

Exploring Location Data and the 360Giving Data Standard

A tradeoff from keeping it simple, March 2022

Introduction

People want to know where funding is going in the UK. And while 360Giving data that has been published so far can help tell that story, funders' location data isn't complete or consistent enough to allow for the kind of robust analysis that can really inform the understanding of the UK funding landscape.

360Giving has been open about this issue, and these challenges were highlighted in our [UK Covid relief and recovery grants: data analysis](#). At the time of writing the report, we stated that we could not provide geographical analysis of Covid grants awarded, and explained why.

In this report on the 360Giving Data Standard working group on geography, we have outlined work we have been doing to resolve these issues to enable users to be more confident when analysing 360Giving data by location. We've explained the research we have done, what our users have said and our next steps.

Our goals

Addressing issues related to location data and the 360Giving Data Standard is an integral part of delivering our [new strategy for 2022-25](#), 'Unleashing the impact of grants data'.

Goal 1: Increase relevant data available for informed decision-making

One way we will be able to tackle this situation is by supporting even more funders from around the UK to publish 360Giving data more generally. This is so users can be more certain if the data is showing a funding cold spot or a gap in the dataset. Indeed, our first goal in our new strategy is to increase relevant data available which will reduce these gaps.

Goal 2: Improve the quality and depth of data for increased usefulness

Our second strategy goal is to improve the quality and completeness of the location data already being shared, and we want to make it easier for funders to share useful location data

whenever they can. Over the past six months, we've been digging into the topic of location data in the 360Giving Data Standard, in order to better understand how to improve our guidance and support for funders in this area.

Goal 3: Enhance data use for greater impact

Finally, addressing some of the complexities around location data will enable us to make progress on our third goal of enhancing data use. We want to provide clear guidance for data users about the data itself, and how it's displayed in our tools, so that they can draw meaningful conclusions about place and avoid some of the known pitfalls.

Where are we now?

The 360Giving Data Standard was specifically designed to be simple for funders to adopt – firstly by allowing for publication of data in spreadsheets, so users don't have to know how to use technical data exchange formats (like XML or JSON). It was also kept simple to ensure that the minimum requirements would be achievable to the broadest range of funders possible.

Put simply, we wanted a low barrier to publishing and didn't want funders to be intimidated by the Data Standard. With this in mind (and as it stands) when funders share data, they must provide details of the who, how much, when and why of each grant, but the question of 'where' did the grant go is optional. That approach has worked – there are now over 200 funders sharing their grants data from across sectors. Publishing funders range from the large lottery funders, to central and local government, to small trustee-led family trusts.

Our existing support and guidance encourages funders to share location data when they can, and the majority of organisations sharing 360Giving data do so. However, there is still more to be done.

Two different types of location

The 360Giving Data Standard includes a range of ways to describe locations – which are split into two main types: recipient and 'beneficiary'¹ location.

- Recipient location is where the recipient of a grant is based.

¹ Note: "Beneficiary" is a term used in this report because it references the field name created in the original 360Giving Data Standard. We recognise that it is not an ideal term and it is being used in the context and limitations of existing structures. We are reviewing our longer term options to change this language in the 360Giving Data Standard.

- Beneficiary location is either where the funded work is being delivered or the people who access the funded work are based.

Many funders collect address information from applicants during the grants management process, which makes including recipient location information relatively straightforward.

However, including beneficiary location can provide a more useful and accurate picture of where grants are going geographically – as these fields focus on where the impact of the funding is being directed. Beneficiary location moves away from where offices are based to where the work, and its impact, is actually happening. However, this data has often been a more difficult type of location data for funders to collect and use.

To the research!

We worked with Alasdair Rae (Independent Consultant, Automatic Knowledge) to review the location data shared by 360Giving publishers. He was asked to provide an independent and expert view on the usefulness and limitations from a user perspective, and share examples of good practice which could help us improve our approaches.

A key test – when is data fit for purpose?

The research included a key test. The location data in 360Giving dataset was classed as “fit for purpose” if it could be:

- Viewed in a map
- Queried and filtered using commonly used spatial units
- Possible to make sense of the results

Based on this test, recipient location data was found to be fit for purpose, and is up to 80% complete. Yet, although some funding organisations’ beneficiary data is fit for purpose, overall in the dataset it is only 29% complete and is varied in quality and different types of data.

Therefore it did not pass this test.

The research highlighted that location data in general can be a type of “goldmine field” – a great raw resource that also comes with challenges of comprehension and risks of misuse or lack of use.

While beneficiary location data has the most potential to provide insights about the impacts of funding geographically, there is also real-world complexity associated with trying to collect this type of information. For example, it isn’t straightforward to capture location data about projects or organisations operating in a range of places, or when needing to work with location

area data at different levels, ranging from a single estate, or neighbourhood up to regions or whole countries.

More considerations

Here are a few of the questions that have arisen whilst we have been working on location data. In the case of funding for a community sports team is the location the home of the participants or in a sports venue? Time period is another complication, as there could be a long period over which impacts might occur. It may not be possible for organisations to know the location, or things may change between time of the application and eventual impact.

Yet there are huge benefits to be gained from using location data well. By unlocking where grants are going, funders can understand the degree to which funding is aligned to their aims and local needs.

What can we do with recipient data? And its limitations?

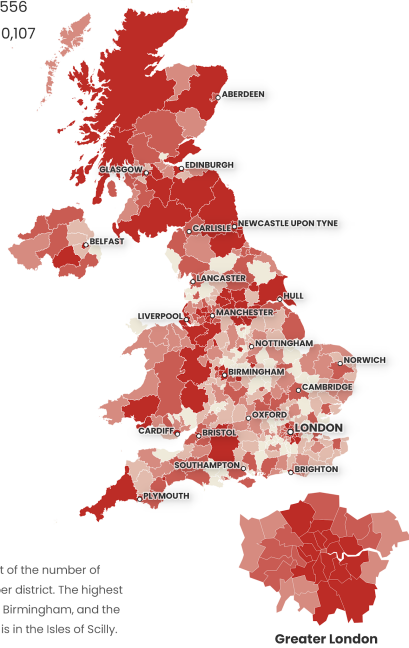
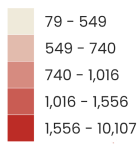
The relative completeness of recipient location data means it is possible to be confident about the location of 80% of grants (78% of the total by value). Recipient location data needs to be properly understood by users in order to avoid misinterpretation. It is possible to create maps of this data that aren't that useful.

For example, it is easy to create a map of the UK using all the 360Giving data with recipient location showing the total number or total value of grants, and this will tell you some useful things about where the organisations receiving grants are based. But the usefulness of these maps is limited because of the significant issue known as the 'headquarters effect' where funding appears to disproportionately go to large cities, particularly London, because that is where many charities head offices are based. This issue can be further exacerbated by the make-up of the funders sharing 360Giving data, as there are more, larger funders operating at a regional or national level but important gaps remaining in the local funding picture, for example some community foundations who do not yet publish their data.

It is possible to increase the value and insight that can be derived from a map by applying standardisation to the data, for example by showing the number of grants by 10,000 people or only areas which have received more than £1,000 per head.

However, even these maps will have limitations and show a skewed picture because they don't account for funding received for region or country-wide activities or organisations.

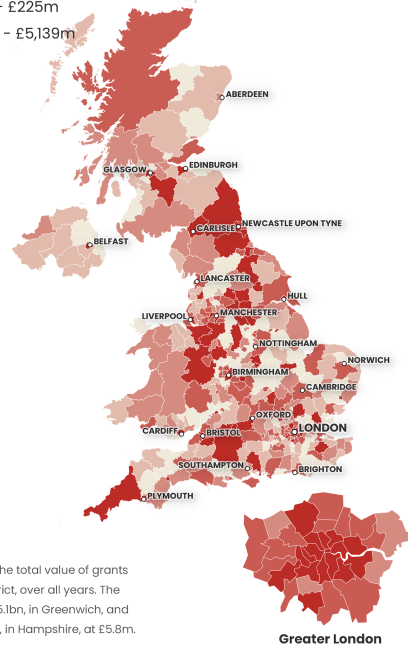
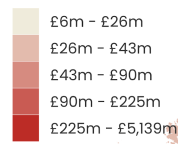
Total Grants Awarded



Notes

This is a raw count of the number of grants awarded per district. The highest figure (10,107) is in Birmingham, and the lowest figure (79) is in the Isles of Scilly.

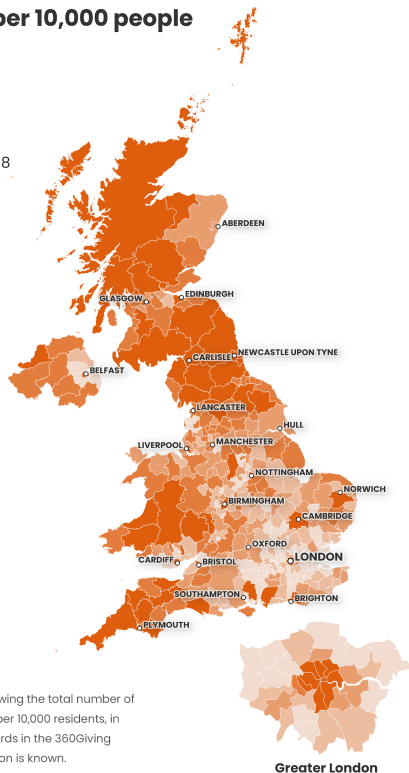
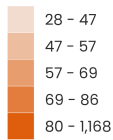
Total Value Awarded



Notes

This is a map of the total value of grants awarded, by district, over all years. The highest total is £5.1bn, in Greenwich, and the lowest is Hart, in Hampshire, at £5.8m.

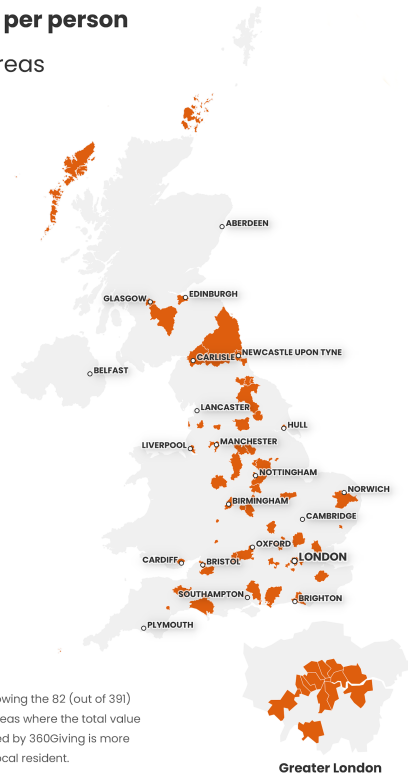
Grants per 10,000 people



Notes

This is a map showing the total number of grants awarded, per 10,000 residents, in relation to all awards in the 360Giving data where location is known.

£1,000+ per person



Notes

This is a map showing the 82 (out of 391) local authority areas where the total value of grants recorded by 360Giving is more than £1,000 per local resident.

Image credit: Alasdair Rae, Automatic Knowledge

Given the intrinsic challenges with both recipient and beneficiary location data, the research focused on recommendations to simplify data collection and sharing so that knowledge is maximised.

Our user feedback

Alongside a deep dive into the data itself, we ran a survey to get the perspectives of funders sharing data and users of the 360Giving dataset to identify their goals and challenges when working with location data. The largest proportion of respondents were from local or regional funders that published 360Giving data (58%), but survey responses also featured views from national and international funders as well as researchers and infrastructure bodies.

The survey results supported what we had already heard anecdotally about the challenges funders faced when working with location data. The barriers to sharing more location data included lack of capacity at a funder level to collect granular data as well as practical challenges, especially when working with more complex data. Respondents also cited their concerns about data quality, privacy or the potential for location information to be misinterpreted as reasons they didn't share more data.

Respondents were most interested in beneficiary location data (92%) with high interest in recipient location (79%), and more unexpectedly over 40% were interested in data about the location of funders themselves (the survey data is not clear why this is, but it could be because of an interest in seeing how many funders are based outside of London).

People wanted to use location data to understand the geographic distribution of grants and charities compared to needs, and layer grants data with official statistics. There was interest in being able to map grants in a more accurate and meaningful way, and see where the impact of funding is felt. There was also interest in looking at funding trends over time and identifying hot- and cold-spots and comparing with other funders.

In terms of what would help publishers and users to get more out of location data, most wanted clearer guidance about location data and what it means (55%), followed by training to use it more effectively (51%) and changes to the 360Giving Data Standard (48%).

Exploring the issues

In order to dig into the findings of the survey and research in more depth, we held three facilitated discussions, with a Working Group of funders recruited from survey participants. These discussions were designed to explore how funders work with location data, their goals and challenges and consider the possible solutions to the issues with location data in 360Giving Data Standard.

The goal of using location data

For the funders in the group, location data was more often used to evaluate their grantmaking as a whole, rather than being used to determine individual grant decisions. While there were a range of approaches to collecting and working with location data, there was broad alignment in their two goals in using it:

1. To see areas of funding impact, where there is duplication and gaps
2. To identify opportunities for collaboration

Challenges of collecting and working with location data

The challenges the group faced working with location data mirrored those raised in the survey. In particular the difficulties working with grants with multiple beneficiary locations, the challenges of accurately describing the location funding with area-wide activities or impact, or online activities which have no real-world location.

The key feedback from participants was that any change must be optional and backwards-compatible (i.e. it will work with data that has already been published). Publishers will need to consider the impact of any additional data collection on grant applicants.

We considered a range of potential solutions to improve the consistency of data, such as standardising or recommending few types of location data, agreeing shared definitions and also introducing the concept of “location scope”, which is explained below. We also explored ways to enable more precision in the data that is shared, through adding weighting or percentage splits to locations.

Options explored

We explored the following proposals in detail with the users who participated in the working group. Some were proposed by the research we commissioned, and others had been raised previously by stakeholders of the 360Giving Data Standard. We sought to understand whether they would be good solutions to the problems faced by users of the Standard, or whether there were significant objections or barriers to implementation..

1. Revise 360Giving Data Standard so beneficiary location is captured in simplified manner, with emphasis on postcode unit if possible.

A recommendation from the research was to simplify beneficiary location data in the Standard, and promote the use of postcodes whenever possible. Data quality and consistency are vital

for making data usable and useful for decision making, and making things easier is an important way to achieve that goal.

However, the discussions highlighted that the types and granularity of location data used by funders will depend on the needs of organisations. A funder that gives lots of small grants will have different challenges than a funder that gives fewer, larger grants. For example, a funder with UK-wide programmes will need different information than a local funder. Postcodes have an important role to play but aren't going to be suitable for many types of funders, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach that could be implemented in 360Giving data.

For this reason we decided not to take this proposal forward, and our new guidance on geography explains how publishers can decide what is the right level of location data to publish for them.

2. Adding a new field that describes locations in terms of scope

A location scope field has been proposed to provide a way to allow funders to get started with location data - labelling grants as national, regional or local in scope rather than requiring specific location data to be collected. There is also potential for using location scope data alongside postcode data to qualify how postcode data should be interpreted.

This simplified approach to location data would require the development of a new shared vocabulary for describing different concepts of scope that makes sense to those collecting and using the data. Starting to collect this data may require a process or system change, and therefore may not have immediate take-up by funders. Alongside this, there is a need for a shared approach to describing when grants do not have location, so funders know what to do with cases of 'not applicable', 'policy' or 'online'.

We decided to take this proposal forward, and we will engage with a wider set of users of the Standard in our upcoming consultation.

3. Adding ability to provide weighting when sharing multiple locations

A grant can fund activities in more than one delivery location, and when the location covers a wide area, the impacts might not be evenly distributed. Allowing funders to be able to show the weighting or split of funding within and across areas would help provide a more accurate account of where their funding is going, but this may be unduly onerous for grant applicants who will need to provide this data.

The 360Giving Data Standard allows for publishing of multiple locations per grant, so the structures are in place to support this development. However sharing data about multiple locations can be tricky, especially for publishers sharing their data using spreadsheets – which

is currently 99% of those publishing on 360Giving. It can also be difficult to use and analyse this data due to its complexity.

Because of this complexity, we decided not to take this proposal forward, and our guidance does explain alternative ways of sharing information about multiple locations.

Taking a balanced approach

The discussions helped to highlight the need for any new approaches to collecting data to be proportionate, considering grant applicants, staff managing grants processes as well as those working with and publishing the data. The processes should not put a burden on those providing or collecting the data.

In considering the complexity of the issues, there was a sense of needing to balance the messy reality with providing useful data. Although there are drivers to collect more specific information, there are trade-offs and data may need to be less granular in order to make it more comparable and usable. As well as taking steps to improve data quality, it is also important to be open about limitations of what can be done with location data that is available, and avoid overstating what can be known about impact geographically.

Where next?

With a topic as complex and wide-ranging as location data, there was never going to be a single way to fix all the issues. These issues are challenging for a reason, but getting the time to explore these throughout the working group project has brought greater clarity and ways forward for both the 360Giving Data Standard, and the support 360Giving provides for those publishing and using location data.

Here's what we're going to do next in order to progress the issue of location data:

Better guidance for publishers and users

A first and important step is to provide more and better guidance to help publishers make decisions about what location data to share, and provide more clarity on how these choices affect how their data will be interpreted and used. As well as guides, there is a role for case studies to highlight types of location data and practice amongst funders – although there is no one-size-fits-all, there are things funders can learn from each other.

We created [new guidance on location data here](#). Alongside this, we will also improve the explanations in 360Giving tools about the different types of location data available and how these are used.

Updates to the 360Giving Data Standard

For changes that would have an impact on the 360Giving Data Standard itself, we're launching a consultation to get feedback from publishers and users on the proposals, to make sure we're considering the implications and prioritising changes that will make the most difference.

You can have your say about the introduction of a new location scope field in our forthcoming consultation, which we will be sharing in the next few weeks.

Unpacking the language of the Standard

As well as consulting the introduction of a new location scope field, we want to get more clarity on the type of locations funders are capturing data about. The fields in the 360Giving Data Standard are called 'Beneficiary location' but we know the information that is shared using these fields isn't only about where the 'people who benefit' from the funding are based. It can also be used to describe an organisation's area of operation, the location of a building or green space, or where an activity is being delivered. While our survey provided useful information about respondents' challenges and interest in 'beneficiary location' we need to dig deeper into what people mean when they talk about the places that feel the impact of their funding.

The use of the term 'Beneficiary location' is obscuring some of the nuances behind the data but it is also important to acknowledge that this is a term which we want to move away from as it encodes the power imbalance between those that 'benefit' and the generous 'benefactor'.

In our newest tool, the Data Quality Dashboard, we started to use the word 'grant' in place of 'beneficiary' location. Once we have more insights into the types of location data currently labelled as 'beneficiary location' we will be able to consider if there is a more appropriate term that could be used instead.

We want to hear your thoughts on this issue in our forthcoming consultation, which we will be sharing in the next few weeks.

Acknowledgements

360Giving is grateful to all respondents who took the time to respond to our survey and especially the participants in the working group for helping us to better understand the needs of funders so we can provide better solutions and improved support.

We'd also like to give a particular thank you to Alasdair Rae and Dirk Slater.