




Funding Advice for the Voluntary and Community Sectors



What difference does it make?

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What difference

An Exploration of Five Case Studies in the South West

This report¹ summarises the learning from five case studies exploring practice in the provision of funding advice to the voluntary and community sectors (VCS) in 1. Torbay, 2. Bristol, 3. Somerset, 4. Gloucestershire and 5. Wiltshire with Swindon and Bath. Three of these highlight current good practice, and two consider new initiatives to plug gaps in support. Although funding advice in each area has been shaped differently in response to local history and culture, and the levels of development of the VCS vary, the learning across all five is remarkably consistent.

Main findings:

What are the benefits of funding advice and support?

- Investment in funding advice linked to organisational development and capacity building* can unlock significant income for the VCS, helping the sector, including social enterprise, grow and be recognised.
- The leverage of funds and volunteer time into an area by a well-funded VCS is considerable, making a significant contribution to the local economy and resulting in wider community benefits. In the last 18 months, £8 million was raised by the VCS helped by the Torbay Development Agency worker and in the last year the Bristol City Council Regeneration team helped the VCS to raise over £2.2 million. In Gloucester, the City Council's grants to 20 key organisations levers in an additional eightfold amount of resources into the area.
- In areas where there is not significant funding advice and limited capacity building, VCS development, including the number of groups, the range of issues they cover, and their accessibility and effectiveness are much more limited. The level of inward investment levered into these areas is lower.
- Skilled funding advice linked to organisational development produces strong funding applications that demonstrate appropriate project management and business planning, thus avoiding wasted time for funders and applicants.

What works in funding advice and support?

- An approach which combines capacity building and organisational development with funding advice, available locally, appears highly productive. When these functions are integrated, support can be closely tailored to the needs of organisations and groups, and evolve over time.
- This approach appears to be most helpful for new and small to medium sized organisations, especially disadvantaged groups. These may need substantial locally available help to get 'fit for funding', thus becoming more self-managing and sustainable, and able to deliver positive outcomes for their beneficiaries and the wider community. Quite long-term and varied support is needed over an organisation's life cycle.
- Partnerships and larger VCS organisations clearly also benefit from funding and organisational development work, but at a more sophisticated level.
- This organisational development work is essential underpinning for the meaningful use of good funding advice - access to a database or just signposting possible funders are not usually sufficient.


* Organisational development and capacity building enable groups and organisations develop the skills and knowledge to manage their affairs well, deliver positive benefits and become sustainable.

does it make?

- Users of funding advice services are not concerned about who delivers funding advice and support services - it may be more than one agency or worker - as long as the providers are approachable, visible, consistent, flexible, and seamlessly interface with the capacity building help they need.
- Strong co-ordination, signposting, and clarity around roles and responsibilities between statutory and VCS agencies are essential, if the right help is to be delivered at the right time.
- Whilst the model of integrating capacity building and funding advice provision into single workers or agencies is very persuasive, the sophisticated level of knowledge and skill needed in funding advice may be difficult for the generic development worker to maintain without access to specialist support.
- The continuity of funding advice posts is considered very important in this context, where it takes time for individual workers to develop the knowledge and local credibility to make a difference. The VCS appears to be highly vulnerable to change in the provision of funding advice with a lack of staff continuity and short term funding.
- Where there is a history of investment in the VCS, the process of developing a strong VCS can withstand the loss of individual workers; where there is no such history, progress may be hard to sustain. Positive relationships, trust, and history between key statutory officers and VCS infrastructure organisations are also significant.
- Some organisations put significant effort into identifying the leverage and additional resources, that both their direct funding of the VCS, and their resourcing of funding advice and capacity building, bring into their areas. Similar approaches to monitoring, along with a focus on wider community outcomes, and the developing of internal quality standards, would be of benefit to all funders and those involved in giving funding advice and help.
- Providing development support at local level requires investment in VCS infrastructure or development organisations, especially if the VCS is to grow and participate in partnerships and develop its representational role within decision making bodies, like the Local Strategic Partnerships.
- More effort is needed to make good funding advice available to hard to reach communities in rural and urban areas.
- The development of both the regional and local funding advice networks (FANs) for information sharing and peer support and the accredited training programme are greatly valued by funding advice workers. The availability of small grants from the Network Development Fund through the South West Foundation and Funding South West has been important in helping them off the ground. Working together, Funding South West and the FANs give a real opportunity to develop both monitoring and quality standards, and to contribute to national developments.
- The dialogue between the funded, funders and funding advisers needs to be resourced and facilitated to develop understanding and good practice.



Setting the scene

 Funding advice and support are given to VCS groups in the South West (SW) free of charge by many Local Authorities and a range of voluntary agencies and funding bodies. The models and coverage of this support vary considerably, as do the perceived results in terms of a secure and thriving VCS. In 2004 Funding South West, which brings together funders and funding advisers from all sectors who fund and support groups and communities in the region, published research by Red Door Associates³ which mapped the provision of funding advice services in the South West. This found some significant capacity gaps, and an undervaluing of funding advice services.

So the purpose of this research was to identify:

- Different models of delivering effective funding advice, and evidence of the difference such advice makes, especially any multiplier effects of extra resources being drawn in.
- Parts of the region where there is not a fully effective funding advice infrastructure operating, and thus to infer the losses involved, drawing on local, regional and national evidence.

And the questions needing an answer were:

- Where in the region is the VCS best supported by dedicated funding advice? What is the nature of this support, the rationale for its provision and the evidence that it is effective in attracting funds to the area served, and supporting VCS activity?
- In areas where there is not much funding advice support, is it possible to point to a relationship between this gap, the level of VCS development and the level of inward investment in these areas? Are there any developments that could bring improvements or pose a threat to the sustainability of the VCS?

How the five case studies were chosen

The case study areas were identified following group discussions with funding advice workers, analysis of 30 short survey forms and 26 telephone interviews with a range of key stakeholders. A number of 'good practice' locations could easily have been chosen. Devon, for example, has the longest-established funding advice workers' network in the region and we had positive feedback on both local authority and VCS work there. The work of the Local Authority funding advice worker in Bournemouth was also strongly recommended. Some important partnerships in East and West Cornwall, the long distance support of organisations by Intercom, the regional infrastructure agency working with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender organisations, and Arts Officers and Community Foundations, were also highlighted. The final choices, agreed with our advisory group in order to achieve an indicative range of rural and urban locations and models of delivery, were:

- Torbay Development Agency
- Charities Information Bureau and its partners
- Bristol

In identifying two less well-supported areas, there were likewise a number of locations that could have been explored. In both the selected areas, however, alongside contrasting levels of resourcing, gaps in funding advice services and threats to the sustainability of the VCS, it was thought interesting new opportunities were being grasped to address historical shortfalls. The areas chosen were:

- Somerset
- Gloucestershire

Working with the advisory group and key funding advice networks across the region, and building on evidence from an earlier conference workshop⁴, we identified features of good practice and success in delivering funding advice and used these to develop our interview guides.



Who is giving funding advice to the VCS?

As we see in figure 1, there are a very wide range of agencies and individuals, formally or informally offering funding advice and help. Whilst this could look like duplication, the reality is that in most of the South West, resources are spread quite thinly, and the complexity of the picture makes it hard for the organisation looking for help to know where to go.

Figure 1



Clarifying the nature of funding advice and organisational development work/capacity building

During the interviews, the difference between funding advice and help and organisational development work/capacity building became clearer:

Funding advice and help can involve:

- Giving up to date and targeted information about funding sources and specific eligibility criteria.
- Helping groups clarify their ideas and start to turn them into a project with a plan.
- Identifying gaps in organisational requirements and offering limited help with constitutions and 'off the shelf' policies.
- Reading over and commenting on applications in draft.
- Giving support in completing funding applications, knowing where to look for local research evidence, helping to put together budgets, and knowing how to approach the application and the appropriate language to use.
- Offering training on finding funding etc.
- Creating opportunities for funders and potential applicants to meet and share perspectives and raising the concerns of groups about funding issues with funders.



Organisational development work/capacity building can involve:

- Working with individuals and groups to enable them to develop the skills and knowledge to form groups, form and run management committees, draw up constitutions, manage their affairs well and deliver positive benefits.
- Working with individuals and groups from marginalised or socially excluded communities with a common interest or identity, so they are strong enough to have an influential voice locally and to participate in VCOs, neighbourhood activity and partnerships.
- Working with organisations to clarify the needs and issues they want to tackle and identify a detailed project plan.
- Working with organisations to develop appropriate policies and procedures.
- Encouraging groups to network, informally and formally, with other organisations, that have similar needs/interests, and link into relevant umbrella organisations, which can offer a representational role with policy makers.
- Helping larger organisations or projects with business planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, income generation, and securing ongoing funding etc. to improve an organisation's effectiveness and sustainability in relation to its mission and context.

Funding advice and help and organisational development work are different but complementary skills and approaches; many workers explicitly link capacity building to wider organisational development work.



Is funding advice and support important for the VCS?

Recent work in the South West⁵ and in County Durham⁶ shows that access to funding advice and support is a high priority for the VCS. In the large County Durham study, the three key areas of support that groups want to access in the future are funding information and advice (53%), networking with others (42%), and finding and keeping volunteers (34%). This unsatisfied need for funding advice is reinforced by the South West study *Finding the Funding*, undertaken by the South West Foundation partly to inform this research. 800 questionnaires were sent to small VCOs in rural and urban areas, with a response rate of 76% in rural areas, and 31% in urban areas. Nearly 75% of replies came from groups with an annual income of less than £15,000. Around half overall reported difficulty in accessing information on funding, although interestingly only 27% reported such difficulty in Devon, a county with well established sources of good quality funding advice. Around half the organisations in rural areas also identified that advice on developing and managing their organisations was crucially missing, with the figure climbing to 61% in urban areas.

What does the VCS look like in the South West⁷?

The South West region enjoys the highest level of informal and formal volunteering of all the English regions, and contains at least 25,000 voluntary and community organisations, including over 16,000 registered charities and 1,800 social enterprises. Their collective income is £1.5 billion⁸, and they employ 54,000 people (approximately 2.3% of the regional workforce). The VCS is therefore of considerable importance to the region's economy as well as its community life. However, in comparison to Business Links, for example, which provides comprehensive support for new and existing businesses, the investment in VCS development support is small.

The policy context is 'a-changing'

The list of current policy initiatives that have a bearing on the VCS is huge - there has never been so much Government interest in the sector. ChangeUp, a ten-year investment plan to facilitate the reconfiguration of existing VCS-managed infrastructure services so they can meet needs more effectively, is a key initiative. Of importance too is the national Compact, an agreement between the VCS and government to improve their relationship for mutual advantage, and ensure that voluntary and community activity is supported. Regional and local Compacts aim to do this locally between the sector, councils and other local public bodies.

In terms of wider partnerships locally, both Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are key arenas in which Local Authorities need to work more closely with the VCS. As such they are also an important focus for the work of funding advisers.

The changing approach to funding the VCS

Obtaining funding from a range of sources has become increasingly difficult for the VCS as many major European and national funding streams have ended or are declining.

Although 38% of VCS income is still from the public sector (including Lottery), this is increasingly going to large organisations following the Government's 2004 Gershon Efficiency Review. At Local Authority level, although there is a potentially welcome growth in Council-based External Funding Officers, levering in external resources to both Council departments and the VCS, grant aid budgets are increasingly being cut. This reflects a general shift towards shopping and investment models, rather than giving grant aid, as highlighted by Unwin (2004)⁹.


A recent officer's report to Gloucestershire County Council's Cabinet defined these different models as follows:

'Shopping: [The Council] will state the sort of services it wishes to see in the community, and will provide the opportunity for organisations to bid for money to run these - procurement, commissioning and contracting.

Investing: This will be [the Council's] contribution to providing the voluntary sector with the appropriate infrastructure services that it needs to carry out its role.

Giving: This refers to an unrestricted donation or contribution towards a voluntary organisation's core services or projects, where these are in line with (the Council's) priorities.'





In this climate, the split between fee/contract and grant income to the VCS has increasingly tipped towards fee income, which now comprises 53% of the sector's statutory income. Linked to moves towards full cost recovery, these changes make finding funding even more challenging for the VCS. Overall, the sector is having to generate more of its own income, with trading and loan finance becoming increasingly important.

VCS value, leverage and additionality

Limited desk research was undertaken to identify regional and national evidence on the inward investment the VCS brings into areas, as well as evidence about the relationship between advice, funding, volunteering, sectoral growth and wider community benefits. This evidence is complex, and often the underlying methodology is weak¹⁰ and response rates poor, especially from smaller community groups. However, new data are starting to emerge.¹¹

Some of the key debates are around:

- What is included in the definition of the voluntary and community sector - only registered charities, or much wider?
- How to value volunteer time - at opportunity or replacement costs?
- Can you infer a relationship between an organisation getting grant aid funding from its local authority and its capacity to lever in additional resources to the area?
- Can you balance attribution of success in a funding application between the effectiveness and capacity of the organisation and that of the funding adviser?

Evidence of VCS leverage in the South West and elsewhere

Leverage can be looked at in four ways - and they all provide evidence for an investment model:

- The numbers of volunteers involved and the 'economic' value of their work.
- The additional funding levered in directly by the local authority investment in the VCS through grant aid.
- The additional funding levered in indirectly through its resourcing of funding advice and development resources.
- The VCS turnover, the jobs created and its contribution to sub regional GDP.



Looking at the case study areas, we have evidence from the Lottery Monitor that identifies Tewkesbury, although still almost bottom of the regional rating list along with Sedgemoor, as being now in the top 10 'movers' in England in terms of accessing Lottery funding in 2004 as compared to 2003. In the 1996-2003 period it was second from the bottom in terms of regional Community Fund spend. This improvement reflects in part the work of the External Funding Officer who has helped the VCS to bring in £470,000 over the past 18 months.





There is leverage evidence from four other case study authorities – Torbay, Bristol, Gloucester and Gloucestershire:

- **In Torbay**, in addition to the £8 million raised in 18 months by organisations helped by the worker at Torbay Development Agency, the 2005 Torbay Lottery data indicates that it has improved from its third from the bottom place in the Lottery charitable expenditure grants for the 1995-2003 period. Charitable expenditure has increased from £815,000 in 2003 to nearly £3.5 million in 2005.
- **In Bristol**, in 1999, the social economy - the VCS as well as community enterprise - had a total value of £223 million (4.34% of Bristol's GDP); there were more than 9,400 paid staff, 4.6% of total employment in Bristol, with over 20,000 volunteers. The VCS Investment Budget funds 65 organisations from its main programme and 30 further groups on a one-off basis - a £2.2 million grants programme. The City Council Regeneration team, through fundraising support to VCS projects across Bristol, assisted the VCS to raise a total of £2,246,309 additional funds, and helped create or maintain 87 jobs in the VCS in the city. Evidence from the Lottery Monitor also identifies Bristol in the top 10 'movers' for Lottery funding in 2004 as compared to 2003 though it was fourth in the regional rankings for the Community Fund spend in 1995-2003. Leverage evidence is not collected but it was recently noted that VOSCUR and BDA between them receive around £200K from Bristol City Council but lever in an additional £800k to support the local sector.
- **In Gloucestershire**, County leverage is looked at in terms of external funding acquired. With an Economic Development Unit budget of over £1 million per year and a spend of £3.5 million, £2.5 million comes from external funders. They look for a leverage ratio of 2: 1.
- **In Gloucester**, the City Council looks in detail with all those VCOs it funds at how the city council money generates other funds coming into Gloucester. They have a basic annual monitoring form, which covers the numbers of users, volunteers,

and the volunteers' time. Twenty organisations are looked at in terms of leverage and the ratio is 8:1 - i.e. for every £1 given by the Council, £8 is brought in by external funding. The evidence does not take into account volunteer time and it is difficult for county-wide organisations like Young Gloucestershire with a turnover of £1 million, to identify a Gloucester component.

Elsewhere in the region such evidence is rare, although recent work in Bridport, Boscombe and Springbourne¹², indicates that for every pound of public sector investment in Bridport, social economy organisations, including VCS organisations, generate another £6.90; organisations in Boscombe and Springbourne generate another £1.30 for each pound invested. The higher level of public sector funding in Boscombe and Springbourne is thought to be a reflection of the availability of SRB6 and Neighbourhood Management funding as well as the support of charitable trusts in an area of social exclusion. Overall, across the two areas, for every member of staff in the social economy there are seven volunteers. The Devon study in 2003¹³ estimated 92,200 volunteers, 49,000 employed in the VCS, 9.5 of the labour force, and a contribution to GDP of £883 million.

Evidence¹⁴ from other regions is also variable, with urban leverage rates ranging in East London at 2:1 (from an investment of £1 in the VCS attracting in £2 from other sources); to 2.5 :1 in Lewisham; to 4.5 :1 in Brighton and Hove; 7 :1 in North Yorkshire and York, a mainly rural area; and a claimed 14: 1 in Leeds. Both the Lewisham and Brighton studies identified a strong positive relationship between income and number of paid workers and their evidence challenges the view that as income rises, the number of volunteers falls. Research suggests that volunteers provide services worth between three and eight times the cost of recruiting, training, and managing the volunteer depending on the organisation.¹⁵ An

estimated 1.1 million full-time UK workers would be needed to replace formal volunteers, well over twice the number of full-time equivalent paid employees in the voluntary sector. This would be at a cost of approximately £25.4 billion.

There is also national evidence on the effective leverage work of Council External Funding Officers¹⁶. They had an average 89% success rate in 2004, the median value of awards being £1.5 million for those authorities without a co-ordination group, and £7.4 million for those with a group. 32% of the bids involve the VCS with a 74% success rate. The median cost of putting together a bid is £2,305 and bringing in external consultants improves the success rate, but of course greatly increases costs.

Whilst many relationships of change and influence can only be inferred, recent research¹⁷ indicates that even when the class composition and levels of deprivation of communities are taken into account, communities with a lot of civic engagement or social capital are also communities with benign policy outcomes. Of course, the benefits provided by the VCS to individuals and communities go far beyond those that can be measured in financial terms. These wider benefits include:

- Service delivery in, for example, health, social care, education, environment and transport.
- Services that the private sector has little interest in providing because of the very limited opportunities to make profits, often meeting niche needs and developing service models.
- Development and management of community buildings, arts, sports, leisure, and heritage opportunities.
- Bringing people together; new community and self help groups; campaigning and potentially stronger voice for marginalised groups; and 'incubators of civic skills'.

The Case Studies – Models of Good Practice

The case studies presented in this summary do not tell the whole story of each area, and appear here in a very condensed format, with longer versions in the full research report.



Torbay Development Agency – an integrated funding advice and development approach

Background

Torbay, which has been a unitary authority since 1998, consists of three coastal towns with a combined population of 132,500 people, around 20% of whom live in an area that is in the top quartile of the most deprived in England. Torbay Development Agency (TDA) was created by Torbay Council in January 2004 as a public/private sector partnership with a remit to ensure the area's future sustainability through regeneration, marine services and tourism. During consultation for a new Torbay Community Plan, TDA's Chief Executive, Richard Morgan, became convinced of the need to view the development of the VCS as a key component of Torbay's regeneration. So in November 2004 Hester Kuhon was appointed to the post of Voluntary Sector Manager, with a remit to assist the VCS to develop into a strong, sustainable sector.

Hester came into the post with a strong business background, and as a former Funding Advice Worker with the local VCS infrastructure organisation, Torbay Voluntary Service (TVS), had already built up trust and knowledge of the local sector. Within three months she was able to show TDA's Board that her post had been instrumental (both directly and indirectly) in bringing £1.6 million of external funding into the organisations and groups that had sought her help, and hence into Torbay's wider economy. The figure is now over £8 million and she has achieved a 75-80% success rate in the funding applications that she has directly supported. In light of these achievements, the initial focus of the TDA Board in support of high-level job creation and business sector stimulation rapidly changed to a fuller understanding of the role of the VCS in economic regeneration.

Objectives and Services

The objectives for Hester's work are to increase the funding brought into Torbay's VCS, to build its capacity, raise standards of service delivery, and create social businesses. The services that she offers in support of these objectives cover not only funding advice (identifying potential funders, helping with the preparation of bids, bringing together project partnerships) but also help with organisational development to enable groups get 'fit for funding' (in areas such as governance, charity law, financial management, project and business planning, monitoring and evaluation). Much of this work is conducted face to face, supplemented by simple tools, written guidance and training. An annual training budget of £21,000 has been established to offer workshops, short courses and an annual funding conference. The highly successful 2005 funding conference attracted over 250 voluntary sector delegates, 90% of whom were local. Hester also invests time in creating and maintaining links with funders, including private benefactors and sponsors, and in turn has the confidence of the funders. Where local research reveals gaps in services, for example for older people or those with mental health needs, she is proactive in bringing these to the attention of funders.

Users

There are an estimated 300 voluntary and community groups in Torbay, to which TVS offers help with organisational management and volunteering. TVS also plays the leading role for the VCS in major strategic initiatives such as ChangeUp and the Torbay Strategic Partnership. However, since the end of Lottery funding for its funding advice post, TVS has reduced capacity to undertake work of this kind, and therefore signposts most funding advice enquiries to Hester, who has been approached by over 200 organisations and groups since joining TDA.



These range from small community groups to a number of large and infrastructure organisations. Whenever possible users are invited into TDA or out-posted 'surgeries' to discuss their funding needs and what they hope to achieve. This takes the form of a detailed initial assessment and agreement of next steps, with follow-up meetings at regular intervals to review progress. Hester views this as a step-by-step 'up-skilling' process, helping people to articulate their ideas, identifying potential funding sources, reviewing their draft bids and providing helpful documents, but rarely writing letters or applications for them. Where other organisational development needs are identified, Hester offers advice, support and any relevant available training. She thus acts very much as an enabler, nurturing people and helping them to grow.

Partnership work

Partnership work is viewed by Hester as one of the most important aspects of her role. She is currently supporting partnerships to develop a Charity Village in Torbay, to establish Steady Work Torbay (a project to help homeless people regain their lives including employment), to build a Torbay Advice Centre with CAB as the lead partner, and to start a dental project in an area of deprivation in partnership

with Charity Bank, Future Builders, Torbay PCT and SureStart. She thus plays a key role, acting as the 'glue' between different sectors, funders and partners of very different sizes and capacities.

Managing and monitoring

Hester keeps detailed monitoring records, using a number of simple but effective systems to track her work. In addition to monetary success, she also monitors the impact of capacity building by recording any new social enterprises, groups and registered charities that emerge following her input, and by seeking information from funded groups about the wider outcomes funding may have yielded. In terms of her own management, Hester reports directly to TDA's Chief Executive and feels that both he and TDA have been highly supportive as well as providing a challenging and dynamic environment in which to work. TDA uses an annual review system to set staff targets and measure staff performance. Hester's work is thus explicitly aligned with TDA's corporate priorities. She receives regular supervision and she is also well linked into the Devon Funding Advisers' Network, but she does not currently benefit from any formal peer assessment.

Making a difference

Users ultimately see Hester's role as having a funding focus, but for smaller organisations this comes as part of a tailored package that may include many other elements adapted to their individual needs and have wider spin-offs than money. The Apollo Boxing and Sports Club, for example, which coaches disadvantaged young people from the Barton area, had an unfinished, vandalised building and was in urgent need of funds and fresh impetus when volunteer Sean Philpot approached Hester in 2005. Her earliest advice focused on getting the club on a proper legal footing, and fundraising to cover these costs and re-stimulate the community's interest and young people's ownership of the project. In

monthly meetings, this progressed to helping Sean to apply for funds for specific capital improvements, for which £18,000 was raised. She has more recently encouraged him to see how the building could be used by other sections of the community, and local mums now use the building three mornings per week. Sean is currently preparing a Big Lottery bid to help meet revenue costs over the next three years. The club is also about to become the training HQ for the Boxing Association for Devon and Cornwall, which is:

'the biggest honour we could ever imagine... She opened my eyes up to all these possibilities. Why not be the biggest, the best? From the first moment I met her she started to sow lots of little seeds – try this, try that, nothing too big, lots of little projects. She built it up. She could see I was terrified, but it was phenomenally successful. If she'd just given me the names and forms it wouldn't have happened. She's held my hand all through. I've done all the paperwork... but she's helped me to produce letters using my words, my terminology and my passion for the club.'

These comments are echoed by other users, large and small, all of whom describe Hester as 'the right person in the right job', and feel that TDA has provided a good platform for her skills, enabling her to operate at a strategic level: *'We really need this type of person to help us... she has brought about real tangible change in Torbay'*.

Conclusion

An integrated model, combining organisational development with funding advice, appears highly productive, especially for small to medium groups that need help to get 'fit for funding'. Investment in such posts can help the VCS to grow and contribute to the regeneration of an area, but where success is wrapped up in one individual it is highly vulnerable to the loss of the worker.



The Charities Information Bureau - a collaborative partnership between a specialist funding advice agency with local partners and regional reach

Background

Wiltshire is a rural county of small market towns, with a population of around 433,000. The unitary authority of Swindon has a population of 180,000, with some real pockets of deprivation. The Charities Information Bureau (CiB) was set up by the Rural Community Council 22 years ago, to help and advise groups and individuals on funding and charity law across six local areas within Wiltshire and Swindon, and more recently Bath and North East Somerset (BANES). Historically, CiB had only two staff, and was funded by the County and District Councils. Lottery funding permitted additional advice resources, and since May 2005, ChangeUp has enabled CiB to employ two new part time funding advisers, Mary Waters and Sabine Orton, with both professional fundraising and training experience.

Objectives and services

CiB's goals are to support community groups, organisations and individuals by:

- Making the best quality funding and charity law information available and easily accessible.
- Supporting users and Funding Advisers so they can make best use of funding information.
- Investigating and developing the range of funding opportunities available to users.

CiB provides information, advice and support around funding and charity law, and gives free access to its comprehensive online database of local and national information. CiB publishes various 'How to' guides and a quarterly newsletter. Groups that approach CiB are typically helped to

find out how or where to raise money, how to write good grant applications, become a registered charity, and write a constitution. Those needing further organisational development help are referred to their local development agencies.

Users

Prior to the creation of the dedicated funding adviser posts, two-thirds of enquiries to CiB came by telephone or letter, mostly from groups in Wiltshire. In the six months to March 2006, however, CiB worked with 400 organisations and local authorities across all six areas, with more face-to-face work. The range of users is very wide - CiB identifies about 75% of users as marginalised groups and individuals, with 90% from rural areas.

Partnership work

The aim of the ChangeUp funded work is to build connections, so that frontline VCS organisations can access high-quality funding advice assistance, and are better equipped to deliver services effectively and to support communities. Through the two new funding advisers, CiB is now offering a real opportunity to learn about collaborative models for local delivery of funding advice to the VCS, and partnerships with local agencies and the local authorities. Because each of the six areas has a different history of relationships between CiB, the CVS and the local authority, this has tended to shape the nature of co-working in each area.

The new South Wiltshire Funding Advice Service is provided jointly by CiB, Salisbury District Council, and Salisbury and District Council for Voluntary Service (SDCVS). The District Council has appointed Gale Gould as a full time worker dividing her time between funding information, advice and support to the VCS, and external funding advice to Council departments, in recognition of the need to lever in new resources for both. She and Sabine between them cover twice weekly surgeries at

SDCVS. Both work with a range of organisations, including smaller groups, and aim to provide a seamless service, including helping with funding applications and fundraising plans. Both feel their role is to explore options with organisations and facilitate them to undertake funding work. Gail produces weekly funding alerts sent to all CVS members as well as those on their database. Where help is needed with organisational development, they refer to Debrah Biggs, CVS Development Worker. Because of the overlapping needs that are emerging from this work, Debrah feels the Salisbury partnership is becoming increasingly collaborative:

'Half the organisations approach one of the funding advisers first... and then get referred onto me, and the circle keeps going...Gale and I are now starting to do joint visits, working in parallel from the first.'

Gale's post emerged from a recognition by Amber Skyring, the Council's Principal Community Development Officer that *'This is an opportunity to recognise that people come to the District Council for funding, and pull the pieces together so you get CVS group development work, plus training, plus funding advice...It's about sharing knowledge and expertise, so there is flexible coverage.'*

Amber considers that a fundamental shift in culture is taking place, and recognises the need to bridge the funding deficits by accessing new sources of money, alongside supporting the sector in developing strong policies and 'business acumen'.

In North and West Wiltshire, Kennet and the Bath area, partnerships are again being forged between Mary and Sabine as skilled funding specialists and the local CVS development workers who have the local contacts and essential resources to help organisations become 'fit for funding'. The approach taken in these areas is exemplified by their work with CVS North Wiltshire, where Mary runs a



surgery each month. She writes a report on the state of progress for the CVS team, and will refer groups back to work with them. This signposting appears to work well and feedback so far has been good. According to Karen Moyes, the CVS Development Worker: *'[CiB] has real expertise and she's very well versed, and good at gently nudging the groups, but not pushing information and theory. It's a tailored service.'*

In Swindon, Jane Butler, CiB's Company Funding Adviser and Local Network Fund Adviser, works closely with Paul Dixon from Voluntary Action Swindon (VAS) who does all the funding advice work with groups for Swindon. Previously Lottery-funded, Paul's post is now part of the three-year funding agreement with Swindon Borough Council. He integrates funding advice into the development work, with VAS as the first point of contact and advice on what VCOs need to do: *'Groups think all they need is funding, but actually they don't - they need all the other help around funding.'* Paul feels they have good working relationship with CiB, and ChangeUp *'gave us the opportunity to negotiate how we work together'*. Recently they have jointly developed a guide for finding funding.

In each of their six areas, CiB have offered a local training programme for the VCS through their CVS partner, provided by the advice workers supported by CiB's Training Officer. This is linked into Learning Curve's programme of ITC and management training and support around income generation. The training, which has attracted nearly 400 participants, has included filling in applications, planning budgets and full cost recovery, and different ways of fundraising. Other partnership activities include work with the Wiltshire County Central Bidding Unit to run a quarterly External Funders' Network, which brings around £1 million into the County. Their knowledge of local corporate community support also led to their work setting up Swindon Employees in the Community Network, and they are contracted by the Wiltshire and Swindon Community Foundation to undertake outreach and application support work with small community organisations, for their Local Network Fund for Children and Young People.

Managing and monitoring

Due to time pressures, CiB can offer only limited supervision, and is therefore moving team meetings to a peer learning model as well as using each other informally. CiB sends out a letter seeking feedback from organisations 3 to 6 months after the advice work, but this is often too soon for results, and only a quarter of users respond. Most of those who return the forms find the advice helpful and are satisfied with the service and speed of response, but it is hard to get good evidence of success rates. The funding advisers and Gale Gould in Salisbury are now starting to undertake telephone follow-up.

Strategic regional work

In response to the needs identified in the Red Door report, CiB has been working with South West Foundation across the region since 2005 to provide professional training to funding advisers and funders, with support from Funding SW, ChangeUp and the Home



Office. Feedback from over 40 participants on the course for Funding Advisers (accredited at Open College Network level 2/3) has been extremely positive. As well as developing skills and gaining a qualification, they have all benefited from meeting each other and sharing experience. The programme evaluation sheets emphasised a growth in confidence, knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a Funding Adviser. CiB also developed, and in Spring 2006 delivered 'Funding the Future', an accredited training programme for funders. In 2005/6, CiB and partners ran two well-attended events in Weston and Bodmin called 'Together we can... ensure that funding works for our communities' bringing advisers and funders together to share knowledge and information about funding issues.

Making a difference

The Laverton Institute is a charitable trust that administers a Victorian community building in the middle of Westbury. Richard Slingsby, CiB's recent Senior Funding Advice worker, advised their new fundraising sub committee around developing a funding strategy for a much needed phased refurbishment. Helen McKinnon, the Administrator really valued his help:



'He advised us where to go for funding and how to go about doing it... and what we needed to have in place in order to apply for funding. We have discovered what a complex project it is! He helped us think about the sequencing, and made sure we checked things... with our solicitor. We have applied for two grants and are almost ready for the Lottery application.'

Conclusion

CiB is the only specialist funding advice agency in the region. It is both a direct provider of local funding advice services and undertakes strategic regional work including training and support to funding advisers. Regional access to specialist knowledge and resources is clearly important to both funding advisers and generic development workers. In terms of local funding advice provision, collaborative partnerships, in which staff from different agencies work together to offer funding advice and help with organisational development, appear to work well for users. The South Wiltshire model may also have positive spin-offs in terms of trust and mutual understanding between the VCS and the local authority. Effective relationships and joint working practices may however take time to evolve and for the service to be known and used.





Bristol - a rich complexity of resources

Background

With a population of nearly 400,000, and over 90,000 people working in the city centre, Bristol is the big city of the SW and is the base for a number of key regional organisations such as the Government Office for the SW. It is a rich, ethnically diverse city, but in terms of multiple deprivation and key areas like income, employment, education, skills and training and crime, more people are deprived in Bristol than in any other local authority in the Region. In 1999, the social economy - the VCS as well as community enterprise - had a total value of £223 million (4.34% of Bristol's GDP); it employed more than 9,400 paid staff, 4.6% of all employment in Bristol, with over 20,000 volunteers.

Funding advice agencies

Many different agencies and individuals are involved in giving funding advice alongside their main focus of work, often informally or embedded in their development work. However, there are a number of key agencies in Bristol where funding advice is a core activity:

Started in 1993, the Black Development Agency (BDA) was the first BME led CVS in England. It empowers black and minority ethnic communities Bristol-wide and in the surrounding areas by building their capacity to develop a sustainable black VCS. Funding advice is seen as an integral part of this capacity building work. BDA thus includes a session on 'Making good funding



applications' within its training programme. The 'Funder Finder' software package is available on a drop-in basis with support from the Information and Training officer, and some of these sessions result in referrals to BDA's Community Development Team, whose weekly information and advice surgeries are often used by small, emerging groups, often from unsettled communities. The Team helps groups with clarifying aims and objectives, budgeting, work planning, developing policies, as well as identifying their aspirations for long term development and linking them into other parts of BDA. For users such as Mustafa Suleman Mader, a volunteer from "Off Da Streetz", a small BME led community-based organisation for young people, such help with developing the organisation as well as funding is valued:

'I went to them to get help and advice on everything to do with establishing a new organisation, including funding... I felt comfortable dealing with them as (they) understood what we were trying to do...The service we received was great. I was feeling quite lonely and unsure of what to do next, but they gave me so much help and support...They have also put me in touch with other organisations who are working with the group of young people I am targeting.'

A number of groups felt that help with funding can be hard to find. Given that BME

organisations have particularly difficulties in accessing funding¹⁸, the Annual Funders Fayre for BME groups has been an important development. Jointly run with Quartet, the Community Foundation, it involves six key funders and has increased both the number and success rate of applications from BME groups. BDA staff feel, however, that funders need a more sustained investment to keep the Black Voluntary Community Sector informed as well as improve relationships and funders' perceptions, and that they should be contributing to a specialist BDA post around funding advice. This would help promote good practice and avoid wasted effort and would also raise BDA's credibility as a trusted resource. Rana Dildar Singh, BDA's Community Regeneration Manager, feels that once groups start to grow their budgets beyond £50K, they currently tend to look to other BDA partners, like Prohelp and the Cooperative Development Agency, for more specialist support with business planning and strong funding applications. BDA links with other local funding advisers and Balbir Kaur Nirwan, the Community Development Worker, is the convenor of the Bristol and former Avon funding advice network that meets quarterly.

VOSCUR started in 1995, at a time when there was no mechanism for VCS representation in the city. Now Bristol's CVS, it employs 15 staff and has a membership of nearly 700 organisations, of which 10% are BME led. Funded by the City Council, Lottery and ChangeUp, VOSCUR plays the leading VCS representational role in Bristol, is a member of the Bristol Partnership and is involved in developing the Local Area Agreements. VOSCUR also sits on funding panels such as Community Chest and the Social Economic Development Fund and works to influence through lobbying, consultation and working in partnership to produce a response on behalf of the VCS.

In terms of funding advice, VOSCUR offers supported taster sessions on 'Funder Finder' three times a week, after which groups can

use the database on a drop-in basis. The sessions are well used by a wide range of organisations. A six-month follow up of groups using the sessions indicates that users value the service and find it *'supportive, helpful and encouraging'*, but *'the results, so far, show that a lot of users have not been successful in obtaining funds, as they require hand holding'*. Although staff are briefed to offer telephone advice on funding issues on a drop-in basis, VOSCUR does not have the resources to offer the kind of one-to-one support that the Director, Wendy Stephenson, feels is needed in the city.

However, Tyndale Circle Day Centre, which offers a day centre service for people with memory loss one day per week to provide respite to carers and a safe stimulating environment for its 12 members, found the session *'very helpful and constructive. She gave me some training on Funder Finder and then I took off on my own. The programme provided me with a short list of potential funders and then narrowed it down to three... It could have been like looking for a needle in a haystack. I was amazed at the number and range of trusts... It could have taken hours and hours of laborious work and this was done in only a morning... We needed £800 - I applied to three trusts and was successful with two of them. The primary difference it made to us was that we didn't have to divert our time on fund raising activities... It was a supportive, helpful and encouraging process, a high quality service'*.

VOSCUR also works with partner agencies to deliver a training programme to help VCS groups meet City Council's Base Line Standards, covering areas like financial management, developing a fundraising strategy, filling in grant applications and updating on funders. In a six month, ChangeUp funded post, David McKenzie is undertaking strategic work around the future of funding advice in Bristol, as well as designing a self help funding advice

information package. Working across VOSCUR, BDA and BACEN, David is developing a coherent funding advice referral system to maximise resources and avoid duplication and the organisations have now decided to put in a joint bid to the Lottery for three funding advice workers. The role of each worker would be to support the members of their organisation and also to work in a joined up way with the needs of the sector as a whole and effectively be a consortium funding advice team.

Although the research did not set out to cover social enterprises, BACEN (Bristol Area Community Enterprise Network) is clearly an important part of the resource picture. BACEN started in 1991-92 as a lobbying membership organisation raising the profile of community businesses through the phases of SRB1-6. It now has 10 staff and is delivering business development support to the social enterprise sector, including Development Trusts, Credit Unions, and VCS organisations interested in developing trading. In 2004/5 it worked with 89 social businesses. Although BACEN do a great deal of capacity building, they are starting to re-negotiate their role with the City Council's Community Development Team to determine which is the most appropriate agency in Bristol to provide this support to social enterprises. In the field of funding advice, Elaine Flint, the Director, particularly identifies the issue of keeping up to date with funding information:





'We are a small agency and it is a real challenge. Where do we go for this? Bristol needs a central agency to focus on accurate funding advice, which is up to date, rather than all the agencies giving funding advice and trying to do everything.'

Bristol City Council runs a wide range of grant schemes and staff from many departments are involved in advice giving on funding. The Bristol City Council Regeneration Team is comprised of 14 workers who give advice and support to the VCS. In 2004/5 they provided development work and funding support to 257 VCS organisations of all sizes, including 58 new community groups. In practice most of this work is undertaken in the city's Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Their focus is on regeneration and community cohesion, and they have undertaken a great deal of work with refugees and asylum seekers, working with local and new communities. Last year they gave organisational development and project planning help to 50 organisations around the city. Their funding advice work involves helping with constitutions, bank accounts, policies and access to seed corn money. They sometimes help with applications to Big Lottery, offering extensive advice. Detailed team and

individual records are kept that indicate funding levered into the area by the VCS, jobs supported and safeguarded, numbers of hours worked with groups, and regeneration structures.

All the main agencies involved in funding advice are also partners in the Council led Equal funded C3 (Competitive, Credible and Confident) project focussing on social economy organisations, with some additional staff running a one to one Performance Improvement Programmes using the European Foundation for Quality Management model for diagnosis and action planning, with organisations, which is thought to be starting to work well.

Finding help with funding advice and organisational development

The Finding the Funding survey suggests that many groups and organisations in Bristol are aware of VOSCUR as a source of information on funding: 70% of Bristol respondents had used VOSCUR for funding advice, and 40% the City Council. Because of the nature of the sample, only 13% mentioned BDA and 11% BACEN. In terms of advice on organisational development and management, 46% had used VOSCUR, and 24% the City Council. Again, only 12% mentioned BACEN and 7% BDA. However, across the urban areas surveyed, 61% of organisations said advice on how to develop and manage their organisations was missing.

Conclusion

Bristol appears to have a plethora of agencies with some capacity to provide funding advice and support with organisational development. However, in a city of such dispersed resources, it may be difficult for users to know where to tap into the system. The apparent richness of provision also masks some important gaps, especially in relation to BME groups and other VCS organisations that need intensive help with capacity building, and access to specialist up to date advice on funding streams.

The Case Studies – Needs and opportunities in historical gap areas



Somerset – The emergent role of a funding advice workers network

Background

Somerset is a large, rural county with a population of over 500,000 with an age structure older than the UK average. Although the county generally scores low on measures of multiple deprivation, there are pockets of poverty and 4% of people live in an area in the top 20% most deprived in England.

Funding advice and development support at County level

Somerset County Council is seen as having an important strategic role in sharing good practice across the county, in striving for equity in the provision of funding advice, and in helping the VCS to develop more

consistently within each district. There is a particular concern that, following the reconfiguration of the County Council's three geographically-focused Fieldworker posts into a new rural delivery team with responsibility for Rural Renaissance grants, the previously integrated community development and funding advice focus of those posts has been lost. Although there are clearly still a significant number of County posts dedicated to funding advice, there is a perception that these roles are becoming increasingly specialised and targeted, and the County's capacity to identify and respond to gaps and inconsistencies within each district and to build the capacity of the VCS has been significantly eroded.



Funding advice and development support at District level

Historically, the strength of each District's VCS, and its level of activity and sustainability are thought to differ quite significantly, and the availability across Somerset of funding advice and capacity building help for the VCS has varied considerably between Districts.

- South Somerset is viewed as the strongest District in terms of the provision of funding advice and development support to the VCS. The well-established Yeovil and District CVS is the only one in the county to employ a dedicated funding adviser, Alan Williams. Although he has been very successful in helping the local VCS to attract income, the CVS is reaching the point where it can no longer fund his post from reserves. South Somerset District Council works closely with the CVS to offer a complementary service to local groups. The Council and CVS share a licence for the 'Grantfinder' database and in 2005 they jointly organised a well-attended funding fayre.
- Until quite recently, Taunton Deane CVS was in a similar position, with a funding advice post and its own Charities Information Bureau (CIB), funded by the

Community Fund. However, replacement funding could not be found and the CVS now has little capacity to undertake work of this kind. Although groups can approach the Borough Council for advice, little help is available for those needing a more comprehensive service.

- Mendip has no CVS, but Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council have jointly funded a new, small organisation, Mendip Community Support, to help develop the sector's capacity. The part-time paid worker, Ann Watson, estimates that 60% of her time with groups is spent giving funding advice as well as offering wider development support, and she works closely with the District Council's Voluntary Sector Grants Officer to respond to the demand for help. Mendip Community Support has identified the need for a specialist funding advice post to be created, if funding can be secured.
- Sedgemoor has no CVS and the District Council has historically lacked capacity to offer the kind of funding advice needed by the local VCS. The Community Fund has consistently identified Sedgemoor as an area from which few applications have been received or have been successful. Against this background, the Community Council for Somerset was awarded Big



Lottery funding in mid-2005 to employ a Rural Community Development Worker, Katherine Armstrong. Her work is focused initially on helping groups to achieve a more solid organizational foundation before they move on to seek funding.

- West Somerset is the most sparsely populated, rapidly ageing area of Somerset. Although the District benefits from an established CVS, there are no dedicated funding advice posts within either the CVS or District Council, although the Council circulates information about funding sources and provides open access to the Open 4 Community website. There is thought to be a significant need here for help for many struggling small groups that have no paid staff and rely on the goodwill and energy of older volunteers to sustain local services.

The relative lack of CVS-based funding advice across Somerset is borne out by the recent Finding the Funding survey, which canvassed the views of 49 small voluntary organisations across Somerset. Of these, 34% got help with funding advice from their CVS compared with 47% in other rural parts of the region, 25% were helped by the Rural Community Council compared with 21% elsewhere, and local Councils were used by 47%, compared with 45% elsewhere.

The strength of the VCS within each District

There is an inferred connection in Somerset between levels of funding advice and the strength of the VCS in each District, with South Somerset as an example of a District that has enjoyed higher levels of support accompanied by a strengthening of the VCS and its service provision. In West Somerset, by contrast, where activity may be smaller-scale and run by older volunteers, lower levels of investment in the VCS seem to have been compounded by the lack of help to grow or to develop social enterprise:

'Getting funding is extremely hard... Our growth and development as a social enterprise will depend on our ability to get funding. Lack of finance inhibits growth and may even contribute to the demise of some groups. People get depressed and give up; I mean, do I really want all this aggro? It's not sensible and not reasonable to expect us effectively to be full-time volunteers. If we're going to grow, we've got to have paid people to facilitate it, do the leg work.' (John Harris, Chair, Wiveliscombe Area Partnership)

Some key gaps in funding for the VCS across Somerset are also identified, most notably for BME groups and networks, and for disability organisations.

Needs and opportunities

Against this background, the VCS has itself sought to address the needs of the sector through the formation two years ago of the Somerset Voluntary Sector Network (SVSN), a consortium of infrastructure organisations, following a successful bid to ChangeUp. SVSN acts as the umbrella organisation for VISTA, which was set up in 2004 with funding secured through the Learning and Skills Council to build the capacity of





Somerset's VCS through the delivery of programmes to develop the skills and expertise of the sector in areas that include governance, finance and accessing trusts and grants.

SVSN secured additional one-year funding in November 2005 to appoint a Funding Officer, Cathy Pegler (formerly the County Council Fieldworker covering Mendip and Sedgemoor), to bolster the provision of funding advice through infrastructure organisations and to set up a Somerset Funding Advice Network. Following the award of a Network Development Fund grant to cover costs for one year, a highly successful launch meeting of the Network was held in February 2006, attended by 38 funding advice workers (26 from voluntary sector organisations and 12 from local authorities, of whom half are on short term contracts).

These initiatives are now perceived by many as the key to improving the level and quality of funding advice across Somerset and to strengthening the VCS. Some also think it is important for the VCS itself to take the strategic lead in these areas: 'SVSN is taking

up the reins and things are happening. And that's probably essential and a good thing. The advent of the Network is the way forward and there's no way back now...'
(Carol Stone, Arts Matrix)

There is, however, concern about the loss of the SVSN Funding Officer's post from November 2006 when the Funding Advice Network is at such an early stage in its development, and a bid has therefore been submitted to extend its term. Many in the county are also mourning the departure from this post of Cathy Pegler, who recently moved abroad. Cathy was widely trusted as the source of invaluable funding knowledge and expertise and was seen as the champion of funding advice across Somerset.

Conclusion

Somerset's VCS has historically suffered from inconsistent provision of funding advice and capacity building, with inferred losses to the strength and sustainability of voluntary and community services in some Districts. There is now a VCS-led strategy to improve this situation, which may bear fruit if continuation funding can be found for SVSN's Funding Officer post and the emergent Funding Advice Workers Network. However, at this stage of the Network's development, the loss of a key funding advice worker is an important issue.





Gloucestershire - a county of contrasts

Background

Gloucestershire covers an area of 1,025 square miles with a total population of 564,559 and the county has a relatively ageing population when compared to the UK's average structure.

Funding advice and development support

Gloucestershire County Council currently gives £1.5 million in grants to the VCS, and across the council holds contracts worth over £50 million with the VCS and non-profit organisations, mostly in the area of adult social care, but also including over £2 million worth within the Economic Development Unit. This year the County Council is consulting on the commissioning of some services from the VCS (whilst still grant funding others), and this is thought to mark an important shift in the county's use of its grant funds. For the VCS, this situation of flux is compounded by the anticipated

move to unitary authorities within two years, and the consequent reluctance of the District Councils to spend time on unifying grant processes across the county.

Funding advice to the VCS by the County Council is described by one of its officers as *'sporadic and reactive, rather than a proactive resource'*. Officers do not usually get involved in writing bids, other than major partnership bids relevant to the county, often through the County Bidding Group (a mix of statutory agencies and VCS organisations) which acts as a 'dating agency'. There is little capacity to provide advice and support at any lower level than this, though some departments like Community Transport and Arts do undertake capacity building, offering advice and training on funding, contracts and tendering, and supporting groups to bid for Lottery funds. Recognising this lack of



specialist staff, the County Council has paid to provide the VCS with the 'Open for Community' funding search database, which is free to use and is located on the GlosHub (a website funded by the County Council and hosted by Gloucester Centre for Voluntary Services) for easy access.

Approximately 100 groups per month use this to conduct their own funding search. Two District Councils (Stroud and Forest of Dean) have External Funding Officers; Tewkesbury had a similar worker in post until recently.

Within the VCS itself, Gloucestershire Infrastructure Group (GIG), a consortium of the local infrastructure agencies, used its remaining funding advice budget in 2005/06 (from the County Council contract) to hold funding workshops at District level to skill up CVS staff in basic funding advice. GLOSHUB signposts groups to external funding streams via the online search database mentioned above. Although the website and workshops were mentioned positively by nearly all those interviewed, they were not seen as offering the kind of mentoring help needed.

Against this county backdrop, the two districts that present the starkest contrast in terms of the relative strengths of the local VCS, and the provision of funding advice and development support, are Gloucester City and Tewkesbury.

Gloucester is largely urban and contains a

population of 110,000 within an area of just 15 square miles, with 7.5% of the residents coming from black and ethnic minority communities. The thriving VCS is attributed in large part to Gloucester City Council's investment in it over the past 15 years - its grant programmes represented 8% of the Council's budget in 2005. These programmes are thought to have provided important core funding, enabling some now well-established organisations to consolidate and pursue government funding streams, as well as 11% of its grants budget going to support BME organisations. Its Community Development Team of four is mainly engaged in strategic and partnership work, for example offering infrastructure support to the BME sector. It signposts most requests from groups for individual help to Gloucester CVS and Linking Communities (the umbrella organisation for the BME sector).

Gloucester benefits from a strong and well-supported CVS (GCVS), set up in 1996, which plays a key role in ensuring that the VCS has effective representation on the Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership, the Compact Steering group, and wider partnership working. It is widely perceived that there is a positive working relationship and clarity of roles between GCVS and the City and County Councils. The Community Development Team at GCVS has increased the organisation's capacity to support a wider range of the 350 groups in Gloucester and the 30 networks in the county, around organisational issues, governance, conflict resolution, group work, and roles and responsibilities. GCVS had two funding adviser posts (one covering Gloucester and the other with a county-wide remit) until their contracts ceased in 2005. The workers were greatly valued but were overloaded with direct work with strengthening the organisations. Despite the relative strength of the VCS in Gloucester, small groups continue to require direct help. According to Sally Pickering, the Chief Executive: 'We need to keep the 'hands on' work... there is



an argument for more resources for a post to work with small groups, and one that is demand-led’.

In recognition of the particular needs of BME organisations in Gloucester and across the county, Linking Communities was set up in 1998, funded by SRB and the Gloucester City and County Councils, and offers funding advice and extensive hand-holding: *‘We spend hours and hours, and even days... explaining why the funders want information and the types of information needed. We build their skills and knowledge. There are cultural and language barriers that make it doubly difficult to understand the language of funders and what is needed’.* Linking Communities also helps prepare groups to talk on the telephone to funders, as ‘funders prefer to talk directly to groups’. The organisation has also held funding workshops but there are concerns about BME groups in the city, which provide vital services but are vulnerable and could close at any time. The BME sector in Gloucester is responding to these pressures by exploring joint bidding, building partnership agreements, and identifying which areas to bid to as a sector, but these activities place heavy demands on already over-stretched staff.

By contrast, Tewkesbury is a large rural

borough of 160 square miles, with a dispersed population of 85,000. 23% of the population are aged 60+ and 15% have a limiting long-term illness. Although Tewkesbury has a strong volunteer tradition, the lack until recently of any CVS support is widely believed to have hindered the development of the local VCS. Tewkesbury has always been a Lottery and County Council grant ‘cold spot’, despite promotion, to such an extent that questions have been raised about it in the House of Commons. The new Tewkesbury District CVS has now been able to appoint a part time development worker with limited funding from the Community Foundation, Awards for All, the South West Foundation and the Lloyds TSB Foundation. They have been supported by Tewkesbury Volunteer Bureau and Help Centre.

As well as needing to ‘catch up’ in terms of strategic and partnership working, the VCS is seen as needing immediate help with organisational development issues, training and networking. It also faces difficult funding issues. A complete freeze on all grant aid to the VCS from Tewkesbury Borough Council has impacted on organisations’ core funding, making the VCS increasingly reliant on fund raising, and on grants from trusts. In terms of funding advice and development support for the VCS, Tewkesbury Borough Council has decided not to contract with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) for the services of its fieldworker. Fortunately, the GRCC Village Halls Adviser is able to help some local village hall groups move away from grant dependency and toward social enterprise income generation.

The Borough Council also has its own small Community Development Team of mainly temporary workers. Until recently the Borough Council had an External Funding Adviser, Charlotte Dooley, who worked with over 100 groups as well as council programmes, and helped bring in £470,000

to the VCS in the borough over the past 18 months. This work, which included significant hand-holding, was highly valued by users. She felt that:

'New groups find it hard to know where to go for advice and existing groups find it hard to get advice to develop new ideas. There is a general lack of understanding of what is involved to get funding – setting up a bank account, writing a constitution, child protection policy, equal opportunities policy, business plans, budgets etc.'

To address these issues, Charlotte produced regular newsletters, a database and a guide to funding information. She saw her role as being not just about finding money, but also about obtaining resources and building partnerships. She found it necessary to spend a long time with some groups, as volunteers needed both advice and confidence building. A local organisation noted: *'The Funding Advice Assistant at the Council is the best thing that ever happened to us in the voluntary sector, and it is the best time ever that we have had any (external) money coming into Tewkesbury. She found all sorts of pockets of funding'*. However, Charlotte left her employment with the Council in March 2006 and, although her post is now permanent, there are concerns that the recruitment process has not been initiated for a replacement.

Needs and opportunities

There is a widespread view that more capacity building help is needed across the county, as the essential prerequisite for successful funding. Generic development workers may find it difficult, however, to give the latest advice on funding streams, once groups are at the stage of seeking funding. It is therefore thought that the county should have an external funding adviser to undertake active 'horizon scanning' of funding opportunities and identify potential partnerships. GIG has recently identified a need for a strategic

Funding and Finance Policy Officer post to represent the sector's needs to funders and work on implementing Compact, and a bid to the Big Lottery is currently being prepared. In this situation, the need to co-ordinate funding advice more effectively has resulted in the formation, through the County Bidding Group, of a Gloucestershire Funding Advice Network. Twenty people came to a successful first meeting in April 2006, convened by Daniel Robinson, the Development Funding Officer with the Gloucestershire Diocesan Board.

Conclusion

The Gloucester/Tewkesbury contrast highlights the importance of investment in infrastructure organisations and in funding advice and capacity building posts if the VCS is to thrive. Funding advice posts are needed at strategic policy and 'horizon scanning' levels as well as for local support, since generic development workers may not have the required level of knowledge to offer a fully integrated service. Clarity of roles and responsibilities between statutory and VCS workers are very important, and it is hoped the emergent Gloucestershire Funding Advice Network will support the development of coordinated funding advice work across the county.



Conclusions

The case studies and wider work undertaken for this research demonstrate clearly the value to the VCS of good quality funding advice allied to community and organisational development work, if they can be provided 'seamlessly' and at appropriate levels. Such support impacts not only on the strength of the sector and its capacity to grow, but appears to play a significant role in local regeneration, as the eightfold leverage effect achieved in Gloucester City demonstrates. Despite this positive feedback and the generally helpful influence of ChangeUp in bolstering the capacity of VCS infrastructure organisations, the research has found only a few examples of committed, long-term investment in funding advice linked to capacity building work for the VCS, compared with examples of statutory bodies increasingly disinvesting in work of this kind.

Overall, funding advice appears to be in a fragile state with resources arriving and departing over relatively short time scales. In such a climate, it is unsurprising that the VCS at local level so often struggles with

issues of sustainability. The investment model would argue that funders have much to learn in this respect from venture capitalists, who put in both financial investment and considerable business support, in order to secure better returns over the longer term.

In such a turbulent environment, the research highlights the importance of regional leadership and local action to support the development of Funding Advice Networks and the provision of training for funding advice workers, to alleviate isolation and promote best practice. It also identifies the need to build a better evidence base on the impact of funding advice, for example by encouraging funders and funding advice agencies to collect and collate better data about their impact on local economies. The Bristol case study further suggests that, since funding advisers are increasingly required to think about income generation and its links to social enterprise work, further case study work on the role of social economy sector organisations would be useful.

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Authors:

Lesley Frazer, Sarah del Tufo, Jenni Wilson
The Evaluation Trust, Phone/fax 0118 966 4864, e-mail evaluationtrust@maurice.u-net.com

About the research

The research was carried out by The Evaluation Trust in Spring 2006. Sarah del Tufo, Lesley Frazer and Jenni Wilson interviewed a wide range of local organisations and agencies including Funding Advisers and their managers, their users and partner agencies, as well as some funders and VCOs in the five case study areas across South West England. They also carried out desk research.

The research was commissioned by Funding South West, part of creating:excellence, the South West centre for sustainable communities. Copies of the full report (including an extended, web-only version) are available on the creating:excellence web site www.creatingexcellence.org.uk. For further information, contact John Skrine at creating:excellence:

John.skrine@creatingexcellence.org.uk Tel: 01823 250805

