

ELGC COV VS 03

Ymchwiliad i COVID-19 a'i effaith ar y sector gwirfoddol

Inquiry into COVID-19 and its impact on the voluntary sector

Ymateb gan: Sefydliad Cymunedol Cymru

Response from: Community Foundation Wales



Summary notes – Evidence for Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee, November 2, 2020

1. Funding

Important role of Community Foundation Wales' partnership with the National Emergencies Trust in attracting added £3.7m funding to support third sector in Wales. This meant that Wales benefitted from UK-level corporates who usually wouldn't engage at a local level in Wales (Google, Hewlett Packard, Marks and Spencer etc), and Trusts and Foundations who we'd like to invest more in Wales. We were able to work closely with NET, building their insight of needs in Wales.

At the outset, Community Foundation Wales moved quickly to establish the Wales Coronavirus Resilience Fund. This gave a focus to public generosity and philanthropy and was able to attract valuable funding support from Welsh businesses such as Admiral and Welsh Water. The set-up of the fund meant that we avoided the emergence of a myriad of locally-sourced funds across Wales (as we see when there is a local issue eg flooding) and issues/concerns around governance and fund management.

Funding has been released quickly and upfront, which has been great news for successful groups. Given the uncertain financial situation affecting foundation endowments, largely invested on financial markets to create charitable returns, we are likely to see a difficult year ahead.

Many funders have been asking for projects to fund at this time. At a time when many funding channels are drying up, this is storing up a problem for groups who will not be able to sustain the new work on a funded basis.

Trust and foundation funding is playing an important role in supporting the sector through this difficult time. But with the loss of trading income and event-based fundraising, it's not realistic for the sector to rely on sustainable funding from Trust and Foundations in the medium term. While organisations primarily funded through commissioning are less impacted by the pandemic currently, they too will face great uncertainty and concern about their future funding. The sector is facing colossal changes in how it is funded – and we are going to need strong leadership skills and high quality development support to survive and thrive. This is going to require strong infrastructure support and partnership work bringing together government, funders and other partners.

Opportunity

- Continue to build and develop Community Foundation Wales and National Emergencies Trust relationship for future emergency responses

- Develop the Community Foundation Wales funding model for national and local emergency funds to ensure quality, public trust and corporate support
- Supporting the sector in Wales to quickly adapt to the new funding context
- Use the findings from Community Foundation Wales Loud and Clear [report](#) to encourage funders to support core rather than projects, meaning organisations have the freedom to adapt in ever-changing situations.

2. Research

At the outset Community Foundation Wales ran an open-ended consultation to help shape its funding plans. Many groups then felt comfortable in approaching us to explain their situations when they didn't fit our criteria. We were able to be flexible and reach out where we saw gaps. Groups who gave feedback through this helped shape our funding decisions through the first six months, particularly in enhancing some of our grant levels, helping to identify gaps and increased our ability to work strategically.

Most funders would have carried out some level of research/insight-building. Having a more open approach to this across the sector would have helped collaborative working and decision-making.

Opportunity

- Wales Funders Forum is considering how funders can share information and work more collaboratively.

3. Supporting BAME communities

The funding sector generally has been criticised for not reaching the communities affected by the virus. In Wales, Community Foundation Wales has worked with partner organisations to invite applications from different communities. We do know that some groups struggled to find funding. Understanding that BAME communities were disproportionately affected, this was a factor in our grant decision-making and over-rode some of our usual criteria and quality markers. In the longer term, the pandemic experience has highlighted a need to improve the ability of BAME groups to secure funding.

Opportunity

- Funders have undoubtedly stepped up their engagement with different communities affected by the pandemic. We will continue to do this and to work on ensuring equitable support
- Improving the ability of BAME groups to secure funding in the longer term.

4. Giving voice

We felt that an important role alongside our grant-making was in telling the story of what groups were achieving. At a time when communities were feeling the full pain of the pandemic, we sought to balance this by supporting groups to tell their story. It also improved their skills sets for promoting their work and increased their confidence as we featured the videos that were shared to a wider audience. This was important, we feel, in building community resilience and morale and highlighting the community sector in Wales at its strongest.

Opportunity

- Recognising the importance of sharing stories of resilience at times of crisis. The important role of this in strengthening communities and encouraging others to take positive action.

5. Fraud

The first six months of the pandemic saw a significant increase in fraudulent applications. CFW policy is to report fraudulent applications to the police. Funders worked collaboratively, sharing information to stop these applications. We have reviewed and stepped up our security checks as a result – whilst seeking not to slow down applications times.

6. Partnership-working

In Wales we are fortunate to have strong relationships across partners, but Covid-19 pushed us to be more active partners, first of all in sharing information, then in joint planning so that we worked together to ensure our funding was most effective. Regular meetings with key partners and other funders kept everyone connected and informed, and were helpful.

We had strong relationships with Welsh Government and other funders throughout, with regular meetings to keep open communication channels. Despite attempts we were not able to engage or work alongside the Welsh Resilience Forum or the local partnerships. In a different emergency scenario, particularly with decision-making at a more local/regional level, this could be critically important so that funding strategies are aligned.

Opportunity

- We are building further on this through Wales Funders Forum and looking at how we can scale up our collaboration work
- We are very interested in the funding application model which has been developed by London Funders - an integrated process for its funders, cutting out lots of duplication for grant applicants. There are other technology solutions to this too which we are looking at
- Developing stronger links between funders and the Welsh Resilience community that can kick-in quickly in the case of local and national emergencies.

7. Volunteering

We have seen an increase in volunteering activity amongst younger people. This is a significant change at a time when we can see that volunteer activity for older people has been restricted. We saw a strong focus on public sector-based volunteering – it's important the community groups and charities and their volunteering needs are not overlooked at the time when they need that support the most.

Opportunity

- While sections of the population have had to stop their volunteering, other sections were motivated to start volunteering. More active targeting of this audience could bring positive results for the voluntary sector
- Can we maintain focus on third sector volunteering alongside public-service support?

8. Ad hoc voluntary work – Mutual Aid groups

We have seen a significant increase in these type of Facebook/Whatsapp-based groups of local people who are helping others. Much of it is unseen and happening on a very informal level, but with significant local impact. The groups, in the main, have not needed funding, or certainly only small amounts to buy food etc. This community-based support is tremendously valuable – it does however pose some important questions for the sector and society around our expectations on good governance and safeguarding.

Opportunity

- At a time of crisis, is society prepared to take more risks to ensure people have the local support they need?
- Can we develop a proportionate governance checklist for quick set-up groups like this, which encourages them to do things safely without adding too much red tape?

ends