



## **Introduction**

This review is intended for anyone interested in applying for Big Lottery Fund funding. It is also expected to be useful for anyone interested in community engagement, and learning from the Fund's programmes.

The insights in this review have been drawn from evaluations of the Fund's programmes. They are not intended to be a definitive or comprehensive 'how to' guide, instead they reflect practical learning from a large range of projects and activities that have been funded through a diverse collection of programmes. From the broad and open such as Reaching Communities, to the highly specialised and targeted such as Living with Cancer, and Activities for Young People.

For the purpose of this review, community engagement is defined as 'working with the people that you want to benefit from your project'. This can include a broad spectrum of activities. From participation, through consultation and involvement in decision making, to project delivery.

# Top 10 principles for effective community engagement:

No one size fits all for community engagement. Sometimes you need to try many different things before you find what works. However, the experience of projects funded by the Fund suggests that there are some general principles that characterise success, no matter who you want to involve in your project, or what you want to do.

## 1. Knowing the local context

If you want your project to make a difference, you need to understand the local needs, issues and priorities of the people that you want to benefit. This includes knowing who else is doing what, and how your project might relate to existing projects and activities.

## 2. Successful engagement meets people where they are

You will find it easier to capture people's interest and attention if you go to them. Outside the school gates, pubs, shopping centres, local mosques and even GP surgeries are all great places to involve local people. Street outreach workers for example, are an excellent way to build relationships with young people. You'll also increase the likelihood that people will engage in your project if you talk to them about issues they care about.

**Healthy Living Centres** successfully delivered services in social, rather than specialist places, enabling them to engage with more people.

## 3. Effective communication relies upon using the right language

The people that you want to reach will not engage with your project if you don't communicate in the right way – which means being mindful of the language you use, where you use it and in what way. Fathers are very often alienated from mum and toddler groups, for example, just because of the name – even though these groups are usually open to dads and other male carers. Some projects have also found that translations into other languages can dilute their message and impact so it's important to test these with your target audience.

**Palliative Care** found that many medical terms – such as 'heart failure' – were frequently misunderstood, and that more work was needed to communicate the serious nature of conditions, to ensure that patients accessed appropriate support.

## 4. Trust is essential for people to take part

Trust is an essential ingredient for engagement, and can take time to develop. It has many facets, for example how personal data collected from people involved in your project is used through to ensuring that your project delivers what it promises to. Sometimes, you also need to build trust between organisations as well as individuals, to make your project work.

Building trust with other local organisations was crucial in enabling the referral of families into new support services provided by **Improving Futures**.

## 5. Credibility is required to develop trust

Credibility is an important part of developing trust. It will be different for different groups, and comes from a variety of places. If you don't already have credibility it might be gained through working together with organisations that have strong links with the community you want to engage, or, through peer approaches; using staff or volunteers which reflect that community.

## 6. Patience and persistence can help to establish credibility

Genuine engagement and relationship building takes time. It is not a one-off activity and if approached in that way – will most likely not succeed. Adopting a patient yet persistent approach is important particularly when you are trying to reach families who are most in need and sometimes just being 'present' and able to respond to people on their terms, when they are ready, can be far more effective.

## 7. Power is an important aspect of participation and engagement

Enabling the people that you want to benefit to have a real stake in your project can increase participation. Having a stake can be many different things, from

## Top 10 principles for effective community engagement:

involvement in making decisions about the project, to community ownership and management of buildings.

Personal choice and empowerment is also important – particularly for service users who want to choose to access a service rather than having it forced upon them.

### **8. Being open and honest is important for getting, and keeping people involved**

Being clear, open and honest with the people you want to engage is essential for building good relationships and keeping them on board. For example, being upfront early on about the boundaries of a project (particularly the scope for making decisions about activities) or about what users can expect from a service is important for managing expectations and helping to avoid alienating anyone.

### **9. There are many different dimensions to being ‘accessible’**

Barriers preventing people from participating can be mental, physical, geographical and practical and a proactive approach to overcoming them is often needed. For example, providing additional resources

such as transport, translators, childcare and meals can make it easier for different groups to get involved.

Projects in **Parks for people** invited groups that don't currently use the park for their own special tour, helping them to see how they might benefit, and increase their access.

### **10. Meeting need depends upon being responsive, and working flexibly**

Community engagement involves give and take, working flexibly and being responsive to people's needs. The ability to tailor your project or service to specific needs, can be an important factor in engaging the people that you want to benefit from your project.

**Palliative Care** started to deliver services to patients in the home rather than in hospital. Developing Communities Scotland found that providing more flexible, less regimented services than the mainstream offer was highly valued by patients.

## **Case Study: PRYDE and Playz**

The **Playz** is a thriving, resident led community hub in the town of Kilwinning, Scotland. Transformed from a disused old pub, by PRYDE (the Pennyburn Regeneration Youth Development Enterprise), and supported by the Fund's Growing Community Assets programme.

In 2002, Pennyburn Community Association asked local people what was important to them. They found that supporting young people was a top priority, but there was a lack of services and activities to meet their needs, or places for them to go where they would not be moved on. The community association decided that young people would need to be part of the solution from day one, and established a steering committee of residents and young people to develop ideas and proposals.

In 2005, the group became incorporated as **PRYDE**, and after significant fundraising and support from local partners, bought the pub from the council, and redeveloped the building into what is now the Playz. They provide a diverse offer of opportunities for the whole community, and in particular, young people, who trust the Playz, and know that they will be taken seriously. The key to success, has been honest and clear devolution of power to young people, who know how and when they can get involved, and influence decisions. This includes through an active shadow board of directors, who attend board meetings, provide regular reports, and are responsible for their own budget.

# Extending your reach

This section uses examples from the Fund's projects to explore ways of engaging with different groups.

## Innovative approaches

Being innovative and creative in your approach to engagement, can make a big difference. The experience of the Fund's funded projects suggest that:

### ► Practical and visible projects can be catalysts for engagement

Environmental projects in particular are effective at getting people involved and can also be a catalyst for other benefits, such as building trust and relationships. Low cost and low risk projects – such as litter picking, or hedge laying – can also help secure the buy in of local grassroots groups.

### ► Non-traditional forms of learning and study can be extremely effective at engaging people, as demonstrated by the Veterans reunited programme

– immersive learning through meeting people and seeing and hearing about things first hand, is very effective at changing attitudes and getting people interested. The Veterans held exhibits in non-traditional spaces which was also very successful. Drama and personal stories can be powerful tools to engage people, and developing non traditional physical activities – such as street dance – can encourage more people to participate in sport.

## Specific communities

When it comes to participation, involvement and engagement, some communities are less often heard, and under-represented. Often, but not always, those same communities are also the most in need, or might benefit most from projects and activities on offer.

It is important to treat people as individuals, rather than stereotypes, but building upon the principles of engagement that apply to everyone, there are specific approaches that have proved successful in working with particular communities.

## Young people

Many groups aim to work with young people, and involve them in their projects. But, young people are often under-represented, and perceived as being 'hard to reach'. Successful approaches to working with young people emphasise:

- The need for participation to be voluntary (Big Deal)
- The value of involving young people in genuine, rather than tokenistic decision making (myplace)
- A belief in the talents and capabilities of young people (Reaching Communities)

The Big Deal programme in Northern Ireland found that young people were often much more capable than youth workers expect, and are interested and able to take part in project development and decision making from a very early age. Activities for Young People also found that using tools such as contracts can help young people develop their capacity to take responsibility.

### Case Study: Street Works – Derry/Londonderry

**Street Works** is an initiative run by Off the Street Community Youth Initiative, which works with disengaged young people in Derry, Northern Ireland. The project has been supported by Reaching Communities Northern Ireland.

Youth workers start by talking to young people on the streets, which enables them to reach people who wouldn't otherwise engage with local services. They get to know them, build trust, and then slowly work together to develop a personal package of support, tailored to their needs. This might include 1:1 sessions, group work, and access to training opportunities. The support has evolved from an 8 week programme, to support over the course of a year, after learning the value of longer term engagement. The service also takes referrals from the youth justice system and other organisations, and works in schools to do prevention work with young people aged 11+.

# Extending your reach

## **Women**

Women can face a number of barriers to participation in local projects, including childcare responsibilities, and in some cases cultural taboos. Successful approaches to working with women often start with practical solving of these problems. For example, addressing childcare needs (Community Sport) or developing women only activities where people feel comfortable. Sometimes creative approaches can be valuable in breaking down cultural barriers, Living with Cancer successfully used drama to engage with Asian Women, which enabled them to benefit from the project.

## **Older People**

While many successful community groups and activities rely upon the contribution of older people, they can also frequently experience isolation. Community Sport found that developing accessible and familiar locations was essential in engaging older people in physical activities, and that emphasising the social aspect was important. Veterans Reunited found that bringing different generations together was very powerful, and led to significant changes in attitudes and understanding.

## **BME groups**

BME communities are often well connected on the inside, but can lack links to other communities which sometimes make them appear 'hard to reach'. Partnerships with local and grassroots BME groups are a common element of successful approaches. Being sensitive to different cultural needs and perspectives is also essential, and sometimes requires challenging the assumptions of staff and project workers. The Living with Cancer programme found that there are times when professionals are more trusted than peers when dealing with sensitive health issues. But, that there was a need to raise awareness of attitudes and behaviours that can make engagement difficult.

## **Disabled people**

Designing activities for disabled people often means they are inclusive for other people too (Childrens Play programme). However, disabled people can find themselves excluded from many projects and activities that other people take for granted. Thinking practically and creatively can overcome many barriers, for example, in Community Sport, difficulties in using public transport were overcome by carers helping their clients to understand how to use it. Accompanying them on test journeys, and explaining where entry and exit points were. The programme also found that personal empowerment is also extremely important and that having a choice of activities is essential.

### **Social/economic disadvantage**

Communities which suffer from social and economic disadvantage, can be disconnected from mainstream services, projects and activities. The Village SOS programme found that involvement and engagement can be discouraged through presenting areas as being in decline and trust can be difficult to establish.

Successful approaches emphasise:

- flexible learning for those disengaged from formal education systems (Supporting 21st Century Life)
- investing in outreach to build trust and relationships (Community Sport)
- offering 'different' activities, beyond the standard offer (Community Sport)
- the importance of independence from statutory bodies in building trust (Supporting 21st Century Life).

### **Other minority and/or vulnerable groups**

There are many other groups and communities that might be less visible, or are vulnerable in some way. For example traveller, and LGBT communities, those who have suffered abuse, or are engaged in illegal activities. Each community and context will be different and will require sensitivity, but successful approaches have frequently emphasised the need to create safe and neutral spaces where people will feel comfortable, and the use of single sex approaches – for example women only groups.

### **Case Study: Smethwick Library**

**Smethwick Library** pioneered engagement with the LGBT community through the Community Libraries programme, and successfully developed new policies which have now been adopted across the borough of Sandwell.

After attending local events and meeting with representatives from local LGBT groups, the library manager became aware that their needs were not being addressed. Local groups were invited to come together, and discuss how this could be improved. As a result, a new LGBT reading group was formed, which meets regularly, and helps to select stock for the library. The group also advised on a new labelling system for books, which enables the easy identification of books targeted at a LGBT audience, without segregating them. They also supported the development of new display boards in the library foyer which raised the profile of the LGBT community.

Some local residents and library users have resisted the increased visibility of the LGBT community. However, the library has used this as an opportunity to tackle prejudice, and help people understand the importance of inclusion.

# Overcoming challenges

Finally, this section outlines some challenges you may encounter and offers some solutions from our funding programmes.

## Keeping people involved

Getting people involved in your project can be a challenge, but keeping them involved can be even harder. The same can be true of people employed on projects, with rapid staff turnover a problem.

### Solutions

- ▶ myplace found that increasing the stake of young people in the project, by involving them in planning and decision making, and developing different layers of involvement kept people engaged.
- ▶ Activities for Young People used peer mentors, and a range of methods to develop team spirit.
- ▶ Community Sport overcame problems with staff turnover through recruiting volunteers and offering accredited qualifications in coaching and management.

## Reaching the most in need within specific communities

Sometimes it can be difficult to reach the people that could benefit the most from your project, rather than the people who are already engaged, and ready to access new opportunities. Having a broad definition of need can stop you focussing in. But, the Young Peoples Fund found it wasn't clear what worked best; targeted, or universal provision.

### Solutions

- ▶ Targeting additional engagement and outreach to the most in need might be more effective than targeting provision.
- ▶ Developing partnerships with other local groups, can help you reach a larger number of people, including your target audience.

## Geographical isolation

Developing and sustaining projects can be difficult in rural areas. Projects in the Developing Communities Scotland programme used video conferencing and email to make sure management groups were still able

to meet regularly, and Children's Play made use of mobile facilities to enable isolated communities to access play opportunities.

## Access to the right data and information

Without the right data and information, it can be difficult to establish the need for your project, or to target the people that you want to benefit. Living with Cancer found a lack of standard ethnic monitoring frustrating, in trying to reach and support BME groups, whereas Reaching Communities in Northern Ireland were able to use strategic assessments and conduct local research with potential beneficiaries in order to establish the need for their projects.

### Case Study: Conwy Refrain

**Conwy Refrain** – is a counselling service for people with a dual diagnosis of mental health, and substance misuse problems. It is a partnership between Aberconwy Mind, a national mental health charity, and CAIS a personal support service based in Wales, funded through Reaching Communities.

The project grew from the bottom up, in response to ideas from service users in Aberconwy Mind, who highlighted the gap in provision for people with a dual diagnosis. Many individuals were not able to access a full range of services, because mental health services could not offer treatment without first dealing with substance misuse, and drug treatment services were not able to address mental health problems.

To address this gap, Conwy Refrain now provides access to 24 sessions of counselling, and 6-8 weeks of group therapy sessions. People are treated holistically, with the service fitted around the person. As Conwy Refrain has grown and evolved, new ways of continuing to involve and engage service users are also being explored and developed. For example peer support networks and self-help groups which could continue to provide benefits beyond the life of counselling and support group sessions.

# Overcoming challenges

## Working with different levels of skills

The people you want to participate in your project, and the staff that might work on them will have different levels of skills, experience and expertise. Making sure people have access to the right training, and providing activities at the right level to keep people involved can be a challenge.

### Solutions

- ▶ Rather than trying to fit people into a box, the Young Peoples Fund developed a range of activities to suit the people taking part.
- ▶ Reaching Communities in Northern Ireland overcame the inexperience of some project staff by accessing a wide range of online resources, and building on existing skills.

## Getting people to take up leadership roles

It can be difficult to get people to take up leadership roles, despite providing access to training in relevant skills.

### Solutions

- ▶ Growing community assets found that although it wasn't always possible to fill every board position with local people, outside skills and expertise can be accessed.
- ▶ Sometimes further work is needed to encourage people to develop confidence in their own capabilities.

## Case Study: Anawim

**Anawim** – is a charity in Birmingham working to support women vulnerable to exploitation. They provide holistic support to women and their children, working in partnership with local agencies to provide services that meet their needs, funded through Reaching Communities.

The project was established in 1986 by Catholic sisters from the order of Our Lady of Charity, in response to high levels of prostitution in the area of Balsall Heath in Birmingham. They bought a house in the area, and started to befriend women by going out on the street, meeting the women where they were, and building trust. When local people decided to no longer tolerate prostitution, the women became dispersed to new areas in the city, and the women became less visible, and harder to reach. Changes in technology, and the use of email to make appointments, also reduced their visibility.

In order to be able to continue to engage and support these women, Anawim adapted and evolved their approach, firstly going around to different areas by car, and then increasing their 'inreach' work in prison, where many women end up. Over time, Anawim has developed relationships with a wide spectrum of agencies and services such as probation, which enables them to offer a holistic one stop shop approach to meeting needs. Although it is still a significant challenge getting women through the door, once there, and engaged, they want to stay.

# Where to find out more

**Local Trust** – is the body set up to lead and manage Big Local; a neighbourhood investment programme working with 150 areas to help them make their community a better place to live. Local Trust has produced a number of use guides for community engagement, available to download from their website

[www.localtrust.org.uk](http://www.localtrust.org.uk)

**Take Part** – was a national programme, based upon a learning approach to helping people develop skills and confidence to get involved in their community. Useful resources are available on their website, and through a take part directory

[www.takepart.org](http://www.takepart.org)

[www.takepart.info](http://www.takepart.info)

**CDF** – The community development foundation is a national organisation which supports community development and engagement, including managing funding programmes and conducting research.

[www.cdf.org.uk](http://www.cdf.org.uk)

**Involve** – promote and support citizen participation, and work with public organisations to help them engage more effectively with communities

[www.involve.org.uk](http://www.involve.org.uk)

## Big Lottery Fund Thematic review – community engagement

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Our website [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

### Accessibility

Please contact us to discuss any particular communications needs you may have.

### Our equality principles

Promoting accessibility; valuing cultural diversity; promoting participation; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting inclusive communities; reducing disadvantage and exclusion. Please visit our website for more information.

### We care about the environment

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

### Our mission

Helping communities and people most in need.

### Our values

We have identified three values that underpin our work: being supportive and helpful, making best use of Lottery money and using knowledge and evidence.

You can find out more about us, our values and the funding programmes including Bright New Futures by visiting our website [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

The Big Lottery Fund is committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity, both as a grantmaker and employer. The Big Lottery Fund will aim to adopt an inclusive approach to ensure grant applicants and recipients, stakeholders, job applicants and employees are treated fairly.

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