

## Case study 2: Movers & Shakers

How to successfully shift power (and funds) back into the hands of the local community.

**[T]here's a lot of passion for the community, and it's re-mobilising those people, because those people are the change makers, they just need a little bit of support.**

Movers and Shakers panellist

## About the project

The Movers & Shakers Community Fund is a participatory project focussed on shifting power (and funds) back into the hands of the local community. The Fund aimed to bring people in the Amber Valley together, and support individuals and informal groups to try out new ideas.

The Movers & Shakers Panel, a group of local individuals, work collectively to co-design and make decisions on who received funding. The decision to pay panel members valued participation and lived experience as work.

The Fund comprised £30k and was designed and delivered between summer 2024 and early 2026, with three rounds of call outs, application and funds given. The funds ranged between £300 and £1000, with an average of around £900, the final round of funding went out in December 2025 for projects early in 2026.

For the first round, six Panel members were nominated by local collaborators and selected by Make/Shift's Creative Director. There were two men and four women, who ranged in age and socio-economic demographics. Each represented a different geographic community in Amber Valley.

Panel members were provided with training in:

- Concepts and practices of participatory design and budgeting
- Consensus decision-making
- Conflict resolution

They then met to co-design the whole funding and awards process, including from values and purpose, to practicalities such as criteria, model of call out, application form design, whether and how to interview and language and approach. Getting the criteria right was felt by the panel to be key and they developed a set which were transparent and inclusive (see table opposite).

Panel members were provided with £1,200 for their time (based on 60 hrs of work). Five of the six members from the first round decided to continue onto the second. For the third round the original panel members worked together to establish some terms for how membership of the panel might keep evolving.

They decided that they wanted to try and have a mix of existing people (to retain learning) new people (to bring fresh perspective) and people who had been funded (to bring lived experience of going through the process). Following this decision, two panel members from Rounds 1 and 2 stepped down – and three new people were invited to join, including two people who were funded from Round 1.

### Rounds, panel members and applications

- Development phase – co-design of values, purpose and practical delivery Summer 2024 – Sept 2024
- Round 1, 18th Sep to 27th Oct 2024, 22 applicants, average fund = £858
- Round 2, 19th Mar to 18th May 2025, 31 applicants, average fund = £836
- Round 3, 20th Sep to 16th Nov 2025, 24 applicants, average fund = £937
- Panel members – 6 x first round, 5 x second round, 6 x third round
- 77 total applications across 3 rounds, 32 funded

### Applicants:

- Had to live, work, study or have a strong connection with Amber Valley (stipulated by the Arts Council providing the funding)
- Had not received funding within the last two years
- Would ask for small funds from £1 to £1,000

### Projects that:

- Connected communities
- Were kind to the planet
- Brought joy to the applicant and/or project participants

Table 1: Criteria for applicants and projects

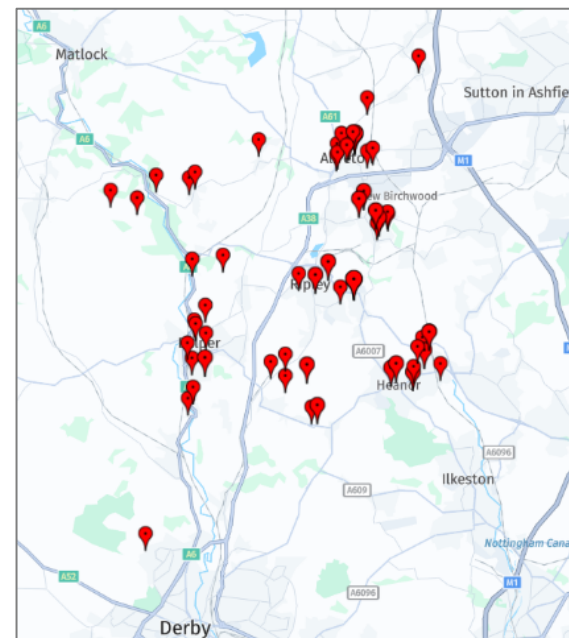


Figure 1: Geographical locations of applicants by postcode

# Approaches

## Trust the process

Movers & Shakers was centred around doing things differently to connect with communities. Make/Shift openly approached Movers & Shakers as an opportunity in itself, to try new ways of working and to trust in the process as more than just a set of outcomes.

**[W]e're not off-the-shelf, we're not like the other grant funds and I know we don't want to be.**

Gemma, panellist

Learning was put into practice through the Panel selection methods, the decision-making processes and training. Initial training allowed Panel members to understand the differences between traditional community funding and Make/Shift's more democratic approach. It included a theoretical grounding in new concepts (participatory grant making), a practical appreciation of new behaviour (consensus-led decision making) and socially supportive environments (outside gardens and good food).

**[L]ooking at how grants work traditionally, [we discussed] how we would hope to be different; for the people, by the people, rather than top down.**

Claire, panellist

For the Movers & Shakers themselves, trusting the process involved taking 'meaningful risk', where control and direction was largely relinquished.

## Example successful third round applications

- Men's Journaling and Bookbinding – a group for men meeting in a pub setting, using practical projects to support mental health
- Folk Art Workshops – therapeutic canal boat art workshops using recycled materials to help people combat isolation
- Table Top Chaos Club – action research into adult play, providing participants with random objects to stimulate creative exploration
- Chronic Crafters – a safe, accessible drop-in space for people with chronic illnesses to share creative crafts and practical health knowledge in a non-judgmental environment

This is exemplified by one second round awardee, who naturally adopted the ethos of Make/Shift in his project the *Table Top Chaos Club*, which asked its participants the deceptively simple question "What shall we do here?".

## Start with strengths

Make/Shift's approach starts with the recognition that assets (past experience, personal skills and attributes) are already existing in the community. The Panel crucially decided that they would not require any proof of expenditure from successful applicants or evidence of intended outcomes. This decision by the Panel is non-traditional, with funding made purely on the basis of trust so that applicants are free to explore without judgement on outcomes.

**[W]e really wanted to dive down and offer opportunities to people who have never done this type of thing before, and for them to bring something to life that they may not be able to do [otherwise]. They don't need a bank account, a constitution – they can just go and try an idea.**

Linda, panellist

Skills and assets were then 'revitalised' as a result of the validation people received from the panellists.

**[T]his project will bring alive my teaching skills again.**

Mover & Shaker

## Ecosystems not empires

Make/Shift employed a devolved decision-making approach from the community Movers & Shakers Panel to the Movers & Shakers themselves, then on to the participants. From the very design and implementation of a community-led approach to distributing funding the decision-making was delegated from the outset.

The Panel was not just 'hired' but had a sense of group agency in determining its own development. This approach removed some of the hierarchical power imbalance between a panel and applicants.

**Trying to get people to understand that there's titles but there's no hierarchy is quite interesting – a social experiment.**

Linda, panellist

For the Movers & Shakers Panel, the approach was for them to decide how they as the Panel operate. Therefore, after having employed a professional trainer for the first round, Make/Shift team member Ian when taking on the facilitation role for the fund, advocated self-led inquiry and peer-to-peer development for the second round:

**We're going to do our own learning and development [...] We want them more to feel like they own this. They run it. They decide what that training is. They decide what they need to learn.**

Ian, Make/Shift team member

## Mutual exchange

A recurring approach adopted by the Movers & Shakers across this diverse portfolio of projects is the reciprocal nature of learning as a form of mutual exchange. One Mover & Shaker described an approach to their participants where they weren't the sole teacher, but rather worked alongside their community to share practical making techniques. This project facilitator explicitly rejected a top-down model:

**I don't want to be the one teaching. I want to be in it with people... let's have the peer-to-peer [approach], because I don't know everything.**

Mover & Shaker

Several projects were purposefully designed to be either low-cost, or free to attend, to ensure those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits were able to participate. "I wanted it to be free so that it was accessible... people weren't [otherwise] having the opportunity... to

be able to take part,” one Mover & Shaker commented. Another planned their market outreach during school holidays to provide activities for families who “perhaps can't afford to get away on holiday”.

Beyond these equitable practices around cost, value and (ultimately) access, many Movers & Shakers also approached their resourcing through the logic of exchange, through upcycling and a sharing of community assets.

One project in particular introduced the idea of a ‘resource pool’, where objects made by participants stayed with the club for others to use. The mutual exchange of resources and the reciprocal peer-to-peer approach sat alongside one another, aiming to decentralise ownership, and distribute power.

## Demonstrate possibilities

While Make/Shift’s longer-term ambition is for the community fund to be managed ‘by the people, for the people’, the recruitment for the first round Panel was begun through peer nominations then individual selection. The trust developed between Make/Shift and their first round panellists (and between the panellists themselves) was a significant step towards demonstrating this wider ambition.

**So, it’s nothing like I’ve ever experienced before. I didn’t have to go through a formal process, and do an application form. But it felt like it was thought out [...]**

**So, when I met everyone [on the Panel] I could see what they’re trying to do. This is fantastic, they want people who are on the ground.**

Gemma, panellist

To ensure consistency across this portfolio of funded community projects, regular ‘Mover & Shaker meetups’ were also held to create space for peer to peer sharing – allowing community members to share and explore what they could get from each other.

It also support those who held the funds to feel and explore their agency, and reassure that Make/Shift wasn’t there to tell them what to do (as other more traditional funding relationships might have led to them expecting), and by giving a space to share what had happened so far, so to outwardly demonstrate what is possible.

## Outcomes

### Making

#### Recognise the value of arts and culture for making change

The initial ‘call’ to making, crafting and community connection has wider outcomes than simply mobilising making – making is a means to an end. In the case of *Chronic Crafters*, the wellbeing and potential health benefits of the group outweighed the making and skill-sharing aspects of the work, intensified further by the suggestion that another group used the ‘secret’ of making to create social change:

**The secret thing is really to have a practical project and then you've got men around a table, and they can chat to each other.**

Mover & Shaker

The making phase of Make/Shift’s overarching approach ultimately underpinned the way trust was built in their local communities, so

that by gathering around a practical project, conversation and connection become positive secondary outcomes.

## Value creativity

Valuing creativity and gathering around it therefore create the safe space for connection to occur. 'Learning through doing' also means that process itself becomes a type of outcome, unlike traditional grants systems that put emphasis on end of project outcomes. Central to this is the recurrence of the words 'trust' and – as we now introduce here – 'care'. Interviewees felt that both trust and care are vital, both internally and externally, to the success of the collective 'work'.

**Everyone has been really sincere about the process – not just 'let's get this done', more 'I like this because this reminds me of this thing and [I] care about this thing'. It's quite moving in a way.**

Panellist

At an Open House event, free activities allowed community members to access making. Movers & Shakers were invited to share activities, skills and memories of making. By engaging at their own pace, community members could build trust, while being introduced to the wider Make/Shift community.

Elements such as *Fireside Chats* and *Object Storytelling* activities were particularly well-received. Conversely, activities perceived as 'less sustainable' were seen by some participants as prioritising design over content. This feedback shows how Makes/Shift leading with values around accessibility and ethics (easy access, low environmental impact) also prompts participants to consider the value they place on creative activity.

We see that valuing creativity doesn't depend on cost or complexity. In this case, where new materials were bought this was seen as unnecessary. Here value is as much about 'doing the right thing' in the eyes of the attendees as it is about 'adding value' (by buying new materials or overly designing an activity).

## Connecting

### Sense of social connection

Movers & Shakers, for its panellists, appeared largely a labour of love. Towards the end of the fund, the Panel were planning to meet to share food and company before the fund closes:

**It's been nice to have that [social connection], because that has helped when we're doing the work, because we know each other's personalities.**

Gemma, panellist

This 'work' validated a sense of community, or of being a part of something larger than the individual.

**[T]hese are people I've never really met or mix with to a certain extent. I'm probably more experienced on the business side of things, business focus. But with that, we all bring something different to it, [including] how we are thinking.**

Tony, panellist

This panellist also described the different approaches between his experience of objective-led 'backward' planning, and the more

'meandering' process of deliberative or consensus based decision-making that were used during the community panel decision making process. Certainly, training has been well-received – this panellist even saying he had taken this into his other work elsewhere – which does represent an opportunity and space in which to explore the cross-fertilisation of panellists' outside experience.

For the most part, Movers & Shakers Panel members speak glowingly of their experience with Make/Shift and advocate for the Make/Shift approach:

**Make/Shift are empowering individuals in communities to believe in their own ideas and themselves [...] but what they're *really* doing is connecting people, and through facilitating those connections, they are helping people uplift.**

Gemma, panellist

### **Sense of stewardship of place and nature**

For the Movers & Shakers themselves, being both a community connector and aiming to inspire and empower was complex to navigate. Using events like *Open House*, and in bringing people together through making, Make/Shift have created opportunities to clarify their role as a facilitator within the wider community.

This has helped to counteract a common misconception identified among community members that the Movers & Shakers funds are solely for professional artist development.

**We're trying to look at that now – how we can change the marketing to help people realise that this is a different type of funding.**

Linda, panellist

Holding events that reinforce this role of 'connector' can risk re-positioning Make/Shift towards the centre of the local ecology, though it does ensure their message is clearly shared and understood in the short term. This tension, of course, is one that has to be held lightly.

### **Shifting**

#### **Ignited curiosity and shifted perspective**

The fact that Panel members were enthusiastic to remain as panellists demonstrated how beneficial they have found the experience. Out of the six panellists chosen for the first round, five continued to the second, and three remained for the third round too, with the other two leaving only to ensure wider representation was possible. Each brought their own community network, connecting with communities that Make/Shift would be unlikely to access via other channels.

The panel members were very aware of the challenges of this. At the end of Round 2, panel members discussed concerns that the lack of change within the Panel may have challenged its democratic aims by potentially inhibiting the recruitment of new members; members also identified that there were wider communities and demographics not yet represented, and an imbalance in terms of gender.

**I felt 'challenged to challenge' [...] we're never all going to be on the same page, that's the point, [representing different viewpoints].**

Gemma, panellist

This reflective critique led directly to the new model for panel composition of including new members, representing new communities, while retaining some experienced ones at every round. Creating the 'best of both worlds' mix of experience and change and an ever changing composition.

In reality, these collaborative tensions appear to have been mostly generative:

**C: [Another Panel member] asked me why I thought that – and I thought, “Well why do I think that?”, and I explained my thought processes, and [the other panellist] was like, “Yes, you’ve convinced me.”**

**L: [... The other panellist] would come in with a crucial question that would make us all think.**

**C: We all bring something different to the process.**

Linda and Claire, panellists

## **Increased knowledge and skills to resource and run projects**

The Movers & Shakers themselves described their own development, one in particular choosing to define this as 'embodied experiential learning':

**I can capitalise on my learning by actually now putting it into practice [...] I'm more equipped.**

Mover & Shaker

The Movers & Shakers, in turn, shared skills and capabilities with their local communities. In particular, one project was designed as a way to 'invest' in young people, recognising their strengths and their potential to become the 'future volunteers for the town', and transitioning them from volunteers to paid staff on zero hours contracts once they were trained:

**[W]e actually offered them zero hours contracts, but they'd got set hours every week, which was great.**

Mover & Shaker

One young person successfully secured funding to launch an open mic project, a result of the support they received during the application process. Questions arise about the ethics of supported applications, and whether project proposals may be mis-shaped by interference from others, but this case does exemplify where that support was potentially the difference between success and being overlooked.

## **Seeing the value of bottom up and collaborative ways of working**

Movers & Shakers identified the value of collaborative projects in their communities. The Panel's application criteria were about making it as easy as possible; the decision not to have a means of follow-up testing and calls for evidence put trust at the forefront, and in doing so, placed value on the process, not the outcome.

**It's helping people who don't get seen, who don't maybe connect with the system or don't feel that they fit. [...] the joy that I felt when we were able to help 13 groups was just fantastic – this is what it's all about for me.**

Gemma, panellist

Furthermore, panellists were also paid for their involvement, with one instead seeing value in donating their fee to a grassroots group:

**I joined [Movers & Shakers] not thinking we're getting paid for it, or getting money from it. I thought it's just purely voluntary and then we get money on top. So, the first round, I gave [the money] to charity.**

Tony, panellist

While in some cases there could be mixed feelings about paying Panel members, for example if a member feels they have adequate income and would prefer to volunteer, it is an important element as it models valuing participation and lived experience as part of the collaborative 'whole'.

This serves to also boost confidence and self-worth in members and a promote strong sense of commitment at all levels. In practice, one panel member who felt they didn't need the financial contribution simply returned their share and it went into the wider fund for applicants.

This was done in a way that didn't in any way criticise other panel members, but simply recognise that in any community there are people with different economic situations.

### **Confidence to make a difference and lead on change**

Panellists expressed optimism in the tangible changes they have felt, including those relating to the positive challenge of leading on change.

**[O]ther people want to see change too – because it [doing things differently] is challenging.**

Gemma, panellist

Here 'challenging' is used in both senses of the word: challenging existing structures is itself a practical challenge.

One awardee explained how the simple act of the community panel choosing to fund her (self-described) 'weird' project was a form of validation for her creativity. This validation then allowed the chosen Movers & Shakers to feel confident in their own delivery.

At times, Movers & Shakers made dynamic changes, potentially occurring because of the example that Make/Shift set. Among these, one Mover & Shaker had originally planned an outdoor cinema but their group changed their minds to move it indoors. This decision was based on the realisation that an outdoor screening couldn't start until sunset, which conflicted with their goal of being accessible to families with young children.

### **Have tested and can articulate which approaches work in achieving Make/Shift's aims**

Through Movers & Shakers, Make/Shift aim to model and articulate how changes in the structure of how funding is distributed can address structural imbalances that are otherwise invisible.

The success of the project is clear. The feedback from those receiving funds on the level of accessibility, the range of types of people, types of work and particularly the lack of previous experience of applying for funding in this way show that barriers were overcome.

The enthusiasm both of the Movers & Shakers themselves, and the panel members for the process also speaks to this. It isn't usual for people to speak enthusiastically about seeking or giving out funding!

There were some important learnings on which approaches work which will be used to tweak future rounds. For example, Make/Shift staff have highlighted the tension between the legal requirements of professionalised arts management and authentic community engagement, specifically highlighting the challenges of maintaining safeguarding, accessibility, and trust when working vulnerable communities, and those which previous funding models have tended to exclude or ignore.

One of the roles Make/Shift takes is 'holding carefully' these facilitators, though again it raises to the fore the potential risks around unintentional outcomes around exclusion, which may go unnoticed.

These tensions and challenges formed a necessary part of the process of testing alternative ways of working. The decision-making processes of the Panel and of Movers & Shakers alike tend towards those that celebrate uncertainty, rather than working through attempts to disentangle all the inherent complexities of community working and collaboration.

## Learnings

Below are learnings from Movers & Shakers, providing tips for anyone embarking on a similar project.

- **Values and ethics-led approaches instil due care** at distributed levels of a programme.
- **Time spent bonding as a group can be considered time well spent**, learning together through shared experience. Remember this when introducing new members.
- **Avoid stagnation** – think about when there needs to be new people introduced – 'over-cohesion' can impede flexibility, adaptation or expansion (getting too comfortable).
- **Paying panel members values participation and lived experience as work that deserves fair compensation**. It also demonstrates confidence in the members building both their own confidence and commitment.
- **Challenging concepts require training** – the transition from 'professionally-led' to 'peer-to-peer' can feel unnerving. It may pose a recruitment challenge further training.
- **The process may not be for everyone**. People still have valuable experiences to contribute so it is important to identify ways of bringing them into the process – for example, through training, or social activity.
- **Consider representation when expanding a panel** – how can new appointments better represent the community or people who are underrepresented?
- **Consider public events as opportunities to communicate ethics**, for the local communities and participants alike.