

Golden Grant Makers

islington
giving



Report on Islington Giving's Second
resident led giving panel for older people

June 2024

About this report

In Autumn 2023, Islington Giving began work on our second resident led panel for older people, our Golden Grant Makers (GGM). This built on learning from our first panel, held in 2022-2023. We took a participatory approach, consulting with older people and older people's organisations to shape the model, decide upon priorities for the fund, and to recruit older people to take part in the panel. The role of the panel was to formulate what the wider consultations had told us about what older people wanted to see more of in the borough into a grant call, to make decisions about applications received, and ultimately to award funding to groups they considered best met the needs of older people. They had £120,000 to distribute, including £37,750 from the Mercers' Company, who also supported this first round of Golden Grant Makers in 2022-23. City Bridge Foundation funded the costs of running the panel. The project ran from October 2023 to February, 2024.

This report provides an overview of the project.

Objectives

1. To support groups working with older people in the borough.
2. To involve older people in deciding how best to use the money.





Summary

This was the second of our resident led grant making panels for older people. Islington Giving has a range of experience and knowledge of resident led giving spanning over seven years, sharing power with a diverse group of participants, including younger people, parents and carers, and more recently, unpaid carers. We also took a lot of learning from the first year of running Golden Grant Makers, particularly thinking about how to better recruit older people, how to talk to more people about what they would like to see funded, and how to better support participants in meetings.

During September, we visited seven local groups, and spoke to over 80 older people. (By older people, we generally mean people at least over 60, but more likely over 65). We ran workshops, asking older people to talk about the borough, what they liked, where they travelled to, what they missed or wanted to see more of, and how they thought services could best meet their needs. This process was used to test and refine priorities for the open funding call, with each outreach session bringing more clarity and focus to deciding the call. In a change of approach from the previous year, the open call was finalised through the outreach consultation and promoted to local groups in parallel to recruiting new panel members. The outreach sessions were also used to introduce the idea of a resident grant making panel and participants who were interested were invited to get in touch to find out more.

Through this process, we recruited eight people to join the grant giving panel who together participated in eight panel meetings. The panel undertook training to support their grant making decisions. A total of 26 applications were received.

Following the awarding of funds, we held a wrap up meeting to which some of the funded groups were invited. We also introduced panel members to our Alumni Manager, who can support anyone interested in accessing further opportunities either with Islington Giving or more widely in the borough.

The remainder of this report provides more detail on the stages of the process, as follows:

1. Consultations
2. Recruitment of Panel Members
3. Panel meetings
4. Application process
5. Decision making
6. Budget
7. Reflection and Learning



We took a participatory approach consulting with older people and older people's organisations.

Consultation

One of our learning points from the first older person's panel was that asking one small group of people to speak for all older people in the borough was a challenge. In our 2023 evaluation report, we wrote that we needed "further consideration of how and at what stage residents should be involved. For this programme, residents designed the open call and made funding decisions within a set strategic framework. Should we go back a stage so that local people are also involved in designing the grant making process? Should we go out to where people are, engaging with them more on their term could the process be designed differently so that different groups of residents participate in different ways/at different times?"

With this in mind, we started the process by visiting seven local groups, all of which work with older people. Groups were asked to invite some of their users to a workshop session, where we talked with older people about their lives, how they feel about changes in the borough, what kind of activities they enjoy, and what kind of projects they would like to fund, if they had a choice.

Participants were invited to say what they thought was positive about living in Islington and what sorts of things they would like to see improved. Facilitated discussions also took place around what kind of support and activities they would like to see more of in the borough. Participants were also given maps to plot their regular journeys and places they visit locally.

Groups taking part in the outreach consultation:

- All Change
- Age UK Islington
- Mercers Supported Accommodation
- Claremont
- Community Language Support Service
- Kevin Richards Foundation
- Aflah

In total, about 80 people joined the conversations. There were some common themes to their discussions, which helped to shape the final call.



Recruitment of panel members

We were conscious that in recruiting older people to our 2022-23 panel, some people didn't understand what grant making was about and therefore were not sure what would be expected of them. This time, we used the outreach consultations to introduce the grant making process to a wider group of people. Following the workshop discussions, it was natural to introduce the next part of the process to people – "Would you like to join the panel to make decisions about the groups we fund to provide the kind of services you have just been talking about?" As a result, would-be participants had a clearer idea of what might be expected of them.

Nine people applied. We asked people to complete a short form, which asked:

- Why do you want to be a Golden Grant Maker?
- What do you like about living in Islington?
- What are the main issue facing older people in Islington?
- If you could pick three things to improve for older people in Islington, what would they be?

We then had a phone conversation with applicants, after which eight people joined the panel, seven of whom attended through the whole process. There was a fairly even split between male and female participants (three men, five women) which was positive compared to the previous round where only one male participant committed to the whole process. Two of the eight participants were from non-white backgrounds (one Black British and the other Thai British) and although this was still low it is an improvement on the previous round when all but one of the participants identified as White (either White British or White – other). Four of the eight panel members were over 70, two of whom were over 80. The remaining four were all over the age of 60.



Panel meetings

After our 2022-23 panel, we thought that “extra care and thought needs to go into understanding and supporting panel members health and wellbeing. This should start at the recruitment stage – it was clear some people interested in participating could not commit to a long-term process due to health issues. However, wellbeing should be embedded in a whole process approach. It was clear for example that the amount of information panelists are expected to absorb as well as the methods in which residents are engaged and participate can have unintended negative consequences and this needs to be kept in mind when planning the process of engagement.”

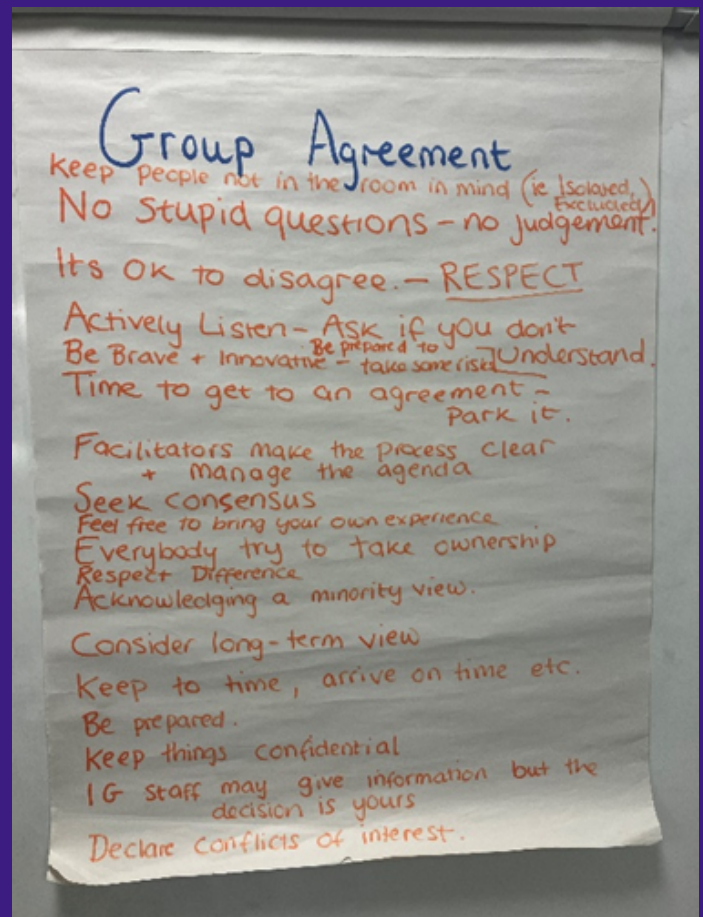
While a positive feature of the outreach was to introduce residents to the process and enable them to make a more informed decision as to whether they would like to take the next step to become a panel member, this did also mean an element of self-selection, whereby there was a sense that those who perhaps had more confidence or judged that this was something they could do due to their own past experiences put themselves forward.

On the one hand this led to the majority of panel members having some degree of professional experience. This included for example, running older peoples services for the local authority and other public sector roles, human resources and training, working in business and for charities.

This experience fed into panel discussions in a positive way which was perhaps missing from the first programme. On the other hand however, this could be seen as intimidating or overwhelming for participants who had other but no less important experience to offer and arguably could even pose a risk to the kinds of projects that were later be prioritised for funding.

All meetings were in person, at our accessible offices in Islington. Panel members were remunerated for their time, either paid per hour at the London Living Wage, or receiving a thank you gift at the end of the process.

The panel wrote a group agreement, outlining how they would treat each other and the decision making process.



We also discussed Islington Giving's values with participants. It was important that the panel understood the things that were non-negotiable for us.

Working together, and using the learning from the outreach groups, the panel wrote the following grant call:

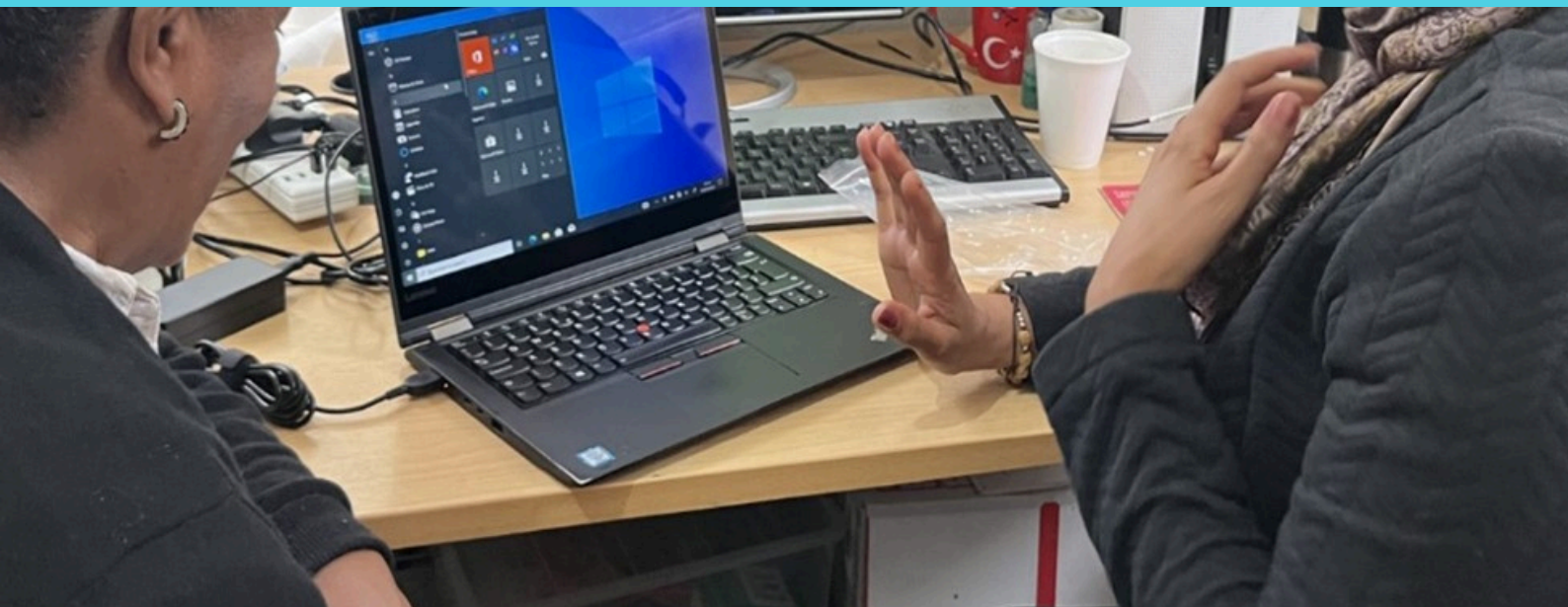
Open Call

People have told us that they appreciate much of what the borough has to offer but many of our most isolated older residents need more support to access what is already available

Priorities

- Financial – affordable opportunities, physical exercise and fun activities, lifelong learning, nature, trips.
- Advice – accessible: Face-to-face, in other languages, housing biggest area of concern.
- Accessible – delivered where older people already meet/live, digital/online accessibility, more connected e.g. hub to access info on local advice and support.
- Criteria
- Be for Islington residents aged 55 or over.
- Be free or low-cost.
- Addresses barriers to participation.
- Be aware of and work with complementary services to support resident need holistically.





Application process

In our 2022-23 evaluation, we agreed that “we needed to review the application process to make it simpler for applicants, panel members and staff.” In part, this was to help applicant groups. We received 42 applications in that round but could only ever fund a small number of those so were conscious that many groups were spending time on unsuccessful applications. Panel members in that first programme also found the amount of applications overwhelming. They were uneasy in having to say no to so many groups. While no one wants to say no, it was important that we managed the process so that panel members better understood where their responsibility ended.

A lesson from the first programme was that the high number of applications was partly due to the wide scope of the open call. This made it more difficult for panel members to use the criteria and priorities to filter out applications based on not meeting the key programme objectives. This is one of the reasons why it was decided to go out to speak to a wider group of residents and use this process to identify key themes coming back from residents while also using this process to focus down, refine and concentrate the priorities for the open call. The comprehensive consultation process also allowed for constant testing and checking back on any assumptions being made as part of shaping the open call.

Alongside the process outlined above to help design a more focused open call, it was decided not to allow organisations that received funding in the first round to reapply. Both factors likely contributed to ensuring there were less applications received compared to the previous programme.

The first four panel meetings took place while the grant call was still live. The first meeting was used to introduce the process and to provide an overview of the open call which was designed in consultation with older residents undertaken through the outreach process that the panel members also participated in. The next three panel meetings were used to provide basic training in the grant making process which touched upon what they should expect to see and how to read an application form, what makes a good organisation, what makes a good project, and what to look for in a budget. In order to help with the decision making process, we also talked about communication styles, how different people make decisions, and how to think about our unconscious bias in considering the groups being helped in different applications.

Applicant groups had just over five weeks to apply, and 26 applications were received.

Decision making

The decision was taken to split the applications and panel members into two groups so that they did not have to focus on reading all the applications in detail – something that can be overwhelming. Steps were also taken to only provide the key information – removing wider organisational information primarily used for due diligence purposes undertaken by Islington Giving staff – so that panel members only had to focus on the project detail. All panel members were given summaries and basic information for all projects so they were still able to hold an overview while focusing in more detail on only half. Each group made recommendations, putting each application into a Red, Amber or Green selection. The panel then reconvened as a whole to discuss all projects and to prioritise shortlisting together. and make final decisions.

The panel considered projects against the priorities and the criteria. They also aimed to fund a range of activities so that a range of people and groups were receiving support.



Funded Groups

Group Name	Project Name	Awarded Amount
Cut Moose	Walking Art	24,900
Hornsey Lane Estate Community Association.	Our Place Older People's Project	26,960
Manor Gardens Welfare Trust	Bridge Befriending: Reconnecting Residents	24,945
CONNAUGHT OPERA	Romantic Musical Memories	9,100
Mei Mei Social	The Art Laboratory	2,000
MRS Independent Living	Fifty-Plus Digital: Weekly Digital Drop-in for older people in Islington	23,300
Choices CIC	Supporting Community Elders	11,250
Total		122,455

Budget

Then panel has £120,000 to distribute (although we eventually agreed to total grant making of £122,455). This included £37,750 from the Mercers' Company, with the rest of grant pot coming from Islington Giving's unrestricted budget. In year 1, the pot had included money from the National Lottery Community Fund, but this grant had come to an end by year 2.

It cost us £2,317 to run the panel, including payments to participants and refreshments. Travel costs were low as most participants used their Freedom Passes.

In 2022-23, we used an external facilitator in all of the meetings. This worked well, but this year, we considered we had the skills in-house to run the sessions. This saved us about £3,000 in direct, consultancy costs, although it took more staff time, with two members of our programme team planning and attending sessions.

Reflection and learning

Conducting the outreach work before the main panel was a good decision. Not only were we able to involve many more people, but their common views helped us to already have the basis of a call before the panel met. This helped us to shape a more focused call and gave the panel confidence in knowing they were reflecting a majority view from older people in the borough.

The outreach work was also really helpful in introducing grant giving to residents. The panel arrived with a better sense of what might be asked of them.

Most of this year's panel had a professional background and/or were heavy users of local projects. This helped in how they coped with the work and in being able to put a context around the range of applications received. While is great for the panel process, we do need to be aware of needing to continue to include less obvious, more challenged voices.

The outreach work was really helpful in introducing grant giving to residents.

With thanks

With Thanks:

- To our panel members, for your enthusiasm and commitment to the process, and for sharing your time and expertise with us.
- To The Mercers' Company for their support from older people in the borough and their interest in involving local people in directing these funds.
- To City Bridge Foundation for supporting the costs of running this programme and their openness to test different approaches to meaningfully involve residents in our work.

For further information visit:

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