

MEETING: 11/09/2023

REF: 20500

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Anchor Programme

Organisation name: Migrant Rights Network	Adv: Maria Hughes
Amount requested: £ 591,281,80	Base: Newham
Amount recommended: £591,300	Benefit: London-wide

Purpose of grant request: Core funding is requested to enable Migrants' Rights Network (MRN) to work towards greater justice and equity for migrants and refugees in London.

The Applicant

Migrants Rights Network (MRN) is a registered charity (no. 1125746) incorporated in 2006, based in Stratford, Newham working across all London Boroughs. The charity works with and for migrant communities to influence stakeholders and effect structural change to achieve justice and equality for migrants. As a small staff team and board majority led by migratised people (first and second generation migrants), the organisation builds relationships across the migrant and refugee sector, as well as other intersecting sectors. The organisation builds relationships with, and supports grass-root, migrant led organisations to understand issues important to them, and how they can work together to achieve transformational change for migrants.

Background and detail of proposal

Migrants Rights Network plan to strengthen its core work over the seven years of Anchor funding. As the charity is looking at transformational change within the migrant rights sector and across others, the organisation is conscious this work takes time. A full-time Community and Capacity Building Manager will be hired to coordinate the delivery of MRN's work as proposed. The budget also composes of monitoring and evaluation support with an external consultant to support long-term systems change, as well reimbursement fees for people with lived experience who will support with designing this work.

MRN aims to have achieved the following over the seven years of funding:

- 1) Embedded intersectional approaches within organisations strategies – Organisations will be better equipped in understanding how systems of oppression exist, and affect each other's sectors, as well as how identities intersect and affect migrant, refugee and racialised communities (such as Islamophobia and its effect on immigration policy). This will lead to the inclusion of intersectional approaches in policy analysis, campaigns and delivery of services, and embolden refugee and migrant organisations to support one another in social justice issues.
- 2) Influenced the use of language around migrants and refugees, both within the sector and beyond – Migrants and refugees will be leading the sector towards a more appropriate, nuanced and holistic approach around their experiences, and interrogate the history of using this language, and what systems of

oppression have influenced it. Examples of this work to date include MRN's '*Words Matter*' campaign, as featured on Sky News¹.

- 3) Growth of solidarity and learning from each other – MRN hope to see an increased understanding and awareness of other social justice sectors, the systems of oppression which affect different communities, and how other sectors are responding to this. This has already and will lead to multi-sector intersectional campaigns where resources can be pooled and experience shared.

To achieve these aims, the following activities are examples of how Migrants Right Network will do this:

- Continue to grow a network of organisations and individuals with a commitment of migrant's rights and justice to collectivise campaign and action.
- Deliver training for other charities/funders, for example around appropriate use of language and the intersectionality with other issues affecting migrant communities, as well as ensure they sign the pledge for the 'Words Matter' campaign.
- Link grassroot, migrant-led organisations with access and resources, for example, access to power-holders and decision-makers and media.
- Facilitate 'Know Your Rights' workshops to help increase migrants' understanding of their rights and how to access them.
- Strengthen and grow migrant leadership through the development of bespoke migrant leadership programmes across London.

MRN's proposal meets the Anchor Programme criteria for funding:

- 1) It is a majority user-led organisation and works collaboratively with migrants and refugees to deliver its workshops and training to the wider sector, such as through the migrant leadership programme with a commitment to equitable practice. Please note however the trustee board is currently slightly under 75% of people from a migratised background. This is due to two Trustees recently stepping down, and they are currently in the process of recruiting two new Trustees with lived experience.
- 2) The organisation provides second-tier support to organisations within the migrants rights sector, and beyond. This is through different approaches including capacity building through training MRN will coordinate campaigns across the sector ensuring grass-roots organisations are supported and given time and space to develop longer term systems change.
- 3) It will work collaboratively with organisations both within the migrant and refugee sector and beyond, with an intersectional and equity focus. Through fostering networking and collaboration between the migrant and refugee sectors with others where key issues intersect, such as LGBTQ+ rights, disability rights, race equality, islamophobia and the cost-of-living crisis; it

¹ https://migrantsrights.org.uk/projects/wordsmatter/#Sky_News- Words_Matter

hopes to not only build allyship across sectors, but also increase understanding how migration intersects with many identities and issues.

London's Migrant and Refugee sector

In the migrant and refugee sector, this is a critical time for organisations and the people they work with and support. There have been rising tensions with the government for some time over the 'illegal migration bill', which has of July 2023 reached royal ascent. This bill includes the controversial plan to send people seeking asylum who arrive in the UK through the government's so called 'illegal routes' to Rwanda, whilst also nearly effectively banning safe routes to asylum for most people. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) has expressed profound concern over this plan, naming it an asylum ban in the UK, which would '*extinguish the right to seek refugee protection in the United Kingdom for those who arrive irregularly, not matter how compelling their claim may be*'². The sector has had to therefore be reactive to this bill as it makes its way into law, building campaigns and lobbying MP's and the House of Lords to introduce amendments to it.

The sector is also dealing with harmful rhetoric across some of the UK media, as well as the rise of the far right protesting outside asylum accommodation. This rhetoric and activity has severe impacts on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, with many people feeling more unsafe, unwelcome and anxious. The sector is repeatedly battling against the harmful depictions of migrants in the media and by the government, alongside little capacity and funding for long term strategic planning to counter this. According to Migration Exchange, government grants have fallen significantly by 76% between 2018-21³ within this sector, and funding is overwhelmingly absorbed by only 3% of charities working on refugee and migration issues with over £1 million income⁴. Smaller and grassroots organisations are underfunded and under resourced consequentially.

Working intersectionally has already led to positive developments, such as creation of the Black Europeans group⁵ after workshops hosted by MRN. This is an example of how their dedication to being intersectional, by working with the anti-racism movement in the UK, has seen positive results already. MRN's partners across sectors include: JCWI (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants), Hongkongers in Britain, Liberty, Freedom from Torture, Race on the Agenda, Voice4Change and Praxis. MRN's partnership work extends to funders too, for example it has supported Paul Hamlyn Foundation to frame its migrant rights strategy. Often the language

² [UNHCR https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/uk-asylum-and-policy/uk-asylum-and-policy-and-illegal-migration-bill#:~:text=Illegal%20Migration%20Bill&text=The%20legislation%2C%20if%20passed%2C%20would,compelling%20their%20claim%20may%20be](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/uk-asylum-and-policy/uk-asylum-and-policy-and-illegal-migration-bill#:~:text=Illegal%20Migration%20Bill&text=The%20legislation%2C%20if%20passed%2C%20would,compelling%20their%20claim%20may%20be).

³ https://global-dialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/People-power-and-priorities_REPORT_MEX_July2023.pdf, p.47.

⁴ https://global-dialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/People-power-and-priorities_REPORT_MEX_July2023.pdf, p.27

⁵ https://twitter.com/black_europeans

funders use influences that of organisations when applying for funding and is therefore vital to ensure it is appropriate and reflective of the sectors they fund.

Migrants Rights Network are an integral part of this sector to ensure longer term, transformational systems change. Whilst many other organisations are understandably reactive to ongoing asylum law in the UK, among other pressing issues (large cuts to legal aid, impacts of Brexit - making child reunification more difficult for example), MRN are able to support these organisations to be proactive as well as reactive in reaching longer term change with an intersectional approach by ensuring collaboration across sectors.

Financial Information

Year end as at 31 March	2022	2023	2024
	Signed Accounts	Management Accounts	Budget
	£	£	£
Income & expenditure:			
Income	132,156	89,606	444,919
Expenditure	(163,408)	(160,347)	(276,656)
Surplus/(deficit)	132,156	(70,741)	168,263
Reserves:			
Total restricted	42,779	14,235	77,846
Total unrestricted	103,291	61,094	165,746
Total reserves	146,070	75,329	243,592
Of which: free unrestricted	101,969	59,772	164,424
Reserves policy target	40,852	40,087	69,164
Free reserves over/(under) target	61,969	32,523	118,751

MRN's free reserves level has been over its target (three months expenditure) for the past couple of years. This is due to a large unrestricted grant received during the covid-19 pandemic, which was used towards its reserves. Due to lower income however in financial years 2022 and 2023, the organisation has been using its higher reserves to draw down funds to use on unrestricted expenditure.

MRN's income has seen fluctuations in recent years. Whilst the last couple of years have seen a decline in income, MRN are on an upward trajectory looking forward. For the 2024 financial year it has already fundraised enough to cover the charities core costs with more applications in the pipeline for other planned work, including unrestricted funding. Whilst the proposed budget for this current financial year (2024) is much higher than has been in previous years (including the Anchor application), it has significant plans for future work and hope to be able to employ more staff to carry this out. MRN have also factored in costs for a potential office move (to a more suitable space), which would incur larger costs. MRN is also diversifying its income from grants through consultancy work, through training and workshops with funders and supporting the development of EDI strategies.

The anticipated budget for 23/24 indicates Anchor funding would be less than 50% of total income, with 45% of budgeted income already confirmed. Even if only confirmed income to date is received, Anchor funding would be less than 50% of total income. Although the proportions would not have been met in 2022/23, there is in any case an exemption to the policy of responsive grant funding being less than 50% of income for the Anchor programme.

Funding History

ID	Type	Meeting Date	Decision
11206	Working with Londoners	27/9/2012	£99,000 over three years (£32,000; £32,500; £34,500) towards the part time salary (2.5 days) and associated running costs of a capacity building programme.
16064	Bridging Divides	28/1/2021	Rejected funding for £65,730. Funding applied for towards their 'London Connected' programme Application was rejected due to financial concerns of the organisation, primarily their low free reserves level and a significant drop in annual income and turnover of trustees.
14841	Anniversary Infrastructure Support Programme	15/8/2018	A grant of £5,050 towards staff costs to scope out a proposed project for amplifying the voices of those with lived experience of migration, as well as securing legal opinion on safeguarding voices. The applicant decided it didn't have sufficient capacity to carry out the second round of funding and the amount was written back.

Previous rejection was due to staff and trustee changes, low free reserve levels as well as the ability to demonstrate the changes they proposed in the Bridging Divides application. MRN are in a more stable situation now. The reserves level has significantly increased in recent years. The staff changes were during a period when the director was on maternity leave, with an interim director. Your officer is confident the organisation is in a more stable position to receive funding.

The Recommendation

£591,300 over seven years (£74,880, £76,525, £80,048, £85,102, £87,225, £91,260, £96,260 towards the core costs of the organisation, including the full-time salary of the Community and Capacity Building Manager to increase collaboration, solidarity and justice across the migrant sector as well as with intersecting sectors (such as LGBTQ+, disability, race equality).