

Building a Fairer City action plan

31st October 2023, 9:00am to 12:30pm, Streets of Growth, Hayloft Point, 6 Middlesex Street, London E1 7EX

The Power of Participation

Learning note

On the 31st of October 2023, the Greater London Authority, in collaboration with [Shared Intelligence](#) ran a facilitated event focused on the Power of Participation. It brought together a broad audience of local government, the voluntary and community sectors and funders across London to explore how to ensure Londoners are more involved in decision-making. The outcome of this event was to understand how to better design, plan and deliver services as well as ensuring that funding reaches the relevant communities.

Speakers from the organisations below shared their experiences of participatory approaches, highlighting what works and what doesn't, and in which circumstances.

- London Funders - <https://londonfunders.org.uk/>
- Barking and Dagenham Giving - <https://bdgiving.org.uk/>
- LGBT Consortium - <https://www.consortium.lgbt/>
- Trust for London - <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/>
- City Bridge Foundation - <https://www.citybridgefoundation.org.uk/>
- Locality - <https://locality.org.uk/>

The event explored some of the practical steps that organisations can take to involve Londoners in decision-making and how to measure progress and success. This note reflects the good and live practice from those experiences and sets out how organisations can begin or develop their own participatory journey. It highlights top tips for organisations to consider when exploring more participatory methods.

Practical considerations and steps

Time, cost and resource should not be underestimated

One of the main lessons from organisations that have been engaging with co-design is appreciating that the work takes time, can be cost intensive and can take up more resource at key stages. These stages should be designed as a journey, not as a one-off in order to see quality results.

- Be realistic with timelines – co-design processes are and should be dynamic, so allowing flexibility in timescales to provide the space to manage the process and any challenges as they unfold is crucial.
- Be realistic with budget – communities must be compensated for their time, and this will add to the overall budget.
- If something isn't working, stop and consider if it needs to be done differently.

Design in transparency and honesty to any process

Transparent collaboration and co-design with communities in London is crucial to creating trust. The power in a decision-making relationship needs to be shared to make a genuine difference to the communities of London.

- Be honest about your organisation's limits, barriers and "red lines".
- Difficult questions are likely to come up during co-design, so be transparent about whether you can answer the questions posed or need to work them through.
- Being honest when things go wrong is crucial to learning and improving outcomes for all parties.
- Be honest about conflicts of interest and having in place procedures to manage them.
- There is a place for informal discussions, and these should be delivered in an open and honest manner.
- Have conceptual clarity of what your approach is – e.g., is it participatory grant making, whereby decisions about funding are made by the groups who will be affected by this funding, or expanding co-design approaches, which aim to bring diverse groups together as equals in decision-making.

Expect training and development needs to shift within your workforce

Training can be a useful tool for supporting staff in your organisation to develop a co-design model. Skills such as negotiating, democracy and engagement are all key to a successful process.

- Training can help organisations and individuals understand the skills they need for collaboration, improve design and participation of a journey.
- In the context of grant givers and funders, grant managers are often in transactional relationships. Supporting them through the transition to one which focuses on convening and facilitating can help improve participation and build trust.
- Collaboration with other organisations is valuable to continue learning about what is working, what others are doing, and successes and failures.
- Translating the theory to the practical through constant contact and communication can help to improve live practice.

Consider the accessibility needs of others beyond your own systems and processes

Processes need to be designed with, and with consideration of the skills, capabilities and capacities of the end user. Every community will have its particular challenges so don't exclude them before you begin.

- Make any application or design processes as simple as possible. In the context of grant-giving, this may include access to multiple grant programmes through a single application process.
- Consider different mediums for information sharing, for example enabling use of video applications.
- Pre-screen questionnaires for eligibility criteria before asking candidates to write full grant applications.
- Ensure any language used is accessible and avoids unnecessary jargon.

- Consider intersectionality and inclusion of language and understand the needs of the communities with which you are collaborating.
- Protect the communities that may be sharing difficult and traumatic experiences. Share learning in a way which is respectful and conscious of the challenges communities face.

Understanding where you want to get to and measuring that success

Measuring the success and impact of collaboration is difficult and will be different for different organisations, programmes and initiatives. Collaboration can be a valuable tool in helping to understand what success looks like, both in the long and short term.

Preparing

- Start early. Allow enough time for trial and error in understanding what matters most.
- Understand who the reporting is for and what their needs are.
- Co-design the evaluation framework such as a theory of change to allow participants and end users to report impact in their own terms.

Work collaboratively to understand the parameters

- Understand the different measures that will be needed between reporting over a year versus measuring over the long term.
- Consider if participation itself has an impact value and how to measure it.
- Understand what participation and impact mean. This will ensure the impacts will be proportionate, useful and appropriate whilst ensuring that the organisations with power and money consider the needs of participants.
- Understand what is meant by systemic change and of the complexity of systems by all parties to assess that change.

Learning

- Factor in dedicated resources to reflect and learn the process of collaboration.
- Regularly share learning between organisations on what is working and what is not.
- Look at both individual successes but also at broader trends and progress.

Resources

For organisations interested in learning more about involving communities in decision making, please see below a list of resources from organisations that took part in the event. You can also visit the [GLA's Building a Fairer City Hub](#) for more helpful resources and toolkits.

- London Funders article discussing collaboration and risk - [Reconsidering risk: what working in collaboration has taught us about pushing boundaries | London Funders](#)
- Information on Locality's campaign to government to put communities in charge of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) - [Communities in Charge - Locality](#)

- Campaign from Locality that looks at the value of working with local organisations - [Keep it Local - Locality](#)
- An example of co-designed funding from City Bridge Foundation - [City Bridge Foundation | The story of the Anchor Programme](#)
- LGBT+ Consortium's web page for grant giving - [Grant Giving \(consortium.lgbt\)](#)
- A hub for organisations interested in participatory grantmaking - [Participatory Grantmaking Community](#)
- Information about Barking and Dagenham Giving's community-led investment fund - [GROW Fund – A legacy for Barking and Dagenham - Barking and Dagenham Giving \(bdgiving.org.uk\)](#)
- [Podcast - Barking and Dagenham Giving \(bdgiving.org.uk\)](#)