

Refugee-Led Projects Workshop

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Split into groups to discuss the following areas:

Why is it important to run refugee led projects?

Benefits:

- Empowerment of all involved
- Shared ownership / equal status (active partner v passive recipient)
- Upskilling (both refugee and host communities)
- Builds confidence
- Opportunity for refugees to represent their communities
- Encourages integration through a sense of belonging and identity
- Being heard, not just listened to
- Feel integrated, active member of a community rather than passive
- Engages personal experience and experiences, leads to greater shared understanding (e.g. barriers, needs, cultures): 'how do we know the need unless the refugees lead?'

Barriers:

- Confidence
- Language
- Cultural barriers
- Resources: money, time, family
- Lack of connections (across communities)
- Lack of database of projects/ resources available
- Ambiguity around Brexit
- Focus on mental health / wellbeing
- Institutional need to control
- Lack of institutional knowledge

Solutions:

- To help the host community understand, refugees needed to lead/ teach
- Work with refugees, not for them - understand their barriers needs and culture
- How long does the term refugee apply?
- There should be equality of place, no imposition
- Greater cultural awareness is required
- Greater understanding of needs
- Funding opportunities that are available should be shared
- Recognition of skills

Reflections on poorly run projects

- Don't involve refugees – planning/ delivery
- Lack of safety net
- Others feeling they are best placed to speak for refugees
- Lack of diversity and representation – wrong people in the room
- No active participation- tokenistic- tick box exercise
- Poor communication limiting creativity
- Lack of resources/skills/ space
- Poor risk assessment and safeguarding- risk of re-traumatisation
- Lack of relevant skills
- Assumptions about what refugees want/ want to talk about
- Short funding cycles - no continuity
- Projects exclude people through non-equitable opportunities- e.g. cost of travel/attending, timing, level of commitment required
- Not asking right questions/ setting right goals/ objectives
- Not understanding what participation means and what will be achieved through it
- Idea that refugees need something that others don't
- Lack of resourcefulness

How to encourage refugee led projects / How to do them well

- Challenge non-refugee led projects (shift thinking)
- Leadership by refugees (if compare to women, lgbtq, black projects – non-lived experience leadership would be completely unacceptable). So people with lived experience to lead project - they know what to do
- Training for refugee leaders (support systems to access), pathways to leadership -> jobs -> board positions
- Collaborate on everything (including budgets)
- Ensure refugee ideas are followed up on
- Reprioritise projects led in English (e.g. run in Arabic with translator)
- Educate refugee community on their rights – e.g. that they can speak up, won't affect asylum case
Build trust before exploring projects - coffee mornings, walks; empower / build relationships through tasks
- Inform – create platform to share funding options, look at funding structures - play the game/ meet the requirements, lobby funders re co-curation requirement and reform applications to a more accessible format - the funding system marginalises non-traditional applicants
- Open attitudes to outputs of programme -> create space and freedom
- Start with what refugees want to do! Empower them to do it.

Broader discussion / some specific thoughts:

- Challenge gate-keepers, white middle class -> co-curation.
- There is strong unconscious bias/ deficit model rather than asset model view.

- Language barrier - try to work around.
- Use of language - language can be so contentious, e.g. empower (shared v. passive), look beyond the words to the people and motivations. Also make meaning tangible - beyond linguistics.
- Highlight examples - advocates, role models, case studies.
- In response to a discussion about how long does the label "refugee" apply: Being a refugee not a problem (part of identity - individual choice how to present), stigma associated is the issue -> frame the word positively: human being, person bringing qualities.
- Speak in solidarity. An example of a high level session discussing arts / refugees - only 3 refugees present. Individual uncomfortable and left - later regretted not speaking up about lack of representation. Speaking up more likely to move things on.
- Person to person education - shift perceptions.
- Example of a professor from Ukraine who states we don't have a refugee crisis, we have a political crisis.
- Importance of long term projects.
- Really important that host community is part of the process / activity - not just for refugees -> more likely to improve integration.
- Speak to people. What is need? How to help. Everything co-curated, every step of the way (really interrogate everything, down to the real nitty gritty!)