

Beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

A study by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research

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Executive summary

This report presents findings from a study undertaken by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) on behalf of the BIG Lottery Fund (BIG) to explore the organisation's experiences of involving beneficiaries in funding processes, including needs assessment, programme design and awards. BIG has also involved beneficiaries in other ways that are beyond the scope of this study (e.g. community-based funding and large-scale public consultations).

This study was commissioned at a time when BIG wanted to review and improve the way that it funds in order to meet its mission more effectively and efficiently. Although BIG has been involving beneficiaries in funding processes for some time now, there is no overall requirement to do so, nor is there a standard way to organise this. The findings of this study will contribute to BIG's wider thinking about whether and when to involve beneficiaries, as well as the practical and resource implications.

This study was carried out between November 2012 and March 2013 and used a qualitative research approach. Research activities included: interviews with BIG staff; case studies of four BIG programmes; interviews with a small number of other funders; and analysis of relevant BIG documents and literature on participation.

In this summary we outline the study's key findings.

Beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

- This study focused on 12 programmes in which beneficiaries had been involved in funding processes. We found that involvement varied widely according to programme budget, geographic focus, length of involvement (notably whether one-off or sustained), type of beneficiary group and the stage of grant-making where involvement took place.
- BIG approaches beneficiary involvement in three main ways:
 - Involving specific beneficiary groups in decisions about programmes.
 - Working with an intermediary organisation that brokers contact with beneficiaries and/or facilitates their involvement
 - Involving the general public in deciding how funding should be spent through public voting.
- The three main features of beneficiary involvement that vary across programmes are function, intensity and methods.
 - **Function (or purpose)** of involvement is determined by the stages of grant-making where involvement occurs – most often in needs assessment, programme design and award.
 - **Intensity** of beneficiaries' involvement ranges from lengthy and in-depth to short or one-off experiences.
 - **Methods** of involvement are chosen for their suitability to a particular stage in the funding process. The three methods used most frequently are focus group discussions, decision making panels and public voting.

- Different approaches for beneficiary involvement at BIG are appropriate in different contexts and *'one size does not fit all'*. Three determinants of approach were identified as:
 - Stage of the grant-making process for which beneficiary involvement is required
 - Perceived needs and capabilities of the beneficiary group e.g. use of social media with young people
 - Available resources to support beneficiary involvement, including staffing and finance.

Benefits of beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

- Beneficiary involvement demonstrates BIG's commitment to engagement as a principle, and sets an expectation for grantees to involve beneficiaries. Activities involving members of the public serve to raise awareness and foster support for BIG.
- Inclusion of beneficiaries' perspectives was described as resulting in more *'grounded'* and *'robust'* funding outcomes. Beneficiaries were thought to bring knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to BIG's funding processes.
- There were examples of involvement in needs assessment activities that resulted in improved access to harder to reach groups, and increased the number of people consulted.
- There were examples where beneficiaries' involvement challenged existing thinking at BIG and affected the course of a programme's development.
- Involving beneficiaries in public events, e.g. a launch event, was said to have enhanced the public perception of a programme.

Challenges of beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

- Establishing *'representative'* beneficiary groups was complex. Whilst *'direct'* or *'lived'* experience was considered valuable, study participants acknowledged that beneficiaries' perspectives are also subjective.
- Beneficiary involvement suffers if activities are rushed, if beneficiaries are not properly inducted into BIG's established funding systems and processes and if BIG staff do not adapt practices where necessary.
- Beneficiary involvement in funding processes is resource intensive and requires appropriate amounts of money, organisation and staff time. Staff hold different opinions concerning the payment of beneficiaries on practical and ethical grounds.
- In order for beneficiaries to have a positive experience with BIG, they need adequate support to handle both the practical and the emotional demands they face. Linked to this, BIG staff suggested that it was important to manage beneficiaries' expectations

by ensuring they understand their role, by maintaining momentum throughout involvement and identifying appropriate ways to end participation.

- BIG can adapt or adjust its processes to prepare for beneficiary involvement by: improving induction, training and confidence building for beneficiaries; and ensuring staff and committee roles accommodate involvement.

Options for future beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

- There is strong support for involving beneficiaries in BIG's future funding processes as well as widespread understanding of the relationship between involvement and BIG's core value of 'involving people' and its commitment to 'intelligent funding'.
- Beneficiary involvement has improved incrementally, with new programmes learning from, and building on, previous ones. However, there was agreement that BIG's approach could be improved in places (i.e. improving induction, training and confidence building for beneficiaries; and ensuring staff and committee roles accommodate involvement).
- When beneficiaries are invited to become involved in BIG's funding processes, they are expected to work within BIG's existing funding development framework. As such their views become '*another piece of the jigsaw*' of funding development alongside other evidence and influences that BIG assembles. BIG might be more explicit about this with participants. We found that the concept of '*invited spaces*' shed light on the nature of beneficiary involvement at BIG: beneficiaries are 'invited' to participate in BIG's 'space' i.e. the already established funding development framework.
- Building on BIG's experience as well as the study findings, our report suggests that it might be better for BIG to focus on recruiting groups that offer a range of experiences rather than imagining that these groups could ever be 'representative' of a particular group, experience or condition.
- We also suggest that BIG should maintain its flexible approach to beneficiary involvement and continues to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. It may be appropriate to think of beneficiary involvement at BIG as a spectrum where function, methods and intensity of involvement can vary.
- Beneficiary involvement can be strategic as well as flexible if appropriate policy and practice are embedded in BIG's funding development framework and other core functions such as finance and communications. In terms of staff responsibilities, we would recommend the following:
 1. Build on the energy and enthusiasm of staff that have successfully made beneficiary involvement happen in the programmes they design, manage and deliver. How can they best share their experience with their colleagues? How can they be enabled to continue working in this way?
 2. Enable Funding Officers to connect with beneficiaries within their existing roles and responsibilities e.g. by visiting projects to learn from their work 'in the field'.

3. Support finance, communications and other core functions at BIG to identify and adapt systems and processes to enable beneficiary involvement – for example, in matters of beneficiaries' payment and communication/public relation strategies where beneficiaries are involved. There is currently no corporate view on the question of paying beneficiaries.
- Establishing a framework for thinking about and making decisions regarding beneficiary involvement will usefully support staff in the future. Appendix Two offers a preliminary framework.

Part One: Introduction

This report presents findings from a study undertaken by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) to explore the organisation's experience of involving beneficiaries in funding processes. *Involving People* is one of seven core values that underpin BIG's work; this is highlighted in BIG's strategic framework update - *Fresh Thinking*:

*'We recognise that Lottery money does belong to communities and through our initiatives we will continue to empower local people to develop their own solutions to the issues and opportunities that face them.'*¹

This study, carried out between November 2012 and March 2013, provided an opportunity to review the steps that BIG has taken to involve beneficiaries and to consider what beneficiary involvement might look like in the future. In particular, BIG was interested to learn whether a more systematic approach to beneficiary involvement might be appropriate. Our focus was on beneficiary involvement in programme development and grant-making up to and including the point at which grant decisions are made. Our investigation into beneficiary involvement at BIG was complemented by a modest inquiry into approaches used by other funders.

We use the term 'beneficiaries' in this study to describe the individuals who will potentially benefit from a funding programme, e.g. young people who help to shape a programme for youth opportunities. The term 'involvement' is used to refer to a wide variety of methods, including panels, focus groups and online participation.

1. Research questions

Our research aimed to address five main questions:

1. What approaches to beneficiary involvement have BIG and other funders used?
2. Are different approaches more effective for different purposes, situations and audiences?
3. What are the benefits for the funder and beneficiary of being involved at different points in BIG's funding processes?
4. What are the practical, ethical and representational issues about involving beneficiaries and how can they be overcome?
5. What options are there for BIG's future engagement of beneficiaries in terms of good practice, cost effectiveness and legitimacy?

The focus of this study has been on 12 programmes where beneficiaries were involved in one or more of the following: needs assessment, design and awards. We note here that BIG has made significant investment in other forms of beneficiary involvement which lie outside the scope of this research. For example, BIG has funded two programmes – Fair Share and Big Local – that endow defined local communities with a pot of money that residents then determine how and when to spend. BIG has established Trusts (the Fair Share Trust and the Local Trust) to oversee these programmes. Here, neither BIG or the trustees intervene closely in community decisions about priorities or funding choices, although the Trusts have established very broad parameters and requirements for accountability. This rather more advanced level of beneficiary involvement (if not control) has been facilitated by the use of a Trust model, which has effectively freed beneficiary communities from some of the

¹ BIG (2012) *Big's strategic framework refresh: Fresh thinking – The next chapter*, London: Big Lottery Fund

bureaucratic constraints associated with public funding. Given the complexity of that model and the fact that decisions about the level of involvement are removed at an early stage from BIG's funding development and decision-making processes, we do not consider those programmes in this study.²

From November 2008 to February 2009, BIG also carried out their largest ever public consultation, *What you told us*³, to shape their strategic direction to 2015. This is a major activity BIG has undertaken to involve users, however it is not included in this research study in order to retain a focus upon beneficiary involvement in *funding processes* at BIG.

2. Approach and methods

In order to meet the aims of the study, data was gathered in the following ways:

- **Interviews with 10 BIG staff**, either by phone or face to face. Those selected had experience of implementing beneficiary involvement across a range of funding programmes and diverse groups of beneficiaries. Topics explored during these interviews included: experiences of beneficiary involvement; different approaches used; the opportunities, benefits and challenges related to beneficiary involvement; and future options at BIG for beneficiary involvement.
- **Participant observation** at an 'Involving Beneficiaries Learning Session' held by BIG in November 2012. This was attended by BIG staff and representatives from INVOLVE, the National Institute for Health Research and the Social Care Institute for Excellence.
- **Case studies of four BIG programmes** which involved beneficiaries in order to learn more from their direct experiences of beneficiary involvement. Four programmes were selected that dedicated a significant amount of time and resources to beneficiary involvement, reflected a range of approaches and involved different groups of beneficiaries. The programmes were: *Talent Match* and *Empowering Young People* (with young people), *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* (with older people) and *Millennium Now* (in partnership with Channel 4). Material for the case studies was collected through interviews with individuals who were involved in developing or managing programmes and who could offer insights into beneficiaries' perspectives. Interviews took place with seven BIG staff, one BIG committee member, three beneficiaries and one intermediary organisation.
- **Interviews with other funders**. A small number of funders were identified using IVAR's networks and the Association of Charitable Foundation's Funder Network. Interviews explored: approaches to, and experiences of, beneficiary involvement; the opportunities, benefits and challenges related to beneficiary involvement; future options for beneficiary involvement within their organisation.

² For more information refer to the following:

- www.localtrust.org.uk/big-local
- Sally Downs Consulting (2005) *Evaluation of the fair share initiative*, London: Big Lottery Fund (www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/stronger-communities/evaluating-fair-share)
- Wells et al (2012) *Research study into outsourcing grant-making*, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research Sheffield Hallam University (www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/better-funding/outsourcing-our-grant-making)

³ BIG (2009) *What you told us*, London: Big Lottery Fund

- **Review and analysis of BIG strategy and documents** relating to 12 funding programmes; and of **existing literature on participation** for insights into beneficiary involvement in funding processes.

3. Our report

This report sets out our findings from interviews and a review of BIG documents as described above. Where relevant we draw on literature about participation in order to shed light on some of the issues raised by our findings, although we note that the majority of existing literature on participation is not directly relevant to funding processes.

We refer to those who took part in the study as ‘study participants’. Their views are presented anonymously and are illustrated with unattributed quotations (indicated in italics). Where appropriate we indicate if opinions were expressed by a particular group of study participants, e.g. BIG staff, but we do not name individuals. Given that this is a qualitative rather than a quantitative study, we do not indicate the number of people holding any particular point of view.

In Part Two of the report we describe aspects of beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG to date. Parts Three and Four consider the benefits and then the challenges of beneficiary involvement. In Part Five, we discuss key issues and questions raised by our findings, drawing on relevant literature and the experiences of other funders. We relate our findings to future options for beneficiary involvement at BIG.

Part Two: Beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

In this part of the report we describe beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG to date. We begin with an overview of the 12 programmes we have looked at, before moving on to discuss in turn:

- BIG's motivation for beneficiary involvement
- Approaches to beneficiary involvement
- Key features of beneficiary involvement
- Making decisions about beneficiary involvement at BIG.

4. Overview of beneficiary involvement

BIG has accumulated a considerable amount of experience in beneficiary involvement in funding processes. Currently, however, BIG does not have a framework or policy regarding the involvement of beneficiaries in funding processes.⁴

Working with BIG, we identified 12 programmes in which beneficiaries had been involved. These formed the focus of our study and are described in the table of beneficiary involvement at BIG (Appendix One). From our interviews and a review of relevant documents, we learned that there is wide variation in beneficiary involvement at BIG in relation to the following factors:

- Scale: Beneficiary involvement occurred in programmes with budgets ranging from £2 million to £200 million
- Region: Beneficiary involvement occurred in programmes in each of the four countries and across the UK
- Time: Beneficiary involvement ranged from one off events to regular participation for a set period of time
- Beneficiary group: These varied from any member of the public through to specific sub-groups such as young people with a disability
- Stage of grant-making: Involvement took place at every stage of the funding process with programme design being the most common stage for beneficiaries to be involved.

5. BIG's motivation for beneficiary involvement

We found strong consensus amongst study participants about the motivation to involve beneficiaries in BIG's funding processes. They considered that the notion of *'involving people'* has been one of the organisation's core values since its establishment, shaping policy, practice and decisions. They further suggested that beneficiary involvement is of *'core importance'* to BIG's mission and strategy and that it reflects its ambition to be an *'intelligent funder'*. These views align with statements published by BIG about its strategic direction⁵ as well as with statements and directions from government.⁶

⁴ Overall programme development at BIG occurs within the funding development framework and documentation.

⁵ BIG (2012) *BIG's strategic framework refresh: Fresh thinking – the next chapter*, London: Big Lottery Fund.

⁶ *Directions given to the Big Lottery Fund under section 36E(1)(b) of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993.*

Many study participants highlighted public and community involvement as critically important values and strategies for BIG. Beneficiary involvement was described as a core value and as a *'moral imperative at BIG'*. Participants believed that beneficiary involvement:

- Provides legitimacy and accountability about BIG's work on a broader level
- Emphasises BIG's commitment to involvement with their applicants and stakeholders. Beneficiary involvement allows BIG to lead by example: *'The path of building involvement has been about doing what we ask projects to do'*.
- Offers opportunities for BIG's beneficiaries, including lottery users, to have a greater sense of ownership in programmes and activities.

6. Approaches to beneficiary involvement

BIG has approached beneficiary involvement in funding processes in three main ways, although the first and second approaches may sometimes overlap.

6.1 Involving target beneficiary groups in programme design, development and award

This has been achieved through BIG inviting or recruiting specific groups of beneficiaries (including young people, older people and people with multiple and complex needs) to participate. Their engagement has occurred for various lengths of time – from seven months in the *Talent Match* programme development, to single consultation events in the *Fulfilling Lives: Supporting People with Multiple and Complex Needs* programme. Beneficiaries were usually engaged via BIG's networks of charities and voluntary and community sector organisations.

6.2 Working with an intermediary organisation to facilitate involvement of a specific beneficiary group

Most of the BIG programmes that we examined had worked with an intermediary organisation which already had contact with the beneficiary group of interest. For example, in the 12 programmes covered by our study, intermediary organisations included AGE UK in *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* and Channel 4 in *Millennium Now*. Intermediary organisations primarily helped BIG to make contact with groups of beneficiaries, but where BIG was interested in involving people with complex needs or living in vulnerable situations, intermediary organisations also facilitated and supported involvement.

'I wouldn't have known how to recruit people with multiple and complex needs or how to organise the meeting.'

For example, in *Life Changes Trust*, Alzheimer Scotland organised and facilitated a focus group involving people with dementia. Study participants said that intermediaries play a critical role when working on sensitive issues and with vulnerable groups: the beneficiaries knew and trusted the intermediary organisation while BIG staff acknowledged that they did not have the expertise or skills to work with very vulnerable groups.

6.3 Involving the general public in deciding how funding should be spent

This approach to beneficiary involvement was used by the *Millennium Now* programme, with members of the public voting for issues that they felt merited funding. Another example is *The People's Millions* programme, in which members of the public voted for specific projects

to be awarded funding. These activities occurred in partnership with Channel 4 and ITV respectively.

A key difference between involving groups of beneficiaries and involving the general public is that the former asks beneficiaries to work in collaboration with BIG staff, while the latter enables BIG to communicate to the public about their mission and activities. We found one example where these methods overlapped; in the Silver Dreams programme for older people beneficiaries were recruited through the Daily Mail in order to engage with the wider public, as well as BIG's networks.

7. Key features of beneficiary involvement

In this section, we describe our findings about the features of beneficiary involvement at BIG in relation to function, intensity and methods.

7.1 Function of involvement

Study participants were asked about beneficiary involvement in relation to three stages of grant-making, up to the point when grants are made:

- Needs assessment (i.e. problem/issue identification)
- Programme design (i.e. eligibility criteria, outcomes etc.)
- Programme awards (i.e. who receives funding, conditions for award).⁷

Some study participants viewed the needs assessment and programme design stages as overlapping but they nevertheless found that each stage presented some distinct requirements and challenges as well as opportunities.

7.1.1 Needs assessment

We found fewer examples of beneficiary involvement in needs assessment compared with other stages of grant-making. Where beneficiaries had been involved in needs assessment, they had usually also been engaged in programme design; there were only two examples of beneficiaries being involved in needs assessment as a one-off activity (*Bright New Futures* and *Life Changes Trust*).

Needs assessment activities had several different objectives. While some beneficiaries were invited to consider and help clarify BIG's own assessment of need in a particular field or group, others undertook some needs assessment work usually to engage harder to reach beneficiaries. Examples of the latter were found in two programmes: *Talent Match* (young people) and *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* (older people). The young people involved in *Talent Match* visited youth centres and used cameras to record conversations with their peers: 'they reached people we couldn't'.

7.1.2 Programme design

We found several examples of beneficiary involvement in programme design (*Fulfilling Lives: Supporting People with Multiple and Complex Needs* and *Joining a Community*); and two programmes where involvement can be described as intensive or in depth (*Talent Match* and *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better*). We also found instances of public involvement in programme

⁷ This grant-making schematic can be linked with the different stages within BIG's funding development framework.

design through selecting funding themes, for example *Millennium Now*. However, the points made below about involving groups of beneficiaries do not apply to this form of public engagement.

Participants thought that beneficiary involvement in programme design was useful for clarifying and *'testing out'* ideas and issues with people *'who are likely to be affected by them'*. Involvement in this stage was thought to be particularly useful for developing interventions that address specific issues, such as domestic abuse.

Involvement in programme design was quite challenging, according to BIG staff, both practically and ethically, in three main respects. First, care was needed to ensure that beneficiaries did not feel that their contributions were about confirming pre-determined priorities. Second, in programmes where involvement was more intensive, beneficiaries needed to understand BIG's funding policies and criteria; and, third, some beneficiaries found this understanding difficult to achieve.

7.1.3 Programme awards

We found several examples of beneficiaries joining BIG's award decision making committees or participating in public votes. Programmes in which beneficiary involvement occurred only at this stage include *Young People's Fund*, *Silver Dreams* and *People's Millions*, as well as a small number of programmes (such as *Empowering Young People*) where involvement at award stage followed involvement in design or needs assessment.

Several study participants described involvement in programme awards as a powerful and important stage for beneficiary involvement. Decision-making panels were viewed as a space for beneficiaries to exert direct influence on programme awards. Study participants emphasised that beneficiary votes carry equal weight within a committee; however, some referred to the challenge of integrating beneficiaries into the established dynamic of committees. They also highlighted the need to ensure that appropriate mechanisms of support are developed for beneficiaries to feel comfortable expressing their opinions within the formal setting of decision-making committees. This issue is discussed later as it was also raised as an ethical challenge to this work.

7.2 Intensity of involvement

In the 12 programmes we examined, we found that both the length and depth of beneficiary involvement varied. We have called this 'intensity of involvement' and we discuss this further in Part Five of the report.

7.2.1 Lengthy, in-depth participation

Talent Match (young people) and *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* (older people) each recruited one group of beneficiaries to attend a series of meetings and undertake assignments in their local communities as part of the programme design. Staff who had experienced this kind of involvement said that it had been integral to the design of the programme they had worked on, for example, beneficiaries undertaking needs assessment activities. Study participants referred to this approach as *'co-design'*, although with hindsight they questioned the accuracy of this term to describe involvement; this point is explored further in Part Five. This kind of involvement was thought to have considerable resource implications.

7.2.2 Short involvement at every stage of the funding process

Empowering Young People involved different groups of young people for shorter periods in two distinct phases: needs assessment and programme design, and later at the programme

award stage. At the needs assessment and design stages young people were invited to participate at single events and through social media. Staff with experience of this kind of involvement commented that short, focused involvement was more appropriate for engaging beneficiaries in vulnerable situations or with complex needs.

7.2.3 One-off (sometimes brief) involvement in a single stage of the funding process

The *Life Changes Trust* and *Life Transitions* programmes involved beneficiaries in one off focus groups at the programme design stage. *Young People's Fund* and *Silver Dreams* with older people involved beneficiaries at the programme award stage through decision-making panels. *Millennium Now* and *The People's Millions* are both examples of involvement with the general public that lasted just the length of time it took to vote over the telephone or online or to complete a survey.

Our study uncovered mixed views about the appropriate intensity of involvement for people who are vulnerable or have complex needs. Some participants felt that a one off or short-term involvement through an intermediary organisation was appropriate, while others thought that a longer-term experience would ensure that beneficiaries felt valued and fully involved: '*I want to ... involve them throughout the journey*'.

7.3 Methods of involvement

Our findings indicate that BIG uses a variety of methods to facilitate beneficiary involvement, but that three methods dominate:

- Focus group discussions for needs assessment and programme development
- Decision-making panels at programme award stage (the most widely used method of beneficiary involvement)
- Public voting online or via broadcasting media.

Other methods that were used less frequently included: young people conducting interviews and creating videos with target groups and staff; and consulting about needs and priorities at outreach events.

Overall, our findings suggest that involvement methods are chosen for their suitability to a particular stage in the funding process. This indicates that beneficiary involvement methods at BIG are driven by the function or stage of the funding process.

8. Making decisions about beneficiary involvement

There was general consensus among study participants that '*one size does not fit all*' in terms of beneficiary involvement at BIG; our findings reinforce the view that different approaches are appropriate in different contexts. From the 12 programmes that we studied, we were able to identify three determinants of approach to beneficiary involvement in a programme:

- Stage of the grant-making process for which beneficiary involvement is required
- Perceived needs and capabilities of the beneficiary group e.g. use of social media with young people
- Available resources to support beneficiary involvement, including staffing and finance. For example, there was a £14,000 budget (inclusive of beneficiaries' expenses) and three staff available to support beneficiary involvement in *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better*, a programme that used longer term, in-depth involvement.

Part Three: Benefits of beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

We asked study participants about the benefits of beneficiary involvement. While they perceived a wide variety of benefits, many found it difficult to provide evidence of actual, tangible benefits. This is perhaps due, in part, to participants' caution and desire not to over-claim benefits of beneficiary involvement at this stage of its development at BIG. It may also stem from the absence of a systematic approach to the evaluation of beneficiary involvement in funding processes. Nonetheless, we found considerable enthusiasm and support among BIG's staff for pursuing beneficiary involvement. In this part of the report we describe separately the perceived and actual benefits of beneficiary involvement identified by study participants.

9. Perceived benefits

We describe here study participants' thoughts about the perceived benefits of beneficiary involvement for two main reasons: they shed light on the things that motivate staff and they may indicate areas where evidence of benefits might be collected in the future.

9.1 BIG's reputation and legitimacy

Beneficiary involvement was described as beneficial for BIG's reputation and legitimacy in the public eye. Public involvement activities such as the online and TV voting in *Millennium Now* and *People's Millions* were perceived as useful for: raising awareness about BIG; fostering continued public support; communicating how BIG spends its money; and raising awareness of the issues it supports. This connection with the public acknowledges the origins of BIG's funding.

Beneficiary involvement was also perceived as having a positive effect on BIG's reputation with its stakeholders, including potential grantees: *'to show we're serious about engagement as a principle'*. It also gave staff the confidence to expect grantees to involve their own beneficiaries in their projects. For example, the experience of beneficiary involvement in *Empowering Young People* gave staff within BIG Northern Ireland confidence that it could be achieved in realistic, practical and concrete ways.

9.2 BIG's programme efficiency and effectiveness

Many study participants believed that beneficiary involvement enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of programme spend and leads to improved funding results. Participants described the inclusion of beneficiary perspectives as resulting in more *'grounded'* and *'robust'* funding outcomes. Beneficiaries were thought to bring knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to BIG's funding processes.

9.2.1 Knowledge

Beneficiaries can help staff to clarify and confirm programme needs and outcomes and challenge existing thinking. Some study participants thought that beneficiary involvement might contribute to BIG's ability to lead thinking about new and different ways of delivering and improving services.

Beneficiary perspective one: *Empowering Young People*

Empowering Young People is a programme for ‘at risk’ young people aged 8-20. Its aim is to ensure that young people at risk had the necessary support structures, capacity, improved personal development and skills to help them negotiate the transitions in their life. A young person who was a member of the *Empowering Young People* Decision-Making Committee considered that he had a role in relaying to BIG his experience as a member of an at risk group. For BIG, the motivation to apply beneficiary involvement to *Empowering Young People* was to gain appropriate understanding of ‘at risk’ life issues, leading to more focused design and grant-making decisions that were more likely to fund effective projects. *‘The young people were very clear and adamant [in saying for example] on a project, ‘that’s not going to work, I am one of those young people’, or else they would say, ‘I can see why that’s a good thing to do’, or ‘do you know there are loads of organisations doing that.’*

9.2.1 Experience

BIG staff considered that the insight provided by beneficiaries’ individual experiences was a significant benefit. As one participant explained: *‘you can read as many policy papers as you like but it is not the same as hearing people’s experiences in person’*. Another participant reflected that ‘experts’ accessed through research *‘provide different views’*. The lived experience of beneficiaries is important to *‘match up those different perspectives’*. The importance of the experience that beneficiaries can offer was reiterated in the comments of a beneficiary who was part of the young person’s group for *Talent Match*, a programme investing in youth employment: *‘We [young people] know best ... Older people wouldn’t have realised some of things we did’*.

Beneficiary perspective two: *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better*

Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better is an older people’s investment to fund projects that will tackle social isolation and establish a centre aimed at building and sharing evidence about effective interventions.

A beneficiary participating in the *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* investment explained that BIG had done *‘a fantastic amount of research and work’* which supported ways for the group to feed in their views and experiences. She described learning new things even with over 25 years of experience working in older people’s services. The information BIG provided was crucial because individuals could place their individual experiences, limited to their areas, in a wider context. *‘The kinds of information they gave us helped shape and sort our relevant experiences.’*

10. Actual benefits

At present, BIG does not have a standardised method for collecting evidence of the difference that beneficiary involvement makes to the funding process. Nevertheless, through interviews and case studies, we have been able to discern three actual areas of benefit: improved needs assessment; enhanced decision making; and enhancing the public face of a programme. These benefits arose at different points of the funding process: needs assessment, programme awards and public launch of a programme.

10.1 Improved needs assessment

Improvements to the evidence gathered through needs assessment as a result of beneficiary involvement were highlighted in several of the case studies, most notably; *Empowering Young People*, *Talent Match* and *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better*. In all three examples participants described activities specifically created to enable beneficiaries to identify needs and priorities. These activities facilitated improved needs assessment in two key ways: (i) beneficiaries were able to access harder to reach groups; (ii) cumulatively, a group of beneficiaries could access greater numbers of people through their local networks and contacts.

Beneficiary perspective three: *Empowering Young People*

Empowering Young People was a programme for 'at risk' young people aged 8-20. The first phase of consultation involved the BIG staff member briefing *Participation Network* members (the intermediary organisation) on the questions BIG wished them to pose to young people. The officer reframed some of the issues into four questions for the participating young people, specifically in terms of beneficiary involvement. Web-based input from young people via the Network's and BIG's sites was solicited. The early consultation included a dramatic performance by young people that reflected on their priorities, the production of a film and an ICT application (Quizdom) used at a conference event. Ten focus group discussion events took place. In total around 400 young people were engaged through this process.

Beneficiary perspective four: *Talent Match*

This programme is supporting young people aged 18 - 24 who have been out of work, education or training for over 12 months. It will fund inventive ways to help young people find work or start their own enterprises. The young people had '*carte blanche*' in the needs assessment process. One study participant described their '*ground level intelligence*' as very useful for this stage of grant-making. Group members were asked to identify the priority issues currently facing young people in England and then to go to their local areas to consult with other young people. Through their local networks they spoke to young people, visited youth centres, used cameras and made films to present their findings. At the next meeting they presented these findings to each other and identified three priorities for *young people's investments*: unemployment, health and wellbeing and the portrayal of young people in society. In total they spoke to 2000 young people in a two week period and were able to engage harder to reach young people. The identification of the three priorities resulted in *Talent Match* targeting unemployment and another programme, currently in development, aimed at building young people's resilience focusing on the other two priorities. A BIG staff member reflected: '*we don't have the credibility to do that*'. Throughout the design process the group also used social media to collect views from a wider audience of young people.

Beneficiary perspective five: *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better*

BIG called the first meeting a *'blue skies session'* where they identified needs and priorities. The group listed about 30 to 40 needs and priorities. Social isolation was the primary concern identified; this aligned to BIG's previous thinking about a key need of older people in England. After identifying the priorities, the group's task was to return to their local area, visit projects and speak to older people through their own networks. They were thus able to *'test out'* the needs identified with a much larger audience, and across the country.

10.2 Enhanced decision making

Study participants thought that beneficiaries could enhance funding decisions by bringing a different perspective to the process. They gave specific examples of times when beneficiaries' views challenged their thinking and affected the course of a programme's development. As one participant put it: *'It is very easy to come up with a Project Manager-led view'*. For example, during the development of the *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* strategic investment, beneficiaries argued for the benefits of funding a multitude of small, low cost activities such as luncheon clubs and buddying schemes to tackle social isolation.

Beneficiary perspective six: *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better*

Usually, BIG's strategic investments including *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* target large sums at major projects whereas programmes such as Awards for All are set up to fund low cost activities. The beneficiary group felt strongly that funding multiple low cost activities was an effective approach to tackling social isolation and one beneficiary successfully argued this point at a committee meeting. As a result *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* will invest funding in small, low cost activities such as luncheon clubs and buddying schemes. Beneficiary involvement in this case was able to affect the funding direction of a strategic investment.

10.3 Public face of the programme

Study participants highlighted the benefits of beneficiaries adopting an *'ambassadorial role'* in order to reflect publicly the manner in which a programme was developed. For example, most of the young people involved in *Talent Match* were the public face of the programme for the official launch events. This was considered an important part of the process of beneficiary involvement and enhanced the public reception of the programme.

Beneficiary perspective seven: *Talent Match*

A number of young people chaired and gave presentations at a series of launch events for *Talent Match*. The events were attended by stakeholders including representatives from local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations and private sector organisations. One study participant described young people's involvement in the launch event as an important way to *'generate buy in'*. Witnessing young people's involvement allowed stakeholders to realise the extent of their participation in the programme design and development. According to BIG staff, this was important for the external credibility of the programme: *'They provided a human face rather than a corporate BIG face'*; *'Their involvement set a tone for the programme, it was aspirational.'* A beneficiary recollected the feedback they received in response to their presentation: *'the feedback from our presentation was that Talent Match really was designed by young people'*.

Part Four: Challenges of beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

This part of the report describes the challenges and issues BIG staff have encountered when involving beneficiaries in funding processes and the ways in which they have sought to overcome them. These challenges raised both ethical and practical issues for staff and are set out under five headings:

- Understanding representation
- Positioning beneficiary involvement
- Resourcing beneficiary involvement
- Responsibilities to beneficiaries
- Managing expectations and maintaining momentum.

11. Understanding representation

Staff we interviewed acknowledged that ‘representation’ is a complex issue for BIG.⁸ Some interviewees described their practical efforts to establish representative groups of beneficiaries, highlighting two key criteria: the experiences and qualities a person might bring to a group of beneficiaries, and the importance of securing a balance, especially when working with a broad group such as older or young people. Staff said that they looked for people with ‘direct’ or ‘lived’ experience of an issue and emphasised the importance of a person’s context and background: *‘Having people connected into the issues and a socio-economic background of relevance to beneficiaries... Representation enables life stories and passion to come out’*.

Although study participants felt that they had found ways to draw together representative groups, some remained concerned that beneficiaries’ perspectives and opinions are, perhaps inevitably, subjective.

12. Positioning beneficiary involvement

Study participants discussed the challenges of positioning beneficiary involvement within established funding processes at BIG. This links to a broader question raised by some people about the degree to which beneficiaries have influence within BIG’s existing processes. Grant-making at BIG follows an established funding framework and beneficiaries are invited or recruited to participate within this. As one study participant explained: *‘our systems weren’t built for beneficiary involvement’*. Our research indicates there are a number of facets to this challenge.

12.1 Timing

In some instances, timelines for programme development affected the way in which beneficiary involvement was organised and also the quality of the beneficiaries’ experience: *‘it suffered slightly from the speed we had to do it’*. Some study participants felt that beneficiaries may feel that their contributions are not valued if adequate time for their

⁸ A previous study for BIG suggested that representation is an issue that can never be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction, so pragmatic responses are required. See BIG (2009) *Executive summary of the final evaluation report*, London: Big Lottery Fund (<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/stronger-communities/evaluating-fair-share>)

involvement is not factored in. Our research suggests this particular issue is more relevant to short term involvement where, for example, beneficiaries are invited to participate in a one-off focus group. Study participants stressed the importance of good forward planning as a way of managing this issue.

12.2 The need to work within BIG's funding framework

Study participants said that involvement of beneficiaries needs to take place within BIG's existing funding framework. As such, beneficiaries were required to understand a range of systems and processes, such as the criteria used in assessing applications. The extent to which they needed to understand BIG's systems and processes varied according to the nature and intensity of involvement. BIG staff wondered, therefore, whether they should take into account beneficiaries' ability to understand BIG's funding framework when assessing their suitability to be involved.

Part of ensuring beneficiaries are supported to understand systems and processes is about ensuring that materials regarding funding processes are accessible. Staff working on *Talent Match*, for example, sought ways to make materials interactive including using technology to enable young people to complete questionnaires on iPads and recording their involvement on video. Young people also gave verbal presentations of their findings from needs assessment consultations rather than producing written reports.

12.3 Time and space for staff to adapt their practices

Study participants described a number of barriers to beneficiary involvement, in particular instances where BIG staff were required to adopt new practices in order to accommodate this way of working. For example, staff in finance and communications roles required time and space to work out how to accommodate beneficiary involvement where this conflicted with standard practice. Making payments to beneficiaries also raised questions about accounting and tax requirements.

13. Resourcing beneficiary involvement

Study participants generally acknowledged that beneficiary involvement requires a lot of money, organisation and staff time. For example, there was a £14,000 budget (inclusive of beneficiaries' expenses) and three staff available to support beneficiary involvement in *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better*. Specifically, they highlighted the work involved in ensuring the appropriateness of the recruitment process in terms of engaging a group whose members could offer a range of experiences and perspectives. They suggested that there is a risk of just recruiting the '*usual suspects*' if time is not invested at this stage. They also emphasised the time taken to coordinate sessions, communicate with beneficiaries and prepare materials. Engagement with young people has also required BIG staff to work at weekends. One study participant reflected that he had '*no idea*' how much time involving beneficiaries would take until he had actually been through the process; another noted that: '*You need time to do it properly*'.

Study participants raised both practical and ethical questions about whether or not to pay beneficiaries for participating. Their views about the appropriateness of payment varied and revealed that staff do not have a common understanding or experience of BIG's practices in this respect. While not all study participants agreed that beneficiaries should be paid for their time, those who did hold this view expressed their opinions in strong terms. For them, payment is necessary to confirm beneficiaries' commitment and demonstrate their role is valued by BIG. Other questions raised were: Should beneficiaries be paid in cash or vouchers? Might some beneficiaries prefer a charitable donation to be made in their name? Does payment mean that beneficiaries do not express their views honestly?

Findings regarding public engagement activities for *Millennium Now* and *The People's Millions* revealed one area of cost savings – broadcasting partners undertook many consulting and promotional tasks for little or no cost.

14. Responsibilities to beneficiaries

14.1 Beneficiaries' experiences

A question raised by a number of study participants concerned BIG's responsibilities towards beneficiaries. A number of them said that they felt responsible for ensuring that beneficiaries were comfortable and that their needs were properly met. Another, more complex issue concerned the importance of beneficiaries feeling appreciated, respected and secure whilst participating. It was recognised that the issues that beneficiaries address during their involvement can be complex and sensitive. They offer their own experiences and may expose personal and sensitive information about themselves: '*beneficiaries trust you and they tell you personal stuff*'. Some participants wondered how this should be managed: '*We have a duty of care. We could open up a can of worms and there is a risk and a danger if we are not addressing this*'.

14.2 Providing support

In practical terms, our findings suggest that ensuring that beneficiary involvement is a positive experience is dependent upon the provision of adequate support, for example covering travel costs or providing accommodation. Some of the older people involved in *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* had specific care needs and BIG staff needed to ensure that these were met.

A number of study participants also discussed the issue of support from a capacity building perspective; for example, support may be required to enable beneficiaries to participate fully in a decision-making committee. This requires providing them with information such as financial criteria; explaining committee procedures; and ensuring that beneficiaries feel confident to express themselves in such a setting. It was suggested that this might require the provision of training for beneficiaries. Linked to this, one study participant highlighted the ethical dimension of support, stating that it is about ensuring that beneficiaries '*have a voice*' when they participate.

Although the interplay between internal BIG requirements and bringing beneficiaries into established processes is complex, participants were generally confident that these challenges can be met by:

- Thinking through the support needs of beneficiaries in advance
- Preparing the ground internally; for example, working with committee members to adapt processes to enhance beneficiary participation
- Appropriate recruitment processes. The implications of a formal process meant that BIG staff had '*buy in*' and '*commitment*' from beneficiaries. There was a feeling that selection through a recruitment process also resulted in beneficiaries feeling valued.

15. Managing expectations and maintaining momentum

Several study participants highlighted the importance of managing beneficiaries' expectations, particularly in relation to: roles and expectations; maintaining momentum; public involvement; and ending involvement.

15.1 Roles and expectations

Ensuring clarity about roles and expectations was emphasised; some BIG staff suggested that beneficiary involvement might be formalised through the use of terms of reference. Other suggestions included allocating specific roles to beneficiaries at the start of their involvement in order to provide focus. One example of this was to be found in the *Talent Match* programme in which staff initially divided the group of young people into a design team, a learning team and a social media team. *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* allocated roles based on older people's areas of expertise, such as marketing and communications.

The issue of managing expectations arose during one particular programme in which beneficiaries had expected to be more involved throughout the process. Group members were initially disappointed that programme development continued in between meetings. BIG staff needed to explain the different stages of developing a programme at BIG: *'we had to explain they [beneficiaries] were one cog in a much larger machine. However, the group thought they were the main cog. There was a delicate re-aligning with the group that work continued in between the sessions'*.

15.2 Maintaining momentum

Beneficiary groups can lose momentum, with *'drift in involvement'* especially likely if members are involved for long periods of time. One participant reflected that, with the benefit of hindsight, organising meetings at key times throughout the different stages of grant-making might help to manage this situation. A complete funding process contains *'in-between'* or *'quieter'* periods, and during these times involvement *'fatigue'* can occur. In addition, the membership of a beneficiary group can alter because of unpredictable changes in members' personal circumstances. One participant reflected that it was important to *'freshen up'* the group at these times by bringing in new members.

15.3 Public involvement

A particular challenge for public engagement activities is the risk that *'popular'* issues are chosen; typically members of the public tend to support programmes with a clear linear relationship between funded activity and change. Whilst this has advantages, it may at the same time limit the scope of programmes being delivered.

15.4 Ending involvement

A few study participants were concerned about how to bring beneficiaries' involvement to an end without them feeling cut off or unappreciated. It was suggested that clarity of purpose about the duration of beneficiaries' involvement can alleviate this concern: *'the end is not a bad thing; it just needs to be clearly understood'*. For example, *Talent Match* involved beneficiaries in launch events for the programme; others spoke to the media about their experiences of involvement. These roles provided a *'natural end'*:

'For me it is where beneficiaries have had a real opportunity to work with us and meaningfully shape an investment to the point where they want to represent the work publicly.'

Part Five: Options for future beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

In this final part of the report, we discuss the implications of our findings for beneficiary involvement at BIG. We build on our study findings, drawing on insights from other funders and grant programmes, as well as the existing literature on participation. Below we summarise our key points before elaborating on them in detail.

16. Summary

BIG has accumulated a range of experience in beneficiary involvement and can now build on this. What works for BIG, we suggest, is to perceive beneficiaries' knowledge and experience as *'another piece in the jigsaw'* of funding development alongside other evidence and influences. For example, BIG invites beneficiaries to participate in an established funding development framework albeit with some practical adjustments to make participation possible (timing, support, payments). This kind of beneficiary involvement is about collaboration between BIG and a variety of stakeholders, including but not limited to beneficiaries.

This study has focused solely on the above kind of beneficiary involvement. Beyond the scope of this study have been examples where BIG has taken beneficiary involvement a step further and established programmes in which control over spending is deliberately handed over to citizens e.g. Big Local. Here, we comment briefly on these examples and go on to suggest that BIG maintains its flexible approach to beneficiary involvement making decisions about the function, method and intensity of involvement on a case-by-case basis. We argue that 'thinking about beneficiary involvement' can be embedded in BIG's practices and funding development framework as a way of ensuring that its flexible approach remains strategic, thorough and sustained.

17. Growth of beneficiary involvement at BIG

Study participants thought that BIG's approach to beneficiary involvement has steadily improved, with new programmes learning from and building on previous ones. For example, the lessons learned from involving young people in *Young People's Fund* and *Talent Match* have been applied to involving older people in the *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* initiative. And the success of involving older people on the decision-making panel for *Silver Dreams* influenced the decision to develop involvement in the *Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better* process.

While study participants were optimistic about their experiences of involving beneficiaries to date, they also said that they were still learning as they went along: *'It's been a very positive experience but it has often been a very happy accident'*. There was general agreement that there is scope for growth and improvement in the ways in which BIG approaches beneficiary involvement: *'BIG is not looking to become a leader in beneficiary involvement but we can do better'*.

18. BIG beneficiary involvement as participation

We have described earlier the views of study participants in relation to the motivations for, approaches to and features of beneficiary involvement at BIG. This section locates these findings in a broader context of participation and identifies two concepts that may prove helpful in taking forward beneficiary involvement at BIG: 'invited spaces' and 'spectrum of involvement'.

18.1 'Invited spaces': beneficiaries participate in an established funding framework

Literature about participation suggests that we might usefully think about the 'spaces' and 'places' in which participation (or involvement) takes place⁹ as a way to understand it. Gaventa¹⁰ describes three spaces for participation: 'closed spaces' where participants play a minor role in involvement; 'invited spaces' where people are invited to participate by various types of authority; and 'claimed spaces' which are created more autonomously by participants.¹¹

We can describe BIG beneficiaries as participating in an 'invited space' – the funding development framework – where they (alongside other people and processes) help to shape a programme. The idea of beneficiaries participating in the funding development framework (the 'invited space') clarifies a number of points that study participants found puzzling.

- Beneficiary involvement is 'just one cog' in a funding development process that goes on before, during and after beneficiaries' involvement.
- Beneficiary involvement does not imply that programmes are co-designed solely with beneficiaries; their views and experiences will sit alongside other intelligence and influences.
- If beneficiaries' views and experiences are perceived as one cog or piece of the jigsaw then there may be less pressure to create so-called representative groups of beneficiaries. Funders can focus instead on recruiting groups with a range of experiences and perspectives on a theme.

This study has focused on beneficiary involvement in shaping programmes that have been managed and delivered by BIG. In all 12 of the programmes that we studied, beneficiaries were 'invited' into BIG's funding development framework. There have, however, been programmes where this is not the case: Fair Share and Big Local are examples of BIG outsourcing a programme to an independent trust so that residents and communities can have more direct control over programme spend. In the next section, we suggest that BIG may find it helpful to maintain a variety of approaches to beneficiary involvement.

18.2 'Spectrum of involvement': different functions, methods and intensities of involvement

The literature on participation provides a number of typologies and concepts that can help us to understand what different kinds of involvement may achieve. Brodie et al refer to the '*...different techniques of participation, and the implications they have for the quality and 'depth' of participation that they enable*'.¹²

After looking at a number of these typologies and concepts, we suggest that, for BIG, it may be helpful to see beneficiary involvement as a spectrum where '*different kinds of involvement might be appropriate at different stages and for different stakeholders*'.¹³ This 'spectrum' of involvement accommodates the idea that different functions, methods and intensities of involvement may be required according to the kind of programme being developed. From a community perspective, research suggests that it may be '*preferable to*

⁹ Brodie, E. et al (2009) *Understanding participation: A literature review*, London: NCVO IVR, Involve

¹⁰ Gaventa, J. (2006) 'Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis', *IDS Bulletin*, 27, 6, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies

¹¹ This is part of Gaventa's 'power cube' demonstrating interrelated dimensions of levels, spaces, and forms of participation.

¹² See note 9

¹³ Taylor, M. (2011) *Public policy in the community*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, p.153

conceive of participation as a cycle or a wheel in which participants engage at the point and for the purpose they choose.¹⁴

Although we noted in the previous section that BIG has taken beneficiary involvement beyond programme development in for example, Big Local, this form of involvement was beyond the scope of this study. We note here that other typologies such as Arnstein's¹⁵ ladder of participation, which implies a progression towards citizen control, may be more useful for thinking about programmes like Fair Share and Big Local than it is for the types and purposes of involvement we consider in this study.

19. Maintaining a flexible approach to beneficiary involvement at BIG

We have described how beneficiaries are invited to participate in BIG's established funding development framework i.e. to work within BIG's systems and processes. We have suggested that BIG needs beneficiary involvement to serve different functions and, therefore, to use different methods and intensities according to the theme or issue being explored. As such, it can be argued that there is a spectrum of involvement in funding processes at BIG.

There is currently no overall requirement to involve beneficiaries in funding processes at BIG nor is there a standard way to organise this. BIG is interested in whether or not involvement can and should become more systematic. In this section we explore this dilemma and uncover some learning from other funders which may help. We then propose a flexible approach to beneficiary involvement where thinking about involvement is embedded in the organisation and its funding development framework, but the function, method and intensity of involvement remain flexible.

19.1 The dilemma

Some study participants felt strongly that beneficiary involvement should be flexible. They considered that when deciding whether or not to involve beneficiaries in funding processes, BIG needed to start with the question: *'On what occasions is it important to do this?'* They felt that involvement should occur when it is considered useful for grant-making within a specific programme: *'we should be quite clear where to use it and what value it adds and where it will be taken notice of'*. A few study participants, however, considered that beneficiary involvement ought to be a feature of all grant-making practice: *'it would be used as a matter of course; it would be integrated within our systems and processes'*.

19.2 Learning from other funders

Both BBC Children in Need and Comic Relief use beneficiary involvement in funding processes in a selective manner: *'it is not standard across our work'*. Both funders considered that successful beneficiary involvement was targeted, planned, strategic and built around individual initiatives and interventions. This is illustrated with examples from each funder.

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Arnstein, S. (1969) A ladder of citizen participation, *JAIP*, 35, 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224

BBC Children in Need's three-year Fun and Friendship programme involved young people identifying unmet needs. BBC Children in Need asked young people to provide examples, through anecdotes and stories, of what particular needs meant from their own experience. The involvement of young people in the programme's design developed because the organisation had *'a fairly clear idea about the need but ... did not realise how strong it was. They [the young people] really brought it to life'*. As a result of hearing these stories, BBC Children in Need decided that the programme's target age group should be 12-18 years as they *'understood from listening that's when the need starts to become a big issue'*. This is significant as the age category 12-18 differs from the usual age categories used by BBC Children in Need.

Comic Relief described the example of Innovation Labs Mental Health Grants Programme for digital ideas to support young people's mental health (whose other funders include Nominet Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Mental Health Foundation). Young people participated in focus groups called 'innovation labs' to develop ideas for investments. This was achieved through supported development days and was managed by a steering group of young people. Along with supporters, the young people were decision makers for funding decisions (£350,000 allocated for the development of seven technological projects). Comic Relief's rationale for beneficiary involvement within this programme was their concern to ensure that the value base of young people's participation was threaded throughout the programme's development.

19.3 A flexible approach

Building on BIG's experience and learning from other funders BIG may wish to maintain its flexible approach to beneficiary involvement. Other funders we spoke with advocated the use of a flexible approach to beneficiary involvement built around individual initiatives. Based on our findings we have identified the following factors in support of retaining a flexible approach to involvement:

- If beneficiary involvement in funding processes is standard practice across all programmes, it risks becoming a process for its own sake: *'the risk is that it becomes just another process that you implement'*. A flexible approach embedded in the existing funding development framework, will ensure that decisions about how to involve beneficiaries will be driven by context.
- Beneficiary involvement takes time and may not always be practically feasible: *'it is important to create a timeframe for involvement that is realistic for the group'*. A flexible approach to beneficiary involvement may help to ensure that beneficiaries are appropriately involved.
- We can see from the range of programmes that beneficiaries have been involved in, and the variety of methods used, that there is no one ideal approach to beneficiary involvement; different methods are required for different programmes. A flexible approach leaves room for new ideas and innovations in methods of involvement.

20. Future beneficiary involvement in funding processes at BIG

20.1 Embedding a flexible approach to funding processes at BIG

On the basis of our study findings from BIG and other funders, as well as lessons from literature, there is a strong case for maintaining a flexible approach to beneficiary involvement. This flexible approach can be strategic if thinking about beneficiary involvement is embedded in the organisation and its funding development framework.

In order *to embed beneficiary involvement across the organisation*, the following may benefit from some attention.

- Build on the energy and enthusiasm of staff that have successfully made beneficiary involvement happen in the programmes they design, manage and deliver. How can they best share their experience with colleagues? How can they be enabled to continue working in this way?
- Enable Funding Officers to connect with beneficiaries within their existing roles and responsibilities e.g. by visiting projects to learn from their work 'in the field'.
- Support finance, communications and other core functions at BIG to identify and adapt systems and processes to enable beneficiary involvement. For example, by developing a policy on payments to beneficiaries which would set out BIG's position as well as explaining the practical arrangements.¹⁶
- Reach a shared awareness that beneficiary involvement is resource intensive and requires a lot of staff time, some of it out of hours, and the allocation of appropriate resources.

In order *to embed a flexible approach to beneficiary involvement in the funding development framework*, BIG will need a framework for thinking about and making decisions regarding involvement. Appendix Two offers a more detailed, albeit preliminary, framework to support staff in thinking about and planning beneficiary involvement.

20.2 Adapting for beneficiary involvement

We have described how BIG 'invites' beneficiaries to participate in BIG's established funding processes; this approach appears to make sense for BIG. Nonetheless, there are ways in which BIG could adapt or adjust its processes to prepare for beneficiary involvement.

- Beneficiaries need to understand BIG's funding development framework so that they can see where their involvement fits into the many stages of developing a programme at BIG. Study participants felt that the quality of participation is better when beneficiaries have a clear idea of their role and what to expect.
- Beneficiaries also need to understand BIG's systems and processes (e.g. criteria for assessing applications) in order to participate effectively in the funding development

¹⁶ INVOLVE developed a comprehensive guidance document regarding payment to members of the public involved in health and social care research. This document addresses their principles for payment as well as the practical arrangements. See INVOLVE (2010) *Payment for involvement: A guide for making payments to members of the public actively involved in NHS, public health and social care research*, INVOLVE: Eastleigh.
(<http://www.invo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/INVOLVEPayment-Guiderev2012.pdf>)

process. Participants identified the following areas for improvement: induction processes that are accessible to different groups; training in the way priorities are translated into outcomes and criteria for assessing grant applications at the programmes awards stage; building skills and confidence to take part in decision-making committees.

- Ensuring that the staff and committee members who will be part of beneficiary involvement activities are clear about their roles, for example, working with committee members to adapt processes to beneficiary involvement.

Going forward, developing these mechanisms is likely to determine the quality of the beneficiary's experience, and the benefits from their involvement in grant-making processes.

20.3 Learning and improving beneficiary involvement

Study participants were motivated to learn from, improve and develop their approaches to involving beneficiaries. Our findings from 12 programmes that involved beneficiaries suggest that *'one size does not fit all'* and that BIG will continue to develop or adopt new methods, as well as adapt or replicate those that have been used before.

Staff wanted to document the different approaches used for involving beneficiaries so that they could reflect and continue to develop this work. Creating a central place within BIG for sharing materials and evaluations of beneficiary involvement in funding processes would support this.

Currently, BIG does not have a consistent approach to evaluating beneficiary involvement in its funding processes. Future evaluation of this work could focus on the functions, intensities and methods of beneficiary involvement in relation to what was learned and what changed as a result. There may be an argument for analysing programmes where people with multiple or complex needs have been involved in order to understand whether these processes have, or could be, lengthy and in depth; and whether the involvement of an intermediary organisation makes it more or less easy to facilitate lengthy, in-depth participation.

21. Concluding remarks

In this final part of the report, we have argued that it is useful to think of beneficiaries as being invited to participate in BIG's funding processes; as such they will need to understand how a grant funder operates. It may be helpful for BIG to think about beneficiary involvement as a spectrum, along which different kinds and intensities of involvement will be appropriate to different programmes and stages. A flexible rather than a standard approach to beneficiary involvement might therefore be helpful. Finally, this flexible approach can be strategic and systematic if thinking about involvement is embedded in the organisation and its funding development framework.