



**SURF**  
Scotland's Regeneration Forum

SURF : sharing experience : shaping practice

# **SURF's Alliance for Action: Sources of Learning**



**SURF Alliance for Action**

**This document outlines the ways SURF collect and disseminate learning through the Alliance for Action programme.**

## **Some background on SURF's Alliance for Action**

SURF set up its Alliance for Action against the background of the extended recessionary context of 2013. It did so to assist the delivery of successful and sustainable regeneration in the face of rising demands and reduced resources. The Alliance uses SURF's knowledge and networks to actively link local assets and initiatives in specific disadvantaged communities with relevant national policy and resources. It has done so to support better outcomes in those areas, while testing and enhancing shared understanding of the realistic possibilities for cross sector community regeneration in a challenging economic context. To that end, the Alliance has both supported and linked investments in, and, learning from, place focused, cross sector collaborations.

The Alliance initiative was set up in cooperation with the Scottish Government and relevant Local Authorities. These key partners share SURF's aim of more effectively engaging and developing national economic and social policy, based on the reality of practice at the local level.

Over three years, the Alliance has creatively connected people, policies and resources in support of; more sustainable places, greater empowerment, increased enterprise, intelligent public sector reform, and greater local benefit from infrastructure and procurement investments. A key point of focus for collaboration has been on engaging dynamic community based initiatives with cross sector aspirations for reducing poverty and inequality, while generating new and inclusive growth in Scotland's most disadvantaged communities.

The dual purpose of SURF's *Alliance for Action* is:

- to strengthen resilience and practical outcomes in the programme's case study communities (currently: Govan, Glasgow; East Kirkcaldy, Fife and; Rothesay, Bute)
- to enhance wider policy and resource considerations for supporting community regeneration in the continuing challenging context.

SURF's Alliance initiative simultaneously enhances the delivery of practical regeneration benefits to communities, while identifying, connecting and disseminating relevant learning from that process. That reality based, cross sector, learning is shared and debated between the sites and across SURF's national regeneration networks and wider contacts.

## INTRODUCTION

This report identifies the variety of ways in which SURF captures learning from the *Alliance for Action*. The learning is transferrable across different sectors and settings and is used to enhance local and national community, funding, project, policy and resourcing decisions. Learning recipients use it as evidence to underpin, reinforce or challenge existing policies; as validation of established regeneration programmes, to support funding and resource applications or as advisory notes for embryonic community projects.

There are a variety of opportunities for collecting and recording learning within the *Alliance* programme. This reports sets out the different processes SURF uses to do so.

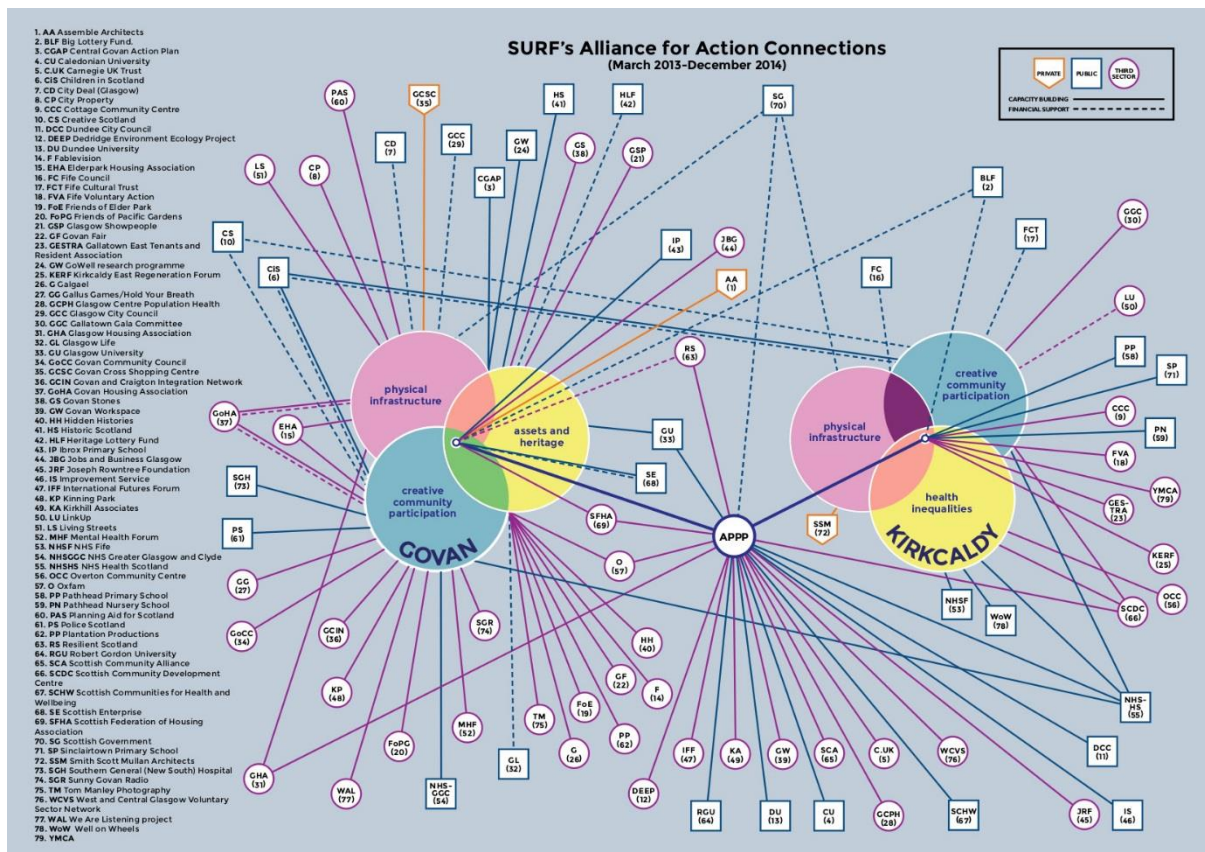
## 1. CAPTURING THE LEARNING

### 1.1. ESTABLISHING A BASELINE:

**Community engagement, Public meetings, Surveys (gathering, consulting, identifying and prioritising) Mapping, Infographics, *Alliance*opedia, Interviews, Films**

The early stages of the *Alliance* programme include locally informed and supported **community engagement exercises**. These participative processes are a combination of **public meetings** and/or **community surveys**. The purpose of these is: to introduce and present the *Alliance* to the community; and to identify assets and challenges and agree priorities and possibilities. The themes which emerge are then used to form the basis of the *Alliance* framework of collaborative action for that community.

Once the key partners, priorities and processes are agreed, it is essential to establish a practical baseline for comparison in order to measure changes which occur during the *Alliance* programme. **Early mapping** of this community context is done by collating information about existing projects and amenities and other relevant actors. A list of local actors and agencies is compiled and recorded in spreadsheets. Links between the different bodies and any existing relationships to external organisations (national funders, support groups; etc) identified and noted. One of the ways in which the *Alliance* conveys the complexity of these links is by transcribing the information in the form of an **infographic chart** (see below)



Details about the agencies identified, as listed on the left of the chart above, are additionally collected in a cross-referenced separate index *Allianclopedia* to provide basic background and contact information.

More detailed background on those organisations identified as being the most important and relevant local players is then collected during a series of **interviews**. The interviews are structured to provide material for a standardised report on each organisation - developed from the earliest *Alliance* work. The reports are filed for reference and used to cross check *Allianclopedia* content.

Alongside the interviews, the *Alliance* facilitator will be additionally (or sometimes, concurrently) conducting filmed interviews with a representative cross section of local people or organisations. The filmed interviews follow a loose framework encouraging interviewees to describe their historical and current circumstances and aspirations. The collection of minimally edited **films** which result, allow members of each community to present their unmediated views. These again form a valuable baseline from which to measure change.

Within 18 months to two years after the original filming, the interviewees are revisited (and re-filmed). In the intervening period some organisations or individuals may have opted out or scaled down their activity, but where possible everyone in the baseline film will be given the opportunity to provide updates and take part in subsequent films. New interviewees are added to the mix alongside the original participants.

## **1.2. IDENTIFYING AND RECORDING CHANGE:**

**Edited highlights, Themed films, Reports, Topical seminars, SURF Conferences, Food for thought (themed SURF partner meetings with Chatham House rules), Shared Learning sessions, Promoting informed debate**

As well as contributing to the baseline records, the filmed interviews are used in other ways to identify and promote learning.

All of the filmed material – including the lengthy collected interviews from each community - is available for public view through SURF's website. The place-based collections are also packaged as shorter **edited highlights** from each community. Interviewees can review the way they and their community are represented and leave feedback.

The filmed interviews are likely to reveal shared concerns and challenges, both from different actors within the same community and across different communities. Where practical, the material is re-edited and presented as short **themed films** which illustrate those shared themes and place them in a broader national and political context.

Learning themes which emerge from the films or from the face to face interviews which form the baseline reports are further recorded as part of the regular written **reports** the *Alliance* compiles for SURF's partners and funders.

The films are presented at *Alliance* events within and across communities and at a variety of large national SURF events, such as the **annual conference** and at smaller less public occasions, such as **Food for Thought** gatherings.

Where relevant the films are also used at **shared learning sessions**. The *Alliance* aims to hold two of these events a year, each based around one of the themes which have been identified and agreed as a common area of concern in one or more of the *Alliance* communities.

For example in 2015 shared learning sessions were on *Creativity and Food in the Community*. 2016 sessions are on *Heritage and Health*.

The shared learning events are crucial as a way of engaging with the community and of encouraging community participants to recognise and value their own contributions. In addition the events encourage and promote the exchange of knowledge by:

- Showcasing different approaches and experiences to encourage greater community participation and cohesion in the regeneration of the different *Alliance* for Action contexts of Govan, East Kirkcaldy and Rothesay.
- Creating a constructive context for shared learning and cooperation across:
  - People and organisations from *Alliance* for Action areas involved in directly supporting or participating in relevant community initiatives.
  - Representatives of relevant local and national support bodies

- Relevant policy influences and funders
- Exploring existing and potential collaboration among existing initiatives in practical regeneration efforts.
- Facilitating shared learning and enhance cross sector understanding of the theme in local and national regeneration policy and practice.

The *Alliance* facilitates the sessions in a way which creates an atmosphere of sufficient trust for participants to engage in lively and **informed debate**. Feedback from these events demonstrates different levels of positive learning.

## 2. SHARING LEARNING

### 2.1 PUBLIC ACCESS:

**SURF website, Social media presence on Facebook and Twitter, Monthly e-bulletin (Distributed to more than 2000 subscribers), Academic journals and conferences, Third sector conferences, Informing Post graduate, department and third sector research**

Some learning results from specifically funded activities may contain confidential sections and some reports may be anonymised to protect confidentiality - but the large majority of *Alliance* learning is presented and promoted on platforms which are easily accessed by the public.

SURF maintains a healthy **online** and **social media** presence with a well-used **website** and a monthly **e-bulletin** which goes to all members, with public access through links on SURF's **Facebook** page and **Twitter**. *Alliance* activities and reports are a strong component of that online and media presence and all *Alliance* reports, updates and events are publically and freely available through those mediums. .

Learning from the *Alliance* helped to inform much of the backbone of SURF's acclaimed 2016 **Manifesto** for Community Regeneration<sup>1</sup> and some key manifesto themes emerged directly from *Alliance* work.

The *Alliance* has also attracted the attention of online and traditional academic publishers and *Alliance* learning has been shared in articles and **journal** contributions. Andy Milne is regularly invited to make presentations about the *Alliance* to **academic and third sector conferences** and to visiting groups of students. Andy Milne and *Alliance* colleagues also make themselves available for **post graduate, department and third sector group research projects**.

### 2.2 TARGETED LEARNING:

**Academic Policy and Practitioners Panel (APPP), Presentations and formal reports to funders, Informal updates and consultations**

In addition to the community cycle of *Alliance* learning which facilitates the general sharing and promoting of learning within and across the *Alliance* communities, learning is further disseminated in more focused directions.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotregen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SURF-2016-Manifesto-Final-Draft.pdf>



Members of the **Academic Policy and Practitioners Panel (APPP)** meetings are drawn from relevant supportive contacts within SURF's cross sector networks. The first four gatherings of the APPP helped to inform and support the development of the *Alliance* initiative over 2013/15. Meetings are convened biannually.

The early APPP discussions helped establish a **Theory of Change** and effective methods for identifying transferable learning from the practical interactive process. Subsequent sessions have looked at how that learning could be most usefully linked to other research initiatives, policy considerations and practice developments and considered the main lessons as they emerge. The unusual membership make-up of academics, policy makers and practitioners encourage wide-ranging debate and cross sector learning.

The *Alliance* also prepares different types of **formal reports** which are informed by the experience of facilitating and observing *Alliance* activities and events; the learning which results and by the authors' broader perspective and knowledge of policy context.

Some of these reports are prepared to meet funders' criteria as part of contractual agreements. **Scottish Government** and **Highlands and Islands Enterprise** are among those bodies which require formal written reports which identify the learning from the *Alliance* in ways appropriate for informing policy and resource decisions and reviews. In addition to these written reports, Andy Milne regularly presents less formal **verbal updates** to senior Scottish Government and other funders.

In addition to these positive learning visits by groups and individuals, the *Alliance* also supplies feedback to funders and policymakers on particular areas of policy. Sometimes this can be in the form of replying to a specific question which arises as a result of a visit or in response to a request for more informal detail on something which featured in a formal report.

Additionally the *Alliance* may report on unexpected negative or positive consequences of policy implementation at ground level, of which policymakers may be otherwise unaware.

## CONCLUSION

SURF's commitment to capturing and sharing the learning from the Alliance for Action is an integral part of the process. By establishing and recording baselines of activity and context SURF is able to demonstrate change and benefit which accrue across the Alliance communities. By developing and sustaining effective communication networks within and across those communities SURF maintains ongoing contact with key actors - enabling the Alliance to identify and disseminate new learning relevant to policy and practice to beneficiaries within the SURF network of partners.

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