

Involving people with lived experience in grant-making (Decision-Making Panels)

June 2021

One of the big changes in Corra's 10-year strategy is 'the power to create change rests with people themselves'. Involvement of people with lived experience in grant-making is a clear and important step towards this.

Corra is committed to involving people with direct experience in its grant-making. In 2019/2020 this included people with lived experience involved in decision making panels for; Comic Relief's #ShiftThePower and the Scottish Government's Challenge Fund. Conversations with people involved in both panels have been shared in more detailed evaluation reports. This briefing shares the lessons learnt from those conversations.

The aim is to offer insights from Corra's approach, what people felt worked and what changes need to be made in the future.

The Practicalities:

- **Supportive staff.** People talked about how friendly and knowledgeable staff were, making sure made everyone feel welcome.
- **Resourcing it right.** Budgets are essential and it needs to include enough money for event hire, catering, (potentially digital equipment), travel/accommodation/ childcare costs.
- **Comfort in the group.** A lot of people told us that their confidence increased being part of the group. This was really positive to hear. Conversations beforehand whether over a coffee, or induction (a getting to know each other) session helped people relax and understand how valuable their contribution was.
- **Accessible materials.** Paperwork is often an obvious barrier without us being aware. At Corra we tried to provide people with accessible information in easy to read formats. We didn't always get this right. Some people felt information was too lengthy. Made more difficult when some were reading material on smartphones. We have listened and now look at other ways to overcome these issues, testing material beforehand or asking people if they would like information posted.

At Corra we always offer people to be accompanied and supported by a friend/worker to support them with any issues with paperwork. This has included workers discussing the material in advance of decision panel sessions or attending with the person. It is important to ensure costs are covered to support friends/workers as well.

The internal challenges we need to keep exploring:

- **People closest to the issue are often the voices least heard.** It is important to consider a spectrum of experiences and approaches that encourages diversity of backgrounds, and views from current experiences to past experiences. This will definitely require us to look outside our usual networks, engage with different people and give them the space and support to be welcomed into the conversations.
- **People first.** We need to step back and look at how each decision panel is designed. Is it welcoming, friendly and accessible? This includes everything from room layout (including online space), structure (enough breaks), how information is presented (does it need to be all paperwork), additional assistance. This is often easier said and done as we find comfort in our regular processes. Stepping outside of the usual process can create the spaces for more informed decisions.
- **People need to feel comfortable, happy, and able to contribute.** We have found that conversations beforehand whether over a coffee, or induction (a getting to know each other) session helps. But, we can't see this as one-off, if we value these connections, we need to bring our whole self each time we meet, time spent together getting to know each other is vital.
- **Every comment has merit and value.** It is important that people are able to share without their comments being dismissed. We continually have to find ways that provide enough space for people to have the conversations and shape decisions. This will require time, agenda free spaces, and often looking outside our normal ways of reaching decisions.
- **Reduce the barriers.** Feeling excluded can happen at any time and while it may seem a small issue to us, is a significant barrier to others. Many people who want to contribute feel unable or can't. Barriers come in many forms: costs, time, geography, accessible venues, literacy, confidence. We need to ask regularly "what support do you need?" sensitively and respectfully, not wait until people need to ask.

What we did	How we did it	What was important	Lessons	What would be different
<p>Inviting people to participate on the panel</p>	<p>Corra worked through partners and existing networks to identify and invite people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We contacted everyone beforehand, either a telephone call, video call or a coffee for them to get to know us, and to understand what was involved. • Provided clarity in what was expected, their role and the time commitment that people will need to give. • Where possible we aimed to have an equitable approach including experiences, geography, and backgrounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corra relied on the existing relationship with either partner organisation and/or individuals. This helped to develop a more trusting relationship quickly, as people knew us or our partner. 	<p>Look at how to broaden the scope for more diverse group of people.</p>

<p>Preparation and planning</p>	<p>Considered the logistics and set-up. Budget was allocated for venues, catering, travel expenses and payment of participants.</p> <p>Developed and issued materials that covered all the key points to support people in the decision-making process.</p> <p>Provided guidelines to all members on purpose, role and specific areas that would be discussed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate induction session. This was a good way for people to get to know others, run through what they would be doing, providing space to chat without any pressure. • Ensuring people knew they could be accompanied and or supported by a worker/friend to help them feel comfortable. This involved both reading materials in advance as well as coming along to the panel meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information was provided advance. It was presented in ways that aimed to engage the whole group e.g. avoiding jargon. • People valued the opportunity to be accompanied by someone they trusted. 	<p>Be aware that everyone has different needs. Consider how to reduce barriers and accommodate preferences.</p>
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<p>At the panel meeting</p>	<p>Provided a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.</p> <p>Ensured everyone was able to have the space and time to discuss the applications to support decision making.</p> <p>Created flexibility within the agenda to allow for comfort breaks and clarification on points.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a space that is more than physical layout, how Corra staff supported the session is vital. • Staff were well prepared to answer questions and encouraged conversations. • People understood that their views mattered. They were not a representative for a whole group or community. • Allowed plenty of time for breaks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time taken by staff beforehand and during the panel meetings contributed to people feeling confident and comfortable in sharing views. • Budget that covered all the necessary costs to attend and be involved. 	<p>Actively listen. Build the time and space for people to share ideas that may not naturally fit in the agenda.</p> <p>Accept that do this well it will need proper resourcing.</p>
<p>Post panel</p>	<p>People were advised on how their inputs influenced the final decisions.</p> <p>Everyone participating was offered the opportunity to feedback on their experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People value the opportunity to be part of the decision-making. • People were willing to share where improvements could be made. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone spoken to afterwards felt they had gained something from their involvement. Many felt more confident. • Some wanted to offer more. Corra was potentially missing valuable experience in shaping future work. 	<p>Look at how to build more opportunities for people to be involved in all stages of grant-making.</p>

About Corra

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

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