

On 12 June 2024 mySociety convened funders at **The Impacts of Civic Technology Conference** to discuss their views on supporting civic tech to achieve its maximum potential across the globe. This year, instead of holding an open funders panel at the conference, we took the opportunity to convene a group of funders in a private session to enable a more open dialogue - exploring the trends, challenges and opportunities they see, using Chatham House Rules. 12 funders joined the discussion and a mix of UK, European and International focus areas were represented. The key themes uncovered were as follows...

More funders grant to civic tech, than would call themselves “civic tech funders”

This interesting observation of language is helpful for grant seekers to consider when positioning themselves. Many funders in the room did not use the term civic tech, or recognise themselves as a civic tech funder, but had awarded grants to charities that use technology to impact society. There was an acknowledgement of the lack of understanding amongst funders of how civic tech could be used, although the trend for some seemed to be moving away from seeing it as a risky area to more of an opportunity for them.

1

The need to demonstrate the ‘and so what’ for tech infrastructure projects

A critique was raised that potentially a lot of work was going on in the anticorruption space to surface data and create platforms, but that funders couldn’t always see the tangible impact of this and asked the question about who was then bringing that information to the public or working on strategic litigation. However, a counter in the room was that philanthropic funders are in the privileged position to fund infrastructure projects where you cannot always see or predict what the eventual impacts will be.

2

Civil Society’s digital competency

It was noted that the majority of civil society organisations that funders interact with do not have sophisticated tech access or capabilities, often due to lack of resource or capacity to invest in solutions. Therefore the sophisticated products being created by the civic tech space may not be usable for grassroots community work. Good examples of civic tech products being used for civil society included better use of targeting with digital and using technology to scale, as well as using tech to mobilise volunteers. There was also an acknowledgement of digital exclusion across society and how providers of civic tech must consider innovative approaches to meet people ‘where they are at’ - one funder saw the potential for civic tech to connect grassroots organisations, helping movements to spread like a WW2 resistance movement!

3

More partnerships please!

The strength of funders partnering with other funders was articulated in examples where seed funding from one foundation enabled another longer term funder to join and take a project from launch through to growth. There was a recognition that the scale of the societal challenges required joined-up working across the sector - funders also urged civil society to understand the ecosystem they operate in and find collaborators, trying to avoid duplication or competition.

4

Much of this discussion was informed by sessions held at TICTeC [you can view the conference recordings here](#)