

**12 strangers.
£100,000.**

What did they decide?



**WEALTH
SHARED**

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Introduction

On a warm day in June 2023, twelve strangers gathered in a community centre in Liverpool, England for the first time. They had little in common except the area they lived in, and the fact that a few weeks earlier, they had responded to a letter asking them to take part in an unusual exercise.

They described feeling cautious and apprehensive. Almost every person upon receiving the letter had thought it was some kind of scam.

A friendly and confident person called Emily led a series of introductions, then confirmed what was taking place.

“Over the next few weeks you will be asked to decide what should happen to £100k.”

“This is really happening.”



In a brief period of time, the atmosphere changed. Strangers became colleagues and collaborators. Uncertainty was replaced by determination. What unfolded over the next few weeks was a journey featuring high energy and calm contemplation as they grappled with the existential questions arising from this task.

For what purpose – for who – and how – should the money be used?

The twelve strangers were now in a race against the clock to reconcile their competing perspectives.

The concept

The essential idea of Wealth Shared was to recruit 12 strangers at random, and ask them what should happen to £100k.

They were able to choose pretty much anything. The money could go to any cause: animal rights, poverty reduction, environmental protection or even payments to individuals.

The beneficiaries could be local, national, or international. The only rules were that the participants could make no more than four transfers, they couldn't give the money to themselves, and couldn't have any continuing involvement with the money beyond the conclusion of the project.

They had four two-hour sessions over four consecutive weeks to decide.

600 households in the L8 postcode got letters asking if they wanted to participate. This was based on a randomised selection from a list of publicly-available addresses. Anyone aged 16 or over living at the selected address could register their interest via text, email or an online form.

38 people responded. Of those who said yes, 12 were selected, also at random¹. The deliberation took place round a boardroom table in a community centre over June and July 2023.

The sessions were supported by Emily, an experienced facilitator. The goal of the facilitation was to ensure that the participants understood what they were being asked to do and felt comfortable working together.

Participants taking part in all four sessions were offered a gift of £200 in recognition of the time and effort they contributed.

600

households
received letters

38

people
responded

12

were
selected

4

weekly
discussions

2

hours per
discussion

¹ This is considered best practice by deliberative democracy experts.

The donor

David Clarke

I'm David, the donor of the £100k and the coordinator of Wealth Shared. I'm a 33 year old writer and researcher.

Like a lot of people in my generation, I've struggled to reconcile the privilege I have with an awareness of the need that exists around me. I'm in a particularly fortunate position financially because of money I have inherited.

I consider myself to be a socially-minded person and I want to see less inequality in the world. I therefore resolved to give away most of my money.

As I was considering what to do with the money, I was acutely conscious of the power that it represented. An extensive body of work exists examining how philanthropy, even when it is well-intentioned, can entrench injustice. Everyone has blind spots and limitations in their life experience, and this can be particularly true of people with wealth, who are insulated from aspects of the world which might otherwise inform our decisions.

I asked myself,

“why is it just me exercising this power? Why not entrust it to the wider community instead?”.

I've been inspired reading about the increasing use of sortition and deliberative democracy around the world to solve policy challenges. I read about the use of participatory grantmaking, whereby power over funding decisions is handed over to the communities the funds are intended to benefit. I was curious to see whether this principle could be extended further to determine not just how funds are deployed, but for what purpose.

Thus, Wealth Shared was born. I developed the concept in conjunction with a range of experts. I wanted to administer the project in a 'lean' way, which included recruiting the participants from the neighbourhood I live in.

² I've posted about my financial situation and my decision to give away my money on my [Linkedin page](#).

What happened?

The participants met for four deliberation sessions lasting two hours each and taking place over four consecutive weeks. They were supported by Emily McChrystal, an experienced facilitator.

WEEK ONE

The group arrived not knowing what to expect. Almost everyone said that when they received the original invitation, they had thought it was a scam.

Emily led a round of introductions and explained what would unfold over the following weeks. David gave a short explanation about the origin of the money and his motivation for undertaking the project. He stressed that he and Emily would not seek to influence the deliberation in any way.

Emily asked people to share details about their lives if they felt comfortable doing so, and to tell the group why they responded to the invitation letter. Participants said they were motivated by a sense of curiosity, having ideas about what money could be spent on and wanting to meet other people in the community.

The group entered into an in-depth and lively discussion about how the money could be used. Participants agreed that having a say over this much money was an exciting opportunity, but also described feeling apprehensive and a heavy sense of responsibility.

There was discussion of the fact that £100k feels at the same time like a huge amount of money and like very little – depending on how you look at it. It could have a

About Emily

Emily works within the Third Sector, having experience within a directorial role of a Community Interest Company supporting marginalised youth, and working specifically within policy change for marginalised communities.

big impact on people's lives, but is also unlikely by itself to solve any major issues facing society. It would be transformative perhaps only for smaller organisations.

Although the donations would be one-off, there was a desire to ensure they paved the way for a longer-lasting impact that would be sustainable and regenerative.

Participants spoke of their awareness of the ongoing effects of inequality and the cost of living crisis. They described being very aware of how much people are struggling in the local area. There are visible signs, such as in the number of rough sleepers, and boarded-up or dilapidated buildings. The participants also pick up information from their own networks.

There was discussion throughout the session about what kind of causes they might want to focus on. At one point there was a lot of agreement about focusing on poverty and deprivation, although other areas were mentioned including medical research and treatment, and environmental protection.

There was discussion about whether the money should be spent locally or elsewhere. There was support for the idea that the money should be spent locally in the L8 postcode. This way they could draw on their own knowledge and lived experience.

As well as putting forward ideas for how the money should actually be allocated, the group also shared their thoughts on how they might go about tackling the decision in the coming weeks.

Ideas were proposed about how to make the discussion more structured, such as having a rotating chairperson, or allowing each person in the room to nominate a chosen charity. The participants agreed that they would conduct

their own research and come up with suggestions. Emily asked the group to set some 'ground rules' for the deliberation. Participants spoke of the need to be respectful of each other, particularly given the different political and religious views represented in the group.

The session concluded with the group reaffirming their wish to find local recipients for the money.

WEEK TWO

Participants were able to ask the project organisers to conduct research. Following the first session, a request was made for some socioeconomic information regarding L8 and a list of not-for-profit organisations operating in the area.

David presented the below data. Not all participants were aware that L8 is, by some measures, in one of the most deprived areas in the country. It was suggested that this reinforced the case for choosing local recipients for the money.

About L8

L8 is a postcode located to the south of Liverpool city centre. It occupies undulating land rising from the banks of the River Mersey.

The area has a diverse cultural mix. Many African, South Asian and Yemeni communities are present. L8 hosts a large Muslim population. 62% of people class themselves as 'white', compared to a city-wide average of 84% and a national UK average of 82%.

Liverpool Riverside, which includes L8, was ranked as the 37th most deprived constituency in England, out of 533.

Properties in L8 had an overall average price of £160,045 between 2022-3, compared to £310,000 in the UK overall.

16% of people in L8 are classed as having an AB social grade, (i.e. 'white-collar' middle-upper class), compared to 27% across the UK. Total median income is £25,100 compared to national average of £32,300.

David explained that an exhaustive list of non-profit organisations in L8 was not available but presented a spreadsheet containing all charities registered in the postcode.

There was a discussion about the usefulness or otherwise of the data. It was suggested that there was no obvious

logical way of picking local organisations from the spreadsheet. There was agreement that although data can tell you some things, it can only be understood within a wider context. For example, the data might tell them about the nature of deprivation in L8 but the judgement about what issues and organisations to focus on would come down to values.

As had been discussed the previous week, participants considered how they might use their own knowledge to choose potential beneficiaries.

One of the participants suggested that the money could be used to fund local schools. There was a discussion about the relationship between state and charity provision of services.

Participants grappled with the question of whether some things shouldn't be funded if they are in principle the responsibility of the state. There was a feeling that many services are currently underfunded.

But an alternative view was expressed: that if in reality needs aren't being met, it may be necessary and appropriate to cover those gaps through philanthropy.

As well as specific ideas about what could happen to the money, the session also featured some 'meta' discussion about how the group might use the remaining time to reach a decision. Ideas included giving groups of participants the chance to advocate for a particular cause area, or issuing an invitation to external groups to pitch for funding. No firm conclusion was reached at this stage.

During the course of this week's session, a number of organisations and cause areas were put forward. One of these was The Florrie, a community organisation based in the building in which the sessions were taking place. The

others were Team Oasis, a local children's charity; the Dingle, Granby and Toxteth Collaborative (DGT Collaborative), a network of local schools; and a local charity supporting people experiencing homelessness.

An observer's perspective

There was a strong sense of calm in the room. People were really focused on the assignment. Although there were disagreements, people were respectful of each other.

They listened carefully to what they were each saying. You could tell they were taking the task seriously and carrying the full weight of the responsibility. I felt privileged to be there and witness it. It was uplifting.

The session began with a discussion about the project overall. Some anxiety was expressed regarding the idea of handing over the money without any means of holding beneficiaries to account. There was discussion about donating the money through some kind of intermediary who would be able to perform this function.

But it was also pointed out that the process necessitates a degree of relinquishing control. There was agreement that it should in principle be possible to identify beneficiaries that the group can place their trust in.

Over the previous weeks participants had undertaken a significant amount of independent research between the sessions and prepared materials to present to the group.³

This material consisted of a letter from the DGT Collaborative outlining how they would use the money, a brochure prepared by the Team Oasis children's charity, and an annual report from The Florrie community centre.

The group reviewed the material. This prompted consideration of how to judge the effectiveness of organisations. A variety of possible approaches were mentioned, such as assessing organisations' past record and the reputation of key people within them, listening to third-party experts, as well as drawing on first-hand experience held by individuals in the room.

As had been discussed in previous sessions, some participants felt that the lived experience of the participants was one of the strongest bases for a decision.

³ We had no expectation of this when inviting people to take part; we had simply asked people to turn up to the meetings.

Participants discussed the size of potential recipient organisations. They wondered whether additional funds are more beneficial to well-established organisations that have the experience to know where to deploy resources most effectively, or younger and perhaps more innovative organisations getting off their feet. They concluded that there is no universal rule about this and they would have to make judgements on a case-by-case basis.

The Granby and Toxteth Development Trust (GTDT) was raised as a potential beneficiary. It was recommended on the basis of its adult education services; it offers courses on areas such as digital skills and employability. It was understood to be running a wide range of activities aimed at supporting local people to improve their lives.

The group held a series of non-binding votes on the DGT Collaborative, Team Oasis, the GTDT and The Florrie as recipients.

WEEK FOUR

The proposal to give money to each of these organisations received unanimous support. There was dissent prior to the votes but this was dropped in the search for a consensus.

The group requested further information on the organisations under consideration; the size of their budgets, their governance arrangements and key people within them.



The final decision was focused on examining and confirming the tentative decision made during the previous week.

David presented the information about the organisations that the group had requested: the DGT Collaborative, Team Oasis, the GTDT and The Florrie. This prompted a discussion about governance.

There was an exchange about the fact that the DGT Collaborative does not have a formal structure in its own right, but is a “confederation” of local schools. The money would be transferred to one of the schools in the network with the expectation that it would be utilised in a way which benefited the whole group. A concern was expressed over a potential lack of transparency; perhaps the “loose” structure would make it difficult to hold the network to account. But the group ultimately decided that schools are subject to a lot of regulation and scrutiny, and that the schools in the network have a good reputation locally. There was agreement that the group would proceed with the donation to the DGT Collaborative and trust that the funds would be used appropriately.

The group had general discussion about governance and considered whether certain structures and procedures are advantageous or otherwise. There was agreement that as long as they operate transparently and comply with

the relevant regulations, it is difficult to draw any hard and fast rules about what structures are best. It is more helpful to look at the track record of what organisations have delivered.

There was further consideration about whether the money should be handed over with some kind of stipulation that it be used for a particular purpose. As with the previous week, some participants expressed anxiety about handing over the funds with no way of holding beneficiaries to account on how they are spent.

It was suggested that attaching conditions to the donations would give the group peace of mind that the money will be used in a way which aligns with their hopes and expectations.

However, the group ultimately decided that the donations should be made unconditionally, and that organisations should be trusted to determine how exactly the money should be used.

About the recipients

Early on in the process, the participants agreed they wished to use the funds to address poverty and deprivation. They chose to focus on groups in their locality.

The Florrie

The Florrie is a community centre offering a variety of participatory activities for people of all ages, food support through a subsidised community shop and cafe. It hosts a range of cultural events and exhibitions.

Granby Toxteth Development

Granby Toxteth Development Trust is a community anchor providing services which support local people including adult learning and employability, youth services, community gardens and health and wellbeing. It also hosts advice services from other trusted organisations including Liverpool In Work, Shelter and Citizens Advice Liverpool, creating a one-stop advice hub for local people. It says it works within the local community to develop and empower people so that they can take a more active role in society and improve their quality of life.

Team Oasis

Team Oasis is a children's charity offering inclusive opportunities for children and young people of all abilities and circumstances to engage together in a variety of activities and projects.

Dingle, Granby and Toxteth Collaborative

Dingle, Granby and Toxteth Collaborative is a network of local schools. The participating schools pay a subscription to the collaborative to fund collective resources such as staff training.

On receiving the money, headteachers of schools making up the DGT Collaborative said that the money would help to improve the life chances of the roughly 1000 children in their care.

They said, regarding the financial pressure on schools, that they have "never known it so bad". The costs of heating, lighting and electricity have risen in recent months. They described instances where they had conducted whip-rounds among staff to subsidise costs. Food banks operating on school premises have seen a surge in demand and the schools are providing extra meals to children who they know would otherwise go hungry.

"We are tracking our budgets to the penny," they said.

Was the process successful?

In a basic sense, the process reached a satisfactory conclusion, in that the participants were able to reach an agreement on what the money should be used for. All aspects of the decision; including the selection of the four organisations, the decision to allocate the funds equally between them, and the decision to offer the money without any conditions, received unanimous support. An agreement was reached comfortably within the time available.

Is this a good way of making a decision?

The underlying philosophy of Wealth Shared is that the question of how best to use money is fundamentally a value judgement and that such decisions are best made in a democratic way. There is an intrinsic advantage in a democratic approach. It is possible to harness greater wisdom and ingenuity from groups of people than from individuals acting alone.

This seemed to play out in terms of the richness of the discussion. The participants explored many hot topics in philanthropy that occupy the minds of highly-paid executives and consultants: the appropriate relationship between state and non-state provision; the best way of assessing organisational effectiveness and value for money; and how to assess organisations' governance and leadership.

Several people sat in on the discussions as observers and remarked upon the deep consideration that the group were giving to the matters under consideration and the altruistic spirit that was present in the room.

Did the group consider all of the options available?

In an evaluation session held several weeks after the final decision, we challenged the group on whether the decision to focus on local organisations represented a lack of imagination. Did they merely follow the path of least resistance? A strong defence was offered of the decision. Participants cited the emotional intensity of exchanges that took place between members of the group as evidence of the deep consideration they had given to the task.

They also offered a view that although the group had drawn on their subjective experience to some extent, it was rational for them to do so.

The knowledge they have, both first hand and second hand via their community is real and meaningful.

They are aware of the need that exists because they and their neighbours live it every day. The reputation of the organisations they chose has been built up because of the tangible difference they make to the lives of people living in the area.

Moreover, the decision to focus on the local area was backed up by objective data. The group reviewed indices of deprivation in the locality, and how it compares to elsewhere in the country. Almost all areas of L8 sat within the most deprived decile in the UK in 2019 according to the Harmonised Index of Multiple Deprivation published by the Consumer Data Research Centre⁴. This encompasses indicators of deprivation across seven domains such as low income, unemployment, limited life expectancy and barriers to housing and other key services.

⁴ Consumer Data Research Centre (2019). Index of Multiple Deprivation. <https://data.cdrc.ac.uk/dataset/index-multiple-deprivation-imd>

Early on in the process the group agreed that they wanted to focus on using the money to alleviate the effects of poverty and deprivation. They made a decision to deploy the funds to organisations focused on addressing different aspects of poverty and deprivation in what they knew to be one of the most deprived localities in the UK.

Was it sufficiently rigorous?

We asked whether the group's approach was sufficiently rigorous when it came to judging whether the nominated organisations are well-run. Once the participants had settled on a shortlist of potential beneficiaries they spent some time reviewing corporate information, official records, websites and social media accounts. They considered the organisations' governance arrangements, annual reports and accounts and remuneration policies.

It was also suggested that reputations in an area like L8 are hard-earned and that instances of mismanagement would come to light.

They suggested it is in the culture of the area that people tend to speak their mind; people's behaviour is scrutinised and thus if there were issues worth mentioning the word would spread.

Nevertheless, some members of the group expressed a view in the in-person and written feedback that they would have valued further time to investigate the governance of the organisations. This might have involved soliciting specific information from people in leadership positions, conducting more detailed searches of media reports and/or looking at other third party materials such as from other grantmakers, local authorities and/or regulators.

Was it actually democratic?

Given that Wealth Shared was intended to be an exercise in democratic decision-making, one way to evaluate its success is to consider whether it represented a truly democratic process.

The selection of the 600 households which received invitation letters, and the selection of the 12 participants from the people who responded, was entirely randomised. The households were selected based on a random selection from a list of publicly-available addresses. This differs from many sortition exercises whereby an effort is made to select participants proportionately in terms of demographics and geographical location.

Despite the fact that no deliberate steps were taken to select a group that was demographically representative of the local population, the selection process did produce a cohort that featured some diversity in terms of age, occupation, ethnicity and religion. This was remarked upon during the sessions;

participants said they valued the fact that they had different life experiences. This gives the process some credibility as an authentically democratic exercise.

That said, the participants were self-selecting in the sense that there were responses from only around 6% of the 600 households we contacted. They were people who were prepared to put themselves in an uncertain situation with others they had never met. They showed themselves to be willing to devote their energy in pursuit of goals which would not benefit them personally. It could be argued that they were unusual in deciding to respond to the letter and take part in the project, and that the decisions they reached should be viewed with this in mind. But it is also true to say that everyone who lived in a household that received the letter had an equal opportunity to put themselves forward and an equal chance of being selected.

⁵ Sortition is the selection of a group of people from a random sample to discuss an issue or make a decision.

One concern we had when designing the process was that the deliberation might be dominated by more confident and opinionated individuals and that it would therefore not reflect the true collective will of the group. The feedback from the participants was that a majority felt they had taken a leading role in the discussion and they had been able to have their say. There were moments of tension and conflict. Although the deliberation always seemed fundamentally good-natured, there did appear to be a genuine clash of perspectives which is an essential feature of any democratic process.

There are a number of decisions we made about the design of Wealth Shared where an alternative approach could easily have been taken, with implications for the democratic nature of the project. Some potential alternative approaches are offered in the following section.

The experience

The feedback from the participants was positive about the experience overall. Common themes were that people appreciated being given the power and responsibility to make such a consequential decision, particularly when they can feel powerless in other aspects of their lives. People described feeling proud of the decision they came to and the impact it would have in the community.

We asked participants to say in one word how it felt to be part of the project.

- Positivity
- Community
- Unbelievable
- Grateful (to be part of the project)
- Proud
- Togetherness

We asked participants what aspect of the project, if any, they most enjoyed.

- Compromising for the bigger cause
- Meeting and listening to different opinions
- The final decision
- Making the decision
- The moment of reaching consensus toward the end of the third session was extremely rewarding. And in the final session I felt a real sense of camaraderie among the group and a shared sense of accomplishment at what we'd achieved and this was the most enjoyable aspect of the process for me.
- Meeting other people in the community and discussing a wide range of issues
- Collaborating with people with different skills

We asked the participants if they had any concerns or reservations about how the project went.

- No
- No, Everything went well,
- None
- I feel like some of the other members arguments were largely subjective rather than based on fact, but not sure how a similar project could limit this
- In the main, no. The way that the project was organised and run was extremely impressive, Emily's facilitating was excellent and I was really happy with the outcome of our discussions. My only reservation came in the final session when it emerged that one of the bodies that we had chosen as a beneficiary was no longer in existence in the form we had believed it was and it really wasn't clear (at least to me) to whom the funds would be allocated. I felt that this contradicted some of the core principles that we'd agreed to follow in terms of selecting an established charity/community group and there being transparency around where the donation was going.

I felt that it was too late in the process to raise any meaningful objections at this point and undo all the work that we had done. Also, the single member of the group who had championed this beneficiary from the outset, seemed to feel very strongly about it (to the point of becoming emotional during some of our sessions) and I didn't want to upset her.

In hindsight, it didn't sit right with me and I would have liked to have known much more about the loose confederation of teachers that were to receive the donation. However, I do feel it was a reasonable concession to make in order to complete the process and to agree as a group on the other bodies that I had felt more worthy. I regret not being brave enough to raise this, both at the time and at the feedback session.

Did it represent value for money?

The administration of the project cost £6500, which included the venue hire, payments to the participants in recognition of their time and facilitation fees.

At 6.5% of the total funds being allocated, this is significantly cheaper than many other participatory decision-making exercises. Having said that, significant unpaid time also went into the project from David and external experts who fed into the design and strategy. We designed the process and developed a lot of the materials from scratch, so it would be less time-intensive if we repeated it.

Has the project had a wider impact?

Upon embarking on Wealth Shared, we hoped that as well as harnessing the wisdom and ingenuity of a group of citizens to decide how best funds should be deployed, the project might also deliver some wider benefits.

We hope that over time, the project may inspire others to undertake initiatives in a similar direction. We believe Wealth Shared is both a practical example of wealth redistribution in action, and an attempt to allocate funds in a way that is truly democratic. It is not yet possible to determine whether the project will have this impact. We are encouraged that it has received a modest social media and email following and some press coverage.⁶

Representatives of some of the organisations receiving the money said that the fact that the donations had been decided on by people in their local community was a boost to their morale at a time when the economic situation is putting them under pressure.

They said it represented a recognition of their work on a level which they were not necessarily aware of.

£800

Venue hire and refreshments

£3,200

Fees to specialist contributors

£2,200

Payments to participants

⁶ E.g. Evie Breese, Big Issue (2023). Wealth Shared: What would you do with £100,000? www.bigissue.com/news/activism/wealth-shared-what-would-you-do-with-100000

Design questions

Wealth Shared was based on a proposition that decisions about the distribution of funds could be handed over to a group of randomly-selected citizens. Beyond this, we made a series of judgements about the design of the process which could be made differently in an alternative scenario. Here we identify some of these choices and offer some analysis of them.

Selecting participants from a limited geographical area

The participants in the project were selected from the L8 postcode in Liverpool, England. This is a small geographical area with a population of roughly 35,000 residents⁷. This choice clearly affected the outcome of the process because the participants ended up choosing local organisations to receive the money, including the community centre in which the discussions were being held.

35,000

Residents in the
L8 postcode

L8 provided an instant point of connection for the participants. Members of the group described feeling a strong sense of pride and an attachment to the local area.

This point of commonality may have affected the culture that emerged within the space. It may have made it easier to build trust within the group and therefore contributed to the relatively swift process by which the participants reached a provisional agreement during the third session on what to do with money.

⁷ Office for National Statistics (2021). Postcode estimates, England and Wales.

One participant suggested that although they were aware they could have chosen recipients for the money based elsewhere and even overseas, the fact that the participants were all from the same area meant that choosing local recipients was almost “baked-in” to the process.

An alternative approach would be to recruit people from a similarly concentrated geographic area, but in a different location. It would be interesting to see how this affected the nature of the deliberation and the outcome. Were there characteristics of L8, or Liverpool in general, that influenced the way the deliberation played out and the choices the group made? Liverpool has a reputation as having a strong sense of community and a tradition of solidarity, although it is not straightforward to objectively measure or compare this quality to other places.

A further possibility would be to select participants drawn from a range of geographical locations. In theory, a group could be formed with participants from a number of cities or even countries. It would be very interesting to see how this would play out. Such a group might take longer to establish trust with each other. Conversely it may turn out that wherever the participants are from, the experience of being collectively entrusted with the important task of allocating funds would naturally bring people together.

L8 is by several measures an area facing significant deprivation relative to the rest of the UK. During the evaluation session we asked the participants to imagine that they had all been drawn from Formby, an affluent town near Liverpool. Would they have still picked local organisations to receive the money? It was suggested that they would not have done so. They said they may still have focused on poverty and deprivation, but the local focus flowed from the economic status of the area.

“From my perspective, it was the shared task that bonded the group, more than our shared postcode,” one of the participants said afterwards.

Selecting 12 participants

The group was made up of 12 participants. Each participant contributed more than once in each session. A majority of people said they felt they had played a leading role in the discussion.

We chose this number because we felt that it struck a good balance of being large enough to provide a range of perspectives and lived experiences, but small enough that each person would have a chance to make their voice heard, particularly over a relatively limited timeframe. We felt that the larger the group, the more variation there would be in terms of communication styles and leadership approaches, which would help to ensure a rich discussion and a constructive process.

Some participants had strong views about what should happen to the money and how the group should go about the deliberation. Two of the organisations the group selected were championed respectively by two individuals in particular. One participant said afterwards that they were reluctant to challenge another participant who seemed to have a particularly strongly-held view, for fear of upsetting them. Despite this, we do not believe that the overall decision, encompassing all the four organisations selected, was dominated by particular individuals. A majority of participants said they felt either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the decision.

Were a similar process undertaken with a group much larger than 12 people, more thought might have to go into the structure of the deliberation, to allow the participants to contribute equally. Whereas our participants would address each other by their first names by the end of the process, participants in a much larger group would have less chance of knowing each other personally.

Allocating eight hours over four weeks for the deliberation

The deliberation took place during four two-hour sessions over consecutive weeks. We did not ask the participants to undertake any activity outside of the sessions, although some chose to do so. At a total of eight hours, this was a shorter amount of time than is allocated for most participatory decision-making exercises. For example, a guide on How to set up a Citizens Assembly published by the charity Involve outlines a process involving 32 hours of learning, deliberation and decision-making.⁸



In one sense the process demonstrated that it was possible to have a rich discussion and to reach a consensus within the time available. In fact, the group had reached a provisional agreement on the four organisations by the end of the third session. However, the subsequent feedback from the participants is that they would have liked at least a bit more time. There was a view that if they had been given an additional session, for example, they'd have spent it conducting further investigations into the organisations they were considering nominating, for example into their governance and what third parties have to say about them.

We chose to allocate eight hours for the process because we wanted to deliver the project in a lean way and because we theorised that it would be possible to condense the deliberation into a short timeframe.

For everyone involved in Wealth Shared, it was an intense experience took place over a short timeframe. The participants met each other for the first time, embarked on an intellectually and emotionally demanding exercise together, and less than a month later it was over.

A “hands-off” approach to facilitation

The deliberation sessions were supported by an experienced facilitator. The goal of the facilitation was to ensure that the participants understood what they were being asked to do, were encouraged to get to know each other, and felt comfortable working together.

⁸ Involve (accessed 2023). How do I set up a citizens assembly? involve.org.uk/resource/how-do-i-setup-citizens-assembly

We debated whether to have a more structured approach to the deliberation or to allow it to be more self-led. One option we gave a lot of consideration to was preparing a “menu” of different things that it would be possible to donate money towards. This would have outlined all of the different cause areas that non-profit organisations exist to address. It would have been a significant challenge to prepare this information in a way which was both comprehensive and digestible. We wondered whether it would either lead the participants to a state of paralysis, or whether the way in which we presented the information would inadvertently influence them in some way.

We also considered preparing a curriculum for the participants on different approaches to philanthropy. This might have included an introduction to effective altruism, social justice giving or community organising for example.

But again, we opted against this on the basis that we wanted to avoid unintentionally “nudging” the participants in a particular direction.

Nevertheless, we told the participants that if they wanted us to arrange a presentation or other input from any outside organisation or expert, we would endeavour to organise this.

As part of the process, participants were able to request information from us as the project organisers which we later presented to them in person and/or as written materials. They did this on several occasions; asking for data about the demographics and socioeconomic status of the local area; a list of not-for-profit organisations operating locally; and information about the governance of several organisations under consideration. It was not always obvious that this information substantially influenced the subsequent discussion. It may have been

possible to give greater consideration to how we delivered the information; if we as the organisers had more capacity we might have been more creative about delivering the material in a user-friendly way.

Emily concluded afterwards that trust-building turned out to be her main task as the facilitator. She would have liked more one-on-one time with members of the group to understand their needs and to ensure that they were supported to the greatest possible extent to contribute to the deliberation.

The facilitator's reflections

Emily McChrystal

From a facilitation standpoint, this was the first of its kind for me. Mainly since this has never been done before, but also because of the lack of guidance or structure I had provided the group with. It was imperative for myself and David to ensure that my main role was less around the set-up of the decision, and more around the structured support around the group making it.

When I was first asked to lead the facilitation of this project, I couldn't have said yes quick enough; yet the more I explored and examined the task at hand, the more I began to look introspectively to ensure my support of the space was productive.

I am a working-class person and work within the Third Sector, specifically supporting marginalised people in several ways. So, for me to not only contextualise £100,000, but to then come to the space in a way that I could minimise the group's anxiety around that figure, was something that took a lot of interrogation of my own barriers around finance. As someone who has experienced, and works every day within, poverty crises – it was important for me to be a sounding board for the group to make their decision in a way that felt safe, informed, and empowering.

While I had to work through my own biases and feelings around the positive distribution of wealth, my experience of facilitating Wealth Shared sessions were entirely positive and enlightening. It was incredible to support the group to interrogate their proposals, their personal expectations of the space and how they feel equity is truly achieved. There were times when the group and I would joke about 'another vote' happening, and at times it felt as though a lot of decisions were having to be cemented through a collective vote. However, it was my prerogative to ensure that no matter how people presented in the space, whether confident and loud or quiet and pensive, that everybody had a chance to share their opinion and be a part of the final say.

I see my role of facilitation in Wealth Shared as a metaphorical mirror- reflecting the groups opinions and views back to them for them to question and explore; to really look at and think deeper about.

Wider significance of the project

We hope that over time, Wealth Shared may inspire others to undertake initiatives in a similar direction. It is an attempt at creating a practical example of wealth redistribution in action, and an attempt to allocate money in a way that is truly democratic.

There is too much inequality. The richest fifth of the population owns 63% of the UK's wealth. We believe more people should have a say over what happens to more of the money in the economy.

In some of the public communication regarding Wealth Shared and in this report, we have located it within a wider social and political movement towards greater wealth redistribution. Groups including Resource Generation, Resource Justice and the Giving Pledge support and encourage people to give away their wealth⁹. Meanwhile Patriotic Millionaires mobilises the voices of wealthy people in support of increased wealth taxation¹⁰.

Wealth Shared is a visible example of money and power genuinely being redistributed. Although the ultimate solution to excessive wealth inequality is likely wealth taxation, we believe that visible examples of voluntary wealth redistribution can help to build support for government policies to the same ends. We offer further thought about this in the upcoming section, 'Where this concept could go next'.

⁹ Resource Justice website (accessed 2023). resourcejustice.co.uk

¹⁰ Patriotic Millionaires website (accessed 2023). patrioticmillionaires.uk

We see Wealth Shared as being part of a growing move towards introducing greater democracy into philanthropy and grantmaking.

Radical democracy in philanthropy

Wealth Shared has some similarity to participatory grant-making¹¹ (PGM). This involves funders handing over decision-making power to communities impacted by their funding decisions. Our project is slightly different to conventional PGM in that while PGM is usually deployed when funds have been allocated for a particular purpose, we left it up to the participants to determine what purpose the funds should be used for.

An alternative answer to the question of how to democratise philanthropy is offered by advocates of unconditional cash transfers. These are programmes which offer payments to people in need for the recipient to use as they wish. This concept has gained particular prominence through the charity GiveDirectly which transfers funds to people living in poverty in east Africa. GiveDirectly says it dispersed \$122m in 2022 and reached 319k people¹².

In the UK, The Biscuit Fund operates on the same principle of issuing unconditional payments to people in poverty. It provides one-off payments on the basis of referrals from social, advisory and health organisations and online forums. It is run by volunteers on an anonymous basis¹³.

Where this concept could go next

This marks the conclusion of Wealth Shared. We have no immediate plans to undertake further activity beyond the publication and dissemination of this report. However, we can offer some ideas for initiatives which could build upon the project.

¹¹ Participatory Grantmaking website (accessed 2023) www.participatorygrantmaking.org

¹² GiveDirectly (2023). End of Year Update. www.givedirectly.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-GiveDirectly-Year-End-Update.pdf

¹³ The Biscuit Fund website (accessed 2023). www.biscuitfund.org

A similar exercise could be undertaken involving the random selection of citizens to allocate funds, but using an alternative design approach, perhaps along the lines of the suggestions we have made in the 'design questions' section. This may provide a clearer idea of what effect the design elements have on the process and potentially provide some firmer conclusions about what approach is optimal.

A future process could take place online. Online deliberation is increasingly being used as a means for stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes. It offers a low cost, easy access, and flexible way of bringing people together from different geographical locations¹⁴.

A project could be undertaken that similarly focuses around the open-ended question of what should happen to a pot of money, but utilising an alternative democratic process; for example a formalised series of votes.

There may be scope for further activity that develops the link between voluntary wealth redistribution and cultural and political change.

In a world in which the dominant trends are towards the accumulation and concentration of wealth in the hands of a minority, it is sometimes hard to imagine that a different model could materialise. The existence of a cohort of wealthy people giving away their money voluntarily provides a potential starting point for the emergence of a new set of social norms and expectations.

¹⁴ Gilbert, D., Rasche, A., Schormair, M., & Singer, A. (2023). The Challenges and Prospects of Deliberative Democracy for Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility. *Business Ethics Quarterly*. [Click to access](#)

The donor's reflections

David Clarke

It has been a very rewarding process to be part of.

I thought the participants might see the project as an eccentricity and approach it in a detached way. In fact, they undertook the task of deciding what to do with the money with passion and sincerity. It was gripping to watch.

I can think of very few things I might have done with the money that would have had such a lasting emotional impact for me, or given me the same level of satisfaction.

To anyone who is lucky enough to have more money than they need and is wondering what to do with it, I think this concept – or something like it – is a good solution.

An expert's view on Wealth Shared

Rhodri Davies is founding director of the think tank Why Philanthropy Matters.

I met David in March 2023, when he contacted me via LinkedIn on the basis that we have a shared interest in philanthropy and both live in Liverpool. We met for a coffee, and David told me about the idea that was to become the Wealth Shared project. As someone who spends all of their time thinking, writing and teaching about philanthropy it was certainly great to hear that such an interesting project was taking place on my own doorstep! Although I was only ever a tangential part of it (acting as an informal sounding point at various points and sitting in on the deliberation sessions), I learnt a lot from the involvement I did have.

I am well aware through my own work that in the wider context many critical questions are being asked about philanthropy at the moment. For instance: is it often undemocratic, as it gives those with wealth a disproportionate ability to decide where society's priorities lie? Do the models we use create uncomfortable power imbalances between donors and recipients? And can philanthropy be part of a meaningful redistribution of wealth? The fascinating thing to me about Wealth Shared as a project is that it was trying to address these kinds of questions, and to find at least one practical model for how we might make philanthropy more democratic and equitable.

My hope is that other wealthy individuals or grantmakers who are interested in exploring new models for deciding how philanthropic resources can be distributed will be inspired by the Wealth Shared project, and will think about what they can learn from it and how they might put into practice some of these ideas and ambitions in their own work.

Conclusion

What has Wealth Shared told us?

We recruited 12 people at random and asked them what should happen to £100k. This concept essentially seemed to work. The participants had a rich and wide-ranging discussion and reached a decision within the time available.

The participants chose to transfer the money to four organisations working to address the effects of poverty and deprivation in their community: a community centre; a network of local schools; a community development trust; and a children's charity. The project took place at a time when local people are facing acute pressure from the cost of living crisis. This loomed large over the deliberation. The participants wanted the money to have an impact as quickly as possible to alleviate suffering and to offer some hope to the community around them.

Reflecting on the design of the project, the biggest potential weakness we can see, is that the decision to recruit people from a narrow geographical area may have stopped the participants from considering the question with as much of an open mind as they would have done otherwise. Nevertheless, their decision seemed to make objective sense. They wanted to focus on addressing the effects of poverty and deprivation, and chose to give the money to organisations working in an area where deprivation is at a particularly high level.

The most common recommendation from the participants was that they would have liked extra time to conduct research into the organisations under consideration. We suggest that although we have shown that it is possible to conduct this exercise over a short timescale, it would optimally be conducted over a minimum of ten hours.

Perhaps the lasting impact for us as the project organisers is the culture of trust, mutual support and altruism that impact upon other people within the space. This emerged out to everyone who came into contact with the project; David as the originator of the money, those who came to watch the sessions, and the organisations who received the money.

This is hard to quantify but it seems important.

The participants

Amy Meacock-Smith

Anne-Marie Gilleece

Bradley Denton

Denise Moongo

Don Loy

Gladys Williams

Glynis Jackson

Ismail Saboordeen

John Welsh

Lindsay Challoner

Michael Lynch

Peter Fitzsimmons



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