Expression of Interest: External Learning Partner

Background

Propel Long Term Grants is a seven-year funding programme supporting 34 organisations working to address structural inequality across London. The majority of the £34 million total funding has been awarded to organisations led by and for the communities they serve, reflecting a deliberate focus on lived experience and community leadership. The long-term funding marks a continued shift in funding practice. Rather than short-term, project-based grants which only address the symptoms of inequality, this programme is designed to give organisations enough time, stability, and flexibility to tackle the root causes of inequalities affecting their communities.

Propel is rooted in relational ways of working, equity, participation and shared learning. We see learning as an integral part of the programme rather than a separate activity, creating opportunities for funded partners, funders and the programme team to reflect, adapt and shape the programme as it develops.

As Propel progresses, we are looking to appoint an external learning partner who can work alongside us to deepen our understanding, challenge assumptions, surface emerging insights and help generate creative learning that is useful both within the programme and beyond it.

You can learn more about the programme and the organisations that are part of it here.

Our ambition

We are looking for a learning partner who can help us create meaningful learning throughout the programme, rather than evaluate it from a distance.

Our intention is to create change in the funding landscape where we operate.

Our ambition is for learning to:

- Shape and strengthen the programme as it unfolds.
- Support reflection, experimentation and adaptation.
- Deepen understanding of systems change, equity and collaboration.
- Generate insights that are useful to funded partners, funders and the wider sector.

Feedback from organisations involved in Propel's first three years highlighted the importance of building on existing learning without duplicating requests or creating additional burdens. Propel has already invested in understanding the conditions that support effective collaboration, and this learning is captured in previous work,

including *Funding change and changing funding: what we've learnt from the first two years of Propel* and *Funding differently for systems change: Learning on collaboration, equity and funding at scale from Propel's first three years.* This new phase should build on, rather than repeat, those initial explorations.

Principles

We are seeking approaches that are:

Relational
Learning should emerge through dialogue, trust and relationships, not solely through formal data collection.

Equitable and collaborative
Learning processes should actively recognise power dynamics, value different forms of knowledge and ensure diverse voices are included.

Honest
We are interested in learning that helps us understand what is working, what is not working and where tensions, trade-offs or unintended consequences may exist. We want learning processes that create space for challenge, critical reflection and constructive disagreement, rather than focusing solely on success stories.

Cumulative
Propel is building on significant previous learning, relationships and experience. We are looking for approaches that value and build on existing knowledge, avoid unnecessary repetition and help us deepen understanding over time rather than continually starting from scratch.

Contributive
Everyone involved in the collaboration has something to contribute to our collective learning, while remaining open to perspectives and practices developed elsewhere. We want learning within Propel to be enriched by knowledge, ideas and experiences from beyond the programme.

Creative
We are looking for approaches outside of traditional learning models to be aligned with what Propel is trying to explore. This involves bringing positive energy, creativity and enthusiasm to the process.

Useful
Learning should inform decisions, support improvement and contribute to wider influence across the funding landscape. We want learning to lead to action, challenge established ways of working and push practice forward to create meaningful and lasting change.

What we want to explore together

We are seeking a learning partner who can join the existing learning ecosystem within Propel and help strengthen it. Rather than commissioning a predefined set of activities or deliverables, we are looking for a partner who can bring expertise, challenge, curiosity and perspective to help us shape the learning approach together.

The programme's learning priorities will continue to evolve, but current areas of interest include:

- How does funding organisations led by and for groups experiencing structural inequality enable them to achieve systems change work?
- How are relationships between funded partners, the delivery team and one another experienced, and what becomes possible through these relationships? What can emerge from this collaborative space that might not otherwise happen?
- How are power dynamics experienced across the relationships between funders, the Funding Committee, the delivery team and Propel-funded partners? What helps to build trust and openness, shift power and support more equitable relationships and what are the barriers to this?

The current learning priorities have emerged from conversations across Propel, including with funded partners and members of the delivery team. This process has sought to align Collaboration Circle's interests with what those delivering the work want and need to learn from it. These priorities are therefore a starting point rather than a fixed framework.

As findings emerge, partners across the collaboration will make sense of them together and collectively decide what action to take. This iterative approach will allow both our learning priorities and our responses to develop throughout the programme.

Furthermore, we are looking for a learning partner who is open to working alongside the different learning structures already operating across the programme. These currently include, for example, annual reports through which funded organisations reflect on what they are learning about delivering systems change programmes; regular conversations with the grant management team that help identify emerging learning needs and connect organisations working on similar issues; and the work of

Propel's Learning Manager, who brings insights from other collaborations and considers how Propel's learning can influence the wider system. We may also commission external evaluators to explore specific areas where additional expertise or focused inquiry is needed.

The learning partner will be one part of this wider learning ecosystem, adding a distinct perspective and helping connect relevant insights where useful. They will need to be aware of and work in connection with these other sources of learning, but they will not be responsible for overseeing them or for undertaking an overall evaluation of the programme.

We are looking for an agile learning process that enables us to identify emerging themes and opportunities as the programme develops, rather than waiting until its conclusion. At this stage, the purpose is not to evaluate Propel's impact as a long term fund or revisit the conditions for collaboration, but to explore what funded partners, funders and the delivery team can do, test and change together during the programme's next stages. Learning should support action and adaptation in real time, helping us understand where our collective work can add value and push practice forward.

Key deliverables include:

- Facilitating and leading reflection and collective sense-making spaces with funded partners, funders and others involved in Propel (in person once a year).
- Other reflective spaces with funded partners and Propel's team (online).
- Helping identify patterns, opportunities and challenges emerging across the programme.
- Bringing independent perspectives and models from outside of Propel that help us notice what we may otherwise miss or see things in a more meaningful way.
- Supporting the programme to test assumptions and learn in real time pushing practice forward to create change.
- Helping translate learning into accessible insights that can influence wider audiences in the funding landscape.
- Contributing to periodic iterative reflections on the programme's development and overall learning.

While we anticipate regular learning outputs and periodic synthesis of insights, the specific form, frequency and format of these outputs will be co-designed with the appointed learning partner through the first months of working together.

Who we are looking for

We welcome proposals from individual organisations, partnerships or collaborations of learning providers.

We are particularly interested in partners who can demonstrate:

- Experience supporting learning in complex collaborative environments.
- A strong understanding of systems change and relevant frameworks or approaches.
- Experience and deep commitment with questions of power, equity and participation.
- Comfortable working in situations where learning questions and approaches may evolve over time.
- Experience building and holding spaces where difficult conversations can take place.

We believe no single organisation necessarily holds all the expertise required for this work and therefore welcome collaborative proposals where this helps bring together complementary strengths.

Above all, we are looking for a partner whose approach aligns with the values and ambitions of Propel and who is excited by the opportunity to learn alongside us.

Ways of working

This is not a traditional evaluation commission.

We recognise that some aspects of the learning partnership remain intentionally open. This reflects our belief that the most useful learning approach should be shaped collaboratively and draw on the expertise of the partner we appoint.

We are therefore looking for organisations that are comfortable working within an evolving environment and helping co-design the learning approach as the programme develops.

We see the learning partner as a critical friend, thought partner and contributor to the programme's learning culture. We recognise that no learning partner can be entirely neutral or objective: everyone brings their own experiences, values, assumptions and ways of understanding change. We are therefore looking for a partner who is transparent and reflective about their position, shares our commitment to shifting systems and addressing structural inequalities, and retains

the independence needed to question assumptions, surface uncomfortable findings and offer constructive challenge.

We also recognise the tension in asking for independence while Propel continues to hold power over programme decisions, including how learning is acted upon and communicated. We want to approach this honestly and explore it with the appointed partner, agreeing how disagreements, different interpretations and decisions about sharing or publishing findings will be handled. We want challenge to be rigorous and helpful, supporting reflection, action and change rather than simply affirming our existing views or identifying problems without helping us consider what could happen next.

The successful partner will be expected to work alongside funded partners, the delivery team and funders in ways that are constructive, respectful and grounded in the programme's values.

Budget

The available budget is **£35,000–£45,000 (VAT inclusive) per year** for an initial three-year period. A detailed budget is not required at this stage, as we expect the scope and allocation of resources to be developed collaboratively in response to the needs identified.

The initial appointment will cover three years, with the possibility of extending the partnership for the remainder of the seven-year programme.

The following costs will be covered separately by Propel:

- Funding to support funded partners' participation in learning activities. Including travel and accessibility costs that funded partners might need.
- Design and production of reports or other agreed formats for sharing learning.
- Logistics and coordination associated with arranging meetings with organisations involved in Propel.
- Promotion and dissemination of the programme and the learning generated through this work.

Expression of Interest

Please submit a maximum **five-page response** addressing the following questions:

1. How do you see the role of a learning partner and what would you bring to the Propel programme?
2. Drawing on your previous experience, how would you approach learning within a collaborative systems change programme?
3. How do you create learning processes that centre equity, inclusion and participation?
4. How would you build trusted and relational ways of working while retaining the independence needed to offer constructive challenge?

Applicants should also share an existing example of work that is relevant to this opportunity and helps us understand their experience and approach. This could be a previous report, publication, learning resource or another type of output, shared in its original format or through a link to something already published. We do not expect applicants to create anything new for this purpose.

Information should be submitted by email before the end of 15 December 2026 to daniel.orrego@funders-together.org.uk.

Applicants will be invited to have an interview with the decision panel after reviewing the information submitted. Only in the case of missing information we will reach out to make sure we have all the information needed to make a decision. There won't be a submission of a full proposal after this stage. As mentioned before, we will be developing together the final details of this commission after the learning partner is appointed.

Interviews will be undertaken by members of the Propel Funding Committee. This is a governing body of Propel representing funders and equity infrastructure organisations.

Assessment approach

We are interested in finding the right learning partner rather than selecting the most detailed technical proposal.

Applications will therefore be assessed primarily on:

- Alignment with Propel's principles and values.
- The quality of the applicant's thinking and creative approach to learning.
- Experience of systems change, equity and collaborative practice.
- Ability to work adaptively and build strong relationships.

We are particularly interested in understanding how you think, how you approach learning and how you would contribute to a genuine partnership that challenges power and helps to develop equitable ways of working.

If you want to have a conversation with Propel's teamto ask for clarification in any of this, please contact daniel.orrego@funders-together.org.uk or malene.bratlie@funders-together.org.uk.

Timescale

Activity	**Date**
Expression of Interest opens	November 2026
Submission deadline	15 December 2026
Online interviews	Week commencing 11 January 2027
Appointment	End of January 2027