



## What works in supporting civil society organisations' resilience?

4<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Event note

### Background

This event organised by London Funders and Rocket Science was an opportunity to bring together funders and VCSOs to explore the role of diagnostics and capacity building support in helping organisations become more resilient and sustainable. It was also a chance to talk directly with three London VCSOs who have been supported by Rocket Science; Bromley Mencap, Daffodil Advocacy and The Asian Centre about their experience of the Local Sustainability Fund grant. Information about the organisations is appended to this note alongside the event presentation slides.

### Presentation

The event was attended by 40 people and an attendee list is attached for information.

Geraldine Blake from London Funders presented an overview of The Way Ahead to provide context around the issues and challenges facing London's VCS and what was being taken forward at the London level to help support VCSOs across the capital. Following the launch of the report back in the summer, London Funders with other stakeholders, is working towards implementation of the recommendations and Geraldine is leading on this work.

Caroline Masundire from Rocket Science, followed with a presentation on the types of support for helping VCSOs become more sustainable and how this had changed over the past six years. She reflected on their evaluations of support programmes for Big Lottery Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund, the design and delivery of support programmes in London and in other parts of the UK and their experience of providing direct organisational support to VCSOs. The key messages from this were

- the importance of combining an online diagnostic process with one to one discussions and to get a 360-degree perspective across the organisation including service users
- focus on developing the capacity of the organisation by releasing senior level time which can be back-filled, to focus on sustainability and resilience planning, rather than wholly relying on using external support
- importance of being flexible and not binding support to a particular theme/activity but recognising that organisations need help to access and commission a support provider.

## Discussion session

To bring this learning to life a panel discussion was facilitated by John Griffiths with

- Eddie Lynch – Chief Executive of Bromley Mencap
- Denise McIntee – Manager of Daffodil Advocacy
- Philip Mathew – Manager of The Community -Hub Haringey (The Asian Centre)

Panel members were asked about their experience of the Local Sustainability Fund, including how they accessed the funding, their use of the diagnostic tool and some of their learning along the way. This was followed by short table discussion around the role of diagnostics and the types of organisational support needed.

## Diagnostics

- There are already a number of diagnostic tools in the market and funders need to be careful that they are using the right one and that there is consistency in their application - there is not a 'one size fits all' diagnostic tool.
- However, there is a danger that organisations could be asked to complete tools which have different purposes and outcomes and therefore lack consistency or alignment with what the organisation needs to achieve. The key issue is the extent to which diagnostics help organisations get to the truth so that they can plan for their needs more appropriately
- People felt that it can be difficult to get the true picture from organisations when it is tied to funding. Getting a 360-degree view is important because 'nobody gives the full truth'. In particular, you need to talk to people – especially service users – to get a more honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses and to supplement self-diagnostic tools with observations and other activities to triangulate the data to find the 'truth'.
- Comic Relief and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation are both launching programmes soon where they will use diagnostic tools as part of the package, but post funding approval rather than as part of it. This is the case with the Building Capabilities funding provided to recipients of Reaching Communities Funding from Big Lottery Fund.
- Lots of successful grassroots organisations don't 'perform well' in diagnostic tools. So have to be careful that these organisations don't get left behind and unfunded because they don't fit the mould of organisations that perform well. For example, organisations with a more professional approach or front may come across well in diagnostic tools but perform with the same quality as other 'less professional seeming' local organisations
- There is a risk with organisations rating themselves over time as they are likely to rate themselves higher at the beginning, then as they go through the process they start to understand the questions better and may rate themselves a lot lower. So what could look like a worsening, is actually an increase in the understanding of what needs to be done.
- For the Local Sustainability Fund, the time-lag between undertaking the diagnostic and the receipt of funding was discussed. This took around nine months and things had changed for all of the organisations who had received the funding, meaning that the position was very different in terms of their sustainability than when they had originally applied. This was emphasised as being a particularly pertinent issue for a funding programme centred around implementing change and it was also highlighted that going through this process presented a greater risk for smaller organisations as there was more pressure on these organisations who are already "living hand to mouth".

## Flexible funding

- Flexible funding is important as it enables organisations to do what they do best – use their expertise to design programmes and work out how and where to invest. Funding that is very tightly bound to projects that also specify how the project is to be delivered means that organisations don't have the scope to use their expertise to create a good programme. The expertise that small charities have in this area is often undervalued.
- However, funders/commissioners are coming out with very tightly defined ITTs with a detailed methodology. This is often designed by the commissioner with no engagement with the organisations who hold the expertise.
- But there is a risk in going too flexible –if organisations are left without support and have the potential to waste resources and time. Also organisations often appreciate a direction or critical questioning contribution to guide their thinking.
- Local funders are perhaps best placed to offer flexible funding as they are embedded in the local context and have a greater understanding of need. Local funders often form long-lasting relationships with the organisations that they fund, which means that they can place greater trust in these organisations.

## What support should be provided by funders?

- Support should be tailored to what the organisation needs. Often a blanket approach is applied – eg a mentor, when this is not the most appropriate support for an organisation.
- Big Lottery Fund's new portfolio is likely to see a shift away from project funding towards more support for organisations. It will be interesting to see if this shift is then replicated by other funders.
- However, there are difficulties for funders in providing more organisationally-based funding, given the huge diversity of the VCSE sector: what might be appropriate for a small local organisation might not meet the needs of a large national charity. This flexibility in approach needs to cut across both funding and the use of support. The learning from the Supporting Change and Impact evaluation, was that £10,000 did not go very far, however you could do two or three things relatively well with the money if you use it in the right way. Trying to do too much dilutes the impact of the fund when in most cases you need to enable behavioural change within the organisation.
- It was noted that a one year can be very short for implementing the kind of changes asked of organisations – a multi-year programme would be more manageable. Though this kind of funding gives organisations breathing space and enables them to reflect and focus on longer term issues of mission/vision etc., short-term funding is not really compatible with a change programme.

## Links to tools, resources and reports which may be of use.

[Supporting Change and Impact Evaluation](#)

[VCS Assist – Diagnostic tool](#)

[Big Lottery VCSE Diagnostic](#)

## Attendees

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mridu <b>Thanki</b>	Asian Centre
Sakthi <b>Suriyaprakasam</b>	Bexley Voluntary Service Council
Samantha <b>Magne</b>	Big Lottery Fund
Eddie <b>Lynch</b>	Bromley Mencap
Rohan <b>Martyres</b>	CAN
Gilly <b>Green</b>	Comic Relief
Phillip <b>Matthew</b>	Community Hub Haringey
Jenny <b>Field</b>	Daffodil Advocacy Project
Carol <b>Gardner</b>	Daffodil Advocacy Project
Denise <b>McIntee</b>	Daffodil Advocacy Project
Ros <b>Weinberg</b>	Daffodil Advocacy Project
Alex <b>Hayes</b>	Foundation For Social Improvement
Jake <b>Ferguson</b>	Hackney CVS
Alex <b>Van Vilet</b>	Lloyds Bank Foundation
Danny <b>Slater</b>	London Borough of Barnet
Claire <b>Witney</b>	London Borough of Hackney
Feria <b>Henry</b>	London Councils
Geraldine <b>Blake</b>	London Funders
Geraldine <b>Tovey</b>	London Funders
Steve <b>Browning</b>	Mind
Rob <b>Hardy</b>	NCVO
Ria <b>Bowler</b>	New Philanthropy Capital
Helen <b>Morton</b>	Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Penny <b>Yewers</b>	Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Natalia <b>Griffiths</b>	People's Health Trust
Sharon <b>La Ronde</b>	Richmond Parish Lands Charity
Mark <b>Barratt</b>	Rocket Science
John <b>Griffiths</b>	Rocket Science

Clare	<b>Hammond</b>	Rocket Science
Caroline	<b>Masundire</b>	Rocket Science
Steph	<b>Nixon</b>	Rocket Science
Hannah	<b>Rich</b>	Rocket Science
Richard	<b>Scothorne</b>	Rocket Science
James	<b>Turner</b>	Rocket Science
Stuart	<b>Brown</b>	Small Charities Coalition
Sufina	<b>Ahmad</b>	The City Bridge Trust
Cathryn	<b>Perrin</b>	The Cranfield Trust
Gordon	<b>Muir</b>	The Social Investment Business
Rob	<b>MacMillan</b>	University Of Birmingham
Kevin	<b>Nunan</b>	Voluntary Action Camden