

CiFR | Mid-term insights



What is CiFR?

The Cumbria Innovative Flood Resilience (CiFR) project is demonstrating the benefits of Natural Flood Management (NFM) to communities at risk of flooding.

We are targeting small rural communities that do not qualify for normal grant in aid funding, despite having flooded in the past and being at increasingly high risk in future.

CiFR is funded by Defra as part of the £200 million Flood and Coastal Innovation Programme which is managed by the Environment Agency. The programme drives innovation in resilience and adaptation to a changing climate.

CiFR is innovating with its team structure. We are a distinct team made up of two staff from the host council, one from the Environment Agency, one from Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service, and two from Natural England. This is in addition to research and consultancy support from others such as Lancaster University and 3Keel. This structure has brought many advantages and some challenges: covered below.

What is CiFR doing?

Our main areas of activity include:

- Working in four communities at high flood risk, who don't qualify for grant-in-aid.
- Building relationships with local farmers via two Catchment Sensitive Farming advisors employed by Natural England, working upstream of the four communities.
- Modelling what NFM features would work best where, to maximise flood risk reduction.
- Paying farmers to install features, alongside existing agri-environment scheme funding.
- Monitoring the impact of NFM features installed, including on water quality.
- Supporting community resilience groups to build their size, skills and stability, and giving them a voice within the local resilience forum, so communities can prepare for and recover from future floods.

What is CiFR achieving?

It's early days to quantify impact as we are only part-way through the programme and much of the groundwork has yet to come to fruition. We have however:



Shown by modelling that NFM has the potential to move properties across flood risk bands: it *can* make a real difference.



Recruited and trained two CSF advisors to advise farmers specifically on NFM and how it can help the farm business amongst other funding streams. Had **187** conversations, **195** farm visits, with **70** farmers or landowners.



Supported the development of the national Met Office community resilience training prospectus: following a trial with the community groups from CiFR, it now includes modules on climate change.



Installed our first NFM features on the ground. Done via co-design, stacking funding, use of volunteers and contractors.



Stabilised six key community groups for emergency response and flood preparedness, by providing core funding. This has allowed them to focus on delivering benefits locally.



Produced quality communications films explaining about NFM: used nationally with 30,000 views to date.

Learning

Running an innovation project



We have noticed a variety of challenges arising because we are trying to do new things in new ways. Some of these have been time-consuming or difficult. They are phrased as positive advice to others when embarking on an innovation project, whether it be on flood resilience or any other topic:

- **Develop (via recruitment or training) a comfort with complicated and complex project environments, as referred to in the Cynefin framework.** Whilst you will be used to 'linear' project environments, you are probably entering an environment where the factors affecting your success are harder to predict and are inter-related, and often the links between cause and effect are only apparent in hindsight. This can feel uncomfortable and - if you're not aware of other project environments such as complicated or complex ones - you may feel it is chaotic and out of control.
- **Spend extra time at the start building a joint vision** amongst the team of what you're aiming at and how roles and responsibilities will work, as innovation projects don't fit 'normal' assumptions about roles. You will need to discuss these frequently. Structure in these discussions to make sure they happen.
- **Acknowledge that daily administration platforms often don't work across multi-organisation teams.** You may not be able to view each others' calendars, or file share without workarounds, or access the GIS information system a partner uses. This acts as a sea-anchor and slows administration down, creates barriers and team frustrations.
- **Organise frequent in-person meetings.** In a team where people are not co-located and are also employed by different organisations, in-person meetings make all the difference to helping the team operate smoothly. Effective teams need good relationships, especially when innovating.
- **Expect setbacks and failures along the way.** Celebrate the little wins, and accept the failures as learning and a prompt to try something different. Continue to look for opportunities for innovation. Funders at the programme level should remind projects of this, and support them where possible when they hit setbacks.
- **If you place an innovation project in a Local Authority or any large organisation, you must establish a Project Sponsor role at the Director level to champion the project,** specifically:

1

Creating connections between the project and new contacts in the Local Authority that are not needed in Business As Usual, so the project is not hidden in one specific team.

2

Counteracting the cultural drag that comes when you try to do new things in new ways in a large organisation. Hierarchical management layers and traditional risk management procedures are useful in normal circumstances, but they are not ideal for an innovation project. The Project Sponsor's role here is to champion the project, unblock blockages and reassure the team, especially when the project meets resistance from existing cultural norms (such as legal, finance, human resources or procurement).

Funders should require this Project Sponsor role to be clearly named, so they buy in from an early stage to the project's vision and what their role is.

Learning

Targeting NFM interventions



Through our sustained monitoring, research and modelling work, we now know that if you want to significantly reduce flood risk (moving properties at least one risk band) for communities, you must design your NFM interventions strategically and target them to specific water volumes or flow routes. Smaller features dispersed across a landscape without targeting and coordination are unlikely to make a significant difference.

Learning

Legal agreements with farmers



The single main delay CiFR experienced was the time taken to develop a legal agreement for the inundation of a farmer's land. Our learning points include:

- Very time-consuming and sensitive to develop: to date it has taken us over 2 years and is still not finalised.
- Use a dedicated legal resource that has specific expertise in land-based agreements with farmers.
- Develop a basic agreement with your legal support well in advance of when you need to show it to a farmer. Don't wait until you need it!
- Remember that part of role of the legal team is to protect the Council from risk, and so their advice can often be understandably cautious. This can lead to tension in relation to an innovation project, which needs to try new approaches, at pace, and cannot remove all risk. It is therefore important that the Council's risk appetite for the innovation project is determined early on, and tricky issues are escalated at an early stage for decision by the Project Sponsor, in order to prevent significant delays.

Learning

Supporting community resilience groups



Effective...

Community led approaches to resilience via existing emergency response groups can be effective and value-for-money. This is because it is tailored to local circumstances and fueled by place-based relationships, as well as harnessing so much volunteer time and effort.

Scalable...

Community resilience groups aren't just restricted to flood action. They can expand their volunteer activities into emergencies such as power loss, and into supporting people to leave hospital, delivering wider public value. These extra benefits could largely be supported from the same central fixed costs.

Core costs are essential...

Much of the input required for effective community groups is volunteer time (which costs £0) BUT it is still essential to have core costs funded. This covers insurance, pump servicing, rent, basic kit etc, as well as in some cases a paid person to coordinate work. However...

It is hard to measure and quantify the value these groups deliver...

on behalf of society, due to inadequate data and metrics to translate the public goods they provide to financial terms. (*Note that work is underway via CiFR on this*).

Managing community funding awards...

is best done by an organisation familiar with administering such funds. Could either be an external third party (as used in CiFR), or a Council team if there is capacity.

Learning

Farmer engagement



Having built relationships with farmers for 2-3 years our **top ten** tips are:

- 1 "No farmers = no project" so your main priority is getting the farmer engagement right.
- 2 It takes a huge amount of time and effort and can be hard to justify at face value BUT it simply cannot be shortcut. Put the time in with farm visits and chats round the kitchen table. Expect to do this multiple times per farm. Many relationships will not proceed to an installed feature, for various good reasons.
- 3 Councils aren't normally familiar with this type of farmer engagement. If not, then recruit to new roles or outsource it to a suitable local organisation.
- 4 Know what it is you want to do on a farmer's land before visiting them.
- 5 Know the specific benefits of a feature you want to install, quantified and explained – even if this means doing some modelling to get the evidence.
- 6 Give Catchment Sensitive Farming advisors some delegated authority to award limited funding at farm level: it allows small 'quick wins' to be achieved.
- 7 The personal preferences of the farmer are very influential, so successful engagement can require a change in tenancy or generation change on the farm.
- 8 It is not realistic to fund farmer engagement from a capital budget given the prospective and uncertain nature of it. It's better to fund it from a revenue budget and be ready to draw down from a capital budget when a farmer is ready to proceed.
- 9 When starting work in a locality, get all the advisors and stakeholders together to help you build a baseline of local activity. It helps you make connections far more rapidly.
- 10 Liaise with the planning authority in general terms at the start about changes to the landscape they would find acceptable, rather than waiting until specific interventions are identified. It saves time.

Learning

Blended finance



Despite significant efforts on the CiFR project to raise green finance for various benefits of NFM (flood risk reduction, water quality), we have not been successful in raising any funds. Our key learning – although we hope this changes in the last half of the programme – is simply that NFM is a really hard sell to private investors especially in rural locations with fewer properties and no large corporate interest.