



Co-production within micro-funding



About this Toolkit

This toolkit is based on experiences of micro-funding (small grants) within the Ageing Better programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. It has been developed by two Ageing Better programmes; Bristol Ageing Better and Ageing Better in Birmingham.

The purpose of this toolkit is to share our learning and recommendations about co-production within micro-funding, based on our own experiences. We hope these insights are valuable for funders as well as individuals and community groups who are interested in applying for funding.

We recommend using this toolkit in combination with other resources available on this topic, for example those listed in the 'Further Reading' section of this toolkit.

Micro-funding within the Ageing Better programmes

Bristol Ageing Better (BAB)

The BAB Community Kick-Start Fund (CKSF) offered funding of up to £2,000 to support the development of new activities designed to reduce loneliness and social isolation in people aged 50 and over.

Applications could cover supply of goods (e.g. equipment needed to start a new activity), delivery of services (e.g. training provision, room hire) or a mix of both. However, under the grant conditions of the National Lottery Community Fund, it was not possible for BAB to make a grant of money to an applicant. BAB therefore purchased the goods and/or services on behalf of the successful applicants. A Project Officer within the BAB team was responsible for coordinating the fund.



Applications were assessed by a panel of volunteers who were themselves aged 50+. Applications were open for a 3-year period between January 2016 and March 2019, with 10 rounds of funding applications. During this time, the fund received 221 applications and made 141 awards, with a total expenditure of over £229,300.

An evaluation of the BAB Community Kick-Start Fund can be found here:

- a) Full report
- b) Addendum during Covid-19
- c) Summary document

Ageing Better in Birmingham (ABiB)

Ageing Better in Birmingham's Ageing Better Fund (ABF) offered funding of up to £2,000 to support the development of new grassroots activity designed to support local people coming together to reduce loneliness and social isolation in people over 50 in the city.

Applications could cover goods (e.g. equipment needed to start a new activity), services (e.g. room hire, sessional workers' time) or a mixture. Conditions from The National Lottery Community Fund meant the programme couldn't give out grants and so goods and/or services were purchased by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) who managed the fund, on behalf of successful applicants.



Several members of staff worked on the fund. Centrally, a Programme Coordinator with responsibility for overseeing the Fund, and an Administration Officer with responsibility for liaising with applicants and purchasing goods/services made up the core team. Crucially, the Ageing Better Fund reached prospective applicants and active citizens across the city through community development workers (referred to on the programme as Network Enablers) employed by partner organisations. Their responsibility was to support applicants and help develop activity on the ground.

Applications were assessed by a panel of four members, including two volunteers who were over 50 and who had lived experience of social isolation. A number of volunteers sat on the panel on a rota basis, which allowed for a diverse range of expertise to be involved, representative of Birmingham's super-diversity. Applications were scored on five criteria which formed the basis for the panel's discussions. The programme used a Test & Learn model, encouraging the panel to say yes rather than no to applications and to try out new activities without the fear of not hitting 'targets' or meeting funder's expectations.

Applications opened in June 2016, were assessed monthly and up until January 2021, the Fund had received 473 applications and made 284 awards, with over £418,000 committed to grassroots activity.

As a result of activities funded by the Ageing Better Fund, a number of learning reports were produced on a local level in Birmingham:

- Getting older men involved in activities
- How to make a difference in your community and keep your activity going (sustaining your group)
- Overcoming barriers to joining activities
- Top tips for successfully setting up a local group
- Women's' swimming lessons reducing social isolation

Other Ageing Better programmes

A number of other Ageing Better programmes also ran micro-funding schemes, and each used a slightly different model.

More information about these micro-funding schemes can be found on the following websites:

- Brightlife Cheshire
- Ambition for Ageing, Greater Manchester
- Time to Shine, Leeds
- Age Better in Sheffield
- Ageing Better Middlesbrough

Structure of this toolkit

This toolkit is split into four sections – an outline of co-production with micro-funding schemes, a section for funders and a section for individuals and community groups:

WHAT IS CO-PRODUCTION WITHIN MICRO-FUNDING?

An overview

RESOURCES FOR FUNDERS

1. Encouraging a diverse range of activities to be funded through micro-funding
2. How to ensure a co-produced micro-funding selection panel functions smoothly

RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

1. Tips for working together with your community when making the application and running the activity
2. Jargon buster! Key words used in funding applications
3. Keeping your activity going after the micro-funding ends
4. Where to get information and advice about micro-funding

CASE STUDIES

Suggestions for further reading can be found at the end of this toolkit.

