Fourteen - LEARNING
SHARING THE BEST BITS FROM THE COMMUNITIES
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FOURTEEN – LEARNING

PURPOSE OF THIS LEARNING REPORT
This learning piece aims to share good practice and learning from the Fourteen communities. The piece will be shared with the Fourteen communities and the wider sector. We hope to inspire ideas and encourage new ways of working. This piece aims to be accessible and easy to read.

CONTENTS

• Background
• Process
  • Consulting, piloting and training
  • Communications and engagement
  • Community Plan
  • Match funding
• Local Reference Groups
  • Convening the local reference group
  • Skills, qualities and attributes of a good local reference group
  • Reviewing and maintaining the local reference group
  • Upskilling the local reference group
• Building a stronger voluntary sector
  • Forming local partnerships and networks
  • Events
  • Volunteering
  • Upskilling local organisations
  • Research
  • Small grants
  • Participatorily budgeting
  • Capacity building
  • Sustainability
BACKGROUND OF FOURTEEN

Fourteen is a £3.5m community led programme that seeks to deliver long-lasting social change in 14 communities throughout the UK. The programme is funded by Spirit of 2012, a charity set up by the Big Lottery Fund to connect events to communities across the country.

Over a three-year period (2015 to 2017), Fourteen seeks to increase levels of social inclusion, improve wellbeing, improve the perceptions of disability and enhance participation in each of the identified communities. The activities undertaken through the programme fall into the following strands:

- Social action and volunteering
- Grass roots sport and physical activity
- Cultural activity and the arts
- Youth leadership and personal development

UK Community Foundations (UKCF) manages the programme in Scotland, Wales and England (12 Communities and £3m of investment) and Springboard manages the programme in Northern Ireland (Two communities and £500,000 of investment).

Each community has a resource pot of £200,000 which is managed by a local delivery agent – either a Community Foundation or Springboard in Northern Ireland. The delivery agent’s role is to appoint a panel of local decision makers, create a community plan, identify outcomes and design an approach to spending the money. The parameters for spending the community resource pot are wide as long as they are in line with the aims of the programme - most communities have: held funding rounds, commissioned projects, employed community builders, held events and commissioned research.

PROCESS

Community led grant programmes need time to find their feet before they can evolve. Enough time to develop Local Reference Groups (LRGs) who are the panel of local decision makers, create a vision and community plan, build relationships and make time for critical reflection is fundamental to any community led grant making programme. Ensuring the fund is flexible and not ring-fenced for specific purposes, has been a key to opening doors in Fourteen and helped to form a wide range of new local partnerships.

CONSULTING, PILOTING AND TRAINING

The first year is vital for learning, growing, piloting and understanding the community; many of the Fourteen communities only felt ready to construct their visions and localised outcomes a year in to the programme, after trailing methods of engagement, awarding small grants, holding community events, asset mapping, needs analysis and community consultation.

Our biggest learning is that in order for a programme to be truly community led, the community need training, time to consult and the opportunity to pilot ideas. This first year is invaluable for learning. For example, in Fourteen, the communities found that operating some initial grant-making was an important stage for LRG members to understand grant assessments and the responsibility of distributing funds and build their confidence in terms of understanding the voluntary sector and being able to make decisions.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Good communication and promotion are vital to the success of a community led grant making programme, this could be done through:
• Leaflet dropping – door to door, in community spaces, in cafes, restaurants, at sports clubs etc.
• Social media, Community website or blog
• Community noticeboards
• Partaking in existing community events
• Community film

Engagement with local people goes beyond promotion. Successfully reaching out to those that are isolated or un-engaged can be the most difficult part of a setting up a new programme, the list below shares some of our more successful methods:

• Employ a volunteer co-ordinator or a Community builder to convene local groups and people
• Put on ‘get-togethers’ following flyering for people with common interests and assets
• Run regular community events open to all
• Link up with established voluntary sector and statutory organisations in the area to ensure a comprehensive distribution of information, e.g. schools, GPs, youth clubs
• Door knocking
• Providing free and subsidised activities
• Using grassroots sports, artistic and cultural activities as a hook to engage people and to break down social, cultural or language barriers
• ‘Bring a friend’ events targeted at those who already engage with and endorse Fourteen

COMMUNITY PLAN
Creating a Community Plan is a crucial first step – the plan should be designed to address the aims and outcomes of programme against the timeframe. Creating the plan will help LRG members formulate ideas, consider budgeting, promotion and outcomes.

• An overview of existing assets
• Highlighting the need within the community
• A vision for change
• Aims for the programme
• Outcomes at the end of the programme
• Priorities
• Approach to spending the money – linked to outcomes
• Budget
• Risk

MATCH FUNDING
Match funding helps your programme become more sustainable, brings additional resource in to the area and can fund elements of projects which might be ineligible under your programme. As part of the Fourteen programme Community Foundations raised £2.3 million over 2 and a half years. Some of our top tips are below.

• Approach existing donors an existing interest in the community ensuring a natural synergy between the fund ethos and the philanthropic aims of potential investors
• Channel money from existing funds, where the donors have an interest in the particular issue you are funding
• Liaise with Local Councils and Community Voluntary Services
• Develop existing and new partnerships with local family trusts
• Identify a local need before approaching donors. Asset / needs mapping – finding out what resources are available to groups where and finding where the gaps are to create a more compelling ask for donors
- Put on events for high net-worth individuals
- Invite donors to be part of the panel of decision makers

Run awareness events about the issues facing people in that community or focus on a specific issue within the community e.g. mental health

LOCAL REFERENCE GROUPS

The local reference group (LRG) is a collection of local people who decide how the money available to their community is spent. The LRGs are made up of residents and individuals from local stakeholders – such as voluntary sector groups, public sector bodies and business owners.

CONVENING THE LOCAL REFERENCE GROUP

- Create a programme that is attractive across a divergent range of community stakeholders and interests
- Connect with residents – through community builders, door knocking, leaflet dropping
- Engage with community leaders in hard to reach or target demographics
- Raise awareness at local events and activities that are already taking place
- Once most members are appointed draw up a skills matrix to see what gaps you need to fill

SKILLS, QUALITIES AND ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD LOCAL REFERENCE GROUP

- Existing relationships with local community – providing a ‘recognisable face’ for groups and individuals
- Good communication – particularly the ability to listen and learn from residents and others
- Experience in: running community projects, sitting on community councils, volunteering, governance, project management, budgeting, fund raising, bid writing etc. etc.
- Lived experience of the issues faced
- A relevant career in, or passion for, the issues the programme aims to address e.g. social worker, teacher, artist etc. etc.
- Analytical thinkers
- Leadership roles for strategic outlook
- A drive for change

Key learning

Above all else a ‘recognisable face’ and good existing relationships with the community are key to embedding successfully and in turn being able to create change. Alongside this it is important to have a diverse range of skills and personalities within a local reference group or community panel; this needs to include both local residents and business owners who are naturally invested in and passionate about their communities, as well as skilled professionals who can contribute knowledge, experience and strategy to proceedings.

REVIEWING AND MAINTAINING THE LOCAL REFERENCE GROUP

- Be clear about the commitment in time that members of the LRG will be expected to give from the recruitment stage (it’s always more than you anticipate!)
- Appoint a Chair with a track record of strong leadership – but with enough free time to dedicate to your programme
- Schedule meetings at times of the day which suit people – meeting times will have to vary to engage with a range of different stakeholders
• Hold open panel meetings to encourage new participants to take part in decision making
• Create subcommittees and give them different projects to work on – not all members of the LRG will be available all the time and decisions are often better made in smaller sub groups of invested people
• Hold reviews of LRGs at least annually to ensure everyone is still invested and that you have all the skills and knowledge you need
• Offer skills building and training to members

UPSKILLING THE LOCAL REFERENCE GROUP
It’s important to ensure your LRG have all the skills they need to make informed and accountable decisions on how money is spent; opportunities to learn also help people to feel valued and engaged.
Upskilling some or all members in the following areas is key:
• Assessing grant applications and awarding grants
• Commissioning, tendering, soliciting, participatory budgeting
• Event planning
• Project management including budgeting
• Extended IT skills e.g. doodle polls, drop box, teleconferencing
• Fund raising and bid writing
• Thematic training, e.g Autism Awareness
• Improving governance
• Monitoring and impact assessment
• Communications - including blog and case study writing, press releases and social media marketing

BUILDING A STRONGER VOLUNTARY SECTOR

FORMING LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS
Community led funding programmes are built on strong voluntary sector networks – whether these are set up as a result of the programme or in place beforehand.
• Ensure you have representatives from key organisations on the LRG
• Create a buddying system where members of the LRG are assigned to a geographical area or selection of local groups to act as friendly face and to provide support and advice – making members of the LRG feel useful at the same time as forming valuable local connections
• Use a Community Builder to directly introduce people and organisations to each other.
• Provide examples of where collaboration has worked well in other contexts.
• Target specific organisations – tailor your offer
• Support local organisations to understand each other’s offers, share information and set guidelines to work within
• Hold networking events – with additional reasons to attend e.g. at the same time as funding fair or whilst revealing findings from a community consultation.
• Use a ‘recognisable face’ or a trusted local organisation to reach out to unknown groups
• The most successful partnerships are those which include people from a range of different types and sizes of organisations as they have more to learn from each other.
• Use part of the fund to employ a community builder to create connections
• Adapt one of your grant programmes to focus on funding for partnership working
• Commission research projects which identify need, resource and existing organisations – then share the research amongst local groups
• Look for existing local initiatives and strategies that compliment your programme and aim to connect with them
• Commission a piece of work that aims to bring groups, businesses and people together this works well when focused on a specific theme or space e.g. improving a community building
• Involve local groups in community consultation to ensure they feel included and that they might benefit from the research that comes out of it
• Convene groups which have a common interest such as proximity to a local housing estate for example, to develop a plan of collaborative working.

**Key Learning - Regular informal meetings offering refreshments and a topic for discussion are a great way to connect groups.**

- Regularity means people will commit and ideas can evolve beyond one meeting, friendships and connections will be formed
- An informal nature doesn’t pressure people in to attending but creates an open and inclusive atmosphere
- Refreshments encourage people to attend and make it feel more like a social event adding to the inclusive element of the events

**EVENTS**

We’ve found that events are a great way to engage the community in your programme and encourage people to celebrate their surroundings. They are also valuable ways to bring together people who would not usually meet, leading to trust being built and a sense of personal wellbeing.

• Use events as a hook to engage people in further activities e.g. community consultation surveys could be handed out at a community fun day; groups could show case their work and put a call out for volunteers
• Use events that are already taking place as a platform to promote your programme
• Hold events that do not centre on particular groups from the community but are open to all, a focus on arts and culture or sports are often well attended from a wide variety of people
• Arranging shared transport and make the event accessible
• Make sure events are free or subsidised

**VOLUNTEERING**

Getting and maintaining volunteers can be tricky, the main learning we have found is to make them feel completely valued.

• Engage people by getting them to volunteer as part of an event
• Survey them to see what they want from the experience
• Celebrate volunteers with certificates
• Provide skills building and training
• Give them freebies

**UPSKILLING LOCAL ORGANISATIONS**

Sustainability of organisations can be improved through training for staff and volunteers, it also provides opportunities to engage with key organisations in your local area, training could be run by the delivery organisation or provided by expert consultants for more of a draw:

• Application writing and responding to tenders
• Project management and governance
• Networking
• Volunteer recruitment and retention
• Extended IT skills e.g. doodle polls, drop box, teleconferencing
• Thematic training, e.g. Disability Awareness
• Safe Guarding
• Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment
• Communications - including blog and case study writing, press releases and social media marketing

RESEARCH
Research can be a key component to understanding the assets and needs within communities, findings can also act as a tool to engaging and bringing together different voluntary sector groups. Quartet Community Foundation commissioned a Disability Research project which aimed to identify existing provisions alongside issues faced by disabled people within the community. They did this by:
  • Setting up a disability navigation group made up of disabled and non-disabled people
  • Holding small group discussions and guided conversations with disabled and older people - encouraging them to explore issues faced and strategies learnt.
  • Consulting disabled people as widely as possible – for example - before or after a fitness class, during a group/activity/forum, over a cup of tea in the canteen.
  • Exploring different approaches to inclusion from a range of groups.
  • Organising a final event to share the learning and to gain support.

SMALL GRANTS
Small grants are excellent engaging tool especially for new groups. Giving a newly constituted group a small grant can help them build a reputable track record and teach them how to manage funds and to meet funders’ requirements particularly with regard to impact assessment, budgeting and monitoring.
  • Ring fence some of your funding for micro grants of less than £500. Encourage local residents to take part in social action by connecting around a community project or idea and applying for a micro grant to support this.
  • Offer small grants as incentives for groups to build capacity – i.e. scale up activities, move in to new areas, constitute their group etc..
  • Hold open grants rounds offering grants of less than £5,000 with a wide criteria and a long application period to get word of the programme out there and inspire small groups to take on first time funding.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING EVENTS
Community budgeting events inspire local residents to get involved distributing money in their community – giving them a sense of ownership, as well as highlighting the opportunities available.
  • Ensure the day is as community-led as possible. Recruit local people in the planning and organisation stages, ask people to bring food and provide entertainment.
  • Draw up actions such as: planning, paperwork and permissions; advertising and promotion; proposals and pitches; catering; entertainment; feedback/evaluation; equipment & other resources and divide tasks up between groups of invested individuals.
  • Ask attendees (local people) to contribute a minimum donation to come along use the money raised on the door to award to groups.
  • Create a simple, accessible voting system that is transparent and open.
  • Announce results on the day.
• Make sure the day is fun and engaging and that groups are fully prepped to engage as many new people as possible.

CAPACITY BUILDING

• Provide first time funding to small groups – allowing them to manage grants and build a track record.
• Put on Funding fairs to offer groups guidance on applications.
• Carry out asset mapping to help community groups understand existing infrastructure and encouraging them to use what is already there.
• Support un-constituted collectives to become constituted groups, so that they are eligible to receive grant funding now and in the future. Help them to open bank accounts, run and minute committee meetings, raise match funding, write applications, be interviewed and produce case studies to promote their work and to complete monitoring and evaluation reports to show the impact of their work.
• Use your application or monitoring form to ask funded and unfunded groups what they most need support with – use some of your budget to put on workshops using this feedback which aim to build skills of individuals within local groups.
• Encourage funded groups to raise match funding – driving them to improve fundraising skills (where necessary), allowing them to manage larger amounts of money, helping them to increase resources, helping them to pay for elements of their project which are not available to them through your programme e.g. capital costs, and supporting them in becoming more sustainable.
• Help groups understand the value of monitoring and evaluation – teach them how to gather a body of evidence through community consultation, surveys, focus groups etc. which can be used to demonstrate the impact of their work and in turn help them to secure future funding.

Key learning – regular programme of skills building workshops for groups and LRG members. Having a formalised programme of skills building workshops available from the outset helps to build the capacity of the voluntary sector locally, as well as helping to form collaborations from an early stage. These should also be open to the LRG to attend making members feel more valued and the group more self sufficient, lessening the strain on the service delivery partner and potentially creating a more sustainable structure. Workshops could include: event planning, blog writing, grant assessment training, IT skills, budgeting, etc. etc.

SUSTAINABILITY

Embedding sustainability from the outset is crucial - those involved must feel as though their contribution is a part of a wider community commitment to change.

• The vision must go beyond the term of the programme
• Commit to raising match funds to support beyond the life of the programme
• Produce a programme of regular and formalised training for LRG and local groups so that they are equipped with skills to continue supporting groups after the funding has gone
• Convene local groups and help them to build capacity to form a stronger more cohesive voluntary sector
• Support initiatives that aim to combat social isolation
• Commission research that will serve as a resource to the community beyond the term of the programme
• Commission a programme evaluation. Evaluations are critical tools for evidencing your ability to manage large funds strategically and demonstrating the impact of your programme on the
community. Being able to cite a positive prior evaluation increases your chances of receiving future or continuation funding. To get the most valuable findings the evaluation should commence at the beginning of the programme and should be carried out by an external organisation.