Strategy
2023-2026

Barking & Dagenham
Giving



Invested for the Long Haul

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1. About Us

Barking and Dagenham Giving was set up in 2020 to give local people more opportunities to participate in decision-making.

The people of Barking and Dagenham are at the heart of everything we do. Uniquely, residents make all our funding and investment decisions to achieve social good in one of the most deprived and diverse boroughs in England.

Our aim is for Barking and Dagenham to become a hot spot for social sector funding and investment in the next three years. We want to attract £5 million of additional investment to address the systemic issues that matter most to our local community.

We're in it for the long haul - and we're hopeful about the future in Barking and Dagenham.

Local people have the appetite to improve the borough and our community-led social investment and grant-making can accelerate their efforts.

2. Introduction

BD Giving is embarking on a new strategic direction.

In our first three years, 2020-2022, we gained invaluable learning and experience in participatory grant-making. We worked with panels of residents and community leaders to deliver several grant funds, and to develop the UK's first community-led investment policy. We also established a trusted local network to help improve our understanding of the needs and aspirations of our community.

There is ample evidence that when people with experience of a place are involved in decision-making processes the outcomes of those decisions respond better to the needs of the local community.

There is an added benefit to this approach. Participatory decision-making inspires agency and trust in the participants. It fosters a sense of hope for the future that has ripples in the wider community.

Over the next few years, we want to continue our efforts to democratise finance, digging deeper into what it means to hand power back to local people and exploring what an ecosystem of resources might look like if ordinary people shaped it.

Crucially, we're focused on empowering communities to have a say in the total trajectory of wealth, rather than being limited to the portion allocated through grants.

We warmly invite you to join us on the next leg of our journey.

3. What We Learned: Our 2021-22 Pathway

In 2021, we established a two-year Pathway focused on five priority areas: listening, participation, learning, collaboration, and organisation. This section looks at the progress we made in each of these areas.

3.1. Listening

We made significant strides in creating a culture of open and honest communication and building trust. We have established a reputation for actively listening and engaging with feedback, and for being transparent about our limitations and the challenges we face.

We worked on making our language and work more accessible. For example, we slowed down and gave residents the time they needed to fully digest and grapple with the many difficult topics and issues at stake. This has resulted in a high level of sustained engagement from our Community Steering Group.

This confirmed what we thought: trust is earned through consistent actions, honesty, and integrity. It requires transparency, clear communication, and understanding, and it can take a long time to develop. When working with communities that have been previously failed by people and institutions, we are constantly reminding ourselves of power dynamics, and seek to approach everyone with this awareness and humility.

3.2. Participation

We have continuously interrogated the fairness of how we work and devised ways to expand participation and equity across our grant-making to decisions about investments.

We have seen the benefit of bringing the community further into our governance structures. Developing our Investment Policy and strategy alongside residents has improved the quality of our work and rooted it

further into the community.

This isn't to say that we have become a fully participatory organisation. There are areas, e.g. around our fundraising, or finance, where much work remains to be done. Acknowledging where we could improve and outlining the conditions for improvement gives our community a means of holding us to account.

3.3. Learning and Sharing

We have developed a Learning and Participation strategy to ensure that our approach to learning is consistent across all of our programmes and projects. We look at patterns across three different levels:

1. individual participants in our work, which includes grant applicants, grantees, and decision-makers;

2. our own organisation, including all staff and trustees, and;

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

Owing to constraints in monitoring and evaluation capacity, we have employed a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches, occasionally relying on anecdotal evidence. Determining what data to gather and when is a common challenge for many organisations. Consequently, we are refining our data collection practices by prioritising the most crucial information for the future.

Sharing this learning matters too. Among other communications, we have launched #BDGivingNotes, a fortnightly blog aimed at sharing our work and what we are learning; what's gone well and what didn't.

3.4. Partnerships and Collaboration

We have invested in building partnerships to increase the support to frontline social organisations across the borough. In fact, most of our work involves some form of collaboration or partnership and we have been fortunate to cultivate robust and effective relationships.

In just under two weeks we were able to launch a collective fundraising

effort with three other local organisations aimed at addressing an immediate need for vulnerable people. What's more, the emergence of numerous participatory funds in the borough supported – but not run - by us demonstrates the potential of our participatory work to inspire and drive social change.

The impact is far-reaching, addressing immediate needs and building community capacity and resilience for the long term. It demonstrates the value of collaboration in addressing complex social issues and has the potential to create lasting change in the borough and beyond.

3.5. Organisational Development

We have grown significantly in the three years since we were founded:

- Our Programmes team has doubled in size and invested in facilitation training, increasing the organisation's capacity to convene and support community discussions and decision-making.
- Our Fundraising and Partnership team has established relationships with major development projects and new industries, generating interest in the community-led investment fund.
- Our Communications team has helped build a local profile, connecting with more people, organisations, and businesses to raise awareness of the impact of community-led decision-making.
- This increase in staff capacity has allowed our CEO to collaborate with other infrastructure organisations and engage in national conversations around community power.
- Our Trustees have become more involved in our work and are monitoring the impact of their involvement on themselves.

4.Next Steps: A New Participatory Resource Ecosystem

4.1. Purpose and Mission

What we've learnt, has reinforced our belief that the most effective way to champion the causes that truly matter to communities is by providing them with the tools and resources to take the lead. As a funder and facilitator, we've witnessed firsthand the transformative effects of giving individuals a voice in how our own resources are allocated.

4.1.1. Our Vision

Imagine a world where local communities are empowered to identify and address the issues that matter most to them.

In our vision, collaboration thrives, communities, businesses, and local institutions work closely together to enhance neighbourhoods.

This is a place where everyone is included. Where individuals have the agency and means to make decisions, and opportunities to shape developments and investments within their borough.

At the core of this vision is a commitment to inclusion and a future where people and the planet are thriving. In this world, resources are equitably secured and distributed, advancing social and environmental justice. Every individual dedicated to improving their neighbourhood can find the support they need to champion their cause. Systems and structures are collaboratively designed, transparency and accountability reign; fostering trust and optimism.

Over the next three years, we aim to develop and grow a community driven ecosystem of resources to move closer to this vision and demonstrate its transformative potential if scaled up.

4.1.2 Our Mission

Our mission is to equip local people with the resources they need to get involved in collective decision making. This mission embraces two ideas:

The first is how the combination of resources supports economic and social activities in a place. We'll use all the tools available to us, from grants to social investment, from physical space to facilitation, mentoring and network-building to achieve our mission.

The second idea is the importance of participation and collaboration in developing an equitable and sustainable society. This includes communities participating in planning and development processes, directing investments, and taking an active role in resource distribution and management.

4.2. Our Aims

We use the concept of "investing" to describe our commitment to the borough and our approach. We recognise the significance of strategically allocating resources; not only financial but also time and effort to make a lasting positive impact.

With an investment mindset and using our participatory approach, we will invest in the place, people, community, and the system. These four areas are a vital component of the future we imagine.



4.2.1. Investing in the Place...

- Expand the borough's social infrastructure so communities are empowered to work together to strengthen their neighbourhoods.
- Use our financial instruments, including grants and investments, to support the development of community spaces tailored to meet the needs of our residents.
- Use our influence as a shareholder in a local housing company to advocate for policies and practices that prioritise the voice of residents and their active involvement in decision-making.
- Foster welcoming spaces for residents to gather, exchange ideas, and contribute to making the borough more inclusive.



4.2.2. With Local People...

- Equip local people with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to participate in collective decision-making.
- Develop the skills for managing conflict in a productive and constructive manner.
- Explore innovative approaches to participation, meeting people they are and using a combination of digital and in-person engagement methods.

- Meaningfully involve people in our organisational governance and programmatic decisions and support our partners to do the same.



4.2.3. For Each Community...

- Forge strong relationships between residents, businesses, and local organisations to nurture connections and strengthen neighbourhoods.
- Foster a culture of collaborative and data-informed fundraising to provide better support to underserved areas within our community.
- Facilitate the formation of local partnerships and collaborations aimed at addressing the root causes of issues, going beyond addressing mere symptoms.



4.2.4. And A Better System

- Reimagine the access and distribution of local resources, valuing social impact as much as financial return.
- Build a new approach that challenges existing paradigms and empowers individuals and communities to actively participate in decision-making.
- Test innovative ideas, embrace change and adapt strategies based on emerging insights.
- Inspire a movement for community-led investment beyond our immediate surroundings by sharing our learning and collaborating with like-minded organisations to ignite a ripple effect of positive change, driving transformation at a broader scale.

4.3. How We'll Do It

4.3.1. Our Approach And Values

This new strategy stays true to our values of collaboration and inclusion. We have a new third value 'learning' to reflect its importance to our work.

Collaboration is intrinsic to what we do. It's about working together towards a common goal, leveraging diverse perspectives and strengths

to achieve something greater than what any individual could accomplish alone. We value participation, open communication, active listening, mutual respect, and a willingness to compromise in pursuit of our shared vision.

At its best, collaboration brings out the best in people, fosters trust and camaraderie, and creates a sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the success of any endeavour. We believe that collaboration is essential for success in today's complex and interconnected world. We strive to promote a collaborative culture in everything we do.

Inclusion is a fundamental value that drives our work. It's about creating a sense of belonging and equity for all individuals, regardless of their background, culture, or identity. We value diversity, recognise and respect differences, and strive to create an environment where everyone feels valued, heard, and supported.

We believe that inclusion is not only the right thing to do but also essential for building a more just and equitable society. We want everyone to feel included, valued and empowered to participate fully in our communities and workplaces.

Learning is a vital component of our approach. It's about the willingness and ability to continuously grow, evolve, and improve in response to changing circumstances. We value curiosity, flexibility, and a growth mindset, recognising that there is always more to learn and new ways to approach challenges.

At its best, learning creates a culture of continuous improvement, where individuals and organisations are constantly pushing the boundaries of what is possible and seeking out new opportunities for growth and development. We embrace learning to ensure that we remain adaptive and responsive to the needs of our community and the planet.

5. Conclusion

This is a strategy for investment in a place, with local people, for each community, and a better system.

We are reimagining the way resources are accessed and distributed locally to value social impact as much as financial return. By sharing our learning, testing innovative ideas, and leading a movement for community-led investment, we hope to inspire others to join us on this transformative journey.

Most important of all, our strategy sets a vision for empowering local communities to create lasting change in Barking and Dagenham. We are in it for the long haul, and we are ready to make a significant impact in the community and beyond.

Barking & Dagenham
Giving

Everyone Included



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