

**MEETING: 26/09/2019**

**Ref: 15356**

**ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Positive Transitions**

**Business Disability Forum**

**Adv: Ciaran Rafferty**

**Base: Southwark**

**Amount requested: £248,250**

**Benefit: London-wide**

**Amount recommended: £248,000**

**The Applicant**

Business Disability Forum (BDF) is a charitable company established in 1991. It is a not-for-profit membership organisation that makes it easier and more rewarding to do business with and employ disabled people. By providing pragmatic support, sharing expertise, giving advice, providing training and facilitating networking opportunities, it helps organisations become fully accessible to disabled customers and employees. Its aim is to transform the life chances – and experience – of disabled people as employees and consumers. It does this by bringing together business people, disabled opinion leaders and government to understand what needs to change if disabled people are to be treated fairly so that they can contribute to business success, to society and to economic growth. When previously known as the Employers' Forum on Disability BDF was at the forefront in lobbying for the first meaningful disability legislation in the UK (the Disability Discrimination Act 1995).

**The Application**

BDF's current membership of 300 organisations now employ around 15% of the UK workforce and range from FTSE 100 companies and central Government departments to transport providers, construction companies, retailers, higher education providers and public services. However the SME sector is not represented within the membership as fully as it might be and so the focus of this application is to enable the charity to better reach and support this audience. It intends to do this through expansion of its advice service to SMEs and to make the Disability Standard assessment tool easier to adopt.

**The Recommendation**

BDF has a deserved reputation for engaging the business sector and working constructively with it to make their services and jobs more accessible for disabled people. It is the only organisation working exclusively with employers to positively impact disabled people in work. It has regularly assisted the Lord Mayor's Appeal with delivering its Power of Inclusion programme; and this proposal, should you agree it, will greatly support your Bridge to Work programme as it will help open up new employment opportunities within the SME sector. A grant is advised:

***£248,000 over five years (£50,000; £50,000; £48,500; £49,500; £50,000) for the salary of a f/t SME Disability Advisor and related project costs to support the SME sector in London to become more inclusive.***

**Funding History**

None

**Background and detail of proposal**

Despite record levels of employment overall the disability employment gap remains deeply entrenched. Disabled people are over two times more likely to be

unemployed than the general population, with a far higher gap for some groups. Whilst BDF has a significant track record in improving employability and inclusivity within many of the bigger employers there is a need to provide targeted support to SMEs as they form the bulk of London's employers yet are harder to reach regarding barriers to services and employment. BDF aims to address this by employing a specialist Advisor and by working with that sector to make the Disability Standard online tool better known and more readily adopted and usable. (The Disability Standard is a whole-organisation disability management audit developed by BDF to help organisations measure and improve on performance for disabled customers, clients or service users, employees and stakeholders.) A targeted and flexible service, such as that proposed, will help SMEs consider and address some of the concerns, perceptions and misunderstandings that may be currently preventing their ability to be more inclusive.

### Financial Information

The charity's entire income is unrestricted as it mostly comprises membership fees. Other sources of income are the provision of training courses and publications. Members usually commit fees for two years at a time hence the organisation states that its income for the current year is confirmed. The reserves held as shown below are significantly below target. However, the charity's membership terms and conditions are explicit in that membership fees, which are paid for two years at a time are non-refundable in any circumstances, so the charity does not envisage repaying the unused portion of the fees in any winding up situation.

When setting the reserves level of £570k the charity deems that this amount should allow it to wind the organisation down by providing skeleton membership services.

Year end as at 30th June	2018 Signed Accounts £	2019 Draft Outturn £	2020 Budget £
<b>Income &amp; expenditure:</b>			
Income	2,026,345	1,857,000	2,050,000
- % of income confirmed as at 22/7/2019	N/A	100%	100%
Expenditure	(2,120,510)	(1,881,000)	(2,045,000)
Total surplus/(deficit)	(94,165)	(24,000)	5,000
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	0	0	0
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(94,165)	(24,000)	5,000
	(94,165)	(24,000)	5,000
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	2,120,510	1,881,000	2,045,000
<b>Free unrestricted reserves:</b>			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	21,053	(2,947)	2,053
No of months of operating expenditure	0.1	0.0	0.0
Reserves policy target	570,000	570,000	570,000
No of months of operating expenditure	3.2	3.6	3.3
Free reserves over/(under) target	(548,947)	(572,947)	(567,947)