

The background features abstract geometric shapes in a vibrant pink color against a white background. These shapes include a large circle on the right side, a triangle at the top right, and a curved shape at the bottom left.

# **The Common** **Platform:**

**an inquiry  
into a good  
society**

The Common Platform will build a shared vision, programme and set of alliances for a good society; one that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. Crucially it will combine emerging new practice in civil society and the social economy with creative ideas and policy thinking to build the foundations for social and economic transformation. This will entail:

- A tangible vision of a good society
- Models of a new economy and democracy that enable such a society
- The development of a new democratic 'Organising Principle' to replace the free market and the bureaucratic state
- Alliances established across issue areas and between civil society movements and new productive forces and the state, with the latter in service to the former
- A theory and practice of change that enables systemic transformation to take place



The Common Platform, a space for all voices

## Purpose

We need big change to happen and we need it quickly. But the old ways of making change happen aren't working. It is time to do things very differently.

The Common Platform will bring together thousands of people and hundreds of organisations to build not just the vision and ideas, but the means to build a good society – one that is much more equal, democratic and sustainable. The Common Platform will start

small but purposefully grow much bigger as a generative space combining vision, ideas, theories and practices of change. Critically, it will work off and with emerging small-scale innovations in civil society and the social economy that are already prefiguring this good society. Ultimately, its goal will be to bring together all these elements, alongside crucial state actors and resources, to bring about the social transformation we need.

Many people and organisations are already working on parts of this - but it's a mess. A sum that is way less than its parts. The goal of the Common Platform will be to crystallise this work and develop new thinking and approaches that make the desirable feasible.

## **Justification**

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This initiative is necessary because the multiple crises in our society are gathering pace. The emerging ecological disaster has been evident for almost half a century. The impact of the 2008 financial crash rumbles on, with years of austerity and the likelihood of another crash ever present. Brexit simply

revealed the depth of our social and economic divisions. But there is a crisis of meaning and purpose to our lives too - we are participants in a race that no one asked us to join and that seems to have no end. People are exhausted and fearful as they lack any control over the institutions that seem to govern their lives. Too many have too few friends and too little purpose. Hope is denied by a democracy too feeble to cope with these challenges.

The scale of these gathering crises suggests that the future must be very different from the past, as must the means by which we achieve this different future. All societies go through periodic big turning points: for example, the UK in 1906, 1945 and 1979. It is time for society to turn again and to write a new chapter for our country and its place in the world. In doing this, we will follow a principle developed by [Buckminster Fuller](#): 'You never change something by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.'

On this the people are ahead of the politicians. New ways of thinking, being and acting are

being developed and tested in civil society, often at the edges and margins of communities and the economy. But these fireworks that momentarily light up the sky need to be sustained and accelerated by bigger collective institutions such as the state.

Extensive research by Katy Goldstraw and John Diamond, reported in [Collaborative Conversations](#), shows that civil society already has a strong appetite for change and is alive with ideas and new ways of making things happen. Precisely because bureaucratic states and free markets are failing to create the spaces for human beings to meet their needs and those of society and the planet, people everywhere are creating their own institutions for change, mostly local and small scale. These new institutions carry with them the seeds of more democratic, open and even egalitarian practice. The recent [Civil Society Future](#) report amplifies this point.

However, there is no mechanism to bring these conversations and practices together - creating a sum greater than the parts and a route map to transformative change. As a

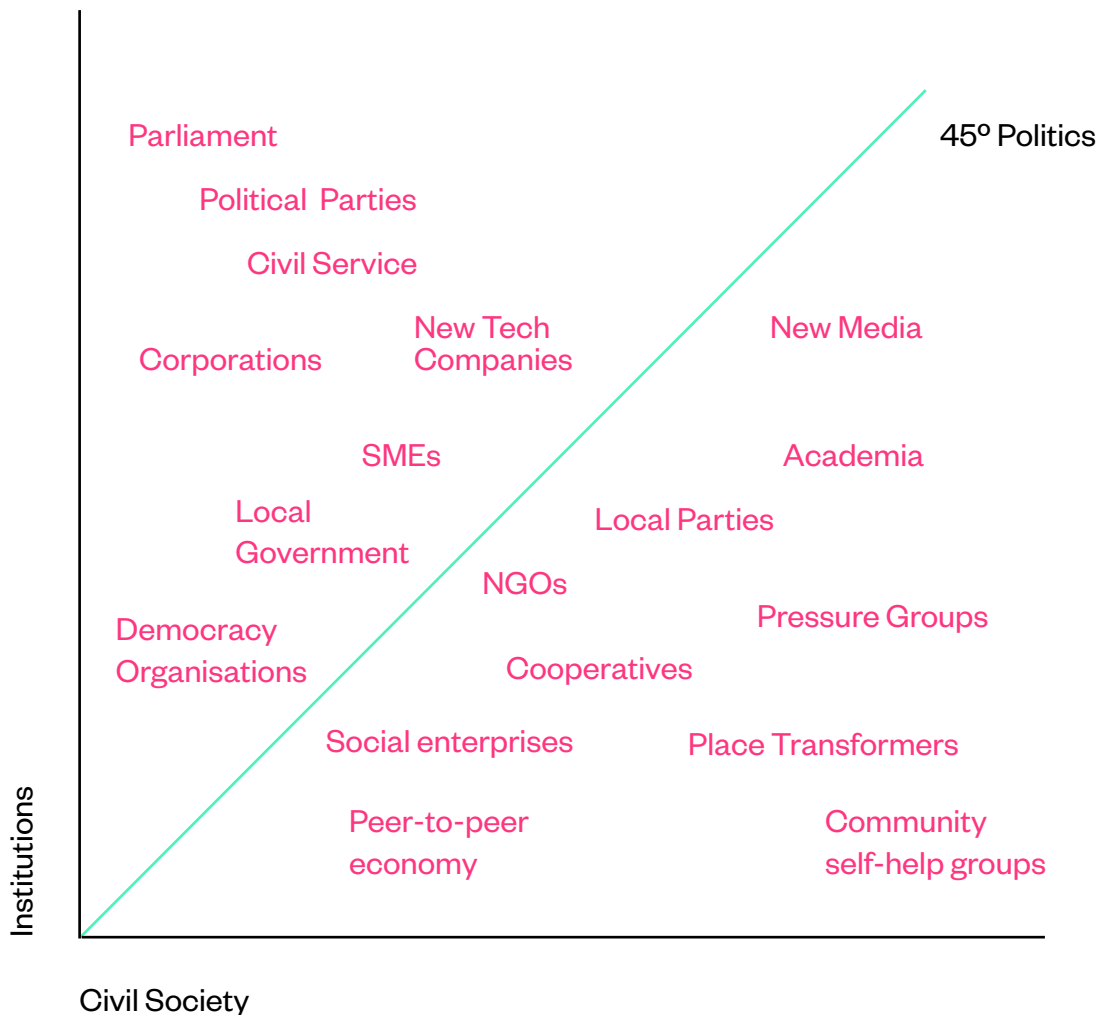
result, we have a cacophony rather than a symphony of new transformative voices. Civil society organisations, social entrepreneurs and other emergent forces remain disconnected and fragile. They face huge barriers in influencing the dominant culture of markets and bureaucracies, because there are no coherent messages emerging from the field.

To address this, the Common Platform will work with a range of producers, thinkers, suppliers, innovators, politicians and campaigners to see how what is being said and done can be scaled up and joined up by a supportive state that facilitates and accelerates their work.

The Common Platform will develop a theory called 45° Change in which civil society on the X (horizontal) axis combines with the state and other big institutions on the Y (vertical) axis. Transformation occurs at the diagonal meeting point where bottom-up change meets top-down support; the energy and inventiveness of civil society being encouraged and sustained by the state. The Common Platform will work at this 45° intersection; the fault line along which a new society will be created.



# 45° Theory of Change

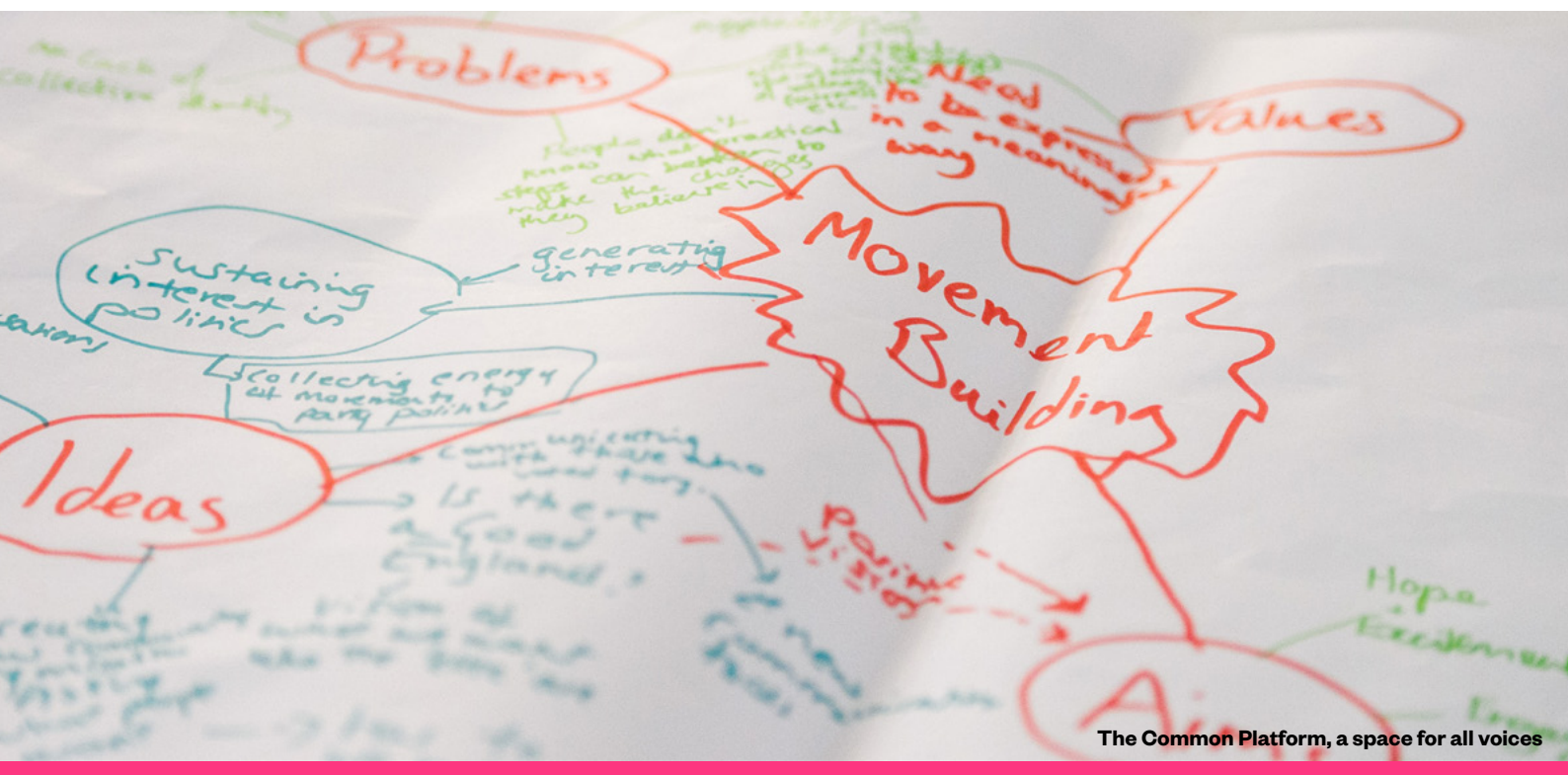


Now is the right moment to do this. The manifold crises are evident as are the systemic weaknesses of the old methods of change. More importantly, people are more aware, better connected and more able to organise at speed and scale than they have ever been because of the multiplying and aggregating



effects of networks and social media.

Critically the Common Platform will look to establish a new 'Organising Principle' for our society. The limits of 20th-century forms of governance - the bureaucratic state and the free market - have been exceeded. If networks define the 21st century, then it is solidarity and collective action across and through networks that must define the nature of a good society and the means by which we achieve it. A new, and eventually dominant, 'Organising Principle' must be established which builds on the energy and vitality of the emerging economic and social forces which tend towards a more democratic and egalitarian spirit.



## **The Common Platforms unique approach will be based on:**

- Addressing the interlocking root causes of social, economic and environmental failure
- Building a theory and practice for systemic transformative change
- Locating new prefigurative practices in the economy and society that are emerging precisely because the free market and the remote state are failing to provide the security and freedom people need
- Joining up and scaling up common threads of new practice and new ideas to produce inclusive, workable and scalable solutions that build a transformative approach
- Creating a genuinely open platform to enable wide and inclusive participation in the process and to prefigure new ways to collaborate
- Building new cross-sectoral alliances and strengthening existing networks

- Corraling new and old policy ideas to inspire supportive government action, not as policy lists but as models of change for a new economy and a new democracy in support of a good society
- Establishing a new 'Organising Principle' for a good society based around collaboration in a networked society
- Working with the best politicians, nationally and locally, from all parties who understand and embrace their role as facilitators of change in service to this emerging good society - and in so doing changing the nature of the demands made of government
- Developing a decisive cohort of politicians, thinkers and doers who understand and support a shared vision and practice for transformative change

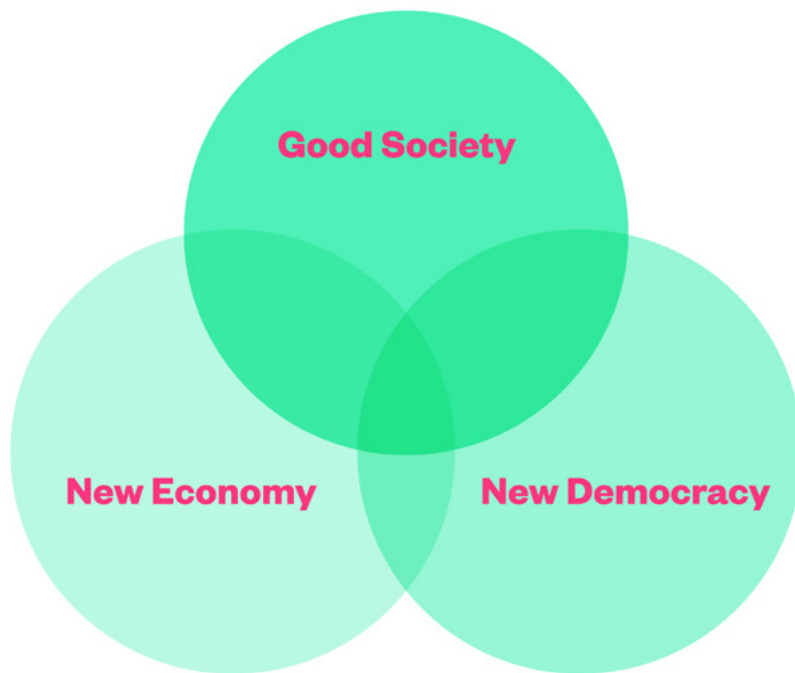
These activities also represent the desired outcomes and consequences of the Common Platform. Progress towards them will constitute the key measurements of success for the project.



Sustainability will run through every aspect of the Common Platform

## Characteristics

The Common Platform will develop as a gradual and collaborative process resulting in a series of broad-based agreements on the nature of a good society. We will start by recruiting from our extended network up to 25 individuals who represent a range of experiences and interests. These early participants will be deeply involved in what the Common Platform does and how, as well as playing the crucial role of helping the project



to connect with their causes and networks. As it gathers pace, and members develop mutual trust, this group will form the nucleus of the initial inquiry, which will grow over time as issues and areas are explored. Despite the relatively limited size of the inquiry group, it will eventually allow the project to expand extensively, as it will give the process the early intellectual, cultural and organisational definition that it needs. The inquiry group will be one node in a decentralised network which will grow organically as new nodes are formed.



Our initial insight is that the Common Platform will develop to include detailed pathways in terms of the new economy and the new democracy that will help create a good society. Core values and issues such as environmentalism, internationalism and equality will run through all the work.

While being hosted in the UK, the Common Platform will be global in its outlook, sourcing ideas and the best practical solutions to issues like housing, renewable energy, social finance and deeper democratic practices from across the world, and playing them back out to the world.

By looking at the intersections between various approaches, it will be possible to find the common points between solutions to inequality, democratic decline and environmental destruction. By welding together such diverse approaches, a coherent view of how to move forward on policy and practice will emerge through a process of abductive reasoning (a technique that begins with an incomplete set of observations and proceeds to the likeliest possible explanation for the set).

In seeking the engagement of a wide range of people and organisations, genuine dialogue is essential. Experience to date on alliance-building shows that there are a number of key principles that guide successful discussions:

1. A sense of one's own vulnerability and incompleteness - and therefore the need to really engage and find the support of others – and stepping outside of organisational and issue silos to see working together as a vital starting point
2. An emphasis on what we agree on but really listening to others and actively welcoming difference as a constructive force through which we all learn
3. A focus on positive solutions
4. An acceptance of 'good enough' outcomes that 'we can all live with' and not necessarily consensus
5. Acting with care, compassion, humility and respect for each other in the search for a shared common good



Using these principles through an 'open platform' will prefigure new collaborative ways of building visions and making change happen. The principles will be the building blocks for alliances and networks to create a broad-based movement to strengthen 'the demand side of governance'. The Common Platform will not be about producing a manifesto that everyone must sign; it will be about producing a body of work and a set of relationships that lay the basis for the eventual transformation of society.



The Common Platform will develop and grow through genuine dialogue

## **How will it be organised?**

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The Common Platform will require patient and steady organising from the bottom up so that, through key gatekeepers, it reaches organisations and people with influence as well as engaging people who currently feel powerless in our society. It will require working with those 'at the top' to change the attitudes to power and their role as servants of society.

The process will require careful design and an extensive engagement programme. It will also require a publication and social media strategy to engage and empower people to build the content in terms of both ideas and new practice. A key resource will be an online platform, so that people can take part in work in a genuinely collaborative, open and empowering way. We will work with the best platform designers who seek to use technology for the common good. We will reach out to people and organisations experimenting with new ideas and practices, offering to strengthen their work by giving it visibility through the platform.

The process will start small and build slowly. Over time, the Common Platform will grow organically

and add value as a place for sharing, learning, developing and influencing people and organisations - building their new power and acting as a bridge with old vertical power structures. Eventually, the Common Platform will work across the progressive landscape of parties, campaigns, NGOs, think tanks, social enterprises, businesses with purpose, civil society organisations, media (old and new), academia, community organisers and activists, and new cooperative platforms. We want many thousands of people and many hundreds of organisations to be involved. A detailed project management paper is being prepared.

In developing these relationships, we will use a 'create and adjust' approach, learning and adapting as we go. We will ensure that we talk to many different people and organisations, and include those we may not initially agree with. The Common Platform will be open to anyone who aspires to a good society and agrees to a code of conduct based on the five principles of successful engagement outlined above.

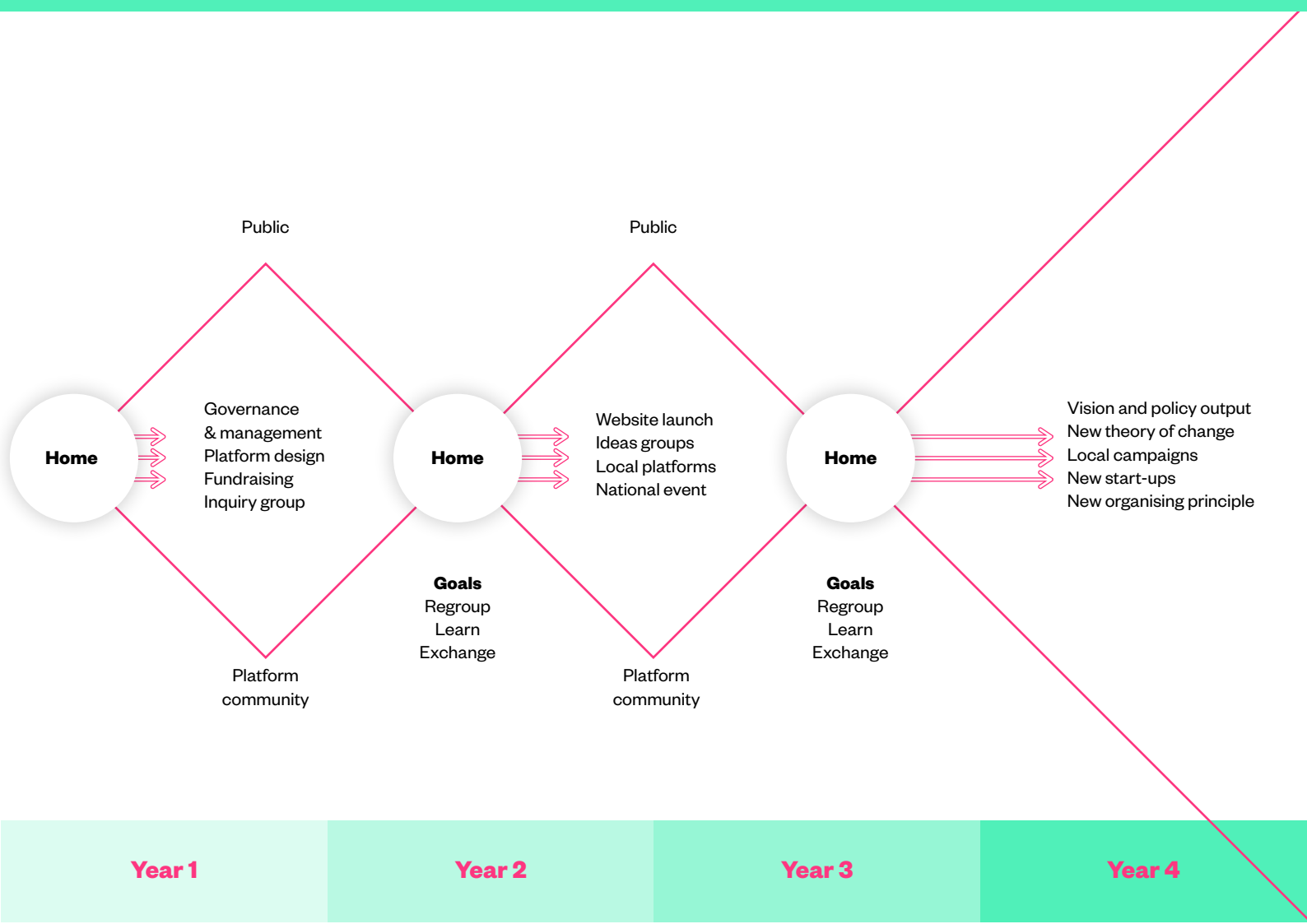
We will follow the lead of Kurt Lewin and conduct a [forcefield analysis](#). This divides

people and organisations into four categories in relation to their attitude towards the developments we wish to see in society. There are people who will:

1. **Make it happen** – being part of the agency driving forward
2. **Encourage it to happen** – not driving forward but having an indirect effect by assisting those who are
3. **Let it happen** – being neutral about change
4. **Stop it happening** – blocking any proposals that emerge

Dividing stakeholders into these categories will help us develop effective means of harnessing positive energy, while being aware of those who are likely to resist the changes that the movement wants to see.

The Common Platform will be divided into a number of key phases. The first is design, support and funding. Then there will be an inquiry phase before opening out debate and learning in a process of divergence and contraction. Through every phase, knowledge will grow and the number of people and organisations involved will be expanded.



## Governance and management

The project will be hosted by Compass and it will be the organisation's major project for the next four years. But Compass doesn't want to, and can't possibly, 'own' the project. Instead, by helping to serve it, the objective is to create an 'open platform' in which participants create a common agenda and narrative for change. It must be done in this way, because the challenges and opportunities we face are too



big and too complex for any one organisation to tackle; and because this collaborative approach prefigures exactly the kind of co-produced society we want to help create.

Compass will provide the essential infrastructure for the Common Platform, online and offline, and will ensure the key activities take place as planned. There will be a small advisory group of experienced project managers to help design the process and ensure it runs as smoothly and effectively as possible.

While all the ideas and practices will be developed through a collective and open effort, and decision-making processes such as citizens juries will be used when appropriate, any fundamental disagreements will reside with the Compass Management Committee to settle.

Compass has the resources of ambition, intellectual capacity and experience and the will to make this work. What the organisation doesn't yet have is the financial support and investment the Common Platform requires.





## Risk assessment

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A project of this scale and ambition cannot be undertaken lightly. It is a challenging project because of the range of issues it is looking to tackle and the way it seeks to operate. Some of the issues we need to be acutely aware of include:

- **Designing the process:** getting the balance right between necessary ambition and sufficient realism is going to be hard; we need both. The process needs to be carefully designed so that it starts in a manageable way, but can then be expanded, accelerated and scaled.
- **Developing the Platform:** this must feel like a different kind of process, open but with edges so it has purpose and achieves the critical and unique objectives outlined above.
- **Unexpected events:** the project is designed to help create deep intellectual and organisational foundations for the long-term transformation to a good society. It is therefore not overly concerned with day-to-day events. However, events like a 'No

Deal Brexit', a snap General Election or another financial crash will have an impact on the work, so we must be flexible about the project at all times.

- **Governance and decision-making:** we want ideas and practices to emerge through dialogue and consent, avoiding binary voting decisions. That said, we need to protect the process from 'hobby-horseism' and people pushing agendas and issues that may not be in the open, generous and transformative spirit of the project.
- **Funding:** since this is a radical process examining radical ideas, many traditional progressive funders will balk at its ambition. We need to find funders who recognise the scale of the challenges society faces and the necessity to invest in new ways to tackle them. Some early seed-corn funding is essential.



But the biggest risk is *not* to attempt a project of this scale, this collaborative culture and this ambition, because, we fear, anything less will fail to meet the challenges and opportunities of our times.

## **End thought**

The last word is left to Milton Friedman, one of the principal architects of the 40-year-old world order that is now failing that world. He said:

*There is nothing so powerful as an idea when its time has come. I say that time is a crisis, actual or perceived. When the crisis occurs the actions that are taken depend upon the ideas lying around.*

As the crises will keep coming, we must scatter the ground not just with ideas, but with practices and with people, thousands and thousands of them, and all the experience, knowledge, wisdom and ambition that comes with them.

## **Your role in building** **a good society...**

The better world we want is only possible if you, and many people like you, contribute your support, time, expertise, resources, money and energy.

Please talk to one of us about how we can work together to create the Common Platform to make the vision of a good society a living reality.

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