



Working together to strengthen London's voluntary and community sector

## London Councils/London Funders seminar, 24 October 2008

London Councils organised and hosted a half day gathering for representatives of boroughs and interested London Councils staff to hear about London Funders, meet staff and committee members and feed in their ideas about how London Funders could help them.

Nick Lester, Corporate Director of Services at London Councils, welcomed everyone to the meeting and talked about the importance of partnership. He was keen to see a renewal of the Borough Grants Officers Forum (due to meet and discuss its future later in the day) but also to demonstrate the value of London Funders as a cross-sector alliance, well rooted in London's real priorities. London Councils pays the subscription to London Funders on behalf of each of the boroughs. He introduced Gaynor Humphreys, Director of London Funders, to chair the morning session.

### Is it good for the voluntary and community sector when funders get together?

Gaynor introduced Debbie Pippard, Vice Chair of London Funders, and Belinda Birch, its Membership and Communications Officer. Also in the discussion were Ian Redding (London Councils, and London Funders' Treasurer) and three Executive Committee members, Susan Humphries, LB Haringey; Sandra Jones, LB Lewisham; and Bonnie Royal, LB Southwark. London Funders is a membership organisation for funders of London's voluntary and community sector (VCS) and provides unique opportunities for pan-London, cross-sector meetings, discussions, data gathering and collaboration. It is focused on these activities:

- ★ Share knowledge about social issues in London and keep up to date with social change
- ★ Increase understanding of current funding and policy trends
- ★ Identify and encourage best practice in grantmaking or investing to support and strengthen the VCS
- ★ Get to know each other better and work intelligently together
- ★ Improve efficiency and increase leverage on investment
- ★ Promote innovation in funding
- ★ Be a channel for dialogue between funders and the third sector in London

Gaynor gave a quick introduction to the range of membership - public sector, many foundations (national, London-wide and more localised), Lottery distributors and some corporates. She described the quarterly members meetings which usually take the form of a half day seminar including expert speakers, up to date publications and material and plenty of opportunities for discussion and information sharing. Recent topics: Climate change: the funding challenge; Child poverty in London; Equalities in London: what next for funders?; Working money harder; What would make London better for young people?

Debbie described London Funders' project groups, member-led groupings on specific areas. Groups meet about four times a year and set their own agendas, often inviting speakers. Current groups are:

**Asylum, Refugee and Migration:** This group's discussions have ranged from migration statistics to projects that help refugees with professional skills find work, to human trafficking and forced labour.

**Good Practice in Grantmaking:** Ian chairs this group which grew from discussions around Gershon and good commissioning practice. Last meeting was on communications, especially how funders can use new media.

**Olympics/Paralympics:** with a special emphasis on the legacy for London.

**Research and Evaluation:** lately doing some hard talking on funders' expectations of their funded groups' ability to monitor and evaluate their work.

**Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Development:** This group has been influential in funding decisions in London in programmes which support second tier and infrastructure bodies.

Ideas for new groups are always welcome - social enterprise is currently under discussion as a sixth group.

Belinda's work includes London Funders' communications with its members, especially:

- \* six e-bulletins a year (700 subscribers and rising) - bite-sized information on topics of relevance to funders and member news - easy and free to subscribe to
- \* mini updates in between for urgent news
- \* [www.londonfunders.org.uk](http://www.londonfunders.org.uk): meetings coming up, reports, news and information; links to all our members; some pages to help fundseekers; and big plans for expansion.

Any interested staff (or councillors) from the London boroughs are welcome to sign up for information, join the mailing lists of project groups and attend quarterly meetings or other briefings and events. Most events are free and open to multiple attendance from each member organisation. Short written reports follow most meetings and events so that it is also easy to report back to colleagues.

## Talking cross sector - bringing funders together to make a difference

Debbie also talked about her work as Head of London Region for the Big Lottery Fund, outlined the Fund's recent programmes and plans. The Fund will soon be celebrating its 10 billionth pound given to London.

One of BIG's priorities is to evaluate the success and impact of its grantmaking, which covers a big range from broad funding rounds to much more focused programmes, like "Family Learning". All kinds of funding mechanisms have been used over the years from very traditional grantmaking to the use of funding partners to deliver programmes and portfolio grants like Children's Play. Recently they had been managing non-Lottery funds too, such as "Myplace" and the transfer of community assets.

There has been much development of the Fund's website to make it a wider resource, including a dedicated area for "helper agencies" such as second tier groups and local authorities. This website holds advice on key policies and procedures such as full cost recovery budgeting, assessing needs, and understanding outcomes as well as details of all their current funding programmes, a timetable of regional events; and quick links to funding streams. Local authorities were encouraged to contact the London region if they did not already have access to this area of the website. BIG's regional team have an outward facing role, but are separate from the grants teams. They provide certain types of support to grant-holders, for example offering seminars for new grant-holders on communications and press work. Inevitably, as a funder in the public sector the Fund is often accused of being risk averse but nonetheless Debbie knows that radical and innovative work has been supported. She particularly feels that the Children's Play funding has achieved significant improvement and represents strategic investment in every borough.

Debbie confirmed how valuable she finds London Funders, for "big, frank discussions" on funding themes, and for quiet, off the record conversations about tricky issues. She has been one of the people putting time and effort into developing London Funders and says BIG has received "many, many times" the value of the subscription from that.

## Talking cross-sector - where's the new money?

Victoria Warne, Head of Grants at Capital Community Foundation, outlined Grassroots Grants, a £130 million programme created by the Office of the Third Sector and rolled out through local grantmakers all over England, mostly community foundations like hers. It is in two parts. There is a small grants programme (running from now to March 2011) offering grants from £250 to £5,000 to groups with income below £20,000 a year, for any community purposes. There is also an endowment challenge for each fund-holder, where funds raised through primarily individual and corporate giving are eligible for a government match. The funds raised are then placed in endowment for the benefit of small community groups in perpetuity.

Victoria's Foundation will be running Grassroots Grants in nine boroughs: the link below shows who to contact for all the London boroughs (except Haringey and Hillingdon where decision are still to be made). [http://www.cdf.org.uk/SITE/UPLOAD/DOCUMENT/Projects/Small\\_Grants\\_Organisations\\_24\\_10\\_08.pdf](http://www.cdf.org.uk/SITE/UPLOAD/DOCUMENT/Projects/Small_Grants_Organisations_24_10_08.pdf)

Victoria also talked about how her Foundation is building "borough funds", firstly by encouraging boroughs to look at dormant trusts that they manage and get help from the community foundation to modernise them and transfer them to community foundation trusteeship, where they can be invested and managed alongside other funds, but still earmarked for their specific area. This is part of the Community Foundation Network's BOOST initiative in partnership with the Charity Commission. The borough fund model is also an ideal way of encouraging local philanthropists and businesses to create endowed funds for long term local benefit. A fund

of this kind is about to start in Lambeth, been pump-primed by a Council transfer of an old £2 million trust to the Foundation. Wandsworth are working with Thames Community Foundation on a similar model.

Debbie and Victoria both answered lots of questions and each confirmed the usefulness of this sort of cross-sector information sharing.

### Knowledge tables - talking in small groups

As part of the morning, the borough and London Councils participants took part in a discussion session on how London Funders could better fulfil its commitment to helping them support London's VCS.

The following questions kicked off discussion:

- \* What are the primary issues for you in your own and your team's work?
- \* What is your experience of linking with other funders (foundations, Lottery distributors, other parts of the public sector)?
- \* Has London Funders been helpful? How could its work be more targeted to assist?
- \* Are there areas of collaboration, learning together, etc where cross sector work is crucial?

Feedback from the four groups:

#### *Overall*

- \* London Funders events are different from other funding meetings (eg LLALN) and these differences need to be highlighted
- \* A marketing tool to disseminate information on London Funders within boroughs would be very useful (cf the Big Lottery Fund website)
- \* What London Funders provides is good - events and services, high quality speakers, a regional view - but more needed

#### *Areas to share learning/ collaborate*

- \* Mapping of second tier support organisations and which are receiving funding - to co-ordinate information and highlight gaps (especially cross-borough)
- \* Joining up intelligence and highlighting best use of funds
- \* Shared expertise and learning
- \* Sharing outcomes from funding
- \* Joining up at policy level/ strategic overview - the whole funding picture
- \* The pre-qualification questionnaire is too challenging for many groups - how can we build up resources and capacity within the sector?
- \* Better collaboration/ coordination and information sharing between local authorities and linking local authority intelligence to the rest of the sector

#### *Possible future meeting topics*

- \* **Social enterprise, including pressure on income generation**
- \* **Impact of commissioning on the sector:**
  - borough exchange and trust perspective: how do we keep hold of what is good in the voluntary sector?
  - are funders outside local authorities aware of commissioning frameworks?
  - the problem of smaller groups being excluded
  - where's the best practice in commissioning?
- \* **Staff development**
- \* **The credit crunch/ recession: how will it affect us?**
- \* **Government spending priorities and new streams of funding - preferably including a government Minister**

#### *What's good about London Funders?*

"I always walk away with something new, something different. It's inspiring, always gives a new angle. The bulletin is very useful - I always look at it. It's the best source of information pertinent to funders I've seen."

Inga Spencer, Hillingdon

Comments included that participating in London Funders represents a good staff development tool - through events, project groups and use of the website. When topics are tackled in meetings there are expert speakers and an effort is made to help funders think together strategically and at a policy level, helping to understand targets, policies and outcomes.

### Attendance by organisation

Name	Organisation
Debbie Pippard	Big Lottery Fund/ London Funders
Victoria Warne	Capital Community Foundation
Monica Needs	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Augusta Morton	London Borough of Brent
Jacqueline Smith	London Borough of Brent
Devbai Banji	London Borough of Brent
Ann Wynne	London Borough of Camden
Niki Nicolaou	London Borough of Enfield
Susan Humphries	London Borough of Haringey
Kashmir Takhar	London Borough of Harrow
Malcolm John	London Borough of Harrow
Jalal Rajonuddin	London Borough of Havering
Inga Spencer	London Borough of Hillingdon
Charlotte Brewster	London Borough of Hounslow
Enid Watts	London Borough of Hounslow
Elaine Aherne	London Borough of Lambeth
Grace Gbadamosi	London Borough of Lambeth
Sandra Jones	London Borough of Lewisham
Robert Bowler	London Borough of Merton
Jo Sarafin	London Borough of Newham
Stephen Collins	London Borough of Newham
Shila Barber	London Borough of Redbridge
Bonnie Royal	London Borough of Southwark
Tracey Chadwick	London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Amanda Daoud	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Connie Mante	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Sasan Abathi	London Councils
Bally Dhaliwal	London Councils
Paula Ghosh	London Councils
Morven McCallum	London Councils
Nick Lester	London Councils
Ian Redding	London Councils
Belinda Birch	London Funders
Gaynor Humphreys	London Funders
Colin Bloxham	Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Gillian Pennington	Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames