



Building Better Opportunities National Evaluation - Key Findings

Big Lottery Fund is matching funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 programme to provide joint investment in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth, particularly for the hardest to reach groups.

The Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme is supporting a variety of projects helping individuals, including those with multiple and complex needs facing significant barriers to work, move closer to and into employment. BBO is enabling people and communities to thrive, engaging the expertise and knowledge of a wide range of stakeholders through encouraging partnership delivery, creating positive impacts for groups and individuals most distant from the labour market. With individuals tackling isolation and poverty through employment and education,

they will be better placed to contribute to, and participate in, thriving local communities.

Ecorys is delivering a **national evaluation and learning contract** up until early 2020. The evaluation draws on a range of evidence including a survey of BBO grant holders, qualitative interviews with grant holders, partners, delivery staff and participants, analysis of Management Information (MI) data, a participant survey, shared learning workshops for projects, and local evaluation evidence and materials.



What are the key findings so far?

Widening access for Voluntary Sector organisations

The evaluation evidence suggests that the BBO programme is fulfilling its aim of increasing access to European funding for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector groups. The programme aimed to involve these organisations to utilise their experience and specialist support to work with disadvantaged and 'hard to reach' groups. Around 26% of organisations that responded were accessing ESF funding for the first time as part of

BBO either as the lead grant holder or a member of a partnership. The majority of respondents (68%) to the initial grant holder survey were charities, 87% were independent organisations rather than a branch of a larger organisation and 91% were working locally or regionally.

Expanded local partnerships

Evidence to date suggests that BBO has stimulated new partnerships or expanded working relationships in others. In a slight majority of cases relationships between BBO lead and partner organisations were newly formed in the BBO context, while in instances where pre-existing partnerships existed BBO was seen as expanding and deepening relationships in some cases.

There is evidence from interviews and local evaluation reports of strong working partnerships forged to deliver BBO provision. Partnership working is central to a project's ability to draw on

a wide range of delivery organisations, often with specialist skills, to enhance the holistic support offered to BBO participants. As the local evaluation of the BRIDGES (Building Reachable Individual Dreams Gaining Employment & Skills) BBO project operating in the Black Country makes clear, having a partnership composed of 29 organisations enables the project to 'offer a truly diverse range of services to participants'

"Prior to the programme, partners were unaware of some organisations and services available, they are now building strong working relationships, the impact of which could last far beyond the lifetime of the programme."

(Local evaluation report)

Dealing with administrative requirements

The administrative and evidential requirements of ESF funding, and the need to embed processes to facilitate this, has been a recurring theme within the evaluation. Interviews for the national evaluation, along with local evaluation reports, indicated that these requirements were challenging during the early delivery stages, but that guidance and requirements are being clarified over time. Big Lottery Fund has encouraged projects to work closely with their Funding Officers to navigate the

requirements and have raised issues with the Managing Authority on behalf of the programme where requirements have needed higher level clarification.

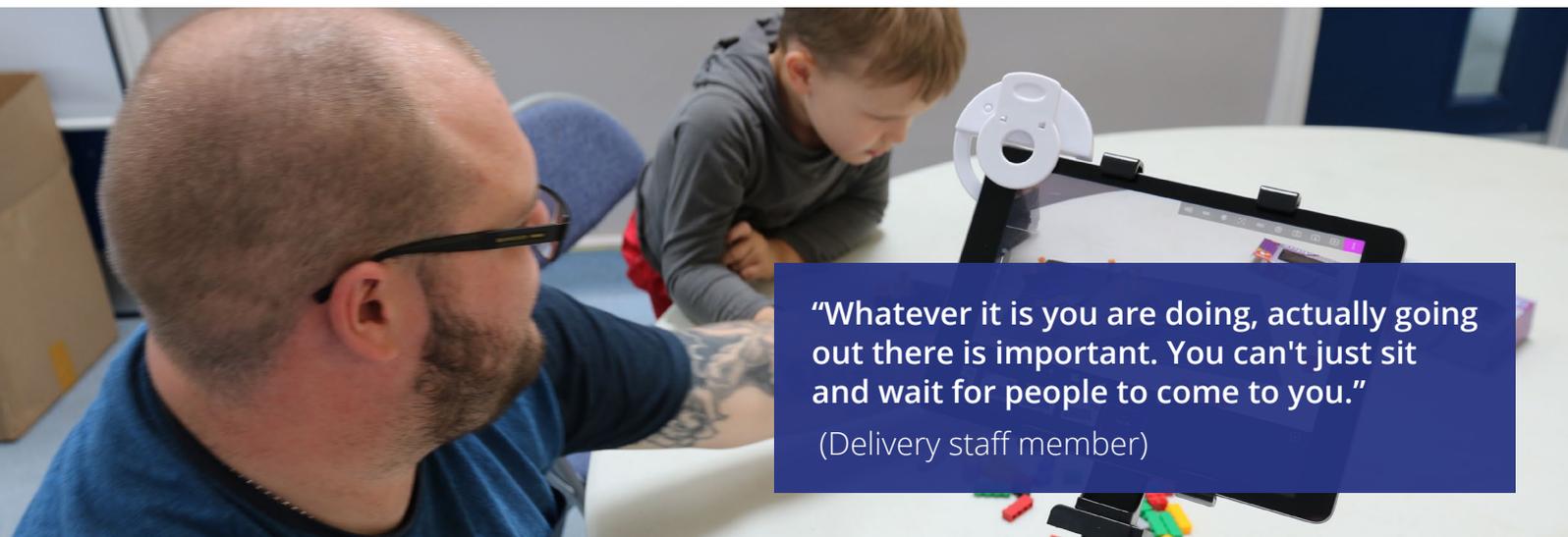
At a project level, strong, effective management and communication by lead organisations is assisting smaller partners to navigate these requirements, and there is a view that the programme has now reached a more stable period of delivery.

Prioritising engagement

BBO projects have typically focused significant attention on referral and engagement activities to date, recognising that the intended scale of subsequent outcomes and results will only be achieved with participants on board. While some challenges have been experienced, in terms of building awareness and ensuring full understanding of the eligibility requirements amongst referral partners, projects have responded creatively and proactively to ensure they are engaging the profile of participants required in terms of gender and economically inactive versus unemployed.

A combination of referral routes, pro-active engagement measures and building strong

relationships with external referral partners are key success factors in this area. Many projects have had success using outreach activity including visiting community venues or established groups, or having BBO project staff permanently or on an ad hoc basis based in local organisations or offices. For example, the Activate Learning project has one of their participants who now works for the project visit the local Jobcentre on a weekly basis to meet participants and maintain awareness amongst the Jobcentre coaches. Using specialist partners with established links with the target groups was also proving successful.



“Whatever it is you are doing, actually going out there is important. You can't just sit and wait for people to come to you.”

(Delivery staff member)

Providing tailored, holistic support to participants

The interventions delivered by BBO projects have been designed to respond to local needs. However, projects are working with people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, with the challenges faced by participants being more acute than anticipated in a projects original application. This has meant that providing tailored support, able to deal holistically with the range of issues BBO participants face, has become vital to effectively meeting their needs.

The design of the programme, in terms of enabling organisations to provide intensive, individualised and longer-term support, has received particularly

positive feedback during the evaluation. Projects are successfully replicating good practice, developing structured, individually focused ongoing support through key worker/coaching models, supplemented by targeted, specialist support as and when required. Projects recognise that many participants will need to focus initially on building soft skills such as confidence and self-belief, before feeling able to approach other goals such as work. BBO provision overall is characterised by the development of holistic, tailored approaches to meeting participant needs, built on trusted relationships between delivery partners and with external support organisations.

"It is participant led. The fact the whole journey is built around the participants... to offer them different support as necessary, I think that's the true strength of it."

(BBO Project Manager)



Outcomes for participants

There is strong evidence to date of positive impacts for individual participants; in terms of addressing barriers they face and supporting them to move closer to work. Projects welcomed the ability to develop project-specific outcomes to work towards, beyond those specified by ESF result targets, and the opportunity to focus on the “underlying stuff”. This related, in particular, to being able to address

barriers such as lack of confidence, or challenges linked to participants’ circumstances such as housing or debt issues, which they perceived as fundamental and important for generating sustainable outcomes, rather than focusing solely on results in terms of an employment or education goal.

“That's what's really quite exciting about delivering ESF with the National Lottery - those outcomes and those changes alongside the results. So you could really feel that you're not just ticking those boxes, you're actually really trying to change things sustainably.”

(Project Manager)

Wider benefits

For delivery organisations, there is evidence of enhanced organisational capacity, both for grant holders and their partners. Organisations also see potential for a raised profile and reputation as a result of participation in the BBO programme. Delivery organisations are benefiting from new and enhanced partner arrangements, including examples of newly formed partnerships successfully accessing additional funding together. One example of this comes from the Better Off Finance project, led by the Women’s Organisation, where several of the partners have been successful in together

applying for further ESF funding. Specifically, eight of the eleven original BBO partners will be delivering an Advice Skills Academy which aims to enhance capacity and staff development within the advice sector in Liverpool City Region.

There is also evidence that BBO is filling gaps in provision for harder to reach target groups by providing flexible, tailored provision that can be integrated with local services. All of this offers a solid basis for achieving further positive benefits as the programme continues to develop.

“It's a great project and it feels really good to be able to offer some quite intensive support for people. There aren't many projects out there.... offering that much support”

(BBO Project Manager)

Ecorys’ evaluation of the BBO programme continues until early 2020. For more information on the evaluation and to read the full evaluation reports produced so far, visit:

www.buildingbetteropportunities.org.uk

For more information on the evaluation contact us at BBO@ecorys.com

Or visit:
www.buildingbetteropportunities.org.uk



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