**Redundancy and Retraining in the West Midlands: pilot evaluation.**

**Call for Expressions of Interest.**

**Introduction**

Ageing Better is seeking Expressions of Interest for the evaluation of a new pilot intervention, designed to support people age 50-SPA recently made redundant to find sustained employment through skills retraining or employment support. We are working in the West Midlands

We are currently developing this pilot through a co-design and prototyping process – so we do not know precisely what form the pilot intervention will take. We are seeking an evaluator to come on board at the end of the prototyping phase, to shape the evaluation framework, and generate useful and impactful learning from the pilot.

**Context to this work**

**Organisational context**

To enable people to lead a good later life, the Centre for Ageing Better (Ageing Better) works to influence nationally and deliver locally – we do this through a range of partnerships with local and national organisations.

Ageing Better synthesises, develops and disseminates evidence on “what works” in relation to our four priority goal areas. With our partners, we conduct research and design and evaluate new solutions to challenges faced by those most at risk of missing out on a good later life. We then disseminate information about our learnings to relevant stakeholders to support their own practices.

The design of new solutions within our projects is led by Ageing Better’s Innovation and Change team, often alongside contracted service design partners. An example of this work is our [Greater Manchester Employment Support for Over 50s project](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/news/pilot-programme-announced-help-over-50s-back-work), where we are designing a new support service to over 50s job seekers who are long term unemployed.

**Tackling worklessness in England**

The Redundancy and Retraining in the West Midlands project (the project) sits under our ‘Fulfilling Work’ priority goal, more specifically, the *Worklessness Programme.* The project will help us to achieve our programme objective: one million more people aged 50 to SPA in fulfilling work by 2022 by working to improve employment and retraining support for 50-66 year olds who have been made redundant.

The current employment support landscape does not work well enough for people aged 50 to SPA in England. People in this age cohort are significantly less likely to return to work after 3 months unemployment compared to other age groups. Appropriate support and intervention to help those aged 50 to SPA back into work or to retrain after redundancy is key for financial security and to enable them to live a good later life.

The pandemic has been particularly hard on this demographic, there are 4.7 million furloughed employments (February 2021) with 27.9% (1.3 million) of these being aged 50 years and over.

Those aged 50 years and over had the highest overall increase in redundancy rate over the year to February 2021, rising from 4.3 to 9.7 per thousand, up 5.4 per thousand on the year. This was the highest redundancy rate across age groups in the latest quarter.

Nationally, approximately 20% of all redundancies for over 50s were in the manufacturing and automotive sector.

In the West Midlands people aged 50-64 are the hardest hit in employment terms; for that age bracket the employment rate has dropped 3% points compared to 0.5% points for 18-24 year olds since March 2020 (the start of the pandemic). In contrast to the national picture where the employment rate has dropped 1.4% amongst 50-64s and 2.5% amongst 18-24.

**The Redundancy and Retraining in the West Midlands Project**

Ageing Better, supported by Barclays, are working in the West Midlands. We want to support individuals aged 50-SPA who have been recently (i.e. within 6 months) made redundant from the manufacturing or automotive industries (large-scale employers and SMEs) to find sustained employment through skills retraining or employment support. We plan to achieve this by either designing a new, or adapting an existing, redundancy and retraining support service using a co-design process.

The aim of the project is to learn “what works” in designing new solutions for individuals aged 50 to SPA who have been made redundant. Ageing Better does not directly deliver services and therefore will share information about what works with local organisations for them to adopt. Additionally, we will share learning with national commissioners and service providers- our ambition is that the service designed through the Project will be scalable across other regions and/or industries.

Throughout the Project, it is a condition of our funding to work with 150 older adults (i.e. this number can be collated across all phases).

**Delivering the project to date (Phase 1: Research) - Completed**

We commissioned a design agency, Shift, to run the first stage of the design journey between January and May 2021. They researched the current redundancy support landscape (locally and nationally), completed user research and service mapping. Out of this work came six opportunity areas, and seven proposed ideas, for interventions to be taken through to prototyping including “designing for self-serve” and “designing to fill market gaps” (see Appendix 8 for further detail). Through this Phase, we engaged with 9 people with lived experience and over 25 stakeholder organisations.

**Next stage of the project (Phase 2: Prototyping)**

1. **Testing the assumptions (Ageing Better):**Over the summer, Ageing Better will be working through the feasibility of the opportunity areas identified in Phase 1. We will do desk-based research and have conversations with stakeholders to test assumptions involved in these opportunity areas and ascertain stakeholder interest in taking part in prototyping solutions. We hope to gather as much information as possible to support the design agency that we commission for this tender. We have commissioned a small reactive piece of research to interview people currently going through the HR1 process in our cohort to add to our existing research.
2. **Prototyping (design agency ):**Between September 2021 and January 2022, our commissioned design agency will support us to refine the opportunities (based on Ageing Better’s work on testing the assumptions) and prototype solutions. We are currently tendering for the design agency to lead this phase.

**Phase 3: Piloting and evaluation**

Following the prototyping stage, Ageing Better will work with relevant local partners to commission either a service improvement or new service, with this piece of work to run until October 2022.

An evaluator will be commissioned for this phase to evaluate the impact of the selected piloting model and to document what in our pilot is working, for whom and why (this tender). Further details are below.

**Relevant stakeholders**

***West Midlands Combined Authority***: This project works in partnership with West Midlands Combined Authority. We anticipate that West Midlands Combined Authority may be involved in commissioning the pilot of this project.

***Barclays:***This project is funded by Barclays Lifeskills as part of their charity partnerships to help tackle key issues facing the UK labour market.

***Design agency:*** We are currently tendering for a design agency to prototype and design the final pilot intervention. The evaluators will have access to the team – and their materials – to help them understand the intervention. Depending on the final pilot, we have an option to extend the contract for the designers into the pilot phase, to support the implementation.

***Ageing Better project team:*** Our internal project team is led by a Project Manager dedicated to the project. We also have representatives from:

* Worklessness team: The team of sector experts on worklessness and unemployment support, including the Senior Programme Manager for the Employment Support Programme.
* The Innovation and Change team: The team responsible for designing the project and liaising with service designers on their outputs.
* Evidence team: The team responsible for commissioning evaluators for the pilot.
* Communications team: The team responsible for communications and branding.

**Scope of the contract**

We are looking for an evaluation partner to evaluate the pilot – Phase 3 of the project. This is essentially a ‘proof of concept’.

We do not, at the time of commissioning this evaluation, know precisely what the pilot intervention will consist of. We know that it will broadly take the shape of one of the opportunities identified during Phase 1 of the project (see [APPENDIX A](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/Appendix-A-Confidential-Redundancy-Retraining-Project.pdf) ).

We are seeking to bring the evaluators in at the end of the prototyping phase (Phase 2), at the start of January 2022. Not to collect any data, or offer analysis – but to observe the final decision-making element of the pilot, to deepen their understanding of the project.

They will then have c. 3 months to work with the Ageing Better team to scope the evaluation, and develop an evaluation framework. We anticipate that the pilot itself will run from April to October 2022. We anticipate that the evaluation will continue c. 12 months after the pilot completes, to assess whether any outcomes are sustained.

We are therefore looking for bidders who can demonstrate:

* Ability to work flexibly and collaboratively with commissioners
* Experience of evaluating innovative, emergent interventions
* Experience of evaluating employment and/or training interventions
* Experience of co-creating evaluation plans with the audiences intended to use the learning
* Demonstrable experience of sharing learning from evaluations with key audiences

**Aims and research questions**

As a result of this evaluation, we want more commissioners and service providers to adopt practices that will support people age 50+ to find sustained employment (or move closer to it) through skills retraining or employment support.

The aims of this evaluation are therefore:

* To outline how far our pilot – or elements of our pilot – were successful in supporting participants age 50+ to find sustained employment (or move closer to it) through skills retraining or employment support.
* To give commissioners and providers of relevant services the tools and information that need to implement those successful elements – either by implementing our intervention wholesale, or elements of it.
* To generate wider learning on the needs of people age 50+ who were recently made redundant, effective strategies for supporting them, and the case for age-specific interventions.

The overarching questions we would like this evaluation to answer are therefore:

* What elements of the intervention were successful – or showed promise – in supporting participants age 50+ to find sustained employment (or move closer to it) through skills retraining or employment support?
* For whom was that success (not) achieved, and why (not)?
* What should be considered by commissioners and providers wanting to implement this intervention – or elements of it – in the future? What are the key conditions for success?

We are therefore interested in both process and outcomes: we want to know what difference this pilot is making, but also what constitutes effective implementation.

If possible, we would like the evaluation to offer some insight into how specific the findings are to this geography, and to these industries – and how far they might be applicable elsewhere. We would like prospective bidders to comment on how feasible this is within our budget.

**Stages**

We anticipate this evaluation will have four stages:

Stage 1: Scoping and developing the framework (January-March 2022)

During this stage, the evaluator will familiarise themselves with the project, and work with Ageing Better to:

* Develop a prototype Theory of Change for the pilot intervention - identifying relevant outcomes for different participants, and potential causal pathways
* Identify process and outcome measures appropriate to the final intervention
* Refine the evaluation research questions
* Develop and agree an evaluation framework, and project plan

Ideally, the evaluator would work collaboratively not just with us, but with the key audiences for the evaluation, to co-create and prioritise the research questions.

Stage 2: Pilot delivery (April – November 2022)

While the pilot is underway, we expect the evaluators will:

* Undertake fieldwork using the agreed research methods
* Provide regular feedback to partners to improve delivery as the pilot intervention evolves

Stage 3: Interim findings (November- December 2022)

At the end of the pilot, we would like the evaluators to:

* Provide an interim report at 6 months outline factors that drive effective delivery and positive outcomes, and what can be done to reduce identified barriers to positive impact.
* Refine/revise the prototype ToC in line with the evidence collected in phase 2

Stage 4: Follow up and final report (October-December 2023)

We would like the evaluators to follow up with contacts around 12 months following the completion of the pilot, to investigate how sustained any of the outcomes from the pilot were.

These should then be reported through a final evaluation report, and a final update to the ToC.

**Evaluation approach and methods**

Given the small number of anticipated participants (c.150), the short length of the pilot, and the limited context in which it is being delivered (in one part of the country, with workers from just two sectors), we anticipate that a **theory-based** evaluation approach will be most appropriate.

However, we would not rule out a quasi-experimental approach, if an appropriate comparison group could be identified. But this is not crucial.

As described above, we expect this evaluation to look at process as well as outcomes: generating findings which will allow commissioners and support/training providers to effectively implement the intervention (or elements of it) themselves.

The precise information to be captured will depend on the form the pilot takes, but we imagine that it will include: factors affecting take-up; satisfaction with delivery and content; reasons for drop out; unmet need; perceived impact (soft – e.g. confidence) and hard data (e.g. applications for jobs, success rate). We want to look at the perspective of all stakeholders – such as delivery partners – as well as participants.

It is difficult at this stage to identify the most appropriate research methods. We anticipate that surveying participants will be key, as will gathering qualitative data from them to understand their experience of the intervention. We also expect that engagement with the professionals surrounding the pilot intervention will be important – not just staff delivering the pilot, but people involved in the system surrounding it. It may be useful to capture observations of practice, if possible.

**Ways of working**

Partnership. Centre for Ageing Better is not a service delivery organisation so the pilot will be delivered by an external delivery organisation (to be identified through the design and development process. The evaluators will need to be comfortable working in projects with multiple partners.

Collaboration. Our design and prototyping contract currently covers Phase 2 – but with an option to extend into Phase 3. Depending on the outcome of Phase 2, we may extend the contract of the design partners for the start of the pilot phase, to support implementation. Any involvement from the designers in Phase 3 would form part of the object of study for the evaluation.

However, if both teams are seeking to engage with participants at the same time, it may prove beneficial for the evaluators and designers to work together, to avoid over-burdening participants with requests from multiple partners. The evaluators should be ready to have these discussions in an open way – as will the designers.

‘One team’. The Ageing Better team will offer support by providing expertise on worklessness in mid-to-later life, establishing relationships with relevant stakeholders and moving the project forward as a whole. We expect to work as ‘one team’ with all our partners – communicating regularly about project progress, and sharing common communication channels. In return, we will actively support the delivery of the evaluation – for example, helping to recruiting participants.

Ongoing sharing and engagement, and focus on impact. Ageing Better is not waiting until the final evaluation report is complete to share the learning from this project. Already, we have established a network of stakeholders in the West Midlands – for example in the Combined Authority itself, other local authorities, and Jobcentre Plus – to share the findings from Phase 1. This network will expand once we have chosen the pilot intervention.

Ageing Better work actively to ensure that the learning from our projects is useful – and used – by our target audiences. The evaluators will be expected to join us in this endeavour – sharing findings with this network as they emerge, and putting the concerns and interests of the intended recipients at the centre of the research.

**Deliverables**

1. An evaluation framework: setting out clearly the key research questions, and plans for answering them. Co-created with Ageing Better and key audiences.
2. A theory of change: developed alongside partners at Ageing Better, WMCA, and other relevant stakeholders (depending on pilot intervention).
   * To be developed and validated over the course of the evaluation (with revisions to be delivered alongside the interim and final reports).
3. Regular presentations at steering group meetings, and 2-3 stakeholder workshops.
4. An interim evaluation report – outlining initial findings – immediately following the end of the pilot (c. December 2022)
5. A final evaluation report – including materials designed for target audiences – 6 months to 1 year following the end of the pilot (c. December 2023)

**Contract term**

January 2022 to December 2023.

**Budget**

The total budget available for this work is £100,000 including VAT. Extra capacity in the form of Ageing Better staff time will also be available to the evaluators – particularly in the area of recruiting, liaising with and managing stakeholders and research participants.

At this stage we anticipate three payment milestones, on receipt of the deliverables at the end of stages 1, 3 and 4.

**Questions for prospective bidders**

**Please complete and send the below questionnaire by 15 September 2021 to** [**responses@ageing-better.org.uk**](mailto:responses@ageing-better.org.uk)

**Please ensure ALL the below questions are responded to.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Company Name |  |
| Company Address |  |
| Company Number |  |
| Contact Name and Position |  |
| Contact e-mail Address |  |
| Would you like to express an interest in bidding for this opportunity? | Yes  No |
| If you do not wish to express an interest in this opportunity, please provide details as to why. |  |
| Do you feel there is sufficient information contained within the specification to formulate a bid response? If not, please provide details as to the type of information you would like to see within the Invitation to Tender documentation. |  |
| Do you feel that the budget is sufficient to achieve all deliverables noted within the specification? If not, please provide details of which elements you would suggest de-prioritising. |  |
| What scope do you think there is – within this timeframe and budget – to assess how far the findings from this pilot might be more widely spread to other geographies and industries? |  |
| How comfortable would you be creating ‘user-friendly’ materials alongside the evaluation report, for key audiences (ie. commissioners, providers)? Is this your skill set – or do you think you would be better placed to provide a full, detailed evaluation report, and then review the translation materials produced by Ageing Better themselves? |  |
| Please provide suggested Key Performance Indicators which you deem achievable and suitable for this type of contract. |  |

[APPENDIX A - Phase 1 Research](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/Appendix-A-Confidential-Redundancy-Retraining-Project.pdf)