

Voluntary Sector Funding in Westminster

Developing and sustaining the voluntary and community sector in uncertain times

A consultation on improving the way that the council and NHS Westminster fund the voluntary and community sector.

Who replied

- 75 formal responses were received
 - 46 people attended four dedicated workshops
 - Around 34 arts organisations attended a presentation and Q&A session at the Westminster Culture Network and around 38 people attended a presentation at the Westminster Faith Exchange.
 - Just under 90 people attended the Westminster Community Network (WCN) conference and contributed to a response by the WCN
 - 59% of respondents worked mainly in Westminster
 - 25% worked mainly in Westminster and some other London boroughs
 - Organisations of all sizes replied:
 - 18.6% had a turnover of less than £10,000
 - 17% had a turnover of between £10,000 and £100,000
 - 38.6% had a turnover of between £100,000 and £1 million
 - 25.7% had a turnover of over £1 million
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What you said

Question 1. Do you agree with the shared principles outlined on page 23? Is there anything missing?

98% of the organisations who responded to this question agreed with the principles set out in the consultation document, with an overall figure of 79% in agreement when taking into account those who did not respond.

However a number of you told us that the principles should go further, and we should include more information on what we mean by some of the principles, such as “clarity” and “openness”. Others thought innovation and full cost recovery should be included as principles.

Question 2. Should Westminster small grants continue?

98.6% of organisations that responded to this question want Westminster to have a small grants fund. Including non-responses, 96% of you agreed.

In your responses many of you highlighted the importance of small grants to smaller organisations, and its role in helping the sector innovate and come up with new ideas.

Question 3. Should the grants be one year only or up to three years?

80% of you who responded to this question agreed that the grants should be available up to three years. Overall the average (including those who did not respond) was 75% in favour of the grants being available for up to three years, with 19% in favour of grants for one year only.

Question 4. Should small grants be limited to smaller VCS organisations, e.g. those with a turnover of less than £10,000 a year?

69.1% of those who responded answered “no” to small grants being limited to organisations with a turnover less than £10,000.

Those organisations that answered “no” to this question were organisations varying in turnover size.

Around 54% of the organisations with the smallest turnover, who answered this question, said “no” it should not be limited.

Question 5. Should the fund be managed by the council, a VCS agency, or a separate trust.

Of those who answered this question, 57.6% thought a small grants fund should be managed by a VCS agency.

Almost a third of those who responded expressed a preference for the funds to be managed by the council, at 30.3% and 12.1% selected a separate trust.

Question 6. Would your organisation be likely to apply for a small grants fund in the next three years if it was available?

71.6% of organisations said they would apply to for a grant if it was available.

Organisations of all sizes said they would apply.

Question 7. Should Westminster have a medium sized project grant mechanism, or should such projects be commissioned through a simple procurement process?

79.2% of the organisations who responded agreed that Westminster should have a medium sized project grant mechanism, while 20% would prefer a simple procurement process.

A number of you agreed that commissioning is a better way for the statutory sector to procure core services, however you highlighted your anxiety about the future levels of funding available. Some of you thought the council should make funding available through a medium-sized grants mechanism, and we shouldn't wait for funding from central government to do so.

Arts organisations highlighted the value they bring to the community, but were concerned their services wouldn't fit within a commissioning through procurement approach.

Question 8. How can we make sure VCS organisations are aware of and able to bid for these grants?

Most of you suggested using a range of communication methods, from email, website notices, newsletters, events and grassroots consultation. 31% of respondents thought information should be distributed by a VCS agency, and 19% of responses suggested distribution by a VCS agency in conjunction with council/NHS communication methods.

Arts organisations told us arts liaison officers would help to make people aware of funding opportunities.

Question 9. Do you think that all services should be funded through a commissioning approach?

18.6% of respondents thought all services should be funded through a commissioning approach. 81.4% disagreed.

Question 10. Do you have any questions or concerns about how the commissioning process would work for your organisation?

6.7% of respondents said they had no concerns. A further 8% said they would have no concerns as long as the process was clear and transparent, and clear information and advice was provided.

A range of concerns were also expressed:

- 23% of respondents thought small organisations would be at a disadvantage in the commissioning process.
- 15% thought procurement and commissioning was complex, or felt they didn't have a good understanding of either.
- 10% had questions about how needs were identified, and how they can be involved if they identify needs.

Question 11. What would you need to help you tender for services in the future?

- 22.2% said information and guidance on the process would help when tendering for services
- 20.8% said they needed simple, transparent processes with realistic timeframes
- 13.9% thought a service to help with drafting and reviewing applications would be beneficial
- 12% said training and help with registering on Compete For was needed
- 9.3% said advertising opportunities well in advance would help

During the workshops and in some of the responses, a number of organisations told us that they may need help to form consortia if they wanted to bid for parts of larger contracts. Concerns about the time it would take; the legal and financial risks; and also knowing who to partner with were also raised as issues.

Question 12. Considering your answer on the funding process, which funding option do you think is best?

Of those who responded to the question:

- 70% thought the best funding option was Option 2 – a small grants fund, a medium-sized grants mechanism and commissioning through contracting
- 16% preferred Option 1 – a small grants fund and commissioning through contracting
- 6.7% supported Option 3 – commissioning through contracting only

You said you preferred Option 2 because it created more opportunities for organisations and projects of all sizes to be funded, and that it gives organisations more flexibility. You also said small grants were needed for small organisations and projects.

Question 13. Should the set of services required to support and develop the VCS be specified in detail or do you think a broader, outcome based, specification is more appropriate?

Of those who answered the question, 42.4% thought a specification for a VCS support service should be specified in detail. 57.6% thought an outcome based specification would be better.

Question 14. How can we make sure that support and development reaches all parts of the voluntary and community sector, including equalities groups, vulnerable people and organisations working with equality groups?

There was a range of different responses to this question:

- 21.1% said regular communication was the best way to ensure support and developments reached all parts of the VCS
- 17.5% said VCS agencies are best placed to reach all parts of the sector. 3.5% said we shouldn't rely on VCS agencies.
- 10.5% said organisations tendering should have to evidence working with disadvantaged and hard to reach groups.

Question 15. How do you think individuals from the equality group/s and vulnerable people that you work with will be impacted by the different funding options?

Option 1 (Small grants and commissioning)

- 51.2% thought there would be a negative impact
- 32.6% though there would be a positive impact

Option 2 (Small grants, medium-sized grants mechanism and commissioning)

- 15% thought there would be a negative impact
- 75% thought there would be a positive impact

Option 3 (Commissioning through contracting only)

- 77.8% thought there would be a negative impact
- 8.3% thought there would be a positive impact

Question 16. If you are an organisation working solely with an equality group, how will the different options affect your organisation? Do you think that single-focus organisations will be disadvantaged more than other types of organisations by all or any of the different options?

43.2% said single-focus organisations will be disadvantage and 9.1% said they did not think single-focus organisations would be disadvantaged. The rest of respondents were unsure.

Question 17. If you think that the equality group/s, vulnerable people or organisations working with equality groups will be negatively impacted by any of the options, how can this negative impact be minimised?

Respondents said the impact can be minimised by:

- Fair commissioning and needs assessments (26.7%)
- Training and support (13.3%)
- Supporting VCS infrastructure (4.4%)

4.4% of respondents thought the impact can't be minimised.

Question 18. Bearing in mind the equality groups that you work with, which option do you think is best.

66.7% said Option 2 (Small grants, a medium sized grants mechanism and commissioning through contracting) was the best option.

17.8% supported Option 1 (Small grants and commissioning through contracting)

4.4% supported Option 3 (Commissioning through contracting only)

Question 19. Do you have any other comments?

Some of the comments received mentioned:

- that transparency is important
- it is important to fund core costs
- it is important to fund VCS infrastructure