot opportunities to transform the issues that they're working on.



## AUTHOR

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Emily is a senior director at Social Finance and a member of the Board. She founded and oversees the Impact Incubator and leads Social Finance's thinking on impact at scale. She has worked to establish and support the scaling of impact of numerous initiatives designed to transform how we respond to entrenched social issues ranging from domestic abuse to young people leaving care. These include: leading the set-up of the world's first Social Impact Bond in Peterborough, and the development of Drive as a response to perpetrators of domestic abuse.

She formerly worked with REDF, a venture philanthropy fund in San Francisco and as a strategy consultant in London. Emily sits on the board of The Henry Smith Charity and on the advisory board of Greenwood Place, a philanthropy advisor.

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Over the past five years we have had the honour of working with inspired individuals and organisations from a range of backgrounds and sectors, all seeking a better way of addressing difficult social issues. It has been a joy to work with them and we have learnt an enormous amount together. However, the thoughts in this document are Social Finance's and I know each individual and organisation will have their own reflections on what we have learnt in the process of change. On a personal note, we wanted to take this opportunity to record our deep appreciation for the inspiration and challenge David Robinson has provided as Chair of the Impact Incubator. We are hugely grateful for his ongoing mentorship and advice.

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