

Norfolk Community Research Network vision and outline – DRAFT FOR COMMENT

Summary of the opportunity

Over the past eighteen months, Norfolk Community Foundation, with our partners The Feed and Shrublands Youth and Adult Centre, have been part of a UKRI-funded programme to develop a Community Research Network. The aim of the network is to develop local capacity to carry out community-engaged research and enable NCF and our partners to take action with the confidence that we understand what communities want and need.

The initial set of Community Research Networks can now submit a bid for up to £1 million over five years as part of a competitive process for further funding to continue to develop the programme.

We have developed the following draft vision and outline for the network and would love your views on this so we can create something that is valuable and makes a positive difference to communities and the organisations that work within them.

Please send your comments by email to katyrutherford@norfolkfoundation.com or contact Katy to arrange a meeting to discuss your views in more detail.

Vision for the network

Our vision is a thriving Community Research Network which helps to ensure that research, innovation and decision-making in Norfolk are based on a true understanding of what communities need and want and involves those communities in making change happen. It will:

- Give people and communities a stronger voice and agency over what happens in their lives and neighbourhoods, building trust and pride in place.
- Provide co-ordination of community-involved research activities to ensure a system-wide approach.
- Enable better decisions and best use of limited resources across the system.
- Build understanding of the assets that exist across the county and how we can build on these to strengthen communities.
- Help to address existing challenges and enable partners to be responsive to emerging needs and ambitions.
- Support us to understand the outcomes that really matter to people and quickly move from insight to action.
- Help to create effective feedback loops so that people can see the impact of sharing their knowledge and insights.

Proposed activities

Over the five years of the grant, our Community Research Network will focus on the following activities:

1. Supporting communities to **test and implement different approaches to community research** in ways that work within their neighbourhoods and with their populations. We will offer funding and capacity-building support to enable participation in this work from groups that have previously faced barriers to getting involved.

2. Working with local anchor institutions to advocate for community insight so that it is viewed as integral to research, commissioning, service design and policy making. We will build on successful community research projects carried out with the County Council, Integrated Care Board and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner which have helped to shape strategy and commissioning decisions and offer a **local community insight service**. This will give network partners the opportunity to commission support and capacity to carry out community insight projects and act on what they learn.
3. Working towards the creation of a **system-wide place to store and analyse qualitative community data**, focused on creating actionable insights that help to shape policy, commissioning and service design decisions.
4. Creating regular spaces (including workshops and events) for network partners to come together to shape a **system-wide community research approach**, share knowledge and learning, develop joint projects, and offer up their respective assets (knowledge, community connections, academic expertise, funding) for the benefit of the wider network.

Progress during the initial stage of the programme

During the initial stage of the programme, our Norfolk network has focused on:

1. Understanding the range of community research activity across the county, creating spaces for different partners to connect and share their respective assets, and supporting strategic and practical change in the way that research and innovation happen.
2. Supporting community partners to build their interest and capacity to carry out community-based research through learning events, resources and research opportunities.
3. Working with grassroots community organisations to test and learn how to undertake community research in practice. We have worked with two community food hubs, The Feed in Norwich and Shrublands in Gorleston to recruit and support volunteers to design and carry out research and take action based on what they learn.

Plans for the five-year grant period and approach to sustainability

We want our plans for the five-year grant period to be responsive to community insight and develop/iterate based on what we hear and learn so we have intentionally only outlined detailed plans for the first year of the grant (2024-25). In Year 1 we intend to seek funding for the following activities:

- Staff time to advocate for community-involved research and support practical research activity (and resulting action) with anchor institutions.
- Workshops and events to connect partners to understand their respective work and share assets and learning.
- Training and support to build community capacity to participate in and lead research activities.
- Grants to support existing strong local practice, including community conversations, community-involved work in health, and community outcomes research.
- Small grants to test and learn from new community-led approaches.
- An external evaluation partner to support our learning approach.

- Costs associated with participating in the national Community Research Network programme.

Our longer-term plans for sustainability include:

- Offering a cost-effective route for partners to understand community assets and needs through dedicated research capacity.
- Exploring the creation of a new community insight entity which could host, co-ordinate and analyse community insight and data on behalf of the system, offering economies of scale.
- Supporting R&D grant funding applications led by academic and system partners and exploring grant funding opportunities that may not be available to statutory partners.