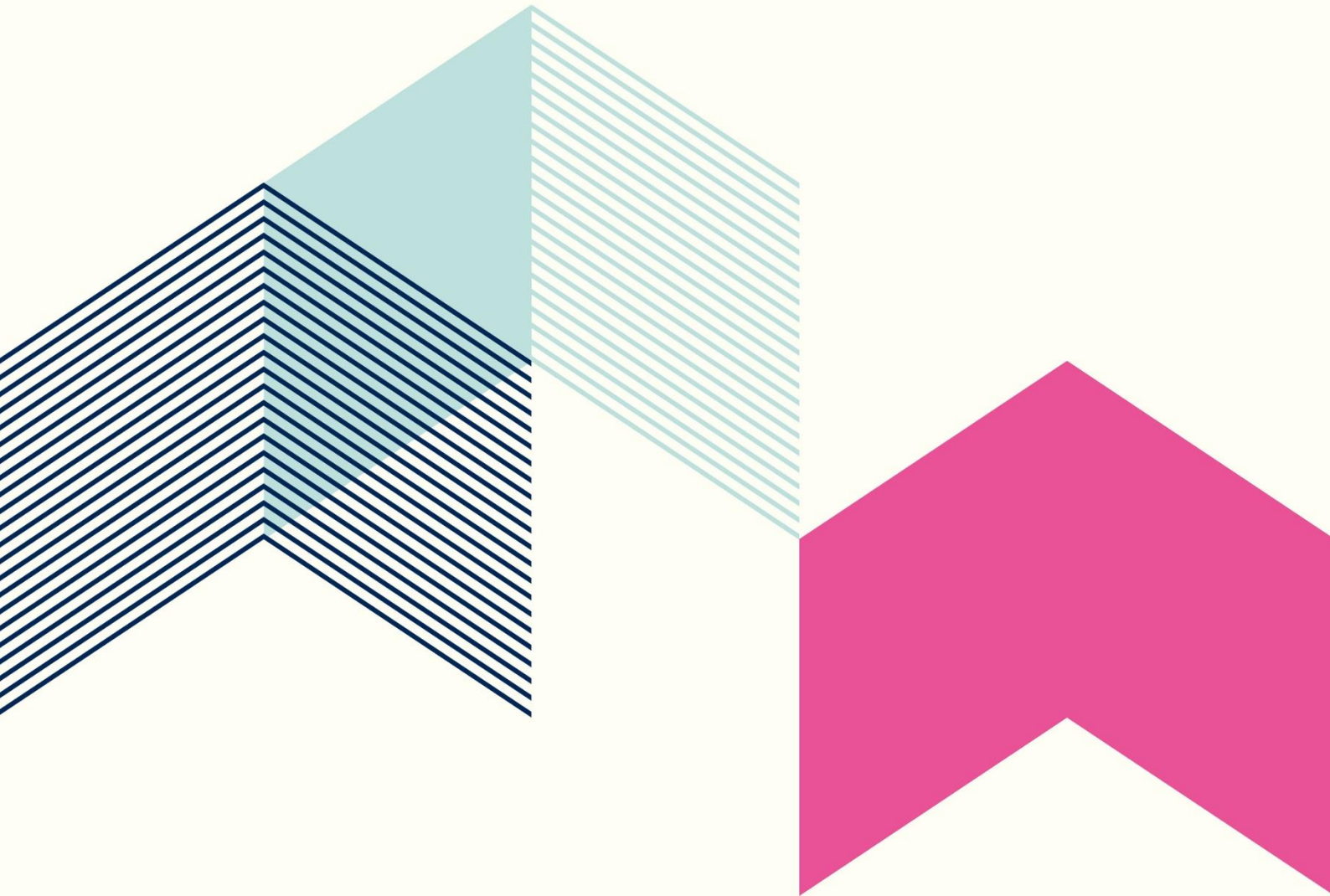
The Access to Justice Foundation

Improving Lives Through Advice Year One

Learning Report, September 2025



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Acknowledgements

Improving Lives Through Advice is supported by £30 million from The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest community funder in the UK. Thanks to National Lottery players, the funding will help 59 specialist organisations improve access to social welfare legal advice for some of the most marginalised communities in England.

Naveed Somani of RLI Consulting our Learning & Evaluation Partner, who created this learning report.

Executive Summary

This is the first learning report about the Improving Lives Through Advice (ILTA) programme, a £30,000,000 five-year core costs grant programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund. The ILTA grant was awarded to 59 organisations who focus on increasing access to legal advice for marginalised communities across England. It was launched in March 2024 and will end in June 2029.

The report shares high-level insights, records funded partner's early reflections from the first year of the programme and identifies where support and strategy might evolve. Below is a summary of the key achievements, but also some of the challenges which frontline charities are facing in their work with communities.

During its first year, funded partners delivered direct, one-to-one legal advice to 82,406 people, and supported a further 72,727 individuals to access services through referral or signposting. In parallel, partners' digital platforms recorded over 11.14 million pageviews of legal advice resources.

The funding enabled an expansion of services to underserved communities while addressing structural and cultural barriers that many encounter when seeking legal advice. This often involved embedding services in familiar, trusted, and hyperlocal settings. The funded partners also benefited in terms of capacity and sustainability as the funding prevented service cuts, made it possible to retain experienced staff and to respond to emerging risks.

The flexibility of ILTA core funding has enabled organisations to strengthen back-office functions, invest in strategic roles and build systems and partnerships beyond crisis delivery. This funding has also been an opportunity to invest in monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems to pave the way for impact measurement.

Alongside the above positives, funded partners highlighted the broader challenges which include funding uncertainty which limits strategic ambitions, the changing legal aid landscape and amendments in court procedures or immigration laws, which force organisations to constantly adapt their work. Internal challenges such as the need for training and updated systems was also mentioned as a common barrier to measuring impact.

Outdated, fragmented or unsupported case management systems make it difficult to undertake meaningful impact analysis.

Through management and leadership training, communities of practice and bespoke consultancy, the Legal Aid Practitioner Group's (LAPG) Funder Plus programme will support organisations to become more resilient and sustainable. This comes alongside the Foundation's continuous grant management support which includes guidance to embed the MEL approach, workshops and events to share learning and on hand support from the team. All of this aims to drive forward the ethos of working in collaboration and partnership to develop an evidence base which supports further investment in, and understanding about legal advice and the difference this can make for individuals, families and communities.

It is important to note that this first reporting period has been light-touch to enable organisations to develop, strategise and plan. This report provides some initial insights into the bedding in of the programme, what works so far, the challenges, and what changes can be made to facilitate the implementation going forward. Future reporting will involve more in-depth information including about community impact, client outcomes and partnership working.

1. Introduction

The Improving Lives Through Advice (ILTA) programme provides multi-year core, flexible funding and tailored organisational development support (the Funded Partner Support Programme, or "Funder Plus") to funded partners working with marginalised communities, including but not limited to specialist legal advice providers. This Year 1 Learning Report brings together data and reflections from 59 funded partners to explore how ILTA is supporting progress across four core outcome areas:

- M1: Advice to People from Marginalised Communities is Sustained and Improved
- M2: More People from Marginalised Communities are Empowered to Resolve Their Legal Problems
- M3: Organisations Have More Capacity to Engage in Influencing, Partnerships, and Fundraising Work
- M4: Organisations are Better Able to Demonstrate the Difference They Make to People's Lives

This report offers an early view of how ILTA is enabling stability, adaptation, and innovation across a diverse cohort. Unlike future six-monthly reporting cycles, which will focus on standardised metrics and outcome tracking, this first return was designed to surface high-level insights, capture funded partners' early reflections, and identify where support and strategy might evolve. It provides a critical starting point for understanding variation across the portfolio and for shaping both the programme itself and wider sector learning.

2. Method and Dataset

The Year 1 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning form collected both quantitative data and narrative insight, focusing on five key areas:

2.1.1 Headline beneficiary numbers (e.g. advice delivered, outreach sessions, online reach)

2.1.2 Reflections on progress against each of ILTA's four core outcomes (M1–M4)

2.1.3 Description of engagement with the Funded Partner Support Programme

2.1.4 Feedback on ILTA's funding model, reporting approach, and overall value

2.1.5 Basic expenditure and budget forecast data

To enable comparative analysis, these submissions were linked with the Introductory Survey baseline, which includes funded partner data on delivery models, staffing, and MEL capacity.

Analysis combined deductive coding aligned to ILTA's four intended outcome areas (M1–M4) with inductive theme development to surface cross-cutting patterns in funded partner narratives. Quantitative data—such as beneficiary numbers, expenditure figures, and delivery model characteristics—was triangulated with qualitative insights to build a coherent picture of early programme progress. While data depth and specificity varied across returns, overall engagement was strong, with most partners offering detailed and reflective input. Findings are organised by outcome area and supported by real-world examples and verbatim quotes to illustrate variation, innovation, and learning. The report also includes a dedicated section on the Funded Partner Support Programme, a financial overview drawing on reported and forecasted budgets, and funded partner reflections on the Access to Justice Foundation's role and approach as a funder.

3. Findings: Progress Against ILTA Outcomes

3.1 Outcome M1: Sustaining and Expanding Access to Legal Advice for Marginalised Communities

3.1.1 Overview and Challenges

Year 1 reporting shows that ILTA's core funding played a vital role in helping funded partners sustain and expand access to legal advice for marginalised communities. Collectively, partners delivered direct, one-to-one legal advice to 82,406 people, and supported a further 72,727 individuals to access services through referral or signposting. In parallel, partners' digital platforms recorded over 11.14 million pageviews of legal advice resources.

At the same time, partners faced a range of persistent constraints. The most frequently reported barrier was accessibility and inclusion, with over half of organisations highlighting challenges such as language barriers, digital exclusion, disability, and rural isolation.

Workforce pressures—particularly difficulties recruiting or retaining housing and immigration specialists—continued to limit capacity for both service continuity and growth. Ongoing policy changes, especially in welfare and housing law, created additional pressure to keep services up to date. Many partners were also navigating data and infrastructure gaps: many organisations reported working with outdated systems that hindered their ability to monitor reach, manage referrals, or target delivery effectively.

While ILTA funding allowed many organisations to stabilise operations and begin innovating, the delivery context remained fragile. Challenges such as these often delayed or constrained the scale of change that partners hoped to achieve.

3.1.2 Deepened Reach and Service Expansion

A consistent pattern across funded partner reports was the use of ILTA funding to expand advice access into underserved or excluded communities, often by embedding services in familiar, trusted, and hyperlocal settings.

- Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton used ILTA to fund its Community Engagement team, delivering 614 outreach sessions across 34 different locations:

> "The provision of community engagement has enabled greater access to our services… within their own local communities/partner agencies they are familiar with – this has bolstered community engagement."

- Cumbria Law Centre launched a youth-focused advice partnership in Carlisle, supporting over 100 young people—many neurodivergent or care-experienced—to secure over £211k in financial awards.

- Derbyshire Law Centre introduced drop-ins in previously low-engagement rural areas, including Bolsover and High Peak:

> "A fortnightly presence in the [Bolsover] local authority has had a significant impact on our visibility… and has led to a 27% increase in referrals."

- Disability North increased outreach reach by 50% and broadened the scope of support provided through local partnerships:

> "The additional funding has allowed us to expand our network, increase outreach work, and support more people at appeal."

- North West London Law Centres opened new advice hubs in Brent borough locations, co-locating with community partners to improve access for people facing homelessness, language barriers, or domestic abuse.

These examples reflect a deliberate move from static, office-based delivery to active, place-based outreach, helping funded partners meet clients where they are—both literally and in terms of access needs.

3.1.3 Accessible and Culturally Appropriate Services

ILTA also enabled organisations to address the structural and cultural barriers that marginalised groups — particularly those facing intersectional disadvantage — encounter when seeking legal advice. Funded partners adapted their services through multilingual provision, flexible delivery models, and co-designed outreach to improve accessibility for groups including disabled people, migrant communities, and survivors of abuse.

Latin American Women's Rights Service resumed in-person services for digitally excluded women and introduced a Portuguese-speaking caseworker for the Brazilian community:

> "A major success... has been the recruitment of a Portuguese-speaking caseworker... only recently possible thanks to ILTA funding."

IKWRO – Women's Rights Organisation embedded multilingual legal advisors in community spaces:

> "Access to legal advice is sustained and improved by offering free, culturally sensitive advice... in accessible community spaces with multilingual support."

Friends, Families and Travellers continued their mobile outreach bus and expanded national helpline capacity to meet demand.

Your Voice Counts developed targeted drop-ins for people with learning disabilities in Gateshead Outer West.

Maternity Action translated materials into Arabic, Urdu and Kurdish Sorani for low-income migrant women, and restructured helpline rotas to better meet demand.

These shifts show an emphasis on equity-driven, community-informed delivery—meeting people in the formats, languages, and environments that work for them.

3.1.4 Sustaining Services Under Pressure

For many funded partners, the most critical impact of ILTA was enabling continuity in the face of escalating pressures—including public sector funding cuts, staff attrition, and overwhelming demand.

- Nottingham Law Centre lost significant funding following the bankruptcy of the local council but maintained triage systems and partnership pathways: “We have had to work hard to avoid a first-come, first-served approach... and maintain a triage system.”
- Merseyside Law Centre lost its immigration capacity due to staff departure but used ILTA to rebuild its leadership and operations.
- Bristol Law Centre used ILTA to expand Housing and Immigration teams and invest in management roles.
- Suffolk Law Centre, Friends, Families and Travellers, and Rainbow Migration all reported hitting or nearing capacity, with triage and delivery models adapted to prioritise urgent and vulnerable cases.

"Our legal service has been in consistent demand and had to regularly adapt... due to ongoing changes in the asylum system... We've increased group asylum sessions from monthly to fortnightly and now run additional sessions on asylum interviews."

– Rainbow Migration

The ability to “hold the line” under these conditions—by avoiding service cuts, retaining experienced staff, and responding to emerging risks—may not represent service expansion, but it still reflects meaningful progress against this ILTA outcome. It aligns with Theory of Change assumptions around sustainability and the resilience of the advice system.

3.1.5 Improved Data Use and Targeting

Funded partners reported increasingly using data to shape outreach, track unmet needs, and inform more equitable service planning, although data maturity remains varied.

- Spitfire Advice and Support Services used a “holistic data-driven approach” drawing from internal demographics, IMD data, and Birmingham City Observatory insights to target the least financially resilient communities.
- Access Social Care is piloting a community hub model grounded in data-informed targeting: “We will identify the communities in greatest need through our data collection... and work co-productively with local experts.”
- Working Families added a new AdvicePro field to identify "least access to justice" clients—combining low income, complex issues, and other disadvantage indicators—to better segment and track support for the most marginalised cases.
- Worcester and Herefordshire Citizens Advice used IMD data to track localised need, enabling targeted triage and benefits casework expansion.
- Citizens Advice North Somerset identified improved reach into ethnic minority communities (from 4% to 10%) in ILTA-funded services and committed to “pop-up” outreach to improve access for older and disabled clients based on additional data analysis.

These examples suggest increasing MEL maturity across the portfolio, laying the groundwork for more strategic, needs-led provision.

3.1.6 Workforce Development and Sector Capacity

Some funded partners used ILTA to address sector-wide challenges in workforce development, succession planning, and recruitment in shortage areas like immigration, housing, and social welfare law.

- Bristol Law Centre doubled the number of legal supervisors and supported trainees to build long-term staffing resilience.

- FISCUS embedded advisers in food banks and delivered in-house training to community partners, increasing reach and sector knowledge.
- GMIAU invested in solicitor qualification pathways and commissioned a review of its trainee model to improve long-term retention.

This investment in the future of social welfare law delivery is essential in a sector facing burnout, salary competition, and limited recruitment pipelines.

3.1.7 Contribution and Future Learning

Funded partners consistently described ILTA funding as a vital enabler of service continuity, particularly in the face of financial uncertainty, rising demand, and workforce pressures. Some organisations used ILTA to protect and stabilise core delivery; others leveraged it to invest in systems or pursue strategic bids. For example, Access Social Care credited ILTA with giving them "the security needed to commit to deepening our relationships with marginalised communities," while Derbyshire Law Centre noted the grant "provided the capacity to submit several funding applications aimed at improving our digital infrastructure." These reflections support ILTA's core assumption: that multi-year, flexible support strengthens organisational resilience and service reach.

Year 1 data was primarily qualitative and non-standardised, limiting cross-portfolio analysis but offering useful insight into how organisations interpreted and applied ILTA's flexibility around reporting. Contribution to specific service outcomes was limited but plausible, with ILTA often cited as accelerating work that might otherwise have stalled. As the six-month reporting cycle rolls out, more granular data should begin to surface around reach, continuity, and access. A focus on counterfactual questions—what would not have happened without ILTA—may help strengthen contribution claims going forward.

3.2 Outcome M2: More People from Marginalised Communities are Empowered to Resolve Their Legal Problems

3.2.1 Overview and Challenges

Many organisations demonstrated good progress against this outcome. However, few provided concrete evidence of clients independently resolving legal problems or avoiding future issues. Nonetheless, as legal processes are often complex, emotionally taxing, or not realistically navigable without continued support, fully independent resolution may be neither desirable nor likely, making supported action the more effective empowerment pathway.

The strongest evidence of empowerment came through:

Development and use of self-help tools and legal education resources (e.g., chatbots, templates, accessible guides).

Peer- and lived experience-led initiatives, including volunteer training and employment pathways.

Embedding advice services within trusted community and health settings, enabling people to act earlier and more independently.

Themes like systems navigation, self-advocacy, and confidence-building were frequently mentioned, but less often supported by data on long-term outcomes While confidence-building, systems navigation, and self-advocacy were frequently reported, these were often illustrated through case examples or short-term feedback rather than formal outcome data.

Organisations welcomed the opportunity to focus on empowerment but described this work as complex, time-intensive, and still emerging. A recurring challenge was the difficulty of evaluating less tangible outcomes like resilience or reduced dependency. Many lacked the capacity or tools to measure these in a systematic way.

Empowerment efforts were also shaped by relational trust: many partners emphasised that confidence and self-advocacy arose through sustained, trauma-aware engagement, not standalone tools. Digital resources were seen

as helpful but not universally accessible—particularly for older people, disabled clients, and those in crisis.

Finally, cross-sector collaboration remained a major aspiration but was often slow to implement. Most organisations described efforts to build referral and advocacy pathways—particularly with NHS and housing services—but noted barriers such as GDPR compliance, data-sharing uncertainty, and uneven partner capacity.

3.2.2 Legal Information, Tools and Self-Help Resources

Some funded partners reported creating and disseminating legal information, self-help tools, and plain-language resources—often online and community-facing.

Access Social Care scaled its AI-driven chatbot, AccessAva, to 30 more organisations, quadrupling use and adding new content:

> "Quadrupling our conversation numbers from the previous year... empowering more people to ensure their legal rights are met."

Law for Life (Advicenow)'s Advicenow platform empowered users across areas such as family law and PIP appeals:

> "60% said it gave them a better understanding of their legal problem... 52% said it helped them take action."

Friends, Families and Travellers provided downloadable legal templates and step-by-step advice: "

> "Our online advice hub includes practical tools... enabling clients to take action independently."

These examples show promising and potentially scalable approaches to legal empowerment. However, most of the evidence focuses on usage and reported

confidence levels—there is less insight into long-term impact or whether users are successfully resolving issues on their own over time using these tools.

3.2.3 Peer Models and Lived Experience Pathways

Some funded partners embedded lived experience into delivery or began creating pathways for people with lived experience to become advisers, trainers, or advocates.

ATLEU co-designed an apprenticeship to support survivors of trafficking into paid legal advice roles:

> "A sustainable route to employment... a model to increase representation of lived experience in the advice sector."

Manuel Bravo Project trained volunteers with lived experience to deliver Level 1 immigration advice:

> "One volunteer has since secured employment in an advice role."

Stockton and District Advice and Information Service recruited eight volunteers from marginalised communities into advice and admin roles and ran peer-led training to enable community members to promote Citizens Advice within their networks:

> "Training sessions to train those in marginalised communities to promote Citizens Advice to their peers."

Rights of Women expanded work with experts-by-experience to co-develop advice strategies, embedding lived experience in programme design:

> "Expanding work with experts-by-experience to co-develop new advice strategies."

Spitfire Advice and Support Services' Expert by Experience group informed service improvements and supported others through financial literacy training.

These initiatives go beyond supporting service users to empower community members as legal facilitators, co-designers, and emerging sector leaders

3.2.4 Training and Capability-Building in Community Settings

A few funded partners delivered legal training in community settings to build early-stage legal capability and empower people to act on their rights. These initiatives aimed to diffuse legal knowledge into trusted spaces and enable earlier intervention or self-advocacy.

- Public Law Project ran co-designed trainings and community-led events:

> "Participants in our trainings reported knowledge gains of 100–180% and greater confidence to challenge unfair decisions."

- Citizens Advice Wandsworth delivered Advice First Aid training across every London borough, supported by a new hub-and-spoke model designed to democratise legal knowledge and embed early legal capability within communities.
- North West London Law Centres trained local support workers:

> "We trained community support workers based in Brent and Camden through second tier support to increase their triage knowledge base."

3.2.5 Integrated, Trust-Based Support for Client Empowerment

Many funded partners emphasised that empowerment often starts with building trust, demystifying legal processes, and supporting clients through key steps. This relationship-based approach helps people feel safer and more confident when facing legal problems—particularly where fear, trauma, or complexity would otherwise prevent engagement.

- Citizens Advice Central Dorset built relationships with community mental health teams to support vulnerable clients, which:

> "Empowered both the client and their support network to resolve issues."

- MAP (Mancroft Advice Project) extended time with young refugee clients to build rapport via interpreters, enabling clients to return and refer peers:

> "Our young refugee clients feel comfortable enough in our environment to return multiple times... and frequently introduce their friends."

- New Forest Disability Information Service underlined the importance of continuity and consistent local presence to build trust and unlock deeper legal support:

> "The key aspect [is] building lasting relationships and trust which [lead] us to the opportunities to support and empower."

3.2.6 Contribution and Future Learning

Funded partners clearly linked ILTA funding to empowerment-focused work that might otherwise have been deprioritised. Flexible core support enabled the development of self-help tools, deeper client engagement, and new pathways for people with lived experience to participate in legal support. These efforts often took place amid significant external pressures, with ILTA cited as providing vital space to invest in confidence-building, early intervention, and user-led delivery.

Year 1 reporting on empowerment relied mostly on narrative and early-stage feedback, rather than systematic outcome tracking—an expected limitation given the challenges of measuring confidence or self-advocacy in complex legal contexts. Still, the evidence showed clear intent and direction, particularly

in longer or more trauma-aware client engagement models, and in peer-led or accessible legal education approaches.

As six-month reporting develops, future learning may emerge around which activities most effectively support legal confidence, how client voice shapes delivery, and what light-touch indicators might credibly reflect empowerment or supported self-resolution.

3.3 Outcome M3: Increasing Organisational Capacity for Influence, Partnerships and Fundraising

3.3.1 Overview and Challenges

In Year 1, this outcome saw widespread and tangible progress across the portfolio—much of it attributed directly to ILTA's flexible, core funding model. Many funded partners used ILTA funding to:

- Hire dedicated fundraising or comms staff
- Create or strengthen partnerships
- Participate in policy forums and consultations
- Develop internal systems like CRM or MEL tools

While levels of activity were high and well-documented, the strategic depth of this work varied. Some organisations moved towards long-term sustainability or systemic impact; others focused more on operational improvements. Evidence of influence — defined as policy or practice change — was strongest where organisations had senior leadership capacity, trusted partnerships, and alignment with wider advocacy efforts.

Many partners reported being held back by persistent constraints. Funding insecurity remained the most commonly cited barrier, limiting their ability to make permanent hires or commit to large-scale infrastructure investments. Without multi-year guarantees, organisations often delayed or scaled back initiatives designed to enhance strategic capacity.

Ongoing regulatory and legal changes added further pressure. Partners described constant adaptation, especially in areas like legal aid, tribunal procedure, and immigration law. One housing advice team, for example,

reported spending 80 staff-hours updating templates following new tenancy legislation.

Cross-organisational partnerships were widely pursued but often proved resource-intensive to sustain. While shared training, joint bids, and local alliances were seen as valuable, many organisations found themselves "toggling" between crisis delivery and strategic collaboration—frequently sacrificing the latter to meet immediate frontline need.

3.3.2 Fundraising and Income Diversification

ILTA funding demonstrably strengthened funded partners' ability to pursue sustainable funding models, invest in strategic fundraising roles, and diversify income. For several organisations, this included new staffing, improved infrastructure, and enhanced strategic positioning—all of which contributed to longer-term financial resilience.

- Access Social Care highlighted that:

> "ILTA's use as core costs is essential to our overall work, allowing increased flexibility for fundraising, finance and operational teams."

This flexibility enabled them to trial new income-generation methods, invest in a business development team, and ultimately secure new grants from Pears Foundation, Disrupt Foundation, and the Julia Rausing Trust.

- Manuel Bravo Project used ILTA to build strategic leadership and organisational readiness for a Legal Aid contract, stating this:

> "contributes to long-term sustainability... by diversifying revenue streams."

- IPSEA reported that ILTA:

> "has been transformational in helping us to build a sustainable funding base to grow our services and leverage further funding,"

referencing new grants from John Lyon's Charity and the Pears Foundation.

- Friends, Families and Travellers hired a Fundraising Manager, which:

> "had significantly freed up time for our Department Head to focus on service delivery improvements."

- North West London Law Centres leveraged their housing work to secure a £159,642 three-year grant from Brent Council for immigration advice.

These examples illustrate how ILTA's core funding was used strategically—not simply to fill gaps, but to unlock new income streams and reduce reliance on short-term, reactive grant cycles. While not all successes were directly attributed to ILTA, funded partners frequently noted that its multi-year, flexible support provided the stability and headroom needed to pursue more ambitious or longer-term fundraising strategies.

3.3.3 Policy, Influence and Advocacy Capacity

ILTA funding enabled a subset of funded partners to increase their capacity to engage in policy advocacy and systemic influence. The most visible progress came from organisations with dedicated staff, prior expertise, or strong networks—especially those able to leverage ILTA funding for management capacity, communications, or research roles.

- ATLEU coordinated coalition submissions on legal aid and immigration, convened a Lived Experience Coalition, and pursued strategic litigation.
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) used its Early Warning System and convening power to shape the upcoming national child poverty strategy.
- Public Law Project expanded its public affairs and legal research teams, co-led the Coalition for Asylum Rights and Justice, and shaped policy debates on algorithmic decision-making.

"PLP's research and litigation informed policy change... and contributed to the government abandoning the Rwanda deportation plan."

- Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) worked with 45 organisations to co-develop a regional call to action focused on making Greater Manchester a more inclusive and supportive place for migrants.

- East European Resource Centre led a safety-focused policy response after anti-migrant riots, gaining traction with the Met Police and GLA. They are now convening a cross-sector safety conference.

Where impact was strongest, it was typically grounded in long-term relationship-building, mobilisation of lived experience, and a proactive stance on systemic change. ILTA's core funding gave some organisations the stability and flexibility to engage in this work—whether by enabling staff time, funding communications posts, or absorbing short-term income shocks to free up leadership capacity. However, this level of influence was not widespread. Many funded partners, particularly smaller ones, either lacked the resources or see influencing as outside their immediate remit given urgent service demands.

3.3.4 Partnerships and Collaborative Infrastructure

ILTA funding contributed to a broad and visible strengthening of partnerships across the portfolio. Many funded partners used the stability and flexibility of core support to invest time in building or deepening collaborative infrastructure—often beyond their usual remit.

- Bristol Law Centre engaged in joint commissioning with the local authority and co-hosted high-profile events on the future of advice, helping raise sector visibility and unify local strategies.

- Worcestershire Advice Network (WAN), coordinated by Citizens Advice Worcester & Herefordshire, successfully secured a 60% increase in county council funding after coordinated advocacy.

- Coram Children's Legal Centre restructured its teams to embed influencing into practice, allowing its new Policy and Practice unit to focus on systemic change in support for care leavers.

- Spitfire Advice and Support Services authored the Birmingham Advice Strategy and led reform of the city's Information, Advice and Guidance system, in collaboration with local universities and the City Council.

- Your Voice Counts co-created an "Advocacy Aware" mark with local health partners and piloted it in a specialist mental health unit, promoting rights-based support for disabled people.

These examples illustrate how ILTA helped some funded partners move from transactional partnerships toward more strategic collaborations—often involving joint delivery models, shared governance, or sector-wide reform efforts. The most effective initiatives had clear community benefit, rooted in strong local legitimacy and shared resourcing. While partnership working was nearly universal, the depth and ambition varied. Some remained focused on referrals and service coordination; others moved toward shaping systems.

3.3.5 Strategic Leadership and Operational Infrastructure

ILTA's flexible core funding provided many funded partners with the headspace, stability, and capacity to focus on strategic leadership, organisational development, and systems-building—essential precursors to fundraising, influence, and partnership work.

- Public Interest Law Centre (PILC) created new senior roles—including a Head of Casework and a Comms Manager—freeing up the Director to focus on long-term sustainability.

> "These appointments, in part created through ILTA's contribution, will enable PILC's director to dedicate more time on leveraging further funding."

- Norfolk Community Law Service hired a Fundraising and Engagement Officer, supported by ILTA, to coordinate its 40th anniversary and develop long-term legal sector partnerships.

> "Greater certainty over finances, which was really helped by the ILTA funding, played a key role in giving us the confidence to do this."

- Merseyside Law Centre used ILTA to support the CEO role, which enabled strategic collaboration with other law centres, universities, and sector partners. These efforts included co-leading a theatre-informed access to justice project.

- RCJ Advice credited ILTA funding with enabling the CEO to lead strategic developments, including the setup of a new London-wide Citizens Advice partnership and securing a three-year, £500K contract to deliver second-tier immigration advice.

"He led the setup of a new Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service legal aid contract with three partner law centres."

- Suffolk Law Centre strengthened MEL infrastructure and client-facing systems, reporting that improved webforms were streamlining enquiries.

"We have seen a steady increase in the numbers of people contacting us by online form... [reducing] time spent following up on incomplete telephone or email enquiries."

This type of investment is critical to long-term resilience. Funded partners repeatedly noted that without ILTA's flexible, multi-year support, they would not have had the space or stability to undertake this foundational work. This confirms a key assumption of ILTA's Theory of Change: that investing in organisational infrastructure is essential to unlocking broader strategic capacity and sustained impact.

3.3.6 Contribution and Future Learning

Funded partners widely attributed progress on this outcome to ILTA's flexible, core funding model, which enabled them to strengthen back-office functions, invest in strategic roles, and build systems and partnerships beyond crisis delivery. Access Social Care noted ILTA support helped them trial income generation "with increased security"; RCJ Advice said the funding gave their new CEO "time to build relationships"; and New Forest Disability described a shift from reactive to strategic working that "tangibly" improved their community impact.

Year 1 reporting on this outcome was generally stronger than in other areas—likely because the changes (e.g. grants secured, staff hired, collaborations formed) are more immediate and measurable. Evidence was clearest where organisations had leadership capacity, MEL infrastructure, or strong partner relationships. However, longer-term effects—such as sustained influence, enduring partnerships, or true income resilience—were harder to assess at this early stage.

Future reporting will benefit from tracking how new fundraising or MEL roles are maintained over time, and whether they translate into sustained income or strategic positioning. It will also be useful to explore which partnerships lead to tangible community outcomes, and what enables successful income diversification across different contexts.

3.4 Outcome M4: Demonstrating Impact and Strengthening Learning Culture

3.4.1 Overview and Challenges

Outcome M4 highlights funded partners' efforts to better evidence their impact and embed a culture of continuous learning. In Year 1, many organisations used ILTA funding to invest in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)—whether through new roles, system upgrades, or better outcome tracking. The strongest progress came from organisations able to combine qualitative insight with improved data systems, or those who linked evidence directly to service design and advocacy.

However, MEL maturity varied widely. While some partners successfully integrated evaluation into their operations and strategic planning, others focused on building basic systems or identifying appropriate tools. Many acknowledged persistent data gaps—especially around long-term client outcomes or the experiences of marginalised groups. Year 1 was widely viewed as a foundational phase in which organisations were building the conditions for more systematic learning in future cycles.

The most consistently evidenced themes were:

- System upgrades and improved data architecture
- Lived experience and trauma-informed feedback

- Applying learning to influence and adapt services
- Cultural shifts around reflection and MEL ownership

The most common barrier to evidencing impact was data system fragility. Funded partners described working with outdated, fragmented, or unsupported case management tools—often relying on Word documents or spreadsheets that made meaningful analysis difficult. Several noted that even basic analytics or outcome tracking was unfeasible with their current infrastructure.

These issues were compounded by shifting funder KPIs or legal frameworks, which required some organisations to revise indicators or rebuild datasets, thereby undermining continuity and comparability. Others described a lack of internal confidence or skills in evaluation design, especially among smaller teams, and a reliance on anecdotal data or externally produced outputs.

While feedback tools were widely used, response rates were sometimes low—particularly among clients navigating trauma, language barriers, or digital exclusion. These factors limited the reach and reliability of client voice in MEL systems.

In short, while a learning culture is taking root, it remains uneven and under-resourced. A small number of data-mature organisations are leading the way, but many others are still navigating foundational barriers. Continued progress will depend on accessible peer learning, sustained investment, and recognition that evidencing impact in the advice sector requires time, trust, and proportionate tools.

3.4.2 Strengthening Systems and Tools

ILTA funding has enabled many funded partners to invest in systems that better capture, analyse, and communicate their impact. While most are still in early stages, a number of organisations reported practical improvements to data infrastructure, CRM systems, and feedback mechanisms that are laying the groundwork for more robust outcome tracking.

- Access Social Care developed a "'stories' database" and a:

> *"knowledge dissemination dashboard... bringing together multiple datasets and providing structured insights."*

- Central England Law Centre began adapting the Beacon CRM system:

> “to enable better management information and show our impact through improved data standards, architecture and processes.”

- Friends, Families and Travellers upgraded their Lamplight case management system with new evaluation modules that allow for both anonymous and identifiable surveys, stating:

> “Lamplight now plays a central role in our ability to monitor client outcomes, map their journey through our services, and assess impact.”

- Working Families significantly increased their survey response rate by personalising follow-up emails, which:

> “boosted July's response rate rose to 29%, with subsequent months averaging 20%.”

- Suffolk Law Centre used ILTA funding to create a Digital and UX Coordinator role:

> “This has made a huge difference in assisting us to better understand our data.”

- Disability North improved evaluation methods with follow-up calls:

> “This has led to an 80% response rate... 74% stated that the quality of their lives had improved.”

- Law for Life (Advicenow) introduced secondary surveys and semi-structured interviews to better assess legal capability gains over time.

These examples show early but promising efforts to transition from output-based reporting to more sophisticated outcome tracking. Investments in CRM systems, feedback tools, and capacity roles are helping funded partners move toward data-informed service development and clearer impact communication. Several also noted plans to build on this foundation in Year 2, often in conjunction with MEL consultants or evaluators.

3.4.3 Listening to Lived Experience and Capturing Qualitative Impact

Several funded partners used ILTA funding to strengthen qualitative evaluation, particularly in trauma-aware or peer-led ways.

- ATLEU described their approach as:

> *"We stay in touch with clients for years, to understand their journey from surviving to thriving... We plan to implement a secure/anonymous database of stories with consent, for influencing/communications/fundraising."*

- Manuel Bravo Project highlighted the difficulty of gathering feedback post-case:

> "Many of those we support are navigating trauma... we are developing more appropriate and trauma-aware methods... including face-to-face case study interviews... and group feedback sessions in collaboration with trusted partners such as Leeds Refugee Forum."

- MAP adopted the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and asked clients:

> "if they feel more confident and less worried about money/debt after receiving advice... to understand our impact on their lives in their own words and using 'feedback friendly' questions."

- Coram Children's Legal Centre shared powerful examples, including:

> "Through the Tribunal appeal, we secured an alternative education provision package… his mother said she had never received such life-changing support in the 19 years."

3.4.4 Using Learning to Influence and Adapt

A smaller group of funded partners are beginning to use monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) not just for reporting, but to inform service design, guide strategy, and shape influencing work. Where present, these practices demonstrate how data can support adaptive leadership and strengthen the evidence base for advocacy.

- CPAG showed how feedback loops inform national influencing:

> "Our Early Warning System continued to be used to influence policy and practice… featured in 15 publications produced by our policy team."

- Public Law Project integrated learning into strategic planning:

> "Lessons from this year have fed into PLP's new strategic plan,"

and they committed to:

> "partnering with researchers to deepen understanding of the long-term effects of our interventions."

- East European Resource Centre combined internal learning with external messaging:

> "We are developing report generation from Salesforce... [and] this funding has been contributing also to the costs of our graphic designer... to highlight the value of advice services."

- Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit embedded lived experience in decision-making:

> "Our Consultation Group... provides valuable insights... Their perspectives ensure our work is always grounded in the realities faced by the people we help."

- Suffolk Law Centre worked with a Cambridge University academic to analyse patterns in enquiry data:

> "...to see what we can learn from these."

- Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk) enhanced impact measurement by piloting the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and moving toward a paperless system.

These examples show how learning, when embedded across teams, can inform real-time improvements and help organisations better articulate their value. While still relatively limited—often driven by larger or more data-mature organisations—this shift hints at MEL's broader potential as a strategic tool for reflection, service improvement, and influencing change.

3.4.5 Embedding Learning Culture

Several funded partners are beginning to embed learning more intentionally across their organisations—moving from isolated evaluation exercises to organisation-wide reflection and improvement. ILTA funding appears to be a key enabler of this shift, giving organisations the time and headspace to prioritise learning as a strategic function.

- Bristol Law Centre introduced regular reflective practice sessions for caseworkers and solicitors:

"Particularly effective for ensuring non-silo working and widening perspective on best practice."

- Derbyshire Law Centre described a turning point:

"ILTA funding has played a vital role in enabling this progress... We now hold a growing body of meaningful data and are starting to build the internal skills and capacity needed to make the most of it."

- Latin American Women's Rights Service highlighted a mindset shift:

"Key learning: storytelling and data are equally important for demonstrating impact."

- RCJ & Islington CAB began developing a public-facing impact page *"to start to present statistical information about how many people we have helped and the difference we are making."*

"to start to present statistical information about how many people we have helped and the difference we are making."

- Family InFocus used ILTA to strengthen their volunteer programme and look beyond basic satisfaction measures.

These examples suggest that ILTA is supporting a broader cultural change around MEL—particularly in valuing both quantitative and qualitative insights, creating space for cross-team learning, and using evidence not just for funders but for internal development. While still uneven across the portfolio, this shift represents an important foundation for longer-term improvements in how funded partners

3.4.6 Contribution and Future learning

ILTA funding was widely credited with enabling organisations to strengthen their MEL capacity in ways that fit their needs and values. Funded partners

used the flexible support to fund MEL staff, build Theory of Change models, test trauma-aware or user-led feedback tools, and embed reflective practice into advice settings. For example, MAP linked new data coordination roles to improved analysis; Rights of Women launched a data project using insights from their bespoke case management system; and Your Voice Counts developed an outcomes tool to better evidence advocacy impact.

Year 1 reporting showed growing momentum across the portfolio, particularly in strengthening systems and developing more thoughtful approaches to data. The strongest evidence came from organisations with dedicated roles or infrastructure, but even lighter-touch efforts often reflected intentional, values-aligned learning. Participatory and qualitative methods added depth in some cases, particularly where traditional metrics are difficult. Long-term or systemic impact was not yet common—but this is expected at an early stage. Looking ahead, areas to watch include how MEL roles and systems support strategic learning and influence; how feedback tools shape services and advocacy; and whether shared, low-burden indicators of confidence, prevention or wellbeing begin to emerge. Peer learning may also help surface practical approaches that balance rigour with resource constraints.

3.5 ILTA Year 1 Financial Overview

3.5.1 Overview of Actual and Forecasted Expenditure

Across the 59 funded organisations, self-reported actual expenditure for March 2024–March 2025 totalled £5.19 million, with forecasted expenditure for April 2025–March 2026 rising to £7.70 million—an increase of 48% (£2.51m). While not all partners will spend at this level, the growth signals renewed momentum following start-up delays, organisational restructuring, and changes to staffing or delivery plans.

This scale-up should not be read as automatic expansion; some forecasts reflect planned catch-up from Year 1 underspend, while others represent shifts in strategic priorities (e.g. investment in evaluation, outreach, or infrastructure).

3.5.2 Strategic Spending Patterns: Actual and Forecasted Trends

3.5.2.1 Staff Costs

Staffing accounted for the majority of ILTA spend in Year 1 (~£4.03m) and is expected to rise to over £6.1m in Year 2. Reported roles included:

- Frontline delivery: Advice workers, solicitors, VAWG caseworkers, tribunal advocates
- Leadership: CEO, Directors, Heads of Legal
- Infrastructure: Partnership managers, finance leads, operations officers

Forecast increases point to delayed hiring in Year 1 being reactivated, plus the creation of new posts for business planning, outreach expansion, or communications.

3.5.2.2 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

MEL expenditure was modest (£112k actual) but forecast to grow by 70% to £193k. Roles such as *Data Officer*, *Evaluation Consultant*, and *Learning Lead* were named, alongside references to CRM system upgrades.

However, MEL still accounts for under 3% of budgets. This suggests that while some organisations are embedding evaluative practice, others are constrained by capacity, prioritising delivery over learning. Several partners flagged MEL work being delayed until Year 2 or merged into wider leadership responsibilities.

3.5.2.3 Service Delivery Costs

Service delivery costs sees the largest proportional forecast increase: from £101k to £272k. Key items included:

- Interpreter and translation services
- Community legal clinics
- Client travel and subsistence

These entries point to delivery possibly becoming place-based and user-responsive, particularly in response to structural access barriers (Outcome 1).

3.5.2.4 Premises and Operational Overheads

Operational costs (rent, utilities, office infrastructure) totalled £486k in Year 1, rising to £592k in Year 2. Most spend was modest (e.g. average rent costs of ~£42k per org), but essential. Several partners cited rising costs or emergency relocations as unplanned expenses.

The data suggests most organisations are operating lean models: hot-desking, hybrid work, or co-location. These setups help contain costs, but may also signal under-capacity in environments meant for client-facing delivery.

3.5.2.5 Training and Development

Spending on training remained relatively low (£123k → £143k). Entries included:

- Safeguarding and legal CPD
- Volunteer or peer advisor induction
- Management development

Where it occurred, training was often tied to regulatory compliance or onboarding needs. Some partners noted deferring training due to time pressures, or accessing free support (e.g. via the Funded Partner Support Programme).

3.5.2.6 Equipment

Equipment spend drops from £ 104,000 (actual) to £ 90,000 (forecast)

3.5.2.7 Other Expenditure

Other costs rise from £232k to £309k, covering:

- Fundraising consultancy
- Communications and public engagement
- HR, governance and wellbeing investments

3.5.3 Financial Pressures and Adaptations in Year 1

Analysis of narrative returns from partners reveals seven recurring patterns:

Theme	Observed in Reporting
Delayed recruitment	Most common driver of underspend
Salary pressure	NJC uplifts, cost-of-living, and Employer NI increases
Premises disruption	Office moves, building works, rent changes
MEL and evaluation delays	Deprioritised in favour of staffing or delivery
Funding instability	Difficulty securing co-funding, paused funder rounds
Service demand spikes	Increased triage, referral bottlenecks, burnout risk
Reprofiling and carryovers	Several partners intentionally deferred costs to Year 2

Despite these challenges, few reported needing to return funds. Most intend to reallocate underspends to outreach, training, MEL, or delayed staffing. Only two reported “no change” from budget plans; nearly all others described minor to moderate deviations.

3.6 Funder Plus support

The Funded Partner Support Programme was widely seen as a valuable and timely complement to ILTA’s core funding. While engagement varied in Year 1—often due to capacity or recruitment delays—many organisations accessed training, leadership development, and thematic sessions that aligned closely with their strategic needs.

3.6.1 Strengthening Leadership and Management Capacity

The LAPG Management and Leadership Programme was the most frequently accessed and praised strand, with over 30 funded partners participating. Many credited the course with improving strategic thinking, supporting role transitions, or helping embed a leadership culture within teams.

"Our Deputy CEO & Head of Advice secured a place on the MLP course... he is developing a solid understanding and equipping himself with practical tools which apply to his role." — Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton

"It is very difficult to find individuals who possess both the qualities and abilities to take on leadership roles in our sector. So to have a structured leadership programme is very helpful." — Cumbria Law Centre

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Even organisations not yet fully engaged showed awareness and intent to participate:

"We have not been able to engage with the Funded Partner Support to date due to absences in our senior leadership team but will have capacity in the coming quarter." — Central England Law Centre

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3.6.2 Targeted Consultancy and Strategic Planning

A smaller number of organisations accessed bespoke consultancy support, often using it to shape strategic direction, improve governance, or design new delivery roles.

"One-to-one sessions helped clarify how Funder Plus aligns with our long-term goals and has informed our strategic development planning." — Derbyshire Law Centre

"Our previous Learning & Development Lead had a valuable one-to-one meeting with Tina Puryear... clarifying how the Funder Plus

programme aligns with our five-year funding strategy." — Derbyshire Law Centre

Though fewer in number, these engagements reflect the funder's intention that ILTA supports both service continuity and forward-looking, system-level planning.

3.6.3 Peer Learning, Inclusion and Thematic innovation

A smaller but visible strand of engagement related to peer learning, EDI, and innovation, including sessions on trauma-informed practice, digital delivery, and AI.

"Staff attended sessions on AI and EDI. These supported staff development and provided valuable opportunities to reflect and share." — Citizens Advice North Somerset

"We have engaged through community-of-interest sessions... allowing us to connect with like-minded organisations and share knowledge." — Disability North

These thematic sessions were particularly valued by organisations seeking to embed inclusive design or scale digital access strategies.

3.6.4 Barriers and Planned Future Engagement

Some funded partners—particularly those navigating leadership transitions or operating at smaller scale—reported limited engagement so far, but strong intentions to participate in Year 2.

"We haven't had a need for this service yet, but we remain vigilant to it." — Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)

"We envisage that we will engage with the programme in subsequent periods." — Child Poverty Action Group

3.6.5 Summary Reflections

Funded partners consistently valued:

- The practical focus and sector-specific design of the offer
- The opportunity to learn alongside peers in leadership positions
- Access to dedicated coaching and thematic sessions not otherwise available
- The flexibility to engage as capacity allowed

Many organisations noted that the support came at the right time to help develop internal capability, succession planning, or delivery innovation.

3.6.6 Implications for Year 2

To maintain and build momentum:

- Repeat high-demand courses like the LAPG Management and Leadership Programme
- Offer more spaces or repeated runs of oversubscribed sessions (e.g. trauma-informed delivery)
- Sustain 1:1 strategic support for organisations navigating change
- Encourage cross-organisation knowledge exchange through structured peer learning

Overall, the Funded Partner Support Programme is already contributing to ILTA's broader goals around organisational resilience, strategic leadership, and system learning. With continued investment and responsiveness to demand, it has strong potential to support capacity-building across the cohort in Year 2 and beyond.

3.6.7 Funded Partner Reflections on the Access to Justice Foundation

Funded partners provided rich, detailed feedback on how the Access to Justice Foundation (ATJF) has delivered the ILTA programme to date. Most responses

were strongly positive, with repeated themes of flexibility, trust, responsiveness, and practical support. Constructive feedback focused on improving clarity, expectations, and timing.

3.6.7.1 A Supportive and Trust-Based Relationship

The Foundation's approach was widely described as empowering, respectful, and aligned with grantee realities.

"The Access to Justice Foundation is so clear and straightforward to work with, and really 'gets' the advice sector."

"We feel like true partners, not simply grantees, and the consistent effort to bring partners together is very much appreciated."

"Without The Access to Justice Foundation funding, we would have been forced to close our charity last year... The 5-year funding has provided us with the stability to revisit our strategy and the opportunity to reimagine how we support the families we serve."

"We are extremely grateful that we have been chosen to be part of this programme and find ATJF very accommodating and supporting. Part of this support is also giving us our own space and having trust in us to develop our own methods of working."

Many organisations noted that the multi-year nature of the funding and the Foundation's approach enabled long-term planning and reflection.

"The five-year funding from Access to Justice reflects a vital move toward long-term support—something we see as essential for meaningful, lasting impact."

"The openness of this grant, not only in core funding but also the learning that is taking place, has enabled us to reflect on our practices."

3.6.7.2 Reporting, MEL and Programme Management

Organisations reported positively on the monitoring and evaluation approach, particularly the Foundation's effort to make processes proportionate and consultative.

"The offline reporting documents have made the reporting process much easier and more manageable. Having clear, accessible templates has saved us time."

"We were really supported in understanding what data to collect and how to report on it in a manageable way."

"We appreciated the workshops held to introduce and explain the MEL approach on gathering data and reporting."

"The opportunity to provide feedback about the proposed reporting templates of the programme was refreshing and enabled us to clearly identify what data we were already set up as an organisation to collect, and what to add/amend to fulfil the reporting brief."

A few organisations noted that clarity and timing could still be improved:

"The monitoring framework arrived later than we would ideally like so we didn't have enough time to enact changes to our monitoring framework."

"It was difficult to understand what was required of reporting in the earlier stages. It will be good when there's more information around the specifics."

"We were a bit caught out with the expenditure/budget reporting... because the form doesn't divide up costs in the way we do in our organisational and service budgets."

"One piece of constructive feedback... the ILTA introductory survey... took us 1h 15mins and we wonder if others had the same issue. It would have been fine to set aside this time if we had known."

3.6.7.3 Broader Reflections and Suggested Improvements

Alongside overwhelmingly positive feedback, partners offered constructive suggestions around systems, definitions, and communication.

"More clarification as to what 'Core' funding meant from the beginning would have been helpful."

"The word count in the initial application forms were very tight... challenging to distil key information into such a short space."

"We ran out of rows when adding staff costs/salaries into the budget and forecast so we had to combine some roles—can this be amended?"

"Knowing what is expected of us in Year 2, we are preparing to alter our framework to better reflect data requirements."

A few partners noted opportunities to deepen collaboration across the cohort:

"It would be great to have some more opportunities for networking, if possible face to face meetings... we gain knowledge and strength for growing our much needed services."

"We do believe... there are further opportunities to develop deeper links between the legal and non-legal organisations... Access to Justice would be a good coordinator of this."

4. Summary

Funded partners characterised ATJF as one of the most supportive, professional, and empowering funders they had worked with. The flexible, core-focused funding model was seen as enabling organisations to think long-term, invest in strategy and systems, and respond confidently to challenges. Reporting was broadly viewed as manageable and well-communicated, though some improvements in timing and system alignment were suggested. The Funded Partner Support Programme was widely welcomed, with clear appetite for deeper and more flexible engagement in Year 2.

"Brilliant! This project... has provided so much scope to develop our service, our staff, and to make ourselves more fundable and sustainable."

"We find The Access to Justice Foundation to be an excellent funder, who has been deliberate, proactive and collaborative in the delivery of the Improving Lives Through Advice programme."

"Incredibly important and rare grant. Imagine that for many organisations this is the difference between staying afloat/firefighting and truly taking stock of strategic priorities."

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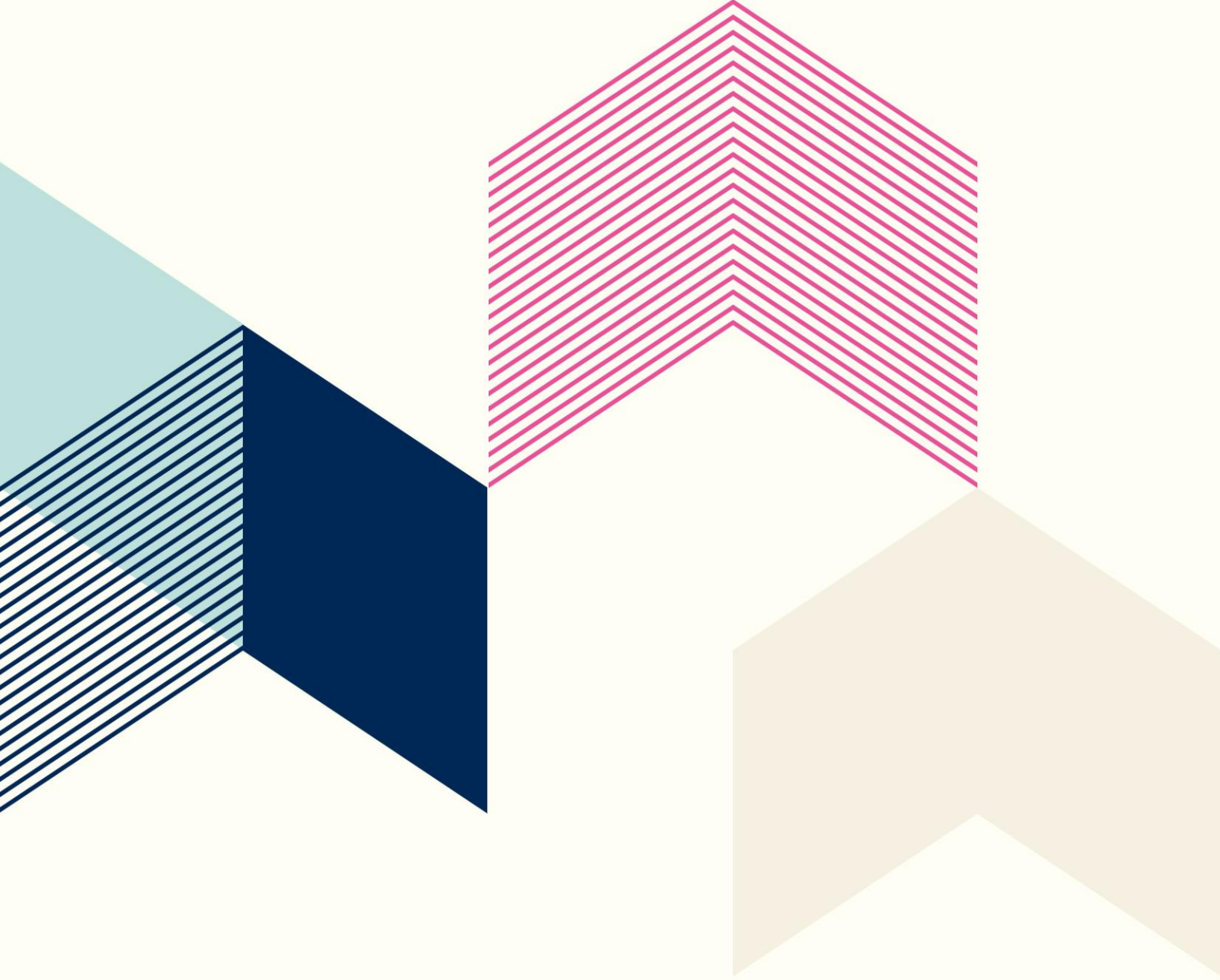

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