

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Strengthening London's Voluntary Sector**Project Oracle Evidence Hub****Adv: Tim Wilson****Base: Lambeth****Amount requested: £90,000****Benefit: London-wide****Amount recommended: £90,000****The Charity**

Initiated as a project hosted by the Greater London Authority, and subsequently managed by London Metropolitan University, Project Oracle Evidence Hub (Oracle) became a registered charity in June 2016. Oracle is concerned with improving the standards of evidence used by children and youth organisations in their programme operations, and by funders in the commissioning they undertake. In addition to improvements by individual organisations, Oracle also works to develop a community that shares and learns from evidence so that, in time, the most effective approaches to children and youth work are pursued.

The Application

Following registration with the Charity Commission and the end of term of establishment funding from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, Economic and Social Research Council, and Greater London Authority, Oracle is now approaching several Trusts and Foundations for core support. The request to City Bridge Trust is towards the costs of their planned work with London-based organisations. Activities will concentrate on improvements to monitoring and evaluation with a range of training, mentoring and volunteer placements available for charity clients. City Bridge Trust will subsidise work that clients would otherwise pay for in full.

The Recommendation

Whilst there are several organisations offering monitoring and evaluation support to London's voluntary sector, Oracle's approach is of particular note given its concern to map the most effective approaches in a particular sector. At a time when grant funding is under pressure and commissioners are challenged to spend their budgets as effectively as possible, Oracle's interest in 'what works' is welcome. The charity has a strong board drawn from academia, the private and non-profit sectors and is led by a former manager of the Government Economics Service. Funding is advised:

£90,000 over three years (3 x £30,000) towards the costs of Project Oracle's work to improve the quality and quantity of evidence in the children and youth sector in London.

Funding History

None.

Background and detail of proposal

Oracle has worked with around 200 organisations to date. It delivers training events and more in-depth one-to-one support to validate organisational evaluation data against the Oracle Standards of Evidence. Researchers are also placed in host organisations to work on evidence gathering and reporting, and learning events bring charities together to share practice with one another. In turn, Oracle has

commissioned evaluation of its own work and now plans to develop its operations nationally (this latter ambition is not part of the application to the Trust).

Costs requested from City Bridge Trust are equivalent to validation work with five London projects each year, 15 training places each year and placements for five student researchers. Some funding has already been secured from the Esmée Fairbairn and Paul Hamlyn Foundations, with a number of other requests pending to get Oracle to its target for 2017-18.

Financial Information

The three years covered by the table below show substantial variation in turnover. However, this is slightly misleading to the true position. In 2015-16, examined accounts cover work done by the body pre-dating the current registered charity. During this year some Oracle activities were managed by a team at London Metropolitan University which held a budget for this work, but whose activities are not covered by the examined accounts. All funding for Oracle activities was consolidated in the charity in 2016-17. This partly explains the sharp rise in turnover. The rise is also attributable to some work (and its associated funding) which had been deferred from 2015-16 to 2016-17. Forecast turnover in 2017-18 is more reflective of the norm Oracle expects going forward.

Cost of raising funds is shown as zero in 2015-16 because Oracle filed its accounts as a micro-entity online with HMRC and fundraising is not an expenditure category the online portal recognises. In the most recent, and forthcoming years Oracle expects to spend 10 – 16% of its income on fundraising.

Year end as at 31 July	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18
	Examined Accounts	Draft Accounts	Forecast
	£	£	£
Income & expenditure:			
Income	74,131	345,400	192,400
- % of Income confirmed	n/a	100%	43%
Expenditure	111,557	267,400	234,800
Total surplus/(deficit)	(37,426)	78,000	(42,400)
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	(17,500)	0	0
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(19,926)	78,000	(42,400)
	(37,426)	78,000	(42,400)
Cost of Raising Funds	0	35,000	30,000
- % of income	0.0%	10.1%	15.6%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	94,057	207,400	132,400
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	3,712	81,712	39,312
No of months of operating expenditure	0.5	4.7	3.6
Reserves policy target	23,514	51,850	33,100
No of months of operating expenditure	3.0	3.0	3.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	(19,802)	29,862	6,212