



Lankelly Chase



THE DECIDING TOGETHER LOCAL FUND FOR YORK

THE PROCESS

The Deciding Together Local Fund for York was created through a Participatory process that co designed the Grant Making model. It was a process that took a year to complete from which lots of valuable learning took place.

This writing attempts to take the you on the journey we collectively experienced in 2021, sharing insights and learning so that you may draw on our experience to support the development of yours.

WHERE WE STARTED FROM

The Deciding Together process was funded by **Lankelly Chase**, a national funder that seeks to tackle the root cause of extreme marginalisation. They devolved power to the participation group with no prerequisites beyond the fund moving beyond “get the money out quickly” to thinking about the process of making use of the funding and to consider activity that enable systemic change.

Lankelly were open about what emerged from it. They understood and accepted, even, that the process ‘might not work’.

Deciding Together was also building off two years of work already underway by the **York Multiple Complex Needs Network (York MCN)** in the city, which brought together people in York from diverse perspectives of multiple complex needs (homelessness, addiction and recovery, poverty, mental health difficulties). Their aim was to see how York as a city could change the system that perpetuates disadvantage for people experiencing multiple complex needs. This network involved people with lived

experience, commissioners, housing practitioners, senior statutory leaders and support workers.

Regional Funder, **Two Ridings Community Foundation**, brought their 20-year history of grant making alongside an in-depth knowledge of local need and local communities. Two Ridings came with wisdom but openness to learn, to be stretched and to work with others. Two Ridings recruited and hosted a Facilitator to administer the process.

Deciding Together built on what was already strong in our City of York.

Learning from this...

“It is key to assess whether your starting point is already out there in some form in your area. Anyone starting this process needs to attempt to connect with a network of people with principles that align.”

Lankelly Chase also commissioned facilitators from the **Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations** that matter community. “The Art of Hosting” is a method of participatory leadership for facilitating group processes.¹This

community group understands “hosting” as a certain way of facilitation that is supposed to have the capacity of making emerge the collective intelligence that people possess. The practitioners see this methodology of engagement as a way to bring people in complex, social systems into convergence on collective actions, with the participants discovering and proposing their own solution

INVOLVING EVERYONE

The initial process was the three starting institutions— York MCN, Two Ridings and the Art of Hosting – reaching out to as much of the York population as possible, through a power mapping exercise.

They ensured Council leaders, funders, community groups, lived experience networks, faith organisations, disability groups, culturally diverse organisations, faith groups and education establishments all received invitations to get involved, initially through conversation then an open Information Event. In the invitation was a clear offer to anyone wanting to be involved that they could do so in one of three ways.

- **Very involved** in the whole process, committing day per month for six months
- **Partially involved** unable to participate throughout,
- **Low key involvement** where they were kept informed via a mailing list

Seventy people attended the first meeting. It was made very clear that you didn’t have to ‘apply’ to be involved, anyone could come along.

Learning from this...

By not having an application process, which at the time we felt was important, we couldn’t create an appropriate system as payment for peoples’ involvement. This resulted in at least one person dropping off because it was not in

place. We were naïve in this circumstance. It was not good enough not to pay people. We were honest and open about our error and apologised. Although we lost one person because of this, we gained respect from others for how we dealt with it transparently.

THE FIRST SESSION

A month after the initial Information Event we held our first session to form the group and build the relationships needed. We had a clear engagement plan so that people were fully able to commit to the full process. At this meeting we also ran a session on ‘Understanding Participatory Grant Making’

Learning from this...

We recognised that introducing formalised Participatory Grant making models at this stage was too early. Our Facilitator stated “Until I saw the models, I didn’t really get it [Participatory Grant making], but because I had a vague understanding, it became clear to me once I had seen them. But our actual participants hadn’t really got to that stage, they hadn’t the chance for even a vague understanding, so more time was needed before this was introduced.”

At the first session, a Framework was established and we worked backwards from that to create a timeline, so we knew which milestones we wanted to hit.

Although we had planned this first session, plans for subsequent sessions would not be formed until we had drawn from the group.

Before each session – which we called our Decision-Making Space – everyone involved were pre-ready having established what we were making a decision on and also from some of the group meeting each other separately to discuss.

Before any decision was reached there was space to talk and share each person’s own

perspective and listen to everyone else in order to come away with a collective decision.

We applied 'Consent decision-making' whereby not everyone might agree, but everyone 'consents' to the final decision.

We created a Tweak/Remember model to use in our process ...

This is a simple process where anyone could use the word Tweak or Remember to guide us through the process.

An example was when we were creating the application form we did a 'Tweak' to ensure the form was really in very plain English for anyone to understand

An example for 'Remember' was when people were talking about individual applications for the fund and we had to remember that the funding was about system change in York, not about an individual application

The group were constantly empowering each other through the decisions that were made.

SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS

We held six sessions in total, at each one making decisions as a collective.

The Two Ridings facilitator had no decision-making power. They inputted insight, experience and knowledge but were never part of the final decision.

How we were together

From the emerging agreements, we put in place an informal group agreement around how we connect with each other and how we are in the space.

This was about humanity, creating an ethos where diversity was welcomed, individuals were welcomed and power dynamics were neutralised.

The decision made

Decisions made were:

- How do people apply?
- What questions will be in the application?
- What will the invite look like to apply?
- What will be in the Guidance notes for the fund?
- How many panels will we have and how will those panels look?

Collectively it was decided to have three panels

- **Small Grants** – under £1k – 10% of pot – Up to £24k
Anyone can apply – including individuals
- **Medium Grants** – Between £1k and £10k – Up to £80k allocated
- **Large Grants** – Over £10k – Up to £130k

Each member of the group was asked which panel they would like to sit on and it was ensured that each panel had a spread of people with different experiences on them – including lived, professional and grant making. Although people were not labelled, anyone on a panel could have a variety of different experiences, it was never highlighted who was there in what capacity.

Learning from this...

Throughout the process trust was being built. It was always an open space for discussion, honesty and connection between all involved.

Occasionally small groups would come together between sessions to finalise part of the process. This would be circulated to the whole groups to Tweak and Remember before finalising and signing off anything.

HOW PEOPLE AND GROUPS WERE INVITED TO APPLY

We designed an invite together which we tried to make as accessible and open as possible and got that out on our social media channels. We also wrote a blog, covered it on our websites and crucially every individual agreed to speak to as many people as they could to invite them. We had already done a lot of the 'groundwork' about the fund when we engaged with the York population on the idea behind the fund.

We also facilitated two Drop-Ins, attended by over 20 people. We openly provided email and phone number of the facilitator for anyone to call at any point

Learning from this...

Before the Panel Process the objective of the fund was tweaked, through a collective decision, for projects applying to answer 'How do we create the time and space to make fundamental change in York for people with multiple complex needs?'

THE FUNDING PANEL PROCESS

Some people in the group only wanted to be on the Small Grants panel as they felt uncomfortable making decisions around larger sums of funding.

Who should go on which panel was decided through a private vote. Each person said which panel would be their preferred choice and then their subsequent choices. The facilitator mapped the roles balancing up the experience people shared and what they thought they would bring to the panel process.

A week before the panels, each panel member received a full panel pack. It was stressed that it was the individual's responsibility to read thoroughly and not to

discuss with each other. The Facilitator was available for any queries.

Collectively we decided to anonymise the applications

Learning ...

The Facilitator found anonymising the applications difficult because they were not a detailed-focused person. The next time this happened others were also involved in the anonymisation

The Facilitator ordered the applications by how they fitted with the Fund (Remember, the Facilitator was neutral throughout the process, they weren't part of the decision-making process). For some people this helped them with their thinking, but for others they felt it could create bias and they did not like it. In future the group would be asked about this.

We were advised that Panels often didn't read the full applications beforehand, but in the case of Deciding Together, everyone read in detail. We put this down to the group being very tight and committed to the process and the right outcome.

THE PANELS

The time allocated for the panel meeting was over two hours longer than would 'normally' be allocated. This gave the panel members time to settle in, check in, agree the space and also welcome new members who had had 'low key involvement' with the process, but were keen to be on panels.

The panels were planned to spend 4 minutes on each group's application.

The Small Grants Panel

Because there were 12 applications for the Small Grants (under £1k) funding and a 10% allocation (£24k) for it, this was a non-competitive process.

Learning from this...

For the small grants we requested only basic details on application in line with the individual or groups values, having a strong trust that the groups applying knew best.

The Medium and Large Grants Panel

A week after the Small Grants Panel, we held two further panels. We had different 'lenses' for different amounts requested, so the application asked a little more than the one for less than £1k.

The panels separated into two rooms with two strong experienced facilitators chairing them. There was also a note taker, who was specifically asked to record all feedback for projects that didn't get a grant (as well as those that did) so that we could feedback openly to them.

For the Medium Grants of between £1k and £10k we had 14 applications adding up to £94,033

For the Large Grants of £10k+ we had 15 applications adding up to £563,045.

As this amounted to more than the £216k we had allocated for these panels, the process was deemed 'competitive'.

The panels went through each application in their allocated 4 minutes with the question 'Do we want to fund this application?'

Generally strong decisions were made, with a pile for Yes and a pile for No. There were also a few 'Maybes'. The decision making was consent based, rather than consensus. The difference was after hearing from everyone, discussing together, to you consent to the decision made, even if it is not the decision you would have made alone.

We went through each application once, and then returned to the Maybes. The majority of the time was spent on the Maybes.

In the end the panel allocated £46k in Medium grants and £160k in Large grants. Both of these came under the budgets allocated.

Learning ...

One project we decided not to fund actually involved a panel member. On seeing the other applications, the panel member was the first to say their project should not be funded.

THE STRENGTH OF AN EXPERIENCED AND OPEN FUNDER

Supporting the relationships and trust was rigorous, transparent and accessible process. through the experience and expertise of the Two Ridings Grants team. From developing organised papers for people to read to generating communication to all grant applicants at the same time to avoid hearsay – the process was held in a strong, flexible and safe way. This allowed the people involved the time and space to make the clear decisions, to be creative, relieving them from being bogged down by process.

Learning from this...

The panel found it invaluable to have professional grant makers available for this

process, giving them reassurance with a safe, robust, flexible and proven process in place.

COMMUNICATING THE FUNDS AWARDED TO THE APPLICANTS

After the panels everyone understood that they could not divulge the outcome of the grant decisions to anyone outside the panel. It was crucial that everyone, whether they were allocated a grant, or not, was informed at exactly the same time so that whispering, hearsay and unknown did not develop and therefore negatively effect other relationships across the city.. Two Ridings agreed to do the follow up communication within a two-week window but managed to inform everyone within three days.

Learning from this...

“As someone who had applied for funder many times before I had never quite understood the scale of the operation following a panel to communicate the outcome. To honour everyone simultaneously, you have to get everything done and shared in the same way, at the same time and it is very precise and time consuming.”

DISTRIBUTING THE AWARDED GRANTS

Some of the groups were not established legally as a charity, time and support was needed to explore the best constituted structure they should establish to support this funding and their long-term sustainability. Distributing the funding was not straight forward for everyone, and sometime frustrating for some. however, by working together we have developed new practice, learned together awarded grants that might not otherwise be possible. Through the Grants team at Two Ridings and the groups very solution-focussed mindset are able to

honour the groups awarded in Deciding Together, and Spread the opportunity across other programmes across the region and beyond.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW? (Feb 2022)

There are three major outcomes that are now part of the post-decision making process

- The facilitator is working with the funded groups to establish community practise. A space for them to come together, learn from each other, feel supported and extend their connection and reach across the city. This community will be the means to share good practice, what doesn't work and feedback on the impact of the grants. Instead of an end of grant report the groups will share with each other as well as us, through relationships.
- Two Ridings are looking at their Grants Policy and how to make it more fit for purpose.
- Two Ridings is working with other funders to share learning and develop participatory grant making throughout the UK.

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