

Impact evaluation feasibility assessment of Phase 2 of the Youth Investment Fund

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Ipsos UK



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1 Executive summary

Ipsos was appointed by The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver an impact evaluation feasibility study for Phase 2 of the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). The aim of the study was to identify a range of design options for delivering a robust evaluation of the impact of Phase 2. This report sets out our key findings and recommendations.

1.1 The Youth Investment Fund

The DCMS Youth Investment Fund (YIF) aims to create, expand and improve youth facilities and their services, in order to benefit young people. The fund aims to “level up” youth services in areas where provision is low and need for youth services is high. Improving access to dedicated youth facilities and trusted youth workers and volunteers is anticipated to result in improvements to young people’s health and wellbeing, and their skills for work and life (such as employability and social skills).

Phase 2 of YIF will be delivered over the next three financial years from 2022/23 to 2024/25. It will largely be a capital fund (around £288m), which is intended to fund up to 300 facilities. These could be new bespoke medium and large youth facilities, smaller facilities built using innovative design, or redevelopment projects that extend or improve existing youth facilities or repurpose vacant premises to be used as youth facilities.

There will also be resource funding (£60m) available to organisations that receive capital funding. The purpose of this will be to help organisations get going in their new facility and develop the capacity to sustain their activities with income from other sources.

1.2 Outcomes in scope for counterfactual impact evaluation

A Theory of Change has been developed for the Youth Investment Fund, which identifies a wide range of anticipated outcomes and impacts from the fund. It would not be practical or desirable to include all of these in a counterfactual impact evaluation. We have therefore worked with DCMS to narrow this down to the following set of key outcomes of interest to be included in the scope of the impact evaluation:

- **Capital investment** made by youth organisations: measured through a primary survey of youth organisations
- **Scale and quality of youth facilities:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations, and perhaps also Valuation Office Agency data
- **Quantity of youth provision:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations
- **Diversity of youth provision:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations
- Youth organisations’ **financial stability and resilience:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations and secondary datasets (including Charity Commission data)
- **Youth participation:** ideally measured using secondary datasets, but a primary survey of young people could be considered if this is not possible
- Young people’s **wellbeing and life satisfaction:** ideally measured using secondary datasets, but a primary survey of young people could be considered if this is not possible

- If a primary survey of young people is carried out, this could also measure **young people's skills for life**.

These outcomes were selected as those which are: most **relevant** to the success of the fund; can be reasonably **attributed** to the fund; can be anticipated to be realised / observed within the **lifetime** of the impact evaluation (up to five years); and possible to **observe / measure** through primary data collection or analysis of secondary data sources.

1.3 Measurement of outcomes

The feasibility study has included an initial assessment of what data will be available from **secondary sources** to measure the outcomes identified as being in scope for the counterfactual impact evaluation. However, further scoping of these sources will be required ahead of the impact evaluation of YIF Phase 2, in particular to gauge whether the number of observations / data points available from these will be sufficient for impact evaluation once more is known about the organisations and areas that have received funding.

We recommend a **primary survey of youth organisations** as the only way to gather data on several of the key outcomes of interest (noted above). This should include all youth organisations (with the possible exception of the very smallest¹) in the left-behind areas, and in areas falling just outside the selection criteria for left-behind areas. A sample frame for this survey could be constructed from the National Youth Agency (NYA) Youth Census, Charity Commission data and potentially from membership records of other organisations such as National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

We considered a **primary survey of young people** which could be used to measure outcomes for young people if secondary sources are insufficient for this purpose, and contribute to a theory-based impact evaluation and process evaluation. However, both an area-based primary survey and a survey via youth organisations are likely to present practical difficulties. It would be difficult to access the datasets needed to target a survey at households containing young people in the relevant age bracket, while a non-targeted survey of households in relevant areas would likely be prohibitively expensive. There are also issues relating to confirming parental consent for young people to take part in research and the risk of over-burdening youth organisations. Therefore, on balance, our view is that these difficulties are likely to outweigh the value this survey would add to the evaluation.

These primary and secondary sources would be complemented by **application and monitoring information** from organisations that have applied to YIF and/or received funding.

1.4 Impact evaluation recommendation

An impact evaluation will require the identification of a comparison group of organisations, and the areas surrounding them, that did not benefit from YIF funding. These organisations and areas should be similar enough to funded organisations and areas to enable an estimation of what would have happened within funded organisations and areas in the absence of YIF funding.

We have considered four options for identifying such a comparison group: (A) organisations which applied for funding unsuccessfully, (B) organisations in areas that are "only just" ineligible for the fund, (C) organisations that were eligible to apply but did not receive funding (whether or not they applied), and (D) funded organisations that received funding later (as a comparison for those who received

¹ The very smallest would be organisations unlikely to apply to YIF due to their size/need.

funding earlier). However, the more robust approaches (A, B and D) do not currently appear feasible for practical reasons, due to the anticipated profile of grant applications and awards.

We therefore recommend that **the impact evaluation constructs a comparison group made up of eligible organisations and areas that do not receive funding**, option C. We also recommend that DCMS reconsider the feasibility of the other options considered once more is known about the portfolio of grant applications and awards.

To reduce systematic differences between the treatment and comparison groups, we recommend the use of **matching techniques and a difference-in-differences analysis**.

We have also considered **spatial analysis techniques** to assess the impacts of the fund on young people in the areas surrounding organisations in treatment and comparison groups. Since the impact of the Fund may be very local, a spatial analysis comparing differences in outcomes for young people living closer to youth facilities with outcomes for young people living further away would help identify this impact. Options for undertaking an area-based primary survey with young people (as opposed to a primary survey of young people attending youth facilities) are limited due to practical difficulties, so this approach would need to rely on secondary datasets. The feasibility of this approach will depend on the overall number of funded facilities and therefore the number of relevant observations that might be expected to appear in secondary datasets, and on whether secondary datasets will provide enough information on location to allow distance from a facility to be measured.

Alongside the counterfactual impact evaluation options presented above, we recommend a **non-experimental theory-based evaluation**. This would complement the quasi-experimental approaches described above by providing a more detailed understanding of the YIF's Theory of Change, and give greater confidence that YIF contributed strongly to any outcomes observed.

1.5 Approaches considered and rejected

As part of the feasibility study, other impact evaluation designs were considered and deemed not to be feasible for a range of reasons relating to how YIF Phase 2 will be designed and delivered. These are briefly outlined below along with the main reasons they were rejected.

- A **randomised control trial (RCT)** will not be feasible due to it being very unlikely that there will be enough applications which meet the criteria for funding, yet are not funded, that could act as a control group. Moreover, this would require the random allocation of funding within the set of fundable applications, which is unlikely to be acceptable.
- A **stepped-wedge trial** will not be feasible as this would require all funding to be allocated at the start, whereas there will be several funding rounds. This approach is also not feasible due to the time lags for outcomes to be realised.
- A **regression discontinuity design** based on a scoring threshold will not be feasible as applications will not be assessed in this way.
- A **dose-response approach** comparing outcomes for smaller and larger projects. This will not be feasible since there are likely to be underlying differences between organisations that bid for projects of different sizes which would affect the outcomes observed.

2 Introduction

Ipsos was appointed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver an impact evaluation feasibility study for Phase 2 of the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). DCMS is committed to undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of YIF Phase 2, which is likely to include process, impact, and value for money evaluations. The aim of the feasibility study was to identify a range of impact evaluation design options that would be suitable for the YIF Phase 2. This report represents the final output from this, including our recommendations for delivering an impact evaluation of Phase 2.

2.1 Context and background

The overall aim of the Youth Investment Fund is to “level up” access to youth provision by increasing the number of safe, high-quality facilities for young people in areas of need. The Fund has been informed by DCMS’s Youth Review, which engaged around 6,000 young people and 170 youth sector organisations and academics to develop a clear direction for policy relating to (out-of-school) youth provision. YIF forms part of the National Youth Guarantee, alongside the National Citizen Service, the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award and the #iwill Fund, and funding to tackle uniformed youth group waiting lists. Together, these are intended to create opportunities for young people to realise their potential, in the context of the negative impact of Covid on young people’s lives.

As well as outcomes for young people and the youth sector, YIF is expected to be an opportunity to improve the evidence base for the youth sector, which is currently limited.

2.2 Aims, objectives and approach

The aims of the feasibility study were to review the theory of change for YIF; explore a range of options and possible methods for undertaking an impact evaluation of YIF (based on the design of the fund), giving particular consideration to Randomised Control Trial or quasi-experimental approaches; document timings, risks and challenges for these methods; and provide **recommendations** for an impact evaluation design.

We understand that DCMS intend to commission a separate Value for Money (VfM) evaluation of YIF. We have not discussed this further here, but note that any VfM assessment of YIF will depend on having robust results from an impact evaluation so that the outcomes attributable to YIF can be known and, where possible, quantified.

The feasibility study has been informed by a desk review of relevant documentation and data for the fund, consultations with key stakeholders involved in the design, development and implementation of Phase 2, and a workshop with sector experts. Following this, we presented our recommendations to key stakeholders from DCMS, the HMT/Cabinet Office Evaluation Task Force and Phase 2 Intermediary Grant Maker and facilitated a discussion around these. This report incorporates consideration of issues raised in this discussion.

2.3 Structure of document

The remainder of this document is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 3** provides an overview of the YIF in terms of its design and Theory of Change.

- **Chapter 4** sets out the core outcomes to be included in the impact evaluation of Phase 2 and potential ways to measure these.
- **Chapter 5** presents recommendations for the design of the impact evaluation, with discussion of how these could work in practice, strengths and potential limitations.
- **Chapter 6** summarises the other impact evaluation options that were considered through the feasibility study and rejected, and the reasons for this.

3 Overview of the Youth Investment Fund Phase 2

Chapter Summary

- The DCMS Youth Investment Fund (YIF) aims to **create, expand and improve** youth facilities and their services, in order to benefit young people. The fund aims to “level up” youth services in areas where provision is low and need for youth services is high.
- Improving access to dedicated youth facilities and trusted youth workers is anticipated to result in improvements to young people’s **health and wellbeing, and their skills for work and life** (such as social skills).
- Phase 2 of YIF will be delivered over the next three financial years from 2022/23 to 2024/25. It will largely be a **capital fund** (around £288m), which is intended to fund up to 300 facilities. These could be new bespoke medium and large youth facilities, smaller facilities built to a standard modular design, or redevelopment projects that extend or improve existing youth facilities or repurpose vacant premises to be used as youth facilities.
- There will also be **some resource funding** (£60m) available to organisations that receive capital funding. The purpose of this will be to help organisations get going in their new facility and develop the capacity to sustain their activities with income from other sources.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents information about the Youth Investment Fund, its design (particularly in terms of how the funding will be awarded) and its objectives as set out in the Theory of Change for the fund. Characteristics of the fund that have particular significance for the design of the impact evaluation have been indicated in bold.

3.2 Design of the fund

Phase 1

The Youth Investment Fund (YIF) is being delivered in two Phases. Phase 1 applications opened on 31st January 2022 and organisations were required to spend their grants by the end of March 2022. This meant that Phase 1 had to focus on short-term capital investments that could be spent within these timescales. It therefore aimed to address urgent/shorter-term demand for equipment and/or capital that would enhance youth services, in particular digital infrastructure (a need highlighted by the pandemic) and smaller-scale refurbishment and renovation. Anticipated outcomes from Phase 1 include organisations being able to offer new activities (such as new sports, DJing, outdoor activities), buildings being more secure and young people feeling safer, and more young people being able to participate in activities.

Ipsos is undertaking a process evaluation of YIF Phase 1. However, there is limited scope to apply the findings from this to YIF Phase 2 given the short-term nature of Phase 1 and significant differences in how the fund will be designed and delivered. Phase 1 is not in scope for the impact evaluation.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the YIF will be delivered over the next three financial years from 2022/23 to 2024/25. It will largely be a capital fund (around £288m) with some resource funding (£60m) for activities to be delivered within new or redeveloped facilities and for organisations to build their capability and skills to manage a youth facility and deliver youth activities.

YIF Phase 2 is aiming to fund up to 300 facilities in total. Grants will be made available for one of the following:

- A standardised innovative facility – this is likely to be a contained element of the programme with a standard offer of several types of building. Youth organisations will be able to bid to have one of these built for them or to extend an existing building. The rationale for offering this type of building is to make it easier for organisations with less capacity to make plans for a building, as they can effectively order something ‘off the shelf’, and because such modern methods of construction have environmental benefits. A pilot involving the development of four such innovative buildings is currently underway, the findings from which will inform the approach taken for this element of the fund.
- New bespoke medium and large youth facilities – likely to be run by local authorities or charities working in partnership.
- Redevelopment projects - that extend, preserve or reinstate existing youth facilities; or that repurpose vacant premises to be used as youth facilities. Funding must increase capacity, quality or inclusivity rather than just stopping the facility from closing.

The exact profile of grants to be awarded cannot be determined at this stage since the fund will be demand-led. It will not be possible within the scope of Phase 2 to fund something in each of the “left-behind” areas that are eligible, and there are likely to be some eligible areas that do not bid for funding. Ensuring a geographical spread of awards will be an important factor in selecting funded projects, but the degree of importance placed on this in the awarding of the funding (relative to other factors) is still to be determined.

As stated, some resource/revenue funding (£60m) will also be available to organisations that receive capital funding. The purpose of this will be to help organisations get going in their new facility (for example by funding new activities in their early stages), and develop the capacity to sustain their activities with income from other sources (for example through training about income generation).

Distribution of Phase 2 funding

YIF Phase 2 launched on 1st August 2022 and organisations are currently able to submit an Expression of Interest. Once these have been reviewed, organisations will work with a Relationship Manager at the Intermediary Grant Maker to go through the application process. Following this, applications will go to an assessment panel for review and then to a grant-making panel for approval. The grant maker will assess applications in terms of organisational resilience, project feasibility/viability, and the youth offer – that it will expand access to youth services.

In terms of size, most applications are expected to be for grants of between £300,000 and £8.7 million². YIF is intended to be a catalyst for other fundraising and contributions, and match funding is strongly encouraged. The expectation is that funded projects should be sustained by funding sources independent of YIF. This could include revenue from activities/subscriptions, local authority contributions through the statutory duty to provide services and activities for young people, lottery funding and/or philanthropic investment. DCMS are also interested in exploring where there may be shared opportunities relating to other Government initiatives, such as DWP Youth Hubs or Violence Reduction Units and are discussing options with other government departments.

Some of the largest bids are expected to be coordinated by local authorities bringing together partnerships of local organisations from the statutory and voluntary sector, including schools and housing associations. These partnerships are expected to take time to develop and DCMS have already been engaging with local authorities around this.

Projects funded through YIF Phase 2 will need to be completed or be no longer reliant on YIF funding beyond 31st March 2025 (if projects have also received funding from other sources, they could still be ongoing at that point, but YIF funding must be spent by this date).

Phase 2 of YIF will incorporate multiple funding rounds, the first of which will be awarded in October 2022 and the last is likely to be in April 2024. This phasing of the distribution of the funding will be helpful for those organisations that need longer to put together a bid or to secure match funding. The Intermediary Grant Maker will work closely with applicant organisations to improve their bids. At this stage, they anticipate that most applications will ultimately be funded.

Organisations will have to commit to actively engaging in the evaluation as a condition of receiving funding. The intermediary grant maker will also be collecting monitoring data and detailed secondary data on grant applicants and recipients, including from the register of charities.

3.3 YIF Theory of Change

The overarching objective of YIF is two-fold:

- **To create, expand and improve local youth facilities and their services,**
- **To drive positive outcomes for young people, including improved physical health and wellbeing, and skills for work/employability and life.**

DCMS have developed a detailed Theory of Change for YIF, which identifies the **short-, medium- and long-term outcomes** YIF is intended to produce in relation to youth infrastructure, youth services and young people³.

Implication: An impact evaluation of the YIF will need to assess how effectively it has delivered against both elements of its overarching objective. This implies a need to understand its effects at two levels:

² Based on guidance for applicants available here: <https://youthinvestmentfund.org.uk/faqs/>

³ See Annex A

- the **direct effects** of the programme on youth provision (i.e. quantity and quality of youth facilities and associated provision)
- the degree to which enhanced youth provision leads to an increase in participation in youth provision and associated benefits in terms of physical health, wellbeing, and skills for work/employability (**indirect effects**)

Assumptions and risks

As part of the development of the Theory of Change, DCMS identified **42 assumptions** associated with the realisation of the intended outcomes of YIF Phase 2. The following assumptions and risks are particularly relevant to the impact evaluation.

- **Deadweight:** The programme provides funding for capital investments in youth facilities. There is a possibility that funded organisations would have been able to obtain equivalent or partial funding from alternative sources. In this eventuality, the funding provided by DCMS will be partly allocated to deadweight investments that would have been made anyway that will not lead to an increase in investment in youth provision. A comprehensive value for money assessment will require **evidence on the degree to which the fund increased overall capital investment in youth provision**⁴ to support an understanding of how economically the fund was delivered as well as to support a potential cost-benefit analysis.
- **Financial sustainability:** Expansions in youth provision are likely to increase the operating costs of organisations awarded grants, and financial sustainability will be linked to the extent to which additional sources of income can be obtained to meet those costs. An impact evaluation will need to examine **the effect of YIF on measures relating to the financial health of supported organisations**⁵ to support inferences on the likely sustainability of the enhanced youth provision beyond the lifetime of the evaluation.
- **Net effects on participation:** It is anticipated that organisations awarded funding may experience an increase in participation as a result of new, expanded, or improved facilities. However, there is a risk that users are displaced from alternative youth provision (where competing provision is available), limiting the overall increase in youth provision. An impact evaluation will need to **establish the net effect on youth participation** – requiring information on participation at the level of the relevant communities (rather than in terms of the users of funded facilities).
- **Social benefits:** The social benefits of YIF are likely to include:
 - **Benefits for young people residing in the communities concerned.** This will take the form of quality-of-life improvements arising either directly from taking part in new or improved youth provision, or indirectly resulting from their participation in youth provision (e.g. improvements in physical health or skills). As such, **the impact evaluation will need to establish the effect of YIF on the quality of life of young people**, which can potentially be captured in

⁴ The level of deadweight can be understood by comparing estimates of the total increase in capital expenditure resulting from the fund to the total grant funding provided. Given match funding requirements, it should also be noted that it is possible that the fund will leverage additional investment in youth provision (which would be identified if the total increase in capital expenditure exceeds the grant funding provided). Finally, while developing a framework for a cost-benefit analysis is outside the scope of this study, the effect of the programme on capital investment levels will represent a core component of the resource costs of the scheme.

⁵ Estimates of the effect of the programme on operational expenditures will also be needed for any CBA of the scheme.

measures of subjective well-being⁶. It should be noted that the assumption that enhanced youth provision leads to improvements in quality to life is not based on extensive evidence (with some research showing that those participating in youth provision experience worse outcomes than those that do not⁷).

- **Externality benefits.** The benefits of YIF may extend beyond young people benefitting from improvements in youth provision if it diverts some young people from behaviours with negative social impacts (e.g. street crime or anti-social behaviour). There is some evidence that suggests that effects of this nature are possible⁸, though the research is inconclusive (again, with some evidence that unsupervised youth provision can produce criminogenic outcomes). A longer-term impact evaluation should also consider these types of possible spill-over effects (to the extent practicable).
- **Unintended effects on youth provision:** It should be noted that any displacement of users (or displacement of funding) from competing youth facilities could have unintended consequences for their on-going viability. This could limit the net improvement in local youth provision if competing facilities are forced to close or reduce their scale or scope. The impact evaluation should establish the extent of any unintended consequences of this nature.

3.4 Evaluation questions

The impact evaluation of Phase 2 of YIF is intended to address the following key questions:

- What is the impact of YIF in terms of creating, expanding and improving local youth facilities and their services?
- What is the impact of YIF in terms of levels of young people's participation in youth provision?
- What is the impact of YIF in terms of increasing the volume and diversity of youth provision on offer?
- What is the impact of YIF on young people in terms of wellbeing and life satisfaction?
- What is the impact of YIF on young people in terms of skills for life and work?
- What is the impact of YIF on youth organisations in terms of their resilience and financial stability, in other words their ability to remain open and deliver activities? This includes the ability to generate income.

⁶ These types of benefits can also be monetised as part of a cost-benefit analysis – see for example, Fujiwara (2013) A general method for valuing non-market goods using wellbeing data: three-stage wellbeing valuation.

⁷ Department for Education and Skills (2005) Leisure contexts in adolescence and their effects on adult outcomes

⁸ For example, research produced by the Youth Select Committee for a 2020 report on knife crime:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/youth-select-committee/full-report.html>

4 Outcomes & measurement

Chapter Summary

In discussion with DCMS and informed by a review of the YIF Theory of Change, the following outcomes have been identified for measurement through the counterfactual impact evaluation:

- **Capital investment** made by youth organisations: measured through a primary survey of youth organisations
- **Scale and quality of youth facilities:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations, and perhaps also Valuation Office Agency data
- **Quantity of youth provision:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations
- **Diversity of youth provision:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations
- **Youth organisations' financial stability and resilience:** measured through a primary survey of youth organisations and secondary datasets (including Charity Commission data)
- **Youth participation:** ideally measured using secondary datasets, but a primary survey of young people could be considered if this is not possible
- **Young people's wellbeing and life satisfaction:** ideally measured using secondary datasets, but a primary survey of young people could be considered if this is not possible
- If a primary survey of young people is carried out, this could also measure **young people's skills for life.**

The feasibility study has included an initial assessment of what data will be available from **secondary sources** to measure these outcomes. The scoping stage of the impact evaluation will need to incorporate a further review of these sources, in particular to gauge whether the number of observations / data points will be sufficient for impact evaluation.

We recommend a **primary survey of youth organisations** as essential for the evaluation since this is the only way to gather data on several of the key outcomes of interest (noted above). This should include all youth organisations (with the possible exception of the very smallest) in left-behind areas, and in areas falling just outside the selection criteria for left-behind areas.

We considered a **primary survey of young people** which could be used to measure outcomes for young people if secondary sources are insufficient for this purpose. However, both an area-based primary survey and a survey via youth organisations are likely to present practical difficulties, and on balance, our view is that these difficulties are likely to outweigh the value this survey would add to the evaluation.

These primary and secondary sources would be complemented by **application and monitoring information** from organisations that have applied to YIF and/or received funding.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the outcomes the counterfactual impact evaluation should focus on, and the data sources that could be used to measure these. It is based on discussions with DCMS and a review of the Theory of Change, as well as initial scoping work to understand how these outcomes could be measured.

4.2 Selecting outcomes for the impact evaluation

The YIF Theory of Change contains a large number of causal chains, outcomes and impacts and it would not be practical or desirable to include all of them in a counterfactual impact evaluation. We have therefore worked with DCMS to narrow this down to a smaller number of key outcomes that the counterfactual impact evaluation will focus on. These were selected to meet the following criteria:

- Outcomes most **relevant to the success** of the fund and of most interest to policymakers and other stakeholders.
- Outcomes which can **reasonably be attributed to the intervention** – not too far along the chain of cause-and-effect.
- Related to this, outcomes which can be anticipated to happen/for change to be observed **in the lifetime of the impact evaluation** (likely to be c. 4-5 years).
- Outcomes which are **possible to observe or measure** either through primary data collection or existing data – and possible to measure for a comparison group as well.

Applying these criteria, we have developed **two key logic chains** (underpinning the fund-level Theory of Change) for the counterfactual impact evaluation to focus on. These relate to youth participation and the short/medium-term benefits of this for young people; and the financial resilience of youth organisations and the sustainability of the provision they offer. A robust impact evaluation will require data on all the steps in these logic chains in order to test whether these chains of anticipated effects are materialising as a result of the Fund.

The fund-level Theory of Change (see Annex A) contains a wider range of outcomes beyond those shown in these two logic chains: for example, that young people are happy with the new facilities and that the facilities are environmentally friendly. Some of these outcomes will be better captured by a process evaluation or through monitoring of the Fund, and others could be included in a theory-based impact evaluation (see section 5.5). There may be a small number of outcomes that it is not possible to include in the evaluation at all. Outcomes not in scope for the impact evaluation are discussed further in section 4.7.

Figure 4.1: Logic chain resulting in outcomes for young people

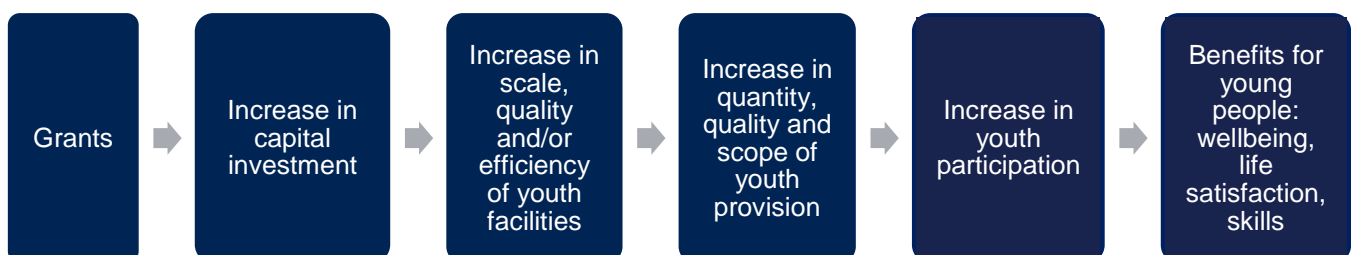
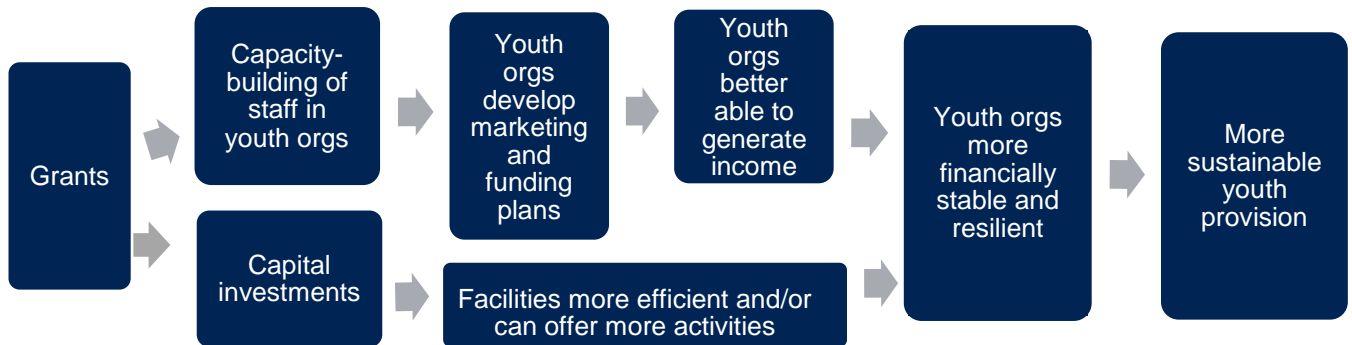


Figure 4.2: Logic chain resulting in outcomes for youth organisations

4.3 Overview of outcomes, measures, and data sources

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below list the key outcomes to be measured through the counterfactual impact evaluation based on the logic chains above. Table 4.1 covers outcomes relating to organisations and Table 4.2 covers outcomes relating to young people.

The counterfactual impact evaluation will require data at two levels:

- Data on the **organisations** receiving YIF funding (and an appropriate comparison group) – to establish how far the fund has delivered against its objective to create, expand and improve youth provision.
- Data on **young people** living in areas receiving YIF funding (and appropriate comparison group) – to establish whether improved youth provision has led to the desired beneficial outcomes for the resident population of young people.

In order to understand how outcomes have changed over time, the evaluation will require data on outcomes from the time periods before and after YIF funding (pre-and-post data). To support a matching exercise (see section 5.4.1) it will also be helpful to have pre-and-post data on organisation and area characteristics, if these are expected to change over time. It may be possible to collect much of this data retrospectively.

Being able to measure these outcomes for treatment and comparison areas will be useful because it will provide evidence on the assumptions made in the Theory of Change (see 3.2 above). In particular, if the analysis of outcomes further along the logic chain (such as outcomes for young people) reveals less difference than expected between treatment and comparison areas, having evidence on the intermediate outcomes would enable the evaluation to pinpoint why this might be. If, instead, analysis shows differences in youth participation and youth outcomes between treatment and comparison areas, data from intermediate outcomes would help to corroborate a conclusion that these differences are the result of YIF.

The remainder of this chapter discusses data relating to the outcomes of the Fund. The data required for a matching exercise, relating to organisational and area characteristics, is discussed in section 5.5.1.

Table 4.1: Outcomes to be measured for organisations

Outcome	Reason for measuring this outcome	Measure to be used	Existing datasets that could be used
Increase in capital investment made by youth organisations	To assess whether the grants led to increased capital investment as opposed to simply replacing investment from other sources.	Organisations' capital expenditure per year	Monitoring data from funded organisations
Increase in scale of youth facilities	To assess the difference made by the funding to the scale of youth facilities and whether it has created or expanded these.	Total area of the property (m2)	It may be possible to use Valuation Office Agency data to estimate the total size of premises belonging to youth organisations (see section 4.5.2 below). Monitoring data from funded organisations
Increase in quality of youth facilities	To assess the difference made by the funding to the quality of youth facilities.	Features of the property such as kitchens, IT rooms, sport facilities and outdoor space, accessible toilet facilities, security features	Monitoring data from funded organisations
Increase in quantity of youth provision	To understand whether improved/more youth facilities led to an expansion of provision.	Number of hours the facility is open to be used by young people 11-18 Maximum number of young people able to use the facility during these times	Monitoring data from funded organisations
Increase in diversity of youth provision	To understand whether improved/more youth facilities led to a more diverse range of provision.	Number of different types of activity offered by youth organisation (from a pre-coded list)	Monitoring data from funded organisations

Outcome	Reason for measuring this outcome	Measure to be used	Existing datasets that could be used
Youth organisations are more financially stable and resilient	To understand whether the funding led to increased financial stability and resilience for youth organisations.	<p>Total income in last financial year and % split by different sources</p> <p>Operating expenditure in last financial year and % split by type of expenditure (from which we can calculate operating surplus/loss)</p> <p>Value of assets / liabilities (both short and long-term)</p> <p>Value of financial reserves (from which we can calculate as % of annual operating costs)</p> <p>Whether had to use reserves in last three years</p> <p>Change in income over past three years – increased / stayed the same / decreased</p> <p>Projected income from existing sources over next three years – increase / stay the same / decrease</p>	<p>The register of charities for England and Wales contains information on income and expenditure over time, assets, liabilities and reserves (see section 4.5.1).</p> <p>The intermediary grant maker will be collecting detailed secondary data on grant applicants and recipients, including from the register of charities. It will be important for the impact evaluation to align with and complement the work of the intermediary grant maker.</p>

Table 4.2: Outcomes to be measured for young people

Outcome	Reason for measuring this outcome	Measure to be used	Existing datasets that could be used
Increase in youth participation	To understand whether increased provision as a result of YIF led to more young people participating in youth services (as opposed to displacing existing users of other youth facilities to the new/improved facilities).	Proportion of young people participating in youth services.	It may be possible to use data from the Understanding Society longitudinal study (see section 4.5.4).

Outcome	Reason for measuring this outcome	Measure to be used	Existing datasets that could be used
Young people's wellbeing and life satisfaction	To assess the difference the funding made to young people in the shorter-term.	This could be measured using the ONS4 personal well-being questions.	It may be possible to use data from the Understanding Society longitudinal study (see section 4.5.4), the Active Lives survey (section 4.5.5) or the Annual Population Survey (section 4.5.6).
Young people's skills	To assess the difference the funding made to young people in the shorter-term.	This could be measured using validated measures of emotional and social skills and practical skills (e.g. those from Centre for Youth Impact ⁹).	We have not found any existing datasets / sources which effectively capture this outcome. Primary data collection would be needed.

⁹ <https://www.youthimpact.uk/sites/default/files/2022-03/YRSS%20Guide%20to%20DCMS.pdf>; <https://www.youthimpact.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/YIF%20Economic%20Report.pdf>;

4.4 Monitoring information

The impact evaluation will also be able to draw on information submitted through applications to the fund. At a minimum, the impact evaluation will require the **location** of the proposed facilities (postcode) and **contact details** for organisations responsible for applications. It would also be helpful to have baseline measures for some of the outcomes above, such as the **characteristics** (scale and features) of existing facilities and organisations' financial metrics. We understand that data will be collected by the intermediary grant maker as part of the application process. We suggest the following data should be collected from applicant organisations:

- Postcode of existing facility
- Total area of existing property (m2)
- Status of existing property – owned, mortgaged, rented, public facility, etc
- Facilities in existing property – from drop down list (such as IT rooms, sports facilities, kitchen facilities, disability access)
- Number and type of activities delivered to young people – from drop down list
- Number of hours facility is open for use by young people
- Maximum number of young people able to use the facility during opening hours
- Number of young people currently accessing facilities / engaging in activities
- Whether they are open to all young people or target specific group/s (such as LGBTQ+ young people, young carers) – if so, which
- Number of volunteers
- Number of full-time equivalent (FTE) paid staff
- Financial metrics:
 - Total income in last financial year and % split by different sources
 - Operating expenditure in last financial year and % split by type of expenditure
 - Value of assets / liabilities (both short and long-term)
 - Value of financial reserves
 - Whether had to use reserves in last three years
 - Change in income over past three years – increased / stayed the same / decreased
 - Projected income from existing sources over next three years – increase / stay the same / decrease
- Contact details for applicants

By its nature, application and monitoring data will only be available from organisations which have engaged with the fund. Therefore, this source is likely to be of limited use for understanding outcomes for comparison areas or organisations. However, it will be useful in informing a theory-based evaluation (see Section 5.6), both directly and in terms of informing sampling approaches for fieldwork and streamlining the process of engaging with organisations. The success of the impact evaluation will largely be dependent on grant funded organisations actively engaging in the evaluation, including providing ongoing monitoring information. Involvement in the evaluation is a mandatory condition of receiving YIF funding.

4.5 Secondary datasets

Longitudinal data on some outcomes of interest will potentially be available from secondary data sources. The sections below provide more detail on these secondary datasets. They include **administrative data** capturing financial and other details associated with organisations awarded funding; and **annual surveys** of the target population that could potentially be exploited to establish the

downstream outcomes of the Fund for young people – by accessing the underlying survey responses and identifying those respondents in the target group residing in proximity to funded facilities (or in proximity to organisations in the comparison group) to establish the impact of YIF on local youth populations.

It should be noted that the extent to which the survey sources will provide useful data will be largely dependent on the number of respondents to the surveys that live within a reasonable distance of relevant facilities (or proposed facilities). Samples sizes cannot be determined at this stage as the number of funded facilities and their locations are unknown.

We have conducted a non-exhaustive review of potential datasets (identified through discussions with expert colleagues and DCMS) and recommend a more thorough review is undertaken once projects have been awarded funding and decisions have been made on the general evaluation approach. We also understand that the grant maker will be collecting and analysing secondary data on grant applicant organisations as part of their grant management and assessment processes.

4.5.1 The Register of Charities in England and Wales

The Charity Commission for England and Wales publishes data from the Register of Charities. Charities must send their annual return within 10 months of the end of the charity's financial year. This data is updated daily and can be downloaded from the Charity Commission website (<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/register/full-register-download>).

The data from the Register can be used to measure financial outcomes (see Table 4.1 above), and identify suitable organisations for the construction of a comparison group. The data allows the selection of charities that operate in areas that are close to where the YIF-funded organisations operate and are similar in terms of other financial characteristics. In addition, the Register contains all charities' contact details, which can be used to contact them to collect further information on characteristics that may be missing in the Register and more up-to-date information on financial outcomes.

The main focus of the Register of Charities is the financial profile of the organisations. The information that charities need to submit (and hence included in the publicly available data) depends on the total income of the charity and the type of charity. For instance, charities and unincorporated charitable organisations with income under £10,000 only submit information on income and spending. Larger charities must answer a number of questions (regarding the sources of funding, staff, assets, liabilities). Charities and incorporated charitable organisations with income over £25,000 must also include copies of their accounts and annual reports. Finally, very large charities (with income over £1 million or gross assets over £3.26 million and income over £250,000) will also need to submit a full audit and additional documentation on their finances.¹⁰

Based on research conducted by the National Youth Agency for the Youth Census (see below), the Register of Charities includes a total of 8,471 youth organisations delivering youth provisions in England. For consistency with the NYA research, it is recommended that the final list of charities produced by the National Youth Agency is used as a starting point for the identification of charities in scope for the impact evaluation.

¹⁰ See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-a-charity-annual-return>

For each charity with income above £10,000, the Register lists the following information that can be used in the impact evaluation:

- Registered charity number
- Organisations' name and contact details (phone and email address)
- Organisation's full address
- Financial period to which the financial information refers to
- Financial information: The type of financial information submitted by the charity depends on their income.

For charities with income between £10,000 and £500,000, the following information is available:

- Total gross income
- Total gross expenditure
- Total income from government contracts
- Total income from government grants

For charities with income over £500,000 there is also information on:

- Total value of assets
- Total value of liabilities
- Income from investments
- Other sources of income (donations, legacies, trading activities)
- Reserves
- Structure of the organisation: charities with income above 500,000 need to submit information on number of staff in different salary bands and number of volunteers.

4.5.2 VOA data

Valuation Officers are required by law to periodically compile and maintain a local rating list for each of the 350 Billing Authorities in England and Wales.

For each listed property, the VOA data has detailed information on size of premises, rateable value, billing authority, full address and description of the properties. The data is publicly available and can be downloaded from the VOA website (<https://voaringlists.blob.core.windows.net/html/rldata.htm>). At the moment, the latest available VOA data were compiled in 2017. The next release (compiled in April 2022) is forthcoming.

The VOA data are a useful source of historical information on the size and characteristics of youth facilities before receiving YIF funding (see Table 4.1 above). Up-to-date information on the size of the premises of youth facilities after funding receipt will not be included in the latest VOA data. However, for the treatment group, this can be collected through monitoring data. Information for the control group might be included in the April 2022 VOA listing or can be collected through primary surveys.

4.5.3 National Youth Association Youth Census

The National Youth Association (NYA) has recently undertaken the first Census of youth organisations in England. In total, the Census will contain information on over 31,000 youth organisations. The data is still being finalised and will be available by the end of 2022. It will contain financial information, staff

information, geographical information, and information on the type of young people an organisation works with (age group, ethnicity).

At the time of writing, the data has not been released, hence it is not possible to add further information on this data source. It is however envisaged that this data could be used to **help identify organisations for a comparison group through a matching process, and to gather information on the outcomes of interest for both funded and comparison organisations.**

The evaluation may also be able to identify relevant youth organisations for a comparison group through the membership lists of other youth organisations, such as National Children's Bureau (NCB), Children England, NCVO, London Youth, or the British Youth Council. These organisations will have segmented their membership by size (as this is how they set their membership fees) and we could therefore identify and rule out the organisations which are likely to be too small to bid for YIF Phase 2. Further investigation would be needed to explore whether the evaluation could access these lists and, if so, what conditions would need to be met (for example, to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)).

4.5.4 Understanding Society

Understanding Society is a longitudinal study of UK households. It includes 17,000 children and young people under the age of 22. The same households are interviewed each year (the study follows the core sample household members as they move to new households and form new families). There is a young person questionnaire for 10-15 year-olds. Young people aged 16 and over complete the adult questionnaire.

The young person questionnaire contains questions about:

- how often they "go to youth clubs, Scouts, Girl Guides or other organised activities" (only asked every other wave)
- how they feel about their life as a whole (scaled from 1-7 from very happy to very unhappy)

The adult questionnaire contains questions about:

- whether they join in the activities of any of these organisations on a regular basis (whether or not they are a member): voluntary services group, Scouts/Guides organisation, social club, sports club or other community or civic group (only asked every third wave)
- their satisfaction with life overall (scaled from 1-7 from completely satisfied to completely dissatisfied)

This data could therefore be used to measure outcomes relating to participation in youth services, and wellbeing and life satisfaction, for young people living near to funded facilities or to organisations in the comparison group.

The Understanding Society technical report¹¹ indicates that there are around 3,600 interviews each year with young people aged 10 to 15 (it does not give a figure for the number of interviews with 16-21 year olds specifically as these are treated as adults in the relevant table). This means there are 0.41 young

¹¹ <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/documentation/mainstage/technical-reports/wave-11-technical-report.pdf>

people aged 10-15 interviewed per ward. The number of wards receiving YIF funding is yet to be determined, but if it is (for example) 300, then we would have 124 observations each year that the question is asked in YIF funded areas. This number will be higher if more wards are included (if some YIF funded projects cover more than one ward) and if 16-21 year-olds can be included. There is therefore a reasonable probability that there will be enough observations in YIF funded areas to use for an impact evaluation, and we assume that there will also be enough observations in the set of areas chosen for a comparison group.

The version of the dataset that would be needed for the purpose of the YIF impact evaluation is a special license version containing detailed geographical identifiers (Lower Layer Super Output Areas), to be able to measure outcomes at the local area level. To obtain access to this data, it is necessary to send an application to the UK Data Service, describing the project, individuals who access the data and procedures to securely store the data. From previous experience, it is estimated that the application process will last between one and two months, hence this time should be factored in when planning the evaluation.

4.5.5 Active Lives

Active Lives is an annual survey of young people aged 5-16 in England. It takes place via schools. In 2020/21 there were 86,828 responses from children and young people aged 5-16. For children in school years 1-2 (aged 5 and 6) the questions are answered by their parents.

For children in school years 7-11 (aged 11-16) the survey asks how happy they felt yesterday, and how satisfied they are with their life nowadays, both on a scale from 0 to 10.

This data could therefore be used to measure outcomes relating to wellbeing and life satisfaction for young people living near to funded facilities or to organisations in the comparison group.

It may also be possible for DCMS to explore the costs, advantages and disadvantages of adding a question to future waves of the survey around participation in youth organisations. This would need to be discussed with Sport England.

Two versions of the data exist. One is publicly available from the UK Data Service (UKDS) website (<https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/>), to all registered users who accept the UKDS terms and conditions. In this version of the data the lowest geographical units are counties and County Sport Partnerships. A special-permission version of the dataset is available from Sport England upon request and contains the residence of respondents by local authority and NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups. To prevent disclosure risks, this version does not contain details on some variables (e.g., no single school years, age, ethnicity, or disability types). It is also important to note that all the geographical level information contained in the Active Lives surveys refers to the children's schools and not where they live. However, this may not be problematic in areas with high densities of schools but may be more of a problem in rural areas where the place young people live may be some distance away from their school.

Given the relatively localised impact of YIF funding, data which is broken down by county or LA level is unlikely to be sufficient for the purposes of the evaluation. More detailed geographical data for the Active Lives surveys may be available upon request to Sport England. Sport England will assess whether the request entails any disclosure risk. If no disclosure risk is identified, the survey team can release the data for evaluation purposes. It is recommended that the option of obtaining more detailed data is

explored with Sport England during initial stages of the evaluation, since the value of Active Lives as a data source for the evaluation is likely to depend on whether this more detailed data can be provided.

4.5.6 Annual Population Survey

The Annual Population Survey (APS) is a continuous household survey, covering the UK, with the aim of providing estimates between censuses of main social and labour market variables at a local area level. A special access version of the APS is available from the UK Data Service. The special license version contains very detailed geographical identifiers (postcodes)

The Annual Population Survey contains the following well-being questions (all scaled from 0 to 10)¹²:

- How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- How worthwhile things done in life are felt to be (overall)?
- How happy did you feel yesterday?
- How anxious did you feel yesterday?

This data could therefore be used to measure outcomes relating to participation in youth services, and wellbeing and life satisfaction, for young people living near to funded facilities or to organisations in the comparison group.

There is a caveat to using the APS for the impact evaluation of the YIF. The official documentation¹³ for this data notes that the size of the achieved sample for the Well-Being variables within the APS dataset may be small, as the well-being questions are only asked to persons aged 16 and over, who gave a personal interview; proxy answers¹⁴ are not accepted. As a result, some caution should be used when analysing responses especially at detailed geography areas, where unweighted responses number may be small.

4.6 Primary surveys

Several of the outcomes of interest detailed in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 **do not appear in existing datasets**. Moreover, the impact evaluation also requires information on the characteristics of organisations and areas to select an appropriate comparison group. As noted in Table 4.1, some of the organisational metrics could be included in monitoring data collected from funded organisations, but the evaluation also needs a way to collect data on these metrics from a control group.

¹² These are known as ONS4 and are used to compute official national well-being estimates published quarterly by the ONS.

¹³ https://doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/8928/mrdoc/pdf/lfs_user_guide_vol10_analysis_of_data_collected_by_lfs_2022.pdf

¹⁴ Answers provided from somebody else, e.g., the heads of the household replying for their children.

Recommendation: In order to gather this information for organisations in both treatment and control areas, the impact evaluation will need to incorporate a survey of youth organisations in these areas. This will be critical to enable assessment of the impact of the YIF against its objectives.

We also recommend a survey of young people in treatment and control areas, although this is less critical than the survey of youth organisations. A survey of young people would be the only way of collecting data on young people’s skills, and would complement data on other outcomes that may be obtainable from secondary sources.

4.6.1 Primary survey of organisations

As noted, a primary survey of youth organisations in treatment and control areas will be essential for establishing the impact of the fund on the scale, scope and sustainability of youth facilities. This survey would gather data on the following metrics from organisations in treatment and control areas. The first six of these relate to the outcomes in Table 4.1 above and the remaining three will (alongside baseline measures of the other metrics) help to identify an appropriate control group.

- levels and sources of the organisation’s capital spending
- scale of youth facilities (in terms of size of building and capacity)
- quality of youth facilities (in terms of features of the building)
- volume of youth provision (in terms of hours open and number of users)
- nature of youth provision (in terms of range of activities on offer)
- key financial metrics
- level of ambition to expand youth services
- perceptions of local demand for youth services
- perceptions of the level of competition from other local service offering

The evaluation will require baseline measures of all of these metrics, as well as post-funding data on the outcome measures. In theory, both baseline and post-funding data could be collected at a single point in time by asking organisations to think back and provide answers for an earlier time period as well as the current one. However, a separate baseline survey would produce more accurate data and lead to better comparability of samples and more credible findings, and we therefore recommend that a baseline survey is carried out as early on in the lifetime of the Fund as is feasible before the effects of YIF funding begin to materialise.

The survey should seek to include all funded organisations as well as sufficient numbers of non-funded organisations to create an appropriate comparison group. Because the complete list of funded organisations will not be known at the time of the baseline survey, we recommend that the survey includes in its sample frame all youth organisations within the “left-behind” areas, as well as youth organisations in areas that were just outside the definition of “left-behind” areas (in case we wish to use Option B for a counterfactual – see section 5.2 below). To construct a matched comparison group of the same size as the group of funded projects, the evaluation will need to survey a minimum of 3x the number of funded organisations to create a pool from which enough suitable matches can be found. This would imply surveying a minimum of 1,200 youth organisations altogether (of which 300 will be funded and 900 unfunded).

We understand that there is no existing list of eligible youth organisations and so in order to identify these organisations, **the evaluation would need to draw on the National Youth Association (NYA) Youth Census, Charity Commission data, and potentially other youth sector membership lists as mentioned above.** Organisations below a certain size (that would not reasonably be expected to bid for YIF funding) could be excluded from this collated list if desired and if it is possible to identify an appropriate size threshold to do so.

There may be opportunities to use the survey for multiple purposes, such as gathering data to inform the implementation and/or evaluation of the wider Youth Guarantee, in which case DCMS may wish to extend the range of organisations included (in terms of geography or size).

Participation in the survey can be made a mandatory condition of receiving funding. However, non-funded organisations may need to be incentivised to participate. This could be done by:

- emphasising the importance of participation for the sector and organisations like them, and explaining how the findings will be used
- offering to provide them with a breakdown of the findings (perhaps personalised to their type of organisation or region so that they can see how they compare to other similar organisations)
- offering a voucher to spend on supplies or equipment – this could be framed as compensating the organisation for the time they will need to spend completing the survey, and as such we would recommend a minimum of £30 per organisation. Larger incentives will increase response rates but may not be acceptable to DCMS given the number of organisations eligible for an incentive (900).

4.6.2 Primary survey of young people

It is not yet known whether the secondary datasets identified above will provide enough observations from the areas selected for the impact evaluation to allow analysis to take place. If they do not, another option would be for the evaluation to collect outcome data directly from young people. This would also allow the evaluation to collect data on young people's skills, which is not collected by any of the secondary data sources we have reviewed. It would contribute to the theory-based impact evaluation by complementing qualitative data, and could also provide a source of data for a process evaluation.

A range of options for carrying out a primary survey of young people for this purpose have been considered as part of the feasibility study and are discussed in this section. The options presented are purely illustrative and not intended as an exhaustive list. There are pros and cons associated with each are set out in Table 4.3. This analysis suggests that most of the options considered are unlikely to be feasible: the most feasible would be surveying young people via youth organisations, but even this option has significant challenges. Moreover, this approach would not enable observation of the difference made by the existence of a youth facility or participating in youth activities overall, but could be used to assess differences that may be attributable to changes in the quality, accessibility or diversity of youth provision as a result of YIF; and observe how outcomes change over time for young people that attend youth facilities. On balance, our view is that the difficulties of undertaking a primary survey of young people are likely to outweigh the value this survey would add to the evaluation.

Sample sizes for a survey of young people via youth organisations have been considered and are discussed in more detail in Annex B. The ideal sample size will depend on a variety of factors including the size of the change in outcomes the evaluation is expecting to observe and the level of confidence required in the findings. For example, if outcomes are expected to change by at least five percentage

points, have equal numbers in treatment and control groups, and the aim is to achieve a <5% chance of a false positive and a <20% chance of a false negative, this suggests a sample size of around 3,500 young people (given some other assumptions discussed in Annex B).

It is important to recognise that Government Social Research (GSR) guidelines state that parents or legal guardians must be approached for consent to enable children under 16 to participate in research, which would need to be considered in the design and delivery of any surveys of young people in this age group.

Table 4.3: Sampling approaches for survey of young people

Sampling approach	Description	Potential risks
Schools (standalone survey)	<p>The evaluation could survey young people through schools in the relevant areas. The Children's Active Lives Survey currently adopts this approach.</p> <p>To achieve 3,500 young people would likely require around 80 schools to agree to participate (two classes per school, with not all pupils participating) in treatment and comparison areas.</p>	<p>A key challenge with sampling schools is gaining their agreement to participate, which has become increasingly challenging in recent years. There will be several other large-scale surveys of young people taking place via schools during the period of the impact evaluation (such as Active Lives) which may also reduce willingness to participate. This is significant because loss of some schools from the sample will leave few (if any) replacements in the relevant areas. Therefore, this option is unlikely to be feasible.</p> <p>This option would exclude some young people who are over the age of 16 and no longer at school.</p>
Schools (via omnibus)	<p>Ipsos' Young People Omnibus is an annual survey of young people attending secondary schools. The survey incorporates interviews with around 2,700 young people aged 11-16 years in approximately 110 schools in England, Scotland and Wales. The sample is designed to be representative of all secondary and middle schools in the state sector that deliver education to curriculum years 7-11.</p> <p>It might be possible to add a small number of relevant questions to the Young People Omnibus.</p>	<p>This option is unlikely to be feasible because the proposed impact evaluation approach requires the selection of geographic areas from which outcomes are gathered (near to funded projects and in selected comparison areas) and it is unlikely that the schools Omnibus would be in the areas needed. It would also exclude young people over the age of 16.</p>
Child Benefit records	<p>Child Benefit records could be used to identify young people in the target age range in the relevant areas and to create a sampling frame from these. Households could be contacted by post and encouraged to complete the survey online.</p>	<p>Not all households with young people under the age of 18 receive Child Benefit: some young people aged 16-18 are not eligible because they are not in education or training, and households with high earners may not be present on the records. Both treatment and control areas would be similarly affected and</p>

Sampling approach	Description	Potential risks
		<p>so the impact estimator would not be biased. However, the estimate will not fully reflect the impact on older young people not in education, or children from higher income families.</p> <p>DCMS would need to actively support access to the records for permission to draw a sample for the study. A strong case is required to access the sample and based on our experience, permission may not be granted in this instance. It can take several months to access the sample once permission is granted.</p>
National Pupil Database	<p>The National Pupil Database could be used to identify young people in the target age range in the relevant areas and to create a sampling frame from these. Households could be contacted by post and encouraged to complete the survey online.</p>	<p>The database does not include young people who are not attending state-funded schools or colleges. Both treatment and control areas would be similarly affected and so the impact estimator would not be biased. However, the estimate will not fully reflect the impact on young people not in education.</p> <p>As with Child Benefit records, a strong case is required to access the sample and it can take several months to access the sample once permission is granted.</p>
Household survey	<p>Relevant locations would be identified from their postcodes (using the Postcode Address File) and these areas would be used to create a sampling frame.</p> <p>Households would be contacted by post and encouraged to complete the survey online.</p>	<p>At least 33 households would need to be approached for each participant household agreeing to take part. This assumes that around 15% of households have children in the relevant age bracket¹⁵ and that agreement to participate is around 20% (typically the upper end of a mailshot invitation to complete an online survey).</p> <p>However, this level of agreement to participate can only be achieved by using relatively generous incentives (we would suggest a £10 shopping voucher), which would be likely to encourage fraud. Avoiding the use of incentives would mean that</p>

¹⁵ In 2020, [2.6 million households](#) in England had at least one child of secondary school age (11-16), which is [11% of all households in England](#). However, YIF is relevant to a wider group of young people aged up to 18 or to 25 with SEN, and we have therefore rounded up this estimate accordingly.

Sampling approach	Description	Potential risks
Youth facilities	<p>This approach would focus solely on young people attending facilities offering youth services, which would be equivalent to a treatment in the treated impact design.</p> <p>Youth organisations would be given short paper questionnaires for young people to complete, and the questionnaires could then be returned to the evaluation team for processing. The main driver of costs is the time required to liaise with youth organisations and follow up with them about returning the questionnaires. For funded organisations, the intermediary grant maker may be able to support this process.</p> <p>Alternatively, the evaluation could undertake a push-to-web approach whereby young people and their parents would be given an information sheet about the survey via youth organisations, and young people encouraged to complete the survey online. This could help facilitate the process of gathering parental consent and reduce burden on youth organisations, but it may also reduce response rates.</p>	<p>response rates would be lower and more households would need to be approached.</p> <p>This would ignore young people who do not use youth services, and therefore could not be used to assess the difference made by having a youth facility at all or taking part in youth provision. However, it could be used to assess differences that may be attributable to changes in the quality, accessibility and / or diversity of youth provision as a result of YIF; and how outcomes change over time for young people that attend youth facilities.</p> <p>It is likely to have some practical challenges, since many youth facilities do not keep a register of users and their details, and we know from speaking to youth organisations that young people are often reluctant to take part in surveys when they are attending a youth facility. There would also be logistical challenges around getting parental consent.</p>

4.7 Outcomes not in scope for impact evaluation

As described above, we undertook a collaborative exercise with DCMS to identify the key outcomes that the impact evaluation will focus on. The outcomes set out in Table 4.4 were suggested for consideration given their importance to the success of YIF, but on review were deemed not to be appropriate for inclusion in an impact evaluation, for the reasons presented.

DCMS is committed to undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of YIF Phase 2, which is likely to include process and value for money evaluations as well as an impact evaluation. Some of these outcomes could therefore be covered as part of process or value for money evaluations instead, which would complement the impact evaluation and together provide a broader picture of whether YIF has achieved its aims.

Table 4.4: Outcomes not in scope for impact evaluation

Outcome	Reason not in scope
YIF funded facilities are in the right left-behind areas, and/or targeted to the right young people.	<p>This is more of a process evaluation question about whether the fund operated as intended and whether decision-making processes were effective.</p> <p>It could also be hard to define which are the “right” left-behind areas (within the wider group of those eligible for the fund) and young people in ways that could be evaluated quantitatively.</p>
YIF funding leads to facilities being environmentally friendly and contributing toward net zero.	This is more of an output to be included in monitoring (X facilities were funded that met certain environmental standards) than an outcome requiring evaluation.
YIF funding leads to a reduction in operating costs compared to other similar facilities.	Reduced operating costs can arise for a number of reasons, not all of which would be positive (such as reduced provision or lower staff numbers). As some grants are intended to expand provision this could imply an associated increase in operating costs.
YIF funding leads to higher-quality youth provision on offer compared to other similar areas.	<p>Difficulty measuring the quality of youth work in a way suitable for quantitative assessment.</p> <p>Weak evidence (according to expert advice) that expanded and improved facilities lead to higher-quality youth provision.</p>
Longer-term outcomes relating to young people, such as less use of the criminal justice system and lower demand on the NHS.	As set out in the Theory of Change, these are likely to materialise over the long-term (5+ years) and therefore may not be visible in the lifetime of the impact evaluation.

5 Impact evaluation recommendations

Chapter Summary

- An impact evaluation requires the identification of a counterfactual group of organisations, and the areas surrounding them, **that did not benefit from YIF funding**. These organisations and areas should be similar enough to funded organisations and areas to allow us to estimate what would have happened at funded organisations and areas in the absence of YIF funding.
- We have considered **four options** for identifying such a counterfactual group. However, some of the more robust approaches do not currently appear to be feasible for practical reasons, due to the anticipated profile of grant applications and awards.
- We therefore recommend that the impact evaluation constructs a comparison group comprised of eligible organisations and areas that do not receive funding. We also recommend that DCMS reconsider the feasibility of the other options considered once the portfolio of grant applications and awards is known.
- To reduce systematic differences between the treatment and comparison groups, we recommend the use of **matching techniques and a difference-in-differences analysis**. We recommend a baseline survey of youth organisations is carried out to provide a dataset to use for matching.
- We have also considered **spatial analysis techniques** to assess the impacts of the fund on young people in the areas surrounding organisations in treatment and comparison groups. Since the impact of the Fund may be very localised, a spatial analysis comparing differences in outcomes for young people living closer to youth facilities with outcomes for young people living further away would help identify this impact. Options for undertaking an area-based primary survey with young people (as opposed to a primary survey of young people attending youth facilities) are limited due to practical difficulties, so this approach would likely need to rely on secondary datasets. The feasibility of this approach will depend on the overall number of funded facilities and therefore the number of relevant observations that might be expected to appear in secondary datasets, and on whether secondary datasets will provide enough information on location to allow distance from a facility to be measured.
- Alongside the counterfactual impact evaluation options presented above, we recommend a **non-experimental theory-based evaluation**. This would complement the quasi-experimental approaches described above by providing a more detailed understanding of the YIF's theory of change and give greater confidence that YIF contributed strongly to any outcomes observed.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an appraisal of the available options for delivering a counterfactual impact evaluation of YIF Phase 2. It considers (a) ways in which a comparison group of non-funded organisations and areas could be constructed, and (b) analytical methods that could be applied to assess the causal effects of the Fund. It should be noted that the appraisal is partly based on current

information and expectations regarding the likely profile of applications for funding, and a definitive assessment of some options cannot be provided at this stage.

5.2 Selection bias and counterfactual selection

A credible quantitative assessment of the impacts of YIF Phase 2 requires comparisons between funded organisations and associated areas, and an appropriate control group of organisations and areas that did not receive funding, to establish what would have occurred in the absence of the programme. Such comparisons will only provide a robust measure of the impact of the fund if the comparator organisations and areas can be considered equivalent in relevant respects at the point at which the programme was launched.

The main challenge in constructing a suitable comparison group for the YIF funded organisations and areas is addressing possible biases that might arise from systematic differences between organisations that were awarded funding and those that were not (selection bias). Given the architecture of the fund, there are three possible sources of selectivity:

- **Eligibility:** Funds are only available for projects in eligible areas. Forty-five eligible upper tier authorities were determined based on a transparent scoring process accounting for the number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET), local deprivation levels (based on the average IDACI score), and spending on services for young people. The 15 percent most deprived wards (again based on IDACI scores) that were not located in the 45 eligible upper tier authorities and not in a major/minor conurbation using DEFRA rural/urban classifications were also eligible (647 wards). Comparisons between eligible and ineligible areas (or youth organisations based in eligible and ineligible areas) could potentially produce misleading results if differences in the characteristics of those areas are an important determinant of youth provision. For example, deprivation was a key determinant of eligibility implying that funding is likely to be directed to lower income areas. This will influence local ability to pay for youth services and comparing eligible and ineligible areas could understate the impact of the fund.
- **Self-selection:** The scheme is demand led and youth organisations 'self-select' into the programme by applying for funding. Organisations that apply for funding are also likely to differ in systematic ways from those that do not. For example, applying for funding could signal that that the organisation is more likely to see opportunities for (and benefits from) expanding their service offering or improving their facilities. Given the minimum grant value of £300,000, organisations applying for funding may also consider themselves better equipped to manage larger programmes of capital investment. As such, comparisons between organisations that do and do not apply for funding are likely to overstate the impacts of the fund.
- **Competitive entry:** Finally, the programme will be delivered on a competitive basis with applications for funding being subject to an assessment process (with ineligible bids filtered through an initial EOI process). At the time of writing, the full details of the assessment process were still being worked through. However, it was expected that proposals would be assessed against three criteria – resilience (the financial health and governance of the organisation), construction (the viability of the project), and youth (with specifics to be determined). Applicants that are and are not awarded funding are also likely to differ in systematic ways that could bias findings. For example, declined applicants are likely to be associated with weaker financial health and less viable construction proposals. Again, comparisons between applicants that are and are not awarded funding are likely to overstate the impacts of the fund.

The issues outlined above can be (partly) mitigated through careful selection of the comparison group. Consideration has been given to four options for constructing a comparison group as summarised in Table 5.1. The approaches have been assessed both in terms of their likely level of robustness and their feasibility. Details of the assessment are provided in the following sections.

Table 5.1: Overview of counterfactual options

Option	Robustness	Implementation issues
Option A: Successful vs declined applicants	High – most robust approach in principle	Significant risk/likelihood that population of declined applicants is too small to support statistical analysis
Option B: Eligible vs ineligible	High – risks of bias mitigated by focusing on areas that were ‘just’ ineligible	Effects of fund unlikely to be detectable given low share of eligible areas likely to receive funding
Option C: Funded vs unfunded	Low to medium – non-applicants likely to differ in significant ways to funded organisations (though risks can be partly mitigated with appropriate statistical methods).	Comparison group sample can be constructed from publicly available sources (NYA Youth Census) – likely only practical means of constructing a comparison group
Option D: Pipeline design (early versus late)	Medium to high – risk that later projects differ in systematic ways to those that do not	Deadline for spending funds means that, in practice, projects are likely to be completed around the same time even if awarded funding at different time points. Scope of analysis would be limited to those outcomes that can be measured with secondary data, owing to need for longitudinal data

Recommendation: It is suggested that the impact evaluation use as a comparison group **eligible organisations and areas that do not receive funding (Option C)**. This is the least robust of the four approaches outlined above but the most likely to be feasible based on current assumptions about the design of the Fund and profile of funded organisations. These assumptions should be revisited once more is known about the Fund, in case one of these more robust approaches can be adopted.

A further set of more robust approaches (discussed in Chapter 6) have also been ruled out due to practical reasons based on expectations about the Fund at the time of writing. However, this assessment is not definitive as it is based on speculative assumptions regarding the volume, quality, and spatial distribution of applications received. **It is also recommended that DCMS revisit the conclusions of the feasibility study once more information is known on application volumes.** As all applications are not being made at the same time, this will need to be monitored during the first few rounds of funding. As long as appropriate baseline measures are in

place (see section 4.6.1) then it will not be a problem to incorporate these designs at a later stage in the lifetime of the fund.

5.3 Recommended options

Option C: Funded vs unfunded

This option would compare outcomes for funded organisations (and for young people residing in the surrounding areas), with outcomes for organisations that did not receive funding (and young people residing in areas surrounding these organisations).

- **Robustness:** This approach is likely to be least effective in terms of addressing possible sources of selection bias. It would be possible to reduce bias by limiting comparisons to organisations and areas within eligible areas (assuming that within eligible areas there are a sufficient number of organisations and areas that do not benefit from the funding to act as a comparison group). However, as comparisons are made between funded organisations and organisations that chose not to apply for funding, there are likely to be significant differences between the two groups that are likely to bias findings. The risk of biased findings can be reduced by applying statistical techniques (as explained in the following sections).
- **Sample construction:** The approach also involves similar (though less acute) practical issues in generating a sample of organisations that did not receive funding to Option B. While a sample can potentially be constructed using publicly available data (see Section 4), the profile of organisations covered by these datasets may differ from those that apply for funding. If some types of youth organisation receive YIF funding but are not covered by the NYA Youth Census then it may be necessary to exclude them from the scope of the analysis, since we will not be able to identify suitable comparator organisations. These types of risk can only be assessed once the organisations awarded funding are known.

While this approach faces the greatest threats to robustness, it is likely to prove the only feasible means of both (a) constructing a sufficiently large comparison group to detect the impacts of interest and (b) provide a means of comprehensively covering the outcomes of interest to the evaluation (as it does not demand annual or longitudinal data).

5.4 Options unlikely to be feasible

Option A: Successful vs declined applicants

In principle, the most effective means of addressing the issues of selection bias outlined above would be to draw the comparison group from the population of declined applicants and the areas surrounding them. This eliminates possible biases driven by systematic differences between eligible and ineligible areas, as well as differences between youth organisations that do and do not apply for funding. The approach also has some practical advantages in that the application process reveals the contact details and locations of the comparison group, avoiding some of the issues highlighted below around constructing a comparison sample.

As flagged above, the main threat to the robustness of the approach relates to residual differences between successful and declined applicants that could bias results. Successful applicants are likely to be associated with some unobserved features that will also be related to the outcomes of interest. For example, if those submitting higher quality applications also have superior managerial skills, then those

organisations may also be better equipped to secure funding for the proposed project from alternative sources. This means that basic comparisons between successful and declined applicants could overstate the impact of YIF.

This issue is commonly handled in evaluations by restricting the comparison population to declined applicants that submitted high quality applications but 'just missed out' on funding. These applicants are more likely to share features in common with those awarded grants, mitigating against the risk of biased results.

However, based on expectations at the time of writing, there are likely to be substantial practical challenges involved in adopting this approach:

- **Demand for funding:** Scope to use the population of declined applicants is dependent on excess demand for funding. Based on discussions with DCMS, there is strong expectation that demand for funding will likely be limited and that all 'fundable' applications will receive funding. While some declined applications are expected, these proposals are likely to be far from the quality thresholds required to secure funding.
- **Scoring process:** Details of the scoring process were unavailable at the time of writing, but it is understood that it will involve a series of pass/fail tests against the scoring criteria (rather than a scored or graduated assessment). This means that it will be impossible to discriminate between proposals that were close to and far from the required quality thresholds (making it infeasible to identify those that 'just missed out').

Based on the information available, an approach based on comparing successful and declined applicants (the most robust approach in principle) is unlikely to be feasible in practice. This conclusion is clearly based on speculative assumptions regarding the likely volume and quality of applications that will be received. Given the potential strength of the approach, it is recommended that DCMS re-visits these assumptions if the volume of EOIs received indicates that there is likely to be excess demand for funding and a reasonable number of high-quality proposals are likely to be declined. In this event, it is recommended that the assessment of bids incorporates some form of graduated assessment to discriminate between marginal and low-quality proposals (e.g. scoring proposals against three categories 'fail', 'acceptable', and 'strong' would help restrict a comparison group that met basic quality standards against the criteria).

Option B: Eligible vs ineligible areas

An alternative approach would be to compare eligible and ineligible areas (and youth organisations based within those areas). This approach faces several threats to robustness which could partly be mitigated in the design of the evaluation:

- **Selection issues:** Issues of bias driven by differences between organisations that do and do not apply for funding would be addressed by adopting an 'intention to treat' approach. This would involve comparing eligible organisations (regardless of whether they applied for funding) to organisations which were ineligible for the Fund because of their location. While the programme involves a precise definition of the areas that are eligible for the fund, there is no precise definition of the organisations that are eligible. However, as highlighted in the previous section, an approximation of the eligible population (and the equivalent population in ineligible areas) can be defined using secondary data.

- **Differences between eligible and ineligible areas:** Issues of bias driven by differences between eligible and ineligible areas would be addressed by restricting the comparison group to areas that were 'just ineligible' for the fund (e.g. the 5 percent of upper tier authorities and wards below the eligibility thresholds) and organisations within these areas. This is feasible because the definition of eligible areas was based on the rank order of upper tier authorities and wards and the eligibility threshold itself can be treated as arbitrary (i.e. while eligible areas and ineligible areas may differ in general terms, differences between areas just above and below the threshold might be expected to be effectively random).

This type of approach is also likely to be rendered infeasible owing to a range of practical difficulties:

- **Definition of eligible organisations:** As mentioned, the evaluation could construct an approximation of the eligible population, and equivalent organisations in ineligible areas, using secondary data (i.e. the NYA Youth Census). Comparisons would be made between the organisations appearing in the secondary data, and could introduce issues of generalisability if there are some groups of potential applicants that are systematically underrepresented in the NYA Youth Census. For example, if there are important groups of organisations receiving funding through YIF that do not appear in this data, they would be excluded from the analysis. There are also possible issues in that organisations located in ineligible areas (forming part of the comparison group) could also potentially benefit from the fund if they put forward proposals for projects in eligible areas. The significance of these risks can only be assessed once funding decisions have been made but could indicate that this approach could be more effective in examining area rather than organisation level outcomes.
- **Share of eligible areas receiving funding:** Funded and unfunded areas are pooled in this type of approach (in other words, the analysis will look at eligible areas/organisations regardless of whether they are funded or not). Therefore, the power of the approach in detecting the impact of the fund is dependent on the share of eligible areas receiving funding. If a high share of eligible areas do not receive or benefit from the funding, the effects of the programme will be difficult to detect using this approach. The programme is expected to fund around 300 projects within approximately 1,700 eligible wards¹⁶, so that less than 20 percent of eligible wards will contain a funded project. However, some projects might be expected to benefit young people from multiple wards. It is recommended that DCMS re-visits this approach once the share of eligible areas benefiting from the funding is known.

Option D: Pipeline design (early vs late)

This option exploits the likelihood that funding for the programme will be administered over a series of funding rounds. This creates the possibility of restricting comparisons to organisations and areas that were funded, using those that were funded later as a counterfactual for those that were funded earlier. This assumes that those organisations and areas receiving funding earlier will also see the impacts of funding more rapidly than those that receive funding later.

As comparisons are limited to those that ultimately received funding, the approach would be expected to produce robust findings as it mitigates against all potential sources of selection bias highlighted at the beginning of this section. Additionally (as with Option A), details of the organisations and areas

¹⁶ Based on an average of 23 wards per local authority.

benefitting from the programme are revealed by the application process, limiting any practical hurdles associated with constructing the samples required.

This type of approach is likely to be impractical due to likely project completion dates:

- **Simultaneity:** We understand that part of the rationale for staggering funding rounds is that some projects will take longer to complete than others and, because of the 2025 deadline for spending the funding, projects which will take longer to complete need to be awarded funding earlier. This means that projects which receive funding at different points in time may ultimately be completed around the same point in time. This means there may be little or no staggering in practice since impacts will begin to be observable at around the same time for both “earlier” and “later” groups.

The approach also involves some other risks and constraints:

- **Systematic differences between funding rounds:** There are also potential threats to robustness if there are systematic differences between the organisations or areas that benefit from the programme at different points in time. While current plans for the funding rounds also suggest that the average size of grants will fall over time, there is no prima facie reason to expect that funding will be targeted at different types of organisations or areas as time passes (though this may change as the programme evolves). As such, a pipeline approach is likely to produce robust results in principle though a final assessment will require comparisons between the organisations awarded funding in each round (e.g. in terms of their scale, financial health, managerial capacities, and relevant characteristics of the area such as baseline levels of youth provision).
- **Reliance on longitudinal data:** Unlike other approaches, this type of design approach will require annual (rather than pre/post) observations of the outcomes of interest, as the effects of projects completing at different stages will be visible at different points of time. It would be prohibitively costly to implement an annual programme of primary survey research as part of the evaluation, and as such it is recommended that this approach is only adopted for those outcomes that can be measured using secondary datasets (e.g., the Register of Charities or the NYA Census). Therefore, while this approach is likely to offer more robust findings than Option C above, it will necessarily be narrower in scope.
- **Sample sizes:** With fewer than 300 funded facilities, sample sizes for each time period may be too small for this approach to be feasible.

5.5 Analytical techniques

As highlighted above, the recommended approaches to constructing a counterfactual are likely to involve some threats to robustness owing to the likely presence of systematic differences between those organisations awarded funding and the comparison group. This section outlines analytical and statistical techniques that could be applied to mitigate these issues (and associated implications for the design of the study).

5.5.1 Propensity Score Matching

Propensity Score Matching is a statistical technique that can be applied to ensure that comparisons are only made between organisations or areas that shared similar characteristics at the time the programme was launched. These types of approach apply statistical models comparing the baseline characteristics of those receiving funding and that do not, to estimate the likelihood or probability that a given

organisation or area receives funding. Each organisation or area receiving funding is then 'matched' with those members of the comparison group that share a similar estimated probability of receiving funding.

The application of matching techniques is likely to be particularly critical for the comparisons between funded and unfunded organisations or areas (given the high risk of systematic differences between the two groups). It is anticipated that there will be a need to control for a range of organisational and area level characteristics. We would recommend all of the following:

- Baseline measures of the financial health of the organisation (including assets, liabilities, operating expenditure and income)
- Scale of provision (which could be approximated by the number of users and the scale of physical assets under management or which organisations use)
- Level of ambition to expand youth services
- Perceptions of local demand for youth services
- Type and scope of youth services offered
- Perceptions of the level of competition from other local service offerings
- Local authority spending on youth services (as used to determine eligibility for YIF)
- Scale and density of the local youth population (and up to date measures from the 2021 Census are expected to be published in 2022)
- Accessibility of the relevant location (which could be measured at the local level using DfT's Journey Times Statistics)
- Socio-economic characteristics of the local resident population such as wage levels (which will help provide information on ability to pay for youth services, again potentially measurable using the results of the 2021 Census)

While some of these characteristics are measurable using secondary data sources, many organisational characteristics can only be measured using primary surveys. While some objective measures (e.g. operating expenditure) can plausibly be collected retrospectively, more subjective aspects (e.g. growth ambitions) could only reasonably be collected at the time the programme is launched. Given the potential weaknesses with the proposed counterfactual design, undertaking a baseline survey of youth organisations to collect these additional control variables is likely to increase the comparability of two groups in the analysis.

Recommendation: Given the likely reliance on a comparison group comprised of organisations that did not receive funding, it is recommended that DCMS consider the value of undertaking a baseline survey of youth organisations to collect additional information on the characteristics of funded and unfunded organisations that cannot be gathered from secondary sources or established retrospectively. This is likely to improve the comparability of samples and credibility of findings. A baseline survey should be undertaken as soon as possible but questions can be asked retrospectively if needed.

5.5.2 Difference in differences

It should be noted that matching approaches can only control for those aspects that can be measured or observed. There are likely to be unobservable differences between funded and unfunded organisations that cannot be controlled for directly (e.g. managerial quality), which may bias basic comparisons even after the application of matching. The application of further statistical techniques will be needed to mitigate this risk.

The collection of longitudinal data on the outcomes of interest will enable the application of difference-in-differences models (or fixed effects models where annual data is available) using the matched samples, that are robust to unobserved differences between the two groups that do not change over time. The models compare the relative change in the outcomes of the groups to provide inferences on the impacts of interest¹⁷.

It should be noted that difference in differences relies on the 'common trends' assumption. This assumption states that, in the absence of the programme, trends in the outcomes of interest would remain the same for intervention and comparison organisations. One way to provide evidence in support for this assumption is to show that trends in treatment and comparison groups were similar before the intervention. This would require at least two periods of data prior to the start of the intervention: this information is only likely to be available for those outcomes where secondary data is available (i.e. financial characteristics of the organisations concerned, and outcomes relevant to the local youth population).

5.5.3 Spatial analysis

We suggest that the two analysis techniques above are complemented with a spatial analysis of the outcomes relating to impact on the local youth population (in terms of participation and resulting outcomes such as wellbeing).

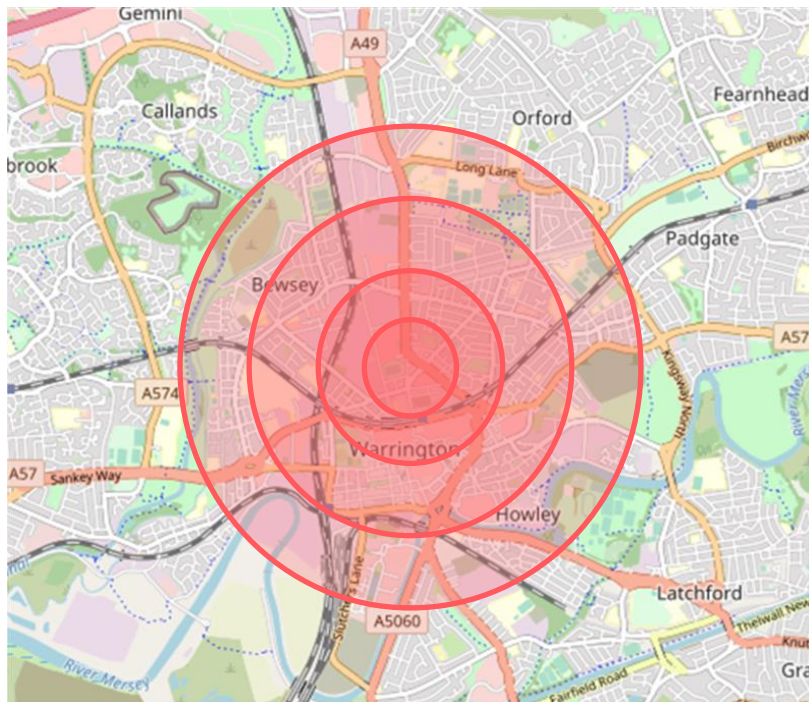
The NYA Youth Census indicates that most youth organisations operate at small geographical levels (the level of a neighbourhood or a community). The impacts of the programme are expected to be highly localised and may not be visible at the level of an entire electoral ward or other small unit of geography. Young people that live closer to funded organisations or facilities might be expected to experience more significant impacts (e.g. on the probability of participation in youth services) than those that live further away. As such, it is anticipated that spatial analysis techniques will be needed to assess the impacts of the fund on the local youth population. This involves making comparisons between those that live closer to and further away from funded and unfunded organisations, to help reveal the impacts of the programme on young people in terms of participation and outcomes resulting from this. This will also help identify second-order effects of the Fund on local populations (for example, related to the survival of non-funded youth organisations).

For a spatial approach to be viable, the evaluation will need to obtain data on at least 100 young people across England who live less than 3km away from one of the YIF-funded facilities, and at least 100 young people living close to one of the comparison group facilities, including data on precisely where they live (to measure distance from the facility). This measure of distance can then be included in a regression framework that compares changes in the relevant outcomes in areas closer to and further from funded facilities, before and after the implementation of the scheme. This type of approach is known as 'distance-decay' model. If the programme is successful in meeting its objectives, one would expect the participation of young people and their wellbeing to rise faster following completion of the project if they live closer to funded facilities than those further away.

¹⁷ The DiD analysis on the matched sample is performed within a standard regression framework. The variables included in the regression are an indicator of whether an organisation received funded (capturing unobserved differences between funded and unfunded organisations), an indicator for the 'post' intervention period (capturing common trends across the two groups), and an interaction term that is the product of the two preceding variables (that captures the impact of the initiative).

A common strategy for implementing this approach is to allocate respondents to 'buffer zones' of increasing distance (e.g. 0 to 1km, 1km to 2km, etc) from the facility as illustrated in diagram 5.1. The evaluation would then compare outcomes for young people living less than 1km away from a funded facility with outcomes for young people living less than 1km away from a comparison (unfunded) facility, and so on at increasing levels of distance. However, this depends on the volume of observations available in each 'treatment zone'. If this is not sufficient (at least 100 young people across all funded facilities within each zone), another approach would be to measure outcomes as a function of distance from the facility. However, this is less desirable as it may be difficult to detect anything other than very large effects.

Figure 5.1: Treatment zones of increasing distance from facility.



This analysis could be undertaken with secondary data or with data from a primary survey of young people within a certain area (rather than restricted to users of particular facilities). However, surveying the population of young people within a certain area may not be proportionate or feasible (see section 4.6.2. above), so this approach would likely need to rely on secondary data.

There is a risk that existing secondary surveys will not provide sufficient volumes of observations at this geographical level to support this type of statistical analysis. However, this risk is mitigated by the relatively large number of facilities expected to receive funding (while there may be relatively few respondents within 3km of any individual facilities, when aggregated over 300 organisations sample sizes may be sufficient) and the fact it is possible to make use of multiple years of data (e.g. if an impact evaluation takes place in 2026, it would be possible to use data from each year between 2022 and 2026, multiplying the number of observations available for analysis). The feasibility of this approach will depend on the overall number of funded facilities and therefore the number of relevant observations that might be expected to appear in secondary datasets. It will also depend on whether precise geographic information on where young people live (and therefore their distance from the facility) appears in the relevant datasets and can be shared with the evaluation. If there are insufficient observations, or insufficiently granular location data, in secondary datasets, then a spatial analysis will not be possible.

5.5.4 Spatial regression discontinuity design

One final analytical possibility would be to exploit the spatial boundaries of the programme to assess its impacts on the local youth population. The programme involves a sharp boundary between areas that are eligible for funding and those that are ineligible. However, the definition of the programme area was based on administrative boundaries that are arguably arbitrary with respect to the outcomes of the programme. As such, while eligible and ineligible areas may differ in general terms, differences between areas that are very close to these boundaries might be reasonably expected to be random in nature. As such, comparing young people living on either side of these boundaries could produce highly robust measures of impact.

This approach is likely to be problematic for two reasons and can be ruled out. Young people in ineligible areas living close to the boundary are not ineligible to participate in youth services in eligible areas and may be expected to benefit as much as those living in eligible areas (so would not represent a proper 'control group'). Additionally, the effectiveness of the approach depends on the degree to which funded projects are located close to boundary areas. It is considered unlikely that sufficient numbers of investments will be made in these zones.

5.6 Theory-based evaluation

Overview

As discussed in Chapter 4, counterfactual impact evaluation based on a quasi-experimental design (QED) **will only be practical and feasible for some of the intended outcomes of YIF Phase 2**. That is, those outcomes that are amenable to quantitative measurement for both treatment and control groups. Moreover, whilst a QED evaluation will enable a robust assessment of the impact of YIF on those outcomes, it will not be able to answer questions about how or why outcomes have (or have not) been achieved, the associated pathways and causal mechanisms between inputs / activities and outcomes / impacts and the effect of wider contextual factors on the realisation of outcomes.

We would therefore recommend that a **theory-based evaluation** is delivered alongside the QED evaluation. This would enable exploration of a broader range of direct and indirect outcomes from YIF, including any unintended / unexpected effects. It would enable exploration of the pathways to outcomes and testing of the assumptions underpinning the Theory of Change (discussed in Section 3.2). This would **complement and enhance** the findings from the QED evaluation, supporting the development of an accompanying narrative explanation of the impact of YIF on intended outcomes. It would also contribute to the evidence base for a process evaluation of YIF as well as any future value for money assessments.

How it would work in practice

One approach for testing and explaining causal links between inputs/activities and why outcomes do (or do not) occur or can (or cannot) be observed is **contribution analysis**. This follows a six-step process (see Figure 5.1) in which other factors that could impact relevant outcomes (i.e. alternative explanations) are explicitly identified and considered in the course of evidence gathering and analysis. Evidence is thus collected that either **confirms or discounts these alternative explanations**.

Alternative explanations explored through this approach would include wider **contextual factors** likely to influence the outcomes of interest for YIF (such as family, peer group, school and wider community influences), as well as other types of funding and support that grantee organisations and young people may have access to. The approach would draw on both **quantitative and qualitative data and**

evidence (including through the recommended surveys of organisations) which would be triangulated to inform the assessment. If there is strong evidence to support YIF's effects on outcomes and limited evidence to support alternative explanations, greater confidence can be given to conclusions that YIF contributed strongly to any outcomes observed.

Figure 5.2: Contribution analysis approach



- 1. Setting out the attribution problem to be addressed:** This involves articulating the key outcomes that YIF aims to improve or change, with a clear rationale.
- 2. Develop a Theory of Change (ToC):** A ToC has already been developed for YIF. This is likely to need to be further developed to ensure it fully articulates the expected route to the outcomes and impacts identified at step one, including the anticipated pathways and causal mechanisms from inputs/activities through to outcomes.
- 3. Populating the ToC with data and evidence:** Quantitative and qualitative data would be collected to assess YIF's contribution to anticipated outcomes. Where evidence supports an alternative explanation or 'performance story', the evaluation would make a judgment on the reduced contribution of YIF to observed outcomes.
- 4. Assemble and assess the contribution or performance story:** Step three would naturally lead to the development of an initial 'performance story' for YIF. This performance story would be tested through qualitative interviews with stakeholders (grant recipient organisations, young people, local stakeholders / partners) to assess how far outcomes can be attributed to YIF relative to other factors.
- 5. Seek out additional evidence:** Depending on the outcome of the previous step, the data and evidence generated in step 3 would be revisited (e.g. to examine a particular sub-group or insights related to contextual factors) to strengthen the final performance story.
- 6. Revise and strengthen the 'performance story':** Contribution analysis is an iterative process. As new evidence becomes available for analysis over the course of the evaluation, the claims made by the theory can be tested and further refined.

This approach would be further underpinned by **realist evaluation principles**, which involves exploring the specific causal mechanisms resulting in **behaviour change** as a result of an intervention, whilst accounting for the context within which this change occurs. It focusses on gathering evidence to understand "what works, for whom, under what circumstances". This will be particularly useful for YIF given the likely diversity of funded organisations in terms of location, context, types of youth activities delivered, and profile of young people engaged.

Conditions that would need to be met

The strength of any contribution claims arising from theory-based evaluation depends on the quality of thinking about the attribution problem to be addressed. This requires a **well-developed Theory of Change** with clear set of assumptions and hypotheses to be tested, including pathways and causal mechanisms. The current ToC for YIF is likely to need to be revisited and further developed to ensure that all of the anticipated pathways to outcomes and impact are fully articulated.

A theory-based evaluation of YIF will require a comprehensive programme of **primary and secondary data collection** on YIF grantees, young people accessing their facilities and wider stakeholders (such as parents, schools and other members of the community). The quantitative data on outcomes collected for the quasi-experimental impact evaluation will be drawn on to inform the theory-based evaluation, which would be supplemented with additional qualitative data collection with key stakeholders. This will need to be planned in advance and built into the grant distribution process (ideally through grant agreements) to ensure that appropriate systems, processes and permissions are in place to enable this.

Benefits, including research Qs that could be addressed

A theory-based evaluation would be **complementary to a QED impact evaluation**, enabling detailed exploration of how and why outcomes are achieved (or not). It would facilitate further development, testing and refinement of the theory of change for YIF, further contributing to the evidence base on the impact of capital investment in the youth sector.

The rolling programme of data collection associated with theory-based evaluation would generate **regular and ongoing insights into progress towards the outcomes and impact of YIF**, which will be helpful in informing ongoing decision making relating to the fund including any course correction that might be required during delivery. This is in contrast to QED evaluation, where the full results of the analysis will not be available until after the end of the funding period.

Key questions that the theory-based evaluation will be able to address include:

- What is the likely **contribution** of YIF to observed outcomes / impacts?
- What is the likely role and contribution of **other factors**?
- What are the **causal mechanisms** associated with the achievement of outcomes?
- What are the **conditions** for successful realisation of outcomes?

Limitations

The main limitation of a theory-based evaluation is that it **will not provide definitive proof that YIF has had a causal effect**. Rather, it will enable the development of an evidenced and logical line of reasoning which would give some level of confidence in YIF's contribution to observed outcomes. However, delivering this alongside a quasi-experimental evaluation would help address this limitation.

Timescales

As noted, a theory-based evaluation approach would need to be embedded into the design and delivery of the fund from the outset. This would enable relevant baseline data to be collected from YIF grantees at application or grant award stage. This baseline data would need to cover as a minimum **the key**

outcomes of interest that would later be measured through a follow up survey of youth organisations. As noted in section 4.6.1, this will include:

- levels and sources of the organisation's capital spending
- scale of youth facilities (in terms of size of building and capacity)
- quality of youth facilities (in terms of features of the building)
- volume of youth provision (in terms of hours open and number of users)
- nature of youth provision (in terms of range of activities on offer)
- key financial metrics
- level of ambition to expand youth services
- perceptions of local demand for youth services
- perceptions of the level of competition from other local service offering

The baseline data would also need to cover the key **characteristics** of youth organisations, including turnover, main sources of funding, numbers of staff and volunteers.

It would also that appropriate systems are in place to enable data collection (such as contact details and permission). Following this, a rolling programme of primary data collection would be required aligned to expected timings for the realisation of outcomes.

Data collection, sample sizes and costs

Theory-based evaluation will require **quantitative data collection** from all grantees at baseline (ideally at the grant application / grant award stage), which we would assume could be built into the grant application or award processes. We would then anticipate that a **follow-up survey of grantee organisations** would be administered 6-12 months after completion of the grant to measure change on key outcomes of interest.

Theory-based evaluation would also need to be informed by a programme of **qualitative data collection** in the form of interviews, focus groups and / or case studies with a sample of **30-50 funded organisations**.

6 Rejected Designs

Chapter Summary

The feasibility study considered and rejected several other impact evaluation approaches including:

- **A randomised control trial (RCT)** – will not be feasible as we understand there will not be a sufficient number of applications which meet the criteria for funding, yet are not funded, that could act as a control group. Moreover, DCMS and the Intermediary Grant Maker would need to allocate funding at random within the set of fundable applications, which is unlikely to be acceptable.
- **A stepped-wedge trial** – will not be feasible as this would require all funding to be allocated at the same time, whereas there will be several funding rounds. This approach is also not feasible due to the time lags for outcomes to be realised.
- **A regression discontinuity design based on a scoring threshold** – will not be feasible as grant applications are not being assessed using scores.
- **A dose-response approach** comparing outcomes for smaller and larger projects. This will not be feasible since there are likely to be underlying differences between organisations that bid for projects of different sizes which would affect the outcomes observed.

6.1 Introduction

A number of other impact evaluation designs were explored as part of the feasibility study and deemed to be unfeasible. This chapter discusses these in turn and the reasons as to why they were rejected.

6.2 Randomised Control Trial (RCT)

6.2.1 Description of the approach

Widely regarded as the most robust approach to measuring the impact of public policies and programmes, the RCT involves randomly assigning areas, service providers or individuals to a treatment or control group. The random allocation should mean there is no systematic difference between these two groups and therefore any differences in outcomes between the treatment and control group can be attributed to the programme.

6.2.2 How this could be used for YIF

Youth organisations that are seeking funding and are eligible for funding (in that they meet criteria for finances and governance, project feasibility, and the quality of the planned youth provision) could be randomly assigned to either receive funding for their proposed capital improvements or not receive funding (treatment and control groups). Outcomes for the two groups are then compared.

6.2.3 Conditions that would need to be met

Crucially, there needs to be a list of units which can be randomly allocated so that a proportion receive treatment and a proportion do not¹⁸. For YIF, the unit of allocation would be the grant. These units must be equivalent to each other in the treatment and control group. Consequently, the allocation must take place on applications for grants that have all been classified as suitable for funding. This situation would require substantial oversubscription of fundable grant applications. It is our understanding that no such oversubscription is anticipated.

DCMS and the Intermediary Grant Maker would need to be willing to randomly deny funding to eligible applicants. These organisations (in the control group) would not be able to apply again, at least until a certain period of time has passed after which final outcome measures have been collected. This is unlikely to be acceptable from a policy point of view.

Another approach would be to adopt a waiting-list design, i.e. those successful awards allocated to the control group would have their implementation delayed for some time. This delayed time would enable comparisons to be made between outcome measures in the treatment and control groups, after a suitable time-lag to enable the intervention to occur and to have time to impact. After this time-lag, the control group would have their awards funded and be able to begin work. This was deemed infeasible for various reasons, e.g., the likely rising costs of materials with delay, challenges with arranging contracts to time and the limited time available for the evaluation to incur any large time lag to enable the impact to 'bed-in'.

6.3 Stepped Wedge

6.3.1 Description of the approach

The stepped wedge is a variant of the RCT waiting-list design described above in which awards are staggered in their start time, and organisations awaiting work to begin serve as a temporary comparison group.

6.3.2 How this could be used for YIF

The grant maker would need to identify all applicants to be funded early in the lifetime of the fund. These organisations would then be randomly allocated to two or more groups, one of which would receive funding immediately and the other/s which would receive funding after a time lag. For example, the second group could receive funding after six months and the third after 12 months. In this way, it would be possible to compare the six-month impact comparing outcome measures taken at six months prior to the commencement of the second group. Similarly, the six-month gap between groups two and three can also contribute to the six-month impact effect.

6.3.3 Conditions that would need to be met

The stepped wedge approach has a number of drawbacks. First, the delay before the start of each group should reflect sufficient time for the impact to emerge from the funding. Given the limited time available for the delivery of the fund and the evaluation, this condition is unlikely to be met and the stepped wedge design, at best, may look like the 'waiting list' design described above. Secondly, applications would

¹⁸ These two proportions should sum to unity, although it is not necessary that they be equal. However, unequal allocation between treatment and control groups reduces the statistical power of the design.

need to all be made and assigned in the same time period, early on in the programme, whereas we know that YIF will have a number of funding rounds running until 2024.

In addition, the drawbacks described above in relation to the waiting list design would also apply to the stepped wedge design.

6.4 Regression discontinuity design (RDD) on application score

6.4.1 Description of the approach

This approach would assess the impact of the funding by comparing declined applicants who ‘just missed out’ with successful applicants who ‘almost failed to’ obtain funding. When the selection into the programme is exclusively driven by a strict threshold, one can assume that organisations just below the threshold are similar to organisations just above it. Analysis can therefore compare these organisations to see what effect the funding has had.

6.4.2 How this could be used for YIF

Applications to the programme could be judged using a scoring system with a cut-off point. Organisations that score very highly may be unlikely to be similar to organisations that are unsuccessful, but the evaluation could compare outcomes for organisations who scored just above this cut-off point with outcomes for those who scored just below.

6.4.3 Conditions that would need to be met

There would need to be a fixed scoring system for allocating funding. In discussion with DCMS and the IGM, it was made clear that there will not be scoring system for the assessment of YIF Phase 2 grant applications. This approach is therefore not feasible.

6.5 Dose-response analysis

6.5.1 Description of the approach

This approach would assess the link between the intensity of the “treatment” and the extent of the outcomes achieved. The idea behind this approach is that if the evaluation observes a pattern whereby more funding results in larger improvements in outcomes, this supports the conclusion that these outcomes are caused by YIF funding.

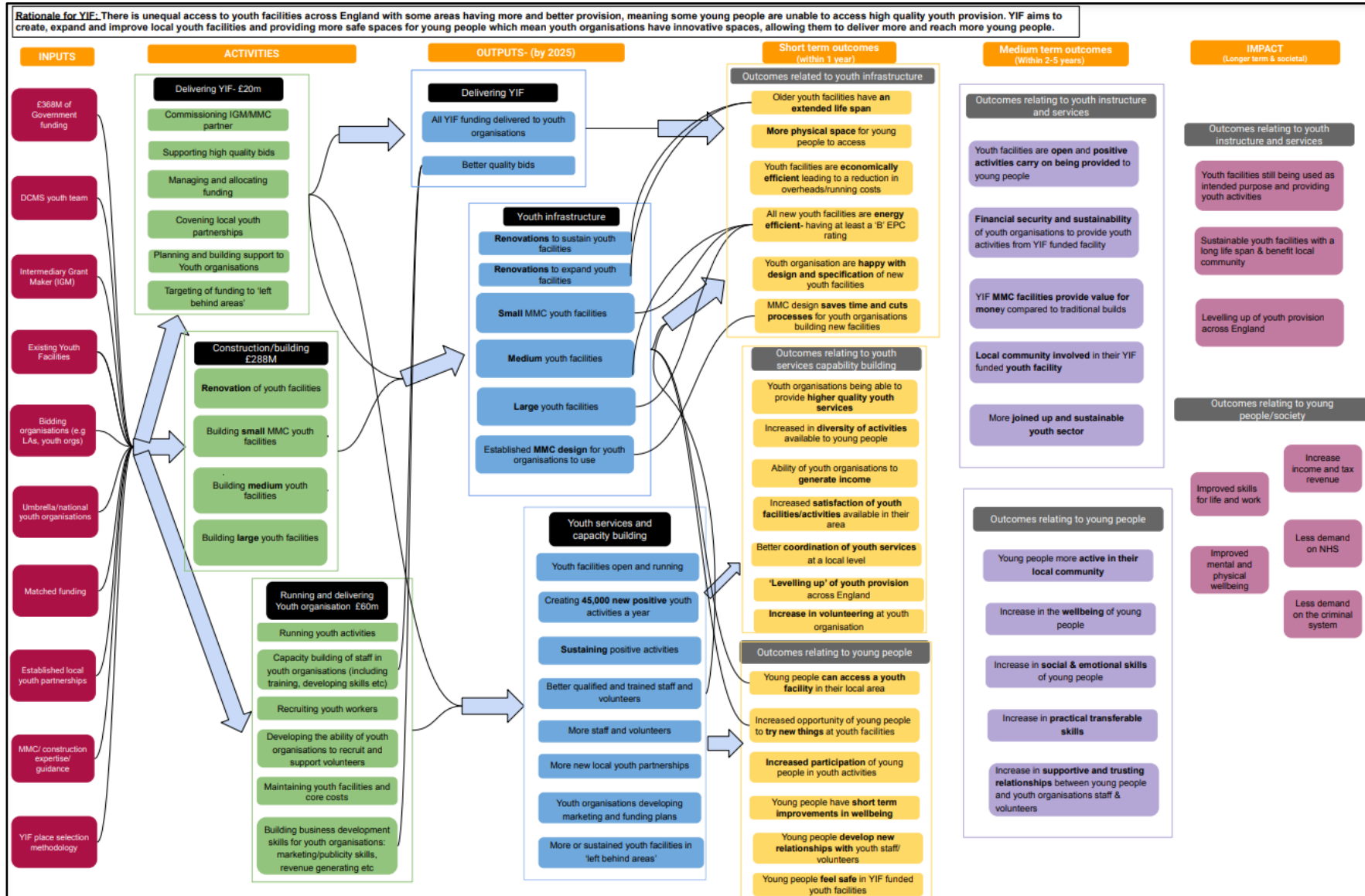
6.5.2 How this could be used for YIF

The evaluation could compare outcomes for projects that received larger and smaller amounts of funding from YIF, or that were of different sizes/scales.

6.5.3 Conditions that would need to be met

To make a valid comparison, the size of project an organisation bids for, or the amount of funding requested, would need to be unrelated to other factors that could affect outcomes. For example, the size of the project an organisation will be able to take on will be linked to their underlying managerial capacities. These capacities may also be linked to their ability to drive the outcomes of interest for the programme. This means that a comparison which did not control for these underlying factors would overstate the impact of the programme.

Annex A: YIF Theory of Change



Annex B: Determining sample sizes

For an impact evaluation to be successful, it must be conducted on a sample of sufficient size to detect an impact effect, where one exists. Calculating a minimum sample size requires consideration of various issues and requires value-based judgments of certain risk factors.

The first of these factors is the level of risk appetite regarding decision errors concluding false positives and false negatives (Types I and II errors). Standard defaults for these tend to be a two-tailed Type I error rate of 0.05 and a Type II error rate of 0.2. These values, however, are not 'set in stone' and can be adapted by decision makers to reflect their appetite level for the two risks. The more stringent, i.e., lower, the values chosen for the error rates then, other things equal, the larger the required sample size. It is worth highlighting that a Type II error (false positive) can be more expensive than a Type I error (false negative) because the former can result in the inappropriate roll-out of an ineffective treatment, with all the costs that entails. Conversely, a Type II error reflects a missed opportunity.

A crucial consideration in setting the sample size is the minimum size of the impact that is deemed to be successful for the intervention, the minimum detectable effect (MDE). The MDE should be set before the intervention and reflect what policy designers deem to be the minimum size to be successful. Often this is challenging because no relevant previous research exists and expert judgement is often required.

There are other influential factors which need consideration, such as whether the allocation uses a multi-site/cluster approach, the inclusion of any covariates in the analysis that reduce the variance of the impact estimator, two-Phase sampling¹⁹ and response rates. Once a required sample size is calculated for the purposes of analysis, adjustments for design features need to be applied to decide how many invitations need to be issued to achieve the required analytic sample size.

We provide here an illustrative example of some adjustments that might be required. This illustration considers a household survey sample, which requires identifying young people in surveyed households from a broad sweep of all households sampled. It also requires consideration of response rates to the survey, which will vary depending upon survey mode (online, mail, phone, face-to-face). Each of these factors is an important consideration when costing different survey design options.

The required illustrative sample size has been calculated assuming an MDE of five percentage points, using a two-tailed Type I error of 5% and a Type II error of 20%, with a 50% baseline control group score on a binomial distribution, with equal allocation to treatment and control group. It assumes simple random sampling and individual level allocation to treatment and control group.

The example below shows three adjustments, using illustrative values for each adjustment. These values should be investigated in detail for a more accurate setting before applying them to the table for a real-world sample size calculation exercise. The first adjustment assumes clustering. Clustering can take place during the survey design, it can also describes the method of allocation to treatment and control groups. In effect, YIF is a multi-site cluster design with clusters of young people entirely 'nested' within a treatment area or a control area²⁰. For this illustration, we have assumed this clustering increases the required sample size by a factor of 1.1, i.e., from 3,140 to 3,454. We have also assumed that around

¹⁹ Two Phase sampling is required when there is no way to identify the target population directly from the sampling frame. The first survey Phase is used to identify target population members and the second Phase selects from the first Phase, following up with the desired questions.

²⁰ We note that there may be overlap at boundaries if treatment and control areas are geographically contiguous.

one-sixth of the households contacted will include young people of the eligible age range. This increases the number of households to contact and check for eligibility for the survey by a factor of around six, i.e., to 20,724. Finally, we assume a response rate of 20%, requiring approaching five households for each response, which results in approaching 103,620 households to achieve the 3,454 interviews required for the cluster design analysis. This would take around 4 to 6 weeks, plus 2 to 3 months to set up.

Figure 6.1: Illustrative example of survey design requirements on achieving the required sample size

Adjustments	Adjustment rate	N
Required sample size	NA	3,140
Cluster adjustment	1.10	3,454
Young person adjustment	6.0	20,724
Response rate adjustment	5.00	103,620

There are other design features which can reduce the required sample size, such as stratification and the inclusion of influential baseline covariates in the analysis, which should be considered as part of the final evaluation design and incorporated into the sample size calculations.

Some evaluation designs are more efficient than others, i.e., different analytic techniques require different sample sizes to detect the same MDE, under otherwise comparable designs. The above example used a standard approach to calculating sample size for an RCT with individual level allocation to treatment and control. However, at a minimum, difference in difference models require survey measures at two time points and are typically less efficient than the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) methods applied to the same dataset²¹. For technical reasons, many matching methods are often challenging to calculate a required sample size, but it is usual to increase the number of cases in the control areas over and above the treatment areas to increase the chances of getting a match for all units in the treated areas.

Undertaking bespoke surveys to collect primary data can require substantial initial sample sizes under some designs, so it is important to consider different approaches and to judge trade-offs in terms of data quality and cost. A list of addresses identifying households with children in advance can save costs, even if coverage of the target population is not as complete as a household survey. Critically, if the treatment and control areas are equivalently affected by sample coverage issues, then there should be no systematic selection effects between the treatment and control groups introduced by sampling to bias the impact estimator.²²

²¹ The ANCOVA would only be relevant to an RCT design and not generally appropriate for a DiD design. The key point is that a DiD analysis typically is less powerful than ANCOVA, not that these two designs are necessarily interchangeable.

²² The key challenge is that the impact estimator may be biased through undercoverage of the target population, i.e. those excluded from the survey may be differentially impacted compared to those covered by the survey.

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