

BIG on... Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)



Since 2004 we have distributed over £4.4 billion across the UK to projects covering health, education, the environment and charitable purposes. Our mission is to bring real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need. BIG is an outcomes funder, we are interested in what works and what makes a positive difference to the communities in which we deliver funding. We are also able to deliver non-Lottery funding.

Funding the Voluntary and Community Sector

We have undertaken to commit at least 80 per cent of our funding directly to the VCS and this year 90 per cent of committed funds have gone to the VCS. This target provides funding certainty for the VCS in a very uncertain time. It also provides BIG with the flexibility to fund projects and partnerships run by other types of organisations such as Local Authorities and Parish Councils that benefit the VCS.

BIG's relationship with the VCS

Without the trust and respect of the voluntary and community sector, BIG simply could not do its job. We have strong relationships of mutual benefit with the leading sector representative bodies.

In March 2010, in a joint letter to the Minister for the Third Sector, NCVO, ACEVO, NAVCA and ACRE stated: "The Big Lottery Fund has consistently proved itself to be an excellent funder, following good practice and listening to the needs of the sector."

People Power Change

People Powered Change will use BIG's funding and influence to enable individuals and communities to develop and implement their ideas to change lives for the better. People Powered Change isn't a new approach, BIG has been doing this for years. We believe that every community facing problems contains within it people and groups who step forward as the solution. BIG will use its resources, passion, and belief in communities to unlock and inspire community action across the nation.

Our goal is to ensure that through our investments people and communities most in need can make the most of opportunities that arise during this critical time.

We also want people to share and celebrate their work, and learn from others that are doing it for themselves.

Leading good funding practice

BIG is an outcomes funder, we are interested in what works for people, communities and neighbourhoods rather than just the specific type of organisation delivering the project.

BIG seeks to continually review and improve its funding practice. We previously pioneered approaches such as Full cost recovery and five year funding, which are still not offered by all funders. BIG has already collaborated in social investment initiatives and will look to identify further opportunities. For example, we are supporting a social impact bond pilot at Peterborough prison in which 17 social investors of a scheme to cut prisoner re-offending will get a return on their investment – partly funded by BIG, if reconvictions fall.

We were recognised by the Public Accounts Committee¹ for understanding communities and putting them at the heart of our funding. They recommended that "Grant-makers should seek to learn from Big Lottery Fund's approach, including its regional outreach operations."

Public involvement in decision making

We have a long history of enabling and empowering people and communities to decide where Lottery money should go. This ranges from our People's Millions programme where projects feature on ITV regional news and are then subject to a public vote to decide which projects receive funding; to ensuring members of the public sit on our decision making committees; to our £200 million Big Local programme where we have allocated money to local communities and allow them to organise and agree how that money shall be spent over time. In 2005 we commissioned a MORI survey into Lottery players' attitudes to the issue of public involvement. 93% of those interviewed said they felt it was important that the Public is involved, including three quarters who said it was very important. Public involvement in Lottery distribution has the potential to educate people about the wide diversity of projects in need of support and where the Lottery can make a distinct and additional contribution.

¹ Evaluation of Children's Play Programme, ECOTEC Research and Consulting, Nicola Hall and Laurie Day
www2.biglotteryfund.org.uk/ecotec_eval_280509.pdf

Millennium Now

This is a recent £10 million programme. Developed in partnership with Channel 4, public involvement is at the forefront of this programme. Through the Big Decision, the British public told us where they felt £10 million of Lottery funding should go. We took this feedback and combined it with the results of an Ipsos MORI poll, conducted with 2,000 people from across the UK, to help decide the five distinct project types that Millennium Now will fund.

Improving Futures

BIG's Improving Futures programme aims to improve outcomes for children within families experience multiple and complex problems – for example, to do with poor health, unemployment, debt, and housing problems – which can affect their children's wellbeing and life chances.

Transition Fund

BIG has the ability to deliver non-Lottery funding we are delivering on behalf of the Office for Civil Society a £100 million programme to help VCS organisations most affected by reductions in public spending to be more resilient, agile and able to take opportunities presented by a changing funding environment.

Being a more effective and supportive funder

BIG continues to explore ways to improve its processes, to provide better feedback and support to those applying to us for funding whilst all the time focussing on providing good value for Lottery money.

- ▶ We have streamlined the process of applying to Reaching Communities, our main open programme in England. We have simplified the application form and only applicants with a high probability of receiving funding are invited to go through the full application process, saving time for both the applicant and BIG.
- ▶ We have been working on streamlining the processes for all our programmes, from applying for a grant to completing monitoring requirements. This has ranged from moving toward online application forms to investigating a new online grant system that enables applicants to monitor their progress online and complete monitoring requirements online.
- ▶ Our regional teams work with around 500 helper agencies across England, who disseminate information to the voluntary and community sector and provide support for organisations applying for funding. In order to support helper agencies and ensure that advice is consistent, we established a section of our website to provide useful tools and resources.

Funding programmes

Two of our most popular programmes are worth particular note:

Awards for All – grants of £300 to £10,000 is the quickest and simplest way to access our funding. The easy-to-use application form can be downloaded, filled in and emailed direct to the Big Lottery Fund, as well as being available in hard copy.

Reaching Communities England – offering funding from £10,000–£500,000 for projects helping communities and people most in need. We recently re-launched this programme, incorporating a number of key improvements in response to customer feedback – including a simpler application form and quicker decision-making for smaller projects. The budget for Reaching Communities will be at least £100 million each year until 2013.



Hunlocke Community Garden

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