

MEETING: 09/12/2024

REF: 25055

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Anchor Programme

Agenda Alliance CIO	Adv: Maria Hughes
Amount requested: £ 1,165,456	Base: Hackney
Amount recommended: £1,165,488	Benefit: London-wide

Purpose of grant request: Agenda Alliance CIO (AA) is applying for core funding to support early prevention work of public services for the most marginalised women and girls in London (those with multiple unmet needs).

The Applicant

Agenda Alliance CIO (AA) is a charity (no: 1179417) incorporated in 2018. It was formed following work by a group of voluntary sector organisations and trusts and foundations (including Esmee Fairbairn, Paul Hamlyn, Barrow Cadbury and Lankelly Chase) building on momentum started with Baroness Corston's 2007 report into the experiences of women in the criminal justice system (CJS). They decided to create an alliance to form a joined-up approach to support women and girls with multiple unmet needs. This was identified as important to manage the needs of women in a gender and trauma informed way, i.e. supporting service providers such as mental health agencies to identify and deliver bespoke support to a woman experiencing violence and abuse, and to ensure women and girls are not overlooked and face further cycles of trauma and disadvantage.

AA works on systems change with 117 member organisations (61 currently in London) to improve the lives of women with multiple unmet needs (formerly women with multiple disadvantage). This is defined as women who experience any combination of poverty, homelessness, substance misuse, contact with the CJS, domestic and sexual abuse, child removal and poor mental health. These intersecting issues are compounded by structural inequalities which shape their lives, including but not exclusive to gender inequity and racism. AA strives for statutory and voluntary services to respond better to the distinct and multiple unmet needs of women and girls to prevent them being swept into further trauma and harmful places or situations (such as prisons, homelessness etc).

AA works to prioritise and understand the unique needs, experiences and issues faced by the most minoritised and marginalised women in society. AA co-creates solutions to these issues with its Alliance members as well as women and girls with lived experience through:

- Convening the sector through its Alliance membership to help foster a joined-up approach to systems change for women with multiple unmet needs
- Conducting research to build expertise and evidence on behalf of the Alliance
- Using this evidence to campaign and influence national and regional change

- Platforming women and girls with lived experience in its campaigns to ensure not only their experiences are shared, but that AA is working responsibly in this area.

Background and detail of proposal

This is the first time AA have applied for funding from City Bridge Foundation (CBF). The charity's staff and trustees are all women, and its work is designed collectively with the communities it serves. The high number of trustees (12) for an organisation the size of AA is driven by the fact that half of its Board (including its co-chairs) are women with lived experience of the intersecting issues identified as women with multiple unmet needs. AA Through its Women's Advisory Network (WAN)¹, a group of women with lived experience of multiple unmet needs largely connected through its Alliance members convene every two months as a network alongside the AA team. The group has developed the 2024 charter for the charity and has also co-produced its 2023-27 strategy (leading to a focus on racism, criminal justice and school exclusion). Women and girls who form the network are paid for their time and expenses. These meetings are supported by experts to prevent re-traumatisation and to build new skills.

AA has a very strong intersectional approach to its work, per the Anchor Programme criteria. The key approaches to its work are anti-racist, gender-responsive and trauma-informed. The Alliance is made up of a wide range of organisations with just over half representative of women's organisations (such as Women's Aid, Women in Prison, Women for Refugee Women, Sister Circle). Other organisations in its Alliance are working with a gendered approach to intersecting issues such as homelessness, the CJS and mental health that affect women and girls with multiple unmet needs (such as MIND, Clink etc). This wide-reaching membership extending out of the women's sector ensures there is a holistic approach to breaking the cycles of trauma, particularly the impact systemic racism within statutory services has on minoritised women and girls. In its anti-racism work, both internally and with its membership Alliance, staff have also worked with Martha Awojobi of JMB Consulting² for example, to ensure anti-racism is embedded in its work to highlight the greater inequity faced by women and girls from a global majority background.

Over the ten-year funding period, the organisation plans to ensure there is a joined-up and holistic approach in London across the women's sector and beyond to support more early intervention and prevention support (as opposed to crisis intervention) for women and girls with multiple unmet needs within public services, ensuring they are able to provide greater specialist and holistic support to meet these distinct needs. This space does not currently exist in London, and it is clear there is a need for it. Whilst there are pre-existing structures in place such as the London VAWG consortium, this has a focus on violence against women and girls and does not focus on women with multiple unmet needs, at the sharpest end of disadvantage. Agenda and its Alliance have collectively identified the priority for a London based focus on supporting women and girls with unmet needs. AA seek to

¹ <https://www.agendaalliance.org/women-girls-voices/womens-advisory-network-2/>

² <https://www.jmb-consulting.co.uk/about>

achieve this through Anchor funding by becoming sufficiently resourced to lead on the work.

AA plan to deliver this proposal over a ten-year period through the following activities:

- Establish a London “Women and Girls with Unmet Needs” forum formed of the Alliance’s London membership. This includes the collaboration and sharing of information between organisations and services, to better understand systemic barriers for women and girls, identifying where to make change and breakdown the silos in which organisations operate
- Form a London-specific Women’s Advisory Network and Young Women’s Advisory Network (currently in operation nationally) to ensure this work is led by and informed by women with lived experience.
- Develop advocacy and campaigning skills for organisations and amplify the voices of members through AA’s campaigns and research work
- Establish a “Women and Girls with Multiple Unmet Needs” Board with the Greater London Authority (GLA) ensuring that their varying needs are catered for in policy and programmes at the London level.
- Grow AA’s London-based/focused membership - currently 61 specialist organisations (e.g. Milk Honey Bees, Hibiscus, Sister Circle).
- Carry out three perception shift campaigns across the grant lifetime, targeting decision makers and London frontline services.

This will ensure AA members, as well as women and girls with lived experience, will have direct routes to be heard by decision-makers who will be equipped with greater knowledge and solutions to implement their recommendations for change. Its impact seeks to ensure women and girls in London with multiple unmet needs receive better and more appropriate support from services before reaching crisis point, leading to reduced exclusions from school, reduced racial disparity of excluded girls, and fewer women in the CJS for example. For its members, and wider grassroots organisations across London, this will also decrease demand for services and expand capacity of women’s organisations and the wider voluntary sector to engage in cross-sector collaboration to deliver London-wide systems change.

AA has a strong track record of effecting systems change through its work in its relatively short history. This includes its Young Women’s Justice (YWJ?) project³. This both directly influenced the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime’s (MOPAC) decision to fund a women and girls’ service in East London, as well as the Ministry of Justice committing to developing a Young Women’s Strategy to improve responses to the intersecting and unique needs of young women in the CJS.

As well as building effective cross-sector partnerships, AA has a strong track record of wide-ranging systems change work. For example, AA worked with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) who commissioned the charity to convene voluntary and statutory services, as well as women with lived experience, to highlight

³ <https://www.agendaalliance.org/our-work/projects-and-campaigns/young-womens-justice-project/>

systemic failings and support the implementation of recommendations from AA's report, 'Tackling Women's Multiple Disadvantage in Greater Manchester'.

AA's approach to systems change is strengthened by its well-considered approach to impact and learning. AA have partnered with Justice Futures (a learning partner) to co-create with its membership and the WAN an impact framework which includes power and influencing mapping. AA have identified four key areas in which to measure change: power, practice, perceptions and policy. This will include an outcome harvesting⁴ approach, which has been identified as a strong framework to use to measure systems change.

London's Women's sector

The women's sector is severely underfunded. Research shows that in 2021 only 1.8% of total grants awarded across the UK went to women's and girls' organisations⁵, with 50% of funding under £10,000. With limited funding available, particularly following the cost-of-living crisis, there is a disproportionate focus on frontline organisations (particularly with a focus on VAWG) and a decrease of funding available to infrastructure organisations,⁶ particularly those working on systems change like AA. Frontline women's organisations are overwhelmed with the numbers of women needing support for their services, and often do not have the funding, resources or time to dedicate to longer term systems change. It is essential that infrastructure organisations such as AA exist in order to supply the time, resources and collective space to advocate and campaign for change on behalf of, and with, these organisations. Long term core-funding for AA would enable it, and the wider sector to respond to emerging and intersecting needs through over the next ten years whilst also maintaining further stability, benefitting the wider women and girls' sector.

Financial Information

Year end as at 31 March	2023 Signed Accounts £	2024 Draft £	2025 Budget £
Income & expenditure:			
Income	374,605	382,430	407,165
Expenditure	(377,983)	(439,593)	(412,320)
Surplus/(deficit)	(3,378)	(57,163)	(5,155)
Reserves:			
Total restricted	114,241	45,161	25,000
Total unrestricted	146,182	158,099	173,105
Total reserves	260,423	203,260	198,105
Of which: free unrestricted	142,765	155,027	170,033
Reserves policy target	175,000	219,797	206,160
Free reserves over/(under) target	(32,235)	(64,770)	(36,127)

AA's financial position is stable, with many different funding streams from trusts and foundations, and a small income from speaking engagements. Income his expected

⁴ <https://outcomeharvesting.net/>

⁵ <https://esmeefairbairn.org.uk/latest-news/funding-uk-women-and-girls-sector-where-does-money-go/>

Research by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research.

⁶ <https://insights.threesixtygiving.org/360/infrastructure/>

to increase slightly in the three-year overview. The organisation is also deepening its fundraising strategy to target HNI's in future years. Funding from CBF would account for around a quarter of the organisation's current yearly budget.

Whilst the three-year financial overview shows AA is under its free reserves target (the gap on this is closing for F/Y 2025 however), this is using calculations of six months reserves, which is at the highest end of their reserves policy (3-6 months expenditure). However, the charity is within the target range for its reserves throughout the assessed period and increasing income is matched by increasing free reserves.

There is a large grant of £100,000 unrestricted funding reported as unconfirmed income for F/Y 2025. AA is confident this will be confirmed with the funder shortly in a contract, as a verbal agreement has been given by the funder.

Funding History - None

Recommendation

Funding is recommended for £1,165,488 over ten years (£101,200; £107,768; £112,980; £112,400; £121,200; £114,400; £119,368; £119,160; £124,292; £132,720) towards core costs of Agenda Alliance to coordinate a joined-up response to changing the systemic cycles of trauma faced by women with multiple disadvantage in London.