

Collaborating to change lives

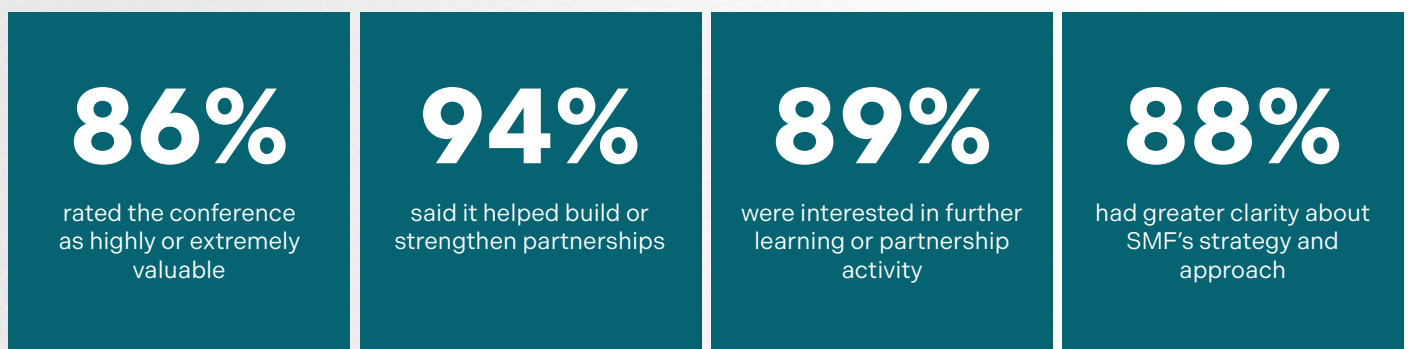


Regional lessons from the Steve Morgan Foundation 25th Anniversary Conference 2026

Overview

Drawing on feedback from key partners, charities, funders and policy stakeholders at the Steve Morgan Foundation 25th Anniversary Conference, this paper captures the strongest messages from the day and sets out the next step for our regionally focused funding: turning shared appetite for place-based change, prevention and collaboration into action.

Participant feedback on the conference



Participants told us:

- Place-based working is strongest when it builds relationships, coordination and local insight, not just activity in the same area.
- Prevention and early support matter most before disadvantage becomes entrenched.
- Structural barriers, including poverty, transport, digital exclusion, fragmented services, employment pathways, housing and health needs, continue to restrict opportunity.
- Lived experience should be central to design, learning and influence, alongside data, community evidence and frontline insight.

What this means for SMF's future role

What we have learned: Our experience over the past twenty-five years shows that lasting impact comes not just from funding activity, but from strengthening the relationships, knowledge and collaboration that underpin change.

Where SMF adds value: Participants reinforced that SMF's role lies not only in grant-making, but in using its independence, relationships and reach to help partners align effort, learn together and tackle barriers no single organisation can solve alone.

How our role should evolve: SMF to continue to invest in strong organisations while creating the space, evidence and partnerships needed to test new approaches, challenge the status quo and drive lasting place-based change.

How we will work: Back local leadership, connect partners, apply evidence and influence the systems that determine whether change lasts.

What will enable delivery: Our growing team capacity will help SMF act with greater focus and discipline. Enhanced regional leadership and roles across operations, communications and impact will strengthen the core functions needed to manage a sharper portfolio, respond to sector demand, amplify learning and maximise the value of the £100m strategy investment.



**Lasting
change is built
together.**



What this means in practice and priorities for action

Priority	Why it matters
Run focused follow-up sessions	Move from conference energy to practical collaboration around shared themes and places
Share learning, contacts and case studies where consent allows	Help partners find each other, learn from real examples and avoid duplication
Build lived experience into future work and decision-making	Keep people closest to the issues involved in design, learning and influence
Support long-term capacity	Systems change requires sustained relationships, coordination and ownership beyond individual funding cycles

A shared call to action

Expanded team capacity will turn conference interest into focused cross-sector collaboration for learning and impact. SMF will work alongside interested partners to connect organisations around shared priorities, develop practical collaboration and create stronger routes to impact.



The challenge now is clear: work with urgency, focus and ambition, and in Steve's words, "keep attacking".