

How might the Catalyst network respond to requests for help from funders?

Content plan

Fill this in before you start writing. You can fill in 6 at the end though.

1. Why are we writing this?	<p><i>We want to be transparent with the network about how we are engaging with funders when they approach us needing help/opportunities.</i></p> <p><i>We want funders to understand the network way of operating.</i></p>
2. Audience	<p><i>Primary: Network members</i></p> <p><i>Secondary: Funders</i></p>
3. What does the audience want or need?	<p><i>The network isn't aware of this so much yet so its hard to know what it needs.</i></p> <p><i>We want to explore it with the network.</i></p>
4. News item or resource?	<i>News item</i>
5. Scheduling	<i>nope</i>
6. Images	<p><i>State if you have any images you'd like used, or any preferences if we use stock images.</i></p> <p><i>(If sending us images include at least one header image in landscape)</i></p>

Blog

Now you can get started... or read some [ideas for structures](#).

How might the Catalyst network respond to requests for help from funders?

Working with funders to run funding+support digital support programmes: a request for input, an attempt to be transparent, and some ideas.

Intro

In 2020-21 Catalyst contributors CAST, Shift and DOT PROJECT managed four funding programmes for funders in the network. During 2021 three more funders talked to Catalyst about helping them with digital support+funding in 2022.

We expect a similar thing to happen this year: more funders looking to run similar programmes in 2023. However, we want to respond in a more networked way. This means others from the Catalyst network leading programmes, on behalf of the network.

A networked way of operating

However, networked delivery is still a relatively new way of operating in our sector. We're all learning that working as a network takes time, challenges power imbalances and requires different methods of governance and decision-making (e.g. sociocracy). Funders, and the rest of us, are learning how it's different from the commissioner-supplier, '*we ask, you deliver*' relationship that most of us are used to.

To be fair, neither do we fully understand it yet, either. We don't yet know what a more inclusive, networked approach to funders' needs looks like.

But we do have questions to guide our exploration, and we are testing different approaches. We want to explore and test more.

5 questions about what a networked approach to helping funders looks like

1. How do we know when the network could provide more value to funder and grantees than an individual organisation could?
2. What does an inclusive and networked response look like?
3. How do people and organisations in the network respond to an opportunity as part of the network?
4. How do people lead on behalf of the network?
5. What role does the Catalyst core team play? How much should they be looking to influence and shape the opportunity and relationships?

3 possible models

We see 3 potential models of relationship management and programme design/delivery. The [Catalyst core team](#) has a different role in each: from managing and delivering everything, to immediately passing on all opportunities across the network.

The models also have one thing in common: a need for preliminary financial commitment from the funder. This pays for the resources required to lead and coordinate a networked response to the request.

Here are the models. We want to explore each one.

1. **Core team facilitates, then hands to a coalition.** Core team identifies which network member would be most suitable then hands the programme and relationship over to a partner-led coalition to deliver.
2. **A designated partner leads.** Core team hands all new opportunities directly to a designated partner to manage and determine who else is involved. The partner handles contracting.
3. **A circle decides.** An 'opportunities circle' made up of diverse network members (who have a good understanding of the network) receives all new opportunities and determines where each might fit best and who could be involved.

We also explored a fourth. **Core team leads.** The Catalyst core team holds the relationship, and leads the programme design and delivery. They contract

network members to deliver specific elements. This model could also involve bringing in additional core team members for the programme duration. However, we've decided this isn't viable because we tried this in 2020/21 and we no longer have the right capacity. And because it doesn't feel fair and equitable.

How Catalyst is testing different approaches

Power to Change

In Spring 2021 Power to Change approached Catalyst. They wanted help to deliver a new digital capabilities programme for community businesses on their Powering Up programme.

In response network members CAST, DOT PROJECT and Outlandish formed a coalition. Together, as a circle, they ran a discovery process and [designed a prototype programme](#) for Powering Up. Power to Change have funded all of this. The programme has launched and is recruiting three delivery partners to deliver support to 20 Powering Up participants.

This approach is helping us learn about model 1 and model 3.

Charities Aid Foundation (CAF)

In September 2021 CAF asked Catalyst to become a 'suggested digital support provider' for the 103 small charities on CAF's resilience programme. They didn't want a full programme of support and weren't able to fund a networked response. CAF couldn't guarantee take up of any support programme developed as it wanted each charity to be able to choose who they used for support.

Catalyst's core team took the opportunity to the network. Together they decided that a collaborative response was not feasible. However 20 agencies and freelancers did express interest in becoming 'suggested providers'.

To support this the core team has set up a simple enquiries process for resilience programme grantees. They will match enquiries directly to the most suitable help from the 20 'suggested providers'.

This approach is helping us learn about model 1.

Sport England

The 2022 Commonwealth Games will take place in Birmingham. Sport England want to help national sports governing bodies and their networks to use digital innovation to create better access to sport. They asked Catalyst to help.

The work needs a quick response and previous experience so for this reason, and because they had an existing relationship to Sport England, we asked CAST to take it on. Subject to contract confirmation, CAST will design a framework for delivery. Then in 2022 others in the Catalyst network will be able to collaboratively deliver the work to sports charities directly, through open contracting. The core team will support this collaboration.

This approach is helping us learn about model 2.

Learn more

[Learn more about Catalyst's 2021 funder journey](#)

Credit to Debby Mulling for her help in producing this article.