

Small Groups Network Spring Conference 16 March 2017 **- Approaches to Empowerment**

This network is primarily aimed at smaller community organisations and people who work with or support those organisations; mainly groups who are run by volunteers and who don't have large pots of funding.

This network session explored issues of empowerment and discrimination from the point of view of smaller organisations and the communities they represent. It also looked at recent changes to funding processes for 3 funders – Awards for All from the Big Lottery, Sussex Community Foundation and Brighton and Hove City Council.

Elected Reps

Community Works Small Groups Reps elected in November to represent small group issues at a city-wide level:

- Val Cane of Working 50+
- Claire Jacobs of Friends of Farm Green

Visit the Community Works website for more info:

<http://www.bhcommunityworks.org.uk/members/services/voice-and-representation/>

Empowerment and Discrimination

At this workshop we explored how groups are empowered to get their voices heard to challenge discrimination and how that happens so that change can be achieved. We also discussed how we ensure all voices are heard.

Challenging Discrimination

Exercise 1: what works well?

- An organisation itself coming together (e.g. around a disability)
 - Finding like-minded people
 - A common voice, so services listen
 - Sharing experiences
- It helps to understand where that discrimination comes from:
 - Lack of education
 - Fear of difference
- Take up invitations to speak e.g. at conferences

- Push for scrutiny of services
- Find allies in those services
- Work with the relevant 'Community Safety Forum' (there's one for LGBT)
- Work with other groups, those dealing with:
 - Similar issues
 - Different issues
- Use 'your art' to convey a positive message (eg a choir singing)
- Ensure your members/beneficiaries have a good time: positive support to counteract the negatives
- Ask other individuals what they want to be called/how they want to be treated
- Apologise if you get it wrong
- Use communications to explain (eg a card on parked cars that have blocked wheelchair access)
- It may take a long time to help a group change
- There can be fear from individual group members (eg fear of students in housing by long-term residents)
- Challenge discrimination by saying:
 - "I feel...when you say/do that" because your feelings can't be invalidated
 - "Why did you do/say that?"
- Important to build confidence
- It's a slow process – communication and connection you are not alone (CUPP, Trust for Developing Communities, Community Works)
- Challenge of engaging users from the start
- People need to see something on the ground before engaging
- Challenge with:
 - Personal experience
 - Not too defensive
 - Hit head on

Exercise 2: Influencing change and ensuring voices are heard both within the group, and from the group to others

- Take a 'person-centred approach' when supporting individuals ie recognise each individual has different talents and abilities
- Could partner with businesses to provide opportunities to your service-users who are experiencing discrimination
- Run taster events to bring people together eg pop-up shops
- Utilise a local authority focus (eg the Local Education Authority) for leverage

- Funders look to see if groups have provided a 'safe space' for service-users. So it's a good idea to show how the group has ensured that different voices are heard.
 - Can divide a larger group into sections, and have representatives from each sub-group
 - Can use an online forum for member communications, and review what is said there to decide upon strategy/actions. Eg Facebook, Google Docs, being aware of 'barriers to joining' whatever platform you choose
 - Utilise technology eg 'Doodlepoll' to find out times when most people are available to meet
 - Organise relevant support for events (eg sign-language support), and review events to see how accessibility could be improved
 - Run a self-help group
 - Maintain dialogue over difficult issues, accept it takes time to resolve them
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- Many people feel they are not heard
 - Let people know in advance they can contribute
 - Create games and mechanisms to facilitate this
 - BUT success militates against involvement
 - = Strong engagement
 - Numbers of people
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- Funding – speaking to the right people? Council not the only source
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- Encourage people to come by:
 - Let people post questions to board of categories
 - Food etc
 - Opportunity to speak
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- Different groups need different approaches – creative activities to make it easier to share e.g. post-it notes and tree.
 - People can share more when doing something else
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- Challenging to feed back without prejudice
 - Can get help with this – a BHT project
 - Keep original quotes (maintain voice) but translate too

Changes to Funding Processes

Funders are increasingly looking for groups to demonstrate how they empower the people that are involved in their group or use their services to be involved in the decision making that goes on in the group. For example, decision making around what activities to put on, where to hold them, who else to work with etc. etc.

The following funders are making changes to their processes this year – Sussex Community Foundation, Brighton and Hove City Council and Awards for All.

Sussex Community Foundation (SCF)

- Reducing to 3 funding rounds a year to manage application numbers and give more time to assess applications. The summer round will be dropped so the deadlines are in May, Sept and Jan.
- Application will be online (although you can still request a hard copy or electronic to submit by email)
- The wait for a decision will increase from around 8 to 10 weeks. SCF hope the new schedule will allow more time to provide feedback to applicants
- A new Comic Relief programme will launch in March. Groups can apply to this AND central fund. Requires a different application form to standard application
- The average grant is £2,500. Groups should show TOTAL project costs as they may get more. SCF grants do still fund core costs.
- It is better if applicants get their application in BEFORE the deadline as this leaves more time for any points of clarification
- Their webpage gives a summary of the process: <http://sussexgiving.org.uk/apply-for-grants/how-it-works/>

Awards for All

- The Big Lottery are refreshing the process for applying to this fund and the changes are likely to come in shortly (early spring)
- It is likely that you will be able to apply for up to £20,000 to be spent over 2 years (this is currently up to £10,000 in one year)
- They are likely to move to an on-line application form to enable them to speed up their decision-making processes (from 12 weeks to 3 weeks)
- ‘Putting people in the lead’ will be their new strategic approach which will require groups to demonstrate how you are genuinely engaging your stakeholders in your activities and planning
- Keep an eye on their website for when the changes will come on-line (Community Works will also put the announcement in our newsletter)
<https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/england/awards-for-all-england>

Brighton and Hove City Council

The Communities Fund is the council's new programme that is replacing their annual grants programme for the next 3 years. The details are still being finalised and Jonathan Best and Luke Sheldon-Edwards presented to the network to ask for feedback on the plans.

- The Communities Fund is made up of 3 'schemes' – the Engagement Fund, the Resilience Fund and the Collaboration Fund
 - The Engagement Fund – for organisations with an annual income of up to £20,000. Maximum grant £2,000. Likely to be £100,000 in the pot in year one.
 - The Resilience Fund - for organisations with an annual income of up to £100,000. Maximum grant £10,000. Likely to be £100,000 in the pot in year one.
 - The Collaboration Fund – this welcomes applications from a partnership of organisations across the third, private and public sectors. A third sector organisation needs to be the lead partner and there must be a council advocate signed up to the project. There is therefore an Expression of Interest form before you get to application stage. Maximum grant is likely to be £10,000 to be distributed amongst the third sector partners. Likely to be £100,000 in the pot in year one.
- Outcomes – as with the annual grants programme, bids will need to fit under one of these outcomes – wellbeing, fairness and/or cohesion.
- Deadlines – Early May, July and October. The programme is likely to launch in April in time for the first deadline.
- Application – this will be on-line only. Jonathan and Luke are keen for people to test the new site by submitting an application (not connected to a real funding bid!) Click on this link to access the site: https://test-bhcc-self.achieveservice.com/en/service/Communities_Fund_2017_18. Email feedback to jonathan.best@brighton-hove.gov.uk