



**CONNECT  
HACKNEY**  
ageing better



# What have we learnt about procuring projects for older people?

## Connect Hackney Key Messages

**The learning below comes from the Connect Hackney programme<sup>1</sup> team which has commissioned over 40 projects for socially isolated older people in the borough, as well as from staff from the commissioned projects.**

---

1. Connect Hackney is one of 14 programmes in England funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. In operation since 2015, Connect Hackney aims to reduce social isolation, improve the wellbeing of older Hackney residents and to share their learning about what works.

---



**1. Connect Hackney projects that have most improved older people’s wellbeing have some or all of the following qualities:**

- Are co-produced with older people
- Offer interesting activities that older people want
- If charging, don’t charge too much
- Are usually delivered by organisations with a track record of working with older people
- Have a flexible service offer
- Consider how to make links with transport providers
- Have considered how to build monitoring and evaluation into the project
- Have considered how to reach new people
- Make space for service users to socialise

**2. The network and approach of the commissioning body impacts the applications received**

- Hackney CVS was able to commission smaller and Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) organisations that aren’t well networked with funders
- As a CVS we are at risk of being compromised by our responsibility to support the local voluntary and community sector (VCS)
- Reconciling the needs of the local sector and the requirements of our funders is an ongoing piece of work
- Having consistent and transparent processes

when deciding whether to terminate contracts is key

**3. A proportional, robust and ethical assessment process is essential**

- Scale down paperwork so that the work required to respond to the ITT is proportionate to the funding amount and request
- Think about how you will use the information you collect and focus on what is really needed
- Ensure the invitation to tender (ITT) encourages realistic costings for co-production and outreach
- Guidance on scoring criteria should be used in order to build consistency and fairness
- It is difficult, but important to assess how networked organisations already are – ask for more detailed and realistic plans for how they will build referral networks since this can take time
- Invest resources in enabling older people to meaningfully participate in the procurement process
- Offer different ways to involve service users in the assessment process including activities that don’t require literacy skills
- Co-design the assessment process with older people from the outset
- Ensure the process is ethical by doing a risk assessment of potential ethical challenges
- Establish a robust method for assessing budgets

- Piloting ITTs with providers could help ensure bids can be fairly assessed

#### **4. Upskill staff and older people to be effective commissioners**

- Find ways to mitigate the impact of literacy issues that prevent older people for meaningfully engaging in the process
- Provide training and ongoing support to older people who may not have skills or experience in this area
- Older people value being involved in commissioning
- Assess whether staff have the right skills to be involved in assessing bids

#### **5) Brand and market the ITT effectively**

- Use a range of publicity, marketing and communications methods
- The ITT should be branded using both text and images to convey the kinds of projects and/or approach you are looking for
- Targeted work is needed to reach less networked community groups
- The mismanagement of marketing commissioning rounds can impact future responses

#### **6. Commissioned projects can provide valuable learning on procurement. CH projects recommended that procurement processes should:**

- Require applicants to submit a theory of change with their project plan, including thinking about how the project will impact the organisation as well as beneficiaries
- Include details about monitoring and evaluation requirements including specifying any outcomes tools that will be used
- Focus on outcomes rather than being prescriptive about how they are achieved
- Be specific about the issues or conditions the

project should address and include definitions where appropriate

- Include research on the issues the project should address including effective approaches and local data on its prevalence in Hackney
- Include case studies of potential beneficiaries
- Provide applicants with examples of the likely challenges they might face
- Prompt applicants to consider how changing seasonal conditions will impact their project and what adjustments they may need to make
- Allow larger pots of funding for organisations who want to work in partnership

#### **7. It's important to understand the challenges facing both the sector and older people locally**

- The local older people's sector has been hit by both cuts to VCS funding and the crisis in health and social care which has increased the needs of their client group
- Hackney's older population are the second poorest older population in England and have many health challenges which makes service delivery resource-intensive
- Investment and market development work are needed in order to support the VCS to find new ways of working with housebound people
- Older people's activities are often focused on health and wellbeing
- A lack of core funding and the short term nature of most funded programmes impacts the sustainability
- Frontline staff are dealing with clients with increasingly complex needs while often on low or stagnant wages that do not rise to meet the increased cost of living in London. This impacts their wellbeing and may impact the quality of support they can provide
- The emotional labour of supporting people with complex needs is not given appropriate monetary value