

MEETING: 21/03/2019

Ref: 15325

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Anniversary Programme

British Refugee Council

Adv: Jenny Field

Base: Newham

Amount requested: £220,800

Benefit: London-wide

Amount recommended: £220,800

The Partnership

British Refugee Council, or the Refugee Council to use its working title, is the lead organisation for this collaboration which will involve working co-productively with refugee community organisations (RCOs) from across London rather than through a formal partnership.

The Lead Organisation

The work of the Refugee Council will be well known to you. In addition to this bid to the Cornerstone Fund¹ it has also recently submitted an application to your Bridging Divides programmes (which it is eligible to do).

It was one of the organisations that received funding through your Bridge Fund², with two grants of £50,000 and £25,000 respectively.

The Proposal

The proposal is to work with RCOs from across London to co-create a pan-London refugee advocacy forum in order to amplify the voices of refugees and asylum seekers within policy and practice related fora. The current modes of engagement with London's voluntary refugee sector employed by policy and decision makers provide little space and opportunity for RCOs to participate and be heard. Traditionally, local, regional and national governance bodies have often relied on large voluntary organisations – such as the Refugee Council – to act as specialist experts and advisors and to provide feedback to policy makers on how existing and proposed policies, practices and strategies impact on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. Additionally, some organisations that do not focus on immigration issues have often not engaged with RCOs at all, thereby overlooking the specific experiences of an often particularly marginalised group that can experience exclusion on multiple levels.

During the first year, 15 RCOs will be recruited to co-produce how the forum, once established, will be structured, how it will operate and to produce its terms of reference. It is envisaged that the Refugee Council will provide them with intense support during this period with the following outputs:

- Specialist training on such topics as the role of advocacy in achieving better outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers; ways of influencing through such

¹ The Cornerstone Fund is the Anniversary Infrastructure Support programme of £3m originally which you have developed in partnership with a cross-sectoral advisory group and in consultation with the voluntary sector in London.

² The Bridge Fund was a 'pot' of £1m which you established to enable organisations previously funded by London Councils to remain engaged with The Way Ahead.

means as use of media, research; parliamentary work; partnership and negotiation skills; understanding decision-making processes.

- Co-design of the terms of reference.
- Development of an Action Plan for the forum.
- Towards the end of the first year, this initial cohort will recruit an additional 15 new members.

Year 2 will commence with the launch of the forum and training for the new cohort of 15 will then be ongoing. During the second year, the Action Plan will be treated as a live document that is reviewed and revised by the forum to take account of changing circumstances. During this time, the Refugee Council will provide the secretariat for the forum.

In Year 3, a further cohort of 15 RCOs will be recruited to be trained during the year and to have input into the delivery and monitoring of the Action Plan. During this final year, much of the focus will be on implementing the Refugee Council's exit so that forum will function as an independent body at the end of the grant.

The Refugee Council used its development grant to:

- Conduct a survey of RCOs in London to which 38 responses were received.
- It held two consultation events with RCOs – one in North London and one in South London.
- It held meetings with refugee forums in Leeds, Sheffield and with the Regional Refugee Forum North East to understand and learn from how other refugee forums operate.
- Met with the Greater London Assembly (GLA) officers responsible for Migration and Refugee and Civil Society, Communities and Social Policy.

All of this has helped shape the Stage 2 application.

For the forum to succeed, of course, it is crucial that policy and decision makers engage with the forum once it is functioning – as well as a positive response from the GLA, the Refugee Council has had positive engagement with the Home Office as well as the secretariat of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees.

Cornerstone Fund Outcomes

The project will contribute to the following Cornerstone Fund Outcomes:

- **Voice and influence:** The project has been designed to achieve the short-term outcomes of
 - RCOs will have increased confidence, skills and opportunities to take part in decision-making;
 - RCOs will have increased awareness of sources of support to facilitate campaigning activities; and
 - RCOs will have stronger engagement in decision-making at the local, regional and national level.

These short-term outcomes will then contribute to the long-term outcomes of Londoners being able to campaign effectively and having increased voice and influence.

- **Collaboration:** The project has been designed to achieve the short-term outcome of improved co-ordination between support organisations and

Improved cross-sector networking which in turn will contribute to the long-term outcome of improved collaboration between organisations and across sectors.

- **Capacity and capability:** In order to achieve the first two outcomes, the project has a strong strand of capacity building and training to ensure that RCOs have the capacity to take advantage of the new influencing and advocacy opportunities being created. This in turn feeds into the long-term outcome that community and voluntary groups are effectively supported to deliver their mission and goals.

The Recommendation

The forum potentially would be game-changing because it could establish a direct influencing and engagement mechanism between RCOs and local, regional and national power structures on a pan-London basis. This aligns with the aspirations of RCOs as revealed by independent research commissioned by the Refugee Council with a clear message that RCOs do not want another intermediary to convey their messages to decision-makers.

At the time of assessment, the Refugee Council's board had not yet signed off the 2019-20 budget, and so this has not yet been provided although high level figures have been submitted in the meantime. It is therefore recommended that any grant approved today is conditional on a full budget for the year being provided, together with the updated management accounts for 2018-19 which cover the full financial year (the current ones cover the period to 31st December 2018).

£220,800 over three years (£90,900; £68,900; £61,000) towards the establishment of a forum to enable refugee community organisations to engage effectively with policy and decision makers in London. The grant is conditional on a full budget for 2019-20 being provided, together with management accounts for 2018-19 which cover the full financial year.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
07/09/2018	£20,000 towards staffing and associated running costs to explore the development of a pan-London forum to enable Refugee Community Organisations to directly influence the bodies whose policies, practices and strategies impact the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. (Cornerstone Fund)
14/03/2018	£25,000 towards the salary of a Community Co-ordinator to support Refugee Council's engagement with The Way Ahead. (Bridge Fund)
11/05/2017	£50,000 for a salary, associated on-costs and operational costs. The grant is to be spent over a minimum 10 month period to support the organisation's involvement in The Way Ahead and is subject to a review after 6 months. (Bridge Fund)
24/05/2016	£112,000 over three years (£36,200; £37,300; £38,500) towards staffing, running costs and overheads of a counselling service for refugees in London (Investing in Londoners)

Financial Information

The Refugee Council's reserves policy is to hold between £2million and £3million in free reserves. From the information in the table below, you will see that the level of reserves in 2017-18 were at the high end of this target. However, in the current financial climate, this is considered prudent. In addition, free reserves are forecast to reduce slightly in 2018-19 and the 2019-20 high level budget shows a further small reduction in free reserves.

Year end as at 31st March	2018 Audited Accounts	2019 Forecast	2020 Budget
Income & expenditure:			
Income	8,550,000	9,721,000	10,395,000
- % of Income confirmed as at 26/02/2019		96%	to be provided
Expenditure	(8,960,000)	(11,403,000)	(11,345,000)
Total surplus/(deficit)	(410,000)	(1,682,000)	(950,000)
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	(213,000)	(1,296,000)	(700,000)
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(197,000)	(386,000)	(250,000)
	(410,000)	(1,682,000)	(950,000)
Cost of Raising Funds	1,364,000	1,482,000	1,435,000
- % of Income	16.0%	15.2%	13.8%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	2,361,000	3,825,000	to be provided
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	2,843,000	2,443,000	2,193,000
No of months of operating expenditure	14.4	7.7	TBC
Reserves policy target	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
No of months of operating expenditure	10.2	6.3	TBC
Free reserves over/(under) target	843,000	443,000	193,000