

Bridge Programme Review & Reset

Stage 1 Report Summary of Findings

22/05/2024

Cranfield Trust & Locality

Summary Report of Findings

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Context and Objective

- Locality and Cranfield Trust are carrying out a **review of City Bridge Foundation's Bridge Programme of 'Funder Plus' support** for grantee organisations. Launched in 2017, the Bridge Programme offers grantees support across a range of management and technical topics.
- The report covers work from **Phases 1 and 2 of the review**, as follows:
 - Data on grantee organisations which have accessed support to date
 - Types of support delivered, progress in providing support and barriers to take up
 - Provider organisations
 - Review of learning reports from the Programme
 - Different models of funder plus support
 - Preliminary findings from a survey that was sent to City Bridge Foundation grantees
- This presentation provides a summary of key findings from the review and recommendations on what City Bridge Foundation can consider to enhance the Bridge Programme, as well as opportunities for further exploration and research for the next stage of the review

Supported Organisations

- Since the programme started, 211 contacts from 207 organisations have been made to explore the possibility of support. **138 organisations have received or are receiving individual support.**
- **The number of organisations contacting the Programme has been low**, in comparison to the overall number of CBF grantees in the Programme period.
- **Stronger communications activity** thanks to the support of the CBF communications **team is raising awareness of the Programme**, which is already having an impact in terms of demand:
 - 109 organisations had been supported to end January 2024, a further 29 have come forward since then. → **A significant jump from approximately 22 organisations a year to 29 organisations within a single quarter.**
- **Who's been participating in the Bridge Programme?**
 - 63% of Bridge Programme participants are medium and small size organisations (turnover of £500K or less) → only 2% are micro-entities (turnover of £10K or less)
 - Support has been concentrated in 10 boroughs: Lambeth, Southwark, Brent, Camden, Croydon, Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth. → **7 of these are Inner London Boroughs**
 - Organisations are very diverse in their missions and focus areas. 17 sectors have been identified with organisations working in 'Health and Well-being' being the largest (13%)

Support Provided

- Support provided has covered a wide range of topics. The flexibility of the Programme and the wide-ranging capabilities of the Providers mean that we have been able to respond to a varied range of requests. Most/least popular topics were:
- **Top 5 Support Topics**
 - Strategic/business planning 25%
 - Fundraising 19%
 - Governance 10%
 - Impact 10%
 - Marketing/Comms 5%
- **Bottom 5 Support Topics**
 - Finance/Financial management 4%
 - Mentoring 4%
 - IT 4%
 - EDI 1%
 - Merger support 1%
- Strategic and business planning is a widely held need in voluntary organisations, and there is a good range of options for organisations to obtain this support, from both pro bono/volunteering organisations and from paid consultants.
- The cost structure of the Bridge Programme, including working through commercially paid Providers, may not be the most cost-effective option for providing this type of frequently accessed support.

Support Provided

- Other topics which may **be able to be accessed on a pro bono/lower cost basis** are impact measurement, finance/financial management, merger support, communications and marketing and governance support.
- **Fundraising is a difficult skill set to access at low cost**, there are few options for charities in need of fundraising expertise, so provision through the Bridge Programme is particularly valuable. **Support around equity, diversity and inclusion is also difficult to access free of charge**, although other funders have had offers of support in this area.
- **The Bridge Programme could be one of a smaller number of options for charities to access these vital and valuable areas of support without cost.**
- **Average Provider Costs for Top 5 Support Topics**
 - Strategic/business planning: £3,225
 - Fundraising: £2,295
 - Governance: £3,988
 - Impact: £3,357
 - Marketing/Comms: £2,848

Opportunity to promote support on hard to access topics and perhaps integrate aspects of them into more popular offerings

Communications

- **Programme Communications:**

- The Programme relies on CBF's communications functions to promote its offer of support to grantees.
- Regarding how organisations contacting the programme found out about it:
 - 46% found out through direct recommendation **from Grants Manager/CBF contact**
 - 21% found out through the **website**
 - 13% through the **newsletter**
 - 6% through **CBF events**
- Grants Manager recommendations are not in line with the initial aims of the Programme, which included distancing support activities from grant relationships, but as the Programme has developed, this 'clear blue water' approach has been relaxed.

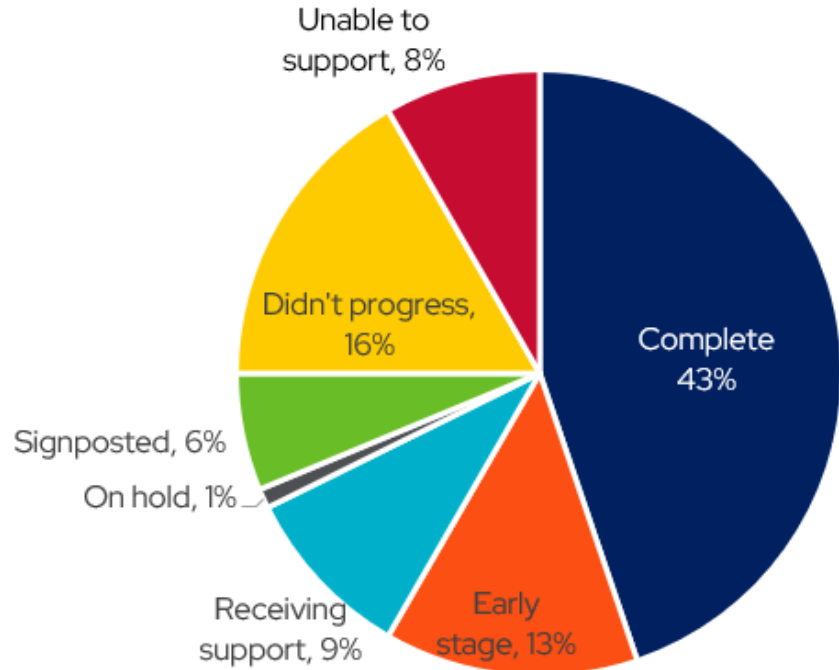
Engagement and Progress with Bridge Programme

- **Regarding engagement:**
 - Of the 211 enquiries made by organisations to participate in the Bridge Programme, **16% didn't progress their enquiry through to full conversations with the Connectors.** This group simply became unresponsive following their initial enquiry, despite repeated attempts to follow up by the Connectors.
 - **2% cited lack of capacity as the reason for not taking up support.** Lack of capacity is an important issue, as organisations may have critical concerns or issues to address, but feel unable to address them.
 - At an early stage of the Programme, **offering 'backfill' funding was considered,** to support some additional capacity for grantees, **but this has not been implemented.**
 - **6% of organisations contacting the Programme were signposted to other help,** outside the Bridge Programme. These were largely grantees of the LCRF programme, which were not eligible for full support, but which could attend the webinars and events delivered through the Bridge Programme.

Opportunity to explore 'light-touch' support offerings for organisations to compensate for potential lack of capacity among grantees.

Engagement and Progress with Bridge Programme

- **Regarding Progress of Support:**
 - Of the 138 organisations which have actively engaged with support:
 - 43% (59 organisations) have completed support activities
 - 9% were under way with support activities at end April 2024
 - 13% were just starting on the process of accessing support – reflecting the number of organisations (29) which have come forward to the Programme in the last three months.



Support Providers

- **Some Providers have been more active** in the programme than others, although overall, **the list has been well used.**
- 15 Providers have delivered one support activity only. While the range of Providers has covered the needs of grantees well, **it would be worth reviewing the Provider pool to explore whether additional areas of expertise are needed**, and to agree the best approach to recruiting, managing and engaging Providers.
- While a substantial number of charities have been engaged as Providers, **the largest volumes of activity overall have been delivered through independent consultants and commercial consultancy firms.**

There is a need to develop mechanisms to enable us to receive feedback on providers and reassess the provider pool to make sure all areas are covered sustainably and with consistent approaches to support. There is also an opportunity to engage with other charities and VCSE agents to have them act as support providers to their peers, and to explore the role of the connector organisations in providing some support.

Different Models of 'Funder Plus' Programmes

- Nine different programme structures have been identified from Cranfield Trust's and Locality's experience and through research. The different structures are:
 1. 'Connector' Programme (Bridge Programme's current model)
 2. Grants Manager Programme
 3. Collaborative Pro Bono Programme
 4. Single Provider Open Programme
 5. Single Provider Structured Programme
 6. Informal Referral to Funded Provider
 7. Independent identification of Support
 8. Start Up Support
 9. Specialist focus
- The different models need discussion: It is difficult to rate them in terms of overall 'success' as each funder is likely to have a slightly different approach and ambition for their programme, and a different scale of activity. Details and research of each model have been incorporated in the Appendices of the full report.

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Who Participated in the Survey?**

- To more accurately assess the Bridge Programme's effectiveness and accessibility, a survey was developed and sent out to past and present City Bridge Foundation grantees.
 - **In total 78 organisations participated in the survey:** 63 completed the survey (80.7%) and 28 partially completed it (19.3%).
 - **Registered charities composed the overwhelming majority** of the survey's respondents (67.9%)
 - Regarding their size: **60.2% of respondents had a turnover of £500K or less**, only 1 respondent (representing 1.2%) had between £0-£10K → **consistent with research of supported organisations. Some participants have commented on their belief that start-ups inclusivity within the Bridge Programme is an issue**
 - The top 3 themes through which participants received funding were: Children and Young People, 13 orgs; London Community Response Fund, 11 orgs ; Migrants, Refugees and people seeking asylum, 8 orgs → **Receivers of LCRF funding were not considered eligible for full support.**

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Who Participated in the Survey?**

- To more accurately assess the Bridge Programme's effectiveness and accessibility, a survey was developed and sent out to past and present City Bridge Foundation grantees.
 - **60% of the organisations who responded to the survey were either led by specific communities of identity or provided support to specific groups.** The majority focused on Older People and/or Children and Young People (20 orgs.), disabled people (16 orgs.), and communities experiencing racial inequality (12 orgs). Only one organisations focused on LGBTQ+ community members, and 5 worked with faith communities. → **there is an opportunity to contact these often-excluded groups for more detailed feedback**
 - **18 of the surveyed organisations worked 'London-wide'**
 - **Inner London is strongly represented among the respondents, with 9 of the 12 inner boroughs within the top 50% areas of work.** → **consistent with earlier research on supported organisations and there is definitely an opportunity to enhance engagement with VCSE agents focusing on Outer London boroughs**

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Programme Visibility and Communications**
 - **Only 6.5% of respondents (5 respondents) were not aware that non-financial support was available to them through the Bridge Programme**, which positively speaks to the programme's general visibility to grantees .
 - Of the 71 respondents who were aware, however, **28 did not take up support through the programme (39.4%)**.
 - **8 of the 28 did not have the staff/resources to engage with the programme (25%)**
- **Opportunity:**
 - While grantees are aware of the programme and its general aim to provide non-financial support, there is room for improvement in how the Programme is communicated. **Clarity on eligibility, kinds of support and the programme's process need to be communicated more clearly.**
 - **These enhancements could also come hand in hand with other recommendations in the report regarding comms:** firstly, promoting skills development in critical areas (financial management, EDI, merger support) and, secondly, promoting opportunities to receive support in areas which are usually expensive to access (fundraising, EDI)

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Organisational Capacity to Participate**
 - 7 of the 28 who did not take up support said it was due to **lack of staff/resources to engage with the programme (25%)**
 - 3 did not have **the time to engage (10.7%)**
 - 2 also stated it had to do with **internal capacity issues (7.1%)**
 - **This reveals that 42.8% were unable to take advantage of the Bridge Programme due to internal capacity issues (lack of time, staff and/or resources).**
- **Opportunity:**
 - Similarly to earlier research, internal capacity concerns were found to be **a key barrier to organisations' engagement with the programme.**
 - Findings from the survey give additional weight to the recommendation that some **short input/light touch support may be needed** to provide immediate help with grantees' problems, rather than in depth and time-consuming consultancy being the main offer.
 - CBF are open to the Connectors using their own services within the Programme (as Providers) and **this could apply to substantial support and to new 'light touch' support offers**

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Organisational Capacity to Participate**

- When asked about what would make them more likely to participate in the Bridge Programme, respondents provided a variety of answers, but 2 trends were identified:
- Some respondents (8 of them) stated that **additional support to compensate for the lack of time and internal capacity to participate** would enable them to participate, **one respondent also suggested that an 'attendance fee'** would be advantageous (to be paid to prospective organisations as incentive to join). Another proposed childcare to allow working parents to join.
→ **measures to enhance 'substantial support offerings'?**
- 2 of the respondents wanted a clearer understanding of what support is available to them through the programme. → **additional research for enhancement of comms**
- One respondent specified that they thought the programme was not inclusive of start-ups, which could also speak to the low participation of micro-organisations in the survey → **consistent with earlier research, micro-organisations rarely participate in Bridge Programme though they could be found to be most in need of substantial support. Can 'light touch' strategies and perhaps compensatory mechanisms help increase their engagement?**

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Impact of Support on Organisations**
 - **43 of our respondents participated in the Bridge Programme's support offerings (56.5%).** 38 of them provided feedback on their experience through the programme.
 - **Top 5 strengths of the programme** (percentage represent those who either somewhat agree or strongly agree with the statements below):
 - Easily providing grantees with the support they need (76%);
 - Supporting organisations to be better able to work toward their mission (71%);
 - Raising the confidence of organisation members/teams in their own roles (68.4%);
 - Raising the confidence of organisation members in their leadership (65.7%);
 - Improving organisations' offers to their beneficiaries (60.5%)
 - This shows that the apparent strengths of the programme's actual support process lie in its **ease of access and relevance to organisations' needs**, as well as its **leadership training, team and organisational management, and service delivery** support offerings.
 - This is consistent as well with the general trend within the program: **support in governance, strategic/business planning, and marketing/comms are the most provided**

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Impact of Support on Organisations**

- It is noteworthy that, for all statements, negative responses do not exceed 13% (those who 'somewhat disagree' or 'strongly disagree'). **This speaks to the good standard that the Bridge Programme already fulfils.** That said, there is always room for improvement:
 - Potential lack of consistency with support provided on the same themes: the programme was surprisingly weakest with 'Finding it easy to access the support they needed' (13%) and 'Resolving issues to do with property through the support' (13.1%). This shows that some of the programme's best strengths are also simultaneously weaknesses, which could hint of a lack of consistency in the programme.
 - The programme is seen to be weakest for the following support types: impact monitoring and evaluations, financial management, and premises/property support. → **the programme has provided a lot of support with premises/property and with impact and evaluations, but perhaps there's room to enhance them. Financial management is has had low take up – and it's something that charities need but they don't always know they need, so there is an opportunity to promote this more strongly.**

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Impact of Support on Organisations**
 - Regarding their ability to retain what they learnt:
 - 52.6% of surveyed programme participants were able to.
 - 31.5% were only partially able to do so.
 - 15.7% were not able to.
 - Many respondents believed that, due to time pressure, **they were not able to fully incorporate the findings and lessons from the support they received.** Some of the respondents also expressed **difficulties coming from their own resource limitations.**
- **Opportunity**
 - Providing **follow-up support** for Bridge Programme participants to help tackle ‘new issues’ identified through initial support process and to support with retention of learnings
 - **More strongly promote support topics that are important but typically not requested, and to incorporate aspects of these ‘neglected’ topics in more commonly wanted support** (for example: tackling financial management in business planning support)
 - **Evaluation of each support activity** provided to ensure that organisations are able to implement advice

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Impact of Support on Organisations**
 - When asked about what they would change about the Bridge Programme, suggestions were diverse. Below are the respondents' most recurring suggestions:
 - A key issue for many was the slowness of the referral process and the long time that communications/responses can take. **They propose that a streamline referral process and a quicker response rate would enhance the programme. → Need to explore connector and provider capacity to investigate response rates, also review the systems used for charities to submit requests, and programme information management**
 - Many believed there was little opportunity for exchange and feedback after the programme. Additional work with consultants/providers to apply and/or monitor proposed changes from the support would be very helpful, and an opportunity to return for additional support or feedback would also be appreciated. **→ Feedback could be integrated in follow-up support**
 - 2 believed that the programme should be longer **→ Unclear about how specifically, but integrating follow-up support and feedback would address this issue**

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Connectors and Providers**

- Of the 37 surveyed grantees who did participate in the Bridge Programme, 24 of them took up the offer of 1-2-1 consultancy support.
- Cranfield was the connector for 13 of them, Locality for 6. Four of the respondents could not remember or did not know who their connector was.
- 14 different support providers were identified through the survey, which shows that surveyed respondents received support through a very diverse range of providers.

- **Experiences with connectors were very positive:**

- 69.5% of respondents strongly agreed that they met with the connector happened in good time, 8.6% somewhat agreed.
- As for the connector's ability to understand their issues: 56.5% strongly agreed and 17.3% somewhat agreed with the statement.

Findings from the Bridge Programme Survey

- **Concerning Connectors and Providers**

- **Concerning support providers**, the majority of respondents also had positive experiences. Providers' weakest points were associated with the following statements:
 - My organisation achieved the outcomes we needed from the support: 43.4% strongly agreed and 13% somewhat agreed
 - My organisation was stronger for having worked with this support provider: 39.1% strongly agreed and 17.3% somewhat agreed.
 - I felt like I had enough time with my support provider: 43.4% strongly agreed and 17.3% somewhat agreed
- **There is therefore an opportunity to consider the following recommendations:**
 - Developing its post-completion process to get feedback from providers and grantees.
 - Providers could also be given guidance: making advice clearly actionable and practical for the organisations, taking their size into account.
 - Providers should receive feedback on their approach so they can reflect and improve
 - Follow-up support opportunities will also enable grantees to benefit from a longer and more holistic support process

Recap of Recommendations and Opportunities

- **Communications:**

1. Improve how the Programme is communicated. Clarity on eligibility, kinds of support and the programme's process need to be communicated more clearly.
2. Promote skills development in critical areas (financial management, EDI, merger support).
3. Promote opportunities to receive support in areas which are usually expensive to access (fundraising, EDI).

- **Support Provision:**

1. Explore light-touch support packages that can be more widely and easily accessed by grantees to overcome lack of capacity to engage with more structured support.
2. Explore other methods to compensate for lack of capacity.
3. Develop robust feedback loops that would enable connectors, providers and the Bridge Programme team to improve and grow. Could also be used as evidence base for guidance.
4. Explore follow-up support offerings, especially for organisations that have identified new challenges as a result of original support
5. Incorporate elements of 'less requested' support types into 'more popular' offerings

Recap of Recommendations and Opportunities

- **Provider Pool:**
 1. Investigate potential to engage more VCSE sector providers in the programme
 2. Reassess provider pool to make sure all support areas are covered sustainably (for example: only having one provider for premises support could create delay in some grantees receiving support if multiple organisations are interested)
 3. Consider connectors' capability as providers
- **Additional Research Opportunities for the Review:**
 1. Contact grantees for more detailed feedback on their experience of the process: if there were delays, when did they happen? Why did so many believe communications was slow and inconsistent?
 2. Contact grantees of specific types or size to see if they had a unique perspective on the programme: for example, faith organisations and LGBT+ led organisations, which seem to be quite a minority amongst grantees
 3. Explore ways to improve engagement of organisations located in outer London boroughs
 4. Explore ways to improve engagement of micro-organisations and start-ups

Thank You!

Full reports are available on desk research and on the survey findings. They will also be integrated as a combined report for the final stage of the Review & Reset.

Please note that survey findings rely on data collected by April 30th, 2024. Survey was left open until May 13th, 2024 and has now been closed. Final findings from the survey will be incorporated in the next stage but we expect that trends identified here will largely be reaffirmed.