

MEETING: 24/11/2016

Ref: 13366

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Strengthening London's Voluntary Sector

Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens

Adv: Tim Wilson

Base: Outside London

Amount requested: £182,020

Benefit: London-wide

Amount recommended: £180,000

The Charity

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFG) is the national umbrella organisation for more than 1,200 local groups. It provides technical support to its members, as well as showcasing and representing the value of their work to decision makers. London is a significant part of FCFG's network with 19 city and school farms, 199 community managed gardens and 17 groups in development. It is estimated that these London groups attract 750,000 visitors each year.

The Application

In summer 2015 FCFG conducted a membership consultation exercise in London to identify priority support needs. Support to improve monitoring and evaluation, financial management, and volunteer management were the most common requests, with members citing challenges of a more competitive funding environment, the need to generate more of their own income, and administrative challenges such as Disclosure and Barring Service checks before engaging volunteers. Recognising that the members, collectively, hold a good store of knowledge, FCFG seeks funding to recruit a dedicated support worker who will coordinate a peer-to-peer learning network, as well as providing training and outreach support services.

The Recommendation

This project has been developed following a comprehensive needs assessment, and is designed to improve the exchange of knowledge between members. There are several larger London members who are well-positioned to support their smaller colleagues and who will be properly resourced to do so through this grant. In addition, a dedicated worker can deliver personalised services depending on the specific needs of the individual city farm or community garden. The charity will document best practice lessons throughout so learning is captured and legacy can be sustained following the end of the grant term. Funding is advised as follows:

£180,000 over three years (3 x £60,000) for a learning and support programme to London-based City Farms and community gardens.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
13/02/2013	£11,900 for the provision of 10 training courses over two years and the printing, distribution and launch of a London Map.
28/04/2011	£80,000 over a further and final two years towards the London Regional Organiser post.
03/04/2008	£120,000 over three years towards the continued sustainability and development of city farms and gardens across London.

Background and detail of proposal

Previous awards to FCFG, made under the Trust's Growing Localities, Working with Londoners and Main Grants programmes have supported network expansion and efforts to broaden the appeal of the organisation's work to a wider range of communities. Monitoring reports have been consistently good, and the site quality of many members is testimony to the time and energy that local volunteers commit to these 'green oases'. The network now operates in a far more challenging environment, with funding harder to come by, health and safety legislation more onerous, and a growing demand for services. Some of the larger farms, such as Spitalfields, Kentish Town and Vauxhall, have made a series of innovations that would benefit the wider network, but, with small staff teams, it would be very difficult for them to do so without disruption to their own operations. This proposal will allow a dedicated worker to coordinate learning and plan legacy, and to resource larger groups to support their peers.

Financial Information

At 17th October FCFG advised it had confirmed £797,937 of its 2016-17 income (89%). FCFG expects to fall slightly short of its minimum target for free reserves until the end of the current year, but a level equivalent to 2.5 months' worth of expenditure is not a cause for concern, particularly since the charity is making expenditure savings to stabilise its position.

The charity advises that it achieves a relatively low cost of generating funds because it does not employ a dedicated fundraiser. Instead, it calculates cost based on a proportion of management staff time. However, FCFG recognises that the calculation does not currently include the portion of overheads attributable to those staff, and so the figure is somewhat lower than the reality. FCFG is working to review the presentation of future accounts and will include support costs and overheads in this line in coming years.

Year end at 31 March	2014-15 Audited £	2015-16 Draft £	2016-17 Forecast £
Income and Expenditure			
Income	995,824	888,122	894,822
Expenditure	967,920	947,135	894,822
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(51,147)	(20,516)	0
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	79,051	(38,497)	0
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	27,904	(59,013)	0
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	2.8%	(6.6%)	0.0%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	22,216 (2.2%)	25,110 (2.8%)	18,217 (2.0%)
Free unrestricted reserves			
Unrestricted free reserves held at Year End	202,468	185,881	185,881
How many months' worth of expenditure	2.5	2.4	2.5
Reserves Policy target	241,980 – 483,960	236,781 – 473,562	223,704 – 447,408
How many months' worth of expenditure	3 – 6	3 – 6	3 – 6
Free reserves over/(under) target	(39,512 – 281,492)	(50,900 – 287,681)	(37,823 – 261,527)