

Influences on the development of Big Local

The Community Development Foundation (CDF) undertook research on behalf of Local Trust to identify what is influencing the progress of Big Local areas. Our research, undertaken in 2014-15, aims to help Big Local areas across the country make progress and inform the support provided to them by Local Trust and its partners.

Summary of our research findings

Our research involved visits and interviews to 15 Big Local areas and a survey sent to key residents in all 150 Big Local areas. We find evidence that some areas are starting to meet the aims of the Big Local programme, namely:

- Areas have a plan in place that has identified local needs and they are building up partnerships with individuals and organisations to address these;
- Residents are increasingly taking the lead in Big Local and are developing skills and confidence as a result;
- Where progress has been made, particularly through tangible changes like the development of community buildings, residents are starting to feel they are making a difference; and
- Residents report knowing more about their area, are engaging with more of the community and are delivering tangible changes. All of which are supporting them to make their area an even better place to live.

No matter what stage a Big Local area is at, whether they are getting started, preparing a plan or delivering a plan, there are three main challenges which hinder their progress:

- Involving residents from the wider community;
- Accessing support needed; and
- Understanding the Big Local process.

Possible solutions to these issues are detailed below, including ways of increasing involvement and moving into shared leadership and roles to help access support and understand the Big Local process.

Involving residents in the wider community

There are a number of factors that influence how aware, engaged and involved residents are. The following advice may help some areas to increase this further:

- Use different means to engage different people;
- Keep up a constant presence within the local area;
- Face-to-face communication and events are great ways of spreading the word;
- Residents often get involved and stay involved in Big Local through completion of small tasks or involvement in subgroups;
- Activities with tangible outcomes often increase involvement;
- Keep communications as community-friendly as possible;
- Work at a pace which suits your area; and
- Understand that it is natural for people to drop in and out of volunteering.

Accessing support and understanding the Big Local process

We find a helpful structure to deliver Big Local is shared leadership. This is where all team members engage in leadership and decision making to deliver projects. Shared leadership is occurring in Big Local when partnerships and steering groups share a vision (most often through the plan), support and encourage each other to deliver the vision, share information and everyone feels able to express their opinions in relation to this. We also identify key 'team roles' to deliver Big Local:

- **Strategic Thinker** – keeping an eye on the bigger picture and ensuring activities relate to desired outcomes;
- **Do-er** – making things happen;
- **Catalyst** – sparking new ideas and ways of doing things;
- **Connector** – bringing together different people and groups across the area;
- **Advisor** – providing expert advice and support; and
- **Coach** – supporting development and motivating others. This is often someone who is slightly removed.

These roles may be filled by more than one person. One person may also perform more than one role and may also change roles over the course of time, or depending on the project. Partnerships become weaker when they lack certain roles and this can happen when they don't have the 'right people' in place. The support functions provided by the roles we identified in Big Local are illustrated in the circular structure shown in [Figure 1](#).

The role of reps, locally trusted organisations and other partners in providing expert advice is increasingly important as areas deliver projects identified in their plan. They also contribute to helping residents understand the Big Local process. An increasing number of areas are also hiring a worker from within the area to act as a Do-er and increase capacity to deliver Big Local.



Figure 1 Roles in Big Local identified by CDF

Key messages for Local Trust

- There is evidence that areas are becoming increasingly clear about what Big Local is, are more confident in leading Big Local, and that residents leading Big Local are not just the 'usual suspects'.
- Areas are maintaining the principles of Big Local through majority voting on partnerships and ensuring the sustainability of funding through building a legacy.
- Support is still required in terms of understanding and promoting the programme and being clear on monitoring requirements.
- Areas want to feel they are not alone in their journey; shared learning and promotion of Big Local as a national programme may help with this.

Key messages for areas

- Big Local can be a challenging process for many residents involved and while the journey is not always smooth, areas that persist find it rewarding and are starting to see change.
- Understanding the process, having the confidence in taking the lead, choosing the right people to work with and connecting to others in the community to support delivery all makes a difference to the development of Big Local.
- Having control does not mean having all the answers; support is needed from other residents, reps, locally trusted organisations, workers, local organisations, other Big Local areas and Local Trust to help deliver Big Local.
- Everyone on the partnership has a role to play in Big Local and responsibility should be shared.
- Some areas find that hiring a worker gives them extra capacity and helps them understand the process of Big Local better.
- Continuous publicity of Big Local through conversations, websites, leaflets, newsletters, events and activities helps to increase the number of residents who are aware of Big Local, who are engaged, and who volunteer to help.
- Areas are continuously learning and building on the foundations of activity in the area with a continual process of planning and action and celebrations of achievements.

Conclusion

Residents are giving their time and energy and working extremely hard to deliver Big Local across the country. Though the Big Local journey may be challenging, particularly in terms of getting people involved, there is evidence of increasing awareness, engagement and involvement from the wider community. Residents are identifying the needs of their community and taking action in response to them through the support of those around them. This support includes other residents, the rep, the locally trusted organisation, local organisations and, quite often, a worker. Residents are growing in skills and confidence to increasingly take the lead in Big Local and remain very committed to it. This is because of their continued passion to make a difference to their area and make it an even better place for all who live there.