



### HCIF Stakeholder Workshops October 2020: Settling into the New Normal

On the 21 and 22 October, representatives from 116 organisations from the HCI Foundation network joined us for a virtual workshop on Settling into the New Normal, to encourage us all to reflect and share good practice, inspire each other and celebrate the work we all do.

The workshop objectives were to:

- Create a space for practitioners to reflect on their experiences as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.
- Explore M, E & L under the new normal (COVID-19).
- Celebrate and inspire individuals and organisations.
- Identify opportunities for growth, connection, and creativity within the NGO sector.

This was with the understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us to continually



Based on feedback from participants and our own observations, we can conclude that the workshop achieved the following:

1. Through the pre-workshop survey and workshop sessions, organisation leaders were able to reflect and identify the strengths of their organisations and teams. This process revealed that organisations managed to adapt and used innovation to meet their goals. Organisations are committed to make use of the strengths identified to help them meet their goals and create a work environment that supports individuals' strengths.
2. The organisations' agility and resilience were strongly affirmed and encouraged throughout the workshop.
3. Participating organisations reviewed their monitoring, evaluation and learning systems and processes with the guidance of the workshop content and facilitation.
4. Organisations collectively co-created a vision for their sectors. Co-creating these visions encouraged organisations working in the same sector to buy into a shared vision to help strengthen their operations and programmes.
5. Organisations in attendance agreed that there is value in collaboration for maximum impact and committed to collaborate and share resources.

6. In reflections at the end of the workshop, some participants committed to reviewing strategic organisational processes to ensure their organisations are aligned to the new circumstances presented by covid-19. For example, one sectoral group committed to “review organisational policies towards building learning, caring organisational cultures that promote a balanced approach to work and self-care” at an individual organisational level.
7. Theory of change was one of the strategic approaches advocated when reviewing.

To meet the Foundation’s engagement goals, we selected speakers with knowledge and experience in the areas we covered during the workshop. Below we provide a summary of each facilitator’s input.

1. Nicci Hayes, from the Centre for Social Development at Rhodes University in Makhanda, gave a presentation on their holistic Early Childhood Care Education initiative that seeks to co-create centres of excellence linked to local primary schools and the homes of the children they work with. Their programme also aims to ensure that all children have access to quality, inclusive, transformative play-based early learning programmes provided by skilled, qualified, passionate, nurturing and imaginative teachers.
  - CSD shared how they negotiated lockdown, and the deep learnings they gained alongside their losses.
  - Learning had to be taken to where it was needed – into the homes. Most urgently, parents had to be empowered to be the first teachers of their children. This was based on the fact that parents reported that they “feel disempowered in the education space, and really appreciate having their opinions elicited and valued”.
  - Collaborations assisted CSD to offer better support to programme beneficiaries.
  - The Centre had to rethink how they teach, who they teach, and what resources are available to them to deliver their programme.
2. Lucy O’Keeffe, a development consultant, workshopped ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ with participants, who were invited to recognise their organisations’ current skills and resources and, in this way, envision who and how to be in future.
  - This session encouraged participating organisations to explore opportunities that were presented by the lockdown using an Appreciative Inquiry methodology. Many organisations discovered that they were more innovative they have ever been before.
  - Organisations got an opportunity to look at what is working well as the basis of growth, as opposed to only looking at challenges. This activity allowed organisations to celebrate their strengths and appreciate each other more.
  - Through this process organisations were able to collaboratively identify opportunities for collaboration in areas they need to strengthen as a sector.

- Organisations reported that this process made they feel as though they are not alone, but part of a broader sector that has a vision to contribute towards creating thriving and empowered communities.

3. Nyaradzo Mutanha, from Tshikululu Social Investments, addressed the group on monitoring, evaluation and learning within the context of the new normal, expanding on how COVID-19 has thrown us into the future, and setting out key principles and structures for meaningful monitoring, evaluation and learning.

- Organisations were encouraged to revisit their Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plans, to align them to the new normal circumstances and organisational Theory of Change.
- Theory of change was suggested as an important organisational strategic tool/approach that provides guidance on which data should be collected and why. The facilitator encouraged organisations to make the Theory of Change graphic simple and very accessible.
- A blended approach to collecting data was highlighted as a methodology that can be used as we settle into the new normal. Use of WhatsApp, Zoom, Skype, Telephone calls, Microsoft Teams, online surveys and face to face ways of collecting data.
- There was emphasis on the importance of always reflecting on what you have reported on before, to pick up on trends and gain information on what could be strengthened, or how trends can be used as learnings.
- Organisations were encouraged to only collect data that is necessary and that can be used.
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning was positioned as an activity that should be well understood by all team members and be a collaborative process from design to implementation.
- Organisations were encouraged to always perform quality assurance of the data they collect before they use it to make sure it is reliable, credible and valid.
- In performing Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning activities organisations were encouraged to always comply with the state policies that protect citizens' information and vulnerability.

The importance of embracing the new technology; highlighting access inequalities, especially in rural communities; collaborating to share work experience and ideas and advocating on behalf of and across communities of interest, were commitments which emerged from the two days. Normalising COVID-19, which has induced a spirit of generosity and sharing which has been a real gain out of this difficult time, was suggested as an important way forward.

At HCI Foundation we are committed to walking the journey with our partner organisations in creating a South Africa where young people are inspired and empowered to create thriving and sustainable communities.

The HCI Foundation thanks all participants and presenters for your generous sharing of skills and experience. We wish you well in the vital work you do as we take the next steps into the future together.

