

What the COLIF pilot tells us about Civic-Academic collaboration

About the Evaluation

As part of the **Creating Opportunities Through Innovation Fellowships (COLIF)** Programme, one cluster externally *evaluated* how their model operated, *what value* it created, and *what lessons* could support future place-based Fellowship schemes.

About the COLIF Model



COLIF aimed to build stronger **links between universities and local communities** through short, civic-led projects. Cluster 5 **designed a regional model** and **funded two projects**. Each project began with a civic partner identifying the problem, supported by an Impact Professional (Professional Services) at a local university. An academic team was then appointed to respond.

The goal was to test a more open and responsive way to design research.



What the Evaluation Found

1. Civic-first design

Ensures the projects are grounded in identified needs and priorities, often based on previous research and consultation.

2. Flexible project brief

Allowed research teams to adapt and leverage their expertise.

3. Academic-Civic Collaboration

Enabled meaningful engagement with stakeholders and holistic understanding of the civic partner's work. It can also provide a capacity boost especially to small civic organisations.

4. Interdisciplinary teams

There was a variety of skills and expertise across the project teams.

5. Professional Services involvement

Professional Services staff connected the civic and academic sides. They did this by translating institutional processes (contracts, finance, ethics) into something that civic partners could navigate.



6. Relational trust

Pre-existing relationships and networks among civic partners and universities facilitated collaboration and impact.

7. Network-leading civic partners

Having "anchor" or network-leading civic partners helped ensure reach and influence.

What the Model Enabled

- **Stronger, more trusted** civic-university ties.
- More **confidence** and **credibility** for civic groups.
- **Better use of evidence** in local policy.
- **New academic skills** in civic-led research.
- **Clearer routes** for civic partners to influence local policies.
- **Valuable opportunities** for academics to apply their work to real-world problems.

Building Blocks for future programmes

- Allow **12+ months** for **setup** and **delivery**.
- Provide **dedicated funding** for **Professional Services**.
- Recognise that **some** civic partners will **need funding** to **participate meaningfully** as a partner.
- More in the **full report...**

