

# ***What Have We Learnt?***

## **A year on from the first UK Community Partner Summit**

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It is a sunny day in June 2013 and the UK Community Partner Network (UKCPN) working group are meeting in London to discuss how they might support community-university partnerships to develop in more effective ways. Formed a year ago, this group is part of a long-term project to build community-university partnership resilience. Despite the diversity of their experiences of working with universities, the participants share common challenges and a belief that community-university partnerships have the potential to achieve positive social change.

The network is the first example where community-based organisations working with universities have come together nationally to share their collective wisdom on community-university partnership working, as a basis to improve the field and to challenge the culture of their partner universities. Given the strength of feeling about both the value and the difficulty of community-university partnerships, it raises the question: how is it that community organisations have not come together to investigate these issues already? Is it because it is not a priority, as they are busy working on other more important issues and community-university partnerships are just one way to approach these? Is it that community-university partnerships are not critical to the mission or objectives of community-based organisations, and they are happy to walk away if the partnership does not work? Is the perceived value of working with a university considered worth the effort and the costs, a throwback to the inherent power differentials that exist within community-university partnerships? Or could it be that changing cultures is hard, and that sometimes resources or intermediaries are needed to build capacity for change? Echoes of all these issues have been found in our conversations over the last year. Whilst noticing that, when we do come together, there are common concerns, it is puzzling that there is less recognition of the value of a collective voice and coordinated action in this space.

The authors of this article, a community partner, a public engagement practitioner and an academic involved in the project,

took this opportunity to reflect on the journey travelled so far. In the article we do not attempt to solve all the issues and challenges we have faced, but to open them up for further reflection.

### THE CONTEXT

The UK Community Partner Network working group came out of a Summit held in June 2012. The Summit brought together 20 community partners and 10 engaged academics from across the UK to think about ways of building community-university partnership resilience. It was part of a successful grant application that argued the need for community partner infrastructure support and real decision-making powers, to create enduring community-university partnerships for the future.

Interestingly, it was the academic amongst us who spotted a major capacity issue for community partners to take part in individual partnerships, or to get involved in the larger strategic work, to influence and promote good partnership practice. She noticed that, whilst many academics have the opportunity to support their ongoing learning by attending conferences and securing faculty buy-outs, community partners rarely, if ever, get to network to share their experiences, consider solutions to partnership problems, or increase their knowledge base. As both academics and community partners testify, funding for community partner participation is very hard to acquire, and UK public and voluntary sector funding cuts are making the strategic inclusion of community partners even harder. With this in mind, the 2012 Summit was our first attempt to craft a space for community partners to network, share experiences and good practice, and explore the potential for a UK-wide community partner network.

The Summit was part of a larger project made possible by funding through the Connected Communities Programme (see: [www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/)). The Connected Communities Programme is an unusual cross-research-council funding stream, led by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which aims to understand the changing nature of communities and community values in their historical and cultural contexts, and the positive and negative role of communities in sustaining and enhancing quality of life. Submitting a successful application co-written by academics and community colleagues, and supported by seven community partners and eight academics, was no easy task.

Connected Communities Programme funding is research funding and projects are required to be led by academics. What was challenging for the project team was how to create a space where community partners could lead the agenda, and balance this with the needs and interests of the academics involved. This has been a creative tension within the project – opening up interesting discourse amongst the team and helping all of us to reflect on how our roles play out in the running of the project. It

has been, perhaps, most apparent to the lead academic, who is used to having much more of a controlling interest and leading role in projects than that which played out in this one.

The success of the Summit was in part due to the involvement of two well-respected public engagement organisations equipped to provide infrastructure support and credibility to the event, and a long-standing community partner able to lend a degree of authenticity to coordinating the work. Having an experienced community partner with intimate knowledge of community-university partnerships was fundamental, as was the involvement of a small working group of community partners who came together to help plan the Summit.

The Summit was held over two days, with the first day solely for experienced community partners who had been working for over three years with universities to address social justice challenges together. This deliberate target group and boundary was drawn to encourage depth of discussion and facilitate achievable outputs, with the hope of including more community partners in the future if the network took off. Community partners were then joined on the second day by a small group of engaged academics, who shared their belief that things should and could improve, to expand the conversations about ways to build more effective community-university partnerships in the future.

The decision whether or not to include academics in both days of the event was a difficult one. We wanted to create a safe space for community partners to openly reflect on their work, but also wanted to recognise that community-university partnerships are about partnership and perhaps, therefore, all members of these partnerships should be involved throughout. While the authors held slightly different opinions about this, we agreed that until the community partners had met together we would be unable to explore whether we shared agendas in common, and that community partners may be inhibited from honest reflection were their academic counterparts in the room. This proved to be an effective way of running the event; however, it was not popular with some participants.

- Together the Summit attendees agreed to do three things:
- Set up a UK Community Partner Network to bring people together, virtually and face to face, to support and build community partner capacity for effective partnership working
  - Develop a community partner ‘sat nav’ to guide partners and navigate the terrain of partnership working with universities
  - Explore opportunities to participate in discussions and activities that could lead to policy change, to better support community partner involvement in partnership working in the future.

We are currently working together to deliver these three things. So far, through additional funding from the Connected Communities Programme and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE: [www.publicengagement.ac.uk/](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/)), we have written a vision statement, produced a Summit

film, established an email list, created a web presence for the network, and presented our work internationally to learn from other countries' perspectives of community-university partnership working. We have also conducted an online community partner survey and focus groups which support these activities.

Whilst the Summit could be seen to be the start of the UKCPN story, we need to go back slightly further in time to consider other sources of insight and learning to better understand the roles and perspectives of communities in this important work. One of the difficulties of doing this is explained in a paper which explores the literature about university public engagement and highlights that '[r]esearch in the field is highly dispersed – scattered across multiple disciplines, adhering to different values, using different methods and mobilising different research traditions, making it hard for people to discover and draw upon each other's work' (Facer, Manners & Agusita 2012, p. 2). The report seeks to explain why this is:

*Time pressures and a focus on delivery, means that those leading such activities are also unlikely to draw on the existing research in related fields and are equally unlikely to contribute to them through written or other tangible outputs. Exacerbating this is the fact that academic systems of reward and publication tend to discourage 'engaging' academics from writing up their work in publications seen as outside their main discipline, and also discourages those academics and researchers who are studying engagement processes from producing outputs that are of use and accessible to those seeking to do engagement (Facer, Manners & Agusita 2012, p. 9).*

A further difficulty is that the direct voice of community partners is largely missing from the literature. The vast majority of what has been written about community-university collaboration is presented from an academic perspective and these accounts are mostly published in journals – a format of little relevance to community partners. Incentives for community partners to explore and reflect on partnership working in this way are limited. In addition, whilst there is a body of literature that explores the nature of community-university partnerships, both for research and for service learning, Stoecker et al. (2010) make the critical observation that there is little which investigates the value for the community partners themselves. A current study by researchers and community partners in Canada explores this very issue (see the project page at: <http://carleton.ca/communityfirst/>).

The Summit participants highlighted seven specific challenges for effective community-university partnership working: dealing with different cultures; negotiating expectations; building relationships; engaging students for mutual benefit; tackling issues of power, equity, capacity and funding; measuring value and effectiveness; and building a legacy. These themes are also found in the literature. For example, Stoecker and Tyron (2009) reflect on 67 interviews with staff in community organisations

who were working with universities to develop service-learning (opportunities for students to enhance their learning through working in partnership with community-based organisations). They identify a number of challenges, including cultural differences in the willingness to identify as learners or experts, the community-based organisations being more comfortable with the former and academics with the latter, and the assumptions that each partner made of the other.

In addition, the Connected Communities Programme has funded a range of scoping studies which cover a diversity of issues, many of which are pertinent to our work and have provided further insights. One such study concludes: 'Given CCP's co-production agenda, further studies might seek to enhance the role of community partners, including community partner-led bids, or ones explicitly aimed at community-university capacity building' (Hart et al. 2011, p. 9).

There has also been significant investment in developing ethical frameworks to inform community-university partnership working. The ethical guidelines produced by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, University of Durham and National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2012), and co-developed by Sarah Banks (academic) and numerous community partners (Banks et al. 2013; Durham Community Research Team 2011), provide a useful steer as to how to ensure partnerships are mutually respectful and purposeful.

There is clearly much value in exploring this literature in more depth. It has reminded us that there are great resources, literature and learning, from which we can draw inspiration and understanding, and there is a need to provide easy and relevant access points for academics and community members to engage with it. That said, more research is needed to better understand the roles and perspectives of communities in this important work.

### **INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES INSPIRE AND REASSURE**

The community partner working group was funded to participate in three international conferences. These provided inspiration, as well as lots of opportunities for practical learning, to augment the other sources of evidence we have considered.

#### **Reassuring Realism**

The Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH, see: [www.ccph.info/](http://www.ccph.info/)) set up their first community partner forum back in 2006. Five years later, they delivered a conference for 100 community partners focused on community-based participatory research, which a member of the working group attended. We have taken significant inspiration from their work, and imagined that the UK Community Partner Network might develop along similar lines. When our early experiences suggested it was going to take time to coalesce as a network, meeting with CCPH's founding Executive Director reassured us. Despite having a key focal point, a strong shared agenda and a large number of organisations

participating, the CCPH network took around five years to get established. A critical part of this phase was to build community partner capacity to engage and to pursue policy change. Tools they used in this effort included training sessions run via conference call, community mentors and national conferences. They now regularly submit responses to research agencies' strategic plans, participate in peer review processes, and secure community partner places on research agency and health-focused decision-making committees. Of particular note for us was that the group had received consistent organisational support and had taken time to reach this point of influence. We therefore recognise that capacity-building elements are a critical feature of developing a mature network that can begin to influence community-university partnership working locally, regionally and nationally.

### **Linking with the Global Agenda**

Members of the working group also attended the 6th International Conference on Higher Education, convened by the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), which introduced us to a group of academics across the world who are passionate about social justice and the need to develop research with impact outside the academy. Whilst community partners were very few in number at the event, we were privileged to hear of community-university partnerships from across the world seeking to address social inequalities through research and student engagement. Whilst the power differentials in partnership working were discussed, there were few solutions offered on how to make a space for a new way of working.

The conference was supported by the UNESCO Chairs for Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. Their mission centres on the critical need to co-create knowledge and one of their key aims is to 'conduct research on dimensions of knowledge democracy and the co-creation of knowledge, identifying the most effective practices in community-university research partnerships with special emphasis on vulnerable communities and less wealthy nations' (<http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/>). This is the only UNESCO Chair that is co-held by an academic and a community partner, which seems an important step towards more equitable involvement of community and academic partners within this space.

Several things of relevance to our work emerged from this conference. For example, what stood out was that all parties found it challenging to create more equitable conditions for community-university partnerships to flourish, given the multiple agendas and pressures of participants, and the need to find more ways to come together to develop more effective working in the future. In addition, the need to stand together and provide statements that could speak to policy was one tool that could be used to develop this work in the future. Such a statement was developed as the culmination of the conference (see <http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/>

[pdf/resource/GDIII-Final-May\\_20.pdf](#)). Although open to all to participate in this statement, it is relevant to note how few of the signatories represented community-based organisations.

### **Passion for Partnerships**

The CUExpo 2013 conference saw a broader group of people come together to discuss and build capacity for community-university partnerships. This Canadian-led conference showcases community-university partnerships worldwide. Of the 500 delegates, around 40 per cent represented community-based organisations, which provided a welcome dynamic to the content and tone of conversations. Whilst there are similarities between the UK and Canadian contexts, there are some significant differences. For example, in Canada, community partnerships are foregrounded, particularly due to the First Nations context; they are more likely to involve both researchers and students working together with community partners to address social issues; and there is a strong tradition of service-learning and student placements.

The Summit challenges to community-university partnership working were echoed in the discourse of GUNI and CUExpo, and both conferences offered the opportunity to discuss what great partnership work looked like and to come up with some shared principles of working together. It seems that these conversations – whilst important to build consensus and shared understanding amongst delegates – need to be acted upon. We are currently planning our second Summit and this is foremost in our mind. How do we develop practical ways to move community-university partnership working forward in the UK, and how do we ensure we build on learning we have already? Our international experiences have opened up new vistas and provided important context for our work.

### **DEFINING THE TERRITORY — WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE?**

As the network developed, informed by the literature and conversations with others, we began to recognise the consequences of some of our early decisions about defining the scope of the network. When we set out to explore the potential for a community partner network we were keen to be as inclusive as possible and not make the definition of terms an inadvertent barrier to participation. We wanted to avoid long discussions about language so that we could prioritise our limited time together on themes, actions and ways forward. In principle, this built on our values of inclusion; however, it immediately led to challenges. Were we to start again, we would be clearer about defining key terms. Agreeing definitions at the outset may have helped improve inclusivity (as it may have provided more confidence in those we hoped to include to recognise that the network was for them), provide clarity and boundaries, and enable a more focused start. Clearly, it could be possible later in the process to broaden the initial definitions, but what has proved more difficult is to narrow definitions that were initially very broad. Three areas proved

particularly challenging – although there is no easy solution to how we might have addressed them differently.

### **Who is a Community Partner?**

Initially we chose to leave this term undefined, hoping that people would explore the aims of the Summit and consider whether it was something relevant to them. As we were at such an early exploratory stage, we wanted to leave the door open to see who might be interested in the idea of a network and were mindful that there was the possibility that the initiative would fail to garner any attention. Mason O'Connor et al. (2011, p. 4) suggest that ‘... there is no single uncontested definition of public or community. However, this lack of definition can be considered a strength rather than a limitation, engendering local debate as to what these terms might mean in different contexts’. By not defining ‘community partner’, we attracted Summit participants from a wide variety of organisations including grassroots, resident or faith-led groups, social enterprises, not-for-profit groups, cultural organisations, national and local charities, the public sector such as schools, public libraries, government workers, and so on. That said, we received quite a few enquiries asking about eligibility, and noticed that some of the organisations we hoped to attract did not have the capacity to participate despite their interest in doing so.

The only defining characteristic for Summit attendance was that individuals needed to have been working with universities in partnerships with a social justice focus for over three years. Whilst this breadth of definition was a strength – the fact that attendees shared common issues and challenges was a strong message to the Higher Education sector – it was also a weakness, as we did not necessarily share enough commonality to immediately form a cohesive network.

CCPH has also struggled with the term – although they have rejected the term ‘community partner’ because they consider it too referential, as community partners are defined on the universities’ terms. They now use terms such as ‘community leaders’ and ‘community-based organizations’, but within our context these too are problematic. For example, one unexpected outcome of our work was that a small number of Summit applicants worked as freelancers and did not identify specifically with one particular community group or issue.

### **What Types of Community-University Partnerships?**

Broadly speaking, Summit attendees worked with universities in three ways: on research projects; providing volunteer placements for university students; or contributing to course curricula. A small minority of attendees were concerned about issues to do with making use of university facilities. Failing to define the types of partnerships meant that the potential sphere of activity for a national network became burdened with trying to map out the territory, rather than identifying commonalities on which to build. Our ambition was that, in time, the network would grow to such



an extent that there could be subgroups meeting around specific themes or types of partnerships. Our hunch was that these would be either thematic such as health, social justice or environment, or partnership purpose, for example, research, student placements, volunteering etc. Tightly defining the types of partnership work may have afforded us more focused discussions about how community-university partnerships can help to tackle social inequalities, develop more collaborative research work, or improve student placement and learning practice, all of which were in our minds as we wrote the first funding application.

There remains the opportunity to move in this direction, and there is clear interest from community partners to promote and champion partnership working that has co-production, co-collaboration and action orientation at its heart. Other forms of working together that are less partnership focused are of little interest to the community partners involved so far, perhaps on the basis that those wanting to partner universities in less collaborative ways, for example, to make use of their facilities, are better off targeting their efforts at working with their local university rather than a national network.

### **What Should the Theme of the Network Be?**

When preparing for the Summit we were aware that we only had capacity for 20 community partners. Therefore, it was important to be clear about the focal point for the Summit. We chose 'social inequalities' because this theme was a key driver for those responsible for the original funding application and for those on the Summit planning group.

We defined social inequalities as 'when individual groups in society don't have equal access to its riches such as social status, property rights, education, health care, housing, travelling and so on – in other words, the inequality has its roots in socioeconomic conditions' (Aumann et al. 2012, p. 2). What is interesting to observe is that, despite being the reason people came together, the social inequality theme has not been a strong feature of the discourse of the working group, although it is explicitly mentioned in the Vision Statement they developed:

*Our mission is to help build a fairer society by unlocking the potential of community-university partnerships to positively impact social concerns ... We aim to mobilise a network of community partners designed by and for community partners, to harness their knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm for effective community-university partnership working by: a) Raising the profile of community-university partnerships as a mechanism for impacting social challenges ... (<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about/community-partner-network/about-project>)*

One possible reason for this is that the focus of the Summit, and the subsequent working group, was to strengthen community-university partnership working. Whilst participants wanted to improve community-university partnerships to serve their social

justice agendas, the improvement of community-university partnerships was the key reason they came together in this forum. This contrasts quite strongly with the CCPH, who came together to tackle health inequalities, and to recognise the need for community-based organisations and universities to work together to this end.

The Communities of Practice model (Wenger 1998) would argue that people interested in knowledge exchange organise dynamically when there is a common problem to solve and a shared passion to solve it. The common problem we seem to have coalesced over is a need to improve community-university partnerships, by providing resources to help community partners navigate the terrain, a network for peer-to-peer support, and an opportunity to affect culture change in community-university partnership working. Injected into this problem-solving arena is the need to rekindle our passion – a focus on the purposes of community-university partnership working, and the inspiration, insight and effectiveness this style of working brings.

The question remains whether we should have had an even tighter focus for the initial Summit, but it is really hard to assess whether this matters. Would a community partner network be stronger, more robustly defined or more action orientated if organised around a tighter theme, and if so what should that theme be? Or is it too early to know? Theorists such as Aldrich (1999) and Mitleton-Kelly (2003) interested in the evolutionary model of organisations would remind us that even really large organisations started small, and that the emergence of organisations, or a network in our case, takes time if they are to grow organically and be sufficiently flexible to explore possible alternatives to find the most appropriate way to function.

### **GREAT EXPECTATIONS – DID WE REALLY MEAN A NATIONAL NETWORK?**

Contact with our opposite number in North America planted the seed to establish a UKCPN and introduced us to their framework. While we did not give a lot of attention to alternatives, the concept of a ‘network’ was broadly agreed by Summit delegates, albeit with some useful caveats, such as checking possible overlaps with other networks, clarifying membership, and agreeing how it might be governed and sustained. The term ‘network’ clearly raises expectations of what it is, what it is not, and what it can do, and the term ‘national’ also has an impact on expectations.

Once established, a national network could bring collective community voices together to speak to national funding and policy, influence culture change within the Higher Education sector, and provide opportunities for capacity building within community partners and universities. However, we recognised this would take a long time to establish.

Tensions arose within and without the working group between trying to get things going and incubate the creation of a new network, and an eagerness to start influencing wider Higher

Education policy and practice. Whilst it has been encouraging to notice interest from funders and universities in working with the network to recruit external panel members for funding calls, and to advise on community engagement strategies, we need to be cautious about overextending the small resource we have and to whose end it is used. We need to unpick the assumptions and practicalities of what participating in these opportunities means. We do not want to become a tokenistic tick-boxing service that enables universities and their funders to suggest their decisions have been approved by a UKCPN, especially given that we are some way off establishing a network that could be said to represent a wider sector.

It may be that by calling ourselves a ‘network’ we have inadvertently implied that there is a large group of community partners active, wanting and able to participate in these types of activity, and that they are supported and funded to do so. Clearly this is not yet the case. The UKCPN is still in its infancy, and it will be some time before it is ready to participate in the ways hoped for by our partners.

### **CULTURE CHANGE**

The original Summit and subsequent community partner survey show a strong desire by community partners to change academic culture. Community partners are clearly keen to influence how universities work with communities, and how this can be better supported through funding and policy. Despite this being a key desire, those involved in taking this forward struggled to identify how best to do it, and also to recognise that they too needed to change.

The project benefited from the involvement of a national public engagement organisation set up to stimulate culture change in how universities engage with the public. Research funders in the UK established the NCCPE and Beacons for Public Engagement in 2008. The Beacon projects were focused on addressing some of the cultural barriers to effective engaged practice by universities and their academics. The NCCPE ran a systemic action research process to explore these cultural factors in more depth, which highlighted several factors, including the need for universities to consider their purpose as an institution and how this animates their approach to engagement. What is needed is wider systemic change involving multiple actors in addressing the challenges. ‘Embedding public engagement in HEI’s will require a major culture change which is rooted in the development of successful action. A learning based approach to change, rather than one rooted in top down directives, is best suited to facilitate the corporate transformation that is needed’ (Burns & Squires 2011, p. 44).

Since then, the NCCPE has been working with universities, and their funders, to explore more effective ways to support public engagement. They have developed a self-assessment framework

for universities, to support them to reflect on how they support public and community engagement in nine key areas ([www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support/self-assess](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support/self-assess); [www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/The%20EDGE%20tool%20V2.pdf](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/The%20EDGE%20tool%20V2.pdf)) and have sought other models of working that could better support effective community-university partnership working. This is exemplified in the Research for Community Heritage Project, which is a partnership facilitated by the NCCPE between the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, with each party funding communities or universities to work together on heritage projects.

Clearly, an established community partner network could potentially have the capacity to feed into regional and national consultations, highlight specific governance opportunities to be involved in, and develop tools to support community partners to impact local university agendas – but we do not yet have such a network.

Valuing the expertise of community partners, and seeking to use their contributions, time and commitment effectively at the decision-making table, is important. A pragmatic approach to this would be to consider the systemic change needed to create an environment for community-university partnerships to flourish, the investment needed to build community partner capacity and the methodologies that might be employed to address this, for example, through action learning, including all the actors involved in affecting the ecosystem.

There are lessons to be learnt from the extensive participation work in the UK and its growing body of literature (for example, Arnstein 1969; Blackburn & Holland 1998; INVOLVE 2008; Kirby et al. 2003; Lightfoot & Sloper 2002; SCIE 2013), which suggest consultation and participation work needs to be developed and implemented within a wider participation strategy. For example, listening is only half the story; acting on what community partners say, and working to ensure that they are influencing decision-making, are as important. Part of the way a national network could begin to influence culture change would be to seek investment in sustainable engagement processes, including guidelines, toolkits and training for community partners, and building a learning environment for community partners that addresses issues such as leadership, transparency, power differences, ways to assist cultural change, and effective monitoring and evaluation of partnerships.

We are currently reconsidering what the best vehicles are for organising, lobbying and finding a collective voice, and how best to support learning and reflection on practice. In these early days we need to be pragmatic. Clearly, we need to build community partner capacity, and the 'sat nav' and Summit will provide some tools to help do this. Eventually we would hope, like CCPH, to provide peer mentors and infrastructure and support for nominated or elected representatives to participate in decision-making groups.

### **A SHORT NOTE ON PAYMENT AND FUNDING**

This work has been punctuated by a question that arose time and time again. Should community partners be paid to participate in the network? It relates to the larger question of how community partners should be remunerated for work with universities, and how the funding for partnership working is fairly allocated amongst partners. Clearly, discussions about money belie the greater agenda of power differentials and who owns the decision-making. Therefore, the ‘money’ question became shorthand for exploring the value to community partners of participating in the community partner network and in university partnerships as a whole. The stance taken by the working group was indicative of the values that underpinned it, namely that we need to recognise appropriately the input of community partners – valuing their knowledge, skills and expertise, and their time. This seemed a simple principle, but in practice it is very hard to apply. In this context one size does not fit all.

We have little space to discuss this fascinating topic here, but NCCPE has commissioned some research to draw on the different models of payment for community partner expertise, including patient and public involvement initiatives, internships and volunteering, research council guidelines in the UK, and work in Canada and elsewhere.

Finally, building community partner capacity and supporting authentic partnerships requires investment. In the same way that regular research projects require infrastructure funding, this project has had the benefit of a £40 000 grant and the contribution of many voluntary hours from the community partners, public engagement organisations and academics involved. Exploring the potential for a national network has required significant time to explore the literature, conduct focus group discussions, coordinate and administer a successful national Summit, cover community partner travel costs and offer token fees towards the cost of their specific contributions, organise and complete field visits, set up a dedicated web presence and email list, and produce funding applications and written outputs. We could not have done it for less.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The last year has been an interesting journey that has changed us all. We have learnt a lot about community partners’ views and appetite for this work, and are beginning to make some headway. By the end of this year we will have:

- Hosted our second community partner Summit – involving, we hope, around 80 community-based organisations
- Launched the community partner ‘sat nav’ and encouraged community partners to contribute to it
- Developed a set of guiding principles to support community organisations in their work with universities, drawing on the ethical guidelines

—Explored models of funding to support the work of the network into the future.

Whilst the journey has been a challenge, there have been some really encouraging signs along the way. The Arts and Humanities Research Council has supported the development of the network and has a clear agenda for change. It has approached the network to explore the potential for community partners to sit on peer review panels for Connected Communities funding. This opportunity, whilst a small step in the right direction, provides a rare chance for community partners to be supported and funded to participate in a process that has an impact on us all.

We have been working with the NCCPE, and have had the opportunity to provide input to some of their thinking about how to support universities to improve how they work with community-based organisations. They have agreed to help support the network and embed the community partner 'sat nav' into their website, ensuring it will be sustained beyond the current funding period.

And we have had the privilege of meeting livewires from across the world who have stories and experiences that help to take our thinking forward and give us confidence that community-university partnership working is an important part of the ecosystem to build a better society. We are looking forward to the next phase of the journey.

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