



Funders for Sustainable Living Network

Report 2020-2021

Foreword

The [1.5-degree lifestyles](#) approach, supported by KR Foundation, reveals the profound social and economic shifts needed for equitable and sustainable living. Although working on consumption and lifestyle change can be controversial, KR Foundation's commitment to a systemic approach to sustainable living attracted interest from our colleagues in other foundations, prompting us to establish a network in early 2020.

The sharing of wisdom and cutting-edge ideas between funders and civil society experts has raised the ambition level for all of us – and it has also been a lot of fun! Even during the difficult years of 2020 and 2021, while we lived through lockdowns, race riots, political tensions and extreme weather, the network has provided space for thoughtful consideration of how these events impact our work as funders. During these two years, the transformation of lifestyles has revealed the possibilities for deep and rapid change: as funders we are more aware than ever of our role as supporters, convenors, and risk-takers for bold action on sustainable living.

As KR Foundation's focus shifted, we provided the seed funding for Hot or Cool Institute to take over as convenors of the F4SL network, as they continue to co-create the concept of 1.5-degree lifestyles and [a fair consumption space for all](#) with researchers, policymakers, practitioners and funders. It is exciting to see the network growing, reflecting philanthropy's wider recognition of the need to change the systems that determine our lifestyles.

On behalf of KR Foundation, I would like to thank the members of the F4SL network for their intrepid pursuit of change to our carbon-intensive ways of life.

Brian Valbjørn Sørensen
Executive Director, KR Foundation

Introduction

The Funders for Sustainable Living Network (F4SL) is a group of about 50 people from more than 30 funding organisations who are actively working on, or interested in, ambitious action for sustainable lifestyles. The group had a series of 15 online workshops exploring themes within sustainable lifestyles, such as inequality, new economics, and narratives for sustainable living.

The F4SL network was initiated by KR Foundation, who were among the initial funders of the [1.5 Degree Lifestyles](#) research programme: the work takes an equity-based approach to keeping our consumption emissions to below 2.5 tons per person per year by 2030 and 700kg per person per year by 2050 in order to give the 1.5 Degree target a reasonable chance of being achieved.

The 1.5 Degree Lifestyles analysis was the starting point for inviting interested funders to join the network, discuss the possibilities and find our role in the necessary transformation.

This ambitious approach has profound implications for the need to transform our way of living and organising our societies. This has tended to make sustainable behaviour a challenging and controversial field of work – but the interest we received from other funders made us aware that the time is right to explore these difficult issues with others in the world of philanthropy.

“Really interesting speakers, and then a very valuable opportunity to reflect on the key issues, what it means for funding, and be amongst a network of people who really understand the opportunities and challenges of being a funder in this space.”

(Survey response from F4SL participant)

Key challenges explored by the F4SL network

- The enormity of the 1.5 challenge (and knowing sustainable living is a part of that).
- The challenge of both change-makers and funders to know where and how to intervene - what to do about this challenge.
- The challenge for funders to know not only where to divert their funding, but also what type of role they need to play in supporting the necessary level of change.

What we did - a network of funders

In 2020, KR Foundation created the Funders for Sustainable Living network, in response to many questions received from funders interested in KR’s Sustainable Behaviour programme. The network was set up by inviting those funders already known to KR who were working on - or interested in - sustainable consumption, behaviour change and sustainable living. This started with 25 foundations in Europe and North America in March 2020 and grew through word of mouth to 30 Foundations in Europe, Africa and North America by the end of 2021.

The funders in the network have a diverse range of strategies for working on sustainable living, including regenerative cultures, experiments with living within the 1.5 degrees limit, legal and financial leverage points for systems change, advocacy, promoting dialogue between stakeholders, supporting change-makers from other sectors (e.g. health, sports) to work on climate and environment, convening experts to promote political change, addressing our internal organisational emissions and related policies, community projects addressing waste and consumption, the role of procurement in promoting sustainable living, and supporting community leadership.

The original purpose of the network was to raise ambition and scale impact of sustainable behaviour initiatives. KR Foundation had noted an increasing interest in sustainable behaviour among funders, and found it valuable to discuss strategies, share knowledge, reflect on challenges together and when appropriate, take coordinated action to support the proliferation of sustainable ways of living. This includes actions such as finding suitable projects, co-funding and co-developing more ambitious interventions.

The aim was for funders working on sustainable behaviour to get any support they need - through meeting potential collaborators and grantees, sharing knowledge and considering high-impact interventions. The collaboration is open to all funders active or interested in the field of sustainable living and behaviour change relating to climate and environment. Originally hosted by KR Foundation, with strategic support and workshop facilitation from Forum for the Future, during 2021 the F4SL shifted to being hosted by Hot or Cool Institute.

Method

Although the original invitation was open to all funders, regardless of levels of knowledge and experience, it was intended to be a network that raised ambition towards actions proportional to the 1.5 Degree Lifestyle targets and equity-based approaches. An initial email invitation to potentially interested funders was followed up with one-to-one interviews, and most went on to join the network.

Due to funders being based in both Europe and North America, we settled on regular online workshops as the best way to get to know each other, learn from guest experts, and explore possibilities for raising ambition in our work. We aimed for approximately monthly workshops, but this was derailed by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent home-schooling requirements, which made full time work impossible. In 2020, six online workshops were held; in 2021, seven online workshops were held, as well as the two Compass Festival events (see below).

Workshops have all been hosted by Kate Power (KR Foundation, and from May 2021 onwards, Hot or Cool Institute) and facilitated by Dr Anna Birney (Forum for the Future). Surveys and interviews were used to establish themes and approaches of relevance to the funders - although recognising that we represented organisations with a wide variety of strategic approaches to this field, and quite some variability in terms of existing knowledge.

Apart from the initial meeting, all workshops included guest experts from research, practice, or communications in the field of sustainable living:

Workshop date 2020	Workshop theme	Guest experts
March	Kick-off meeting, present results of baseline survey	All workshops hosted by Kate Power and facilitated by Anna Birney
June	Covid-19 Strategy Check-in: Sustainable Living and Behaviour Change for Systems Change	Susie Wang & Adam Corner, CAST (Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations); Andrew Simms, Rapid Transition Alliance.
September	What are “sustainable living, behaviour change, and 1.5-degree lifestyles”?	Dr Jennie Moore (BCIT); Dr Lewis Akenji (Hot or Cool Institute); Dr Renee Lertzman (Project InsideOut).
October	What is possible in terms of aligned funding, co-funding and pooled funding?	Professor Peter Newell (Sussex University) with draft conclusions from the Cambridge Sustainability Commission on Scaling Sustainable Behaviour.
November	Funder collaboration: Covid-19, collaboration and philanthropy behaving sustainably.	Scientists for Global Responsibility; Stay Grounded; Children's Radio Foundation.
December	Agenda-setting: narratives and storytelling to mainstream zero carbon living	Dr Vanessa Timmer (One Earth); Malin Pettersson-Beckeman (IKEA Sustainability Division).

Each workshop began with a short welcome, acknowledging what was happening in the world at the moment, as members of the network (and guests) experienced various extreme events including: the Covid 19 pandemic and its impacts, protests and riots connected to social justice issues, forest fires and other extreme weather events, high profile elections, violent political incidents and more. The welcome also reminds participants of the theme of the workshop and gives everyone time to transition from whatever they were doing before the workshop.

A 20–30-minute check-in session enables everyone to introduce themselves: although there is a core group who attend almost every workshop, there are often a few people joining who attend rarely, as well as the guest speakers. In addition to the introductions, people are asked a question related to the theme e.g. what questions are you bringing with you about narratives for sustainable living? This gives everyone (especially the facilitator) a sense of how people are already thinking about the issue, and what they are hoping to get out of the session. Often it also surfaces some of the inherent tensions within a theme, which helps us to quickly get down to a deeper level of discussion about the issue in general and the specific role funders can play in facilitating change.

Workshop date 2021	Workshop theme	Guest experts
January	Revitalising Citizenship for Sustainable Living	Jill Kubit, DearTomorrow / Our Kids' Climate, Dr Martin Kopp, GreenFaith's Living the Change project.
February	Creative Workshop aimed at shaping our shared narrative for mainstreaming zero carbon living.	Erica Priggen-Wright (Creative Executive Producer of the Beacon for Sustainable Living and Producer of The Story of Stuff films), Vanessa Timmer, Executive Director of OneEarth and co-lead of the Beacon.
April	Bringing Sustainable Living into the heart of climate policymaking	Tim Gore ('Per Capita Emissions Gap' report), Rich Wilson & Claire Mellier (Global Citizens' Assembly for COP26)
May	The Compass Festival - part 1	
May	Cambridge Sustainable Commission – how can funders set the agenda for high-ambition work on sustainable living?	Professor Peter Newell (Sussex University)
June	Tackling Consumerism	GAP UK, Purpose Disruptors, Badvertising
June	The Compass Festival - part 2	
July	Deeper transformation for sustainable living: activating deeper change.	The Week (Frederic Laloux); The Jump (Tom Bailey), Boundless Roots Community (Leila Hoballah)
September	New economics and the connection to sustainable living, co-hosted with Partners for a New Economy (member of the F4SL network).	ZOE Institute, NEON, Make My Money Matter

Guest speakers give relatively short presentations, usually less than 15 minutes. The facilitator makes use of the questions and discussion to spot themes of significance and decide with the participants which questions to explore in more detail. This usually leads to setting up a series of breakout groups and a final plenary to find out what we have learned together, before a 'check-out' where we share what we are taking with us from the workshop.

What we explored

Through expert input and our subsequent conversations, we explored a broad range of ideas connected to the need to transform our societies and ways of living. There were recurring patterns in this, especially:

- the tensions between working with domains (e.g. food, housing, mobility) and working with whole lifestyle approaches or deeper infrastructures
- the relationships between individual and systems change
- Power imbalances between funders and grantees, and between staff and Boards

Connected to these themes were recurring issues for funders in this field, including:

- the need to acknowledge deeper economic injustices in the work that we do
- the interplay between policy and narratives
- balancing the focus on funding community-led, bottom-up initiatives with funding work that aims to shift top-down policy
- Introducing controversial strategies to Board members, such tackling the “polluter elite” as an alternative to only using “inside track” strategies

We also explored what Covid is teaching us about behaviour change and systems change, in addition to exploring how these types of disruptions might be opportunities for us to promote the change that is needed. Finally, we also discussed the role of funders in change and how they might both use their funding but also play roles in ecosystem building, shared narratives etc.

“The workshops are a breath of fresh air, a way to step back from my daily job and take a second look at how I'm articulating issues and opportunities, and perhaps adjust things so that I'm better aligned with the best ideas and practices. It's also one of my only ways to connect internationally on a recurring basis, which is super precious.”

(Survey response from F4SL participant)

Behaviour change domains - where we usually start

Several foundations have based their sustainable behaviour work around key consumption domains such as food, household energy or transport - and there are many civil society interventions and research programmes that take a domain-based approach. The F4SL network debated the issue of whether domain-based approaches are helpful or not. We considered a broad range of benefits of grounding our work in concrete changes that are needed in high-consumption domains.

- It is important to ground our work in the concrete - the practical changes that are essential to enabling 1.5 degree societies, such as car-free cities and plant-based diets. We know the changes that are needed but they are still very far from mainstream policy / social acceptance in many places.
- We need to make fast progress on reducing emissions: this will buy us time while we tackle the deeper and more challenging underlying drivers of climate change and environmental degradation.
- Working on the highest impact domains, such as food, housing and mobility (as well as growing impact domains such as textiles and digital & IT) enables us to engage with existing local, national and international policy processes.

- Focusing on specific domain-based changes is often suitable for initiatives at local level, including community-led projects. This enables projects to be manageable and not attempt to change the entire society and economy single-handedly.
- Domain-based work allows us to model specific shifts that are unavoidable within equitable 1.5 degree lifestyles, such as avoiding flying, driving and living in large homes: these lifestyle options are still controversial even within the climate sector itself, and so it is important to demonstrate that they are necessary, possible and compatible with a good quality of life.
- We know that many aspects of our current lifestyle are incompatible with 1.5 degree lifestyles: if we don't address this now, we will continue to build the physical and social infrastructure that perpetuates these unsustainable lifestyles, rather than urgently shifting to low-carbon lifestyles.

However, we also discussed the risk that a domain-based approach could obscure the level of ambition that we need to work with: shifts to local currencies, cycling and veganism are important but will not get us to 1.5 degree lifestyles by themselves. The depth of change needed in our societies and economies is profound, and our way of living will need deeper shifts that need to be further explored. Does a focus only on domains give us a false impression that we can make some relatively simple swaps (e.g. public transport instead of cars in cities) and this will be sufficient to mitigate climate catastrophe?

An analogy was made to the role of renewable energy in mitigating climate change: in principle, renewable energy is helpful - but only if it is replacing fossil fuels. Currently, global demand for energy continues to increase: at the global level, renewable energy is additional to fossil fuel energy - it has not replaced fossil fuels. We need to both reduce energy use and replace fossil fuels with renewables, otherwise we are giving ourselves a false sense of security when we look at statistics about how renewables are increasing rapidly. Similarly with lifestyles, we need to both tackle the high impact domains such as food, housing and mobility, and simultaneously tackle the underlying drivers of overconsumption, such as the economic model, systems of production and consumption, and social norms. There is a need for honest exploration of how healthy and happy societies can be sustained with very low levels of energy and resource use, and radically lower levels of consumption in richer parts of the world. Are we avoiding difficult conversations by focusing on the domains and their policy processes?

The implications of the 1.5 degree global goal for equity and lifestyles can more easily be avoided when working on domains rather than considering whole lifestyles that fit within fair carbon budgets (e.g. 2.5 tons per person / per year by 2030).

A helpful way to take this question forward may be to consider what we as a group know or can explore in terms of our own foundations' barriers and mandates. For example, is our organisation open to maximising strategic impact through funding domains (such as sustainable transport) in order to catalyse deeper system change? Is our organisation willing to consider alternatives to the current economic system?

The F4SL has discussed the suggestion that is often made, that climate action needs to "start where people are": this was challenged, by noting that we are often inviting people to only do things they feel comfortable

with, even at this stage of the climate emergency. An example is suggesting that individuals replace their car with an electric car, thereby minimising the lifestyle change needed, while only partly reducing emissions. Options that have far better social and environmental outcomes - such as active transport & public transport - are already available but require more work to build social and political support as well as infrastructural and economic shifts. It was suggested that necessary actions include e.g. shutting down power stations and airports, and working for disarmament - but often our sector is asking people to slightly reduce their emissions with small, easy lifestyle changes.

In addition, by avoiding deeper issues of economic and social practices, we also avoid tackling inequality in power and access to resources, as well as inequality in both causing climate change and suffering its consequences.

These conversations led to questioning of what those of us with both privilege and influence can do that is much braver. We also questioned why there is a lack of moral outrage about the existential harm being done by a minority of over-consumers - presumably because many people working in the climate mitigation field in the global north are in the top 10% of income earners that cause about 50% of carbon emissions.

“We never really looked at how we give up our own privilege, we were focused on how to invite others into a privileged tent. We didn't push ourselves hard enough.”

(Quote from a workshop participant)

This is a critical issue for further exploration in the group. The positive outcome at this stage is a deeper awareness of the implications of focusing our work either on domains or deeper structural issues, and the importance of staying connected to the “big picture” of sustainable lifestyles. The F4SL can play a beneficial role in facilitating this connection.

Individuals and systems change - not just two sides of a coin

Funders and change-makers working on sustainable consumption and 1.5 degree lifestyles still encounter significant pushback from others in our field, who suggest that individual lifestyle changes are an irrelevant distraction from the necessary changes to underlying systems. This was a theme that recurred in the majority of our workshops.

For some funders (and change-makers) it is frustrating to continually try to counter this misunderstanding of how social change works, and there is a concern that this false dichotomy hinders discussions about how we can facilitate deep and rapid systemic change. Change-makers missing out on building the power of individual influence as a catalyst for systemic change. And worse, messaging from climate organisations suggesting that we don't need to change the way we live can undermine the push for exactly the systems changes that are necessary - because they imply that only governments and businesses need to change and that our current way of living can continue with efficiency changes.

Similarly to the tension between domain-based change and deeper change outlined above, these aspects of change are to some extent falsely separated: in reality, we need top-down and bottom-up approaches, as well as action at individual, community, institutional and governmental levels.

As funders we can be more aware of the dangers of this false dichotomy and give credibility to various approaches even if we are focusing our work more towards aspects more classically described as “systems change” such as advocacy and infrastructure.

Engaging with policy is a priority for many funders who work with sustainable lifestyles; in connection with this we explored how we might engage citizen voices in promoting ambitious policy. Promising case studies were brought by guest experts, such as Global Citizens Assembly: it was noted that citizen assemblies can bridge the gap between activists (who might be pushing for ambitious change) and policy makers (who might be aiming for incremental change). Social movements can feel oppositional to authorities and not necessarily representative of all citizens. As political space for change opens, citizen assemblies can play several important roles including ensuring wider representation, providing time to reflect on both the evidence base and the impact of various potential policies, connecting communities to policy processes through democratic mechanisms.

In our explorations of how funders can contribute to wider systemic change, we considered our own roles as individuals - acknowledging that we are mainly a group of western funders, and this gives us particular perspectives and privileges. Staff of funding organisations are part of the wider power dynamic between philanthropy and civil society, and we could learn more about how to acknowledge and address this; our workshops aim to create a space where funding staff, researchers and civil society experts can meet and discuss the difficult topics together without the pressure of funding pitches, but it not so simple to create a space free from this power dynamic. The Compass Festival (see below) was, in part, an attempt to bring together experts from practice, academia and philanthropy as equal counterparts in building a common, ambitious agenda for mainstreaming 1.5 degree lifestyles. This is a work in progress.

Similarly, our workshops often inspired consideration of the inequality in consumption, emissions, and climate impacts - and therefore a discussion of who’s lifestyle should be changing. The urgent need to reduce the consumption emissions of the top 10% of earners has been quoted relatively often in the last 2-3 years, but there is still little awareness that this means a radical reduction in consumption of people like us, who work in the climate field in places such as Europe and North America.

“We have squandered the carbon budget - not to lift people out of poverty but to support luxury lifestyles”
(Quote from a workshop presenter)

Participants who work in the Global South, or community organisations and indigenous groups noted that there is still a lack of representation: research, meetings, funding etc is still dominated by middle class perspectives, which can result in knowledge gaps, false assumptions and interventions that might not be

appropriate. In addition, there is a lot of pushbacks to lifestyle change initiatives from those who “didn’t create this mess” and might have relatively low standards of living or have objections to richer nations imposing limits on economic development in other parts of the world. This creates a dilemma for those working on lifestyles: we have tended to focus on richer parts of the world which makes sense as richer households need to make deeper and faster reductions in emissions: how can we ensure that perspectives from other social classes and other parts of the world are incorporated, while not suggesting that people who are struggling to make a decent living now also need to take on responsibilities for promoting sustainable lifestyles? Funders are continuing to explore this issue and consult with a wider range of experts on inclusion and diversity. As an immediate first step, it is noticeable that several funders are now very willing to provide per diems to projects that wish to invite experts from community organisations and Global South experts. In practice, per diems are offered to all participants but usually only taken up by those who need them, such as those who are not in full time academic roles.

These and other deeper structural issues connected to the global economic system were a consistent theme, and as a result we invited Partners For A New Economy foundation to jointly host a workshop with us, sharing strategic approaches and highlighting cutting edge work to seed sustainable economic practices.

It was noted that there is a tension between our desire to be highly ambitious and push the cutting edge, and the need to work with our current political reality. In practice, foundations have a range of priorities as well as tolerance for radical versus incremental approaches. Wherever our work falls within that spectrum, we noted that the F4SL network helps us to maintain awareness and appreciation of other work within our field - whether pushing the ambition levels higher, or grappling with the technical details of the current policy frameworks. For those organisations working on incremental policy improvements, staying abreast of the deeper structural shifts needed helps to frame the work in such a way that it contributes to increasing policy / social acceptance of more radical changes to how we live.

Funders are very aware of the short timescales we have to create major change, and the immense political barriers and vested interests that we are up against. A further recurring theme was the urgent need for visions and stories of radically reducing the environmental footprint of mainstream societies - which need to be inspiring yet realistic and relatable.

Workshops with experts in narratives and framing for sustainable lifestyles engaged us in creative activities to explore meaning making, discourses and the social science evidence base for cultural change. Many funders are active in this area and discussions are underway about the need to communicate at scale, while tuning in to the needs of a range of audiences. One aspect that is less often discussed is who controls the messages: when do we “start where people are” and when do we push the boundaries - and who decides? There is often an assumption that all climate communication is good, but could communications about “small, easy lifestyle changes” undermine attempts to shift the narrative about the need for much deeper changes to the way we live?

“I’ve loved them very much. I am always so impressed by the calibre of the speakers.”

(Survey response from F4SL participant)

How we need to work with change - from Covid to wider opportunities

The Covid-19 pandemic and responses gave rise to discussions with experts on themes including disruption and the potential for shifts to low-carbon lifestyles. As the workshops continued and Covid-related discussions evolved, some funders in the F4SL network supported specific pieces of work to build on the behaviour change potential during the pandemic, seeing this time as an opportunity for deeper change in structure such as policies, infrastructure, social practices and narratives.

The evidence base connected to behaviour change during life transition stages was explored, as well as a wealth of evidence for catalysing quick shifts in policy and infrastructure from the Rapid Transition Alliance's Reset series. We also learned from Climate Outreach's work on communicating climate during the pandemic, and analysis from various experts of how attitudes and behaviours are shifting in different parts of the world. Also, during this time, political upheaval, social unrest and violence in the USA was of major concern to several members of the F4SL network, and this further influenced our work together.

We discussed a wide range of issues relevant to our organisations, including the need to embrace constant change and disruption - which is likely to increase with time; the inequality revealed and worsened by the pandemic, and the urgent need to ensure climate mitigation addresses social justice issues; the tensions between aspirations and political reality, as well as struggles with fear and maintaining hope / belief in positive change; mental health issues and breakdown of some of the structures of society; acknowledging changes that have been positive (for some) and how to maintain lower carbon lifestyles once the pandemic responses end.

This period was challenging for grantees and civil society colleagues: KR Foundation held a workshop with grantees to hear more about the issues they faced during this period. Many organisations had struggled with funders who had suddenly shifted priorities or closed application rounds due to Covid-19, leaving them with worrying funding gaps after already investing significant time working on proposals. This was in addition to the very significant stresses many of us faced due to home-schooling our children while working or possibly facing isolation, caring for sick relatives, and generally navigating lockdown restrictions.

One of the F4SL network member organisations, SITRA, gave a presentation of their research on "Lifestyles After Lockdown" and led a discussion about the implications of this work. The research focused on those at the leading edge of change to more sustainable living and identified high potential areas. Generally, the study found that many people are interested in shifting away from consumption that they consider excessive, towards a focus on moderation and wellbeing. The research suggests that people are becoming more grounded at this time and finding more value in the small ordinary pleasures of everyday life, closer to home. In addition, there is an ongoing shift towards experience economy and intentional time use: this has varied potential for environmental impacts, which could be positive in terms of everyday shifts, but negative if discretionary spending on international travel increases. It was noted that although there is an enormous opportunity for social change at this time, there is also a risk of bouncing back to previous consumption patterns and behaviours once pandemic restrictions are lifted.

"Really great speakers, edifying, motivating."

(Survey response from F4SL participant)

Funders and their role in change

Each workshop included reflection on the specific relevance of each theme to funders, and the potential role of funders in catalysing positive change. Some central topics emerged:

- The role of funders in taking risks and supporting experimentation in the field
- Creating a shared learning ecosystem: convening and funding strategic collaborations, including with researchers, practitioners and funders
- Deciding when to engage in pooled funding and co-funding, depending on a range of theories of change
- Supporting the development of shared agendas
- How ambitious / radical are staff compared with the CEOs, Boards, families etc?

What is needed to support this:

- Skilful facilitation of the various processes and collaborations
- Building trust between partners
- Co-development of unbranded communications assets
- Guidance on working with boards

A recurring concern was the extent to which staff at funding organisations are restrained - for example, by low ambition levels in the organisations, by the need to align with other workstreams / sustainable lifestyles being a relatively low priority, or by the need for guaranteed impacts rather than ambitious experiments. Staff from some organisations talk about how they self-censor, because the leadership are triggered by any questioning of the growth paradigm, capitalism, the role of the market in perpetuating climate change and other crises.

In addition, it was noted that funding sustainable lifestyles is challenged by the significant confusion within the philanthropic sector about individual action, policy shifts, the role of movements and the role all of these play in systems change.

It was noted that smaller working groups on specific issues are very valuable for funding staff, as are narratives and frames that can be used by multiple organisations working on aligned issues: these can assist staff with building expertise, contacts and compelling communications in areas where they are not themselves experts.

“It is so useful to know how other funders . . . understand these systemic problems and how they approach them - eg. sticking with grantees over the long term. . . Might be an idea to hear from people approaching the same problem (eg advertising/air travel/the consumer citizen) from different perspectives (activists, academics, NGOs, creatives). A really good space and one I always try to make time for. . . this thematic network is so important.”

(Survey response from F4SL participant)

Recommendations for Funders of Sustainable Lifestyles work from the Cambridge Sustainability Commission on Scaling Behaviour Change

During 2020-2021, KR Foundation initiated the Cambridge Sustainability Commission on Scaling Behaviour Change, led by Professor Peter Newell, University of Sussex. The research and report were commissioned by KR Foundation in order to address the situation of funders in this field:

“It is challenging for funders to identify high-impact, evidence-based, scalable projects to support in the sustainable behaviour field. These difficulties are related to the current lack of understanding of the relation between system change and individual behaviour change needed for societal transformation. This challenge is compounded by the difficulty of accepting the scale and urgency of transformation that deeper forms of sustainable living imply. An additional obstacle for some funders is that their money comes from individuals or organisations leading carbon intensive lifestyles, so there may be an understandable reluctance to address these issues.”

Changing our Ways?: Behaviour change and the climate crisis. Recommendations for funders from the Cambridge Sustainability Commissions on Scaling Behaviour Change: p4.

In addition to consultation with experts from academia and civil society, the commission process also included a workshop with the F4SL network. After the publication and launch webinar, a follow up workshop with the F4SL network enabled deeper consideration of the recommendations for funders, in collaboration with Peter Newell. Highlights from the presentation included:

- The need to socialise the idea of limits to consumption, making “maximum consumption levels” a legitimate conversation.
- Just transitions can include a range of enabling factors e.g. infrastructural change, encouraging top consumers to show restraint and finding policies to restrain them.
- Social movements are essential, both to imagine / build alternatives to our current way of life, and to pressure for systemic change.
- It is important to bring in diverse voices e.g. unions, indigenous communities.
- The polluter elite issue needs addressing not only due to the overconsumption / direct emissions, but also due to the investments and political influence of this minority.
- There are still some difficult conversations that haven't been tackled in relation to sustainable living e.g. the need to decrease house sizes / m2 living spaces.
- In addition to amplifying positive change, we also need to prepare for pushback and opposition strategies.
- Funders can be of great help in supporting experimentation and the value of imagination in creating enabling environments for sustainable living, as well as making it possible for the sector to react quickly to opportunities and challenges.

We shared our reactions to the CSC Recommendations for Funders and the issues we are trying to address in our own work, including the following:

- Denormalise lack of ambition in the climate sector and mainstream society with phrases such as “we are better than this”, “is this as good as it gets?” and “this is not normal”.
- Funders are working to raise internal ambition levels within their own organisations, so that senior staff and Boards are less afraid to fund the more radical initiatives.
- Funder staff find it easier to get support for high-ambition work if projects are already underway and can show proof of concept, and / or if other funders are already involved. It is an ongoing challenge to get funders to take on experiments with more challenging, untested work.
- We could do more to get out of our silos and work on intersectional issues including social justice, care work, health and economics.
- It is essential to tackle cultural shifts at the same time as tackling policy change - these need to work together.

Our discussions included many ideas for how we can work together to increase our impact on sustainable living, including the following:

- We could commission analysis and reports about sustainable living e.g. to publish in funder journals.
- It is very hard to talk about this work: we could commission experts to guide our communications; we could reach out to a wider range of funders and continue with capacity building workshops to bring more organisations into this field of work / ambitious agenda-setting.
- We could undertake (or commission) a mapping exercise to develop a map of fundable projects that are ambitious in promoting sustainable living, using different approaches and in different parts of the world.

The Compass Festival: virtual conference on equitable and sustainable lifestyles

Building on the supportive and ambitious discussions between funders and potential grantees in the F4SL network, the Compass Festival further tested the potential for collaborative agenda-setting through a larger event. The festival had two virtual convenings during 2021, which explored what it means to work on this controversial agenda, and what is needed to create the community of practice required. Further events are planned for 2022 (see below).

The aims of the Compass Festival are:

1. To create a shared agenda for ambitious action towards 1.5-degree lifestyles/societies.
2. To create a “compass” to guide our work in promoting equitable ways of living within ecological limits.
3. To create new ideas and momentum on high-impact, high-ambition work that transforms the way the top 10% live and influence wider society

These two events brought together funders, researchers, practitioners and communicators to set an ambitious agenda for working on sustainable living. Based on the findings of the UN Emissions Gap Report (2020) chapter on equitable and sustainable lifestyles, especially the question of how to accelerate and amplify individual action as a catalyst for collective action and wider systemic change, this was a 3.5-hour collaborative workshop facilitated by systems change expert Anna Birney and sustainability communications experts Vanessa Timmer and Erica Priggen Wright, with support from Climate Outreach, Stanley Center for Peace and Security, and Rapid Transition Alliance. Online convening was chosen due to the environmental impacts of face-to-face meetings; experiments in creating a “festival vibe” showed the potential of online conferencing to be fun, inspiring, creative and memorable. The festival included live streamed music and poetry, delivery of “tea party” snack boxes to participants to be enjoyed during the breaks, and a virtual after-party.

We are familiar with positive visualisations of towns and cities powered by green energy and reduced car use, but climate campaigns are over-optimistic about what equitable living at 1.5°C might look like in terms of shifts in consumption for the world’s relatively wealthy. It means radical reductions in material consumption, but what might we be gaining? Are we all truly on board for the recalibration of consumption this implies? During the two festival events we developed a guiding ‘compass’, or baseline of ambition and commitment, that will enable us to elevate our work on sustainable living into the mainstream climate discourse with the highest level of ambition and clarity.

The draft Compass points (currently still under development) are as follows:

1. That deep and rapid change is needed, and possible with a shift in power.
2. Transition will only succeed with equity, justice and commitment at its core.
3. Lifestyles that raise the chances of health and well-being for everyone can be built in many different, creative ways within climate and ecological limits (such as 0,7t CO₂e per person annually by 2050).
4. Life is about much more than our material possessions. This simple truth is woven through history, across cultures and is central to many indigenous and marginalised communities. People value relationships, health, trust, meaning, place and belonging, joy and time.
5. Small reforms or isolated behaviour changes are not enough. Transformation arises from citizens working together, collectively for change, enabled by systems designed to support them, backed by business and policymakers.
6. The richest do the most climate damage – the top 10% causing close to 50% of emissions. But the poorest are most vulnerable, so climate action must be fair and recognize our mutual vulnerability and interdependence. This means innovative action for deep change by the wealthy.
7. Momentum for change comes from collaboration and connecting different interests and approaches to reinforce each other

The Compass Festival will continue in 2022 with workshops on narratives and framing for equitable + sustainable lifestyles, led by the Beacon for Sustainable Living, and further initiatives are being planned.

Impact of the F4SL network

Participants in the F4SL network have given feedback via workshop discussions and anonymous surveys. Participants reported that the workshops are fun and informative, and that they deeply appreciate the introductions to / discussions with a wide range of cutting-edge experts. It was noted that the network is well facilitated, and there is interest in making more regular use of the group Slack channel, in order to build momentum and connection between meetups.

- The participants in the F4SL network reported a range of direct outcomes of the work so far, including:
- Funding of several projects introduced to funders via F4SL workshops
- New and strengthened relationships among funders working on the challenging issue of sustainable lifestyles, including co-funding and sharing of due diligence
- New relationships between funders and civil society organisations
- New ideas, motivation and support. Motivation and support were deemed particularly important, as sustainable lifestyles is a controversial field with few colleagues or champions in philanthropy and can therefore sometimes feel isolated.
- Development of a national (Canadian) network of funders for sustainable living: [Fair Earth Living](#)
- The Compass Festival (see above) grew from the F4SL network, bringing together funders with researchers and practitioners as equal partners in developing an ambitious agenda for sustainable lifestyles work. This ongoing experiment is getting the field to work together as parts of the change ecosystem, thinking together, raising ambition levels and figuring out what it means to generate action that is proportionate to the 1.5 degree lifestyle targets and the equity perspective.

To accelerate the impact of the F4SL network, it was suggested that the network could identify relevant political moments to work together on, to get some quick wins. It was also suggested that we could have more externally facing events, in order to raise the profile of this work.

A related theme is the discussion about how and when to expand the group: will it be possible to keep the ambition level at this very high level as more people join? It was also noted that currently many of the speakers and funders are from the global north; this is partly a reflection of where many of the unsustainable consumption problems are coming from but also just a reflection of our lack of connection with funders, researchers, and practitioners in other parts of the world. Some feel that network participation should become more diverse, while others feel the focus on tackling global north consumption is appropriate.

“Maybe inevitably - and appropriately given where the most damage is being done - it feels as if the default focus is much more global north than south.”

(Survey response from F4SL participant)

It was agreed that we need to develop a shared agenda before inviting more funders to join, starting by mapping where members are now, and putting together a carefully considered offer to new participants.

Next steps for the F4SL network

A survey in 2021 assessed potential for future collaboration, as the grant for the F4SL work from KR Foundation came to a close.

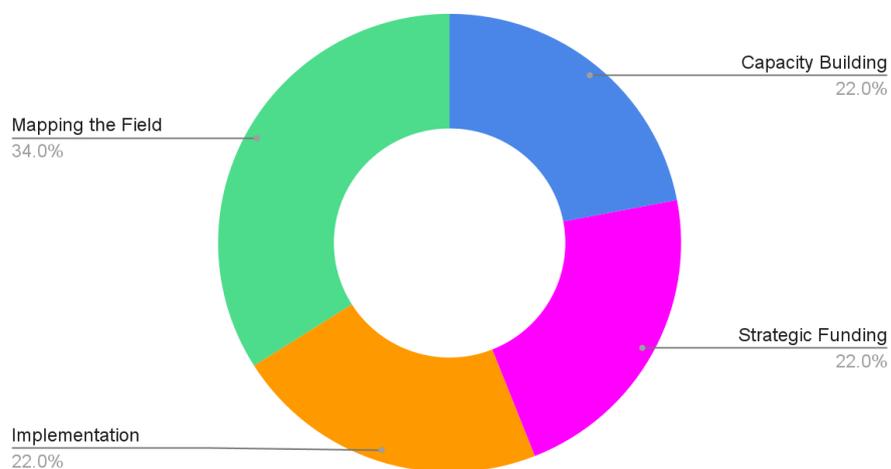
Drawing on outcomes from workshop discussions, the key suggestions presented in the survey were:

1. Capacity building
2. Strategic co-funding
3. Strategic implementation
4. Mapping the field

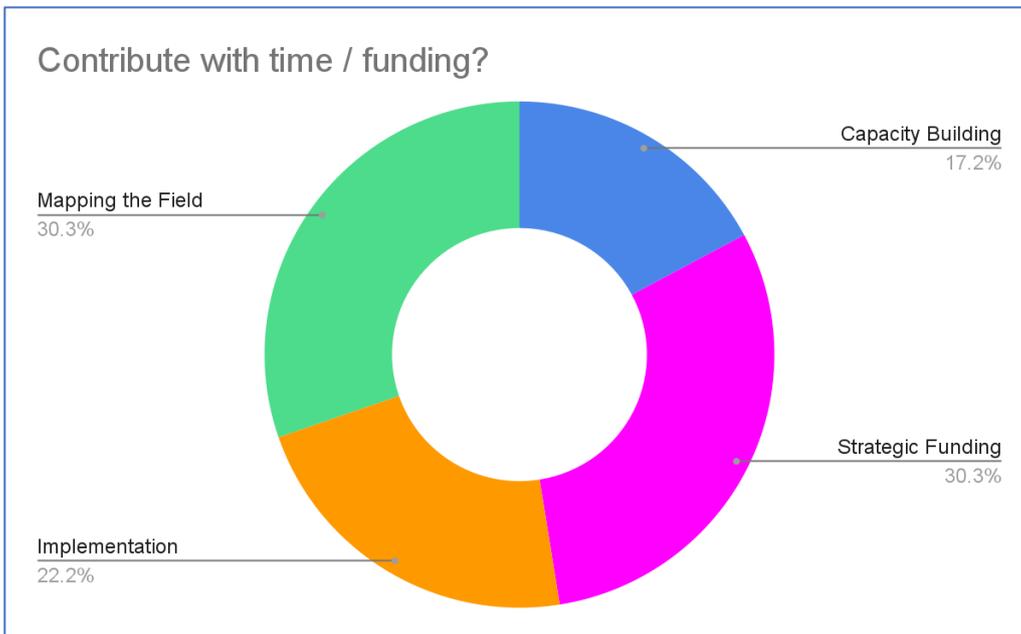
Which of these activities should be a priority for the F4SL network over the next year? Tick as many as you like.

- Growing and capacity building: inviting new funders to join and building capacity through workshops on relevant themes
- Strategic funding: exploring options for aligned funding and pooled funding
- Strategic implementation: collectively funding / driving a specific piece of work e.g. framing "Sustainable Living" for mainstream policy discourse; promoting the "per capita emissions gap" in preparation for COP 26 - or many other options.
- Mapping the field: creating a map of "hot projects" and potential projects to share with interested funders, in order to raise the ambition level of Sustainable Living programmes of funders and assist them with due diligence
- Other

F4SL priorities?



- Which of these activities might you be interested in contributing to, either with time or funding? Tick as many as you like.
- Growing and capacity building: inviting new funders to join and building capacity through workshops on relevant themes
 - Strategic funding: exploring options for aligned funding and pooled funding
 - Strategic implementation: collectively funding / driving a specific piece of work e.g. framing "Sustainable Living" for mainstream policy discourse; promoting the "per capita emissions gap" in preparation for COP 26 - or many other options.
 - Mapping the field: creating a map of "hot projects" and potential projects to share with interested funders, in order to raise the ambition level of Sustainable Living programmes of funders and assist them with due diligence
 - Other



Two further suggestions were captured through the open comments field:

“We would hope to see more emphasis on content that helps organisations drive large scale behaviour change and less research type funding focus.”

“A pilot project (e.g. could be supported with a discretionary grant/s) + results would make it easier to get funding into this space”

Survey results

All activities were of interest to a number of organisations, which is unsurprising, given that the suggestions drew on workshop discussions. Mapping the field emerged as the priority activity for next steps. Strategic funding and mapping the field also emerged as priority actions that participants would be willing to contribute to, either with time or funding.

Proposal for F4SL network: 2022 - 2024

It is proposed to resume and build the network by:

- continuing the workshops and strategic discussions: further define our focus and ambition to commission the mapping of the field
- invite additional funders to join the network, initially based on contacts of current participants; as the mapping progresses, contact will be made with a wider field of potential funders
- host the third part of the Compass Festival, focused on action planning between funders, researchers, practitioners and communicators in the field of sustainable living.

Over the next 1-3 years, the development of the F4SL network could look like this:

1. Mapping the field to identify allies for high-ambition action (rather than only mapping projects to fund).
2. Strategic funding alliance inspired by the mapping: identify those with a shared level of ambition and vision - even if they have different geographical focus or different approaches.
3. Continue the network based on this disruptive approach and invite others to join; this could also include capacity building small but radical funders or individual philanthropists to join perhaps with financial or other support.

Rather than holding space for all funders interested in sustainable lifestyles, the overall focus could be building capacity towards taking larger-scale, evidence-based action with allies from philanthropy, civil society and beyond. Or alternatively, there could be a focus on including a wider range of funders who agree on fundamental principles, such as the urgency and need for systemic change, and building relationships across differences.

First ideas for mapping the field: aligned funding for deep action on sustainable living

For funders, mapping the field often means identifying individual projects to fund; our suggestion here is rather to identify allies for coordinated, co-created action. The proposal is to agree on a shared level of ambition and agenda for action, and then map the field of potential actors. Allies could include e.g. funders, researchers, civil society, social movements, journalists / communicators, faith groups, youth representatives, influencers.

With this mapping of potential allies at the cutting edge of action for equitable and sustainable lifestyles, the F4SL network could engage in other actions of high importance, such as co-funding and pooled funding initiatives, pilot projects, strategic implementation projects to raise ambition on sustainable lifestyles in the mainstream discourse, and capacity building for other funders.

Inspiration for this mapping of ambitious actors is drawn from *inter alia* Knowledge Integration in the Politics and Policy of Rapid Transitions to Net Zero Carbon: A Typology and Mapping Method for Climate Actors in the UK. This mapping method from the University of Surrey enables stakeholders to visualise and evaluate the strength of support (in this case, for the UK government’s net-zero-by-2050 “green growth” strategy) “and the tensions, challenges, and strategic opportunities potentially facing more radical alternatives” (Smith and Christie 2021: 662).

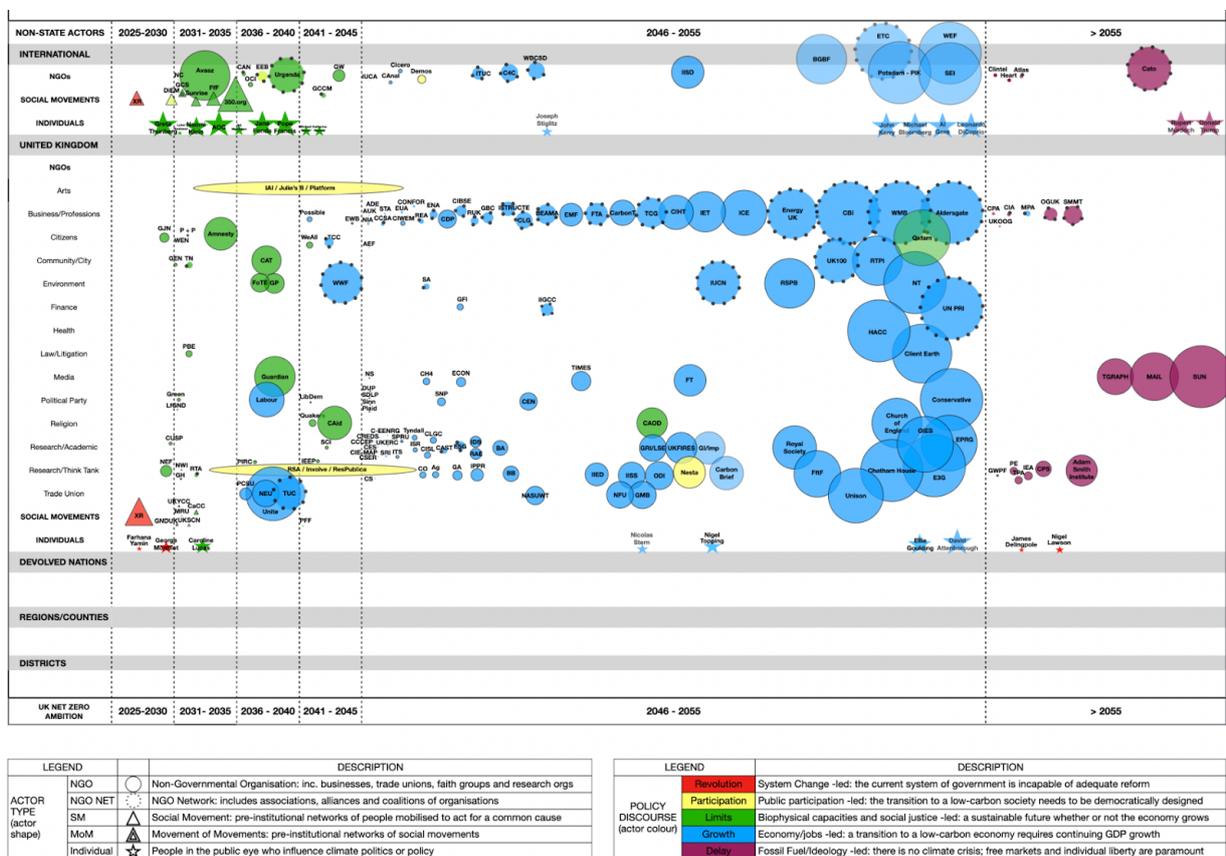


Figure 1. Map of non-state actors influencing UK climate change mitigation politics and policy, taken from [Smith and Christie 2021: page 14](#).

Theory of Change

In order to create action proportional to the 1.5 Degree Lifestyle targets, transformation in our ways of living and organising our societies is necessary. Very few people or organisations are willing to consider action proportional to these targets, on an equity basis, as they consider the necessary measures to be “radical” or “politically impossible”. If we don’t change the level of ambition of important stakeholders, we will stand almost no chance of meeting the 1.5 targets and / or fail to tackle inequality in access to material consumption.

In order to rapidly shift the Overton Window towards support for deep transformation of our ways of living, we could identify stakeholders who are aligned with the need for radical change and willing to work on it - whether they are funders, CSOs, researchers, communicators / journalists, community / faith leaders - and whether they are organisations or individuals within organisations.

Interested funders could convene high-ambition actors to co-create a shared agenda for rapid transition to sustainable ways of living; this could eventually be supported by aligned funding or co-funding initiatives, as well as practical and institutional support. A range of approaches could be supported, including research, communications, political advocacy and civil society action - but with a shared level of ambition and access to shared tools e.g. framing and messaging, communications assets.

The overall purpose would be to normalise approaches that take targets for equitable and sustainable lifestyles seriously (e.g. 2.5 tons CO2e per person / year by 2030; 0.7 tons by 2050). The work could bring discussions into the mainstream about what life looks and feels like at this level, how to maximise wellbeing and social justice, and how individuals, businesses, policy makers and institutional actors can start today to make this way of living possible.

This might look different from current funding e.g. it might be necessary to fund a larger number of smaller, but more ambitious projects at local or national levels, rather than larger international organisations that might find it too challenging to work on deep and rapid lifestyle change. Additional expertise could be explored in the field of political science in regard to the urgent need to build political and social acceptance for deeper transformation of how we live. There would also be a need to prepare for pushback, as major reductions in consumption levels (and therefore emissions) would have significant economic impacts: collaborations with experts from the field of new economics (and beyond) and social justice are already underway and could be further strengthened.

The work of the F4SL network could also connect with the growing discussion about societal collapse and adaptation, and how these intersect with mitigation. Instead of business-as-usual, we will aim to shift the narrative to ecological realism-as-usual.

Strategic communications expertise would be essential to start to normalise the higher level of ambition / deeper level of change for sustainability, regeneration, wellbeing and social justice.

References

Newell, P., Daley, F. and Twena, M. (2021) Changing our ways? Behaviour change and the climate crisis. The report of the Cambridge Sustainability Commission on Scaling Behaviour Change.

Smith, S. R., & Christie, I. (2021). Knowledge Integration in the Politics and Policy of Rapid Transitions to Net Zero Carbon: A Typology and Mapping Method for Climate Actors in the UK. Sustainability, 13(2), 662.

Our Partners



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