

# Supporting alignment of impact in the youth sector – data, evidence and narratives

Opportunity areas for funders, commissioners and practitioners

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Department  
for Culture  
Media & Sport

# About this toolkit



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This toolkit was developed by the Centre for Youth Impact, now part of YMCA George Williams College, with the support of a range of funders, including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

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# Introducing this toolkit

## Who is it for and what can it support?

# What is the purpose of this document?



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This is a toolkit designed for funders, commissioners and practitioners working with and for young people through informal and non-formal learning, and who are interested in supporting alignment of 'impact' – through shared data, shared evidence and shared narratives.

The document contains five sections:

- An introduction- what is alignment of impact; why do we care and why is it so difficult?
- Roles and responsibilities - What leverage do funders, commissioners and practitioners have in the system?
- What are the opportunities: What can be done to support alignment efforts?
- Five principles to support alignment
- Further reading - Other legacy outputs around alignment from the Centre for Youth Impact

## Where does this work come from?

These insights were developed during a 'listening project', led by YMCA George Williams College as part of its role convening the Youth Work Evidence Alliance. The College was funded by DCMS to establish an alliance of actors focused on improving impact, building evidence and supporting the youth sector, and through this cumulatively generating insights and learning.

The listening project focused on the topic of alignment in measuring and improving impact. It took place between the autumn of 2024 and the spring of 2025, during which time it conducted a series of roundtable discussions in order to engage experts, funders and commissioners, practitioners and young people; as well as drawing on insight from wider work with the Back Youth Alliance and Healthy Data Ecosystem initiative.

With the closure of the College, the team produced a suite of resources to share the legacy of the work around alignment. This toolkit is part of these resources.

# Introduction

**What is alignment of impact; why do we care and why is it so difficult?**

# Why do we care about alignment of impact in the youth sector?



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When practitioners talk about alignment, they are typically looking for ways to bring the sector together to better demonstrate the impact of their practice.

This normally means:

- Telling more powerful and consistent stories about what good youth work looks like and why it matters to young people and society
- Advocating for the quality and principles of effective youth work
- Supporting wider awareness and adoption of 'best practice' around impact measurement
- Increasing efficiencies and reducing the burden on individual practitioners to start from scratch each time they want to evaluate the impact of their practice

## Why is there a lack of alignment in the sector at the moment?

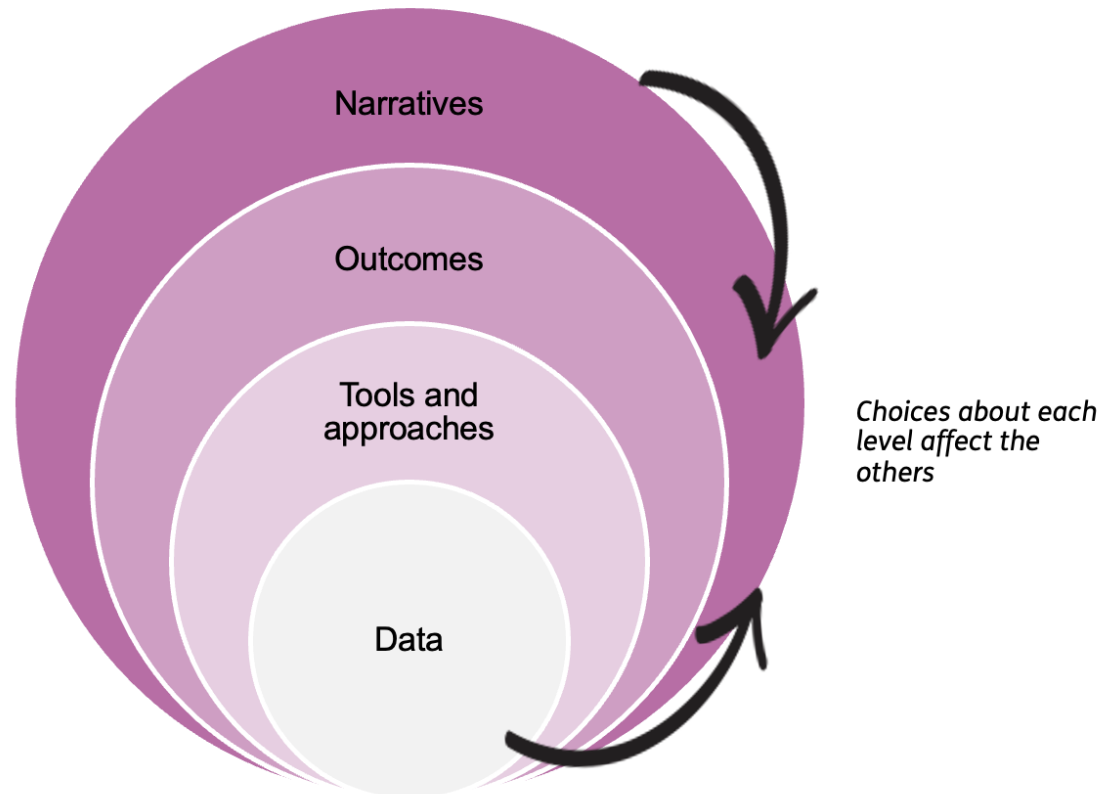
The youth sector has faced significant challenges in the past few years. Financial pressures resulting from the 2008 financial crash and the Covid-19 pandemic saw local authorities spending on average 70% less on youth provision; as well as shifting from open-access provision towards more targeted, outcomes-driven approaches.

Many feel these trends have devalued youth work and put pressure on those working in the sector itself to justify investments made. Practitioners may be volunteers, and/or working part-time to keep a local initiative open for young people. They are often looking for ways to measure impact robustly, but which also support a relational, person-centred approach to working with young people. These factors have all led to – and perpetuate – a wide range of approaches to evidence, data and narrative across the sector.

In addition, the sector itself is diverse, disparate and dispersed, comprising a huge range of sizes of organisation, types of practice, funding streams and desired impact for young people and communities. This makes it hard to develop a joined-up narrative – and evidence base – around the positive impact of youth work and why it's worth investment.

# Why do we care about alignment of impact in the youth sector?

Alignment can mean different things depending on who you talk to. We outline the following framework to clarify what we might be talking about aligning, and why, across different 'levels'. These levels connect, with decisions at each level affecting all the other levels.



## These levels are:

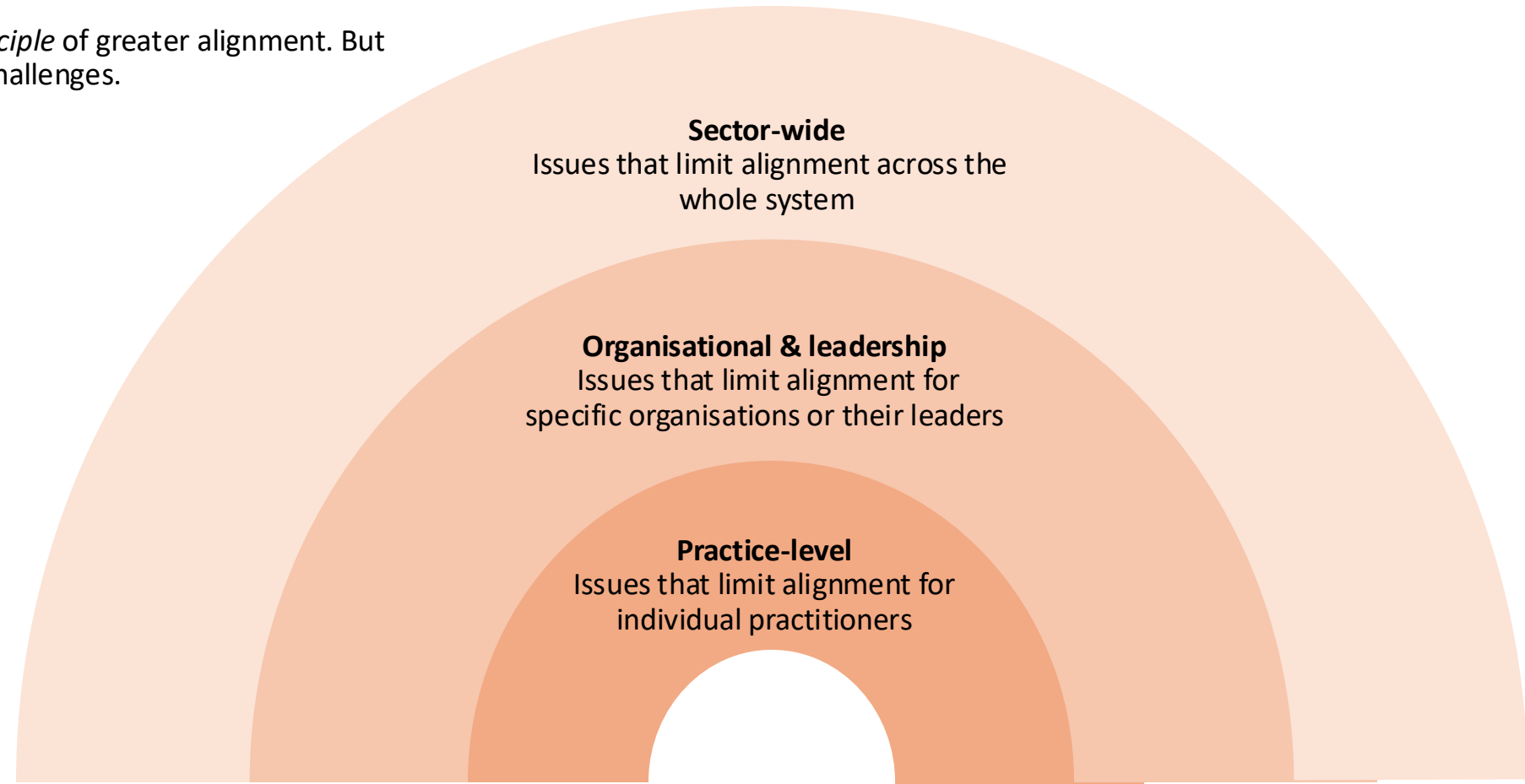
- **Narratives:** How we understand and talk about impact across the sector. (e.g. youth work helps young people to feel more optimistic about their futures)
- **Outcomes:** The skills, capabilities and assets that matter to young people and what we think 'good' youth work should be developing (e.g. self-efficacy, or developing a sense of identity)
- **Tools and approaches:** Methods or resources used to measure or monitor progress against outcomes (e.g. the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale - WEMWBS)
- **Data:** Information held about the practice being delivered/offered to young people, and who engages and how (e.g. demographic data about the young people participating)

# Why is alignment so difficult?

Many people are on board with the *principle* of greater alignment. But under the surface there are a range of challenges.

These operate at three levels:

- Sector-wide;
- Organisational & leadership; and
- Practice.



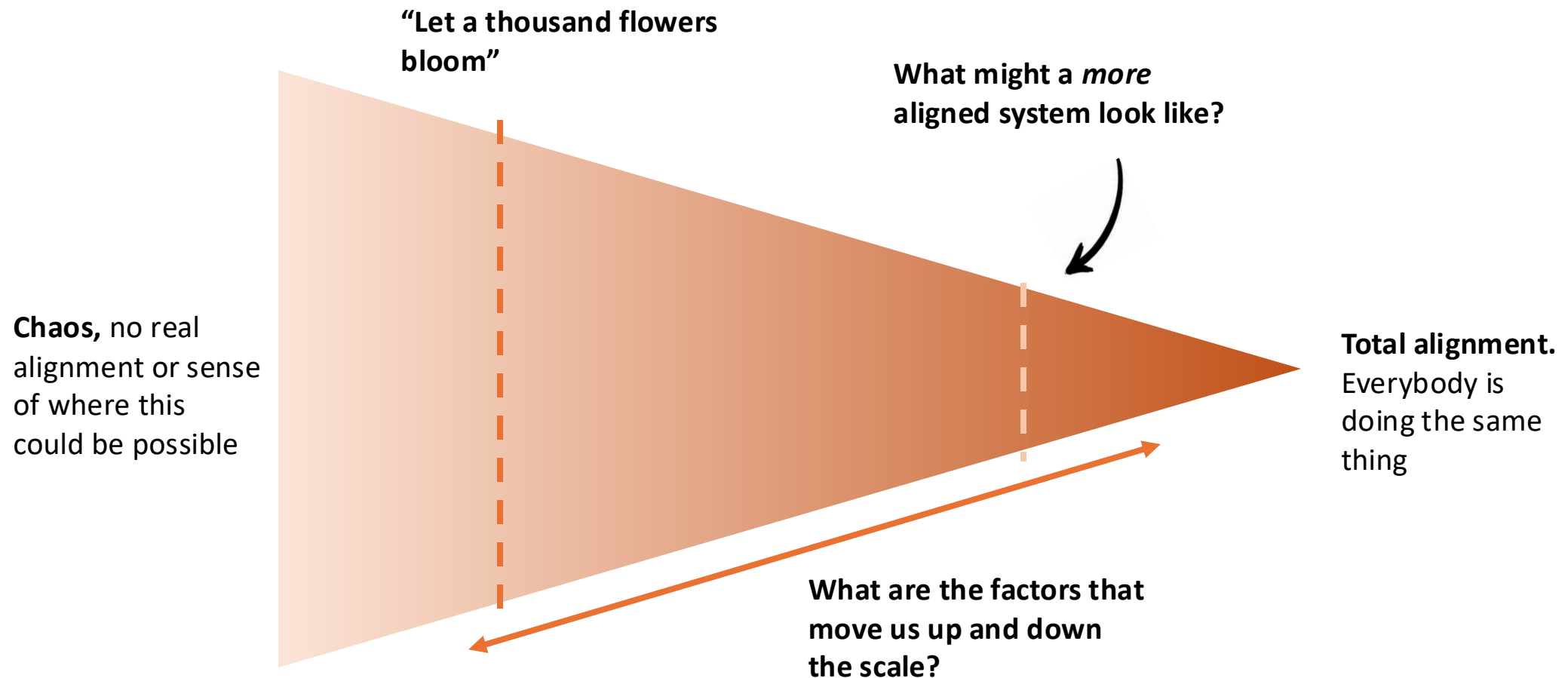


# Why is alignment so difficult?

<b>Sector-wide</b> Issues that limit alignment across the whole system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• With the sector perceived/believed to be in crisis, nobody is prioritising alignment. This can make new ideas feel more challenging than normal</li><li>• It is unclear who should be taking the lead in alignment efforts</li><li>• Even those working deeply with the sector find it hard to describe the scale and nature of the system within which the youth sector operates</li><li>• More alignment might strengthen the sector – but the benefits would not necessarily be seen for individual practitioners, or even individual organisations</li></ul>
<b>Organisational &amp; leadership</b> Issues that limit alignment for specific organisations or their leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are different opinions about how aligned we should be in the first place. Some of this thinking is values-driven, with people worrying about the ethical implications (e.g. over-surveillance of marginalised groups)</li><li>• Organisations are often incentivised to demonstrate the ways in which their work/practice is unique. Some worry that aligning will mean losing some of their edge</li><li>• Many hold the perception that aligning will be resource-intensive and require big changes. Those who have already invested in their own systems are often particularly concerned that aligning might mean changing these after spending time, energy and money on them</li><li>• Even for those keen on the idea of more alignment, it's not always clear what they should be aligning 'to', or where to start</li></ul>
<b>Practice-level</b> Issues that limit alignment for individual practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making alignment work in practice can be really complicated. People can get stuck in the theory</li><li>• Some practitioners worry that aligned approaches might undermine flexible data collection methods, person-centred approaches and relational working</li></ul>

# Is increased alignment necessarily a good thing?

Young people are growing up in an ever-more diverse world, and the youth sector has always been a diverse tapestry of practice and spaces in response. Our work suggested that ‘total alignment’ in how we measure, monitor and communicate about practice would be neither possible nor desirable – but that the current system would benefit from *greater* alignment.



# **Roles and responsibilities**

**What leverage do funders, commissioners and practitioners have in the system?**

# How can we understand the 'system' within which alignment might happen?



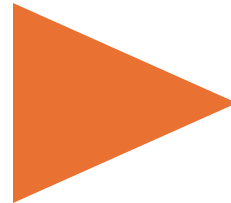
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One way to start thinking about alignment in the youth sector is by mapping out the system, and the key stakeholders who would need to work together in order to align. We conducted some high-level systems mapping to identify the key stakeholders influencing and impacting alignment efforts and the relationships between them. This followed three stages:

1. The system, as it is now



2. What we'd like to see change



3. What a new system could or should look like

This helped us to identify two main areas we'd like to see change. These were:

1. **Centring and empowering young people** to ensure the system is grounded in what matters to them
1. More clear recognition of the **responsibilities and powers of funders** and commissioners in driving alignment

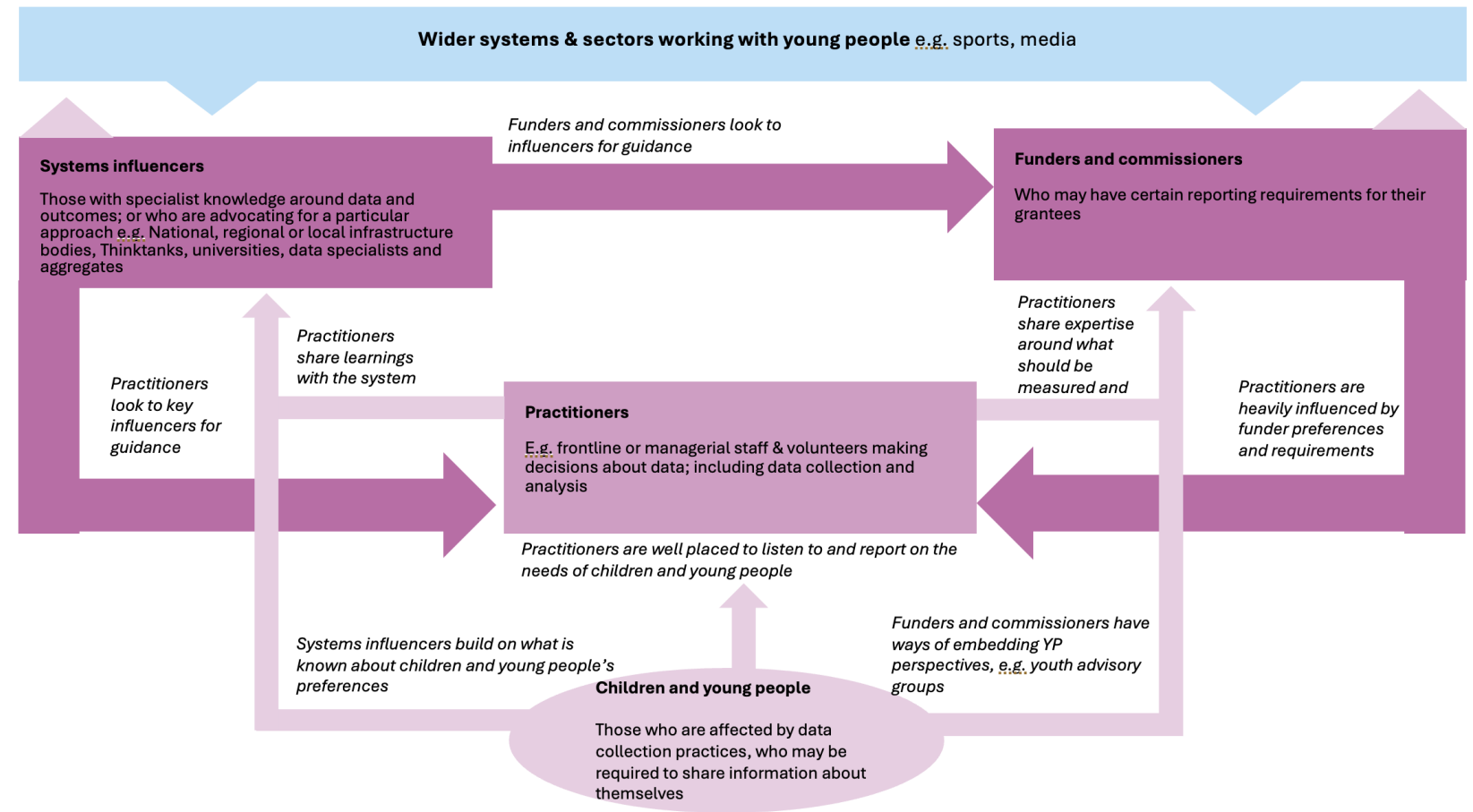
The following slides lay this out in more detail.

# The system, as it is now

The map below shows how we understand some of the key groups involved and the relationships between them in the system as we see it now:

Key things to note about this conception of the system include:

- The darker colours demonstrate increased power and influence in the system
- The system is not static but can shift over time. It's worth asking what conditions hold certain relationships or tensions in place when we are considering systems change
- This 'system' sits within and alongside bigger and other systems. You could imagine zooming out to see relationships with wider systems e.g. education, health

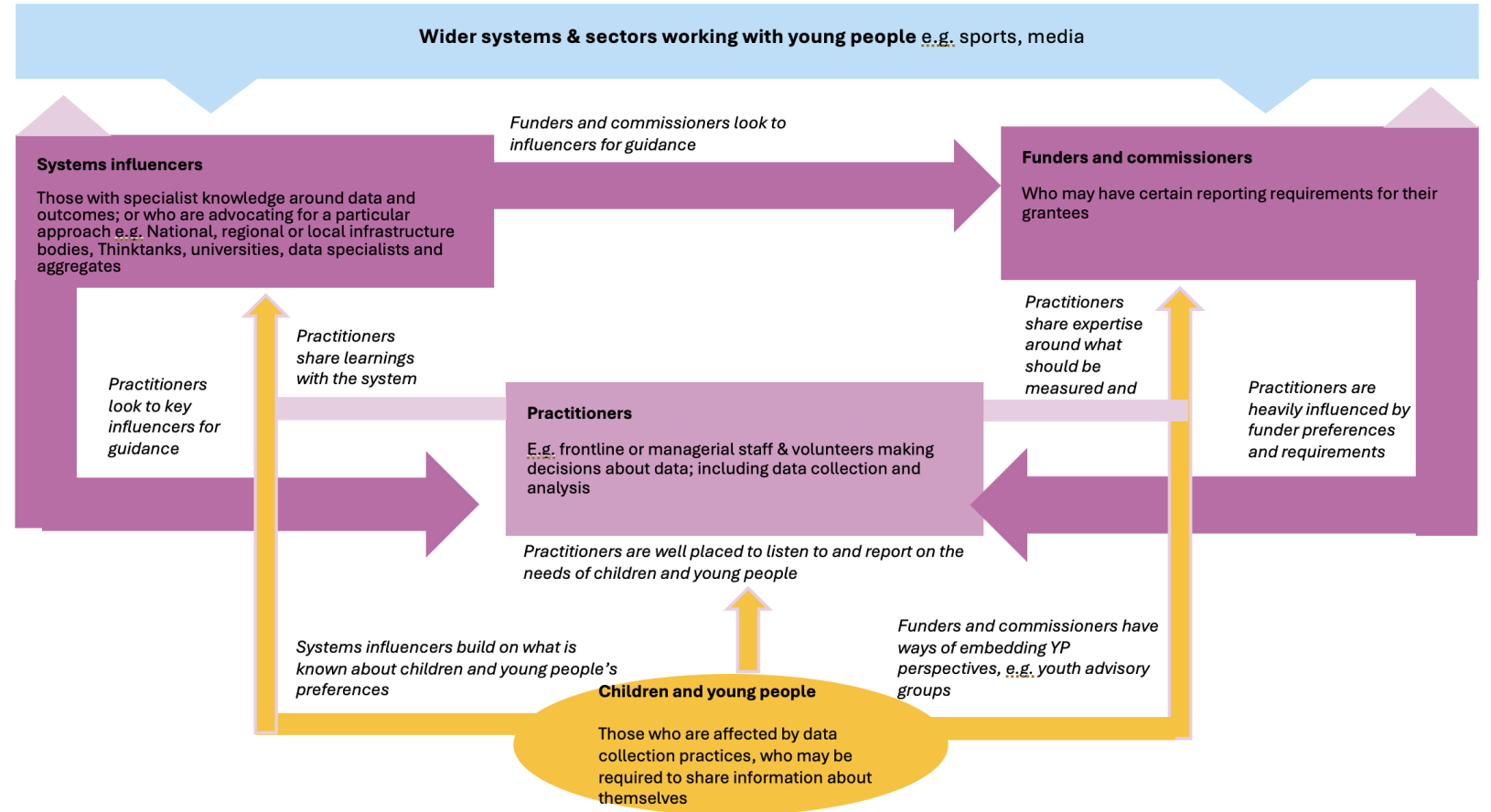


# What we'd like to see change:

## Centring children and young people

Centring children and young people in this context would mean:

- Emphasising their role as central to the conversation around data and alignment
- Developing the channels for youth voice that give young people power and levers for change in the system – whether that be with systems influencers, practitioners, funders or commissioners
- Starting with considering the impact on young people of any moves toward alignment

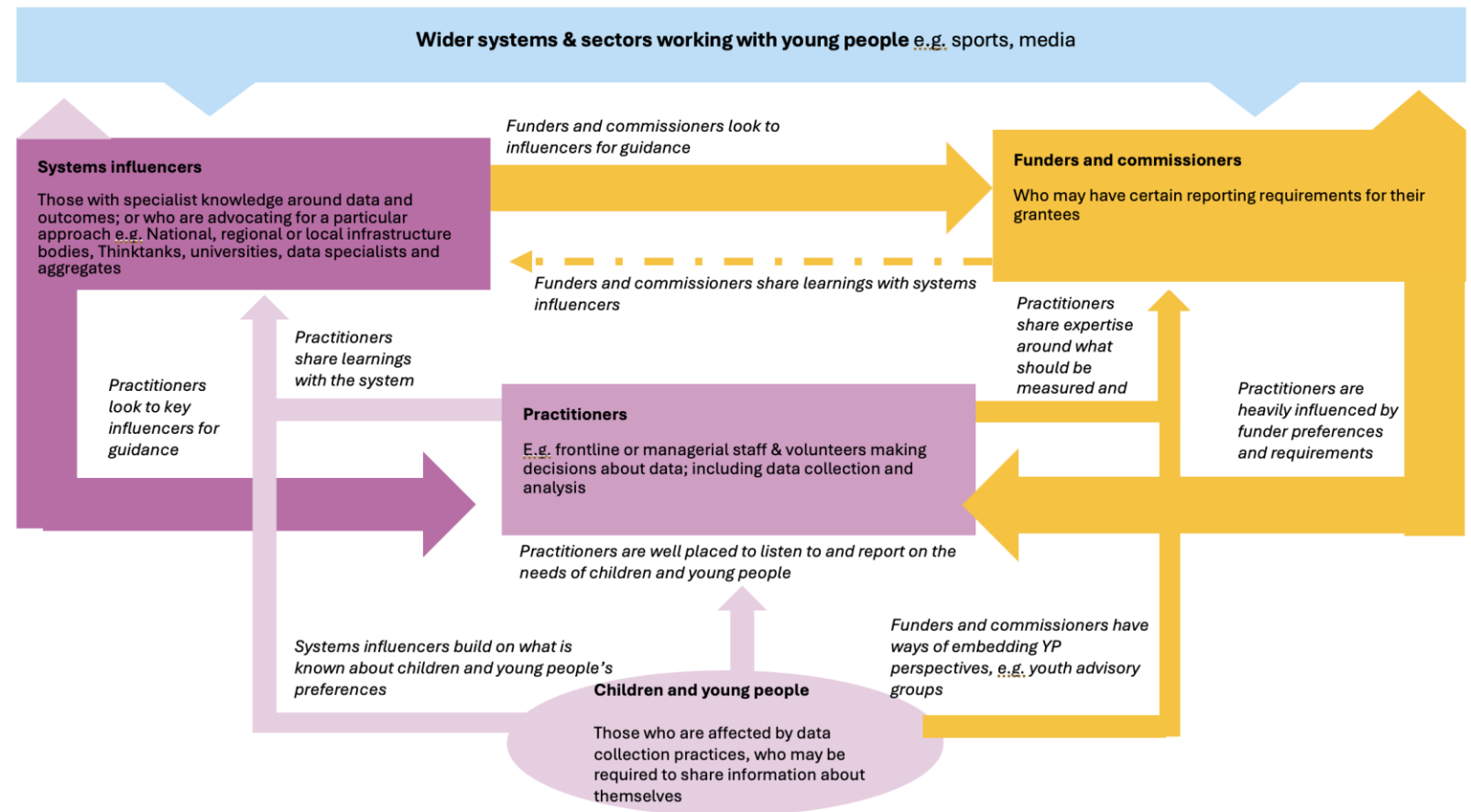


# What we'd like to see change:

## Acknowledging the influence and responsibility of funders and commissioners

This would mean:

- A clearer commitment to alignment on the part of funders and commissioners
- Emphasising their role as powerful influencers when it comes to data and alignment practices, and their being willing to 'step into' this power
- Developing collaborative practice to support more joined up working among funders
- Developing channels for communications and influence for funders and commissioners looking to support and drive alignment across the wider system
- Better awareness and championing of the issues and opportunities surrounding alignment among funders and commissioners



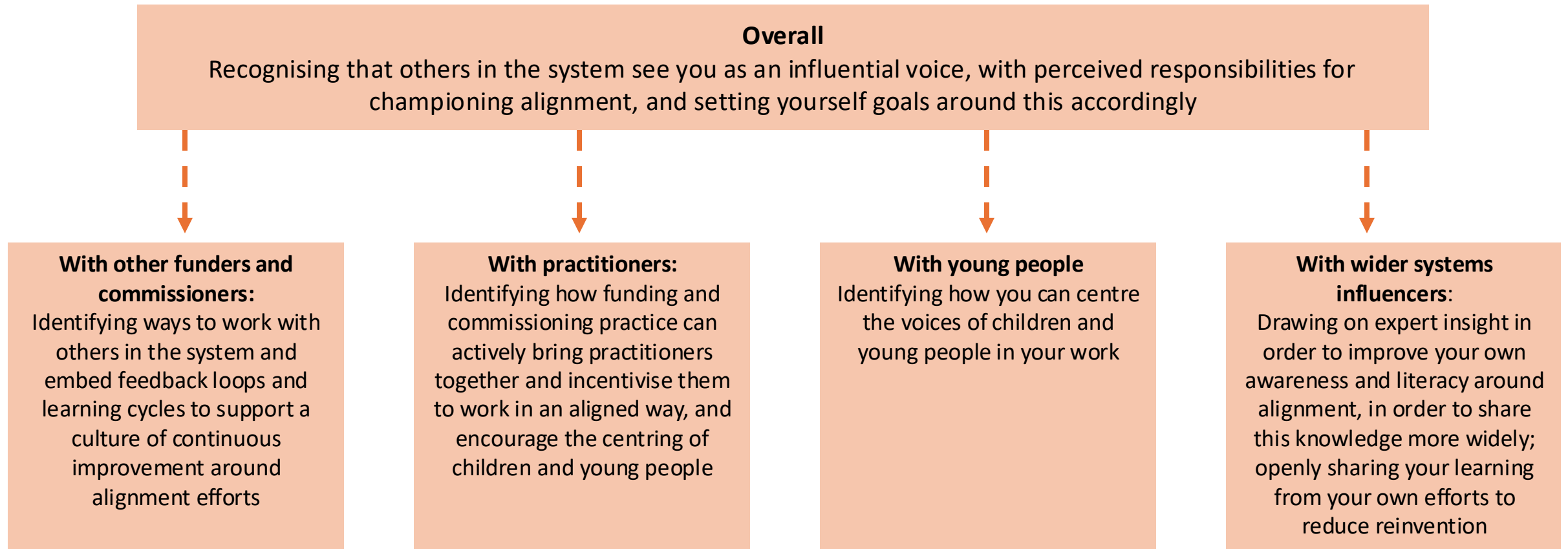
# What are the implications for funders and commissioners?



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If you're a funder or commissioner, this might mean:





# What are the implications for practitioners?



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If you're a practitioner, this might mean:

## Overall

Identifying the opportunities you have to centralise and amplify youth voice, where and how you can bring your practical expertise to support funders, commissioners and others to make good decisions around alignment



### **With funders and commissioners:**

Identifying opportunities for collaborative outcomes setting, sharing what is known about young people's needs and preferences around impact measurement

### **With other practitioners:**

Collaborating with practitioners in communities of practice or other forums where you can share learning around alignment of impact and promote meaningful practice

### **With young people**

Identifying how you can centre the voices of children and young people in your work

### **With wider systems influencers:**

Drawing on and sharing back with wider influencers in order to improve awareness and literacy around impact alignment across the system and embed this in your work.

A horizontal bar composed of five colored segments: orange, light green, light blue, teal, and yellow.

# **What are the opportunities?**

# **What be done do to support alignment efforts?**

# What might it take to increase alignment across the system?



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To move the system towards greater alignment, no *one* actor can shift the dial. Instead, multiple players from across lots of different parts of the system need to take action in concert and start to move towards working better, together.

There are some conditions that can support the move towards alignment across the whole sector, including:

- A set of shared principles that invite different stakeholders to commit to the idea of greater alignment and take steps to work towards it (see some examples in the next section)
- A coalition of interested parties and early adopters, ideally drawn from multiple 'places' within the system, who can work together to test, learn and improve on aligned approaches in practice
- A neutral 'driver' in the form of an organisation or collaboration that can convene the sector to identify and pursue new opportunities for alignment, build on the thinking laid out in these principles, and hold the sector to account; ideally with a youth voice mechanism embedded in this work
- A clear strategy, laying out the short-, medium- and longer-term goals of the work, with indicators of success at each stage
- Resourcing to support the work and enable longer-term planning
- Influential and inspiring leadership to take learning out to the wider sector, and promote good practice more widely

Through the work we discussed where there are **specific opportunity areas** for greater alignment. These are laid out in the following slides.

# We identified three overarching opportunity areas



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**1.**

Ensuring young people are kept at the heart of alignment efforts

**2.**

Developing clearer 'hooks' or 'starting points' into alignment efforts for people early on in their alignment journey

**3.**

Addressing barriers in funding structures that limit alignment

# What might this look like for funders and commissioners?



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Opportunity area	What might this look like for funders and commissioners?
<b>Ensuring young people are kept at the heart of alignment efforts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engaging young people in funder strategy development; young commissioner groups or use of youth voice models (e.g. Lundy Model) and working with them to define 'alignment' and what it means in practice</li><li>• Ensuring funded partners are embedding meaningful youth voice practice in their work and making their practice accountable to young people, and working together through common frameworks</li><li>• Testing and developing shared measurement methods with young people</li><li>• Investing in innovative practice around sharing power with young people when it comes to their data (e.g. through an app where they can track their own data and progress)</li></ul>
<b>Developing clearer 'hooks' or 'starting points' into alignment efforts for people early on in their alignment journey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building a clear and compelling argument around why moving to greater alignment makes sense in the first place, specifically outlining what the benefits will be for different stakeholders</li><li>• Identifying some criteria around what 'good' alignment practice looks like; and developing case studies to bring 'alignment' to life for different stakeholders</li><li>• Incentivising funded partners to engage in thinking about what meaningful alignment looks like for them, and what a 'starting point' might be</li><li>• Reflecting on your own starting point and position within the system to identify what meaningful alignment looks like for your funding or commissioning practice</li><li>• Investing in dashboards or platforms that enable live data visualisation, so those collecting data can quickly see how the data they are collecting can be used</li></ul>
<b>Addressing barriers in funding structures that limit alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Committing to ways of working that bring people to work together on common issues over a sustained period of time (e.g. longer term, unrestricted and collaborative funding models)</li><li>• Learning from past collaborative efforts like the DEI data standard, Propel, 360Giving and Grenfell Emergency funding</li><li>• Identifying and calling for opportunities for influential and inspiring leadership, including direction from central government that can support alignment</li></ul>

# What might this look like for practitioners?



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Opportunity area	What might this look like for practitioners?
<b>Ensuring young people are kept at the heart of alignment efforts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connecting the young people you work with to funders and commissioners to influence the design of funding mechanisms, and how they might support greater alignment with young people at the centre</li><li>• Embedding high quality youth voice practice in your work as standards and making your practice accountable to young people, through common frameworks</li><li>• Testing and developing shared measurement methods with young people</li><li>• Exploring innovative practice around sharing power with young people when it comes to their data (e.g. through an app where they can track their own data and progress)</li></ul>
<b>Developing clearer 'hooks' or 'starting points' into alignment efforts for people early on in their alignment journey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building a clear and compelling argument around why moving to greater alignment makes sense in the first place, specifically outlining what the benefits will be for different stakeholders</li><li>• Advocating clearly for greater alignment, drawing on these arguments</li><li>• Feeding into conversations around what 'good' alignment practice looks like</li><li>• Thinking about what meaningful alignment looks like, and what a 'starting point' might be in your practice, and sharing this with peers</li><li>• Trialling and sharing learnings from dashboards or platforms that enable live data visualisation</li></ul>
<b>Addressing barriers in funding structures that limit alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing feedback to funding partners around the ways in which their practice limits alignment and what might make this easier</li><li>• Advocating for alignment in work that is longer term and collaborative, and sharing learnings from these efforts</li></ul>

# We identified specific opportunity areas against each 'level' of alignment



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Narratives	Taking confidence in the premise that youth work is effective and building alignment from here	Better leveraging what is already known about effective practice	Supporting more joined up communication across the sector
Outcomes	Raise awareness about different outcomes sets in rotation and how these can be used to best effect	Funders using their leverage to align around outcomes sets	Collaborative outcomes setting between funders and practitioners to bridge the 'birds' eye' and 'on the ground' perspectives
Tools and approaches	Promote better 'measurement literacy' so people can make informed decisions around the tools they choose	Guidance for how the tools can be used in the 'real world'	Developing and quality assuring the tools themselves
Data	Fostering a culture that supports shared data processes	Encouraging alignment around ethical and equitable data practice	Identifying data fields where more standardisation is possible

# **Funders and commissioners**

**Where are there opportunities to support alignment efforts?**



# Narratives: 'ways in' for funders and commissioners



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Opportunity area	'Ways in' for funders and commissioners...
<b>Taking confidence in the premise that youth work is effective and building alignment from here</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reducing the drive or demand to 'prove' the effectiveness of youth work among funded partners, and instead focusing on building shared insight into who's engaging in youth work, for example, and how</li><li>• Developing a clearer stance that youth work has value for young people and communities, and instead promoting joint conversations about specific lines of enquiry or research questions of interest to the sector</li><li>• Testing key messages around the effectiveness of youth work to understand framing and how these can be used to best effect</li></ul>
<b>Better leveraging what is already known about effective practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Synthesising historic data that you're holding to draw out what is already known about youth work practice and sharing it openly</li><li>• Identifying bigger players in the sector who can take more responsibility for narrative work, and the ways in which they can support smaller organisations / ensuring that the pressure for 'narrative shaping' does not sit too heavily on young people/ those with lived experience</li></ul>
<b>Supporting more joined up communication across the sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resourcing proactive, collaborative narrative shaping activities, which bring together practitioners, young people, sector leaders, funders and commissioners</li><li>• Engaging in collaborative strategy development and goal setting with other funders and commissioners</li><li>• Identifying the core narratives that are already in use and effective, which those looking to align could 'align to'</li><li>• Identifying, defining and emphasising core elements of youth work that make it distinctive, e.g. 'relational practice', 'youth work'</li><li>• Conducting clearer mapping of the sector to identify who needs to be involved in narrative shaping and to ensure key groups aren't missed – e.g. volunteers, smaller organisations</li></ul>

# Outcomes: 'ways in' for funders and commissioners



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Opportunity area	'Ways in' for funders and commissioners...
<b>Raise awareness about different outcomes sets in rotation and how these can be used to best effect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outlining and making clear some of the different outcomes frameworks used in the sector, and the trade-offs involved in choosing between the different sets</li><li>• Exploring how broader-scope outcomes frameworks can sit alongside and support more targeted or relational practice and person-centred delivery.</li><li>• Better promoting the ways in which 'soft' or relationship-based outcomes can be understood and measured robustly</li></ul>
<b>Funders and commissioners using their leverage to align around outcomes sets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Signing up to and championing alignment principles to demonstrate a commitment to supporting alignment</li><li>• Trialling approaches to aligning around very simple outcomes sets or principles, to begin learning in practice</li><li>• Establishing regional pilots to test how funders can work towards shared outcomes (e.g. through established funding groups or networks such as London Funders)</li><li>• Learning from existing outcomes frameworks, and how these are implemented in practice e.g. funder-specific outcomes frameworks; the Common Outcomes Framework</li></ul>
<b>Collaborative outcomes setting between funders and practitioners to bridge the 'birds' eye' and 'on the ground' perspectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding collaborative spaces that bring together funders, commissioners and practitioners to build up trusting relationships and align language around outcomes</li><li>• Identifying areas where funder need and practitioner needs around outcome setting are in tension and what can be done to mitigate this</li></ul>

# Tools and approaches: ‘ways in’ for funders and commissioners



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Opportunity area	‘Ways in’ for funders and commissioners...
<b>Promote better ‘measurement literacy’ so people can make informed decisions around the tools they choose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developing clear guidance, in plain English, for anyone interested to know more about which tools might work to support which outcomes sets and the trade-offs and investment involved in using different measurement systems</li><li>• Developing training for specific tools and approaches to support consistent use of the tools available</li><li>• Exploring and championing evaluation methods that are favoured by young people and which support (rather than disrupt) the positive relationships between young people and youth workers</li><li>• Clarifying where alignment is most beneficial (for example, a small, core set of outcomes), and where divergence may be welcome</li></ul>
<b>Guidance for how the tools can be used in the ‘real world’</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting a culture of ‘pragmatism over perfectionism’, recognising the importance of testing and learning in the real world and sharing learnings from trialling tools and approaches in different contexts</li><li>• Promoting awareness of the ways in which measure can be used flexibly or in conjunction with other tools</li><li>• Supporting communities of practice who can share learnings and support around measurement in practice</li><li>• Exploring the different incentives and barriers for young people to engage in longer-term ‘tracking’ of impact, and how this can be incentivised ethically, equitably and appropriately</li></ul>
<b>Developing and quality assuring the tools themselves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing tool-specific ‘how to guides’ that sit alongside the tools themselves</li><li>• Building the sector’s confidence that tools and measures are being reviewed and optimised over time by providing more information e.g. when and how tools will be reviewed, what this process will look like</li><li>• Promoting and funding collaboration between different developers to align and decouple tools</li><li>• Reviewing the tools from an equity lens to surface any inherent assumptions around approaches, cultures and lenses and suggest more inclusive adaptations or alternatives as needed</li></ul>

# Data and datasets: ‘ways in’ for funders and commissioners



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Opportunity area	‘Ways in’ for funders and commissioners...
<b>Fostering a culture that supports shared data processes</b>	Identifying and supporting existing data sharing initiatives, and adopting them within your own practice Acting as brokers between funded partners to create collaborative goals Using local or regional models as a way to trial and encourage more collaborative working in specific places; share evidence locally; and generate an evidence base that demonstrates local need Ensuring data collected is beneficial for practitioners, as well as for funders and commissioners
<b>Encouraging alignment around ethical and equitable data practice</b>	Creating a clearer understanding about what proportionate data-collection looks like when working with young people Producing guidance around how demographic data, personal data or more sensitive data can be collected ethically and in a non-intrusive way Developing clearer lines of accountability and feedback around how information will be used, who and what the data is for, and how sharing it will be for the benefit of the young people sharing their information
<b>Identifying data fields where more standardisation is possible</b>	Reviewing and exploring the ways in which data collection can be streamlined between different funders, commissioners and delivery partners, so data collection only needs to be done once Identifying the data fields where more standardisations may be possible and offering specific guidance around how this can be done well (e.g. demographic data standard); Identifying where common data is already captured and how this could be better aligned – e.g. reviewing and agreeing the data that gets captured and shared in 360Giving

# Practitioners

**Where are there opportunities to support alignment efforts?**

# Narratives: ‘ways in’ for for practitioners



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Opportunity area	‘Ways in’ for practitioners...
<b>Taking confidence in the premise that youth work is effective and building alignment from here</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developing a clearer and more collective stance about <i>why</i> youth work is effective and building a common language to talk about different forms of practice</li><li>• Testing key messages around the effectiveness of youth work to understand framing and how these can be used to best effect</li></ul>
<b>Better leveraging what is already known about effective practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Synthesising and openly sharing historic data to draw out what is already known about youth work practice</li><li>• Identifying the ways in which your organisation can support or feed into ‘narrative shaping’</li></ul>
<b>Supporting more joined up communication across the sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Getting involved in collaborative narrative shaping activities, which bring together practitioners, young people, sector leaders, funders and commissioners</li><li>• Engaging in collaborative strategy development and goal setting with other practitioners, and writing these up as shared strategies, manifestos, or vision statements</li><li>• Identifying the core narratives that are already in use and effective, where those looking to align could ‘align to’</li><li>• Identifying, defining and emphasising core elements of youth work that make it distinctive, e.g. ‘relational practice’, ‘youth work’</li><li>• Conduct clearer mapping of the sector to identify who needs to be involved in narrative shaping and to ensure key groups aren’t missed – e.g. volunteers, smaller organisations</li></ul>

# Outcomes: ‘ways in’ for practitioners



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Opportunity area	‘Ways in’ for practitioners...
<b>Raise awareness about different outcomes sets in rotation and how these can be used to best effect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exploring and trialling some of the different outcomes frameworks used in the sector, and sharing learnings from embedding these in practice</li><li>• Exploring how broader-focused outcomes sets can sit alongside and support more targeted or relational practice and person-centred delivery.</li><li>• Exploring the ways in which so-called ‘soft’ or relationship-based outcomes can be understood and measured robustly</li><li>• Mapping language across outcomes frameworks to highlight similarity rather than difference</li></ul>
<b>Funders and commissioners using their leverage to align around outcomes sets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Signing up to and championing alignment principles to demonstrate a commitment to supporting alignment</li><li>• Trialling approaches to aligning around very simple outcomes sets or principles, to begin learning in practice</li><li>• Engaging in regional pilots to test how practitioners can work towards shared outcomes (e.g. through established funding groups and networks such as London Funders)</li><li>• Learning from existing outcomes frameworks, and how these are implemented in practice e.g. funder-specific outcomes frameworks; the Common Outcomes Framework</li></ul>
<b>Collaborative outcomes setting between funders and practitioners to bridge the ‘birds’ eye’ and ‘on the ground’ perspectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participating in collaborative spaces that bring together funders, commissioners and practitioners to build up trusting relationships and align language around outcomes</li><li>• Identifying areas where funder need and practitioner needs around outcome setting are in tension and what can be done to mitigate this</li></ul>

# Tools and approaches: 'ways in' for practitioners

Opportunity area	'Ways in' for practitioners...
<b>Promote better 'measurement literacy' so people can make informed decisions around the tools they choose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing learning from the tools and approaches you've trialled</li><li>• Exploring and championing evaluation methods that are favoured by young people and which support (rather than disrupt) the positive relationships between young people and youth workers</li></ul>
<b>Guidance for how the tools can be used in the 'real world'</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting a culture of 'pragmatism over perfectionism', recognising the importance of testing and learning in the real world and sharing learnings from trialling tools and approaches in different contexts</li><li>• Exploring and promoting awareness of the ways in which measure sets can be used flexibly or in conjunction with other tools</li><li>• Participating in communities of practice who can share learnings and support around measurement in practice</li><li>• Explore the different incentives and barriers for young people to engage in impact tracking, and how this can be incentivised ethically, equitably and appropriately</li></ul>
<b>Developing and quality assuring the tools themselves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing feedback on the tools and measures which you have used and which could be adapted or updated for different contexts, including around how the tools themselves could be better aligned and decoupled</li><li>• Reviewing the tools from an equity lens to surface any inherent assumptions around approaches, cultures and lenses and suggest more inclusive adaptations or alternatives as needed</li></ul>



# Data and datasets: ‘ways in’ for practitioners



Here for young people  
Here for communities  
Here for you

THE CENTRE  
FOR YOUTH  
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Opportunity area	‘Ways in’ for practitioners...
<b>Fostering a culture that supports shared data processes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identifying and supporting existing data sharing initiatives</li><li>• Create collaborative goals with other practitioners</li><li>• Using local or regional models as a way to trial and encourage more collaborative working in specific places; share evidence locally; and generate an evidence base that demonstrates local need</li><li>• Advocating for collecting data that benefits practice, in addition to reporting to funders and commissioners</li></ul>
<b>Encouraging alignment around ethical and equitable data practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing insight around what proportionate data-collection looks like when working with young people</li><li>• Sharing insight around how demographic data, personal data or more sensitive data can be collected ethically and in a non-intrusive way</li><li>• Developing clearer lines of accountability and feedback around how information will be used, who and what the data is for, and how sharing it will be for the benefit of the young people sharing their information</li></ul>
<b>Identifying data fields where more standardisation is possible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reviewing and exploring the ways in which data collection can be streamlined between different partners young people interact with, so data collection only needs to be done once</li><li>• Identifying the data fields where more standardisations may be possible and offering specific guidance around how this can be done well (e.g. demographic data standard)</li></ul>

A horizontal bar composed of five colored segments: orange, green, blue, teal, and yellow.

# **We developed five principles to support alignment**

## **These principles are for everyone**

## Prioritise alignment over other things

This means identifying where you can become practically involved and taking action. This might look like:

1

- Joining or forming a community of practice with publicly stated goals around alignment
- Developing or trialling shared outcomes frameworks, methods or approaches
- Allocating funding or resource to support alignment in the sector (e.g. providing training or space for collaborative working)
- Reviewing/pooling data to identify what is known about outcomes, tools and effective practice, to bolster narratives where needed
- Promoting and sharing best practice around alignment (e.g. writing expectations into commissioning)

**2**

## **Treat young people as subjects, rather than objects, of alignment efforts**

This means working to ensure young people are central in decision making and alignment efforts are accountable to young people in some way. This might look like building or supporting youth voice practice in the sector, advocating for youth voice in alignment or identifying funding streams to support this.

3

## Embed equity, diversity and inclusion in alignment efforts

Alignment should not shut out or ‘mask’ diversity but instead raise the quality bar around EDI efforts to make sure this is more consistent across the sector. This might look like seeking feedback and input from more marginalised groups around terminology and the perceived risks/benefits of sharing data about identity and experience; and valuing diverse forms of impact measurement, whilst updating and adapting standardised tools and approaches where needed.

A large black circle containing the white number '4', indicating the fourth point in a list.

## 4

### **Do something collaborative with the data you collect**

Everyone needs to work in concert in order to shift the needle on alignment. This might look like collaborative or pooled funding, use of shared reporting or outcomes frameworks, committing to data standards, or opening up data sets.

## Keep talking about what you're learning

5

The sector needs to hear from real world alignment efforts, to demystify 'alignment' and support a culture of pragmatism over perfectionism. This might look like committing to trialling new approaches over extended timeframes and recording learning along the way; publishing learning reports and case studies.