SHARED FUTURES
FUNDERS, FUNDING AND THE BME THIRD SECTOR
CONFERENCE SUMMARY
Acknowledgements

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A note on terminology: the conference brought together a large range of stakeholders, who also brought their own preferred terminology, all of which are used throughout this publication: black, Black, Asian, BME, BAME, people of colour, racialised, minoritised, racialised minority, ethnic minority and marginalised.


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YOU DON’T SPEAK FOR ME

You don’t speak for me
When you look nothing like me
You don’t know the struggle, the fight
The pain I have lived.
Put on my size eight shoes
Go forth …
I can’t put on your size four shoes
And walk your walk.

What makes you think that we are the same?
Just because we fall
Under the BAME?
Lump us all together in a big, brown box
Culture, history, religion: we’re separated anyway
Doctor, Solicitor, Dentist: excelling in this game
Aggressive, Ghetto, Angry, Rachet
We get labelled
We are shame.

I dare not show passion
I dare not upset Claire
Instead, I make a version of myself,
For you
Speak on my behalf.
There are butterflies and roses, and we live in perfect harmony.
You’ve done your job.
At the end of the year
Tick the box, you have listened.
Tick the box, you have engaged

Will I get the spot for the BAME?
After Black Lives Matter
Getting funding
Because
You can see my passion
Because
You value the work.
Because
It gives to others.
Or am I on trend?

Will I revert back to heartache and questions
That labelled my work as mundane?

I hope it’s not a phase.
I hope you see me as me
I hope that we are seen for our talent, our intelligence
Our love for what we do.
I hope to get rid of
The crab-in-the-barrel mentality.

I hope that today we learn to listen.
To take the time to re-educate ourselves
To sit in our uncomfortableness.
We all have a story to tell.
How you choose to tell you is up to you.
I don’t speak for you.
Don’t speak for me.

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As London’s Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, I know there’s incredible work happening to support communities across the capital, every day, work that continued throughout the pandemic and was incredibly valuable to people across not just our city but also the UK.

From running foodbanks, befriending lonely neighbours or helping young people find jobs, community support is central to keeping our nation moving and its people safe.

So much of that effort comes from Black and minority ethnic led community organisations which continue to play a critical role in delivering services to millions. But years of underfunding and lack of resource, made worse by Covid-19, means we risk losing these organisations and the lifeline of support they provide.

Prior to my role as Deputy Mayor, I worked for many of those organisations in our vital third sector – these are organisations that are trusted by the vast array of communities that are often unheard or under-represented, who support, engage with but also act as bridge builders between communities and key decision makers. These organisations are not only change makers, but also work hard to bring the voices of communities to our decision and policy making tables and I am incredibly grateful to them.

So as this conference summary importantly shows, it is time to recognise the value BME-led organisations bring to our communities and reward their efforts with substantial and sustained funding to continue their vital work.

This means challenging the status quo to ensure future funding is shared fairly, that this funding moves beyond short term project based grants towards financial support that builds capacity and enables organisations to develop the long term, impactful work that they know drives change.

It means working collaboratively with equity-led organisations to ensure racial justice sits at the core of funding practices, recognising what work to create race equity looks like and funding accordingly.

And finally, it means dismantling structural racism and the barriers that prevent Black, Asian and minority ethnic led organisations from shaping decisions that affect their communities, looking critically at funding practices and listening to BME led organisations to create a more racially just funding sector.

If we want all to thrive, we must invest in everyone working at the heart of our communities.

And the time to act is now.

Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard
Deputy London Mayor for Communities and Social Justice
INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt BME communities are bursting with the leadership, energy and vision to manage, mitigate and ultimately solve the problems of our society. Projects, groups and organisations that are led by the black and minority-ethnic communities that they serve, are fundamental to bringing about institutional change across all sectors. But, on the whole, the BME-led third sector has an arm’s length relationship with funders, who remain chronically under-engaged with their work.

As part of trying to change that picture, Runnymede organised a two-day conference to bring these two constituent parties more directly into conversation with each other. Shared Futures: funders, funding and the BME third sector was also a timely event coming at the tail end of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, and the emergency funding many BME-led organisations had received in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

SUMMARY

This publication is a summary of the range and depth of conversations which took place during the conference. With 430 registered participants, 25 programmed sessions run by 40 contributors and session leaders, many, many conversations took place across the two days. Here are just some of the conclusions of the conference:

- Funding needs to shift from short-term, project based, and often ‘performative’ funding - which meet the ad hoc, target-driven agendas of the individual funder - into long term investment, which make financial and other resources available for the core and development costs of the BME group or organisation.

- Some funders do engage in unethical behaviour: pitting grassroots organisations against each other, using the expertise of BME leaders without giving proper renumeration or recognition. ‘BME’ or ‘BAME’ are catch-all terms which have worked to spread funding even more thinly, and sometimes unfairly, across many different types of communities.

- How BME leaders and communities frame and narrate their issues - and therefore how they choose to work to address those issues - should be respected and adopted by funders; their lived experience and expertise are central, not marginal, to the ultimate impact of the funding under question.

- Becoming a charity is still seen as the main development model. There are not enough BME-led entities adopting other kinds of development models such as Co-ops, Community Land Trusts, Community Businesses or taking advantage of Social Investment loans.

- In the relationship between funder and BME-led group or organisation, new, more equitable and productive funding approaches are emerging, such as participatory funding. Other examples such as Baobab Foundation and Resourcing Racial Justice, are funds and funders founded and managed by BME leaders themselves.
NAVIGATING THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is a document of record for the whole conference, which was structured around the following sections:

1. Keynote Speech and the panel discussion which followed.
2. BME Third Sector Champions - sessions which acknowledge that funding for the BME-led third sector has its own history.
3. New approaches, new methods, new models: Sessions programmed with funders in mind.
4. Insight, tips and timesavers: Sessions programmed with BME leaders in mind.
5. Closing event and panel discussion.

In this publication, conference contributions which echo each other have been collated together under the following themes:

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- The UK third sector 14
- The BME-led third sector 18
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A FINAL NOTE

Individual and personal funding journals are chronicled throughout this publication. They are an addendum to the conference, but included as a way to keep much needed and relentless focus on the lived experiences of BME leaders as they seek funding and develop their projects, groups and organisations. Often under-funded, and trying to meet demand with insufficient investment, BME leaders are also often growing their organisations in isolation from each other. A welcomed aspect of the conference was its sociability, bringing 430 participants together, to hangout online, to reflect, compare experiences, to share stories and ideas, as well as exchange business cards. The Shared Futures conference was an invaluable event for creating new connections and friends, and Runnymede hopes to be able to create further similar opportunities in the future.

Carol Sidney
Runnymede Trust
December 2021
My name is David Bryan. I am here giving the keynote speech as I was one of the core team behind the Common Cause research, completed in 2018. I got involved with Common Cause research project because I was keen to find out how black, Asian and minority ethnic communities could secure investment from collaborating with universities, rather than continuing a reliance on a limited pool of sympathetic funders that were already known to support our organisations. I wanted our communities to know that there are other avenues for support, and other ways for them to fundraise for their work and increase their profile.

Money always captures people’s attention. So, let me be clear: I am not a funding directory or an oracle on fundraising that is going to rattle off the names of good funders, ‘out’ the bad ones and tell you where pots of gold are stashed. When I used to deliver fundraising courses, I would attempt to make it simple, and ask: why do you need money? Make a convincing story and persuade everyone in the room. How will you know it has had impact other than through your own devotion?

I want to affirm the importance of us talking in detail about our needs in a racist society and naming it as such. I want to encourage us to explicitly locate our endeavours as a constructive contribution to civic society. I want us to avoid detrimental, self-fulfilling prophesies that many funders lock us into. Lastly, I want to encourage us to build big visions and big alliances.

**BACKGROUND**

I have been self-employed for over 30 years. Initially, I was focused on running a black bookshop in Brixton, just 100 metres from where the previous attempt had been burned down. I turned my passion for reading about the ‘Third World’, as it was called then, into skills to run a values-based, social enterprise cooperative. I became a member of several groups, all in search of a purpose. Some were just about knowledge, but others were about making a difference. The bookshop combined both, and placed me in the company of some amazing black people within the collective and in the community. We felt that we could make a radical difference.

So, we moved from the outskirts of Brixton to its very centre. We left our neighbours – the Black Panthers, the Race Today Collective and the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard helpline – and moved towards West Indian Parents Action Group and the Brixton Law Centre. We organised the first black book fair in the UK. We were building an institution in order to do politics, with no long-term plan other than survival. They were hard times, the miners were on strike and most people had to work a three-day week, if they had a job.

After years of being a driver for change in Brixton with voluntary organisations, working with African-, Caribbean- and Asian-led organisations – those working against injustice – I became self-employed. My plan: see how powerful institutions make decisions in the real world, and learn. Towards the end of the 1970s, I went to the United States for a holiday. At one point I found myself at a brunch organised by a black councillor in Boston. It was an event he organised at the end of summer and I was just fortunate to be there at the right time. It was an incredible event, with black students from Harvard. One of my main takeaways was a metaphor given by a black professor of psychology. He said that each of us had a responsibility to see ourselves as having left our villages to find sustenance, but then to return, to share that sustenance and knowledge. So, over the years, I have worked for government departments, local authorities, the NHS, property developers, voluntary organisations, funders and arts organisations. I am not an academic, I no longer run voluntary groups and I am not a funder. That said, however, I have been, at some point, all of these, for a variety of institutions, so I have some useful insights.
My involvement in community organisations began when I was at secondary school, Tulse Hill school, a South London comprehensive, agitating for Black British History to be incorporated into the mainstream teaching of history. I survived Tulse Hill Comprehensive School, with a population of 1800, an all-boys school, built in 1956, just outside Brixton, where the sizeable black student population felt like it was the majority. The students studying Latin were as militant as those in the pupil referral units. Those were formative years, where in my view, many of us progressed in spite of the school rather than because of school, myself included. In those days, you could be suspended for having an afro and expressing solidarity with the civil rights movement. I was aged 12 in 1968. To give some context: the American civil rights movement was in full flight and Martin Luther King assassinated. The women’s movement was making its voice heard across all classes. Apartheid was still dominant in South Africa. There were regular demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, and nuclear weapons. Students were playing a leading role around the world, standing up to oppressive democracies. The ‘colour bar’ was widespread in the UK. Enoch Powell made his ‘rivers of blood’ speech. Immigration and racial politics were volatile and hostile. Those days seem very similar to what is happening now. The actions taken by communities and our allies to press for change have made some advances, but the subtle and not so subtle manifestations of racial discrimination are persistent and stretch beyond institutional boundaries. Many of our organisations are created to advocate, educate, influence policy, support the poor and marginalised, challenge the failings of powerful institutions – be that the police, Grenfell, Windrush, abuses in educational institutions and much more. There is a long list of black people who have died in police custody in the UK, year after year. They are rarely acknowledged in the British press and media. And it’s not just the brutality and the impervious nature of the police. It is the orchestration of a hostile environment that draws institutions into its web of compliance with procedures and legal justifications, where, for example, employees, new and established, are required to bring in passports to prove their right to employment in local authorities and elsewhere.

Black-led and Asian-led organisations are defenders against injustices, communities of affirmation and investors in building civic society. I was, for a period, the Chair of Working With Men, now rebranded as Future Men. It was, and I’m sure still is, a highly effective organisation, supporting the young person, the parents and the school. It may have started as a support for young black men, but it expanded its services to include all young men in need. Whoever our focus of engagement, we and they are part of the social fabric. Each of our social and cultural organisations is an attempt to demonstrate our care for others and our willingness to make improvements. It’s an intentional intervention that says we care and therefore we will act, and learn to do so in solidarity with others. The act of working with others, paid or unpaid, to affect change is an affirmation of our humanity.

SYSTEMIC, INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Little has changed over my 50 years of engagement in campaigns or working on governance issues. Some people might think that statement is unfair and unfounded, but they may be living in a bubble or an alternative reality. They may not have kept track with the relentless sector and industry...
Black Lives Matter has not only sparked a global movement but has challenged the liberals and radicals alike to demonstrate that they have confronted structures and processes that maintain the degrees of discrimination that warrant comparison with the USA and South African apartheid.

Gary Younge recently wrote in the weekend Financial Times:

“Every now and then much of Britain discovers racism in much the same way that teenagers discover sex. The general awareness that it is out there collides with the urgent desire to find out where.”

It is vital for the wellbeing of all in our society, for all of humanity, that that discovery is made, but not at the expense of the same excluded people. A number of organisations are now tentatively trying to have honest conversations about race. Some will say that they are comfortable with gender and sexual orientation but less so about class, and not at all about race. There will be those that want no discomfort as they fill knowledge voids, or confront assumptions and mythologies that are, in essence, about white superiority. Sadly, there will still be many that will restrict their development to a tick-box process in order to curtail any emotional exposure or culpability. Learning is difficult. But, as a nation, we also have a learning opportunity. Some people want to characterise the challenge on colonial statues as a binary issue: do they stay or do they go? But behind the statues are questions that challenge the historical myth dished out for hundreds of years, that portrayed British colonialism as a benevolent endeavour. And that Britain became great from its brilliant business acumen, with implications of racial superiority. Nothing about the genocides and barbarism, culminating in the long-term devastation of colonised countries. The UK’s wealth was built on the enslavement of Africans and colonialism, while simultaneously destroying the economies of the colonised. If funders do not understand the context in which we operate, the history behind much of their own fortunes, they will always consign the work of our organisations as marginal, culturally specific and a short-term problem that eventually the state will fix.

BLACK- AND ASIAN-LED CIVIL SOCIETY

Before I move on to talking about funders and their investments, I want to acknowledge the importance of our enablers, conveners, catalysts and trust-builders. These people are vital to the formation of community organisations that underpin civic life. These are the people who experience or identify a problem, or need, and seek to address it. They’ve plunge into a world armed with passion and a resolve to make a difference. We give our time, because we care. We are passionate, because we care. We are determined, because it matters. All our successes build confidence, a real sense of community, and signal possibilities.
Racism and persistent discriminations limit us, and limit us all. They drive us into restricted zones of activity, they sometimes limit our horizons and they lead many funders to believe that we are a short-term intervention, not to be regarded as vital and permanent contributors to civic society. Some funders do not need much help to ignore our civic contribution as they loiter in a twilight zone of self-delusion, where they trust that systemic failures are merely individual errors. And despite the evidence of outcomes such as the ‘hostile environment’, the Windrush scandal, the roll-out of Universal Credit and the lack of freedom to walk the streets.

FUNDERS AND FUNDING

My experience of funding covers the gamut from naive applicant to grant adviser. On one occasion, I had been unsuccessful with a grant application. For some reason, I felt indignant and sought an informal conversation with the funder. A contact got me a meeting and the funder came to the project and we had a warm and friendly conversation about race and making change happen. Subsequently, they gave us a grant and increased the amount. And somewhere in the correspondence, they stated the obvious: it was not only the project that they needed to believe in, it was also the people.

I have also experienced, and at times witnessed, the limitations that funders can ascribe to some organisations and not others. I once employed a white consultant that told me a funder had asked him if I would run off with the £10,000 we were applying for. Thankfully the consultant conveyed to the suspicious funder that my lifestyle meant I would not need to stoop so low.

All too often I found that funders were comfortable providing restrictive funding, as many were neither at ease with the purpose of the organisation nor understood its contribution, and didn’t take the time and effort to understand either of those. Whether working with arts or civil society organisations, too often funders work with a disbelief that their society is racist. In some instances, our organisations and their leadership might be adopted. They would build a rapport with a particular funder, but while warm and friendly, it did not, and was never going to, lead to organisational growth and transformation.

Many funders work from a mindset, reinforced by racially contaminated and under-examined societal attitudes, that black and brown communities cannot be trusted with substantial funds. This leads to funders setting low expectations on the group prior to their application. To hedge their risk, some funders will insist that black and brown applicants find match funding if they want larger sums or will just keep the sum in question small. These low expectations have a damaging affect and they inform the tone of the relationship. If the group succeeds in getting funding, it is often just enough to do the task. Rarely is it enough for an evaluation, or to explore what further impact could be achieved, or for further research and development. Those of us who are focused on doing the work, rather than perpetual fundraising, end up lurching from one short-term funding period to another.

This focus on project funding, and not on longer-term investment or infrastructure, ensures a fragile operation is the order of the day for BME-led organisations, where their senior members of staff labour as multi-skilled, multi-talented, multi-purpose leaders, working from dawn till dusk. This funding approach burns out good people and dissuades others. It conveys the message that seeking solutions to societal problems is only for the better resourced, the white and the middle classes.

While investment in personal and organisational learning and development are essential, there are a large number of funders that constantly suggest that ‘training’ is the solution. Training, alongside scant funding, is not a solution. Some funders have embraced better practice and provide a more enabling package of support, reflecting their commitment to building capacity, not dependency, within black and brown communities. But when black and Asian groups attempt to ask for a step change in investment, from the funders that they think they have a relationship with, they do not get it. At Arts Council England we managed to increase the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (20+) within the National Portfolio, but mostly at the lower end of funding. The concession was that at least
they got stability for three to four years. Those of us advocating for this change still had to plead not to draw the newly funded groups into unnecessary, capacity-sapping bureaucracy that had nothing to do with quality delivery.

So, in summary: many funders are reluctant to acknowledge failures of white civic institutions to support black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and organisations. Funders lower expectations and have low expectations. They provide small grants. They restrict development. They use training as a catch-all solution to problems. As a result of all of this, they create insecure and unstable organisations.

Where are the organisations that have been supported to grow and make a valuable contribution to civic society? Who are the white organisations with years of secured investment that can demonstrate good or exemplar inclusive practices? What is the role of funders in relation to our under-acknowledged and under-appreciated contribution to civic society?

Simply put: funders need to fix up!

CIVIC SOCIETY

Black- and Asian-led organisations are vital. These organisations have built our pride, retained our sanity, created space to breathe, provided a place for shared purpose, and enable shared memories and stories. These organisations, alongside genuine partners, have made civic society tolerable. But we need to give ourselves time and space to be ambitious and to forge progressive plans, otherwise funders will determine our futures and trap us in a cycle of impoverishment.

Working with funders should, at its best, be about a mutual partnership to achieve societal advancement. Our organisations are not just a response to societal disregard, but are also organisations engaged with the improvement of people’s lives, taking our place, taking up space and contributing to civic society.

I have written funding applications, been an assessor for funders, been on the advisory panels for grant decisions as well as a funder, courtesy of Arts Council England. These, among other experiences, tell me that black- and Asian-led organisations need to position themselves and remind everyone that we are part of the infrastructure of civil society. We manage the pain and discrimination of white society, while endeavouring to build fulfilling lives.

The voluntary sector has been ambivalent about black- and Asian-led organisations. That was evident when I was on the board of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) back in the 1980s, and it is to this day. Many if not all of our organisations are a double indictment, on the mainstream infrastructure and on civic society. We are not only here, as Stuart Hall wrote, because you were there, in colonial terms, but we are here, as independent organisations, because so many white voluntary groups failed to provide a service to our communities. This is not colour blindness, this is colour negation and disregard: we are seen and ignored.

Our organisations need to re-examine how we work, and to think of new ways to make a lasting impact. Growing everyone’s potential to live their best lives must be our aspiration and that must mean encouraging everyone to be vocal and active advocates for enhancing life: theirs and others.

We are stronger together – a cliché, I know but it is the truth. To achieve this, we have to invest in collaborations that are based on mutual understanding and respect for what each contributor adds, building meaningful relationships across communities and sectors.

This question of making substantive change is critically important. Some might argue that black- and Asian-led organisations exist to plug a hole in white society. They are wrong. We are part of fortifying a shared humanity, for the benefit of all. If they, the white middle-class civic society, were more inclusive, then black, Asian and minoritised ethnic organisations would need to exist less. And more importantly, fewer black- and Asian-led organisations would be pre-occupied with addressing the impact, legacy and suffering caused by colonialism and racism – systemic or otherwise.

The leadership in the funding world is predominately white and middle class, and, like the rest of society, it has done a great job of employing people in its own image. Few were concerned until a global moment
of injustice and a worldwide campaign under the slogan Black Lives Matter. This has forced some introspection. How long and to what effect? Who knows! Again. I hope they use this moment to create sustainable change and this not yet more short-term symbolism.

GOING FORWARD

• Do not go quietly. Make sure everyone knows about the success and impact that you are having. We cannot afford to underestimate the quality of our work because we are too busy doing the work.

• Avoid, where possible, thinking solely about project delivery and think in terms of building institutions. This requires investing thought and plans about the future you want, as opposed to the focus on the short term and ‘getting by’.

• Maximise your support. Get everyone to be engaged cooperatively in making your venture a success, from board members to volunteers. Make everyone an ambassador.

• Where possible, forge relationships with several funders/investors and build for the long term. Building funder relations is work – it needs to be mutual and nurtured.

• Create a captivating vision for the future. Be over-ambitious.

After introducing all of the panellists, Halima’s opening remarks included an acknowledgement that although this is 2021, we have been having these conversations about funding and infrastructure support for BME-led civil society many times over, for many years. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global Black Lives Matter protests, the present moment seems like a pivotal and symbolic time, perhaps ushering in the possibility of permanent change.

Halima: How hopeful are you that this attention funders are placing on our communities doesn’t become just another trend?

David B: I am not hopeful as government is largely indifferent, and institutions unduly compliant. We are in an era where we have to make the money that comes into our communities, which is that much harder to get, to go farther, to get the same results. The impact on active citizens, expecting them to do far more, with far less, erodes their aspirations and intentions. I see a lot of tokenism in the reaction to Black Lives Matter. This is a society that is failing to have honest conversations about race, and has always failed to do so consistently.
Halima: What do you need to see happen to make sure this attention on our sector is permanent and stays as a permanent trend?

David B: We need to be building institutions for the long term. So much of the time we get caught up in short-term funding programmes – and right now, in the midst of COVID, it is all short term, if there is any funding at all. We need the larger institutions to become partners in engaging us to grow our capacity. And we need to resist the urge to believe that we are a temporary part of British society.

Marlene: I have to have hope. I am trying be hopeful – but it’s the tokenism. It’s being left to fend for yourself. I’ve spent six years trying to establish my work, and only now am I seeing signs of growth and development. I am too busy trying to survive, when all I want to do is create work. Smaller organisations need help in elevating themselves.

David W: Like Marlene, I have to have some hope. If we see the panacea to the problem as being recognised by funders or getting extra funding, I don’t have any hope, and this is like déjà vu as we have these cyclical conversations time and time again. If it is about what generations of black people – not just here, but across the world – have to do to eradicate racism, then I do have hope. That awakening around the world does give me hope. In relation to the sector, it’s about doing for self. There are many organisations now – Ubele, Baobab Foundation – that are premised on the notion of doing for self. Funders and funding institutions were not set up to address issues such as institutional discrimination or poverty. We need to be doing for self.

Kieron: I would say hopeful, but not especially confident. I run a fund that is learning about its own connection to colonialism and I am learning a great deal from this conversation. I want to pick up on the resistance to talk about racism that we have in this country. Part of the answer is for us as funders to look at ourselves systematically, to look at our processes: what do they replicate, what do they embed? What deliberate and intentional choices are they making? We have to do the work. We, in our fund, are starting to do that work, which I am happy to share, but we have a long way to go.

Halima: What is this lack of trust in the BME sector? What’s going on here?

David B: It is exaggerated. We, as a nation, invest a great deal of hope in the individual and the attitude ‘I’m going to grab what I can’. But then we underestimate or ignore how others are doing great work by working creatively and collectively – and that’s what we, as a sector, have to elevate. Model that, and more will join.

Halima: Where is the fear coming from? Is building a shared understanding about our history a means to combat fear?

David W: When setting up Baobab, we decided one of our main values is unity. We don’t believe the hype about the lack of trust in BME leadership, governance or communities. Let’s not rely on or focus on those narratives from the funding infrastructure in the UK. Instead of being dominated by that regime, let us ask, instead: how do we help them to shape their values and their purpose so that they reflect us and our needs? Let’s be united, then let’s address the issue of fear.

Halima: Don’t fall victim to a narrative you have not set up yourself, and instead build up from a narrative that you want. Unity, collaboration, etc.

Kieron: Foundations need to get back to this question of ‘how are we doing things?’ as that is how we build trust. So many of the processes of foundations are designed not to build trust. They are not conversational, they are not focused on relationships. They are about filling in an application, which is the one thing that will not create a partnership. I am hopeful that more foundations are grappling with these questions.
David W: It’s about what we do want, more than what we don’t want. We need decisions about funding, and priorities about funding being set by those closest to communities. Criteria are led and laid by funders who are not from the community, are not diverse, have no lived experience, so we have been chasing the priorities that have been set for us. The question is how we empower BME leadership to work at that level. And we need to be wary about thinking of the black voluntary sector becoming a buffer or gatekeeper.

Halima: What should the conference be talking about, and reflecting on?

Marlene: How can we make funders become accessible, to being open to challenge, so that we can have a conversation. Too much, we have to bend ourselves and we lose sight of ourselves. How can we say ‘no’ to that bending, and not be afraid that we will be blacklisted?

David B: We have to get stronger by getting bigger so that we build towards having a critical mass of BME-led organisations. Search for money anywhere and everywhere. The more diverse the source of resources, the better. And how we need to be ambitious beyond the point of observable reality, because we constrain our intellectual potential by being too caught up with the immediate.

David W: Let’s keep it real, these are serious times: we live with disproportionate death rates because of racism. Society will never be effective unless we address this. Their [white] lives will not be happier and their children’s lives, too. That maxim of ‘no justice, no peace’ is more than a slogan: it’s an imperative. The second issue: systemic and structural racism. The Sewell report gifts us with that focal point for unity, and invites so many different types of people into the conversation. To funders: let’s have some clarity about the designs of the interventions you say you want to meet. Let’s do that within a framework that recognises change needs to take place at a systemic level. Thirdly: not being so self-absorbed as a sector that we forget the urgency and daily consequences of racism. We also need to keep building our own narratives, and we have some great writers and journalists who do that, can do more. The last point is about recognising our power as a community. We are powerful, beyond measure.

Halima: This conference might want to reflect on how funders, and funding regimes, can respond to the imperative to dismantle institutional racism. Thank you to you all, as with these contributions, you have raised the stakes for this conference, and for us all. Thank you for sharing your expertise and wisdom. What a great way to start.
STRONGER FOUNDATIONS: CHARITIES THAT THRIVE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The ACF is the membership body for UK foundations and grant-making charities. ACF is driven by a belief that trusts and foundations are a vital source for social good. Its mission is to support them to be ambitious and effective in the way that they use their resources.

Following George Floyd’s murder, the Black Lives Matters protests and the social disparities which became evident through the COVID-19 emergency, Max, Tracey and Jaden identified a surge in attention to racial inequality. Racial inequality is hardly a new phenomenon; however, the public reaction to these events does feel bigger and more permanent. This has been evident in the rapid increase in related philanthropic giving to racial equality charities and other organisations.

Although all of these momentous events in the last year have helped gain more support and put a spotlight on racial justice, they have simply been an addition to the decades of efforts by organisations who have persistently promoted equality to deepen funding for BME communities. This session focused on ACF’s Stronger Foundations, exploring trends in the trusts and foundations sector and examining initiatives that are embodying forward-thinking and inclusive practices. Charitable foundations contribute £6.5 billion in funding to civil society organisations per year, and more than £1 billion was allocated to the COVID-19 emergency last year. In addition, 9 out of 10 foundations have pledged to increase their funding, including some taking on a specific focus on anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion.

The FREA initiative was set up by the National Lottery with a group of funders including City Bridge Trust, Children In Need and Comic Relief, with a focus on combating the increase in hate in the wake of Brexit. The Alliance has three priorities:

• to increase understanding of and focus on race equality in funding organisations
• to seek more and better funding to address race equality
• to increase black and minority ethnic representation in foundations’ leadership and governance

Many initiatives focused on aspects of DEI and racial equity in the UK foundation sector have come to fruition in the last two years. The speakers argued that this is something to celebrate, but also posed a question to conference attendees: ‘Is the gap between the vision of these initiatives and the reality in practice narrowing or widening?’ The session discussed how FREA was set up to improve relationships between the two constituencies – funders and BME communities. FREA created an audit or benchmarking tool which allowed funders to assess their performance, giving a clearer picture as to whether expectations had been met as a result of their funding. Some funder feedback given to the Alliance was quoted: ‘it had sent a shockwave to them, as it was clear our funds hadn’t reached certain communities’.
funded by trusts and foundations, have been a traditional business model, entities are now starting to diversify. The Shared Futures conference was organised, in part, to highlight the range of business and development models available, as well as to raise the profile and state the value of the collective work of the BME-led third sector. In the meantime, the UK’s third sector more widely is also engaged in DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion), participatory and other progressive initiatives to embrace the role of and contribution which can be made by UK’s BME communities.

Jaden, Tracey and Max acknowledged an ongoing concern felt by many parties that this sudden spotlight on addressing racial equality in funding will not be sustained into the longer term. It remains to be seen if funders too, in sufficient numbers, can learn from the good practices of these emergency responses. The Baobab Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in different ways, are examples of funders working directly and explicitly to address racial justice. Additionally, the ongoing 2027 Initiative Programme was created to try to populate the grant-making sector with professionals from working-class backgrounds. These many programmes and initiatives in the trusts and foundations sector will continue to work towards a future which gives BME organisations ‘easy access to lasting, sustainable funding’.

The Shared Futures conference coincided with the launch of a new FREA report on the state of funding for black- and minority-ethnic-led organisations. Tracey reported that funders within the Alliance were looking at the challenges, the opportunities and the ways in which they could build a race equality lens into their funding streams. They were also struck by the wave of funding to black- and minority-ethnic-led organisations in 2020, never seen in quite the same way before. The Alliance decided there was a need to better understand the amount and nature of the emergency funding that came about as a result of Black Lives Matter protests and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, a series of research reports showed a growing concern about the disparities and the impact of COVID-19 on BME communities. The Alliance commissioned this analysis to help UK funders:

- identify their next steps
- review and analyse their funding processes: what worked/did not work

The Alliance has three key priorities: increasing funders’ focus on racial equality, seeking more and better funding with a key focus on black- and minority-ethnic-led organisations, and improving meaningful racial representation in the funding and grant-making sector.

- enable more focused conversation about future funding strategies
- identify infrastructure groups and networks
- identify gaps in funding: what was funded most/least
- support the sustainability of black and minority ethnic civil society
- understand the causes, consequences and impact of the unexpected shift in funding
Though founded in 2011, Money A+E did not start trading until 2013. In the intervening two years, lacking the large-scale funds to fall back on, I found myself funding Money A+E through a combination of my time, my money and a small £1000 grant secured via a church transformation fund.

Up and running in 2013, the two-year period between 2013 and 2015 saw me delivering a series of financial training workshops, while also securing small contracts with a housing association, a homeless charity and a university. Sad to say, the funds received from taking on such contracts did not prove adequate to meeting my living costs or the operating costs of Money A+E. It felt like pushing a truck up a hill with short breaks to recover your breath and all the while thinking, ‘Why am I doing this?’ Funny thing is, my passion to help other people and my faith is exactly why I am doing this and why I can endure such hardship.

In 2015 I secured a grant of £25,000 from a charitable trust in London, with the purpose of providing debt and welfare benefit advice in South London. Seeing a glimmer of hope, I ploughed on with vigour. As I strove to grow Money A+E I found myself having to develop in several areas. I had to develop my bid-writing skills, submit applications and maintain my records. Part of my frustration comes from knowing that funding is only ever given to the same few organisations, that ideas and concepts I have developed are likely to be stolen and that despite offering my time and insight to various research workshops, I consistently find myself being used as a source of knowledge, as opposed to a serious prospect for funding. Despite doing all that I can to meet the criteria of particular schemes, I am met with the same refrain: ‘Your application is unsuccessful’.

All is not lost, however. Since 2021, Money A+E has expanded to 14 employees, 10 volunteers, an Advisory Board and Steering Committee, alongside winning numerous awards. Though Money A+E has grown in size and reputation, I still face many challenges. Though I have recently received grants from mainstream funders, it cannot be described as a consistent source of funding. Lacking money reserves and ever financially vulnerable, long-term sustainability seems some way off.
The Phoenix Fund was a joint initiative established in May 2020 between Global Fund for Children and The National Lottery Community Fund to provide £1 million in emergency grants to black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities across England. In addition, the Ubele Initiative was commissioned as the delivery partner, and BRAP worked alongside as the learning partner. The initiative aimed to offer core funding to BAME grassroots groups, raise awareness of the unique challenges facing BAME communities and ‘establish an effective, innovative partnership to improve and promote community-based organisations within English philanthropy’. Session leaders were careful to use the term ‘BAME’, while acknowledging the term as a contentious one.

The session explained how the fund spanned six regions across England and offered a collaborative steering group who had understanding and lived experience of working with black, Asian and minority ethnic communities that could drive the fund’s grant-making decisions. Thirty national organisations were successful in receiving funding. The fund was open for six months and received 1347 applications, with 100 being successful in the first round.

The Phoenix Fund was presented at Shared Futures as a case study of a fresh and inclusive funding decision-making model by Ryan, along with former colleagues Kieran Lewis and Rachel Stephens, who have continued this work.

The session leaders drew attention to feedback that applying organisations have given on the fund. The application process was very light-touch, requiring just ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a series of 13 questions. Applicants felt that decision-makers understood the work they were doing and what they were trying to achieve. Ubele echoed this – ‘the fund was tailored to the community’ – and Global Fund for Children stated that the fund ‘addressed inequalities’. Fifty per cent of the successful applicants were micro organisations operated by voluntary staff, and 60 per cent of applicants had no record of previous funding. The total of 1347 organisations who applied to the fund also totalled £223 million in prospective funding. In the end, the Phoenix Fund provided £2 million to 200 BAME-led organisations, and awarded grants ranging from £5000 to £10,000.

Successful organisations that received the Phoenix Fund included the Policy Centre for African Peoples, who commented that the Phoenix Fund award was ‘their first ever core fund’. Greenwich Vietnamese Women stated that the fund was ‘invaluable and helped them to serve their vulnerable members who had been neglected since the first lockdown in March 2020’. And Media Cultured CIC professed that the fund was ‘incredible news and a huge sigh of relief’.

As the COVID-19 pandemic and protests for racial justice swept the world, the time to decisively support BAME leadership and relief efforts was long overdue. The seminar finished by exploring the learning lessons that the Phoenix Fund had taken from the initiative and participatory approach. Seven lessons were highlighted, with a focal point being that ‘people are not hard to reach. Instead, we need to ask more, and tell less, and not over-engineer the process’.
Decades ago, the BME third sector emerged as a response to the failures of statutory services and mainstream charities to recognise and address the needs of BME communities. The three key organisations below are part of a small group of organisations providing infrastructure support to the BME third sector. Race on the Agenda (founded in 1984), Black Training and Enterprise Group (founded in 1991) and Voice for Change England (founded in 2005) represent an entire collective history of BME-led organisations engaged with funders and funding, both on their own and on others’ behalf. The Shared Futures conference was a chance to share a little of their history, their perspectives and wisdom.

RACE ON THE AGENDA: Q & A

Maurice presented an ethical dilemma recently faced by ROTA, which, like many BME-led organisations, had been chronically underfunded and largely ignored by funders. In the wake of George Floyd’s murder, many such organisations in the UK were suddenly attracting funding and funders. But Maurice argued that this kind of ‘performative’ funding can be cataclysmic to small organisations if plans have not been made in advance. ‘As a sector, we need to think and plan.’

‘Work out what you’re comfortable with.’ Consider the ethics of accepting funding from certain sources. And consider what safeguards BME-led organisations need to put in place in order to manage the potential negative pressure exerted by a ‘suboptimal funding relationship’. In the end, ROTA declined a sudden and lucrative source of funding which they judged would have compromised ROTA’s objects and constitution. Maurice advised conference attendees to invest time and thought into planning for their own organisations.

Funders, too, need to realise that chronically underfunded organisations need infrastructure support to manage unanticipated budgetary expansion. Without such support, organisations are being ‘set up to fail’.

Q: How much has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced funding bodies in the UK?

Maurice: Current conversations with funders feel a lot more holistic. There seems to be more pro-activity in terms of securing racial justice. But this might only be temporary.

Q: How should small organisations navigate conflict arising from ethical/unethical partnering?

Maurice: There’s no clear answer to that, but the team should have conversations about what is and is not acceptable, so that the organisation doesn’t break down as a result of those conflicts.

Q: Could you elaborate on the idea of an ethical partnership policy?

Maurice: A policy should be what you need it to be. What do we need this tool to do? This is what is acceptable to us, this is what isn’t; these are the pros, these are the cons. Are we doing good with this money, or are we allowing a funding body to use us as ‘whitewash’?

Q: Speaking on behalf of a heritage organisation keen to work with community groups, what do groups like ROTA require to work successfully with the heritage sector? What does ‘performative action’ look like?

Maurice: We need longevity and legacy to secure racial justice, with projects that will actually solve problems. It is important that there is an actual community benefit, and not empty gestures.
BTEG has been operational for 30 years, and initially tried to do everything for everyone. The financial crash of 2007 and 2008 left it quite vulnerable, and ushered in a period of austerity which was devastating to many black-led groups. BTEG had to take a step back and reflect and ration what it was able to do. Thinking about more recent times, especially this past, eye-opening year of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter, BTEG has eight core messages for funders:

1. Provision of flexible funding. Trust in us to know what we need and why we need it. Enable us to grow, not just survive.

2. Simplify application processes. Consider the submission of video, for example. Be sensitive about insisting on quick turnaround time.

3. Employ staff and grant-makers who are culturally aware. We need to be understood, even if you have to say no to us.

4. What lens are you looking at reserves and assets from? Recognise that small organisations struggle with too few resources, and take time to build and rebuild.

5. BAME organisations are struggling to be recognised by you (funders) as having specialism and expertise at all. Allow creativity and space for articulating intersectional issues.

6. Revisit exit strategies and what those may mean to the particular organisation. Issues do not go away within the lifetime of a funded project.

7. Appreciate the need for longer-term funding to build our infrastructure and capacity: information technology (IT), communications and social media. Non-financial support may be just as important.
8. BME-led organisations want to connect with other BME-led organisations, but they also may need funding to enable those connections.

**Q & A**

**Q:** I am based in Leeds and I know BTEG do some fantastic work. Is there any chance they could be doing more work outside of London?

**Tebs:** Reach out. We want to collaborate, so if there is something you have in mind, get in touch. We are funder driven as well, so we want to do more joint applications. Let’s co-produce, share good practice through different platforms. Like other black-led organisations, there is always a capacity issue, so for instance, we are trying to put more of our training online. But do reach out.

**Q:** My organisation, Wiltshire Racial Equality Council, started in 1968 and we’re still going. When we apply for funding we are told that other Caucasian organisations (they don’t use that word, it is my word) are doing the work that we do, and yet the community comes to us. What are we doing wrong?

**Tebs:** You are not doing anything wrong. I feel we are being heard a little bit more now. Funders have suddenly realised they need us more than they realised. Think about how we are selling ourselves, as we may not be as assertive as we could be.

**Q:** Do you think funders have become more culturally aware in the context of Black Lives Matter?

**Tebs:** I cannot say categorically yes, but funders, recently, have reached out more. There seems to be a genuineness about wanting to understand.

**Q:** How can small organisations outside of London work with you?

**Tebs:** Reach out. We are loving this whole Zoom, Teams online space. BTEG is not a membership organisation as such, but once you are in our database, we can keep you in the loop. So, reach out. Let’s see how we can collaborate, whether physical or virtual.

**Kunle joined Voice4Change in 2013 as the director, from a background of representing black workers, dealing with internal disputes, grievances, disciplinaries and issues around immigration status. During this Q & A he reflected on a seminal Voice4Change report, Bridging the Gap, published in 2007. It mapped the BME third sector at the time, and many of the themes and issues documented in that report in 2007 have not changed by 2021.

Some of the common themes then and now:

- lack of funding
- the need to give BME groups the opportunity to articulate their story
- under-resourcing and the dominance of project funding

Today, core versus project funding is still an issue. Voice4Change has seen the pattern over and over again, even for seemingly healthy organisations that have a turnover in the millions: sign up to a project and out of that project funding, somehow, core costs which support the long-term health and sustainability of the organisation need to be covered. Of course,
the organisation will need more and more projects to try to cover those core costs. What happens? The organisation ends up with cashflow problems, as the financial health of the organisation is built on sand, until finally it takes one domino to fall for the whole to collapse.

Kunle urged conference attendees to revisit this report, as it has stood the test of time.

Q & A

Q: You mention core funding and organisations taking on more work than they can actually manage. Can you elaborate?

Kunle: Funders are clear that the cost of buildings, rent, administration and staff that service the organisation are not covered. Organisations then take on more projects. Think about it as a piece of elastic: eventually outgoings and incomings simply do not match. It has happened to a lot of organisations. Despite a healthy turnover, the reality is the organisation is very fragile. Overnight an organisation can find itself in serious trouble.

Lee: Is there anyone in the audience representing an organisation, who has found themselves in a similar position?

Michelle Charters spoke from her experience as CEO of Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre in Liverpool, which she described as a fabulous building, but which, early on, had no rental income. They had to work out how to get in that rental income, and their story is the success they have made of this turnaround in the last 14 years. The black voluntary sector needs to be honest, be open, call for help and share opportunities.

Q: I stepped back from working in the community sector because of the lack of core funding. Everything was project based. Would doing more commissioned work assist with having more funds for core costs available? But also, infrastructure organisations who are wanting to do support work rather than delivery – how are they going to get any money at all if they can’t access core funding? Your commentary and assistance with that.

Kunle: V4C is one of those organisations – how do you address the problem of core funding?

Q: Is there a BME voluntary sector website and/or database? Does that exist?

Kunle: It is being built as we speak.
Based in London and registered in England and Wales, La Fraternite Guineenne was set up in 2007 with the intention of helping Guineans both within the UK and within Guinea. As part of this work, I, with the help of others, provided support to victims of military abuse following the coup in Conakry. In 2014 – four years later – La Fraternite sent money and supplies to the survivors of the Ebola outbreak in Guinea. This only became possible due to the generosity of trustees and volunteers, many of them donating their own money.

Ever reliant on this continued generosity and inspired by my own experiences when pregnant with my first child, I continued to provide support to others, playing a prominent role in raising awareness of FGM within the Guinean community. Wishing to continue the promotion of healthcare and education in Guinea through the supply of provisions, and ever dedicated to helping Guinean migrants integrate – helping them with housing, opening a bank account etc. – I required funding.

There was one problem, however: I did not know where to start. Lacking the funds to support the community and unsure of who to go to or who to ask, I turned to a friend who was working for a Somalian organisation. He did not wish to share anything. Being such a competitive field, it has not only been a problem trying to access information but almost impossible to build long-lasting, fruitful relationships with large-scale funders. A case in point is a recent FGM event, where, despite the Guinean community seeing the highest levels of FGM, representation was limited to the Somalian and Sierra Leonean communities. It is often a case of who you know rather than what you know, with big organisations seemingly only willing to work with those they are familiar with. This meant other avenues had to be pursued.

In 2015 I learned of one such opportunity. In the course of volunteering for family action, I learned about the National Lottery Community Fund and, knowing the value of money and what I could do with the funds, I applied. Sadly, I was unsuccessful. In 2018 I tried again. This time I was successful, and I found myself the recipient of £9970. But my funding journey does not end there, and I am ever conscious of my need to improve my understanding of funding and the wider system. The Ubele Initiative has been particularly helpful in this regard, offering advice on how to apply, where to apply, as well as advice on funding in general. I am ever grateful for such advice.

With one eye on the future, I am hoping that funders will form a closer association with grassroots organisations, taking the time to learn and understand the struggles and realities that local communities are facing. To get to this place, funders must engage with local community members directly, showing a willingness to attend their workshops and become familiar with their work.

Mamayimbe Sylla is founder of La Fraternite Guineenne, which works to support the Guinean community in the UK. La Fraternite has run award-winning awareness-raising campaigns against female genital mutilation (FGM), but although this work attracts most of the organisation’s attention, it is by no means its only focus.
Securing funding for my projects has not been an easy journey. Over the past 10 years I have submitted numerous funding applications, only to be told time and time again my application has been unsuccessful. Reasons given included: ‘We had a large intake of applications’; ‘We didn’t feel your project/activity was community-led’; ‘Using Art to deliver your projects was not clearly demonstrated as an objective in your constitution’. I have followed the standard advice: attending one-to-one funding sessions, following the funding adviser’s guidance regarding what to include in my application, getting them to look over my application before it is submitted. None of that helped. The feeling of rejection was always disappointing and often made me question whether I was just kidding myself that I could help to make a difference for others in the community. However, the passion I had for helping to make a difference and the positive response I received from those taking part in my projects was my drive to continue.

So, after each disappointment, I would eventually ‘pick myself up and brush myself down’, then set about organising fundraising events, applying to businesses to sponsor elements of my projects, negotiating services in kind, and used my own cash to make up shortfalls in expenditure. In 2018, I was successful in receiving my first ever grant for £2000 and in 2019 received my second grant for £250. Although the amounts were small in comparison with the £10,000 plus others were receiving, this gave me a huge uplift and a feeling that finally a funder could see my vision and felt impelled to support. I was truly grateful.

The grants helped me to reach more people living in isolation and provided skill development opportunities for the young people in my projects. There’s still so much more that we could be offering the community, which in turn could make a difference to the lives of others. However, this would require a larger injection of cash and resources. I continue each year with my fundraising activities, albeit time-consuming, with the hope I will one day be successful with a larger funding application. With additional funding, I could appoint a fundraiser to focus on income generating, which in turn would help me to focus on organising and delivering the planned projects, working to become sustainable.
The Shared Futures conference deliberately set out to centre the voices and experiences of individual BME leaders, BME-led organisations and other stakeholders who have direct experience of trying to activate the needs, wishes and perspectives of BME communities. This section of the UK’s third sector lives with the challenge of being ignored, chronically underfunded or undervalued. It was important for the conference to structure themes and conversations about funding and funders in a way which centred and enunciated their stories, while at the same time inviting in funders, allies and others seeking new knowledge.

THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY FOR BME-LED ORGANISATIONS: WHAT IT REALLY TAKES

Not-for-profit organisations exist in the background of our communities and some are more well known than others in the difference they make to people’s lives and the needs they meet. All need better resources as they try to tackle some of the most intractable problems in the UK. But non-profits in the BAME sector particularly suffer from not attracting funding. During this session Carol explored how their leaders can develop competencies and skills that can make them more effective, more attractive to funders and sustainable for the long term.

MONEY4U ran the Avocado project, funded by the Tudor Trust and developed between 2016 and 2018. They partnered with 20 BAME organisations and assisted them in their capacity to deliver their missions effectively, now and in the future. They identified that a communications strategy, thoughtful leadership succession, technology, use of social media and diverse funding streams were just some of the factors that build the capacity of a charitable non-profit to effectively deliver its mission. Organisations from London to Birmingham were brought on board, and by the end of the programme, the project delivered an intense training programme, offered over 200 consultancy days fulfilling the project’s aim to make the organisations more attractive to funders.

Phase two was then delivered as Avocado+, condensed into a one-year programme. This allowed more time for ‘practical implementation’, as capacity continued to be a struggle for some organisations, especially those that were based further afield in areas such as Birmingham. Through Avocado+, MONEY4U formed partnerships with Black Funders UK and Race on the Agenda.

Phase three has now been launched as BAMER Hub. After hundreds of requests for support around viability beyond COVID-19, MONEY4U decided to take everything online, developing other capacity-building interventions such as virtual space education, monthly bootcamps, wellbeing workshops and recommended practices. The hub now boasts over 373 registered members, mainly UK based with a handful found internationally. BAMER Hub members range hugely, especially in salary levels, and each seeks to overcome challenges that differ widely from the others. The hub has been able to provide a one-stop shop for support in bid-writing, tools for sustainability, workshops and grant giveaways, among many other services. Participants have described the hub as ‘challenging, excellent and stimulating’.

The Sickle Cell & Young Stroke Survivors organisation is a long-standing member of the hub. It was the inspiration behind the first phase of the project, along with its founder Carol Ossai, who has sadly passed away from COVID-19. Grant-makers play a critical role in helping non-profits with capacity-building, and the BAMER Hub seeks to continue to provide a stepping stone for organisations to access more of this crucial resource.
This session focused on the power of lived experience and knowledge equity in the context of unjust and oppressive systems. Too often, funders and other partners exhibit what can be characterised as a ‘saviour complex mentality’. While allies are vital to BME communities’, we need to choose carefully those with whom we work, and those we elevate as our knowledge producers.

Lived experience, as a term within the social sector, needs to remain distinct from learned experience, which occurs through education and training, and practice experience, derived from working as a practitioner. Together these sets of experiences provide vital technical expertise for social purpose work. But lived experience, Baljeet argues, is a stake in the ground that honours the insights and wisdom of those who have direct, first-hand knowledge of social injustice.

Lived experience illuminates human history. People on the hard edge of lived experience will be the change-makers. And yet, she feels, the social sector is plagued by illusory meritocracy and bureaucracy and the privileging of those with technical expertise. She says:

My own lived experiences of racism, poverty and marginalisation combined with my practice experience working with marginalised groups and youth gave me a level of expertise that was drowned out once I became a human rights lawyer. From that point, it was only my law degree which had the power to speak, and my lived and practice experience was downgraded.

I also witnessed how leaders from countries where there were dictatorships would arrive in this country, and rather than be recognised for their credentials, were cloaked in victimhood and labelled as vulnerable by social sector leaders in this country. Their lived experience was not valued beyond victimhood.

The Centre for Knowledge Equity is developing a Lived Experience Leadership Network, which is an activation and integration of learned and practice experience, combined with lived experience, to enable them to drive change to directly benefit communities. Some Lived Experience Leaders are well-established and others only just beginning, but in the social sector the focus is always on the service user rather than the service leader. Anyone, she says, who is a Lived Experience Leader in the conference is free to join that movement for knowledge exchange and collaboration. She added:
As black leaders, it’s also really important that we don’t lazily overlook or assimilate other types of experience lived by our black brothers and sisters. Don’t design with complacency but with equity. Don’t design another layer of oppression within the sector but recognise expertise and work with people with that expertise.

We need to move away from misery memoirs and towards a recognition of the wisdom in our communities. We need to execute change better, which requires a knowledge-equity-centred approach. The risk of getting it wrong is too high. We must cause no further harm.

My Funding Journey

Tomar Beh

Tomar Beh is the founder of M-prez Enterprise, based in Derby, which provides activities in the fields of arts, culture, education, technology, communication, science and health for the public, but with a special interest in supporting women and young adults from ethnic minorities. M-prez Enterprise is concerned with the world which is left behind for our children and recognises that actions and inactions taken or not today have an impact for tomorrow.

Courtesy of having spent more than ten years working with some of the most vulnerable women and young people in our society, I am fortunate enough to have some experience of both acquiring and managing a fund. But for all my experience, it is hard work – it takes both time and effort. Despite this, I have not let it deter me from my efforts and I have often worked to overcome obstacles that bar me from or make it difficult for me to access funds. For example, I have invested both time and resources into not only learning about potential funders but learning how to fundraise effectively, securing the sort of funds I need to continue my work.

But while I have managed to cope, I have benefited immensely from an injection of cash within the last year. For example, with the onset of COVID-19, I have been fortunate enough to receive emergency funding, allowing me to provide support to black women in relation to their mental and physical wellbeing. While this allowed me to expand my work into several topics of interest, I remain particularly optimistic about the opportunities provided by the changing social landscape. With Black Lives Matter bringing widespread attention to racism, it has become easier to access funding and support, with funders proving more accessible than they were previously. Though this is not a guarantee of continued funding, it gives me hope of securing more funding in the future, and seems to indicate a more fruitful relationship with funders going forward. Hope has got me this far, but I also need funders to stay open and receptive. Now, coming to terms with the precarious nature of funding provided by foundations and trusts, I am currently in the process of developing alternative funding models, confident that it will leave me well placed when it comes to offering advice and support to those most in need.

In conclusion, while I have often found it difficult to secure funding over the last ten years, I have also learned a great deal about the wider funding process and how it operates. So, if you are new to fundraising, or unsure of where to start when it comes to applying for funding, the following may help:

• read the guidance notes
• do not apply if you do not match the criteria
• stay within the word limit
• be mindful that funders often know little about your organisation or project locality
• have someone who knows nothing about your organisation read your application beforehand: if they understand what your plans are, it is likely the funder will also
• ask questions if you are unclear
• complete the application on time
• try to stand out: you are competing against other projects and causes
Victoria Anderson

MY FUNDING JOURNEY

Victoria Anderson

Seeking funding is hard work. Rewarding and then, by turn, dispiriting. Being an introvert by nature, I find it emotionally quite difficult to work on a funding bid, to perhaps be invited to pitch, and then to be rejected. Intellectually I know it is important not to take rejection personally, but it can be hard not to feel discouraged. The other issue is that you can find yourself bending impossibly to fit through hoops that may not be right for you or your project. What I have found is that funders are not likely to take a chance on you if you have no track record. The problem is you need funding to establish a track record. Though the bigger picture needs to be in focus, the small steps – the small funding pots – can often provide the means to prove what you are proposing can work.

Some of this comes down to temperament and resilience. Despite ‘knowing better’, I personally can find it intimidating and depressing to make an unsuccessful pitch. Shortly before Christmas I pitched to a panel of trustees for a sum of £10,000. When they finally got back to me, with a no, they said that in the end my pitch was ‘simply not as compelling’ as the others. That really hurt! It felt like a very personal failure: that I had failed to make a good case; that I had wasted my time, and theirs. Only after a few months have I come to realise that the way I presented the pitch could indeed have been far more compelling. It is a learning curve, but learning takes time – and resilience!

So far, the most rewarding fundraising experience for me has come through Kickstarter. I used this platform to crowdfund for a prison-based book project and raised more than £3000. Since Christmas I have also raised almost £1000 through website sales. Additional funds from the Runnymede Trust (an R&D grant through Common Cause Networks) and the School for Social Entrepreneurs have been invaluable along the way. I must admit that I haven’t been as proactive with sales and marketing as perhaps I could have been, but I like the democratic nature of appealing directly to customers and supporters, rather than funding panels. Still, I’m gathering myself for the next phase of income generation. I will absolutely try crowdfunding again in future, and have a series of projects (too many?) up my sleeve …

Victoria Anderson is a writer, co-author of Wings: A Prison Odyssey and founder of Cell Memory, which uses digital media to present and showcase stories direct from the prisoners themselves. She has an interest in narrative, myth and folklore and the intersection of race, class, gender and questions of disenfranchisement.
Embracing change at an individual, group or organisational level is hard. Embracing change at an institutional level, with its implication of embedded practices, embedded partnerships, and attachment to its own worldview or its own history, is really, really hard. And rare. Institutional change is rare, but so necessary and vital if the UK is to serve its population in an era of huge political, technological, social and environmental change. BME communities have been making demands for institutions to evolve, adapt and change for decades now. The Shared Futures conference was able to programme a couple of examples who, in some small way, have heard the call.

**FUNDING CHANGE: ON BEING A FOUNDATION LEARNING HOW TO TAKE A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO CHANGE**

Lankelly Chase Foundation aims to challenge systemic issues faced by marginalised people in the UK. In recent years it has increasingly come to understand itself as part of the system it hopes to change, and is in the midst of a process of self-examination and improvement. Most of the team have a practitioner background and see social change as part of a complex, interconnected set of systems while acknowledging that funders usually don’t recognise that complexity. The foundation recognises the problems inherent in its ‘unbroken record of white senior leadership’, and acknowledges that mistakes have been made in terms of (under) funding black- and minority-led organisations.

The foundation has always seen equality and rights as important, although it admits its approach has sometimes been simplistic. It has always addressed issues such as institutional racism, school exclusion, criminal justice and detention under the Mental Health Act. However, Cathy, speaking in plain and honest terms, said that the team have come to reflect that such approaches were fundamentally flawed.

We were naive and insufficiently aware of our own dynamics. Sometimes we were performative in what we were doing.

We are aware that everything exists in relationship and that mindsets and behaviours are pivotal to systemic change. We want to fund the capacity of change-makers knowing that they have been under-resourced. We are funding experimental infrastructures for systems of the future. We want to disrupt the power balance.

Our mistakes included not checking our starting assumptions, which led to flawed data. Once those pathways were set it was difficult to reverse out of those positions. And we thought we could fund systems change without eliminating the roots of those issues.

Ultimately we can’t succeed in our mission if we don’t have the kind of leadership and expertise that come from black and minoritised people.

The foundation has recognised its own lack of a holistic approach to the issues it is supposedly working to change. Cathy is clear that Lankelly Chase is in a long process of changing itself. It is currently at the stage of developing a racial justice accountability plan, and working out the benchmarks for the systemic change it would like to see.
Q: It’s great that you are so transparent. How could you help other funding organisations to move forward in a similar way?

Cathy: We do try to engage with fund managers and other foundations but it’s taken a long time for us to get to a stage where we’re reasonably confident about what we’re trying to do. It’s about sharing our experiences as much as we can.

Q: You need to have people of colour around the table or conversations will go round in circles. What is the current make-up of your leadership team?

Cathy: Existing members of our board agreed to step down to make room for new people with lived experience of different forms of oppression and marginalisation, and we’ve seen that as fundamental. And we’re having to think about our staff and leadership teams. Some of it we are getting right, but the power dynamics aren’t always right.

Q: How do we go about putting in a grant bid, or otherwise working with you?

Cathy: Drop me an email: it always starts with a conversation.
to have just a day or a single event to show that work is being done in a particular area of justice. It is not easy to do this in a way that is ‘top to bottom’ and to live the truth of this. That means a different kind of thinking.

Much of Karen’s background has been in policy work. So, she wanted to know, how do we sustainably translate knowledge, creativity, ideas, urgency and radical thought into consistent policy? The problem is that policies come and go. And no magical policy on its own is going to change mindsets. Policy can struggle with sustained reparative work, where, at least from the outset, it tries to repair relationships and communities in ethical ways and with ethical partnerships.

Karen challenged everyone working in institutions to question how the ‘piping’ – in other words, the unseen infrastructure – works in their organisation. To examine and deconstruct how those particular leaders and those particular managers have arrived at the top of their institution. To work to identify what a sustainable practice of transformative social justice work might look like. The next stages would then be the courage to embrace that and then enact it.

The more we can share those sorts of ideas, the more we can look towards building these structures. Because we need new ways of being with each other, of researching with each other, and sharing knowledge with each other.

And ultimately, the end goal must be to come to the point where we no longer need policies. ‘That is the world we are seeking.’

Thinking about the role of research, the session also included a contribution from Michelle Charters from Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre in Liverpool:

As organisations we need to be able to work with research organisations in order to appeal to funders … Smaller organisations need to connect with larger universities for legitimacy and longevity. In Liverpool a lot of black-led organisations lost a lot of historical permanency through not having records of what they’d actually done and so everything relies on memories. So, working with research organisations is a really good way to preserve the work and capture the historical essence of the work.
With lived experience of the asylum and immigration systems of the UK, the Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG) was founded as a community organisation with the remit of providing support for refugees and asylum seekers. Wishing to kickstart a housing project, I chose to apply for a particular funding opportunity in 2018, which stated they were looking for applications from innovation projects across the region. Though I was confident in my project and my cause, I was not prepared for all of the hurdles I would have to overcome in my efforts to secure funding. During the preliminary stage, for example, I was required to complete an application form, answer several questions, produce a project brochure and, in an effort to help shape my project, take part in a consultation meeting with a coach. The second stage – taking place in front of a panel of judges and audience – involved giving a live pitch and then taking questions on the project. Having achieved a high enough score, I was awarded £5000. But while I felt a sense of euphoria, the nature of the funding process meant that the funds were not available until seven months after the award. And then, only receiving partial payment, I was informed the remainder would be paid once an accurate and detailed financial report was submitted. The final hurdle to overcome involved producing a report, explaining how the funding was used and how my project made a difference to the community. I submitted this after submitting a second financial report.

Lorraine Mponela is chairperson of Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG), a grassroots, migrant-led organisation which works to give an authentic voice to migrants in the community. CARAG is working for the dignity and human rights of all migrants in the UK, offering direct practical and emotional support. CARAG is currently part of a campaign calling for a comprehensive overhaul of the ‘hostile environment’ immigration system, which currently condemns some of the most vulnerable in UK society to destitution and injustice.
In 2018, the Runnymede Trust, funded by Bristol University and AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) Connected Communities, ran a legacy project, Common Cause Networks, which also distributed a small amount R&D funding. The Shared Futures conference is itself a legacy project of the Common Cause Networks. The Glasgow Common Cause Network chose to spend its allocation on a qualitative research project and report: The Colour of Funding: Evidence of Racism enacted through Funding Infrastructure – Research with People from Racialised Communities, Organisations and Projects in Scotland. The findings were analysed and discussed at the Shared Futures conference – findings which, although Scotland-focused, are applicable to funding practices throughout the UK.

The team presented their qualitative research, which investigated the funding landscape through the direct experiences of leaders from marginalised communities seeking funding in Scotland. It was carried out within GCCN between September 2018 and May 2019. The research was conducted by members of marginalised communities in partnership with the Runnymede Trust and Glasgow Caledonian University. Data was collated from workshops and conversational interviews.

The research identified the challenges community organisations working with people who experience racism face when applying for funding. The systemic processes identified in Scotland largely speak to the challenges faced by grassroots community groups throughout the UK – particularly the mechanisms through which their experiences and expertise continue to be marginalised.

If funding organisations are to address the systemic issues which impact on those who engage with their systems and processes, this is a valuable reference point. It demonstrates how funding support infrastructure can reproduce racialised power dynamics, which in turn reproduce and maintain the existing inequalities. These mechanisms of marginalisation indicated by the research include distributing funding through predominantly white-led organisations with little critical understanding of the mechanisms of racism. Thus, the incompatibility of experiences and worldviews between applicants and funders can create misunderstanding between the intention of applicants and the judgement of applications.

These are the evidenced processes of systemic racism in action:

- Leaders seeking funding for their projects felt obligated to use marginalising terminology, and to frame and raise issues in a way that conforms to the dominant narratives held by funders.
- Applicants had experienced feelings of being compromised and ‘gaslit’, even before going through an application process.
- There is a toxic, as opposed to healthy, competitive environment, which risks fracturing the solidarity among grassroots groups.

Overwhelmingly, organisations working with people who experience racism feel that the current funding regimes in Scotland limit the amount of time funders spend understanding and producing innovative and creative solutions which are specific to these organisations’ issues. The research challenges and invites funders in Scotland to work to produce a funding infrastructure which has a greater duty of care for communities of racialised minorities, and which understands the degree of pressure put onto grassroots organisations by a system which is not meeting their needs. Ultimately, the research calls for greater transparency and equity and a critical understanding of how racism and racialisation contribute to social inequality.
Based in Scotland and supporting over 1100 women and girls, Saheliya exists to provide support to those suffering from mental health problems as a result of abuse, violence, torture and discrimination. In 2020, turnover was £1.3 million.

While that may seem a great deal, the funding journey, so far, has been an emotional rollercoaster full of highs and lows. Notwithstanding stiff competition for depleting funds, Saheliya has managed to maintain a strong track record of delivering services to women at risk. The reasons behind this include the good relationships I share with a range of funders and the robust business strategy in place. As part of this strategy, time and money has been invested in improving Saheliya’s profile on social media and on securing a presence ‘at the table’, doubling the demand for Saheliya’s services in 2020. Despite this, I have not found it any easier to secure funding; with grant deadlines coming thick and fast, it can often take its toll on staff. There is little in the way of downtime.

The funds simply do not stretch far enough to cover fundraising and development costs.

In recent years, despite having the relevant level of expertise and accompanying track record, I found myself outbid on a City of Edinburgh contract for the provision of specialist BAME women’s therapeutic services. The beneficiary: a large, white and male-led charity. Being the head of a small organisation, it was largely impossible to appeal.

Further challenges came in the form of funding drying up. With furlough funds and emergency grants coming to an end and European funding drying up as a result of Brexit, the situation has often looked precarious. Sad to say, this situation has also been exacerbated by the end of two very large National Lottery grants. To overcome some of these difficulties, I have dedicated resources to generating income via the provision of childcare services, and seeking both individual and corporate donations. Without an understanding of business development and fundraising – two specialisms unrelated to Saheliya’s core activities – this would not have been possible.

Nonetheless, and irrespective of the challenges I have faced, I remain strong in the belief that Saheliya’s work saves lives. And if our service users have complete trust in us, funders, donors and customers will too.
O

f the many different types of funding models BME-led organisations can choose from, partnerships, in their different guises, have emerged as a serious option for leaders who are planning for growth in a sustained and structured way. Successful partnerships offer the chance for BME-led organisations to deepen their expertise in their own field, to raise their profile and/or align their organisation with another larger or more established entity, to gain stability as funding is utilised across a longer term, and to deepen the practice of enunciating their story. The Shared Futures conference offered attendees the opportunity to ‘try on’ these different types of partnerships, as varied and distinctive as they are.

THE ROAD TO SOCIAL INVESTMENT

The session addressed some of the differences between social investment and grant awards as funding models, as well as the disparities in the way funding is distributed. SIB has a substantial track record in terms of supplying social investment, in most cases blending the two models of funding. Most of its fund recipients are large organisations of around 10 years’ standing with a large turnover (more than £700,000) and who have had government contracts. However, despite best intentions, SIB has found that there are still significant inequities in the way it has funded social purpose initiatives and entities.

The two main forms of funding available to social businesses are grants (gifted money) or investment (debt in the form of loans). Blended funding can also be offered in the form of a loan alongside a grant. Usually this will not go beyond a 40 per cent grant-to-loan ratio. Loans in the social purpose sector are similar to grants in the sense that applicants will be required to meet a series of criteria in order to access the loans. Networking and connections help a good deal in the sector when it comes to securing this kind of funding.

Entities set up for social benefit can also consider a less common investment route: equity, or taking shares in a company in exchange for upfront money. Equity is less common, as social purpose organisations rarely issue shares. Community shares are a possibility for community benefit societies, but these can’t be traded and have quite a narrow range of application.

So how do grants and loans differ in practice? Grants are usually short term (up to three years) and restricted to projects. Money must be spent against key milestones and drawn down against delivery targets. There can be indirect costs in terms of monitoring grant conditions, and grants don’t tend to cover core costs. And they can be inflexible.

Loans, on the other hand, are usually longer term, up to and beyond 14 years. Loan finance can be drawn down in full and immediately, rather than against milestones. There will usually be interest payments and also some indirect costs in terms of monitoring and servicing loans. Loans can be reasonably flexible, depending on the investor.

Social investment is not for everyone. Repayable finance is best suited to organisations that are trading, but not all social purpose organisations are set up to trade or to attract investment or debt. SIB has found that BME-led organisations face multiple barriers to funding. BME organisations have had the most success when the eligibility criteria are broadened, where they can remain unincorporated or where they are applying for very small amounts, echoing their tendency to be awarded lower-value grants.

Q & A

Conference attendees suggested that SIB could work more closely with funding applicants to better understand the issues faced by black-led organisations, and help them better prepare for sustainable funding.
Maddy presented examples of public engagement and university–community partnerships. These projects vary enormously but, for example, might include:

- setting up a process of working with local groups to address issues of wellbeing
- community-engaged research, such as a collaborative research project based on the activities or experiences of a local group working in heritage, wellbeing, criminal justice etc.
- a more formal community–university partnership in the form of a project set up to enable access to university resources which are used to build the skills of the staff and volunteers of the community group

Such partnerships add value for the university, allowing it access to community expertise and enabling potentially long-term research relationships. These relationships work to embed the community in the university, and the university in the local community. Maddy encouraged BME-led organisations to seriously consider this source of funding, and to seek out either their local university’s public engagement officer or department or an academic interested in the focus of their work. She encouraged BME-led organisations to embrace the role of research in their own practice – as a source of funding, yes, but also as a way of deepening their own knowledge and expertise.

Challenges in partnership working include problems with culture clash, misaligned expectations and poor communication. BME-led organisations can get around such obstacles by being aware of potential problems and putting them on the agenda for discussion between the two parties, right from the start.

Before embarking on a university collaboration, consider the following:

**MAP YOUR PURPOSE**

Consider what you need from a research partnership. Do you have an idea for a research project? What is your research question? What is the partnership for: to help create impact? add legitimacy? access expertise? evaluate your approach? What would the research partner gain from working with you? Do you want to gain research skills yourself? What capacity in your organisation do you have to set aside to manage the partnership?
BE RESEARCH READY

As well as being clear about what you want to find out and why, be clear about your current resources, expertise and what you have to offer. The university research process can be complex and bureaucratic, so previous partnership experience will help. And don’t forget there are lots of different types of partnerships, from resource-intensive co-production of the research to commissioning a researcher to do a piece of work on your behalf.

FUNDING

As well as large funders, there are also local funding opportunities within universities: funds set aside for widening participation, for example. Sometimes an individual researcher or team will have received funding and will be looking for a community organisation to work with. If their plans align with yours, this can work well, but be wary. If the approach is already signed off, you may not be able to shape it in ways that work for you. The best kind of partnership is one where both parties have worked together on the bid, shaped it together and built it together from the start. Avoid being co-opted into an existing bid when it is too late to shape the project.

APPROACH THE UNIVERSITY

Check the web to see which departments resonate with your approach, project or organisation. Find a help desk or community engagement team contact: keywords to look out for include knowledge exchange, widening participation and public engagement. Engagement professionals like these will have a lot of knowledge of researchers and their research interests and can help you make that initial connection: You can contact an academic directly, and it’s well worth checking with your local third sector support services to see if they have any contacts or tips.

It may be that you don’t feel you have the resources or capacity to absorb the requirements of a full research partnership. Be aware there are other ways to work with universities, such as offering a student placement, contributing to a teaching module or employing a researcher to carry out some specific work for you. All these approaches will help prepare you for a more substantial partnership down the line.

TIPS FROM THE Q & A

You should feel able to ask the university for financial compensation for your time. Having an ally in the university will help, if you are able to build trust over time. Always state your costs upfront so that they can put that into a funding bid.

Working to build relationships with several points of contact in the university, rather than just one person, can help with longevity and resilience, as there can be rapid staff turnover.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The UK Community Partner Network (UKCPN; www.publicengagement.ac.uk/connect-with-others/uk-community-partner-network) is a network of people involved with community-based organisations interested in working with universities to tackle social concerns and inequalities. They have developed a range of resources to help support community organisations to work with universities:
Getting started. Tips for community groups who would like to work with universities: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/getting_started.pdf

Contacting academics. A guide to finding an academic partner for community organisations wanting to develop their research: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/ukcpn_resource_-_contacting_academics.pdf


Other resources can be found here: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/connect-with-others/uk-community-partner-network

Though many BME-led organisations have had experience of accessing restricted, project-based funding, a partnership with corporate organisations can often provide an opportunity to secure core or unrestricted funding, to be used in accordance with the needs of the organisation. But be prepared for this funding model and these kinds of partnerships to take time to become viable.

In the first instance, BME-led organisations and other social interest groups must do their due diligence. They must examine the products, programmes and personnel of the corporate they are considering and spend time making a judgement about a potential partnership. Though it is tempting to see corporate partnerships as merely a route to money and resources, they are not just about asking for financial support. They are also about building personal relationships, which is easy to say but takes intention and creativity to actually achieve. Corporates are a collection of individuals, just like any other organisation, and it starts with two individuals coming together.

Many networking tools can be used, such as network mapping (a process characterised by identifying who knows who), or social media platforms such as LinkedIn. Those from the BME-led organisation can then reach out to those from the intended partner, getting to know a little about them, their interests and their lives. This takes time and energy. And, as with all good relationships, it’s about being authentic, sharing good news and saying thank you.
Location and locality has become a central concern for corporates. Many businesses wish to root themselves within their local communities, gaining not only a stake within that community but also building credibility and recognition for their brand. With many equally concerned about how they are perceived on a more national and global stage, a number of corporates have pledged to do more to tackle social and racial inequalities, particularly in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020.

Such partnerships should work to be mutually beneficial. The partnership between Innocent Smoothies and Age UK is a case in point. So, for example, the corporate could have their staff volunteer or fundraise for their community partner, often with an increase in the morale and engagement of their own employees. On the other hand, consumers are often more willing to spend on brands that are socially conscious. BME-led organisations are well placed to assist corporates to attract a broader and younger customer base.

Outside of financial support, BME-led organisations can be supported in other ways, including the offer of office space, specialist legal or accounting services, event planning and support, and access to mailing lists and customers. The exchange of goods, resources and services must be rooted in an intention of mutual gain. Though tempting, such partnerships are not about setting up unnecessary schemes or services that put a strain on the resources of BME-led organisations, who will already be working with strained resources and capacity.

However, it is important to remember: BME-led organisations have the expertise, the vision and the means to effect change and should seek partnerships based in mutual respect and equality.

Acutely aware of the many health inequalities facing the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, I founded Vanclaron Cares, a social enterprise that aims to provide evidence-based health and wellbeing support to individuals and communities, helping them to break the intergenerational cycle of social and economic inequality. To this end, I have worked alongside local GP practices, gained contracts as part of the primary care network and provided services to immigration detention centres, among other organisations. While the pandemic has presented its challenges, grants from the government and the National Lottery – among many others – have allowed me to continue offering services during the lockdowns. Though such schemes have kept me afloat in the present, I remain optimistic for the future. Having gained acceptance to the School for Social Entrepreneurs programme, I am hopeful that I will be better placed to access more unrestricted funding.
Edith Iheama has a background as a trained medical doctor, as well as being the founder of Vanclaron Cares CIC, which is beginning to establish itself. Vanclaron Cares works within the UK’s health and social care system to provide culturally appropriate health and wellbeing programmes to support Nottingham’s vulnerable and marginalised communities.

But for all my success there is an equal measure of frustration – it has not been an easy journey. For example, despite increased demand, I have struggled to expand the capacity of Vanclaron Cares, running into numerous obstacles along the way. Along with all the pitfalls of being a BAME-led organisation in regard to securing contracts, it has often been a challenge to secure longer-term funding. I have often found myself relying on small local grants. Though I have been able to subsist on the funds provided by local organisations – their support often proving invaluable – they are unable to provide the sort of funds that would allow me to cover the costs associated with running a CIC. As the organisation lacks the funds to hire the appropriate staff, most of the background duties are handled by volunteers and students on placement, along with the workshops and courses offered. This is not an arrangement conducive to growth. With many volunteers moving on after three or four months, I have often found myself back at square one, unable to build the kind of track record that large-scale funders look for.

Looking towards the future, by implementing the new support and services developed with the help of students on placement, I remain confident of securing funding over a period of three to five years. This will provide Vanclaron Cares with not only the means to cover existing costs but the finances required to hire staff capable of carrying out frontline and backroom duties. On this more stable foundation, and with an ever-growing reputation, the references provided by my contacts should put me in a position to compete more fairly for contracts.
ME-led projects and organisations centred on business models based in democratic leadership and management practices are still too few. Although cooperatives, community land trusts and community businesses have long been part of the UK economy, they are lesser-known development models compared with charities and social enterprises – both in the wider UK population and within BME communities. The Shared Futures conference programmed a series of spaces where conference attendees could become more familiar with these models and seriously consider them as an option, as they develop their own entities.

TRADING FOR SOCIAL BENEFIT: COMMUNITY-LED ENTERPRISE

Fergus Arkley explained that Power to Change, as a funder, has been building on its existing DEI work through 2020 and has created an action plan which aims to help transition its focus from equality to equity. This refocus is about making it a level playing field for everyone and making it so that businesses which have struggled to get funding in the past will find it easier to access funding and support.

The Ubele Initiative, one of Power to Change’s strategic partners, has helped it to understand its position as a funder and how it can begin to reach new communities. Ubele Initiative compiled a report and created a very useful toolkit, Cultivating Diversity (www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/61894692/cultivating-diversity-bme-community-enterprise-toolkit), which outlines the additional and distinctive challenges BME-led community businesses face.

Community businesses tend to:

- be locally rooted, in and of a place
- be accountable in some way to the community they work in and support

Power to Change’s research has found that BME-led community businesses:

- predominantly adopt a grant dependent charitable model, which is not commercially inclined
- work against a backdrop of not being acknowledged as commercially viable, especially in geographical areas experiencing significant economic disadvantage
- tend to exist to address inequalities in society, but at the same time are subject to the same inequalities themselves
- face challenges in accessing finance, including barriers to credit and social investment
THE CASE FOR COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP: ASSET-LED DEVELOPMENT

- tend to be small, with limited turnover, which also limits contracting opportunities, as commissioning and tendering favours larger organisations
- tend to restrict activity to their own community rather than tapping into wider markets

Definitions of socially trading organisations can include community businesses as well as cooperatives, social enterprises, community land trusts and community interest companies. Susie explained that to apply to Power to Change, an organisation does not need to have a specific legal structure, nor does it need to be a registered charity. Instead, businesses will need to be able to demonstrate charitable and social purposes, that they generate some income through trading and that they are accountable in some way to their community.

To conclude, the following was shared as useful support and funding for community businesses:

- MyCommunity.org.uk
- Plunkett Foundation
- Locality
- Co-operatives UK
- UBELE Initiative

Session led by Claude Hendrickson and Tom Chance

Tom Chance is CEO of the National Community Land Trust Network (NCLTN) and Claude Hendrickson is a DEI associate with Leeds Community Homes. Both advocate for community land trusts (CLTs), as too few projects using this model are led and set up by leaders from BME communities.

The webinar was started by Claude Hendrickson, who asked: ‘How can we stimulate more black-led Housing Projects in the UK’.

Claude shared that he has been active in Chapeltown, Leeds, for over 30 years, initiating and being involved in many ground-breaking projects: for example, Frontline, a self-build project, which started in 1988 and enabled young unemployed black men to gain skills, employment, a sense of self-respect and the respect of others while building their own homes. The street was eventually renamed Frontline Close, as a homage to the work of those men.

In 2020 Claude became the first black male accredited community-led adviser in the UK. His role is to get more black and minority ethnic leaders involve in the community-led sector: to lead on projects, learn a trade, build new and refurbish homes, create employment and enterprise in the city and the region. For example, Leeds Community Homes has recently devised a strategy to enable homeless people to be more involved.

Tom Chance’s section of the presentation, ‘The Arc of Justice’, related to the history of community ownership, affordable housing and land. The first community land trust (CLT) was set up in the USA and came about as a result of black farmers in Georgia struggling to keep their farms and constantly being harassed by racist officials. In 1969 they formed a new type of cooperative, which they called a community land trust (CLT), to take ownership of their land and their farms. They did not want just to own the land and the farm: they wanted anyone in the community to also have a stake in it. This idea spread to different parts of the world and looks very different in England. It can range from
providing affordable housing or new garden villages to taking over existing things like a council estate threatened with demolition.

Tom stated: ‘If you do not own the land you cannot build wealth in your community, as the person who owns the land is going to take that wealth’.

To overcome the key barriers:

- secure land by approaching a public body or sympathetic private owner and make a pitch showing them how you can use the land better
- secure finance by tapping into the various grant and loan options; ensure you have a sustainable business plan
- speak to experts by using the Enabler Hubs set up by NCLTN across the country, which have trained advisers
- do not limit your ambitions because of what Tom describes as a ‘culture of paternalism’: build yourself up as a community organisation, demonstrating that you have the members, the skills and ability to make it happen; put political pressure on those holding you back
- on structural racism, do not look to rent services that someone else owns – take back control!

Claude concluded by sharing that all local councils have a legal obligation to keep a Self-Build Register, accessible to the public. That would be a good place to start when thinking about your project.

Within this session John Atherton gave an overview of the cooperative movement, detailing how it first got started, the keys to setting one up, and how cooperatives have changed in the intervening 200 years. While the cooperative model has not appealed to or met the needs of ethnic minorities, the interest in coops has grown in the last year or so, particularly in the wake of COVID-19. With several food banks and mutual aid societies having emerged within the context of a precarious situation, many individuals have found the need to come together and go democratic.

But the question remains: how did co-ops get started? Facing economic depression in 1844 and existing within a context where many revolutionary ideas were becoming prevalent, 28 men within Rochdale (a town 10 miles north of Manchester), tired of having to work under oppressive conditions, made the conscious decision to take control of their own housing, labour and lives. Their solution: they decided to found a shop. It is through their example that several other co-ops emerged, the most famous of these being the Co-op chain of convenience stores.

But co-ops are more than a shop which offers Fairtrade tea and coffee – they have grown to take many forms. OrganicLea in London operates as an agricultural business, growing and selling produce, alongside offering education and training programmes to schools, helping children understand not only the origins of food but also the concept of healthy eating. In Edinburgh, Student Housing Co-op owns and manages a hall of residence, operating for the benefit of its student members. This spirit of cooperation is not limited to the UK, however; co-op members have grown to number 3 million worldwide, with co-ops employing more than 280 million people and supporting a further 720 million.

The Indian Farmers Fertilisers Co-op – a federation of 35,000 co-ops – has grown to control 30 per cent of the fertiliser market, providing support to 50 million farmers. Organised in such a way
as to cut out the intermediary and large organisations, they have been able to exercise control over their own livelihoods. Much like trade unions, the co-op is a collection of individuals who have come together to secure a mutual benefit. On the surface, co-ops appear to be similar to businesses – both existing to make a profit – but as John notes, they differ in one big way: co-ops at their heart are about individuals or organisations joining together to meet a specific need, while companies exist to make profits for their shareholders. Much like a business, however, co-ops may exist in many legal forms. Further advice is available from Co-operatives UK. For anyone interested in setting up a co-op, there are three fundamentals to consider:

1. Co-ops need to consist of two or more people who share the same agenda and vision.

2. At the heart of a co-op should be the principle of self-help – you must possess the relevant skills or have the desire to acquire them.

3. Co-ops must be built on a community of interest, a set of customers, workers and investors that can be called upon to support the co-op.

If you ever want to set up a cooperative or other type of democratically owned enterprise, information from Co-operatives UK can be found at [www.uk.coop/start](http://www.uk.coop/start).

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**MY FUNDING JOURNEY**

**Morshed Akhtar**

Morshed Akhtar is the founder of Rhythm Arts CIC. Based in the West Midlands, Rhythm Arts uses arts, storytelling and performance for the wellbeing of British Bangladeshi communities. Rhythm Arts CIC can be found on Facebook.

In 2018, I set up The Rhythm Arts CIC (TRACIC), a creative community arts organisation which works to showcase film, photographic and theatrical productions in the West Midlands. But while I have had some success, there is a danger that it hides the many challenges that I face.

For example, aware of the importance of working sensitively with close-knit ethnic minority communities and the risks they face of social isolation, I resolved to put together an online cultural event called Ekotre Sobete (All Together). Although it was initially aimed at addressing the marginalisation and improving the wellbeing of those in the British Bangladeshi community of the West Midlands, the use of the internet meant that Ekotre Sobete evolved to cover a much wider area, encompassing the British Bangladeshi community across the breadth of the United Kingdom. Though I was certain the event could make a difference to those in the community, I required funding. Unfortunately, my application to Get Creative & Make a Difference proved unsuccessful.

Though disheartened, I persevered, and in 2019 I was finally successful. Receiving funding from the Mayor’s Community Weekend, I was able to hold a street party in a specific postcode area, bringing those in the community closer together. High off this success and confident that others were starting to believe in my vision, I received a second grant courtesy of Awards for All in 2020 (which later turned into an emergency COVID-19 funding activity) that enabled me to send healthy activity packs to teenagers aged between 14 and 18 via a local school.

I have managed to follow this up with a project called Raaga Therapy (Music Therapy), supported by the cultural development services of Birmingham City Council. I hope that the platform provided by Raaga Therapy, aimed at empowering those in the Bangladeshi community of Birmingham through music lessons, will not only encourage greater participation in cultural activities but open up the possibility of establishing more cultural activity hubs within the city.

But despite my recent success, I understand that my work does not end, and there is so much more to be done to assist the most vulnerable and isolated within our communities. I am constantly looking out for opportunities to secure further funding, and it is the wellbeing of the communities I support that sustains me.
The Shared Futures conference centred leaders, organisations, stakeholders and other voices from BME communities, but it was also clear that our future is collective. Funders are being invited to embrace radical change, to experiment with more participatory approaches, to share power and to co-produce solutions. At the centre of the conference, the Ubele Initiative and #CharitySoWhite presented a workshop based on their nine Calls To Action. And, in the thoughtful and inspiring closing discussion, a panel of friends and allies reflected on the seminal year just past, their fears that funders will revert to old patterns, but also the resilience and talents of the BME-led third sector for meeting the challenges to come.

In this thoughtful and inspiring closing event, Runnymede trustee Farah Elahi began by reflecting on the range of critical reflections raised throughout the conference: the extent to which funders are applying DEI to their practice, cooperative governance models, sustainability, participatory funding, how funders can act on structural barriers, knowledge equity and social investment models, to name a few.

Building on the lessons of 2021, Farah led the panel by asking: ‘What are the skills, capacities and resources you would put in a toolkit for a gentle revolution?’

The discussion that followed highlighted the importance of the race equality sector and of the anti-racism movement more widely, helping us to understand both the value in our everyday actions and the important role of quiet leadership. Those who are in the revolutionary act may not realise that they are in the process of leading the revolution. And those delivering change may often go unnoticed. Without their hard work, openness and compassion, the revolution would never take place.

Each of the panellists brought their unique insights into the anti-racism ecology, recognising that everyone involved with the sector has something to contribute that is meaningful and impactful. In a gentle revolution we need to recognise the pragmatists and realists, who are the pathfinders that see the reality we operate in and understand its nuance and its complexity, taking us with them towards our end goal. We need transparency in our movement, and to work with collaborative wisdom. We need to know the importance of friendship, but importantly, the kind of critical friendship that allows us to challenge the systems which are not working, and that allows us to put equity and justice at the heart of our movement.

A gentle revolution sits in a radical space of openness, somewhere between irony and contradiction. It requires each of us to dip into our own skill set, to challenge ourselves constantly in order to know what it means to be anti-racist and to allow these lessons to inform our actions. In a gentle revolution, we should also remember to direct the gentleness towards ourselves. In confronting injustice, we cannot make an exhibition of our anger, as this takes our power away from us. We need to assume responsibility for our emotions, to know where to take approval from, and to not be afraid of taking on responsibilities and becoming leaders. For those of us in a position of privilege, we need to know when to step aside, when to listen and when to allow others to speak.

For many of us, the gentle revolution will require drawing on experiences of operating and existing in spaces that have not been designed for us. Through this collective action we are able to shift the needle, and point it towards...
UNLEARNING OLD PATTERNS, EMBRACING SHARED FUTURES: A FRESH VISION FOR THE BME THIRD SECTOR

a smarter and more moral way to achieve racial justice. Each of the panellists shared a final thought and hope for the future:

**Sufina:** Being in a learning and evolving mindset, always. Taking space to celebrate the abundance and the wins, and using that to fuel the onward work and the progress that is still lacking.

**James:** My hope is that we can be a bit more human. We too often separate out the personal and the professional and, as funders, we can make a false division between the two, getting a bit too focused on process and leaving our humanity at the door. This last year (during the COVID-19 pandemic) we have been bit a more human and I hope we do not forget that.

**Halima:** The importance of investing in black leaders and BME-led civil society. I came back to working for Runnymede after 25 years, and I was struck by how few black-led organisations are working at a national level. Black-led civil society is missing and I hope for its urgent and sustained investment.

**Michael:** Funders and policymakers need to allow black and ethnic minorities to define the narrative, and be led by that. Who decides the language we need to speak about our work? It is so important that the narrative that you are funded from comes from the people who are doing the face-to-face work.

Martha Awojobi is the founder and director of JMB Consulting, having worked for nearly a decade in a number of fundraising roles in the charity sector. They are both fearless and joyous in their intention to support organisations led by people of colour to become sustainable through income generation.

**Yvonne Field** is the founder and CEO of the Ubele Initiative and has more than 35 years of professional experience as a management consultant. Ubele Initiative is an intergenerational social enterprise, which sees itself as a catalyst organisation, embedded in the community, providing infrastructure support but also incubation projects, and part of building sustainable communities.

**Natalie Armitage** is project manager with Ubele Initiative. She has over 10 years’ experience working with communities and young people in London, including people with disabilities, communities facing racial oppression, women and girls, and the LGBTQI+ community, and is presently on the Governance Board of the Advocacy Academy.

**Anny Ma** works with #CharitySoWhite, which began in August 2019 after a social media conversation about racism in the charity sector. The hashtag continues as an umbrella campaign which has a vision for a charity sector that takes the lead on tackling and rooting out racism and where leaders and decision-makers reflect the communities that they work with.

Anny Ma introduced the session. All of the co-hosts were clear about the framing of this workshop: we do not need to innovate around racism, we need action, and that the most innovative voices in this work are not in the room but in the communities we support. Their voices should always be the focus and centre of this conversation.

Martha outlined #CharitySoWhite’s useful framework for understanding racism: the four I’s of oppression:

**Ideological:** where racism is based in belief systems. This shows up in an assumption that the funding organisation knows best, and that organisations run by people of colour do not know what is best for their own communities.
Interpersonal: where racism shows up in the everyday. This includes racist jokes, microaggressions, refusing to pronounce people’s names properly. It is in the everyday that the belief system is reinforced.

Internalised: where racism shows itself in the psychologies of people of colour, where people of colour internalise those negative messages that come from white supremacy. It can show up as ‘imposter syndrome’, not being able to bring your whole self at work. It can lead to a perfectionism which can result in depression and burn-out, especially for women of colour. Skin bleaching is a global, $4.8 billion industry.

Institutional: the main focus of this conference and how racism shows up in our social structures and our laws. It is the most socially accepted form of racism, and it governs, for instance, who has access to resources, housing, jobs etc. It can look like the underfunding of the BME-led sector and all-white funding panels making decisions about how money is meant to be distributed to communities.

All four of these systems work together.

Yvonne Field talked about the mission of Ubele to create an intergenerational organisation and how inspired she is by the younger generation of activists, including those co-hosting this session. She characterised the funding work in the UK as ‘stuck’, as it has been for 10–15 years, along with many structures, organisations and institutions. There has been a crack, with COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd, as they exposed the way that systemic racism works.

She noted that we are approaching the 28th anniversary of Stephen Lawrence’s murder. Over that time, she has seen how equal opportunity training has morphed into cultural diversity training, which in turn has morphed into unconscious bias training, all of which has made very, very little difference in pushing and changing systems in the way they need to be.

You cannot have change without friction. The times we have now have caused a lot of friction, and that needs to be sustained.

Ubele is not a new organisation. It has been around for 10 years but, like many black-led organisations, hidden in plain sight until it surfaced during this period. It was there doing the work that was needed, but the wider system chose to ignore it. ‘Ubele’ is taken from Swahili and means ‘the way ahead’ or ‘the future’.

On the funding regimes in the UK, a few remarks:

- We need to rethink the whole design of systems: who builds them, then controls them. We need to be in the design phase to ensure more equitable outcomes.
- We need to influence the wider system: meeting with funders, speaking at conferences, the #CharitySoWhite campaign – all have had some impact. We still need to find a broader range of voices – we have yet to see a young black man speak at an event on behalf of a fund.
- Phoenix Fund, an interesting example, gave away over £2 million, focusing on black leadership, black excellence and funding going to micro and small organisations, as the majority of our organisations have turnovers of less than £50,000.

Natalie Armitage talked through the nine Calls To Action that Ubele has published in its position paper, The Booska Paper. These are direct challenges to funders:

1. Move from performative funding to long-term investment, and recognise that the work of BME communities has suffered chronic underfunding.
2. A black or brown face in a strategic place is not enough. Take on a deep analysis of your boards, your decision-making, your programmes. How much resources are you actually devoting to anti-racism?
3. Are you taking on intersectionality? Consider ring-fencing funding for black and minoritised women and girls, and those that are disability-led and LGBTQI-led.
4. Base funding decisions not just in academic research, but learn to include and value lived-experience-led research and knowledge.

5. Change transactional relationships to relational ones with communities, and work to build trust. No more assuming, without asking.

6. Make your funding data transparent. Funders need to be accountable. Rejection is devastating for people of colour who are experiencing institutional racism in their everyday lives. We need to understand who is being turned down, and for what reasons.

7. The ‘gaslighting’ of black and minoritised groups, who are told they are not getting the funding because their applications are just not good enough, needs to stop. We need to shift this narrative.

8. End the use of the catch-all ‘BAME’ which means communities of colour are pitted against one another for often limited, ring-fenced resources. This fosters toxic competition. Instead, work to foster collaboration.

9. Prove your legitimacy by publishing and demonstrating how you are taking accountability for where your money comes from. People who are black and minoritised are often asked: ‘Where do you come from?’ We want to flip that, and ask funders: ‘Where does your money come from?’

Aiming to improve the prospects of children as young as 7 by teaching entrepreneurship, I initially set up Ultra Education as a traditional for-profit limited company. Learning that I was having a profound impact on the lives of children, I looked for further opportunities to secure funding and offer my services to other vulnerable children. It was then that I realised that being a limited company, Ultra Education was not set up to receive social impact funding and grants. After researching different charity structures – CIO, CIC, limited by shares, limited by guarantee – I registered Ultra Education as a CIC. From that period onwards, things started to look up. I received my first grant from the South Kilburn Trust to run a summer programme for £2000, quickly followed by a £19,000 grant from Brent Council to run a similar programme a year later. Safe to say, I have achieved a lot under my own steam and effort. This, however, is only half of the story, as I could not have achieved all I have without relying and drawing upon the example of others. Working alongside the London Basketball Association, I came to appreciate how it remained focused on its objectives and its overall ability to publicise the impact of its work. It was the first time that I had seen a charity promote its social return on its investment on its website in such a way. It soon became clear that I was going to have to dedicate myself to my cause and avoid skirting around the edges.

With renewed confidence in my cause but aware of the limitations of my knowledge, I applied to the Reach Fund in the hope that I could secure enough funding to hire a consultant. Unfortunately, despite putting my heart and soul into the application, my application was unsuccessful. Disheartened, I took my story to UNLtd, aiming to convince them of the merits of funding me and my vision. A few months later, I received a call from the Ultra Education CIC chairperson: ‘UNLtd said no. But …’ Following on from this ‘but’, UNLtd took me back to the Reach Fund, helped me secure funding and provided me with two consultants. Four months later, UNLtd gave me the green light on funding. This proved a pivotal moment, proving the start of a series of successful bids, with Tesco, Brent Council and the National Lottery Community Fund all responding positively to applications.

Still, with any success there is a fair amount of failure, and my story is no exception. I have lost count of the number of bids I have made but which have been declined compared with those I have won. Nonetheless, I will keep bid-writing and keep articulating the ideas and programmes that Ultra Education CIC has to offer.


It Takes A System: the systematic nature of racism and pathways to systems change. Race on the Agenda (2021)

Digging Deeper Report: insights on tailored funding to organisations led by black people and communities experiencing racial injustice in 2020. Baobab Foundation UK (2021)
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Common Cause Research: building research collaborations between universities and black and minority ethnic communities. University of Bristol, Connected Communities (2018)


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