

Tech to Connect

Tackling isolation
through innovation

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The **Tech to Connect Challenge** ran from April 2019 to March 2020 and aimed to help civil society develop their early stage ideas for tech to enable more or better interactions between people. Technology can be alienating or divisive for those that are isolated, but it doesn't need to be that way. Tech to Connect was all about supporting civil society to translate their knowledge into good ideas for new ways to connect people.

The challenge prize helped ten finalists develop their ideas into working prototypes and plan for their implementation. The £1 million prize was split into £500,000 of business support with the other £500,000 being awarded as financial support – £25,000 grants for each finalist, plus a winning prize of £100,000 and two runner-up prizes of £75,000.

Finalist of the Tech To Connect Challenge

PlaceCal – the community calendar by Manchester Age Friendly Neighbourhoods (MAFN)



Location

Manchester

Our idea

PlaceCal is a community toolkit that brings resident groups together to create a shared social calendar, and was developed out of a research project into social isolation and loneliness experienced by older residents in Manchester.

Who do we want to reach?

Our core beneficiaries are people at risk of social isolation, especially older people in low social capital neighbourhoods. It is used by various support networks to reach our beneficiaries:

family, GPs, neighbourhood teams, city councils and public health teams. Though everyone in a neighbourhood can use PlaceCal and derive benefit from it, beneficiaries are not just people using our service directly; everyone living in a neighbourhood can benefit from neighbourhood agencies and councils being better connected, as it would allow their community workers more time to focus on building social connections within the community.

The story so far

PlaceCal emerged directly out of Manchester Age Friendly Neighbourhoods (MAFN), an engaged research project exploring wider determinants of health across five neighbourhoods in Manchester. We conducted mixed-method research with a wide range of beneficiaries in the Hulme & Moss Side neighbourhood.

We interviewed 30 community groups in the area on a range of event-related topics and discovered that almost no one felt they were

promoting effectively. None of the groups interviewed even knew how to publish event information on their own website, if they even had one. We found that existing websites were far too complicated and people found them hard to use. We worked with Manchester Age Friendly Neighbourhoods to develop an attractive, high contrast colour scheme, set the font size much larger than average, and removed as much visual clutter from the screen as possible. We have developed a plan to reach out to small community groups nationwide, recognising that these are at the heart of their communities.

What's next?

We plan to work with our current pilot organisations (One Manchester, BAVS, Marvellous Mossley, Christchurch, and NEPHRA) to identify scale-up opportunities in their local areas. We will then use this information to further hone our marketing strategy and identify the most likely clients for regional rollout. We will continue to try to grow our reach by working with key anchor organisations in as many areas as possible and achieve saturation by using these groups to scale up.

After completing this work, we will be able to conduct a targeted marketing campaign to contact relevant potential users across the UK. Once we have conducted one regional rollout and the associated co-production and evaluation, we will be in a much stronger position to provide rollouts to other regional areas. Our ambition is to become leaders in advocating for bottom-up solutions that tackle social deprivation and isolation, and demonstrate the future of how software can strengthen communities rather than widening the digital divide.

"We see PlaceCal as a collaborative tool and shared methodology that can be used nationwide to enable residents and community groups to work better together to reduce social isolation and loneliness."



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