OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

# Engagement Report

## Innovation and Sustainability Grant Funding Review 2019

April-May 2019

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## 1.    Purpose of this document

This document is a report following a period of engagement with those organisations and individuals who were involved with the council's Innovation and Sustainability Grant Funding rounds in 2017 and 2018.

## 2.    Timescale

Oxfordshire County Council carried out engagement activities from 8th April until 13th May 2019

## 3.    Process and Methodology

An online engagement method on the council's e-consult portal was primarily used, which invited organisations and individuals to answer and comment on 14 questions about the grant funding process, criteria and application forms used in 2017-18.

A link to the consultation was sent out to 84 individuals who either applied for funding individually, or on behalf of their organisations (whether successfully funded or not) or expressed an interest in applying.

A workshop was also held on 9th May to allow for face-to-face discussion, commentary and questions to be raised. This was attended by 14 representatives from 10 funded organisations, together with two council officers and two county councillors who all had been part of the appraisal, selection and decision making processes.

Feedback was additionally sought from those service users and carers who participated in the cross-party panel, as part of the funding decision process.

## 4.    Background

As part of the **daytime support review** in 2017, Oxfordshire County Council introduced grant funding to support the continuation and development of community and voluntary sector daytime support opportunities, for people aged 18 and over, in Oxfordshire; these funds included the **Innovation Fund** to support new initiatives and the **Sustainability Fund** to support existing services.

The Innovation Fund, £100,000 per year, has provided one-off grant funding to support the establishment of self-sustaining projects, delivering new opportunities for people in Oxfordshire.  The Sustainability Fund, £250,000 per year, has provided grant funding to support the continuation and development of daytime support opportunities, which need this support, whilst supporting all to increase self-sustainability

The main aims of the workshop and online survey were to:
- Review the application form
- Reflect on and review the grant criteria and guidelines
- Provide the opportunity to listen to ideas and work with individuals and organisations to understand where the grant funding and process can be

improved, in order to support the continuation and development of existing services and in developing new, self-sustaining opportunities

- Review the geographical reach of current services and to identify gaps in the provision of services available

With a view to the feedback, comments and questions raised helping to shape the future of the funding and how the council can best deliver these appropriate grant processes in future years.

## 5. Summary and key themes

The online survey received 15 completed online questionnaires. There were additionally 7 incomplete responses which have not been included in this summary as they did not contain useful data.

The workshop produced a range of recorded comments which fall broadly in line with online responses and which have been included in this summary.

**Key messages**
The following are the central messages received from responses to the questionnaire, with additional commentary derived from discussions which took place during the workshop. Feedback and comments about the Innovation Fund make up approx. two thirds (66%) of overall responses – see 'Summary Data' for a breakdown of the statistics.

**Innovation Fund & Sustainability Funds – application forms and guidelines**
The main themes centred around improving the clarity of information being requested on the application form:

- Several thought that the same questions were asked several times or that many of the questions repeated themselves in different ways, making it necessary to write multiple answers for what was essentially the same question
- Some considered that it might have been useful to include examples of projects that would not be approved for funding.
- More information would be helpful on who can apply. Make it clear that individuals are eligible to apply as well as organisations
- Some misunderstanding on the length of time for funding offered was evident
- The use of the term 'research evidence' seems onerous, as this appears to indicate the need for a wide knowledge of local statistics and trends. More explanation of what is required would help – e.g. what depth of research is expected? Contributors acknowledged that evidence can be found in local plans, etc, but is this what is being asked?
- Project monitoring expectations were a concern for some. Examples of this would be helpful and the criteria could form part of the agreement from the start, so groups know what is expected in advance
- Request for a 3-year business plan was off-putting for many. Again, clarity of how much information is expected would be helpful

Positives
- Support from OCVA and the Community information Network was considered to be very helpful.

- Others said the application was all fairly straightforward, however it was thought the information and guidance could have been formatted differently in a less text-heavy, and more reader friendly format
- Really help to have a named person at OCC who could be contacted throughout the application process
- For most applicants any award of funding is appreciated for an existing service. However, a new start up may be unable to proceed if they are awarded less than they have requested, due to specific start-up costs and usually slightly higher in the first year, as they include one-off costs.

Suggestions:

- Transport, as always, was a large concern. Applicants would like an element of funding to be built into the criteria. It was not fully understood why this is excluded as OCC policies are not clear on how transport issues can be resolved at a local level.
- There was much support for holding a workshop(s) at the time of launching new rounds of funding, hosted by OCVA, with specific guidance and assistance with the actual bid writing. Also, in a mentoring role as applications are progressed.
- More information on the demographic and geographic spread of existing OCC services, together with services receiving Innovation and Sustainability funding
- Avoid all jargon. e.g. 'Sustainability' is difficult for some to comprehend
- Make all publicity and promotional requirements clear from the start, with expected timelines. This aspect should be co-ordinated between funded organisations, the press and OCC
- Make the layout of the forms clearer to allow for those submitting applications on paper, with variable handwriting. Not everyone can use computers.

# Summary data of all responses to the online questionnaire

## Q1

Please let us know which type of grant funding you applied for, or in which you had an interest

| | |
|---|---|
| Innovation Fund | 8 |
| Sustainability Fund | 5 |
| Both | 2 |
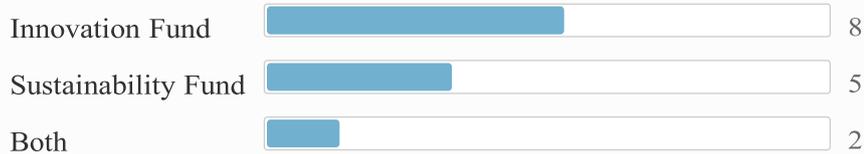
## Q2

From receiving information about the **Innovation Fund**, what was the result?

| | |
|---|---|
| Successful application | 6 |
| Partially successful application | 1 |
| Unsuccessful application | 2 |
| Interested but did not apply | 1 |
| Criteria was not relevant to our service(s) | 0 |
| Other | 0 |
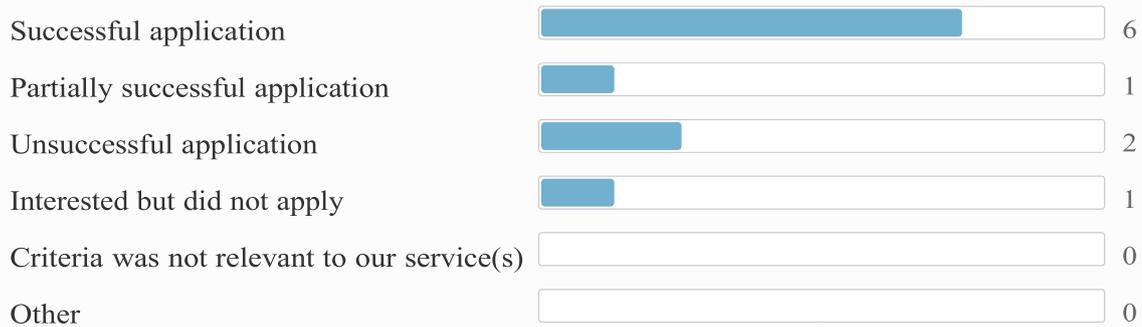
## Q3

From receiving information about the **Sustainability Fund**, what was the result?

| | |
|---|---|
| Successful application | 1 |
| Partially successful application | 3 |
| Unsuccessful application | 1 |
| Interested but did not apply | 0 |
| Criteria was not relevant to our service(s) | 0 |
| Other | 0 |
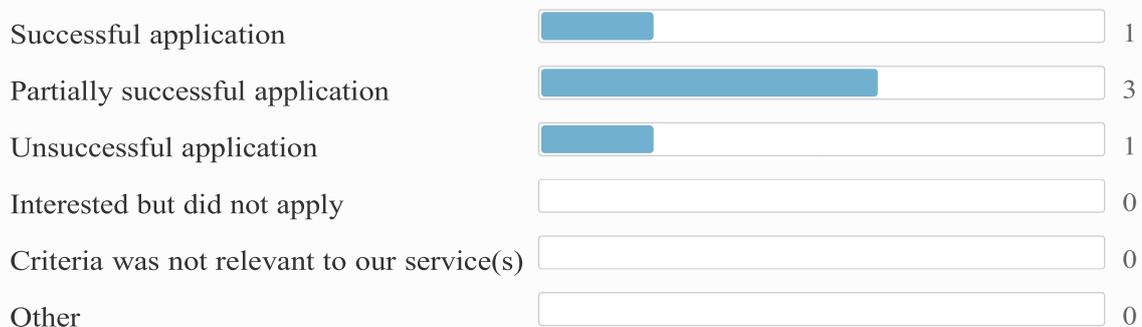
## Q4

From receiving information about both the **Innovation and Sustainability** Funds, what was the result?

| | |
|---|---|
| Successful applications - both funds | 1 |
| Partially successful applications - both funds | 1 |
| Successful application for Innovation fund only | 0 |
| Successful application for Sustainability fund only | 0 |
| Unsuccessful applications to both funds | 0 |
| Interested but did not apply | 0 |
| Criteria was not relevant to our service(s) | 0 |
| Other | 0 |
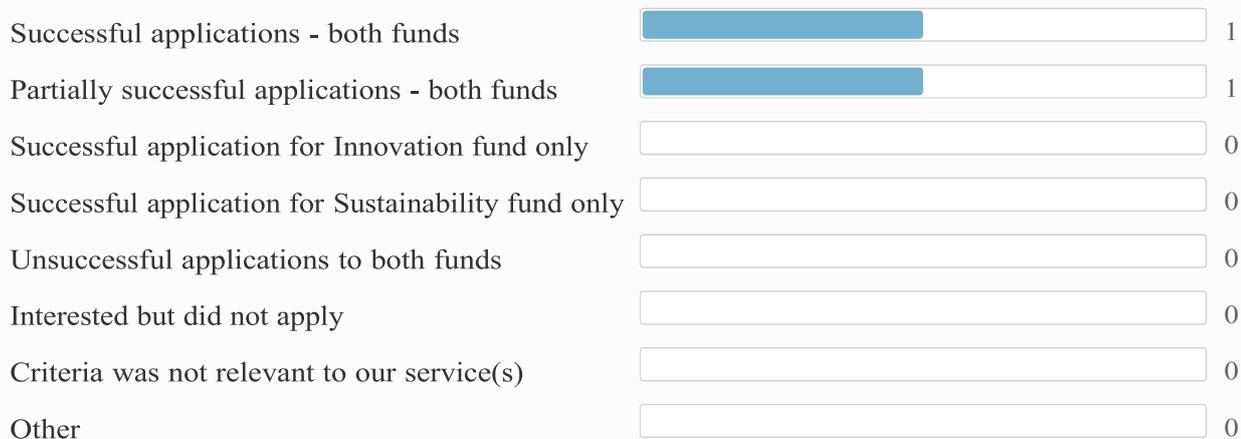
## Q5

This question is about the application information and the application form for both Innovation and Sustainability funding. How would you rate the following?   Where 0 = poor and 5 = excellent

Average scores

| | |
|---|---|
| Helpfulfulness of the application guidance? | **3.86** |
| Explanation of the funding critera? | **3.93** |
| Clarity of applicant requirements - i.e. who can apply for funding? | **4.14** |
| Ease of understanding the questions on the application form | **3.73** |
| Ease of use and accessibility of the application form | **4.15** |
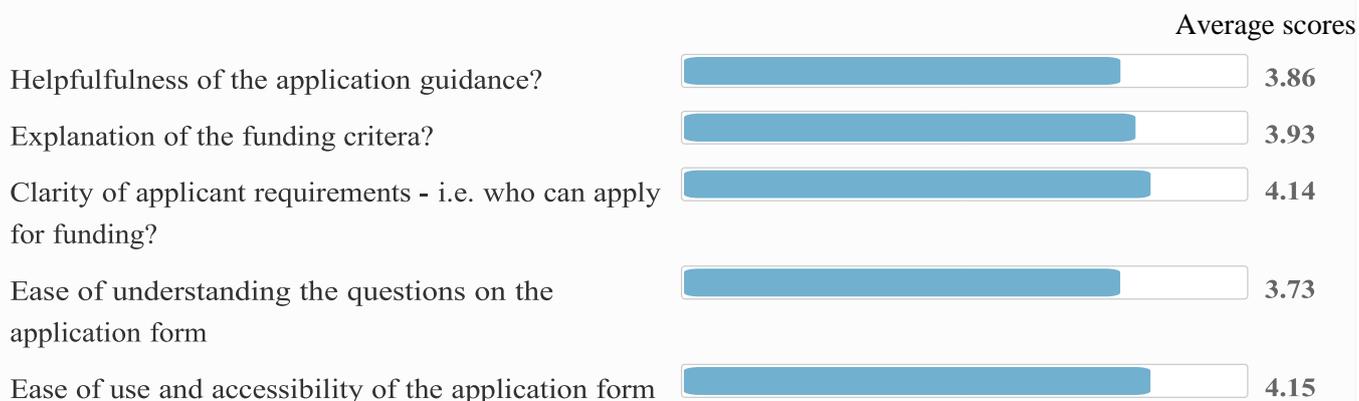
## Q6

What is your opinion about the timescale we provided for the application process?

| | |
|---|---|
| The timescale for applying was about right | 11 |
| The timescale for applying was not long enough | 3 |
| The timescale for applying was too long | 1 |
| Not sure | 0 |
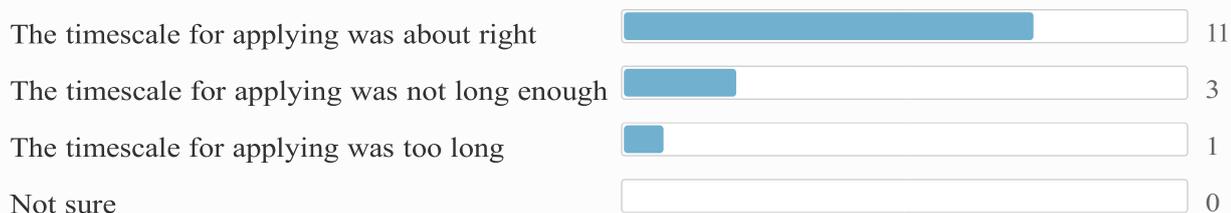
## Q7

If you were awarded a grant, was sufficient information provided at the time of the award notification about the next steps and expected timescale for implementation of your project/service?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 6 |
| No | 5 |
| Not sure | 2 |
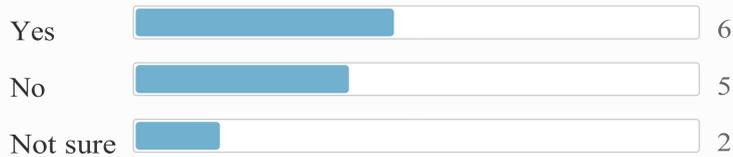
## Q8

Would you find it helpful to know where the Council currently funds services in Oxfordshire?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 12 |
| No | 0 |
| Not sure | 3 |
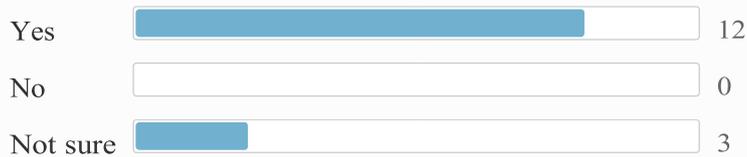
## Q9

If you were awarded a grant, but not for the full amount you applied for, what impact did this have on your project?

| | |
|---|---|
| We were still able to deliver the project | 3 |
| We were able to deliver some of the project | 4 |
| We were able to accept reduced funding to deliver a modified project proposal | 1 |
| We were not able to deliver any of the project | 0 |
| Other | 0 |
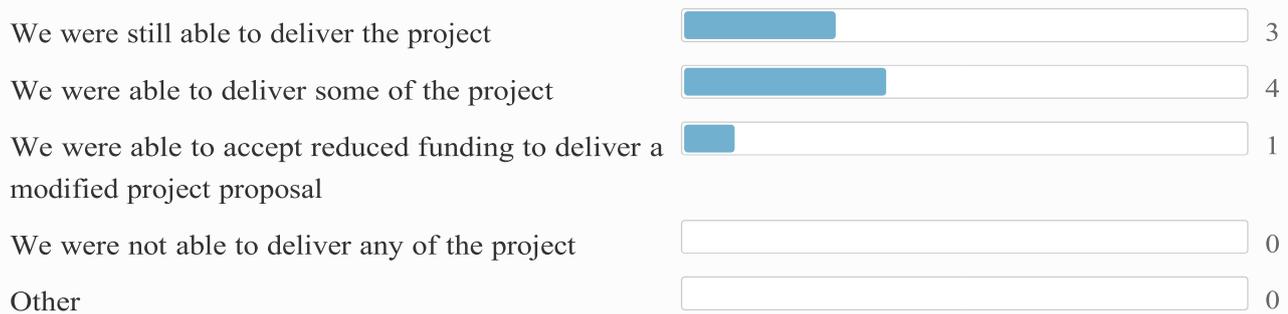
## Q10

If you were invited to present your idea to the cross-party panel, did this feel helpful to your application?

| | |
|---|---|
| It was helpful to be able to explain our project in person | 8 |

| | |
|---|---|
| We would prefer that the selection process did not include a presentation | 0 |
| We were unable to take part in the presentations | 1 |
| Not applicable (only relevant to The Innovation Fund application process) | 4 |

## Q11

Is there specific information or support from the Council that would help once you have received the grant funding and your project has started?

There were 3 responses to this question:

1) I don't yet have any information on what the monitoring and evaluation requirements are - that would be very useful! We did actually build in our own process which is probably more detailed than would be required by the funder, but nonetheless, it's important to know that we meet the funder's expectations

2) Having Rebecca Lanchbury to contact is already very helpful, thank you. Knowing that one could approach OCVA for advice would also be helpful

3) It is quite difficult to recall, though I have already mentioned that the process for registering our group with the body administering the fund was not clear

## Q12

Was the financial information and guidelines that we provided about the grant easy to understand and sufficient for you to compete the application process?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 11 |
| No | 3 |
| Unsure | 0 |

## Q13

Does the current application form allow you to fully explain and describe your project and service?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 11 |
| No | 3 |
| Unsure | 1 |

# Q14

Do you have any other comments, suggestions or ideas that would help you: as an applicant for the funds, as an interested individual or organisation?

There were 6 responses to this question:

1) To give a better explanation of why we did not get full grant applied for. To offer more than one year funding.

2) The application generally provides the flexibility to detail the reasons for the funding requirement and also the justification for requesting it. As such it is judged to be sufficient and not too complicated.

3) When we were unsuccessful with the second application (where we were not the lead applicant), we felt frustrated that a project we understood did meet the criteria, had been rejected with no useful feedback. Also, if the council felt this was a good project regardless, some discussion following the funding decision that might suggest alternative sources of funding would have been useful

4) I would just like to be kept aware of funding that is available in the future as our Day Centre is so successful and it has been possible with the funding we have received in the past.

5) We would be most grateful if the County Council would increase the funding for Day Centre, as it is very difficult to apply for funding for ethnic minorities.

6) Having gone through the process, I think the application could be re-designed to me more visually appealing and user friendly, with longer word counts for groups to be able to explain their project more fully. I do think the presentation to the panel was a really valuable part of the process and a positive one for the applicant, and hopefully for the council too.