Extending the Hub for London

Proposals for extending the [Hub for London](#) to become a networked system, drafted by David Wilcox, for discussion by The Hub Advisory group and more widely. See status of proposals at the end of this note. The proposals are based on:
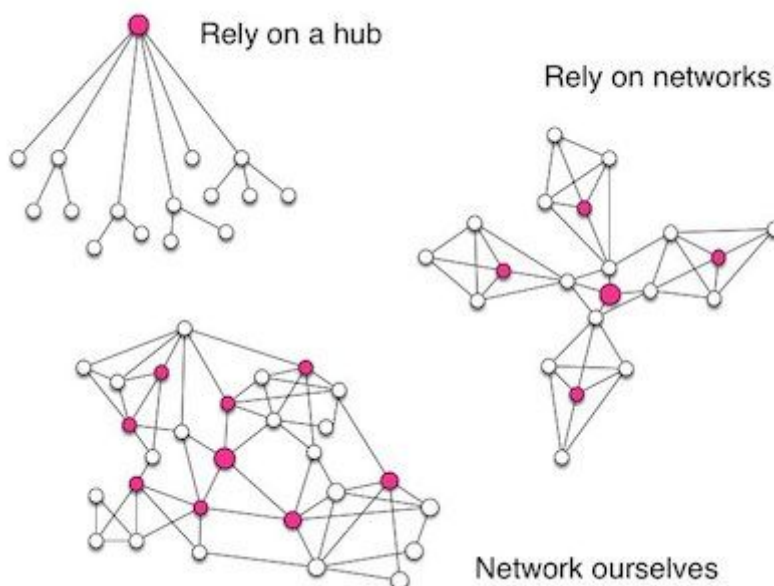
- [Recommendations](#) ([pdf download](#)) from the secretariat to the Advisory Group for the Hub, that collate all proposals from reports and groups.
- Proposals from Our Way Ahead for a [Community of Practice](#), ([pdf download](#)) circulated to the Hub advisory group, and referred to in the Recommendations.

The aim here is to develop common ground between The Way Ahead, the Hub Advisory Group, and Our Way Ahead in preparation for funding proposals, whether jointly or separately. The proposals are one outcome an exploration into London as a Networked City by Connecting Londoners and Our Way Ahead [documented here](#).

This document is [available for commenting online here](#). January 17 2017.

Summary

Key issue: we can't just rely on a hub, or existing networks. We also need to network ourselves.

- Recommendations from a wide range of sources including the proposals by consultant Steve Wyler suggest that the main role for Hub for London should be as a convenor, enabler and network builder across all levels and sectors in civil society. We need a **networked system** of communication, sharing and support as well as a new Hub organisation.

- Networks should **use a range of online and other methods** to support the collection and dissemination of data, peer-to-peer learning, sharing of open-source resources, and a collective voice.

- Development of this networked system will require **new skills and tools throughout civil society**, as well as in the Hub, and attitudes to promote cooperation and collaboration.

- The system cannot be designed top-down. Connecting Londoners and Our Way Ahead suggest we should **start with people and assets** in civil society, rather than tools and structures.

- **Design for the system should be co-produced** by first outlining what a networked system could look like; demonstrating how to map existing assets and connections; simulating how systems could work; recruiting expertise to a Community of Practice; and piloting networked communication systems.

Sources

These proposals are based on an analysis of the [Summary of recommendations](#) on the Hub, prepared by secretariat to the Advisory Group for the Hub. The recommendations include reference to proposals from Our Way Ahead and Connecting Londoners, and these are included, together with some additional quotes from Steve Wyler's report which also featured extensively.

- [Announcement of Hub for London](#)
- [Extracts from Steve Wyler's report on the Hub](#)
- [Summary of all main recommendations on the Hub, prepared by secretariat to the Advisory Group for the Hub](#) - ([pdf download](#))
- [Connecting Londoners proposals for a Community of Practice blog post](#) - ([pdf download of CoP proposals](#))
- [Summary of work by Connecting Londoners and Our Way Ahead: Netorked City exploration](#)

The model: a networked system

- The Hub, with limited staff resources to cover existing GLV activities and its new functions should act, with others, as a convenor, enabler and network builder across all levels and sectors of civil society.

- The networks needed will not be hub and spokes, but should build on and connect existing networks, and support peer-to-peer connections: bottom-up and bottom-across. Networks should use a range of online and other methods, and be interactive to gather insights, promote social integration, learning and codesign.

- These networks will need to support data gathering and exchange, peer-to-peer learning, sharing of open-source resources, and collective voice. They should be the basis for co-production - cooperation and collaboration - and the development of innovative approaches.

- Networks may exist and develop around affinities of location, passion, interest, and professional practice. They will range from informal local connections among citizens and community groups, to pan-London networks for campaigning, support and development.

- Realising network value will depend on developing cultures of sharing within networks, and preparedness to connect across networks. Some of this will be achieved through self-organising, some by network weaving and facilitation.

- The challenge is not just developing a Hub, or a Hub and spokes, but a system for connecting people, groups and organisation in localities and networks.

- Steve Wyler, in his report on the Hub, suggested the brand is not the Hub, but the system, and proposed calling it "Connecting Londoners": a label we adopted.

Principles for building the networked system

- The starting point for building the model should be recognition of the expertise, assets and networks in civil society, at all levels, and across all sectors. Data will need to show existing connections and relationships as well as who holds assets, and where so that these connections can form the basis for further network building.

- The immediate research outputs should be datasets and network maps, not just directories. Outcomes should be stronger relationships, networked infrastructures, and more sharing of assets.

- The Hub will not have the resources to undertake and maintain a multilevel exercise in mapping, and so one of its enabling functions should be training and supporting mapping and network building.

- Nor will the Hub be able to develop and maintain a centralised open-source pool of resources, across all topics. These knowledge assets will need to be developed and shared across networks, with the Hub and other key nodes on networks undertaking facilitation and curation.

- Successful networks need flows of knowledge, information and support as well as assets and connections.

- Communication systems will need to be networked not broadcast. Additional skills will be needed at all levels in using digital tools, and the associated skills and attitudes involved in creating and curating content, cooperating and collaborating.

- Messaging will take place at all levels not just centrally from the Hub. Content must be accessible and understandable both at grassroots level and to policy makers.

- Powerful voices will be developed through cooperation across networks. Insights will be generated and analysed through networks, not just centrally. The Hub should create the conditions for this not attempt to represent interests.

Learning

- Learning will take place not just through centralised training, but peer-to-peer exchange across networks, using a mix of face-to-face and online methods.

- This form of learning depends upon people learning how to learn for themselves, and developing new skills to do that.

- There will be a substantial learning challenge for those involved in developing the Hub. For this reason Our Way Ahead and Connecting Londoners proposed setting up a [Community of Practice](#) for people involved in data, mapping, networks, communications and influencing. This could be the 'coalition of the willing', and the pool of specialist consultants recommended by Steve Wyler, who would learn by doing.

Innovative elements in building the system

From this analysis, in order to build the Hub and associated systems, some innovative elements will be needed. While these are common practice in private and some public sector agencies, they are not currently well deployed in the community and voluntary sectors.

For starters:

- We need a deeper understanding of what networked systems are, and how they operate. This could be achieved by developing an initial **Framework and Guide to Networks and Network Building**. This could inform the Community of Practice and Hub staff, and provide a framework for guides that will be needed at all levels. Connecting Londoners have started this work.

- A **demonstration of asset and network mapping** in localities and across networks, and development of training and support. This could build on work by Connecting Londoners, justMap, and Living Maps.

- **Simulations of how the system will operate** at different levels. Again Connecting Londoners have prototyped a number of simulation games, and with Our Way Ahead ran one at London Metropolitan University in November 2017.

- A **demonstration of networked communication systems** for community groups and organisation. Interests.me, one of the members of Connecting Londoners, is working with local groups and networks on a system that provides web presence and a set of networking tools.

These elements are just for starters, based on work by Connecting Londoners and Our Way Ahead. Other requirements will emerge, and could be satisfied if we have a Community of Practice established before the Hub staff are in place, and before comms and other systems decided.

The CoP would extend the expertise already available through the advisory group, in particular on mapping, network building, data, digital comms and self-organising.

Detailed proposals on the CoP are [available here](#), and have already been circulated to the advisory group.

The model adopted for the Hub/system will determine branding and messaging about development. For example, Steve Wyler was clear this should attach to the system, not just the Hub organisation.

The model adopted will also determined appropriate roles, skills and culture for the Hub as a convening, enabling and network building organisation.

Piloting the Community of Practice and networked communications

We have started work on a prototype for the sort of networked communications that the Hub might need to complement its static website, and to connect with wider networked comms in the system. This consists of:

- A blog for gathering useful content on data, networks, voice and other key themes. The blog can both feed social media, and post topics into ...

- A cooperation and collaboration space using the sort of forum software employed to support product and service communities of users, and communities of practice.

- A wiki to host static content

- Other tools to curate content and facilitate networked communications.

We can develop and demonstrate these further once we have discussed ways forward with the Hub advisory group.

Status of proposals and next steps

So far Our Way Ahead has acted in part as a critical friend to The Way Ahead, making the case for a bottom-across, co-production approach that recognises the importance of community-based expertise and networks. This is in accordance with the original pragmatic co-production proposals in The Way Ahead report, and is clearly reflected in the recommendations now summarised by the advisory group secretariat.

Connecting Londoners, with OWA, has explored over the past year the potential for introducing networked thinking, digital technology and new forms of organising to development of the Hub and networked system. That work is summarised here.

Most of work our so far has been self-funded, and we need to make decisions on how to proceed. Our preference is now to join forces with The Way Ahead team, and the Hub advisory group, in developing the Community of Practice, initial mapping and pilot communication systems. Details of how to do that would, of course, be subject to discussion.

We would develop funding proposals to support that work, and seek endorsement from the Hub advisory group. Alternatively we can develop proposals independently, and continue to make the case for the approach that we outline here.

These proposals are drafted on behalf of Connecting Londoners and Our Way Ahead, and subject to further comments from members of those networks. They reflect earlier proposals, agreed by OWA, on the Community of Practice, and contained in the summary of recommendations.