



Reflections from Conversations with Community Panel Members

Dr Katy Adams (University of Hull)
The YPIP Community Panel
Ben Jessop & Prof Joe Cook (University of Hull)

April 2026

Contents

01

The Yorkshire
Policy Innovation
Partnership

02

Executive
Summary

03

Policy/Practice
Recommendations

04

Introduction

05

Headline Findings
and Learning

06

Conclusion

The Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership

Running between 2024 and 2026, the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP) brings together academics from 12 institutions across Yorkshire and the Humber with local stakeholders, including businesses, voluntary sector organisations, community members and local and combined authorities.

The project seeks to enable the sharing of knowledge, insight and experience through equitable partnership and working in order to shape policy making around local challenges.

A key component of YPIP is the community panel, a group of 20 individuals recruited from a range of disadvantaged or underrepresented communities.

The community panel was recruited by disseminating information in multiple formats through trusted connections in local authorities, anchor community organisations, and other community networks. Potential panel candidates registered their interest via an online form, with accessibility support offered by members of the YPIP team where necessary. 65 applications were received. Aiming to ensure a diverse range of lived experiences, a group of public sector and academic YPIP team members selected 30 applicants to form the first community panel, overfilling the 24 places available to allow for the expected attrition.

Since its inception, the panel has met regularly to explore through discussion and practice what inclusive and respectful collaboration looks like, and how communities can be engaged and enabled to positively, equitably and effectively influence research and policy making.

Panel members also participate in YPIP's work packages, working with academics and other stakeholders to develop innovative solutions to specific topics and challenges. Prior to the writing of this report, five nominated members represented the panel at YPIP's Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund (CIYF), where they reviewed and decided on funding allocation to voluntary and community sector-led research projects via a competitive application procedure.

This report forms part of YPIP's attempts to embed equity and award communities a meaningful voice. It draws on interviews undertaken during the latter half of 2025 reflecting on the panel's first 10 months. It shares key insights from this initial period of panel operation around experiences of the process and membership, including personal reflections. Crucially this report reflects a snapshot in time half-way through the community panel journey. It forms only part of a complex jigsaw of evidence and reflection accompanied by other public reports available later in the YPIP journey.

Executive Summary

Between July and October 2025 members of the YPIP community panel were offered the chance to speak with the research team about their experiences of the panel and the wider YPIP project. The below summarises the key reflections of panel members about the first 10 months of participation.

Reflections on Panel Membership

- Participants spoke positively of the panel's diversity and richness of backgrounds, opinions and experiences, noting the value of their shared goal of contributing to positive change.
- Positives were the creation of a unique space for relationship and connection building, creating trust and fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere where people felt they could have their voices heard.
- Participants also identified the growth of positive relationships outside of the panel and a desire to engage with each other more on a social level to help strengthen these connections.
- Individual and community level benefits were highlighted, including: gaining satisfaction from panel membership, growing in confidence around the value of their life experiences and the insights they could offer to research and policy, and broadening their own awareness and understanding of other life experiences.

Reflections on Co-Production

At the heart of YPIP is the objective of working with communities as equal partners alongside academic, policy and business stakeholders. Co-producing with the community panel is a key vehicle for achieving this.

Participants commented, however, on the challenges of bringing together such a diverse and geographically dispersed group, and of ensuring their equitable involvement with the project.

Co-production within the community panel and work packages

Creating an inclusive operational space:

- Participants expressed a preference for in-person meetings. Technology was experienced unevenly and as a barrier to relationships.
- Communication and staying up-to-date was made difficult by long gaps between panel meetings.
- The panel space was nevertheless experienced and valued as an open arena where members could represent their communities. Participants felt this had increased understanding and influence.

Accommodating individual needs and expectations

- The panel's facilitators are key to instilling inclusive practice through leading by example.
- Member's diversity of skills and experiences highlighted the practical challenges of co-production, including aligning different language skills, levels of policy knowledge and personal journeys. In addition, working in this inclusive manner conflicted with some participants' expectations around pace and outcomes, leading to frustration and threatening the desired co-production.

Hierarchies of power between the panel and wider YPIP

- Participants described a hierarchy in which members' participation, opinions and abilities were less recognised and respected than those of the academics and other decision makers.
- Issues included: perceptions of inequities in financial recompense, the extent of member influence over decisions, and the time lag between the launch of YPIP and the start of the community panel. This limited scope for effective co-production and community voice.
- Members experienced power discrepancies in communication between themselves and other parts of YPIP. A lack of understanding and access to knowledge were identified, leading to feelings of confusion and disempowerment.
- Nevertheless, members expressed a desire to be more involved and to have more influence, suggesting challenges and negative experiences had not dampened their commitment to be involved with co-production.

Co-production in the Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund

Five community panel members were nominated to review and be part of the Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund (CIYF) funding decision-making.

Hierarchies of power between the panel and the CIYF

- Individuals who represented the panel at the CIYF perceived the fund's framework and approach as biased towards larger nonprofits, criticising how this harmed smaller nonprofits' chances of success.

- Panel representatives' perceived the process by which grants reached the final round of the CIYF as having been dominated by other voices. Although there was evidence that representatives had been involved in this sifting, they nevertheless questioned their value to the CIYF and the extent to which it achieved co-production.
- By contrast, panel representatives spoke positively about how final round decisions relating to the fund had been made in a collaborative and respectful manner, with their voices and opinions being heard and responded to.
- Despite the challenges and difficulties, participants remained positive about the panel's future and the opportunities it could offer to increase community representation and influence.



Policy / Practice Recommendations

The insight offered by these reflections inform research, policy and practice recommendations both for the panel and approaches to co-production.

1

The project succeeded in creating and maintaining an accessible, open, and inclusive space where panel/community members could grow in confidence, build relationships, and share experiences. This has important learning for research, policy and practice.

2

Co-production challenges existing cultural/organisational practice and ways of working. Without addressing this from the onset and throughout, barriers can arise which hinder community participants becoming or perceiving themselves to be equal stakeholders.

3

Recognising the complexity and demands of effectively integrating co-production into programmes and projects is crucial to ensure that infrastructure, systems and budgets support community members' involvement and co-decision-making. The CIYF offers rich learning here.

4

Clear expectations for all partners in the co-production process, having open channels of communication, being wary of volume/scale of ask, and accepting that uncomfortable conversations may occur are all necessary to making co-production work.

Introduction

Between July and October 2025 members of the YPIP community panel were offered the chance to speak with the research team about their experiences of the panel and the wider YPIP project, including its work packages and the Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund (CIYF). Recorded interviews or focus groups took place with eleven of the 22 panel members, three of whom had also been part of the CIYF grant-making panel. Whilst we cannot therefore claim universal coverage, we have based the following analysis on these interviews/focus groups, as supplemented by written records of discussions during the panel's May 2025 meeting.

This analysis considers community panel members' experiences of participating in the panel, the work packages and the CIYF grant process during the panel's first 10 months. It first examines the make-up of the panel and the difference being part of the panel makes for its individual members. Subsequently, it considers the panel's goal of achieving co-production through working together and "sharing power and responsibility" with the wider YPIP research team ([Albert et al., 2023](#)). It examines whether this has been achieved, looking in particular at questions of inclusivity and power hierarchies. Finally, it considers members' hopes for what will happen after the end of the YPIP project.

Overall, the findings create a picture of a diverse yet cohesive panel composed of individuals rich in experience and committed to the project and its underlying goals. There are some examples of the positive inclusion and equitable relationships known to enable effective co-production. However, findings also reveal how panel members recognise an inherent hierarchy between them and the rest of the team which poses a risk both to members' long-term engagement with the project and the project's overall success.

For space reasons, not all quotes relating to each finding have been included in this analysis. Instead, the analysis states the number or proportion of participants who discussed the relevant finding, confirming its overall salience.

The quotes are coded as:

CP... = contribution from an individual panel member

FGP... = contributions from a focus group

MMD = contributions from the May 2025 panel meeting



Headline Findings and Learning

A. Panel members and membership

All panel members interviewed spoke about the others on the panel and how they interacted with each, as well as the difference being on the panel had made for them. Participants were complimentary about the panel's composition. They mentioned members' diversity and breadth of experience, and how they worked together in an inclusive, collaborative fashion, motivated by their commitment to a shared goal. Participants also believed their involvement benefitted them individually, providing opportunities for friendship, learning and personal growth.

(i) The characteristics of the panel's members (discussed by 7 out of 11 participants)

The majority of participants talked about the make-up of the panel, which brought together individuals from a diverse blend of backgrounds and with a variety of opinions and community experiences. Participants noted members' considerable experience and knowledge, as well as their shared resilience, ability and drive. They were positive about the panel's potential, noting its members' shared goal of wishing to contribute to something positive.

The people... I think they're brilliant... I don't agree with everyone... but I met some incredible people... You guys have a golden nugget when it comes to this community panel... look at the experiences in the room... The more time I spend with people in the panel, the more I understand it's a gold mine... every single person in the panel [has] created our own opportunities so when it comes to policies and the things that we want to change, it could be incredibly influential. We're quite daring: we're not scared of sending an email or talking to that person or knocking on that door. We have so many resources internally we can use (CP1).

I found myself in the room with different people with a lot of knowledge and experience, so much to give. It's a good selection of individuals that are taking part in this project. I'm so impressed. I've never worked on such a project with people that you have... with all ages, different backgrounds, everybody engaging together, everybody bringing their opinion to the table (CP2).

“

I love how diverse we all are, coming from different backgrounds... The panel has some amazing people... Everyone has something individually, they're working on amazing things. They have things to bring to the table... I love what [panel members are] doing outside of the panel (CP11).

”

We are an exceptionally and fantastic, diverse group of people... We're all there for the same reason. We want the knowledge that we've gathered over the time that we've lived to be of value in that space, not for the individual, but for the collective... everybody in the space wants this to achieve what it needs to achieve (CP7).

(ii) Relationships between panel members (discussed by 9 out of 11 participants)

Just under half of participants praised how members responded to each other and were accepting of each other's individual characteristics and challenges. In particular, participants spoke positively about how the panel brought people together in a collaborative, welcoming manner. They created a unique space for connection and relationship between people who otherwise might never have interacted, fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere in which everyone had a voice and were treated with respect, despite differences in opinion.

Everyone is heard. It doesn't matter what your opinion is, everyone can just tell what he thinks and all the decisions are acceptable. I really like this... everyone is very kind to each other and ready to help. [This] joins us all together. If you have any needs, everyone tries to help you and slowly you explain everything and we understand everything better and better (CP3).

We have many people with different backgrounds with different views, different experiences, different knowledge... it is a positive... they are welcoming... different communities coming together, sitting in a room and talking and at the end coming to a joint agreement. That's a big achievement (CP5).

We respect each other. And sometimes we have some different points of view, which is acceptable, but always showing that with respect. All the group, we're accepting each other... sometimes we are not agreed, but we still tolerant, accepting difference... it's good to have this diversity in one room. In real life, we don't have the time to speak to each other or to understand each other, but we have it in that small room at the panel. It's like we're representing the big community in a small role. I never felt like there is a gap or strong words (CP8).

Around two-thirds of participants talked about the personal relationships and growing friendships developing between panel members. Many participants recognised how members had offered each other support and understanding right from the start. These connections were seen to encourage future impact, commitment and team-spirit. Three participants also suggested that additional training sessions or dedicated social events could further strengthen relationships. One, however, expressed scepticism about the wider YPIP team's motivation for such initiatives, perceiving the team as primarily operations-focused.

I think some of us get each other... I feel like it's... lifelong friendships and partnerships (CP1).

I feel like I've made great relationships that could probably take me far... even if it's a busy day, I'm still going to make time for YPIP... I'm part of something. It's become a community and you still want to see people, see how they're doing and see how the work is going (CP11).

That is one of the things that it feels is so far not happening... relationships between panel members... it feels like that's being put to one side in order to focus on getting the panel work done... The priority has become getting the Panel business done [rather than relationships building]... I think maybe more space within the training days for facilitated 'getting to know' each other's sessions (CP10).

Having that diversity is really important... spending time together, know each other... sometimes I wish we have an active time to do activities together because all the time it was formal about things... why not having a day for activities? (CP8).

(iii) The difference panel membership makes for individuals (discussed by 9 out of 11 participants)

Almost all participants described how being part of the panel had had a positive effect on them. Members had been challenged to reflect on their community involvement, to confront their own assumptions and biases, and to move out of their comfort zones into situations which forced them to learn and seek support from others. The opportunities for training and the sharing of information provided by the panel were also experienced as having strengthened members' other community engagement.

Satisfaction, confidence and learning

Just over a third of participants described in general terms how being part of the panel benefited their overall well-being and satisfaction. Only one participant, who has since resigned, disagreed, describing how they were disappointed that the panel had not lived up to the expectations they had when they joined.

At the moment I'm off sick, I'm not working, and [the panel] is something that keeps me going... it's good for my health, my well-being... The challenge was a positive challenge (CP2).

This panel is actually probably one of the greatest things I've done in the past three years (CP1).

[My referring organisation] told me it was [about] being on a climate change panel... I thought [the panel] was going to be something completely different, and unfortunately it's not hit my target of what I want it to be (CP6).

A similar number of participants noted how membership of the panel had built their confidence. Through encouragement and active participation, members were shown as having become more aware of the value of their life experiences and more willing to contribute and engage, both on the panel and more widely.

I've never seen myself sitting in a room with academics and talking about things, but [it] has really changed my perception... I have a voice and I have power in that voice and I can use it no matter the room... The experiences that I have, the life experiences that I have... it's not nothing... That has really shifted my mind. Because usually I feel really shy and reserved... and... I'll be in the background. But I think [it] made me realise that, no, you still have your voice and you can still speak about things that are relevant, that matters and you can be listened to. So... it's really grown my confidence (CP11).

“ *As a migrant... I break out of comfort zone... it is giving me the confidence that slowly I'm integrating and being part of this community... I want to give this, I challenge myself with that (CP5).*

”

In addition, panel membership had led to two participants critically analysing their own behaviour and opinions. These participants described how hearing other members' comments and experiencing their approaches to group discussions had broadened their own awareness and understanding. It had also led them to consider their potential for personal growth, and where changes in their approach could enable more equitable collective decision-making.

Sometimes if somebody is telling his opinion... I think... 'Maybe I need to think about this, it is an interesting idea'... because it would not come to my mind, but... somebody mentioned it and you think "Oh, it seems, it sounds good, that's interesting", it challenges you (CP3).

Gosh, I did learn some things... [Taking part] definitely increased my awareness in terms of other people's limitations... that was probably a major take... I had to be patient and I had to really understand other people's limitations. Sometimes I can be overwhelming and my voice can be quite loud. So I'm working on facilitating other people's voices... I've realised that oftentimes I don't have to hold the room and put myself forward for a lot of things. I don't have to carry all the load. This is actually probably one of my biggest learning curves - how to deal with other people... the more I step back, the more I learn (CP1).

Learning, increased awareness and reflection on community involvement

Two participants praised the formal training they had received around participatory decision-making, which they had experienced as novel and interesting. In addition, three other participants praised how the panel had given them the opportunity to share their experiences of community work informally with each other.

This had increased members' awareness of the needs of other communities and encouraged them to reflect on their own community involvement. As such, it had enabled the panel's impact to begin to move beyond YPIP into the wider community.



The training days were good... The facilitation training and the going through the collaborative problem solving has been really interesting. I'm really enjoying learning how that works physically in space-making decisions... it's very formal... that's very different because I'm used to much more conversation [but] it seems like a much better process for such a large group of people over a much wider area that can't meet as often (CP10).



[The panel] has given us an opportunity to meet up with other people and see what they're doing... that has been one of the greatest things that has happened, to learn that other people are doing some amazing stuff on the other side of your city you're not even aware of... Some of the things that we've learned... I'll take that information back and be like, "Okay, this is what's being said there, so how do we apply it?"... it [has] really helped us navigate some places where we were going and meeting other people, other academics or MPs (CP11).

Learning with each other... having [another panel member] with us explaining things about the charity [they're] working with... we learn from each other (CP8).

B. Enabling effective co-production

YPIP states “that people who live in communities should help make decisions on projects that affect them and their local areas and so this project aims to put communities at the heart of our decision making”. It also describes how the CIYF project involved “subject matter representatives from academia and the voluntary sector team[ing] up with five members of the YPIP Community Panel to review all applications and utilise their diverse perspectives to agree on the allocation of funds”.

Participants’ experiences of the panel and work packages, as well as of the CIYF grant process, revealed two core challenges when seeking to enable co-production: (i) working in an inclusive manner in respect of all members; and (ii) overcoming hierarchies of power which could act as barriers to full transparency and involvement.

(i) Co-production in the panel and work packages

Working in an inclusive manner (discussed by 8 out of 11 participants)

Although participants were positive about panel members’ diverse life experiences and backgrounds, they also noted the challenges these posed for the panel’s operations. These included keeping members connected with each other and the panel despite the geographical distance between them and the intervals between meetings, and accommodating members’ individual needs, including avoiding assumptions about their pre-existing levels of knowledge and capacity.

Creating an inclusive operational space

Panel meetings have been held both remotely and in-person. Around a third of participants discussed the impact of this choice. Opinions varied.

Some members recognised how meeting online made it easier to enable all members to attend sessions. In contrast, others noted technical issues with the online meeting platform, as well as how it could prevent members from fully understanding each other’s contexts and working collaboratively.

“

We had some glitches with the system, Teams in particular... We tried different ways, but a few people still struggle to join the meetings... something to... get improved (CP2).

”

Relationships are almost impossible to manage online properly... it's hard to understand my perspective... You can't see my context... I'm fairly sure there have been some miscommunications and some tensions because we don't have full context for each other. We don't know what's going on... that inhibits the ability to be honest [and share] stories... We're supposed to be building the processes that build the panel [but] we can't do that as effectively as we could if we knew what was going on with each other (CP10).

It was also noted by four participants how the infrequency of meetings made it hard for members to remain aware of what the panel was doing. Regular, comprehensive communication from the communities team was seen as crucial in helping members remain connected, encouraged and motivated. In addition, although the impact of Loomio on information sharing and communication was yet to be ascertained, one participant hinted at its potential benefits in this area.

When you come home, if there is no follow-up or anything that ties you to the work constantly, you move on to other things. It's so difficult. It feels like every single time that we're having a meeting, you're having to refresh yourself about what we learned before, because it's been so long in-between... there's nothing on the ground that ties us back to what's happening... but because of the way that communication flows... you're somehow pulled back (CP11).

[Loomio] will be very helpful to keep all the information together. All of it in one place... having time to look through for the future plans (CP8).

Despite these challenges, over a third of participants spoke positively about communication during panel meetings. They believed there to be ample opportunity to share information and thoughts. Individuals listened to each other and moved forwards together. This helped members feel heard, validated and encouraged.

We like to communicate, as we share our experience, our thoughts... During the face-to-face meetings, I feel that we are all on the same level... I think that we are doing well, that everyone is heard, everyone can share their opinion (CP3).

We're bringing ideas together... we share thoughts and... fill in the gaps... we're producing together an idea, a new strategy and we're working together... when [we're] missing information... it's like we complete each other (CP8).

Two participants also described how they had already been able to communicate a variety of information and lived experiences of their communities to the panel and the work packages. They believed this had helped them improve wider understandings of the issues and to correspondingly impact on the project's wider influence, key reasons for their having joined YPIP.

An additional participant explained how they had not yet had this opportunity, something they attributed to the panel's exploratory way of working. Nevertheless, they remained positive about their opportunity to do so in the future.

We want to have this impact, to see these projects change policies and [have] decision-makers look at the community in a different way. I wanted to break down all these stereotypes and help to understand things that usually, no matter if it's an academic, if it's a politician, if it's a decision maker, they don't have any clue or lived experience. And I managed to do that... to have this input in a positive way. No matter if it was about discrimination, racism or things like that, it was all well received (CP2).

I don't think we've got off the ground yet... I feel like we're still figuring out the process... because it's something new, there is that chiseling through concrete with a feather feel to it... it's difficult, but I also respect and understand that where things are difficult is where change happens and being part of the process is the project. [However] being able to speak out on behalf of my community isn't something that I feel has happened yet (CP7).

We've made quite a lot of changes and brought quite a lot of perspective into a project that... academics set... myself and a couple other people [have] changed the project in itself and the frameworks for different work packages... When YPIP was put together and the way it's been set up logistically, it was from an academic perspective and... there were parts that were genuinely unrealistic... We came and brought that real life perspective of how things actually work in real life (CP1).

Accommodating individual needs and expectations

Although the diversity of the panel had many positive aspects, responding appropriately to members' different needs and expectations was challenging. Just under half of participants provided examples of such individual requirements and how a failure to accommodate them could threaten effective collaboration and full participation. Needs included: ensuring the language used was simple and accessible enough for everyone with a certain standard of English; not making assumptions about members' understanding of the wider policy environment; and respecting the extent of members' willingness to share their personal experiences.

Things like [sharing experiences] can be overwhelming... For some... it's light, for others it's a heavy thing and we need to bear this in mind. Sometimes it's overwhelming (CP2).

“

The first meeting mentioned that it mattered that the language be simplified so that it could be understood by us all and we don't struggle. And I think they've really maintained that simplified language. The communications are quite clear. We don't really struggle with whatever's being put out (CP11).

”

Five participants saw facilitators of the panel's meetings as effective in ensuring members were seen and accommodated in line with their individual needs. Facilitators supported co-production through inclusive practice, offering the leadership the panel needed and encouraging participation and a mutual understanding of members' life experiences and contexts.

At the first training meeting [after a series of challenges] I was already in overwhelm. Part way through... they started taking scaffolding down... as soon as [the facilitator] heard the noise, [they] knew something was wrong... everybody started getting out of the way and opening doors and getting me out, which was really, really positive. Partially, it's because of the way that the facilitators reacted... 'This is important, but also normal'. There wasn't any high drama... It was a minor disruption.. it was treated as though it wasn't a massive issue... because the facilitators haven't come to it with any attitude other than, of course you're here, of course that's normal, everything's fine, that taught everybody something. It's not just you explaining, it's them actually seeing that with their own eyes (CP10).

We all do lead within our own capacity... but I feel that there is a need for somebody to take the lead (CP7).

I was very scared the first time... [facilitator] encouraged me and said, "Take part, be with us for one session and whenever you feel like it's hard for you, just tell me"... they try to be flexible (CP8).

Just under half of participants described how inclusive meetings required sessions which ran at a slow pace and within a fixed framework, often contrasting with members' usual experiences and expectations of group work. This was experienced by some as uncomfortable, frustrating and demotivating, since it appeared to hamper the group's progress. Ensuring members understood the approach and, where appropriate, possessed a willingness to feel unease, was therefore seen as crucial.

No-one knows what will happen tomorrow. In many cases it depends on us... I am sure that slowly, slowly, step by step we will go forward... Maybe it doesn't work as quickly as you would like, but slowly, slowly it works. I don't think it is negative, but it is slower than we expected because everyone should be heard, and sometimes we need more time to discuss something (CP3).

Less talking, more action... I think sometimes projects are just to tick the box and have too much paperwork, overthinking... I think it's [important to] know the real problem, know the community that needs to be targeted and start taking more action. This is why sometimes... people are losing interest to get involved in any sort of shape or form. People feel like it's always another meeting: Why am I here, what am I going to do, what difference is this making? (CP2).

“ There’s a lot of time spent unnecessarily [in meetings]... there’s often a frustration in the room, but the uncomfortableness and the frustration is where the change is... it feels uncomfortable because it’s different (CP7). ”

Hierarchies of power (discussed by all participants)

Just over half of participants discussed discrepancies in power and influence between the different YPIP members. All but one (CP11) described a hierarchy in which members’ participation, opinions and abilities were less recognised and respected than those of the academics and other decision makers. Such hierarchy was perceived in how members were treated, the financial compensation they received for their time, and the failure to include community views and local knowledge during the initial stages of panel and work package projects. This final point related to a time lag of more than eight-months between the start of YPIP and panel member recruitment.

Whilst this was an unforeseen result of the time required to recruit, and gain ethical approval, it nevertheless contributed to members’ subsequent perceptions of a lack of equity. As a result, opportunities to enable co-production had been lost, members’ willingness and ability to engage was threatened, and participants believed the project risked failing to achieve its full potential and reflect the community voice

These work groups existed before we were signed up. So we can't be co-producers in that... [as a result] it's been quite difficult to see how we can be involved... The only way that could have felt different is to have been involved from the absolute very beginning... What's missing is something to co-produce (CP4).

We've definitely been underestimated... they were overly explaining things. We're not acknowledged and patronised... Not necessarily by the [research] team, but the people from the work packages. I stood up and spoke out and one of the leads of YPIP shut me down... Education has always been on a pedestal and having a title is so significant. Just because I don't choose to show my diploma doesn't mean I'm not educated, knowledgeable, intelligent, capable. It's really important for us to get off this traditional archaic ideology - it's quite detrimental to innovation (CP1).

I think what was missing was to start from the bottom, with the communities, to understand the communities, get the feedback before they put it all together and throw it to us. Academics don't have experience... When it comes to the practice side and dealing with the issues in community, the more we were meeting, the more we were discovering, saying, 'Oh, we missed that!' (CP2).

The hierarchy was immediate [and] my time isn't valued as much as other people's... the academic, the policymakers or local authority bodies, Joe Public... this process is aiming to equalise us, but... my exchange value is not as equitable as everyone else's... that's not fair [and means] I can't spare more of my time because I need to pay bills (CP7).

Power discrepancies were also reflected in communication between the panel and other parts of YPIP. Members had not been told enough about how YPIP worked or how the panel and the different work packages fitted into wider objectives. They were also not kept up-to-date on what was happening in relation to work packages. This led to further feelings of frustration, disempowerment and confusion, as well as a more general sense that YPIP would not bring about any fundamental change. In addition, participants' criticism of such failures took general aim, suggesting a tendency for their experiences of one aspect of YPIP to colour their views of the project as a whole.

There was a lack of understanding from the beginning, what was the panel's role [in the CIYF]... [panel members] don't know what to expect, what to do, what the project entailed, then the terms and then what we are going to achieve (CP2).

It's been quite frustrating because although you're sharing and sharing, a lot of times it seems that there's a lot that we don't know. I'm still not really sure what's happening [What's been the most challenging aspect?]. Getting information, having a real idea what outcomes were wanted. We kept being told that you [central team] didn't know either. There seemed to be somebody else in control: nobody knew who that was and what their motives were (CP4).

When it comes to the [work] packages, honestly, I'm not sure what exactly is going on. I wanted to be part of this thing because I really wanted to learn and be able to bring something back to my community. But till now, I have no idea about what the other packages are (CP11).

In response, five participants believed members should be given more opportunities to share their thoughts about the panel, the work packages and the wider YPIP project. Members' feedback could help the team obtain insight which could strengthen the panel, and receiving updates about the value of their contributions would help members feel engaged and motivated.

I would follow up the [work package] projects... engage with [them] one-to-one... a phone call [would] make a huge difference, especially as a volunteer... the motivation (CP2).

[Another panel member] sent a detailed email: without feedback, I would be totally unaware that [this] had been valuable and had influenced thinking on parts of the project... As much as it is very important that we influence the project with our knowledge and experience, it is also very important that we are aware that our labour and time is both appreciated and is making a difference. It is disempowering and really makes you feel like disengaging to be left in the dark. We need to be fully informed of both what is happening and our power and value to the project. To me it is more important than the monetary payment - let me know this is worth my labour and that it is being applied and respected (CP10).

It's about [panel members] being listened to. Their views are listened to and are important, whether they're heavily involved or lightly involved, it's important to hear what they have to say (FG1P2).

[Feedback] is a good thing... what people are actually thinking and feeling. Sometimes people want to be able to voice concern and whatever they're feeling at the moment, and you're giving a platform for that to happen. So I think it's a good thing. Even the people that have stepped back, this could be an opportunity for them to [explain] the reason why we have stepped back. It gives you something to work with. It gives you an opportunity to change things. It's really good to have someone that you can give a little bit of feedback to (CP11).

(ii) Co-production in the CIYF

Creating an inclusive operational space (discussed by all interviewees involved with CIYF and in wider feedback)

It was commonly agreed that the CIYF grant-making process had not been designed with an appreciation of the challenges facing nonprofits seeking support. As a result, participants had found themselves choosing between applications within a framework which prioritised and rewarded larger nonprofits' greater capacity and experience to the detriment of smaller organisations and innovation.

“ I think it was confusing, the way the information was shared for the communities to get the grant. [Larger organisations] know what to write, how to write, what to say. [Smaller organisations] don't have this support... but they still have the heart, the passion, the interest... but need the fund (CP2). ”

The amount of jargon used throughout the application process was overwhelming [and] the application itself was confusing (MMD).

I felt there was a very big disparity between the seedcorn and the major projects in terms of numbers and value of money [awarded]. I think there could have been a better balance. If you're looking for innovation, innovation comes from the seedcorns, that's where innovation happens, at the edges, not in the established [space] (FG1P2).

Hierarchies of power (discussed by all interviewees involved with CIYF and in wider feedback)

Participants did not, however, perceive the CIYF more widely to have acted in such an equitable fashion. Community panel members had been supported to become involved with the initial sifting of CIYF applications, choosing which to bring to the session at which final decisions were made. Participants' memories of their involvement, however, differed: they described themselves as only having become involved with the CIYF process after the initial shortlisting had already occurred. They therefore saw themselves as having been constrained by decisions already taken by the central team and unable to contribute to decisions around which applications should go through to the final stage. This contradiction between the process followed and how it was understood by participants harmed panel members' perceptions of their value to the project, leaving them questioning whether the CIYF process could be considered genuinely co-productive or whether voices other than those of the panel had dominated.

[The benefit of] involving the community members at the [CIYF grant] short listing stage is... that we can make a judgement where academics might write it off... we weren't involved [in the CIYF grant shortlisting]... If [the community panel] are to be involved, we should be involved at every stage because our view is a challenge... Being presented with the shortlist, you're basically being told it's a done deal... You're thinking 'Well, what was the point of me doing that?!'(FG1P2).

Our experience living in the community [compared to]... an academic or [someone] leading the project, is a completely different view... I think if we had a different process to select the projects, who gets [through] to the fund or not could be different (CP2).

Despite these concerns, CIYF participants described how they had felt comfortable expressing their opinions, particularly during the final-round selection process. They believed that all members of the CIYF team had worked together collaboratively in an accepting and inclusive fashion, despite different approaches, and that members' views had been listened to and had influenced choices.

The actual day on the [CIYF] panel was great. It worked really well. It was chaired well. We were all involved... Even on the shortlisted ones, it was clear, very clear that [the academics] were scoring way, way lower than everybody else... there's a different perspective and it's how you balance that [with] the community view (FG1P2).



It was important for all voices to be heard and that was achieved... People were very daring and their openness and vulnerability was appreciated... The process went smoothly and was satisfactory. It was well facilitated with no awkwardness and came to a natural resolution... [It] represented how a community should work together and... felt very much like a collective effort (MMD).



People heard, they took on board... when we had the meeting for scoring the projects (CP2).



C. Members' hopes for the panel's future

Almost all participants (n=9/11) voiced a conviction that the community panel could, if managed well, succeed and have a positive impact. Some recognised a general opportunity to bring about positive change, and expressed their hope for future opportunities to share the voices of their communities. Others spoke directly about the potential for the panel to focus on new initiatives post-YPIP and to act as a blueprint for community involvement.

We need to ensure that when we get everybody together [we] take the most of the best that everyone can bring and continue to encourage. Otherwise you will miss this opportunity with the really good people (CP2).

It should be a model for... involving the communities... at the local and the national level... I'm sure at the end it will become fabulous (CP5).

“

I think it's really important... for our panel to become its own entity outside of YPIP... every single organisation in the country should sit down with one of these panels and be like, 'How can we do things better?' (CP1).

”

I feel like it's a seed that is being planted. And it will be sad to reach the end of this project and then everyone goes back to whatever they do... but if we could turn that into something that grows and moves forward, a group that still stays doing other things, as a project, I think it would be great. Everyone has something individually, they're working on amazing things. They have things to bring to the table, so it would be good to carry on with the work, maybe in any other capacity than the one that we're doing right now (CP11).



Conclusion

Participants' reflections reveal an appreciation of the value and potential of the community panel alongside frustration with ongoing barriers to effective co-production. Whilst participants valued their relationships with other panel members, they were less positive about how they were viewed and treated within the wider project. Their descriptions of administrative processes, personal experiences and high-level decision-making revealed persistent power hierarchies which restricted equitable contribution.

At panel level, participants praised members' skills, diversity and experiences, which were seen to offer a powerful catalyst for future action. There was also clear evidence that relationships between members, and the support and learning this offered, benefited participants personally and strengthened their community engagement beyond YPIP.

Evidence of wider impact, in particular in terms of underrepresented communities' voices being heard and acted upon, was nevertheless limited. Individual leaders and facilitators were praised for their inclusive approaches to participants and their needs and abilities. Criticism was, however, made by participants of attitudes held within the broader YPIP project towards community members, and the extent to which members were acknowledged and treated as equitable participants. Perceptions of failures to include members in key initial decisions, particularly in relation to work packages and the CIYF project, restricted meaningful community representation and left members questioning their true value to the project.

Participants also described poor communication, a lack of respect for members' opinions and a limited awareness of their needs amongst the wider team. Combined, participants were left frustrated and confused by failures they perceived as project-wide, threatening their effective engagement.

These challenges reflect recognised tensions within co-production, which is acknowledged to be a complex and often challenging way of working. While co-produced projects are able to draw on the "alternative, legitimate expertise" of non-academic participants ([Liddiard et al., 2019](#)), they are also, as encountered here, vulnerable to the impact of complex relationships and the difficulties of ensuring full inclusivity ([Clarke et al., 2018](#); [Liddiard et al., 2019](#); [Hoppen et al., 2025](#)).

Despite these difficulties, many members remained hopeful about the panel's future and its potential to continue beyond YPIP. Participants' experiences of co-production to date suggest that the panel's ability to realise these goals is not, however, guaranteed and will require ongoing commitment from all parts of the project to develop existing relationships, improve communication and embed widespread community involvement.



We thank you for your ongoing support.

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank the YPIP Community Panel members and the wider YPIP for their thoughts and feedback to produce this report.

Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP)

Bringing together academics, decision makers, and communities to harness the power of collaborative research and innovation to address local challenges with informed policy making.

Get in touch



ypip@leeds.ac.uk



ypip.org.uk



[LinkedIn](#)



Economic
and Social
Research Council