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**Online Roundtable**

**17 September 2020**

Tim Cutts (Chair) Allen Lane Foundation

Carla Marshall (Co-ordinator) Sir George Martin Trust

**Contributors**

David Warner The Local Trust & formerly London Funders

Ben Cairns IVAR

Sam Caldwell South Yorkshire’s Community Foundation

Lady Anne Neill DL The Neill Charities

Nicky Smith Community First Yorkshire

**Attendees**

There were 32 attendees from a range of local funding and infrastructure support organisations.

**Link to recording of session**

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/y3UVrCGNwb3hJhw2YEwMlOx7tddTaM1QJghzptTRHW5wb0CmiP3xraq-n2obPCFj.EStXmNvB0F_384RA> Passcode: qvBd+7JQ

* Fast forward to **24 minutes** for the official start of the Roundtable (otherwise you will sit through a lot of informal chit chat) and then after the break-out groups which weren’t recorded, fast forward to **1hr 44 minutes** for the second part. The full stream of ‘chat’ – questions and comments – is shown on the right hand side which covers a number of interesting points.

**Key points from David Warner – What Does the Landscape Look Like Today?**

* It’s a messy landscape with considerable uncertainty of what the next six months will bring,.
* Reflecting on the last six months, Covid has massively increased the pace of change in the third sector and there have been creative responses from both frontline groups and funders. However, the crisis has exposed shocking levels of deprivation and disadvantage, as well as racism and racial injustice.
* The reaction of funders has been impressive, with many showing agility, responsiveness, trust to recipients and relaxing their funding restrictions.
* Now moving from crisis response to building back better, but still need to move at pace. There cannot be a return to business as normal.
* We need to consider:
  + What should the balance be between supporting long standing organisations and new, emerging organisations/movements. How do we balance our funding?
  + Covid has shown that there is very little resilience in frontline groups and many of them don’t have long term funding to keep them stable. We need to try and rectify this.
  + As we build back better, we need to find new and better ways to fund local, place-based work. Focus on recovery and renewal and those with power and influence should work more collaboratively and with more people.
* There has been an incredible breaking down of a silo mentality and local authorities, businesses, infrastructure support organisations and funders are coming together. In addition the previous, strict national and local lines are merging. There are more challenges of efficiency and as an ecology we need to learn and think about resilience.
* Sam Caldwell from South Yorkshire’s Community Foundation mentioned the Human Learning System in relation to the last point – here are two useful reports from IVAR – Trust, Power and Collaboration: Human Learning Systems approaches in voluntary and community organisations <https://www.humanlearning.systems/uploads/Trust%20power%20and%20collaboration%20-%20IVAR%20July%202020%20-%20Final.pdf>

and from Collaborate CIC and Newcastle Business School – Exploring the New World: Practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity

<http://wordpress.collaboratei.com/wp-content/uploads/1.-Exploring-the-New-World-Report-MAIN-FINAL.pdf>

* Sam added that there is an inequality in the level of community capacity and community connectedness. How do we re-build the sense of neighbourhoodness?
* Jan Garrill from Two Ridings Community Foundation commented that funders can add bureaucratic barriers when we insist on groups being constituted or a registered charity. Why should a group of neighbours who are doing great work and helping each other have to create a formal structure to access funds?
* Kath Lindley from WDHCS added that on the recent Locality webinar, Influencing Locally and Regionally, they discussed how there needs to be more lobbying of MPs and local government to address the funding challenges the pandemic has created for charities and community organisations.

**Results from poll to participants**

1. Have you frozen/paused your funding or application process this year?

YES 30%

NO 70%

1. Have you changed who, what, where you fund?

YES 58%

NO 42%

1. Are you being more flexible about what your grants are funding?

YES 92%

NO 8%

**Ben Cairns, IVAR – Time for Flexibility**

Read full PowerPoint presentation here <https://www.yorkshirefunders.org.uk/resources/>

Other key points included:

* The biggest challenge for frontline groups is that it’s all happening at once, at pace and with intensity that isn’t letting up. Their creativity and adaptability is breathtaking and they have stepped up in an extraordinary way.
* All funders are emergency funders and uncertainty and unpredictability is the new normal. It’s taken a global pandemic to make some funders realise that flexible, unrestricted funding should be the norm.
* Let’s help to build capacity back into organisations – they need time and space.
* Funders should fund the core of an organisation and what they stand for – trust them, be empathetic and work together.
* Light touch is key. Try to stabilise those groups that already matter to your organisation and also fund those that you haven’t heard from before.
* Comments in the chat room/additional comments from Ben focused on:
  + The fact the government are the biggest issue as they fund on a short term basis.
  + That in a small locality we need to try and build systemic change. Local, place-based funding and working together really works.
  + The top down approach isn’t appropriate anymore and this needs need to change now and for evermore.
  + Some of the best debates within boards have happened since March and some grant teams/officers are now more empowered to ‘speak truth to power’. Works very well to have a grant holder do a Zoom with the board to tell them about how the grant helped, instead of just providing a written report.
  + Agree collaboration with other funders/organisations is vital but important that funders keep their independence and that for any collaborative opportunities, the question ‘will it add value to what we are trying to achieve’ is always asked. Be careful and considered about the right collaborations.
  + There is a funder challenge about how to continue collaborative responses to Covid (ie. collaborative single access points and mental health services triage), there needs to be more awareness of connector and infrastructure organisations and more emphasis on BAME focused and led organisations.

**Salient points from break-out groups**

* We are all mired in uncertainty – so for once funders might be able to share more of an understanding with groups. We have all faced (albeit at different levels) degrees of hardship during lockdown.
* We need to move away from the fallacy of certainty that groups can apply for funding for a specific project that will be delivered exactly as planned. This was never the case but now it is absolutely not the case. We need a more candid model with each other and accept we are funding groups to do what they can.
* But this raises the challenge that this is easier to do with groups we know (the ones within Ben’s words, funder capital) but what about those groups or communities without this? Typically these may be BAME groups, new groups and small groups. We need to challenge ourselves to set up systems and flip our approaches so that groups can access funds. Currently the entry point is too high. One key way of overcoming some of the risk funders may face with all of this new ways of working is via collaboration at a place level.
* The NET funding to Community Foundations resulted in them speeding up grant processes and generally across the board most funders are being more flexible with their funding.
* Lots of groups have changed the work they do and supported their local community however needed, eg. an arts charity delivered food and essentials. Some local authorities, infrastructure organisations and funders did the same, and were out on the frontline, but generally you need a good infrastructure organisation to facilitate this work, like in Leeds. Issue now is those organisations are trying to going back to same as before – losing the neighbourhood spirit, but can they just go back to what they did before?
* Some funders paused their grant giving this year because they had problems deciding who to fund as so many groups that applied for funding had to stop the activities or they were going to be delivered in a different way. And some found it harder to get together because of Covid which delayed things, but taking a break was positive in many ways as it gave funders time to reflect and an opportunity to stop and think about how to respond faster and better, instead of continuing as they had for many years.
* Giving core funding is much more prevalent now…2021 investment income is a worry which adds to the uncertainty for funders and makes it harder to plan funding for the future.
* Dilemma between saving groups we’re already funding who are ‘in the club’ and those that ‘aren’t in the club’ and are new to a funder and how to react to them. More funders have been looking at particular geographical areas or issues such as domestic abuse. They are being more flexible and light touch. The quality of applications coming forward as been quite poor – desperation of groups, low capacity, etc. and as funders we need to help develop skills and capacity. Real concern that the funding has been frontloaded and worried about 2021 income and beyond.

**Sam Caldwell & Lady Anne Neill DL – South Yorkshire Collaboration in Action**

Read full PowerPoint presentation here <https://www.yorkshirefunders.org.uk/resources/>

* A number of other local funders groups have been or are currently being set up. YFF will work on collating all the contacts and information and circulate these in the coming weeks.
* Important that the local funding advisor/infrastructure support organisation also attend these groups.

**Key points from FAWN/points of discussion**

* Keen for funders to attend FAWN meetings and take it in turns to tell the group about their current funding available.
* Some funders are starting to do videos which can be sent out/posted and it would be useful to see more local funders do this.
* Funders need to be asked by funding advisors/infrastructure support organisations to take part in their online funding fairs or one-to-ones with groups.
* Mutual aid groups are still needed and very much operating and many are converting to become registered charities.
* When a funder is developing a new funding programme or re-launching an existing programme, they should consider getting the local funding advice worker/development officer’s input.
* YFF are meeting with FAWN soon and they will put together a plan of action which is led by the funding advisors, to ensure funders and funders advisors keep working really closely together and the groups have access to many local funders.
* Online funding fairs are the obvious option but what other ideas are there? We must remember that digital and sometimes language barriers will mean many marginalised communities won’t be able to take part.

**Next steps/future YFF events**

* Email Carla any topics or issues that you would like to be covered in a future YFF online or in-person event (will see if this is possible for the first quarter of 2021).
* Save the Date – 18th November Online Autumn Conference. Further details to come soon.