

Invitation to Tender: Reclaiming our Regional Economies programme evaluation partner

We are looking for an evaluation partner to support us to understand the power and impact of new models of community-led policymaking undertaken in partnership with regional partners, including Combined Authorities.

If you are skilled in making sense of power dynamics, complexity and experienced in the nuances of community-led change – please read on and apply. We would love to hear from you.

Submission deadline: 9am Monday 23rd September 2024

About the Reclaiming our Regional Economies programme

Reclaiming Our Regional Economies (RORE) is a five-year programme, launched in 2023 and running until 2028, which is co-ordinated by four not-for-profit organisations specialising in progressive approaches to the economy: [New Economics Foundation](#) (NEF), [Centre for Local Economic Strategies](#) (CLES), [Co-operatives UK](#) and [Centre for Thriving Places](#) (CTP). The programme is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Friends Provident Foundation and Power to Change Trust.

RORE seeks to bring communities together with political and institutional leaders to test ideas that help to re-wire and reform their regional economies, so that they deliver good lives now and for generations to come.

The programme is being delivered with partners in three pilot regions: the West Midlands, South Yorkshire, and the North East. Each region is exploring a different pathway to change, which will enable programme teams to test and demonstrate the many routes to delivering, not just better regional economies, but also wider systemic shifts for the UK's regions.

In the **North East** the focus is on developing the social economy and community-led economic development through convening grassroots groups that are representative of communities across the region and closely connected within their communities, to form a network which can make the case for supportive policy and resource allocation. The first gathering was held in mid-July 2024 and future planning will happen with their direction, working with a community organiser.

In **South Yorkshire** the focus is on testing a people-led policymaking approach with smaller organisations that are representative of the communities across the region through a process co-created with them, but convened by NEF and other partners. They will act as the commissioners of research and work alongside stakeholders inside the Local Authorities and Combined Authorities, facilitated by existing RORE relationships. The first focus of this process is tree planting and green infrastructure, with a view to then focusing on another policy area when this is complete. This is complementing NEF's existing organising work in Maltby with the residents of the Little London Estate, building their power to take action against their landlords.

In the **West Midlands** the focus is on two areas. The first is supporting Solihull Council to undertake a community-led process to develop the economy in their area in response to both the place-based strategy requested by the Combined Authority (to enable them to allocate their devolution funds appropriately), as well as the Levelling Up zone status awarded by central Government (allowing the Council to retain 100% of the business rates in

North Solihull). The second area of focus is supporting a campaign of a coalition of grassroots groups against the cuts and public building closures and sell offs. This is through a combination of research pieces which quantify both the money lost to Birmingham since austerity began in 2010 and through contracts with private business for social care statutory duties, including emergency housing, care services for looked after children and adult residential and nursing homes. .

In addition to this regional delivery, the programme is also supported by a Policy and Communications working group consisting of colleagues in the four lead partner organisations. This group supports the programme's aims by synthesising insights to inform national policy on regional devolution and economic development, and sharing the programme's learning with relevant external stakeholders.

Aims of the RORE programme

The programme aims to demonstrate that engaging local people, communities and grassroots groups in developing regional economic policies is a viable, and indeed essential, part of democratic and effective economic development. It provides an opportunity to explore different approaches to partnership working between Combined Authorities, Local Authorities, regional stakeholders and local communities to test and refine varied models for community-led regional policymaking, which can be used to inspire and inform regional authorities across the UK and central government.

The programme has a draft Theory of Change which articulates the beliefs at the heart of this approach:

***IF** we demonstrate that people-led inclusive economy policies and practices deliver better outcomes and value for people, place and planet;*

***THEN** Combined Authorities will shift their purpose, priorities and spending towards equality, sustainability and wellbeing;*

***BECAUSE** we have built confidence that there is an alternative to extractive economies.*

The RORE programme's approach and workstreams

This programme is rooted in decentralising power and enabling the priorities of local communities experiencing poverty and debt as a result of unfair and extractive economic conditions to be at the forefront of policy making and resource allocation..

Those worst impacted by these issues must be at the centre of the change we need, which can only be achieved by building collective power. RORE is building a coalition of organisations representing communities whose voices desperately need to be heard. Through these networks we are creating a local, regional and nationally impactful programme that makes the case for an overhaul to our economic, social security and financial systems, with the leadership of those most impacted firmly at the fore.

The programme is designed around 4 workstreams:

1. **Community-led policymaking** - this includes mapping regional stakeholders, reviewing local priorities, developing community-led policy working groups, and identifying potential pilot projects.

2. **Community capacity building and empowerment** - this includes grassroots community organising on local issues, convening local groups and campaigners, and working alongside VCSE organisations to build their power and influence.
3. **Participative, inclusive and sustainable economic development approaches** - this includes working with teams within Combined Authorities, developing impact and wellbeing frameworks for relevant policy areas, advocating for inclusive economy principles, and engaging with regional anchor organisations.
4. **Cross-cutting policy and communications** - this includes synthesising community-led policy work, research, analysis and external communications with a view to influencing and informing economic development policy and practice in other regions and at a national level.

The first three workstreams are embedded in regional delivery, and the fourth is delivered centrally by the programme partners (informed by the work and priorities developed in the regions).

The RORE programme's governance and management

The RORE programme is led by our Programme Director, Frances Northrop and the programme is managed by Dominika Jarosz. Frances will provide overall strategic direction and vision for the evaluation, and Dominika will provide day to day support.

Senior oversight for the programme is provided by the CEOs of the partner organisations. The evaluation partner will be expected to share their proposed approach with these senior leaders after the scoping phase, and provide occasional updates on the work (with support from Frances and Dominika).

The programme team comes together for quarterly team meetings, which the evaluation partner will be invited to attend and may be used to share findings, understand the wider context of the programme, and facilitate learning exchanges. The team uses Monday.com as project management software, and the evaluation partner can be given sight of the information on this site if required.

The RORE evaluation's purpose and focus

RORE is a large programme, being delivered over five years in three regions by four core partners with a multitude of local and regional stakeholders. We do not want an evaluation partner to attempt to evaluate the whole of this complex programme in depth. Instead, we would like this evaluation to focus on the programme's heart: developing the evidence base for the role of community-led policymaking in reclaiming regional economies. We anticipate the evaluation to cover a two-year period of programme delivery, from February 2024 to January 2026.

All four delivery partners have expertise in evaluation, notably social research, data analysis, impact frameworks, economic analysis, evaluative thinking, and synthesis. As such, we would like the evaluation partner to focus on gathering and interpreting evidence where we cannot, either for reasons of capacity or positionality; in particular, to conduct primary research with community groups and local participants to understand their experiences and how to build effective community power within devolved regional contexts.

We are fortunate to be working alongside Barrow Cadbury, who are funding additional work in the West Midlands that complements the RORE programme, including an evaluation. For this reason we would like the RORE evaluation partner to focus evidence gathering in two of the three regions: the **North East** and **South Yorkshire**. We would like the evaluation partner to work alongside the West Midlands team to share and integrate findings where appropriate; but we do not expect the same level of primary research and relationship building to take place there compared to the other two regions.

The RORE team has already gathered a great deal of information, insights, data and learning about the programme which can be shared with the appointed evaluation partner. We would like you to help us bring these sources together and integrate them into the evaluation as it develops. Where possible, we would also like the evaluation partner to support us to create opportunities for reflection and building shared understanding, to help us make sense of our learning across the different parts of the programme, to empower us to take action based on what we are learning, and to understand and articulate what the programme is achieving in a complex and shifting context.

We want this programme to shape the thinking and practice of partner organisations, to inform future work, and to share learning with our funders and external audiences that share similar goals. We also recognise the limitations of 'traditional' evaluation techniques for a complex programme working towards changing economic paradigms, and are not wedded towards any one methodology or research method. Rather, we would like the evaluation partner to support us to agree an approach that is realistic and appropriate to our aims and audiences.

Our key evaluation questions

We would like the evaluation partner to support us to understand and articulate what the programme is achieving, and enable us to share this story in a way that will inspire change elsewhere. In particular, we would like to understand:

- What different approaches to community organising, convening and empowerment have been used in the different regions?
- Whether, and how, has building community power in this way enabled communities to advocate for fairer regional economies within devolved authorities?
- How far has the programme been able to shift dominant narratives on poverty and build understanding of its causes, namely extractive economies and poor economic circumstances?
- What lessons can be learnt for future work elsewhere with similar ambitions?

We would like the evaluation partner to support us to refine these questions and work with regional partners to identify any additional areas of learning that may be useful and relevant to the programme's aims.

The evaluation partner role and approach

We anticipate that the evaluation partner will:

- Design a scoping phase for the work, including reviewing background materials, meeting team members, helping us to clarify the aims and scope of the evaluation partnership, and identify any adjustments to the original proposal if required.

- Develop an updated work plan at the end of the scoping phase, including anticipated activities, deliverables, key milestones, and expectations of team input at key moments.
- Design and implement an evaluation methodology focused on regional delivery that will help us to understand and articulate what the programme is achieving, in a way that is realistic and proportionate.
- Attend and observe key programme meetings and a range of activities being delivered through different workstreams in the two regions where the evaluation will be focused (the North East and South Yorkshire).
- Work alongside partners in the West Midlands, including the independent evaluation lead, to understand the programme's delivery and context in that region and to share and integrate findings where appropriate.
- Provide ongoing supportive challenge, bringing evaluative thinking and an external perspective as well as your own expertise in the issues we are working on.
- Be proactive in providing ongoing support to our team to act on what is being learnt.
- Produce short summaries of learning and key findings throughout the evaluation period, and bring these together into a concise final report. It is important that the outputs are accessible to different audiences, and we welcome the use of different formats including slide decks, blogs and diagrams that can be shared online.

We are open to tenderers' suggestions for how to deliver this role well, and what mix of research and evaluation approaches to use to help us to achieve our goals. Whatever approach you take, it is essential that the evaluation partner builds a good relationship with our teams and partners to facilitate a positive and meaningful learning process.

The audiences for this work

We would like the evaluation partnership to generate useful insights for a range of audiences:

- Community groups and local participants who are engaged with the programme and are sharing their time and expertise to drive change in their area.
- Regional authorities engaged in the programme, including partners within the Combined Authority and Local Authorities (where relevant) who are working alongside the programme team to facilitate community-led policymaking and delivery.
- The four partner organisations who are leading this programme, who have the opportunity to learn from this programme to inform future work.
- National and regional policymakers, including devolved authorities, who have the opportunity to integrate learning from this programme into their own work and approaches.
- Our four funders and other potential funders of similar work.

What we are looking for

We would like to work with a learning and evaluation partner who has the following **abilities**:

- The ability to **make sense of complexity**, build shared understanding and develop clarity in fluid and evolving contexts – as well as bringing challenge and asking difficult questions when needed.

- The ability to be **responsive, adaptable** and **flexible**, adjusting to suit the needs and preferences of different people and organisations especially at a local level – whilst not losing sight of the overall evaluation aims and purpose.
- The ability to **think critically** about the issues that this programme addresses, and develop well-informed **political analysis** of the power dynamics, systems dynamics and social structures that hold economic unfairness in place.

The specific **experience** that we would like the learning & evaluation partner to have includes:

- **A deep understanding of community-led change and grassroots community organising**, including the nuances and complexity of working with communities especially those experiencing unfair and extractive economic conditions.
- **A good understanding of devolved regional government** and public bodies, including the public policymaking process in particular relating to local and regional economies.
- **Previous experience of working on large, complex programmes** that are ambitious, multi-faceted and designed to inspire changes in policy and/or practice.

We would like the evaluation partner to have high-level **skills** in:

- **Social research conducted with grassroots communities that have many intersecting identities and experiences** – so that you are able to design an evaluation approach that is embedded, sensitive, empowering and effective, and in line with the ethos of the programme.
- **Evaluative thinking and analytical skills** – so that you are able to step back, make sense of a wide range of information, and help us to think strategically about the programme’s achievements and what that means for future work.
- **Facilitating high quality reflective spaces** where people are able to share their experiences and build understanding together – so that you are able to help us generate meaningful learning that moves the work forward.

We are open to evaluation partners based anywhere in the UK, but having a meaningful connection to South Yorkshire, the North East and/or West Midlands would be an advantage and frequent travel to these regions will be required.

Budget and timelines

There is a budget of **£75,000 including VAT** available to fund the evaluation partner role for 18 months. We would like the evaluation partner to advise what is realistic to achieve within the budget constraints, and where trade-offs may be needed.

We expect to appoint the evaluation partner in October 2024 and would like to receive the final evaluation report in March 2026. We would like the evaluation to cover the programme’s second and third years of delivery (between February 2024 and January 2026) - therefore, the evaluation will need to retrospectively cover what has been delivered and achieved in the first months of this year.

How to tender for this work

We are open to written proposals and/or other creative ways to apply (e.g. via video or voice notes). Please be concise, but make sure you address our requirements clearly and demonstrate how you meet the criteria we have outlined under 'What we are looking for'. We equally welcome individual organisations, freelancers or consortia to apply.

Please send your proposal to Dominika Jarosz at [dominika.jarosz@neweconomics.org] by 9am on Monday 23rd September 2024. We will then invite shortlisted applicants for a 45-60 minute interview to explore their proposals in more depth.

Please note that if the original proposal is not in a written format, we will require the successful tenderer to submit a written overview of their approach, timelines, deliverables and budget to be used in the final contract agreement.

Your proposal should include the following:

- Details of your organisation(s) and the people who will work directly on this project, including the experience and personal qualities that they will bring to the role.
- How you meet the criteria we have outlined under 'what we are looking for'.
- What approach you will take to respond to this brief.
- How you will work with the key regional stakeholders involved, to support them in the evaluation process and make sure that they benefit from the insights generated through this work.
- How your work will comply with good practice in research ethics and equitable evaluation.
- A clear breakdown of indicative costs including number of days, day rates for each person, travel costs and VAT if applicable.

Subsequent timelines will be as follows:

- **Application deadline: 9am Monday 23rd September 2024**
- **45-60 minute interviews with shortlisted candidates: 26th September 2024**
- **Contract confirmed: w/c 30th September 2024**
- **Contracted work period: October 2024 - March 2026**

If you have any questions, please do ask. Questions can be sent to **Dominika Jarosz at [dominika.jarosz@neweconomics.org]**.