

Committee	Dated
City Bridge Trust (CBT)	28 th January 2021
Subject: The Bridge Programme Funder Plus Offer	Public
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Y
If so, how much?	£360,000
What is the source of Funding?	CBT Bridging Divides Grants budget, within BHE designated grants fund
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: Chief Grants Officer and Director of City Bridge Trust (CGO)	For Decision
Report author: Jenny Field, Deputy Director, CBT	

Summary

In September and November 2018, you agreed proposals to pilot a new Funder Plus¹ offer. This pilot is now reaching its end and this paper proposes that you continue the programme for a further year while we continue to ‘test and learn’ how best to test what good ‘diagnostics’, ‘connecting’ and ‘supporting’ looks like, building on the learning from the pilot phase, and factoring in the extraordinary needs of the sector that have been caused by the Covid-19/Corona crisis.

Your Bridging Divides strategy 2018 – 2023 committed you to improving your Funder Plus offer to make it more coherent and better aligned with other funders. We launched the pilot in the autumn of 2019, following a period of co-design with your partners, Rocket Science, Cranfield Trust and Locality.

The model you approved comprised Rocket Science, appointed through the City of London's procurement process, as Learning Partners and Managers of the programme, and grants of £150,000 each awarded to Locality and the Cranfield Trust to provide a diagnostics service and then to connect CBT grantees to appropriate providers of support services or to facilitate peer support/networking opportunities amongst grantees.

You originally approved a total of £500,000, comprising 3 grants of £150,000 for the diagnostic and connection service plus £50,000 to procure the Learning Partner and Manager. In the event, only two organisations were identified for the diagnostic and connection element and the balance of £150,000 was written back into your main grants budget. The recommended funding below effectively proposes continuation grants to both the Cranfield Trust and Locality and a further budget to procure the

¹ ‘Funder Plus’ means providing capacity building support for grantees, usually through a third-party provider, thereby adding value to the grant. For example, you are supporting the Cranfield Trust's Strive Programme which is providing pro bono management consultancy support for CBT grantees.

Learning Partner and Manager. This amount has been increased from £50,000 to £60,000 to enable the learning element of this part of the role to be increased and strengthened.

It should be noted that the recommended funding commitments are not included in today's "Grants Budget and Applications Today" report due to time constraints. However, there are sufficient funds in your 2020/21 budget to support this initiative and this will be reflected in the figures with which you are presented at the March meeting.

It was always intended that the initial stage would provide the foundations on which a more complex offer could be built that took account of the 'total assets' that the City of London Corporation has at its disposal, as well as providing a platform that other funders could join should they so wish. Officers are of the view that the pilot phase has enabled a foundation to be established on which additional 'layers' of support can be added.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) Approve a grant of £150,000 to the Cranfield Trust towards continuing the Triage and Connect programme to support the delivery of the next phase of the programme, subject to the satisfactory review of their financial assessment by the Charities Finance Team (representing the Chamberlain).
- b) Approve a grant of £150,000 to Locality towards continuing the Triage and Connect programme to support the delivery of the next phase of the programme, also subject to the satisfactory review of their financial assessment by the Charities Finance Team (representing the Chamberlain)
- c) Commit up to £60,000 non-grants expenditure in order to procure, through the City of London's procurement process, a Managing and Learning Partner to provide capacity to continue the next phase of the programme.

Main Report

Background

1. The pilot phase of CBT's funder plus offer (branded the "Bridge Programme") began development in early 2019 and went live as a pilot during the autumn of that year. Over the course of 2019-20, the programme was promoted to targeted cohorts of CBT grantees (identified by the date when their funding was approved). Since the inception of the pilot, 47 CBT-funded organisations have applied for support). As of 31st December 2020, 31 organisations had been paired with a provider with 19 completing the programme. The remaining 12 will complete their support by end February 2021; data on all 31 participants from the pilot will be included in the evaluation report which will be ready for the CBT Committee's meeting in March 2021.
2. The following graphs give an overview of the organisations which have taken part to date:

Overview of grantees supported during the Bridge Programme pilot (31 organisations)

Figure 1: Size of organisations supported (number of employees) (n=31)

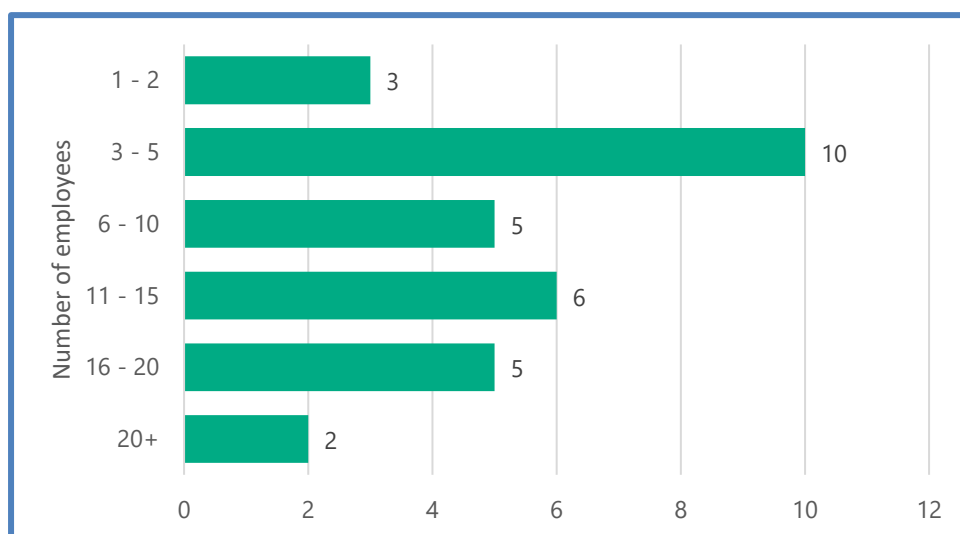
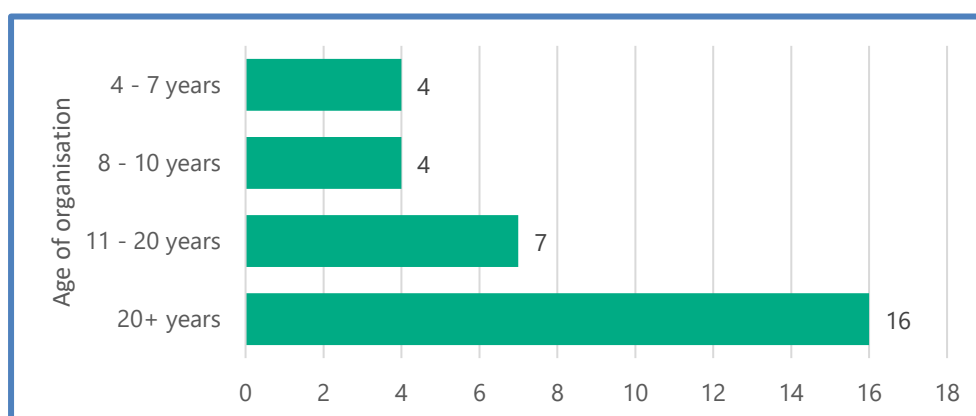
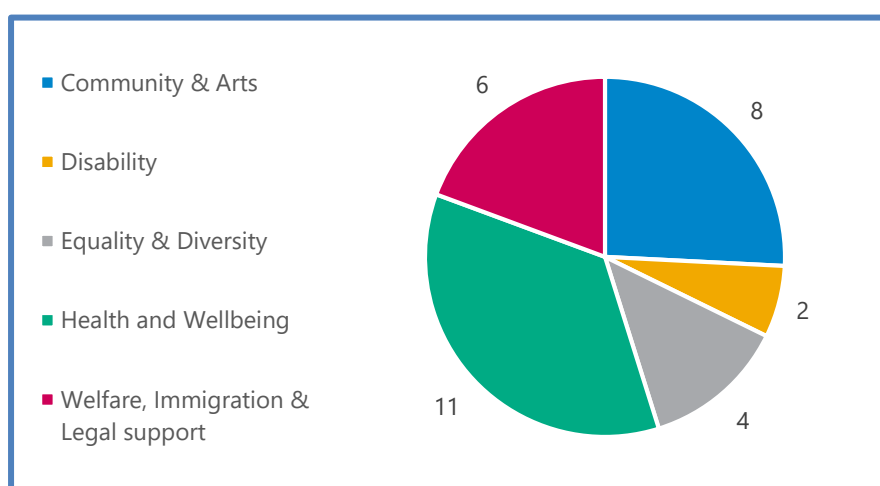


Figure 2: Age of organisations supported (n=31)



3. Although based on a small sample, it is noticeable how the Bridge Programme has managed, as intended, to reach and work with smaller civil society organisations within the CBT portfolio. More striking is the extent to which take up of the opportunity has been higher among longer-established, potentially more secure civil society organisations, with close to three quarters of those completing the pilot having been in operation for at least 10 years.

Figure 3: Organisations supported based on their specialisms (n=31)



4. Of the 19 CBT grantees which completed and assessed the value of their engagement in the Bridge Programme, 16 chose to answer the question “would you recommend the programme to others in the sector?” 100% of these participants answered in the affirmative with over 80% saying that they would be “very likely to recommend” the programme to others:

- “It has been brilliant. I’m not sure what else is on the menu [in terms of forms of support from CBT]”
- “The support has been really fantastic. Most funders don’t offer additional support”
- “Thank you to CBT and Cranfield Trust [Connector]”
- “It’s not often you get an offer for this kind of assistance”
- “I couldn’t believe a funder could be so generous”

Impact of Covid-19

5. The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 brought considerable disruption to the Trust’s plans to roll out the Bridge Programme. As the scale and impact of the pandemic became apparent, CBT’s grantees - like most of London’s civil society organisations (CSOs) - faced the combined challenge of meeting a sudden rise in demand for services (many of which could no longer be delivered in person), whilst coping with a considerable drop in their income. In these circumstances, as organisations focused either on their emergency responses and/or their own survival, it proved difficult to stimulate sustained interest in the Trust’s funder plus offer.

6. There have, however, been some unanticipated outcomes from the experiences of those organisations which have gone through the Bridge Programme, supported by one of the Programme’s 28 expert advisers. These provide some useful insights and lessons to inform the potential extension to the programme during 2021/22, particularly as the immense dislocation caused by the pandemic is set to continue.

What are the short to medium-term challenges facing civil society organisations?

7. Managing uncertainty – the level of uncertainty facing many CSOs is unprecedented. As one of the Bridge Programme providers put it, we are simply “not used to scenario planning in a pandemic.”
8. Having appropriate tools for the job in hand – in recent years it has become commonplace for CSOs to adapt planning tools from the world of business; these have tended to be market-based and growth oriented. Suddenly they no longer seem so fit for purpose. In the wake of the pandemic organisations need help to be agile, adapt and collaborate, not necessarily to grow and expand.
9. CSOs are responding differently to the crisis – and cannot easily be type cast – some have opted to double-down, taking almost a “protectionist approach” in order to try to see themselves and their users through the crisis; others, however, have taken the approach of “throwing their chips in the air” and seeing where they fall, which may mean being more open to new forms, if not more disruptive, funder-plus support.
10. There are parallel challenges relating to income generation from trading (room rental, cafes, retail etc.). On the one hand, organisations which ordinarily raise part of their income this way face continued trouble because of Covid-related restrictions. On the other hand, more organisations are now considering this approach as part of “building back” with the aim of reducing grant dependency.
11. Harnessing the availability of skilled volunteers – one of the positive side-effects of the first lockdown and the furloughing of thousands of employees, has been the opportunity to access increased numbers of skilled volunteers. This also brings management challenges for organisations to make the most of their availability and to sustain this resource beyond the short-term. There has also been an increased demand for digital, fundraising and entrepreneurship skills.
12. Trustee recruitment: There is anecdotal evidence of trustees resigning – because of other priorities in their lives, or possibly the pressure of now finding themselves “on the front line.” Some participants in the Bridge Programme reported a challenge in persuading trustees to differentiate between operational and strategic matters.
13. Digital technologies – making the most of the opportunities from the adoption of digital platforms – e.g. further reach, training for busy people; connecting with colleagues, users and communities; breaking down formality. Zoom has been beneficial up to a point, but still presents challenges in sustaining meaningful connections with people and not exacerbating the digital divide.
14. Diversity – alongside Covid-19, the effect of the Black Lives Matter movement has catalysed many CSOs to search for structural answers, going beyond merely increasing board and/or senior management diversity. This also offers a pointer to future potential funder-plus support as it was not an issue which could readily be addressed by the skills set of the current Bridge Programme providers (see section 6 below).

The Bridge Programme Design Principles

15. The pilot phase was based on a set of guiding principles:

- a) **Building trust:** A key principle was to ensure that the offer of capacity-building support was seen as independent from the offer of funding. Clear blue water between ourselves and our grantees was maintained through the procurement of a Manager and Learning Partner for the programme.
- b) **Successful diagnostics:** It is often easier to focus on the presenting problem and ignore the underlying cause. The Cranfield Trust and Locality have provided an effective, independent diagnostic that has objectively posed the right questions to an organisation.
- c) **Empowering grantees to make choices about support:** In order for the support to be effective, it was important that grantees felt in control of the process
- d) **Networked:** It was important during the pilot that the various players, i.e. the funder, connectors, providers and recipients, saw themselves as part of a wider funding/support system.

16. The current project partners² believe that these principles remain appropriate and, in the context of London's recovery from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, are even more relevant. These will therefore form an integral part of the next phase of the programme which it is proposed continues on a 'test and learn' basis.

Learning from the pilot phase

17. The forthcoming evaluation will analyse the effectiveness and impact of the Bridge Programme in more detail. However, the feedback we have received from participants in the pilot phase points to some critical determinants of a connection's success:
18. Do not expect grantees to present with a clear idea of the support they need. During their engagement with connectors, grantees often identify more pressing support needs than they initially presented, reinforcing the value of a thorough and independent diagnostic process at the heart of the Bridge Programme's offer.
19. The application process needs to be as simple as possible, with effective information sharing and smooth handovers between partners. There is evidence that the experience and sector knowledge of the connectors as "honest brokers" has added real value.
20. Involvement in the Bridge Programme has provided grantees a chance to reflect on the purpose and direction of their organisation, going beyond addressing the more immediate challenges of a particular service or project's delivery. However, to be effective requires significant organisational buy-in, the capacity to prioritise the support offer and sufficient time also for application and reflection.

² Cranfield Trust, Locality, Rocket Science and City Bridge Trust

Proposals

12. It is proposed to run the programme for a further year along very similar lines to the pilot phase. This will enable CBT and our partners to build on what we have learnt so far and to plan for building additional 'layers' into the offer.
13. It is also proposed that the offer will be open to all CBT grantees, including those funded through London Community Response Fund (LCRF).
14. It is therefore proposed that you approve funding of £360,000. This would provide each of Locality and Cranfield with a grant of £150,000 to run the 'Triage and Connect' service; attend programme 'test and learn' meetings as well as learning events with grantees, providers of civil society support and potentially other funders; and to hold a grants 'pot' that enable CBT grantees to purchase the support they need. The remaining £60,000 would be used for the procurement of a Learning Partner and Manager for the programme, using the City of London's procurement process. (Rocket Science are extremely likely to tender but the process will be a competitive one).
15. It should be noted that the whilst the pilot 'year' has lasted for more than 12 months, because fewer organisations have been supported, neither the Cranfield Trust nor Locality have fully utilised their grants pots. As at the time of writing this report, the Cranfield Trust has c£8,500 and Locality had c£22,00 left in their budgets which it is proposed to roll over into the second phase, if funding is approved today.

Conclusion

15. Although the pilot phase reached fewer organisations than was originally hoped, it has nevertheless been an important offer from the Trust, greatly appreciated by those of your grantees who have benefitted.
16. The Corona pandemic means that many organisations are in need of additional support at a time of great need amongst London's communities.
17. LCRF to date has awarded over 1,500 groups, many of which have not been funded by the Trust before. Being able to offer this cohort additional capacity building support will add great value to the awards.
18. It is proposed that if you approve funding for a further year, officers will work with the partners to co-design building additional 'layers' to the offer to make better use of our 'total assets' approach.

Report author

Jenny Field, Deputy Director, City Bridge Trust
E: jenny.field@cityoflondon.gov.uk
T: 07789 526 521