



‘Was it worth it?’

Research report on the Project Towpath Community Grants initiative by the ‘Taking Part’ Capacity Building Cluster

Jamie Arrowsmith and Carol Packham

Community Audit & Evaluation Centre ~ Manchester Metropolitan University

This research project was funded by the Economic & Social Research Council:



Contents

Contents.....	<i>page 1</i>
1. Introduction.....	<i>page 2</i>
2. Methodology.....	<i>page 4</i>
3. An Introduction to the Frameworks	<i>page 9</i>
4. What Did Project Towpath Do.....	<i>page 11</i>
5. Exploring the Impact of the Project.....	<i>page 22</i>
6. The Project Towpath Process.....	<i>page 37</i>
7. Three Emerging Issues and Five Lessons Learnt.....	<i>page 47</i>
8. Conclusion: Why the Local Third Sector Matters.....	<i>page 51</i>

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research study undertaken as a collaborative effort between Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) between March-July 2010 as part of the 'Taking Part Capacity Building Cluster (CBC). The study aimed to develop understanding between academia and the third sector by facilitating an extended period of engagement between the two organisations, via a research fellowship placement.

The Taking Part CBC

The three Universities involved in the CBC have been working together since 2004 as part of the Home Office /Department for Communities and Local Government funded Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme. This has resulted in a collaborative partnership between Manchester Metropolitan University, Lincoln University, and Goldsmiths University and involved them working with third sector partners to explore a variety of approaches to ALAC. The initial programme became Takepart in 2007 and the programme widened from an initial 7 pilots to 18 pathfinders, working in partnership with local authorities.

In recent years the ESRC has placed an increased emphasis on working with organisations within the third sector. As a part of this work, the three universities worked together to form the 'Taking Part Capacity Building Cluster', which sought to create closer links between academia and third sector organisations. As a part of this process, the ESRC funded a placement Fellowship for a researcher to work alongside an infrastructure organisation – in this case, GMCVO – to help evaluate some aspect of their practice. Following this, Project Towpath has acted as the vehicle for developing engagement between MMU and GMCVO, and the work presented here forms part of that collaboration. The CBC works alongside the Pathfinder programme and the newly formed Takepart National Network.

Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations and Project Towpath

As an infrastructure and support organisation working with, and for the voluntary sector across the Greater Manchester region, GMCVO was ideally placed to enable the researcher to engage and interact with a diverse range of people working in the third sector: e.g trainers, fundraisers, volunteer coordinators and workers, representatives from both well-established community-based projects and newer initiatives, community leaders and, of course, those people being supported by and through the efforts of the sector. One specific initiative 'Project Towpath' was chosen to help steer and shape the study as it represented, not only the challenges and opportunities involved in working in and with the third sector, but also reflected the diverse nature of practices at work as well as the complex relationships between ground-level voluntary workers, the people they work with on a daily basis and the support organisations such as GMCVO that seek to represent. Funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Learning and Skills

Council (LSC)¹, Project Towpath was part of a wider initiative known as the Community Grants programme that sought to support smaller third sector organisations with close links to excluded and disadvantaged communities to undertake first engagement activities with people who, for whatever reason, found themselves excluded from education and employment.² The novel aspect of this project was that it sought to use support organisations such as GMCVO to act as mediator between the funding agencies and the not-for-profit sector, drawing on their knowledge and expertise of the (local) sector so that the funding was accessible to these groups who, due to reasons of lack of capacity, experience, and familiarity, would often find it difficult to (successfully) gain support from larger awarding bodies. ‘Project Towpath’ was therefore a route through which the research could engage with the sector. At the time of the study Towpath had funded more than 60 different groups from over 170 applicants.

This report focuses on the findings of this process of interaction and engagement between the third sector, organisations working to support and develop the sector, and academia. It was felt that overall the experience should be seen as a formative endeavour, for both the researchers involved and the host organisation. Therefore throughout the study attention will be drawn to key instances which demonstrate practices and examples that appear to have a particular resonance, or where suggestions for developing better practices emerge.

The Research Project

The research was carried out during March-July 2010 and involved the researcher being located at GMCVO and working closely with the Towpath coordinator. The research involved utilising existing quantitative data (e.g. Towpath monitoring statistics), plus obtaining qualitative information from all stakeholders, as well as making comparisons with other similarly funded-projects across the country.

Interviews were conducted with members of the infrastructure organisations and support agencies such as GMCVO (n=5), and with representatives of groups funded through Project Towpath (n=9). Observations were also conducted at three of these organisations. Surveys were sent to all groups who had applied for Towpath funding. Completed surveys were received from 24 groups: three-quarters of these (18) were from funded groups, with the remainder coming from groups that did not receive funding (6). Data from learners was collected directly during the observations, plus through individual meetings (n=1) and as part of two larger events.

The research also drew on the case studies and feedback that had been obtained through the project evaluations conducted by supported organisations themselves.

¹ Known as the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) from April 2010. See www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk, accessed 28 September 2010.

² For details on Community Grants and the bidding process for support organisations, see http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/EastMidlands/Community_Grants_Other_proposal_2_.pdf, 28 September 2010.

The study aims to develop a key framework which outlines the activities and experiences identified over the duration of the initiative (Chapter 3). The report provides an overview of the Project Towpath initiative itself, (Chapter 4) is an exploration of the key data findings to emerge from the research and the extent to which it has impacted upon learners and the groups, Chapter 5 explores key data, and ways in which Project Towpath impacted upon learners and the funded groups themselves, Chapter 6 focuses on reflections of the process itself concluding with some of the main issues and lessons to emerge from the study as a whole) Chapter 7 draws out a number of main issues and five key lessons that should be learnt from the process ().

A note on the Fellowship

The research conducted alongside GMCVO was funded through a Research Fellowship from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). As part of this strategy, the ESRC has developed a number of Capacity Building Clusters (CBC) which focus research activities with and on the third sector around certain key issues. The present project was co-ordinated through the Taking Part? CBC, The cluster is structured around two main themes: addressing social exclusions and empowering the voices of excluded communities to be heard; and promoting community cohesion and solidarity, both within and between different communities.

2. Methodology

The idea of using evaluation as a way of involving processes of critical reflection and dialogue, and not as an attempt to summarise the totality of experiences encountered in terms of a simple value judgement, has found favour in the influential work of Thomas Schwandt. In his 2002 study *Evaluation Practice Reconsidered*,³ Schwandt argues that evaluation is a practice where “what is said, written and done [...] is constituted by sets of norms, traditions, values and interests that [...] give it coherence and meaning”. Thus the act of evaluation, how it is conceived of, enacted, what is to be explored, all occurs under the influence of a diverse range of inter-related interests that must be negotiated. Similarly, Schwandt’s work questions the centrality of notions of ‘objectivity’, and the importance of summative value judgements placed on programmes in the process of evaluation. Instead, he argues, in order to arrive at better understandings of projects, processes of interaction, dialogue and critical reflection throughout are both worthwhile and epistemologically sound. In his words, evaluation is best conceived of as an exercise in “practical hermenutics”, of engaging in a dialogue with those at the heart of an evaluation to influence the development of practice.

This particular research project was governed by a number of different stakeholders with varying aims and objectives First, are the needs of the ESRC itself which has a broad set

³ Schwandt TA, 2002 – *Evaluation Practice Reconsidered* (New York: Peter Lang)

of aims and objectives relating to the research agenda it regularly sets out. Next, there are the terms governing the Taking Part CBC through which the project was administered; as well as the Fellowship itself which has a number of specific aims; and finally – and possibly most importantly – there are the desires of the host organisation, which needed to be discussed and understood before the research could begin to take shape. Figure 1, below, provides an overview of these competing aims and interests.

Guiding principles for the ‘Taking Part’ Fellowship

Strategic Aims of the ESRC: Third Sector Engagement Strategy

1. Increase and enhance the evidence base with, for and on the third sector, contributing to improving demonstrable effectiveness of the sector
2. Build capacity for carrying out and making use of research relevant to the third sector through the co production of knowledge
3. Develop systems for knowledge brokering and exchange amongst third sector stakeholders
4. Assess and maximise the impact of ESRC’s research and knowledge transfer activities in relation to the third sector

Taking Part? Capacity Building Cluster: Key themes and questions

The ‘Taking Part?’ CBC is structured around two key themes, social inclusion/ combating social exclusion, and promoting community cohesion and social solidarity.

From these concerns, a number of guiding questions emerge, including:

- How can third sector organisations tackle existing inequalities effectively rather than reproducing them?
- How can third sector organisations promote increasing social solidarity rather than increasing competition within, as well as between, sectors and communities,?
- How can infrastructure organisations best support smaller third sector organisations, enabling them to deliver public services in distinctive, effective and empowering ways?
- How can the long-term impacts upon individual volunteers and third sector organisations and groups be tracked more effectively?

ESRC Placement Fellowship: Aims of the Placement

The aims of the placements are to:

1. Promote the application and co-production of knowledge between Research Organisations and third sector organisations;

2. Provide third sector organisations with research-informed evidence to develop and review strategic and operational policy and practices;
3. Enhance the research capacity of the collaborating third sector organisations;
4. Expand networks for third sector organisations into academia and vice versa;
5. Enables all parties, including the ESRC, to develop their understanding of the interaction between research and the development of third sector policy and practice.

GMCVO: Ideas and desires

Based on discussions with GMCVO, the early concerns appeared to be:

1. Understanding and evidencing the impact of the Towpath funding on participating organisations and individuals;
2. Identifying and developing 'practical', 'applied' knowledge that can help small third sector organisations improve their practice;
3. Exploring the ways in which different communities experience the project, civil engagement, informal and formal participation.

Figure 1: Guiding principles of the research

Undertaking a 'straight' evaluation of the project was not considered an appropriate option due to the complexities of timescales involved. The Fellowship began in March 2010, and was completed in July of the same year. 'Project Towpath', on the other hand, started two years earlier, in 2008, and was not due to finish until October 2010. Consequently, the timeline did not allow for a traditional evaluation. The complexity of the project – more than 60 different groups funded, from over 170 applicants, all with very different foci and different stages of completion over the course of the Fellowship – also precluded a summative study that would present a thorough and 'objective' reading of the impact.

Second, more importantly was the fact that the researcher's close engagement with the host institution GMCVO allowed for a different conceptual strategy to be followed. A key facet of the research conducted here was that there was a continuous process of engagement and interaction between the researcher and GMCVO, particularly with the staff most closely working on Project Towpath, and so much of the research undertaken can be seen as ethnographic in nature, using this day-to-day experience to build up a more complete picture of the ways in which the host organisation functioned with respect to the community it supports. Therefore it was possible to use the experience in a more responsive, formative way, and to develop understandings and knowledge that would have benefits beyond the immediate object of study. It is perhaps more useful, therefore, to see the present study as a 'snapshot', a reflective case study developed over the course of this collaboration, more in line with the vision of 'evaluation' forwarded by Schwandt than with what might be termed more traditional perspectives. This, it is hoped, is a key strength of the study.

The main objectives of the study can be viewed in three spheres:

First, there is the immediate question of Project Towpath, in terms of accounting for the experiences of those engaged with the project and exploring the nature of these interactions. Second is the 'intermediate' sphere - the ways in which the relationships between GMCVO and the sector they seek to support. Finally, there is the wider context, of the learning that emerges from the project which can be used by the sector in general.

In order to address these broad aims, the research presents four key, inter-related phases:

- a *descriptive* phase, exploring what was done and accounting for the experiences of those involved;
- an *evidential* stage, which provides an account of the impact of the project as recorded by the research, and forms the basis on which later ideas can be founded;
- a *reflective* stage, which considers the ways in which people thought about the project and the experience as a whole; and
- a *critical* stage, which explores the wider learning that can be drawn from the experience, grounded in the data and reflections provided

It was also clear that due to the complexities of the study a mixed methods research approach would be more appropriate and effective as Guba (1994) and Gorard (2007) argue⁴. Different problems clearly call for different solutions; therefore, when undertaking any research project, the methods used must reflect what is needed to be known, and not be dominated by preference alone (Gorard, 2007). A case study approach was therefore chosen as it employs a range of data sources in order to generate a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular case or set of cases.⁵

The study involved three main phases: the documentary stage which involved analysing all the data connected with Project Towpath e.g analysis of funding applications; files on successful projects; information relating to the Community Grants application from GMCVO; feedback given to all Project Towpath applicants; and literature relating to the Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) framework. The second phase was the 'survey' stage, which involved circulating a mixed-questionnaire (i.e with both qualitative and quantitative questions) to all organisations to have applied for a grant (successful or not) under the auspices of the Towpath project. Drawing on prior work in this field found in the evaluation of ALAC by Mayo and Rooke,⁶ the survey asked for feedback regarding the application process from all participants, how they thought their

⁴ Guba EG & Lincoln YS, (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research'. In: Denzin NK & Lincoln YS (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications)

⁵ Gorard S, (2007) - *Mixing methods is wrong: an everyday approach to educational justice*. BERA, Sept. 2007 (London: Institute of Education, University of London)

⁶ Mayo M & Rooke A, (2006) *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* (London: Civil Renewal Unit)

projects had performed against set objectives, and the types of outcomes and challenges that they had experienced.

Finally, a third 'fieldwork' stage was undertaken. From the findings of the documentary and survey stages, together with the input from the Project Towpath coordinator, a number of current projects were identified as potential participants in the research. In total, nine organisations engaged initially while observations of activities within GMCVO and of some of the processes and practices engaged in by the funded organisations were also conducted. Throughout the project, this work was at all times underpinned throughout by an ethnographic element as the researcher collected data in situ on a daily basis as part of the GMCVO placement, and therefore a process of engagement, dialogue and reflection informed the development of the research design and methodology.

Interviews were conducted with members of the infrastructure organisations and support agencies such as GMCVO (n=5), and with representatives of groups funded through Project Towpath (n=9). Observations were also conducted at three of these organisations while completed surveys were received from n=24 groups: three-quarters of these (n=18) were from funded groups, with the remainder coming from groups that did not receive funding (n=6). Data from learners was collected directly during the observations, plus through individual meetings (n=1) and as part of larger events (n=2). The research also drew on the case studies and feedback that had been obtained through the project evaluations conducted by supported organisations themselves.

3. An Introduction to the Frameworks

Active Learning for Active Citizenship, or *ALAC*, programme emerged in 2004 as the precursor to the Taking Part programme of pathfinders and its associated Learning framework. The intention here is to introduce the key underlying principles that help shape some of the themes outlined in this report.⁷

The key aim of the ALAC agenda is to restore a sense of engagement and ownership within local communities as many people feel that there is a dislocation between themselves, the communities in which they live, and the institutions which govern everyday life. As Woodward argues ‘if we are to have a healthy democracy, we need to support each other in identifying the issues that concern us, and develop the confidence and skills to make a difference to the world around us’ (2004). Central to creating an engaged society through which people, not only feel they have a say in the institutions through which civic society executes its will, but actually also possess the ability to exercise their power, are three key ideas, all of which are represented in this brief statement: [participation; learning; and impact](#).

The ALAC framework argues that participation is the key to a healthy and vibrant democracy, and the process through which communities can develop into cohesive and stable entities. There is a need – indeed, a duty – to engage with others and with those networks and structures that govern us. This participation is only effective, however, if participants have the skills and aptitudes to engage *effectively*: it needs to be informed. Thus, a certain level of skills and confidence is required to ensure that this participation is informed, otherwise the needs and desires of individuals and communities may well not be represented. As Woodward argues, this participation of informed citizens is undertaken to ‘*make a difference*’ – it is not about tokenism or ratifying local governance, but about making changes that benefit the community, as a result of informed debate between engaged citizens. These, then, might be seen as the three key principles on which the ALAC agenda rests. It is important to note the key concept that recurs in ‘active learning for active citizenship’: the notion of *activity*. Citizenship, and the process of learning which is fundamental to this particular notion, cannot be viewed as a passive process. It requires [action, experience and participation](#).

Given the notions of experiential learning and participatory approaches that underpin activities under the auspices of the ALAC/Takepart programmes, it is important to note that there is no single model on which ‘active learning for active citizenship’ should be based. Central to the framework is that activity is negotiated at a local level to reflect the needs and desires of those engaging with the process. As the work in Take Part’s 2006

⁷ For a comprehensive account of the ALAC agenda, see: Woodward V, (2004) – *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* (London: Home Office)

For an evaluation of various approaches to work under the ALAC agenda, see also Take Part, (2006) – *The National Framework for Active Learning for Active Citizenship* (London: Communities and Local Government), available at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/takepart. Accessed 4 October 2010

Report (see fn.8) demonstrates, there are a multitude of ways in which people and communities can engage in order to change the environments in which they live. The 2006 Take Part report argues that ALAC/Takepart approach is needed for three key reasons:

1. It helps equip people and communities with the skills, confidence and experience to both identify and engage with the challenges that they are faced with;
2. All individuals are members of communities, and community change emerges only from communities working together; and
3. It allows people to develop an understanding of the way in which power works, and how they can exercise their own power to influence the policy and practices through which their own lives are governed

The research undertaken during this study worked towards these objectives in that it engaged excluded communities and sought to develop the skills and personal capacities that would facilitate engagement with mainstream society, with flexible and reactive initiatives working at a local level.

4. What Did Project Towpath Do?

Background to the research project

Project Towpath, the initiative led and managed by GMCVO in Greater Manchester, was part of a wider nationwide project that was funded by the ESF and LSC⁸. This project – the ‘Community Grants’ programme – sought to engage smaller, community-based third sector groups to work with people that were excluded from work, education and training, and to empower them to take the first steps towards attaining greater economic and personal wellbeing through employment and learning. Acting as a ‘bridge’ between excluded individuals and opportunities to participate, the intention was to set about “assisting the disadvantaged or excluded to move closer to the labour market by improving their access to mainstream ESF and domestic employment and skills provision” (ESF/LSC, 2007: para. 1.1.1). The fund’s aim was to begin:

engaging those furthest from the labour market through delivering support at grass roots level by community based organisations in particularly focussed on community based mobilization and community based employability projects

(ESF/LSC, 2007: para. 1.1.1)

Consequently work could begin with smaller third sector organisations that would normally be excluded from bidding for funds directly from providers such as the ESF, with GMCVO administering the fund in the Greater Manchester region. Their main aim was to support applicants through the process and to help develop their capacity to deliver on funded projects. The focus on these smaller, ‘ground-level’ organisations that would be undertaking early intervention, ‘first engagement’ activities, was indeed unique, and *Project Towpath* was the vision of Community Grants established by GMCVO.

Project Towpath in the wider context

The key objective underpinning the Community Grants programme in both Greater Manchester and in other areas was the redistribution of funding to smaller organisations who, due to lack of capacity, size, time, experience, etc., would be unable to secure fiscal support directly from the larger funding bodies. Thus, the role of GMCVO was, by and large, that of a facilitator, which aimed to support organisations through the process of applying for these grants.

Not-for-profit organisations with fewer than 50 employees and with a limited turnover were eligible to apply for up to £12,000 to help towards the costs of providing ground-level, first steps engagement activities with people from excluded or disadvantaged groups. Priority was to be given to projects which sought to work with disabled people, the over 50s, women, people from BME communities and lone parents, all of whom

⁸ See fn. 1

experience their own set of specific issues challenges to (re)entering the world of training and employment

The first thing to note about Project Towpath was its appeal: some 170 applications for support were received, totalling approximately £1.8 million – approximately three times the available fund, which was around £630,000. Consequently a high number of bids could not receive support. As part of the research, there was an attempt to engage with the other organisations that have been holding the *Community Grants* funds in the five North West sub-regions. Interviews were conducted with *Cheshire & Warrington Learning Together* and *Community Foundation for Merseyside*, while the Community Grants project based in Cumbria provided information regarding the projects they have funded. This has proved to be a valuable exercise as it enabled the activities taking place in Greater Manchester to be understood in a wider, comparative context.

In terms of activities being conducted elsewhere, data from Cumbria and Cheshire & Warrington has been provided which enables us to begin to explore the different ways in which the funds have been used across regions. Throughout the following analysis, the data was drawn from the database of funded projects provided by each organisation in April 2010. Where an organisation has submitted more than one successful bid, each individual grant is counted. In terms of the number of projects funded, this is, unsurprisingly directly related to the size of the fund available, thus the Greater Manchester project held by GMCVO has delivered nearly twice as many projects as Cheshire & Warrington, and six times as many as Cumbria, as the graph on the next page illustrates (Figure 2, below):

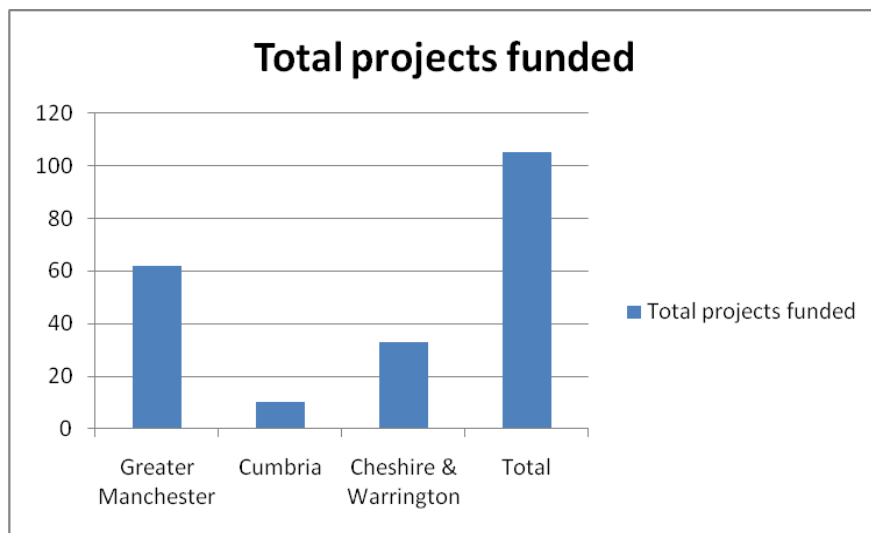


Figure (2): Total projects funded by region

In terms of average grant sizes, both Cumbria and Cheshire & Warrington have provided marginally smaller individual grants than those provided by GMCVO, but all are of a similar order. In Cumbria, the data provided suggests that the average grant awarded was

around £8,600, and in Cheshire & Warrington, approximately £7,225. These compare to an average grant of £9,935 in Greater Manchester, suggesting that the larger ‘pot’ available in this sub-region has provided for a slightly greater level of fiscal support to slightly fewer organisations, relative to the size of each fund. It is interesting to note that, at the time of its inception, it was believed that Project Towpath would work with more groups and projects, but fewer learners, with a projected average grant of £6,000. In reality, the vast majority of applications sought a larger contribution – close to the maximum permissible grant, £12,000 – but also wished to work with more learners. As one of the Project Towpath representatives for GMCVO was to remark:

In the original tender document we put in, we thought most groups would ask for £5,000-£6,000, the middle of the range, but that was a silly assumption as everyone asked for the maximum! But we thought that we would hit about 920 learners, and we must have trebled that so the impact has been amazing. Organisations have been looking to give us the maximum value for money, which is great.

In terms of the type of organisations funded, the databases of successful applicants held by the same three sub-regional award holders were analysed to enable a comparison of activities. An initial free coding exercise was devised in relation to the project descriptions carried within the databases in order to obtain a set of categories that were appropriate for enabling a comparison between the regions. The data provided below represents a guide only; many projects work with groups that span a number of the categories listed. The single main focus of the project, as was deduced from the project description, provided the categorisation. The data is reported in Figure (3), below, as a percentage:

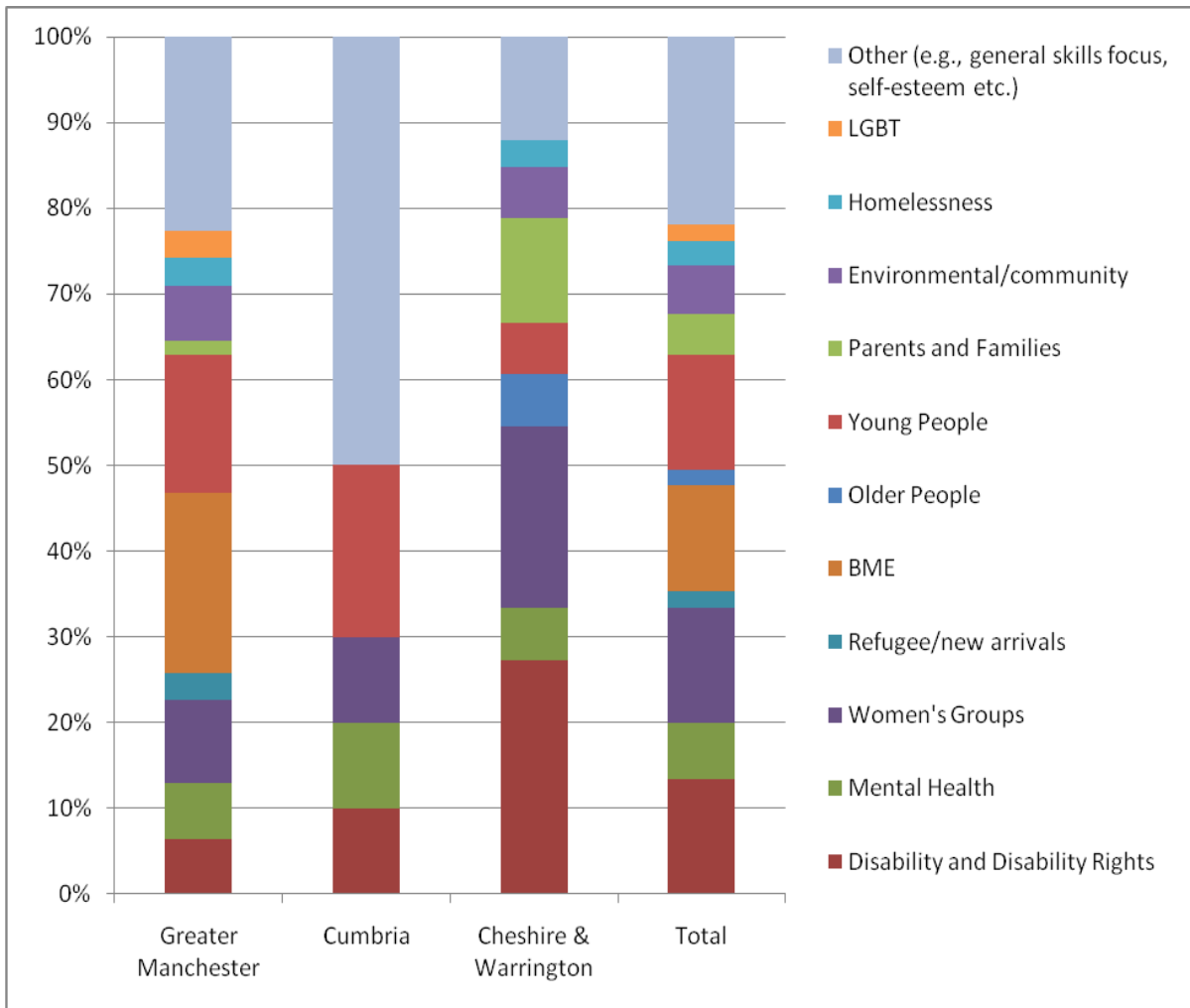


Figure (3): Primary Focus of Funded Projects by region

As can be seen from this graph, there are some notable differences between the sub-regions. Apart from Cumbria it is clear that while over half of the groups funded in Cheshire & Warrington related either to some form of disability or were projects targeting women, in Greater Manchester the corresponding proportion was just over one-fifth. Conversely, the latter of these two regions focussed largely on groups supporting BME groups and young people (around 40% of the total number of projects supported), whereas Cheshire & Warrington supported a smaller number relating directly to young people and no projects working exclusively with BME groups. This might be seen as fairly representative of the type of third sector organisations prevalent in the areas concerned. Cheshire & Warrington stated that:

What we found was that the majority of our grant applicants, and obviously that was reflective of the groups in the areas, is that they're disability-type organisations – mental health groups, learning difficulties – and that a lot of them are church related, they have faith undercurrents. But the majority are disability groups, and I think it's reflective of the area – we don't have significant

BME communities, which I know there are in Manchester, but our percentage is like 2% here. So it reflects our local needs.

Similarly, the experience within Greater Manchester can be seen to represent some of the key concerns in that area, namely the prevalence of youth and community projects, and the high number of groups working with BME communities which is broadly in line with the demography of the region. However, there was some concern that both the orientation of groups applying, and the geographical spread of these organisations, was not diverse enough in the first instance:

We had a lot [of organisations applying to Project Towpath that were] from the centre of Manchester [and] a lot of BME groups, far more than we expected initially, which was a surprise, yes, and eventually we had to say hang on, we need to spread the money about a bit more to, say, groups that worked with disability – but we had to actively go out and find those.

As a result the fund-holding organisations had to take proactive measures in order to ensure that the funding was distributed in what was perceived to be a more equitable and fair way. Importantly, this was not a case of refusing applications based simply on the type of project they represented, but (as the extract makes clear) involved making more concerted efforts to encourage applications from these ‘under-represented’ groups, most notably in terms of applications from outside of the central Manchester area. It was only in the very latter stages of the project, when funds became more limited, that the grant awarding panels had to become perhaps more ‘discriminating’, though the high quality of many applications by this stage meant that good projects were necessarily turned away, as was evident by the feedback provided to applying organisations.

Some thoughts on differences in applications to Project Towpath

In discussions with representatives from the various fund-holding organisations, it became apparent that three inter-related issues were viewed as lying behind the variable application rates among different types of organisations.

Firstly, it was reported that, in different areas, different types of groups have stronger inter-organisational networks that allow for a more effective distribution of information regarding, as in this case, funding opportunities. In one region, the prevalence of support organisations for disabled people, women and young people was accounted for by the “*faith undercurrents*” which they often shared; the implication being that these organisations, based within or associated with churches and other religious groups, were part of wider networks external to the Community Grants programme, and it was through this mechanism that information had spread. Likewise, the common links and interactions between BME groups in central Manchester were considered to be important organising principles which explained the high number of applications from these groups. Further, where the fund-holders had direct access to key networks – such as, in GMCVO’s case, the Greater Manchester Voluntary Sector Learning Consortium – bids from groups within these networks were common: “*a lot of the members of the Learning Consortium applied, which remember is who held the funding so that was entirely appropriate.*”

A second issue to emerge from the data was concerned with the way(s) in which third sector organisations positioned themselves *vis a vis* what they termed ‘political’ agendas. While in some cases there was something of a misunderstanding about what, exactly, the funding available through Project Towpath was intended for – as anecdotes relating to enquiries from youth basketball teams asking for funding to undertake a team tour would indicate – there was also the matter of the relationship between charities and support organisations, client groups and the employability agenda. Here, the purpose of the Towpath funding was understood, but some organisations struggled to justify their own engagement, in spite of the desperate need for funding:

Some of the organisations didn’t think it was right for the voluntary sector to be engaging with the employability agenda. They had people, who they were supporting and wanted help, within their organisations but they didn’t think that it was right to be doing that within what they saw as a ‘political’ agenda

The concern in these cases appears to have been related to the commitment and ‘bond’ organisations believed they had with the people whom they engaged with. For example, some groups working with disabled people did not want their clients to see the organisation linked with ‘employability’ funding in case they saw this as an attempt to force them towards employment for which they were not ready or able to undertake. As the researcher was told:

[It is to do with] where they see themselves positioned. Certainly some of the disability groups who came forward saw themselves as support organisations but not necessarily as part of the employability agenda.

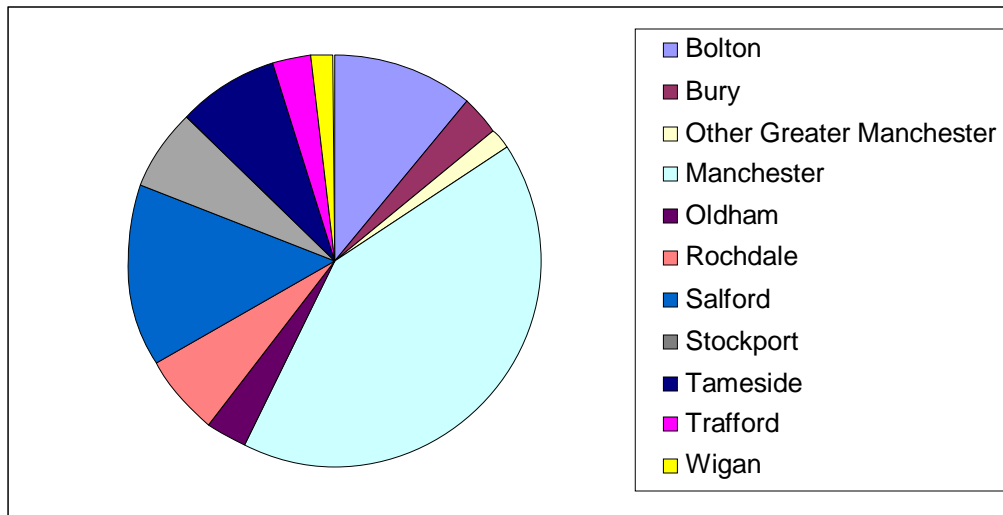
Consequently, it was important for the fund-holding bodies to assure groups that proposals need not be aimed at those unable to work, or who did not wish to engage, but could be used to develop skills, competencies and personal characteristics that might later be seen as valuable but did not in any way need to link directly to immediate, ‘solid’ employment outcomes:

Once we kind of said that, well, these projects are available if you want to help your members to get into work, then this money is here – it’s not about trying to pressure them into work, but the funding is here if you want to do that sort of thing, and if you want to make use of it, and quite a lot of them did go on to do that (Towpath coordinator).

This might be argued to be one of the strengths of the Project Towpath initiative, - their flexible approach to goal-setting and sympathetic implementation of the endeavour, allowed for groups to develop projects that were more agreeable and sensitive to the specific – and well-understood – needs of their client groups, but which crucially still had the capacity for real and positive personal gains for participants (as can be seen in the next chapter). It is also important to recognise that many groups working with excluded and disadvantaged communities do so out of a very real understanding of the issues being faced, and of the reaction these groups may indeed have if they perceive themselves being targeted as a ‘problem’ to be ‘fixed’. In light of current developments regarding the third sector, and the ongoing debates in terms of its role supporting the public sector, the

principles of such organisations need to be granted respect, and engagement with agendas that are understood as ‘political’ cannot be assumed simply because they have funding attached to them.

Finally, there was the issue arising from an apparent geographical exclusion, with groups based outside of Manchester making far fewer applications than had been expected, at least in the initial stages of the project. As the pie chart and table below illustrate (Figure 4), more than half of the projects funded were based in either Manchester or Salford, with other areas providing considerably fewer of the successful projects:



Area	No of projects funded	As % of total projects funded*
Bolton	7	11
Bury	2	3
Manchester	26	41
Oldham	2	3
Rochdale	4	6
Salford	9	14
Stockport	4	6
Tameside	5	8
Trafford	2	3
Wigan	1	2
Other Greater Manchester	1	2
Total	63	

* figures rounded to nearest whole number; may not add to 100%

Figure (4): Pie chart and table showing proportion of funded projects from target areas

Clearly, there is a significant imbalance within the funded projects as to their location. In part, this is related to the size of the third sector within the various sub-regions, with Manchester itself comprising a significantly larger area than the others served by the project, hosting over 20% of the Greater Manchester voluntary sector (constituted groups)

and over 26% of the charities. However, there are two further explanations to be considered.

The first was that, outside of the immediate area in which GMCVO was based – within Manchester itself – there was more of a reliance on third parties to act as gatekeepers through which eligible organisations could be contacted, such as the local CVS groups for each of the relevant sub-regions, with varying degrees of success. At times, it appeared to be a little more difficult to ensure that the message regarding Project Towpath was being distributed as readily as it might otherwise have been. However, when organisations were asked how they had heard of Project Towpath, they highlighted two organisations in particular (other than GMCVO) via which they had first heard of the initiative, and these were the Bolton and Salford CVS – the two areas providing the most successful applications after Manchester itself. The second point relating to applications from outside of the Manchester area might again be said to fall under the rubric of ‘positioning’. Here, it is concerned with the way in which third sector organisations view themselves in relation to the activity of GMCVO, with one suggestion being that the distance between areas and the historical connections with Manchester being stronger in some places than others meant that groups simply had not seen a project managed in Manchester as being relevant to them, even where the guidelines were quite clear regarding eligibility. In this case, the engagement of the local support and infrastructure groups, such as the CVS, becomes an even more important foundation, and one which it could be argued would need to be undertaken with a renewed vigour if the project was to take place again in the future, and at an early stage to ensure that groups from a wider range of geographical locations are better represented.

Activities funded through Project Towpath

As we have already seen above (Figure 4), projects which gained funding were spread across a wide range of thematic areas, and encompassed an innovative selection of methods and approaches. Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to give a complete review of all the activities Towpath was responsible for supporting, it is important to get a sense of the *types* of projects funded. As one of those involved with GMCVO’s administration of the scheme noted, innovation and novel approaches were a common theme in these activities:

We’ve seen loads of examples of novel practices. We went out to Gorton to a project that uses former battery farmed hens, which were being used to support young women leaving care. Once they leave care, there is no support there or anything, absolutely nothing for them and this group has got together in Gorton and they’re supporting these women to gain confidence through horticultural skills, by looking after these chickens – they’re supporting them in the hope that – a lot of them are mums – that they can possibly get a job, and look after their children so that they don’t end up in care. I just thought that was an absolutely fantastic project

Here, the important point was that a number of key and interpersonal skills were being developed through processes that were new, different, and quite removed from the type of formal education and learning that may have been a previously experienced by the

participants as negative. An overview of all the activities supported through Project Towpath is given below, in Figure (5):

Add Action Project	<i>A confidence & self esteem project working with parents of children with ADHD.</i>	Inspired Sisters	<i>An English conversation project that works with young Asian women.</i>
Arts for Recovery in the Community	<i>An art project working with people with low to moderate mental health illness.</i>	Kashmir Youth Project	<i>A confidence project that works with people from the Kashmir community in Rochdale.</i>
Back on Track (formerly NEARIS)	<i>A confidence & self esteem project working with the homeless and ex-offenders.</i>	Lesbian and Gay Foundation	<i>An employability project that works with LGBT people in Manchester.</i>
BlueSCI	<i>An art project working with people with low to moderate mental health illness.</i>	Looked After Chickens	<i>An animal project that works with people with low self esteem.</i>
Bolton Literary Trust	<i>An literacy project working with people with low self esteem</i>	Manchester Council for Community Relations	<i>A confidence and self esteem project that works with young Asian parent carers.</i>
Bolton Phoenix	<i>An theatre project working with people with low self esteem</i>	Manchester Victoria Baths Trust	<i>A project that supports volunteers into further employability.</i>
Brain and Spinal Injury Centre	<i>A confidence project working with people with Brain and Spinal Injuries.</i>	Mind in Salford	<i>A gardening project that works with local residents to give them confidence and horticulture skills</i>
Breakthrough UK Ltd	<i>An employability project working with people with disabilities</i>	Mustard Tree	<i>A project that works with the homeless an ex-offenders to give confidence and self esteem</i>
Broad African Representative Council	<i>An employability project working with young black men.</i>	OAK Community Development	<i>An English conversation project that works with the Asian Community in Oldham.</i>
Central Residents Action Group	<i>A gardening project that works with local residents to give them confidence and horticulture skills</i>	Off the Record	<i>A project that gives confidence and self esteem to teenage mums.</i>
Citizens Advice Trafford	<i>An employability project that gives confidence and self esteem.</i>	Personal & Community Development CIC	<i>A self esteem and confidence project that works specifically with residents on the Pungle Estate in Bolton.</i>
Coach House Community Café	<i>A café project working with people with mental health issues.</i>	Project 29	<i>A Radio project working with young people in Bury.</i>
Community Development Initiative	<i>A confidence and self esteem project working with Asian people.</i>	Proper Job Theatre Company	<i>A theatre project which gives confidence to young people in Manchester.</i>
Community Revival (UK)	<i>A confidence and self esteem project working with Asian people.</i>	Rais Academy	<i>A sewing project which give opportunities for self-employment to Asian women in Rochdale.</i>
Community Revival (UK)	<i>A confidence and self esteem project working with Asian people.</i>	Rebuild (Bury)	<i>A furniture project in Bury</i>
Co-operative College	<i>A confidence and self esteem project working with de-motivated people.</i>	Regenesis2	<i>An English language project that works with Asian women in Manchester.</i>
Creative Hands Foundation	<i>An art project working with migrants new to the UK to give confidence and self esteem.</i>	Rochdale Connections Trust	<i>A confidence and self esteem project that works with young people in Rochdale.</i>

Disability Stockport	<i>A confidence project working with people with disabilities</i>	Sale Moore Community Partnership	<i>An IT project that works specifically with people from the Sale Moor Estate.</i>
Diversity in Barrier-Breaking Communications	<i>A radio project working with hard to engage people in Bolton.</i>	Salford Unemployment & Community Resource Centre	<i>A project that works with migrants to improve their job search skills.</i>
Fatima Women's Association	<i>A confidence project working with young Asian women in Oldham.</i>	Shore Fold Community Farm and Garden	<i>A farm project that works with young people to give them self confidence and self esteem.</i>
Gaydio	<i>A radio project working with people with HIV & AIDS in Manchester.</i>	Somali Golden Age Care Group	<i>A confidence project that works with people from the Somali community in Manchester.</i>
Greater Manchester Bangladesh Association	<i>An IT skills project working with Bangladeshi people.</i>	Stockport and District MIND	<i>A mental health project working with people in Stockport.</i>
HBHG Development Trust	<i>An IT skills project working with people with low confidence.</i>	The Broughton Trust	<i>A self confidence and self esteem project working with residents in Broughton.</i>
Henshaws Society for Blind People (Manchester)	<i>An IT skills project working with blind people and people with visual impairments.</i>	The Interlink Foundation	<i>An employability project working specifically with orthodox Jewish women.</i>
Here to Help Trust	<i>A project working with hard to engage people, giving them practical work experience.</i>	The Terifah Club	<i>A sugar craft project working specifically with orthodox Jewish women.</i>
Hibbert Community Regeneration Centre	<i>A confidence project working with young Asian women in Bolton.</i>	Wigan & District Community Transport	<i>A Community Transport project, giving an expensive driving qualification FOC to unemployed or economically inactive people in Wigan.</i>
Hope Manchester	<i>A confidence project working with hard to engage individuals from the local community.</i>	Women In Supported Housing	<i>A media project working with young women in a supported housing environment.</i>
Hulme Community Garden Centre	<i>A gardening project that works with local residents to give them confidence and horticulture skills</i>	Women In Supported Housing	<i>A media project working with young women in a supported housing environment.</i>
Hyde Community Action	<i>A confidence project working with the Bangladeshi community in Hyde.</i>	YMCA (Bolton)	<i>A confidence project working with young people in Bolton.</i>
Independent Living Solutions	<i>A project that gives support to people leaving the care system, within a supported housing flat.</i>	Inspired Sisters	<i>An English conversation project that works with young Asian women.</i>

Figure (5): A summary of projects funded through Project Towpath

There is a real diversity in the types of activities undertaken under the auspices of Project Towpath with a wide range of aims and methods being employed across the examples cited and with a mixture of projects seeking to develop practical skills, such as IT competency or English language skills, or more personal characteristics such as confidence and self-esteem. Asked to summarise the activities participants took part in, groups provided the following responses:

[Participants took the] PCV driving bus and coach theory and practical training leading to a PCV driving licence being obtained which enables people on Job Seekers Allowance to search for jobs in the bus and coach industry

We assisted participants with CV preparation and interview techniques as part of a structured programme that we deliver to our service users. We also motivate and support young people to consider the merits and benefits of study and vocational courses. Our whole ethos of intervention is about problem solving learning in everything that we do with young people

Participants attended a six evening training course in preparation for volunteering as a way into education, further training or employment

Clients took part in a course focussing on developing confidence and motivation. Many of those taking part had been very demotivated, had a lack of belief in themselves, had been unemployed or on benefits for a while in some cases. The aim was to motivate them, give them confidence to make the step towards getting out and getting work. The course also showed practical as well as 'soft' skills, such as writing CVs and applying for jobs

The range of vehicles through which this learning was to occur is also considerable: projects drew on horticulture, farming, or animal welfare, as was evident in the *Central Residents Action Group* and *Looked After Chickens* projects; radio and broadcasting or arts and media functioned as the methodological framework in the projects run by *Gaydio* and *Project 29*; while some introduced skills through work experience (for example, with *Coach House Community Café*) or training on official, accredited courses such as those offered through *Community Revival* and *Wigan and District Community Transport*. This survey hopefully provides something of the 'flavour' of projects funded through Project Towpath, of their aims, focus and methods, and gives some indication of how these activities compared with other others funded through Community Grants across the North West region.

5. Exploring the Impact of Project Towpath

General perceptions

The Project Towpath initiative worked with a large number of organisations representing an array of different communities, services and approaches, in order to support people from disadvantaged communities to take the first steps towards a more active engagement with learning, work and civil society. As one of the Project Towpath representatives commented

we thought we knew who would want to get involved, but we've actually had many, many more organisations engaging with the project than we expected

Project Towpath was a significant venture for the eligible organisations in Greater Manchester, releasing as it did more than £600,000 to the voluntary and not-for-profit sector. Through this investment and engagement, more than 1000 learners were supported into opportunities provided by Towpath-funded organisations. Given the stipulation that projects were required to be novel and that they should address communities needs not accommodated in mainstream provision, it is possible to suggest that a significant number of these learners would not have engaged with alternative forms of learning had these projects not been in existence.

In general terms, the Towpath initiative received extremely favourable reviews from those projects that were funded and chose to engage with the research. As one group reported, Project Towpath was

...a very positive programme. Through it, we have got people who were not thinking about work, not doing very much, just signing on, doing nothing – they're going to college, starting work, being motivated – not just thinking about it but doing it [...] It has been a very uplifting project

Although some participants viewed the scheme as overly bureaucratic in terms of the paperwork and monitoring which formed a necessary part of the funding requirements, the overall view was that it was a highly worthwhile, well-organised project through which a great deal of positive work was undertaken, and where the needs of the organisations receiving funding were acknowledged and accommodated as far as possible. Of those organisations (n=18) responding to the survey research all said that they would take part in the project in the future (cf. Figure (x), below). Being involved with the endeavour was *“a very uplifting and positive thing to be a part of,”* said another respondent. They added:

...watching [participating individuals] learning, either confidence or skills, it is a very uplifting thing, to see people taking part and getting involved, and then doing something positive with it. It made a big difference

Thus, being a part of Project Towpath was seen as being a valuable and rewarding experience, and was largely viewed in this way because of the new work the fund had enabled, and the impact that these groups subsequently perceived in the learners they engaged with. The experience of being able to deliver services that would empower and support excluded and disadvantaged individuals – some of whom were, according to one project leader, “*people on paths to destructive lives*” – to engage with learning and their own personal development created a sense of worth and achievement for those in charge of the projects. As another project leader was to venture, it had provided the opportunity to undertake “*exactly the kind of work we’ve been struggling to do [prior to funding from Project Towpath]*” It was

...very satisfactory to know that we have helped students to be more successful and that they now have a better chance of improving their lives

It can be seen that the work funded through the Towpath initiative was perceived as creating valuable opportunities to engage with and support learners towards the kind of goals set out under the auspices of the Community Grants programme. Allied to this, the feedback from learners themselves tended to support such claims, though this data itself must be read more cautiously. Access to individual learners was somewhat limited and the funded groups at times acted as gatekeepers to the ultimate beneficiaries of the funding delivered through Project Towpath. However, the data that *was* available from learners directly engaged with Towpath-funded projects was strongly in favour of the experiences they had gained, with some extremely convincing and positive case studies emerging over the course of the study. Below, a sample of learners’ comments is provided:

I just want to say thank you to everyone for making this so interesting and for all their hard work

I thought they did a brilliant job and wouldn’t change a thing

I hope there are more such lovely programmes; they are very helpful and motivating

Other respondents were equally as effusive in the praise they offered, often talking of the quality and effective nature of the activities that had been provided:

I don’t think I would have improved on this training – it was well delivered and it was obvious that great thought had been put into what was delivered...This was good stuff!

[It was a] really enjoyable course, I learnt so much. Having two peoples’ experiences brought to the group was very powerful and helpful

Clearly, not all feedback was as positive: some activities were described as “*a bit limp*”, or that other learners had been “*lazy or passive*”. Similarly, some practical concerns were also raised e.g. rooms being cold or ill prepared, poor planning and timing issues with

some courses and activities (for example, there was “*not enough time and too many games on the first day*”) or that work would have been more effective if there had been smaller groups and more discussions and reflection. In addition a small number of respondents felt there had been too much bureaucracy involved:

The only thing that kind of spoilt it was all of the form filling on the first night, it felt a bit too much, I think it would be a good idea to set aside one night just to do the forms as a group and then get into the course

However the negative feedback mainly related to practical issues and whilst these concerns need to be addressed it is clear this did not impact adversely on the whole learners’ experience. Nowhere during this study, both through third-party evaluation data and first-hand interviews and observed encounters, was the overall, summative evaluation one of failure or of a wasted opportunity for the learners. Indeed what feedback existed from learners themselves appeared to accord with the perceptions of project organisers regarding the positive and valuable nature of the Project Towpath initiative.

The impact on and engagement of learners

There are three main successes in terms of impact on learners.

First is the issue of **engagement**. By its very nature, Towpath facilitated work with individuals from communities that were regarded as ‘excluded’ and ‘hard-to reach’, hence the recruitment of more than 1000 learners across the 63 funded projects, a figure which greatly exceeded initial estimates and funders’ targets, can in and of itself be viewed as a not insignificant achievement. Though one or two reported problems in recruiting learners – for instance, one reflected that “*target numbers were set too high*” and that they had to renegotiate the objectives of their project (but, importantly, were able to do so with staff at GMCVO to arrive at a more deliverable plan of action) – others had the opposite ‘problem’: “*dealing with the large numbers of people who need the project*” was the greatest challenge encountered for some. “*If we had the funding, we could double the numbers in 8-12 months.*”

It should be highlighted that, for many, the continued attendance of learners was a challenge. As one over-subscribed but successful project reported,

We have targeted a group of 20 [learners] and have actually had a bigger group than originally planned [...] Although we have not got all the participants who began, others joined in a little later...

Engaging learners from excluded groups, and indeed maintaining that engagement over a period of time, was clearly a challenge, but it is one that organisations took great steps to meet:

Getting people through the door was one challenge, especially younger people, who could be difficult to engage and keep on the course at first, you don’t know

who is going to turn up sometimes. But we're learning too, as an organisation, we have to learn from our own mistakes, it's a learning experience. For example – people we got to do the confidence building classes, we had one woman teacher who had all the qualifications and experience, but people couldn't relate to her – she was from a very different background. Then we got someone different who didn't have the experiences or skills but had a background which resonated with the participants, he'd changed his life around – but that didn't quite work as he didn't have the skills. So we got someone in the middle, and that's working now.

Here we can see that there was, within this particular project, recognition that there existed an issue in the recruitment and retention of certain learners, but the response – importantly – was not to assume that the fault lay at the door of the learners, but that the project, in the way it was conceived and delivered, needed to adapt to the specific needs of the community of learners with which they were working. New modes of delivery were used in order to positively engage the group, with the result, noted by the above respondent, being that the continued engagement of learners, particularly the previously problematic 'younger people', was greatly improved. In light of the challenges associated with working with 'hard-to-reach' groups, this sense of flexibility and of responsiveness was a key characteristic of projects that appeared to be successful in achieving their objectives.

The second key finding relates to the actual learning and development that was witnessed across a range of projects. All organisations argued that they had witnessed a clear and definite impact on the people they worked with, whether in terms of 'soft' outcomes (e.g. confidence and self-esteem) and skills (e.g. team-working) or more specific and practical competencies (e.g. computer literacy, language, writing). Generally, projects reported a mix of these three key areas as the perceived impact of these activities and –data obtained from learners themselves appeared to agree with this reading of the experiences. Take the following extract, which reports on the ways in which participation in one 'sugarcraft' project was seen to have benefited participants:

The participants are gaining hands on knowledge and know-how in sugarcraft, something that is a rather new experience to them. Our tutor has never taught before and has discovered that she enjoys this very much. She has been given an opportunity to take a short [Preparing to Teach in The Learning Sector] course which she has taken up [...]

Quite a few of our participants have tried to create their very own sugarcraft creation for particular occasions. The very fact that they dare to try to do something, and try to do this professionally as possible, shows how much this is giving them self-confidence [...] This indicates [an impact on] self-esteem.

Here, we have something of a microcosm in which we can see the various levels on which Towpath projects have attempted to work. Individuals have been introduced to novel and challenging experiences which, in their own right, require a more positive and confident outlook, and so beyond the specific skill being taught there are believed to be subtle and important psychosocial developments taking place. With the extension of the skill into the public domain being used as a vehicle for demonstrating and realising this developing confidence, we can begin to see the mechanism through which many projects

purported to affect and support those taking part in their projects: developing soft skills through novel and interesting experiences, then transferring these activities into a more ‘public’, open or challenging space. All responding projects made similar claims about having an impact on learners.

Aside from such ‘soft’ factors, there were more focussed and practical experiences reported. In one project, the participants had undertaken training which enabled them to drive larger passenger carrying vehicles: *“having a qualification that enables successful applicants to drive a 12 metre long vehicle not only increases personal confidence but road awareness, leading to them becoming better drivers.”* Other activities had taught *“employment related skills such as IT, communications, literacy and presentation skills,”* or *“skills in job searching, preparing CVs and completing application forms correctly.”* In each of these brief examples, a practical skill gain came to be associated with a more general sense of personal development. The example below provides a succinct explication of the perceived impact, and indeed the mechanisms through which this impact was transmitted:

Many of the participants have English as their second language. The project has helped them develop their speaking and listening skills through the group activities such as arts and crafts and cookery. People come to us as a first step into learning before moving on to maybe college or training. They typically have had poor experiences of education in the past and low self-esteem and come out of the project with a sense of ‘I can do’, make friendships, interact better with people and have support.

Again, we see the link between novel learning experiences through which skills develop, skills which are seen to have a real impact upon the learner’s ability to engage with other and more general experiences and opportunities, and that in learning some ‘practical’ skill, there is an underlying sense of self-worth and confidence which also experiences valuable gains. Feedback from learners again underlines and supports the sentiments reported by the Towpath-funded organisations themselves. As one reported:

I became much more confident as the course went on and felt much more capable of getting ideas heard and considered. I feel more confident now after the course, and also it has made a nice change having something to get out of bed for. It has made me think about doing some sort of college course or voluntary work.

Note the self-awareness and openness the learner offers here, noting that a lack of confidence had led to problems of motivation, of even ‘getting out of bed’. This demonstrates the issues affecting some of the learners working under the auspices of Towpath projects, and the way in which such first-steps engagement is a necessary and valuable tool for re-integrating individuals into wider, more mainstream experiences. Further to this, the link between learning and confidence gained through engagement with a Towpath project and personal gains, both in terms of skills and re-engaging with learning and employment was most obviously related to the researcher during a chance meeting at one of the projects. The learner had participated in one of the early projects that funded under Towpath, and her testimony provided a snapshot of how, at its best, such projects have a real, profound and lasting impact:

Sarah's Story

Sarah lives on a housing estate in Tameside where one Towpath-funded project has been working with local residents, helping them learn skills in horticulture, improve the local environment and develop the confidence to engage with wider learning. For Sarah the key to her getting involved with the project was its location:

"I used to pass by the project on my way through the estate. I'd see [the project leader] and he'd say hello, he knew I was in to gardening and he asked if I would want to do this course. I said yes, I wasn't working and didn't have a garden... It was very word of mouth, obviously it was on my path walking through here, the only reason I came along really is because of where it was..."

"Over five weeks we started here, at the allotment. We'd look at different plants, depending on the season... You build on what the last groups have done – it's only meant to be Fridays but you end up coming everyday!"

Many participants on engaging with activities funded through Project Towpath have experience some kind of dislocation, where they have moved to the periphery of community life for a variety of reasons. For Sarah, this involved a move to a new home, without work, which left her feeling isolated and vulnerable. Through the project however she believed that she was not only developing skills but becoming a part of the local community:

"Me, I'm new to the area I didn't know anybody, so it was really good to get to know people and to get into the community. It helped me get my confidence back, which had gone – it got me back out again. I'd not got a job so had no way of meeting new people... You meet people from different estates... Its good meeting people, breaking down boundaries – how else do a 20 year old start meeting a 70 year old! ... We've all got different backgrounds – getting involved has really helped my confidence, helped me get back to how I used to be, my old self. The next stage now is to get some work through it..."

For Sarah, it was important that the project she worked with not only helped socialise her into her new surroundings, but provided a route through which she could progress, hopefully into work. Already, having completed the Towpath-funded course, Sarah had embarked upon further training within more mainstream provision. As she went on to say:

"I've since done the City and Guilds qualification – it takes you up to the next level. I thought my learning days were over, but I'm now doing the City and Guilds level 2 in Horticulture – we learn in the office over there!"

'Taking part' had enabled her to grow in confidence, but her participation did not end with the conclusion of her project and the beginning of her vocational studies – Sarah remained committed to the project as a leading volunteer, taking charge of a significant aspect of the activity as a way of further developing skills and experiences that, she hoped, would help her enter the world of work once again:

"I'm now a volunteer here, I'm in charge of the greenhouse, which frees up someone else to do other things, and I'm getting introduced to people And building up my own network. I used to have my own business so I'm now able to use those again, show that I'm still using those skills and show other people"

For Sarah, as for many others, the experience of engaging with one of the Towpath-funded projects had been a good one, through which she had begun to learn new skills, rediscovered her confidence, and gained experiences that she thought placed her in a better position to gain work:

"It's just very positive, getting you out there, meeting new people who you wouldn't necessarily associate with. It changes your perspective. Everyone is learning."

Figure (6): Sarah's story of engaging with Project Towpath (above)

In this learner's story, we can see many aspects of the processes and practices supported through Towpath-funded initiatives that resonate with the wider experience. The learner herself had, through a long-term process of disengagement, brought about by unemployment and relocation, become isolated and withdrawn and saw herself as losing a confidence and motivation she once possessed. The particular project she worked with was rooted within her local community as she literally had to walk past it when leaving her own flat, and by her own admission would have been unlikely to have sought out such an opportunity further afield, particularly given her frame of mind at the time. However, the project was local; it resonated with her, being based around an activity (gardening) with which she had a personal interest; and in taking part, the learner began to develop not only new practical skills, but also a sense of confidence and worth. New personal networks within the community became open to her, leading to a more active role within the environment while participation in the project grew from one half-day per week training to the stage where she now managed part of the site on a voluntary basis for the project leader, and had progressed on to an accredited training course as a direct result of this experience.

Here, then, is the ideal example of the way in which first-steps engagement activities function, and why: they are accessible and approachable, address local needs, and provide clear roots into other, more mainstream activities. As another organization was to observe, their most obvious strength was their position within the community they served:

What we provide, it that we're in the local community, it's easy access and very convenient and it's not, you know – at the job centre it might be, "Oh, there's the job point, there's this, there's that" it's not very welcoming, you're on your own and if you're shy or not confident... I think our people, unemployed people felt comfortable, it was a lot more personal and one-to-one – we knew what they wanted...

The idea of progression in Sarah's story also represents the third and final aspect of Towpath-funded projects which suggests a **wider positive impact**.

Though projects were expected to develop partnerships with businesses and/or education or training providers in order for clear routes of progressions and development existed from the first-steps engagement activity into something more formal and fully developed, the Community Grants regulations were clear that developments over the course of the project need not result in 'hard' outcomes such as work, or a recognized qualification: the funding body recognized that such activities were addressing a very specific demographic, and the aim of these endeavours should be to facilitate later entry to these more formal routes, but not demand their fulfillment as part of the funding. However, in a number of cases, projects did indeed report strong absolute and concrete outcomes related to their activities. The learner described in the case study above, moving on to both a recognized City and Guilds course and into further voluntary work with the Towpath-funded organisation, was but one example of such progress being made. Seven of the 18 organisations that responded to the survey stated that they had gained new volunteers as a result of their Towpath-funded projects, with all but one reporting that there were in fact multiple new volunteers on board because of this project.

In addition, reports of learners undertaking further study, entering employment, or volunteering were commonplace: “we are aware of two applicants that have obtained full time permanent employment”; “one [learner] has already secured a place at University”; “Five of the participants have gained employment as a result of accessing this project”; “Several have moved on to college courses or have joined another of our classes”; “some have moved into further education, some have gone into voluntary jobs”; “five participants from the first course progressed on to [our organisation’s] Advocacy Training programme [...] a further four are now volunteering with [us]”. Members of one project had:

...become support workers gaining jobs with the local council, working with people with disabilities, but also in a range of other jobs –agency work, security work, work in factories – they have made a start, they have taken the first step and moved off the dole and had the confidence to do something different and try something new

This ‘snapshot’ of the work undertaken under the auspices of Project Towpath demonstrates that, when projects work in a responsive way and locate their practices within the communities they aim to serve, and provide novel and engaging learning experiences, then learners really do benefit. However clearly learners are not the only group to benefit from engagement with Project Towpath: the organisations delivering the funded activities are, in many ways, equally important when exploring the impact that the initiative has had,

The impact on third sector organisations

Clearly, the first, most obvious and easily the most fundamental impact that Project Towpath had upon the smaller third sector organization with which it worked was the provision of a new, accessible and – for many of these groups – relatively significant funding stream, which enabled a plethora of actions and activities to be ventured upon. Without this financial support, many of these projects simply would not exist, and would almost certainly have struggled to gain a similar level of fiscal support from other sources. For many of the groups, the monies received from Project Towpath represented the single biggest injection they had received to date. Given the ultra-competitive nature of funding in the not-for-profit sector, it is unsurprising that, the Project Towpath fund was massively over-subscribed.

A sector that has traditionally been under-resourced now faces three added pressures: of economic downturn, which leads to a reduction in income from fundraising and other sources; increased demand for services, a problem which is acutely felt by organisations working in the fields of learning and training; and of the new political situation, where the new coalition government have placed an emphasis on The Big Society, calling for third sector organisations to provide services that have traditionally been viewed as the job of the public sector, which again should serve to increase demand at a time of shrinking budgets.

We have already provided an overview of the range and types of projects funded through project Towpath, and the achievements of its associated projects in recruiting a large number of learners from disadvantaged and excluded communities, and how these represent significant accomplishments under the banner of the Community Grants initiative. However, it is worth demonstrating, just how important the injection of funds from Towpath has been for many of the groups. One organisation described living a “hand to mouth existence”, which affords no time for an organisation to reflect on its practices or – and this is a serious flaw, as reported in the previous section – to properly evaluate the impact of its work.

Overall, the greatest challenge for such a small company as such as ours is to keep afloat financially. Although we are in a position where the Local Authority pay us on a spot purchase basis, at times cash-flow problems have caused us the most anxiety. The amount of money we gained from Towpath did help to alleviate some of these problems as it meant that the staff member we employed was able to draw her salary, regardless of cash-flow issues (Project Leader)

Staff employed through the project to deliver services are in real danger of not having a regular, fixed or guaranteed income, as they are dependent upon regular payments which may or may not transpire if, say, a certain level of participation has not been achieved in a given time-period. This clearly makes it very difficult both for the organisation, in terms of planning and future provision, and for the individuals providing the training, as their commitment and input cannot be guaranteed if there remains uncertainty over payments being received. The second point is that this group clearly feels that they are, in some respects, ‘one of the lucky ones’: however uncertain, they at least do have access to some form of (ir)regular funding based on service provision and are not only reliant upon successful grant applications or funds raised through other charitable means. Other groups are not so lucky, and it should be recalled here that at least one of the organisations that took part in Project Towpath ceased to exist by the end of the project. Thus, the funding entered into the local voluntary sector was very important. As one of GMCVO’s representatives suggested, one of the great successes was of the project from their perspective was “*knowing that we’re getting money into smaller organisations and that we’re benefiting them, they’re benefiting in terms of their capacity.*”

This notion of **developing organisational capacity** amongst smaller third sector groups emerged as a key aspect of the project. In terms of funding, smaller groups such as those targeted by Project Towpath often struggle to be successful in funding bids as they lack capacity, whether that is in terms of: completing applications adequately; providing evidence of suitable and appropriate systems of monitoring and assessment; or of prior and demonstrable experience in administering funding, and of the utility and effectiveness of a particular project or activity. Many of the organisations which applied for funding under Project Towpath “*just didn’t have the systems in place*” prior to engaging with the initiative, and so under normal circumstances would not succeed. However, declining to provide access to funding for reasons of capacity and experience (or lack thereof) presents something of a vicious circle: a lack of competence or capacity in administrative areas does not mean that projects lack the wherewithal to reach and work effectively within the communities they know well, but preventing them from

undertaking supported, funded work does prevent them from ever developing either the formal means of monitoring a publicly-financed project or the evidence base from which they can positively assert that their approach and activities are demonstrably effective and successful. Drawing on their own considerable experience of the sector, the issues facing smaller third sector organisations were described by one of the Project Towpath partners:

The sector knows how to engage the hard to reach – the sector is doing that anyway. But what we have found is that it is their systems which are lacking, the knowledge of how to monitor and how to record things. It invariably comes down to cost. The person writing the bids is sometimes not the person who'll be delivering this for real, and so it's those individuals who need the extra support to know how to use the paperwork. So it's that, but also the skills needed around Health & Safety, having a competent person who understands how to ensure the workers' safety. So yes, it's the systems mainly

Thus, the key issue here appears to be one of training and development in the more formal spheres of administration, monitoring and basic legal requirements. Via Project Towpath, groups therefore had access to funds that were to be distributed in something of an innovative way: a significant fund was available, restricted to smaller organisations which had acknowledged support needs, and whereby the application process itself was to be considered a formative process, with groups supported throughout. As we saw earlier, those groups engaging with the research stated that the support they received during the application process was *“informative and useful”*, *“extremely helpful and informative”*, and that *“the grant officer was extremely helpful and transparent in all discussions, and provided excellent encouragement to make the application”*. It is clear that, from an early stage, the needs of the sector were apparent to those working on the wider project:

We identified significant needs for the sector in terms of capacity, because what we've had is, there are only a few projects that have really romped away, and run with it no problem, the majority of organisations have had difficulties

As a result, Towpath was not merely about providing funding to support learners, but also about developing the ability of the local not-for-profit sector to access other funding streams, and to develop the competencies and experiences that would make more sustainable practices a possibility. The scheme as a whole was seen in this 'formative' way, about preparing them not just for this current contract, but for others that may lie in the future – *“we always say to them at the induction, the aim is to put you in a better place for future contract”* – hence it becomes a process through which the capacity needs of the sector can be explored, better understood, and consequently addressed.

The need to develop certain competencies and systems was fully acknowledged by many of the groups taking part in the research. For one group, the greatest challenge they believed they faced was monitoring the progress of the learners they helped, while references to improving systems permeated the research data, the following comments are from four different applicants:

Our bid was not successful at first, they told us it needed to be more joined up and linked to better outcomes. We wrote that in the next bid and got it

...we had things like an equal opportunities policy but it was from a few years ago. It wasn't good enough, we had to do some research and do something else

The project has helped us to develop enhanced systems for the registration of learners

As an organization [we] have become more aware of the need to collect evidence to substantiate what we do and to collect more outcome based evidence

Here, we see a number of different actions that are indelibly related to the issues of capacity and competency and which have been taken in concert with – or, at the very least, as a result of – a dialogue with GMCVO as the leaders on Project Towpath. These four examples show how the experience helped groups at various different stages to develop their capacity: in terms of linking funding applications to the criteria and parameters expected by the fund-holders; of developing the necessary legal frameworks to receive funding; of monitoring those engaging with the project; and of the need to track the progress made by learners in order for the experience to be of value to the organization in the future. Developing capacity through engagement was therefore an opportunity taken by many of the participating organisations.

An important point to take from this is that, 'capacity' as it relates to the ability to undertake and deliver on a funded project is not something that can be taught outright; it must be learned through a formative, supported process. Clearly, some aspects can be delivered 'in the classroom', and it is notable that one of the key successes in the sphere of capacity was the training offered to all participating organisations, who had access to the 'Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector' [PETLS] qualification, possession of which is a fundamental requirement of European and other sources of public funding:

Under the QTLS agenda, organisations who deliver training and learning under publicly-funded contracts, the tutors have to be minimum qualified to the *Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector* qualification, which most of the organisations either a) couldn't afford, or b) couldn't access the programmes through colleges because they were either full or they needed a Level 3 qualification in the subject they wanted to teach, and there isn't a Level 3 qualification in most of the subjects the voluntary sector teach. We previously developed a QTLS course that didn't need those requirements but was the same work and was equally as accredited as the ones through colleges – it was essentially for the voluntary sector. A lot of organisations could not afford to come or send people on it, as there was a very small amount of money available through the set up which originally funded it, which was under another LSC contract. This, the *Community Grants* programme, the capacity building money we've had, has enabled us to put people who want to go through that from the organisations delivering the projects to go through the course. That's been important as it's now got them to the point where they are qualified to access public funding

This highlights how the Towpath initiative has equipped participating groups with a demonstrable skill set through which they can now access a greater variety of funding resources – in itself a significant achievement. However, it is clear from the examples noted above that the benefits and developments gained by organisations were located in

practice and activity, and some experiences challenged their existing ways of working and created fresh understandings of the processes involved in delivering publicly-funded projects. As one of the groups concluded during interviews:

It has definitely helped our capacity, yes, as it was our first project. We're a little bit more confident, we've delivered a project so now we're confident we can do it. It gives you a good CV, you can show you have done it in the past

Two key areas highlight the ways in which the process developed through Towpath was indeed formative and beneficial for the participating groups: the applications process, and the maintenance of appropriate forms of monitoring and assessment.

In terms of the application process, groups either reappraised their projects in light of discussions and feedback from the Grants Panel, or realized the need to produce and place new and appropriate frameworks in place. As one panel member explained:

When people fail, we give them the opportunity to comment and ask why, and I think a lot of it is a lack of understanding about how to answer questions, even though there is guidance. There are a lot of silly mistakes; people don't have much understanding of how to make SMART objectives

The way in which the interaction between panel and project helped guide some groups emerged from the analysis of all feedbacks that is discussed in the next section. At times it required multiple attempts for a project to finally succeed, but the interaction between the panel and the applicant did indeed allow for the development of a project that had a stronger focus with more clearly defined outcomes. Hence, the application process itself was indeed a formative, learning experience. Indelibly linked to the formative applications process was the development of these 'systems' which were needed in order to satisfy the demands of the funding bodies. While, bureaucracy was considered inappropriate and excessive at times, there was an understanding that it was broadly necessary:

...there was always going to be quite a lot of paperwork involved in running a project which conforms to the LSC and ESF requirements

For us, it wasn't a major problem, we've had funding before and knew what to expect, I guess it could be hard if it was like new to you, but I guess its got to be accountable

...it was a challenge to get all the paperwork completed and the signatures in place but you know you have got to do it

However, many of the groups did not have the experience of maintaining such systems – or even have the necessary forms, paperwork etc. in the first place – to fulfill the funding requirements. These had to be learnt, developed and adapted and – importantly – maintained (“*now we've given them the paperwork, so that has been helpful but it's using the paperwork as well*”). It is here that the importance of practical, real-world experiences of delivering funded projects is fundamental to building capacity within the sector:

...because they have had to deal with the paperwork and the learner records, it has made them focus on the kind of stuff that is required to deliver a contract, and I think that will put them in a stronger position, certainly to take part in consortium contracts even if not applying for funds themselves directly from fund holders such as the LSC

If you take these systems and use them, and implement them with other contracts, then you'll just be in a better place for getting other contracts

Through engaging with Towpath, and receiving funding that required such capacity but also offered the channels through which the development of these skills and competencies could be supported, the ability of participating groups to administrate their own activities, and to evidence and demonstrate this to outside interests, has been improved.

In the data emerging from GMCVO as a result of delivering Project Towpath, and of the reflections and submissions garnered from the participating projects themselves, three key, inter-related issues emerge. First is that there is a sector wide need in terms of developing the necessary capacity and competencies to ensure that smaller third sector organisations have access to a diverse range of funding streams; as one GMCVO representative argued:

what we have identified is that moving to a commissioning model, the sector actually needs additional support in order to do that and so we have to identify funds that will enable them to do that

Second, as the experience of Towpath has shown, in order to truly develop these necessary skills and engage with formative experiences, then delivering small scale, locally-rooted projects with a specific set of aims and objectives, supported by the administrating body, is a method that appears to have worked in this case. And finally, organisations such as GMCVO are well placed in terms of the local third sector community to act as a conduit between these smaller groups and wider funding opportunities, as they are able to mediate some of the demands of the major funding agencies, and help translate these into steps, processes and practices that are realistic demands of smaller organisations.

There was, emerging from the data, one final area which should be raised, in terms of the impact of Project Towpath on participating organisations, and that is the element of collaboration which, as we have already mentioned, was a central aspect of the funding. Organisations in receipt of funding through the initiative were expected to develop links, either with other third sector organisations or, more productively, with the public sector and more mainstream providers. The importance of developing such links was emphasized during the grant panel observation, where the experienced members of the panel often suggested (and fed back to the applicants) details of other groups or organisations which might help strengthen a bid.

While numerous examples of this inter-sector partnership and links with the public sector were evident, one organization in particular shone through as a key example of the strength of engaging with mainstream education providers and developing closer ties within the local community in which they were based. The story highlighted below, in Figure (7), explains this in greater detail:

Developing stronger organisations through partnerships

One organisation taking part in Project Towpath worked in the field of mental health, and had a long established volunteer recruitment and development programme which, while popular – the training was never advertised but always well-subscribed – had one perceived weakness in that it had no accredited outcome, and therefore lacked some structure. The project leader heard of Project Towpath through a local CVS talk by one of the GMCVO representatives, and decided to submit a bid to strengthen the programme they offered:

“We already had a volunteer programme but it had no real outcome, other than you became a volunteer... What I wanted was to bring in this structure, bring in a nationally recognized qualification for a volunteer programme, and to build on our links with other organisations, and Towpath was out way of doing just that...”

The issue, therefore, was to build upon the organisation’s existing strength in recruitment and development, through the provision of an accredited learning route, which required the organization to engage the help and support of an established further education provider. Luckily for the project leader, one of the largest and longest-established providers was very local – directly across the road, in fact.

“We then went to the college – they’re literally across the road, our neighbours – and they came up with a nationally recognized NCFE Level 2 certificate in volunteering... From that, we looked to redesign our training program, but then the college came in with what they already delivered...”

“The college provided assessors for the programme and they delivered the qualification to our volunteers, they marked the coursework – it worked really well.”

While there had been some limited engagement with the college prior to this, none had been at this level, and with both parties this closely involved in the delivery of a single programme that had been co-developed. This approach enabled the more structured and stronger programme to be delivered that had been the project leader’s objective all along. In using the strengths of a local organization to develop and deliver this improved programme of training, the service on offer to participants was seen as much stronger and, consequently, so were the outcomes. As the project leader went on to recall:

“Having the course accredited has made a massive difference to the people we get in. Part of the difference is that some of the people have gone on to other places, not working with us! But I can live with that, it means its working and the course is aimed at moving people on to further education, employment, whatever...”

“All the participants got the qualification – sorry, all but one – now 12 out of 13 have either gone on to volunteer with us or gone on to further education and training, all doing something because of that course – it’s a really solid set of outcomes.”

Thus, the partnership with the local college that had been supported through Project Towpath provided for a better learning experience for participants, who therefore went on to achieve more than was usually experienced as a result of participation in the course. However, this was only part of the story, for a potentially greater set of effects were noted for the organization, as a result

of the stronger programme they were able to deliver:

“I think the quality of our volunteers has increased; we’re offering a better quality of course, and a better quality of volunteer comes out of it – certainly better value. Because of our work with the college we’ve now got much better ties; we can do a lot more; someone from the college now sits on our board of trustees; and two of us go over to do guest talks. Plus, they’ve come in and done our training, and they’re offering us training on an advocacy course...”

“We now work closer, we see the benefits of that – but they do too. Everyone who goes on our course has to enroll as a student at the college. It’s a real win-win, the other really big side of it [what has happened because of Project Towpath]”

In establishing links with a local provider of mainstream education, this third sector organization has been able to develop and deliver a stronger learning experience for their participants; benefit from better prepared, better trained volunteers; provided a pool of effective volunteers from which other local groups have benefitted; and strengthened both their own organization, and that of the college, through the exchange of skills and services, to the benefit of both. Although the strongest example encountered, the work of this mental health charity and the college with which they engaged stands as a testament as to what can be achieved when the skills of the third sector and in public education providers join forces to introduced an excluded demographic to a well-planned learning experience. As the project leader says: ‘a real win-win’.

Figure (7): Developing stronger organisations through partnership working

As we can see in this story, the potential for such links between the third sector and mainstream service providers can be profound, and Project Towpath worked to encourage the development of these links. Such engagement and collaboration could take many forms, such as co-delivery of learning activities, accessing a pool of potential participants through the networks of other groups, or in terms of establishing progression routes from the ‘first steps’ engagement supported through Towpath into accredited study. Importantly, most groups reported the development of new or stronger links either within the sector or with mainstream providers and public sector organisations. As an essential part of the development of more resilient and cohesive communities, the spread of such networks might be seen as an important development and, as the case study above demonstrates, creates both stronger organisations, and better outcomes for learners when managed in an effective manner.

6. The Project Towpath Process

As a part of the research, we aimed to explore the mechanisms through which third sector groups heard about the *Project Towpath* initiative, applied for funding and received feedback from these funding enquiries, and how they perceived the monitoring and assessment processes. The survey instrument described in the Methodology section collected both quantitative and qualitative data on aspects of the application process, while this topic was also covered as part of the interviews carried out over the course of the project. Additionally, each applying organisation – successful or not – received feedback from GMCVO which was noted in their records. This data, comprising responses of some 170+ applicants, was also analysed. Data regarding monitoring and assessment was obtained during the case study interviews. Here, then, we explore the ways in which groups encountered the project, and explore their thoughts concerning project processes.

The survey data

Participating organisations were asked to respond to a series of statements about *Project Towpath*, saying whether they ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly Disagree’ with a series of given statements:

- (1) The *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme was well publicised;
- (2) The information provided by GMCVO about the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme was clear and reliable;
- (3) The application process for the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme was clear and easy to understand;
- (4) The support provided by GMCVO throughout the application process was adequate and appropriate; and,
- (5) Given the chance, I would apply for funding through the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme in the future.

The responses obtained were analysed in three groups: first, in terms of the whole cohort; second, as a group including only those who were successful in their applications; and finally, the small number of responses from those groups who were unsuccessful in their applications were explored as a sub-set of the data. The results are illustrated in Figures (8) to (10), below:

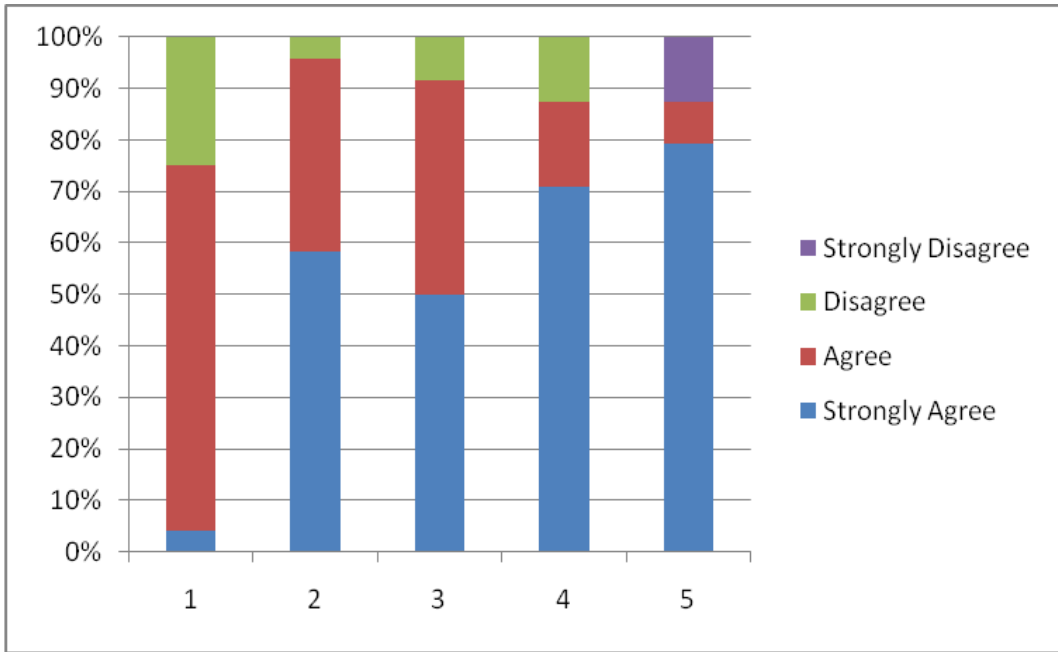


Figure (8): Responses to Survey Question 2 (a-e) – all applicants (n=24)

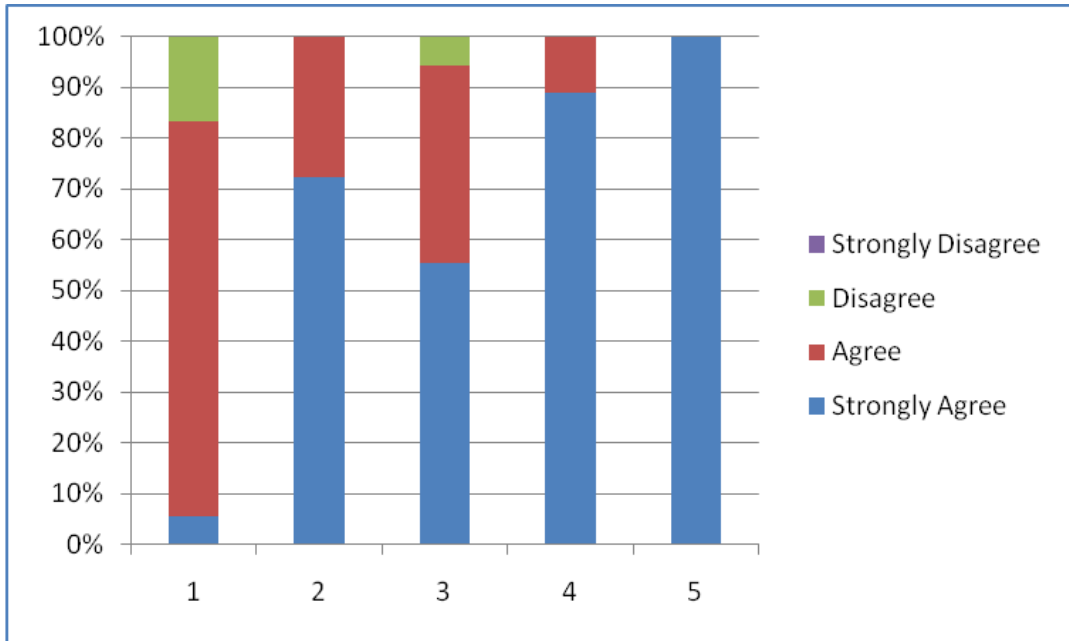


Figure (9): Responses to Survey Question 2 (a-e) – successful applicants (n=18)

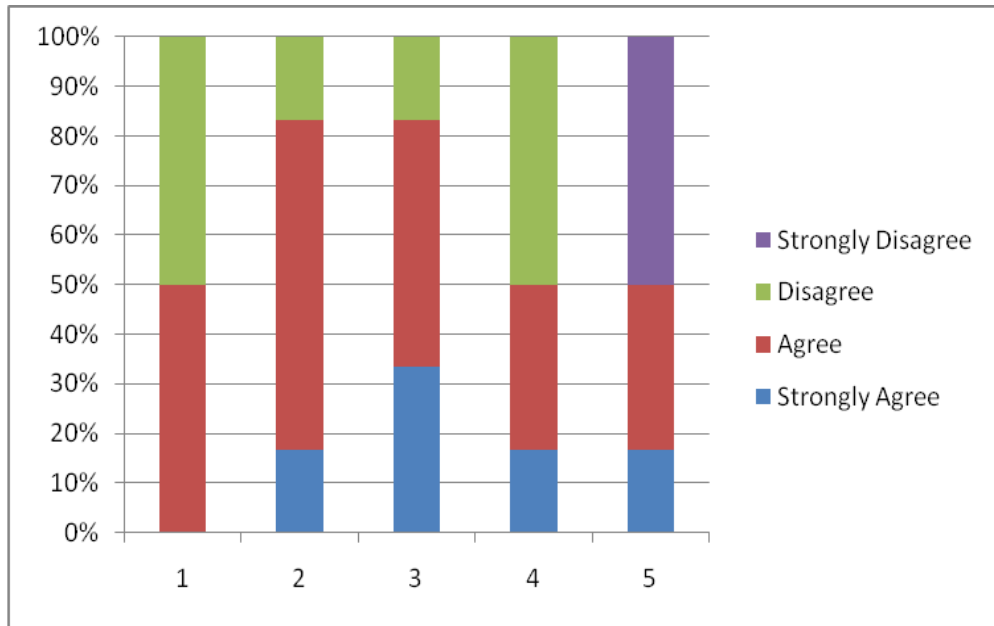


Figure (10): Responses to Survey Question 2 (a-e) – unsuccessful applicants only (n=6)

Additionally, unsuccessful applicants were also asked to respond to a further series of statements relating to the feedback they received which explained the reasons for their bids being rejected, again using the categories ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly Disagree’:

- (1) The feedback that I received regarding the application to the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme was clear and easy to understand;
- (2) The feedback that I received regarding the application to the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme was appropriate and relevant;
- (3) The feedback that I received regarding the application to the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme was helpful to our organisation;
- (4) I understand the reasons why our application to the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme was unsuccessful; and,
- (5) I agree with the reasons given for our application to the *Community Grants – Project Towpath* programme being unsuccessful.

The findings from this survey question are illustrated below, Figure (11):

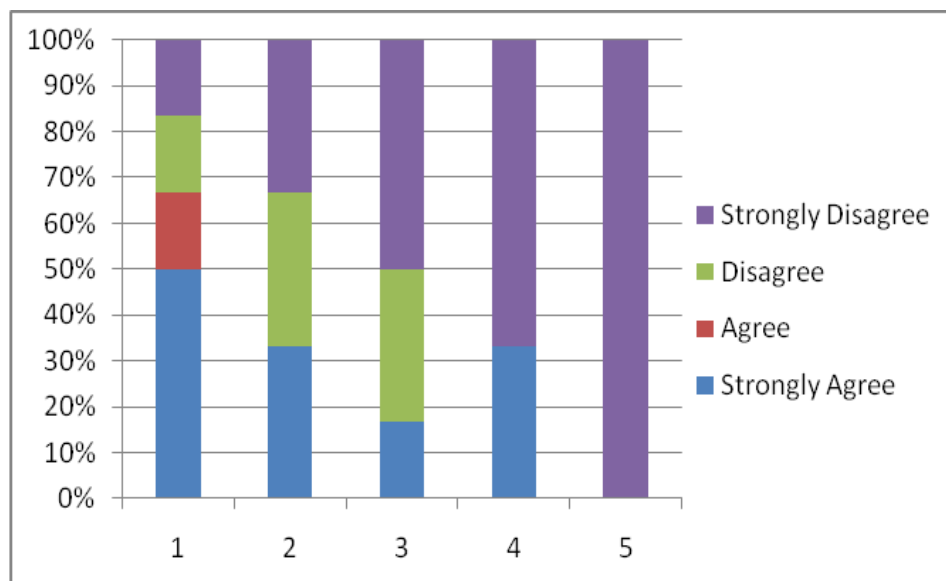


Figure (11): Responses to Survey Question 5 (a-e) – unsuccessful applicants only

A note on the survey results

The most immediate issue concerning the survey data relates to the low response rate: the number of surveys obtained from successful applicants accounted for as little as one-quarter of all funded projects, while only a very small number (n=6) were received from organisations that did not receive funding (though several others (n=4) did make contact and provide feedback via email or through personal discussions which did, to some extent, corroborate the sentiments expressed here). However, the 18 responses from funded groups were received from just 43 unique organisations surveyed, as a number of groups were either (a) successful in either applications to continue funding into a second or even third year; or (b) were not included in the survey as work had yet to start on their projects. Thus, while 63 individual projects were indeed funded through the *Project Towpath* initiative, a number (n=15) had only been accepted in the final (February 2010) meeting of the grant panel, meaning that little (if any) work had been undertaken at the commencement of the present research (that is, March 2010). From these 48 projects, a further five projects were discounted as they represented duplicated efforts whereby the host organisation had been funded in more than one financial year through *Project Towpath*. Thus, the survey was targeted at the 43 organisations that had been funded prior to February 2010, and so the actual response rate in terms of all third sector organisations funded through *Project Towpath*, and not as a proportion of all projects, is more substantial than it initially appears, being around 42%.

In addition to these parameters, it also emerged that some of the projects had received funding for just a few months in 2008, which hampered the data collection as the period of time which had elapsed was considerable; the consequence of this was that in at least

three cases the relevant member of staff was no longer with the organisation and so they were unable to help, and in at least one case the organisation itself no longer existed. In light of these factors, the response rate can be considered to be satisfactory.

The analysis that follows draws on both the quantitative data illustrated in Figures (8) to (11), above and the qualitative reflections of organisations gathered from the same survey instrument; interview data; and the feedback analysis that was noted above. Three key areas are explored: publicity and information; and the application process and feedback; and monitoring, assessment and evaluation.

Publicity and information

The first thing to note regarding the feedback received from Towpath-funded organisations is that responses have on the whole been very positive about the project. However, in spite of this support the responses to Statement 1 (figure (8), above) are not *as* positive as others and it can be concluded that more could have been done to publicise the initiative to a more diverse range of organisations. A more prominent involvement of CVS and support organisations at the outset of the process might encourage a greater sense of shared ownership and involvement, thus enhancing the potential to access this wider range of groups. Though the data is drawn from a small and self-selecting sample, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that areas outside of Manchester with the greatest involvement in Project Towpath (that is, Bolton and Salford) also stated most often that they had been introduced to the initiative through the local CVS centres. Similarly, and also in line with conclusions that were drawn in Chapter 4, besides learning of Project Towpath through the local CVS, organisations also appeared to draw on personal and sector-wide networks, either through engagement with GMCVO (and the associated GMVSLC) directly or through contacts with other third sector groups. Thus, those groups which have more prominent and active engagements with others in the sector appear to have an advantage when it comes to exploiting potential opportunities for support.

In terms of information regarding the project, feedback was extremely positive, even among those groups who were not successful in their applications. As the survey of all applicants shows (Figure (8), above), the information regarding the project was viewed as clear and reliable. One conclusion to draw from this is that once relevant groups knew of the project, the quality of information being provided was high. As one respondent noted, *“the project was well described, the application process straightforward and the visit... was very informative and very useful.”*

Applications and feedback

Overall, the application process created by GMCVO to handle enquiries regarding Project Towpath was viewed very positively, with over 80% of all applicants (including those not receiving funding) agreeing that it was clear and easy to understand (see figure (8)). This was also supported by feedback from participating organisations' survey

responses and interviews conducted over the course of the research. There was a general feeling that the process had broadly been pitched at the right level. The need for public funds to be accounted for in an appropriate way was understood, and so the application process – viewed as a formative experience – was pitched specifically so as to not deter potential applicants, while also having to serve its purpose and identify those organisations that would not have the capacity at this time to successfully deliver on a funded project, regardless of the support they received:

We tried to make it as easy as we could, as Gill and I agreed from the start that we didn't want that, didn't want the application process to be a barrier to groups accessing the money... So we pitched the application somewhere in the middle, whereby it wasn't just a case of ringing up and saying, 'I want some money', but it's also not a 100 page application. It's like a 4-5 page application form that takes the main details we need to know to assess the project.

Some organisations have still struggled with that, but to be fair they tended to be the organisations that wouldn't have had the wherewithal to administer a project anyway. I mean, we go out and visit every organisation that applies, to meet them and to try to get them through the process but occasionally you go to one where you realise it just isn't going to happen, and that's just part of the weeding out process I'm afraid

(GMCVO Staff)

It was, therefore, important for GMCVO that the application process did not act as a deterrent to potential applicants. This was, met with a positive response from those who took part in the project, with one group going as far as claiming that *“the application process was simple and clear, by far the easiest and simplest of all the applications I have ever made for any funding.”* Whereas others were a little more measured in their reactions to the process – for example, *“it wasn't the hardest application but it wasn't the least taxing either, but for the amount of money, it was probably right”*

Similarly, in terms of the support provided by GMCVO for those applying the feedback was particularly good when only successful groups were considered., with all 18 respondents to the survey stating that this was the case. In terms of qualitative feedback, staff at GMCVO who dealt with enquiries regarding Project Towpath were described as *“extremely helpful and informative”*, while the service provided was *“excellent”*, and *“very informative and very useful”*. As one respondent commented *“I found the support received via GMCVO excellent, they did what they said they were going to do within the timescales.”* with another adding *“The grant officer was extremely helpful and transparent in all discussions and provided excellent encouragement to make the application,”*. Thus, over the course of the initial application process, the support and guidance provided by GMCVO in their efforts to administer the project were considered to be exemplary.

In light of the data provided here and in the earlier chapters, two points regarding the application process should be highlighted. The first is that the visit to all applying organisations, which formed a central part of the process was described by one Towpath

worker as the “key” to what they did, as it was the one time they could engage directly with applicants on their own territory, and provide a level of personal support and guidance – and, importantly, gain an individual and considered perspective on their abilities to deliver upon a funded project – to potential grant recipients. It is this kind of practice that larger and more remote funding organisations might struggle to provide, and is surely one of the benefits of disseminating funds to ground-level community work through a third party organisation such as GMCVO,.

The second point to note is the importance of the grant panel that was ultimately responsible for decisions to fund (or otherwise) organisations who sought to take part in Project Towpath. These panels involved not only members of the managing infrastructure organization, GMCVO, but independent and experienced representatives of the local third sector from across Greater Manchester. The researcher’s experience of these panels was that these independent voices brought a wealth of knowledge about the local sector, and understanding of existing services and community needs, that again reflected very positively on the organisation. The panels not only gave summative judgments on the projects, but provided advice and guidance on potential collaborations or interaction that could strengthen bids or to highlight more appropriate sources of funding, which can be an important fillip where a process is aiming to be formative of organisational capacity. These ideas were fed back to applicants – all applicants – once their bid had been assessed in the form of a short statement, which would suggest ways of improving or further developing the proposal.

However, one comment that must be made is that, while the discussions of the panel were enlightening and informative, the manner in which it was actually channeled back to organisations was sometimes perceived to be a little too vague or general (for example, “*the outcomes of the project did not have strong enough employment outcomes*” to be really useful. Clearly, a more considered and extensive form of the feedback being provided would be more appropriate to developing the capacity and competency of the applying organization, though the potential to provide this is significantly limited by the time and resources available to the grant panel. Within the records of each project proposal, it was possible to read in the narratives the process by which organisations failed with initial applications, took on board feedback (sometimes on more than one occasion) and engaged more proactively with GMCVO and – eventually – succeeded in developing a more effective project that could be funded; the process demonstrably worked. Thus ensuring additional capacity for GMCVO to provide a more considered response to applicants would arguably mark a significant positive development in the service the fund-holding organisation is able to offer.

Monitoring, assessment and evaluation

The issue of monitoring, assessment and evaluation is clearly one of the most significant areas of need within the sector in terms of developing capacity. Monitoring their own projects was something of an issue for many organisations, with evaluation seen as a particularly difficult task in terms of time, resources and competencies within the sector.

The following sections examine the monitoring, assessment and evaluation of groups by GMCVO, as well as those conducted by the groups of their own activities.

The system of monitoring developed by GMCVO could be described as somewhat ‘light touch’ with a great deal of the administrative burden associated with funded projects taken on by GMCVO themselves so as to ensure that the process was accessible to the smaller groups targeted by the scheme. This ‘light touch’, however, was as much by accident as design: in taking on this burden of the bureaucratic systems themselves, there were simply not enough resources to engage with a more thorough regime of monitoring of the organisations. While it was entirely legitimate for GMCVO to take this approach for the reasons given (that is, to ensure that the process was accessible to groups with more limited capacity), it did mean that intervention on a day-to-day basis was maybe less than the organisation would have preferred. It was, in essence, a question of means, namely that the resources provided to the host organization to administer the fund did not allow for taking on both the bureaucratic strain and a more rigorous monitoring presence.

In general terms, the groups being funded did accept there would be a certain level of bureaucratic accountability associated with the project, while sometimes seen as cumbersome and a little over-bearing (such as learner records), this generally reflected an organisation’s experience in delivering projects. Those that had accessed funding streams before believed that the processes in place for Project Towpath were favorable compared to prior experiences; those who did not have this experience tended to err on the side of a less favourable judgment. In the case of the latter, the researcher would suggest that there was a lack of understanding as to just how much of the administrative duties were indeed being taken on by GMCVO in order to facilitate and support their experience. Only in one area was there a more vocal and widespread concern with the nature of bureaucratic process and practices, and this was to be found in the (albeit limited number of) occasions where some aspect of the paperwork or process was altered part way through a project. This might be understandable given that the project spanned a number of years, with organisations receiving funding that may have spanned particular overlapping policies and practices associated with recording data, outcomes, etc. As the comments below suggest the problem was a practical one of resources as opposed to an issue with organisational competency and capacity to complete certain tasks:

Moving the goalposts

During one interview, the issue of bureaucracy and the administrative demands of the project was raised. According to one group spoken to, completing the task itself was not in fact too taxing:

“It was our first proper funded project, but we didn’t find it too bad. The paper work was actually ok really; we managed it and didn’t think there was too much.”

However, there was one issue that arose, and it was more a question of resources (or lack thereof) than competence or understanding:

“The paperwork we had to do got changed a lot... We’re a small organization and what happened was, we’d print out documents for people, so they could fill them in, and then within a month it would be like, well, it’s changed now and everything we’d printed would just need putting in the bin. If it was properly organized at the start, so you have someone say, ‘Right, this is the

paperwork,' it would keep costs down. We're a small organization and moving the goalposts was a problem...

"It was alright, using it and that, but changing it in the middle of the course, you'd have to do monitoring, things that weren't there at the start. That was the only problem really."

Figure (12): A key issue for smaller organisations

It was, then – even for a group new to the world of externally-funded work – the changing nature of demands, rather than the demand itself, that created a problem as it placed an additional significant burden on the resources of the group. When dealing with such groups, large funders should keep in mind the impact that small changes such as these can add a significant cost in terms of time and resources; in the example cited above, the group was managed by just two people, and so minor changes considered at a macro-level might result in major issues when translated into activity on a local scale.

In terms of the monitoring of organisational activity by groups themselves, of their own activities, this was seen as one of the biggest challenges facing recipients of Towpath funding, and was noted as a key issue in earlier chapters. As of July 2010, few organisations had submitted the (required) case studies providing an example of their work in practice, while evidence relating directly to developments in learners was limited – with the caveat that, as noted in the methodology chapter, Project Towpath was still in process at the time of the research, hence final evaluations were unlikely to have been undertaken for many of the projects. There does, however, need to be a real and concerted effort to ensure that the development of capacity in relation to self-assessment, critical reflection and – the foundation of both these activities – sound evaluation is seen as a priority. Of the evaluation work that was evident, the results were very good, and the efforts laudable. The issue was that these efforts seemed to be in the minority.

One point that needs to be understood relates to the type of outcomes Project Towpath asked for which, as was explained in Chapter 4, were based on ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ results. The rationale for this is, in itself, extremely positive: an acknowledgment by the major funding bodies that positive developments seen in first-engagement activities such as those provided by Project Towpath initiatives were unlikely (or, more accurately, were not expected) to be ‘hard’, for example qualifications achieved, employment found etc though such outcomes were indeed a part of the impact that was seen. The paradox in this expectation of ‘soft’ outcomes over more concrete quantitative metrics is that the former are infinitely more difficult to demonstrate: from an academic and research point of view. (There is a considerable and complex scholarly literature devoted to ways of exploring developments in, say, self-esteem, confidence and motivation.⁹) Establishing that a

⁹ See, for example, the comprehensive work of Herbert Marsh concerning the assessment of ‘self-concept’, a rigorous methodological approach to assessing developments in self-esteem. E.g, Marsh HW, (2006) *Self-Concept theory, measurement and research into practice: the role of self-concept in education psychology* (Leicester: British Psychological Society). ‘Self-esteem’, a regular focus of first-engagement activities, is shown to be both highly important in mediating achievement in any field and highly complex in terms of demonstrating with scientific rigour.

participant has or has not obtained a qualification is relatively easy to demonstrate even if it is more difficult to achieve; to impact upon a person's self-confidence in the short-term may be seen as a more realistic objective of first-engagement activities, but evidencing this is more problematic. Thus, the apparent difficulty organisations have in 'proving' their claims beyond self-reporting and reflective data is understandable.

Developing the research and analytical skills commensurate with producing evaluations that 'prove' developments in esteem and confidence along the lines of the work cited in the footnote below will be beyond many organisations. However, potential solutions do exist. Participatory approaches to conducting evaluations of activities such as those undertaken by community groups have been developed, and have been developed alongside the ALAC/Takepart programme through which the research into Project Towpath has been framed.¹⁰ Such processes emphasise the inclusion of participants in setting the evaluation agenda and have a good track record. If, as one of the GMCVO representatives interviewed suggests a key role for the organisation that has emerged from the experience of managing Project Towpath is that they should be commissioning work that develops the capacity of the third sector, then this is one area which offers both a great opportunity and a practical way forward, as improving the capacity of organisations to research and reflect upon their own activity would be a powerful tool that could conceivably encourage greater sustainable development of the sector.

¹⁰ The work of the Community Audit and Evaluation Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University– is just one example. See www.mmu.ac.uk/caec for more details. Accessed 4 October 2010.

7. Three Emerging Issues and Five Lessons Learnt

In the course of this engagement with Project Towpath, a number of themes, issues and challenges have emerged which appear to relate and have a significance within the wider sector.

Three emerging issues...

1. Bureaucracy as a recurring theme

It became clear that the question of bureaucracy was an important one for organisations involved with the project. Organisations involved with the project generally understood the need for certain forms of monitoring and assessment, and indeed wanted effective systems in place to help support their work. However, the strain that ensuring this burden remained manageable for these organisations had to be taken up by GMCVO: the resources provided by the funding body to GMCVO was woefully short of what was necessary in order to provide the high level of service GMCVO strived to offer. That some organisations still found it difficult to fulfil the demands asked of them makes the need to properly support and fund the managing organisation even more pertinent.

2. The problem of evidencing practice

There was a lack of evidence-based data for a number of projects, and the problem of effectively evaluating practices for the type of organisations targeted by Project Towpath is therefore a significant one. As with the monitoring and assessment undertaken by GMCVO on behalf of the participating groups, the organisation also sought to give clear guidance on how activities might be evaluated. However, assessing development of ‘soft’ skills is notoriously difficult, and a more considered effort needs to be made to support groups, possibly in the form of a mandatory training course or supported qualifications as part of the capacity building aspect of the project.

3. The third sector and ‘politicised’ agendas

Some organisations did not wish to be associated with what they believed were politicised agendas as they saw it as a threat to the relationships they had developed with their client groups. In the current context of government efforts seeking to engage the third sector as part of an as-yet-to-be-fully-conceptualised ‘Big Society’ agenda, this is clearly a major concern, and one that has been repeated by other voluntary groups working with disadvantaged groups in research linked to this project. The third sector requires support and funding, but it is clear that (at least) a vocal minority are not prepared to accept funding at any cost if it conflicts with the principles through which they organise their work. Clearly, this is an area where further research is required.

...and Five Lessons Learnt

1. Project Towpath provided an invaluable source of funding for smaller organisations to develop and expand their practice

Project Towpath distributed a significant amount of new money into the third sector, and in such a way that made the funding accessible to smaller organisations who might normally be excluded from such opportunities. This provided a major boost for those able to take part and the resulting 63 projects saw an array of innovative and exciting activities begin that it is reasonable to assume would not otherwise have taken place. More than this, however, the endeavour has provided a model – albeit one that requires some refinement, particularly in terms of resourcing for the award holding body itself – through which the strain and demands associated with undertaking publicly-funded activity can be supported and mediated to a significant degree, to the benefit of both the third sector and to disadvantaged learners that would otherwise be a long way from accessing more mainstream learning and training opportunities.

2. Organisations developed closer and stronger ties, between each other, mainstream service providers and the communities they sought to work with

It was an important part of the Project Towpath process that proposals linked the activity of third sector organisations with services offered by mainstream providers in terms of recruitment or progression routes, and that organisations should attempt to develop links between each other. Stronger ties between organisations, and between the public and third sectors, is a vital part of creating more effective and engaged communities – also appears to play a role in helping organisations to access and exploit a wider range of opportunities. As the examples in Chapter 5 demonstrate, the strength and vitality of organisations which actively engage with other providers in their communities is greatly increased, to the benefit of learners, volunteers, and the capacity of the groups to deliver services.

3. The capacity of smaller organisations to deliver such projects can be challenging for infrastructure organisations, but participation with project Towpath was a valuable learning experience for all

The ability of smaller organisations to deliver on funded projects was a challenge for the award-holding body to negotiate. However, with the right degree of support and guidance, and assistance provided in developing appropriate systems at the outset of a project, these third sector groups can deliver important and effective services which engage learners who would struggle to access and benefit from mainstream provision. That this capacity needs further development is beyond question, and the experience of delivering on this project has involved a significant learning curve for GMCVO itself. There is now more awareness within the organisation of what these needs are within the local sector, with

GMCVO well placed to support and service these needs should the appropriate funding be made available. Likewise, the learning of funded groups themselves has been significant, in terms of the requirements associated with delivering publicly funded projects. Such capacity and competency cannot be learnt or evidenced through training alone; there needs to be an active process of learning and in engaging with a supported and formative process such as the one provided by Project Towpath. The downside to engaging in such a process, of ‘learning through doing’, is that some will no doubt fall short; thus, there is a debate to be had regarding how these funds are best used. The key to ensuring this number is kept at a minimum is surely, once again, proper resourcing of the award-holding body. The suggestion, emanating from one of the funded groups themselves, that monitoring of their activities should be more and not less thorough, with payments staged against agreed targets, was welcomed by those managing Project Towpath, but viewed as unrealistic under present conditions.

4. The position of organisations within their communities is a unique selling point that should be developed and exploited

Local, grass-roots organisations know their communities well, they understand the needs of their clients, and have many good ideas about how to best engage with and support them into and through learning experiences. The position of these groups at the heart of the communities they serve, involved in wider networks that allow information about opportunities to be spread through informal contacts and networks, was a recurring theme. This is the key, fundamental strength of the smaller groups targeted by Project Towpath, and needs to be explored further by these organisations. The third sector, it appears, is not always very good at selling itself and of showing people outside of their immediate communities the valuable work they do. Activities that are grounded in community networks – either communities of interest (such as projects working with LGBT learners) or geographic communities (such as those running projects at the heart of housing association estates) – have better links with the ‘hard-to-reach’ communities. Thus, such groups need to be kept at the heart of efforts to engage excluded and disadvantaged groups – and they themselves need to promote their activities to the wider sector with more confidence and vigour.

5. Smaller organisations can, with the right support and access to funding, make a real and lasting difference to individuals and local communities

There was no shortage of examples of good practice supported through Project Towpath. Where activities were grounded in their communities, delivering valued and effective activities targeted at specific groups, based on a sound knowledge of the clients’ needs, then the impact could be profound. Yes, the level of support and guidance that is needed may be high at first, but it is only through such engagement that the third sector can develop the competency and capacity required to successfully deliver on publicly funded projects, and so steer a path towards a more sustainable future. Now, more than ever, there is a need to ensure that communities, and particularly those on the margins of

society, have a route into more mainstream opportunities, as the sector looks set to become increasingly competitive, and depended upon for service delivery and the meeting of local needs.

8. Conclusion: Why the Local Third Sector Matters

This study has provided an insight into the Towpath Project managed by GMCVO, and has suggested some directions in which practices could be developed in order to improve support structures. It is vital that this part of the sector – those smaller groups grounded in grass-roots engagement – remain a central part of efforts to engage and support individuals experiencing disadvantage towards accessing more mainstream opportunities. There are positive stories related about the impact activities have had on individual learners; likewise, community groups themselves took part in a formative and developmental process which has improved the capacity of the local sector to provide services to their target communities. Similarly, the way in which GMCVO developed processes and practices that effectively supported the sector they worked with to deliver on these projects, far exceeding targets in terms of learners supported, has been a major positive outcome; just as the groups receiving funding themselves have demonstrated an ability to deliver on publicly funded projects, so too has the award-holding body demonstrated their capacity to take on such a major role, negotiating the demands of major funding bodies with the needs of smaller third sector groups with some skill.

In terms of meeting the targets established under the auspices of the Community Grants programme, Project Towpath has experienced some notable successes. More learners have been engaged than was initially projected, plus groups have begun to report outcomes in excess of those required by the Community Grants programme, such as learners entering employment and formal education. However, by placing these activities into a wider context the key development associated with activities such as this may in fact be something rather different. An engaged citizenry – a citizenry engaged in public activity and debate, participating in local governance, active in local communities and involved with the state – is key to the creation of cohesive communities. The route towards developing such a citizenry is learning – the active engagement in education and lifelong personal development – and collaboration between people, communities, community groups and the state and it is a theme that has begun to emerge in the words of the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government under the rubric of the ‘Big Society’.

In supporting over 1,000 learners into learning and training, and beginning to introduce pathways towards wider civic and community engagement, projects such as the Towpath initiative can play an important role in developing an active and engaged citizenry. Many have taken the opportunity to engage with voluntary and community work as a result of their experiences; groups have developed better and stronger ties with each other and with mainstream service providers in reciprocal arrangements; and the necessary prerequisite of an engaged society is that people within that society have the confidence, skills and aptitude to take part. Something which lies at the heart of Project Towpath in its focus on raising the skill levels and developing interpersonal attributes of learners who have experienced exclusion. As the recent work of Pearce (2010) has argued, continuous learning is a fundamental part to the development of democratic society, one based on

participation and active engagement,¹¹ and it is in this light that we should see the potential contribution that endeavours such as Project Towpath can make to the wider society in which they operate.

A recent Institute for Public Policy Research report (2010) into third sector and social enterprise activity in the North West was highly prescient in terms of some of its findings.¹² The work posited that, while there were clearly high expectations in some policy circles of the role the third sector was to play in the delivery of public services in the coming years, there was something of a disjuncture between these expectations and the reality at ground level in terms of resourcing and developing capacity within the sector – but that, with the correct support and systems, it was indeed a significant opportunity.. Echoing the point reiterated throughout this study, the work of Cox and Schmuecker (2010) sees the development of administrative and management systems as fundamental in developing capacity because as they argue, “successful organisations are built on good processes” (2010:4). Thus, the development of the sector towards more competent and sustainable processes and practices is *the* key issue that needs to be addressed in the years ahead. Also in this report, it can be seen that there is a tendency, as more work within the public sector is tendered out, for contracts to increase in size to the detriment of smaller third sector organisations and social enterprises which, simply cannot compete at this level. This is a tendency that has already been witnessed in relation to Project Towpath, and so the role of infrastructure organisations such as GMCVO is highly important if the third sector is to continue to play a positive role in supporting people experiencing disadvantage. The activities supported by Project Towpath are just one example of how this can work.

A full evaluation of each and every activity funded through Project Towpath, tracked over the coming months, would be the only way to assess the scale and permanency of the impact the endeavour has had at all levels, yet it is hoped that this snapshot has introduced enough evidence to indicate the importance of continuing activities and programmes such as these in the future.

¹¹ Pearce J, (2010) - *Participation and democracy in the twenty-first century city* (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan)

¹² Cox E & Schmuecker K, (2010) *Growing the Big Society* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: IPPR North)

Contacts

Dr Carol Packham, Director – Community Audit and Evaluation Centre
Katherine Roycroft, Co-ordinator – Community Audit and Evaluation Centre

COMMUNITY AUDIT AND EVALUATION CENTRE

Institute of Education
Manchester Metropolitan University
799 Wilmslow Road
Didsbury
Manchester
M20 8RR

c.packham@mmu.ac.uk
k.roycroft@mmu.ac.uk
caec@mmu.ac.uk

Tel 0161 247 2114

Website: www.mmu.ac.uk/caec