

Barriers to Funding:

experiences and perspectives from the MiFriendly Cities Social Innovation Network

*“We are here, we want to be changemakers ourselves,
not just informers. Let us work together.”*

The Network

- About us..... 1**
- Barriers to accessing funding, experiences from the Network 2**
 - 1. Knowledge, understanding and language 2
 - 2. Relationships and networks 2
 - 3. Cultural assumptions within the funding process 3
 - 4. Conditions of grants excluding certain people 3
 - 5. Communities: under-represented and complex needs 3
 - 6. Lived experience 4
 - 7. Structural racism 4
 - 8. Decision-making being unclear 4
- Potential Development 5

About us

The MiFriendly Cities Network is a Network of user-lead community projects, which have all been funded by the MiFriendly Cities project in the West Midlands. Our group of community projects have come together to form a Network.

We are a group of **creative, visionary community leaders**. We work to support migrant, refugee and BAME communities and individuals.

We are motivated and driven by the issues that we see in our community – that we ourselves experience, and that our brothers, sisters, neighbours, and friends experience on a daily basis.

We understand the social issues that we work on, inside out. We know what solutions work, and what doesn't – because us and our communities have been trying to find solutions to our own problems, testing out how best to solve the issues which affect us.

We often work alone, pioneering change within our communities around issues that we see and have experienced, and that we are driven to tackle and change.

Others of us are part of collectives and groups of driven volunteers who work together to achieve a change. Many of us **lead groups of volunteers**. Our vision inspires others and we have been able to identify practical pathways to deliver support, which others help us with.

The work that we do is characterised as being **under-funded, under-served** by mainstream services. We provide services which **fill the gaps**, and which tackle issues and support people who are overlooked by mainstream services.

Most of us have **worked for free** doing our work in the community for years. It is not for us a job, but it is something we must do, because if we do not know-one else will – and **the issues that we tackle affect us as individuals**.

Barriers to accessing funding, experiences from the Network

1. Knowledge, understanding and language

In order to access funding, there is a particular language and set of knowledge that is required:

- Understanding the way that questions are written and should be answered
- Understanding the particular format of different questions
- Understanding about the bureaucratic processes of receiving funding (about reporting for instance)
- Understanding about the UK professional communication style

Some of this understanding might be implicit to someone who is born and educated in the UK, but might not be implicit to someone for whom English is their second language and for whom the English work culture is not their native work culture. However, standard written or spoken English is not an issue for a sizable majority of migrant-led organisations because their knowledge and skills in the English language already meet or exceed official requirements for either higher education or employment.

It is more likely that problems with completing applications, and/or barriers to securing funding support relate more to usage of English by professionals in the funding and voluntary community sectors rather a lack of ability on the part of migrants. Sector specific terminology, transdisciplinary jargon and buzz-phrases are mainly incomprehensible to most native speaking of English, and so relative newcomers to the UK are likely to face an additional linguistical burden despite possessing advanced levels of English for academic or occupational purposes.

2. Relationships and networks

- We believe that we are structurally disadvantaged due to the limited range of our relationships and networks within this particular sector.
- New communities in particular can lack relationships and networks.
- Funds also rely on demonstrating a **'track record'**. It can be difficult to get started, when you have a short work history in the UK, and thereby limited professional networks here.

3. Cultural assumptions within the funding process

There are certain cultural assumptions inherent in the funding process. These assumptions cater for certain applicants over others. They include:

- Valuing written over oral communication
- The application process does not value the intangible / the relational. Migrant communities and support networks often operate in a relational way. There are different values for working with different groups which are not factored into the application forms.
- Language – demonstrating impact: it can be hard to gather feedback forms in English (and translating responses is labour intensive).
- Restricted funds do not allow for the complex needs of the people that we work with.
- The criteria of funding applications do not always reflect the reality of lived experience – the categories can be limited and limiting.

4. Conditions of grants excluding certain people

- The different immigration statuses that people have, and the rights, entitlements and support associated with each different status, are perhaps not always well understood by funders. This can mean that certain groups miss out on statutory support as well as being excluded from the conditions of certain charitable grants, meaning that their immigration status leaves them in a 'gap'. (For example people with No Recourse to Public Funds).
- The conditions of grants are sometimes not explicit in stating that they would be willing to support these people. It is helpful if it is made explicit which immigration statuses are supported by each grant.

5. Communities: under-represented and complex needs

Under-represented:

- Our communities are **under-represented at a local government level, and at a funders level.**
- The people commissioning local support services or new projects often don't have an awareness or understanding of the groups we work with or the challenges that they face.
- Our issues are not identified as 'priority areas'; and the application process can lack an awareness and understanding of our experiences.
- Mainstream media and research often don't pick up the nuance of the issues around the communities we serve. This can impact our ability to 'evidence the need' for our work. There may not be clear and/or current evidence about the Congolese community in Birmingham, for instance.

Complex needs:

- It can **be difficult to explain the complex needs** of vulnerable migrant, refugee and BAME communities and individuals and how our projects will meet those needs to funders and funding officers who do not understand because:
 - o The funders are based in other parts of the country

- No two communities are the same so what works in one area may not work in another area, so if a BME specific funded project in one area failed it does not necessarily mean it will fail again somewhere else.
 - They are not from these communities and so do not have a direct understanding of the challenges that these communities might face
 - Accurate and relevant information about our communities and their organisations is often confused with generic messages in social affairs.
- There often is not enough space in the application to explain the **nuance** of the particular context.
 - Equally, we don't always know 'who we are talking to' – and therefore it is hard to know what aspects of our work need explaining, in order to build a common ground or common understanding. Therefore, there may be a misunderstanding about the work that we do, or else a lack of appreciation about the particular context that we are working in.

6. Lived experience

- We are often used as informers (often by white-lead organisations). But the people with lived experience are not regarded as changemakers. We are here, we want to be changemakers ourselves, not just informers. Let us work together. We wish to work in partnership towards, and to share positive outcomes.
- We have experienced white lead groups wanting to organise us, not thinking we can organise ourselves.
- We have been organising effectively in an informal way for a long time, but we do not necessarily have official validation to reflect the work we have done.
- Our experience is that our lived experience needs to be validated before it is valued – for instance, by an organisation, or by some kind of accreditation. We lack this, especially if we have not been part of institutions in the UK. It can be hard to 'get in' with institutions in the UK without a track record, as previously mentioned.

7. Structural racism

- Encompassed within many other points on this document
- We see white lead groups being funded for the same work as black lead groups – but the white-lead groups often get far larger sums of money while the black-lead groups get small amounts (or sometimes nothing).
- We have to work a lot harder to get recognised for the work that we do than white-lead organisations.
- White-lead organisations often come to our organisations to ask for data, information, or to work under them within a project for which they have been awarded funding. White-lead organisations often win bigger contracts. We provide the credibility and the community link, but we do not get credit, leadership or payment.
- Lack of trust: we experience a lack of trust from funders and from white-lead organisations in delivering projects.

8. Decision-making being unclear

- We have experienced a lack of clarity about why some people get certain amounts and not others, and about why a grant amount was reduced
- This is relevant to the specific experience of migrant led organisations because of our experience of 'lack of trust'.
- "I think maybe it's because of who I am."
(A member of the Network about a funding rejection)

Some of this understanding might be implicit to someone who is born and educated in the UK, but might not be implicit to someone for whom English is their second language and for whom the

English work culture is not their native work culture. However, standard written or spoken English is not an issue for a sizable majority of migrant-led organisations because their knowledge and skills in the English language already meet or exceed official requirements for either higher education or employment.

It is more likely that problems with completing applications, and/or barriers to securing funding support relate more to usage of English by professionals in the funding and voluntary community sectors rather a lack of ability on the part of migrants. Sector specific terminology, transdisciplinary jargon and buzz-phrases are mainly incomprehensible to most native speaking of English, and so relative newcomers to the UK are likely to face an additional linguistical burden despite possessing advanced levels of English for academic or occupational purposes.

Potential Development

The comments in this paper are based on shared observations and perspectives from recent exploratory exchanges between representatives from the West Midlands Funders Network (WMFN) and the MiFriendly Cities Social Innovation Projects Network. Those discussions have been insightful, constructive and highly informative. It would be important and beneficial to the migrant support sector and broader social development to continue the conversation, joint learning and pursuit of solutions.

The diverse nature of the migrant-led and migrant support sector is both a challenge and opportunity for innovation and development for funders and the voluntary community support workers alike. The wide range of racial, ethnic, religious and social factors, as well as diversity and varying degrees of issues, values and priorities present opportunities and platforms for rich learning, understanding and lasting social development. However, a proactive and purposeful approach to reversing outdated views and outmoded practice is needed if successful reach and engagement is to be secured going forward.

As an immediate way forward, the WMFN is asked to consider singular or combined implementation of two suggestions: 1) creation of a fund specifically targeted at migrant-led projects; 2) a migrant friendly programme for support and partnership working.

i) A Migrant Specific Fund

- Created by contributions by members of the WMFN
- Open to applications by migrant-led/support organisations only
- Recognises social entrepreneurship and social capital of non-EU migrant-led projects
- Acceptance of broad sponsorship and endorsement of applicants.

Such an initiative could draw on good practice and experiences from The MiFriendly Cities programme as a model for evolved migration support. The MiFriendly Cities programme is based on rigorous, yet flexible engagement, working relationships and support throughout project lifecycles by key stakeholders (Coventry University, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton City councils).

ii) A Migrant Specific Support Programme

This would involve implementation and development of migrant friendly funding criteria, procedures, processing by grant managers and fund officers to build a model of funding, support and capacity development specifically for the migrant-led projects.

Other aspects of the migrant friendly programme could cover:

- Recruitment and retention of migrant project leads to funding boards and associated forums
- Promotion of good practice in appropriate discernment on immigration status of migrants
- Recognition of current and pre-project achievements (including pre-arrival history and experience of social entrepreneurship)
- Encouragement and support for, as well as learning from integrative linkage and intersectionality issues and developments relating to the migrant support sector.