

Funding for Systemic Change action enquiry  
**Learning paper #5**

# Advancing place based systems change

Renaisi  
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## Introduction



### The project

The Funding for Systemic Change project is chaired by Save the Children UK. It is overseen by a steering group of individuals from a range of social sector organisations including national charities, agencies and individuals (for full list see page 10).

The steering group provides project oversight and direction, engages with outputs and findings to inform the direction of the project, and shares access to contacts, networks and other relevant opportunities.

All members of the project have a deep understanding of community or place-based initiatives, systems change and complexity.

The key issue this group will examine is: **how to manage funds to best support long-term, place-based systemic change (PBSC).**

It will also explore how to reach that goal, moving away from short-term, simplistic and output-based approaches to resourcing social change.

The first phase of this work, led by Renaisi on behalf of the steering group, is designed to:

- build an understanding of how funding can best support local, place-based organisations and leaders in ‘systems change’ work;
- work with traditional funders and the national charity sector to explore ways to better fund and support this type of work,
- develop a range of practical tools and/or proposed approaches which could be tested or piloted in future stages of work; and,
- strengthen the understanding, relationships and interest in this area between steering group members and wider stakeholders.

### This learning paper

This learning paper sets out the final definition from this phase, some key insights to build on, and a proposed set of next steps.

# 1. Definition of PBSC



The working definition that was developed by the group, building from their own practice and from a discussion, was then developed in work with funders (see learning paper 2) and places (see learning paper 3) to finish with this definition.

It is that place-based systemic change is an approach to social change, rather than an outcome of it, and is defined by:

<b>1. Focus</b>	It is not limited to a single organisation or service, but rather about collective and interrelated practice within a geography
<b>2. Time horizon</b>	It is long-term in ambition and practice, although it may well achieve things in the short-term
<b>3. Approach</b>	It is engaged in building and developing ongoing and evolving relationships between people and organisations, it is flexible and responsive, and it explicitly engages in questions of complexity
<b>4. Scale</b>	It is focussed on geographies that are understood by those who live in them, and to the systemic challenge.
<b>5. Intentionality</b>	It is attempting to unlock structural change, and is conscious of the different roles that need to be taken to achieve this. As a result it builds learning and adaptation into its work.

## 2. Insights and principles



Some features that were common across practice:

- The essential role of buildings and shared, flexible spaces is incredibly common across all examples and approaches.
- The role of individual, values-based leadership is also a recurring feature. This does not have to be a Chief Executive or a senior individual, but rather somebody initiating a belief in others of what is possible and focussing on values and justice (a recurring word) in the local place.
- A common feature of those leaders was that they had a tendency to see the whole system in people (they saw how issues connected), as well as seeing the people in the system. It was a very human view, rather than an intellectual view of systemic challenges.

Pulling all of this together highlights a set of insights and principles to focus on in the next stage of this work:

- PBSC is an aspirational approach to social change that different organisations and communities are working towards through different approaches and to different degrees.
- Those approaches share some features, but they also have quite different practical challenges and need different support depending on that approach. Clarifying these differences will be helpful when considering how best to support the approaches.
- Some organisations will spend a long time at one 'level' (learning paper 4), others will be moving back and forth between levels quite a lot. Positive place-based social change can happen at any one of those levels. But for those who want to see PBSC, it is important to consider what is needed to move the approach and place through the levels in a systematic way.
- No organisation is currently working in a completely PBSC way, because it requires all funders, commissioners and stakeholders in a place and system to work together to achieve that. But individual approaches are having an impact.
- The move from the 'connected' to 'mutuality' levels demonstrates the organisational commitment to this way of working, but they need support from many others to move beyond that into the final stage, 'systemic' working. That move allows organisations, the place, and other partners to really see and believe that they are committed to this.
- There was an incredibly strong and consistent desire across the interviews to learn from others, in a similar position, who are trying to work in this way, in order to further develop and codify the practice.

## Notes



### Funding for Systemic Change Steering group

The membership of the steering group includes:

- The Children's Society
- Save the Children UK
- Lankelly Chase
- The MEAM Coalition
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)
- West London Zone

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## About Renaisi



We're passionate about creating the conditions for strong, inclusive communities to thrive.

We're constantly learning from the different perspectives we see working directly with communities, with the providers of services and the investors in communities. It gives us a unique perspective on how systems work and how to improve places fairly.

The combination of our research and evaluation consultancy with significant community programme delivery experience, makes Renaisi a uniquely well-rounded learning partner for the voluntary and community sector.

Find out more at [www.renaisi.com](http://www.renaisi.com)

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Follow us on Twitter (@Renaisi) or on LinkedIn and get in touch at:

**Contact details:**

**T** +44 (0) 20 7033 2600

**E** [info@renaisi.com](mailto:info@renaisi.com)

Unit 2, 290-296 Mare Street, London, England, E8 1HE

