



Expression of interest in joining the NCIA Action Learning Process

Background

The NCIA project

The National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA) is an ambitious new initiative to generate intelligence on civic innovations and aims to provide universities with the framework and tools to deliver meaningful, measurable civic strategies and activities. The programme, funded by Research England, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), will stimulate collaboration and policy and practice innovation involving universities, local & central government, business groups, and the community sector to drive place-based transformations.

The NCIA's vision is to increase the connectivity, momentum, and effectiveness of the HE sector's civic activities for local societal, economic, and environmental benefit and maximise the contribution universities can make towards addressing societal challenges and responding to policy priorities. The project will do this by building a living evidence base to understand what works, for whom and in what contexts; will develop a dynamic learning and innovation programme to pilot civic approaches and build capacity; will scale up their activity with a sector engagement programme of support, tools, training, and communication to maximise reach; and ensure cross sector governance from an expert panel.

The activities will be delivered through four workstreams:

1. **Evidence Capture:** Building a living civic evidence base to understand *what works, for whom* and *in what contexts*.
2. **Learning & Innovating:** A dynamic action learning programme to pilot civic approaches and build capacity.
3. **Scaling Up:** A sector engagement programme of support, tools, training, and communication to maximise reach
4. **Programme Management:** Cross sector governance from an expert panel and robust project leadership and infrastructure.

The NCIA team will be a consortium led by Sheffield Hallam University in close partnership with the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR), the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), the Institute for Community Studies, West Midlands Regional Development Institute at the University of Birmingham (WM-REDI), Queen Mary University of London, and the OECD.

The Action Learning Process

The NCCPE is leading the action learning process which underpins Workstream 2. It will offer university staff and their partners the opportunity to explore issues and opportunities relating to the role of civic engagement in different types of places and types of institutions around England.

Up to **12 universities** will be involved. Individual members of staff and partner organisations will be able to participate in up to **8 action learning groups** of 6- 10 people, working alongside colleagues from around the country working on similar challenges. Meeting online every two months, these groups will have the opportunity to share and reflect on common challenges and explore approaches to addressing them.

Initially the groups will be made up of people who share a common role or functional responsibility within an institution or partner organisation. Following the first phase of the action learning process, new groups may emerge based on themes arising from the discussions, ensuring that the approach is useful to all involved. We will encourage all groups to use the [Civic Impact Framework](#) as a shared reference point to scaffold their learning.

The group meetings will be focused on **action**: participants will take their learning into their own contexts, try actions that they have committed to, and come back and reflect with the group on what happened, who benefited and how, and what factors enabled or hindered progress. As the project progresses, the NCIA team will work hard to ensure that this learning is made accessible to the wider sector to mobilise wider action, through developing tools and resources that others can draw on.

Groups will be facilitated by an NCCPE member of staff, and a research team will work alongside the groups to capture and reflect on emerging learning. The process will adhere to appropriate ethical protocols, including respecting the anonymity of participants and ensuring informed consent.

Participants in the action learning groups will come together for **whole cohort meetings** three times during the two years, twice in-person, and once online. There will be an opportunity for others to join these meetings.

Each action learning group will have access to the **specialist researchers** involved in NCIA Workstream 1, who will be able to respond to requests for research and evidence pertinent to the challenges they are working on. The action learning groups will also help to shape the development of a **civic evidence hub**, which will build evidence of 'what works' in civic engagement.

In addition, a small amount of **innovation funding** will be made available to the action learning groups to implement pilot actions (a total pot of £120K will be available for groups to bid for over the course of the project). **Bursaries** are available to help facilitate the involvement of partner organisations.

We are asking that each participating institution or partnership convenes an internal **action team**. This will help to ensure that their participants in the action learning process meet regularly 'back at base' to share their learning, align their actions and engage other colleagues in the process. This may be an existing civic committee or working group.

We also expect that each participating institution or partnership will identify a **project leader** to act as a contact point for the NCIA team. We anticipate working closely with the project leads over the course of the programme, to shape and refine the process and reflect on its impact.

The application process.

We are purposefully seeking to recruit universities at all stages of development in their civic mission - not just those who have mature civic strategies. We wish to bring together a cohort of universities with different approaches, working in different contexts, and at different scales, and to involve different institutional types.

We are inviting you to submit a short expression of interest to enable us to identify a complementary cohort to join the action learning process. We want to emphasise that the action learning programme is only one way to be part of the NCIA community. It is designed for institutions who are prepared to commit significant time and energy to learn alongside others, whilst contributing their own knowledge and expertise to the process.

Running in parallel with the action learning process, we will offer a regular series of capacity building and networking events to ensure every HEI in England can get engaged with our work. As part of these events and engagement activities, we will share the insights, tools and evidence that emerge from the action learning project as they happen and provide opportunities to interact with and contribute to the learning programme.

We really look forward to working with you in the years ahead.

How we will select the action learning cohort.

Criteria for selecting the participants:

- Commitment to participating in a learning process relating to civic engagement, and willingness to be open about challenges as well as successes.
- Commitment to taking action between meetings and bringing back reflections on this to the group.
- Identification of specific challenges and opportunities to tackle through this approach and the offer of particular areas of interest and expertise to share with colleagues.
- Commitment to ensuring that the results of the process are shared widely and support other HEIs to develop their practice
- Commitment of staff resource (3-9 staff members and partners, depending on the size of the institution), able to commit time to participating within an action learning process and associated events. We anticipate members being involved in 6-10 action learning sessions of 2 hours online, at a time booked with other members of the group, and 3 day-long events.

Where we have more applications than available places, we will seek to create a cohort which balances the following:

- the relative maturity of the HEIs' approaches to civic engagement: we are keen that we work with universities at different stages of the civic journey – from people at the initial stages to those who are well advanced.
- the different characteristics of their places: we want to involve universities working in different kinds of location (rural to urban, multi-campus etc); with different demographics and different kinds of local governance arrangements, including those with limited existing civic infrastructure in their locations.
- the scale and mission of the HEIs and their thematic priorities.

We are aware that some universities are already working in partnership with other HEIs on their civic activity. We would welcome applications from such partnerships. We expect all applications to involve civic partners as active participants, ideally as co-leads.

The timeline and what happens next

The deadline for submitting your expression of interest is close of play on **Tuesday 30th May**.

The EOIs will be reviewed by a panel drawn from the NCIA partners.

We aim to have made a preliminary selection of participating HEIs by **Wednesday 7th June**, at which point we will be in touch with requests for more information and clarifications.

We aim to make the final announcement by **Tuesday 20th June**.

The first full cohort meeting is planned to happen in the second week of July, on either the **10th or 12th July**.

A chance to ask questions

We have created an online Padlet board to allow you to post questions about the project and process outlined above. We will regularly update this to ensure all applicants can access our answers and clarifications.

You can access the Padlet by following this link: [NCIA Action Learning Padlet board](#)

You can also access a short presentation about the Action Learning Process, from the NCCPE's Sophie Duncan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mR8YX9Jt8Dc#t=17m10s>

How to submit your expression of interest

You can submit your expression of interest using an online form on the NCCPE website.

It isn't possible to save 'work in progress', so you may want to complete your answers 'offline' using a Word document, before copying and pasting your answers into the online form. You can access the word document here: [NCIA downloadable form](#)

The online form is available here: [Expression of interest in joining the NCIA Action Learning Process | NCCPE \(publicengagement.ac.uk\)](#)