



**ROC RESEARCH**  
CONSULTANCY

# TACKLING INEQUALITIES FUND EVALUATION

Independent Evaluation  
April 2022

## Preface

This document is the final output of a short retrospective independent evaluation of Active Lincolnshire's approach to distributing the Tackling Inequalities Fund (TIF) between April 2020 and March 2022. The TIF was launched by Sport England in April 2020 in response to Covid-19, using £20m of National Lottery funding to support community groups across the country. The pandemic posed a threat to many community groups who found that restrictions made it near impossible for them to maintain connections within their communities and support people to be physically active. It was also intended to support those disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and prevent the inequalities gap from widening due to increased inactivity levels. These groups included those from culturally diverse communities, those on low incomes, those with long term health conditions and those with disabilities.

The extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic provided a new and exciting opportunity for organisations to work differently. Sport England encouraged their partners to work collaboratively, using their knowledge and understanding of local contexts to ensure funding was distributed to the right places quickly. A flexible approach built on trust allowed local organisations and groups to be freed from time-consuming paperwork and make decisions based on need.

This evaluation explores the approach taken by Active Lincolnshire to distribute TIF funding and uses three case studies to detail how by working collaboratively with partners, sustainable change can be achieved to reduce health inequalities and overcome other challenges faced by people during Covid, such as loneliness and isolation, by making options to be active available and more accessible.

The evaluation was led by Dr Rebecca O'Connor through ROC Research Consultancy Ltd. Qualitative research methods were used to provide a rich insight into the experiences of partners involved in the TIF. The report is designed to be of specific interest to Active Lincolnshire, Sport England, and key partners working with communities across Lincolnshire, but there is likely to be broader appeal for those interested in delivering similar projects elsewhere in Lincolnshire and beyond.

We would like to thank Active Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire County Council for funding this evaluation through ROC Research Consultancy Ltd.

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## Introduction

The Tackling Inequalities Fund (TIF) was launched by Sport England in April 2020 in response to Covid-19. Sport England made available £20m of National Lottery funding to support community groups across the country who were facing substantial threat to their existence due to Government imposed restrictions. Many groups found that it was near impossible for them to maintain connections within their communities and support people to be physically active. Alongside this the TIF intended to support those disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and prevent the inequalities gap from widening due to falling activity levels in particular groups including those from culturally diverse communities, those on low incomes, those with long term health conditions and those with disabilities.

Early in the pandemic, Sport England recognised that the extraordinary circumstances the country found itself in provided a new and exciting opportunity for organisations to work differently. The concept of collaboration was not new and moves had been made to encourage organisations to work closer together in partnership to provide better support to communities. However the pandemic required urgent action and Sport England challenged their partners to work collaboratively, using their knowledge and understanding of local contexts to ensure funding was distributed to the right places quickly. Despite widespread uncertainty they promoted flexible approach built on trust which allowed local organisations and groups to be freed from time-consuming paperwork and make decisions based on need. In turn organisations such as Active Lincolnshire were able to develop new ways of working with Sport England and their local partners by building on existing relationships and establishing new ones to create a sustainable response to tackling inequalities through physical activity.

This evaluation retrospectively explored the TIF in Lincolnshire with data collection taking place between November 2021 and February 2022. Through in-depth conversations with key stakeholders involved in the TIF, the evaluation gives a rich exploration of the TIF to understand how Active Lincolnshire, Sport England and partners across Lincolnshire are working collaboratively to find sustainable approaches to reduce health inequalities through physical activity. The evaluation

includes three case studies of TIF funded projects to highlight good practice and learning for the future.

## Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the evaluation was to understand the impact of the TIF in Lincolnshire by exploring the roles played by key organisations, and focusing in detail on three case study projects to understand the impact projects had. Key questions to inform the evaluation were as follows:

- How have organisations worked together with the TIF? (e.g. how have organisations been involved, what roles have organisations played?)
- How has the TIF impacted on impacted on health inequalities in the short term and long term? (e.g. has sustainable change been achieved?)
- What is the learning from work associated with the TIF and how can this be used to inform work in the future?

## Methods

As the evaluation was predominantly a retrospective overview of the the TIF, a case study methodology was used. The data collection methods comprised of semi-structured interviews (audio recorded) with key individuals involved in the work. Participants were identified by key stakeholders from Active Lincolnshire. All participants were informed of the evaluation through introduction to Dr Rebecca O'Connor by the key stakeholders and invited to participate in the evaluation interviews. Ten participants were invited to take part in the evaluation and nine agreed to take part. All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. All data collected remained anonymous and no personal information was obtained during any data collection methods. All raw data was stored in password protected files and not shared beyond ROC Research Consultancy Ltd.

## Analysis

Interview audio recordings were themed in situ and revisited to clarify themes and extract illustrative quotes. Themes were analysed using a framework approach based on the aims outlined above. Findings were presented back to key stakeholders in February 2022. This allowed the findings to be discussed, challenged, and corroborated to co-produce the evaluation findings reported here.

## Evaluation Findings

### The TIF application process:

Since the launch of the TIF in April 2020, Active Lincolnshire have been awarded 3 rounds of TIF grant funding from Sport England totally £248,000. Active Lincolnshire were asked by Sport England to distribute this funding across Lincolnshire in response to local need. As part of the process, Active Lincolnshire were involved in the identification of suitable recipients of funding, and support during the application process and subsequent delivery of TIF projects (figure 1). To make use of local knowledge and connections, Active Lincolnshire brought together their existing key partners in local districts to give a briefing on the TIF, discuss local need and invite applications. Applications were co-written with Active Lincolnshire to ensure that Sport England's agenda was met, and then reviewed before submission to Sport England. Although labour intensive, the process resulted in a 95% success rate and fast allocation of funding to get projects up and running.

*“Partners really like the fact it’s fast and responsive.”*

Active Lincolnshire



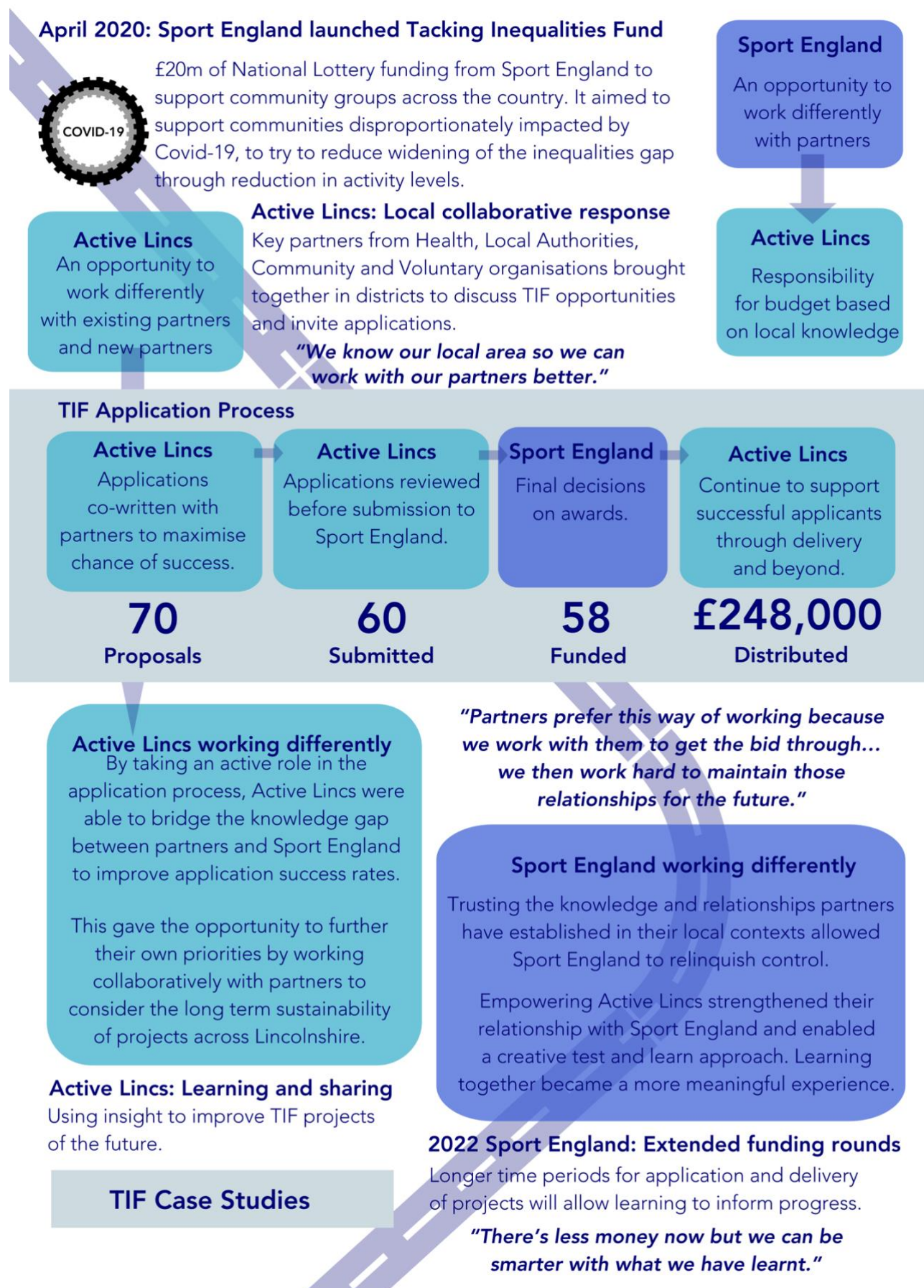


Figure 1: The TIF application process



### Working differently to make funding bids:

Working differently allowed Active Lincolnshire to strengthen their relationships with existing partners and establish relationships with new partners. Taking a district level approach and utilising existing networks and connections allowed need at a micro level to be considered. Although the original TIF funding was a Covid-19 initiative, Active Lincolnshire incorporated physical activity and sustainability into projects from the outset. They recognised the long-term opportunity to create lasting change in the local system for people with health disadvantages and other facing inequalities through engagement with physical activity.

*“A lot of the organisations we worked with didn’t do physical activity so it was an opportunity to sell something to them about the benefits of physical activity”.*

Active Lincolnshire

*“The worst thing you can do is give something and then take it away so we tried to get projects to have a sustainability plan from the word go”.*

Active Lincolnshire

From the outset of the pandemic and TIF, Sport England recognised that they needed to change the way they worked. They acknowledged the local knowledge held by partners such as Active Lincolnshire and the value in well established relationships with local organisations and groups. Sport England trusted partner organisations to monitor and support projects locally, thereby reducing the requirement for time-consuming metrics and paperwork. For example, following the success of the first round of funding, in the second and third rounds of funding Sport England allowed Active Lincolnshire to agree changes to budget allocation with delivery partners and without the need for permission from Sport England. This empowered Active Lincolnshire to continue to maintain and nurture relationships and enabled them to support projects more effectively.

**Case study:** Overcoming Covid barriers and maintaining physical activity in older women, and people with long term conditions. **TIF Award: £9350**

## England Netball: Walking Back

### Pre Covid-19: Walking netball groups well established across Lincolnshire

Many women loved playing netball in their younger years. Walking netball is a slower version of the game which encourages anyone to take part regardless of age or fitness.



#### Covid-19: Impact

Walking netball groups became inactive due to the rule of 6, cost of hiring facilities and additional equipment required to meet Government and England Netball guidelines. Participants were at high risk of reduced activity levels during the pandemic and may possibly fail to re-engage with walking netball during the recovery phase.

Active Lincs

EXISTING RELATIONSHIP

England Netball

#### TIF Application

##### Target Audience

People with LTHC  
Disabled people  
Women and girls  
Older people

##### Aims

Restart participation within guidelines  
Increase number of session facilitators  
Increase membership  
Provide suitable physical activity and social wellness  
Avoid risk of group closure

##### Sustainability

History of successful groups promoting physical activity in target groups.  
Requires kick-start to overcome barriers associated with Covid-19.



**Kick started successful group following COVID-19**



**Addressing inequalities across the county through access to physical activity**



**Long term sustainability without additional funding**

#### TIF: Impact

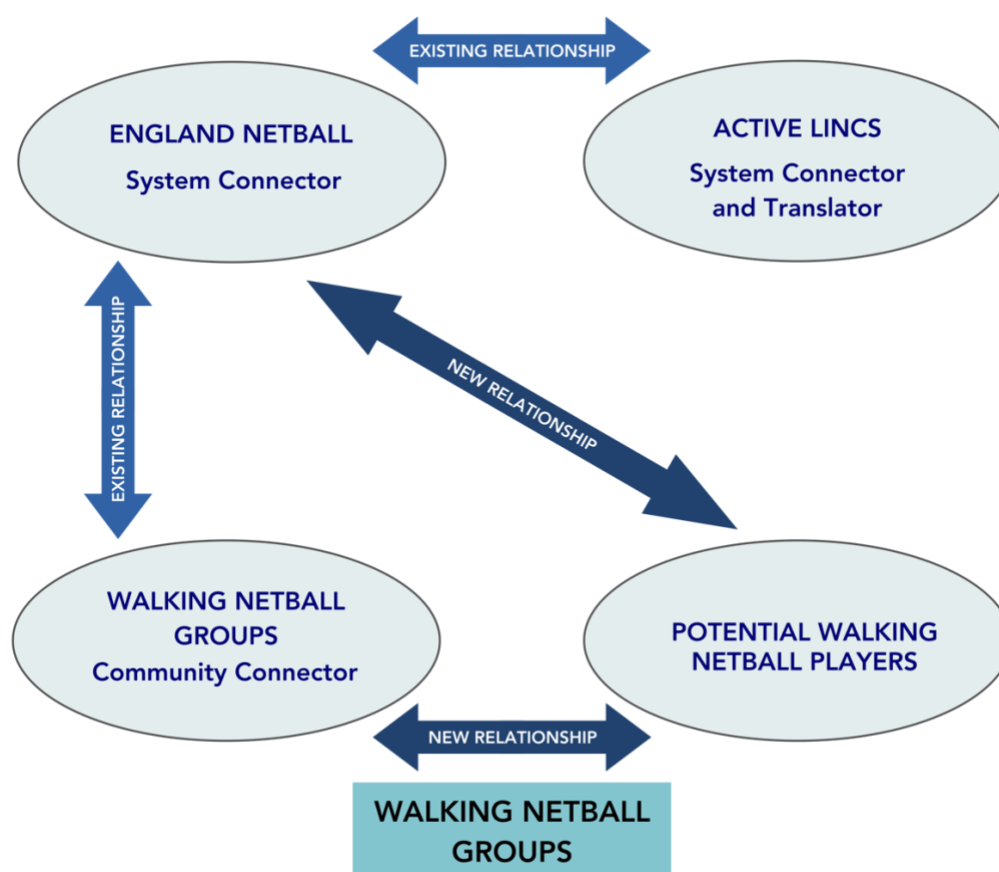
Walking Netball group's financial barriers from Covid-19 guideline removed. New equipment reduced infection risk. Running small groups despite a loss allowed participants to feel safe to return. Unexpected gains have led to long term sustainability and increase in target audience participation.

#### TIF: Sustainability

An underspend allowed the 11 new facilitators to be trained and new groups in places such as the East Coast are enabling people from low socioeconomic groups and those with LTHC to participate.

Figure 2: England Netball Walking Back

The England Netball Walking Back project (figure 2) successfully kicked started an existing physical activity initiative in Lincolnshire that was forced to pause due to Governmental Covid-19 restrictions. The TIF enabled an existing cohort of older women, many with long term health conditions, to safely return to regular physical activity in the form of walking netball and it has since become a sustainable and growing opportunity for those at risk of health inequality. Key to the success of the project was the relationship between Active Lincolnshire and England Netball, and England Netball's existing relationships with communities across the county (figure 3).



**Collaborative solution to reduce threat to established physical activity provision**

Figure 3: Roles and relationships in the England Netball Walking Back project.

The existing relationship between Active Lincolnshire and England Netball allowed an application to the TIF to be quickly submitted with both organisations understanding the criteria and process. Locally, England Netball had a detailed

knowledge of how to successfully run netball groups and was an enthusiastic promotor of walking netball initiatives; they were able to identify opportunities and connect partners. The existing local walking netball groups were well established and well connected within their local communities but were threatened by the Covid-19 restrictions and as restrictions eased they faced numerous barriers to reinstate groups. Importantly England Netball held an existing relationship with Active Lincolnshire so were able to access information about TIF quickly and make an application to the fund to support local walking netball groups in the post covid recovery period. Funding was granted and the well-established groups were successfully adapted to be covid safe. Groups trusted England Netball to work within Covid-19 restrictions and this allowed physical activity habits to be maintained with the additional costs of equipment and losses incurred from running groups with low numbers.

*“It didn’t matter that there were low numbers; it was about bringing people together and feeling safe”.*

England Netball

Bringing existing participants back together brought about the opportunity to grow walking netball across the county. The TIF provided the resource to train 11 existing members as new group facilitators, which in turn enabled new groups to be set up. Some of the new groups were in low socio-economic areas so will contribute to reducing health inequalities. England Netball plan to launch a campaign to encourage more people to take up walking netball but groups have learnt that this is most successful when groups are visible and active in local communities, with new members joining with the support of peers and expectation that participation will provide meaningful social engagement with the added benefit of physical activity.

*“It’s not just about physical activity, it’s meeting people and getting out .... One lady who comes along only does it because of the tea and chat afterwards, She enjoys the netball when she’s there but it’s the social aspect”.*

England Netball

**Case study:** Enabling people with sensory disabilities to engage in a mainstream sport. **TIF Award: £3005**

## BSL Sensory swimming

## Pre Covid-19: Inadequate sensory swimming provision for CYP in Lincolnshire

Due to a lack of British Sign Language swimming teachers, individuals who wanted to learn to swim had to access 1:1 lessons at a premium price.

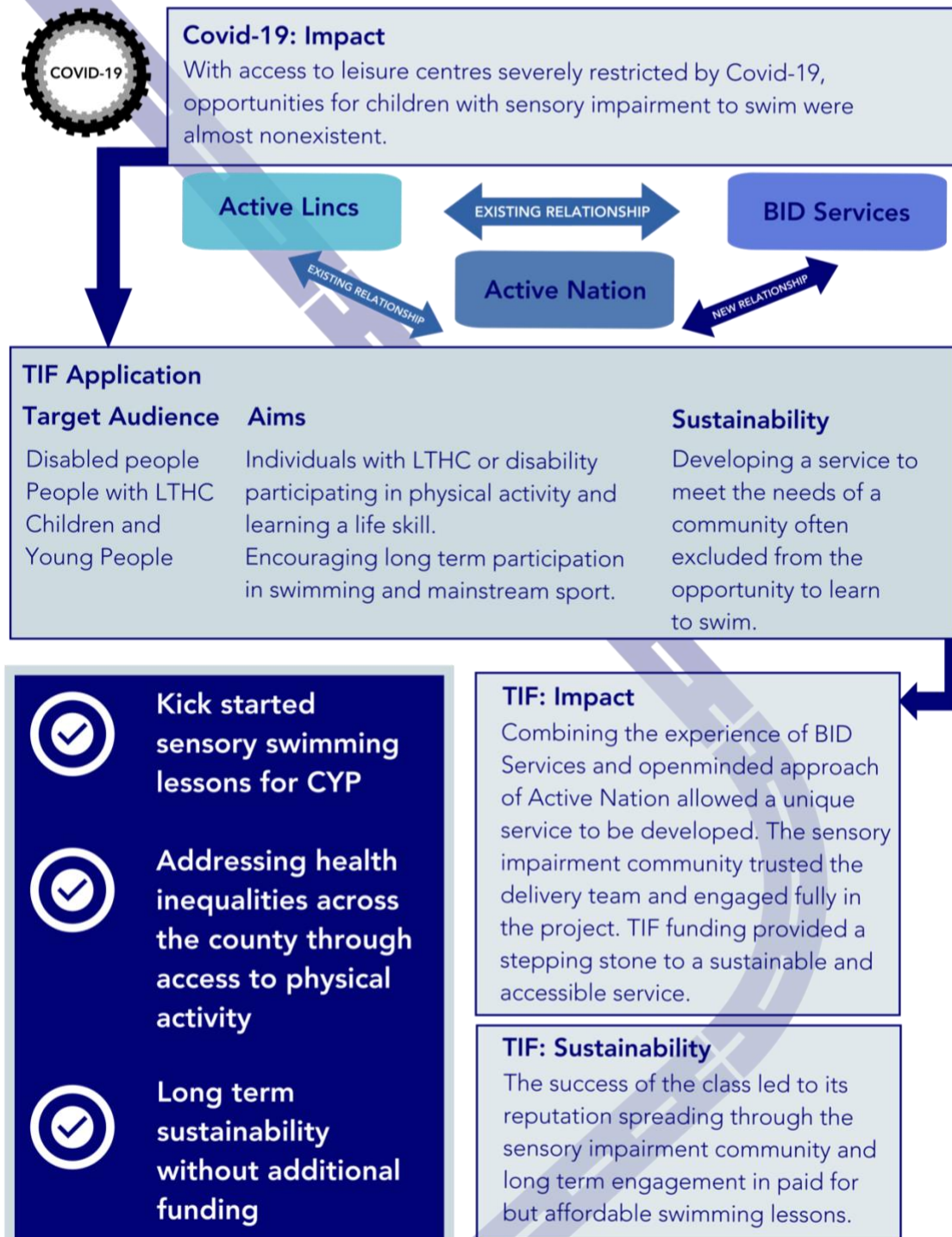


Figure 4: British Sign Language (BSL) Sensory swimming

The BSL Sensory swimming project (figure 4) successfully overcame barriers to children with sensory disabilities accessing swimming lessons and gave them an opportunity to participate in a mainstream sport. Barriers were present prior to but exacerbated by the pandemic but by working with partners who were willing to work differently and collaboratively, a sustainable solution was found. Key to the success of the project was the relationship between Active Lincolnshire, BID Services (a sensory support organisation) and Active Nation, and the unique and trusted relationship between BID Services and the Sensory Impairment community (figure 6).

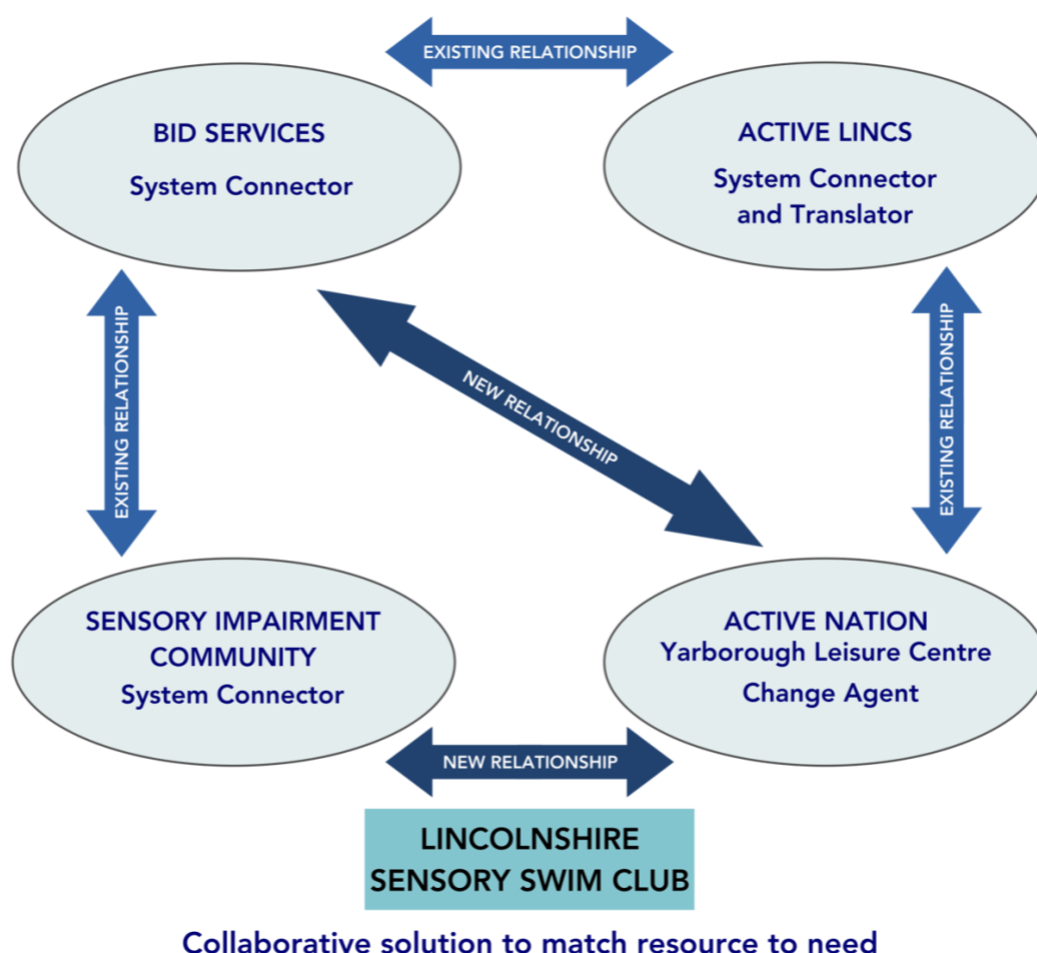


Figure 6: Roles and relationships in the Sensory Swimming project.

BID Services had a detailed knowledge of the Sensory Impairment Community and recognised they had a unique opportunity to be able to provide a specialist swimming lesson service for children with sensory impairment. The Sensory



Impairment Community had long experienced inequalities around swimming, with access to lessons being expensive and restrictive, and the pandemic restrictions threatened access further with access to swimming pools being severely restricted for mainstream use. Within the BID staff was a trained swimming instructor with experience with children with sensory disabilities who was interested and well qualified to provide specialist sensory swimming lessons.

An existing relationship with Active Lincolnshire allowed a TIF proposal to be worked up to enable children with sensory disabilities to access swimming lessons with the experienced instructor but a suitable location was required. Active Lincolnshire had an existing relationship with Active Nation and knew that they were open to working creatively and collaboratively. Active Nation built a new collaborative relationship with BID to develop and implement the new sensory swim sessions which met the needs of the sensory impairment community. Active Nation hosted the swimming lessons and found they had high levels of interest from the sensory impairment community because it was viewed as being delivered by a trusted service.

*“The funding gave us the stepping stone to try out something new. It was a big deal Sport England giving us the money; they want all children to learn to swim and no child to be left behind after covid. That says a lot”.*

BID Services

*“The deaf community is close knit and you have to prove you are deaf aware to be let into their world...it spread by word of mouth and so many people got in touch that I had to turn them away”.*

BIS Services

The initial Sensory Swimming project was free to participants but was so successful that many children wanted to continue, and new families were interested in accessing lessons for their children having heard about its success from within the community. Importantly Active Nation were open to addressing health inequalities and agreed to continue Sensory Swimming at the same cost to participants as regular swimming lessons even though numbers had to be lower and more time in



the pool was required. Sensory Swimming has since continued, enabling children with sensory disabilities to access swimming lessons at the same cost as other children and with a trusted instructor, experienced in teaching those with a sensory impairment.

**Case study:** Connecting community assets through physical activity. **TIF**

**Award:** £1775

## Elms Golf Society: Golf, tea and cake

**Pre Covid-19:** Loss of local community hub and provision for older residents

Lack of local amenities and traditional golf club barriers limited older residents access to physical and social activities in local community.

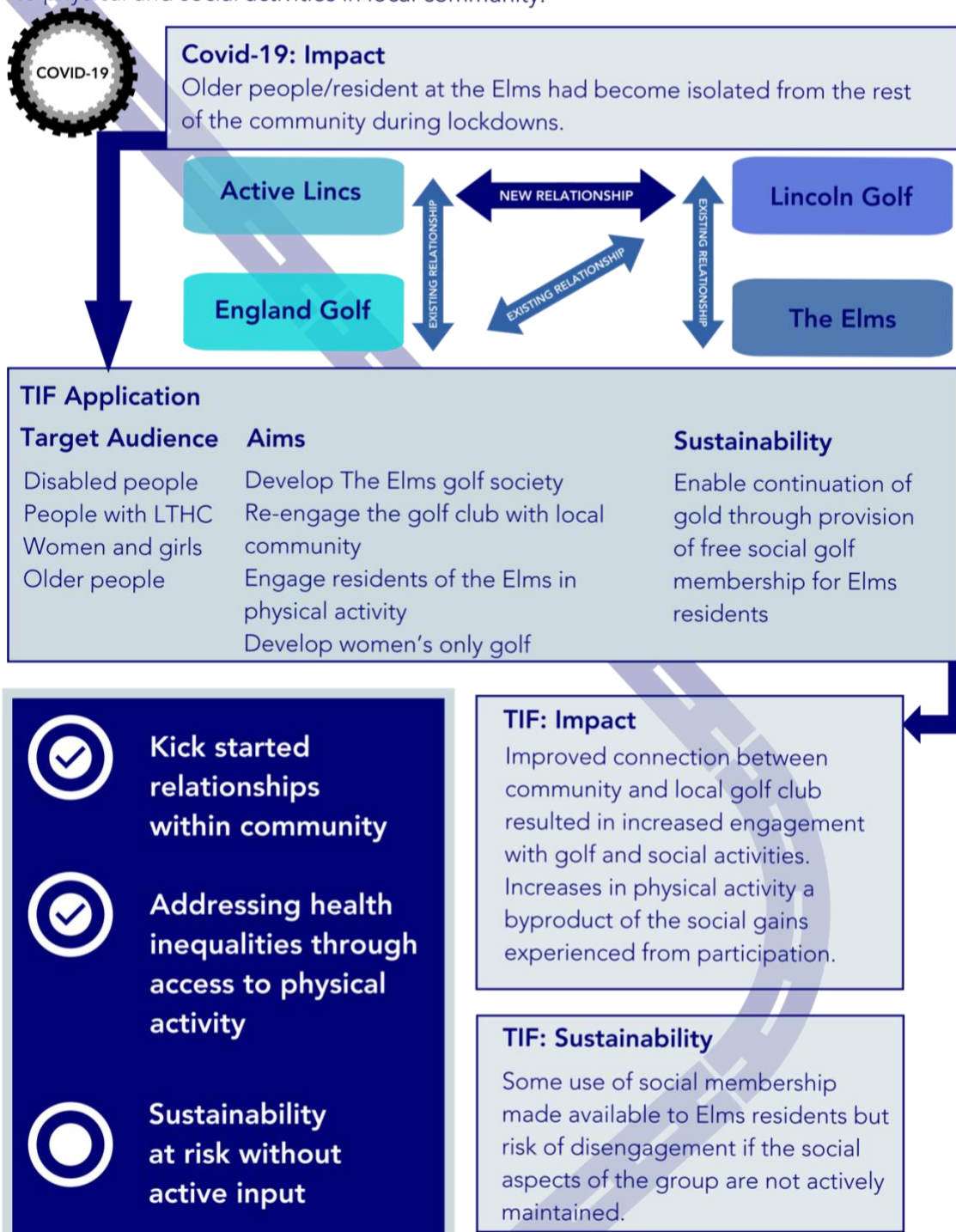


Figure 7: Lincoln Golf: The Elms Golf Society

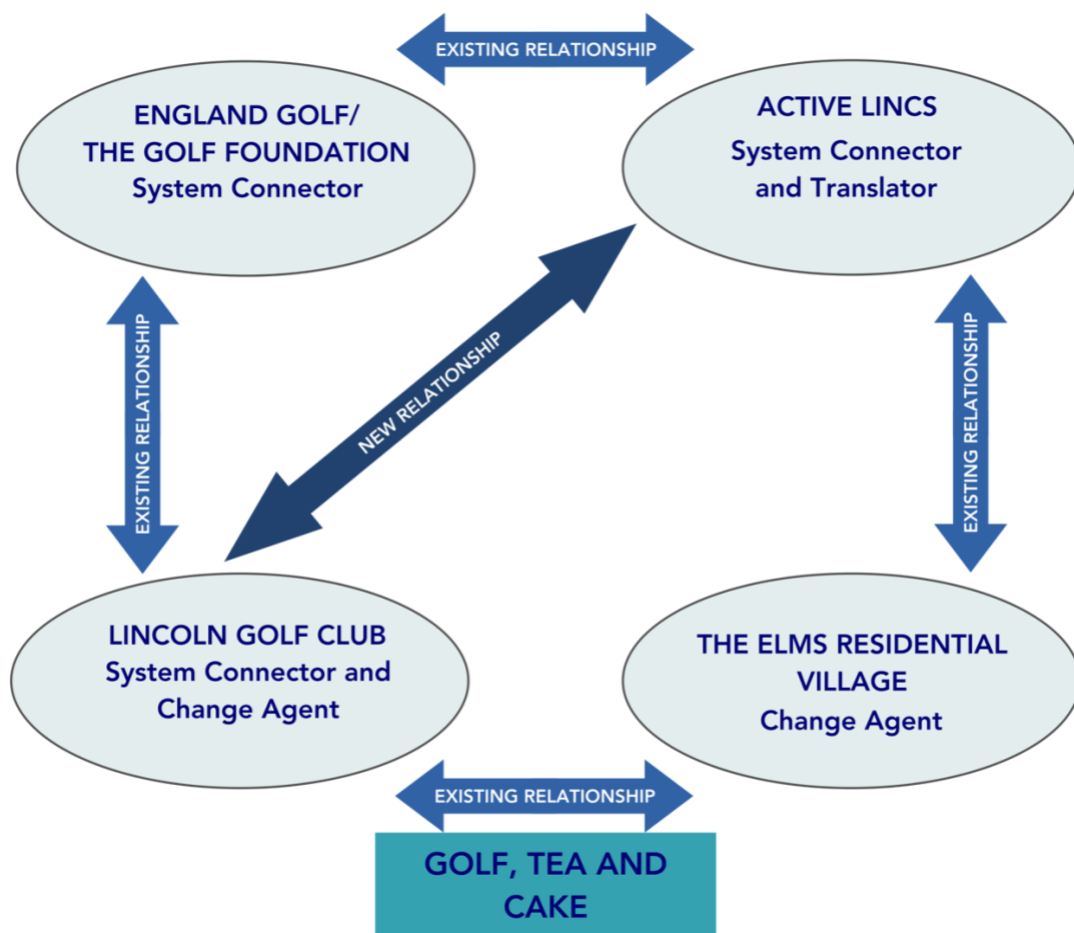
The Elms Golf Society project (figure 7) sought to overcome a loss of connectivity in a community who had lost local amenities and been subject to an exacerbation of isolation in older people due to the pandemic. Without a local hub, older residents of the Elms had limited opportunity to socialise and be physically active beyond their retirement village. A new manager at Lincoln Golf had a developing relationship with the Elms and was interested in promoting the Golf Club and its facilities as a new social space for the local community.

England Golf and The Golf Foundation were interested in a bid to the TIF for a project to engage young people in golf but in its development, Active Lincolnshire were concerned that the project did not meet Sport England's requirements. The Golf Foundation suggested Lincoln Golf could be a potential candidate for the TIF, and Active Lincolnshire's knowledge of a local residential village, The Elms, brought about the successful application for Golf, Tea and Cake which followed.

*"The connection between the golf club and Active Lincolnshire wouldn't have happened if I hadn't joined them up ... although the scope of the project was outside my usual remit [of young people] I was keen to see something positive with golf emerge from the TIF".*

The Golf Foundation

Golf, tea and cake strengthened the existing relationship between Lincoln Golf and The Elms, and created a new relationship between Lincoln Golf and Active Lincolnshire through their Active Lincolnshire's connection to The Elms. Together the different organisations used their unique knowledge of the local area and community to successfully implement a new initiative that strove to break down ingrained attitudes and beliefs that may have surrounded the golf club in the past. By working together, the Golf Club's goal was to engage the local community in adopting the club as a new community hub and intended to use Golf, Tea and Cake to build new connections. The project successfully engaged a group of older people in social golf at the club, and some of those continued to be physically active at the golf club through use of the social memberships gifted to The Elms.



### Collaborative solution to match resource to need

Figure 8: Roles and relationships in the Elms Golf Society project.

However since the project, there have been no follow up events to continue to support engagement with golf as a physical activity or attempts to engage new members of the community in something similar. This suggests that similar projects in the future need to have more consideration as to how they could lead to sustainable physical activity level and reach potential new participants.

*“We’d like to do it again if we could but I’m not sure how they would feel if it wasn’t free. Some of them might pay to be a member of the club but I think it would need to be subsidised. I think they also need that regular input to keep going; I don’t think many of them would do it on their own’.*

The Elms

## Key learning from the Tackling Inequalities Fund

### 3 key roles to get projects up and running

In each of the three case studies, it was clear that key to getting a project up and running was the individuals involved and the roles that they played. As well as being enthusiastic about their projects, it was the way in which they worked within a complex system that contributed to the successful allocation of resources from the TIF and the implementation of well attended physical activity opportunities from people at risk of health inequalities. These key roles were 'system translators', 'system connectors' and 'change agents' (figure 9).

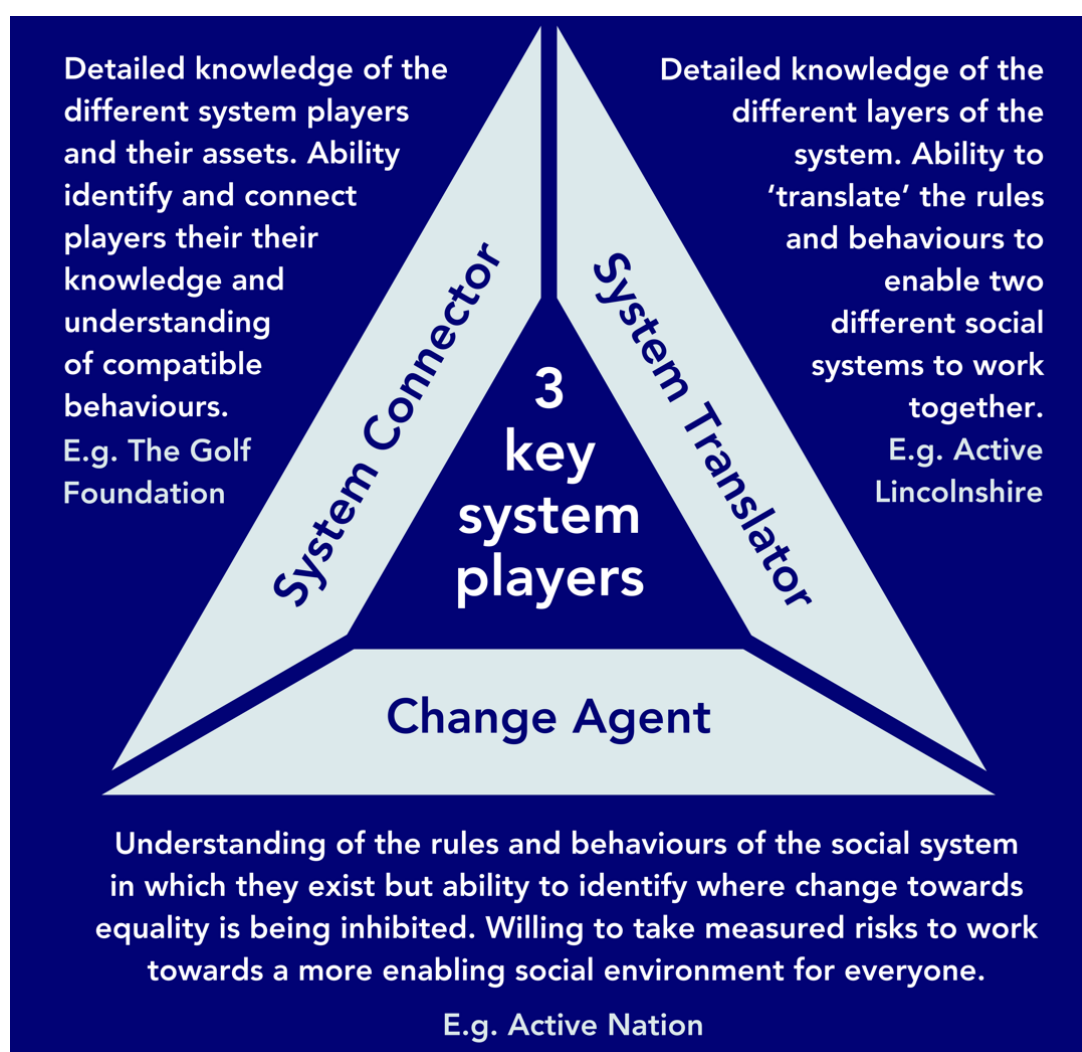


Figure 9: 3 key system players involved in TIF project implementation.

**System Translators:** In each of the 3 case studies, Active Lincolnshire played an important role as system translators. A system translator needs to have a detailed

understanding of the different layers of the systems that they are working with. For the TIF, Active Lincolnshire assumed the role as an intermediary between Sport England and funding applicants. Each layer or organisation has its own set of rules and behaviours that it operates within. These rules may be in conflict during the TIF application process because each organisation is not equipped to understand the behaviours and expectations the other exhibits. With Active Lincolnshire in a position to understand the process from both sides, they were able to help organisations navigate the expectations set by Sport England to increase the chance of successful applications.

*“We helped them write the bids so that they met Sport England’s agenda. It’s about understanding what they need and want and some of them [the applicants] just didn’t get that. But it didn’t mean that their projects weren’t suitable’.*

Active Lincolnshire

**System Connectors:** Sensory Swimming and Golf, Tea and Cake both established new relationships during the application process to the TIF. These new relationships were brought about through System Connectors. A System Connector has a detailed understanding of their local system and operates in multiple networks. They are skilled at recognising individuals and organisations that may have the potential to work well together and are motivated by collective gain rather than competition. For example with Golf, Tea and Cake, The Golf Foundation had existing relationships with Active Lincolnshire and Lincoln Golf Club, and thought that their approaches complimented each other. This resulted in a new relationship forming that led to the successful implementation of the project, and paves the way for future work. To ensure this happens, system players must be willing to nurture the relationship.

*“We don’t have a lot of capacity but we try to maintain relationships even when the money has ended”.*

Active Lincolnshire

**Change Agents:** Change Agents are those in the system who are willing to work differently. They understand the rules of the system but also recognise the boundaries and work creatively to find ways to overcome those boundaries. For

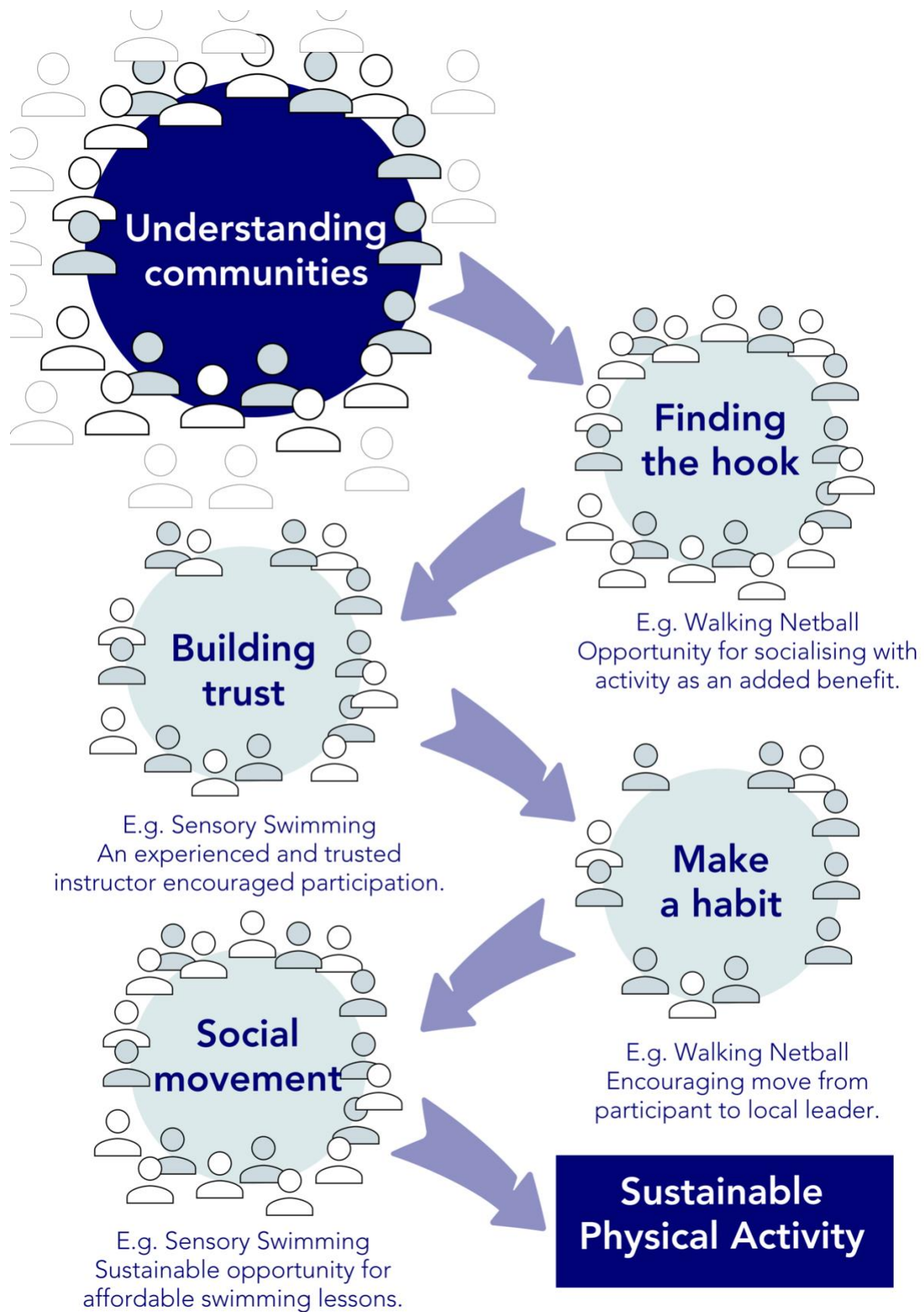
example, Active Nation recognised the inequalities facing the sensory impairment community in accessing affordable swimming lessons for young people. Through the TIF funded lessons, Active Nation supported the additional requirements to implement sensory swimming sessions and recognised a local need and market for the lessons. To allow Sensory Swimming to continue, they made sensory swimming lessons available at the same cost as ordinary swimming lessons despite the increased costs associated with running such sessions. They were willing to reduce inequalities for people experiencing health inequalities but at the same time increased their customer base for the future.

### Engaging target communities

Although projects can be well planned and implemented, key to their success is engagement of target communities. In all three projects there was engagement and participation and this appeared to be based on a good understanding of the target communities, the ability to find the hook for participation, building trust between the participant and the project, making activity a habit through participation and creating a social movement towards sustainable physical activity (figure 10).

**Finding the hook:** If a community is well understood, it should be possible to find the right hook for participation. The hook will be unique to each community but in the three case studies two important factors were the social element of a project (Walking Netball and Golf, Tea and Cake) and meeting an unmet need (Sensory Swimming).





**Figure 10: Engaging target communities in physical activity**

**Building the trust:** It is essential that participants trust those involved in delivering a project. Sensory Swimming would not have been successful if the instructor did not have an existing relationship with the target community. If a similar class was replicated elsewhere, ensuring the right individual delivers the project is crucial. Trust is also built through social networks. In all three case studies, participation was most successful when it was recommended and encouraged through social circles.

**Make a habit:** Providing the opportunity for habit forming is essential for long term engagement in physical activity. Walking Netball successfully achieved this by encouraging their participants to train to become group facilitators. Moving participants into a leadership role empowers individuals to develop a long-term habit and inspires them to encourage others to participate. Habits were also formed in Sensory Swimming with a number of participants continuing to engage in swimming lessons after the project had finished. Unfortunately, Golf, Tea and Cake did not show much evidence of habit building; although some participants used the social golf club membership made available to them, most participants did not continue to engage in golf related physical activity without the support of the project.

**Social movement:** Social movements occur when groups of individuals are connected by their shared interest in system/social change. Sensory swimming is an example of how TIF funding allowed a solution to a known need to be tested and then moved into a sustainable offer for the sensory impairment community.

## Conclusion

Active Lincolnshire have successfully distributed the TIF by working collaboratively with partners, both existing and new across Lincolnshire. Key to successful implementation of projects is the development and maintenance of relationships, and recognition that partners can play different but complimentary roles when they work collaboratively to find solutions to tackling health inequalities.

Active Lincolnshire play an important role as System Translators. They have detailed knowledge of the local system, Sport England and the TIF process and are able to translate this knowledge to their partners in many different contexts from small voluntary groups to large corporate organisations. By acting as a translator, it brings different parts of the system together and facilitates high quality applications to the TIF and maximises the chance of a sustainable change in physical activity behaviours.

The approach is further complimented by partners who can act as connectors to new parts of the system where Active Lincolnshire may not have explored, and by change agents who are open to a new and collaboratively way of working by breaking down barriers in the system. To continue the successful implementation of TIF projects in the future, Active Lincolnshire need to continue this way of working with their existing partners and identify new partners who may act as system connectors and change agents in the future.