NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION

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UNDERSTANDING THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF BY-AND-FOR ORGANISATIONS

AUTHORS:
DR ABI O'CONNOR
FRANCES NORTHROP

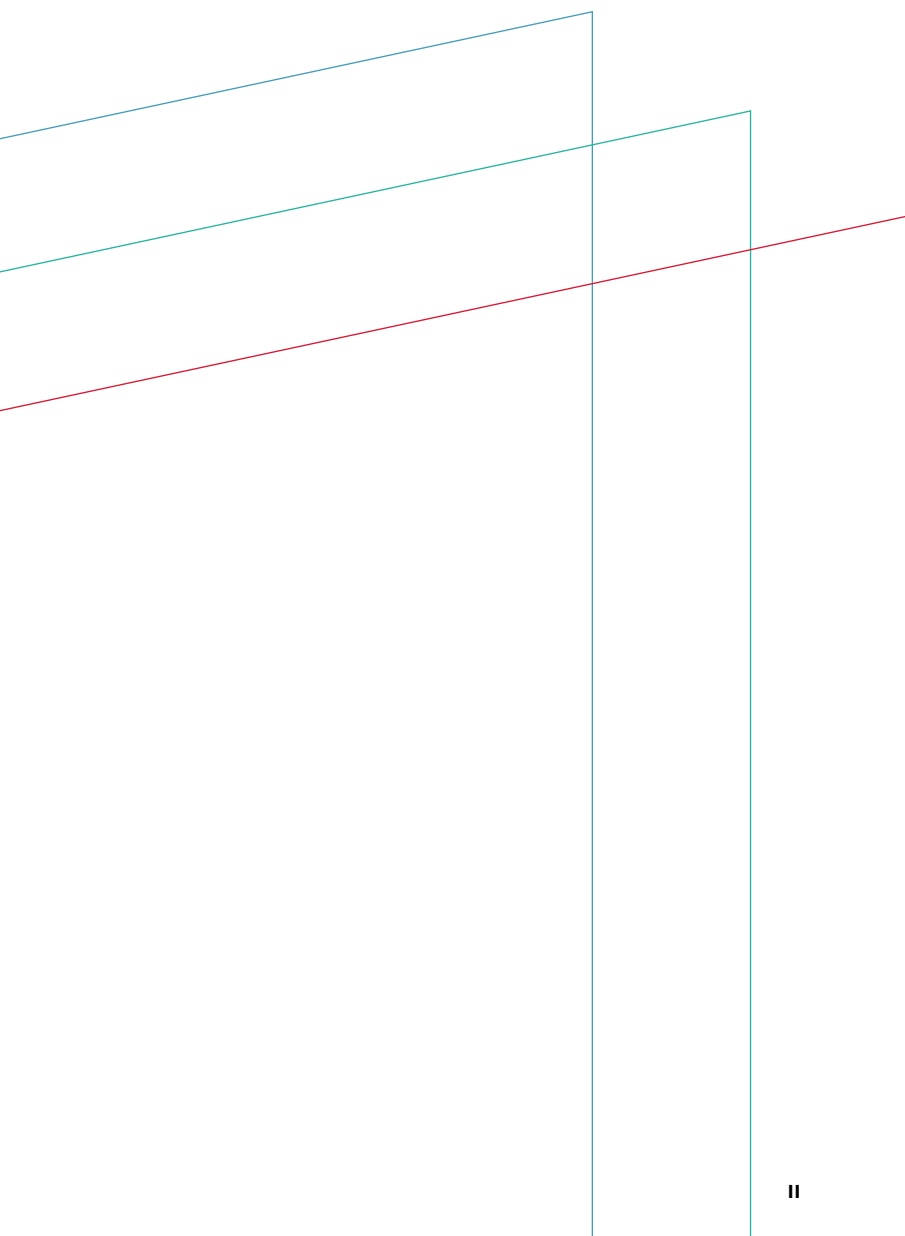**WITH:**
ALYA HARDING
DAVID ZILKHA
DR. STEPHANIE EJEGI-MEMEH
ZARA MANOEHOETOE
DR. AIDAN NYHUS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across millennia, people have come together to take action on things that matter to them and solve the problems that are important in their communities – be they communities of interest, identity, or geography.

This involves people giving their time and other resources for the common good, in a range of forms – from setting up organisations to meet a need and establishing community-owned assets and services to organising community campaigns to build pressure on decision-makers.

In recent years, as inequality and specific forms of injustice have accelerated, the concept of "by-and-for" organisations has gained significant traction within the UK voluntary sector. This interest has also grown since the Covid-19 pandemic and the racist riots in the summer of 2024, where by-and-for organisations were able to respond quickly and effectively. These organisations, characterised by their commitment to being led by and serving specific communities, represent a unique and vital part of the landscape of civil society.

This study, commissioned by Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales (LBFEW) and LEF, provides in-depth evidence about the contributions, experiences, and challenges of by-and-for organisations in England and Wales. These organisations, defined by being run by and for the communities they serve, play a vital role in addressing inequalities and providing essential support. The research focuses on improving funders' and policymakers' awareness and understanding of these organisations, increasing sector-wide knowledge of their characteristics, and producing recommendations for practice and policy changes to better support them.

To undertake the study, we used qualitative research methods, working with four peer researchers, including in-depth interviews and focus groups with 98 individuals deeply embedded in 86 different by-and-for organisations. The research engaged with organisations across five broad regions: London and the south-east, Wales and the south-west, Greater Manchester and the north-west, Sheffield and South Yorkshire, and Birmingham. The project also benefited from the stewardship of a Research Advisory Group involved in commissioning the work and guiding the research at critical stages.

Key research questions explored the definition of by-and-for organisations, their distinct qualities and value, and the challenges they face. The study developed a working typology based on principles such as genuine representation of marginalised communities, a commitment to structural change, and tangible evidence of meaningful engagement. We identified funding as a significant challenge, with organisations facing issues related to access, conditions, and sustainability. The research highlights the vitality of these organisations, their organic formation, their community-oriented approaches, and the centrality of lived experience.

THESE ORGANISATIONS, CHARACTERISED BY THEIR COMMITMENT TO BEING LED BY AND SERVING SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES, REPRESENT A UNIQUE AND VITAL PART OF THE LANDSCAPE OF CIVIL SOCIETY.

KEY FINDINGS

DISTINCT QUALITIES

By-and-for organisations are characterised by genuine representation of marginalised communities, a commitment to equity, and tangible evidence of community engagement. Their formation is often organic, emerging from shared experiences and needs, and they can provide insights which enrich policy and funding programme strategies.

INVISIBILISED ISSUES

The nuanced place-based knowledge and insights that by-and-for organisations hold are often overlooked. The rigidities and conditionalities of funding can compromise organisational values and approaches, and there are power imbalances between smaller by-and-for groups and larger organisations, which can lead to extractive practices.

VITALITY

By-and-for organisations provide unique value through their deep community connections, lived experience-led approaches, and horizontal partnerships. They offer support that is often unavailable elsewhere, addressing unmet needs and fostering liberatory practices.

STABILITY

These by-and-for organisations provide a critical anchor and commitment to their communities. A lack of core funding and long-term relationships with funders leads to staff burnout, a heavy reliance on volunteer time, and service precarity for the most marginalised.

CHALLENGES

Resourcing is a significant and multifaceted barrier for by-and-for organisations. The specific challenge they face is that they do not emerge through traditional professional or charity routes and are operating on a shoestring, which means they are coming to an unlevel playing field in terms of securing funding.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

A key strength of by-and-for organisations is their ability to advocate for their communities and speak truth to power. They create spaces which have an emancipatory impact and the potential to transform lives.

By-and-for organisations are a critical part of society, providing essential services and a voice for communities which are increasingly marginalised. They are the lifeblood of many communities and often have a transformative impact on the lives of the people they serve. However, they face significant challenges. Funders and policymakers could do more to adopt more flexible, trust-based approaches that recognise the unique value and needs of these organisations. Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of this vital sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR POLICYMAKERS, CIVIL SOCIETY INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANISATIONS, AND FUNDERS AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL LEVELS:

CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- ☐ Make a point of seeking out good practice from elsewhere when making plans and decisions.

- ☐ Acknowledge by-and-for organisations as a distinct class of civil society organisation and distinguish how you will work with them within any strategic or engagement plan.

- ☐ Actively acknowledge power imbalances between smaller by-and-for organisations and larger organisations and create safe spaces to discuss and resolve these issues.

- ☐ Avoid taking out more than you put in; create the environment for information, knowledge, and expertise to flow both ways and benefit both sides.

- ☐ Recognise and value place-based knowledge and expertise.

- ☐ Adopt a hands-on approach, visiting organisations and understanding their work on the ground.

- ☐ Make provision to incorporate the expertise and value of lived experience, not just traditional qualifications.

- ☐ Be bolder in naming systemic issues like austerity, racism, ableism, and classism so that decisions can be made in the context of the environment by-and-for organisations are operating.

- ☐ Develop more personalised relationships with by-and-for organisations, moving beyond transactional funding or formal engagement relationships.

RESOURCE BY-AND-FOR ORGANISATIONS

- ☐ Invest in strategies, models, values base, and approach rather than simply funding projects, enabling more flexibility and responsiveness to the evolving needs and priorities of by-and-for organisations, co-producing plans with organisations and accepting the fluctuating realities of work on the ground.

- ☐ Create a working typology to anchor relationships, based on the principles identified in this Phase 1 research, such as genuine representation, commitment to structural change, and capacity for deep engagement.

- ☐ Provide core funding and funding continuity to support long-term planning and sustainability, and support staff well-being and job security.

- ☐ Support organisations to access fiscal hosting if they lack in-house financial infrastructure.

- ☐ Ensure funding is sufficient to cover organisational costs and avoid placing high expectations on small budgets, simplifying any application processes to make them more flexible and equitable and reducing the administrative burden of monitoring and reporting.

GLOSSARY

Terminology and definitions have been the most prominent challenge in this work.
When discussing what a by-and-for organisation is, coherence and agreement in terms of
specificities were absent across all interviews and literature, and in conversations with Research
Advisory Group (RAG) members. To help structure this report, we have included a glossary
of terms which broadly captures the range of points different individuals chose to focus their
attention on.

GOVERNANCE

The systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, effectiveness,
supervision, and accountability of an organisation. Within their legal form, organisations can,
and do, organise themselves and their decision-making structures in many different ways in a
deliberate move to have a healthy working culture.

LEGAL FORM

The structure or type of organisation, which determines how it operates, is accountable, and
is governed. It also affects how much protection the organisation's members and trustees/
directors have from personal financial liability. The legal form is the vehicle which establishes
the organisation, determines what reporting is necessary and to what body (eg a CIO reporting
annually to the Charity Commission and holding an Annual General Meeting).

OUTCOMES

The meaningful and valued change or effect that occurs because of a particular activity or set of
activities. Outcomes may be achieved over a relatively short period, or they may be longer term
in nature. For example, if you are supporting people to find employment, a shorter-term outcome
might be improving confidence, and the longer-term outcome might be getting and ultimately
staying in a job.

OUTPUTS

A quantitative summary of an activity. For example, the number of youth work sessions
delivered or the number of elderly people attending a luncheon club are outputs. An output tells
you an activity has taken place, but it does not tell you what changes as a result.

REMUNERATION

How employees and governance roles are compensated for their time. This is a significant
consideration for all organisations and impacts power relationships and who can step in to be
involved. It is not as simple as financial remuneration being the answer; it needs attention if an
organisation is to run well.

SCALE

The size of an organisation, where it operates, and in how many locations – so both how it scales
up, and across. This can be measured in several ways, including the number of employees, the
levels of income, and how many beneficiaries/members the organisation has.

"A BIG PART OF CAMPAIGNING AND ORGANISING IS IMAGINING THE WORLD AS IT SHOULD BE. I HAVE TO IMAGINE THE WORLD AS IT SHOULD BE IN ORDER TO KNOW THE WORLD I'M TRYING TO GET TOWARDS. AND I CAN ONLY DO THAT WITH MY COMMUNITY."

1. INTRODUCTION

In May 2024, Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales (LBFEW) and the Legal Education Foundation (LEF), supported by their Research Advisory Group (RAG),1 funded the Community Economic Power team at the New Economics Foundation (NEF) to explore the characteristics and distinctiveness of organisations run by-and-for their communities2 and help bring the findings to light in the public eye.

Over the past year, we have worked in collaboration with LBFEW and LEF staff, RAG members, and four peer researchers to speak with 86 by-and-for organisations across England and Wales. Working on an incredible range of creative solutions to meet the needs of communities of identity, place, and experience, these organisations are the lifeblood of our communities.

We are pleased to present the report on these findings and share them with the wider movement and those of you with the power to effect change in the funding and policy world.

1.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study was commissioned by LBFEW to build on existing research and provide in-depth evidence of the contribution and experiences of by-and-for organisations and the changes that can be recommended to improve the sector.

TO THIS END, WE STRUCTURED THE RESEARCH AROUND THREE OVERARCHING AIMS:

1. Improve funders' and policymakers' awareness and understanding about the role and value of by-and-for organisations through creating compelling evidence.

2. Increase sector-wide understanding about both user- and equity-led organisations through investigating the small, local, and specialist characteristics of being a by-and-for organisation.

3. Produce a set of recommendations about practice and policy changes that can better support by-and-for organisations.

FROM THESE AIMS, WE DEVISED SEVERAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS (WITH SUB-QUESTIONS):

1. What describes and defines 'by-and-for' organisations?

2. What are the distinct qualities, roles and value of by-and-for organisations?

3. What are the challenges that by-and-for organisations face?

To explore these questions, we undertook a mixed-methods study which involved, among other data-gathering techniques, conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups with 98 individuals from 86 different organisations, all of whom are deeply embedded in by-and-for organisations across England and Wales.

The literature review showed that it is very difficult to explore the distinctions and commonalities between the types of by-and-for organisations (eg user-led vs lived experience vs shared identity; or campaigning vs service delivery). This is in part because the literature works with a variety of overlapping but not identical concepts - for example, lived experience, user-led, representation, and diversity - and partly because interviewees shared their views based on their personal experiences of specific organisations.

As such, we undertook this research with the acknowledgement that there are legitimate concerns around by-and-for becoming a catch-all term. Nonetheless, we aimed to develop a broad understanding of the state of play in the sector and broadly defined by-and-for organisations as those being run by and for those they serve across the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

The main challenge is that studies usually only focus on one activity, one area of focus, and/ or one legal form. As such, a key part of this research project centres on reflecting on these concerns and refining the definition(s) of by-and-for organisations by engaging with organisations ranging in size that are working around a range of issues and in different geographical spaces. Doing so sought to develop comparative analysis on commonalities and differences in experiences, to develop recommendations that will oversee tangible improvements across all corners of the sector.

THE FIELDWORK WE UNDERTOOK ENGAGED WITH ORGANISATIONS IN FIVE BROAD REGIONS:

- Wales and the south-west

- Greater Manchester and the north-west

- Sheffield and South Yorkshire

- Birmingham

- London and the south-east

Within each of these regions, we employed a peer researcher to undertake fieldwork. Throughout the research, guidance was offered by, and sought from, the RAG, appointed and facilitated by LBFEW. Nine individuals sit on the RAG, all of whom have extensive expertise across the sector. The RAG was directly involved at key stages of the research, through reflective learning sessions, input into participant longlists, and reviews of interim findings.

GREATER MANCHESTER AND THE NORTH WEST

SHEFFIELD AND SOUTH YORKSHIRE

BIRMINGHAM

WALES AND THE SOUTH WEST

LONDON AND THE SOUTH EAST

1.2. CONTEXTUALISING THIS RESEARCH IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MOMENT

Despite this report reaching a wide array of by-and-for organisations, many of whom have previously struggled to receive funding and have not formally been involved in research and policy discussions, we acknowledge that there are inevitable areas of omission in its contents. The depth, breadth, and complexities of understanding of challenges within each sub-sector of the by-and-for sector are such that they require an equivalent length report of their own. Unfortunately, as with all research, this work has parameters. Our aim was to explore the distinctiveness of by-and-for organisations by understanding – in their own words – the opportunities, barriers, and challenges they face.

The insights developed through this research are informed by and built on a significant existing body of research, which shows the explicitly inequitable nature of funding practices,[3,4] the significant needs, challenges and valuable contributions of organisations led by disabled people,[5] and the systemic racism faced by organisations led by-and-for global majorities.[6] Furthermore, valuable research has been carried out, which highlights the vital role that racial equity infrastructure organisations play in supporting their communities, particularly in the absence of mainstream funding opportunities.[7,8]

As is apparent throughout this report, the most prominent backdrop to all participants' stories was the broader political and social forces that shape their work. All who participated in this research, and those beyond, have for years been operating in turbulent political, economic, and social contexts, filling the gaps left by funding cuts under austerity and rising inequality[9] and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.[10] Deeply entrenched issues, including systemic racism, ableism, and classism, have created an environment in which these organisations provide crucial support to so many but are simultaneously underfunded, underappreciated, and expected to deliver more with fewer resources.

This research was conducted at a particularly turbulent time in the UK, with the wave of racist riots in summer 2024 detrimentally impacting communities who directly contributed to this research. As with the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, during the summer of 2024, when marginalised communities were attacked, it was the organisations rooted in communities that were a lifeline. The role of these communities in responding to the upsurge in Islamophobia, racism, and hatred cannot be overstated. In the latter stages of this research, many organisations involved found themselves defending disabled communities who are faced with further inequality following announcements of government funding cuts. Disabled and D/deaf people's organisations, and all of those representing marginalised groups, were again faced with playing a key role in bringing vulnerable communities to a place of safety and solidarity.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research was undertaken using qualitative research methods in two phases. The first comprised primary and secondary data collection through desk-based research and semi-structured interviewing. Peer researchers conducted the second phase using a combination of creative qualitative methods to gather rich insights into by-and-for organisations.

An overarching principle which guided this research was a commitment to capacity building in the sector. We designed the research in a way that offered the opportunity for organisations to build capacity and networks, establishing lasting impact.

Therefore, we focused on what organisations needed as well as looked to connect different organisations to work together. Furthermore, we ensured that all participants and peer researchers were fairly remunerated for their time in contributing to this project, which is vital to ensure engagement is accessible to all groups.

2.1. RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

The NEF team has extensive experience in undertaking in-depth research and co-producing work with communities. We devised three key principles which informed our methodological approach. These speak to the ethical foundations from which this project was built, which align with the values of our research team and NEF as an organisation.

PRINCIPLE 1: A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

This project took a wholly participatory approach that harnesses the strengths and understanding of our expansive, cross-sector networks and other actors, whether the RAG, by-and-for organisations, anchor institution allies, or national bodies like the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). Doing so offered communities an authentic chance to shape the project through co-production. By building on the understanding and experiences of those on the ground, the nuances and complexities that characterise the sector were made visible.

PRINCIPLE 2: CAPACITY BUILDING AND NETWORK STRENGTHENING

NEF is committed to outputs and outcomes that have benefits that exist well beyond a project's lifespan. We designed elements that offered the opportunity for organisations to build capacity and networks, establishing lasting impact, including using the budget as an opportunity to build skills, understanding, and capacity deep into the sector itself, through this co-design approach and opportunities for networking. We remunerated all participants for their time, travel, and any accessibility needs to enable them to participate fully. In doing so, this project focused on what organisations need and connected different organisations to work together, as well as developed research evidence.

PRINCIPLE 3: CENTRING SPECIFICITIES AND NEEDS OF BY-AND-FOR ORGANISATIONS FOR LASTING IMPACT

The work is fundamentally framed by those with experience of and in by-and-for organisations, with a commitment to shared learning both informally and formally built into the project plan. By employing peer researchers, our project captured a wider variety of voices than traditional research projects, meaning it proactively challenged the limited model of who is traditionally involved in undertaking research. This is a vital principle as we understand that those who are closest to and/or most affected by issues are best positioned to identify and centre the unique needs and necessary changes for them and their community. This is also an opportunity to build capacity for individuals within the sector, and therefore, the sector more broadly.

2.2. A PHASED APPROACH

PHASE 1

Phase 1 was undertaken by NEF researchers, who sought to develop a state-of-play analysis of the sector, which began with a literature review. We reviewed 42 research outputs from across the UK and international landscape to explore the sector's issues and opportunities. It was vital that the project began with this research, as a wealth of data exists that evidences the vitality of small organisations based in communities; as such, we wanted to draw out points of connection and departure.

The findings from this review contributed to the design of the second aspect of Phase 1: eight in-depth interviews with individuals who have extensive experience in the by-and-for sector. These interviews explored existing definitions of by-and-for organisations, their distinct qualities and value, and the challenges they face.

The findings of Phase 1 informed the development of a working typology based on principles such as genuine representation of marginalised communities, a commitment to structural change, and tangible evidence of meaningful engagement. This typology sought to identify the wholly unique aspects of by-and-for organisations and ensure that inclusivity, equity, and a commitment to valuing lived experience are central to the understanding of their work.

PHASE 2

Phase 2 was designed by NEF's team; the data collection was carried out by four peer researchers whom we advertised for and interviewed to ensure they had experience of working in by-and-for organisations. After appointing the four researchers, we worked together on an issue area pie chart using snowball sampling, where all organisations discussed were supporting people with multiple and intersecting needs. Following this process, we selected and then agreed on five geographical areas with LBFEW and the RAG. Eighty six by-and-for organisations spread across these identified areas, through the pie chart, participated in this phase of the research.

Each peer researcher conducted a maximum of 15 interviews and one focus group with a maximum of 10 participants. We used creative methods, including photo and object elicitation, word clouds, visual methods, and walking interviews to ensure accessibility. All individuals interviewed had worked in (paid or voluntary) and/or had benefitted from by-and-for organisations.

We then brought together this wealth of data – over 100 hours of transcripts – and cross analysed them using a name/participant assigned number, sector/who they are supporting; and used quotations verbatim to stay true to accents and dialects. This was a deliberate choice not to lose meaning and not to remove agency. On average, organisations had between 2 and 10 staff, with some having <1 FTE.

3. A WORKING TYPOLOGY

The findings from our literature review showed that there is currently no universally accepted definition of "by-and-for organisations".

These findings were corroborated during Phases 1 and 2 of the research, in which leaders of long-standing by-and-for organisations, as well as funders of them, discussed the complexities of defining them.

Organisations run by and for those they serve are complex, nuanced, and responsive. Through analysing the data, it became apparent that research which seeks to understand the richness of by-and-for organisations cannot operate from a one-size-fits-all premise. Many interviewees were steadfast in their view that strict definitions are a fundamental part of the sector's problems in terms of accessibility and equity. As such, participants were asked to share their views on what constitutes by-and-for organisations, and key principles emerged.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Genuine representation of marginalised communities is seen to be the most important foundation of a by-and-for organisation.

- The underpinning commonality of all types of by-and-for organisation is that an impassioned commitment to deep-rooted, long-term structural change drives both their organisational aims and their daily working practices. It is this commitment, among other attributes, like access to communities, which means by-and-for organisations offer strengths and, opportunities and a mandate not gained by working with other organisations.

- By-and-for organisations can show tangible evidence of their engagement with several people (proportionate to organisation size / resource level) from their defined community.

However, we are acutely aware that parameters are a necessity for funders, policymakers, and the wider VCSE sector to make a distinction. As such, we endeavoured to create a working typology, based on our Phase 1 research, which could then be tested during our Phase 2 research and refined where necessary. This typology was reviewed and discussed at length by the RAG and revised accordingly.

Following Phase 1 of the research, we contended that to be considered as a by-and-for organisation, particularly for funding purposes, organisations should meet a minimum of 6 out of the 8 criteria listed. During Phase 2 of the research, peer researchers tested this assumption – asking participants whether the organisation they were representing would fit the criteria.

All the organisations engaged in this research fitted at least six of the eight criteria listed in the typology. Of those interviewed, 91% fitted all eight criteria (below).

THE WORKING TYPOLOGY was developed from Phase 1 findings, which saw key principles identified by participants when discussing what constitutes by-and-for organisations. These are as follows (in no particular order):

- The organisational aims and values are to make demonstrable change in the lives of people experiencing hardship and injustice as a direct result of discrimination, inequity, and inequality.

- The organisation undertakes direct engagement with communities of geography, identity, or interest.

- Community-led work is an ongoing effort that directs projects, organisational policies, values, frameworks, and processes.

- There is clarity on the role the organisation plays in their community, geographical area, and/or sector.

- Work undertaken is centred on breaking down barriers, challenging prejudices through, for example, capacity-building, resourcing, and education.

- The Board or staff body has a minimum of 80% of those with lived experience of the issue(s) the organisation is addressing, including a high representation of those holding decision-making power with lived experience.

- They are a constituted organisation in some way, with the caveat that not being constituted is a possibility a) if risks are apparent to individuals and b) if all other criteria are met.

- Fiscal hosting can be an alternative to in-house financial infrastructure if organisations can be supported to access it.

4. THE VITALITY OF BY-AND-FOR ORGANISATIONS - THEIR UNIQUE VALUE TO SOCIETY

A golden thread that ran through all stages of the research was that shared values are the bedrock of the work of by-and-for organisations, the guidepost that underpins decision-making, relationships, and approaches.

This is coupled with a determination that drives the work and a confidence and a motivated resilience that deepens the work, to not accept or normalise what they have experienced and what happens to them, but instead a hunger to change and undo those things, while working (with others) to find solutions that prevent these experiences from continuing. that deepens the work, to not accept or normalise what they have experienced and what happens to them, but instead a hunger to change and undo those things, whilst working (with others) to find solutions that prevent these experiences from continuing.

4.1. THEIR EMANCIPATORY IMPACT

It is common that people associate the term "radical" with campaigning organisations and collectives that use direct and disruptive tactics (eg protest or boycotts) to achieve their aims. This research shows that many organisations operated by and for the communities they serve are radical - in their values, their organisational goals, and achievements. The immediate necessity of many of the services that by-and-for organisations provide means that a large amount of their work is reactive. Nonetheless, a strong theme concurrent throughout the research is also the long-term transformative impact of by-and-for organisations, by nature of the work they carry out.

> "The council are talking about things that are going to happen in sort of five years time, and people have got problems at the moment that they need to sort out that are urgent problems, or the children have got urgent problems with the schools or things, then it's very difficult to to get them engaged"

Participant, Traveller, Roma and Gypsy organisation

> "It's uncomfortable to be around other people thinking I need to be careful what I say…spaces where you can be yourself are liberating."

Focus Group Participant, health justice charity

> "You get a lot of people caring about each other. And tending to each other. Yeah, and supporting each other. And praying with each other […] I have to say, it's rather remarkable."

Focus Group Participant, health justice charity

> "And a big part of campaigning and organising is imagining the world as it should be. Right with this campaign, I have to imagine the world as it should be in order to know what I'm trying to get towards the world as it should be. And I can only do that with my community"

Participant, criminal justice reform collective

All participants shared that a strength of their organisations is their ability to speak truth to power and their ability to produce spaces in which members experience empowerment. Their agency is amplified and nurtured in a communal environment which stresses belonging and understanding.

> "Our advocacy services…we're not saying the person is right. We're saying the person's voice needs to be heard and in the work we do. …But what is important from our point of view is that the individual is heard, and their voice is heard in that process, just like anybody else would be."

Participant, disabled people's organisation

> "There are things that you can't do as an individual but once you are an organisation, you can easily get your voice heard"

Ruth Ngwata, Coventry Empowered Women's Group CIC

> "My background has been campaigning, so I started the campaign. The more I got into work, the more I realized that, like, I need to create a community, and a big part of that community is healing, and healing is obviously like supporting with the kind of like things like economics, but I don't directly do economics. In my brain, I think that, you know, I'm raising awareness on the issue."

Participant, criminal justice reform collective

4.2. ORGANIC FORMATION, ORGANIC APPROACHES AND ORGANIC SPACES

The emergence of these organisations is described by those involved as "organic". That is to say, their formation was a product of shared situation and circumstance among individuals involved. By-and-for organisations are created when mutual experiences identify a lack of adequate service provision to meet a need, or the inaction and exclusionary nature of institutions has necessitated people to come together to address an issue and organise collectively to overcome this. Sometimes these go hand in hand.

Often formed as grassroots endeavours, these organisations are community oriented and adopt flexible, reactive, and empathetic approaches, emphasising care and solidarity, which are reflective of their origins. The sentiment, which underpinned all of the stories shared by participants, was the centrality of their community to the work they do. All participants discussed "community" – to varying extents – during their participation in the research.

Many of the participants shared that their organisations emerged as a consequence of somewhat routine conversations at their homes

> "It started from, yeah, from my kitchen table, well I was staying at my bredrins house at the time. So it started from his kitchen table."

Jamie Dennis, Mandem Meet Up

> "It started in someone's backroom with a cup of tea, and the women decided that they weren't getting the right information about their own health, and they wanted to do something about that."

Karen Downing, Womens Health Information & Support Centre

> "So our first, our first coming together as a group of families was about just that, local North Manchester families. We started off in Moston at Farida's House. She lived in Moston at the time and we met as a group of families in her kitchen. So it was very much a very organic response to just supporting each other again, we had no bigger ideas than that. It was just around we need support. And so Frieda at that stage she put an advert in the Evening News. Expecting two or three, maybe people to come through,

we were inundated by people who were experiencing similar situations and we didn't even know what to do."

Diane Curry, Partners of Prisoners

"It is run by the grassroots community. It is run by the people who are part of that community and they have the decision making powers. It's a very cooperative approach into how things are done. There's a lot of solidarity and it is led by the culture, the tradition, a particular tribe or community follows and they understand each other."

Priya Chopra, Saheli

"It was started by 4 Black Queer women who had found themselves in Manchester, who'd found each other in Manchester and were all kind of jaded and frustrated and disappointed by the racism within LGBT circles and organisations, and also a kind of erasure of Queer and trans identities within Black spaces and other people of colour spaces, and so kind of we're just like, right, well, we'll, we'll we'll make something ourselves then and decided that they wanted to make something that was specifically for and run by LGBTQI people of colour. And so and so it was set up really."

Chloe Cousins, Rainbow Noir

While community was referenced by all participants, analysis of responses showed that the meaning of community is inherently dependent on each individual, in each organisation, and in each locality. There is no one-size-fits-all definition of community in this context. Participants shared that over time, the concept of "community" can and does change depending on the direction of the organisation. For some individuals, the fluidity of this understanding of community was a source of criticism, considered to be an example of organisations experiencing mission drift if they were unable to tangibly embed themselves in a community. However, for others, the fluidity of their community is a strength of their work. These tensions were prominent throughout the research, as the analysis in this report shows.

4.3. HORIZONTAL PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

Building strong relationships – nurturing them, investing in them – are central to the everyday functioning and success of by-and-for organisations. Yet while these organisations have a central purpose and are oriented around a specific goal, building strong relationships is not simply an internal matter but an external one too. Organisations reported seeking to build strong relationships and solidarity networks with those doing similar work, and see the nurturing of these partnerships and networks as a key driver of change.

"We do lot of partnership work with Black Minoritised women in Manchester, but all also Northwest wide. So with Apna hug and in Rotherham and Hamras in Bradford and Ubuntu Centre in North East and in Angelou Centre we do a lot of work with Rochdale Women's Association, Bury woman's. So those partnerships are very special to us, you know, and that helps us too if there is a campaign to be done or there are issues that we are collectively worried about, we come together in Manchester. We work closely with Bangladeshi Women's Project and Olive Pathway Safety for Sisters and other organisations."

Priya Chopra, Saheli

"We are looking beyond the organisation and really exploring how you can use either network advocates and also partnership building, to be able to inform and shape the sector and build the sector in such a way that it benefits the women collectively that we're working with."

Participant, violence against women and girls (VAWG) organisation

"And I think if you were to look at if you were to sort of like map the composition of all our work in different neighbourhoods, there's always those kind of partnership relationships. I don't think we're ever like You know, just doing our own thing."

Participant, housing equality organisation

> I think I have been very mindful of, like, who we build partnerships with, who we build in community with, or build spaces with...So all of our work is continuing in conversation with other grassroots groups also working towards the same sort of thing, liberation for black and global majority community people. So, as much as we have been, like, in partnership, building across Manchester, across the UK, all of that has come with, like, deep due diligence and deeper check-in, even checking between groups.

Hamza Rana, Muslim Social Justice Initiative

Often, by-and-for organisations emerge in a manner which stresses their isolation. For many, the environment they step into is new, and it is only the people around them, those who have faced similar injustices, experiences or trauma, who want to know them and want to understand how they feel. Participants reflected on the difficulties they faced in trying to build networks, partnerships and alliances as they were very new to the sector.

> We were so new, and I don't think there wasn't really anyone like people working with bits and pieces of advice. But there isn't like a manual.

Hamza Rana, Muslim Social Justice Initiative

It became clear that for some organisations, their hesitancy to engage in partnership working derives from experiences of others who perceived themselves to have been harmed by larger organisations. Several participants reported direct experience of this:

> We're most of the one of the longest-serving projects in the community; we're also one of the busiest serving the community. And you know these other big ones it's difficult because they always want to piggyback on the back of you always if you'll make them successful\[…\] That's just the machine, \[it\] just drops people, picks them up and drops them when they've finished needing them. I struggle with them, to be honest.

Participant, neighbourhood project for the working classes

4.4. THE CENTRALITY OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Alongside the importance of community, the most common signifier of a by-and-for organisation, which stands them apart from other organisations fighting against inequality, is the fact that those involved all have lived experience of the issues they are seeking to tackle. Participants explained that retaining a focus on lived experience ensures that organisations remain bonded to their founding principles and values.

From volunteers to board members, an emphasis on lived experience helps build a culture of care and solidarity within by-and-for organisations. It helps build trust among peers, develop a greater understanding of their circumstances, and fuel the kind of passion that makes the work of by-and-for organisations vital in their communities.

Participants often spoke about needing to do the work, because history has shown them that no one else will, and many shared that they believed this was because commitment to a cause is often strongest when it derives from lived experience:

> They \[the criminal justice system\] don't function the way that we function, out of need and necessity and because we've hurt so badly personally. We don't want this to happen to anybody else, so it's not like I'm going to work today and this is my job, and then I clock off at half five and I go home and have a great time. There is no clocking off, and when you're looking at another woman who's going through what you went through, I mean, I look at, I look at all photographs of me, I look dead a lot and smiling. But you can see I've got dead eyes, and I meet women like that at least once a month. And remember what I felt like. So we have chipped away, and we have done something. But it's us that's done it.

Jan Cunliffe, JENGbA

> "The isolation is the worst thing; you can't see your way out of the pit you're in. We can signpost; there is support out there, and they trust us because we're parent carers ourselves."

Ishbel Hansen, Swansea Parent Carer Forum

> "There's a need of needing to connect with other people who share similar experiences to you \ […\] and actually all the other stuff, all the kind of more like harder outcomes that services try to meet, like, better mental health and that \ […\] comes often from a core sense of like being connected to other people being understood, knowing that you are not alone, knowing that you're not the only person, knowing that you can ask somebody else about this."

Chloe Cousins, Rainbow Noir

> "So I arrived in England and in the deaf community, I had no contacts with them, with other deaf people. So I later became a volunteer in the same way that those in the community. I would help with refreshments, teas, things like that, and I also helped do art to teach them about art that is something I'm interested in… And over time, it was a challenge, but two years later, now I'm confident in my role as a coordinator, and that's how I reached it."

Participant, disabled people's organisation

> "The organisation and most of the women, whether it's volunteers, staff, the board members, are women from Saheli, a South Asian women-led organisation.… But for 40 year, I mean 49 years we celebrate our 50th birthday next year we've been led by South Asian women, 70% of our staff are ex-service users, high percentage of our board members are our service users, our volunteers are our service users, so the whole, the lived experience lives within the organisation and decisions are made. You know that you are embedded in their experience as such. You know that impact not only the women who are working and living with us but the women who's likely to call us and the women we are trying to support."

Priya Chopra, Saheli

Many participants emphasised the importance of intersectionality in shaping the work of by-and-for organisations. While many organisations focus on a specific group (eg people with disabilities or mental health conditions), there is recognition that lived experience intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. This intersectional lens is crucial for understanding the complex ways in which discrimination and marginalisation occur.

Alongside building deep connections, prioritising lived experience also means that individuals are better able to protect those using services because they can mitigate potential harms from being inflicted, for example:

> "When you hear domestic \[abuse\] \[people\] assume that it's always between intimate partner relationships, so being able to give the right language and the definitions to help people in like their experiences is really important to us. So for us, it's having our lived experience and using that to be able to support the women and girls in their mental health and wellbeing is something that we do."

Participant, VAWG organisation

However, while funders and stakeholders have in recent years begun to recognise the value of lived experience and representation, interviews show there is still a disparity between understanding of lived experience and expertise, the latter of which remains overwhelmingly determined by traditional qualifications and professional position.

> "Everyone has lived experience – we find that this term is being used to differentiate between "experts" (like academics) and those with actual lived experience, despite them being "experts" in their own lives."

Participant, disabled people's organisation

> "We have a more comprehensive analysis of the problem they're trying to fix, and it means something more to us."

Participant, racial justice charity

4.5. THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE IN RELATION TO GOVERNANCE

The emphasis on lived experience in governance structures ensures that decisions are made by people who truly understand the challenges at hand. This can lead to more engaged, knowledgeable, and passionate trustees and staff members who are deeply connected to the cause. All interviewees were asked about the importance of lived experience in relation to organisational governance, and all emphasised the

importance of having boards or leadership structures composed of people with direct lived experience. It was noted that this helps ensure the organisation stays connected to its mission and deeply understands the needs of its particular community.

> "And I think that's why our advisory board is so important to us, because that actual community members with lived experience that come to us and like, Okay, I think this will work really well. I don't think this will work really well… "

Participant, VAWG organisation

While the 51% rule (having at least 51% of the board members with lived experience) is common, there is recognition that lived experience is not just about having the right number of people on the board, but about the balance of power and influence within an organisation.

Some participants held the view that boards or leadership teams comprised solely of those with lived experience may lack technical expertise, or individuals with accessibility needs may need support to carry out certain tasks. This perception can lead to tensions between lived experience and this need for technical expertise (eg HR, legal and financial knowledge) and challenges in terms of how this links with real or perceived concerns about capacity to make decisions and hold governance, leadership, or influence roles, which creates inequalities in these organisations. This is a particular issue for disabled people's user-led organisations where dementia or a learning disability might impact their ability to meet what are often arbitrary requirements around legal documents such as signing leases.

During one focus group, 65% of participants shared that they have been forced to use funding to outsource financial processes and administrative work due to a lack of capacity. Of those 65%, all of them shared that their funding could have been spent directly on resourcing projects.

> "If you don't have the resource and knowledge in-house, you'll have to pay a fortune to outsource payroll and administrative work, governance and HR."

Participant, disabled people's charity

While this is often addressed through the use of external consultants or advisors, this research shows that key questions must continually be raised as to who is determining the skill level and capacity of others, and to what extent this reproduces the harms these organisations are seeking to address.

4.6. IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL SPACE AND LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

As this research was conducted across England and Wales, there are geographical specificities to some of the issues raised. Most prominent is the lack of physical space in certain areas, including rural communities and the most deprived urban centres. Having physical space is essential for many activities and services offered, but participants shared that it is also essential as a space of solidarity and care.

For some organisations, securing a physical space is fundamental to their work; for example, women's organisations supporting survivors of domestic violence. While London and the south-east is better resourced than the rest of England and Wales in terms of existing community spaces, ground rents are significantly higher, meaning that new organisations are often reliant on sub-letting and sharing space, which can have significant operational implications.

> "It does have to be a physical space. That's part of Christianity. Breaking bread together. That's very important for the people coming to the group […] it's very, very important. Food is very important, and sharing bread with each other."

Participant, Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support

> "It'd be great to get a physical space to provide safety for those women"

Yejide Adewakun, BloomElle

> "We can help because we have a place to be, because we have an organisation that facilitates that [community work]. If we didn't have that, that lady would have still been in the world, completely hopeless and full of fear, and she left this space full of hope. "

Participant, Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support

5. RESOURCING THE WORK: A MULTIFACETED BARRIER AND OPPORTUNITY

The nature of the missions of by-and-for organisations often means that they emerge in broader social, political, and economic contexts, which forces them to confront a challenging paradox: their work is vital to those socially forgotten or excluded, yet they frequently lack the financial resources or expertise necessary to adequately remedy the situation. Most of the participants were involved in organisations facing a perpetual challenge of sustainability.

The context-specific nature of the operations of small organisations is widely understood to be their strength, as they can respond very quickly to the needs of their communities – much like many did during Covid-19 and in the racist riots of summer 2024. Yet, a key theme across interviewees in all regions was their explanation that some policymakers, civil society infrastructure organisations, and funders and/or certain funding models, overlook the place-based knowledge and expertise that make by-and-for organisations so valuable.

5.1. RESPECTING THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF EMBEDDED RELATIONSHIPS

That the work that by-and-for organisations is valuable on account of its more localised nature is a critical finding of this research; however the culture of some bigger institutions and organisations and the way they function mean that there can be a lack of acknowledgement or understanding of the value of the services provided by by-and-for organisations due their nuanced way of working, their embedded relationships, and their scale. By-and-for organisations felt that this can sometimes lead to a lack of understanding of, or respect for, the value of the detailed insights they can offer.

"We lose out then,' you know, because we can't take the voice of our service users to policymakers when they're making the decisions, so that voice is lost […] it is very difficult for them to be heard. And that is important for us. You know, we want our service users' needs and their struggles […] the pathway that they have taken to reach to safety to be recognised, identified and […] to bring transformative change."

Priya Chopra, Saheli

"It can be challenging when working with bigger organisations; sometimes they don't take account of smaller organisations, can be hard for us to meet some things, e.g. very short deadlines."

Participant, mental health charity

"They will often contact [organisation name], but those types of organisations never pass on funding; there's an expectation that [organisation name] should be "honoured" to have an opportunity to input. We're on the ground, we know what's going on, in a way that the big organisations don't."

Participant, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support charity

This also leads to a failure to take into account the limited capacity of smaller by-and-for organisations to deal with more bureaucratic processes and expecting significant outcomes while providing inadequate resources and engaging in extractive practices in which expertise or knowledge flows one way.

Many interviewees pointed to a power imbalance between smaller by-and-for organisations and larger, more established institutions and organisations, which typically attain and control most available resources. This brings with it several problems. Partnering with said organisations is often necessary to access funding. However, doing so is a double-edged sword in that it typically means sacrificing the values and practices that make by-and-for organisations what they are.

"I won't use names of others, but there have been other charities, similar, who have a lot mainly led by white people, white women, who have a lot more access, who have essentially tried to extract the work that [organisation's name]... and even at one point, asked if they could, like, merge, which meant that [organisation's name] would become a part of their work, so that they could, yeah, and, and just yeah, they basically took the whole like outline …it in their own very like hierarchical kind of way, which was yeah exactly in a corporate structure, but kind of copying thing. And yeah, that's what happens."

Participant, health organisation

"Very large third sector organisations […] are like huge machines. There's less co-production with staff, and internal comms are one way […] Small by-and-for organisations like this one, communication is "all ways".

Participant, VAWG organisation

"There's a systemic power imbalance, which large organisations maintain. Larger organisations keep the money, keep in their ivory towers, are nervous about disruption."

Participant, SEND support organisation

"We're not interested in power. We're not interested in ego. We're not interested in fame, notoriety, getting a profile. We're just interested in making sure that this, like, this does not happen again. "

Hasaan Amin, Mothers Against Violence

However, other organisations reported how they had been able to build constructive partnerships that bridged these divides. These participants expressed positive sentiments vis-à-vis their sustained relationships with particular organisations, and how their ways of working had been key to establishing this trust.

> "We have learnt to be more assertive, insist that some of funding gets passed on by the bigger third sector organisations if they want our input."

Participant, SEND support organisation

> "One positive example is we successfully co-designed a health project with continuation funding each year from the health board. Key for success: lots of time invested to build good relationships."

Dave Horton, South Wales Community Centre

> "Good relationship with some third sector organisations, especially mid-level organisations, more than larger national organisations. Lots of support from Cardiff Third Sector Council."

Mike O'Brien, Voices Adfocad

> "There was a good example of partnering with a bigger organisation/s to get funding where the grant money goes directly to the by-and-for org and they then commission the bigger orgs - less hierarchical and switches the power dynamic."

Sharon Harvey-Lewis, Single Parent's Wellbeing

> "The most important aspect of the Action in Caerau and Ely approach has been the move away from a deficit model … We use a strengths/asset-based approach which supports and nurtures skills … ideas and solutions are created which outsiders/traditional approaches wouldn't have thought of. The organisation has a very specific type of knowledge, not what it means to live well generally, but what it means to live well in Caerau & Ely. "

Dave Horton, South Wales Community Centre

5.2. SMALL BUDGETS, HIGH EXPECTATIONS

To understand by-and-for organisations fully, it is essential to understand the context in which they are working. While many of their barriers are shared by other civil society organisations, the immediate and visceral nature of the problems they are solving means that their organisations offer a vital anchor which needs to be stable. All of those interviewed referred to having sufficient and steady income streams as an essential part of being able to work consistently with their communities, and their importance in building trust and maintaining strong relationships. This is an acknowledged key challenge across the sector; however, these challenges manifest differently within the by-and-for sector.

Almost all participants talked about support and funding getting harder to find, with some of the organisations facing serious difficulties. Several contrasted this with a period during Covid-19 where funding was more readily available. While volunteers are an important part of the operation of by-and-for organisations, resourcing core staff costs, operations, and activities is essential. When asked what their biggest concern is for running for organisation, one participant shared:

> "It's core funding basically, but I'm sure this is like a very common thing […] we've been lucky that we've got two funders who are keen to fund the core of the organisation. If we lost one of them, things would get a lot more tricky because at the moment we don't have our own income to cover that kind of core costs."

Participant, housing equality organisation

> "It's about trust, building trust, where we have a relationship [with funders]... Come and see us. Come and meet us. See where the money is going."

Participant, youth organisation

Core costs for organisations can vary from "keeping the lights on", to funding physical resources or bricks and mortar, to paying staff wages. The issue of core funding was described using the chicken-and-egg analogy in one focus group. To show impact to gain further funding, you need core costs to be covered, yet to apply for core costs to be covered, many funders require at least one year's accounts and impact case studies. This was also referred to by another participant as:

> "Having to build the rail track whilst also having to drive the train."

Participant, racial justice charity

Another added:

> "We need some solid funding that can enable this important relational connection work to build."

Becky Clarke, Manchester Women's Justice Collective

Staff wellbeing and job insecurity are key concerns for many organisations. These reflections are incredibly important for the sustainability of the sector, but also because many leaders in organisations shared that they felt uncomfortable that they are unable to treat staff in accordance with the principles on which their organisation was founded, particularly in terms of the insecurity of employment and job tenure. There is a distinct need to centre care in the sector – care which is embodied within organisations and by those who make decisions about policy and grant-making, to ensure that staff are not unintentionally caused harm while carrying out work of significant social value.

> "[We] are consistently challenging the status quo, or challenging those who hold power, who do have resources, though it's obviously, it's very tiring […] we're kind of pretty much all in the same place of trying to figure out ways that they [powerholders and funders] can be more accessible, more adaptable, more understanding."

Participant, creative arts CIC

> "Funding is always an issue. We try to stay on top of it, but it is difficult. Like you know how the sector is, you know we get staff, we train them, and they are so good, and then we have to let them go because there is no funding."

Priya Chopra, Saheli

In Phase 1, which involved interviews with individuals involved in grant-making, participants raised similar concerns, sharing their views on the sector:

> "Funders have to rid themselves of [the] belief that delivery exists in a vacuum; we have to fund the conditions for the work to be successful, and for the people who are delivering the work to [be able to] stay in the sector. Like we are technically setting the conditions for the third sector with our grant agreements and what we'll fund."

Participant, funder

> "We need to recognise [the] needs of staff around well-being – organisations are cut to the bone and funders should support better."

Participant, funder

> "There's a lack of continuity when funding ends – continuation funding is rare, so we can't build on the projects we have put resources into."

Participant, racial justice charity

> "The stories we hear are really worrying. We have to fight the corners of buy-and-for women's organisations. I mean, there were 35 refuges and I think there are only 15 or 16 left now. Most of them have closed. We are struggling to survive and nobody's fighting our corner."

Priya Chopra, Saheli

Many participants shared feelings of guilt when services come to an end due to funding, which often results in staff continuing to deliver services without resources because once a commitment has been made, it is incredibly damaging for both the person in the organisation and the recipient of support if it ends before people are ready to move on.

> "What you've done [by funding a new initiative in the short term] is create a need. So, by talking to these women about menopause and the lack of resources and then shared experiences, many of them then said to me, "But hang on, I'd like to continue talking to you about how I'm feeling." What you've done now has created a need. Because you [funders] are not talking about sustainability, how can we keep these projects going? I've had to donate my time. Because ethically, I can't leave these women hanging."

Ola Fagbohun, Zest OF: You

> "When the funding and project ended, it felt like I was taking something away from people. "

Participant 49, VAWG organisation

The personal responsibility described by participants is compounded by the fact that they have often cultivated personal relationships, due to shared connections of lived experience, and hold deep personal commitments to their work. This creates a landscape in which staff burnout is commonplace.

> "You can't underestimate the amount of work that like that takes, and also like having a team that you can have open conversations with. And that's probably a challenge we've overcome as well in that I/we are better at articulating our

needs, how we work, how what we need from each other."

<div style="text-align: right">Chloe Cousins, Rainbow Noir</div>

5.3. OPERATING ON A SHOESTRING – A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

This commitment to each other and a wider cause means that small, short-term funding pots are normalised by by-and-for organisations and by those resourcing them. In many ways, their resourcefulness and emphasis on mutual aid make them a victim of their own success. Their consistent reputation for doing a lot with a little, to make the best of their circumstance by fighting on no matter the odds, and their inherent tenacity and resourcefulness can act as a justification for not consistently funding them.

Added to this, small and short-term funding pots with high levels of expectation in terms of outputs can have a detrimental impact on an organisation's ability to plan for the longer term. Both issues produce significant problems around sustainability and precarity, for the organisation, paid staff, volunteers, and service users.

> "We weren't happy with getting tokenistic grant funding from the statutory organisations that would last a year. It was no good to us. We couldn't plan anything, although we were really grateful for it; we couldn't plan properly for it. It's a constant learning journey. It's a constant learning journey because things change all the time, and the same funders might have different funding streams and require different stuff. So you keep on top of that. You've always got to be looking for those other pots."

<div style="text-align: right">Karen Downing, Women's Health Information & Support Centre</div>

The most significant issue for by-and-for organisations was this inherent lack of access to adequate funding, which is sufficient to cover their costs. As one participant succinctly shared, their experience is that lots of funders:

> "…want first class service on a RyanAir budget"

<div style="text-align: right">Ola Fagohun, Zest OF: You</div>

While all participants shared frustrations with small funding pots, many also expressed the

simultaneous feelings of relief, gratitude, and being "lucky" to have any form of funding. This tension speaks to the very difficult landscape in which the sector operates, with community needs being significantly and consistently higher than the resources available for by-and-for organisations.

The reality for many of the by-and-for organisations involved in this research, as they narrated it, is that dual pressures exist in the sector: the need to promise to deliver highly impactful work that is inevitably resource heavy, while also wanting to keep costs as low as possible to position themselves with a better chance of being awarded funding.

> "There is a lot of misunderstanding as to what is actually feasible and possible and impactful when it comes to accessing money and accessing resources to do the work that one wants to do. That's probably the core challenge that I see with funding in that the expectations are incredibly high. For resources that are inadequate for the things that are being expected. I need to be very loud about the impact that we have had and the impact we think we're going to have, but there is a false […] almost an acceptance of dishonesty on the funders side where they know they're giving you peanuts to do something, so they know it's unlikely that you're going to be able to achieve anything whatever. But if you don't seem to have the goal. Or the confidence to at least do that shoot from the stars thing. You're not going to get the money."

<div style="text-align: right">Ayisatu Emore, Idaraya Life</div>

> "Sometimes the conditions are too high, whether it's the monitoring evaluation or that, you wouldn't be able to deliver things in the way you want to. [Conditions are sometimes] not worth it - I'd rather do the hand to mouth thing."

<div style="text-align: right">Last Mafuba, Inini</div>

> "You're offering me scraps. You want me to fill out a 40-page funding bid, right? And with monitoring, that's going to take me two years to complete. For £2,000. Not gonna happen. Nonsense. So, I refused."

<div style="text-align: right">Ursula Myrie, Adira</div>

> "...It's only a thousand pounds and the amount of information that they need, and they've

come back. And they've asked so much more, including the trustees' whole addresses, what? Just for a thousand pounds, a thousand pounds. Yeah. Yeah. I mean I sent um a bank statement, a redactive bank and they come back and says no we need to see all your transactions, and it's, it's just it really gets my back up because it's so much work for such a small amount of money."

Kirsten Mitchell, Spoons

The consequences of this are that many organisations continue to be reliant on voluntary support to run essential services and programmes, despite having secured funding in many cases.

"So even though there's a £5k budget there, which is already, like, basically vanished, because it goes on food, it goes on facilitators, blah, blah, blah, transport, there's a mountain. I'd say, like, 80% of this is still voluntary, which I'm saying, like, no one's getting paid. I don't get paid to do all of like the meetings or the organisational, designing events or facilitating, that's not funded."

Hamza Rana, Muslim Social Justice Initiative

"People around us, volunteers who come in and give their time to do that, most of them I can't do it on my own….we're lucky in that sense because we have got good volunteers in every different way from maintenance all [the] way up to people helping us with funding."

Participant, equity-led CIC

An over-reliance on volunteers, particularly during a cost-of-living crisis in which many people are having to work more hours – and in many cases multiple jobs – risks the longevity and sustainability of an organisation's work. During all focus groups, participants agreed that if expectations were relaxed, their organisation would still achieve impactful work, yet the stress for those working within the organisation would be reduced, which would have a hugely positive effect.

5.4. APPLICATIONS, MONITORING, AND CONDITIONALITIES IN FUNDING

Alongside this, securing any funding at all is a demanding and time-consuming endeavour, particularly within organisations that are overstretched in terms of staff and work capacity.

The most common problems that all participants pointed to, alongside the lack of core funding and small budgets, were the application processes and monitoring procedures. They were frequently deemed to be too demanding of time and expertise that most by-and-for organisations could better use elsewhere.

Indeed, the technical and time-consuming nature of many application processes was said to be off-putting for many. To achieve greater equity, it was felt that flexibility and iterative relationships must be baked into funding processes.

"Grant writing is incredibly time consuming and we often have to use precious money to employ a bid writer."

Participant, Unpaid Carers Support

"They should offer more diverse and less stifling application processes."

Participant D4, VAWG organisation

"Bureaucracy puts people off: application, monitoring, evaluation. Sometimes people don't have that expertise. That paperwork should be drawn up with the people who have to fill them in."

Kay Tyler, The Grapevine

"They don't realise the impact it [excessive monitoring processes] has on community organisations."

Marie Croker, ISRAAC

"The whole set-up is wrong, it doesn't make sense – the best written application gets funded, rather than the best project."

Participant, disabled people's organisation

"Getting funding is so time consuming and so highly professionalised that it's like you have to be a professional fundraiser in order to get funding, and that [...] excludes organisations like us."

Participant, domestic abuse support organisation

Another strong theme emerging from this research was the frustration of long-standing organisations who have to repeatedly apply for funding, often to the same organisation, and are required to re-tell their stories, despite having done so before. Participants

shared that not only is this time consuming, it is also disheartening as it contributes to a feeling of their organisation's work not being valued.

> "The funding applications are just so difficult. And we're not trained to do it. And every time you do one. You have to have a different project, a different project. It's the same project from day one. Yeah, it's, it's never going to change. But you have to come up with some fancy ideas."

Jan Cunliffe, JENGbA

> "The number of questions, why do they need them. We've been here for 50 years? Why do we need to keep telling you what we are doing?"

Mahad, Saheli

> "It is very, very frustrating [that funders keep asking what community organisations do]."

Alberto Gonzalez, Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support

5.5. CENTRING THE BY-AND-FOR VALUES OF CARE AND TRUST IN ALL RELATIONSHIPS

As this report has discussed thus far, securing and maintaining long-term relationships and resourcing is fundamental to by-and-for organisations. Securing this with institutions, organisations, and policymakers often comes with demands and conditionalities which limits the practices and work of by-and-for organisations. In turn, many organisations then face the prospect of compromising their values, their approach, and potentially even their overarching mission.

The by-and-for work is relational work; it is long term, it is consistent, it is busy, it is flexible, it is ever-changing to keep up with the demands of the core work. So much is missed in rigid question-and-answer report formats or statistical data collection, which exist in the commissioning and funding world. A true understanding of the work and its impacts comes from being able to feel it, to know the organisations, to know the people working there, and to be in a relationship with them.

This research showed a tendency for funders to be too keen to draw distinct lines between themselves – their operations, their purpose – and the organisations that they fund. Indeed, the experience of the overwhelming majority of participants is that funders

operate at a distance – perhaps reflected in the current approach to managing risk that manifests in the bureaucratic nature of application and monitoring processes – which makes the building of long-lasting relationships, premised upon long-term goals, a significant challenge for the sector to overcome.

> "There is a lack of trust between the funder and the by-and-for organisation – when you apply and particularly when you report."

Participant, equity-led organisation

> "Listen to us. Trust us. Trust us. Just trust us and make it a lot easier because we haven't got time. We haven't got time to be. We haven't got time to be arguing about you know, doffing our caps and please sir can we have some money. Just trust us and let us have it and watch what we can do with it."

Jan Cunliffe, JENGbA

> "I'm not. I'm not hiding anything. You know, we're getting the money to do something with it. You know, if that's what we're … we're getting it for. This is what we're going to be doing. Well, come and see us. Come see us instead of what you call asking for all this data."

Participant, disabled people's organisation

> "It works best when they're hands-on when they need to be. They need to understand what the organisation is doing differently, they won't get it unless they come in and feel and see it….. We also used MSC (Most Significant Change) to evaluate, brought the funders in as part of evaluation."

Dave Horton, South Wales Community Centre

> "Be more hands on, engage in conversation. Possibly host a wider workshop or focus group on how we could manage to mitigate those risks. Support/training with opening what can feel like "a can of worms". All orgs interested could attend, training for all, then could book in for a 1:1 if wanted to go further. Thinking about one stage at a time. Funders could be part of holding that process, so those small orgs can also hear each other."

Isabella Jones, Carers Creative

"Look to us as the investment that you want to make for the future. You're not funding us; you're investing in our business. You are investing in our strategy. You are investing in our model. You are investing in the women that use the service. It's an investment."

Karen Downing, Women's Health Information & Support Centre

"It's more than just money. I want to be involved in the strategy conversations…commissioning. I want the Caribbean and African experience to be at the forefront of people's minds, and I'm not confident that if we're not in the room, that our experience is taken account of."

Participant, diaspora support organisation

In the face of rigid conditionalities, several participants suggested the need for commissioners and funders to be more flexible – to better understand the ever-shifting needs and reflexive priorities of by-and-for organisations and take them seriously when approaching funding. This, of course, entails working with organisations on a closer, more personalised basis, co-producing plans and accepting the fluctuating realities of work on the ground.

"Cardiff Third Sector Council was flexible. "It doesn't quite fit the criteria, but we'll work with you on that." Flexible and willing to engage. Also, willing for the organisation to deviate from the original plan (as long as within general aims): "We tried this, it didn't work, we'd like to do this instead" and the funder was open to that."

Mike O'Brien, Voices Adfocad

"National Lottery Community Fund is fabulous. Four years. Also can go back and say, this is what we've found by doing it by co-producing, can we shift the activity from the original plan to this, which is what people need more. Receptive to this."

Participant, young carers organisation

"Most funders determine categories. I don't like tailoring something to suit their categories. That's why I like to co-produce with a funder. I like to talk to people, let them see what we're doing. I seek funds for immediate outcomes, not long-term dreams. […] I look for innovation/ ideas all the time. When you co-produce with

partners, it's amazing what comes up. We all learn from each other. We want to find out what people want, what they need, not what we think, or what we want to do."

Trevor Palmer, ResponsABLE Assistance

Despite frustrations, most participants had examples of good practice and positive engagement with funders who showed an understanding of how they work and what they need. A number of funders do adopt the kind of hands-on practices that by-and-for organisations would like to see as universal. Participants explained that these funders have an altogether more personal approach, which brings them closer to the work on the ground, magnifying their value, impact, and the wellbeing of their staff.

"What has helped has been the development of ongoing trusted relationships, not with Job Centre overall, but with individual employment advisors. If those advisors know that Samee is involved, more likely to reduce pressure on a disabled job-seeker and allow more time and space."

Sam Everard, Samee

"Lloyds is very good at that: active relationship, wanting to understand. Lloyds is also good at looking at what an organisation needs, eg help with how to manage finances and providing help and support. Also good at bringing charities together, especially smaller ones."

Dave Horton, South Wales Community Centre

"I think it's always nice when they come and visit. And see the work and kind of have a chat, because then I guess it feels a bit less. Impersonal, and I think. It's always good to know that they're like, wherever you're right is kind of balanced with their, like, human assessment of the work and the value of it."

Participant, VAWG organisation

"Peter Cruddas Foundation does this really well. It sends funding managers out to meet organisations. More alive, see the passion and the difference the organisation makes. More funders need to come out of their ivory towers."

Sam Everard, Samee

6. CONCLUSION

By-and-for organisations are a critical part of society, providing essential services and a voice for communities and populations often missing or excluded from the workplace, the charity landscape, and within spheres of influence and policymaking.

They are the lifeblood of many communities and often have a transformative impact on the lives of the people involved and those that they serve. Defining by-and-for organisations is complex and varies greatly. However, key principles emerged during our research, including genuine representation of marginalised groups, a commitment to structural change, and tangible engagement with a defined community.

While we developed a working typology for funding purposes, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of these organisations, especially the concept of "small" remains crucial. Lived experience is central to these organisations, fostering trust and deep understanding, but tensions exist regarding expertise and funding disparities.

They often face financial precarity and power imbalances with larger organisations and are forced to tone down their position to secure funding. These challenges, which predominantly concern recognition and resourcing, show there is a need for policymakers, civil society organisations, and funders to adopt more flexible, trust-based approaches that recognise the unique value and needs of these organisations.

Despite challenges, these organisations are vital for speaking truth to power, creating empowering spaces, and driving transformative impact. Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of this vital sector. This research forms part of the effort to build the power and voices of these organisations, which, as we have evidenced, are the backbone of our society.

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APPENDIX: PARTICIPANT LIST

Peer researchers		
Name	**Region**	**Organisation name**
Alya Harding	London	FORWARD
David Zilkha	Wales/South-west	Co-production network for Wales
Dr Stephanie Ejegi-Memeh	South Yorkshire	N/A
Zara Manoehoetoe	North-west	Harpurhey Neighbourhood Project

Research Advisory Group		
Name	**Region**	**Organisation name**
Eva Roberts	South-west	
Jo Brown	East of England	Opening Doors
Mark Johnson MBE, Founder	UK	Lived Expert Ltd
Nikhwat Marawat, Director	West Midlands	The Delicate Mind
Patrick Toland	Northern Ireland	
Sarah Forster	North-west	Organisational Development Consultant
Tandy Nicole	Scotland	Womennetic
Vincent Manning	London	Catholics for Aids Prevention and Support (CAPs)
Zlakha Ahmed, CEO	South Yorkshire	Apna Haq