



Report on Pilot Capacity Building Training Programme for Kingston Voluntary Action

Introduction

This report explores Kingston Voluntary Action's (KVA) delivery of a Pilot Capacity Building programme for voluntary and community sector organisations based in and operating in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. The programme set out to test and learn how a programme of support might be delivered to a diverse cohort of voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations (VCSE) organisations to test engagement, impact, and level of interest in working together in this way and better understand the development needs of VCSE organisations with the aim of informing KVA's current and future offer.

KVA approached consultants Hugh Stultz (Orange Consulting & Training) and Kemar Walford (KN Walford Consultancy) in July 2023 to explore the best approaches to supporting capacity-building needs starting with a diagnostic review. From discussions hinged around KVA's 'Ask the Expert' model, to a small-scale pilot with select groups, consultants suggested a small-scale pilot to be advertised and open to all VCSE organisations that fit the criteria of being based in and operational within Kingston and below an income threshold of £500,000. This approach was accepted, and timescales for delivery were agreed upon. It was initially envisaged that the programme would have recruited and begun delivering before the July summer holidays. Due to tight timelines to allow for adequate advertisement and promotion of the programme and shortlist applicants, the programme start was rescheduled to September.

The *Pilot* programme had four broad aims

- To gain an insight into capacity development needs among a cohort of Kingston's VCS organisations
- To understand what the appetite within the VCSE might be to attend a programme of capacity building over several weeks
- Help KVA meet its commitment to develop the effectiveness of the VCSE in Kingston
- To demonstrate the impact and benefits of a sustained programme of capacity building approach

Definitions

For the purpose of this report, we thought it meaningful to define who the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector is. NCVO defines the VCSE as having the following characteristics. '*Formality recognisable structure and governing document, independence from the state, non-profit distributing, self-governance, trustee board and public benefit.*'

Rationale for the programme

The rationale for the *Pilot* is, as stated in the introduction of this report:

To provide capacity support and training to VCS organisations and to test a new delivery model.

Expectations joining the programme

Participants expressed a range of reasons for joining the programme

"We are an established organisation (3+ years) seeking insights into how we may operate more effectively"

"The programme would give me a good understanding of the funding process and allow me to plan ahead"

"I am a new CEO / Chair I needed insights into running a charitable organisation"

The choice of masterclass topics was in part informed by analysis of the diagnostic reviews and by expressions of interest voiced during the diagnostic review interviews.

Royal Borough Kingston upon Thames Context

The 2021 census cites Kingston as having a population of 168,085, the third smallest in London. Kingston has an older demographic of 13.1% compared with the London average of 11.8%.

Kingston is a relatively wealthy outer London borough, and few areas sit within the lowest 20% decile of the indices of multiple deprivation, Cambridge Road Estate, where RBKares operates, being one notable exception. This area is slated for a massive redevelopment initiative, currently in planning and consultative stage.

68.3% of the population is white, higher than the London average of 53.8%. The next largest 'broad' ethnic group is Asian, 17.9% of the population. Within this categorisation is the Korean community, Kingston has the UK's largest Korean Community, comprising between 2.9% and circa 9% of the borough's total population, depending on which estimates are used. This community has shown challenges in taking up many statutory health services and initiatives.

The training programme

The Pilot was advertised as a programme that *'will take participants through the key stages of understanding what funders look for in strong organisations, show how to develop a strong application, where to look for funding and reporting on the impact of your services.'* Emphasis was placed on funding because of its centrality to the sustainability of the VCSE.

Applications were open to VCS organisations based in or significantly delivering services in Kingston who had existed for at least one year with income not above £500,000. Shortlisting was based on matching groups to the selection criteria and groups who, from KVA's experience, would make best use of a sustained training and engagement process.

The Pilot aimed to and successfully recruited ten groups. One participant dropped out of the programme close to the start and was not replaced. Nine groups were enrolled for the introductory session with the proviso that the masterclass workshops would also be opened to organisations who had not applied to be part of the pilot program.

The programme comprised the following components

1. An introductory session outlining programme aims, schedule and timetable of events
2. An organisational diagnostic review of organisations and report back process

3. Three masterclass workshops covering the topics: bid writing and prospect research, monitoring and evaluation, business planning and succession planning
4. Three 1:1 advice sessions with each group assigned a consultant. Discussion followed from the preceding workshop or topic of the group's choosing or, in a few cases, follow on from the findings from the diagnostic review and interview process

Delivery was *hybrid*, in-person and online. Groups were encouraged to send at least two participants as we believe organisational learning works best when two or more board or senior team members attend sessions together to facilitate discussions, share learning and strategise their implementation to their organisation. Some groups, such as RBKares, consistently sent two or more members to each session.

Summary of groups invited to join the *Pilot* capacity building programme

Name of organisation	Service area / Theme	Income level (aprox) 2021/22	Comments
Holly Lodge	Environmental education for children with SEN	£111k	Going through a major transition.
KAG Advocacy	Advocacy, advice to disabled /support to Ukrainian refugees	£129k	
Kingston Association for the Blind	support for the blind and partially sighted	£113k	
Kingston Bereavement Support	bereavement counselling	£124k	
Kingston Centre for Independent Living	support for disabled people to live independently	£332k	
Nanoom	Women and girls (Korean community)	n/a	Long-standing organisation, recently incorporated
RBKares	Support to NHS staff, care homes and vulnerable groups – Cambridge Road Estate, e.g., refugees, homeless	£20k	
Shine Bright UK	supports mental health and wellbeing	n/a	This is a new start-up
Voices of Hope	Women and girls, children basic needs	£236k	
Welcare	Children and Young People	£53,739	Withdrew from programme

The programme was designed to build the capacity of organisations in the six areas identified by Charities Aid Foundation¹ as essential to effective organisations: purpose, awareness, financial and operational fit, impact, effective leadership, and well-networked.

These can be further aligned to New Philanthropy Capitol's four key areas of organisational strengthⁱⁱ

- Purpose
- Impact practice (reflective practice and evaluation)
- Leadership
- Finance and operations

The questions for the diagnostic review tool and the follow-up interview with each group followed these four broad headings.

Summary of the Pilot Programme

Module	Content	Date delivered
Introduction	Explaining the aims, purpose, content and duration of the programme	15th Sept 2023
Diagnostic review – interview sessions	Follow-up discussion and interview following diagnostic review using evaluation tool. Findings were presented and analysed, and recommendations were made. The summary presented for each organisation	5 th & 12 Oct
1 st 1:1 session	Advice support is given to individual groups following diagnostic findings or topics of group choice.	9 th & 10 th Nov
1 st masterclass workshop Bid writing and prospect research	Exploration of the information needed on funding applications and framing this within the understanding of compelling storytelling. Brief overview of prospect research.	23rd November
2 nd 1:1 session	Advice and support given to individual groups follow on from 1 st masterclass or topic of the group's choice.	7th December
2 nd masterclass workshop monitoring and evaluation	Exploration of the knowledge and processes required to collect outcome and impact data for organisations. Exploration of data collection methodologies.	14th December
3 rd 1:1 session	Advice and support are given to individual groups following the 1 st masterclass or topic of the group's choice.	18th January 2024
3 rd masterclass workshop – business planning and succession planning	Defining for groups what BP is and the rationale for it. Explore critical elements of business planning for any organisation, explore processes for gaining joint ownership of the planning process, and review vision, mission, and aims. Preparation for leadership succession, identifying skills gaps with trustee boards. How succession planning supports sustainability renewal. planning supports sustainability & renewal.	25th January

Attendance on the programme

Overall attendance and retention on the programme were high, as seen from the table below. 78% of groups initially enrolled in the programme attended the final workshop and the two groups who were absent reported pressing and unexpected personal or organisational imperatives. In workshops one and two attendance was 100% and 89% respectively. Attendance at the three 1:1 advice sessions was equally high, with some groups, such as RBKares and KCIL, consistently sending two or more representatives to each session.

Date of workshop	Number groups attending	Number of individuals attending	Comments
23rd November	From Pilot -9 Invitee* - 3	From pilot - 13 Invitee – 3	*Additional groups invited to attend workshops
14th December	From pilot - 9 Invitee - 0	From pilot – 13 Invitee - 0	
25th January 2024	From pilot - 7 Invitee - 1	From pilot - 9 Invitee - 1	
Total	29	39	

Outcomes/ impact of the training

Your capacity-building training will enable us to develop and execute higher-level projects, bringing a positive impact on the lives of Korean women with mental health issues.

Pilot programme participant December 2023

The diagnostic process highlighted the areas where groups had the greatest need for support

- Fundraising
- Monitoring & evaluation
- Business planning
- Risk management

Findings from the diagnostic highlighted organisational strengths and weaknesses. Follow up discussions during the diagnostic review provided further insights into groups needs and helped inform workshop topics. Before the first workshop on bid writing and prospect research, 'Telling your Story,' 50% of participants indicated they were not very confident about bid writing, and none were extremely or somewhat confident. After the session, 25% felt much more confident, while 75% felt somewhat more confident. In comparison, 50% of participants had a much stronger understanding of prospect research after the training. In the New Year, one participant remarked that because of this workshop, she changed and improved a grant application she had been working on. All participants who accessed KVA's funding database reported finding several new funding prospects. Free access for KVA members and participants in the Pilot programme was heavily promoted during workshops and 1:1 sessions.

For the second workshop, a third of participants rated their understanding of monitoring and evaluation as either poor or very weak. By the end of the session, a third of participants said they were a lot clearer, and two-thirds said they were a bit clearer. The session also prompted a beneficial exchange between participants about observing the change in their beneficiaries and the challenges of capturing and reporting that information.

The business planning and succession planning workshop was seen as the most helpful, followed by bid writing. One participant stated, '*The succession chapter was excellent and gave me the most to think about.*'

Reflecting on reasons for joining the programme and their expectations, 38% of participants said they hoped it would help them secure more funding, while 25% said they hoped the programme would help them improve governance. Overall, 60% of respondents said their expectations were fully or largely met, with the remainder saying they were partly met.

The *Pilot* brought together a cohort of local VCS organisations and had unplanned outcomes, such as the relationships that occurred through the networking opportunities offered. Groups were able to share their experiences delivering services, recruiting volunteers or how to get help in certain areas. Some began tentatively exploring ways of working together or referring their users to each other services. Experiences such as these help strengthen resolve and remind organisations that they are not alone in their challenges and successes.

Recommendations

- Replicate and develop the *Pilot* programme so more local organisations can benefit
- Scale up aspects of the programme to provide longer support to organisations working through specific deliverables such as business plans or grant funding applications. This would allow groups to complete a deliverable or have a full outline over 2 - 3 days
- Ensure that the aims of 1:1 sessions are fully understood so that groups bring their most immediate learning or development needs to these sessions
- Strengthen engagement with BAME communities and other underrepresented groups within the borough
- Try to understand the barriers to engagement with KVA experienced by BAME and other underrepresented groups
- Broaden the range of topics offered.
- Consider training that targets thematic groups, e.g. those supporting mental wellbeing, older people, children and young people, etc.
- Seek out and raise the profile of smaller VCS and grassroot organisations

Conclusion

Small charities and community groups are the most vulnerable to this impossible pressure cooker of rising demand and deteriorating finances. - Pro Bono Economicsⁱⁱⁱ

Pro Bono Economics highlights the problem faced by the VCSE sector. The *Pilot* has shown that VCSE organisations in Kingston experience near identical challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that in densely populated areas such as London with fragmented and compartmentalised communities, the VCSE can play a vital role in getting support quickly and effectively to local communities. From providing basic needs to help preventing social isolation or vital health messaging. The *Pilot* helped strengthen the capacity of organisations

that provide services to those most at risk or least likely to engage with mainstream services, e.g. women at risk of domestic abuse, migrant and refugee communities.

'..the significant investment in the VCSE in Hackney was the realisation of a longer held ambition. The VCSE has local intelligence and reach into local communities that statutes don't. During the first wave of the pandemic, it became clear that some of the national messaging wasn't penetrating local communities, and Hackney & City concluded that the best way to speak to local people was through other local people.'

Dr Sandra Husbands - Director of Public Health City of London & LB of Hackney^{iv}

Although LB Hackney has some contextual differences to RBK, their model '*The Voluntary Sector Assembly*' represents one example of how local communities can be harnessed to provide vital services. The effectiveness of this approach is underpinned by capacity building in the sector and bringing new funding opportunities to the sector. Strengthening the capacity of VCS should be one of the priorities of new structures such as the Integrated Care Systems as it seeks ways to harness local voices in co-design and co-delivery of non-clinical health initiatives.

With public funding, particularly from local authorities, not only decreasing but increasingly being offered as contracts, the local VCS needs ongoing and consistent support to help improve its resilience and viability and specifically to become contract ready.

The *Pilot* programme highlights the need and appetite for training within the VCS. Learning from the pandemic and successful capacity support models demonstrates that it is essential that programmes such as this *Pilot* are replicated and rolled out to more groups, including grassroots organisations. This will enable the VCS to survive current economic challenges and ensure that it continues serving local communities in a time of growing need while strengthening community contribution to local and national strategic priorities.

Hugh Stultz & Kemar Walford

February 2024

Revised March 2024



References

ⁱ Six Characteristics of Resilient Charities – Beth Clark, Charities Aid Foundation 2018

ⁱⁱ What makes a good Charity by Ruth Gripper & Iona Joy New Philanthropy capital 2016

ⁱⁱⁱ Breaching the dam: The state of the charity sector – Pro Bono Economics December 2022

^{iv} Dr Sandra Husbands speaking 21st September 2022, online conference hosted by Community Links Bromley – Recovery and Renewal: The role of the third sector in post pandemic health and social care

Appendix 1 – Transcript post programme interviews

Filmed interviews conducted with groups regarding the Capacity Building Programme, 22 Feb 2024.

Consent signed by all participants with the caveat to not use Steve's (VOH) surname anywhere.

Key quotes:

Odette Battarel, CEO Kingston Association for the Blind:

The skills I learnt on the Capacity Building workshops have helped me write better funding bids. The module we had on writing story and present your organisation was very useful for me.

Another aspect I really enjoyed was networking, meeting other organisations. Having the time to stop out of the office and get away from the day-to-day work and have another look at the work we do at Kingston Association for the Blind and analyse a bit more what is happening and what we can do better.

I would definitely recommend the programme to other organisations. I think because sometimes we don't take the time to get the training and improve our knowledge and skills because we are chasing our tails, firefighting all the time. To have that space to learn and improve, to gain good contacts, good information whether it's about fundraising, finance or writing bids. I also learnt that Kingston Voluntary Action offered the portal to go and look for grants. Getting that kind of information was really useful.

The programme offered some face-to-face workshops but also one to one virtual. I thought that was a good mixture. One thing we could have touched on a bit more was the finance of charities. I think we depend a lot on our Treasurers and other members of staff that maybe don't have quite the right knowledge and skills. I think that since we are in such a digital world, maybe a little bit more about how we can use social media platforms for charities.

Steve, Voice of Hope (please do NOT use surname, consent only for first name and organisations):

There was some very useful skills, thoughts and ideas that would help us in terms of grant applications and how to structure the grant applications to better fund the charity as a whole. There was also insight into monitoring and evaluation and the benefits of that. So yes, it has given us food for thought to tidy up the fringes of the administration. I found the monitoring and evaluation particularly useful, that gave a lot of insight. The other side of that that was interesting was actually structuring the cost of that into your grant application and that grant providers would actually like to see that. And that most of that money would end up in the core which would benefit the organisations as a whole.

The other financial aspects were interesting. The accounting in charities can be complicated if you have got multiple projects, you've got lots of different funds, unrestricted funds, it's a complex area.

I would certainly recommend it [the Capacity Building Programme] to a young charity like we are at this stage. In particular if your charity is growing and investigating new areas you really need as much input and understanding as you can get. So yes, I would recommend the programme.

From a practical point of view, the projection of the slides was a small screen area which was a disadvantage but I think technologically it can be easily resolved. Otherwise the slide material was good, it was helpful, it enabled you to consider afterwards what you had heard during the day. The rest of it was well structured with breaks in the right place and so on, adequate catering etc. [The trainers] were clearly very knowledgeable, clearly many years of experience.

Kate Kenyon and Ian Price, RBKares

This course showed us that we need to put in a business plan and engage more volunteers.

[It showed us how] to have a formal vision of where we are currently and where we want to be.

We have learnt what structure we need to put in place to make us resilient and sustainable.

We have been fortunate enough to gain some funding through our own appeals and grant writing but we realise that we didn't know how to formally do that and follow a process which we, as a result of the Capacity Programme we now have a greater understanding of.

The monitoring and evaluation we had done on a very ad hoc basis. We need to formalise. We did learn a lot about how to do that. Not just output but the impact. It's certainly been very beneficial to us.

It gave us a real insight into making a much clearer story for grant writing. How important impact is for the funder and actually to make us sustainable. We need to take time to sit down and put in a structure with the notes we took and the slides we got. I would recommend the programme to another community group.

Volunteer run groups need a lot of volunteers so maybe one session [would be needed] on recruitment and retention of those volunteers that we've got so that we don't wear down the ones that we have. Really demonstrate how we value their efforts and keep them long term.

We have a clear picture of where we are at and a clear picture of where we are at. But maybe more about how to get from A to B. The master classes were really good. The monitoring and evaluation gave us tools for that. For sustainability we have tools. It's about finding the time to work out the journey.

The course gave us time to reflect on where we are.

For us, and that's only for us, the timing was bad. We have 4-5 projects that end at Christmas which didn't give us the time straight after [to sit down] so we need to do that now when it's slightly quieter.

The acoustics in the small room wasn't great. I struggled hearing quite a lot in the last masterclass.

Ends.

All interviews conducted February – March 2024 by Camilla Wheal, KVA Communications Manager