Community responses to digital inclusion learning cluster tender

Background:

Big Local is the project that puts money into the hands of communities to use to address their priorities, making their areas even better places to live. Residents living in Big Local areas have the decision making power to use £1million up to 2026 to work on the priorities that are important to their community. Each Big Local area has a partnership, made up of local residents, that oversees and implements Big Local in that community.

Local Trust support the partnerships implementing Big Local with a programme of learning and networking, and one element of this is through thematic learning clusters. These learning clusters are a place for people working on Big Local to build their knowledge, skills and confidence in a specific topic, drawing on learning from within and outside of Big Local. The attendees of these peer learning groups attend a series of events that builds their understanding of the topic, gives ideas for them to take back to their partnership, with the aim that at the end of the cluster the whole partnership has greater confidence and capacity to work on that issue.

You can see examples of existing clusters here: https://localtrust.org.uk/big-local/learning-clusters.

Objectives:

The objectives of the learning cluster are to help Big Local partnerships:

- Support Big Local (BL) partnerships to promote greater digital inclusion within their community at an individual level.
- Build an understanding of what can lead to digital exclusion and the impact that has on individuals, particularly in relation to what this means for the priorities in their BL plan.
- Attendees develop a holistic understanding of different facets of digital inclusion, such as: access to devices & connections (including availability of connections in the community); skills; education; confidence; age; cultural factors; understanding and appreciating the ways that technology can support achieving your objectives; and a 'digital mindset' that looks for innovative ways of using technology.
- Explore how BL partnerships can ensure that they do not create barriers to participation for people who are not going to get online, and how they can support these people to mitigate their digital exclusion.
- Share practice from across and outside Big Local, of tools, approaches, campaigns and projects that can promote digital inclusion and mitigate the effects of digital exclusion.
- Develop ideas that they could take back to their areas to test out.
- Understand the wider context both in terms of statutory provision, key partners, and considerations to be aware of if they begin working in this area.
- Think about creating a lasting, practical and sustainable legacy through this work.
- Leverage partnerships in their local areas or nationally to support their plans.

Structure

Local Trust does not deliver learning clusters directly. We hire a facilitator or facilitators with extensive experience of the topic to develop an overall curriculum for the cluster, develop and deliver the individual sessions, bringing in relevant speakers from within and outside of Big Local as appropriate.

Previously, clusters have usually been delivered as four sessions over approximately one year, starting with a 2-day introduction session then three further 1-day sessions. We expect this cluster to be delivered differently, with sessions being online and the overall programme being comprised of shorter, but more regular sessions. We would anticipate around 15-20 hours of cluster delivery, with any proposed support between sessions in addition to that.

Each session should be designed in a way that introduces new ideas or information to the group, reflects on previous learning and draws this out from among the participants, and discusses interesting case studies or projects that participants can learn from and potentially adapt for their work.

The curriculum should develop participants' learning on the topic in reference to an overall learning journey, explaining what they will be able to do at the end which they couldn't before attending, and how they will develop that knowledge and skills. This is an initial starting point and the facilitator will need to be responsive to the interests and needs of participants both at the outset and throughout the cluster.

Once the contract is signed and people have begun signing up for the cluster, the facilitator should speak to at least one person from each area that signs up to understand their learning needs and current experience. The facilitator will then propose any amendments to the curriculum that will ensure it is tailored to the group.

Learning clusters are usually between 20-35 people, with one or two people attending from an area. We limit all clusters to a certain number after discussion with the facilitator. Generally the same group of people will attend all sessions of the cluster.

We anticipate the first session happening in early 2021. This will be the first cluster that we have designed to be delivered online from the outset, and will be looking for innovative ideas from bidders that will help to ensure that this cluster is as engaging, interesting, supportive and inclusive as our previous face to face clusters. The development of a peer learning group is key to the approach, and bidders' ideas on how to achieve this remotely are especially welcomed.

Draft overall curriculum

We are looking for the facilitator to propose a draft overall curriculum for the cluster, including an outline learning journey and how they would break the topic down over the sessions. The learning journey should explain how participants' knowledge and abilities in the topic will change through the course of the cluster, and be clear on what participants will be able to achieve that they couldn't prior to the cluster.

However there are several elements that we would like to see included in the cluster:

Key concepts linked to digital inclusion

An introduction to the topic, and what areas could look at as part of their digital inclusion work. This could include:

- Understanding the difference between the partnership working digitally (which this cluster will not cover[1]) and tackling digital exclusion within their community;
- The impact that digital exclusion has on various parts of an individual's life: employment, social connections, participation in public life, ability to access public services, education, and often access to lower-cost goods and services;
- What others are doing in this space already and how to partner with them, or make use of their work;
- Exploring the specific value-add that Big Local partnerships can offer, in their unique position as well funded and supported community groups.

Digging deeper into understanding why people may not be using online services

We recognise that each Big Local area is different, and that the people who live there are unique to that community. Although lack of digital skills are a key barrier for many people, there are some further considerations that we want to explore with attendees:

- How to promote the 'digital mindset' to overcome the biggest factor cited in why someone isn't online: that they don't find it interesting or useful[2];
- Accessibility considerations once people are online and how to ensure everyone can use digital services, including supporting people to access assistive technology;
- Exploring some of the reasons related to ethnicity, culture, nationality, religion and other factors that impact on digital exclusion, and how those may differ between different groups;
- Our broader offer has identified 'hard' barriers such as access to devices or connections, and 'soft' barriers such as skills and motivation. Consistent language across the offers where appropriate could be helpful for attendees.

Ideas or examples of innovative projects

Throughout the sessions we would like real life examples of projects that the attendees can learn from to inspire them for what they could do in their area. These could be a mixture of Big Local and non-Big Local; we can help with identifying speakers from within Big Local.

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[1] We have a range of digital support offers, some of which support partnerships to work digitally or build their own skills in this area. This is not the purpose of this cluster, and we will work with the successful bidder to agree promotional materials that make this clear, including any minimum requirements for attendees' digital skills.

[2]

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04

Many Big Local areas have already set up computer training projects and we would be looking for less well known examples which may be new to attendees. Where projects come from a very different context (e.g. overseas) then they should be presented in a way that enables attendees to explore how this could be relevant for them.

Signposting to partners to collaborate in delivering in this work

We would like attendees to come away from the session aware of the organisations they can connect to, to bring expertise or partner with to deliver digital inclusion work in their community. The cluster should help attendees to identify the objectives they want to achieve and then if needed how to select an appropriate partner to collaborate with. We have a range of partners working with BL partnerships on practical digital projects and this support would be available to attendees, alongside others that they may have available locally. We'd also like attendees to become aware of the funding opportunities available to support this work.

Role of the facilitator

The facilitator will be an experienced professional who has extensive knowledge of digital inclusion. They will also have experience of developing and delivering thoughtful, engaging sessions for people of all levels of experience. They will work across each event by:

- Having a short call with each attendee prior to the first event to tailor the curriculum to the needs of those who sign up;
- Developing the agenda and facilitation plan for each event;
- Identifying, securing and briefing speakers;
- Facilitating the events;
- Providing a short write up of each event for attendees, and a combined summary report across the whole cluster for internal and external use;
- Supporting attendees to take their learning back to their area and put it into practice
- Developing an overview understanding of our broader digital support offer and signposting people where relevant.

The facilitator will provide a vital link between events to ensure the consistency of discussions threaded throughout, for example relating to legacy, and to respond to any developments in the groups' needs as the cluster progresses. A member of the Local Trust team will support the facilitator in finalising the agenda, communicating this out to Big Local partnerships, managing registration, and at the sessions. Local Trust can support with hosting on our Zoom account if needed.

Applying

If you are interested in applying to deliver this work then please email your application in line with the guidance below by **9am on the 26th of October 2020** to programmes@localtrust.org.uk.

Please submit a proposal of no more than 10 pages that outlines:

- An overall curriculum for the cluster and the learning journey participants would go on;
- How you would deliver the cluster, including the approach you would take to delivering the sessions, and any other people or organisations you would bring in to support;
- Your experience and knowledge of digital inclusion and exclusion issues, in particular reference to community-led projects you have experience of working with;
- Your experience of facilitating learning events and the types of audiences you have experience working with (CVs can be added as addenda, and do not count towards the page limit);
- The support you would need from Local Trust to deliver the cluster;
- A budget covering development, delivery and follow-up costs. This should include an indicative estimate of any speaker fees, as well as materials and the facilitator's time & expenses.

Please note:

- We want the first event to happen in early 2021, but we don't need specific dates at this stage.
- This contract can be delivered by one or more facilitators, but we will be awarding only one contract for the entire series and expect continuity of facilitators across all events.
- We have added some tips for success based on our learning from delivery of earlier clusters, which should inform your proposal.

Delivering Big Local events: tips for success

These tips are based on research conducted on the first set of learning clusters which Local Trust ran in 2018-2019. It can be used by facilitators, particularly those new to Big Local, to build on previous learning to deliver even more successful events.

Creating opportunities for networking and shared learning

An important reason for bringing Big Locals together for any event is to provide the opportunity to network and share learning. Networking opportunities are often noted in participant feedback as the most valued aspect of events and should be built into the day. Networking opportunities worked best when they were focused, but let Big Locals share details about their area, frustrations or challenges they're facing related to the topic of the event and constructively working together to identify potential solutions.

An evening meal before an event, especially if the majority of participants are staying overnight, was a great way to allow them to informally network ahead of the event. This meant that on the day, participants were familiar with each other and ready to focus on the content for the day.

Additionally, facilitators should include networking opportunities that work for both introverted and extroverted people, particularly considering sessions that require participants speaking to the entire group. Not everyone feels comfortable speaking in front of a large group, which means you may end up only hear from those who are confident enough to speak up.

Bringing in external expertise

Learning and networking events should balance networking between areas, content specific to Big Local and bringing in relevant external expertise. Big Locals are incredibly knowledgeable and have experience working on a wide range of activities and issues. External expertise, however, can often bring a new perspective or idea that Big Locals find extremely valuable.

One particular benefit that was noted in feedback was the benefit of external speakers that could integrate Big Local work into systems and policies more nationally and help them think of the 'bigger picture'. This is something that can be hard to achieve with just Big Local areas and helped participants think about the wider context of their work.

Considering different Big Local audiences

It is important to consider the different roles within Big Locals and who your audience is for the event. Partnership members are the decision-makers in Big Locals and need to know enough about a topic to decide whether they want to move forward with it or not, and often don't need technical knowledge. Workers are key to delivering Big Local activities are therefore require more technical knowledge to implement and run them. Some participants may also register for an event because they have a personal interest in the topic. Understanding who your audience is, or who you want to target, can help decide what content or expertise you want to include during the event.

This also applies when managing broad topics for events. Topics should broad enough to capture the different interests and activities across Big Local areas, but they shouldn't be so broad that they do not have clear, shared learning objectives. To overcome this, it's important to understand participants interest in the topic so that content can be developed that is relevant to the majority of people, both before the cluster begins and throughout to take into account how their interest may change through the course of the cluster.