

The “10 minute read”

Executive summary: Stage 1 Feasibility Study for a Derbyshire Funding Advice and Application Support Service



Derbyshire VCS Infrastructure Consortium Working Party

A working party made up of members of the Derbyshire VCS Infrastructure Consortium was commissioned to address the feasibility of an IT based funding support, advice and information system. This is the executive summary of the working party's findings. Throughout the report, the working party have addressed information and advice / support as separate issues.

Needs of client groups

The working party conducted a survey of 20 voluntary and community groups to assess how they received funding information, support and advice. All of the groups had received funding information and advice from one or more bodies within the VCS consortium.

The interviewees gave a range of answers about how they received the **information** and **support** that they needed. For information, 16 out of the 20 groups (80%) gave face to face contact as one of their answers and when referring to advice and support this rose to 18 out of 20 – 90%.

Given a **choice**, groups would still prefer personal contact, face to face and by telephone for advice and support around funding.

The vast majority (83%) said that they **would** use a new IT based funding information system, accessing it through the internet or receiving information by email. However, some reservations were given about electronic means being the only way to access this information

Over half of the groups surveyed indicated that they would be willing to pay for this funding information service. However, the working group were unable to ascertain the appropriate level for any subscription or charge.

Funding information sources

VCS infrastructure consortium members receive funding information from various sources. Funderfinder (Groups in Need) and the Charities Information Bureau (CIB) funding email newsletter were sources that all of the CVS subscribed to.

The working group believe it is unlikely that an infrastructure organisation is paying any more than £400 in total, per year, in subscriptions for funding information.

Across the county there is duplication - in each area there is processing of the “raw” funding information (supplied from sources such as the CIB newsletter) that is then passed on to funding workers and client groups within that area.

The funding information services available offered by VCS infrastructure organisations

A “core” function for all CVS was a funding service available to client groups. This takes two forms:

- Proactive:** Information passed on by email, newsletter, at events etc, usually about new or updated funding streams
- Reactive:** CVS reacting to specific request from a group, i.e. group coming in or telephoning for information and advice on funding, searching for funding etc
Usually provided by funding workers using their knowledge and experience, through using Funderfinder etc

Views of funding workers

Funding workers would welcome improvements in the way that they receive funding information, and in the “tools” that are available to help them interpret funding information and sources. In order to meet the needs of funding workers and their client groups, an ideal funding service would have the following key characteristics and dimensions:

Accurate, up to date information incorporating local, regional and national funding streams, available to funding workers and client groups in a variety of ways – both proactive and reactive, which enhances rather than replaces face-to-face advice and support.

The working party believe that funding workers are a key source of knowledge and experience offering advice and support that cannot be replicated by an IT based system.

Service Options

Although the provision of an IT based **advice** system is not feasible or desirable, for the reasons outlined above, there is scope to develop a county-wide IT based funding **information** system.

Potentially, this has benefits in:

- Improving the quality of information available to funding workers and client groups
- Improving efficiency across the sector by centralising some of the processing and distribution of funding information functions (the proactive service described above)
- Allowing wider access to funding information through a web based solution

There are a number of options available to meet these needs, and these are detailed in the full report and been split into proactive services and reactive services, although the working party recommends that the “ideal” solution would incorporate both elements.

This “total solution” would result in better quality information, more time for funding workers to spend assisting groups complete quality applications, and better statistical information about how much money is levered into the county through support and information. It should therefore not just be seen as “more expensive than current provision and therefore not viable”.

The working party therefore hopes that this total solution will not be viewed as “more expensive than current provision and therefore not viable”, as it will make savings in other areas, as well as encouraging shared and knowledge working practices across the county.

The working group believes sustainability is one of the key concerns and risks in adopting such a system. There would be little point for organisations to dismantle their existing funding information provision in return for a better service if that improved service did not have any long-term viability.

Within the options, the provision of local information is one of the key areas to address in the second stage of the feasibility.

Second stage feasibility

A second stage feasibility would need to:

- Qualify and quantify the level of subscription that groups would be willing to pay for such a service
- Establish the willingness of local authorities to supply ongoing funding at the end of the first two years, if the systems worth in leveraging in funds for voluntary and community groups could be proved
- Evaluation of number of additional subscribers and their subscription level needed to make the system sustainable

The working party recommends that the project move ahead to the second stage of the feasibility study, with the aim answering the questions above and investigating:

- The preferred reactive options
- The preferred proactive options
- Sustainability of both solutions

The second stage would also produce a business plan, particularly addressing ownership of a centralised proactive information service and key milestones needed to establish a service.