

Southwest England Active Partnerships: Place Working.

Our region.

The south-west is a large and diverse region and it's vast.

Our region has several urban areas but is perhaps better known for its rurality, coastline, and seasonal population. The unique nature of the Southwest of England can make it difficult to articulate the characteristics of our places and the people that live there. Often national data sets don't represent what we see and hear in our rural areas as the inequalities are sometimes hidden as areas of deprivation can border areas of extreme wealth.

Our Active Partnerships: Active Gloucestershire, WASP, Wesport, SASP, Active Dorset, Active Devon and Active Cornwall have a long history of collaboration, support, and friendly challenge. We'd like to develop our relationship, in our unique setting, and the opportunity to build on the investment already directed into our Partnerships to develop a place-based cluster. We are proud of our history working together but we feel that sometimes we have lacked the tangible catalyst around which we can really effect change together. We believe a place cluster represents an opportunity to take joint working across our regional systems to a new level in our collective pursuit of creating the conditions for Uniting the Movement to be delivered .

We'd like to take the initiative collectively and proactively whilst working with our colleagues from Sport England. There is momentum and energy across all 7 Active Partnerships to develop a place based cluster that drives our evaluation and learning, creating strong and robust relationships, with the right characteristics of leadership, not just between us as Active Partnerships but also across different aspects of place such as economic development, health, children and young people etc., all which have very different challenges in a rural and coastal setting. Doing so, we believe that we can better share learning, resources and approaches to evaluation and learning whilst creating the conditions for more people to live healthy, active lives.

Our common challenges.

Despite its diversity and the difference in each of our local systems, there are several things that stand out as areas we can explore. We'd like to understand what processes and approaches make a difference and if they can be translated from one place to another. We'd like to understand:

- How we best work in rurality and coastal towns to address inequalities in areas where populations are dispersed, and there can be large differences in socio-economic status.
- As a region with an aging population there are huge potential health benefits to be recognised from physical activity. We want to be able to better understand what role we can play in impacting physical activity levels of older adults and how to encourage healthy, active aging given the additional barriers of access to service and transport in rurality.

Our strength.

Our collective strength comes from the diversity of our places and commonality of the challenges that we face. We already have strong and trusted relationships amongst our Partnerships, and this provides the foundation to bring other partners into the discussion.

We would build on the collaboration at a Director / CEO level, delivering breadth and depth, capacity and capability throughout our teams. This will help us to share learning, approaches and developing understanding of what it takes to have impact in our region.

We would also welcome the opportunity to build even closer relationships and learning with those places in which Sport England already works in our region through different funded elements. We are keen to have a cluster that is able to receive and disseminate good practice across our region but also be able to share learning from our work nationally and vice versa.

We believe that we are the connectors of many different work streams within the statutory and voluntary sector in a place and would be well placed to act as a catalyst to accelerate development together. Our relationships mean that universal proportionalism is a key principle that we wish to work with, allowing learning from individual places strengths and applying it in other areas.

The beginnings of a cluster and the questions we're holding.

There are several questions that we're holding collectively as a region, and we'd like to explore them further so that we can develop greater understanding of what approaches can work and have the biggest impact. They are:

1. How do we understand and articulate the inequality in rural and coastal communities?
2. What are the common factors, and differences, in approaches when delivered in sub-regions of the Southwest?
3. How can working together as a regional cluster accelerate learning and impact. And how can the cluster help shape approaches so they are relevant for our places and achieve maximum value?
4. How can we share and explore commonalities in our approaches to measurement, evaluation, and learning?
5. What leadership approaches are best suited to Place based working? And how do we develop them further.
6. How do we grow capacity and capability, and retain it, to enable this place-based systemic approaches to flourish across our region?

The help we need.

As a region we've been supported by Sport England investment, and as Active Partnerships we're Uniting the Movement System Partners. Some of our places have received Sport England Place investment, but large areas of the region have not.

We're committed to driving forward the ambitions set out in Uniting the Movement and addressing the inequality in sport and physical activity in our places. We'd like to open a discussion with colleagues at Sport England to explore the following areas as part of Place investment or Place universal offer.

1. Collaborate on how the needs of priority communities are understood in the SW where often the traditional collection and use of data sits ill at ease with the scattered nature of those prioritized groups
2. Help to access learning from locations outside of our region where Place working has been applied.
3. Where appropriate, provide access to resources that have a Place focus such as Moving Communities, Enhanced Active Lives data etc.
4. Can we explore common approaches which help us to understand and accelerate readiness in our priority places?

Insight, data, and learning.

We've been learning from Place approaches for several years, here's links to some of our learning and evaluation:

- Bristol
- Plymouth – [Plymouth Pathfinder update Oct 2023](#)
- Exeter - [Local COP presentation slides - Feb 2024.pdf](#)
- Gloucestershire – [we can move](#) and [Community Building](#).

We have access to rich data sets through local partners within each Active Partnership, where we can immediately interrogate hyper local information which can inform this work. We recognise, though, with appropriate investment that we could do more and achieve greater impact.

We'd welcome the opportunity to build on the conversations that we've had to date and the content of this paper so that we can continue to drive towards the ambition set in Uniting the Movement. Based on our conversation to date (with Place Directorate colleagues - James, Becca and Russ) we would request some initial funding to drive the work forward as we test and learn a cluster approach for the SW.