

Participatory Grant Making Pilot Review

Introduction

The PGM pilot is an innovative funding model (within our sector) where the people and communities we aim to benefit are actively participating in the processes and decisions about how those grants are awarded. Participatory grant making is currently considered a fringe movement encompassing a range of different models, methods and challenges, but at its core, the approach cedes decision making power about grants to the very communities impacted by funding decisions. The fund has been made possible by contributions from ourselves, City Bridge Trust, Greater London Authority, London Marathon Foundation, London Sport and Sport England.

The following sections of this report review the methodology used, the process of funding distribution, the methods employed to ensure community involvement, and the impact on the Black community in London as a whole and the individual groups that were fortunate recipients of this critical funding. Through a comprehensive analysis of the Black Community Sport and Physical Activity Fund, we aim to celebrate its successes and identify areas for growth and continued improvement, while ultimately striving for a more inclusive and equitable funding opportunities for all community organisations.

This evaluation also aims to shed light on the critical role played by this project and its ability to serve as a model for similar endeavours in the future. The Black Community Sport and Physical Activity Fund was not merely a financial endeavour; it represented a commitment to addressing disparities, promoting health and social engagement, and amplifying the voices and aspirations of Black communities.

Background

After the murder of George Floyd, Sported undertook research to gain insight in how racism in sport affected our black communities. This pilot was proposed as a response to that insight gained from **Sported Racism Report- October 2020**¹ and research into the accessibility of grant funding from **“Does Grant Funding Exclude those who it is designed to help?” – January 2021.**² Through both pieces of research, there was an overwhelming feeling that no matter how far groups progress in some areas, funding and the fundraising landscape within the community sport and broader third sector are designed in such a way that excludes them and the communities that they represent or serve.

Through the Sported Racism Report, we sought to understand directly from our network their experience of racism within the community sport sector. A key theme specifically linked to funding emerged where the following challenges were identified:

- Those who receive funding doesn't appear to match up to those doing good work.
- Diversity focused funding streams are not designed by diverse groups of people.

¹ <https://sported.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Sported-Racism-Research-Report-October-2020.pdf>

² https://sported.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Does-grant-funding-exclude-those-it-is-designed-to-help_2021.pdf

- Working with ‘black, Asian and minority ethnic participants’ is too broad a criteria.

The report went further to identify needs and possible solutions:

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities should be empowered into higher positions at funding organisations.
- There should be a greater distinction between funding for black-led groups and those working with black young people.
- Funding streams should be reviewed – ensure they are written by and appropriate to the audience they are aimed at.
- There should be full transparency over who is on the assessment panel making funding decisions.
- There should also be full transparency over eligibility criteria.

As a result of this report, more research into access to funding was undertaken; in which it was found that marginalised groups that funders are intending to reach are often disadvantaged when it comes to applying:

- Many have little to no online presence and restricted networks.
- Local community leaders, often propelled into leadership positions, don’t possess the administrative experience.
- There are limited resources and often an inability to commit the time to write long, detailed funding applications.
- Running on a restricted budget means they may lack the necessary financial arrangements and governance, and may appear unrealistically frugal.
- Small, local organisations are disadvantaged if they are unknown to funders.
- Where groups are driven by a migrant or immigrant population there are different cultural reference points compared to those writing funding strategies.
- If the leaders/fundraisers are educated outside of the UK or have English as a second language formal written English may be harder.

Recommendations from these reports included the following:

- Use of clear explanation of terminology to ‘decode’ application forms.
- Provide verbal and written guidance to improve accessibility.
- Introduce video applications with clear and detailed guidance.
- Set clear parameters to funding.
- Assess groups on delivery and resource, not how well they can write about need and outcomes.
- Give constructive, actionable feedback.
- Fund support alongside grants so groups can improve their skills.
- Consider how funds are presented.
- Distribute funds through a local or trusted network or partner.

Sported’s response to this insight was a proposal of a participatory grant model aimed to do the following:

- Cede decision making power about grants to the communities impacted by funding decisions

- Challenge some of the long-term structural power imbalances that exist within more traditional funding mechanisms.
- Respond to broader demands for funders to be more accountable, transparent and collaborative.
- Develop and shape a scalable framework of participatory grant making for the future.
- Inform other funders and partners within the sector, and within London.
- Make more effective funding decisions and outcomes.
- Build a deeper understanding from those with lived experience.
- Promote greater community engagement – building confidence, trust, connectedness and leadership.

The fund was aimed to be delivered through a collaborative panel of individuals who have specific understanding and lived experience working in and with Black communities. This is in line with the insight we gained that BAME focused work is not as impactful due to it being too broad of a category. That panel would drive the fund's grant making decisions, and award grants to other Black-led and Black-centred community organisations from the final grant pot.

The core aims of the fund were to:

- Offer core funding to Black-led grassroots groups across London serving Black communities.
- Raise awareness of the unique challenges facing Black communities across London.
- Establish an effective, innovative partnership to improve and promote community-based organisations within London.

Community Participation

To deliver the fund, we created three distinct roles for community participants to take on, to ensure we had as much input from as many community leaders as possible. The different roles were:

- **Advisory Group member (2 members):** To join the group of funders, administrators, and facilitators to provide much needed insight through lived experiences and challenge some of the biases present within traditional funding frameworks
- **Co-creation group member (8 members):** To decide on and drive the focus, shape and format of the fund itself, from what the funding will specifically target through to how groups can apply, and how the final funding decisions should be made.
- **Grant awarding panel (8 members):** To receive and review applications submitted by groups and decide which groups should be awarded the grant available.

Interested parties were invited to send an expression of interest, detailing their thoughts on the funding landscape and what this fund is trying to achieve. Due to being oversubscribed, and in the spirit of being more participatory in every space, the final decision of who would be selected to deliver was made by members of Sported's Black Leaders in Sport Network. Individuals from 18 different black-led organisations were recruited to participate.

All community leaders were compensated for their time during training, and the subsequent time required to deliver against their respective roles. Compensation was £20 p/hr (above London living wage) in recognition that the input from the community leaders into this project from their lived experiences are expertise not possessed in house, therefore they should be compensated as such, as we would with any external 'consultant'.

All participants went through an induction prior to the delivery of the fund. Subsequent sessions were held with the groups to deliver on the outcomes of the fund across 2 main phases; the creating of the fund details and requirements, and the delivery of the live fund and decision-making process.

Phase 1 (6 weeks) - delivered by the co-creation group. Partnering with the Social Change Agency to facilitate sessions and delivery, we taught the participants about the principles of PGM, who then went on to create:

- A complete start to end application process for the fund
- Assessment framework for decision making panel
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) outcomes for successful applicants

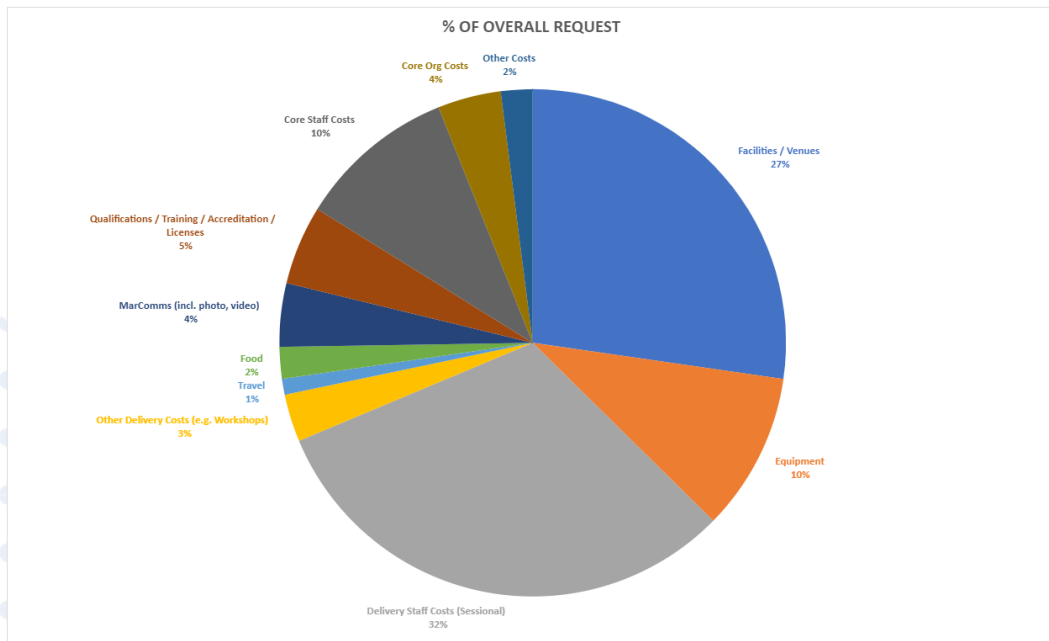
Phase 2 (4 weeks) - delivered by the grant awarding panel. This group was facilitated by Sported staff to deliver on the following areas:

- Use the assessment framework created by the co-creation group to agree a process for deciding on grantees
- Decide on final grantees
- Recommend any conditional terms for grantees to enable them to receive funding
- Provide feedback for unsuccessful applicants.

Grant Application Analysis

The Black Community Sport and Physical Activity fund was launched in December 2022, allowing black-led organisations to apply for up to £10,000 of funding towards any upcoming costs for the groups. An overview of the grant applications showed us the following details from applications:

- 62 eligible applications submitted (an additional 4 were not eligible)
- Total Amount Requested = £561, 384
- Average Amount Requested = £9,054
- Total No. of Young People (YP) Benefitting = 14,429
- 22 London boroughs covered
- 5 applications from organisations delivering across multiple boroughs
- 14 different sports delivered
- 9 groups had not previously been successful in funding bids
- Areas requested in applications:



After a competitive decision process, 18 organisations received funding. As part of the aims of the fund to allow for more equitable funding and provide support to those who may not fully meet eligibility criteria, some offers had conditions applied, with the offer of support from Sported to allow them to get certain elements in order. 24 of the 44 groups who were unsuccessful in their application requested and were provided with bespoke feedback on their application with tangible actions, alongside an offer of capacity building support. The profile of groups who received funding are:

- 14 London boroughs covered
- 13 different sports delivered
- 2 groups have not previously been successful in funding bids
- 4 groups received conditional offers

Review of Funded Delivery

- **Headline stats for delivery and groups**

Beneficiaries

- Total number of people engaged - 2266
- Number of young people engaged – 2192
- Number of newly engaged young people - 881
- Demographics of YP –
 - At least 75% of beneficiaries from a culturally diverse background
 - At least 75% of project beneficiaries live in an area of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Deciles 1-3

Organisational

- 88% had a positive experience in applying to the fund
- 88% are likely to reapply in future
- 100% reported funding contributed to positive impact on their community

- 61% reported that funding provided their community with more opportunities to be active
- 94% either agreed or strongly agreed that activities funded by the grant made a positive difference in their organisation
- 66% of grantees have applied for funding since

Successes

Some of the successes achieved by grantees include:

- 100% of young people engaged reported that they are now taking part in more sport and physical activity.
- A group of novice dancers, after a 10-week programme of activity, performed publicly at a local festival
- 95% of adults reported positive experiences of playing sport and being physically active
- Delivery of a football tournament to bring together young people from rival neighbourhoods- actively reducing anti-social behaviour

Challenges

Some challenges experienced by grantees included:

- Integrating delivery of project into regular delivery post funding
- Successfully obtaining new funding for programmes directed at older adults.
- Having the capacity to meet the demand of the community

Hear from the participants

Here are some words directly from some beneficiaries about the projects they engaged with:

“Since starting Zumba and swimming a few weeks ago I have noticed a change in how my clothes fit. Looking forward to the classes and having so much enjoyment whilst taking part has encouraged me to exercise a bit more and eat healthier. To be honest I initially went because it was free. As a person who was physically demotivated and increasing in size, I am happy to have that push to make a change in my life... thank you.”

“AYD has improved my confidence the most. I feel that AYD has helped me grow as a dancer, with my technique and professional behaviour.”

“I spoke to people I would have never spoken to and even gained a few friends. It was really really fun!”

“Thank you Eugène for getting me out of my house on Tuesdays and Thursday evenings. You made exercise so much fun. I definitely feel I have done a workout and it definitely helps with reducing some of the stress from work. Looking forward to the next sessions. Thanks again!”

“I really look forward to every week’s session. The group now feels like my extended family. I’ve been able to access services I never knew existed. Thanks YAA!”

“You don’t see many women playing football and the fact that they have come together and are having fun, communicating, doing something loving is amazing for this community because we’re coming together and making it stronger.”

Evaluation

Community Participants

Overall, the feedback from the cohort of community participants that led the design and decision-making phases of the pilot, suggests that the project has delivered positive outcomes. The pilot has created a sense of an enhanced optimism about future funding for the Black community in London and reinforced the importance of a participatory approach to grant-making for lasting impact.

One community participant highlighted flexibility in approach, decision making and reporting as “essential” and was pleased to see this come alive through this pilot. The support to groups that did not initially meet the eligibility criteria was also perceived as highly valuable.

A community participant raised the challenge of time required for communication and providing feedback to applicants, but that these are critical elements of the approach.

It was also highlighted that a pilot alone will not provide long-lasting impact that the community needs after years of inequality to resources. It was suggested by one participant that for future rounds; half be used to fund projects already awarded from this programme, and the other half for new groups, to enable Sported, its partners and the PGM participants to see the long-term impact of the fund.

Funders

Among funders, there is a general recognition that current systems within the funding landscape do not work, and a culture shift is needed. Funders acknowledge that to achieve this, power needs to be relinquished and greater levels of decision making must be granted to the communities they are trying to impact. PGM seems to be effective in reaching cold spots that current fundraising processes exclude, and this pilot has helped funders to be more open to risk and to try innovative approaches to targeting specific communities.

The funders also valued the pooled funding approach and praised Sported’s role in facilitating the pilot.

The funders are keen to learn from this pilot, take lessons into future processes and see how it could be further enhanced and expanded.

Challenges

Some challenges identified throughout the process includes:

- Assessing the amount of time and support/facilitation required for each stage is difficult to predict before understanding the level of awareness of PGM among participants.

- Time restrictions meant that not enough emphasis could be put on relationship building between the community participants, which is vital for the ongoing success of community participation.
- The articulation of outputs required could have been clearer, setting an expectation of actionable outcomes the groups were convened to deliver; reducing admin burden on facilitators.
- Impact on communities that have historically been excluded takes time and providing evidence at an early stage is challenging
- Participants felt that having a limit of £10,000 that applicants could apply may have narrowed the kinds of activities that applied for funding. Equally, this being a one-off fund as opposed to multi-year funding meant that it wasn't a long-term solution for groups. Multi-year funding is required to see long-lasting impact.
- The requirement of an additional sign off in some cases, meant that the submission felt more like a recommendation than an actual award decision in the truest sense.

Overall takeaways

The pilot proved successful in building trust with the funders and partners to some extent and it is natural that this will take time. However, continued engagement and empowerment of the community is key. Without this, the trust built over this pilot will be lost. It can also be expected that continued engagement in this model through further rounds of funding will increase trust among the wider Black community, as more groups apply for the funding. Representation of the community being present within facilitation and capacity building roles also supported levels of trust.

Ceding power to those impacted by funding decisions proved to challenge some of the long-term structural imbalances, with what participants described with an impact first approach to applications. Ensuring that more weighting was put towards the potential impact of those black communities rather than an assessment of application writing skills. This resulted in 2 organisations receiving funding for the time after numerous unsuccessful bids previously.

While this process was participatory, this model works across a scale, in which funders will require different levels of participation from communities. So it is important to always think about how participatory the work delivered is being; and to always ask 'how can we make this more participatory?'. This will ensure that funders are always embedding those communities and their lived experiences at the heart of the work.

The future/ Recommendations

Looking forward to future opportunities and life beyond this pilot, there is a very clear message from participants and grantees that this pilot has already shown great impact to date and has to potential

to do even more. Some key recommendations looking forward when thinking about applying this method to your grant making processes are:

- When publicising the fund in the future, explore different avenues to widen your reach, through either partner organisations or the participants themselves; as you will not be able to effect real change if the word does not get to those not known to you.
- Ensure that there is enough protected time to allow for this process to be delivered with high quality and not rushed; emphasising on the process to enable learning and creativity, building relationships between all parties with enough lead-in to deliver on the objectives.
- Throughout the process, always think about how each stage/element can be more participatory and implement along the way.
- It is vital to position the project in the future such that it is led/championed by people in the from within the community, always.

This method has proven to be a powerful community engagement piece, and for organisations looking to further invest into various communities, the PGM model is a great way to do it. A community of race is what was used for the pilot, however this model can be utilised across various types of communities, including age, identities, disabilities, social causes and place. With the right process and effective education, funders can actively enable communities to speak on their own behalf on how investment can best be accessed and used, building trust in those communities.

When thinking about what communities to support/invest in, it is key to take into consideration intersectionality, and how the experiences of individuals who face multiple barriers come into play. Thinking about representation among your participants is important in ensuring a range of experiences is taken into account within the various overlays of identities, and how that plays into the multiplying effect of inequality.

It is also important to think about how else can you invest in the community and cede more power to them, whether it is to integrate members from that same community to lead the facilitation, making the process even more participatory; or what elements of additional capacity building can positively impact the community even more. There are various ways in which funders and organisations can invest in a community, and to ensure that the input aligns with their needs, it is vital that those in the community are at the heart of those discussions/decisions at every level.