

Engaging men in your project: a good practice guide



Thinking about engaging men in your project

This guide is written to introduce groups to ideas about how to ensure that their services take account of men's needs and so attract more men.

Why think about men's needs?

The Big Lottery Fund – and the projects we support – have a responsibility to ensure that services both meet real needs, and do so across all sections of society.

In reviewing information we gather about beneficiaries as part of our equalities monitoring, it became apparent to us that many fewer men than women were making use of the services we fund. Very few projects were specifically targeted at men, and many projects that would welcome more involvement from men were having problems attracting them.

But it is clear that men as a group are affected more than women by some problems. These include a range of health issues, and lifespan itself: on average, men don't live as long as women. Statistics also show that men and boys suffer more from effects of unemployment and financial insecurity, are more likely to be disaffected with education and to be excluded from school. And very tellingly, suicide is the second most common cause of death in England and Wales among men under 35.

Of course, those concerns are a generalisation, but they are drawn from statistics about the male population as a whole. What they tell us though is that BIG does need to promote the importance of meeting such needs more effectively.

This good practice guide sets out some of the ways that groups have considered helping to meet men's needs. It presents some general ideas and approaches that you may find useful in doing this, as well as setting out some sources of further information and support that will help you think about this further.

Ways of reaching men

Consult with men about their needs and preferences

Many projects make sure that they seek the views of a wide range of potential beneficiaries from the planning stage. There is no reason why you shouldn't consider men as a group as part of this.

- ▶ Don't assume that you know what men want or what their needs are.
- ▶ Consider active efforts to seek men's views – for instance, through outreach. This should involve going to venues that men use and tapping in to men's networks. Those venues and networks are likely to vary according to the focus of your project and the types of men your project needs to target. You may consider some obvious (and often a bit stereotypical) places like pubs, gyms and sporting venues, all of which may be good for speaking to men in an environment where they feel comfortable.
- ▶ Speak to other projects that have good contact with your target group and find out how they did it.
- ▶ So for young men, for instance, you may begin with colleges, schools, youth centres and sports pitches, but through talking to young men there and to other people involved with your project, you should get more ideas about where and how to engage with more young men.
- ▶ You can also ask those you consult or work with to try to get two or three other men to speak to you – and repeat the process with any who do. This can be a good way of making contacts in groups that are harder to identify and reach.
- ▶ Building up good and trusting relationships with people in those networks can promote more involvement through word-of-mouth recommendation.
- ▶ Running focus groups can be a good way of getting more in-depth information about men's needs.

- ▶ You can contact men's networks indirectly – for instance by working with occupations that are dominated by men (such as taxi drivers).
- ▶ Make sure that your use of language and images shows that you're interested in male involvement.
- ▶ Remember that men make up half the population and that their interests and priorities vary.
- ▶ Make sure that you continue to consult men throughout the life of your project and that you show how you've taken their concerns into account.

Design your project with men in mind

People may feel uncomfortable about using a service if it seems to be aimed at other types of people. This applies as much to men as anyone else.

- ▶ Make sure that you include images of men in any promotion of and within your project.
- ▶ As far as possible, plan opening hours and services in a way that meets men's needs (among others'). This may mean, for instance, offering services outside normal working hours. Offering flexible times and venues is even better.
- ▶ Be aware that some men perceive some venues – such as nurseries, schools and family centres – as 'feminine'. If you are using venues like those you may need to make even more effort.



- ▶ Actively promote your project to men. Use the effective venues and networks you've identified already to advertise your services. And remember that word-of-mouth promotion is often the best way.
- ▶ Allow service users to choose the level of involvement that suits them.
- ▶ Get feedback from men using your service about what they like and what could be improved.

Use 'hooks' to build interest

- ▶ Engaging men involves marketing your service – and as in all marketing, special offers (or 'hooks') can draw people in. Just advertising what you offer may not be enough.
- ▶ Remember that 'free' is a useful word in marketing!
- ▶ Offering a range of hooks may help to attract men with different interests and backgrounds.

Projects we've spoken to have suggested the examples below.

Promotional offers for different groups of men

- For fathers – a free family photo
- For older men – a free health check-up
- For younger men – trips and residential events
- For men in general – free gym membership, increased access to sporting facilities and free food.

Build partnerships with others

- ▶ Identify any other local services that work with your target group and build up contact with them. They may be able to give you useful tips, but can also promote your service directly. This approach will work even better if you can identify shared goals or co-ordinate your services.
- ▶ This isn't just about other service providers – the types of venues that men visit are equally as important.
- ▶ Remember that if these other services have a good relationship with their male clientele, their recommendation of your service may make all the difference.

Remember that your clients are individuals

Much of the advice we give here may tend to regard men as a single group or a set of sub-groups. You may need to adopt that approach to some extent to reach out to more men, but be careful not to adopt easy stereotypes. Most importantly, treat all your current and potential service users as individuals.

- ▶ Personal outreach at all stages of your engagement and delivery process is probably the most effective approach of all. People respond best to having their needs and preferences heard and acknowledged.
- ▶ Offering one-to-one sessions with men who are interested in your service is very useful in building and maintaining trust. A named contact can encourage men to keep in touch with your service.
- ▶ Consider individual support needs and respond to them. Depending on your project and individual, it may be worth working with partners, friends and families too.
- ▶ Encourage and respond to feedback.

Offer different levels of involvement

Remember that most projects exist to provide their beneficiaries with a specific service. But beneficiaries may wish to get more involved and in different ways – this is an opportunity for you to grab!

- ▶ Build volunteering opportunities into your project, especially for men who have benefited from your services. These men can encourage others to take part and offer their own experiences of the benefits of doing so.

- ▶ Offering a range of types and levels of volunteering activities is likely to be most effective. Some men may be happy to offer general assistance and support; others may prefer to become advocates on behalf of other users.
- ▶ Consider how far you can link to formal volunteering services and offer accreditation to volunteers.
- ▶ User involvement of this sort allows even more effective ways of improving your project and ensuring that it meets the needs of your target group.



Further information

This leaflet can only offer an overview of ways of engaging more effectively with men. It is based on Invisible Men: engaging more men in social projects, a study undertaken for the Big Lottery Fund by the Young Foundation in 2012. You can read that report and a number of inspiring case studies on our website, www.biglotteryfund.org.uk. We will provide further links on our website in response to feedback and recommendations.

Some organisations that work specifically with men include the following:

Working with Men promote good practice in working with men and boys.

See www.workingwithmen.org

ManKind support male victims of abuse.

See www.mankind.org.uk

The Men's Shed movement combats isolation among older men through DIY projects.

See www.mensheds.org.au

Movember raise funds for and awareness of male health issues, especially prostate and other cancers, through 'Mo bros' who get sponsored to grow moustaches throughout the month of November.

See www.uk.movember.com

Stock code

BIG-R+LEngagingMen

Photography

Mark Campbell, Peter Devlin, Simona De Michelis, Alan Fletcher and Chris Watt

Further information is available from:

Email:
general.enquiries@biglotteryfund.org.uk

Phone:
0845 4 10 20 30

Textphone:
0845 6 02 16 59

Our website
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Accessibility

Please contact us to discuss any specific communication needs you may have.

Our equality principles, mission and values

We are committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need. To find out more about our equality principles, mission and values, visit our website.

We care about the environment

The Big Lottery Fund seeks to minimise its negative environmental impact and only uses proper sustainable resources.

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