

Please see below the session summary of notes from the July 2026 Social Economy FORUM Collaboration Catalyst meeting focused on 'New formats, real connections and unlocking growth for our Social Economy'.

OUR HOSTS | This session opportunity was kindly hosted by [NatWest Accelerator Hub](#), 2 St Philips Place, Birmingham, B3 2RB

FACILITATED AND WRITTEN BY | [Jakira Khanam](#), Partnerships Lead, [BSSEC CIC](#)

We've been working on new plans for this year taking on board your feedback. It's clear that opportunities to network, share peer learning and unlock market opportunities are highly valued.

With that in mind, we kicked off the first of these new formats at the NatWest Accelerator hub in Birmingham to connect the social economy with the private sector. We delved into private sector support programmes, social value and inclusive supply-chains followed by table provocations.

We heard lots of buzz during the networking and I know many of you went away with connections and business opportunities!

Here is the summary of the main discussion points:

HARINDER KUNOR, Accelerator Community Manager, NatWest Accelerator



Harinder warmly welcomed the network to the Accelerator hub and invited the group to join the NatWest Accelerator Community, which is designed to support founders and business leaders as they start, scale and grow their ventures.

The programme provides free in-person and online support across several key areas:

- Community and co-working hubs
- Funding readiness
- Business growth
- Leadership development

To get started, please download the NatWest Accelerator App using the QR code below.



NatWest Accelerator Pitch competition

Applications are now officially open for the NatWest Accelerator Pitch competition, which will be taking place in Wolverhampton University on Thursday 10th September, 5pm onwards, coinciding with the official launch of a new Accelerator hub in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton. [View full details and encourage entries here.](#)

BASHIR AHMED MBE, Senior Consultant (Social Value), Arup



Bashir spoke about Arup and its approach to social value and its emerging 12 point plan, which aligns with WMCA priorities for the region. The points include greening cities, skills and employment one stop shops, empowered communities, safety and inclusivity by design, a sustainable transport first approach and retrofit alongside other priorities. Bashir is keen to engage the social economy in implementing the plan and sees great value in working together.

Arup is a global consultancy in the built environment. It views social value not as a tick-box compliance exercise but as a core design and strategy philosophy embedded throughout the entire project lifecycle.

Bashir also spoke about the different types of social value they deliver including apprenticeships and pro-bono consulting which can include planners and engineers. He mentioned the Springfield Lane CIC project which has received 25 hours of structural design time from two engineers.

You can find out more: [Social value and equity - Arup](#)

ANTOINETTE BLAKE, Race Campaign Lead/Inclusive Supply-Chains, Business in the Community



Antoinette spoke about the [Race at Work Charter](#), and its seven commitments, including [Commitment Z](#), which focuses on creating more inclusive supply chains by increasing opportunities for ethnically diverse-led businesses, founders and enterprise owners.

She also referred to a number of useful reports and a benchmarking model that is being rolled out so that employers can see how they are performing against inclusive-supply chain

- [Diverse and Inclusive Supply Chains Insights Report](#)
- [Building Fairer, More Inclusive Supply Chains](#)
- [IPMM webpage](#), an overview of the Inclusive Procurement Management Model developed by BiTC

During the discussion, there was a question about where SMEs can find procurement opportunities and connect with buyers. While there isn't a single platform that brings together all opportunities, these may be useful:

- [Kaleida](#) – A platform that helps connect buyers with diverse suppliers and supports organisations to build more inclusive supply chains.
- [MSDUK](#) – A membership organisation that works to connect ethnically diverse businesses with corporate and public sector buyers through networking, events and supplier development opportunities.

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In our table provocations, we had lively discussions and each group presented one big idea:

Provocation 1: Connecting policy to practical opportunities

Local authorities set social value goals, large contractors want to deliver them, and the social economy has the local solutions.

How can these three groups work more closely to turn policy targets into practical, everyday trading opportunities?

One big idea: help develop consortia, so that social economy organisations can work together to deliver on social value.

Provocation 2: Making supply chains more accessible

Diverse-led social businesses often bring incredible innovation but can struggle to access formal networks.

What simple, practical steps can the public and private sectors take to make their supply chains more accessible for these founders?

One big idea: develop a 1% club, where private 1% of private sector profit is used to support the social economy.

Provocation 3: Building long-term partnerships

True community impact comes from lasting relationships rather than one-off purchases.

How can corporate buyers and local authorities move to long-term partnerships that help the social economy grow and scale?

One big idea: develop a shared understanding and shared language so that different sectors can work together.

Provocation 4: Collaborating for larger contracts

Smaller social economy organisations have the local expertise but may lack the scale to bid for major contracts alone.

How can we design contracts or encourage local collaboration so smaller teams can join forces to deliver larger scale projects together?

One big idea: bring together collaboration of WMCA private sector clusters and social economy clusters.

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Practical steps for the public and private sector to engage the social economy

I'll leave you with some practical tips that we heard from this session to get more impactful social value. Any further ideas? Get in touch with the BSSEC team.

- Actively embed social economy organisations into tier 1 and tier 2 supply chains for procurement and service delivery.
- Involve the social economy in the design phase to co-create solutions rather than applying top-down interventions.
- Sharing skills and expertise and giving the social economy the tools they need to do the work themselves.

Our thanks to all who attended this COLLABORATION CATALYST session, our speakers and for the engaging contribution to this topic.

