Barking & Dagenham Giving
Learning & Participation Strategy 2022–23

Barking & Dagenham
Giving

Contents

Introduction

Since the summer of 2020, we have distributed over £200,000 in grants according to decisions made by members of the community, practising what is known as participatory grant making.

What is Participatory Grantmaking (PGM)?

The working definition of participatory grantmaking in common and current use is:

"Participatory grantmaking cedes decision-making power about funding decisions—including the strategy and criteria behind those decisions—to the very communities that a foundation aims to serve."

- Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking, Grantcraft © 2018 Foundation Center (CC BY-NC 4.0)

As you will notice, it is quite a broad definition, as there is no one way of doing participatory grantmaking. When we talk about communities, these can be:

· Communities of place

· Communities of identity

· Communities of interest

Barking & Dagenham Giving fits into the first category as we work with and fund people and organisations who are connected to our borough.

Other participatory grantmakers, like the <u>Disability Rights Fund</u> and <u>Red Umbrella Fund</u>, are open to those who share a particular identity.

We have done this in a number of ways:

- Groups of community members co-designing grant processes and deciding on applications;

- Devolving a pot of money to a collective of local organisations to make decisions about together;

- Appointing and training a Community Steering Group of residents to decide on the investment policy for our new endowment fund (currently valued at ~£900,000) and;

- Being part of a local working group of organisations that are using participation decision-making.

Our learning during this period has been refined for this strategy, which will outline how we will measure and assess the impact on behaviours and attitudes among people who come into contact with us. These changes will emerge as a result of delivering our outcomes.

This strategy is intended to be carried out over the next two years, and will be reviewed and updated for 2024-25 in light of what we will have learned.

Cameron Bray

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Learning & Participation Manager

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The purpose of this document

At first glance then, BD Giving is a grant-making charity. It is true that we do give out grants but these are a means to a bigger end.

Our work is about shifting decision-making power about grants into the hands of people who are or who feel disadvantaged and disenfranchised by the way power is currently used in the borough.

To have power is to have control over how resources are allocated – we think that the people of Barking & Dagenham should get to decide how the resources of the borough are used. We trust in their ability to learn about the needs and aspirations of their community and allocate resources to address those needs.

We know that participation is resource intensive, especially for people most affected by marginalisation who often give up their time for free to provide feedback or attend meetings. If we are to engage people in our work, we need to be able to demonstrate that there is value in engaging with us – so while we're not always going to be in a position to deliver change, we should always compensate people for the time that they give to us.
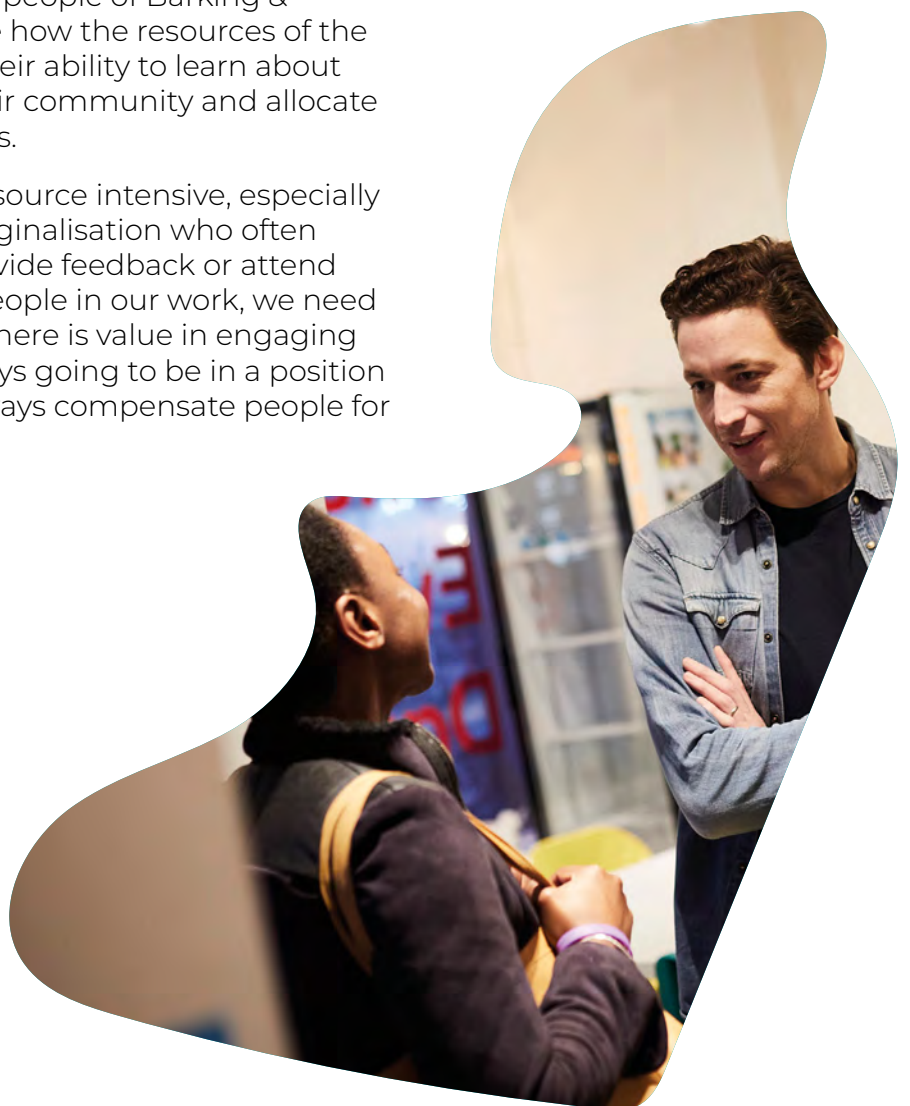
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Marginalisation

When we talk about people experiencing marginalisation, we mean people who are prevented from fully participating in society as they would like. There can be many reasons for this but they tend to fall under the following categories (in no particular order):

- Sexual orientation
- Gender
- Place of origin
- Disability
- Educational attainment
- Income
- Geography
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Housing status
- Immigration status
- Age
- Parental status
- Having caring needs
- Being a carer

A person can be marginalised in many different ways (and more often than not, this is the case), and some of those will have a greater impact on them than others.

Marginalisation happens when something is done to someone or when the support they need is not provided. This leads to them being disenfranchised and disadvantaged. For BD Giving's work to succeed, we need to work to understand and dismantle the barriers that people experiencing marginalisation face, so that they have the opportunity to lead more engaged and fulfilling lives.

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While we specifically promote shared decision-making as a way of allocating resources, we will also advocate for it being a more widely used method of working with communities in the borough. We want to be a local place for people to turn to for building their capacity around shared decision-making, even when those decisions lie outside of BD Giving.

The traditional model of grant-making sees power held by foundations and trusts, who allocate resources according to what they think a community needs. This model of funding encourages communities to come with open hands and to be grateful for whatever is given – by doing this, grant-makers keep communities trapped in cycles of dependency and applicants will only ask for money for things which they think the funder will approve of, not what they actually want funded. This model tackles the symptoms of need, and not their causes.

In doing so, grant-makers also deprive communities of the opportunity to learn about themselves by having the freedom to do something different. Giving decision-making power to communities must mean giving them the opportunity to learn from their decisions and build on what they learn – every decision has a consequence and learning is only possible when people aren't shielded from these consequences. BD Giving will support communities in reflecting on the positive and negative impacts of their decisions and actions, so that subsequent community-led interventions can be even more successful. In doing so, we will transform how marginalised community members feel about themselves – from helpless recipients of support, to active agents in their own transformation.

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Radical vulnerability in assessing our own work

The Learning & Participation (L&P) strategy should be understood as an expansion of the relevant sections of our Pathway document and aims to address how BD Giving seeks to know the impact of our approach to grant-making, power sharing and community participation.

This will be shown by exploring the why, what and how of our work:

- Why do we do the work that we do?

- What does our work entail?

- How will we measure the impact of our work?

Running through all our work is the concept of radical vulnerability. What this means is adopting, as much as possible, a stance that our work can only progress if:

- we are as transparent as possible about what we do and why we do it; and

- we make ourselves available to listen and respond to constructive criticism about our work.

To date, this approach has seen us bring down barriers in our network and the emergence of new ways of working together.

Later, we will outline how we practise radical vulnerability but this document is itself an example of our commitment to openness and transparency and will lay out why we do the work that we do, as well as why we collect data as part of our work. As such, it is also open to challenge so that future strategies can evolve and adapt to respond to the needs of our stakeholders and communities.

What are our assumptions?

We don't know everything and there are a number of assumptions that underpin this document. Some of these assumptions are based on gut-feelings and research whereas others are the result of our observations from doing this work in B&D:

- No one person or organisation has a complete picture of what works in Barking & Dagenham, hence we need to engage with a broad spectrum of views and experiences to enhance our understanding of a complex and constantly evolving situation.

- People should be involved in decisions that impact their lives and given the opportunity to create meaningful change for themselves, their family and their neighbourhood.

- People will feel more invested in the place they live if they are able to play an active role in its future.

- Community members will want to make meaningful decisions and be actively supported in building their capacity to participate in these decisions where they feel it is necessary.

- Community members must be incentivised appropriately so that they will want to collaborate and influence decision-making, and that this will lead to positive and meaningful change to them and their communities.

- Disagreements about how to allocate resources can be used to reveal different ways of addressing complex challenges. This can lead to the development of more comprehensive interventions instead of 'quick-fix' solutions that seek to suppress conflict in the short-term but which lead to a long-term breakdown in relationships while not addressing the root causes of challenges.

- Communities are capable of making decisions that do not exclude others from a shared vision of prosperity, in which one person's success is not dependent on another person's failure.

- There is an opportunity to enhance trust in institutions, which has been historically low in the borough, given enough time and support.

People will feel more invested in the place they live if they are able to play an active role in its future.

- Institutions are constituted by people and can therefore be constituted differently. If the people that form institutions have more agency in their work (rather than simply carrying out commands from above which they do not have confidence in), they will be able to work in responsive ways which allow people to live more fulfilling lives.

- People are capable of ending cycles of oppression by accessing power and using it on/towards others in a way which does not replicate the way power was used on them.

- B&D Giving will be able to secure the resources it needs to expand our work to shift decision-making power about grants into the hands of people who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

- Community engagement and empowerment will become a regenerative circle as capacity is built – people will feel their voice is heard and their needs are met, and this will encourage further resources to flow into the borough for the benefit of the whole community.

- As we are working in a collaborative way that looks at changing systems, there will always be a problem of attribution when it comes to measuring our impact. We do not think this means that we can never claim responsibility for changes in the borough.

Why we do the work we do

We aim to help the people of Barking & Dagenham feel engaged in their neighbourhood and to be able to make a change which will positively impact their community.

We want to see those people who are currently disenfranchised and who are being actively disempowered leading this change because they are the ones whose lives can be radically transformed.

The immediate impact of this will be tangible, in that we are already providing direct opportunities for people in the borough to decide how to allocate resources and supporting causes that are dear to local people. As people continue to engage with our work and learn alongside us, they will feel able to make changes in other parts of their lives, the borough, and beyond.

We also want to work in this way to encourage other organisations both inside and outside the borough – other grant making bodies, local authorities, etc. – to adopt a similar model to their decisions which affect marginalised communities.

At some point, the question people ask when they engage with us should stop being 'Why is BD Giving working in this participatory way?' and 'Why isn't [Funder X/Government Department Y/Local Commissioner Z] working in this participatory way?'

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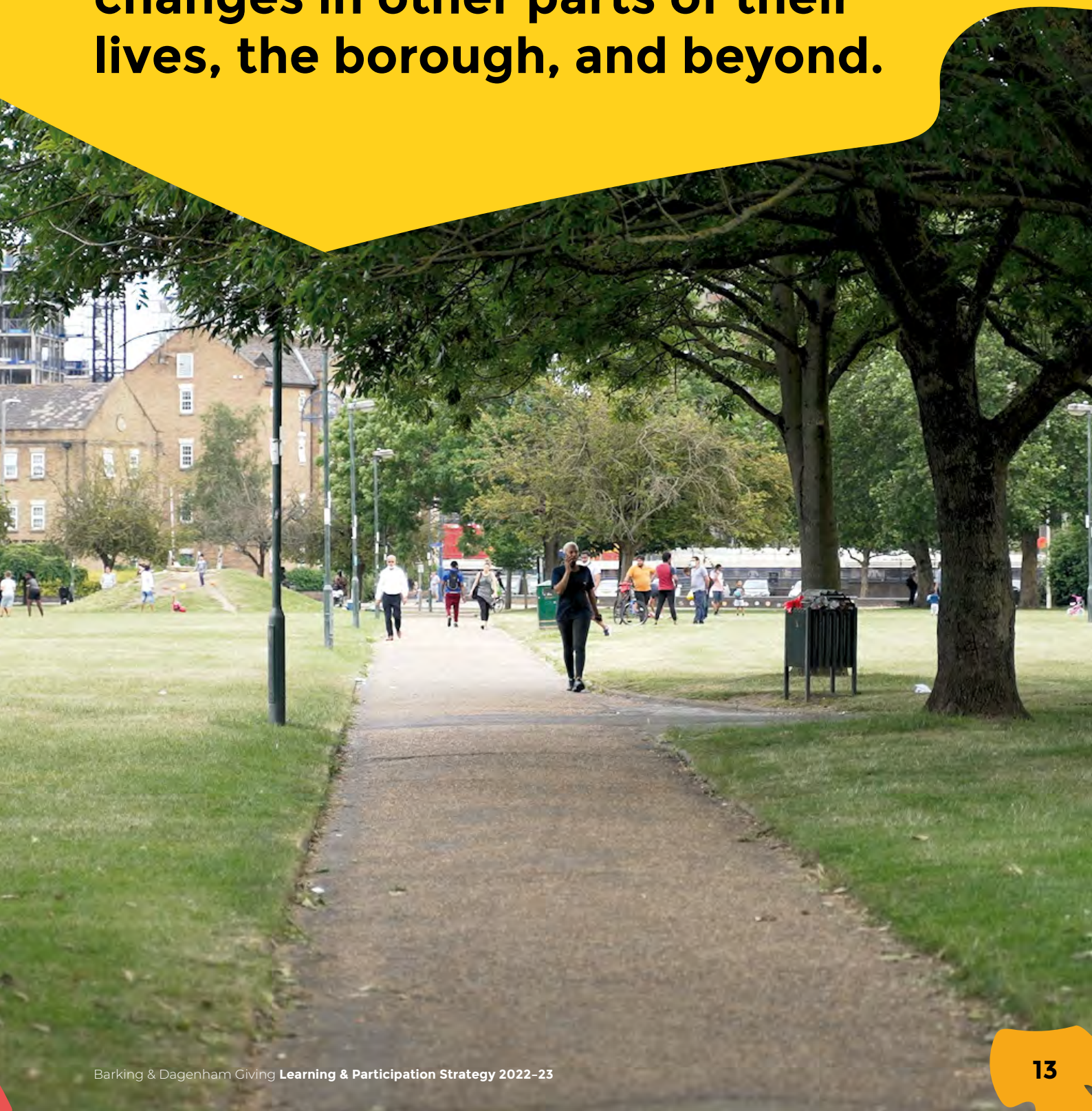
What our works entails

The core values of BD Giving are collaboration, inclusion and adaptation.

These are the behaviours that we think make our funding process better by ensuring that we are always exploring and interrogating our relationship to power.

Participation is the cornerstone of our learning strategy, as it enables us to deliver a service that is responsive to communities' needs and changing circumstances. We will listen, evaluate what is or isn't working, and adapt our practices proactively.

We will continue to act on these values by delivering funding to the borough using participatory methods and outline below how we will support this work. We will continue to use our position to model different ways of funding which place listening and learning at the centre of every discussion about allocating resources.

If we model our grant-making system in a way which requires applicants to meet an arbitrary standard of competency or trust, then we send a message that we believe them to be inherently incompetent or untrustworthy, until they prove otherwise. Instead, we will model collaborative and inclusive grant-making which encourages: bringing in a wide range of perspectives; considered risk-taking; taking people in good faith; and trusting in local knowledge. Our approach will be adaptive because we believe in people's willingness and capacity to learn from what has worked and what hasn't and change their approach as the situation changes around them.
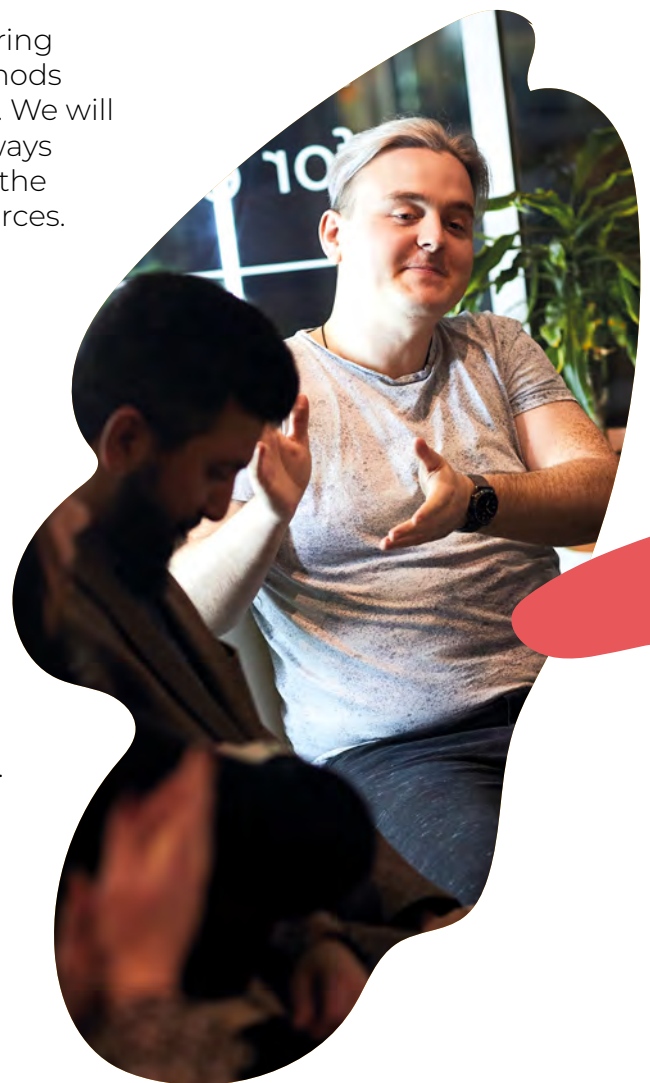
We will listen, evaluate what is or isn't working, and adapt our practises proactively.

a. Building local capacity around decision-making

Between our grant-making and our new Community Steering Group, we are providing opportunities for people to get to grips with decision-making. What we are learning through this is that there are common emergent needs around where participants currently need support:

- Shared decision-making

- Conflict management

- Communication

- Thinking through biases

- Understanding risk in the context of allocating resources

- Mapping relationships and power in the borough

Because we want to see a more participatory borough, we should be offering support and resources around these areas outside of any of our decision-making processes as well, in order to see these skills utilised across Barking & Dagenham.

We also want to create a more formal 'pathway' for participants to deliver our work (e.g. by leading the induction of the next cohort, writing blog posts, interviewing applicants and grant recipients as part of our monitoring & evaluation).

b. Developing a participatory policy platform

In order to make BD Giving a more participatory organisation, we will create a portal of living resources/ policies or operating manuals that people can co-edit.

In the first instance, these will be based on the experience and research of the staff, and draw on the work we have done so far. This input has led us to our current thinking ("policies") around:

- How we go about compensating people for their time (what is 'fair'?)

- How we deal with conflicts of interest in the community

- Our approach to transparency

- Who needs to be included in our work

This platform will be developed in the first half of 2022, led on by the L&P Manager with support from all staff members to engage a wide constituency of community members to feed into the thinking.

Over time, these will have more and more community involvement in their construction, with a regular plenary session where these policies are discussed in terms of their utility, which the community then pushes back into the core values of BD Giving, leading to new thinking being generated and new horizons pursued. It must be the case that the next version of this strategy isn't written by just three people, two of whom work directly for BD Giving. In between plenaries there is a process of observing and collecting relevant data.

c. Practising radical vulnerability

At the start of this document, we mentioned the concept of radical vulnerability which sees us take an open and transparent approach to our work. This document is itself an example of that, but how else do we demonstrate radical vulnerability in our work?

- Speaking about the strengths and successes AND the challenges of a project or piece of work.

- Not being afraid to accept and give good faith constructive criticism both inside and outside the organisation.

- Creating spaces where we are just listening to people without an expectation that they need to come up with solutions.

- Producing content about the work, which also highlights our own feelings about the work.

- Talking about our own lived, living, and learned experience to create a safe space for those we engage with to do the same.

- Highlighting the role of emotional labour in our work which, like all labour, requires appropriate rest and safeguarding.

- Supporting each other, and those we work with, to contribute to difficult conversations with organisations and people who hold power.

- Making our processes transparent and being explicit about what we are trying to do in our work.

- Create healthy spaces to reflect on the process and, in recognising the power that a funder holds, will not simply assume that positive feedback means our approach is working.

If we do these things, we hope that others will be radically vulnerable with us as well and that through this we can co-create solutions that address the root causes of issues that impact Barking & Dagenham and its people.

How we will execute and assess our Learning and Participation Strategy

While participatory grantmaking is a growing global movement, we're not yet at the stage where the ideas that we talk about around power sharing are commonly understood.

As such, we want to adopt a simple learning framework that will help us clearly explain our work and demonstrate its value to all of our stakeholders.

This is inspired by participatory action research (PAR), which combines four main characteristics:

1. it is participant-driven;

2. it follows a democratic model;

3. it is collaborative at all stages ; and

4. it is intended to result in concrete action or change that will directly benefit marginalised participants.

Plan

Act

Evaluate

Observe
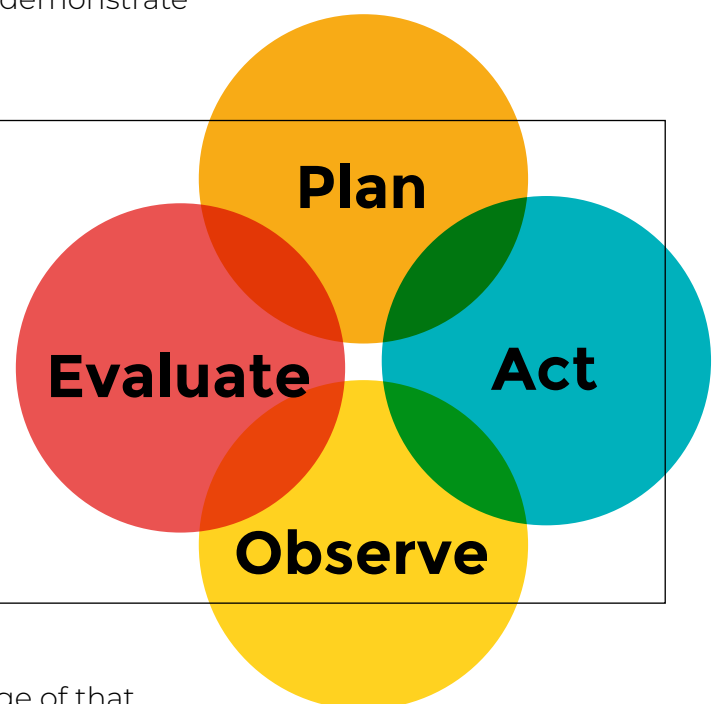
Participation needs to be built in at every stage of that process, in order to reinforce the work that we are doing. We start from a stance of asking how participatory we can make each stage at the moment, given the resources and reach of our organisation and community, and build up from there. Sharing power and building trust will take time but we have to start somewhere.

This document covers the overall 'Plan' of the charity, with the below outlining what actions we will take and what we will be observing to feed into our impact evaluation. Each individual project strand will also follow this simple framework, with their evaluations feeding into this strategy's 'Observe' step.

We do not think that learning only takes place at the level of BD Giving – we expect those we engage with to be learning as well and be able to demonstrate this. In this way, we can co-evolve a more symbiotic and constructive working relationship. To do this, we will take a fractal approach to monitoring and evaluation. Fractal comes from mathematics and is a way of describing the way in which some patterns repeat themselves at different scales. For example, in nature, if you look at a fern, an individual frond looks like a whole fern plant. In this context, however, it means that we will apply our core values across the three 'levels' that we operate at:

- Individual participants in our work, which includes grant applicants, grantees, and decision-makers

- BD Giving itself, including all staff and trustees

- The wider ecosystem that we are a part of (e.g. funders, statutory bodies, donors, other local organisations)

How we do that will not be the same across the three groups but the core plan is the same:

We want to see if participatory ways of sourcing and sharing resources makes Barking & Dagenham a more collaborative, inclusive and adaptive borough.

We can't always measure these values directly, but we can use proxies (or stand-ins) to give us an indicator of change.

Sharing power and building trust will take time but we have to start somewhere.

What value are we measuring?	What proxy do we use to measure this?	How do we measure this?
Collaboration	**Synergy**	Examine how people/ organisations are working together
Inclusion	**Power**	Who decides on what level of resourcing to allocate?
	Participation	Examine who is involved in decision-making
Adaptation	**Changes observed in response to learning**	Examine what people are doing differently

Across the three levels, we think there are four key ways that we can identify our impact, that will help us see how our values are present at each level:

- Instrumental What benefits is our work having on a person/organisation? This might be things like improvements to self-image and wellbeing, access to resources, or upskilling.

- Capacity Are the people/organisations doing anything differently as a result of engaging or working with us? This might look like volunteering locally, attending other participatory meetings, or taking part in joint funding bids.

- Values Are the people/organisations thinking differently as a result of engaging or working with us? This might look like becoming a more trusting person, running participatory activities, or advocating for participatory work in different parts of their life.

- Networking How well connected are people as a result of our work? Is our work reaching a broad range of people at every level? Are these connections leading to further collaborations or access to other resources?

a. How do we evaluate the impact on participants?

Measure	Methods of evaluation

Instrumental	• Application and feedback
	  • *Personal & Community Wellbeing survey*
	  • *Diversity & Inclusion questions*
	  • *Fund reflections sessions*
	
	• Storytelling
	• Data around where and how grants are spent
	• Number of beneficiaries accessing opportunities funded by BD Giving

Capacity	• Number of participatory opportunities people are accessing (including decision-making & training)
Values	• Resilience survey (before/during/after engagement)
Networking	• Application data (D&I questions) and visual heat map of engagement so we have a clear picture of strengths and gaps in our engagement • Counting how many organisations/individuals participants are engaging with through us

b. How do we evaluate the impact on us?

Measure	Methods of evaluation
Instrumental	· Personal & Community Wellbeing Survey (annually) · Value of resources coming into B&D Giving
Capacity	· Learning plans/diaries · Reflective Practice (quarterly) · Number of training, learning or development opportunities participated in · Participatory governance structure (living policies)
Values	· Learning plans/diaries · Reflective Practice and Thinking Time (monthly) · Annual audit of our governance (annually) · Resilience survey (annually)
Networking	· Number of joint funding bids BD Giving applies for · Diversity & Inclusion data about the organisation published as part of our annual impact report

c. How do we evaluate the impact on the ecosystem?

Measure	Methods of evaluation
Instrumental	· Value of resources coming into the borough as a whole · The borough's capacity to retain resources and circulate these within communities · Number of beneficiaries accessing opportunities funded as a result of funding brought into the borough by BD Giving

Capacity	· Effectiveness of local social infrastructure offer
	  · *Number of collaborations/joint working we have influenced*
	  · *Value of resources being allocated through participatory means*
	  · *Increase in enfranchisement/engagement across the borough*

Values	· Number of citations in papers, reports etc. of other organisations · Changes to other organisation's strategy or governance where we have consulted or partnered · Number of participatory opportunities offered in the borough without us
Networking	· Using open source data, like 360 Giving, to map changes in funding over time · Changes in the power/relationship map of the borough (more nodes, different connections) · Mapping future collaborations/independent projects from participant groups

Conclusion

This strategy is the next step on our journey as a participatory grant making organisation.

As a learning document, it will adapt to the data we collect at this stage of the journey.

We want to see the conversation about resources move beyond a simple discussion about the efficiency of allocation to one that takes a more holistic approach. Sharing power over allocating resources will not only have a positive impact on those who get access to power in our system, but also for those who are given the opportunity to share the power that they have. The fewer people experiencing marginalisation in a system, the better the experience of everyone in that system because they will not be part of an extractive or exploitative process.

From what we have outlined above, we hope to be able to demonstrate the positive impact that a systemic shift in how resources are allocated can have on a place and the people who make it.

Thanks

The Learning and Participation Strategy is the product of a lot of time and attention, not only on our part but across our community so we want to mark their contribution to this document.

A special acknowledgement to **Andrea Berardi** from the Cobra Collective, CIC, who spent a lot of time working with us on the development of this strategy. The insight, learning, and resources that he shared have proved invaluable to its development.

Individuals who have taken the time to feed into this strategy directly:

- Lisa Clarke
- Max French
- Valeria Giannuzzi
- Cam Jarvis
- Amy Wheatman

Organisations whose work with us has greatly influenced this strategy:

- African Portuguese Speaking Community
- Barking & Dagenham Youth Dance
- Books By Miles
- Company Drinks
- Community Resources
- Dynamos of Dagenham
- Future MOLDS Communities
- Kingsley Hall CCC
- Kingsley Klan
- Lankelly Chase
- Make Your Mark B&D
- Mums On a Mission
- TalkSpace Mindfulness Counselling and Psychotherapy CIC
- Thames Ward Community Project
- Triangoals CIC

Other acknowledgements:

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The many, many members of the Participatory Grant Making community who shared learning and experiences with us.

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