

Big Local partnerships

A Big Local partnership is a group of at least eight people who guide the overall direction of Big Local in your area. The majority (at least 51%) of partnership members are people who live within your Big Local area. The partnership is responsible for agreeing a shared vision based on the priorities of their community, then creating the Big Local plan, overseeing its delivery, collecting evidence to show how the plan is progressing, and reviewing the plan and partnership to make sure they are working in the best way possible for community benefit.

What the partnerships do

The partnership is a way for people locally to get involved and contribute to decisions about how their area can be improved. So the way it comes together and works is really important in making sure that Big Local is a genuinely local, resident and volunteer-led programme.

The role of the partnership is to:

- bring together the community's views, and make the overall decisions about how Big Local will work in your area and how to use your £1m
- ensure Big Local is resident-led and that people across the Big Local area have a genuine and continuing opportunity to be involved
- work with the locally trusted organisation(s) to ensure the Big Local plan is carried out
- review the plan, in order to create a follow-on plan for future years
- connect with local organisations, businesses, public agencies, councillors and others who can deliver activities and help make Big Local a success
- work with your rep and locally trusted organisation(s) to achieve the vision you have set for your Big Local area.

What we expect of Big Local partnerships

Broadly, we expect partnerships to:

- encourage a range of people in your area to be involved, in a thoughtful, inclusive, open and meaningful way
- operate openly and transparently, which includes recording and communicating how decisions are made
- behave in line with Big Local values and ethos, as well as the locally agreed code of conduct and governing arrangements
- manage any conflicts of interest effectively and report any potential misuse of funds to Local Trust.

We also expect you to have locally agreed policies and procedures that are right for your area, such as a code of conduct and conflict of interest policies.

We do expect that you take care of yourselves and each other in undertaking any Big Local activity. This means contributing only what you are able to and not over-burdening yourselves, as well as bringing in other people to share the load.

For more details on appreciating volunteers please see our guidance on volunteering.

Delivering Big Local and distributing funding

In most areas, Big Local partnerships do not directly hold or distribute the Big Local funding. Instead, money is transferred from Local Trust to your locally trusted organisation(s) to meet the immediate costs of your Big Local plan.

As a Big Local partnership, you are not expected to deliver your Big Local plan yourselves. But you are expected to make decisions about how money and other resources are deployed, whether through your locally trusted organisation or through working with other delivery partners or beneficiaries. So you need to be comfortable with the process for agreeing who will deliver services and activities in line with your plan.

If you and other members of the partnership are interested in either delivering activities directly or being your own locally trusted organisation we have further guidance on different approaches to being a Big Local partnership and on partnerships becoming their own locally trusted organisation.

Criteria for Big Local partnerships

Each partnership is expected to reflect the specific needs and characteristics of its own area and will therefore be unique. However, each partnership must meet these criteria:

- It must have at least eight members.
- The majority (at least 51%) of members should live within the Big Local area's boundaries.
- Members should broadly reflect the range and diversity of people who live in your area - for example, in relation to age, ethnicity, gender, faith, disability or income levels.

Please note that we ask members of the Big Local partnership to participate 'in their own right', which means they cannot represent the views of any other person or organisation.

As long as you meet these criteria, your partnership can take different forms and should be designed to best suit your area. Each partnership can choose their name and structure and the process for people to join the partnership.

Behaviour

Everyone working on Big Local (including when delivering activities outside of their area) should operate in an open, constructive, honest, inclusive and respectful way.

It's important that, as a Big Local, you have a code of conduct or other process where anyone can flag concerns around behaviour, and a proportionate way of responding that allows for an impartial person to review and propose a response.

It is up to each partnership to decide how to work together, and what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. However, while working on Big Local, there are some behaviours that are never acceptable and we would expect partnerships to respond to in all cases:

- Behaviour which has or could have a hurtful or damaging effect, whether intentional or unintentional. This includes but is not limited to: discrimination of any form; actual or threatened physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or financial abuse; harassment; promotion

or sharing of hateful materials; unjustified exclusion from the partnership or activities; intimidation; and any action which puts the safety or dignity of others at risk.

- Non-adherence with agreed partnership policies.
- In addition to this, we expect everyone working on Big Local to meet our guidance on conflicts of interest and political activities at all times, and for partnerships to respond if these are not followed.

We recognise that any policy developed through Big Local can only manage behaviour within the programme, and the Partnership or Local Trust have no power to intervene in issues outside of Big Local. If you feel unsafe at any time you need to consider reporting the behaviour to the police.

Conflicts of interest

As Big Local areas start to spend more in their areas, the level of scrutiny that members of the partnership and locally trusted organisations experience to is likely to increase.

While we expect partnerships to agree their own policies and procedures, we think it is important that all areas pay particular attention to the need to organise themselves in ways that are transparent and give confidence to local residents that Big Local resources are being properly managed and spent.

A key part of this is ensuring that there is good practice around recognising and managing conflicts of interest.

Lots of partnerships have developed policies and procedures that already follow good practice and are working well. However, we know that some areas have encountered difficulties or have asked for clearer guidance on the sorts of issues that needed to be covered in a conflict of interest policy.

In general, we expect partnerships to use their judgement in recognising conflicts of interest when they arise and manage them appropriately. However, based on our experience of working with areas, there are a number of potential conflicts of interest which Big Local partnerships should be particularly aware of, take action to avoid and take account of in their policies and procedures.

We consider the following to be particularly important issues to address in a partnership's conflict of interest policy:

- The role of a paid Big Local worker in partnership decisions.
- The presence of families, either related by birth or marriage on the partnership.
- People in positions of power and influence (real or perceived) such as chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, worker etc. that are related by birth or marriage.
- Procurement and/or grant making decisions.

Partnerships and paid workers

We know that most partnerships now have some form of paid worker, though the contractual relationships, role and workplan vary in each area. A paid worker who is also a decision maker or voting member of the partnership is an unacceptable conflict of interest. This is because the role of the paid worker is to support the work of Big Local and the partnership and they receive a wage to do so. The risk is that they could be perceived as having undue influence on decisions,

including decisions which affect their paid work. Our expectation is that in no circumstances should a paid worker also sit as a voting member of the partnership.

Partnerships and families

One of our criteria for partnerships is that members should reflect the range and diversity of people who live in your area. Partnerships are small groups, so when family members are on a partnership together, it is often not possible to reflect the diversity of people in an area. The small group can easily become dominated by people who are related. This can lead to a perception that the partnership is dominated by a small or exclusive clique.

For this reason, we do not believe it is acceptable for more than two people from the same family or who live in the same household to be partnership members. By related, we mean married couples, civil partner or unmarried partner, parent, grandparent, child or sibling.

People in positions of power and influence

Partnerships should be particularly careful of any perception of conflicts of interest involving people in positions of power and influence (real or perceived) such as chair, vice chair, secretary and treasurer. We know that people are individuals and that everyone brings something different to the role, but it is unacceptable to Local Trust to have people in positions of power who are related because it leaves both those individuals, the wider partnership and Big Local vulnerable to accusations of improper influence on decision making or inadequate oversight of the decision-making process.

For example, in no circumstances should a Big Local worker (employed or sub-contracted through a locally trusted organisation or otherwise) be related to a person in a position of power or influence in a partnership. We would also view it as a conflict if an LTO representative is in a position of power and influence. Particular care should meanwhile be taken to avoid any perceptions of conflicts of interest when members of a partnership are related to a worker.

Avoiding conflicts of interest in procurement or grant making

Many partnerships have processes in place to make procurement (buying) or grant-making decisions by competitive tendering for contracts. As a partnership member, you should not be involved in a decision about who gets a particular contract if:

- you might get a financial benefit from the decision - for example, if you work for a local organisation or business that receives Big Local money to deliver activities or services or owns a meeting space that the partnership pays to use.
- you might get an indirect financial benefit from the decision - for example, if a close relative or friend is employed by an organisation that receives Big Local money, or is doing work paid for with Big Local money.
- your loyalty to Big Local might conflict with your loyalty to another group or organisation. This might be because you are a member or trustee of, or have links with, an organisation or group outside Big Local. Although you yourself may not gain any financial benefit, your decision making could be influenced by your other interests.

For example, if one or more LTO staff are members of the partnership, particularly voting members, there could be many decisions that pose a conflict of some kind. They may wish to consider becoming non-voting members or stepping down from the membership.

Reviewing your Big Local partnership

We know that membership of your partnership will change over time, as new people join, and others step back. So, we ask your Big Local rep to submit updated information about your partnership between September and December each year. This is to make sure we know who is in the Big Local partnership and that it continues to meet the criteria.

As part of the review, we ask your Big Local rep to provide information about each partnership member, including their name, role and if they are a resident in the Big Local area. We also ask each member to sign a Big Local partnership membership form to confirm that they are member.

Your rep will also answer these general questions about the partnership:

- Does the partnership currently reflect the community?
- Has the partnership followed its own policies and procedures?
- Has the partnership behaved in line with the ethos and values of Big Local?
- Does the partnership conform to Big Local's conflicts of interest guidance?

Once completed, your Big Local rep will submit the partnership review to us on Big Local Community. If your partnership no longer meets our criteria, you and your rep will need to tell us what you are doing to meet them, and your timeline for achieving this.

What support is available

We know from the experiences of Big Local partnerships that things don't always go to plan and that support is essential. The following are your main resources:

1. Your rep, your locally trusted organisation(s) and your partners are an important source of advice and practical support.
2. Partnerships can and should budget for training and volunteer costs to enable residents to take part. This could include the cost of a reasonable meeting space and refreshments for the group.
3. Local Trust regularly releases details of training courses and learning events.
4. Local Trust offers a range of guidance, how-to guides and more.

For more information, see our full guidance on support and funding available to Big Local areas.

This document will be developed over time with input from the people using this material.

If you have thoughts on how this document can be made more useful for you, particularly if you live in one of the Big Local areas, please let us know.

Local Trust

The endowment for the Big Local programme is held by the Big Local Trust and overseen by Local Trust. The Big Local Trust was established by the National Lottery Community Fund with a National Lottery grant of £196,873,499.

If you need this document in other formats or a community language please get in touch with Local Trust and we will help you.

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