

# A Feasibility Study to Explore the Potential for Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) in North Yorkshire



## Case Study: York Deciding Together

**Supported by North Yorkshire Council and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund**

Skyblue Research Ltd

June 2023 to January 2024

### Background

This is one of three case studies based on triangulated interviews conducted by Alan Graver (Skyblue Research Ltd) between June and December 2023.

These 'deep dives' contributed to, and complemented, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund feasibility study which was completed by Skyblue in January 2024. A detailed report, short summaries and 'PGM learning together workshop' slide packs were also produced and are available on request from Marie-Ann Jackson, Head of Localities, North Yorkshire Council.

## Case study 1: York Deciding Together (Published 2021)

published by Two Ridings Foundation as part of their commitment to share learning from the PGM process in 2021



**Lankelly Chase**



### THE DECIDING TOGETHER LOCAL FUND FOR YORK

#### THE PROCESS

*The Deciding Together Local Fund for York was created through a Participatory process that co designed the Grant Making model. It was a process that took a year to complete from which lots of valuable learning took place.*

*This writing attempts to take the you on the journey we collectively experienced in 2021, sharing insights and learning so that you may draw on our experience to support the development of yours.*

#### WHERE WE STARTED FROM

The Deciding Together process was funded by Lankelly Chase, a national funder that seeks to tackle the root cause of extreme marginalisation. They devolved power to the participation group with no prerequisites beyond the fund moving beyond “get the money out quickly” to thinking about the process of making use of the funding and to consider activity that enable systemic change.

Lankelly were open about what emerged from it. They understood and accepted, even, that the process ‘might not work’.

Deciding Together was also building off two years of work already underway by the York Multiple Complex Needs Network (York MCN) in the city, which brought together people in York from diverse perspectives of multiple complex needs (homelessness, addiction and recovery, poverty, mental health difficulties). Their aim was to see how York as a city could change the system that perpetuates disadvantage for people experiencing multiple complex needs. This network involved people with lived

experience, commissioners, housing practitioners, senior statutory leaders and support workers.

Regional Funder, Two Ridings Community Foundation, brought their 20-year history of grant making alongside an in-depth knowledge of local need and local communities. Two Ridings came with wisdom but openness to learn, to be stretched and to work with others. Two Ridings recruited and hosted a Facilitator to administer the process.

Deciding Together built on what was already strong in our City of York.

#### *Learning from this...*

*“It is key to assess whether your starting point is already out there in some form in your area. Anyone starting this process needs to attempt to connect with a network of people with principles that align.”*

Lankelly Chase also commissioned facilitators from the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that matter community. “The Art of Hosting” is a method of participatory leadership for facilitating group processes.<sup>1</sup> This

community group understands “hosting” as a certain way of facilitation that is supposed to have the capacity of making emerge the collective intelligence that people possess. The practitioners see this methodology of engagement as a way to bring people in complex, social systems into convergence on collective actions, with the participants discovering and proposing their own solution

## INVOLVING EVERYONE

The initial process was the three starting institutions– York MCN, Two Ridings and the Art of Hosting – reaching out to as much of the York population as possible, through a power mapping exercise.

They ensured Council leaders, funders, community groups, lived experience networks, faith organisations, disability groups, culturally diverse organisations, faith groups and education establishments all received invitations to get involved, initially through conversation then an open Information Event. In the invitation was a clear offer to anyone wanting to be involved that they could do so in one of three ways.

- Very involved in the whole process, committing day per month for six months
- Partially involved unable to participate throughout,
- Low key involvement where they were kept informed via a mailing list

Seventy people attended the first meeting. It was made very clear that you didn’t have to ‘apply’ to be involved, anyone could come along.

### *Learning from this...*

*By not having an application process, which at the time we felt was important, we couldn’t create an appropriate system as payment for peoples’ involvement. This resulted in at least one person dropping off because it was not in*

*place. We were naïve in this circumstance. It was not good enough not to pay people. We were honest and open about our error and apologised. Although we lost one person because of this, we gained respect from others for how we dealt with it transparently.*

## THE FIRST SESSION

A month after the initial Information Event we held our first session to form the group and build the relationships needed. We had a clear engagement plan so that people were fully able to commit to the full process. At this meeting we also ran a session on ‘Understanding Participatory Grant Making’

### *Learning from this...*

*We recognised that introducing formalised Participatory Grant making models at this stage was too early. Our Facilitator stated “Until I saw the models, I didn’t really get it [Participatory Grant making], but because I had a vague understanding, it became clear to me once I had seen them. But our actual participants hadn’t really got to that stage, they hadn’t the chance for even a vague understanding, so more time was needed before this was introduced.”*

At the first session, a Framework was established and we worked backwards from that to create a timeline, so we knew which milestones we wanted to hit.

Although we had planned this first session, plans for subsequent sessions would not be formed until we had drawn from the group.

Before each session – which we called our Decision-Making Space – everyone involved were pre-ready having established what we were making a decision on and also from some of the group meeting each other separately to discuss.

Before any decision was reached there was space to talk and share each person’s own

perspective and listen to everyone else in order to come away with a collective decision.

We applied 'Consent decision-making' whereby not everyone might agree, but everyone 'consents' to the final decision.

*We created a Tweak/Remember model to use in our process ...*

*This is a simple process where anyone could use the word Tweak or Remember to guide us through the process.*

*An example was when we were creating the application form we did a 'Tweak' to ensure the form was really in very plain English for anyone to understand*

*An example for 'Remember' was when people were talking about individual applications for the fund and we had to remember that the funding was about system change in York, not about an individual application*

The group were constantly empowering each other through the decisions that were made.

## SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS

We held six sessions in total, at each one making decisions as a collective.

The Two Ridings facilitator had no decision-making power. They inputted insight, experience and knowledge but were never part of the final decision.

### How we were together

From the emerging agreements, we put in place an informal group agreement around how we connect with each other and how we are in the space.

This was about humanity, creating an ethos where diversity was welcomed, individuals were welcomed and power dynamics were neutralised.

## The decision made

Decisions made were:

- How do people apply?
- What questions will be in the application?
- What will the invite look like to apply
- What will be in the Guidance notes for the fund?
- How many panels will we have and how will those panels look?

Collectively it was decided to have three panels

- Small Grants – under £1k – 10% of pot – Up to £24k  
Anyone can apply – including individuals
- Medium Grants – Between £1k and £10k – Up to £80k allocated
- Large Grants – Over £10k – Up to £130k

Each member of the group was asked which panel they would like to sit on and it was ensured that each panel had a spread of people with different experiences on them – including lived, professional and grant making. Although people were not labelled, anyone on a panel could have a variety of different experiences, it was never highlighted who was there in what capacity.

### Learning from this...

*Throughout the process trust was being built. It was always an open space for discussion, honesty and connection between all involved.*

Occasionally small groups would come together between sessions to finalise part of the process. This would be circulated to the whole groups to Tweak and Remember before finalising and signing off anything.



## HOW PEOPLE AND GROUPS WERE INVITED TO APPLY

We designed an invite together which we tried to make as accessible and open as possible and got that out on our social media channels. We also wrote a blog, covered it on our websites and crucially every individual agreed to speak to as many people as they could to invite them. We had already done a lot of the 'groundwork' about the fund when we engaged with the York population on the idea behind the fund.

We also facilitated two Drop-Ins, attended by over 20 people. We openly provided email and phone number of the facilitator for anyone to call at any point

### *Learning from this...*

*Before the Panel Process the objective of the fund was tweaked, through a collective decision, for projects applying to answer 'How do we create the time and space to make fundamental change in York for people with multiple complex needs?'*

## THE FUNDING PANEL PROCESS

Some people in the group only wanted to be on the Small Grants panel as they felt uncomfortable making decisions around larger sums of funding.

Who should go on which panel was decided through a private vote. Each person said which panel would be their preferred choice and then their subsequent choices. The facilitator mapped the roles balancing up the experience people shared and what they thought they would bring to the panel process.

A week before the panels, each panel member received a full panel pack. It was stressed that it was the individual's responsibility to read thoroughly and not to

discuss with each other. The Facilitator was available for any queries.

Collectively we decided to anonymise the applications

### *Learning ...*

*The Facilitator found anonymising the applications difficult because they were not a detailed-focused person. The next time this happened others were also involved in the anonymisation*

The Facilitator ordered the applications by how they fitted with the Fund (Remember, the Facilitator was neutral throughout the process, they weren't part of the decision-making process). For some people this helped them with their thinking, but for others they felt it could create bias and they did not like it. In future the group would be asked about this.

We were advised that Panels often didn't read the full applications beforehand, but in the case of Deciding Together, everyone read in detail. We put this down to the group being very tight and committed to the process and the right outcome.

## York Deciding Together (YDT) new insights (2023)

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**Acknowledgements:** We are grateful to the 6 individuals interviewed for this case study. They shared different perspectives; one from the originator funder, one from the intermediary organisation (Foundation) with responsibility for the YDT Programme; the 1-day per week paid Facilitator; and 3 people with lived experience who participated in the YDT experience. These additional insights were collected in 2023 as part of this feasibility study and seek to complement the published case study.

### Drivers and purpose for PGM in York

*“Lankelly Chase had an agenda to try and create change to the things that perpetuate a system that creates multiple disadvantage. They also wished to bring people together in York to see how to address this question – not necessarily to solve it – but to explore the issues. The focus wasn’t on spending the money although this was referenced from the outset. Our role (Two Ridings Foundation) was not to do community development but to help others make decisions. We were really clear about our purpose. The Art of Hosting kept us focused on our purpose.”*

### Rationale for PGM

*“The best people to make decisions are those closest to the community - particularly those that are marginalised or suffering poverty.”*

To test the belief that: *“The people closest to the issue are best placed to solve the issue.”*

### Why 2021?

*“The York Deciding Together process was for 12 months in 2021. A wonderful moment in time - Lankelly Chase had the money, Two Ridings Foundation was in a good place with its grantmaking and its involvement with the Multiple Complex Needs (MCN) Network in York (also*

*funded by Lankelly Chase for two years’ prior). It also felt novel at the time.”*

### Further insights about some of the processes and experiences of YDT>>>

#### Three broad groups formed over the course of 2021:

1: **A core group** of facilitators and organisations with responsibilities for the funding comprising the Facilitator (or ‘Weaver’) who was a central person that *“took all the admin away from participants / citizens.”*; the CEO of the Two Ridings Foundation who had internal influencing powers<sup>1</sup> and helped create the conditions for this work (including support of the Board); the Head of Grants at the Foundation *“so that she could take the learning from this and take that into the wider grants landscape she oversees; and also to provide technical knowledge because people still need to know how they can access money when they apply and that wasn’t the Facilitator’s skill.”*; and The Art of Hosting (from Leeds) who were described as good facilitators of emergent processes.

2: **The Participation Group.** This comprised residents / citizens of York reached through different contacts in Group 3 (see next) and the MCN. There were 70 people involved in total of which 25 attended 6 monthly sessions to October 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. amend policies and procedures to enable the organisation to do things differently

*“I would have liked more time to put in a process of paying people for their participation along the Minimum Wage for those that needed it but a maximum of £250 cash (grant) or voucher was enacted / possible based on advice (and supported by other steps) that this had the least risk of implications on people’s other income and declarations, at the time of the work.”*

3: Group 3 comprised funders / organisations that could reach different people in different systems e.g. through City of York Council’s communities team, The National Lottery, faith groups and health contacts. Interestingly, there was some resistance to participate from the faith and health sectors though they did share the YDT information around their networks.

*“I believe it was time capacity that was the limiting factor for both sectors. However, I believe with faith and culture groups it had a lot to do with lack of embedded relationships with YDT/York MCN/the Foundation due to systemic marginalisation that we know much more about and are beginning to collectively address now. Gratefully we were able to fund work to address this as part of the fund which should mean the relationships are developing and future involvement might be more connected.”*

The Project was also limited in how much it could ‘chase’ and the priority was involving people with lived experience rather than representing institutions.

*“Non-involvement inevitably did impact the outcome, however there are many more perspectives we did not involve and recognised that we would never get everyone on board. We maintained an ethos/mentality of recognising who is not in the room – keeping us grounded in the fact we could talk for ourselves but not*

*general population – we haven’t and couldn’t represent full population.”*

## **Recruitment**

*“Recruitment was supported by The Art of Hosting who helped us through a process called POWER MAPPING – we looked at York MCN, CYC, youth work, housing, business, faith, LGBTQ+ and others then the contexts within each of those. Then we reached out to people in those contexts via different supporting organisations / sectors.”*

## **Building decision making capability**

*“Every session involved reaching a decision about something using the 8 breaths approach<sup>2</sup>. This would help people feel more confident by the time they were making bigger decisions associated with the community awards when applications came through.”*

## **Making PGM as participatory as possible**

*“I would have liked more people with lived experience on the group, but their voices were definitely listened to - and I had moving experiences in panels where people talked openly and candidly about why an application was so important.*

*“You do need really strong facilitation skills to enable voices to be heard and for decisions to be made in a fully participatory way.”*

*“When I chaired the giving effective feedback it’s the process to get the right decisions - we’ve had trustees exerting their authority to make bad decisions and delegates didn’t feel powerful to challenge that process. The deep democracy model coming out of South Africa (like a conflict resolution process) helped us learn to be comfortable with disagreement and having tools to surface and resolve those disagreements. It teaches you things like*

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<sup>2</sup> [Background Papers 31-46 2nd edition 2019 \(civilsocietytoolbox.org\)](https://civilsocietytoolbox.org/)

*why you should surface them instead of people nodding but inside not agreeing with something; there's wisdom in the minority. I would make it a core training course for everyone!"*

*"In meetings that are circling back around issues the Facilitator is able to name it and stop it. You explore things during the voting process like 'what would it take for you to come along with that majority decision?'"*

### **Top tips and techniques**

*"Make the front end processes as deliberative as you can."*

*"Delivery/engagement success is in the relationship building and taking time to speak to everyone one to one, getting to know them and listening. The facilitation was done in partnership with the Art of Hosting. There's lots of things we did like:*

- Check in and check out of sessions (personal/emotional connection and closing sessions well).
- Triads – connecting in groups of three – building close connections and accountability within the group, not just to us the "leaders."
- Fish bowls – where you have three people in conversation and everyone else has to listen, only allowed to speak if they step into the bowl.
- Use of art and imagery, audio and written communication supported accessibility.

### **What is different about PGM?**

*"PGM is about involving people in the design and dissemination of resource and money. It's not about being locked in a room with well-paid people from the voluntary sector. It was looking to bring in different people, build trust, relationships and provide mechanisms for listening – things I took for granted before the process began. If these aren't in place it's*

*really difficult for people to reach a position personally where they can make decisions. People otherwise fear – or are doubtful – that they have control, and someone might swoop in and over-ride everything or challenge them."*

*"The panels were the place where we had the most honest conversations and generous conversations about grantmaking - different to the other panels – a more facilitative process in PGM challenged the orthodoxies."*

### **Hindsight – anything that you would do differently?**

*"Dreamland possibly, but if I could, I would have a follow up opportunity available sooner, like another PGM process applying the learning in a more rapid way and giving participants an opportunity to consolidate what we'd done together in a new opportunity. "*

*"Develop a citizen grantmaker model for participants who wished to become freelance citizen grantmakers who could support other processes and future participants."*

*"We did everything online because of COVID – starting with a session in person and ending with a session in person would have been brilliant."*

*"There was something about me being an "outsider" that worked for York, I had no alliances really so people trusted me more than they might trust others...it's a small city with a lot of politics. However, I've done a lot of work elsewhere in the country and where possible I'd like to have someone local who knows more people and can sustain the way of working beyond the funding."*

*"Perhaps there was more opportunity to gain commitment and share learning with The Lottery, other Foundations and Councils to learn together, but officer time was a constraint for this to happen."*



## **Key take aways from the experience**

*"Start small and keep doing it."*

*"The dynamics of people's relationships with money - giving people with limited money big decisions - people get paralysed. In the first round people don't want to spend the money. They are frightened of making a mistake so doing workshops about money can be helpful. Start with a small grants pot and get people's PGM muscles developing."*

## **Final reflections**

### **Complexity vs simplicity?**

*"I think the Deciding Together process was brilliant and created a lot of good outcomes, I learned a lot as did most people involved. I would say though, that it was a massive endeavour because the originator funder is 'complex and hugely resourced.' As a Facilitator I was only 1 day a week on this. You can do PGM really well (without all the bells, whistles and celebrations) with the right 'community development/youth worker' leads."*

### **A timeline for PGM?**

*"Emergent processes can be difficult to plan, but people need to know what their commitment is in order to engage. Then good communication is needed throughout to share if agreements/timelines need to be tweaked."*

*"Making the mistake -as some people do - that just because a person is not in a particular job position they can't make informed decisions."*

### **How much does it cost to do PGM?**

*"Bearing in mind this a massive estimate the first time cost investment for a funder to get something working is going to be 20-30% rather than traditional community grant making costs c10% but it would probably get to 15% on repeated occasions in future getting closer to the lower costs of traditional community grant*

*programmes. This, of course, also depends on the size of the pot. And a £10,000 pot could not be done for £1500"*

*Some of the cost was the voucher payment for participation; other costs = professional facilitation, Facilitator (1 day per week) paid role; venue hire for creating safe spaces for conversations."*

*"We also think there's value in looking at using something like Social Change Agency, a fiscal host for individuals and collectives."*

### **How many people make PGM meaningful?**

*"The number of people doesn't matter it's the process to get to that number. If you've done a really open supportive process and only 3 people have come forward then that's the 3 people you've got."*

### **Success?**

*"Learning was the main outcome."*

*"The connection between the grantees. The connection across the City is strengthened. Some of the (lived experience) participants could phone up the Foundation and say, 'that's rubbish' and the Foundation would take it whereas this wasn't there before. The collective knowledge is strengthened. The Foundation can talk to more / different people than before via drop ins."*

*"All the groups are still coming together. This is what's lasted rather than an end year report."*

*Interestingly, people with lived experience shared that they had enjoyed their participation, but felt a few things hadn't worked as planned, like iterating the process so more people could get involved after the 2021 year period. They were also unsure whether there had been any follow up about the £240,000 of projects awarded and what they had contributed towards.*

## **Future?**

*“The evolution of YDT is ‘York Together’ which will see decisions being made about the use of a devolved pot of funding from Lankelly Chase Foundation promised for use in the city, hopefully including aspects of PGM in its future approach.”*

*“How do you know PGM is working? When public sector organisations use it to spend their own money. There is a theory if you get people into PGM they get into wider democratic processes - e.g., they’re going to vote.”*

## **Useful links**

- Here’s what was funded in Deciding Together:  
<https://www.tworidingscf.org.uk/deciding-together-fund/>
- Blog during the process of each session:  
<https://www.tworidingscf.org.uk/deciding-together-york-session-1/>
- Guidance notes  
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.tworidingscf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Deciding-Together-Local-Fund-for-York-Guidelines-FINAL-no-form.pdf>
- <https://www.tworidingscf.org.uk/participatory-grant-making-deciding-together-session-3/> - this includes a decision timeline.