Bristol Ageing Better Community Kick-Start Fund
What have we learnt so far?

Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them live fulfilling lives.

The Community Kick-Start fund is one of the 16 initiatives that make up the BAB programme, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. BAB is committing £200,000 over five years to help kick-start community activities which aim to reduce isolation and loneliness among older people in Bristol. It allows organisations, groups and individuals to seek up to £2,000 for a new activity in this field.

BAB facilitated a shared learning event in November 2017 with 4 of the 14 Ageing Better areas that have been funded by the Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme. These were Ageing Better in Birmingham, Ageless Thanet, Connect Hackney and Brightlife Cheshire. All were at different stages of delivering initiatives similar to BAB's Community Kick-Start fund. The purpose of the event was to provide an overview of how this project is delivered in different areas, reflect on successes/challenges and learn from each other.

Key tips from the shared learning event:

Awareness of the Fund

- Promote the fund in a wide variety of ways…internet, social media, mailing lists, free local newspapers, radio, TV, flyers in community centres, your local third sector support agency, through council community development workers, delivery partners, and more!

- BAB's Community Researchers raise awareness of the fund while they are out and about in the community for other tasks which has been effective.

- Clearly emphasise that the fund is only for new projects, not to replace any previous funding which has been cut.

Funding Panel

- Making the fund city-wide recognises that loneliness and isolation also occur in affluent areas.

- Maintain momentum by enabling applicants to apply at any time of year. Arrange for a funding panel to regularly review the applications (e.g. monthly or quarterly), providing them with enough time (at least 10 days) to assess applications individually before the joint panel meeting. Ensure older people make up a significant proportion of funding panel members.

- Consider whether an application provides good value for money per person that it aims to reach. No strict formula, but consider whether the cost is reasonable for the activity being undertaken.

Application Process

- Provide a guidance document to help people complete the application form. Explain things in detail (e.g. what you mean by sustainability) but also in a way that is easy to understand and not too lengthy. Be transparent about the assessment criteria you will use.

- Ensure you have capacity to answer questions from applicants. Those who apply to this fund are less likely to have previous experience of funding applications and are therefore more likely to need additional support.

- Clarify on the application form whether you welcome joint/collaborative applications and, if so, whether this affects the level of funding which can be applied for.

- Set a word limit for each question on the application form to ensure the content remains directly relevant. This also makes the assessment process more manageable for the funding panel.

- Your assessment criteria may involve scoring applications higher if they target certain groups (e.g. LGBT, BME, specific geographical areas, those living with dementia etc.). These applications should clearly explain *how* they plan to involve these groups, not simply mention that a high percentage live nearby.

- The application form should ask how the applicant will reach *new* isolated older people not already involved with the project. This helps ensure the funding is directed at those who are the most lonely, isolated and hard-to-reach.

- Ensure the applicant has consulted with older people. Applications are sometimes written by professionals who believe an activity will be enjoyed by older people but have not actually consulted with them to gain their views.

- Talking to unsuccessful applicants provides useful information for improving the application process and making it more accessible. Find out how they found the process and what was difficult for them.

Support

- Consider how you will support successful projects once they have received the funding. For example ensuring they know who they can contact if someone attends their group with additional support needs, or by providing information about local facilities such as printing.

- Consider how you will support the successful projects once their funding ends. Although sustainability should be built in from the beginning, it may also be helpful to signpost them to other sources of funding or to relevant courses run by your local third sector support agency.

- Plan how you will enable funded projects to work together, for example those based in the same geographical area, or targeted towards a particular client group/activity.

- How will you evaluate the fund? Which type of CMF is more suitable for your funded projects? (perhaps trial both and see). How can you use this information to improve the fund?