

Report from Conference

The Long and Winding Road

to unlocking independent funding



Friday 19 October 2007

Community Change Conference Report

Conference title: The Long and Winding Road to unlocking independent funding

Conference date: 19th October 2007

Setting scene from leaflet

On 19th October 2007, Community Change held a conference to explore the reality of concerns within the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, that major Trusts and funders from the UK are no longer interested in funding within Northern Ireland.

Avila Kilmurray from CFNI gave the keynote address and dealt with this concern. She informed the conference that this was not a reality, and in fact, funders were interested in supporting projects in Northern Ireland but needed better quality applications to be submitted by organisations.

The conference then explored the approach groups and organisations needed to be considering when approaching funders to 'unlock the potential' of funding valuable and much needed community and voluntary work on the ground. This was done via the following workshops and participants had the opportunity to choose 3 out of the 5 workshops.

Workshop One - 'Beginning the Journey'

This Workshop focused on Identification of need, what supporting information you can/should use, and setting realistic outputs and targets etc. It was presented by a Representative from The Big Lottery.

Workshop Two - 'Taking the Right Route'

This workshop explored: What funders look for in an application and what makes a good application? It was presented by Kevin McCaughan a Community Change Associate Trainer / Consultant.

Workshop Three - 'Connecting Routes'

This workshop explored the increasing value of loan funding as potential matched funding and two organisations who positively supported and encouraged applications from the community and voluntary sector. Both these organisations U.C.I.T. (Ulster Community Investment Trust) and the Charity Bank co-presented the workshop.

Workshop Four - 'Less Popular Route'

This workshop explored the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a social enterprise model it looked at the good and 'not so good' aspects of this approach as a means of sustainability to embed the work of community and voluntary organisations. It was presented by the Social Economy Network.

Workshop Five - 'Recording and Recapping your Journey'

This workshop explored the importance of monitoring and evaluation from a funders perspective. It stressed the importance of the information a project collects and presents along its lifetime and how that can then be used to 'support' applications and in the future as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the service. The workshop was presented by Bernard Black of John Moores Foundation.

The workshops were followed by a Panel debate, with a question and answer discussion around the potential future direction of funding and sustainability with regard to community and voluntary sector in NI.

Feedback to funders

In closing the conference Community Change created an opportunity for participants to have their voice heard long after the conference was over by asking participants the following question:

“Any comments / suggestions that you wish Community Change to pass on to funders and other relevant agencies?”

Conference participants feedback was as follows:

- Have well informed staff to answer queries and more than one person incase one is off on holidays etc;
- Ensure there are routes for sustainable funding for high quality projects instead of funding new initiatives;
- Longer term funding to make a real difference;
- Openness and transparency in Government funding of Voluntary and Community sector needed and less bureaucracy tied up with it;
- Keep application process as simple as possible;
- Keep the forms simple – reduce need for guidelines;
- Make “guidance notes” clear and precise;
- Fund at a full costs recovery level;
- Short term training funding can mean short term results;
- Be prepared to take risks to really try and reach those most in need;
- Think more collectively, looking at the big picture and planning accordingly;
- Continue to provide support to Community Change and groups by proactive engagement and support to community groups particularly those managed by volunteers;
- Keep communication open with projects and realise targets slip, mistakes happen, needs change;
- Talk to groups you have funded previously and organisations working on the ground when planning new funding priorities – not just the Government / statutory agencies and 'big' organisations;

Community Change agreed to write up a conference report which would include participants main feedback to funders and circulate this to both participants and a wide range of funders.

- Remember many groups are run by volunteers so keep the paperwork to a minimum;
- Make up front payments – retrospective means community groups wait a long time for their money and incur bank charges they can't claim back.

Evaluation

Community Change asked for participants feedback with regard to the format of the conference, workshops provided and the relevance of the information received. To do that we asked the following questions:

What did you find interesting?

- Input from Funding bodies the fact funders were present to talk / discuss with us;
- Interaction from participants;
- Good sound up to date information;
- Everything in the conference was interesting;
- Variety of workshops on offer – great way to offer so much information;
- Good key note speaker;
- Great to find out what's there for small organisations;
- Workshops were very helpful;
- Information from funders;
- Workshops very motivating;
- Good range of topics and speeches covered;
- Great opportunity for audience to contribute;
- Liked the informal style and atmosphere;
- Key speaker very interesting and well presented;
- All the workshops were great;
- I gained a lot of knowledge;
- Very helpful and useful in extent of funding systems;
- Good community awareness of needs;
- Helped in showing how to source and present applications;
- Workshops were very good got great information;
- Enjoyed all workshops;
- Particularly enjoyed getting information on social enterprise;
- Well organised conference;
- Starting talks very useful and highly relevant;
- Very beneficial there should be more opportunities to access this type of training;
- Would benefit from more events of this nature/ We need more of these events;
- Great opportunities to network with other organisations;

Any comments / suggestions you wish to pass on to Community Change that can inform our future work?

- Very beneficial, should be more opportunities to access this type of training;
- Would benefit from more events of this nature / we need more of these events;
- Great opportunities to network with other organisations;
- Use a roving microphone;
- Need about ten minutes more per workshop;
- Would have enjoyed more time in workshops;
- More time to interact or questions;
- Please continue financial management service;
- Great the way the conference and AGM were organised;
- More independent training – more creative and innovative;
- Extend Community Change Finance project please;
- More lobbying of grant funding;
- Workshops were a little too short;
- It would be good to get materials from workshops we didn't attend;
- Perhaps more case studies could have been used;
- Too many workshops for time available;
- An opportunity to attend all workshops;
- Excellent work – next time maybe allocate a full day;
- Slower pace for those new;
- It was important to look at sustainability – more needed;
- Community Change provided excellent topics and support;
- Useful as an all day seminar;
- Attend two workshops instead of three;
- Perhaps full day conferences to allow for overrun

**Please rate the overall experience of the conference on the following scale
0=LOW, 5= HIGH**

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Materials				4	4	16
Facilitation				2	2	20
Workshops				3	3	19
Relevance of conference content				2	2	24

Collation of evaluations of workshops

Workshop One-*Beginning the journey*

Very informative
Answered all questions well
Clear and concise
Gave a good overview of expectations of lottery funding
Plenty of up to date information
Very informative and encouraging
Joanne very approachable and knowledgeable
Would have liked more time to ask questions
Well presented easy to understand liked the interaction and informal way that information was provided

Workshop Two-*Taking the Right Route*

Very valuable information
Very informative
Made application seem more simple and easier to tackle
Very informative has good knowledge
Would have liked more time
A bit rushed
Plain and simple...straight forward easy to understand
Very helpful...just long enough
Very good rapport
Great help
Good to have a frame to work from
Very informative
Frankness and straight forwardness
Informal but informative
Very encouraging
Good common sense approach
Good review of consideration in applying to independent trust funders
Informative and helpful details provided in handout regarding application requirements
Good handout but type very small
Great presentation
Very informative and useful
Good to know what is expected in an application
Practical steps/No Jargon

Workshop Three-Connecting Routes

Very Interesting, Learned something
Very Informative
Would love more time perhaps in future longer sessions around all the sessions
Has taken the scare factor of Bank loans for social business almost away
Really interesting and lots of valuable information
Very informative and challenging
Not relative to my organisation but very informative
Practical to the point
Not enough time to ask all the questions
Provided good details of funding support
Useful to hear about these funding options
Good opportunity for Q+A
Clear information delivered in a relaxed fashion

Workshop Four-Less Popular Route

Everything very good and interesting
Range of exciting ideas for developing into income generating business
Examples of projects/business
Getting a sense of full range of opportunities
Free flow of session made it possible to ask questions
More time needed
Good points and bad points-discussed
Very practical info
Good examples given
More time please to research more
I have learnt a lot about social economies when I knew absolutely nothing
Interactive-opportunity to learn from experiences of others in the group
Very interesting good food for thought
A little too short

Workshop Five-Recording and Recapping your Journey

Straight forward thinking
Experience of issue was very obvious
Excellent high level service
Feel much more able to fill in the output/outcome parts of applications
Interaction within workshop
Very informal, non judgemental manner
Very useful in terms of content and handouts
Very practical help
Could have done with more time
Got knowledge on the terms and better understanding on monitoring and evaluation
Too rushed
This workshop like other sessions was much too rushed
Practical ways of how this could be done to suit all funders
Practical examples given
Interesting and informative presentation
More preparation of a case study is needed
There was room for discussion and there was an open atmosphere
Workshop speaker was well informed
Good energy and interactivity
Relevant and helpful

