

Appendix A: Overview of learning from the Community Resilience Fund participatory process

This report summarises reflections and learning gathered through the participatory process and from the draft evaluation report. This is specifically about the decision making process it does not cover the process of grant making and the impact of this. This will be covered in a report at the end of the programme.

Positive lessons:

- Payment for involvement and a targeted approach to recruiting participants led to diverse decision-making groups, which brought richness and insight to deliberations.
- 100 people who took part
 - had a wide range of skills and experience
 - many had not been involved in this kind of activity before
 - had shown an interest in getting involved in other things following their experience
 - were pleased to be involved in the process and felt it was a positive initiative
- Effective process for building trust and confidence in the relationship between the Council, VCSE orgs and communities.
- Participants were committed and engaged- there's an appetite for further collaboration of this type.
- Skills, capacity, enthusiasm was built for future development of collective approaches to decision-making and participation.
- Importance of access and inclusion- we had resource to ensure people were able to take part (to pay for childcare, personal assistance and taxis for Disabled people and to use appropriate local venues that suited participants).
- The community conversations led to a wider network of groups knowing about and applying for the funding.
- High quality and meaningful engagement of this nature is complex, nuanced and needs time to build trust and commitment. The approach is built on community capacity, trust and connections of BCCs Community Development Team and VCSE partners.

Challenges:

- Co-design and participation which is truly equitable and champions diversity takes time and resource. This was an ambitious and complex process of action learning.
Future initiatives
- The first part of the process was intended to be a co-design – this was about working together to design the process of decision making. This process included training about participatory processes and was with a wide group of people. Community and voluntary sector partners fed back they felt it was more advisory and consultative than co-design. Working with a smaller group more intensively, having training together on deliberative decision making and then codesigning the process would have improved the quality of the process and felt more like codesign. This would have required more time and budget.
- The process took longer and was more time intensive than planned for.
- Balancing the wish for a quality process, at a citywide scale, and responding to applicants within an agreed timescale was challenging. We had to twin track designing future stages with delivering current ones which was difficult for partners to juggle.

- Strong, confident facilitation of the decision-making processes is key. Further training and skills building in this area would embed the skills in the city and grow confidence to run this kind of process again.
- Providing the right amount of quality information in a range of formats is important. Bringing in expertise adds rich information to inform decisions but we could have drawn on experts in different ways. For example, having them in the room to respond to live questions, present things rather than written reports (this would have cost more).
- Number of proposals to consider varied greatly. An initial assessment by the City Council could have reduced the number of proposals to make the process more manageable for decision-makers and enhance the quality of the discussion.
- The City Council's Communities Team knows communities and the VCSE well. The team were facilitators of the process and so did not contribute their knowledge and expertise in the decision making. This needs to be considered in any future process.

Responding to feedback through the process

- Improving access and inclusion as we went to ensure everyone could comfortably take part e.g. changing venues, providing a PA for one Disabled participant
- Responding to feedback that the process felt fast, the format of the meetings was changed in some cases. Working in two groups instead of four, with two facilitators per group instead of one, enabled conversations to be more closely facilitated and detailed notes to be taken. More time could also be spent considering each proposal.
- In some decision making groups, participants were given the option of having additional meetings to give more time for deliberation. This offer was taken up in all three groups it was offered to, which were those with the most proposals to consider.
- 'Heat maps' were introduced as a visual tool to summarise detailed discussion and help participants keep an overview of the process.
- The BCC team answered participant questions between sessions to inform their decisions which included going back to applicants to ask for more details and seeking the advice of experts to share with the group
- Providing additional information as we went. This was a learning process, it evolved and changed. Ideally all the information would be available in a digestible format in one place from the outset.
- All participants were invited to take part in a survey at the end of the process which has informed the learning points below.

How the costs compare with traditional centralised methods of fund allocation:

All grant funds have associated management costs. The most resource intensive aspects of grant management are the process of assessment, decision-making and performance management. Processes that are run by Bristol City Council staff will also involve a wide group of BCC officers and VCSE advisers in the assessment and decision making process. Bristol City Council has two full time staff working on CRF.

Grant programmes have different purposes. The associated costs and decision making process reflect the purpose and value of the fund. CRF is a significant one-off capital investment in

communities impacted by inequity and involving people from those communities in how this funding should be allocated.

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What was different about CRF?

There are three key differences with CRF which impacts on the costs:

1. Participatory and deliberative decision making across all areas of multiple deprivation
2. Capital investment in community spaces which is for buildings and infrastructure
3. Involving a wide group of people in shaping the process

Costs included:

Collaborating on the design of the process

Expertise about participatory decision making to develop our skills and understanding

Community and voluntary sector groups reaching out in their communities to identify priorities for capital funding

Involving residents from the priority communities in the decision-making

Making expertise available to help the decision-making process

Making expertise available to the applicants to help them with their proposals

The cost of the decision-making process and technical support was £250,000.

Costs associated with the participatory decision making part of the process:

Paying for resident involvement in the decision-making process £14,250

Paying for the facilitation of the meetings and the meeting costs £25,000

Training/expertise such as videos and printed materials for decision making participants £5,255

We anticipate spending approximately 14% of the budget on programme management over the lifespan of the programme (August 2021-March 2026).

CRF invested in building the knowledge and skills of everyone involved. This has had immediate positive impacts but, we will see cumulative impact over time if we continue to invest in processes which grow social capital, community infrastructure and trust.

Applying the process to other areas

CRF applies participatory and deliberative decision making to grant making.

However, the approach can be applied to different kinds of decision making such as problem-solving and agreeing priorities. The emphasis is on collaboration with citizens (particularly those people who feel excluded) organisations and sectors to make decisions by drawing on our collective expertise, increasing our collective knowledge and in doing so build capacity, trust and mutual understanding.

CRF is a large and complex programme. A simplified process for future initiatives would reduce the amount of resource and capacity required and aid the learning process.

Areas where this could be applied:

- Devolved CIL/S106
- Services wanting to involve people in decision making
- Shared problem solving
- Focus on building our collective skills but applying the methodology in a number of different settings over time (these could be small scale)
- Community led decision making on matters that are important to them (VCSE partners said they could see using the methodology in this way).
- Developing a consistent approach across the council/city

Progressing a participatory approach to decision making needs to be well resourced and given adequate time. It relies on expertise and knowledge of community development colleagues, the community and voluntary sector as well as BCC colleagues.

Subject to resources, other opportunities to utilise all or some aspects of the process could include:

- Maintaining and develop a bank of facilitators through further training and professional development.
- Apply consistent approach to recruiting citizens to ensure there is inclusion, equity and diversity when engaging people in decision making.
- Continue building relationships and confidence through collaboration with partners and residents as equals.
- Continuing building capacity of the residents we are already working with.
- Continue to develop links with experts in the city to build capacity in the VCSE sector around capital projects – pro bono, social value, volunteering.
- Ensure approaches to funding and decision making continue to be informed by evidence - work with VCSE organisations to share knowledge/ data on context, needs and priorities. For example, to inform spending of devolved S106 and CIL.
- Work with Bristol Funders network to build practice of engaging citizens and people with lived experience in grant making decisions.
- Utilising a large, skilled group of citizens to continue building community power across the city.

Draft Learnings and recommendations from evaluation

Codesign:

- Be explicit about what you mean by co-design in any context. Be clear about the parameters and expectations.
- If possible, work with smaller groups for co-design, potentially bringing into larger settings later in the process.
- Ensure any co-design work is undertaken well in advance of any delivery, to ensure clarity and agreement, and avoiding confusion or any need to rush decisions to meet delivery timeframes.

Community Priorities:

- Use existing community priorities (place based and equalities) to form the backdrop for the community conversations. This would put developing proposals into a wider context but would not limit the potential for new ideas.

- Recognise the knowledge that community organisations already have regarding community priorities through their work and incorporate this in the proposal paperwork, setting them in a strong context.
- An extra initial session could be added at the beginning of the community conversation process to share knowledge and information about the needs of the relevant communities more broadly to inform any proposal possibly coming forward or at least enabling organisations to set their proposals in a clear context.

The process:

- More separation between the parts of the process, giving time to complete one part, take on board the learning and then shaping the next part. Recognising that if you are learning as you go, there needs to be enough time to re-group before moving to the next activity.
- In order to include identifying community priorities as part of the process, an initial meeting or series of meetings/conversations, need to be factored in at the very beginning before proposals are brought forward.

Information:

- The provision of clear information in a variety of formats is vital to support deliberation but can be overwhelming if there is too much at once. Keeping information as concise as possible, integrating it over time as part of the dialogue, and ensuring the number of decisions to be made are in proportion with the timescales available supports good quality deliberation.

Application process:

- Build on the straightforward, simplified proposal paperwork and develop a future approach which: a) sets the community context more clearly; b) provides more information for those assessing the proposals based on the requests which emerged during stage two.

Expertise:

- Expert opinions could have been sought earlier in the process, which would have required earlier investment of time with participants to get a sense of what extra information they required to fully understand the proposals and to inform their deliberation. Specifically, around technical issues which could have been addressed earlier, e.g. building costs etc.
- However, some of the questions that emerged were based on many discussions throughout the process so the timing of this input would always need to be flexible.
- Having experts on hand would allow questions to be answered immediately, reducing frustration for participants.

Deliberation and time:

- Re-shape the balance of information giving and deliberation, allowing more time for discussion.
- Provide participants with a separate early deliberation training session, without proposals, but to build their familiarity with the way deliberation works.
- Do an initial sift to reduce the number of proposals being considered and ensure no 'high risk' projects or projects which don't align with programme goals are put forwards. Also reduces chance of disappointment and raised expectations later when some projects may fall through.

- Explore how to allow more time and space for the deliberative process to emerge, without the need for introducing extra tools to move decision making along.
- More training for participants and facilitators before the decision-making process begins in deliberative techniques, how it looks and feels. The aim would be to increase confidence in deliberative discussions as being the way to get to consensus and the ability for participants to recognise when this is happening.
- Use the experience of the residents who participated to build on a more robust deliberative approach for future decision-making.

Facilitation:

- Recognition that the facilitator training could have been more in depth, both around general facilitation skills and the specifics of managing a deliberative process. Earlier investment in this area would have been helpful.
- The skills and input of the facilitators are key to supporting interested residents to build on their existing skills, confidence and knowledge to participate strongly and effectively in deliberative decision-making.

Community context:

- Having an early session in stage two focussed on community priorities and the wider local or equalities communities' issues would have enabled Councillors and residents to build a shared perspective before considering the proposals. This might also have managed any concerns about hidden agendas.