



# **Consultation Response**

**Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations**

**Submitted to Capacitybuilders**

**January 2011**

This document is available in other formats. Contact the Women's Resource Centre on 020 7324 3030 or [info@wrc.org.uk](mailto:info@wrc.org.uk)

The Women's Resource Centre is supported by



## **About the Women's Resource Centre**

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding. Our members work in a wide range of fields including health, violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women. There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

For more information on WRC contact:

Women's Resource Centre  
Ground Floor East,  
33-41 Dallington Street  
London  
EC1V 0BB  
[www.wrc.org.uk](http://www.wrc.org.uk)

## **About HEAR**

HEAR works to place equality and human rights issues at the heart of the work of London's voluntary and community sector (VCS). We do this by acting as a strong pan-equalities voice and source of knowledge and expertise on issues impacting on the VCS. We aim to:

- Bring together distinct equality sectors, and others that are committed to equality, to speak with one voice on issues of the voluntary and community sector and of relevance to all equality sectors.
- Raise the profile of equality organisations, in particular their unique and vital role in creating lasting solutions to inequality, and place them and equality issues at the heart of London's voluntary and community sector.
- Enable equality organisations, and others that are committed to equality, to network, learn from each other, collaborate

and work in partnership, in order to improve the support available to frontline equality organisations.

- Share our equalities expertise with mainstream infrastructure organisations, to support them in ensuring their services reach and benefit equality organisations.
- Highlight gaps in and solutions to inadequate specialist support for equality organisations and act as a mechanism through which sectors lacking insufficient support can influence relevant policy.

HEAR's work is underpinned by the belief that those with direct experience of inequality and discrimination are best placed to develop strategies to achieve equality.

For more information on HEAR contact: Sarah on [sarah@wrc.org.uk](mailto:sarah@wrc.org.uk)

### **About the National Equality Partnership**

The National Equality Partnership supports the third sector to challenge inequality and promote equality and human rights. It is a three year project (2008-11) funded by Capacitybuilders under the Improving Support Programme. Our national programme covers the whole of England. We offer training, information and one-to-one support to umbrella organisations to help them challenge disability, homophobia, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and human rights abuse. We enable equalities organisations to increase their voices so that inequality is tackled effectively.

All of our work promotes collaboration and partnerships, sharing expertise and encouraging long-term relationships between equalities organisations and the wider third sector.

Our work is closely informed by our reference group encompassing all equalities sectors as well as generalist organisations. The partnership of NEP is made up of:

- [Women's Resource Centre \(WRC\)](#)
- [Voice4Change England](#)
- [Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Voluntary and Community Organisations](#)

- [National Association for Voluntary and Community Action \(NAVCA\)](#)

For more information on NEP contact: [equality@wrc.org.uk](mailto:equality@wrc.org.uk)

## **Introduction**

In October 2010 the Office for Civil Society (OCS) launched *Supporting a Stronger Civil Society*, a consultation on how central government can best play a role to support building infrastructure in the VCS. This consultation represents an important opportunity to input on how the role OCS can play in ensuring civil society in England has the advice, support and influence that will help it to modernise and respond to the new opportunities and challenges created by the Big Society agenda. The consultation addresses six key areas which are highlighted as priorities for action:

- Easier access to advice through online services
- Access to wider sources of support, particularly from the private sector
- Direct support to frontline organisations through bursaries
- Consolidation of support services through merger and collaboration
- Better local public sector partnerships
- Better partnerships between Central Government and national infrastructure organisations

This response has been coordinated by WRC, HEAR and the National Equality Partnership and brings together the equalities and diversity input on the consultation for the VCS.

## **Methodology**

A total of 133 small to medium organisations, representing the seven equality strands, were invited to participate in roundtable discussions to share their views on the consultation. From the seven strands, roundtable discussions were held with 34 participants from five equalities sectors. These included: gender; sexual orientation (LGB); transgender; race; and disability. In addition, an expert roundtable comprising pan equalities representatives was carried out. Each group comprised between 3-9 participants who were asked to provide their responses to the ten questions outlined in the consultation document. The

discussion was led by a trained facilitator and captured by the WRC research team

Sufficient numbers of representatives from the age and religion and belief sectors were unable to attend the discussion groups set up for their strands. Further sessions were organised but due to the inclement weather had to be cancelled as participants were unable to travel. This, coupled with the short timescale for the submission of this consultation response, which includes the seasonal bank holidays, has meant that it has not been possible to factor in further sessions. However, we believe that the data collected is rich, consistent and representative of the views of the equalities sector.

Furthermore, to ensure the widest possible inclusion of equality groups NEP has facilitated Change, the national equality rights organisation, to carry out their own consultation with people with learning disabilities. Having developed an easier read version of the consultation, Change is running its own event on December 21 2010 which will be attended by a NEP team member. The issues raised at this roundtable discussion will be incorporated into the final report to be submitted to Capacitybuilders on January 6 2011.

The use of roundtable discussions was an appropriate method of data collection as it allowed participants to generate their own frames and concepts and pursue their own priorities using their own terms and terminology. They also provided a supportive environment where participants felt comfortable and confident to share their views. To encourage a candid and open discussion, and taking into account potential sensitivities around some of the issues proposed in the consultation, participants were given assurances with regard to confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, while written notes were taken during the discussion and supplemented by an audio-recording for the purposes of accuracy, comments were not attributed to individual participants and no individual organisations are identified in this report.

In addition to taking part in the roundtable discussions organisations were encouraged to submit their own responses to the consultation by completing the online questionnaire.

## Profile of participant organisations

In order to gain a profile of the organisations who took part in the consultation, participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire. Thirty completed responses were received.

### Location of organisation

From the responses received (n=25) over half of the participants (56% n=14) who attended the roundtables were from organisations outside of London. The majority (71% n=10) were based in the North or North East, three (21%) were from the South East, and one organisation was located in the East. Eleven organisations (44%) were from London.

### Area served by participant organisations

Participants were asked to indicate the area their organisation serves or covers. Results are shown in *Table 1* below.

Table 1: Area served by participant organisations

	Local area	Borough/ County	International	London or region	National	Other
Number of organisations	2	4	1	13	13	0
Percentage	6.1%	12.1%	3%	39.4%	39.4%	0 %

### Number of paid staff and volunteers

The number of full time paid staff in the organisations who took part in the consultation ranged from 0 - 200 and the number of part time paid staff from 0 -13. The number of volunteers ranged from 0 - 80, and the number on management committees ranged from 0 - 11.

On average there were 16.8% full time paid staff; 3.9% part time paid staff; 17.3% volunteers; and 7.8% management committee members.

### Community or group with which organisations' members identify

Participants were asked to indicate the communities or groups with which the majority of them members identified. The results are presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Community or group with which organisations' members identify

Category	Number of organisations	Percentage
Black, Asian & minority ethnic	8	13.8 %
Disabled people	2	3.45 %
Lesbian, gay & bisexual people	6	10.3 %
Trans gender people	10	17.2 %
Older people	3	5.25 %
People on low incomes	2	3.4 %
Refugees	5	8.6 %
People from religious belief groups	5	8.6 %
Women and/or girls	9	15.5 %
Younger people	2	3.45 %
Asylum seekers	2	3.45 %
Other	4	6.9 %

### Number of individuals or organisations who use the services of the participant organisations

Individuals attending the roundtable discussions were asked to indicate the number of individual service users or organisations who draw on their organisations' services. As *Table 3* shows, the organisations represented ranged in size from 0-30,000 individual users and 0-3,000 group/organisations users. Twenty six responses were received for this question.

Table 3: Number of individuals or organisations who use the services of the participant organisations

Organisation	Number of individual service users	Number of groups & organisations
1	500	150
2	300	0
3	12,000	12 <
4	3200	100
5	1300	50
6	0	350
7	70	0
8	0	70
9	0	600 <
10	0	200
11	1500	0
12	300	12
13	< 500	0
14	0	378
15	30,000	150
16	0	200
17	500	150
18	0	500 <

19	0	3,000
20	0	400
21	0	1300
22	100	50
23	15,000	45
24	0	600
25	30,000	150
26	3,900	70-90

## Annual income of participant organisations

Table 4 shows that of those who responded to this question (n=24) the majority (75%, n=18) of organisations had an annual income of over £100, 000. Only three (12.5%) of the organisations participating in the consultation had an income of less than £10, 000.

Table 4: Annual income of participant organisations

	Under £10,000	£10,001 - £50,000	£50,000 - £100,000	Over £100,000
<b>Number of organisations</b>	3	1	2	18
<b>Percentage</b>	12.5 %	4.2 %	8.3 %	75 %

## The consultation

The consultation offers an important opportunity to input into the ways the Office for Civil Society can help to support and influence civil society organisations respond to the challenges posed by the Big Society agenda and we welcome the opportunity to put forward our views. However, we would like to draw attention to a number of failings of the consultation process:

**1. The consultation runs from 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010 to 6<sup>th</sup> January 2011.** This complies with The Compact, which states that government should “conduct 12-week formal written consultations” with the VCS, but its timing over the Christmas and New Year holiday period has meant in practice that there has been insufficient time for stakeholders to engage with the process. However, the deadline of 25<sup>th</sup> November for responses to Question

9 is clearly in breach of The Compact as it only allows six weeks for consultation. This consultation has been launched at a time when other consultations involving the VCS are taking place. This has placed a considerable burden on voluntary and community organisations that need to respond to the consultations to ensure their voices are heard while at the same time delivering vital frontline services.

**2. The context for the consultation appears to be London centric** and does not reflect geographical variations and the different needs of VCS organisations based outside of the Capital.

**3. The questions outlined in the consultation document do not address the issues most pertinent to the Equalities sector in the current climate.** This would suggest evidence and research on and by the Equalities sector has not been incorporated in to the consultation and as a result it does not reflect the concerns of those organisations the OCS purports to support. Furthermore, the tables in Annex A of the document, which claim to underpin the analysis used to support the consultation, are meaningless as it is not clear what they show or which equalities strands are represented. This suggests that the consultation is a tick box exercise and undermines public confidence in the process.

**4. For a number of questions it is not always clear how terms are defined or to whom they refer.** For example, in Question 1 it is not immediately apparent how 'online services' are being defined in this context, and in Question 8 what is considered as "expert intervention".

## **Summary of responses**

This section provides a summary of overarching themes and issues which were derived from the roundtable discussions with each of the equality strands.

### **Easier access to advice**

Online services have a place in voluntary and community organisations and many use these services to obtain and provide information to their members. We propose that an assessment needs to be made of those services that already exist. This could

be achieved by undertaking a mapping exercise to identify current online services. However, it is essential that such research is utilised and has a framework in which it can be placed.

For many voluntary and community organisations online services are only useful if employed as one tool amongst many and such services may not be beneficial to all frontline groups. Online services cannot replace the personal approach provided by face-to-face contact and it is a concern that there is an increasing move towards the internet being the only source for information. For a number of organisations providing information online or via email is less personal than sending a letter or giving written information. Ensuring organisations are able to provide the personal touch for their members, as well as information on the internet, is vital for ensuring service users feel they are treated as an individual. As the following participants stated:

All communications we do are done individually by hand, letter, or face to face because it's personal and people are treated as a person and not a number.

Online services are only a tool; there needs to be a holistic service.

People are asking for one-to-one mentoring, [they do not] want to go to a website.

[We need] human input and multiple ways that people access support and information.

The consultation assumes that all frontline organisations have access to online services whereas the reality is that many small organisations lack access to the internet. Furthermore, the issue of the 'digital divide' does not appear to have been considered. Many people are still unable to make full use of information technology, either because they lack the technical skills required to use the internet, which can make the whole experience overwhelming and alienating, or because they cannot access it where they live. As the following participants observed:

Online services are only as good as the people who can use them.

Online services are as good as the people they are reaching.

People need to know what is out there and can only do this through community leaders, people in the community [who] can tell them what is out there.

If online working and the use of social media continue to be favoured by the government there will need to be investment in the provision of training for those individuals and organisations for whom it is problematic. For people living in rural communities accessing the internet can be particularly difficult and will become increasingly so as they are unable to use public services such as libraries. This does not appear to have been considered by the consultation and reflects its London centric perspective. If there is to be an increase in the use of online services investment will need to be made to ensure equality and ease of access to the internet as currently this does not exist.

For those organisations that do have internet access, the sheer volume of information means navigating around sites can be difficult and time consuming. The following comments were made in regard to this issue:

People have to know what they want and sometimes there is so much online information it's a barrier straightaway.

The biggest problem I find when accessing information is that there is so much of it and it's all over the place. Websites don't conform to the same format, to the same standards.

[We need] online services for the initial finding out of Information and it has to be an easily accessible search.

Clear signposting is needed to ensure information can be obtained more easily and precious organisational resources are not wasted

searching websites. This is particularly important when searching for funding opportunities. Currently this requires a huge investment of time and resources. Smaller organisations, in particular, do not have the capacity to sift and sort through vast amounts of information and as a result they can miss out on potential sources of funding.

We consider that there needs to be an assessment of current online services and how these might be improved and suggest a single information site would be one way of improving what currently exists. This could be provided by a central site where information about funding opportunities and tenders are posted, including information about current and expired tenders. As one participant explained:

[I need] one place where I can go for all the information, and particularly for funding, [we need] funding opportunities in one place, at the moment this information is hidden.

A central site would be helpful to enable organisations to be more strategic when submitting applications, e.g. whether they would be better placed to bid for smaller amounts or if it would be worth applying for bigger sums. In summary, a system is needed that is easier to navigate and where information can be accessed free of charge.

While we believe the use of online services should be a two way process, whereby organisations have the opportunity to upload as well as download information from websites, this cannot be at the expense of placing an additional burden on frontline groups. Feeding data in and maintaining websites would put a strain on the already stretched resources of these organisations and in particular small organisations would not have the capacity. Furthermore, extending the use of online services would need to avoid any transfer of cost to organisations, especially those relating to printing documents. This can be achieved by ensuring hard copies are available alongside documents to be downloaded and consideration is given to the document formatting. Currently, much online information is provided as PDFs which prevent the user from making any changes to the text. This often results in organisations having to print documents in colour or including full

page photographs. This requires the use of resources which are costly to frontline groups.

### **Accessing wider sources of support**

In the main we would agree that there is a place for links between smaller voluntary and community organisations and businesses or larger charities. However, the assumption contained within this consultation is that while business has much to offer the VCS, it has nothing to learn from voluntary and community organisations. This illustrates a lack of recognition that those individuals who voluntary organisations support have a lot to give back and instead perpetuates the idea that they are a drain on the economy rather than having the potential to contribute to it.

We disagree and advocate a reciprocal relationship whereby the transfer of skills and knowledge is a two-way process. The voluntary sector has a lot to offer business especially around equalities and there is potential gain for both sectors from forging links and the transfer of skills and knowledge. The following comments reveal the strength of feeling in regard to this issue:

[Government] needs to identify and recognise the skills in the voluntary and community sector on equalities; they need us to strengthen business.

It's a two way process. It's seen as very big deal when businesses give four days a year of their employees' time to charities, it's not very much compared to what we are giving daily.

I would like to see skills transfer as more reciprocal, businesses can learn from us too.

The implication [here] is what can business do for grass-roots organisations ... this says business is better and bigger is better ...

Nevertheless, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into account when considering any connections between small voluntary organisations and business or larger charities, and we do

not feel these have been given due consideration in this consultation.

First, smaller organisations arise out of need and exist because larger charities have excluded them and not been inclusive of all the equalities strands.

Second, it is assumed within the consultation that equalities groups lack relevant business skills. We do not consider this to be the case and are disappointed that the voluntary sector is being cast as the 'poor relation' in this relationship.

Third, the consultation assumes that a relationship between business and smaller organisations would be unproblematic. However, our experience shows that business often lacks an understanding of equalities issues, the equalities sector and struggles to take on board the concepts of equality and diversity. As these participants commented:

Private businesses don't understand equality; business struggles to approach the concept, they don't see the necessity of it and [as a result] there is a mis-match of ethics.

Business doesn't have the answers, that is why we exist.

The reality is that the two sectors operate using different models, have different agendas, and often do not share the same values. As a result the skills that business has to offer voluntary and community organisations may not be relevant.

Fourth, we are aware there are often issues that prevent engagement between industry and some voluntary organisations. For example, the lack of public empathy for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender individuals means that businesses may be reluctant to offer support to frontline organisations supporting them. With their priorities being their shareholders and public profiles businesses are likely to work with more popular organisations leading to potential cherry-picking. This is likely to result in less 'popular' groups losing out. One participant explained how organisations in their sector:

are seen as an embarrassment and so there is a huge education process that is needed first.

Fifth, smaller organisations often prefer to look to each other for support and there is already much sharing of knowledge and passing on skills and expertise between these groups.

Taking these points into consideration the forging of more effective links between small civil society organisations and business or larger charities would need to include:

- Challenging larger organisations lack of inclusivity of all equalities strands. One way of addressing this could be having people from smaller organisations represented on the boards of larger charities at a governance level.
- Promoting awareness of equalities issues and greater understanding of the equalities sector that recognises its heterogeneity and takes into account differences between equalities groups.
- Ensuring businesses are not permitted to cherry pick organisations with who they work. This could be achieved by challenging the culture and putting local people at the centre.
- For knowledge transfer to take place relationships need to be built between business and larger charities and smaller organisations. There is the potential for links between business and voluntary organisations but it would need to relate to a specific intervention, for example, legal support, something that is a specific need of the organisation and clearly defined by a contract. However, for this to work the whole process has to be carried out meaningfully and requires government supporting organisations to identify their needs and the gaps and how business can fill these. This would enable a strategic approach with business providing targeted support based on need.

The provision of pro-bono support is often helpful and beneficial to voluntary sector organisations. However, at present it is offered in a fragmented way and often under-utilised because people are

unaware of the services that exist. There are a number of ways in which brokerage of this type of support could be improved:

First, by setting up a national online register or directory of services where those offering their time sign up and provide details of what they can provide, amount of time they have available etc. Organisations requiring support would then bid for a slot. This would be a centralised service but would need to match skills in the local area. This would ensure smaller organisations had equal access to support on offer and prevent larger organisations from creaming off what is available. Potentially, a large infrastructure organisation could be responsible for the register or directory. This would be relatively inexpensive to maintain and would be greatly beneficial to voluntary organisations. Nevertheless, while an online directory of services would provide a 'one stop shop', where organisations could potentially find a match for their support needs, as we have stated previously in this document, it has to be recognised that not all organisations have access to the internet or the skills to use the technology.

Second, support needs to be provided to communities of interest rather than those based on geography. At present there is an emphasis on geographical areas as if they were the only social structures. This does not reflect the composition of the equalities sector.

Third, government needs to promote pro bono support to business and encourage them to buy into offering their services to the voluntary sector. One way would be to offer financial incentives through tax breaks or showing how providing support could improve their branding image; this might be particularly attractive to companies who have a poor public perception. The key is to endorse pro bono support as a company initiative rather than focusing on individual volunteers. Without this its success is likely to be limited.

Fourth, improving brokerage of pro bono support needs to extend beyond funding infrastructure. For smaller organisations brokerage should be about businesses meeting a particular need, for example, a media company helping to produce an advert. This

could be extended to cover things like providing a conference venue and other activities for which organisations cannot easily attract funding.

Fifth, employer supported volunteering can present challenges to voluntary organisations and be a drain on resources. This is particularly the case for smaller groups who do not have the capacity to induct volunteers into their organisation, train, manage them and plan their workload. Therefore, to minimise such an impact it is imperative that volunteers are sent to a third party to be up skilled prior to starting with a voluntary organisation. This could be provided through training courses run for the private sector by the voluntary sector on how they can support smaller charities and voluntary and community organisations.

### **Direct support to build the skills of frontline organisations**

We consider that core funding is essential for voluntary and community organisations to become more resilient. Funding which prevents groups from having to apply for further funds on a regular basis would remove some of the pressure that they increasingly find themselves under. It would also allow them to focus on the main purpose of their organisation, providing a service. Core funding is particularly important for small groups and needs to be sustained funding for a period of 3-5 years with no obligation to register with the Charity Commission. These are some of the comments made by participants in regard to this point:

We need money, sustained and long term funds.

If the funding goes, the staff go and the expertise goes to.

Resilience comes from understanding the climate in which voluntary and community sector organisations are currently providing a service. There needs to be support for smaller organisations to collaborate for funding and time to form consortiums. Larger charities can employ fund raising teams to apply for grants but smaller organisations do not have the same

resources; this places them at a disadvantage. In addition, as it stands the consortium bidding process is complex. It needs to be simplified using a model that does not adopt a large scale business style approach which serves to undermine smaller organisation's resilience.

A reduction in the bureaucracy accompanying funding applications would ease some of the pressure this places on organisations, particularly smaller frontline groups. It is imperative that the administration and paperwork required when applying for monies is proportional to the amount being sought.

We would also like to see changes to the ways grants are administered. At present where funding is available grants are paid in arrears and rarely on time which forces organisations to exist on their reserves. This is problematic, especially for smaller groups and we would welcome changes to this process.

We consider current government thinking around commissioning, which in our opinion is haphazard, unrealistic, and accountancy driven, to be detrimental to the resilience of voluntary organisations. The drive is to put out bigger commissions because it is cheaper but with the impending spending cuts it will be difficult for smaller organisations to find the time to put together tenders. This will result in difficulties for them as small amounts of money which were available previously will no longer be available to apply for in the future. Therefore, those responsible for commissioning need to conduct research into its impact on voluntary organisations; this is a matter of urgency to prevent more organisations folding and further expertise being lost.

Demonstrating the value of voluntary organisations could potentially contribute to their resilience but support to translate the services we provide on a day to day basis is needed. The support we offer to our members and service users is not easy to quantify which makes it difficult to demonstrate our value to prospective funders. In addition, the current trend to undertake Social Return on Investment (SROI) projects, as a way of demonstrating value, is beyond the reach of many organisations particularly small ones, who do not have the capacity or resources needed to produce SROI reports. For organisations in the

voluntary sector the crux of the issue is that organisations should be valued by acknowledging the skills they have, not just their resilience. As one participant asked:

Why do we have to keep, over and over in the voluntary sector, keep demonstrating that we are value for money, and better value for money than the public sector? We provide excellent value for money and there is a lot of evidence.

The consultation proposes bursary funds “to help frontline groups access specialist services to become less reliant on the state, bid for public service contracts, modernise or be more entrepreneurial”. While bursaries may benefit some organisations there are a number of issues that need to be considered in regard to the current system. At present applying for a bursary involves working through layers of bureaucracy, which is time consuming and often disproportionate to the amount of money being requested. For example, applications often will be rejected if the wording is not correct; this needs to be addressed. One participant explained how they would welcome:

not having to jump through so many hoops to get a bursary of grant.

While another suggested that they would benefit from:

simple processes, having training and information days so people can get information and learning opportunities.

For a number of organisations their relationship to bursaries is alien and they are unwilling to invest resources in applying for monies because past experience has shown they have little chance of success. This is particularly the case for LGB and trans frontline groups who often lose out to infrastructure organisations. As the following comments illustrate:

As far as I know there is no trans specific funding available. You have to make the case and justify it.

No one will fund us to generate the evidence we need

[to support funding applications], so we can't provide the evidence.

We don't have the resources to find funding and write bids.

Where bursaries are allocated we consider the following to be priorities for sources of funding:

- Organisations that have been marginalised.
- Increased availability for small grants as at present it is difficult to access small sums. For some organisations a little amount of money can go a long way and can be used to fund venues, postage and telephone calls or even setting up a group.
- Sustained funding is essential as it enables organisations to achieve their aims and plan for the longer term.
- Support for specialist equalities groups who provide services to the most vulnerable in society.
- Asking organisations about their needs and allowing them to have control over how bursaries are spent and to use them as they see fit. Bursaries should be needs led rather than the government deciding the priorities.
- To extend reach to those delivering diverse services or in new areas of equalities where initiatives can be implemented.

Where bursary funds are available it is essential they are delivered fairly to ensure all equalities organisations benefit. While new ways of doing this appear to be advocated we suggest using existing models that have proved to work well. For example, the Council for Voluntary Service is considered to operate fairly and understands the issues around equality. This would make them an appropriate body through which to deliver bursary funding.

It is essential that the allocation of bursaries is monitored to ascertain whether they are being delivered fairly. This could be achieved through mapping local geographical distribution. However, this only offers a method for those strands within the equalities sector who are organised in terms of geographical communities. It would not be appropriate for those, such as the

women's sector and transgender sector, whose connections are with interest and identity.

To ensure fairness in bursary funding a rigorous approach is required whereby there are clear criteria in regard to the application process and how applications are assessed. To this end, it is imperative that the application process is transparent and information is available demonstrating the rationale behind successful applications and those that are turned down. As one participant stated:

If you want simple and fair you need to be transparent  
On where you are allocating these grants and why.

In addition, the application process needs to be simplified and training made available to organisations of funding applications which could increase their likelihood of success. Consideration also needs to be made in regard to the timescales for applications. The limited capacity of voluntary sector organisations often prevents them from being able to gather the information needed to support their request within the deadlines set. This is particularly problematic for smaller groups and places them at a disadvantage compared to larger organisations that have more resources to hand.

We strongly believe that to ensure fairness in the allocation of bursaries the equalities sectors should be consulted on how monies should be delivered and distributed. We consider that equalities organisations themselves are best placed to identify the gaps in service provision and areas where funding is needed and to make decisions on how to use the funding for our communities. In essence, we have the knowledge, understanding and expertise to make an informed understanding of how best to meet people's needs and plug existing gaps in provision.

### **Consolidation of infrastructure**

The consultation assumes that mergers and substantial collaborations will be beneficial to frontline groups. While we concede that there are potential advantages to organisations sharing back office functions, such as IT support, purchasing, legal

services and human resources, we are unconvinced as to the benefits of consolidation of 'front office' services. This is for a number of reasons:

- There is a danger with this agenda that more dominant infrastructure organisations may control mergers. These may be the most powerful organisations but it was felt they do not necessarily serve the sector well.
- Consolidation could lead to organisations competing for the same funding streams, putting them into competition with other organisations within their sector. This does not fit with the values of voluntary organisations and it more aligned to a business model which the majority of organisations are reluctant to adopt.
- Consolidation or mergers could lead to smaller organisations being swallowed up by larger ones.
- Consolidation of services could lead to services being lost – the question is what will be retained and what will vanish? While the rationale behind collaboration is to avoid duplication of services, it does not take into account that even where duplication exists needs still go unmet and there remains a lack of provision. While there may be more effective ways of working mergers do not necessarily offer the solution.
- The idea of mergers does not take into account the personalities involved and the need for relationship building. It is for this reason that duplication of services exists. For example, in the BME sector there is duplication in advice provision. This is necessary and based on providing different types of services, and the fact there are different relationships with different communities. This is often not apparent when making funding applications.
- Many organisations do not benefit from infrastructure support and would not benefit from collaboration. For example, within the transgender community there are no infrastructure organisations serving them specifically. Therefore, a national infrastructure organisation must support all equality strands; a useful model is the National Equality Partnership.

Taking into consideration the issues outlined above we believe that consolidations grants only could be helpful if:

- Grants are given directly to organisations to enable them to buy infrastructure services thus providing funding from the bottom up.
- Funding is allocated to existing organisations that work well to help them improve their services and work and increase their effectiveness. This offers a more cost-effective solution in the current economic climate.
- Consolidation grants have strong criteria and outcomes which relate to equalities, intersectionality, and the equality strands.
- There is an emphasis on bringing together small frontline organisations to confront the policy agenda.
- Grants are used to fund consortiums to enable small organisations to collaborate on grant applications.

As an endnote to this section we would like to emphasise that we consider voluntary organisations already to be efficient and resilient. This is largely due to the commitment and dedication of those working within the sector who work over and above their contracted working hours to ensure services continue to be delivered. Many continue to offer the same levels of support to their service users even when faced with fewer available resources as a result of funding cuts. As the following quotes suggest:

Everyone in the [name of centre] works a fifty hour week, and on average thirty five of those are unpaid.

Why doesn't the government pay [frontline] organisations to give advice on where they should make cuts because we know how to run our organisations on small or no budgets. They can learn about resilience from us.

People who are working for organisations are also volunteering for the same organisation too and this has been totally missed.

## **Encouraging better public sector partnerships**

The current proposals to encourage better partnerships between the public and voluntary through 'expert intervention' appear to lack clarity with regard to who is being defined as the expert, although the assumption seems to be that it is business rather than those working in the voluntary sector. We consider this to be a paternalistic viewpoint revealing a lack of insight and understanding of the work of voluntary organisations and the support they provide.

The depth and diversity of equalities sector organisations needs to be recognised as does the fact that those working in the voluntary sector are the 'experts'. As the following participants observed:

There is no real understanding about what the voluntary sector is and what it provides.

We are now not asked about the things that women are central to, we are the experts and this needs to be addressed.

Men are talking about [the Big Society] in the first place. The whole Big Society agenda has white middle class men at the front of it and women are disappearing. Women's expertise and [that of] their organisations needs to be recognised.

Rather than looking to implement new models, the government should investigate and harness the expertise that currently exists. Furthermore, it is our strong belief that without a national strategic framework for equalities and diversity it is dangerous to even attempt to define where 'expertise' resides.

We are also disappointed that a similar assumption is made in regard to social capital and would welcome clarity on how areas are defined as lacking in social capital, and how social capital is being measured. As these participants commented:

We are talking about people living in desperate situations, so lacking in social capital is a cover up.

It is our opinion that the concept of 'social capital' needs further investigation before it is brought into the policy arena.

The focus on partnership working seems to focus on geographical communities rather than communities of interest. We would question how, for example, the social capital of LGBT people, who are not in the same geographical areas can be measured, and suggest that the emphasis needs to shift from the 'local'. Similarly, transgender is a small community nationally which makes it difficult to have local social capital and local investment. This makes it difficult to engage and empower people to engage with local groups.

Where expert intervention is implemented it should be brought in to support areas to develop their own social capital or offer them the opportunity to do so. Providing people with confidence, skills and training would encourage them to be involved. To be beneficial expert intervention needs to be based on proper dialogue and ensure all voices are heard.

### **Further suggestions on how the Office for Civil Society can help frontline groups to become more efficient and effective**

There needs to be acknowledgement that voluntary organisations are already effective and efficient and that a small investment could improve this further for many frontline groups.

We believe that current levels of legislation and bureaucracy often impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of frontline groups. For example, the requirement to submit monitoring reports to funders is time consuming and a drain on resources, particularly for small organisations who do not have the capacity. Therefore, we suggest that the bureaucracy needs to be more proportionate to the risks; this would enable organisations to focus on their primary purpose which is providing a service.

In order to help frontline groups become more effective and efficient government first needs to better understand equalities and diversity issues. It is evident from the content of this

consultation that at present that such insight is lacking. There also needs to be recognition that the equalities sector is not homogeneous, there are differences in the sectors, and consequently a 'one size fits all' approach will not work. Rather than creating new structures assessment should be made of those that already exist, making sure there is equality and proportionate investment.

To be effective equalities sector organisations need to continue to provide face to face contact for service users. This cannot be done by online services or by an expert, specialist infrastructure is needed. Interaction with service users is about building relationships so they can come back if further advice is needed and organisations will need to be supported to enable them to do this.

## **Response by equality strand to the consultation questions**

The following section outlines specific equalities issues which have not been presented so far in this response. These are presented in relation to the ten consultation questions,<sup>1</sup> by equality strand.

### **How can online services for frontline groups be improved?**

#### **LGB**

Online services can have a place in the LGB sector and there are a number of websites, for example the Equalities and Human Rights. Commission site which are useful for providing updates on equality legislation. This is useful and we would like to see this and similar online services retained. Online services need to be about providing information to organisations but have little value to the LGB sector if they do not provide services that our relevant to our community. We suggest that the government needs to invest in online services and should consult the LGB sector in the development of online services to ensure their relevance and usefulness to our members.

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<sup>1</sup> Responses to Question 9 are not included in this response and the consultation team encouraged individual organisations, based on their status as infrastructure or frontline groups to make their own response by the deadline of 25 November 2010.

A further for the LGB sector is that it is common for LGB and transgender groups to be hit by firewalls when trying to email Government, local authorities and certain organisations. In order for the message to be delivered to the intended recipient we have seek permission for it to be 'let through'. This equals discrimination and is an issue that needs to be addressed.

### **Disability**

The current approach to online services is to compartmentalise websites according to equality strand. We believe that sites should be useful to non-disability organisations who have disabled service users.

### **Race**

Any proposals to improve online services should be developed in consultation with grassroots BME organisations. This is essential to ascertain their needs in regard to online services and should be an on-going consultation. It is equally important that online services provide a diverse package to fit the needs of different groups participating in the 'Big Society'. This is a further example of where a 'one size fits all' approach will not work.

### **What can government do to forge more effective links and transfer skills between small civil society organisations and businesses and larger charities?**

### **Transgender**

A main issue for the sector is that while infrastructure organisations play a big role in the trans community and offer value for money, the problem is they are at the front of the sector and have no power to say how to support grassroots organisations.

There is no single voice for the trans community and it was felt that to suggest organisations should work collaboratively is unrealistic; it is not going to happen. Infrastructure organisations in this sector set off in the wrong direction and focused on increasing capacity. The result has been prioritising bidding for income rather than carrying out the real purpose they were set up for: to provide a service for members.

In order to forge more effective links and transfer skills between small voluntary and community sector organisations and businesses and larger charities the following we consider the following is required:

- Nurturing and education to get acceptance of trans people. At the moment transgender organisations and the transgender sector are seen as an embarrassment.
- Recognition that transgender issues are compartmentalised, they do not cross over.
- Wider acceptance of transgender people generally within society.
- Nevertheless we believe it would be difficult to establish more effective links between transgender organisations and businesses because the transgender sector is not seen as a popular sector to support. Also, businesses would want something in return for any collaboration and it is difficult to know what this might be when it comes to transgender issues.

### **Disability**

Any discussion relating to forging effective links between business or larger charities and small voluntary organisations needs to ensure the distinction is made between disability charities and disability organisations as many nuances exist.

It is not just a matter of large organisations providing support, smaller organisations provide support to each other and share and pass on expertise. Furthermore, in the current climate of funding constraints disabled people are being encouraged to seek help themselves because the capacity of many organisations is diminishing.

### **Race**

For the BME sector the issue is business understanding equality. In our experience the majority of organisations in the private sector struggle to understand the concept. For example, they feel to see how employing a diverse workforce is relevant to their business when they sell mobile phones. In times of economic downturn the BME community is disproportionately affected, more likely to be unemployed which compounds the issue. This is supported by

evidence from The Race Equality Partnership in East of England who report an increase in employment discrimination cases since the start of the recession.

## **How can brokerage of pro bono support be achieved?**

### **Gender**

For women's organisations local level support is key and needs to be accompanied by a change of culture between the private and voluntary sector.

Consideration needs to be given to the fact that many women's organisations do not operate from premises but are run out of people's own homes. This can be problematic when seeking face to face pro bono support.

### **LGB**

Pro bono support can be useful to the sector and organisations find the provision of pro bono legal advice to be especially helpful. However, the advice provided is nearly always specific as due to time constraints law firms are unable to provide impromptu support. We feel that organisations would benefit more from being able to access step by step support when they need it. Pro bono support is extremely helpful to the LGB sector but we need greater access and availability to the services on offer.

### **Transgender**

Pro bono support is often under-utilised by the trans community because lack of awareness of the services provided. For this reason we advocate a national register or directory where the services being offered can be matched to the needs of those organisations requiring them.

The provision of pro bono legal advice is extremely helpful to the transgender community. However, it is often difficult to find a lawyer who specialises in trans issues. For the support to be useful it needs to be appropriate and as such requires legal professionals with understanding and experience of transgender issues.

## **Disability**

Experience shows that the business sector often lacks understanding of disability equality and do not always see the 'equality' issue. Therefore, for pro bono support to be effective for the disability sector business has to understand the culture of disability organisations.

## **Race**

For pro bono support offered to BME organisations we would like to see a contract set in place between both parties which outlines what each side will get out of the relationship. There also needs to be a period of transition during which time the expectations of the business coming into a BME organisation can be managed. It has to be remembered that business and the voluntary sector represent two very different cultures and it can take time for a business to understand voluntary organisations.

## **What support might your organisation need to become more resilient?**

### **Gender**

We believe that women's organisations are already resilient. This is evidenced by the fact that many have lost funding because of the recession which has led to the loss of staff and operating on less money. In spite of this they continue to deliver the same services. It is difficult to imagine how women's organisations could be any more resilient, many who work in these organisations already work outside of their paid hours to ensure services continue to be delivered.

To help women's organisations become more resilient we feel that they would benefit from stable resources and a stable policy environment to prevent organisations having to re-invent themselves periodically. In addition, funding needs to be in place to ensure organisations are not put in the position of compromising their core values to pursue funding.

There is much evidence to suggest that women's organisations provide excellent value for money, holistic services that improve lives. In spite of this we have to keep demonstrating our economic value.

We consider this question is about turning organisations into social enterprises but how do you turn a unique service, something that cannot be obtained elsewhere into a business? The only way to raise money from enterprise is to sell the valuable knowledge and expertise women's organisations have to the public sector. However, as this knowledge is not valued who is going to buy it?

### **LGB**

For the LGB sector replacement funding is needed to those organisations that are about to lose monies because of the public spending cuts. This is essential if LGB organisations are expected to take up the work formally carried out by groups outside of the voluntary sector.

### **Transgender**

For the transgender sector to be more resilient organisations need core funding. This would remove some of the pressure they are under and allow them to focus on the purpose of their organisation. Individuals/organisations often 'burn out' because lack of funding means they rely on each other for support. Therefore, to become more resilient there needs to be recognition that organisations are already under tremendous pressure. Furthermore, not all trans groups are registered as charities which make accessing funding difficult. As a result they have to rely on donations for basics such as paying the rent on premises, postage and telephone costs.

### **Disability**

Organisations are being encouraged to bring in entrepreneurial services, such as training courses, but no one in the voluntary sector has the money to purchase them. Bursaries are not intended to fund this kind of support; they are more directed towards strategic planning. Funding is provided for generic, not specialist services, therefore organisations cannot apply if not willing to provide services outside of their specialist area.

Many services for disabled people are being done in-house and are not contracted out to disabled or voluntary organisations. They are back in control of local government and there is a move away from voluntary organisations being contracted to provide them. This has

resulted in voluntary organisations are losing contracts to business that take them on and have the capacity to do so.

### **Race**

It needs to be recognised that the services BME organisations provide are not about profit or income generation, therefore to ensure level playing field there has to be support for organisations to support individual in the community.

BME organisations are needs led, come together to tackle inequality where mainstream organisations have failed; there are always new needs.

In the BME sector organisations are values based and to be resilient need to be independent. This is not a popular thing to say but crucial to resilience is giving the sector an independent voice. Without this the sector will lose the fabric it is built upon.

BME organisations also need more support and help to translate what they do on a day to day basis into business planning. It is about how to demonstrate the value of organisations and this value being recognised.

### **What do you think should be the priorities of a bursary fund?**

#### **Gender**

We believe that the priorities of a bursary fund should be organisations that have been marginalised. In the women's sector, clients that organisations work with often have complex needs and this should be recognised when allocating funds.

Sustained funding is needed to prevent women's organisations from constantly having to apply for funding. Such long term funding enables organisations to achieve their aims and plan for the longer term.

#### **LGB**

It is our belief that LGB frontline groups will not be recipients of this type of funding. In our experience if the sector receives money it is usually awarded to infrastructure organisations; those

groups already around the table that will get the funds. We feel that bursary funds needs to be looked at differently for LGBT organisations.

### **Transgender**

For the trans sector we can identify a number of priorities for bursary funds. These include: funding for venues; funding for legal costs for court cases; provision of opportunities for access to education and training as many trans people have little prospect of jobs or sustained employment and have to rely on benefits. Providing them with access to education and training courses would empower and enable individuals. However, any educational training needs to be provided in an appropriate environment. General adult education centres are often not the right places. Many trans people seek refuge in the education system but if they are excluded from this it can be difficult. Bursaries funding support that enable trans people can access courses needs to be a priority.

### **Disability**

Priorities for bursary funding should recognise that many organisations need small amounts of money in order to facilitate meetings and coming together. A small amount of money can go a long way. We believe that a priority needs to be funding smaller organisations and taking into account the context of the organisations.

### **Race**

For many BME organisations bursary funds will come too late as many are about to fold. Transitional funding may pick up small organisations but at present we are unsure how this will work. There needs to fairness in priorities for a bursary fund but how can this be achieved?

### **How could any bursary fund be delivered simply and fairly?**

### **Gender**

It is our belief that bursary funds need to be more targeted and be aimed at communities of interest and identity rather than delivered on a geographical basis. At present many women's organisations miss out because of geographical targeting.

In addition, Proportionality/disproportionality needs to be considered by looking at who is proportionally disadvantaged. Women's organisations have suffered because of the misuse of gender.

### **LGB**

We feel that the LGB organisations should be consulted on how funding for our can be delivered simply and fairly. Those working in LGB groups are best placed to identify where funds for the sector are most needed. We do not want those outside the sector making these decisions for us. Regular networking meetings would ensure that groups are not left out and enable us to keep up to date with what is happening in the sector. We strongly believe that any funding should drive collaboration between LGB organisations, not competition.

### **Transgender**

Any bursary funds should be given to those working in grassroots organisations. Funds could be delivered through local advisory groups who are representative of the equality strands including transgender. However, trans people would need to be funded to attend any such forum.

### **Disability**

A particular issue for disability organisations is that they have to factor in access costs into funding applications. This puts them at a disadvantage to non-disability organisations as they are not necessarily seen as value for money. This can often affect their chances of success. In order for funding to be fair, disability organisations need to be able to bid for money as well as access costs which are awarded on top of the sum of the grant. A bursary could fund additional access costs which would prevent organisations having to incorporate them into funding applications. This would put disability organisations on more of an equal footing with other organisations.

### **Race**

We feel that to ensure bursaries are delivered fairly a mechanism, similar to the Local Strategic Partnerships, is required. To manage the delivery of funds a body at a local level that has set priorities is needed.

## **How could consolidation grants help ensure the sustainability and efficiency of infrastructure organisations?**

### **Gender**

A main concern for us is that consolidation will lead to voluntary organisations competing for the same funding. This goes against the values of the women's sector and is not where women's organisations want to be.

Also, the consultation assumes that consolidation will be an unproblematic process. Our experience of infrastructure organisations has shown that this is not always the case particularly as the additional barriers faced by women's organisations are often not recognised by infrastructure organisations. We suggest this needs to be taken on board with regard to any potential mergers.

One solution would be to give grants directly to women's organisations to enable them to buy infrastructure services, in essence this would be funding from the bottom up.

To ensure sustainability we feel understanding of what the voluntary sector does and what it provides for government is needed. Currently, there are a number of organisations in the women's sector that have had to close because their funding has been withdrawn at short notice. They have not been given any bridging monies, simply left to survive. Investment in the voluntary sector is needed to stop organisations folding and to ensure vital frontline services which are not provided elsewhere continue to be delivered.

### **LGB**

We are opposed to the independent sector becoming potholders for public money; it does not work and does not intensify ownership. Instead it is our view that what is needed is a buffer between those making decisions and giving out monies.

### **Transgender**

This question is moot to the to the trans community as there are no infrastructure organisations serving them specifically.

Therefore, if there is consolidation, those organisations resulting from mergers should have a specific mandate to deal with trans issues, with the proviso that one trans person does not speak for all trans people.

An infrastructure organisation that covers all equality strands will not work as they are unlikely to understand transgender issues. In our view what is needed is funding for a transgender infrastructure organisation, one that works at a grassroots level but does not attempt to speak for the trans community. We advocate a separate funding stream for transgender organisations. Transgender needs to be represented as its own protected characteristic. All too often it is submerged into the LGB strand "and the 'T' gets missed off". The result is transgender is cast as the 'poor relation'.

### **Race**

We consider that within as infrastructure organisations cannot represent the BME sector there is no role for consolidation grants. There is a place for better working but it has to be on an equal footing. We recognise that there may be more effective ways of working within our sector but mergers are not necessarily the solution.

**Are there ways that expert intervention can support areas which are lacking social capital to improve local relationships and develop a stronger civil society?**

### **Gender**

We are disappointed that there is an assumption that women's organisations are lacking in social capital. We disagree and suggest the fact that women's organisations continue to survive despite cuts to funding is evidence to the contrary. In the women's sector it is not social capital that is lacking but money and investment. In our opinion this only serves to confirm our view that the Big Society is about men's agenda and women are disappearing from everywhere.

Any expert intervention must recognise the expertise of women's organisations. In particular, the depth and diversity of women's

organisations needs to be acknowledged as does the fact that “women are the experts”.

The holistic practice of women’s organisations means that they can influence other types of organisations “we are about trying to change society”.

### **LGB**

It is our belief that in this context small LGBT organisations rather than consultants are the ‘experts’. However, with funding cuts these organisations are being lost and with them their expertise. This is particularly the case for those providing specialist services where the introduction of competition will drive them out. Like other equalities sectors, LGB people want specialists and not generalists.

### **Transgender**

We would question who is being defined as ‘expert’ in this context. In the trans community it is trans people who are the experts and this needs to be recognised.

A problem with the Big Society was that it focuses on geographical communities and not communities of interest. Transgender is a small community nationally which makes it difficult to have local social capital and local investment. This makes it difficult to engage and empower people to engage with local groups.

### **Disability**

We feel that there is an assumption in the Big Society agenda that all individuals are able to participate. This does not take into account that for disabled people there are often barriers to participation in the ‘Big Society’. For example, some disabled people have conditions which prevent them from leaving their own home. This poses a major physical challenge to taking part and contributing to activities in the wider community.

**Do you have further suggestions or comments on how the Office for Civil Society can help frontline organisations become more efficient and effective?**

**Gender**

It needs to be acknowledged that women's organisations are already efficient and effective. A small investment would improve this further.

We need to "cut through the bluff" of organisations who say "they do what they do" and this needs to be evidenced through the work of organisations.

**LGB**

We would like a consultation that makes sense, demonstrates understanding of equalities issues and provides evidence to support its statements that is not meaningless.

**Transgender**

We would like to take this opportunity to raise the issue of monitoring transgender. There is a government agenda to count the number of trans people but the rationale for this remains unclear. We strongly believe that it is the environment in which trans people live that requires monitored. Our message is it is a waste of time monitoring trans people instead monitor the attitudes of society.

We would also like to use this opportunity to offer comments on this consultation. In our opinion the document reveals a lack of insight and understanding of equalities issues. We believe that for the trans community it does not ask the most pertinent questions or address the issues most relevant to our sector.