

The Empowerment Fund: Consultation on proposals for funding third sector organisations to empower communities across England

Krata is a creative think tank that runs community engagement projects focused on social, environmental and economic sustainability. Our Research Programme draws on our experiences together with others to explore the social and cultural understandings that underpin and influence community engagement. Our underlying principle is that people know the solutions to their own problems.

In our response to the Empowerment Fund consultation, we encourage the Third Sector Team to consider carefully the insistence on the following:

- Significant existing turnover ranging from £400,000 to £1 million
- Requirements for nationwide coverage
- Emphasis on charitable objects - this needs to be broad enough to encompass social enterprises

Turnover requirements

We are concerned by the use of income as criteria for identifying appropriate organisations to work with. There is a tendency within government to look for easy benchmarks and since turnover is measurable and accountable, it is often selected for criteria. However the organisations and in many cases individuals who are truly facilitating local communities to be empowered rarely have access to such considerable funds. The organisations who are eligible are likely to be one step removed from actual community engagement. The Fund therefore risks financially supporting the wrong organisations through setting such a high income barrier. In particular, it would be a shame if the substantial money made available was spent on salaries of people monitoring and administering community engagement rather than directly working with people themselves. Similarly, capital costs for large organisations are often more significant than smaller organisations, and again the Fund money may be spent on infrastructure rather than activists.

Requirements for national coverage

While we appreciate that the CLG department works at national level, empowered communities run at very local levels. There is therefore an immediate contradiction in the requirements for national coverage. The communities and organisations that are really working at a grassroots level do not have the capacity nor the inclination to spread their activities further afield. As organisations grow, they drift away from the place where they were inspired and, in many cases, the energy and passion that made the organisation work can fade. Key individuals who were agents of change in empowering fellow citizens often move on to other projects as the organisation they founded becomes more bureaucratic. The Fund needs to be very careful in selecting organisations that still have the verve and passion that made them successful.

Our suggestions

Krata is realistic about the short time between consultation and opening of the Fund for application making significant changes challenging. However, we think that there are a few key changes that would improve the Fund assessment and delivery.

We suggest that

- *the Fund prioritises the criteria that successful organisations must demonstrate that they work very closely with community groups, organisations and individuals who are making change happen in their local communities, (e.g. the Community Foundation¹) and seeks references about applicants from the community groups and organisations they claim to support*
- *the Fund should not set income or national coverage criteria for the strategy strand. The emphasis in this strand should be on best practice for empowering communities, sharing learning and successful methods for engaging communities and drawing in diverse community experiences. The successful applicants therefore should be able to demonstrate a good understanding of the issues in empowering communities, a commitment to gathering best practice across the UK and sharing the learning across the community engagement sector. This criteria is more suitable than the organisation's turnover.*

Please contact Jessica Symons on jessica@krata.co.uk or 0161 718 0304 to discuss further.

¹ <http://www.communityfoundation.co.uk/>



Response to consultation

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About Krata

Krata is a creative think tank working on, and learning from, community engagement projects focused on social, environmental and economic sustainability. We work in collaboration with individuals and organisations, such as Creative Concern, Tyndall Centre Manchester, Food Futures, Development Education Programme and UnLtd. Our projects range from setting up a successful social enterprise, to working in schools, to supporting the opening of a community café, to the formation of the 100 Months Club.

We consider the social and cultural underpinnings of community engagement and share these insights with others. For example, through our work in the 'deprived area' of Merseybank in Chorlton, we have learned that while people may be financially challenged, many are very enterprising in their activities, particularly in how they draw benefits and through the black economy. Understanding this nuance:- the independent and enterprising nature of many people in 'deprived areas' - could significantly affect the success of public sector engagement in similar places across the North West.

Krata associates and collaborators

Krata is connected into community facing organisations and individuals in areas across the North West. Our network ranges from AfSL and the Transition Town movement in Cumbria, Chester and Liverpool, to BITC and Manchester Community Information Network (MCIN), to many of the North West museums and art galleries, to EMERGE Recycling and Frankland Timber, to Liverpool, Salford, Manchester and Lancaster universities, to PCT Trusts, to multimedia and communication consultancies, to Striding Out and UnLtd working with emerging entrepreneurs, to notable community organisations such as CARISMA, working to reduce gun crime in Moss Side. The breadth of our network and the depth of our relationships with key individuals allows us to draw on valuable insights and perspectives from across the community spectrum.

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If you would like to find out more, check out our website, www.krata.co.uk.