

# 5 Takeaways from the Collective Action Learning Process - Digital Transformation

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## Background

Following the formidable public health events of last year, along with the restrictions and limitations of how we all needed to adjust our activities to help prevent the spread of the virus and protect the vulnerable it became clear that a lot of what community foundations did (meeting people and gathering in smaller and bigger groups), along with their support infrastructure, wasn't going to be possible. And while technology was already a part of management practices and support activities it wasn't the primary medium for the way we build relationships, connection and social cohesion. With lockdowns enforced for long periods of time, we almost had no choice but *to go digital*. Interactions with our colleagues, staff and board members, grant committees, community groups, donors and other stakeholders had moved almost exclusively online.

While adapting our own strategy, services and opportunities to fit the current realities and documenting the state of field, it became clear that digital transformation was about to play a major role. Therefore, we set out through a pilot initiative, to support community foundations in identifying, working out and documenting how their digital challenges transform into solutions.

Fourteen organisations (see below) submitted their initial digital challenges and received financial support to document their learning journeys. We also wanted to engage the organisations in sharing with each other along the way and ten of them had participated in the Collective Action Learning process from January to March. We had external facilitation support from [Purpose+Motion](#) and together we designed and facilitated the bi-monthly, one and a half hour meetings. The goal for the meetings was to touch base and discuss on progress for each organisation but also to focus discussion on specific topics of interest in managing the project: developing narrative of change, clarifying the goal, mapping your stakeholders, marketing funnel exercise and testing digital tools together.

Below are a few of my thoughts reflecting on the process and what we have learned during its course of development. It is my belief that the ten organisations taking part have benefitted from working on their current “real-life” challenges and being able to share feedback with others in similar situations.



**1. Meeting twice a month over the course of three months would not have been possible unless it would have been online.** The fact that busy working people, from nine different cities, in seven countries along with a facilitation team, living in other two different cities could meet regularly and exchange progress on what they were working on, with minimum costs and diminished environmental impact is a lesson we have to learn from in how we deliver programs and services, when it is crucial to meet and how collaborative work can also be achieved by not being in the same physical room.

- 2. It's important to trust the process and allocate time for building routine and familiarity.** Whenever there is an experimental or pilot project it takes a while for the people you work with to see the usefulness and the rationale behind the steps and the methodology. Thus, allocating time for dialogue and communication in the beginning, repeating the “why” and the “how” of the process is crucial for participants’ buy-in.
- 3. Carve out small group interactions along with plenary group sharing.** This was very important as with physical meetings you have social times to meet and chat about other things, while in an online setting unless the facilitator creates space for that it doesn't happen. During our meeting, at least half the time was dedicated to small group conversations and it often happened that people came back giggling and saying they had wonderful conversations and insights, sometimes not at all relating to what we had asked them to discuss, but relevant to the work of their respective organisations.
- 4. Realising how your European colleagues have similar challenges.** What has been of major importance to the organisations involved in the process, was that the trusted space allowed them to share more challenges and vulnerabilities than those strictly related to digital challenges. Thus, they were reminded again they are not insular, that community foundations in other countries face comparable issues and by coming together there is strength and value in allocating time to share their experiences.
- 5. Beginning at “getting from the group” and ending at “being with the group”. Making the space equal, where everyone feels valuable.** What might be understood through peer-learning is that it happens only among people who are at the same level with each other or on par, while we were trying to develop the type of peer learning where one or more people consider themselves to be equal in supporting each other's development. Based on feedback throughout the sessions and in the end, participants said the meetings were great because their experience and opinions are valued by their peers and we have created a space where there aren't any “stupid questions”.

In the following month all 14 organisations will report on their digital transformation and we hope that by sharing their insights other organisations can benefit from that knowledge.

**List of organisations that have taken part in the Digital Transformation Challenge**, with the first ten organisation regularly attending the Collective Action Learning process:

1. **Nitra Community Foundation** - Slovakia - “Interactive map showing community projects supported by the foundation.”
2. **Podilska Hromada Community Foundation** - Ukraine - “How to support start-up social entrepreneurs with online services.”
3. **Step Forward Community Foundation** - Serbia - “Developing a peer-to-peer fundraising platform.”
4. **Tyne & Wear and Northumberland Community Foundation** - UK - “Online donor engagement strategy and implementation”
5. **Two Ridings Community Foundation** - UK - “Online stakeholder engagement for strategy review and design.”
6. **Northamptonshire Community Foundation** - UK - “Digital Transformation Journey - how to use social media to engage with new and prospective donors.”
7. **Banatul Montan Community Foundation** - Romania - “How to develop the foundation’s strategy through online consultations with stakeholders.”
8. **Sibiu Community Foundation** - Romania - “Adapting tools and processes to work collaboratively and remotely as a team”
9. **Munus Community Foundation of Parma** - Italy - “Website redesign to include better digital communication with stakeholders.”
10. **Canavese Community Foundation** - Italy - “Digitalise processes for remote work and engagement with community.”
11. **Oradea Community Foundation** - Romania - “Adapting two fundraising events into successful online versions.”
12. **Bucharest Community Foundation** - Romania - “Developing the first digital campaign targeting individual donors for support towards the community foundation.”

13. [Community Foundation for Ireland](#) - Ireland - “Implementing a donor portal for donors to access information through the community foundation’s website.”

14. [Healthy City Community Foundation](#) - Slovakia - “Adapting in-person programs to online delivery.”