

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Strengthening London's Voluntary Sector

London Play

Adv: Sandra Jones

Base: Islington

Benefit: London-wide

Amount requested: £111,002

Amount recommended: £111,000

The Applicant

London Play (LP), established in 1998, was set up to ensure that all children have access to high quality, accessible play opportunities in London – whether in supervised settings or in the wider public realm. Through its activities the charity aims to improve existing play provision as well as increase the amount of provision. The organisation has an extremely good reputation on issues around children's play and works in partnership with other London-wide youth organisations such as London Youth. London Play was voted charity of the year for 2015 by the creative agency Collider as well as by the Hawksmoor restaurant chain.

The Application

In March 2015 your Committee agreed a three-year grant to fund PlayWorks, which supports community-led adventure playgrounds London-wide through a training and mentoring programme, with online evaluation toolkits being developed. The organisation is requesting a further two years' funding to continue this work. This will be achieved through funding the salary of a p/t (2.5dpw) Programme Designer; 1dpw of Head of Communications; costs of training playground staff; and related operational and management costs.

The Recommendation

As the infrastructure organisation for children's play in London, the charity is providing an invaluable resource to a sector that is struggling financially. The grant will be supporting play across the capital by strengthening local organisations' evaluation systems and their ability to evidence the impact of their services, putting them in a stronger position to compete for the limited resources available. Targets for the grant have been met, with the organisation using feedback to improve and develop the project. This has been built into the current application, with a change in focus for the main post. By doing this LP identify that they will be able to deliver the service to an increased number of playgrounds.

Whilst the quality of their service remains high, their financial position remains challenging. Their previous grant was subject to receipt of satisfactory quarterly management accounts as their 2013/14 accounts had been qualified. A grant from your Stepping Stones programme is enabling LP to develop its business model which should improve this situation. In the meantime, it is recommended that any funding should be subject to receipt of satisfactory quarterly management accounts.

£111,000 over two years (£53,800; £57,200) towards the salary of a p/t (2.5dpw) Programme Designer; 1dpw of Head of Communications; costs of training playground staff; and related operational and management costs. The release of the first quarterly payment is subject to receipt of satisfactory management accounts to 31 March 2018 and further payments will also be subject to receipt of quarterly management accounts.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
23/11/2017	Stepping Stones - £20,000 towards 50% of the costs of the London Play (Design) Director, subject to quarterly management accounts
18/03/2016	Stepping Stones – application declined
12/03/2015	£138,000 over three years (£37,400, £47,700, £52,900) towards the salary of a p/t (3dpw) Play Works Mentor; costs of training playground staff; and related costs, subject to the receipt of satisfactory quarterly management accounts.

Background and detail of proposal

Adventure playgrounds are at serious risk of closure across London as, in recent years, youth and play services have been subject to financial reductions and within the youth sector play is not seen as a high priority, with the impact of play on young people being under recognised. This has been in part due to play organisations lacking the skills and experience of evaluating their services and the impact on young people's development. The project that your Committee funded to date was to address this by providing community-managed play facilities with the tools to demonstrate the social and developmental outcomes achieved, feeding this into social policy and engaging proactively with policymakers and commissioners.

The project will build on the work done in the first three years. An evaluation of it identified that staff turnover within play organisations; issues with travel and being able to attend the training modules off-site; and pressures on front-line staff to deliver daily play sessions have affected the ability for several organisations to embed the PlayWorks learning in their organisations and to gain manager/trustee buy-in. To address this, the project will now target senior managers (especially those with responsibility across several sites) to attend group workshops delivered by experts to upskill their understanding and long term aims and strategy for monitoring and evaluation. These managers will then draw on frontline staff to carry out their strategy, who will be supported in this role, including some training modules to enable them to understand the necessary aspects on monitoring and evaluation and data collection. The programme will be flexible depending on the needs of each Adventure Playground.

To enable this to happen a part-time Programme Designer will be appointed in the place of the current PlayWorks Mentor who will have experience and expertise in developing online training resources, as part of the programme will be undertaken online. One-to-one and peer group support /review will also be provided along with assistance to undertake independent data evaluations and producing quality evidence. By changing the way the programme is delivered, more local play associations will be supported than previously.

Financial Information

Within the Report and Financial Statements of London Play for the year ended 31st March 2017, the Independent Examiner's report identified as an emphasis of matter that LP had unrestricted reserves of £3,209. However, *"the trustees consider the charity a going concern subject to raising funds and/or reducing costs successfully. The Trustees are monitoring the charity's spending and cash flow regularly to ensure that its liabilities are met as and when they fall due."*

As at the beginning of May 48% of forecast income had been confirmed. This committee did award a £20,000 Stepping Stones grant towards LP to build the trading arm of the organisation, which in the medium term should allow the organisation to improve its financial position. Indeed, they have recently negotiated a contract with a Housing Association, which to date has been an unexploited income source. Given the low level of reserves, funding should be subject to satisfactory quarterly management accounts.

The cost of raising funds for 2017/18 is currently zero in the organisation's draft accounts.

Year end as at 31 March	2017 Examined Accounts £	2018 Forecast £	2019 Budget £
Income & expenditure:			
Income	338,318	239,850	219,375
- % of income confirmed as at 06/06/2018	n/a	n/a	47.97%
Expenditure	(344,723)	(239,000)	(216,975)
Total surplus/(deficit)	(6,405)	850	2,400
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	(5,187)	0	0
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(1,218)	850	2,400
	(6,405)	850	2,400
Cost of Raising Funds	12,539	0	5,000
- % of income	3.7%	0.0%	2.3%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	98,856	180,000	92,000
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	2,632	3,482	5,882
No of months of operating expenditure	0.3	0.2	0.8
Reserves policy target	39,000	39,000	39,000
No of months of operating expenditure	4.7	2.6	5.1
Free reserves over/(under) target	(36,368)	(35,518)	(33,118)

