

BIG Lottery Fund Consultation Programme

background

The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). As the largest distributor of National Lottery funding, it distributes 50% of the money available to good causes from the sale of lottery tickets. Its mission is to bring real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need. BIG's funding covers the areas of health, education, environment and the voluntary, community and charitable sectors.

During the autumn of 2008, BIG Thinking was launched – a major consultation to help formulate policy on future direction beyond the scope of BIG's current grant programmes. The consultation was devised to enable the Big Lottery Fund to identify where it could make a difference to communities and people in need, and to make a hard-headed assessment of emerging needs.

The consultation process began with public workshops across the UK which informed the development of the online consultation exercise and the planned series of Big Thinking regional events in England.

Running parallel to the online research, between November 2008 and the end of February 2009, was a live consultation programme comprising nine regional events and an initial London launch. The purpose of the live consultation was to drill down through the quantitative data collected online, to arrive at more qualitative responses answering more complex and variable questions.

the need

Earlier experience had revealed a tendency for stakeholders to place priority on their own sphere of interest, rather than taking an objective view, so the organisers were keen to find a consultation method that could promote a broader, more inclusive discussion process.

Maintaining a distinction between the two simultaneous areas of research was also a challenge. Rather than duplicating the same sets of questions online and during the consultation meetings, the live medium needed to take the quantitative responses to the next level, encouraging prioritisation and identification of circumstances when one given answer might prevail over another.

The events needed to stimulate high quality discussion and feedback from a good range of stakeholders - from the voluntary, government and other public bodies. Each of nine regional events would involve approximately 100 guests, and the content would need to drive stakeholders to complete the formal consultation document and encourage others to do so. The format of the events would need to be meaningful and inspiring in order to prevent 'consultation fatigue.'

case study



The consultation was co-ordinated at a time when funding was being significantly cut back because of BIG's commitment to supporting the Olympics, and so the first message had to be to explain that there would be less available funding.

Transparency had to be maintained throughout the process. It was vitally important to be able to demonstrate to stakeholders what the conclusions were and how each decision had been reached.

the solution

Crystal Interactive was appointed to facilitate the entire live consultation process.

The initial London launch event was held at Church House in Westminster, where 200 guests heard presentations from BIG about past achievements and future vision, before receiving a preview of the format planned for the coming regional events, including 'practice' sessions on some of the consultation questions. Delegates were seated in a café-style configuration, enabling them to work closely together as a group.

The London launch gave Crystal's facilitation team the opportunity to road-test the questions before rolling-out the format to the regional events. At the same time it enabled the panellists to practice their responses to the viewpoints that were likely to emerge from the subsequent events.

The nine regional events followed a similar agenda, each event beginning with an opening presentation showcasing a local project. This was followed by two consultation sessions. For Round One, delegates at all of the tables discussed nine questions relating to UK-wide funding.

For Round Two, delegates selected three more detailed questions relating to funding in England. These questions had been pre-selected by the delegates as areas that specifically interested them, and discussion tables were allocated for each of the chosen topics. Afterwards, in a plenary session, the facilitator presented the 'playback' from inputs submitted. This was a particularly valuable exercise because it showed delegates a very wide range of equally valid perspectives. Through the process they discovered that there was no single 'right' answer.

The on-site team reviewed content after each event, and each participant received their own regional report the following day. The transparency of the process was evident here, since all inputs were collected. At the end of the consultation programme a final report detailing 90 pages of insights was prepared by Lead Analyst, Dr Alan Woods. A further 15-page synthesis report condensed the key outcomes. This was available just 10 days after the last event. Here again, points published in the report were traceable back to their originator's individual response during the workshop.

the results

By previewing the regional events at the London launch, BIG was able to test the consultation process, and at the same time demonstrate its openness and its commitment to making the process relevant to stakeholders.

As the facilitator and sponsors were able to track the progress of all tables via the central screen, they were able to assist those groups that got 'stuck', thus relieving pressure on the Big Lottery Fund representatives.

Table discussions followed by plenary conversations worked well for questions for which there was no 'right' or 'wrong' answer. The format ensured meaningful responses and resolutions to be reached speedily.

All comments and contributions were captured via Crystal's technology, giving the Big Lottery Fund the best possible insights from the many hundreds of conversations that took place through the consultation. As a result, high quality conclusions could be drawn very quickly.

The format enabled all stakeholder views to be well represented, and the participants genuinely felt that they had contributed to improving the effectiveness of the Big Lottery Fund.

“We were delighted with Crystal Interactive’s involvement in the consultation programme, which broke all the records – both in terms of the volume and quality of participating stakeholders, and the level of satisfaction recorded by the participants.

“We are passionate about the impact we make and determined that every Lottery pound should be put to the best possible use. Thanks to the excellent level of stakeholder engagement, and the speed and quality of reporting, we believe that the consultation programme achieved our objectives in accurately identifying emerging needs.”

Margaret Cooney, Deputy Director (England Region), **The Big Lottery Fund**