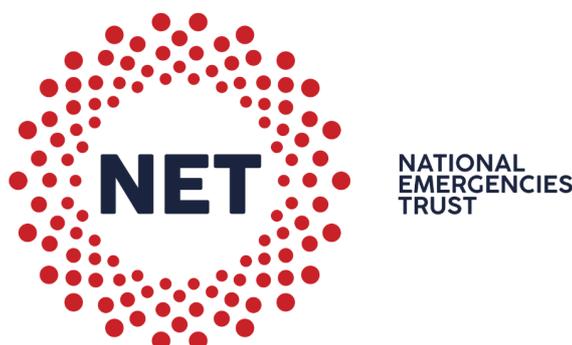


# Bi Funding Research Report

This report was commissioned by LGBT+ Consortium as part of its National Emergencies Partnership funded programme. It's about why bi organisations currently get so little "LGBT" funding, and how the obstacles could be addressed.

It was produced by three bi community organisers in the UK, based primarily on experiences of fellow organisers. Researchers were Jennifer Moore, Libby Baxter-Williams and John G, in May and June 2021. Thanks to everyone who gave their time to speak to us!



If your interest is primarily in perhaps funding bi community organisations, you may like to read instead the shorter "Funders' Briefing", or the even shorter "Key Points" document. Compared to those, this full report includes more detail, more history, more references/links, and more quotes from bi people.

## Key points

- On average as a demographic, bi people **fare as badly as, or worse than, lesbian & gay people** on many outcomes. Bisexuality is stigmatised and ignored.
- **Nominally "LGBT"** projects or spaces **aren't necessarily doing anything** for the "B".
- **Bi spaces** can be very important to people for various reasons: feeling understood, freedom from anti-bi prejudice, etc.
- Almost all current UK bi spaces are run by **unpaid volunteers** in limited amounts of "spare" time. Many areas have **no bi group** at all.

- UK bi communities have a long tradition of "**creatively making do**" - but **could accomplish much more** with adequate funding. Key areas include **outreach** and **access**.
- We recommend:
  - **ring-fencing** a percentage of "LGBT" funding **in proportion** to the percentage of bi people, with half or more under the direct control of a bi panel.
  - creating a "**virtual bi centre**", where one or more workers is embedded within a larger organisation, to provide **practical support** for grassroots groups and cross-group projects.
  - **hiring bi organisers** to reach, train and support bi organisers.
  - adapting **funding methods** for grassroots groups to be **simpler**, less formal, and **less of a gamble**, especially where amounts are small.
  - making basic group-running **resources** available to volunteer organisers on request, such as books, printed flyers, or support with online calendar updating.
  - where **nominally "LGBT"** organisations apply for funding, making it **conditional** on whether they can demonstrate **genuinely serving the "B"**.

## 1.1 Bisexuality background

It's possible that around **5% to 10%** of the UK population, or more, has experienced some attractions not limited to "gay" or "straight".<sup>1</sup> But they don't necessarily call themselves "bisexual".

In day to day life, some may not use a sexuality "label" at all; some may prefer **other descriptions** such as "queer" or "pan".<sup>2</sup>

In this report, for simplicity we'll say "bi". Or sometimes, to emphasise the variety of chosen labels, we'll say "under the bi umbrella".

A common myth is that bi people "have it easier" than lesbians and gay men, because we're "only half gay", and "can pass as straight". However, being **invisible and stigmatised** isn't a healthy position. On many measures

of mental and physical health, **bi people on average do worse** than either straight or gay people.<sup>3</sup>

Bi organisers were part of the **gay liberation movement** in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the political climate shifted, making bi people less welcome in gay spaces and especially in lesbian spaces.<sup>4</sup> Prejudice against bi people is still common within both **mainstream culture** and **gay communities**.

As a result, groups which are nominally for **LGBT** people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans) are not necessarily supportive to bi people in reality.

Typical elements of anti-bi **prejudice** include "confused", "greedy" and "unreliable". It's also common simply to ignore or deny the existence of bi people; this is sometimes called "**bi erasure**".

Many bi people find **bi-majority space** to be **supportive to their wellbeing**. Bi spaces typically **avoid gatekeeping "who's bi enough"** or who uses which label. Most bi social spaces actively welcome non-bi partners or friends.

## 1.2 UK bi communities in 2021

What resources exist **specifically for bi people** in the UK in 2021 are almost entirely **volunteer-run**.

There are currently **two UK bi charities**: Bi Pride and BiCon Continuity. Each is linked to an annual event, and currently run entirely by volunteers.

The Scottish Bi+ Network is the main bi organisation in Scotland, and currently has a **year's funding** for a **part-time admin worker**.<sup>5</sup>

The **majority of local groups** which gave input to our survey had **no bank account**, and run "**on a shoe-string**". We estimate that there may be around **60 to 70** small groups of this type across the country.

There are a handful of local/regional groups or events which have got as far as having a **bank account**: for example, Brum Bi Group or London BiFest.

In our convenience sample of 280-odd bi people, mostly based in urban and suburban areas, about **two-thirds didn't know of a local bi group** near them.<sup>6</sup>

Bi people of colour (PoC) may prefer to lead or participate in groups for **LGBT people of colour**, rather than in a white-led, white-majority bi scene.

Therefore, reaching bi people of colour means thinking about those groups too.<sup>7</sup>

We estimate that **between 120 and 160 people** are currently involved in **organising bi-majority spaces**. Almost all are white; many are disabled.

Most of the smaller groups or events have **never applied for grant funding**. We asked why not; the most common reason was the **lack of any expectation of getting it**, combined with **limited time and energy**.

Although things are beginning to change, the UK out-bi community has a long **tradition** of "creatively making things work on a shoe-string", and dipping into its own pockets, informally or via more structured crowd-funding. In the early days, nobody *expected* to get funding from outside the community, still less to get paid for their time.

## 2. Key obstacles "in between" bi people and existing funding

The context for this research is that the LGBT Consortium had identified a gap:

Despite active attempts to make the funding more accessible to bi orgs, uptake was still low ... we need and must do more to ensure bi organisations have access to vital LGBT+ funds when they are available ... .<sup>8</sup>

We describe three key obstacles which currently hinder grant money from reaching bi people.

- The **first** factor is a historical **lack of ring-fencing** for specifically bi needs and projects. This links with a key **unreliable assumption** from funders: the idea that money reaching "LGB"/"LGBT" groups is already being used to support bi people.

In commissioning this research, the LGBT Consortium is on the leading edge of funders beginning to consider **the distinct needs of the bi population**, and question whether those needs are being met. We very much welcome this approach.

- The **second** obstacle is the **expectation** that bi organisations will **slot neatly into** the funding structures which already exist. This expectation

plays out in various interlocking ways, which we explore and address in more detail in the rest of this report:

- a. Funders thinking in terms of **thousands of pounds**, with commensurately strict governance structures - while **neglecting lower-admin methods** of transferring smaller amounts to informal groups. (This affects many grass-roots groups, not only bi ones.)
  - b. Reliance on a traditional competitive process, optimised for channelling thousands of pounds to the chosen few, while others get nothing. This **favours the groups already better equipped**: for example, those who can buy in professional time and expertise to write grant applications. Alongside the **lack of ring-fencing**, it means that vital bi initiatives may lose out to a less-needed but better-presented project in a different area.
  - c. **Assumption that volunteers have spare time** to devote to grant applications or to setting up a bank account. On the contrary: organisers of grass-roots groups often wish they had a bit more help just to keep the group running as it is.
  - d. **Expectation** that the **main or only solution** to the structural mismatches is for bi group organisers to become well-versed in the **existing structures**.  
  
To be clear, offering training in how to apply for grants (and suchlike) is of course not a bad thing in itself. But relying *only* on that misses a huge opportunity to "**meet people where they are**". If someone's good at making things happen, connecting with new people, and "holding the space" in a group, why must they divert their limited time and energy into also learning about grant applications? That's inefficient. Better to support them with the money and resources they need, so they can continue doing what they do best.
  - e. Lack of **proactive communication** from funders to bi organisations.
- The **third** obstacle is the **lack of a track record** of funders actually giving money to bi organisations. There are few known examples where

UK bi groups which *have* applied for funding received it, except from other bi organisations.<sup>9</sup>

Applying when you've probably got no chance is usually going to prove a waste of time. It's been a **rational choice** for bi organisers not to gamble their limited time on such **poor odds**.

However, this factor **could change quickly**, if funders change the landscape of structural obstacles described above, and money starts to become genuinely available.

### 3. Recommendations

As part of our research remit, we were to suggest

What funders, particularly Consortium, can put in place to ensure there is fair and equal access to future grant funds.

The following recommendations are our and our interviewees' responses to that question, and to the structural obstacles we've described.

1. **Allocate a fair percentage of LGBT money** to be channelled to bi people, **then figure out how to get it there**.

We suggest the following as an outline plan:

- a. Take a reputable estimate of the **demographics** of the UK bi population as compared to the UK LGBT population overall. Call that **B%**.
- b. Within any money raised/funded for "LGBT" (or similar) causes, **calculate B%** of the money, and call that **£B**.
- c. Ring-fence **half of £B** to go directly to projects run primarily by bi people, and approved by a bi panel (discussed further below).
- d. Allow LGBT/queer organisations run **by and for people of colour** to access bi funding "pots" **in parity** with bi organisations, even if they aren't technically bi organisations.
- e. Ring-fence a **quarter of £B** to go to bi-specific projects of non-bi organisations.

For example, a community centre, youth club, day care centre or LGBT project might hire a bi worker to run a bi group; a health centre might hire a bi nurse to run a clinic which is advertised explicitly as a bi-run welcoming space for bi people.

In some cases, the existence of a bi space would in time attract bi volunteers as well, multiplying the effect.

- f. The other notional **quarter of £B** is then available to groups who can demonstrate that they're serving bi people holistically alongside the L, G and T.
  - g. At this time, we consider that money given to nominally LGB or LGBT groups **should not by default be accounted for as reaching or serving bi people**. Sometimes that may indeed be happening, but the default assumption should be that it mostly isn't. (As described above, we make an exception for PoC-run LGBT PoC spaces.)
  - h. If the ring-fenced percentages haven't yet reached their destinations, **don't give up** and decide to give the money to other groups after all, but **keep reaching out** to more bi people and organisations until you can figure out how to get the money to the right place. If necessary, spend some of the money on working out how best to channel the rest.
2. Fund, and help to organise, a **Virtual Bi Centre**, where one or more workers is technically employed by an organisation such as the Consortium, while answerable in practice to bi leadership.

The initial focus of the Virtual Bi Centre would be development and admin work to support **grass-roots bi groups**, local **events** and **national initiatives** which run year-round.

The worker(s) in the Bi Centre must identify "under the bi umbrella".

It's important that the hiring process be "fair, and seen to be fair".<sup>10</sup>

The kinds of areas the worker(s) might help to develop and organise could include

- a. Coordinating the **admin** side of **nationwide projects**: for example, if we wanted to distribute bi information posters to student unions, doctors' surgeries etc.

- b. Coordinating the **admin** side of **training for bi organisers**, including the **transmission of knowledge** from more experienced to less experienced bi community organisers.
  - c. Keeping up-to-date an **online directory** for local groups.<sup>[11](#)</sup>
  - d. Helping to **broadcast information** to local organisers and national media.
  - e. Holding **physical resources** to distribute to groups which need them: for example, books, flags, information materials.
  - f. Assisting organisers of **local groups**, especially with the kind of **admin** which actually makes more sense to do centrally.<sup>[12](#)</sup>
3. Support and fund the creation of a **panel** to make **decisions** about the half-of-£B **bi-specific money**.

Either the same panel, or a similar one, could make big-picture decisions about **worker time** at the Virtual Bi Centre, although the day-to-day supervision of the worker wouldn't fall upon this group.

Similar principles could be adopted when considering the channelling of the other two quarters of £B.

Here we describe a suggested framework for the panel:

- a. The panel's membership would be **8 to 12** people who identify "**under the bi umbrella**". (The quorum for making decisions would likely be fewer than 8.)
- b. For **access** reasons, the panel would primarily meet "**virtually**". Panellists who didn't already have adequate tech would be lent or given a laptop. Panellists on low incomes could get expenses for a decent internet connection.
- c. At least **50%** of the panel must be **people of colour**. There must be **Black** representation.
- d. At least **50%** of the panel must have a **track record** of 5 years or more of volunteer work in bi spaces, and a familiarity with the current bi landscape.

- e. There must be representation from **disabled** people, **neurodivergent** people, **trans** people, and people reliant on **state benefits** (percentages to be discussed).
  - f. People working on the panel would be **paid for their time**.
  - g. Whatever the method of recruitment to the panel, it must be sufficiently fair and transparent for the panel to be in **good reputation within wider bi communities**. (For example, some places could be filled by election or by delegation from groups, whereas some places might be filled by invitation to make a better balance.) The details would have to be **discussed in public** before the panel was set up.
  - h. The minimum number of **8** is to allow for occasions when one or more may need to recuse themselves due to overlapping interests, such as when their own local group or project is asking for money. These details and the finer points of quora would also need to be discussed in public.
  - i. An experienced **staff member** from the fund-managing organisation (hypothetically the LGBT Consortium, though these recommendations aren't only for them) would support the panel in **understanding bigger-picture implications** of their funding choices: for example, understanding how staff time and overheads must be calculated.
  - j. This staff member would also guide the panel to ensure that the projects chosen match the original **funding criteria**.  
  
(For clarity, this point refers to things like: Suppose a fund of £50,000 has been obtained specifically for "**LGBT arts**". Suppose half of B% at that time is 25%. Then the panel must be sure to allocate £12,500 to **bi arts projects** in particular - not lump that money in to be "any bi project in general".)
4. In the meantime and in general, find ways to support grass-roots groups and volunteer organisers which **don't rely on them having spare time or energy** to navigate your systems.

We discuss possibilities and successful precedents in more detail below, but here are some principles to consider:

- a. Make **low-cost** resources available **on request**.
- b. Recognise **the value of small sums of money**. £100 or £200 in the hands of skint people will go a long way.
- c. Offer **informal meetings** with back-and-forth chat as a method of funding application, with the necessary documentation taking place at the funder end.
- d. Measure applications by the recipients' **actions** (including future willingness), rather than by their ability to fill forms and justify their need in words.
- e. Reduce the **admin burden** by not making the traditional "constitution and group bank account" a prerequisite for receiving money. This level of admin should only be demanded when the amounts get big.
- f. When advertising that funding is available, manage the process and expectations as far as possible to **maximise successful applications**.

While this might not *always* be the top priority, it would act as a **remedy** for the demoralising, deterrent effect of "a chosen few get lots, the rest get nothing and have wasted their time".

An outline method:

- i. Estimate the likely take-up. (Not always easy! but, for example, count the number of bi groups currently in existence.)
- ii. Make clear up front exactly what applicants have to do to qualify.
- iii. Cap the offered amount so that everyone who qualifies would be able to actually get that amount. (In the groups example, divide the money total by the number of current bi groups.)

This makes it easier for applicants to decide *before* investing time whether it's *worth it* to them to invest that time.

5. Where you require detail as part of an application, think ahead to the kind of **research** which applicants will likely need to do. Provide some of

it as a "**starter framework**", rather than making each applicant start from scratch. For instance:

- a. Where applicants are asked to demonstrate the **need** for their work, offer basic statistics you've already accepted.
- b. For **costs**, offer "this is the kind of range we'd generally think is OK for training", "this much we'd generally think is OK for printing", and so on.

(This is for things which are *likely* to come up, which are easier for you to find out once than for volunteers to find out multiple times. It is of course not to stop people explaining how their particular situation means they needed different resources.)

6. Prioritise supporting spaces centred on LGBT/queer groups for people of colour, especially (where they exist) spaces for **bi people of colour**.
7. **Hire bi organisers to reach and support bi organisers**. An advantage we had in undertaking this research was our links through different strands of UK bi networks, going back 20-odd years. We were able to start from a position of already knowing some things. We don't think the process could have worked as well if the Consortium hadn't specifically chosen researchers in that kind of position.

During our research, we were told several times that our questions, and our bringing people together to talk about these questions even briefly, had been helpful, and that the community is ready for change. This shows the untapped potential of these conversations.

8. Support and/or offer **training** tailored to the needs of bi organisers. This would include how to run groups, how to run campaigns, and how to understand the funding landscape.

To design the **curriculum**, hire experienced bi organisers, who know what has and hasn't been useful to them in the past. Where available, hire bi **trainers** to deliver it.

Cover **access** expenses, such as captioning, BSL, travel, childcare, carer assistance.

Preferably also **pay people to take part**, especially where a training session is primarily a way of enabling participants to **benefit the wider**

**community**. Paying for people's time can be what makes a session accessible to someone on a low income.

9. Whenever assessing funding applications for **nominally LGB or LGBT projects**, score the application partly on **how they're serving their bi participants**.

For example, if their project includes nominally LGB or LGBT spaces, can they show that they have bi workers co-leading? Does their literature include descriptions recognisably of bi people, or is the B only there in name? Many trans people identify "under the bi umbrella"; in trans-specific applications, is that reflected?

(This applies across the board, not only for money ring-fenced for bi communities. But make an exception if the application is for a **project specific to the L or the G**, with no implied claim that it was *meant* to include bi people.)

10. Some guidelines on general approach:

- a. **Assume that every space includes bi people**. Often it'll be true. Mainstream culture is bad at noticing us.
- b. If you want bi people to feel welcome, **welcome us**, and show some familiarity with our world. Don't assume that a generic "LGB" welcome will reassure bi people that it's safe to come out.
- c. When you want to reach *behaviourally* bisexual people, assume you'll need to use **mainstream media** - not only "gay" media or even "bi" media.
- d. If you're familiar with a "**gay scene**": don't rely on a **mental model** of that, in order to map what might be happening in a corresponding "**bi scene**". The history is different. [13](#)
- e. Recognise the **value** of people who can do a beautiful job of outreach, welcoming people and holding a space, even if they're not good at admin. Ensure they have everything they need, to do what they wanted to do in the first place.

In the rest of our report, we use case studies and quotes to give more of a picture of the current landscape, and give a few possible blueprints for *how* our recommendations might be implemented.

## 4.1 Why bi spaces are important, even when LGB/LGBT spaces exist

In a short survey open to anyone "under the bi umbrella", we invited people to comment on anything related to groups they go to.

(Each arrow represents the start of a different person's comment. **Bold text** is **added** for ease of picking out themes.)

Some people spoke of **what bi spaces gave them**:

→ I would love to go to more exclusively bi events, as I have been to one where we discussed bi literature, and I felt **tremendously enriched** by this experience. You don't always notice how bi experiences and deep discussions are **sidelined** until you are in a bi space.

→ Bi Cardiff has been **a lifeline** to me as someone who came out later in life (in my 40s). Just to be able to meet and chat with other bi people, share experiences, and ask about places to go for support (eg with mental health issues related to my orientation) has been so important.

→ I think that bi organisations are really important to provide spaces where we can **feel understood**, and not afraid of the myths and ignorance that's present even among generally open-minded people and spaces.

→ It's only recently that I've found out about bi-specific events and I really like going to them. I feel there's a higher percentage of Ace people in these spaces than in other Queer events OR that they are far more accepting. I am a biromantic asexual and **I feel a little more like I "fit"** than in other mainstream spaces.

→ I haven't been to a group in over a year, mainly because of Covid. I still think that bi-specific groups (including pan, and queer people obviously) are **amazing places** for bi people who don't feel like they'd have to overperform or underperform their queerness, or prove they're **queer enough**, or are still bi even though they're in a committed relationship.

→ I also go to a monthly bi+ neurodiverse Zoom meetup, which I enjoy because I **don't have to explain being bi** (all but one person

there is bi, including the organiser). I can just talk about whatever the topic for the session is.

Some commented on troubles or awkwardness they'd experienced in **so-called LGBT spaces**:

→ Unless they're run by bi people, in my experience, LGBT+ groups are always **bi erasing** and/or **actively biphobic**. I often feel more comfortable being out as a bi person in predominantly hetero social spaces than in predominantly gay spaces.

→ There are local LGBTQ+ groups, but there are **always a few people not v welcoming** of bi people

→ I used to identify as lesbian. I was really comfortable with that. Then I fell for my male best friend. Since coming out as bi and in an opposite sex relationship I no longer feel properly accepted by the community. I went along to the group but quickly left as I **didn't feel gay enough**.... It wasn't anything they said. I would really like to go to a bi group

→ When I've been to LGBT events locally, it's clear **bi women are thought of as 'really straight'**

→ When I've attended LGBT events (other than Bi-specific ones), I've **felt like an impostor**. I tried to join a group but the organisers saw my Facebook profile and **assumed I was straight**. I didn't feel comfortable going after that, even after correcting them.

→ I went to a 'Hush' night a few years ago, and I ended up talking with a group of older lesbians and they were **explicitly biphobic**.

→ LGBT groups generally **aren't set up for bi people**, especially if in opposite sex relationships. My ex girlfriend, who is bi, was happy to come with me to that LGBT group, but reluctant to out ourselves as dating each other, because of issues she's had in the past with lesbians.

→ I went to a local LGBT choir for a bit but was **uncomfortable as a bisexual and as a survivor** - one of the organisers described it as a "gay choir", and when a person who harassed me joined, I was told "well it needs to be a safe space for them too". I went to my work site's LGBT and straight alliance and the organiser told me "I used to

think bisexual people didn't exist". I'm done with LGBT spaces: they are **for lesbian and gay people**, and I get more biphobia there than I do in non-LGBT events.

But gay-centred spaces can do **a good job of welcoming bi people** at least some of the time:

→ I have attended an event organised by the Gay Men's Walking Group before. They **explicitly state that bi men are welcome** (they don't state anything about pan but I assume that they are also welcome to join). I had a pleasant time attending their event, never felt the need to confirm my precise sexuality in order for the organisers to conclusively determine that I am eligible to join them.

Some people described a perspective from *outside a group*, unsure whether it would be a good place for them:

→ I would definitely be more open to joining something if I knew there was **bi or bi-friendly leadership**.

→ There is a local LGBT group, and while it **seems to be pretty inclusive**, as a 40+ man married to a woman, I haven't worked up the courage to go.

→ More explicit **welcoming** of Bi+ people specifically in LGBT+ groups would help me feel **less afraid** to go there, as sometimes there is an undercurrent of dismissiveness, or at least overwhelming focus on gay men.

Several contributors **compared** experiences they'd had in **different spaces**:

→ I feel **more comfortable** in groups that are labelled as explicitly **Bi or Bi-inclusive or Bi-led**. I feel more included but still nervous in certain explicitly queer or queer-led spaces where I worry about **not being "gay enough" for them**. In spaces that aren't labelled at all but claim to be inclusive, I still worry about people making assumptions or being biphobic.

→ Stopped attending lgbt group at work due to **biphobia that slid me back into the closet** at work and avoiding most other groups. During lockdown decided to seek out **bi safe spaces** and to come out more again.

→ I've never really felt comfortable being out as bi in non-bi spaces... too many misconceptions about us! Also... I'm autistic, and my autism is most accepted in bi spaces. I feel like **in bi spaces I can bring my whole, intersectional self.**

→ I used to play roller derby. It was a very queer space and specifically very bi. I wish the parents group I go to was more bi friendly. It is on the surface but **not if you dig a little deep.** I feel **lesser because I'm bi** and I had my kid via the 'straight' route. I struggle similarly with other LGBT groups though I do go to them sometimes.

**Not everyone felt the need** of a bi-specific group:

→ Being bi is **not a major part of my identity**, being queer and a woman is. I have experienced a lifetime of often violent homophobia, I'm a woman and I don't date cis men but I am bisexual. I prefer **queer friendly groups** in general or women's events.

→ I **don't really go to groups any more**, I don't feel the need

A couple of people raised the problem of *finding* groups:

→ Details of local groups somewhere would be great. Often any are **found by luck.**

Many people's comments included **wishes for more bi spaces to exist!**

→ **Neither gay enough or straight enough to be acceptable** in groups for those, especially not for other people my age. Only for young people

→ I don't know any groups where bi people are **explicitly acknowledged and welcomed**

→ Would like more **bi specific groups** that are **casual**

→ One thing that I am finding a lot as someone **in my late twenties** living in a university town is that it is very hard to find LGBTQIA+ groups in general that aren't catered specifically toward undergraduate students. While I understand the need for spaces and groups where young people can explore their genders and sexualities, it does feel like the emphasis on youth groups means that **people my age and older are left in limbo** without groups where we can

meet up, socialise, and discuss general bi+ stuff. It also means that those who come out later in life are often left with fewer spaces and groups.

→ Just a note about how **so**rely needed bi spaces are, particularly the kind that **don't centre around drinking or dating**, though chances of ever having something like that in my tiny rural community is pretty much zero.

→ Defo support for **older bi's**, especially in **care homes** where they fall into closet again and get lonely. Most bi or lgbt groups are for young or bars, but some more diversity in age and location are needed

→ I would love a bi group (I'd actually love to have any queer group, everything I see is big city focused). The only LGBTQ+ things I've seen locally have been **for under 24, and I'm very much not of that age group**.

→ there **aren't any in my area** (suffolk) i have to travel to london for anything remotely bi related/focused.

→ I wish there were more! I'm **not aware of any bi groups near me** despite living in the centre of a **city**

→ I go to a bi+ virtual craft group that I love. I **wish my town had a bi group**, it is difficult being **semi rural**.

## 4.2 Where bi people go, other than bi groups

In our survey open to anyone "under the bi umbrella", we invited people to mention a **non-bi group** they went to, if any. About 40% did.<sup>14</sup> There was an enormous variety of groups.

- Various LGBTQ groups, including work networks, parent/family support groups, Black Pride, campaigning groups or ones with a social/creative/sporting theme.
- Choirs, musicals, drama, Gilbert & Sullivan, ballroom dancing, country dance.
- Writing, including poetry groups and a NaNoWriMo writing meetup.

- Book clubs, a film club, board games, Dungeons & Dragons (DnD, D&D).
- Swimming, rowing, wrestling, walking, "a left-wing boxing club supporting community self-defence".
- Knitting, crochet, cosplay, Hackspace, "crafting and sharing craft knowledge".
- Other social/support groups with some connection to relationships or sexuality, such as polyamory, kink, asexuality.
- Unions, campaign groups, mutual aid, anti-fascism. "My radical politics and queer identity are inextricably connected"

Thinking about the non-bi-specific groups they'd chosen to mention, about 3 in 4 agreed with the statement "I feel comfortable to be out to some or all of the people there".<sup>15</sup>

Some people said more about these group(s) in the free-form comment box, or in discussion:

→ You often get groups that are **basically friendly** that are **not necessarily in a related area**, but... Green groups or... Like the **co-op** I currently volunteer at, which is a zero waste hub, largely populated by students and hippies. They're very welcoming.

→ I am part of a DnD group, it is not explicitly queer but **a lot of people in the group are queer** (particularly pan or bi) so it is a bi safe space.

→ Before Covid I used to go to a variety of **writing and poetry groups**. I think they were **generally accepting** of queer people. Most knew I have a female partner and probably thought I was a lesbian. Fewer knew I am bi, and that I also have a male partner. Apart from the difficulty of knowing how to mention bisexuality or extra partners, I think my reticence was more from not wanting to be judged negatively for my polyamory (rather than bisexuality) when neither is my main reason for being there.

→ [At a University tabletop game society] we noticed that queer people felt more safe when there at least some openly queer people - my first event i was wearing a "bisexual battleaxe" pin and **met**

**another bi, and an ace person**, both of whom have become lifelong friends!

→ I like to think that all the groups I attend are safe and welcoming spaces, whether I am out or not, and that **I "bi" them up by my presence**

### 4.3 What's typical at a grass-roots bi group

A typical small grass-roots bi group would have **one "main" organiser**.<sup>16</sup> The group would meet **once a month**<sup>17</sup> in a **pub**, or, if they're lucky, some kind of **community centre**.

Finding a **venue** to meet in is often one of the trickiest parts of organising, depending very much on the landscape in your town.

I'd say I spent about six hours over the course of a few weeks wandering around streets in the city centre looking for a suitable place to meet. I wanted it to be bi friendly, free to use, have disabled access and be an independent venue. It also needed to be quiet enough for us to socialise, so venues with live music or sport were ruled out.

- Hannah Bee's Bisexual Blog<sup>18</sup>

Often, the venue isn't ideal for **access** in some way. For example, it may have a flat entrance, but not really enough space to turn a wheelchair in the loos. Or it may be noisy. The organiser is usually familiar with all the alternatives in the area, and they're either worse or too expensive.

**Publicity** happens primarily **online** without spending money. If the group needs money, e.g. for flyers or a subscription to Meetup.com, it comes either from the **organiser's pocket** or from members.

Hosting skills vary, but it would be common for the organiser to offer to **meet newcomers beforehand** outside the venue, so you don't have to walk in by yourself. Topics are usually random; there might be a bit of **bi-related discussion**, there might just be **ordinary chat**. A good host will encourage some of the people to move around from time to time, so different people get to chat.

There are usually some "**regulars**" and some people who dip in more rarely. Sometimes, people only **come a few times** and that's enough - they've got what they needed at that time.

The typical average group would be pretty **white**, but if at some point enough people of colour start coming regularly, it can stick that way.

If there's a local **Pride march**, it's very likely that group members will meet up and march together, perhaps with some bi and pan flags or even a home-made banner.

Running a **stall at Pride** is less likely. For some groups, the obstacle is either money to pay for it or the difficulty of getting your own insurance. For others, it's having enough volunteers available to look after the stall through the day, especially setting up during the march.

Often the group will do something special on or near **23 September**, to mark International Celebrate Bisexuality Day, often better known as **Bi Visibility Day**.<sup>[19](#)</sup>

Because there are areas across the country *without* groups like this, it wouldn't be unusual for people to **travel 15 or 20 miles** to get to their nearest one, supposing they have access to transport. If you don't know any bi people in the rest of your life, the group can **feel like a vital haven**.

During the covid pandemic, some groups switched to **meeting online**, typically using Zoom software. A few have been able to organise outdoor meetups such as **picnics or walks**. It's possible that some groups have folded over the past year, or gone dormant; there were some listings from where we had no reply.

In counting up "how many hours spent running the group", organisers may feel the hours *at* the meetings don't count - those are the **enjoyable part**. It's organising and publicising that feels like "work". However, **hosting can be difficult** if people come along who need a lot of support.

A group can trundle along like that for several years, or many years. Sometimes if the organiser moves away, it'll fold, though sometimes there's a successful hand-over.

Some groups have gradually **built up membership** through steady **outreach**, and eventually got to the level where they're also doing other things. For

example, the Brum bi group is currently thriving and runs "Bi Camp". By this point, there's usually more than one regular organiser.

At that stage, they may decide it's worth going to the bother of sorting out a **bank account**. There's usually some particular nudge for that to happen, involving bigger money or a more complicated project.

However, even a group with a high number of regular members may not necessarily bother, if the group is going along OK as it is. Typically there's **no constitution, committee or bank account**. That is, the group **isn't a legal entity at all**, only an informal planned gathering of people.

When **bigger bi events** have happened, such as a one-day BiFest or annual BiCon, often the organisers of those have been **branching out** from earlier experience running a bi group like this. Before the Internet made collaboration easier across the country, BiCon organising teams were often a group of friends who had got to know each other at their local bi group.

## 5. Applying, or not applying, for funding

Of 22 bi organisers who responded to our written survey, 4 had at some point applied for funding. In a tick-box question, we asked the other 18 **why they hadn't**.

The most common reasons chosen were as follows, most popular first:

- Expecting not to get the money, hence waste of effort (1 in 2)
- Don't have time/energy
- Would have to set up bank account
- We could use £10, £50, £500, but they want you to apply for thousands
- Group is going OK as it is - not ambitious to expand
- Wouldn't know where to look (1 in 3)
- Wouldn't know how to apply
- Ongoing extra admin to report back to funders

We also offered "Never really thought about it" as an option, but only 3 people ticked that (1 in 6). Most people *had* thought about it.

Here we'll look at some of the things people said about this area.

## 5.1 Time, energy, the admin burden, and getting nothing back

Making applications is **time-consuming**, especially if you haven't already got any of the bits of info lined up from a previous one.

→ Beyond the very basic questions on application forms (that I've seen), every question seems to require **something I can't supply yet**, or require significant research or creation/digging into records.

**Each one** of the application requirements, I realised, was probably at least **an evening of work** outside my day job, **or more**, to understand it enough, and finding/asking people to take on roles. Some might be more like **a week's** worth of that.

→ For one bid, we needed to **prove we could ring-fence funds** to spend to match the bid funds. There's a lot of volunteer time in proving [that], or proving appropriate oversight, or proving accounts are up to date, if you are small enough that you don't have to have an accountant check your accounts.

→ Our volunteers are mostly **disabled people that can give a few hours a week**, myself included.

→ [A lot of organisers are] doing a **9-to-5 job**, and then, you know, running the bi group in a **tiny moment** on the side.

**Bank accounts** add another layer of tedious admin:

→ The **big problem** for a lot of groups in terms of accepting funding is that they **don't have a bank account**.

→ There's **so many steps**. To get funding I'd need a bank account, to get a bank account I'd need another signatory, to get that I'd need a constitution. On paper the org doesn't exist.

Also, bank accounts **cost money to run** (bank charges) and our income is very very low.

→ [Setting up the account] was **hard work**, and involved one of our former Trustees having to visit a branch in person more than once to speak to the right member of staff. Even once the account was

opened, it took **ages to add additional people as signatories** to the account.

→ We still struggle **without online banking** or a **debit card**.

→ At the moment we're in a flux situation with our bank accounts, because I **can't find the second signatory**, and the bank's insisting the second signatory signs off on the fact that I can't find them. So I'm **having a fight with the bank** at the moment.

→ We don't really need a bank account - but if we *did* want one now, I suspect the biggest obstacle might be **finding someone who'd want to be Treasurer**.

The prospect of *future* admin isn't enticing, either:

→ Burden that would be placed on the organisers to **demonstrate value for money** and necessary **governance** arrangements

In our survey, the most common obstacle to getting a bank account was the group not having a constitution or formal structure. Five of the no-bank-account groups also named "No-one wanted to take on the ongoing admin".

An application form might require you to get **multiple quotes**:

→ A thing that is **exhausting** about funding bids for small organisations is getting **exact costings**.

Fundamentally, being a volunteer trustee or event organiser or various other things **does not make you a specialist** in the **costs** for printing, design, training, transport costs, childminding etc.

Needing **3 quotes** means I need to **find and talk to three suppliers** about what they can offer and how much they cost. It's exhausting to small businesses or individuals whose time we would buy in as well.

Three organisations will tell me what they can and can't deliver, and what their costs are - and then we need to **translate** that into **how** we can use their time best, and our reading of community need and willingness to participate in different directions.

They are **such small grants** and they all require the same amount of **time and input**.

Funders often require other **information** which an applicant may not yet have assembled (especially if they haven't done it before).

One of the things I need to do when applying to grants outside (and inside) LGBT+ funds is **prove need**. [Funders] could help supply groups with some key studies, statistics or other proofs of need.

The same goes with proving efficacy or monitoring results. **They could tell us** what has been shown to be effective and easy monitoring techniques. All that *planning* of monitoring is volunteer time that could be spent *actually* monitoring, or building resilience and capacity.

If you're not ready when it comes along, you'll miss out:

→ You need to be **on the ball** to apply for it. Once you've seen a specific fund, you need to already have your bank account and committee and referees, because the **closing date** will be in like a month.

Nevertheless, some groups did invest their volunteers' time in making applications - often unsuccessfully.

→ The fund offered **no feedback at all** and failed to acknowledge receiving the bid, though someone at the company acknowledged it to me privately.

→ Generic 'thanks for your application' email saying we'd been **unsuccessful**, no specific information given.

→ [We were told] that the fund was **oversubscribed**: £90,000 in applications for a £20,000 fund.

→ You put a lot of time into the application, then you **get nothing**.

The result was less enthusiasm for applying again, especially combined with the limited available time and energy.

→ We **don't have time** to spend on what we felt were **fruitless activities**.

## 5.2 Misfitting with what's on offer

There were various ways in which groups and events found themselves **misfitting** with how funding bodies wanted to operate.

A common one was wanting the **wrong amount of money**, when funders want to dole out £5,000 or £50,000.

→ Feels **too formal a process for the small amount needed** - but it would be great to take that burden of donating off attendees.

→ And we don't want it to be "**tiny amount or huge amounts**": "we need 50 quid for leaflets" - although good luck getting leaflets for 50 quid, that's a myth these days, *150* quid for leaflets - or "we want £5,000 for a conference". Actually recognising that **we might need something in between**, and what shape that takes will depend on the project.

→ Big organisations don't have a problem, tiny organisations don't have a problem, but **if you're in the middle**, you're neither. You're neither.

Dealing with middling-to-big amounts of money also means having middling-to-big amounts of time:

→ There were the odd times where we've said "actually, we could probably apply for **big amounts** of money. What would we do with that? We **do not have the ability to look after that money.**"

→ I've got big dreams that I could do if you gave me 20 grand, 50 grand, whatever. I could spend it like that. If I had the time. So it's - the **money** is the big problem, but actually the **time** really kind of sits with that. You need person-power *and* money, and there's **no good having one without the other.**

Funders might not be receptive to new inventions:

→ They need to be more **flexible**. They need to be far less "We **didn't expect you to ask for this**, this is why we are not giving it to you".

They'll go "What?! How will you do that. No". You'll end up not getting funding, because it **doesn't fit the traditional ways** of working.

→ When I ran the first Lit Fest, I got turned down for some funding because they looked at me and said, "I **don't think you'll be able to do that**". I'm like, "Are you kidding? We'll be fine!"

We didn't get that funding, I got it somewhere else, and ran the event mostly by myself with some help from the local library. And it was a success and now the Lit Fest is a big thing.

So that was interesting to have that conversation - "We didn't think you'd be able to pull it off".

Funders sometimes impose geographical constraints:

→ If they're going to be funding the bi community, we can't be "England versus Scotland versus Wales versus NI". We are one community made up of a variety of different groups. We **work together** across the UK.

So "we will fund organisations, but they have to be England based and their work **has to be in England**" - not even "you can partner with somebody in Wales or Scotland as a way round it" - that was not a useful way of doing it.

A classic way to misfit, which affects the whole voluntary sector, is when you need running costs / core costs, whereas funders want to pay for a one-off:

→ Also many places don't fund running costs, they like a **big project to put their name on**.

→ My experience has been that people really like funding projects, but **running costs not so much**.

→ [Talking about the idea of paying people to run BiCon:] The problem you then hit is that there are plenty of grant making trusts who will go "oh yes, we fund new stuff, and we don't fund core costs". **This would be a core cost**. That is a complete pain to find.

Funding applications can be much **less flexible than real life**:

→ We will spend differently depending on how much money we have, and we will change course depending on what we can deliver. What I would love is to be able to say that **XYZ is our final goal but XY or YZ will get us part way there** and we will scrap around for the rest.

In the case of training, which we were trying to fund, we could train core volunteers and work outward from a strong base, or offer bite size training to all [participants]. [Which method would be best would depend on which trainers were doing it.] Literally, **our approach would have changed** if we had different trainers available.

You will **change your advertising** based on which type of training is possible, and because quotes need to be up to date for funding bids, all of this becomes **double work** so you can slot it in quickly when writing an actual bid.

It can feel impossible to get the **initial money** which would help you to get going and then get more.

→ One of the things I've been told is that any organisation's first paid member of staff should be a fundraiser. And... I'm not a fundraiser. And I have no access therefore to get the funding to pay a fundraiser. So that **goes round in a tiny circle**.

→ If we had funding, and were able to pay people, then **more would get done**.

→ It gets a bit **chicken and egg**, doesn't it. It's hard to get over that hump of getting the first stuff done, to get a bit of money.

### 5.3 Not knowing where, not knowing how

This was less often talked about, but it did come up:

→ Not having the **skills** to apply, or the **knowledge of the grants on offer** is a big thing.

→ When I did a brief internship at the Fawcett Society, many, many years ago, I discovered they have a piece of software called "Raiser's Edge". It was a database of grant giving foundations. And so I've looked into that, and it's **£1,000 a year**, or whatever it costs at the moment.

So there are lots and lots of smaller organisations, giving grants out, and we're **never ever gonna find out** that that money's available.

Rather than small groups trying to find out where the money is, it would help if sometimes the people with the money went looking for the good work:

→ If funders watched bi projects, and **reached out to ask how money could help**, and offered what was needed where they saw good work happening (skills, money), that would be the most conducive to supporting them; a bi rep at an LGBT grant-giving body could put in some regular time to **look out for** projects worthy of funding.

## 5.4 Anti-bi prejudice in the sector

Part of the big picture is that the **wider culture of prejudice** against bi people also runs through charities and funding bodies at the management level. The B continues to be erased and neglected in those contexts too.

→ [Organisation] got a **very substantial grant** to do a 'what's available' guide to one city. It says it has "**hundreds** of LGBTQ+ services" listed. **Click on "Bi"** and the **single thing** that appears on the map is labelled "**Gay men's** walk-in clinic".

→ "tum-ti-tum bank LGBT rainbow alliance network **gay and straight together** - who? Who've we forgotten?"

→ LGBT organisations use **statistics** about bi trauma to get funding and donations for primarily LG or LGT social and health projects. They **combine LG&B stats** to prove that LGB people have worse mental health, are more likely to live in poverty, etc. therefore need targeted help - but they **don't mention that the group most affected is the bi community**, and it certainly isn't reflected in the services provided. They only include 'bi' in the name or with other insignificant token gestures.

I worked for a big LGBT charity for many years so I know exactly how much the **needs of the bi community are dismissed**.

LGBT domestic and sexual violence projects don't provide bi specific services, despite bi people experiencing a huge amount more violence of this kind than LG people and becoming socially isolated as a result. In their current form, LGBT social and health services further isolate survivors of violence like me - they're **LGBT in name alone**.

This particular LGBT charity told multiple bi activists that they **only added the B** to their name **because they intended to add the T** and provide trans services: the implication being that if they'd

changed it from LG to LGT, their biphobia would've been too overt from the outside.

Sometimes it's more a kind of casual unawareness or lack of prioritisation than any overt anti-bi feeling, but the result is still that bi people are ignored and un-reached:

→ If you want to actually reach bisexual people in, say, London, **advertise** on the **tube / Metro / Evening Standard**, not Boyz / QX / GT / Diva etc etc.

Don't just advertise events / spaces / projects in the 'gay' / 'lesbian and gay' / 'LGBT' media or scene. We know from research done on gay & bisexual men's health that far fewer **non-gay identified men** look at those vs gay identified men.

The reality is that a very large chunk of people who engage in same-sex behaviour or who have same-sex attractions **do not, and will not, have a LGB+ identity**. In many cases, they do not have ANY sexual identity in the way that virtually all LGBT activists do.

So it is crucial for spaces / projects to be aware of **who it is they are aiming at**: people with bisexual **attraction**, bi+ **identity**, and/or bisexual **behaviour**. There are far fewer of the middle one than the first and last, but all are under the 'bi+ umbrella'.

## 5.5 Dipping into the community's pockets

A very **common solution** to the funding obstacles has been to keep things small and dip into our own pockets.

Sometimes this was a typical **ticketed** event, albeit with no-one getting paid for organising.

→ London BiFest is funded by an ongoing **£1,000 loan** from BiCon Continuity, and I currently have £1,200 in the bank as we made a profit last time. Mostly we **break even** - the majority of the cost is **venue** (as always) and the rest is stationery, snacks, flyers and random bits and pieces. **Nobody gets paid** for anything and **costs** are covered by **entry fees**, which are between zero and £10. It's a very simple model and works well.

Sometimes it's "**pass the hat on the day**" - though this can be financially risky for the organiser.

→ [Event] **relied on a few individuals** making larger donations, because not everyone can donate a lot. But what happens if they can't one year? I have to pay out of my own pocket.

Sometimes it's organisers who can afford to keep their lives simple by paying the group's expenses from their own money. **Two-thirds** of organisers in our survey had resorted to this.

→ The actual subscription costs for the MeetUp group, I **pay for that personally**. I don't charge any fees to attend the group. It's just free attendance, and bring drinks and snacks if you elect to. And so, I self-fund the actual yearly subscription to MeetUp.com.

→ It was the beginning of last year, just before the pandemic, that my partner and I who co-run the group went all over [town], **leafleting** anywhere we thought LGBT people might hang out - cafes, shops, anywhere we thought had the vibe that might attract queer people. [It was] in the hope that people who aren't that Internet focused would find the group, rather than just relying on social media and websites where we're named. That came **out of our own pocket**.

→ I learned of all the barriers, and that my group hadn't even begun to approach being ready to apply [for funding], and that it would be hard work and low chance of success if I did go through all that work (which would probably take months). I decided it was **easier not to try**, and therefore just to **fund stuff myself** and **keep any expenses within reach** of that / maybe the odd (spontaneous) donation from a member that helped.

Sometimes it's classic **crowdfunding**, where the enterprise doesn't go ahead unless it's sufficiently funded beforehand.

More recently (2010+ but really since 2015), **crowdfunding** became a practical thing to do after enough platforms like Kickstarter became mature enough. [Bi book] **Purple Prose's success** demonstrated that in our community.

After "From organisers' own pocket", the next most common survey result was "From the community: donations, subs, crowdfunding, pay what you want events".

Aside from whether relying on the community can work - which to an extent it clearly can - several organisers expressed unease at the **ethical implications**.

→ When you see jobs advertised for fundraisers, some of them are charities wanting people to organise "fun runs" for crowdfunding. I don't think we want [to encourage that type of fundraising], because we will be **feeding off ourselves** and **as a community we are not that well off**.

→ I hate that [crowdfunding] means **it's just us funding ourselves though**, whereas LGBT orgs get money from elsewhere, or rich LGBT organisations/people, or who want to look good for it. We need some of that!

→ I know that if I said on Twitter, to the people in the bi community, that we needed to raise £200 to, you know, have a stall at a Pride, then **people in the bi community would contribute that money**. But I don't want to do that, because... [pause] I'm tired of the bi community funding itself, to shout into a void and no one listen. Because that's what it feels like.

→ We're **quite poor as a community**.

→ I'm sick of people asking me to do stuff for free. So I **don't wanna ask other people to do stuff for free**, for me. And [for bi events] we'd try to keep cost to attend very low, as well. Which is difficult, because you don't make money that way. But it's important to me that we **make events accessible**, and **pay people who are performing**, so yeah.

→ [About the idea of being paid to do things] If it's **other bi people paying for it**, then I feel bad.

## 5.6 The tradition of creatively "making do"

Several of our interviewees and contributors remembered **back towards the roots of the present out-bi movement**, beginning to organise together as bi people in the 1980s and 1990s (rather than invisibly contributing within Gay Liberation spaces).

The habit began then of **creatively "making do"** with little or no money:

→ Bi groups have **always run on shoe-strings**. Partly because [many of the groups] come from a background of being able to use free or low-cost non-alcohol venues. "Anyone can start a bi group, all you've got to do is ask the local community centre, and they will say it's going to cost about 30 quid a year to have your post go through there, and then off you go."

The problem then comes when people say "if only we could", I dunno, "have a float, in a Pride event. Have a book come out, that we self publish." And everyone's first thought is, "Well, we'll have to make the money out from between ourselves." So if it's a float, we have to pay for it. If it's a book, we have to self publish. If it's a T-shirt, then... "Doesn't Gary's brother have a screenprinting machine?" Because we automatically first think, **well how can we do this with what we've already got?**

We automatically **assume** that we're not going to get any funding, and we do that because we've **never had** any funding.

Whereas a larger organisation would say: Right, well, we want to have as a project this year, put a float into Pride. So we're going to assign these people to run the project, and their first task will be to work out the budget.

We think: **How can we do this amongst ourselves?** And amongst ourselves, the thing we *don't* have is money.

→ At the same time as the gay community was discovering that the **pink pound** was a powerful force, that you could get some capitalists on your side and suddenly it would be OK for you to have rainbow flags and gay bars: the bi community was going completely the opposite direction.

I think it's gone too far, in terms of, you know, "rainbow-ising everything", making it so commercial. And at the same time I think we've **missed out**.

A lot of the **LGBT** mainly gay male organisations: when HIV funding became available, they did a big bootstrap process of making themselves "funding ready" and looking good, and getting **sponsorship for Pride**, and generally going very **corporate** - which the bi community did not do. And I can totally understand why the bi

community did not want to go that way, but it means that **they are just streets ahead.**

We've got a bit better now that we've got more older people who work for other charities and have some sense about, you know, "**what's normal in other charities**".

→ The **DIY nature** is a hallmark of the community, but also its downfall, basically.

→ It's one of our **greatest strengths** and our **greatest weaknesses.**

→ [About **1990s** bi organising:] I got a grant from the Health Education Authority, that was dealing with HIV, AIDS, safer sex publicity. They said "we will pay for five articles about safe sex in your newsletter".

[Per article, the payment was] in the "hundred quid or more" line, that was more than a week's worth of your benefits. And because most of us were on benefits - students, or just generally **really hard up**, people thought of this as a lot of money. And of course to the HEA, that was *peanuts*.

[At that time] The idea of people being **paid to do something**, rather than paying for supplies or what have you, was completely **alien to us.**

Even though the tradition of creatively working out "how we can do this anyway" is still present, people in our research discussions were very **ready to talk about paid work.**

→ If you want to run big events, then you **really need to be paying people.** There's a big difference between rocking up for a couple of hours once a month and basically running an organisation day in day out.

→ For me it's a no-brainer: if you're coming to **deliver services** for a demographic that need those services, then it's **reasonable to be paid** to deliver them.

→ I would genuinely **love to have a full-time job** doing **equality** stuff.

There was some wariness about **how** that could be set up well, especially in situations when some people might be paid alongside others who weren't.

→ We were both saying: yes we thought it would be good [to pay people], and something we would aspire to in future. Asking people to give their time voluntarily doesn't sit right with us, and we think people should be paid. But **figuring out the structure how to do that** might be difficult.

→ In my experience the biggest problem comes when **some people are paid and some people are not**, and the criteria for that are either **unclear** or seen as unfair.

And yet, a doubt remained about whether we *could* be paid:

→ I'd be very comfortable doing [paid work for the community] because I feel that I could do enough that I wouldn't feel bad for taking money. The question is who would be paying me. It's **not realistic, but it's a nice idea**.

To wrap up this section, two comments looking to the future:

→ I just want to say that **a lot of the questions you ask, I never even thought about**. Like "what would I do if I had somebody to work for a day" - what? But I think you could see as I was answering more and more, that the idea for what the potential is really grows **the more you actually just ask the questions**. And then you can expand on your idea and see the the potential of it. And I think that's really valuable, that exercise.

→ We've seen **how successful we can be** running **shoestring events**, and shoestring organisations, which have, you know, decades of life, but no money. What could [an organisation] do if it was **funded** from the beginning?

## Case Study: QTIPoC Notts

QTIPoC Notts is for **Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour** (QTIPoC, often pronounced "cutie-pok"), in Nottingham and the surrounding areas. The quotes in this section are from an interview with Tuk, a bi woman who's one of the group's founders.

This group isn't technically "a bi group". However, the group has **bi leadership and bi membership**, and runs in ways very similar to a typical grass-roots bi group. Pretty much everything practical that Tuk describes about running the group, there'll be bi group organisers across the UK nodding along as they read this. It illuminates beautifully **the kind of limitations you bump into as volunteer organisers with very limited time**.

Before an explanation of the group's finances, here's some context for **why and how** it came to exist, and why bi people of colour might choose PoC spaces:

When I first was questioning my sexuality, in Manchester, I did go to some general queer events. But I felt uncomfortable and out of place.

When I found Rainbow Noir, which is the Manchester QTIPoC group, that was such a great space, and there was so much that made it easier, and more comfortable to be at.

My first experiences... I found out about Imaan, which is a Muslim LGBT organisation, and that was actually the first meeting that I wanted to go to. But because I hadn't been in the city centre a lot, I was just following Google Maps on my phone. I was just walking. And I didn't realise I was in the [Manchester] Gay Village, obviously with my hijab on.

And then these three gay white men walking the opposite way started laughing, and saying "I think someone's lost". And I started crying, turned around, went back to the station and went home. So I didn't get to go to that meeting, because of that.

I remember, I knew Chloe, on Facebook, who set up Rainbow Noir. I hadn't met her in person, but I told her what happened.

First thing she did was meet me in the Gay Village and walk with me. So we just walked through all the roads, and she showed me buildings, and... You know, no-one would say anything, because I was walking with *her*. And I felt like "oh, it's OK for me to be here". And then she told me about Rainbow Noir, as well.

When I went to Rainbow Noir, it was... Everybody [had stories] about experience that they'd had that was similar, without me even mentioning mine. And it just felt really affirming to be around people

who get that, and so would never do anything like that - even though not everyone was Muslim.

When Tuk moved to Nottingham, there wasn't yet a QTIPoC group.

So then when I moved to Nottingham... I knew [names a few people]. We knew *QTIPoC*, but there wasn't a *group*.

There were queer bars, or whatever. But a lot of people don't drink - that's another way that some things are inaccessible.

That's why we wanted to set up QTIPoC Notts. Because we wanted somewhere where people of colour have less questions to answer, and prejudices, and challenge.

I remember, our first meeting, we went round the table, it was maybe 10, 12 people? And we asked what people wanted from the group. And everybody but one person said, basically, that they need a space where it's people of colour, because they've experienced racism from queer spaces. [They] had had specific experiences that made them want to make the group.

As with many grass-roots groups, the first money came from the organisers, group members and friends.

In the beginning, when we first set it up... we obviously didn't have any money. I don't think we *needed* money for a while, actually, until organising that event [a fundraiser in a small venue]. Because at that point, we still didn't have any money of our own. So to organise the event, I think I put £100 in? And then we made... £150. [laughter]

And then the next time that we needed money was when we were printing our zines. A lot of people volunteered time, and pitched in together. We got it printed as cheap as we could, but I think it still was, like, £50 at least. So again, we had no money at that point. And then we did sell the zine, at some zine fests in Manchester and Nottingham. But I don't think we made enough money to cover what we'd spent.

I remember that by that point, I still hadn't paid myself back [for the original £100]. And this was maybe two years after the fundraiser. Which I don't mind. But now [in a different job], I can't afford to put money in.

The group doesn't have a bank account.

We wanted to set up a bank account. It was because we wanted to apply for some funding, I can't remember where from.

But then to have a bank account, we had to have a constitution. We talked about it. Nobody had the time to write a constitution.

None of us had experience in writing one. I think somebody offered to send us a constitution for their other group, that we could use as a template.

But we're all volunteers, and we all are very busy. So we just do it the easy way, you know.

Like recently, for example, somebody donated £50, through the North Nottinghamshire branch of Unite Community. They voted down a proposal to affiliate to LGBT Labour, and voted to use the funds to sponsor non-party-political Pride-related organisations. So they gave us an endorsement, and £50 donation. Which, again, went into my bank account.

The group had put time into applying for more substantial funding, but unsuccessfully:

I applied for the Resourcing Racial Justice fund, and they had funds of... I think it was up to £50,000, but I only applied for the second-lowest one, just to cover future events. But we didn't get it.

You either had to make an 8-minute video, or a, I think 4-page document, about what you do, what you want to do, what you needed money for. And all of that. So that was really time-consuming. Two hours, at least, just typing it up.

And we didn't get it. They just said "we've received so many applications" - it was just a stock email.

And then there was the Women's Centre, for one of their funding applications. That one was a [shorter] form, so it was quite easy. Again, we didn't get it.

For in-person meetings pre-covid, the group used a room at a wheelchair-accessible arts centre / cinema, nominally for free - but it wasn't exactly free in reality.

We would have our meetings at Broadway. They did give us a room for free, and it was a quiet room, so that was really great.

But there was pressure to buy food and drink. Not every single person, but at least some members of the group. Me and [another founder member] would always buy food and drink. And then if anyone else wanted to, they could. But we would make sure that we did, so that *somebody* was.

So to be able to book a room, even if we had to pay, then that would take pressure off, 'cause people wouldn't feel like they had to spend money.

Apart from venue hire, there were other things for which money would make a difference, a key one being organiser time.

We wanted to make another zine, last year, during lockdown. We did Zoom socials, and I did a few Zoom open mic nights, and, creative events... But it still felt really disconnected. So I thought a zine would be a nice way to do something *together*, from a distance, and then people would get to *have* it, and see it.

But it was difficult to organise, and... yeah. It didn't happen. None of us get paid, and because we were all so busy with other stuff...

The Manchester and Birmingham QPoC groups have each done more than QTIPoC Notts. Tuk reckoned that a key reason was that those cities each have physical LGBT centres, which Nottingham doesn't. This means those groups each have an easy-to-organise, free or cheap place to meet. Comparing with Birmingham:

They would get that space for free, as well. So they were able to organise big events. Not just meetings, but I remember they did a big creativity day with loads of workshops - a weekend, actually. I only went on one day, though.

But yeah I feel like it's difficult in Nottingham, because it's difficult to find good spaces.

There *are* lovely spaces in Nottingham city centre - but they're more expensive than a grass-roots group would typically be able to hire. For example, there are better rooms at Broadway:

They sometimes do small screenings, or after a film, they'll do a little panel discussion, in those rooms. You just sit around on sofas and that's such a nice environment. [But these rooms are more expensive per evening.] I think it was definitely over £100, maybe over £200.

## Case Study: Leeds Bi Group

Leeds Bi Group is a great example of the difference it can make to have **support** from, and partnerships with, other local organisations: for example, some excellent collaborations with Leeds City Council.

It's also in the relatively unusual category of "grass-roots local groups which got as far as setting up a **bank account**".

Quotes in this section are from Emily, who founded the group in 2014.

The reason I set up Leeds Bi Group was 'cause I was sat there like "Am I seriously the only bisexual person in Leeds? Where are they? Why is there no community for me? I've just realised I'm bi, I wanna do something about it".

For several years, the only bi+ event I could go to was BiCon. And then, one fateful day, I read an article in Bi Community News that was like "Do you want to give something back to your community? If you've got five minutes, you could recommend BiCon, or retweet a tweet. If you've got *this* amount of time you can do *this*. Or you could set up your own bi group".

And I was like "I could set up my own bi group!?! I did not think of this!"

I saw Edinburgh do it, off the back of the BiCon in Edinburgh. And next year [BiCon] was in Leeds, so I was like well, this is a perfect opportunity. I will engage with the community. I'll do a little focus group, as a workshop, and see if people want this.

People did. And it grew from there.

Early "getting started" money came from within the community.

We got something like a hundred pounds from BiCon Continuity, back in the day when we first started up, to pay for things like flyers... I

can't remember if the banner came out of that one. Just real basics for what do you need.

I got that as advice from other bi activists who've been running groups much longer than me, kind of sat down with me and said, "these are the things that will be really handy"... "You've got a hundred pounds; pay for a web site, and some flyers" and these kinds of things.

Their first meeting space was at Yorkshire MESMAC, a charity.<sup>20</sup>

We've been very lucky that right from the get-go we had the support of Yorkshire MESMAC. They're funded as a sexual health organisation for men who have sex with men, but they do a lot of other LGBT+ work. And they have a building in Leeds, and they gave us space for free.

I could have my post delivered there, and just put it "care of Emily at Leeds Bi Group", so I didn't have to put my personal address on everything. I do have my address on my bank account stuff because you kind of have to. But everything else is under MESMAC's name, with a "care of" thing on.

It took a while for the group to get going.

We wanted a space for bi+ people to get together and do some stuff. We didn't know what that looked like, and we tried things out and a lot of it failed. There were quite a few sessions where I was sat there by myself, twiddling my thumbs, going "there's no point in this, should I just pack it all in". And then there were other sessions that worked really well.

And then I realised that I really love stall running, and the engagement work.

That was another piece of advice that someone gave me: if you're not enjoying it, don't do it. Because if you can't make yourself go there, on a bus, for an hour, in the snow, because you *want* to be there, then you're not going to do it.

And then other people have got involved, and said "this is the stuff that we love doing, so let's do a bit more of that".

Links with the council and other organisations built up gradually.

Along the line, we've worked with the likes of Leeds City Council's LGBT+ Community Hub, and Touchstone which are a very LGBT+ inclusive mental health charity in Leeds, and they have both been so supportive.

I think possibly this is just being in the right place at the right time and having some really fantastic people working at Leeds City Council. But I mean some of that has been going along and engaging with the wider LGBT+ community in a way that's meant I've met the right people.

So, like, I could have just run bi group meetups and not done anything else. And that would have been absolutely fine. But it's through engaging with the wider community, that I've then made those connections.

A few months after we'd set up as Leeds bi group, me and two other people went along to an event. Leeds City Council has Community Hubs. It's got an LGBT+ one and then some various other ones. The idea is that it's a link between the community and the council.

I was involved in starting the first IDAHOBIT event in Leeds. It was me, it was some people from the Council, and it was some people from one of the universities.

And from that kind of work, we kind of all came together and said: OK, what's Leeds gonna do for Bi Visibility Day. And it's from them, with them saying "we can give you some money. If you want some money, we can give you some money, and make it happen" that the links were made.

How we got in touch with Touchstone as well is that the council said: well we could give you this much money, but you know what, this person over here is doing amazing work as well, so they would probably give you some money, we can do it jointly. And then that just became a thing that happened every year.

Then I learned about the councillors, and they have an LGBT+ champion; they now have - I can't remember exactly all their titles, but they have a Bi+ Champion and a LBT Women's Champion or something like that. All different ones from within the community. So every time I need money, I just drop them an email and say "can I

have fifty quid for this thing, please!" And explain why it's important. And they... yeah, they crack on and do.

We got a bi flag that flies over one of the council buildings for Bi Vis Day. They have bi banners all over one of their buses, for Pride. The work they've done is specifically engaging with the bi community.

So, yeah, we've been really lucky to have that. They wanted to be involved, and I just kind of tapped into that, and built the relationships up.

Unlike many small groups, they had a **bank account** from early on.

My sister worked at a bank at the time, so I could go to her and go "I don't understand what I'm doing! Help!!" And then "the bank's doing weird things, what do I do?" also.

It's knowing - when you go for this type of bank account - this is what you're asking for. You're not a small business, you're a club or social group. We're set up as a club.

It's things like: go to the bank that is your own personal bank, because if they already know your details, it makes the process smoother. Which has been fine for me, but hard to get other people on [as signatories], because no-one banks at the same banks that I use.

[For a constitution] - we nicked it from another group. With their permission.

Even *with* a bank account, it can still be tricky to navigate making payments.

We weren't joint signatories to begin with. We just had to have two named people on the account. I got a debit card, which was very exciting because it meant I could buy all the stuff straight out.

And then we realised funders wanted us to have joint signatories, [which meant] I lost my debit card.

If you've got two joint signatories, but you need to pay for something that you can't be invoiced for, that is a difficulty that no-one really tells you about. I have to pay for everything, and then charge it back to the bank account. It's annoying, and I'm lucky that I'm in full time employment, and have the ability to pay £200 on my credit card and

then quickly get the money back from our bank account - as long as we've got a treasurer in place.

[Another difficulty is] you have a bank account, with two signatories, and you have a PayPal account. You can't link the two, because PayPal won't link to an account that doesn't have a card, and a joint signatory account won't have a card on.

Like many groups, they'd had difficulty at times over changing the bank signatories.

I was trying to get one [signatory] off our treasury books, and somebody else new on. And they [the bank] messed it up, and it took like nine months to do.

And then the same thing happened again, where that treasurer left suddenly, and we needed someone new on. And trying to get that paperwork done, again, took about six months.

Money came in via various small funds, and from the community via events.

We ran an event where we had [bisexual magician/activist] Prospero Acronym doing Bisexuality is Magic, and we actually got people to pay for those tickets. We knew people would want to go, but we didn't want people booking the tickets and then not going. So sometimes we put a price on just to make sure that people came.

We always kept tickets either free or really cheap. So I think it was something like £5 a ticket, but it was enough to build a little bit of income.

The same with some of our Bi Visibility Day events, especially ones where we were offering food and things like that. If we're catering for you, we want to make sure that you're coming, but we're not going to charge you a fortune. That, over time, got to be a little bit bigger pot of money.

Some of the Leeds City Council councillors, they have what's called "MICE money".<sup>21</sup> I don't know if that's an across-the-board thing, or a Leeds thing? It's basically, if you're a City Councillor in Leeds, you have a little pocket of money, that you can then spend on things supporting the community.

We've done a couple of charity pot parties with Lush. Where we go into one of the Lush stores over the weekend, and they give us all the profits from the charity pots from that store for the weekend.

If we needed something big, like a new banner for marching in Pride, we'd ask somebody for money for it, and generally they would give it.

Events meant hiring venues.

We have also been quite lucky to get good rates at generally queer-friendly venues. It's a balance - If it's a hotel in the queer scene that want to support us and drop their money, more than happy to do that. If it's the local independent queer cafe, or bookshop, or whatever, that is struggling to make ends meet, then we want to make sure we pay you, because we want to support you as a business.

A lot of bi group expenses went on venue hire.

It's been really nice running things virtually, and not having to put money into people's travel costs and venue hire.

The group didn't necessarily want to accept all the funding which was offered to them, because of the implications in terms of ethics and inclusion.

We did consider, even when we were accepting funding, where was that funding coming from. And is it appropriate to the events that we're running.

One of the local-ish councillors was involved with a union, and he said "you could get the union to pay for flyers, for the bi group". But we would have to have that union's logo on the flyers. And I'm not anti-union, but I feel like that would be advertising that specific union. Where do you draw the line? So you've got a union's label on it, maybe you've got a Labour logo on it. But we want it to be inclusive and not just for people who are Labour.

Maybe you've got an alcohol logo on it when you're offering dry spaces. And things like that.

For our Bi Allies guide, we got it from the Consortium. We just had to put a logo within it, that said thank you for the funding, from them. And that feels different to having this union's logo all over it or something like that.

The group began decorating bags and making badges to sell: initially not really to make money, but to create more **visibility** for bi people.

At some point, maybe three years ago, maybe more, we went to BiCon Continuity again and we said we'd like some seed money, to make some of our own merchandise. We want to paint some tote bags with bi flags, and we wanna make some badges, and we wanna sell them. For next to nothing, but we just think that there's not enough bi+ merch out there, so we want to do some stuff.

The bags didn't really take off. It was a lot of time. My cat kept walking over them and getting cat hair all over them. Bags all over the place trying to dry.

But the badges were really cheap and easy. We sold them for 50p, and I had every flag under the sun that could be in any way associated with the bi plus community, including things like trans, queer, I had some polyamorous ones - all sorts of ones. And people loved them and people would come to our stalls, and it was a really great way to engage.

And it got to the point where it was actually somewhat profit-making. So we would get more money selling badges than we spent making them, even with buying a badge maker and everything. [Though I don't love it so much] when it's half eleven at night, the night before the event, and you're starting to get repetitive strain from moving the badge maker!

So, yeah, so that's how we built up.

In getting funding from outside, the amount of **admin** varied a lot.

With the council, I only had to put a well-written email through to someone, explaining why this is something the council should support, and that's been it. It might be because they know me, so I've already got the reputation with them.

With Lush, there was a form to fill in. It was along the lines of, you know, "what are your aims, do you have a website, what are your social media accounts, do you fall within this bracket of income?"

Leeds Pride - we had to fill in quite an extensive form for Leeds Pride. There's the one to *march* in the Pride, which is often quite difficult, and then there's the one for the community grant.

We also went to the LGBT Consortium for some money for the Bi+ Allies Guide that we produced.<sup>22</sup> And they printed it and did a launch event for us, which was very lovely. That was an extensive form to fill in: the biggest for the bi group.

None of the sums of money had been large:

It's all been very small pockets of money: £250 here, £50 there. We've not ever been anywhere near "you have to apply for charity status now", put it that way. We've never had that kind of money. It's been a steady trickle in, and a steady trickle out again.

The biggest we got was for the Bi Allies' Guide, because it was printing and website and other things. Might have been in the region of a grand, give or take.

But other than that it's been small amounts of money. And I think that's probably done us well: we've skirted under all of the "big check" things, and just been at the smaller "oh yeah, I can spend £250 for that".

As well as the *time* filling in the forms, a lot of mental energy went into working out **what best to ask for**.

I was really lucky, that I knew some people who had been doing this stuff for a long time, and could say "This is the stuff they don't teach you when they teach you how to do funding bids, is how to put things in that are relevant but are also helpful outside of the project."

[For the Bi Allies Guide] We said, OK, so we want a physical published copy, but [also] we want to be able to put a copy of this online, and at the moment our website won't let us do that. I wrote the code having learned code in about three months - it does the job at the moment, but we need a better website. So, you know what, we're gonna ask you for funding for two years of our website on Wix, and a new name for it. And we're gonna put that in the funding bid of the Allies Guide, because it will support us getting the Bi Allies Guide out there.

So we got our website and two years' funding, [as part of] the Bi Allies Guide.

And we would go to Leeds Pride and say, we want to put on a brunch. We want to put on a pre-Pride-march brunch, and we're gonna have some face painting, and we're gonna have some balloons that are our decorations, and things like that.

We weren't allowed funding for stuff for the march. So we would put on an event, that was a fun event in itself, but we [also] made everyone's faces up ready for the march.

The pretty decorations could be taken [with us to the march], and suddenly we're at a Pride march with a load of purple balloons, and things like that.

It was truthful, but it also meant we benefitted outside that specific event, or thing we were planning for.

At the time we interviewed Emily, the group was in the process of winding up after 7 years, and a new group was in the process of forming.

We did a lot. As opposed to just having one meetup a month, it then grew into something much bigger, and it took a lot of time. I've been running it for seven years; there have been other volunteers involved with the committee; but everyone's just tired. It's really hard doing it in your own time. And I run a literature festival now, as well, and I just got to a point where I said I can't do all of this at the same time.

I went to my committee and said, "I'm done. I think it's time for me to step down", and nobody wanted to step up into my role. And we discussed it, and we said, you know, do we wait and see if we get anyone on board who would want to take it on?

We had quite a lot of - well, *for us*, quite a lot of money in the bank, and didn't feel comfortable giving that to some people we didn't know. We have a mailing list. Again, we didn't feel we could give that to an unknown person. It would have been different if it had been our own volunteers that were taking it over.

So we discussed it over as a committee, and then we took it to the wider AGM and decided: we're gonna close Leeds bi group, but we will be supportive of a new group coming along. And then they're not

stuck to our constitution, you know, they don't have to do all the extra things we do, they can set it up how they want to.

And three or four volunteers came forward and said they wanted to do something. So they're in the process of organising that. And I'm somewhere in the background being, "if you need any advice you can ask me".

I've learnt a lot from the bi group, to be able to run the literature festival. Funding-wise, and just inclusion-wise.

The group had ended with some money in the bank. They set some aside to keep the web site running a while longer, and the rest was fed back into the community.

We discussed it as a community, and we decided we want to make sure the money stayed in the bi+ community, but that it was spent on the right things. So we split it in two, and half of it went to Bi's of Colour, and the other half went back to BiCon Continuity as a thank you, but ring-fenced for anti-racism work.

Emily had thoughts on **what else the group could have done, with more time and money.**

People need to learn more about us still, 'cause it's still so erased and underrepresented. And I think that's where the work needs to be done. All those people who aren't out. And like, me at 20 not knowing that I was bisexual because I liked guys, so I must be straight.

I work full time, Monday to Friday, and sometimes I've thought maybe if we could get enough funding in, hire me to work one day a week, so I can drop my regular job down to four days a week. Then we could do this amazing work in Leeds, wouldn't that be great.

Working more with the council, to embed stuff within them. The local NHS trust. Potentially schools and things like that, yeah.

I think potentially, more publications, more engagement work. Bigger things like Bi Visibility Day, a wider bi+ presence within pride, and things like that, just making it more embedded into the whole city.

## 6. What money could do

Many of the themes which run through Tuk's and Emily's accounts were reflected too when we asked other bi organisers what they'd do if they had some money. Three very common themes were **outreach**, **access** and **paying people**.

→ To keep ticking over as we are, we don't need money. But it would be good to have some to make the group **more accessible**, e.g. if we ever needed BSL interpretation. If we were to expand, would be good to print some **flyers to put around town**. Bigger picture, if we ever had enough money to **hire someone** to run things, we could **do a lot more**.

### 6.1 Money for outreach

As we talked with different organisers about how money would be useful, **outreach** was an incessantly recurring theme.

Of course, *any* group may want to reach new members, but there are bi-specific factors too. Bi organisers are acutely aware of how **erased into invisibility** we are in the wider world, and how many people **haven't yet found a bi community**. Many of us spent a long time not knowing any other bi people. Many of us took a long time to recognise *ourselves* as bi, because bi people **weren't visible as ordinary real people** in our world, only as stereotypes.

In part because of the cultural invisibility, there are people who'd **never think to look for a bi group** - we have to show them we exist.

In our survey to organisers, we asked "If the group does things other than meeting up, say here briefly what". Many of the responses were related in some way to **educating the wider world**: for example, offering training to other organisations, or responding to government consultations.

How would money help?

Almost everyone who was asked about money mentioned **flyers**.

→ particularly [to reach] **older people** who are more likely to be **digitally excluded**.

→ I would spend it on **flyers** and **MeetUp fees**.

Other physical resources mentioned were posters and booklets.

→ One of the things I've often said we'd like to do with the [Bisexual] Index is get **posters into sixth forms and universities**. With a simple thing along the lines of, you know, "bisexuality isn't complicated, it's just attraction to more than one gender" - "website address".

→ **Getting Bi** [booklet often given out on stalls etc - a "**pocket guide to coming out and staying out as bisexual**"]<sup>23</sup>

Having a **stall at Pride** usually costs money too - if not for the stall itself, sometimes for insurance.

→ **£75–100** larger local Pride stall inc. **insurance** (when Prides happening).

When we asked what a **paid worker** could do to help a group, very often that too came under the heading of **outreach or publicity**:

→ If we did have a one day a week sessional worker, I would want them to do a proper scoping exercise about **how to find older bi people who are not part of the LGBTQ community**. Whether it's worth going into day centres putting out posters trying to reach people - because we know they exist - some people really marginalised and not connected at all.

As an organisation, we know where to find older people. But we've never done this work of specifically reaching out to bisexual people, and we've tended not to go into spaces that were seen as mainstream and heterosexual. Which I think has worked against bi people.

And yes, publicity activities I think really, probably like getting on **social media** and spreading the word that the group exists. If we had the [hypothetical] £100 as well then **flyering**.

→ [If we had paid admin help] We could easily have a **monthly bulletin** - "It's now four months till Bi Visibility Day and already... blah blah blah. In the summer we've got *this*. There's news of a new group *there*." That could be going out to every student union LGBT soc and every signed-up local LGBT network, or Meetup group, in the country.

→ If there was any time left over, I would have them maybe work on some **other social media things**, maybe start up an Instagram or something like that. Post some pictures.

Because many organisers are **either disabled or working a full-time job**, some were **struggling for time** or energy even to keep the group's web site updated:

→ I want help with publicity as well. I've not updated the web page in years. I just **don't have the time**. I'm **mostly reliant on email and Facebook** to run the group at the moment, and I'm conscious that won't capture everyone. The web site is **public-facing**: everyone could find that. So I would want help with that just to keep it up to date and post stuff so it looks active.

→ I stopped paying for the website because nobody was updating them. Maybe I could **pay somebody to update the website**. I do have two Twitter accounts that have never seen any action. Somebody to do that stuff would be good.

Organisers are usually very aware of the **needs of new people** who might visit, and that shows in how we think about spreading the word.

→ When they're new, **the biggest hurdle is coming down the first time**. It's partly that you might not be out. It's also just partly that a lot of people have anxiety about going into new groups at all. Even if it was a craft group or something.

→ People are **nervous** if they haven't seen other people's comments, or been before, and seen how it works. They think maybe it's a sex thing. Or that they're going to be hit on all the time. And so I try and [keep on] **explicitly saying** everywhere "**we're not a hook-up group**, yes people may date, that's not our focus".

I've wanted to do a **YouTube video** for new members - "**this is what it's like**, come and watch an event, just see what the atmosphere is like."

## 6.2 Money for access, money for venues

A *lot* of bi people are **disabled**.<sup>24</sup> Some are **parents** or **carers**. Some are **autistic** or otherwise **neurodivergent**. **Deaf** and **hard-of-hearing** bi people

have been central within BiCon organising.<sup>25</sup> A lot of **trans** people and **nonbinary** people consider themselves "under the bi umbrella". And bi people are disproportionately likely to be living on **low incomes**.

Another factor for all LGBT+ groups is of course **outness**. Some people feel most comfortable in an LGBT centre or known gay-friendly pub, to minimise the risk of bother. But if there are people in your life you can't afford to be out to, those are the *most* scary places to be, in case you're seen there, or seen going in.

All of this makes **access** of various kinds a central issue to bi organising, both in person and online.

→ Thinking of access and **how things are paid for** formally or informally (such as feeling **obliged to buy drinks**) and also **travel costs**, **not being on public transport** [routes], **childcare** etc.

In our survey, when asked about **venues**, every local group ticked either "A pub or other licensed venue, which we get for free", or "Another venue we get for free". A few *also* used paid-for venues at times.

→ My advice for running a group: "**Accessible venue**". But that's **like the Holy Grail**, isn't it.

→ For people with physical disabilities, places that are hard to reach (are they **near public transport**, do they require a lot of **walking**, do you have to go up **stairs** etc), does it require a lot of **standing**, that sort of thing.

Then for neurodivergent people, places that have a loud atmosphere or too much **sensory overload**. This can be very hard to handle for you when you're already in a very **stressful situation of meeting people for the very first time**, when all you want to do is have a good time and meet people like you.

This might be the first time you've left the house or socialised in months. So it's important that the accommodations are right, because disabled people will suffer in silence to keep up with those around them, and to be able to have the same opportunities that they've been looking forward to for who knows how long.

→ We always used one of the - perfectly disabled accessible, **toilets**, **ramp**, **automatic doors**, everything. **Quiet**, **private room**.

We won't have access to that any more [due to the host organisation losing the lease]. It's quite unlikely we will have anything quite as perfect as that in those senses.

→ The **cafe** where I run the coffee meetup, it's completely **wheelchair accessible**. That's really useful. It has **gender neutral toilets** which is also useful.

My venue for the pub is very **inaccessible**, even for me. But we've been there for so long... The one **good** thing about the venue we're in is there's **no background noise**.

I'm trying to find a **ground floor space that will be free**, which is **almost impossible**. Particularly if you can't guarantee numbers.

→ **Few to no commercially run places** to meet that are **explicitly bi inclusive** or mainly bi.

→ We've had people lose things in a bigger place, because it's **not all just us**. Things have gone missing at the end of event. Very rarely.

→ We meet in a pub in [city] that has a long reputation of being **LGBT+ safe space**. So from that point of view it's a good place to meet.

But one thing I didn't realise till I was talking to a wheelchair user, is it's not really wheelchair accessible. I had thought, "well it's got step-free access, so all good".

It's got double doors, which means **someone has to hold the doors open**. It's one of these things that had never occurred to me because unless you use a wheelchair, there's nuances that aren't always apparent. And the **toilets** aren't accessible because they're **not big enough, even though they're step-free**.

I only found that out when I was by chance talking to someone who used a wheelchair last year.

And I thought "well, if one person can't come to that venue, that's one too many, so we need to move". The challenge is *where to move*.

The cheaper venues tend to be **further from the city centre** - less likely to work for people coming by **public transport**.

→ Basically anywhere fully accessible that's in the **middle of town** is like, **more money to hire** than a group can pay out of their own pockets. It's one of the reasons we could do with more money.

The choice of **pubs** or **bars**, or the presence of **alcohol**, were mentioned a few times as access issues. The next three quotes are from our survey of people who go (or don't go) to bi groups:

→ Groups that meet up in bars are **hard for a lot of people**.

→ PLEASE can we have queer spaces that **aren't centered around alcohol** and **aren't loud as hell**?

→ I prefer lgbt events that aren't too big, too flashy, so like **lates at museums, film festivals** etc. Not everyone likes to drink/dance

→ It's normally okay [in the pub], but occasionally we get this big group of football lads who come after a game. They make so much **noise**. It's really disruptive when you're trying to have a **quiet social**.

Here an organiser researching venues (this one unchosen) illustrates the classic scenario of "**sort of accessible... but not really**".

→ OK, so there is **technically** wheelchair access, but it's the **freight lift**. And you would have to go to the front door -

'Cause my partner uses a wheelchair. Any time we would arrive for an event, we would go to the lift area, which is at the **back of the building**, and **wait outside**. And then I would have to go to the front entrance, go inside, probably go up the stairs to find someone, tell them that someone's waiting.

It was a **very fussy lift**, and you had to shut the **two sets of doors**, difficult to use. So it would be better to have a staff member there, but then that would... You know, there was one time when we were **waiting** at least **20 minutes**. So it's not *really* accessible.

And also their bathroom... **they say it's accessible**, but actually you can't turn your wheelchair in it.

Although bi organisers are extremely good at scoping out the best compromise of a free/cheap venue, there's no doubt that money would make a difference:

→ Our local Friends' Meeting House, that's absolutely gorgeous. But their **rates are beyond the group's pocket**, normally. We have been there occasionally.

I think this does loop back to the, you know, "we all expect to be skint, all the time, so £3,000 seems like a lot of money". And it actually isn't. If you're hiring an **accessible venue once a month**, that's gone in a few years.

→ In **London**, a **hundred pounds "doesn't touch the sides"**, does it.

→ They would have had to pay a **thousand pounds to have a Changing Places toilet**, to hire [for a day], outside. Because the venue didn't have one.

Several groups were able to use a venue via their **connection with another organisation**.

→ Bi The Way is a group run by Opening Doors London.<sup>26</sup>

→ Bi and Beyond get their **room for free** from LGBT Health, for instance.<sup>27</sup> And then LGBT health report to their funders to say "we are supporting the bi community in this way".

Being connected with a charity can also get you cheaper rates sometimes:

→ We could do with at least one other UK-wide bi charity who could act as an umbrella organisation, so they could say, "we are paying for this group's meeting at this hall, and therefore they should get the **charity rate**".

What about **online spaces**?

As the covid pandemic pushed events online, new skills and resources were needed:

→ At the beginning of the pandemic, I **wasn't really sure how to transition** to doing virtual games nights. It just didn't feel the same. [We needed] virtual games that you could play together online as a group. [And] I'm very good at holding the space in person but virtually it was a bit different.

→ Funding for **closed captioning** to make the Zooms more accessible.

The virtual meetups had *advantages* too, for **connecting people** who wouldn't have met at the in-person groups:

→ [Since covid] I have a few **international** attendees to my virtual meets.

→ Online meets have been great for me. Because I **haven't been able to get out**. I don't need to worry about somebody not being there to meet people.

This comment from a bi disabled poet shows several aspects of the shift to online/international, while questioning whether it'll last:

→ A lot of **activities** have **moved online** during the pandemic, and a thriving international poetry scene of readings, open mics and festivals has developed, mostly on Zoom, but also using Facebook Live, YouTube and other platforms.

This has really **opened things up for disabled people like me**, who often have **difficulty travelling** and accessing live events locally - although there are other concerns like **access to technology**, and **signers / subtitles / transcripts**, which all require extra effort, resources and willingness to provide.

The big question is **how much of this will continue**. Some organisers are making strong commitments to developing hybrid events, or continuing online events alongside live events. There's acknowledgement of the value of the **connections and friendships we've made** and the benefits of being able to hear someone read poetry from another continent, or who wouldn't be reading at a live event.

We'll have to see what happens.

Some access is about **timing** rather than place:

→ Groups that meet up at the **same time every week/month** will always exclude people with specific **working patterns**.

As so many bi people are disabled and/or on low incomes, **financial access** is a well-known issue. A lot of community-run events operate on a **sliding scale**.

London BiFest gives **free entry to people of colour**. BiCon has the "**Helping Hand fund**".<sup>28</sup>

Organisers also had other ideas:

→ We'd really like to be able to fund for **low income** people to come to events in a **shame free** way. Maybe having a **gift card** with funds on it that people who can't afford a meal (which we buy in return for the space) could buy food on.

→ Funding for some **data**, for people who don't have unlimited data plans.

→ **Travel** costs. **Free tickets** for POC and those in extraordinary circumstances.

As with outreach, access came up when people thought about the possibilities from having a **paid worker**:

→ a lot of our spare funds we have now are spent on **inclusion**, so it would be great to **continue that with someone in charge**.

## 6.3 Money for training

UK bi networks **already hold an enormous amount of skill and experience** - which doesn't necessarily get transmitted around efficiently, partly because the people holding it are limited by energy or time.

Here's Marcus Morgan, director of the Bisexual Index:<sup>29</sup>

What I would love to be able to do is **more mentoring, more training, and more teaching**, of the things that I've - I've not been *taught*, but I've come to *learn*, over 30 years. Because I really wish people had been able to say to me at the beginning, "oh by the way, here's a shortcut", or "by the way, here's three things which if you do them now, will save you a lot of time later"

There are things that I've learned: not just about bisexuality, but about how to be an activist: how to approach organisations when you need to talk to them, and how to teach people about bisexuality... that I **really want to try and pass on**, to future activists.

It would be great if we had activist jobs that did that.

It's a problem familiar to self-employed people who need to earn a living:

When we talk about how much *free time* we have, we need to understand, we're balancing that against *paid time*. I have this much *free time*. If you're going to *pay* me to do something, I'll do it in a different *piece* of time. I could use some of that *work time*, more productively, on bi stuff!

What we need is someone to say: We'd like to do better on bisexuality. And to do this, we don't want *us* to be better, we want our *sector* to be better.

But more, I want someone to say: We are an organisation that *mentors and trains LGBT people* to support other LGBT people; we'd like to sponsor an event like that, but for bi. I want activists mentoring activists. And I want it to be funded, and I want some of the funding to **pay people to be there**.

In one of our research discussions for **organisers**, we asked about situations where they **wished they could have asked for advice**.

Several people mentioned **emotional** skills, self-care and knowing where to draw **boundaries**, when difficult situations come up while you're in a **hosting** role.

→ When I was **hosting on my own**... There have been situations where people have come who have brought a lot of stress about their situations to a meeting and I've been on my own.

It's **not a counselling group**. A situation like that, when people have come to a meeting and been in a state of **distress**, or it's had a very big impact on the meetings - sometimes just knowing **how to hold that**, and then to process it for myself afterwards, has been difficult.

You can sometimes be very exposed to the huge level of **stress and damage** that there is in the community. As well as all the lovely stuff.

→ Anything that is **risky legally**, anything that is **risky emotionally** - particularly around unpaid emotional labour and **safeguarding**.

We have had a couple of issues... interpersonally, where we tried our best, but you know the lessons you learn don't... Each situation is unique.

[One situation was] When you've got someone that is **harassing people** inside the group or outside the group.

I think there is a list of people that can't attend. Trying to manage that, and balance it to **confidentiality** - because somebody complained about confidentiality. We brought in an external organisation who helped, and it was fine.

Most recent one [included] a suggestion that our activism has to be perfect despite being volunteers, and we are somehow responsible for rehabilitating people. No, you **can't expect that of volunteers**.

→ The sticky emotional moments. It's really difficult sometimes to separate yourself from the stories you hear, and the **people in the community that are struggling, and you can't always help**. So for us, if we had finance or time to get some training or support for volunteers, that would be amazing.

And then of course there's all the potential learning around **funding**, charities, constitutions, bank accounts and so on.

→ It's not really about filling in a form. It's about **familiarity with a structure** of how things work and what things cost.

→ People don't think about... I already have to pay for internet at home, because my job is home-based at the moment. Great! I can pay for internet.

But this wouldn't be free if I didn't have a good internet package. This [i.e. being on Zoom for the discussion] would actually cost me **data and money**.

It's not just about people being **aware** of factors like that and how much they cost.

It's equally thinking about the other end of that: **how far it can go** to give someone ten pounds towards their internet costs to participate. **How much difference to somebody's life that can make**.

→ One of the things that has often occurred to me is that there is a big gap between **different kinds of money**, so, there is the sort of 100 quid for flyers level, there's the hundreds or couple of thousand quid for venues level... then there is *paying people* [i.e. paid staff].

Like we get at Continuity [the charity], people say "you've got so much money" - and what we've got is enough to pay deposits on venues for 2 years and a bit. We don't have enough money to *pay* anybody.

[Or] you get people saying "oh you should definitely have BSL interpreters for your entire event", who have no idea how much that actually is - which is lots.

→ Concepts that need to be covered. One is **full cost recovery**: what are your actual costs, and how they get covered. The other point is **results based accountability**. What do we mean by outcomes?

We're all making a difference to communities, we're *making* outcomes. But only people who are working in the sector in our day jobs would be **able to write down "these are the outcomes"**.

We know that people in the community can understand that and do that well - they just have never been taught.

Training has to **match** the stage of the problems which the group and organiser are dealing with:

→ The training I did was too far advanced [for where the group was]. Choice of charity/CIC etc is irrelevant when you don't have a constitution or bank account. Online Consortium resources quickly get into **legalese** and complexity - it was **targeted at groups wanting to become an incorporated charity** in the longer term. That feels like **forever away**, if ever. I'd much rather have a version which our members can read and understand too, and not require a solicitor to edit without accidentally breaking.

→ I sit in a fundraising workshop, and I watch my attention level just tick down, every time they say things like "**well, what you need to do is** take along your founding articles and constitution, and your list of trustees, and..."

The **assumption that those steps are easy**... grates on me.

→ I've been on so many different training days, and I feel like whenever it's like "ooh, learn how to do funding applications" it's the same stuff. I'm **not actually learning anything new**. It's like oh, "double check", "read the guidance twice". I already read the

guidance, like that's just not an issue I'm having! "Make sure you state this clearly".

And it's not really getting into the nitty-gritty of what I find difficult, but I **don't know what to say is what I find difficult** until I have the form in front of me going "I don't know what you want from this answer!"

But the money training must be targeted for the people who actually do need and want it:

→ Obviously [money training] is good and it should be available, but I also **worry** that it's a bit like "now **every bi group runner has to** learn to fundraise, and then fundraise" - and they don't have **time**, which is another part of the problem.

Another organiser echoed Marcus's point about **transmitting** the **wealth of skills we already have**:

→ Giving development support to organisations and groups: we can't just arrange all of that ourselves to pass on our knowledge, because **we are too busy doing the work**. But if we had **support** to do that, that could go a long way.

## 6.4 Money for running events

Annual gathering **BiCon** in particular has been an enormous time commitment for the main organisers, provoking discussion about both the **ethics** and the **practicalities** of paying people.

→ I do think people that run things like BiCon should get some sort of money, 'cause it is an **awful lot of time** to take out of schedules to actually run a BiCon. Or even a BiFest.

→ Not relying on **unpaid labour** in general would be good.

→ I don't think you can pay someone less than [national living wage]. I don't think that would be **ethical**. At that point, you might as well be a volunteer.

→ [From a BiCon organiser] When I **added up the hours** it involved, it got **scary**. You can't pay [national living wage] if you are spending 1,000 hours, without finding £9,000 from somewhere.

→ A lot of people in the bi activism community have the **luxury to volunteer** because they have **well paying jobs** in the first place, which is not true for all of us.

→ BiCon being our main big gathering, the fact that it's been done by **volunteers** is quite **remarkable**. But I think **the future is paying someone**.

Most organisers didn't raise the idea of being paid to run their **regular meetups**. But some did want to be able to call on **deputy hosts** for when they have to miss a session.

→ Some support would be nice, the odd time I can't manage a social, or I barely have the energy have to drag myself, because there's **no one else that can run them** in my absence.

It's a tough spot where's there no immediate **way between having lots of support** and just having a **little bit** of support. Even just an engaged group member that has some availability would be nice sometimes.

→ [From a disabled organiser] Somebody to **turn up if I can't turn up**. Virtual meetings have been good for me, because if I've been too ill to get out, I can still do virtual.

We heard of an example where a local LGBT organisation, which lets the group have a room for free, had also given support with facilitation:

→ There was a Bi and Beyond meeting that was **facilitated by paid workers** [from LGBT Health]<sup>27</sup> It helped because there was a shortage of people [available to host] at that point.

For small groups, a paid worker "on loan" for a few hours seems more feasible than hiring anyone directly.

→ When you hire somebody, you don't just need *money*. You also need a **structure** within which they're going to be supervised, or looked after, and get their wages paid and all that kind of stuff.

But, yeah, if you've already got that lined up and **it's just extra hours** [for a person who's employed in a related organisation], then it's simpler, isn't it.

There were other ways that a co-organiser (paid or unpaid) would be able to help:

→ I think **in some ways time would be more useful to my group than money**. I would be thrilled if somebody turned up and said [they would help]. I would first of all suggest that they co-host the group, which is what we're looking for at the moment. [If they had more time after that] **Finding speakers, activities**, doing all the **research** background stuff that I've been doing.

## 6.5 Money for resources

A great many resources (like literature and web sites) would come under the heading of "outreach". But there can also be practical things needed to run the actual events.

One recurring theme was **technology**.

→ Upgrade to **Meetup Pro** subscription, to integrate with other services better.

→ [For educational presentations] **Hiring sound equipment**. So we're not just doing a room with people and having to talk over them. Or, you know, we want to do this in a room, and the one we've found doesn't have a projector. OK, well, let's hire a projector.

**Technical expertise** overlaps with technical resources:

→ Find an affordable way to **integrate virtual and real life meets**

→ automate/link access to Discord via Meetup

→ [When booking a venue for an event] You'll want to know, like, "**what equipment** do you have, or what might we need".

I knew we wanted to have performances. But I didn't know about music, or sounds, or whatever. And then that person wouldn't know, and they'd give me the email of someone else [from the venue]... it was very stressful.

As some resources wouldn't be linked directly to one specific event, a couple of people expressed concern about **overlap with personal use**.

→ When it comes to **buying equipment and tech...** That's when personal guilt creeps over people, myself included. I think to myself, well, if I had a little Chromebook, or something, that could just run a prepackaged PowerPoint file [to do educational presentations]. "Ooh, but then maybe I'd take it on holiday with me".

→ The cost of Zoom, 'cause I'm paying that out of pocket. But if I then used that **Zoom account** for **non-bi-group-related things**, do I end up with issues there around governance? - you know, like using a company car for personal use. I would have to look into that. It would be a concern I would have.

Tech wasn't the only event-related expense. A couple of people mentioned that they were currently paying for **food** for their meetups:

→ The thing that I was paying **out of pocket** for was **refreshments**. I could easily do a hundred pounds on crisps in a year.

→ [If we had more money:] Provide **food and drink** so that people wouldn't have to bring their own.

## 7. Ways to get money to groups, in practice

Two case studies follow, which we think are useful **practical precedents** for the distribution of money to grass-roots groups.

The first is from 2020-2021: the **Equality Network's** distribution of covid-related funds from the Scottish Government.

The second is the **Bisexuals Action for Sexual Health** Peer Education Project (BASH PEP), a community-led enterprise from the 1990s, which had funding from Red Hot AIDS Charitable Trust.

### Case Study: Equality Network Covid Funds

Equality Network is a charity "working for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) equality and human rights in Scotland". In 2020, as part of the Scottish Government's covid emergency money, they got £30,000 for LGBTI community support, which had to be spent by the end of November 2020. Subsequently, they got another £23,500 to be spent by the end of June 2021.<sup>30</sup> In all, 64 groups received money.

Here, we describe the ins and outs of how the process worked, based on an interview with Scott Cuthbertson, Development Manager at the Equality Network, who took the lead on organising it.

For the groups, the **application process** was a fairly informal meeting, usually with Scott.

We had the same chat with everyone. It was usually a Zoom meeting. It would usually last between 20 minutes and half an hour. And really it was just a chat about the money, the process, how they could get the money quickly, what they wanted to do with it, and how they bookmarked it, i.e. checked the receipts and how they forwarded them on to us.

I just wanted to make sure that we had a handle on it - that they knew who we were if they had any issues, and that we could discuss what they needed the money for.

In most cases, Scott already knew the group. If not, a colleague did, or at least they were visible online.

We are a small sector in Scotland - there's probably about 80, 90 groups. Even if I haven't worked with all of the groups, I know who they are. Or I know someone.

I think, had there been a group I couldn't find, I would have maybe asked them for a wee bit more detail, a few questions. "I've not heard of you, can you talk more about your group, or where you work, how you work... Is it just you, or is it... you know, who's involved". But that never happened.

There were a few constraints on the funding: it had to benefit LGBT people, it had to be spent within a short time, and it couldn't fund "duplication".

The government told us, all the money has to be spent by this date. And we had to make sure that groups also got their money out by that date, as well.

They didn't want to fund duplication. We didn't want a group that was doing something to find that the other local group had got some money and they're now doing what *they* do.

To be honest that never happened. There were a few occasions of "oh, there is another group doing this kind of work, but ours is different in this way" - and that's fine.

Most groups applying for the money were LGBT groups, but a few were other kinds, who could show the benefit they would provide to LGBT people.

I need to understand, "if I give you this money, how do LGBTI people benefit from it". If you're not an LGBTI group, and you want to do something, what is it you're doing that is for your LGBTI members, or an LGBTI aspect - what is it that's LGBTI here.

In terms of admin from the groups' end, the key thing was to provide **receipts**.

I never said to groups "you must fill out a report form", but what I did need was a receipt. So if you asked to purchase something, if you were paying for artists for your event, if you were paying for staff time to deliver a specific element of the project you're delivering around covid, then... You had to provide your receipt.

In terms of admin from the Equality Network end, Scott created a **form** to track the process with each group.

It explains who the groups are, what the contact is, what challenges they face during covid, and where the money is going. Quite simple - I could fill it out in minutes. And I fill that out for the group.

So I've got that there. And if the group ever contacts me again, or we're chasing them for receipts, then I can just go straight into those files, I can see what they wanted the money for. Especially if they want more money - I can just say "let's have a look at your form", and I can remember what they've done.

That form was then a way for which our admin person then had a trace on where the money had gone, could set up the payments - 'cause it included their bank details and stuff like that.

We have a procedure where one of our board members or the director has to approve it from the bank account. And so they've got immediately on the form, they can see what that money is, they can set the approval button, and the money goes out, very quickly.

And so [the form] helped dealt with some of the internal processes, it helped deal with external processes, and... Come the 30th of this month, when I have to report on that grant, I can say, well, here's all the groups that have got money, here's all the various different things they've been doing.

Groups varied enormously in **how much money** they asked for.

Some groups wanted fifty pounds, some groups wanted a thousand pounds, some groups got a little bit more, depending on their need, and what they're trying to achieve.

Working with dozens of groups, one might expect that perhaps the odd situation might not go perfectly, but in fact all the receipts did come back.

I confess that some groups needed a wee bit more chasing than others.

The government wanted to know **how many people had been reached**, so groups were asked to estimate that.

The only thing we said to groups to report on was how many people they felt they had reached. And that was only because that's what the government asked us.

So when they send in their receipts, they usually send us a number. I don't ask them to justify it. Obviously I say to them try and be realistic. Just want to know how many people you think you've reached. And then I'll tally them all up.

The **report back** to the government also needed to include which groups had had the money, and in general terms, what for.

I have to supply a list of the groups that have got money, and I also have to give a narrative of the different things that people were asking for. So not a list of what every single group did, but maybe thematically, there were groups that did some of *this*, *this* was a big thing *here*... Like Zoom Pro. I think there was a fair amount of money spent on Zoom Pro. Understandably.

And the funder just stipulates to us, it does say: if we require to audit, then please have a copy of the receipts. But, you know, it keeps us good for our own accounts as well, that we've got traceability.

An important challenge to meet was **the logistics of funding groups who'd never received funding before.**

Off the top of my head, I'd say there was probably about a fifth of groups that didn't have a group bank account, and we paid them to personal accounts.

The key element for me there was: we required a receipt. And it didn't matter to me whether that receipt was from your own bank account or from a group bank account.

Some volunteers couldn't risk receiving any group money into their own account, in case it caused problems with their benefits.

There's a fair proportion of LGBTQI people who are on benefits, and who were worried that perhaps a large payment into their bank account would impact their benefits, and maybe - you know, the DWP coming in and doing an investigation or whatever, causing problems for them.

So, yeah, it was sometimes a case of asking, well do you have a partner, or a parent who has a bank account, or is there someone that you know that could potentially act as a bank account for this money. We need the receipt, and... That's how we got round it.

For four of the groups, the only way they could find was for the group volunteers not to touch the money at all:

There was a group - We couldn't get round this issue around the bank account. They didn't know anyone in their group that wasn't on Universal Credit, or had a bank account that they could access.

And so we bought [the resources the group needed], and paid for them. So we had all the receipts. And then we sent [the resources] to them. And that got round that issue.

We very much had to explore different ways of getting money out to people. And I think just given the pandemic we were happy to do that.

Working in this flexible way of course meant a **higher burden of admin at the funding end** compared to "normal times".

I do wonder if in normal times, people would want to take on that extra responsibility. For six months, I've been working on this night and day. It became days of 12 hours in meetings, chatting to people, meeting people, arranging the Zoom meetings. Getting their money out, liaising with finance to make sure that it had all happened.

Some groups would come back to us and say "oh, we don't want this any more, could we have this instead", or "The pandemic's gone on longer than we thought, can we get some more money." "Let's have a chat about it, what do you need, how can we help?"

At the same time, the **reduced admin burden at the groups' end** meant that many groups across Scotland received funding for the first time ever, making it an enormous **success** by that measure.

There were lots of groups [who said] "This is our first batch of funding".

They've had their first taste of funding, they've done some amazing things with that, they've acted with ingenuity, and engagement in the local communities - it has been a pleasure to work with them.

So they want more of a taste of that. And it's sad to have to explain to them that funding is never always like that. It's never as easy as that. It's never as straightforward as that.

I am proud of how it worked, for sure. As a funding model going forward, I'd love for the funders to adopt it. I wish there was a pot of money I could just get my hands on and do that again, but... I don't know that that's going to happen.

## **Case Study: Bisexuals Action for Sexual Health**

Bisexuals Action for Sexual Health (BASH) organised a **Peer Education Project** in 1995-1996.

As far as we know, this was the first time anyone had been employed in the UK specifically to support a bi community project: a **half-time Project Worker**, funded for a year.

The project included a plan to give **grants of up to £100** to grass-roots bi groups where a group member had taken part. 15 of the 21 groups did claim.

Quotes in this section come from the **end-of-project report**: *Addressing the Need, Unravelling the Myths. A Report on Peer Education in the Bisexual Community*.

BASH had already existed for several years before this project:

Bisexuals' Action on Sexual Health (BASH), was formed after the annual bisexual conference in 1991, with funding from the Health Education Authority (HEA). Its members have included bisexual people with experience of bisexual community activism and some key figures in the HIV sector.

During that time, the idea of bi community peer education had already been discussed. When there was the chance of money to do it, the group was ready to apply:

... an ad from the Red Hot AIDS Charitable Trust (RHA) offering to fund innovative projects ... a broad outline of the PEP was drawn up, based around the maximum grant of £20,000.

The total grant awarded was £19,500.

The Peer Education Project would bring bi organisers together from across the country, to learn and then to pass on their knowledge.

A paid worker would run a series of training events for the organisers of the local bisexual groups around the country, who would in turn run safer sex and other HIV prevention workshops for their groups.

As part of the project, each group could claim up to £100.

£100 would be available to each group who sent someone to the training, partly as an incentive to do so, partly to help them reach their local bisexually behaving population, eg through publicity and advertising, and partly to give them some experience in applying for funding themselves. The trainees' travel and accommodation costs would also be paid.

There was careful discussion over the setup.

The worker would be based in an established organisation, but one local to wherever the successful applicant turned out to come from.

... it would be much harder to 'sell' the PEP to local groups if the worker were not bisexual, despite the community's habit of not asking about people's sexual identity.

In a network where lots of people know each other, it's especially important to be careful about fairness in recruitment.

... because of the knowledge of the bisexual community required, members of the interview panel would know the majority of the applicants. So to avoid any potential bias, the recruitment process was based on equal opportunities principles, with applicants being judged solely on their ability to match the person specification

Application forms were split in two on arrival, concealing applicants' names, education and employment histories from the short-listers.

Interviews were carried out in May 1995, where questions were asked to ascertain knowledge of the bisexual community; presentation skills; the ability to assess needs and the appropriateness of current HIV information to bisexual people; awareness of confidentiality and diversity issues; and the ability to facilitate, train, motivate and support people.

From the interview process, there was a clear winner "on points": Kath Arrowsmith.

The next step was to establish a Newcastle base, from where Kath would work.

A manager for the project was identified at Body Positive North East Ltd. (BPNE)

As BPNE is not primarily focused on health promotion, links were set up with MESMAC Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Promotion and the Northern HIV Trainer's Forum.

Advertising to the bi groups was slower in those days, when most people didn't yet have email. Methods included letters directly to groups, articles in Bifrost magazine, and informal networking at a bi women's weekend. BiCon happened in early September that year; that was an opportunity both to gather input and to share the news, including recruiting more peer educators.

The centrepiece **training weekend** took place a couple of months later:

The national training and support weekend took place on 4th and 5th November 1995 at the HIV Project in London.

30 people (14 male and 16 female), representing twenty-one bisexual community groups and networks from Dundee to Exeter, attended the weekend. All workshops were co-facilitated by bisexually identified men and women.

Workshop topics included *HIV transmission and safer sex, Groupwork Skills, Peer Education, Needs of Bisexuals Living with AIDS, Negotiating Safer Sex, and Community Development.*

Generally people were positive about the weekend ... The weekend as a whole rated higher than any single workshop.

The next phase was for the peer educators to do their workshop sessions to peers.

Ten groups organised and facilitated safer sex workshops as part of the project. Most peer educators also found themselves in informal safer sex discussions as a result of being involved in the project.

The report mentions briefly (as one reason why not all groups delivered a formal workshop session) that two new groups were catalysed somehow by the project:

Four groups have been in the process of setting up during the project (two as a result of the project)

In the February, there were three regional meetings as follow-ups: one each in Newcastle, Manchester and London.

Regional meetings were attended by 21 (9 male and 12 female) educators and were held on 11th, 17th and 24th February 1996.

If a group wanted to claim the £100 grant, they had to fill in a very brief application form, to say what they would do with the money. No-one was turned down.

15 of the 21 bisexual community groups and networks involved in the project, claimed the project grant of up to £100. In total £1457.60 was claimed.

The groups used the money in different ways:

Most peer educators who claimed money have used it to advertise, and buy resources for, their safer sex workshops and group. Some used it to fund specific events or projects. For example, the London Bisexual Group used it to advertise their 15th anniversary celebrations, Nottingham Bisexual Group for line rental for their new phone line ... The representative of the London-based Bisexual Helpline used the project grant to attend the National Lesbian and Gay Phonenumber Conference, in order to acquire more skills for running the Bisexual Helpline, and to raise the issue of bisexuality to other phonenumber workers.

The evaluation of the project named small groups in particular.

It has probably had more impact on smaller groups than those that are more established, such as the Edinburgh and London bisexual groups who have carried out more peer education previous to the project and who have more funds.

## **7.1 Possible structure: Participation as a natural measure of commitment**

What can we learn from those two case studies?

An elegant aspect of the BASH PEP design was the way the **participation** of volunteers formed a **natural measure of commitment**. "If you're committed enough to give up a weekend to do the training, then we trust that you'll do good things with the hundred pounds."

This gives an opportunity to **reduce the admin burden** around writing and assessing application forms. The setup itself was attractive to people already invested in the good of their communities, a strong predictor of the money being spent well.

This structure also meant that there was **no significant amount of gambling with time**. Unlike with an application form which might go nowhere, the time investment from volunteers almost all happened *after* they'd been accepted into the project. They didn't have to apply for the money till part way through, and by then they knew they were likely to get it.

The BASH PEP structure wouldn't have worked if the **training** on offer hadn't been considered **valuable in its own right** by group members. The weekend of training didn't feel like a tedious hoop to jump through just to get the

money; the people who stepped up for it *wanted* to learn about safer sex and workshop running, for themselves and to help them support their friends and communities.

This model could be adapted for other situations.

For example, a year's funding for *hire of an accessible venue* could be unlocked by a certain level of *participation in training to facilitate a group*. Potentially a group could keep on unlocking further years of venue funding as and when new volunteers gained co-facilitation skills. This would encourage the group to become more sustainable, through lessening its reliance on only one or two key volunteers.

## 7.2 Possible structure: Informal interviews as applications

It's clear that for the Equality Network community support funding, informal interviews worked well as a method of taking applications. This possibility came up in other discussions too.

One advantage mentioned was the **shorter time** compared to filling in a form.

→ You don't have to type up, and it's less - Like, you can just set half an hour.

But the main advantage was how much less daunting and more accessible it would be in terms of **understanding what's been asked**.

→ With the application [form], you feel like you've got to type it perfectly, and you're **not really sure what they're asking**, and... it's just difficult? It's disconnected.

Obviously, **because you're talking, it's more accessible** in that way. Somebody's asking you questions, rather than a vague prompt, or statement, that you then have to try and figure out what's relevant, and what's gonna get you the funding.

→ You're **talking to a person** instead of **talking to a blank form**.

→ Application process - no bi groups in the UK have professional bid writers. Consortium could provide support in completing applications and also **make elements face to face** rather than in written question form. Generally a more **simple and straightforward**

**process** for bidding would ensure a broader range of bi groups would be able to apply. This is also an **accessibility** issue.

→ In a form, it says a question, and you're like "**but what d'you need to know?**" If the person's right there, you can go "**how d'you mean?**"

Even if you did still have to fill in a form, it would help to have someone from the funding end to talk you through it:

→ So I think maybe some kind of consultation process, that's probably more work than they'd be able to put in, but just being able to say **if you're struggling with this form, contact us on here** and we will sit and go through with you. Like an impartial person or something like that, it's just what you need.

### **7.3 Possible structure: Catalogue method**

A challenge well met by the Equality Network setup was **how to get resources to groups who aren't currently equipped to manage money**. But in that example, there was a question mark over the sustainability of the admin burden at the funding end, due in part to the complexity of so many different situations and requests.

The **resources** wanted by a small bi group often fall into **predictable patterns**. For example, a common wish is for paper flyers with the group's details, ideally with meeting dates for the year ahead.

A volunteer panel could agree a **catalogue of resources which any bi organiser could request**, such as flyer design and printing, books to lend to group members, or flags for event participation.

A worker based within an existing organisation could be funded for a certain number of hours per week to manage the admin: taking requests, posting physical resources, and managing orders (e.g. to get flyers printed).

The recipient groups would never need to account for money, since they would never touch the money themselves; however, they could be asked to report briefly on results, e.g. numbers reached.

As each small group developed a measurable track record, its successes could unlock access to the slightly higher-cost levels of the catalogue, such as venue hire, Zoom accounts or Pride stall bookings.

This kind of channel for sharing resources, where the admin burden is taken primarily at the distributor's end, would help to **multiply the efforts of the grass-roots volunteers**.

The risk to the funder would be small because the financial amounts would be small; even if a volunteer occasionally dropped out of sight with a few books and flags belonging to the group, that's a small loss compared to the potential benefits.

This type of project could be set up right now. A short-term pilot version would help to establish the demand and the likely workload.

It's also something which could be inherited and built upon by a Virtual Bi Centre.

## 8. Ring-fenced funds and a virtual bi centre

During our research process, there was some discussion of perhaps setting up a new independent bi organisation, e.g. a new charity, with a focus on supporting grassroots bi groups. But the idea of the "**virtual bi centre**" was seen as more efficient:

→ By purely existing and being intermediary, anything that takes you **one step removed** creates in itself **costs** and **complications**. If it's about [distributing] small amounts of money, that would just create an unnecessary level of burden. [You don't want to] end up with a tiny amount of money to actually do projects.

→ If we had a virtual bi centre which had a **paid admin**, say. You could say "this project is based at this virtual bi centre" - which would have to have a **physical address**, but it wouldn't have to be a building people could come to. There's lots of things that **could be done a bit more centrally**.

→ Not the small local bits, not the big, big events - but actually the intermediary [level], where groups want to work together or do something **across the UK** and pool our resources. Those kind of research projects, shared resources -

When it comes to wanting to do things together [across groups], then having that kind of organisation as a **coordinator** and a **central point** would be quite useful.

There was precedent for having a **bi panel** to set the agenda and approve spending:

→ Wales Council for Voluntary Action - which is the Welsh equivalent of National Council for Voluntary Organisations, NCVO: When they're doing **youth grants**, they have a **panel of young people** decide. They don't have "a panel of their staff who happen to be young", they don't have "oh, we have 50% young people on the panel": they have *a youth panel to decide youth grants*. We should have a bi panel to decide bi grants.

For more about how such things could work in practice, please see our [Recommendations section above](#).

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## Appendix A: Landmarks on the UK bi landscape

**Bi Pride** in 2019 set the record for biggest UK bi event, with approx 1300 participants at the Roundchapel in London.<sup>31</sup> The organisation behind it was founded in 2017 and became a charity in 2018. It also works with other Prides to improve bi inclusion.

Bi Pride has 7 volunteer trustees, and is beginning to look at the process of hiring its first staff member. Its fundraising has included sponsorship and a government grant.<sup>32</sup>

**BiCon** is the longest-running bi gathering in the UK, with its origin in 1984. Pre-covid, it took the form of a residential weekend on a university campus in the summer. The largest BiCon so far was International BiCon 2010, with over 450 participants.<sup>33</sup>

BiCon organising teams have always been volunteers. Each year has a new team, usually a mix of past volunteers and new people. It's raised its money almost entirely from participants paying on a sliding scale.<sup>34</sup>

Since about 2011, BiCon's money has been held in between conferences by **BiCon Continuity**, which acquired charitable status in 2014. BiCon Continuity currently has 6 volunteer trustees, no staff. It has sometimes given loans or grants to other UK bi events or groups; however, it has a responsibility to keep enough money to cover the BiCon cashflow. Venue booking deposits can be in the region of £5,000-£10,000, and can be needed 2 years ahead.<sup>35</sup>

**Scottish Bi+ Network** is a community-run organisation set up in 2018 "to provide support for people attracted to multiple genders, tackle bi+ erasure, and raise awareness of issues facing the bi+ community". Regular social events include a monthly Neurodiverse Space, and quarterly one-day community events known as Bi+ Gatherings.

It's unusual among current bi organisations in currently having two part-time paid workers (24 and 10 hours a week), recruited from within the community. However, neither role is funded long-term.<sup>5</sup>

**Bi Community News** is a print magazine, offering 6 issues a year for £15, with a discount for unwaged subscribers. Originally set up in 1995, it's been run and edited for many years by Jen Yockney.<sup>36</sup>

**BiFest** isn't one organisation, but a tradition of one-day bi gatherings, typically with activities, discussions and stalls. Like BiCon, it's been run by different teams in different cities, such as London, Birmingham, Oxford, Brighton and Manchester. In recent years, the "London" BiFest has been based in Kingston, supported by the Kingston LGBT Forum.

**Bitastic** is a one-day event in Scotland, similar to a BiFest. It's co-funded by the Equality Network, Stonewall and the Scottish Bi+ Network.<sup>37</sup>

**BiUK** is "a loose network of academics and activists", established in 2004 "to promote and support bisexuality research in the UK and to create a link between academics and activists. It has always been run by a small core of volunteers, with no resources or funding other than that donated by members." In 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014, BiUK ran **BiReCon**, a one-day research conference, at the BiCon venue on the day preceding BiCon.<sup>38</sup>

**The Bisexual Index** points its online visitors to reliable information, community links, speakers and trainers. Its Twitter account has over 30,000 followers.<sup>29</sup>

**Biscuit** was founded in 2014 as a resource for "modern bisexual women, femmes and those assigned female at birth. If you're at the intersection of biphobia and misogyny, we're here for you."<sup>39</sup>

**Big Bi Family Fun Day** (also known as Big Bi Fun Day), has run in the late spring most years between 2010 and 2019, at Leicester Friends' Meeting House. The venue has a garden fenced off from the street, suitable for young

children to run around. Venue hire is paid by "passing the hat" on the day, making the event vulnerable to debt if poor weather reduces numbers.<sup>40</sup>

**Bi Camp** was set up in 2018 by people from Birmingham Bi Group, as a weekend of camping and cabins at Kinver Scout Camp. They ran a crowdfunder on Kickstarter to cover the £500 for booking the camp site, then sold tickets on a sliding scale. The camp ran again in 2019, and the third one is due to happen in July 2021.<sup>41</sup>

**Bi the Way** is a group for over-50s bi people. It's part of Opening Doors London, an organisation for LGBTQ+ people over 50.<sup>26</sup>

For more on **local/regional bi groups**, see [earlier parts of this report](#).

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## Appendix B: History

In the early days of the Gay and Lesbian Movement and Gay Liberation Front, bi people involved often didn't bother coming out as bi. Challenging the stigma of not being straight seemed **more important than the "fine distinctions"**.

To the queerbasher any man who sleeps with other men is a 'poof'. Why argue? I've always been quite happy to stand up and be counted as homosexual. The hell with fine distinctions, I thought - let's unite and fight.<sup>42</sup>

### 1980s

In the late 1970s and **early 1980s**, that began to change. White lesbian politics became increasingly defined by the rejection of men and of "male energy". In feminist spaces influenced by these ideas, the **distinction between lesbian and bi** became much more of a big deal; bi women were seen as politically unreliable due to not having renounced men.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, bi people were **beginning to find each other as bi people**. The **London Bisexual Group** began in **1981**, catalysed by a bi men's group which had in turn sprung from a Men Against Sexism conference.

We advertised all through the summer of '81 and eventually 80 women and men turned up to the first meeting at the club 'Heaven'

on September 1st. This was the foundation of the London Bisexual Group.<sup>44</sup>

**Bi-Monthly magazine** started around **1982**, as a project of the London Bisexual Group. It was to run till 1989.

The London Bisexual Group then organised the **First National Conference on Bisexuality**, in **1984** - the origin of what became BiCon.

For me, living in Hull and having felt very isolated, the most important thing, and the one that kept me high through most of the weekend, was the chance to talk with, to share with other bisexuals, to know I am not alone!<sup>45</sup>

In the **mid to late 1980s**, **AIDS** was becoming common and well-known in the UK. Bi men became heavily **stigmatised** in mainstream culture, for their potential to transmit HIV from "sick" gay men to "pure, innocent" women; bi women experienced a similar effect to a lesser degree. Meanwhile, bi people in the US were taking up leadership roles in **safer sex** education.

Within most gay circles, bisexuality was seen as inferior and politically awkward. Some lesbians who were willing to share space with *gay* men *didn't* want to share space with *bi* men. At one stage, around **1985**, the **London Lesbian and Gay Centre banned bisexual groups** from meeting there.

In **1988**, **Section 28** of the Local Government Act banned Local Authorities from "promoting homosexuality". Teachers in schools were scared to come out, and scared to speak out against the bullying of children picked on for seeming gay or bi. Many young people were left without support, and even without words for who they were.

The whole of my school career, therefore, was overshadowed by this silence. I can only imagine what my life would have been like if I'd heard the word 'bisexual' before I turned eighteen.<sup>46</sup>

The book *Bisexual Lives* was published by the Off Pink Collective in **1988**, having sprung from discussions at the bi conference in 1985.

In **1989**, the now-annual conference shortened its name to BiCon, and first offered accommodation to participants.

## 1990s

In the early 1990s, HIV/AIDS activists in the USA were organising under the name Queer Nation, and some UK people were using **Queer** as an umbrella term for events and writing. In the UK at least, queer-named spaces tended to welcome bi people, and be generally not much concerned about the finer points of bi versus gay.

Around the UK, grass-roots **bi groups** were springing up.

In **1991**, writers in the US produced the anthology *Bi Any Other Name*, which quickly became popular in UK bi circles.

Monthly **magazine** Bifrost began in 1991, and was to run till 1995. Bifrost briefly rented one room in the Edinburgh LGB Centre (as it then was), which functioned as a tiny volunteer-run bi centre.

Annual gathering **BiCon** was thriving on volunteer energy, albeit very white and rather middle-class. It was heading into a long series of residential-weekend BiCons which would be on University campuses, typically with around 200 to 300 participants. BiCon **1992**, in Norwich, officially accepted **trans** people as their lived gender, and this was consolidated at BiCon 1993 in Nottingham.

In **1993**, Sue George's book *Women and Bisexuality* was published by Scarlet Press.

Many people (both lesbian/gay and straight) have told me that I am the only bisexual they have met. Of course, this is not the case, but even today, popular misconceptions mean that few people feel able to be open about their bisexuality.

... despite the prevalence of bisexual behaviours, bisexuality is relentlessly and deliberately left out of the discussion of the possible range of sexual options.

The book's listings section is a snapshot of **local bi groups** at the time: London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Nottingham and Norwich. There were bi **phonelines** in London and Edinburgh.

At BiCon 1993, some people were **paid by the Health Education Authority** to run sessions on **safer sex**. There was criticism around lack of transparency in who was given the work.

More **bi anthologies** were published in the mid-1990s in the UK, US and Canada. *Plural Desires* was noteworthy for being 50% written and edited by women of colour.

The **mid-1990s** spread of the **Internet** caused an escalation in bi people finding each other, for example through the Usenet discussion group **soc.bi**.

In **1995**, there was a landmark: the **first person** (we know of) in the UK who had bi community organising as their **paid job**. This project also used an effective method of distributing money to the small bi groups. See our case study above on the Bisexuals Action for Sexual Health Peer Education Project.

At BiCon in **1995**, **Bi Community News** magazine was set up, to be run by volunteers, and funded by subscriptions. That's still going today.

London's Pride Trust AGM, at the end of 1995, voted to **change the name** of the event to "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride", recognising the presence of bi and trans people. In both **1996** and **1997**, the London festival included a "**bi tent**", organised by community members, with stalls and performers all contributing for free. (However, the Pride Trust lost money on the 1997 festival, a new group took over, and they didn't continue the bi tent.)

Pride in London weren't the only organisation in this era to acknowledge the presence of bi people by a name change. However, when an organisation *did* change name, that didn't always mean anything else had changed, or that bi people were likely to feel welcome.

In **1997**, Tony Blair's **Labour government** came in. They would eventually repeal Section 28, making it more possible for teachers to come out and to challenge bullying in schools. Meanwhile, they gradually began to make the **benefits** system **more conditional**, so that it became more difficult to do creative, community-nurturing things while "on the dole".

In **1998**, BiCon formally adopted a set of **guidelines** to align expectations around "what a BiCon is". It included the expectation that BiCon would be **run by volunteers**.

We had it so hardwired into us that it's written in the BiCon Guidelines that we will not be taken over by professionals. 'Cause **at that time, we thought that "professional" meant "other people"**. People who didn't recognise bisexuality coming in and taking over, or wanting to dictate how we would do things. So... you

know, it wasn't that we didn't want to be paid, it's that we didn't even *imagine* we could be paid.<sup>47</sup>

## 2000s

In the **2000s**, BiCon was still going strong, albeit perceived by some as becoming less political. Its **costs** and **turnover** were steadily **increasing**, as universities began to take seriously the money-making potential of summer conferences, and started upgrading student accommodation accordingly.

The Internet continued to make it easier for bi people to meet online, though that didn't necessarily always translate into in-person groups thriving.

**LiveJournal**, then **Dreamwidth**, became popular ways of keeping in touch in between BiCons.

In **2002**, a tradition began of "**bi activism weekends**", self-organised and self-funded by a small group, meeting at Leicester LGBT Centre or other venues. Any bi organiser could join the email list where the weekends were organised. The weekends ran fairly regularly up till about 2014.

In **2005**, UNISON's Lesbian and Gay section began officially admitting bi and trans people.<sup>48</sup>

## 2010s

Due to funding cuts and increasingly punitive benefit "sanctions" in the name of "**austerity**", life got more difficult for many people in the **2010s**, especially for disabled people. People who might once have volunteered on a bi event while living on benefits had less energy to spare.

In **2010**, **Bi's of Colour** was founded: a bi space centred on people of colour.

Bi's of Colour was formed at BiCon London in 2010 – a year after a racist incident before BiCon 2009 by one of the organisers. A few of us talked that year about what it would look like to have a safer space for the minority within a minority at the longest running bisexual event in the world. Back then there were only five bisexuals of colour in attendance at BiCon in Worcester, but the following year there were many more. Twelve of us sat in a room, shared, cried and made connections. It was the start of something special.<sup>49</sup>

Financially, the group ran on donations, using a PayPal account.

**BiCon Continuity** became a company in **2011** - after some years of discussion of how best to take care of BiCon's money, and gradual acceptance that a formal structure was a wise precaution.

In **2011**, a team from BiUK and Bi Community News produced a set of *Guidelines for Researching and Writing on Bisexuality*.<sup>50</sup>

In **2012**, some of the same people created the *Bisexuality Report*, a summary of the research up till then.<sup>51</sup>

[Content note: disrespect to bi women] In some feminist circles, bi women remained **stigmatised as untrustworthy** for not having renounced men. As late as **2012**, UK feminist Julie Bindel would state:

I believed then, and I believe now, that if bisexual women had an ounce of sexual politics, they would stop sleeping with men.<sup>52</sup>

In **2015**, Jacq Applebee created the *The Bi's of Colour History Survey Report*.<sup>53</sup>

Around **2015-2020**, writers from Bi's of Colour made some sharp **anti-racist critiques** of BiCon and other white-dominated bi spaces, via the Bi's of Colour blog.<sup>54</sup>

In **2016**, UK bi anthology *Purple Prose* came out, following a successful crowdfunding campaign in conjunction with Thorntree Press.<sup>55</sup>

Around this time, most of the BiCon organiser veterans from the 1990s were retiring from running it; some remained involved as trustees of BiCon Continuity.

In **2018**, **Pride in London** had a **bi float** for the first time, organised by a bi team, paid for by crowdfunding and other community fundraising.<sup>56</sup>

In **2018**, the Scottish Bi+ Network was formed, initially as a self-funded network of volunteers.<sup>5</sup>

In **2019**, the recently-formed **London Bi Pandas** crowdfunded to run a second float at Pride in London.

In **2019**, the first **Bi Pride** took place very successfully in London, following more than a year of outreach to other Prides around the country.

## 2020 to now

In **2020**, the **covid pandemic** meant many bi groups had to cease normal operation. Groups discovered Zoom, and **moved online** except for a few **walks** or **picnics**; international and cross-UK connections increased.

The **London Bi Pandas** converted their **2020** Pride planning money into a **fund** for **vulnerable LGBTQ people**, raised even more, and were able to distribute it, albeit by placing a heavy load on the group's organisers.<sup>[57](#)</sup>

The Pandas formally **disbanded** in 2020. Their "goodbye" post explained the reasons, including a demographic shift towards white participants.

We have been asking ourselves why we need another predominantly white queer space? And the answer is that we don't.<sup>[58](#)</sup>

**BiCon 2020** was held **online**, and offered online **anti-racism training** for participants. In the autumn, there was an "**anti-racism review**" for BiCon and its history, following a promise made in 2019.<sup>[59](#)</sup>

In **2020**, Ele of Bi Cymru began running **online meetups for bi organisers**, including participants from the Netherlands, Italy and the US.

**Bi's of Colour** formally **closed** in 2021.<sup>[49](#)</sup>

In late 2020 and early 2021, because of the Equality Network's community support money from the Scottish government, some **community groups across Scotland** received **funding for the first time ever**: see our [case study above](#).

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### Footnotes

[1](#). **How many people are bi?** It depends **how you define** "bi".

*The Bisexuality Report* (2012) explains:

Due to the different definitions of bisexuality, it is extremely difficult to determine the number of bisexual people. If we define the term narrowly, for example the number of people who self-identify using the label 'bisexual' on a national UK survey or census, then the proportions tend to be small. Of course, this may well reflect issues of biphobia and bisexual invisibility (which we address later) which prevent people from checking the 'bisexual' box on such surveys, despite self-identifying in this way. Recent US surveys have tended to find self-identified bisexual people to be the largest population within the broader group of LGB people, with statistics of 3-5% of the population identifying as bisexual (compared to 1-3% as gay/lesbian).

If we define the term 'bisexual' broadly as all people who have ever had an attraction to more than one gender, then this may be a significant minority, or even majority, of the population.

- <https://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/news/the-bisexuality-report-is-now-available>

Research quizzing a sample of 2,115 **UK adults**, by YouGov in May **2019**, backs that up. They asked people "Please try to place your sexuality on a scale of 0 to 6, where 0 is 'Completely heterosexual' and 6 is 'Completely homosexual (i.e. gay or lesbian)'." (This scale is often known as the **Kinsey Scale**, after Alfred Kinsey who did a lot of sexuality research in the 1940s and 1950s.)

Of the people who'd picked the word "heterosexual" to "best describe" their sexuality, only 77% said they'd actually be at zero on the scale, i.e. "Completely heterosexual".

Likewise, of the people who'd said that lesbian or gay "best describe(s)" their sexuality, only 69% said they'd be at 6 on the scale, "Completely homosexual".

In other words, a lot of people who **call** themselves gay or straight because they feel "it's the nearest" (or because they're more comfortable with that) are actually kind of bi in terms of **behaviour** or **feelings**.

4% of respondents had picked "Bisexual" in the first place, and unsurprisingly, none of them chose either 0 or 6 on the scale.

Of the people who didn't want to pick *any* of "heterosexual", "gay", "lesbian" or "bisexual" as their label, and instead are counted as "Other", interestingly most of them also placed themselves in the middle of the scale - mostly at numbers 3 and 2.

The numbers from this survey can be found on the [yougov.co.uk](https://www.yougov.co.uk) site under the name *YG-Archive-SexualityScaleInternal-240519.pdf*

In the Office of National Statistics (ONS) **UK** survey of **2019**, **1.1%** selected "bisexual". <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2019>. This includes a chart showing how the percentage had increased every year in recent years. However, the ONS figure is a significant **underestimate**, for two reasons:

- The ONS chose simply to base their numbers on the **words** people use to label themselves - and those words don't always fully reflect how the people actually **behave** or feel. In the case of bisexuality, it's common for people not to *call* themselves bisexual, even when they *behave* in ways that could reasonably be considered bisexual. (This is linked to **bi erasure**.)
- Secondly, even among the people who *think* of themselves as bi, not everyone is **willing to disclose their sexuality** to government researchers.

**2. Word preferences:** Bi people may prefer the words bi, pan, bisexual, pansexual, bi-romantic, queer, multi-spectrum, m-spec, bi-curious, heteroflexible, etc. The words *liked* by some people are *disliked* by others. Some people actively reject all such labels, for example saying "I'm just me, I don't need a label for it". Some use the expression "attraction beyond gender". The expression "bi+" (bi-plus) is sometimes used to refer to everyone "under the bi umbrella".

Note that some people, often those born before about 1960, consider "queer" to be a slur. Like "dyke" or "fag", it's not a word to apply to people who haven't chosen it for themselves. However, there are people and communities who use "queer" as their preferred term. This would be an example of "reclaiming" language.

If in doubt about whether it's OK for you to use a "reclaimed" word, go by the guideline that the only people who can reclaim a slur are the people it's aimed at.

It's also worth noting that some people who currently call themselves gay or lesbian may have a bi history, or current bi behaviour which they don't consider important.

### 3. **Bi people on average doing worse:** here are a few sources.

- *The Bisexuality Report (2012)* summed up as follows:

Of all the common sexual identity groups, bisexual people most frequently have mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, self harm and suicidality. This has been found both internationally and in the UK specifically, and has been linked to experiences of biphobia and bisexual invisibility. ... A large Australian study found rates of mental health problems amongst bisexual people to be higher than those amongst lesbians, gay men or heterosexual people. This study cautioned against the inclusion of bisexual people within samples of lesbians or gay men, because this may result in overstatement of the risks faced by LG people, and ignorance of the risks faced by bisexual people.

...

A smaller survey which focused specifically on bisexual people attending the annual UK bisexual conference found that 36% of attendees had either single (24%) or multiple (12%) mental or physical health impairments that interfered with their day-to-day life.

- <https://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/news/the-bisexuality-report-is-now-available>

- *Inequality among lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender groups in the UK: a review of evidence*, published in July **2016** from the Government Equalities Office, found, for example:

Bisexual people, compared with lesbians and gay men, are more likely to be subject to victimisation due to sexual orientation, sexual attacks and domestic violence.

- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/539682/160719\\_REPORT\\_LGBT\\_evidence\\_review\\_NIESR\\_FINALPDF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/539682/160719_REPORT_LGBT_evidence_review_NIESR_FINALPDF.pdf) (PDF)

This review also commented that there are **big gaps in the evidence base**, especially in comparing bi people to lesbian or gay people. In research and the resulting statistics (as the *Bisexuality Report* had also noted), bi women are often lumped in with lesbians, and bi men with gay men.

- In **2017**, the Office of National Statistics published an analysis of LGB research from **2015**, under the title *Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people say they experience a lower quality of life*.

Among other conclusions, the ONS reports:

People who identified as bisexual had the biggest well-being gap ...

Those who identify as "other" or "do not know or refuse" also said they had lower life satisfaction, happiness, and worthwhile [sic] than the UK average.

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/articles/lesbiangayandbisexualpeoplesaytheyexperiencealowerqualityoflife/2017-07-05>

- See also the **report** on bisexual health inequalities which is **currently being produced** by researchers for Consortium, in parallel with our research for this one.

**4. Political climate / less welcome:** See History section for further discussion and sources.

**5. Scottish Bi+ Network:** <https://scottishbinet.org/about-us/>

Here's the original job advert for their paid administrator:

<https://scottishbinet.org/2020/09/02/exciting-opportunity/>

From that:

Hours: average of 24 hours per week, and will not exceed 40 hours in any given week.

[...]

We are looking for an administrator for our organisation, hours can be flexible, but this role will involve some evening and weekend working.

Primary responsibilities would include managing social media and other online communication, developing and delivering training sessions on bi+ issues and needs to both corporate clients and volunteers, fundraising, and co-ordinating events.

The ideal candidate would have extensive knowledge of the needs of the bi+ community, and the issues that they face.

Experience with social media platforms, organising events, fundraising and training and managing volunteers is essential.

The administrator is answerable to the Committee. They manage one other staff member: the "neurodiverse co-ordinator", who works 10 hours per week, also on a 12-month contract.

This second role was set up as part of covid community support, as "during the second big lockdown in Scotland (Oct 2020 onwards) we noticed that the neurodiverse group were the group struggling the most." The co-ordinator "also doubles as our access officer for issues related to disability and chronic illness, which has been a huge help when navigating how to make online events more accessible." The role was funded from money originally destined for Pride events, which had been cancelled due to covid.

**6. "Didn't know of a local bi group":** 283 people answered our survey open to anyone "under the bi umbrella". One of the questions we asked was:

Some areas have a "bi group" - a social, support or activity group specific to people "under the bi umbrella". Do you know of a group like that near you? (whether or not you've actually ever been to it.)

We intentionally left the definition of "near you" up to the respondent, as, for example, what's "near" in a practical sense might depend on whether you have access to a car, or to a good bus route.

We also asked for "Type of area where you live", although a few people skipped that question.

Discarding results where we weren't told the type of area, these were the numbers:

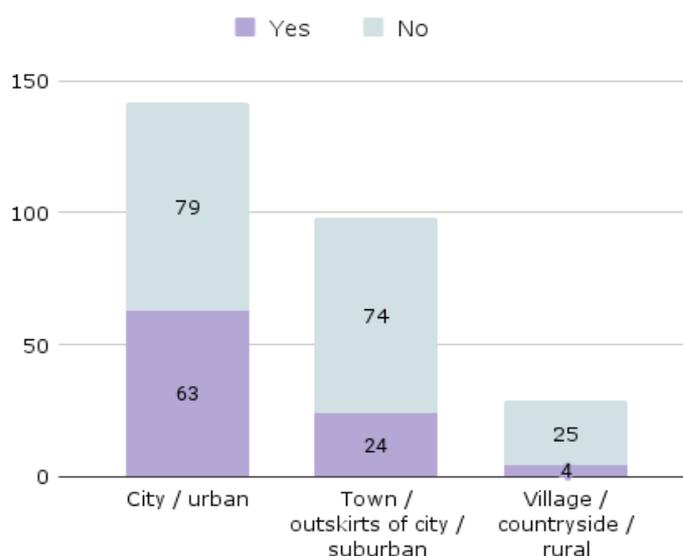
Type of area	Yes [bi group nearby]	No [no bi group nearby]
City / urban	63	79
Town / outskirts of city / suburban	24	74
Village / countryside / rural	4	25
All areas put together	91	178
All areas put together, by percentage	34%	66%

It's important to note that this was a "**convenience sample**": that is, we can't know whether the answers from people who *did* happen to fill in the survey would be similar to the answers which might've come from people who *didn't* (including everyone who never even saw it). So it's just a kind of snapshot, not a statistically reliable result.

If anything, people who go to bi groups are likely to have been **over-represented**: partly because we asked bi group runners to share the fact that the survey was open, and partly because those are also the people probably more likely to be "following" other bi accounts on social media.

Here's the "group or no group, by type of area" info again in graphical form. People in a city are more likely to have said they *are* aware of a bi group near them; but even for them, more than half said no.

Some areas have a "bi group" - a social, support or activity group specific to people "under the bi umbrella". Do you know of a group like that near you? (whether or not you've actually ever been to it.)



**7. Groups for LGBT people of colour:** Examples are Rainbow Noir, UNMUTED or QTIPoC Notts. [Rainbow Noir, Manchester: https://rainbownoirmcr.com/](https://rainbownoirmcr.com/). [UNMUTED, Birmingham: https://www.patreon.com/unmutedbrum](https://www.patreon.com/unmutedbrum). [QTIPoC Notts: https://twitter.com/qtipocnotts/](https://twitter.com/qtipocnotts/). QTIPoC stands for Queer, Trans, Intersex People of Colour, and is often pronounced "cutie-pok". Group names often don't use the terms "LGB" or "LGBT"; "queer" is sometimes preferred as an umbrella term, or the name instead draws on other words or metaphors.

**8. The LGBT Consortium had identified a gap:** This quote, and the one from the Recommendations section, are from the original advert.

**9. Few examples of receiving funding:** As we were finishing up this report, Bi Pride heard they were getting an unprecedented £80,000 from Tesco, and said they were planning to distribute part of it among grass-roots groups. It'll be exciting to see how that affects the bi landscape.

**10. "Seen to be fair":** Of course, fairness is always important, but this kind of appointment is likely to be especially "under the spotlight", because a lot of people would want the job and it's likely that some of the applicants would know each other.

**11. Online directory:** In addition, software such as PlaceCal could be used to collate a central listing of events, harvested from local groups' calendars. <https://www.placecal.org/>

**12. A note on the likely tasks of the first worker:** It's sometimes recommended that the first worker in any new organisation be a fundraiser. However, the hypothesis behind our recommendations is that there *is* money, and the problem we're solving is how to channel it successfully to actually supporting bi people. So in this case, it makes more sense for the paid staff to be taking on coordination, development and/or admin tasks.

**13. "History is different":** This is a bit of an oversimplification. Actually the history in the UK was pretty similar until about 1979. See History section for more.

**14. Non-bi groups: 283** people responded to the survey, which we nicknamed "Where do we hang out?". **114** went to at least one non-bi group: that's just over **40%**, or **2 in 5**.

62 of the 283 went to more than one: about 21%, or 1 in 5.

**15. Comfortable to be out:** Of the **114** people who named a **non-bi group**, 86 agreed "I feel comfortable to be out to some or all of the people there". (**75%**)

Where respondents went to more than one non-bi group, we encouraged them to pick one where they *did* feel welcome as a bi person. And, of course, an actively *unwelcoming* group isn't likely to be somewhere they'd stick around in the first place. So these results aren't for "any old non-bi group"; they reflect the kinds of groups (other than bi groups) where the bi people in our survey are choosing to spend time.

Statement (about whichever <b>non-bi group</b> the respondent named)	People agreeing	Percentage agreeing
"At least one other bi person is visible there"	63	<b>55%</b>
"I've seen that bi people are explicitly welcomed & included"	58	<b>51%</b>
"Some or all of the leadership is bi"	31	<b>27%</b>
"The reasons I like this group aren't really related to being bi"	60	<b>53%</b>

**16. One "main" organiser:** Of **22** organisers who responded to our written survey, 14 were sole main organiser of their group or project (or *had* been, when they were doing it). **12** of the 22 responses represented current local bi groups, of which **8** were being run primarily by one person. (**2 in 3**, or **66%**)

Commonly there would be 2 or 3 other people helping out in some way.

- 17. Meeting once a month:** Of the groups which met regularly at all, this was by far the most common pattern shown in our survey. However, there were a few groups which met more often.
- 18. "I spent about six hours":** <https://bisexualblogs.wordpress.com/2015/01/18/setting-up-a-bi-group-part-2/>
- 19. Bi Visibility Day:** <https://bivisibilityday.com/>
- 20. Yorkshire MESMAC:** <https://www.mesmac.co.uk/>
- 21. MICE money:** It stands for "Members Improvements in the Community and the Environment".
- 22. Bi Allies' Guide,** created by Leeds Bi Group in 2019:  
<https://www.leedsbigroup.com/alliesguide>
- 23. Getting Bi in a Gay / Straight World:** Written by Jen Yockney MBE, editor of Bi Community News. Available here: <https://www.biphoria.org.uk/gettingbi/>
- 24. "A lot are disabled":** See quote from the Bisexuality Report, in footnote above.<sup>3</sup>
- 25. "Deaf and hard-of-hearing bi people":** We confirmed as part of this research that some bi people also participate with Deaf Rainbow, though we didn't succeed in connecting with them directly.
- 26. Bi The Way / Opening Doors London:** <https://www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk/bi-the-way-on-zoom>
- 27. LGBT Health:** <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/>
- 28. Helping Hand fund:** also called the Access Fund or Equality Fund. Info from BiCon 2019:  
<https://2019.bicon.org.uk/access-and-inclusion/financial-support/>
- 29. Bisexual Index:** <http://www.bisexualindex.org.uk/>
- 30. Scottish Government money to the Equality Network:** The two funds were the "Supporting LGBTI Communities Fund" and the "LGBTI Recovery Fund".
- 31. Bi Pride's 1300 participants:** <https://biprideuk.org/bi-pride-uk-2019/>
- 32. Bi Pride:** <https://biprideuk.org/>
- Bi Pride at the Charity Commission: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5110765>
- See also footnote <sup>9</sup>
- 33. "Largest BiCon so far":** <http://www.bimedia.org/1113/britains-biggest-bicon-ever/>
- 34. BiCon's money:** <https://bicommunitynews.co.uk/9473/number-crunching-bicons-money/>
- 35. BiCon Continuity:** <https://biconcontinuity.org.uk/>
- BiCon Continuity at the Charity Commission: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5037467>
- 36. Bi Community News:** <https://bicommunitynews.co.uk/subscribe/>

37. **Bitastic:** <https://bitastic.org/>

38. **BiUK:** <https://bisexualresearch.wordpress.com/2017/11/01/biuk-looking-back-looking-forwards/>

39. **Biscuit:** <http://www.thisisbiscuit.co.uk/contact-us/>

40. **Big Bi Family Fun Day:** <https://bigbifunday.wordpress.com/>

41. **Bi Camp:** Story in Bi Community News about the first Bi Camp, in 2018: <https://bicomcommunitynews.co.uk/6546/camping-glamping-in-the-midlands/>

Bi Camp 2021: <https://www.outsavvy.com/event/5952/bicamp-2021>

42. **"Let's unite and fight":** Tom Robinson, reminiscing in 1987, quoted on the back cover of the book *Bisexual Lives*, 1988.

From that same book, here's Kate Fearnley, who made a similar strategic decision in a similar era:

... it seemed to me that since the most important fight is still to change straight society that's what I'd concentrate on, even if it meant being less than open about part of myself.

43. **"Bi women were seen as politically unreliable":** A useful book about this era is *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*, Paula C Rust, 1995. Chapter 6 is particularly relevant, exploring the history of different ideas of what it meant to be Lesbian.

44. **London Bisexual Group:** Here's a slightly longer extract from that account, from co-founder David Burkle.

For two or three years after admitting my homosexual feelings, I had been casting around for a valid identity, a peer group as it were, and a term to use to describe myself. ... The conference was organised by Men Against Sexism... Their newsletter had carried an article about bisexuality and at the conference I met, for the first time, other bisexual men who were having relationships with women. ... So a small 'self-help group' was set up and this met fairly regularly in London.

We produced an issue of the *Anti-Sexist Men's Newsletter* with bisexuality as a theme. Then, as our group was closed to new members, we felt we should encourage an open mixed bisexual group. We advertised all through the summer of '81 and eventually 80 women and men turned up to the first meeting at the club 'Heaven' on September 1st. This was the foundation of the London Bisexual Group.

45. **"To know I am not alone":** *Impression of the Second National Conference on Bisexuality*, originally from *Bi-Monthly* magazine, June/July 1985. Reprinted in the book *Bi Lives*, 1988.

46. **"Overshadowed by this silence":** Kathleen Jowitt, author of *Speak Its Name* and other novels, in an article *On Section 28 and Its Effect on Queer Lit.* <https://lgbtqreads.com/2017/06/14/kathleen-28/>

47. **BiCon Guidelines quote:** from an interview with Rowan Alison, one of the initiators of the Guidelines, as part of this research.

**48. UNISON:**

Back in the day, there had been hostility to inclusion of bisexual members.  
Discrimination faced by transgender workers was not even discussed.

- UNISON rep Carola Towle, looking back in 2020:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2020/02/union-keeps-making-lgbt-history/>

**49. Bi's of Colour closing blog post:** <https://bisofcolour.home.blog/2021/06/16/goodbye-from-bis-of-colour/>

**50. Guidelines for Researching and Writing on Bisexuality:**

<https://bisexualresearch.wordpress.com/reports-guidance/guidance/research-guidelines/>

**51. The Bisexuality Report:** <https://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/news/the-bisexuality-report-is-now-available>

**52. Julie Bindel quote:** Rather than linking to the stigmatising article itself, here's a discussion of it: <https://www.uncharted-worlds.org/blog/2012/07/lesbian-politics-and-bi-women/>

**53. Bi's of Colour History Survey Report:**

<https://bisexualresearch.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/bis-of-colour-survey-report.pdf>

**54. Anti-racist critiques of BiCon:** see for example

<https://bisofcolour.home.blog/2017/09/21/j-applebee-guest-post-by-angreebindii-people/>

and <https://bisofcolour.home.blog/2020/06/15/bicon-lets-down-people-of-colour-again/>

**55. Purple Prose anthology:** <https://uk.bookshop.org/books/purple-prose-bisexuality-in-britain/9780996460163>

**56. Bi float at Pride in London:** Crowdfunder page: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/bis-at-pride-in-london>

Bi float news story at Gay Star News: <https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/float-bisexual-pride-london/>

**57. London Bi Pandas:** Gay Times reported on the hardship fund.

As coronavirus hit, the community group decided to use their fundraising efforts for the 2020 Pride initiative to instead create a hardship fund for vulnerable LGBTQ groups. ... The fundraiser closed on 30 April, and had raised a staggering £21,280.

- <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/london-bi-pandas-raise-over-20000-for-vulnerable-lgbtq-people/>

**58. London Bi Pandas goodbye post:** <https://www.londonbipandas.com/>

**59. BiCon anti-racism review:** <https://2020.bicon.org.uk/bicon-anti-racism-review-2020-the-write-up/>

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