Inquiry into the future of civil society
Background to the inquiry

A consortium of independent funders have come together coordinated by the Baring Foundation to fund this 2 year Inquiry.
These are: Baring Foundation, Barrow Cadbury Trust; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch); Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; Lankelly Chase; Lloyds Bank Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. In addition research support will be provided the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

Purpose of the inquiry

The ambition for the inquiry is broadly to develop a clear vision for the role of civil society in England over the next ten years.

Specifically:
1. To consider the changing nature of civil society and its prospects;
2. To investigate how to maximise the positive effects of civic action;
3. To provide a road map as to how to realise these opportunities.
The consortium

In Autumn 2016 – the following consortium was appointed to lead the inquiry:

We have formed this consortium to work with the Chair and panel to deliver a ground-breaking and seminal inquiry to catalyse a more vigorous and sustainable civil society, and across the group cover all of the requirements of the brief. We will work together very closely as a team, and have distributed roles as appropriate.

All organisations in this partnership are driven by the desire to understand and promote a thriving civil society as a necessary underpinning of a sustainable world, without prejudice to what that civil society should look like.

Forum for the Future (Forum) is the lead organisation, responsible for coordinating the Inquiry and facilitating panel and expert sessions. Forum is an independent non-profit working to understand and accelerate the transition to a sustainable future. We run multi-year, multi-funder projects which require complex and dynamic project management, careful stakeholder management and flexible, creative approaches. Forum is expert in the appropriate use of foresight techniques to generate insight and action.

openDemocracy will lead on communications, online and advocacy. openDemocracy is a not-for-profit media outlet. Through reporting and analysis of social and political issues, it seeks to challenge power and encourage democratic debate across the world. With human rights as its central guiding focus, it asks tough questions about freedom, justice and democracy. A full-time project co-ordinator will ensure smooth provision of secretariat duties and administrative support to the Chair and the panel and will be located at Forum’s offices.

Citizens UK will lead on public engagement and consultation. Citizens UK builds the power of organised civil society to achieve social justice and the common good, with diverse community alliances in London, Wales, Nottingham, Birmingham, Milton Keynes, Manchester, Tyne and Wear and Leeds. They work to develop community leaders throughout society, increasing civil society’s capacity to hold politicians and other decision-makers to account and develop new solutions to the injustices people face.

Goldsmiths University of London will be responsible for research excellence, through the expertise available at Goldsmiths in the Centre for Global Media and Democracy, the Faiths and Civil Society Unit and the Centre for Urban and Community Research, all of which have a track record of working closely with civil society in a variety of dimensions. Goldsmiths will work closely with NCVO and develop methodologies to investigate civil society and will provide additional press and communications support and grant management and governance services.
Our design principles:

We formed the consortium based on a set of shared principle that we hope to embody through the process and drive the whole inquiry:

1. **Action-oriented:** we believe the Inquiry should be rooted in rigorous evidence. We will test new ideas from civil society actors and develop a roadmap for the future of civil society.

2. **Process as a value creation strategy:** we have designed the Inquiry so it begins to test and build the future civil society itself: via an action research approach e.g. Inquiry online hub, Civil Society Lab and final event.

3. **Sustainability driven:** we will address long term social and environmental trends and use the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals as a reference.

4. **Systemic:** we will take a systemic view of civil society and address how systems work to exclude various groups, and look to the future of how those groups speak to each other.

5. **Iterative:** we are not constrained by definitions and boundaries which could distract from Inquiry goals, or confine our view of the future as a realm of possibility in which radically different configurations come into being.

6. **People-centred:** the locus of civil society is the individual, and that will be our entry point. We place great emphasis on the value of face to face engagement whilst acknowledging that in the past decade much activity has moved online and this must be a major part of the Inquiry.
Inquiry timeline:

The work will commence in January 2017. Below is an outline of the anticipated plan of activities:

1.1 Scoping and orientation
- WS1: Community events
- WS2: Working sessions with community leaders
- WS3: Informal research force

1.2 Initial research
- WS4: Ensuring an international perspective
- WS5: Working with NCVO
- WS6: Creating a conversation online

1.3 Open research

Year 1 Output: Map of the Future

2.1 Analysis track
- Phase 2

2.2 Experiment track: Civil Society Lab

2.3 Final report and event

Year 1 Phase 1

Year 2 Phase 2