

Big Lottery Fund
Evaluation update



Transforming Your Space



Transforming your space evaluation update

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Introduction

This document summarises the findings from the first year of the evaluation of Transforming Your Space and explains the methods that the researchers are using to carry out the evaluation.

The initiative

Transforming Your Space is an initiative that is operating in all four countries of the UK. It aims to involve communities in projects that will:

- enhance the quality of life of local communities
- improve the appearance and amenities of local environments
- develop community assets.

In England, the programme operates in 51 areas that are part of our wider Fair Share initiative. Local authorities have nominated projects in their area. In Wales, the Community Strategy Partnerships also nominated local projects. In Scotland, our award partner, Fresh Futures, received applications from



across the country, while applicants in Northern Ireland applied directly to the Big Lottery Fund. Further information about how the programmes operate (and what they have funded) is available at: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

The evaluation

We were keen to learn from our own experience of running Transforming Your Space and to support groups running projects. So in spring 2004 we commissioned a three-year evaluation that would particularly set out to investigate:

- how successful the programmes in each country are at meeting their aims (and factors that affect their success)
- how projects have responded to the programme, and how successful they have been at achieving their own aims
- good practice for running programmes and projects of this sort.

As Transforming Your Space works closely with local communities, we are also particularly keen to find out what local residents know and think about work that we have supported.

We appointed SQW Ltd to undertake the evaluation. They began work in summer 2004 and will complete the evaluation in spring 2007.

Methods

The approach that the evaluators have chosen is based on reviewing our materials, considering links with other programmes, talking to BIG staff and other stakeholders, as well as more in-depth review of a set of case studies in each country.

In order to identify case studies, the evaluators reviewed the range of projects funded in each country. Among other factors, they looked at locations of projects, their size and the date that they began, the activities that they offer or support, who was involved in the project, and who would benefit. As a result of that review, SQW proposed case studies in the first year as follows:



The evaluation

- seven local authority areas in England (with up to three projects in each)
- three projects in Northern Ireland
- four projects in Scotland
- four lead partners overseeing one project each in Wales.
- what they have achieved
- the effects that they are having on local communities
- plans to sustain the work and achievements of the project after our support ends.

The evaluators will track the progress of these projects across the lifetime of the study, and at the time of writing had agreed another set of case studies to be tracked in the second and third years.

SQW have visited each case study and will maintain contact with them throughout the study. Case studies allow the evaluators to consider such questions as:

- the background to the project
- links to other strategies and programmes
- consultation and how communities have been involved
- challenges that projects have faced

In the first year, the evaluators also sought the views of beneficiaries and local residents in five case-study projects. (Two of these case studies were in England, and one each in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.) We believe that seeking wider views is particularly valuable, because it can offer different perspectives about the project and what it has achieved. In practice, the evaluators have interviewed “direct beneficiaries” (who had actively used the services or facilities provided) and “indirect beneficiaries” (who may have been affected by the project without being actively involved, for instance simply by living near a project).

The full report is available at:
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Findings in the first year

The evaluators have identified some early emerging themes. They will explore these in further years. Overall, the message from the first year is very positive. Key findings include the following.

- ▶ Projects have been designed in line with the programme's aims and objectives, and are generally progressing well.

The evaluators found that projects had responded enthusiastically to the programme. They had developed proposals that linked well with local and wider priorities. Projects have engaged and consulted local residents in order to undertake improvements to local environments.

We had wondered whether there might be some confusion in priorities between the dual underlying aims of environmental improvement and successful engagement of local communities. In practice, participants and beneficiaries were achieving both of these aims. While

these observations apply in all countries, there is some suggestion that the more localised decision-making in England and Wales had proved particularly successful.

- ▶ Projects have identified a wide range of overlapping environmental, social, community, health and economic benefits, even if achieving them is often some way off.

Project staff and other stakeholders had considered a range of benefits for local communities. The details in the full report give a flavour of the variety of these, and how people involved in projects had identified crossover between them.

While "improved green spaces" is perhaps the most common benefit, the process of developing and managing projects has led to more volunteering, consultation and other processes that help develop the capacity of communities and participants. Different groups

Findings in the first year

work together, and have often developed facilities for recreation, notably for children's play. Many projects have made local areas more desirable by removing eyesores and responding to local needs, and have identified possible social, health and economic benefits.

Many of these benefits are likely to become more evident as projects progress. It is rather more difficult to measure such concepts as improvements to quality of life, but the focus on beneficiary views in the evaluation will help to give us some indication of this.

- ▶ Sustainability and maintaining community involvement are likely to become more prominent issues in future years.

It may be that the evaluators' findings have been so positive in the first year because they visited projects that had got off the ground more quickly. In the coming years they may well report more on

projects that have had to overcome more challenges in order to succeed to a greater or lesser degree. At the same time, it may be that projects that have offered "quick wins" and so have captured the imagination and enthusiasm of local communities will lose momentum after some time.

In this, they may well be a victim of their own success, and local people may indeed start taking them for granted. Maintaining community involvement will thus be a key issue in years to come.



What happens next?

At the time of writing, the evaluators were contacting the new, second-year case studies and following up the first-year ones. They plan to submit their second-year report early in 2006.

We know that projects and other stakeholders are interested in the findings and in some of the issues that they have raised. BIG and the evaluators are also keen to support projects in sharing good practice and in hearing more about your experiences.

If you would like to comment on the evaluation and its findings, to make suggestions or to find out what more we are doing to support your work, please contact your grants officer or e&r@biglotteryfund.org.uk

