



OUR PLACE

INTERNAL PROCESS EVALUATION

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This evaluation report examines feedback on the process used to develop and deliver the Our Place programme from pre-launch through to Stage 1.

1. Introduction

Our Place is investing approximately £9m in five areas with high levels of deprivation and high levels of need, but whose share of Investing in Communities funding had fallen furthest behind their share of need.

The Our Place programme was intended to represent a new way of investing Lottery funding based around priorities set by local people. In designing the programme we have built on, but also trialled, approaches that differ from previous spatial interventions, such as the Fair Share Trust. We have given communities quite specific tasks to complete before projects can be awarded lottery funding. In addition, we have specifically set out to provide more specialist support and build capacity in the longer term, while still utilising standard grant-making processes.

Our Place is committed to focusing on a neighbourhood, offering long-term support, promoting cross-cutting funding opportunities to address a range of needs and reaching out to communities to help us invest in their places. The theory behind the programme is that in doing so, the people and organisations in those communities will be empowered to work together to produce a strong portfolio of fundable projects that will bring about positive changes.

We have also invested in development support so that communities and organisations in the Our Place areas get the best possible chance to make effective applications that meet their needs and reflect the outcomes we would like to invest in.

Our Place Outcomes

- Local areas better identify their needs and have a shared vision for the future
- Local organisations have increased capacity to develop and run projects which make a difference
- Local people have services and facilities that meet their needs and matter to them

Support contractors have provided a programme of community engagement, capacity building and development support in each of the five areas, working closely with the communities and with the Big Lottery Fund along the way.

Given the scale of BIG's investment and the expectations that we have for this programme, we believe that it is very important for us to capture learning along the way. We have received feedback and evidence through our management of the programme in general and the support contracts in particular. However, through this internal evaluation we wanted to capture more detailed information in a semi-structured way that would allow us to summarise people's experiences of the Our Place programme since its launch in early 2010, whilst also providing us with an opportunity to identify what has worked well and what we would change if we were to do another spatial intervention in the future.

Methodology

We have interviewed and gathered evidence from a broad range of applicants, stakeholders and support contractors as part of the evaluation. Stakeholders ranged from local councillors to local authority employees to volunteers involved in projects and steering groups.

The breakdown of the interviews conducted is shown in Figure 1 below. We interviewed 21 applicants (with two applicants interviewed from the Newmains project) out of 26 projects that were approved at Stage 1. The numbers we are working with are small for evaluation purposes, therefore it is impossible to draw statistically reliable conclusions. Nevertheless, the feedback provided is relevant and useful for us to capture from a learning perspective.

Figure 1: Breakdown of interviews

Our Place Area	Newmains	Royston	Greenock TC&E	Renfrew West	Bellsmyre	Total
Applicants	2	5	6	4	4	21
Stakeholders	3	1	0	4	4	12
Support Contractor	1	1	1	1	1	5
Total	6	7	7	9	9	38

2. Set Up Phase

The majority of lottery funding is provided through competitive programmes that fund projects for a set amount of time. BIG will usually design the programme and the outcomes that we want it to achieve and then ask applicants to demonstrate that they can deliver projects that meet these outcomes. Experience has told us that some areas are more successful than others in securing funding this way. As with our approach to the Fair Share Trust, we are doing things differently from the outset with Our Place by targeting ‘cold spot areas’ and allowing communities within them to come up with a vision statement for their area and prioritise projects for funding that fit with this vision.

There is a broad consensus among Big Lottery staff that we took a long time to develop the programme and select the areas because we were determined to use robust methodology based on reliable data. In reality, selecting areas for this type of programme is always open to challenge as lots of factors have to be taken into account when selecting the final neighbourhoods. We engaged with stakeholders in the five local authority areas to ensure local knowledge was taken into account. As a result, we left ourselves with tight timescales to procure the support contracts and begin early delivery in each of the areas. Indeed, feedback from the evaluation has highlighted some issues with the preliminary stages of the Our Place programme, and these are discussed below.

Two of the support contractors felt that the area selection could have been better. One support contractor stated that the area required much more capacity building before Our Place to ensure that there would be organisations there to apply to BIG within the timetable that we had set. Another support contractor felt that the areas could have been wider than the neighbourhoods selected in order to have more of an impact in a community. When asked what they did not like about the Our Place programme, 6 (18%) applicants and stakeholders said that there was not enough outreach in or communication with the communities in the early stages. It was also mentioned by a few applicants and stakeholders, and by the support contractors, that quite a bit of time lapsed between the announcement of the areas and any substantial Our Place activity.



“The timescale between the initial announcement and appointing the contractors was too long.”

With hindsight, we realise that BIG could have worked out more of the details before the announcement and then taken time after the launch to clarify the roles of those involved (BIG/support contractors) and make connections within and between areas with similar experiences (for example, areas that have set up Development Trusts).

Key Learning from Set Up Phase

More groundwork required

It is good to have a robust process to select areas, but time should be built in to do some early groundwork (including communication, outreach, support and development) in the neighbourhoods to support the selection process.

More groundwork in the communities at a very early stage in the selection process would help iron out any issues with boundaries and ensure that each community identifies with the area selected.

More communication and outreach within communities would help clarify the roles of organisations involved in programme delivery and facilitate connections with other similar communities.

3. Launch and Early delivery

The most common ways in which applicants and stakeholders first found out about Our Place are provided in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Most popular channels for finding out about Our Place



This demonstrates the value in using local press and people in the community to promote funding programmes in cold-spot areas. The fact that a number of people first found out about Our Place from the support contractor supports their added value, but also suggests that BIG could have done more to promote the programme in the community at the preliminary stages.

8 (38%) applicants stated that their main reason for applying to Our Place was the opportunity to pursue a particular project. Some of the ideas for projects were more advanced than others. For some applicants, Our Place offered an opportunity to get funding for a community driven project where no other funding was available. For more established organisations it represented an opportunity to expand or target their current delivery in response to the needs of a particular community. 7 (33%) applicants said it was because of the funding opportunity that had been made available and 4 (19%) said it was because they were already involved in activities/projects in their community.

5 (42%) stakeholders stated that their main reason for getting involved in Our Place was because it was part of their job to get involved with this type of thing, and 5 (42%) said it was because they wanted to improve their community.

<p>Key Learning from Launch and Early Delivery</p> <p>The right people, the right 'offer' and the right timing are critical</p>	<p>It is important to use local channels and connectors within the community to promote this type of programme from the outset</p>
	<p>The lure of guaranteed funding appears to have been a positive force for engaging and mobilising people to participate in/apply to the Our Place programme</p>
	<p>The 5 month time lag after the launch meant that the support contractors had to immediately pull the community back slightly as some representatives had already 'decided' where the money was going before any community consultation had begun.</p> <p>This was a potentially confusing message for BIG and the support contractors to deliver. A minimum amount of funding was guaranteed for each area, but the communities still had to prioritise the projects that they wanted to put forward and they organisations involved still had to submit applications of a fundable quality.</p>

4. Vision Statement Process

The Vision Statement process was the first point of engagement with the Our Place programme for many people living in the Our Place neighbourhoods. Each community's vision statement was intended to be the result of a series of meetings and events held with a wide range of local residents, organisations and other stakeholders, and it was designed to tell BIG what they wanted to achieve in their community and where they want to get to in the future. The vision statement process was designed to be driven by the community with the assistance of the support contractor, and the product itself was intended to help BIG understand the context for project ideas presented at Stage 1.

17 (81%) applicants and 11 (83%) stakeholders stated that they had been involved in a community visioning process or community development consultation process before. Whilst it is good to have experienced and enthusiastic individuals engaged in this type of process, it is fair to say a more concerted effort is required to bring new people and organisations into the process. Some of the support contractors pointed out that consultation for the vision statement process took place during the summer holidays and that this made the engagement process more difficult.

5 applicants interviewed stated that they were not involved in the Vision Statement process. Some had no personal involvement in it, whilst others were brought into the Our Place programme as a result of the Vision Statement process. Of the 16 applicants that were involved 5 (31%) felt that BIG had not done enough research or groundwork in the communities. The majority of these respondents were based in Renfrew West, an area that got off to a difficult start with boundary issues and a complicated relationship between the local authority and the VCS. Applicants' experience of this early process is a likely explanation for their response to this question. 3 (19%) applicants thought that the Vision Statement process was rushed. Again, all of these respondents were based in Renfrew West. 3 (19%) thought that the process was ok.



“The process got off to a bad start. Initial confusion about the areas added fuel to conflict and territorialism, and there was apathy in the community before the support contractor had even arrived.”

On a positive note, 4 (25%) thought that the process had brought people together and there was a good level of engagement. Others commented that it was a thorough process and that it identified what was missing in the community. Applicants from Bellsmyre were largely positive about the Vision Statement process, and it is interesting to note that this was an area with a strong sense of community from the outset.

2 of the stakeholders stated that they were not involved in the Vision Statement process. Of the 10 stakeholders involved, 5 said that there was a good level of engagement and 2 said that it got people to see the bigger picture. The support contractors had a number of positive messages about the Vision Statement process, with one support contractor describing the Vision Statement as the core of the whole Our Place process (providing people sign up to it). Another stated that the Vision Statement is vital when it comes to dealing with the local authority, as it documents and represents the views of the community.

Despite the mixed feedback about how people found the Vision Statement process, applicants and stakeholders had positive feedback about its main outcome. 10 (30%) of the applicants and stakeholders said that the Vision Statement process had brought people together and that people and organisations were communicating more now. 9 (27%) of the

applicants and stakeholders said that the Vision Statement process provided the community with a focus for action. 6 (18%) said that it empowered the community and 6 said that it identified the needs of the community, whilst a further 4 (12%) said that it got new people involved in community work.



“People have engaged that would never have done so in the past”

17 (52%) of the applicants and stakeholders thought that the Vision Statement reflected what the community wants, whilst a further 7 (21%) said that it broadly reflects what the community wants and it identifies the key issues. 4 (12%) said that it only reflects the views of a limited group of people, and 2 (6%) said that the community was not consulted but it’s still a fair reflection. It is clear that the Vision Statement was considered when the Our Place areas prioritised projects for funding, with 17 (81%) applicants and 10 (83%) stakeholders stating that they felt that the projects put forward to Our Place fit with their community’s vision.

Whilst there is some very positive feedback here to support the value of the Vision Statement process, there are a number of issues that must be addressed if this process is ever repeated by BIG.

<p>Key Learning from Vision Statement Process</p> <p>A worthwhile process if you get the timing and timescales correct</p>	<p>Overall, the Vision Statement process has been a worthwhile way to bring people together, focus their efforts and facilitate better communication in areas.</p>
	<p>The Vision Statement itself provides communities with a useful reference point as they move through the different stages of Our Place.</p>
	<p>Some issues that need to be addressed include launching at an appropriate time, introducing longer timescales and carrying out more groundwork in the communities to ensure that we consult with and involve a broad and representative set of people.</p>

5. Stage 1 Application Process and Support Received

18 (86%) applicants interviewed had received grant funding before. Of those organisations, approximately one third mentioned previous lottery funding. Some of the most common sources of funding mentioned are provided in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Popular sources of funding received by applicants



12 (67%) of those organisations that had received grant funding said that this was their main source of funding. Only three applicants interviewed stated that they had never received grant funding before, and this was because their organisation was newly formed. BIG's initial expectations were that more low capacity and grassroots groups would emerge and apply to Our Place. Some of the findings elsewhere in this evaluation explain why this did not happen - the lack of groundwork and the time lapse between initial announcements and the support contractors beginning the Vision Statement process. The support contractors also pointed out that there are a few cases where there is an experienced organisation applying to Our Place, but the expectation is that the organisation will work closely with a local community group through the development and delivery stage, with a view to handing ownership of the project over to the community group in due course.

9 (43%) applicants interviewed found the Stage 1 application process easy and 9 (43%) found it ok. When asked why they found it this way, 8 (38%) applicants thought that the Stage 1 application process was straightforward/fine. 5 (24%) said it was demanding or complicated and 4 (19%) said that they needed some support, feedback or assistance. A further 4 (19%) specifically mentioned that they were supported well by the support contractor, with some stating that they would not have submitted their application in time had it not been for the help of the support contractor.



“The support contractor was passionate and had the background and the experience.”



“With the contractor’s support, we wouldn’t have managed to get through this.”

As expected, applicants had received more support from the support contractors than they had from BIG up until the point of this evaluation. 20 applicants answered questions about their BIG Funding Officer. 7 (35%) respondents had been in contact with their BIG FO 2 or 3 times, and a further 7 had been in touch with their GO 4 or 5 times. 4 (25%) had been in contact with the BIG FO 6 times or more. The majority (19 out of 20) of respondents felt that this level of contact was just about right. One applicant had been in touch with their FO only once. They felt that this was not enough contact and that the roles of the support contractor and BIG should have been clearer.

18 (90%) applicants that had had contact with their Funding Officer stated that they found this contact either very useful or useful. When asked why they found the contact useful or

very useful, 10 (50%) said it was because they found their Funding Officer approachable and/or helpful and 8 said that their FO provided feedback on their projects and/or kept them on track with their application. 2 applicants said it was because the FO responded to their enquiries and 2 said it was because they had a face/name to go to. This level of positive feedback is reassuring for BIG, as we take a lot of pride in the expertise and supportive attitude of our staff, and of the level of customer service that we offer.

18(86%) applicants received support from the support contractor 6 or more times. The remaining 3 received support from the support contractor on at least 2 occasions. Feedback on the support received was very positive with 18 (86%) stating that they found the support they received from the support contractor very useful and 3 (14%) stating that they found it useful.

When asked why they had found the support useful or very useful, 11 (52%) applicants said it was because the support contractor was approachable and/or helpful. 10 (48%) said it was because they had provided feedback and/or kept them on track with their project. 4 (19%) said that the support contractor had a useful overview of the programme and the package of applications. 2 applicants singled out the commitment of the support contractor, 2 said that there was plenty of information/training available and 2 said that they wouldn't have got through Stage 1 without the support contractor.

8 (38%) applicants stated that getting help with the application process made the biggest difference to them. 5 (23%) applicants singled out the support contractor (e.g. their knowledge/commitment/intermediary role) as making the biggest difference. 4 (19%) said that the biggest difference was knowing there were approachable people there to help, whilst a further 4 said it was just general support that made the biggest difference.

16 (76%) applicants interviewed did not think that there was anything missing from the support that was on offer. For the applicants that did think there was something missing, some suggestions included providing VAT advice and providing low capacity groups with some resources to allow them to lead, organise and run a steering group (e.g. administrative resources to support groups to organise agendas and take minutes, and a small amount of money to rent a space/buy refreshments for meetings).

Despite the lack of negative feedback about the Stage 1 application process, and the number of established organisations identified as having received grant funding before, the amount of support required and appreciated by applicants was significant, and far more than expected.

We would expect that improved groundwork in the communities, better communication and more realistic timescales would reduce the level of support required. Nevertheless, the positive feedback from applicants and stakeholders provides strong evidence to support the case for having this type of support available to communities involved in a programme such as Our Place. The level of support required by the community could not have been met by the Big Lottery Fund without significantly increasing the staff resource assigned to the programme in addition to developing the skill set of BIG staff to deliver this level of intensive community engagement. Support contractors have even questioned whether it would be appropriate for BIG to provide the support, arguing that there needs to be an independent buffer between BIG and the applicants. It is also worth noting that any increase in the number of grassroots/low capacity groups in this type of programme in the future would result in a greater demand for this long-term support.

The support contractors all spoke of the amount of time and effort that they have invested in the Our Place contract, and it is clear that they are very committed to the

projects and the communities involved in Our Place. Again, improved groundwork and early communication in the communities, in addition to the experience gained from Our Place and other similar programmes would allow us to draw up a more refined specification for procuring capacity building support if we choose to do so again.

Key Learning from Stage 1 Application Process High quality and intensive support required and valued by many applicants	Despite the lack of negative feedback about the Stage 1 application process, and the number of established organisations identified as having received grant funding before, the amount of support required and appreciated by applicants was significant, and far more than expected.
	The majority of support was provided by the support contractors and, respondents commented on their knowledge, professionalism and commitment.
	Applicants and Stakeholders recognised the amount of support available through the Our Place programme, and they were very positive about the support received.
	The level of support required by the community could not have been met by the Big Lottery Fund. In addition to requiring a significant increase in the staff resource assigned to the programme and to significantly developing the skill set of BIG staff to deliver this level of intensive community engagement, it has been suggested that the BIG could not have provided the degree of independence that a support contract can offer as they act as a buffer between the community and BIG.

6. Experience and Impact of Our Place

When asked what they particularly like about Our Place, 12 (36%) applicants and stakeholders said that it involves, encourages and/or empowers communities. 7 (21%) said that they liked the fact that BIG was offering guaranteed funding to the communities. 5 (15%) said that they liked the partnership working and communication between people/projects involved and 5 liked the fact that Our Place provided an opportunity to pursue a particular project. 5 people said that they liked that Our Place was bringing the community together and a further 5 said that they particularly liked the support that was available.



“I enjoyed wheeling and dealing with other organisations to maximise benefits for community.”

2 support contractors said that they liked the Vision Statement process and 2 said that they liked having the opportunity to spend a longer time in a community and “do community development in a way that works”. 1 said that they liked the ethos of Our Place, i.e. the commitment to ring-fence money for areas that have not traditionally received BIG funding.

13 (39%) of applicants and stakeholders interviewed didn't identify anything that they disliked about Our Place. 6 (18%) applicants and stakeholders said that there was not enough groundwork or communication in the early stages of Our Place and 5 (15%) said that the process was too rushed and the timescales were too tight. 4 (12%) said that the process was very time consuming for organisations/individuals. Support contractors echoed some of these comments. 1 support contractor said that the timing of the Vision Statement during the summer holidays was poor. 1 said that they did not like the politics at the start when the local authorities, elected members and VCS organisations all had ideas for how the money should be spent, but they did not communicate with each other. Another support contractor stated that they did not like the bureaucracy that goes with this type of programme (such as the detailed application forms and specific practices we require grantholders to adhere to).

When asked what they would change to improve Our Place, 11 (33%) applicants and stakeholders said that they would improve Our Place by doing more groundwork and area profiling of the communities. 6 (18%) said that they would improve the community consultation. 5 (15%) said that they would alter the timescales and/or the demands accordingly for smaller groups and 5 (15%) couldn't suggest anything to improve about Our Place. The support contractors made similar suggestions for improving Our Place, including more groundwork and area profiling (checking the capacity of groups too), improving the timescales, launching at an appropriate time and involving BIG staff in the communities more.

13 (62%) applicants stated that they would continue with their project even if they were rejected at Stage 2. When asked how they would plan to fund it, 11 out of 13 stated that they would seek alternative funding from another funder. 1 applicant said that they would ask local businesses and 1 said that they would use their surpluses. This is a positive finding as it demonstrates a strong commitment to these projects.

100% of applicants interviewed felt that they have or are more likely to have a more positive relationship with BIG as a result of Our Place. 6 applicants stated that they already have a good relationship with BIG. 6 applicants said that they had built communications with BIG staff and that they now know who to go to in BIG, whilst a

further 6 said that they were likely to apply to BIG in the future. 4 applicants said that their knowledge and awareness of BIG's processes had improved and 3 applicants said that they would promote BIG to others.

19 (90%) applicants interviewed felt that the capacity of their organisation had increased as a result of Our Place. 14 (74%) of the applicants who felt that their capacity had increased stated that they had increased knowledge and skills (around matters such as organisational structure, research and how to use it, teamwork, finding out what the community wants, dealing with architects, etc). 5 (26%) felt that they had more experience and/or confidence to apply for funding.



"I didn't know what the Lottery did before, but I know more about it now."

11 (92%) stakeholders said that the capacity of organisations in their community has increased as a result of Our Place. 8 (73%) of those stakeholders thought that the organisations in their community had increased knowledge and skills (around matters such as organisational structure, teamwork, running a shopfront, dealing with architects, etc). 5 (45%) thought that there was increased confidence and aspirations in the community and people were expressing this. 2 stakeholders thought that there was increased partnership working and 2 thought that there was an increased ability to apply for funding.

100% of applicants interviewed thought that Our Place has made or will make a difference to their community. Applicants made a number of positive comments to illustrate this:



"Our Place opened doors for people to talk to each other."



"Our place is an investment and a springboard for projects in the future."

15 (71%) applicants thought that specific project(s) would make a difference if funded. For example, specific projects would improve the health of the community, bring people together, make a physical change to the community, provide a space to meet, improve family life, leave a legacy, and more. 4 (19%) applicants thought that Our Place has improved or will improve partnership working in their community. 4 (19%) applicants thought that Our Place had reduced apathy and increased confidence and community spirit.

11 (92%) stakeholders thought that Our Place has made or will make a difference to their community. 8 (73%) of those stakeholders thought that specific projects would make a difference. 3 (27%) thought that Our Place had reduced apathy and/or improved confidence and community spirit, and a further 3 thought that Our Place was empowering communities to take ownership of projects. One stakeholder didn't know if Our Place would make a difference because they felt that it may be restricted to one part of the community.

All of the support contractors thought that Our Place has made or will make a difference to the community that they are working in. Support contractors made a number of positive comments to illustrate this:



“People feel better. This area was so poorly invested in before. If successful, this project will be so visual, not just be a revenue project that will fizzle out.”



“The setting up of a Development Trust is a new departure and it has given people a new sense of purpose and dynamism. Our Place has shifted thinking from “the council needs to be doing more for us” to “what can we do for ourselves.”

<p>Key Learning from Overall Experience and Impact of Our Place</p> <p>Strong feeling that Our Place is making/will make a difference to these communities</p>	<p>Applicants, stakeholders and support contractors had a number of positive things to say about Our Place, its ethos and impact.</p>
	<p>There was a strong feeling amongst applicants and stakeholders that Our Place had increased the capacity of organisations in the Our Place communities.</p>
	<p>All bar one respondent interviewed through that Our Place has already made or will make a difference to their community.</p>
	<p>The support contractors said that the Big Lottery Fund is doing something different with Our Place and that this programme is offering a level and intensity of support that the voluntary and community sector cannot access through mainstream channels.</p>

7. Conclusion

It is important to note that whilst this is not an independent evaluation, it has been carried out to highlight both positive and negative feedback on the Our Place programme. BIG is committed to learning from the programmes that we deliver, and this evaluation has provided us with some rich feedback on the Our Place process that we developed and the challenges that BIG, the communities and the support contractors faced in the early stages of the programme. The evaluation has also drawn our attention to a significant amount of positive feedback, particularly in relation to the 'ethos' of the Our Place programme and the support that was available to applicants. Most importantly, this internal process evaluation of Our Place has allowed BIG to capture information and feedback that we can learn from, and encourage others to learn from, as we look to develop similar programmes in the future.