

This case study shows how a learning approach can mutually benefit both funders and funded organisations

Introduction

Spirit of 2012 is a funder of Olympics and Commonwealth games legacy programmes. Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) worked closely with Spirit of 2012 when we provided evaluation support to organisations funded through the Physical Activity Fund 2014. The fund was for organisations that help people become more active.

From the outset Spirit of 2012 was clearly committed to embedding a learning approach into the Fund. This case study highlights some of the steps Spirit of 2012 took while also providing insight into the benefits reaped by one of their grantholders, CHANGES Community Health Project.

Learning opportunities for funded organisations

"With Spirit 2012 we decided to work differently, we wanted to fund organisations to learn.

Our principles were learning, changing, improving. We said to partners "this is your fund, we're not the experts, you are the experts. We can only learn from you and we'll support you to learn". We built in opportunities to learn right from the start, with 4 quarterly learning meetings and evaluation support.

There are quick wins which can make a difference – at the start of the fund we shared all the project descriptions and contact details among partners which helped create opportunities to contact and learn from each other".

Alex, Spirit of 2012

"If it wasn't for the learning events I'd never have had the opportunity to link up with other projects. Seeing the bigger picture was helpful and the learning events were quite motivating for us.



We contacted the Active North Ayrshire project and received advice which helped us develop better ways to record information about people using the service.

Heather, CHANGES Community Health Project



Funders – you can generate a learning culture by making it clear from the start that funded organisations are partners – you're in it together!

Expect change to happen

We know projects are likely to change once partners move into delivery. We suggest being comfortable with change because it's changing to improve.

Early in the projects we asked partners to note down any changes they made to their projects. They didn't have a tool for doing this, so ESS developed the change record for them. This was helpful for partners to record changes for their own learning and to let us know too when reporting back. We now use this with any new funds we have.

Alex, Spirit of 2012

The funders were keen to hear about setbacks as well as successes.

Sometimes things don't go to plan and it's important that funders appreciate this and support the organisation to adapt the project outcomes if things don't work out as first anticipated.

Spirit 2012 made it clear right from the start that they were happy to hear if things weren't working out. I didn't feel pressure to 'flog a dead horse'. We made changes to our project. For example, we didn't have as much demand for cycling as we had initially anticipated. We changed this to recruit additional walk leaders to pilot the Nordic Walking sessions, which have proved very successful.

Heather, CHANGES Community Health Project



Encourage an open working relationship in which as a **funder** you are happy to hear about difficulties and set-backs as well as successes.

Take time to reflect on common issues which are arising.

For more information about building positive relationships with the organisations you fund check out

- [*Building mutually beneficial relationships - Top Tips for Funders*](#)
- [*Harmonising Reporting*](#)

Contact details

If you need ESS's support please email Evaluation Support Scotland info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk or phone 0131 243 2770

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