

THE SOCIAL LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Backing leadership as a force for social change

Executive Director Candidate Pack

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Welcome

Dear Applicant

We are looking for a leader to take forward one of the most ambitious investments ever in social leadership in the UK.

We are backing leadership as a force for social change. We believe that the country needs to unleash a wave of social leadership - more people, in more places, with the support they need to create change. People with the power to go beyond fixing problems to changing systems for the better.

These skills can be learned and honed, but for far too long there has been chronic under-investment in the craft and practice of social leadership. In 2025 we began gathering insight into what it's like to lead social change today, the kind of leadership development provision which is currently available and the barriers some leaders face in accessing relevant opportunities. You can read a summary of these insights [here](#). Since the beginning of 2026, we've been exploring what more funders can do to strengthen and grow the ecosystem of support for leaders.

This process, accompanied by extensive engagement with development providers, leaders and funders, has created a compelling strategic vision and platform for action. The next step is to bring this vision to life, and we are now seeking an entrepreneurial and strategic Executive Director to build on the momentum to date and take this initiative into an exciting new chapter.

As a founding group we are committed to this undertaking at scale, and plan to commit £30-40m over the first five years to drive this strategy. As Executive Director, you will steward this significant investment, but your role will extend far beyond funding - you will be building a movement that creates lasting change in society.

Our work so far provides direction, not a script. The successful candidate will have substantial agency to shape the initiative's identity, priorities, programmes, partnerships, and ways of working collaboratively with the field. They will inherit both a strong foundation and a unique opportunity to shape what comes next.

If you believe you have what we are looking for, we very much look forward to hearing from you.

Anand Shukla

The Henry Smith
Foundation

Sam Creme

Collective
Futures

Dan Berelowitz

This Day

Phil Chamberlain

The National Lottery
Community Fund

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Context

We believe that by investing in people who lead social change, the country will become more fair and joyful, prosperous and sustainable.

There's no time to waste. Inequity is entrenched, and many people feel systems are rigged against them. The market is not delivering enough affordable homes or secure, well-paid jobs, especially for young people. In many places, public services are stretched to the limit and powerful forces of polarisation and division are threatening community cohesion. The country also faces major transitions - in climate, technology and the future of the economy - which need to be carefully navigated.

At times like this the right kind of leadership is at a premium: leadership that is bold and imaginative, that turns frustration into aspiration, pain into hope, timidity into action. Leaders that build connection and grow the common ground between people. Leaders who are as diverse as the communities they work in, those with many years of experience and those just starting out. Not simply heroic individuals working alone, but collective leadership that draws on the contributions of many kinds of leaders acting across different places and sectors: social entrepreneurs, leaders of charities, community organisers, campaigners, and many more.

The country needs to unleash a wave of social leadership - more people, in more places, with the support they need to create change. People with the power to go beyond fixing problems to changing systems for the better, leaders who are:

Purposeful - storytellers who move people to action, rallying them around a shared sense of what they stand for, where they come from and the difference they want to make to the world.

Resourceful - mobilising and connecting resources of all kinds through their work, especially resources which grow the more they are used: trust, skills, agency, commitment, pride.

Relational - building teams, organisations, partnerships and communities, working across sectors, places and traditions to grow the collective power to create change.

This kind of leadership already exists but it is often constrained and under-valued. The skills of leadership can be learned and honed, but for far too long there has been chronic under-investment in the craft and practice of social leadership, and failure to acknowledge and uplift social leaders and the contribution they make.

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Our work so far

In 2025, we began work with [System Shift](#) to understand from leaders what it's like to lead social change today, what leadership development provision they make use of and what barriers they face in accessing relevant opportunities. With the input of providers, we built a picture of the current landscape - the kinds of programmes on offer, examples of best practice, and the business models that sustain them.

We used these insights from the field to develop an emerging strategy, and during Spring 2026 System Shift shared and tested this with a range of stakeholders – including leaders, providers, funders, government and other experts.

In July, we will kick off a set of Exploratory Projects aligned to the first set of priorities. These projects will aim to create opportunities to experiment and learn with the field. We will continue to engage others who share this vision, including other funders who share our commitment to backing leaders.

The Executive Director will be joining at a pivotal point, building on the insights and learning from this work, and building on the momentum to date to take this initiative into the next chapter.

A vision for systemic change

The change we want to unlock spans three connected systems. Working collectively over the long-term, there are three big shifts we believe can be generated across these systems:

- A strong and vibrant development ecosystem which nurtures, develops and sustains all social leaders.
- Across stronger communities and organisations, social leadership is recognised and valued as a source of national renewal.
- The unlocked potential of social leaders is a collective force for social change in communities and across the UK.



The challenges we are responding to

Our research has identified a range of significant challenges holding back social leaders and those who support them. These include:

- A widespread lack of recognition of the role social leaders play as a force for positive change.
- Increasing stress, burnout and wellbeing challenges among social leaders.
- Under-investment in leadership development, particularly for underrepresented and community-based leaders.
- Inequitable access to development opportunities across race, class, geography, ability and other dimensions.
- Fragmented and uneven support structures for leaders, with challenges around collaboration between providers of development support.
- A growing need for development approaches that cultivate the mindsets and capabilities required to lead systemic change.

How we will create change

There is no single 'silver bullet' solution to address these challenges. It will take many types of connected actions, by many players, over multiple horizons. Investment into underlying relationships, infrastructure and connective tissue will be as important as more visible, flagship initiatives. We will support work that spans all four of the following, interconnected layers:

The underpinning layer of **infrastructure**. This is both structural (e.g. navigation platforms or funding architecture) and relational in nature (e.g. convenings, networks, communities, and peer support).

The **programmes and models** needed to directly support leaders and cultivate new forms of leadership (e.g. collective and systemic leadership or community-led change). This includes focusing on offers that respond to existing needs or emerging opportunities, applying insight to create innovative approaches, and scaling existing programmes.

A layer of **learning and insight**. This means learning to inform this strategy (e.g. building on feedback, understanding progress, responding to new insight) and the wider learning capacity across the development ecosystem - including supporting shared research and evaluation frameworks, and building a collective understanding of what works well in supporting social leaders.

Ongoing work on **culture and narratives** that can help to shift mindsets. Investing in a collective story of the value and potential of social leadership will unlock changes in other parts of the system. This also means investing in the ability of social leaders to influence and advocate for themselves.

Job description

Job title: Executive Director

Reports to: Chair of the Stewardship Group

Overarching goals for the initiative

- A major uplift in funding for the development of social leaders, and the inclusion of leadership as a core consideration in broader social change initiatives.
- Many more social leaders have the skills, mindsets and capabilities to unlock collective, systemic change.
- Resources are more equitably distributed and all social leaders take up the development opportunities they need, when they need them.
- Learning and innovation, collaboration and coherence become defining features of the ecosystem of support for leaders
- A step change in the diversity and pipeline of those involved in social leadership across the country.
- All social leaders, from emerging to experienced, are supported to prioritise their learning and development.
- Every social leader has strong and trusted relationships with a group of peers and/or allies.
- In every community there is a thriving and connected cadre of social leaders working towards a hopeful, shared future.

Key responsibilities

- Shape and evolve the long-term vision and strategy of the initiative building from the ambitions of the partners and drawing on deep engagement with the field.
- Act as a leading voice and connector within the social leadership ecosystem, building trusted relationships across sectors and creating the conditions for greater collaboration, participation and collective action.
- Design and steward a portfolio of strategic investments, initiatives and partnerships that build field capacity and advances the initiative's long-term goals.
- Lead the translation of an ambitious vision into action, aligning resources, plans and delivery mechanisms, including defining the people and resourcing required to move this initiative into the next phase of action and delivery.
- Foster a culture of learning, reflection and adaptation, developing meaningful ways to understand progress, capture insight and strengthen the effectiveness of the initiative over time.
- Convene and inspire a broad-based alliance of funders, practitioners and leaders, amplifying the impact of this work and mobilising additional resources.
- Build the profile, credibility and influence of the initiative, articulating a compelling narrative about the role of leadership in driving social impact and lasting systems transformation.

Person specification

Knowledge and experience

- A demonstrable track record of building or growing organisations or movements that have delivered meaningful social impact and lasting systems change.
- Experience operating at a senior strategic level, with evidence of translating an ambitious vision into tangible outcomes.
- Resourceful, hands-on and entrepreneurial, with experience mobilising people, partnerships and resources; building teams and driving change through action and influence rather than relying solely on formal organisational levers.
- Proven ability to communicate complex ideas with clarity and conviction, and to articulate compelling narratives that connect with different kinds of actors in a range of settings.
- A history of convening and aligning diverse stakeholders around a vision, building trust, collaboration and collective capacity.
- A well-developed personal philosophy of leadership - including how it is modelled in practice.
- Experience of field building - convening, growing capacity and sustaining long-term collaboration in practice.
- Demonstrated commitment to valuing the contributions of leaders with lived experience of marginalisation and/or inequity. We particularly welcome candidates who bring lived experience themselves, alongside those who can evidence meaningful experience of embedding lived experience perspectives in decision-making and practice.

Attributes

- Able to build belief and momentum around a vision for social leadership
- Combines strategic thinking with a strong bias towards action and delivery
- Thrives with a high degree of personal autonomy and comfortable creating structure and deciding where to focus for maximum impact
- Deeply curious and committed to learning, adapting and improving based on evidence and feedback
- Demonstrates sound judgement, integrity and accountability in the stewardship of significant resources
- Entrepreneurial energy - creative, flexible, and comfortable with calculated risk
- Authentic and values-led, with a natural ability to inspire others through the quality of their example
- Believes in participation and shared power, and actively creates opportunities for others to shape decisions

Terms of appointment

Salary

The salary for this role is c.£120,000 per annum on a full-time permanent basis.

Flexibility

This is a full-time role but we are open to discussing flexible and collaborative leadership arrangements, e.g. co-leadership or job shares.

Location

Remote initially, with desk space available on a flexible basis at partner offices in central London. Longer term solutions for office space could be explored by the Executive Director.

Regular in person engagement with partners and other stakeholders will involve travel within the UK.

Benefits

A generous package of benefits will be provided.

How to apply

We hope you will consider making an application. To make an application, please go to [Starfish Search](#) and click on the apply now button, with the following prepared:

- Your CV (no more than three sides).
- A supporting statement (no more than two sides) that sets out why you think this role is the right move for you and how you meet the knowledge and experience criteria.

We would also be grateful if you would complete the Equality and Diversity monitoring form on the online application process. This form is for monitoring purposes only and is not treated as part of your application.

Closing date: Friday 14th August 2026

Preliminary interviews: w/c Monday 31st August & w/c Monday 7th September 2026

Final Panel interviews: w/c 28th September 2026