

City Bridge Trust – Monitoring Visit Report

Organisation: Voluntary Action Westminster	Grant ref: 10315 (TW)	Programme area: Strengthening the Third Sector\e) Improving quality of evaluation
Amount, date and purpose of grant: 20/01/2011: £135,000 over three years (3 x £45,000) to support voluntary organisations across Westminster with outcome monitoring, evaluation and communication. The funding to be used for the following posts: 40% of a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and 40% of an Information Officer.		
Visiting Grants Officer: Ciaran Rafferty	Date of meeting: 5 th March 2013	
Met with: Emma Plouviez (M&E Officer); Lydia Edwards (Information Officer). Also, briefly with Yvonne Watkins-Knight (Dep CEO).		
1. Introduction to the organisation: Voluntary Action Westminster (VAW) was established in 1965 and has long been the umbrella body for voluntary organisations in that borough. It has gained and deserves a reputation for knowing its membership very well and for the quality of its services to them. Whilst it has always been held in esteem and supported by the local authority recent tendering processes has seen the loss of some CoW funding though this will not jeopardise the organisation's core stability.		
2. The project funded: Funding was for three years' support of work to improve member organisations' knowledge and application of monitoring and evaluation systems; and for work to help groups understand the value of and apply better promotional and marketing techniques. The grant comprises of funding towards two posts (M&E Officer + Information Officer). The grant/project commenced in April 2011.		
3. Work delivered to date: In the first 18 months the project's core approach was to provide intensive support to individual organisations following initial group sessions which, as one would expect, had positive and tangible results. In the first year 11 groups were assisted - more or less as originally planned. In late 2012/early 2013 the two original postholders changed and were replaced by the current personnel. Their methodology is slightly different in that they will focus on delivering more group sessions as these in themselves will help organisations peer support each other and establish stronger contacts and networks. The previous, intensive, support did deter some organisations from signing up as they were worried as to the possible time commitment they would have to give. The new/current approach is more likely to provide for groups who are smaller or less financially secure. Having more group sessions and merging the two strands of the work together (ie M&E and Comms) will help organisations see that they are inherently interlinked ie that better M&E will provide the framework for a stronger communications strategy whilst an improved ability to promote the impact of one's work will help supporters understand its value.		

4. Difference made:

The original, more intensive, model of support was more suited to helping groups focus on whole-organisation change and there are some good examples of where this has worked well. Overall, there are examples of where the project has completely changed (for the better!) the way organisations are run. Many have developed or refined their logos/branding and created or improved their websites. On the M&E side, organisations have been helped to better determine the impact of their work which has in turn helped them to make better, more appropriate, funding applications (before this there was a propensity to overreach and to present projects and outcomes which they would have struggled to deliver). Future work will encourage and support organisations to create bespoke development and/or communications plans – perhaps for a particular project rather than a whole organisation where this will be more suitable to their needs. The project has been a valuable part of the core services offered by VAW to its membership and provides scope for the participating groups to access other services. Some of the work in year 3 will target organisations who previously thought that they probably couldn't benefit from, or have the capacity to engage with, this project as the new approach of having group sessions and more peer mentoring should encourage this.

5. Grants Administration:

The grant has been properly administered (payroll evidence and P11 forms for postholders were seen by your officer) and monitoring to date been timely and of a good standard. Changes to the postholders were communicated to the Trust and at all times has the organisation operated professionally. Due credit is given to the Trust as a funder.

6. Concluding comments:

VAW is a robust and well-managed organisation which knows its membership and its community very well and which is fully committed to supporting and developing the local voluntary sector. This project fits well within their portfolio of services and has been, so far, very useful to a reasonable number of organisations. The original postholders did a good job and accounted for it well whilst the new staff appeared to be very capable of fine-tuning the project and delivering good outcomes for the remainder of the grant.