

Event report

LEARNING FROM BIG LOCAL

Learning from Funders

09.06.2015

HOSTED BY BUZZACOTT LLP

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CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

VENUE

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The Learning from Funders meetings give an opportunity to get together to look at good and innovative practice in supporting the sector with each meeting exploring a particular aspect of the funder relationship with funded groups.

This Learning from Funders event provided funders with an opportunity to hear from Debbie Ladds, Chief Executive of Local Trust (a London Funders member), on the findings from the early years evaluation of Big Local, carried out by NCVO, IVR and OPM and Big Local's journey and learning to date. The session provided a space for funders to reflect on the experience of Big Local and what that might mean for their funding and relationships with local communities and places.

David Warner, London Funders, Chair, emphasized that the discussion would be an opportunity for people to be open and honest, emphasizing that the Learning from Funders meetings follow the Chatham House Rule to encourage discussion and learning. London Funders is a place based organisation and place could well become an increasingly important determinant in the voluntary and community sector.

Debbie Ladds, Local Trust, gave an introduction to Big Local. Big Local is a national, long term programme offering funding and support for residents in 150 areas across England to make a lasting and positive difference to their communities. Each area has an investment of at least £1million and at least ten years to use it once they have developed their own local plan. Local Trust's mission is to enable residents to make their communities and their areas even better places in which to live. This is achieved by helping them develop and use their skills and confidence to identify what matters most to them, and to take action to change things for the better, now and in the future. At the heart of what makes Big Local different is the principle that residents make the decisions about how the money is used and which locally trusted organisations Local Trust funds. Minimal requirements are put on how they use the funding or organise themselves, and support is offered to help residents gain the skills and confidence and make the changes they feel will make their area an even better place to live. The programme is funded by Big Lottery Fund and is the Fund's largest ever investment.

The outcomes specified for Big Local are:

- Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them
- People will have increased skills and confidence so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future
- The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises
- People will feel that their area is an even better place to live.

Although some communities do have very concrete plans about what they want for their communities, part of the intended impact is about social connection and cohesion, therefore it can be complicated to measure these clearly and so the programme development looks at process and feelings too.

External evaluation

The evaluators (NCVO, IVR and OPM) studied more than 100 Big Local areas. It would be too early to attempt an evaluation on long term impact including health and jobs as there is still another 12 years of the programme. The key findings were:

- 94% confidence plans reflect residents ideas about what is most needed to improve their areas
- 94% of those with voting rights are residents and it feels resident led
- 88% feel confidence about their ability to help make Big Local happen
- 85% agreed Big Local is giving residents more control over what happens in their area

The themes coming through were about the people (more active and skilled with raised ambitions), place (the use of assets and the way the area looks) and the connections formed (community spirit). Although the Local Trust money can last for 10 years, initial plans don't last that long. There have been discussions with nef on looking at how the work can contribute to keeping money locally in the long term e.g. community entrepreneurs, local jobs, local charity jobs, selling locally.

IVAR have also done work with Big Local on resident control. Big Local is very 'light touch' and flexible in working with the residents while the residents should make the big decisions on the timelines, pace, activities and impact. It is difficult balance to remain very light touch and still have enough data to report on.

The evaluators did note that in the long run the process alone of defining what is needed and coming together to discuss what is needed may fundamentally matter as much as what is actually prioritised and acted on.

Discussion

- There will be some long term evaluation of Big Local which provides more robust evidence on the long term impact. This includes longitudinal research, following 15 areas and tracking the individuals, families and communities over several years through film and audio. However it is very early stages.
- The outcomes were agreed by BIG at the starting point. There will be a time when we expect more evidence and we ask areas to self-evaluate and also programme level evaluation includes household surveys in some areas. Eventually we will need enough evidence to demonstrate the difference it makes and where it doesn't make a difference and why.
- The locally trusted organisations are selected by the local communities. The minimum requirement is that they hold the money, and can have more involvement as wished by the communities. The local communities can either just set the general direction of the project or others have even become their own organisations in order to be more in control.
- It's important to provide clear information to the communities where needed to keep them on the right side of the law, to ensure there are boundaries on personal behaviour (in line with the Big Local values) and to hold on to the programme outcomes. However otherwise it should be led by the residents. There are some very good examples of where it's worked very well.
- Local Trust have spent a lot of time and money in funding learning and training events national – 122 events nationally. They are currently running a formal training programme on general skills such as chairing and managing relationships, also more specialist training on community hubs and local buildings. The group commented that this is a very different model for

capacity building which may be of interest in the conversations about the future of infrastructure.

- When discussing the relationships with local authorities or CVSs, it was recognised that this very much depended on the local community. Some organisations are not happy where the money isn't going where they think it should, however others already have strong local relationships and this can work very well.
- The Big Lottery Fund made the selection of which communities to fund. There was an internal local analysis of where areas had been underfunded previously and there were discussions with local authorities or infrastructure bodies locally. Some areas were better defined as communities than others in the selection, as some are not natural communities.
- The fundee/ funder relationship is hard to get over, but consistency is helpful to build trust
- Key learning was noted by Debbie:
 - We can never replace statutory funding. If organisations join up together there should be enough money.
 - Hard work! Can be easier to run a standard grant process. It's also hard for some organisations to get involved.

The group thanked Debbie for her honesty, and representatives from [Hammersmith United Charities](#), who acted as a match funder for one group, noted how much they had got from the process, in introducing a new way of working. The money goes to the beneficiary first and then back into the community.

David thanked Debbie for sharing her knowledge and the audience for attending.

Participants

Rohan	Martyres	CAN
Cathy	Togher	Comic Relief
Tim	Hughes	Hammersmith United Charities
Melanie	Nock	Hammersmith United Charities
Alicia	Lippiatt	John Lyon's Charity
Debbie	Ladds	Local Trust (Presenter)
Olubukola	Jackson	London Borough of Southwark
Phil	Sital-Singh	Media Trust
Rachelle	Angeline	Social Finance Ltd
Jessica	Cordingly	The LankellyChase Foundation

In attendance

Becky Green	London Funders
David Warner	London Funders (Chair)

With thanks to Buzzacott LLP for their support in hosting this meeting.