

MEETING: 11/09/23

REF: 20325

**ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Anchor Programme**

<b>Council of Somali Organisations</b>	<b>Adv: Salma Abdi</b>
<b>Amount requested: £998,877</b>	<b>Base: Hackney</b>
<b>Amount recommended: £999,990</b>	<b>Benefit: London-wide</b>

**Purpose of grant request:** To enable the charity to support its members and communities through policy work, capacity building and community outreach programs.

**The Applicant**

Council of Somali Organisations (COSO) was established as a charity (no. 1154667) in 2010 by leaders in the Somali community in conjunction with City Bridge Trust (CBT) and Trust for London. COSO is a national second tier organisation set up for the Somali voluntary and community sector (VCS) to assist as an umbrella organisation. The charity's main objective is to address and respond to the specific and complex needs of the Somali community and the organisations that support them. As a member of COSO, Somali-led organisations gain access to policy and regulations consultation, networking events, training, and guidance on funding applications. In delivering these services, COSO is creating a community hub that encourages and enables Somali-led organisations to participate more effectively within the civil society sector.

**Background and detail of proposal**

For the last three years COSO has focused on building its infrastructure support, with membership increasing two-fold from 112 member organisations to 250. Thus, highlighting the charity's dedication to improving organisational infrastructure and growth. COSO is committed to being user-led, it regularly conducts needs analysis of the systemic issues members face and publishes research and recommendations accordingly. Most recently, COSO conducted a needs analysis and follow up research funded by the National Lottery on the effects of Covid-19 on Somali run mosques. Alongside needs analysis, COSO utilises surveys, focus groups and co-production sessions where there are member wide discussions to ensure the organisation is being led by the collective voice of its members.

Over the last three years, the National Lottery, CBT, and Trust for London have awarded both core and capacity building funding for COSO which has enabled the organisation to diversify its funding base. However, there is still an issue of dependency on a small number of funders as there is little core funding for second tier organisations. Therefore, this grant will enable COSO to have stability through core funding for eight years, as well as allowing it to attract other sources of funding.

COSO aims to use this funding to recruit and employ a Partnerships and Policy Manager who will increase its reach and partnerships. COSO also plan to use the funding for its Director's salary starting from year four of the grant. COSO is a

national organisation, with 50% of its membership based in London. The charity is applying for core funding which equates to 25% of its income, which is proportionate to London benefit. Trust for London are currently funding this post and CBT's funding will allow for continuity of leadership as well as maintaining sustainability. COSO's Director, is currently undertaking COSO's policy and partnership responsibilities, and with a growing number of partnerships both established and developing, a dedicated member of staff to manage these relationships is needed. Therefore, this funding and this post will ensure that the charity has the capacity to manage and continue dialogues with partners as well as centralise COSO's current partnership work.

COSO is keen on developing institutional knowledge and memory through this post. As it stands, its director by virtue of their position has a deep understanding of the sector and relationships within it. This funding would allow COSO to have a member of staff who can fully commit to managing partnerships allowing for the strengthening of internal institutional knowledge as well as the distribution of expertise. The charity is aware of the dangers of centring an organisation's knowledge on one person and through this post it is taking steps towards ensuring equity and agency in addition to addressing and shifting power dynamics.

COSO are also planning to use this funding for a Digital and Information Content Coordinator. COSO had this post for three years with funding from the National Lottery which has since ended. It aims to reinstate this position as it would support the organisation with its internal communications and external communications for example, its newsletter, website, research, and reports. Previously, this role had resulted in the production of 38 videos on health, migration, mental health, and housing law in collaboration with COSO's partners. With this funding, the charity plans to continue producing digital content to meet the current and future needs of its members.

COSO's is currently working with various NHS Trusts and Metropolitan Police on community outreach and engagement as well as The Ubele Initiative, Greater London Authority (GLA), Advice UK and the British Somali Medical Association. COSO also represents the Somali community on several forums on funding and race equality such as Funders for Race Equality Alliance, Hear Equality, Alliance Race Equality, and the Migrant & Refugee Advisory Panel.

### **London's Racial Justice sector**

There are roughly 70,000 Somalis living in London, concentrated in the boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Tower Hamlets, and Camden<sup>1</sup>. In June 2021, Healthwatch Hackney, which advocates for equal access to social services, found that out of 32 Somalis surveyed, the most commonly raised issue affecting health and wellbeing was housing problems, followed by language difficulties and mental health<sup>2</sup>. The Somali

<sup>1</sup> *Creating a contemporary profile of the Somali community in Camden (2022)*:  
<https://wp.wpi.edu/london/projects/2022-projects-spring/sydrccommunity/#:~:text=Somali%20refugees%20have%20traveled%20to,%2C%20Tower%20Hamlets%2C%20and%20Camden.>

<sup>2</sup> *Somali community in Hackney and their experience of health and care services (2021)*:  
<https://www.healthwatchhackney.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Somali-Community-final-June-21.pdf>

community faces multiple barriers in accessing services and high rates of poverty translates into poor health and wellbeing. Housing for the Somali community in the UK has for long been characterised by overcrowding and poor physical conditions. Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities are disproportionately impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. For example, Bristol Somali Forum carried out a survey and found that out of 60 people surveyed, 70% are struggling to pay their energy bills and 67% stated that their financial position is affecting their mental health. In addition to this, infrastructure organisations that are BME led by and for have a history of being underfunded. In 2020, when funders were looking to make sure their emergency pandemic grant programmes were reaching communities who needed it most, the mechanisms to reach Black and Minoritised led organisations were not consistently available due to the reduction in number and capacity of equalities infrastructure organisations.

The charity's partnership and systemic change is based around its main strategic themes for the next five years, Education, Employment, Health and Wellbeing, and an overarching theme of Criminal Justice across all work. These themes were implemented following a needs assessment of member organisations to ensure relevancy and co-production. COSO's work is informed by these strategic themes with the goal of initiating social and systemic change that empowers the Somali community as well as challenging systemic racism affecting marginalised communities. Each strategic theme has established thematic working groups where COSO members communicate and discuss obstacles they face within these wider systemic issues. The charity's staff are informed by these working groups which help to steer the direction of the charity's work.

In terms of looking at long term systemic issues, COSO have produced videos on various health issues such as diabetes and cancer which are particularly prevalent within the Somali community<sup>3</sup>. It is currently working with the NHS on providing resources and dispelling misinformation on vaccines. It also updates its website with translated health information as well as signposting which of its member organisations are best positioned to support those in the community who are facing the impacts of health inequities, thus showing how the charity is working to bridge the gaps between the Somali community and healthcare providers.

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<sup>3</sup> [Somalis in London - Open Society Foundations](#)

## Financial Information

Year end as at 31st March	2022 Signed Accounts £	2023 Draft Accounts £	2024 Budget £
<b>Income &amp; expenditure:</b>			
Income	312,396	384,221	424,089
Expenditure	(265,204)	(366,020)	(413,414)
<b>Surplus/(deficit)</b>	<b>47,192</b>	<b>18,201</b>	<b>10,675</b>
<b>Reserves:</b>			
Total restricted	94,198	98,662	109,338
Total unrestricted	9,164	22,901	33,577
<b>Total reserves</b>	<b>103,362</b>	<b>121,563</b>	<b>142,915</b>
Of which: free unrestricted	9,164	22,901	22,901
Reserves policy target	66,301	91,505	103,354
Free reserves over/(under) target	(57,137)	(68,604)	(80,453)

The figures stated in the table for 2021/22 are restated figures due to there being errors in the 2021/22 signed accounts. COSO's 2021/22 income shows 99% of its total income as restricted sourced from multiple funders such as National Lottery, People's Postcode Lottery and London Community Foundation. The charity's reserves policy is to hold three months of expenditure.

In 2021/22, COSO was significantly below its reserves policy target however the charity has taken cost saving measures such as working virtually to reduce overhead costs of occupying office space. It has invested in its infrastructure for example, implementing Salesforce as part of its Restructure 2020-2023 Plan. This plan is part of COSO's efforts to strengthen the charity's financial position.

From 2023/24 it is seeking to secure long term sustainability of the core funding and activities. COSO aims to do this by cultivating and maintaining funding relationships with the goal of securing multi-year funding. To date COSO has applied to The National Lottery Community Fund as well as working to secure additional funding from Macmillan cancer support. COSO secured income from The Legal Education Foundation in March 2023 for a total of £150,000 (£75,000 per year for two years).

## Funding History

ID	Type	Meeting Date	Decision
IPP115	Inflationary Pressures Payment	21/11/2022	£4,800.00 Inflationary Pressures Payment
19381	Anchor Programme - Resourcing Grant	20/06/2022	£3,600 to resource Council for Somali Organisations to participate in a design group co-creating programme design for City Bridge Trust's Anchor funding programme.
16185	COVID19 Small Charity Emergency Support Funding	13/05/2020	A one-off, unrestricted grant of £12,250, equivalent to one regular quarterly payment for the organisation's current grant. COVID19
15642	Bridging Divides	26/03/2020	£145,000 over three years to support and strengthen the Somali VCS in London through the development of infrastructure, improving skills to influence policy and encouraging stronger (collective) voices.

13208	Investing in Londoners	18/03/2016	To fund the continuation of business and membership development officer (3) and research and development officers' posts (2).
11987	Working with Londoners	13/03/2014	£100,000 over two years. Salary and associated costs, Business and Membership Development Manager 3 days and Research Development Officer 2 days to build capacity of Somali frontline organisation.
10392	Working with Londoners	17/02/2011	£150,000 over three years for the salary and associated costs of a development officer for a project designed to strengthen front line London Somali community organisations.

### The Recommendation

***£999,990 over eight years (£110,560; £107,550; £110,940; £126,290; £130,090; £134,030; £138,130; £142,400) towards salary costs of a Partnerships and Policy Manager, a Digital and Information Content Coordinator as well as salary costs for COSO's Director, to enable the charity to continue supporting its members and the wider Somali community.***