

VCSE Review: Discussion Paper on the Voluntary Sector Investment Programme – response from the National LGB&T Partnership

Introduction

This document provides feedback from the National LGB&T (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) Partnership, a member of the Department of Health, NHS England, and Public Health England's Health and Care Voluntary Sector Strategic Partner Programme. The National LGB&T Partnership is an England-wide group of LGB&T voluntary and community service delivery organisations (see below for members of the Partnership) that are committed to reducing health inequalities and challenging homophobia, biphobia and transphobia within public services

The National LGB&T Partnership members intend to positively influence the policy, practice and actions of Government and statutory bodies, in particular the Department of Health, for the benefit of all LGB&T people and communities across England. The member organisations of the National LGB&T Partnership are:

- LGBT Foundation
- East London Out Project (ELOP)
- Gay Advice Darlington and Durham (GADD)
- Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES)
- Health Equality and Rights Organisation also known as GMFA
- Consortium of LGB&T Voluntary and Community Organisations
- London Friend
- PACE
- Stonewall Housing
- Yorkshire MESMAC
- METRO
- Birmingham LGB&T
- BiUK

The National LGB&T Partnership will ensure that health inequalities experienced by LGB&T people are kept high on the Government's agenda and that best use is made of the experience and expertise found within the LGB&T voluntary and community sector. The National LGB&T Partnership has also established a National LGB&T Stakeholder Group which is open to interested groups, organisations, service providers and individuals, giving a direct voice to the LGB&T sector. For more information, see <http://nationallgbtpartnership.org>.

Consultation questions

Q1-6 are administration questions.

7. To what extent do you agree that the Voluntary Sector Investment Programme should continue? Please tell us why you think this:

The National LGB&T Partnership strongly agrees that the Voluntary Sector Investment Programme should continue.

8. Do you agree with the suggestion to revise the programme to include two programmes? 1. A single grants programme which funds projects and 2. A programme that supports strategic partnerships to support health and wellbeing outcomes. If no, please let us know what you would suggest:

Yes

9. How do you think the Voluntary Sector Investment Programme could ensure that evidence of VCSE impact and outcomes supports future decisions on levels of central government funding?

The National LGB&T Partnership thinks that the Voluntary Sector Investment Programme could ensure that VCSE organisations have the capacity and ability to capture and evaluate the data needed to utilise VCSE impact and outcomes by funding the process. It is often difficult for VCSE organisations to accommodate the cost of research and evaluation when it is not factored into commissioning and included within funding.

Additionally, it would be useful to work out mechanisms to share this data consistently throughout Government in order to fill evidence gaps on LGBT people on a regional and sub-regional basis.

10. To what extent do you support the following statements:

a. One of the programme’s key aims should be to promote equality and reduce health inequalities Yes, very much

b. One of the programme’s key aims should be to contribute to health and well-being outcomes for all communities in England Yes

c. There should be a weighting within assessments towards projects that promote equality and reduce health inequality Yes

If there are any other aims you think the fund should have, please add them here:

The National LGB&T Partnership supports A and C, but queries B because the question refers to “all communities” and this often overlooks targeted focus on protected characteristic groups. The Partnership strongly believes that we need to pay particular attention to communities who have worse health and wellbeing, for instance the LGBT community.

Other aims should include integration, wider health determinants and personalisation. Considering much policy and engagement work surrounds these three principles, they should be incorporated into aims of programme.

11. What do you think are the most important aspects to fund? (Please rank these in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least)

a. Projects that support volunteering or social action

b. Projects that support innovation

c. Projects that help scale up projects that have been shown to have impact

d. Projects that help support an organisation to grow and flourish

e. Projects that demonstrate impact on health inequalities / social determinants of health

Please explain why you have chosen this option as being most important.

The National LGB&T Partnership feels that the importance of the aspects depends on the individual applications.

Whilst we believe that all of these aspects are important we would say that E is the most important, but in the understanding that protected characteristics are included alongside the wider determinants of health.

It is also important to note innovation (B) as a significant method through which new approaches to incorporating and meeting the needs of LGBT people are introduced.

12. Would you prefer the application process to be:

- a. A one-stage application form with the same level of detail required irrespective of the amount applied for
- b. A one-stage application form with a shorter version available for those applying for small grants
- c. A two-stage application with an 'expression of interest' stage followed by a longer application form for successful applicants
- d. If you have another suggestion for the application process, please note this here or provide any comments

C

13. Do you think the Voluntary Sector Investment Programme should fund projects that are:

- a) Locally specific
- b) Regional
- c) National

Please give reasons for your response

The National LGB&T Partnership thinks that the Investment Programme should fund projects that are locally specific, regional and national. Whilst it is important to have a variety, it is equally significant to consider how these three are interconnected. For instance the National LGB&T Partnership feed intelligence and experience from and to regional and local VCS organisations. To cease funding one locational division the sustainability and effectiveness of the sector would be significantly compromised, especially in terms of partnership, communication and learning.

14. Should there be a limit on the size of organisation (in terms of their annual income) able to apply to the fund? Yes / no If yes, what upper limit would you suggest?

There should be an upper-limit of £5 million for organisations wanting to apply to the fund. The fund should support small and medium sized enterprises because they have been most affected by austerity.

15. How can we encourage and support smaller organisations to apply?

The National LGB&T Foundation thinks that the application system -AIMS- is often too difficult and confusing for smaller organisations who may not have a dedicated expert in writing applications to navigate. Additionally, they become intimidated by terminology such as 'innovation' and 'national impact' which, if better explained or simplified would not act as such a barrier to applying.

Inherent in this suggestion is the idea of supporting smaller organisations in making applications, perhaps through infrastructure or other VCSE organisations with previous experience and success. If funded sufficiently, this could form a buddying scheme whereby smaller organisations are encouraged and supported, and infrastructure or experienced organisations are able to exhibit social value by supporting the sector.

16. Do you think we should consider providing loan funding (for organisations with the capacity to repay them alongside our grant funding programme? Yes / no

Whilst the National LGB&T Partnerships don't believe that VCSE organisations would have the capacity to make repayments, if such organisations existed they should be able to explore this option. That said, we strongly disagree with any plans to allow loan funding to displace any grant funding availability.

17. If you have previously applied (or tried to apply) to either the IESD or HSCVF, were there any barriers to applying for your organisation? Yes / no If yes, please note these here and suggest any possible solutions to help overcome these:

The LGBT Foundation recalls that the barriers were that some of the questions were repetitive, they asked for a high level of detail in terms of specific dates when outcomes would be delivered by. Additionally, they asked for a full project plan for each outcome of the project, which was especially difficult considering the application was in its earliest stages. There was also an issue about some of the delivery dates falling before funding would even have been received for the work. They are also aware of current applications being delayed indefinitely. This acts as a significant barrier as a lot of time and resources when into applications and prospective funding streams which are now stalled.

The National LGB&T Partnership feels that it would be preferable to have a shorter first stage application. Once they have identified projects they will potentially fund, it would be useful to have access to the grants team and policy leads to help draft more detailed applications. With a smaller shortlist sifted at the first stage, this should be manageable. It would also help the system leads meet their priorities rather than having to accept or reject from a large number of applications. It seems sensible to have an advice stage where feedback could be given where an application shows promise but needs work. At the moment only a 'perfect' application gets funded, whilst anything else gets rejected. This methodology could be overlooking important or interesting ideas, concepts or projects that could be equally or more effective and efficient with the right support.

18. Do you think the current themes (listed above) are the right ones to implement in a future funding programme? Yes / no If no, how would you suggest we change them in a way that supports effective evaluation and reduces the burden on organisations wishing to apply? : Improving Health and care outcomes

Commissioning

Life course, prevention and loneliness

Integration

Public, patient and citizen voice; and family advocacy

Technology and information

The National LGB&T Partnership feels that the aim of promoting equality and addressing health inequalities is not clearly reflected in the current themes.

Additionally, the themes significantly differ in terms of their precision: 'improving health and care outcomes' is very broad in comparison to the specificity of 'commissioning'.

Whilst removing the themes may reduce the burden on organisations as they have less pressure to make their project proposals fit the themes, the Partnerships questions how removing or reducing them (as suggested in the discussion paper) would ease oversubscription.

Unsuitable applications could be eased by establishing specific but reasonable criteria.

If the current themes are maintained, the Partnership suggests including examples to clarify what is meant by the themes. This is necessary as, for instance, 'prevention' partnered with 'life course' and 'loneliness' as one theme, but prevention could easily also be part of 'improving health and care outcomes' and 'commissioning'.

The National LGB&T Partnership think that having themes would enable evaluation but is unclear as to how this would reduce the burden on organisations.

19. How could we most effectively co-produce the themes and priority areas for funding with the VCSE sector - what approaches or mechanisms would you suggest to do this effectively?

The system partners could utilise the consultation process, focus groups and roundtables to work effectively with the VCSE sector but, in order to get a diverse range of input some organisations across sub-sectors and sizes, funding for travel costs and participation should be considered for smaller organisations.

The system partners could also effectively co-produce the themes and priority areas for funding by working with strategic partners and stakeholder groups to utilise their expertise, localised understanding and lived experience.

20. Do you think capacity building support should be: (please tick your preferred option)

- a. an optional extra to the grant received?**
- b. an integral part of the grant package for all organisations?**
- c. an integral part of the grant package for small organisations?**
- d. not offered as part of the programme?**

The National Partnership would opt for A, B or C, but in order to help fund infrastructure organisations such as the LGBT consortium, option B would be more appropriate.

21. To what extent do you agree with the idea that grant funding would include a requirement to offer 'peer support' between projects in the overall programme? (Options: Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

The National LGB&T Partnership agrees and feels that the requirement to offer 'peer support' between projects in the overall programme would be an effective way to share learning and best practise. However, they would advise that, in order to ensure the support was consistent across programmes, this process should be supported or facilitated to ensure smaller organisations were equally able to participate and to the same extent.

Any costs associated with this process should also be factored into the project funding.

22. Are there any other ways in which capacity building support could be provided?

23. How could we achieve greater consistency in evaluation and measurement of outcomes?

Greater consistency in evaluation and measurement of outcomes can be achieved by better allocating funding and resources to fulfil this process. This would include training smaller or less experienced organisations to measure impact in line with commissioning requirements. Commissioners should also provide resources to infrastructure organisations to support organisations through this process.

24. How can good practice and learning from successful projects be shared more effectively?

The National LGB&T Partnership believes that an effective learning and supporting tool to share good practice could come from having structures and subsequent events through which funded VCSE programmes can share their learning and expertise with VCSE programmes aiming for funding. This funded structure of communication and learning would improve the overall effectiveness of the sector and create a clear line through which best practise can be shared and

replicated. Increased, cross-sector communication could also enable gaps in funding streams - where certain types of programmes are not achieving funding despite their necessity – to be rendered visible. This may indicate issues with the overall funding process or a lack of understanding towards the needs of certain communities.

25. If you have any other comments or suggestions about the proposed programme of grant funding that are not covered in any of our questions, please note these here:

26. Do you agree with the list of aims for this programme? Yes / no If no, what would you change and why?

The National LGB&T Partnership agree with the aims for this programme:

- promoting equality and addressing health inequalities
- contributing to health and well-being outcomes for all communities in England.

27. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

a. There should be strong links between the VCSE sector and relevant policy and programme leads in each of the system partners

Strongly agree

b. Funding should be provided on a three-year cycle

Strongly agree

c. There should be fewer partners overall

Disagree

d. Partners should be selected based on the communities they connect with and their reach into the VCSE sector (e.g. not representing sole health conditions)

Agree

e. The programme should include consortia partners (a group of organisations working together through a single grant to achieve common aims)?

Strongly agree – The National LGB&T Partnership is proof that this method is both effective and efficient at delivering common aims.

f. The programme should extend to work with other arm's length bodies within health and care

Agree – however this would require the sufficient funding to do so.

g. The programme should make links to other government departments

Disagree – The National LGB&T Partnership thinks that other Government departments should follow the model of the Strategic Partners Programme.

h. Strategic partners should be bound by a framework agreement to support core areas of work with additional work distributed through a mini competitive exercise between partners

Agree

i. Strategic partners should have clear work plans, including small projects that they deliver on an annual basis?

Strongly agree, however they should set their own priorities with the flexibility to re-focus throughout the programme as appropriate.

j. The programme should contribute to evidence gathering about relevant issues and current trends in the VCSE sector?

Strongly agree

k. The programme should support capacity building and sustainability of infrastructure organisations within the VCSE sector?

Agree

28. How can we ensure the conflicts of interest between partners are best identified and managed?

29. How could we ensure that partners effectively communicate the benefits and impact of their contribution to the wider VCSE sector?

30. How could a programme ensure that partners are representing views of the sector appropriately and that the sector can hold partners to account?

The National LGB&T Partnership questions whether 'sector' in this instance refers to the wider VCS or LGBT VCS? The role of the Strategic Partners Programme has been about engaging communities, not necessarily about the sector each is from.

31. If you have any other comments or suggestions about the proposed strategic partnership programme that are not covered in any of our questions, please note these here

The Strategic Partner Programme is highly valued and sets the Department of Health apart from other departments and has achieved a good degree of co-design and production. This relationship has also been helpful and important in implementing policy at a local level.