

LERO Leadership Feedback RE: Grassroots Funding

The LERO Leadership group members met on the 23rd of February to discuss amongst other things the new Scottish Government funding for grassroots organisations. In the report below we have given a detailed account of the discussions, with some suggestions and feedback on the process of applying for this fund, whilst also outlining the needs of grassroots Lived Experience Recovery Organisations (LERO'S) from across Scotland.

LERO Leadership Feedback:

The view is this is quite a full application, for such a short timescale. It requires two years' worth of accounts and a reasonably robust evaluation of need and evidence of consultation. Unless you have all of that in place already, it is not really a viable process in the time allocated. Therefore, it is not really available to "grassroots" organisations, who do not have staff or time to complete an application like this.

On reading the guidance notes, rather than being a 'light touch' approach, which you would expect for fairly small sums, the application seems pretty hefty, and maybe daunting for a grassroots organisation. From my previous experience of working in funding with the National Lottery, this guidance looks more like what you would expect from a 'large' grant application (which would be for a significant amount of money - 60k +) from an established/ experienced organisation.

When creating new programmes aimed at grassroots organisations, we would always look at ways of making it accessible and as light touch as possible, whilst balancing the risk of the upper threshold that could be applied for. Small grant programmes such as Awards for All, or the Communities and Families Fund started with a limit of 5k and were eventually extended to 10k were great programmes to introduce groups to managing funding. Risk was judged at the assessment stage, but it was a good way of removing barriers and supporting a grassroots organisation with little or no experience to manage funds. Accounts in any form were accepted (a projection on a piece of paper if they were new, or handwritten ones) The lottery had realised that to attract these smaller groups, and encourage more community led organisations, rather than the big organisation who had a fundraiser hitting the jackpot each time, they had to support these organisations onto an equal playing field, help develop them to manage funding and make funding more accessible.

The system for grant applications needs to have a slightly more sophisticated understanding of its desired audience. Small grassroots organisations would need to divert energy and resource from their primary purpose to complete such a process, which is counter-productive, unrealistic, and uninviting. Therefore, there will be a disproportionately high number of applications from bigger 'grassroots' organisations.

"We are applying but only because we have the infrastructure and staff in a temporary funding role, a few years ago this would have been very difficult for us. Even so, the issues we have found with the funding process:

- 1) The broadness of the grassroots fund is unfair - up to £1million annual turnover is a huge difference to an organisation with £20k turnover. Not that the higher end cannot be grassroots, but those are VERY different types of organisations.
- 2) It is non-recurring, so limits the usefulness of a large uplift in funding - so if we expand our delivery to use those costs, then where will we find that next year? It creates more work without sustainability

- 3) They have not provided a key contact to phone for advice/support with the application process, so there is no building up of a relationship with a funder for the future.
- 4) The timing is difficult - we are awaiting all the new financial year awards, and so would have a better sense of what we could do with the money in a month's time, as we would know what is or is not coming in.
- 5) The money must be spent by April 2022, so no role-over is possible."

"All these things would be reasonable if:

- There was a clearer focus on what the funds were for (i.e., targeting staffing, or certain types of improvement)
- There was a clearer sense of whether there would be another fund going forward next year which would match the potential uplift in funding
- There was a key person administering this fund or at least answering questions, much like the National Lottery does.
- They put this out for a closing date of the end of March, so that there would be a better sense of any public-sector money allocations.
- There was a clear allowance for smaller organisations to be able to use the money over several years (i.e., fund a post for 2 years to embed a project/expansion)."

"My experience is that recovery communities need ongoing core grant funding over a period of years to build on existing infrastructures, although one off grants are helpful for generating new and innovative ideas or projects. We need consistent and ongoing funding to consolidate the already amazing work that recovery communities are doing."

"Imagine all recovery communities got an uplift of £50,000 - £100,000 over the next five years to build the infrastructure of the recovery development teams in localities, then you would increase the availability of aftercare and on-going recovery support surely that would have a massive impact on drug deaths. I think there is a claim for some of the new monies to be distributed to recovery communities through ADP's without all these funding application processes or procurements."

"We are a grassroots organisation in every sense of the word, we have one full time member of staff. In order to grow we need to build on our existing infrastructure by creating positions for full time development and funding officers' posts, in order to do that our community requires more opportunities for core grant funding rather than one of grants."

"We rely on volunteers regarding administration, governance and bookkeeping therefore it would be totally unfair to put such a short timescale and pressure on them. Everyone is putting all their energies into just getting through this pandemic and keeping the much-needed support in the community. A funding application that requires so much information in such a short time takes a team to just focus on that, and at the moment we are unable to commit to such an application."

"Grassroots organisations are often defined by lack of time, funding and even application experience with low staff members so this sort of application will be a huge barrier to the very people it should be aimed towards. Why create barriers?"

CORRA FOUNDATION AND SRC FOLLOW UP TO THE FEEDBACK:

Carolyn Sawers of Corra (which is delivering these funding programmes on behalf of Scottish Government) and Jardine from Scottish Recovery Consortium met on Friday 5th of March 2021 to discuss this paper. Corra welcome the feedback and will use this to help improve funding practices for themselves and others. SRC regard Corra as a key national partner in supporting our strategy for LEROs and note their commitment to meaningful inclusion of Lived Experience in their activities as an organisation.

Both SRC and Corra are wholly supportive of working with LEROs to ensure funding initiatives are both inclusive and understanding of the target organisations needs and levels of development. Both organisations are committed to improving how LEROs, Recovery Communities and smaller scale organisations contribute to their local communities and at a national level. The LERO Leadership Group Feedback confirms the need for us all to work together to create new ways of funding, assessing, and delivering innovative approaches.

Working together we have an opportunity to improve the level of support we provide to each other as organisations and the opportunity for more people to benefit from the life-changing work delivered by Lived Experience across Scotland.