



Building Community Resilience Together

Community Resilience Fund Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

People's Voice Media

May 2026

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Foreword from Councillor Stephen Williams

Chair of Public Health and Communities Policy Committee, Bristol City Council

As Chair of Public Health and Communities Policy Committee I see first-hand the essential role that community spaces play in Bristol. One of the pleasures of my role is travelling around the city visiting many of community anchor organisations, large and small. Among others, I've been pleased to see the great work being done by Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust, Redcatch Community Garden and Hartcliffe City Farm. I was struck particularly by the work of One25, supporting sex workers, some of the most marginalised people in our city.

Warm, welcoming, accessible community buildings and other spaces where people can gather, connect, learn skills and work together are a vital part of our communities. The Community Resilience Fund (CRF) aimed to strengthen the future of Bristol's neighbourhoods by investing in these important buildings and organisations. The Community Resilience Fund is a one-off capital grant fund of £4m established in 2022 to build city resilience by growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality.

In 2020 Black South West Network, working with Locality and Voscur, were commissioned to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the VCSE sector in Bristol. *Designing A New Social Reality* set out a framework for recovery and resilience. CRF was a direct response to this report.

CRF had two aims – to award funding to improve important community spaces and to put communities at the heart of the decision-making.

The first stage was about community and voluntary groups, residents and councillors codesigning the process and communities taking a lead in deciding which projects should be funded. This process was evaluated by the University of Bristol and Vivid Regeneration in *Participatory democracy in practice: evaluation of the Bristol City Council Community Resilience Fund*. You can [read the Executive Summary here](#) and [read the Full Report here](#).

The second stage was about implementing the decisions to invest in community and voluntary projects across the city to create more accessible, welcoming and energy efficient community buildings, upgrading digital infrastructure and improving environmental sustainability.

Continuing this participatory approach, Bristol City Council commissioned *People's Voice Media* to evaluate the impact of the funding that was awarded to community and voluntary groups.

People's Voice Media trained and supported seven resident decision makers to become Community Reporters and invited representatives from funded VCSE organisations to reflect on their outcomes in meaningful ways. This report is a product of conversations between resident decision makers and VCSE representatives, alongside reflective activities completed by grantee organisations.

CRF has formed part of Bristol City Council's investment in community organisations alongside grants such as Bristol Impact Fund (BIF) and the Voluntary Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) infrastructure support grant:

- From 2021 to 2025, BIF 2 provided £6.4million grant investment into projects that build the power of communities facing disadvantage.
- From 2026 to 2030. BIF 3 builds on the foundations of BIF1 and BIF2 prioritising investment of £8.8million into neighbourhood organisations and citywide equalities communities that

increase community skills and knowledge, address community identified priorities through co-production and aim to tackle inequity

- From 2022 to 2026, the Enabling VCSE grant invested £1,266,432 into support for VCSE organisations, this was awarded to Voscur and Black South West Network
- From 2026 to 2031. under its new name the VCSE Infrastructure Support grant will invest a further £1,583,040 to organisations that support VCSEs in Bristol

We hope the recommendations in this report will be useful to a range of audiences: residents and organisations gathering evidence to influence local democracy; decision makers evaluating the benefits of community infrastructure investment; and future community investment programmes or capital building works.

I would like to thank everyone who has engaged with this process. The impacts highlighted in this report reflect our collective efforts and I am confident that the benefits will continue to be felt across our communities in the years ahead.

Introduction

The Community Resilience Fund (CRF) is a one-off capital grant fund established in response to recommendations of the Bristol Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Strategy Group. It is part of an overall goal to build city resilience by growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality. CRF has invested £4 million capital funding in the community and voluntary sector since July 2023, including £800,000 for dedicated grants for city wide equalities communities.¹

The fund supports recovery and longer-term resilience of the VCSE sector in Bristol, responding to the recommendations from 'Designing a New Social Reality'.² This has been done by investing in community spaces, which enables revenue streams to be established and assets to be managed more effectively.



Image 1: One25's night outreach van funded by the CRF

Reinforcing the focus of The Bristol Impact Fund 2,³ the CRF facilitates stronger connections between people and enables community-led action by investing in the sustainability of important community facilities and infrastructure. The funding allocation process aimed to increase participation in decision making, build connections and shared understanding through deliberative conversations.

With the understanding that organisations face challenges to delivering capital projects such as lack of capacity, skills, knowledge or resource, the CRF offered revenue and capacity building support to enable the successful delivery of their projects. To ensure that BCC's Environmental Access Standards were met by organisations with related projects, the CRF team referred organisations delivering these to accessibility experts, West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL), to work on a 1:1 basis throughout the lifespan of their project. WECIL provided a holistic

¹ CRF Cabinet Report Feb 22 - V2

² [Designing a New Social Reality: The Future of Bristol Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector Beyond COVID-19](#)

³ [The Bristol Impact Fund](#)

approach to ensure access improvements were produced to a high standard, following best practice and taking a range of access needs into account.



Image 2: Community group at The Rock Centre, who received a CRF grant

Throughout the delivery stage, Bristol City Council also offered peer learning and skills building opportunities in relation to asset management, to enable networking and the development of a community of practice. These opportunities contributed to the CRF's overall goal of building a more resilient city.

Enabling VCSE Grant

The CRF recognised the vital impact of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations on the life of the city and the key role they play in addressing inequity; delivering often innovative and niche services; promoting inclusion; strengthening voice and influence; and enabling social action. To strengthen and build the capacity of the sector, BCC awarded grants to Voscur and Black South West Network (BSWN) to:

- Encourage organisations to build connections between neighbours and people with shared interests.
- Foster a culture of strong and collaborative relationships between groups and with partners.

Among other priorities set out in its approach, there was a focus on supporting organisations to manage existing community assets and supporting those who aspire to acquire a community asset.

This evaluation seeks to understand, as part of its remit, the impact and value of support provided by Voscur and Black South West Network through these grants, as part of the wider investment in supporting the development, maintenance and effective use of community assets and infrastructure.

Funding Priorities

CRF aimed to build the resilience of community and voluntary sector organisations serving their communities by investing in the following priorities:

- Accessibility Improvements
- Environmental Sustainability
- Financial Resilience
- Digital Infrastructure

Aims of the Evaluation

The main aims of this evaluation are:

- To find out if the funding helped VCSE organisations become stronger, more resilient and more able to cope with challenges.
- To see how the funding affected the people and communities these organisations support, especially groups facing inequalities.
- To check whether the funding helped make grant opportunities more equitable for everyone.
- To understand what difference the support for capacity building made, including things like one-to-one help, learning with peers, free professional advice, and consultancy, in developing and using community resources and spaces.
- To create ways for residents who helped make decisions to also take part in checking and reviewing the CRF projects.

Methodology

People's Voice Media, a social change organisation, were tasked to evaluate the Community Resilience Fund with a focus on collaboration, lived experience and grassroots insights. To make this possible, Community Reporting and Ripple Effect Mapping were chosen as two complementary methodologies, which are briefly summarised in Diagram 1. Both methodologies are participatory, with a focus on collaboration, lived experience and human insight.

We synthesised these findings of these two approaches to create Direction of Travel maps (Section 5 of the main report). Direction of Travel Maps are a way of visually presenting impacts and changes revealed through evaluations or cycles of learning.

Community Reporting

What it is

- A qualitative, peer-to-peer research method that gathers and mobilises digital stories of lived experience to enhance citizen participation in:
 -  Research
 -  Service development
 -  Policymaking
 -  Decision-making
- Stories were collected from grantee organisations by local residents to understand the impact of the grant and their experience of the process.

Why it was applied

- ✓ Draws on lived experience within community organisations
- ✓ Generates rich, nuanced insights
- ✓ Scalable approach to gathering data
- ✓ Reduces power imbalances; inclusive and accessible

Ripple Effect Mapping

What it is

A participatory impact evaluation technique that helps participants and stakeholders visually map intended and unintended changes within a project. It captures “ripples” of impact that traditional methods often miss and focuses on understanding how an intervention contributes to outcomes or system change.

Why it was applied

- ✓ Measures impact through human insight
- ✓ Participatory and easy to replicate across contexts
- ✓ Based on appreciative inquiry — a strengths-based approach to strategic change

Diagram 1: Overview of evaluation tools used

A full outline of evaluation activities can be found in Appendix 1 of the main report.

Purposeful Sampling

The Community Resources team, with input from the Steering Group and People’s Voice Media, created a purposeful sample of organisations to include in the evaluation. It takes into consideration the location and/or community of interest, the support received, and the type of project carried out. WECIL, BSWN, and Voscur were also included as they have provided capacity building support after the decision-making stage and so it was felt important to include their perspective. The full purposeful sample can be found in Appendix 2 of the main report.

From this sample, some organisations provided Community Reporter stories, some took part in Ripple Effect Mapping, and some took part in both to ensure a mix of voices were platformed. The Community Resources team provided the final sample and chose how the different grantee organisations would participate.

Community Reporting Insights



Image 3: Community Reporter conversation at The Nelson Trust

In all, 23 stories were gathered from grantee organisations by local Community Reporters. They evaluated the stories over the course of two sense making sessions and, from their deliberations, five thematic areas of impact have been identified. This process is outlined in Diagram 2.

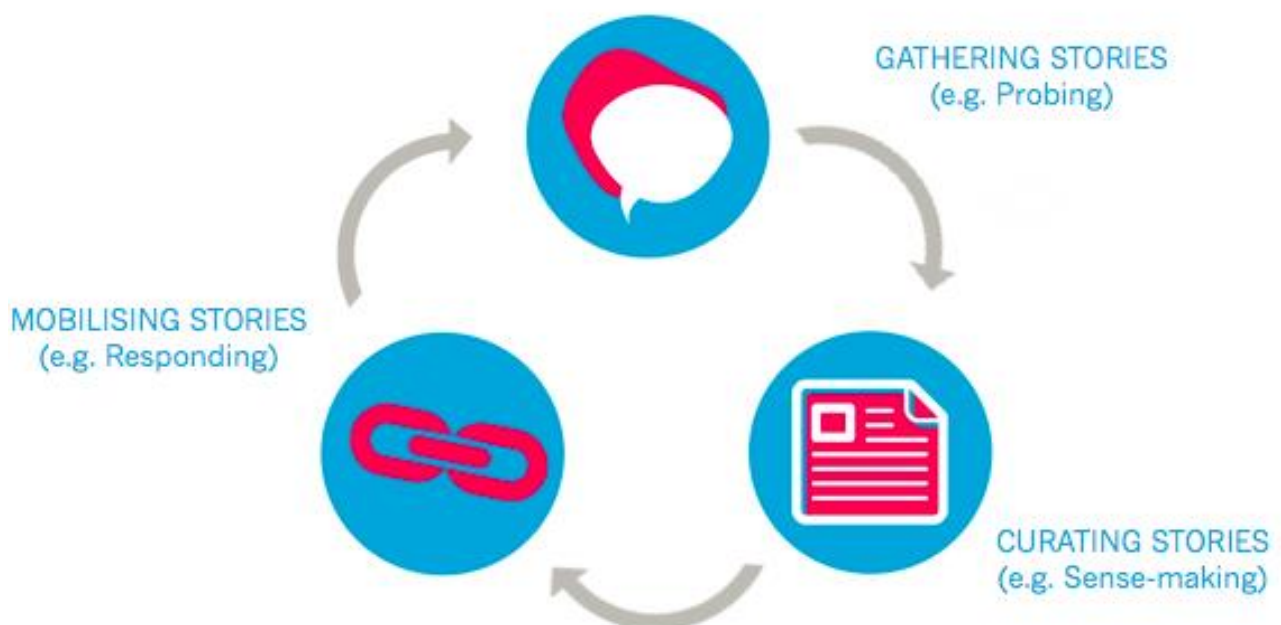


Diagram 2: The Community Reporting cycle

The thematic areas identified are:

- Meeting diverse community needs
- Broadening and deepening community reach
- Financial resilience through cost reduction
- Strategic planning and futureproofing
- A positive, trust-based funding experience

The insights gathered from Community Reporters show that the CRF has been integral in making the funded VCSE organisations stronger. By focusing on accessibility, financial resilience, and building trust between Bristol City Council and VCSEs, the fund has helped organisations solve urgent problems and gain skills and confidence for the future. This all-round support has made community buildings and services more welcoming, stable, and better prepared for what comes next. As a result, local communities will continue to benefit from these improvements for a long time.

The full thematic analysis can be found in Section 3 of the main report, while the stories (where consent was given) are available [here on the Community Reporter website's Bristol CRF archive](#).

Ripple Effect Mapping Insights



Image 4: An example Ripple Effect Map from the evaluation sessions

20 of the 56 organisations that received CRF funding took part in Ripple Effect Mapping. The process looks at the changes made for individuals, organisations, and the wider community. Each participating grantee organisation created a map to demonstrate how the funding helped them improve their buildings, become more sustainable, make their spaces easier to access, and offer more services to local people. Core change areas consistently identified in the maps include:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Skills development and employment creation
- Income generation
- Environmental sustainability
- Support for mental health and wellbeing
- Improvement of community offerings.



Image 5: A Ripple Effect Mapping workshop

At the **individual level**, projects led to increased comfort and safety for staff and those accessing services, new job opportunities, improved wellbeing, and greater access to essential services and healthy food. Facility upgrades have made environments more welcoming and accessible, providing direct benefits to staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries.

Organisational impacts included reduced energy and maintenance costs, enhanced financial sustainability, and increased capacity to deliver services. Many organisations reported improved project management skills and the cultivation of stronger partnerships with contractors and stakeholders.

On a **societal scale**, initiatives fostered deeper community engagement, reduced social isolation, advanced environmental sustainability, and encouraged a stronger sense of pride and belonging among residents. Projects also supported vulnerable groups and reinforced connections within neighbourhoods.

The findings from the Ripple Effect Mapping process demonstrate that CRF funding is generating broad and substantive impacts at individual, organisational, and community levels. The support provided has not only improved physical infrastructure and service delivery, but has also strengthened community cohesion, resilience, and sustainability. Collectively, these outcomes highlight the significant value of targeted funding in empowering communities, supporting vulnerable populations, and facilitating sustainable, positive change across a diverse range of settings.

The analyses of the individual maps can be found in Section 4 of the main report.

Resident Involvement

A number of residents who were involved in the decision-making process were recruited as Community Reporters. The aim was to up-skill residents, continuing to grow the community power that the decision making built on. Feedback from Community Reporters demonstrate that:

- Skills were developed including:
 - Interview techniques
 - Digital literacy
 - Responsible storytelling
- Relationships and networks were strengthened with:
 - Bristol City Council
 - Local organisations and groups
- Some of the residents wish to continue using Community Reporting and being involved with the council.

However, it is also important to note that not all the Community Reporters completed the work, with several dropping out after the training for a variety of reasons. Those that continued, did experience some challenges and we have included a recommendation in the next section to learn from this for the benefit of future work.

Learnings & Recommendations

As part of the evaluation, we synthesised the story insights and recommendations to examine the 'direction of travel' in each set of evaluation areas (Section 5 of the main report). The recommendations suggest ways in which transformative change might be achieved in communities.

Organisational and community resilience

The first two aims of this evaluation were:

- To find out if the funding helped VCSE organisations become stronger, more resilient and more able to cope with challenges.
- To see how the funding affected the people and communities these organisations support, especially groups facing inequalities.

The Current Picture

The CRF has made real impact in terms of increasing organisational resilience, with signs that there is real transformative change in play. In fact, there appears to have been a shift from organisations existing in a state of survival, to ambitious multi-year – and even multi-decade – visions for community service. It has also highlighted that funding which invests in infrastructure is just as vital for resilience as resource funding. In terms of community resilience, the assets improved by the CRF are creating spaces that benefit those communities, including the most marginalised groups within them.

Recommendations:

- **Build** resilience of community organisations by proactively providing advice and guidance on sustainable business plans, which can be underpinned by capital works. This might include advice on generating unrestricted income, reducing maintenance costs, or strengthening infrastructure. As well as helping organisations create long-term strategies, it will also help them in completing applications for future funding.

- **Consider** ways in which community organisations and their facilities can be made more visible to communities, to both allow people to see what these organisations do in their neighbourhoods, but also to help foster a sense of community pride. This might include, for example, showcases of community work, or help with organising community events.

Equitable funding

The next two evaluation aims were:

- To check whether the funding helped make grant opportunities more equitable for everyone.
- To understand what difference the support for capacity building made, including things like one-to-one help, learning with peers, free professional advice, and consultancy, in developing and using community resources and spaces.

The Current Picture

Both the CRF application process, and the embedded support and capacity building have had a positive impact, particularly in addressing inequity in the funding sector, by giving access to funding to organisations that would not normally be considered contenders for such grants. The capacity building support also helped with this inequity by offering valuable advice and consultancy that smaller, grassroots organisations might otherwise be lacking.

The overall view was that the person-centred, holistic approach of the CRF meant that each individual organisation had their needs met, and that is now having ripples of impact in the wider communities.

Recommendations:

- **Adopt** the 2-stage application process in future open grants rounds for capital funding, particularly those aimed at smaller, community and/or grassroots organisations, for which this process was shown to be less daunting.
- **Use** a holistic, person-centred approach in future open grants rounds for capital funding, incorporating advice and capacity building support that focuses on the needs of the specific organisation and the inequities they may face.

Resident involvement

The final aim of the evaluation was:

- To create ways for residents who helped make decisions to also take part in checking and reviewing the CRF projects.

Community Reporters mentioned that they had developed skills including interview techniques, digital skills, and Responsible Storytelling. They had developed relationships with both Bristol City Council and their local organisations, and that some of them would like to continue Community Reporting both independently and in future projects. The overall process allowed the residents to see how their decisions in the first phase had impacted the organisations and communities involved.

Recommendations:

- **Learn** from emerging and existing participatory models both locally and nationally and recognise the benefits of these approaches for community and service development.

- **Look** for ways in which models of participatory democracy and citizenship might be used in the future, to more fully include the voices of people and organisations in decision- and policymaking. Methods such as Community Reporting, Ripple Effect Mapping, focus groups, citizen assemblies, and other formats might be considered.
- **Engage** with current resident Community Reporters on the challenges of the role and how best to mitigate them in the future. This may include clearer expectations of what the role involves, more information about the role, technical guides on the creation of smaller file sizes, online consent and story review forms for simplified data collection, or recommended software for transcription.

Visualisation

Artist Connie Noble was commissioned to produce a visualisation based on the outcomes of the evaluation, with both sides available to view below.

The visualisation was showcased at a celebration event on 22 April 2026, alongside a short film on the impact of the Community Resilience Fund. The film can be viewed [here on the Community Reporter website's Bristol CRF story archive](#).



Image 6: Side 1 of findings visualisation by Connie Noble



Image 7: Side 2 of findings visualisation by Connie Noble

For further details about our work:

Visit: <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

Check out: <https://communityreporter.net>

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