

Time to Shine commissioning review – Autumn 2015

Purpose of the report

This report forms one part of the commissioning review where we would like to assess our success at achieving the commissioning approach as set out in the Time to Shine commissioning strategy.

This included developing processes that will:

- Be fair, transparent and proportional
- Be simple and will;
 - Provide us with the information needed for the project plan e.g. How many beneficiaries each partner will work with, a detailed budget for delivering their activity
 - Assure us that each partner can successfully deliver

Further to this we aim to create processes that:

- Reflect the community development ethos of the project
- Support the Test and Learn criteria of the project
- Support the development of our members
- Creative and innovative i.e. isn't a traditional grants or procurement process

The first commissioning round took place in the Spring of 2015. This report summarises the feedback received from workshop participants; including those who went on to apply for funding and those who did not.

Participants

In November 2015 a survey was sent to attendees of the funding workshops held in February and March 2015. Results were anonymous and we sought open and honest feedback from participants.

Workshop	No attended	No. Responses
Culture and Arts	71	10
Digital Inclusion	19	8
Dinner Dates	18	5
LGBT	7	5
SeNS	32	8
Walk Together	22	4
Total	169	40

Results

- 24% response rate
- 75% felt that they received enough information about Time to Shine before the event
- 65% of responders reported that the workshop met their expectations

Comments highlighted that individuals felt communications from the Time to Shine project changed over the course of the project development and that the expectations of the session were

unrealistic.

“At the workshop, it seemed there had been a U-turn in what LOPF were expecting from Partners. Earlier meetings implied there would be several smaller pots of money to apply for, rather than one large project. However, this was addressed after the workshop and more time was given to develop partnership bids.” (Culture and Arts workshop)

“Expectations weren’t clear to begin with. However over the course of workshops they became a lot more clear.” (attended 5 workshops)

“I expected to come away with clear information on how to make an application and the workshop provided this. I hadn’t expected to be asked to identify my organisation as a possible lead and I hadn’t anticipated working up a project brief within the session.” (Culture and Arts workshop)

“The difficulty was the requirement for lead provider, i.e. someone to lead the bid. I found it very difficult to approach people. In a 3 week timescale I was unsure how a partnership agreement with a total stranger could be written up and approved by Trustees.” (LGBT workshop)

Why participants attended the workshop



When asked how the responder would rate their knowledge of Time to Shine before the workshop the majority confirmed that they had some knowledge (41%) or were very knowledgeable (33%) and had understood the aims and objectives of the project.

- 70% of responders felt that their knowledge had improved as a result of attending the workshop
- 16 of those completing the survey went on to apply for Time to Shine funding

Those who didn't apply for funding

When asked why they didn't go on and apply:

- 2 people were representing a LCC directorate so weren't in a position to apply for funding
- 2 people stated they didn't have capacity and the timescales were too tight
- 1 person felt they were unable to link with a lead partner
- 1 person specifically stated that the funding strand was too prescriptive (attended 4 workshops)

Those who went on to apply

16 responders (67%) did go on and apply for Time to Shine funding. Of these 87% stated the background information provided was about right.

The feedback on the use of the Theory of Change was varied but on the whole positive with 73% of responders stating that they found using the Theory useful in developing a project plan despite 66% not previously using it in their work.

How the application process could be improved

A couple of people stated that the timescales were an issue:

"Allow more time to develop partnerships and write bid or allow for more generalities in the bid, so the finer details can be worked out later after discussions with partners and audiences."

Others suggested the form could be simplified: *"A much simpler form – I felt we were judged on how the form was completed rather than the quality of the project proposed."*

Others highlighted the need for further consideration and time to be given to developing partnerships:

"If you're favouring partnership working, then state this early on and create networking/speed-dating type events to allow partners to meet and discuss."

"I think it was just about right apart from perhaps finding ways to help organisations get to know each other better and look more into collaboration and working together."

"This time round it really has been test and learn for all involved. I'm sure that questions will be more specific to each activity and expectations, timeframes and deadlines will be in place for the next set of activities next year."

Involvement of Older People in the development of the application

Did you involve older people in the development of your application				
Answer Options	Yes	Didn't but would have liked to	Not on this occasion	Response Count
Developing the project idea	11	1	1	13

Writing the application	5	5	3	13
Consulting on their needs and wishes	13	0	0	13
Reviewing the finished application	8	2	3	13
Attending the interview	11	1	0	12

“Older people were critical to the whole process. I wrote the application and am myself over 60. We consulted widely with older people on the ideas in the application. Older people attended the interview”

14 of those who stated that they applied for funding were shortlisted for interview. When asked how the interview process could be improved, 6 people stated that the interview process couldn't be improved.

Responders commented on the informal and relaxed nature of the interviews.

“The interview was very positive and felt relatively informal in comparison to the scoring that we received on our written application (which seemed very robust). The interview felt very relaxed and conversational which was very useful in gaining open and honest dialogue about the project.”

“No, I preferred the informal and relaxed atmosphere. It took the pressure off our service user involved in the interview and they were given the opportunity to speak openly and freely.”

A couple of points to consider included the time and staff resources taken in attending and preparing for the interview.

What worked well through the commissioning process

Comments included: helpful advice, good communication and constant engagement; together with an honest and transparent approach.

“The ongoing dialogue with LOPF. Reshaping and redefining aspects of the project and project budget. The feedback provided on our application. The transparency of information on the website. The key messages which were very consistent. The timing of the process”.

“Good communication from LOPF and the process made the commissioners feel approachable. Detailed feedback was given whatever the outcome of the application.”

“Ensuring older people engaged and involved throughout the process.”

What could be improved

The themes which emerged were around improvement and simplification to the application form, ensuring adequate time for organisations to apply for the funding and develop partnerships and limiting the number of workshops.

“In my opinion the process was much too complicated and time consuming. As commissioners you need to be conscious that only a few projects will be funded and that you are asking projects to

devote considerable resources to something that might not even benefit their organisation and user group. The process could be made much more simple, but still be very professional and fair.”

“Rather than scoring the application and interview and adding the two scores together to see who is successful, I think it would be better to have certain criteria to reach the interview stage and once reached all the applications who are interviewed start on a level playing field – as some organisations might be great at writing bids but not so great at delivering them and the interview stage is a good way to distinguish, work this out.”

“Although I understand and indeed share the values and the motivation behind trying to get organisations to work in partnership, for this project it was impossible. There simply was not enough money in each strand to be able to deliver anything in meaningful partnership with external organisations, and so all of the stuff you did about linking organisations together felt tokenistic, because this could never have come to fruition. In my experience, you need at least £60K to be able to deliver a partnership project, which ensures that all partners are respected, valued and can bring their assets to the table.”

There is a discrepancy between the needs of small and large organisations. One commented that the process *“made it difficult for small, local community organisations to apply.”* whereas another stressed the *“Need to have realistic expectations of stakeholders and their experience. Be open to all potential partners – larger third-sector organisations have a lot of experience to contribute but they were actively discouraged.”*

Learning and conclusions

The survey gave lots of positive examples of where the commissioning process had worked well. It should be seen as a positive that many individuals used the opportunity to feedback honestly on where they felt the process could be improved on.

The first workshop held, attracted the most critical of feedback. The staff team directly after the event reflected on this experience and changed the approach. The issues raised in the first workshop include:

- The need for consistent and coherent messages. Consideration must be given to the balance between full transparency and providing so much information at each stage that this may be confusing
- Networking & Partnership working – acknowledging the time taken to develop partnerships and making provisions to help people to do so; networking events, shared contact lists

Simplification of the application form became an overarching theme in the consultation, together with the positive feedback on the Theory of Change.

The commissioning process was praised in terms of the involvement of older people at LOPF and encouraging applying organisations to do so. At least one older person led each funding strand. Despite this, one respondent stated that: ‘You could have involved older people’. This possibly highlights a need for LOPF to better communicate our involvement approach and ensure that older people lead at every stage of the project.