

Under the radar

In association with
the Camelot Foundation



19.09.07 Fundraising for the smaller charity

“There are no easy answers and it never surprises me that many smaller organisations give up before they’ve even started,”
Helen Beckerson on fundraising, page 4



Introduction

Faith, hope and frontline charities

Charity fundraising is both big business and a recognisable career choice. Even charities that tackle social exclusion use highly skilled, professional staff to generate funds and apply for grants. The fundraising and grant application side, however, can be a challenge for those hard-to-reach groups who do not use PowerPoint or tote blackberries. Even well-established but under-staffed organisations can find the grant application process a struggle.

On the one hand, hard-to-reach means marginalised groups that are socially stigmatised and below the grant-makers' radar. On the other, it means the seemingly unattainable funding streams that a nascent group needs to organise and build capacity. Chances are, such groups have not even thought of asking. A grant application form can be a daunting document. A rejected application can easily put the lid on further efforts.

This supplement, sponsored by the Camelot Foundation to mark its 10th anniversary this month, asks how the gap can be bridged. It investigates how grant application capacity has been developed and features practitioners who painstakingly build skills in unpromising circumstances, and looks at the work of the foundation itself in seeing beyond a poor application.

The supplement examines how cultural difficulties faced by an ethnic minority group can affect grant applications in a sensitive area. One article covers very specific challenges in Northern Ireland, now fully committed to devolved government. Others reflect on organisations working with young people, sex workers and those with mental health needs. They struggle to attract core funding and some report an overall shrinkage of available funding.

The conclusions are that rigorous paper approval systems can miss urgent and vibrant causes. Nevertheless, much good work is being done to overcome this lack of vision. There is, therefore, cause for concern in the stories related in the supplement – but there is also reason to hope.

Laurence Pollock

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Hard cases, hard-to-reach places

Many smaller, grassroots groups do crucial work but, lacking the skills and expertise of their more prestigious charities, remain chronically underfunded. **Laurence Pollock** reports

Good causes, like motherhood, cruelly abused dogs and plucky disabled kids, have always won general approval and inspired charitable giving. Victorian philanthropists, keen to ensure there was no misunderstanding, came up with the phrase “deserving poor”. The workhouse was available for those who drank too much, got pregnant or gambled their money away.

But today charities are part of a wider, often more challenging, voluntary sector. Some have moved beyond “good causes” to politically problematic ones. Occasionally grants from the Lottery have aroused disproportionate tabloid fury.

The growth of the self-help and equalities movements has seen the rise of groups that are both voluntary and campaigning. They can face particular problems in making the right noises to funding bodies such as trusts and wealthy charities. They may also lack the slick skills of professional fundraisers.

Bill Bruty, founder of Fundraising Training Ltd, trains charities and voluntary groups to make effective grant applications. He also takes on hard cases *pro bono*, and the action theatre group, Creative Routes, fell into this category. Creative Routes members have been diagnosed with severe mental illness but, despite this, they have run workshops on drumming, writing and photography at prestigious venues such as Royal Festival Hall, the Young Vic and the South London Gallery. They put on the annual, acclaimed Bonkersfest on Camberwell Green, London.

But they have also had hot-tempered or unproductive relationships with potential support and funders, including local government, NHS trusts and big mental health charities. One disruptive protest at the South London and Maudsley Hospital, called to save an emergency clinic, required a police presence. Despite that,



‘The applicant must show they have done their research. They have to engage with the grant-maker’

Top: the acclaimed Bonkersfest in Camberwell, south London, run by Creative Routes, one of many marginalised but deserving charities that have difficulty with funding. Above: Jo Brand opens the show Photos: Nuala Hamilton

the trust still honoured a £5,000 grant pledge to the group.

They are hard to reach and suspicious of being reached. But they needed to grow, to find a supportive grant-making trust, to hire a development worker, agree a five-year business plan and publish an annual report. And only their encounter with Bruty has allowed them to progress.

But many organisations lack both the practical skills and the “aah” factor needed to open up mainstream funding purse strings. It is a constituency that the Camelot Foundation, a grant-making body, is prepared to tap into. It focuses on four groups: young parents, or those at risk of becoming young parents; young asylum seekers; young people with mental health problems; and young disabled people.

“We are interested in young people who have slipped out of the mainstream of society, or are in danger of doing so,” says director Sam Hyde. She is conscious that asylum-seeking, for instance, is a particularly “media-unfriendly” area but insists their rigorous assessment ensures they get to the right groups. That assessment will, however, include labour-intensive visits if the foundation believes a poor application is obscuring a potentially strong scheme.

Yet there are thousands of small, struggling and, in media terms, unattractive groups that may not find their Bill Bruty or their Camelot. They may have to do it on their own.

Megan Pacey, director of policy and campaigns at the Institute of Fundraising, acknowledges that the grant application process for many smaller, poorly resourced organisations can be onerous. But there are still simple things they can do.

“The applicant must show they have done their research. They have to engage with the grant-maker. If they have issues like using English as a second language or they have learning disabilities, there is a good chance there will be support in making the application.”

At the same time, Pacey adds, a trustee of a grant-making body who is aware of appli-

cations such as these should be checking on the help being given. She also knows the particular problems of a small organisation that desperately needs core funding so it can pay the rent after April. “Unfortunately this kind of spending just isn’t sexy.”

Creative Routes wanted a development worker, and their first stab at an application, a letter in several colours and fonts with some exotic phraseology had, at least, resulted in an expression of interest from their target – the Tudor Trust.

Bruty, the professional, was torn: “It was so real, so visibly honest and it was in their own words,” he says. “But it broke all the rules about how to write a proposal.”

So far it has been a hand-to-mouth existence, according to Sarah Tonin, a spokesperson for the group. “Fundraising skills were learnt on the job, and out of necessity we could only make small bids for workshops and projects. The funding was never enough to cover the full costs, and Creative Routes was always in debt, which was a terrible pressure.”

Bruty sought to capture their motivation and honesty while gently persuading them to “conform to establishment business protocols and financial modelling”.

Once the grant-maker registered serious interest, Bruty worked with group leaders to develop a five-year financial plan. Tudor insisted that Creative Routes should be completely independent of their help by year 6.

The experience of the Camelot Foundation and that of Bill Bruty suggests that the more difficult the cause, the more intense the human engagement needed to bring worthwhile work into contact with significant funding. There are plenty of good causes in the 21st century, but some just need a bit more digging to unearth them.

Weblinks

Independent Fundraising:
www.fundraisingtraining.co.uk
Creative Routes: www.creative-routes.org

Under the radar Northern Ireland/smaller charities

Local problems demand local solutions

Northern Ireland The legacy of decades of sectarianism remains in pockets of deprivation that are difficult to reach and regenerate

Paul McGill

Northern Ireland has enjoyed buoyant economic growth in the last decade. But the areas severely disadvantaged 20 years ago are mostly still the same, despite a succession of initiatives designed to help them.

Part of the mythology of Northern Ireland is that, while Catholics were more disadvantaged than Protestants overall, Catholic areas were better organised and more able to attract funding to improve their areas. This has led to initiatives to tackle weak community infrastructure in Protestant working-class areas.

Three recent independent studies have shattered the myth. They showed Catholics are much more likely to live in areas of weak infrastructure than Protestants; that there is no difference between the two main religions on social capital or indicators of cooperation; and Protestants were more likely to get money from one of the EU Peace II programmes studied, even though Catholics were more disadvantaged.

Despite the evidence, Direct Rule ministers introduced a controversial policy to fund Protestant areas, but this has been dropped since devolution. "I don't fund on the basis of religion; I fund on the basis of need," the new minister for social development, Margaret Ritchie, told *Scope* magazine this month.

Progress has been made in recent years. At government level there has been the Neighbourhood Regeneration initiative in the bottom 10% of most disadvantaged areas. This requires statutory bodies to work with local communities, but it is too early to know if this will succeed.

More tangible success has been achieved through practical approaches that give local communities day-to-day support. One of the most successful initiatives is Communities in Transition, run by the independent trust Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI), whose chief executive, Avila Kilmurray, was in Gordon Brown's recent book of heroes.

"We looked at areas that had not applied for funding from sources like the Peace Programme and the Lottery," says CFNI's Kat Healy. "It's not just that they don't have community groups. It could be local tensions, paramilitary influence or population drift."

"The problem is to identify the issues. There are no databases to find these areas, so we had mapping exercises and talked to external agencies and community groups

to identify them."

In the end, 10 Protestant, Catholic and mixed communities, including two in the Republic of Ireland, were selected for special attention. "Our support was very hands-on," says Healy. "It's a shoestring budget, but what's important is the direct personal support to help with community tensions."

So some disadvantaged areas are developing the confidence and skills to speak for themselves, but the picture is patchy. Many places still have poor community infrastructure and little access to funding.

Neil Irwin, funding expert at the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (Nicva), the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector, believes there is no evidence that Protestant groups lack the skills to get funding. He says many communities are in that position, especially ones with no staff and depending on local volunteers: "The position may even have worsened as more expertise is needed now because there is more competition."

"Money used to go to local community groups, but it is now being concentrated more in bigger organisations. Also, some local network bodies have lost money, so there is less support for small groups. Government and other funders are expecting a lot from small groups." Meanwhile, "there is less European money, less Lottery money and less government money."

Nicva ran workshops and offered practical advice for local groups on fundraising skills and writing funding applications, but money for that has now run out. It still runs workshops, offers advice and maintains the Grant Tracker website (see below) but has only two staff available.

Other voluntary organisations give advice and so do some funders. "But the big issue is that there is less money so people have to be better at it," says Irwin.

This was echoed by CFNI's Kat Healy, who argues that the complexity of some application forms makes it very difficult for many small local communities to get money: "The Peace Programme [requires] people to fill in a 60-page application. Big Lottery grant forms are also very complicated."

To progress more, top-down approaches like departmental funding and Neighbourhood Renewal will need to be complemented by grassroots work such as Communities in Transition. The Camelot Foundation is also targeting Northern Ireland and other regions for a new grants round.

"It is a very risky programme and there are no set outcomes," says Healy. "But the communities speak for themselves."

Weblinks

Community Foundation for Northern Ireland: www.communityfoundationni.org
Northern Ireland Council of Voluntary Service: www.nicva.org
Grant Tracker: www.grant-tracker.org



Community tensions remain in some areas of Northern Ireland, and funding to improve communities is thin on the ground Reuters

Communities Making the difference

Seacourt, Larne

The Community Foundation's Communities in Transition intervention has made a huge difference in some areas. Local activist Bertie Shaw, from Seacourt in Larne, believes the area has been transformed over the last five years. Before the intervention, he says, statutory bodies would not talk to local groups, the area was notorious for sectarianism, and attempts to form a community association failed. The foundation invested staff time and expertise in building community infrastructure.

It began with a success: getting the local council to open a community centre that had been locked up for years, raising more than £100,000 to open a play park and setting up a youth club. Activities have grown enormously, and the latest project has raised more than £1m towards an outreach centre.

A poor environment was transformed, helped by acquiring equipment to

produce hanging baskets. Seacourt has now won a "well-kept area" award two years in a row.

"People wanted out of the area five years ago," says Shaw. "They couldn't sell houses for £24,000, but now they are worth £170,000 and there is a waiting list for social housing. The statutory bodies use us as an example of good practice, but five years ago they wouldn't even talk to us."

Harryville, Ballymena

Harryville in Ballymena is another area helped by the foundation, with a very similar story to tell.

"There was nothing on the ground until the partnership came together and got funding a few years ago," says a spokesperson who did not want to be named. CFNI targeted us because there was no community infrastructure here. We are not as good at working together as Catholic/Nationalist areas. We now have a community development officer to fill

in applications for funding and things like that but smaller groups don't have that."

Mirroring the Seacourt scheme, CFNI's backing took the form of trained staff working with local people.

Harryville has forged ahead with a new youth club and environmental improvements. "People are starting to think they can get things, and statutory bodies are not ignoring local people any more. Meetings with them are now routine. We are also getting more into networks – it all boils down to empowerment," says the spokesperson.

As well as the old issue of sectarianism, Harryville is coming to terms with Northern Ireland's recent arrivals. "We are now dealing with the issue of migrant workers. Just a fortnight ago we had the first multicultural night at the community centre. A recent survey showed that people feel greater pride in the area and the Housing Executive says there are more people on the waiting list to move in."

Uphill struggle of the 'uncuddly' causes

Small charities It's hard enough attracting funding for those charities that enjoy the limelight; for many that don't, it's an immense task

Laurence Pollock and Lucy Hines

For some small voluntary groups, hard-pressed leaders spend more time worrying about money than their core activities.

For instance, Headway Rotherham carries a thank you in September's newsletter to all those who signed standing orders. The newsletter stresses: "If you haven't yet done so, please consider it seriously. It is an excellent way of raising funds."

There is also thanks to Sue and Stu who contributed £4.54 through their collecting boxes. Small change is just about keeping the group afloat and two key staff jobs depend on news of a pair of crucial grant applications, due any day.

Local groups, often doing valuable work, disappear and desperate needs go unmet when liquidity runs out. That is the prospect for Rotherham Headway, in south Yorkshire, part of a national network supporting and helping those with brain injury or head injury. Mostly run by its volunteer committee, a Big Lottery grant two years

ago allowed the employment of two staff members. The grant however, has not been renewed and chairman Bill Hurley has become Rotherham Headway's fundraiser, a sobering experience. Since last October he has applied for 28 grants – 16 to pay staff salaries, eight to fund social activities, three to publish booklets and two to send six members to the national Headway conference.

He has been successful so far with just one, totalling £798. There have been 11 rejections with 17 pending.

"Mostly it is just a half-page letter saying 'We have had to reject your application because we have had an abundance of applications'," he says. There is little guidance as to how to do better next time. "We are all volunteers with no formal training. You get really low, the longer time goes on."

Summer has been a tense time. Hurley, a retired headteacher, submitted applications for £75,000 and £84,000, which would set up staffing for three years, earlier in the year. In the meantime he has had many email exchanges with another grant-maker establishing what they will fund and

We are all volunteers with no formal training. You get really low, the longer time goes on



Rare moment: Fundraising has meant summer has been a tense time for Bill Hurley

hosting a visit from its representative. This is all for a possible £730.

He believes grant cash is getting tighter and says other groups in Yorkshire are closing down for lack of funding. Rotherham Headway is actually applying to the same grant-makers as their national HQ: "We are often in competition with them," Hurley adds.

At least he is fundraising for a group, which invites public sympathy. Jane (not her real name) manages an outreach organisation that works with women and their families who are involved in prostitution and drugs.

She faces a constant battle to overcome prejudice in her fight to raise the £150,000 needed annually to keep the centre running. Jane, the group's only full-time employee, says: "We are just not 'fluffy bunny' enough to attract much funding, especially from corporate sponsors. Lots of businesses give grants to charity, but we deal with the kind of women that people don't want to be associated with. We haven't got a smiling child in a wheelchair, we don't have the 'aah' factor for publicity and we'd be difficult to explain to their shareholders. One company called our clients 'the scum of the earth'."

She applies for 40 grants annually, often filling in 25-page forms at two in the morning: "These days applying for grants takes a business degree, but I'm not trained for that. I'm a voluntary sector worker with a degree in criminology."

Jane has now left the organisation, while Bill Hurley anxiously waits for the post. But their experiences are mirrored by thousands of other organisations anxiously checking their mail.

Weblink

Headway Rotherham: www.headwayrotherham.co.uk

Under the radar Application forms/cultural projects

How to get the big fish to bite

Application techniques

A successful grant application means learning the right skills and knowing how to present your case

Matthew Brown and Laurence Pollock

Teach someone to fish and they will eat for life, the saying goes. One of the charity sector's biggest problems is not money but skill. Helped by leading-edge fundraising, 70% of the sector's income is generated by under 3,500 organisations – just two per cent of the total.

Two-thirds – just over 96,000 charities – have an annual income of less than £10,000. There is barely enough to pay the rent and buy the biscuits, let alone sign up for fundraising courses.

Skill is needed, however, to grow an organisation and it can be generated through grant-seeking. One method is to learn from the mentoring approach of organisations such as the Camelot Foundation, which receives many a dog-eared application form, thin on data and argument, but makes the effort to show the applicant its shortcomings and then encourage a stronger application.

But some have served a different apprenticeship. Grassroots groups in the St Mellon's estate in Cardiff built skills applying for £200 grants under the guise of a healthy living project. Some groups grew stronger on the back of these skills.

The Camelot Foundation receives up to 1,000 applications a year for its Transforming Lives programme supporting work with marginalised young people.

"Some major charities are very well resourced and we get applications that are all singing, all dancing," Camelot director Sam Hyde says. "But many programmes we work with can't do that. We get applications that are a bit grubby, but they're from grassroots organisations that are generally doing great work."

The foundation funds organisations that work with young people not connected to mainstream providers or have been missed by the system.

This year it received an application from Fairbridge Scotland, which works with young people between 13 and 25 who are not in education, employment or training (Neets, as they are known in the sector).

Fundraiser Helen Lawrie needed money for a sexual health project at its Glasgow centre aiming to reach 200 young people through outreach workers and drop-in sessions. She applied to Camelot for £80,000 over two years, answering the foundation's set of questions within the prescribed four pages.

The application was submitted on time,

St Mellons A success and a failure

As co-founder of St Mellons Boxing Club five years ago, Tony Richards strongly avows the controversial sport's contribution to healthy living: "The young people – boys and girls – get interested in exercise, diet and skills. And properly protected, it's more like fencing."

The Healthy Living Project was a stepping stone, he says. "They not only gave you the grant but helped you with other grants. They gave you the confidence to move on a few stages. For instance, they would not fill in a grant application form but they could give you a better understanding of the questions."

As a result the club learned how to explain that it was not all about "punch-drunk and brain-dead men". It was able

to show that it was open to boys and girls who would benefit from, for instance, dietary advice.

There was further grant application success for the club, with £750 from the local Community Chest and £5,000 from the Sports Council for Wales. And thanks to Sandra Goosey and the staff at St Mellons Healthy Living Project, Richards is conscious of the need for feedback to the funder: "We know that if we do not provide feedback we will not stand a chance the next time we apply."

But not everything worked out on the estate. "We could have had £20,000 for a new building – all we wanted was the loan of a room and cash to run a minibus," says Tony Rees, who eventually had to close

his outdoor activities project for young people. Potential funding all focused on major capital expenditure, but he simply needed petrol money to take the group rock climbing.

Many other groups face this dilemma, overawed by the gothic architecture of professional fundraising and needing something more down-to-earth.

The project did get a Small Lottery grant, which helped, but the paperwork was oppressive: "We needed money to run a camp, but did not want to have to specify the cost of every tent peg or gas stove."

Sadly, although Rees got some help with this from the charity accountants, he could not maintain his funding streams long term.

it matched the theme and criteria and it was aimed at Camelot's "client base". But it was also "missing something", says Hyde. "It wasn't strong in the facts it was using to present its case." However, rather than throw it back, Hyde went to visit the project and offer advice.

"I said: 'Your application makes some grandiose statements but you don't back them up.' I knew it was a gem of a project but they needed to make their case."

For Lawrie it was the kind of second chance fundraisers rarely get. "The application wasn't perfect but Hyde recognised something worthwhile. It's great when the person reading your funding application is reading between the lines, because that's what's required sometimes."

Fairbridge resubmitted at the end of May, answering the questions Hyde had thrown at them, providing more information on the organisation and statistics on sexual health and young people's attitudes that had been missing first time around. Hyde even suggested they ask for more money to commission an evaluation.

At the beginning of July, they had got all the money they had asked for. "It was an intensive process and a lot of work," says Lawrie. "But I learned a lot and the direct relationship with the Camelot Foundation has definitely given me a good insight into how a fundraiser views an application."

Many groups, especially those at grassroots level, do not get such support. They are daunted by the forms, the questions and the sums of money. The concepts of financial governance, evaluation, supporting data and evidence of activity are all bewildering.

Sandra Goosey, formerly a principal health promotion specialist with Cardiff local public health team, was involved with the St Mellon's Healthy Living Project (which finished last year) aimed at improving quality of life and reducing social exclusion. Goosey had a flexible view of its remit and used an underspend of several thousand pounds in one budgetary year to set up a small grants scheme with a maximum £200 grant per applicant.

It was an opportunity for local groups to build grant application skills that they could then transfer to other, possibly larger, applications. The project ran sessions to deliver key grant application competencies, including keeping accounts and recording evidence of their activities.

One beneficiary of this knowledge says: "There is a certain code or terminology that grant-makers use. You have to find out how they want it expressed."

It suggests that while some grant applicants need good angling skills to eat long term, to get the best fish you need to use the right bait.

Weblink

Fairbridge: www.fairbridge.org.uk



Camelot offered funding and valuable advice to Fairbridge Scotland (above) which works with disadvantaged young people Don McPhee

'What's the alternative – growing up in ignorance?'

Cultural projects Culturally sensitive projects need solid partnerships to work effectively, especially if they tend to court controversy

Gareth Glynn

Within the Bengali community, sexual health is a taboo subject, according to Mukid Choudhury, executive director of the Bengali Workers Association (BWA). He believes the conflicting expectations and attitudes of older and younger people exacerbate the problem.

"Despite close-knit families, older people don't believe it's an issue for their community. Until now, cultural and religious sensitivities have inhibited open discussion, let alone educational initiatives within the community."

The Camelot Foundation is funding an 18-month pilot project run by Camden, London-based BWA to promote young people's sexual health awareness. To some extent its guidance has been as important as the funding.

"The project is controversial, and was likely to have been rejected by many funders," says the Camelot Foundation's director, Sam Hyde. "We want to help organisations that work in culturally sensitive areas. That means we have to take risks."

Simon Blake, chief executive of Brook, a charity that provides free sexual health



Controversial but crucial work: the staff of the Bengali Workers Association Anna Gordon

advice to young people, is also vice-chair of the Black Health Agency, and sits on the project's steering group. "Some Muslims believe sexual health education promotes sex and condom use rather than health and relationships," he says. "They see it as a secular activity, devoid of values. But rather than inspiring trust and respect, faith can have a negative and controlling impact on the relationships of young Muslims."

The association has nurtured strong relationships within its community. Now it is working with respected members such as elders and an imam, Joynal Uddin (formerly with the UK Islamic Mission), to seek consensus and spread the word about the project. It has been careful with specific words whose interpretations differ in Bengali and English.

It is also partnering agencies such as local health practices, community groups and the youth service to run workshops in targeted areas of the borough. These will largely be mixed but for older people there will be separate events for women and men. Blake advocates objective explanation: "What's the alternative – growing up in shame and ignorance?"

Many small organisations lack professional fundraising resources or business planning expertise. Basic issues such as language can be a stumbling block. The association had failed to secure funds for two other community support projects from the National Lottery and London Borough of Camden.

The King's Fund is supporting sexual health awareness research among Somalis and Bengalis by Voluntary Action Camden (Vac). Despite its closeness to the target communities, the BWA did not pursue this funding because of the project's strong academic orientation. But it will be providing community liaison for the Vac project.

The breakthrough for funding its own awareness project came when the BWA contacted Camelot, whose trustees include "a representative with cultural expertise".

The foundation recognised the project's potential and was very supportive.

Grants manager James Middleton told the BWA that to secure funding it would need a more comprehensive finance and work plan, and to address the political and cultural issues surrounding sexual health education in its community. It helped the association develop the proposal and meet funding requirements such as identifying a suitable insurance provider.

"The BWA is a grassroots organisation with strong community focus and very talented workers. But it lacked the support of wider partnerships. We introduced Mukid to the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations, which offers development and training."

For Hyde, there's no alternative to this labour-intensive approach: "We want to promote genuine partnerships. If we can broker honest connections, organisations can get funding and move forward: everyone profits."

As a proactive grant-maker that wants to help hard-to-reach groups, the Camelot Foundation must do more than simply give out money. It has to track down the recipients and bring them in too.

Weblinks

Bengali Workers' Association: www.multikulti.org.uk/agencies/bengali/london/3790/
Brook (young people's sexual advice service): www.brook.org.uk
Black Health agency: www.blackhealthagency.org.uk

Under the radar Fundraising/opinion

Grants are worth the hard slog

Fundraising Applying for a grant is time-consuming, and will-sapping if you are constantly rejected. But succeed and trust funding can be very cost effective

Kate Hilpern

When Helen Beckerson tells people she is a fundraiser for a mental health charity, chances are they assume she raises money for troubled adults. In fact, she works for YoungMinds, a national charity committed to improving the mental health of children and young people, tens of thousands of whom suffer from mental illness. The problem is that even grant-makers are prone to see this as an undeserving cause.

"The general perception is that kids don't have mental health problems," says Beckerson. "Navigating that stigma and misunderstanding – especially as the lone fundraiser for the charity – can be tough."

So how does she overcome such a mammoth obstacle and what advice does she have for other organisations that either represent an uncuddly constituency or lack the skills to make any sort of case for a grant?

"There are no easy answers and it never surprises me that many smaller organisations give up before they've even started," she says. "For one thing, grant applications are time-consuming and, for another, a rejected application can make you feel more awful than if you hadn't applied in the first place. You're left feeling that because you failed to raise the money, some of the really amazing work that your organisation does won't happen."

Nevertheless, Beckerson insists that grant applications are worth the effort. "In my five years' experience, (charita-

ble) trust funding is very cost-effective, which is why I put so much time into it. Although other types of fundraising, like community and corporate fundraising, can also have great results, they definitely don't get the same level of successful outcomes."

Indeed, a grant from the Henry Smith Charity supports the continued running of the YoungMinds Parents Helpline, while another from the Big Lottery funded the charity's policy work. Meanwhile, the Camelot Foundation has funded a range of projects, most recently three issues of the charity's magazine.

"This is fantastic because we've been able to get an inhouse editor for the first time to look at how we can effectively reach our target audience, which is very diverse," says Beckerson, who started her career as fundraising assistant at the charity Whizz-Kidz and then moved to become lone fundraiser at the Southside Partnership, a London-based adult mental health charity.

"Most of our documents, including our leaflets, are funded by grants. And our information and knowledge team was able to create the only library devoted to the mental health of children and young people – which informs all our work – because of grant funding. Without the information this team is now able to provide, we would not be credible in the advice we give."

Research is key

Key to gaining grant funding, says Beckerson, is having strong research and statistics to back up your organisation's work. "With grant applications, you're working with the written format, so being able to say something like – as in our case – that three people in every classroom has mental health problems, really grabs the readers' attention."

Trusts can feel like very remote institutions with pots of money, she says, and it's easy to forget that there are people in them making the decisions: "The things



Helen Beckerson: 'The things you write have to make people stop and think' Nell Freeman

'You can put in the best application and they still say no. After all, there's huge competition'

you write have to make those people stop and think."

She adds that it's important to simplify what your organisation does. "YoungMinds has a huge number of different activities for lots of different reasons and it's hard to explain it simply. But I have worked hard to fit these into three key areas – supporting parents, professionals and young people; providing information for them; and influencing decision makers."

Also essential, she believes, is trying to persuade the funders to meet you in person. "Almost all the ones we meet with

say, 'Oh, I have a friend whose child has an eating disorder,' or something similar, and they begin to realise that these constitute mental health problems and that they are more prevalent than they thought."

Entering into a dialogue with grant-makers has other benefits. "We recently applied for funding from Comic Relief, who turned down our application. But by meeting with them, we discovered that they really liked our project – it was just that the amount we applied for was too high."

"They suggested trying to skim back some areas of the project where we didn't need quite such a high budget and we were able to submit a new amount for which we were successful."

The charity's young people's panel – made up of 18 young people whose views are at the heart of what YoungMinds does – can be particularly instrumental in gaining funding, especially if funders agree to come and discuss the specific project that YoungMinds is fundraising for.

Beckerson says: "If a panel member with direct experience in the particular area of mental health attends the meeting it counts for a lot."

Even when grant-makers turn her down, Beckerson does not get disheartened. "You can put in the best application and they still say no. After all, there's huge competition for funding. The important thing is to try and get feedback and move on to the next one."

It helps to have certain attributes, she says – resilience, persuasiveness, organisational and communication skills, as well as the ability to juggle. "Patience is key, too, because trawling through the relevant directories and databases to find out the names and criteria of grant-makers takes time. But it pays off in the end."

Weblinks

YoungMinds: www.youngminds.org.uk
Henry Smith charity: www.henrysmithcharity.org.uk

Build capacity and you build a strong foundation



Richard Gutch
Opinion

Futurebuilders supports third-sector organisations (TSOs) to deliver better public services. Unusually for the third sector, this support is primarily through loans combined with targeted grants and professional support.

The fund was created to support TSOs that wanted to play a full role in delivering public services but lacked access to investment capital and the capacity to develop the skills and systems to manage growth. More than 230 organisations have now accessed tailored, alternative finance packages with a commitment to improve public services by contracting with statutory bodies. But many thousands of small

groups cannot access even this support, although they do an important job and are close to their beneficiaries.

Like small businesses, small TSOs often lack the capacity and resources to develop skills in organisational and business development. Without such foundations, groups find it hard to access the finance they need to develop, or prove that they can handle, larger financial programmes. It's a vicious circle that we are helping to square.

As an organisation grows, a lack of knowledge or expertise in governance, financial management, IT or human resources can have serious consequences for groups and trustees in transition periods. And these are just the basics – where can individual organisations find grants to fund skills development in marketing or change management; or to provide the capacity to help seek further funding?

We are testing a model of capacity-building for those organisations already on the development path. But thousands of groups are committed to grow and yet lack access to suitable finance. Many are not suitable for the Futurebuilders model, but this should not deny them access to timely and appropriate support.

Early grant support is ideally placed, but not always on offer, to support organisations to develop themselves from scratch,

or pilot a new idea to diversify services based on user needs. This skills development should not be confined to small or hard-to-reach groups – all organisations could benefit from rethinking the structures or skills within their organisation. However, capacity building is not a luxury or "nice-to-have"; it can sometimes mean survival, especially when competing for longer-term grants or contracts.

Demand in the sector for this type of investment is high. At Futurebuilders we have received more than 1,500 applications from third-sector organisations and over half of our portfolio is development grants. These grants are unique to Futurebuilders and give organisations a short, sharp, small injection of cash to aid research and improve their services or organisational structures.

Development support is an integral part of our service and can help identify operational and organisational deficiencies early, as well as give organisations the resources to take "time out" to plan for the future. We expect our development grant holders to reapply for a full investment, but often we find this form of early capacity building has helped them secure other grant funding or contracts without needing to return for a loan. This is proof that targeted grants for development can make organisations stronger.

But what about groups that fall below the radar? Those working hand-to-mouth or without capacity to take time out to plan for the next three to five years? It's vital that local authorities and other public agencies continue to provide grants specifically for capacity building. This is a challenging call to public bodies, but one to keep on the agenda. Grants help to develop and strengthen the third sector locally, even in the current climate of cuts.

While Futurebuilders is not able to support all organisations to develop capacity – unless they aim to make a significant improvement to public services locally or nationally – there are opportunities for the sector itself to offer alternatives.

We would like to see larger, national organisations working with smaller, local groups, where technical expertise can be combined with experience of working at the grassroots. Consortia are another viable alternative for sharing expertise and training locally, but also through delivering economies of scale, especially for commissioners, who can work through one point of contact for a larger number of small organisations.

Other schemes such as the Only Connect programme, from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and Triodos Bank, helps third-sector organisations explore ideas to generate income

through trading goods and services. It offers a matching service to TSOs to visit a project that has a similar idea up and running to share learning and expertise.

The £80m announced by the Office of the Third Sector for small grants in community groups, distributed at a local level, could also be best spent on capacity building. We are discussing ways Capacitybuilders.org.uk can help get small TSOs ready to approach Futurebuilders through pre-development support.

Small TSOs are the big TSOs of the future. They exemplify the characteristics that the government and commissioners want to encourage. Grant programmes have an important role to play and should be used to invest in the future. Capacity building is just the first rung of the ladder to becoming more business-like. Once there is initial investment, Futurebuilders and other social investors can help organisations take the next steps to climb much higher.

Weblinks

Capacity builders: www.capacitybuilders.org.uk
Futurebuilders England: www.futurebuilders-england.org.uk

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