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Participating in the Funding Process Stage 2 – The Reaching New Scots Fund Evaluation Report



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1. Purpose of the document

This document provides an evaluation of Stage 2 of the Participating in the Funding Process Project which involved the co-design, development and delivery of a fund targeted at small New Scots community groups, The Reaching New Scots Fund. This stage of the project ran from August 2022 to April 2023. This document accompanies the Stage 1 Report.

2. Background

Participating in the Funding Process is a partnership project between The National Lottery Community Fund (The Fund) and Scottish Refugee Council (SRC). A total of £1.5million of National Lottery funding was made available for grassroot groups and organisations that are refugee led or provide support for people seeking safety in Scotland.

In Stage 1 of the project, 4 New Scots volunteers with lived experience of forced migration were recruited, trained and worked alongside funding officers from The Fund to assess applications and make funding decisions. As a result, in June 2022 the project team awarded around £661,000 of grants to 13 groups supporting New Scots.

The evaluation of Stage 1 found that both refugee representatives and The Fund participants felt positively about their involvement, they learned more about how funding decisions are made and gained confidence in their ability to make funding decisions. Their feedback called for New Scots to be involved from the very beginning of the funding process.

In Stage 2, we concentrated on the funding design and application processes to create the Reaching New Scots Fund. This funding scheme has been co-designed by New Scots representatives to ensure the needs of their communities are at the forefront of the funding process. All applications will be assessed jointly by New Scots and funding officers from the Fund.

The project aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

1. More refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups will deliver projects that increase integration.
2. Refugee representatives (volunteers) and Refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups increase their knowledge of funding processes.
3. The National Lottery Community Fund staff and SRC increase their knowledge of the challenges faced by small refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups in applying for funding.
4. The Fund have increased and improved contact with refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups.

3. Management Summary

This report outlines the design and assessment process for Reaching New Scots Fund. New Scots volunteers co-produced the funding stream and selected application criteria to favour small, grassroot, refugee-led organisations. They simplified the application form and offered support sessions to applicants.

Volunteers were paired with funding officers from The Fund and assessed the applications individually, in pairs and as a whole group. 34 organisations across Scotland were allocated funding worth £799,896.41 for projects that support New Scots.

Volunteers and funding officers reported that they thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the project and valued the knowledge that they learnt from each other. It was acknowledged that clearer role outlines and an introductory meeting between volunteers and funding officers would improve the partnership working. Everyone involved wanted more time to dedicate to the assessment process, and reported that the more time-consuming aspects, such as visiting applicants, were worthwhile.

New Scots voices were listened to. Volunteers felt proud to be included in the decision-making process and to have their expertise recognised. They will share their new knowledge about funding with their communities and report that this project has led to greater trust in The Fund and their decisions.

The funding was designed to favour smaller groups who had not received funding before. Most funded organisations (21 out of 34) had previously received funding from The Fund, however most of these were small grants worth less than £10,000 (13 out of 21). Many funded groups were founded or led by New Scots (22 out of 34).

This report makes recommendations for future participative grant making projects, including allocating more time to for Funding Officers, clearer role outlines for partnership working between funding officers and volunteers, flexible volunteer support and training, and embedding participative grant making into all funding streams.

4. The Reaching New Scots Fund

4.1 Fund Design

8 New Scots volunteered to be part of the project. The group met 4 times and in each meeting were joined by 2 Funding Officers from The National Lottery Community Fund. The group agreed that small, grassroots organisations often miss out on funding opportunities, particularly refugee-led groups. They designed the funding with these groups in mind, and took the following steps to favour these groups:

- To be eligible, groups must have an income of less than £250,000.
- Constituted groups, who are not registered charities, were permitted to apply.
- Organisations don't need to have their own bank account; they could receive the funding through a partner organisation's account.
- Long application submission period (6 weeks).
- Further support was provided through four online information sessions.
- Online and Word application form.
- Extra 5 points added to the assessment score for applicants who are doing a new project.
- Extra 5 points for applicants who haven't received multi-year funding before.
- Extra 5 points for applicants who are working with New Scots with protected characteristics, e.g., women.

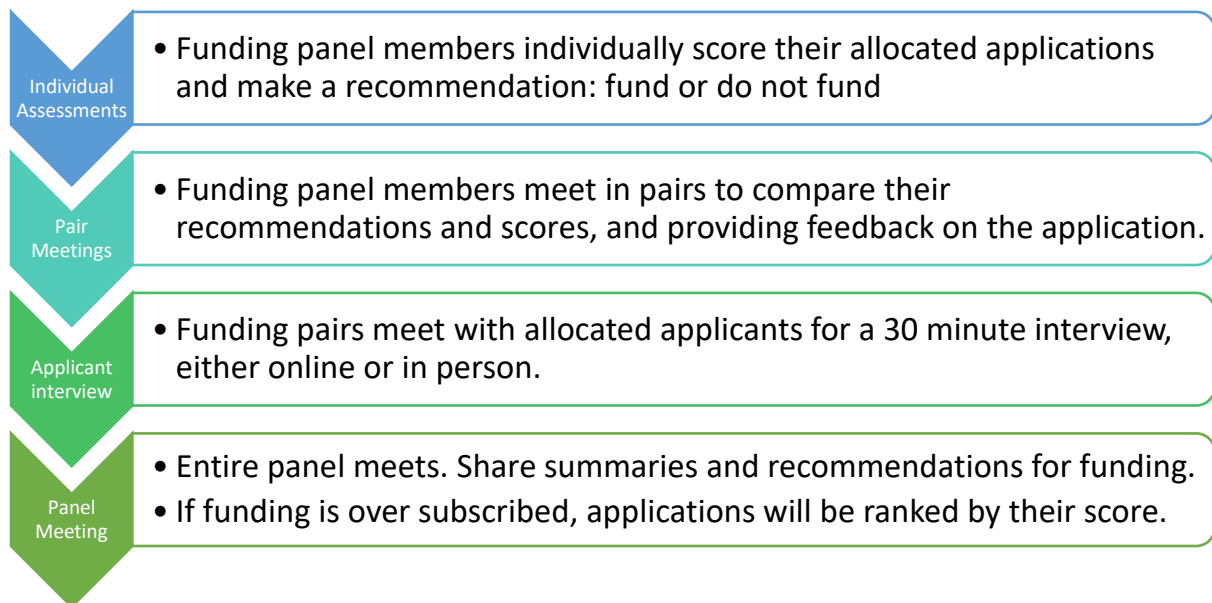
Based on their assessment of what makes a good project, the volunteers wrote the application form and associated assessment criteria.



4.2 Fund Assessment

84 applications from organisations across Scotland were received. To assess the unexpectedly large number of applications in the allotted timeframe, an extra 4 volunteers were recruited to support the original 8 volunteers who were involved in the funding design, and 6 Regional Integration Coordinators from Scottish Refugee Council were co-opted to serve on the decision-making panel. Each volunteer was paired with a funding officer from The Fund or an SRC Regional Integration Coordinator.

The assessment process proceeded as follows -



5. Evaluation

5.1 Feedback

The evaluation of the Reaching New Scots Fund is based on the feedback from New Scots volunteers on both the design and assessment panels, Funding Officers (FOs) from The Fund and from Funded & Unfunded Groups.

Everyone involved gave feedback on the timeline. The assessment process lasted 12 weeks; this is the standard decision time for The Fund. Feedback from some applicants suggested that this was protracted as the project need was immediate.

Funding officers reported that it was difficult to manage the demands of this project alongside their regular workload.

Assessment pairs who made time to visit the applicants had positive experiences; they found them a helpful way to get to know the groups better and assess their ability to run a project as they could find out far more than through the application alone. Funding pairs wanted more time so that they could visit all applicants. Some applicant visits were conducted online but these were deemed less helpful than face-to-face interactions.

The final assessment meeting was allocated 4 hours, but this was not enough time to discuss every application. The project coordinators ranked the applications by the score that the assessment panel had provided and allocated time on the agenda to discuss mid-scoring applications. This meant that not every project application was discussed by the whole panel and the decisions may have been different if this weren't the case.

The scoring matrix was designed to standardise the assessments so that the panel could compare the projects like-for-like. It made the process fair as projects were judged on their individual merits. The Fund does not score applications to their mainstream funds and funding officers commented that the scoring matrix made assessment more time consuming.

New Scots voices are listened to. Volunteers felt proud to be included in the decision-making process and to have their expertise recognised. Funding Officers praised the knowledge that volunteers shared, particularly their awareness of existing support for New Scots and how applicant projects would complement or duplicate it. Funding officers reported that the volunteers were particularly good at speaking to the applicants and applicants felt that the feedback was more relevant coming from someone who had been in the same position as them.

Some applicants raised concerns regarding the impartiality of volunteers and suggested that their connection with different communities would create bias. However, funding officer and volunteer pairs were generally consistent in their scoring, and the process was designed to be as impartial as possible. At the same time, when you are involving the perspective of lived experience in the decision, their

understanding and connection with communities is a valuable part of their contribution and should not be eliminated.

The Fund expected more innovative project ideas to be proposed but found that they were generally familiar with the participants and did not see anything unexpected.

"[I] expected something more grassroots, perhaps something a bit more risqué from this fund, the applications we got in seemed normal. Nothing extraordinary " – Funding Officer

Feedback about the partnership aspect of the project was overwhelmingly positive. Funding Officers and volunteers learned a lot from each other and found working together rewarding. There are calls for more work to get the voices of the community incorporated into decision making, including via recruitment. There is also opportunity for the collaboration to be improved by considering the power dynamic between the staff-volunteer pair. Some volunteers relied on the funding officer to do more work or were reluctant to make negative decisions. Clearer role outlines would help manage the expectations of both parties. Staff from The Fund were grateful for SRC involvement which supported the volunteers.

"I think it's important as a funder for us to think about how we get those voices in and not just in terms of PGM [participatory grant making], but also in terms of recruiting staff" – Funding Officer

5.2 Revisiting Stage 2 Outcomes

Outcome 1 – More refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups will deliver projects that increase integration

As a result of the Reaching New Scots Fund 34 organisations have been awarded funding totalling £799,896.41 to carry out projects that support New Scots Integration. Using information provided by The Fund, 13 organisations had not previously received funding from The National Lottery Community Fund whilst 21 had previously received funding. Of these 21 previously funded organisations, 13 had never received a grant larger than £10,000.

- Organisations founded by or run by New Scots – 22
- Organisations with New Scots in non-management staff positions – 2
- Organisations with New Scots serving as trustees – 2
- Organisations with New Scots volunteers – 3
- Organisations who consulted New Scots on the project development – 5

Feedback from volunteers and funding officers on the assessment panel was that successful applicants were well established and known to The Fund.

*“It just didn't feel perhaps as grassroots as it could have been” –
Funding Officer*

Only a handful of funded applicants received help with their application, and we are not sure why. Some points to consider are the accessibility of the support offered, any barriers to engage with it and to what extent grassroots organisations were aware of the funding and complementary support. Approximately 2 thirds of successful applicants reported that it was easier to apply for this fund than others.

Scottish Refugee Council will continue to support organisations with their management of the grant until the projects end in May 2024. A further report will explore the extent to which organisations were able to deliver their projects and to what extent they increased integration.

Outcome 2 – Refugee representatives (volunteers) and Refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups increase their knowledge of funding processes

In the volunteer debrief meeting, 7 out of 9 volunteers rated their understanding of how grant applications are assessed as 4 or 5 out of 5, which is an increase to the introductory survey conducted 9 months before. They reported a deeper understanding of how funding decisions are made and the deliberation that goes into them. Funding officers observed that volunteers took their role on the decision panel seriously and thoroughly researched applicant organisations.

“Mind blowing! When I sat in [The Fund's] funding meetings I learnt a lot about their processes” - Volunteer

Volunteers plan on sharing their knowledge with colleagues in the community. They reported that they will raise awareness of support and provide training on funding proposals, including how to make sure your project fits with the criteria.

Outcome 3 – The National Lottery Community Fund staff and SRC increase their knowledge of the challenges faced by small refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups in applying for funding

Community need is the starting point of all projects. Colleagues at The Fund and SRC have reported increased understanding of the issues that New Scots communities are facing now. Some colleagues already had a deep understanding of the issues facing New Scots due to their work in the area, or their lived experience as a New Scot. Funding Officers spoke positively of their partnership with volunteers and learned the most from their collaboration with them, for example the importance of culturally appropriate food banks. It also highlighted the difference in statutory and third sector

support for different groups of New Scots according to their immigration status; refugee, asylum seeker, Ukrainian.

Colleagues at The Fund and SRC have reported increased understanding of the challenges faced by refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups when applying to funding.

"The opportunity to work very closely with one New Scot in particular has hopefully deepened empathy, sympathy and just maybe understanding"- Funding Officer

More volunteers gave 5/5 for confidence that funders consider needs of funders upon exit than in the introductory survey.

Issues that organisations face when applying to funding include:

- Understanding the diversity of New Scots communities, including their different languages, cultures etc.
- Culturally insensitive food banks
- Difficulties completing funding applications in 2nd language
- Understanding that the project, while it might not be the best fit for the funding stream, is what is needed by the community
- "How do we balance the structural things that need to be in place, [that the] organisation needs, to have with the urgency of need"

"We don't want to put barriers in the way of people getting funding we want. We're mostly sitting here really wanting to fund refugee projects" – Funding Officer

Funding Officers showed willingness to be flexible in their assessment approach so that they could focus on the merits of the project, rather than the application. They agreed with applicants that visiting projects was worthwhile and allowed them to get to know projects better than just through the applications. FOs do what they can to make organisations feel comfortable, such as meeting in a neutral location like a coffee shop, rather than in offices. The biggest barrier that prevents FOs from doing this is time.

Outcome 4 – The Fund have increased / improved contact with refugee-led and refugee-assisting groups

The level of contact depends on the number of New Scots projects in the Funding Officer's area. The funding officers in Glasgow were aware of and have plenty of

contact with New Scots organisations, less so in other areas as there are few to no New Scots communities there.

Funding Officers communicate with applicants in whatever way is preferred – not always email. They talked about how important it is to make sure that applicants understand the process, what information is needed and why. This includes using less jargon and being conscious that English might not be everyone's 1st language.

"I'll be more conscious when working with groups new to National Lottery funding and those who have people with lived experience. It's a reminder about the importance of face-to-face interactions, as well as being prominent in communities under-represented in our funding" – Funding Officer

Funding Officers touched on the power imbalance that exists between funders and organisations, which occurs when one organisation has money that is needed by the other. This can have a negative effect on communication, for example organisations may not feel that they can be fully honest about challenges that they have encountered with their project for fear that the funder will recall the grant. It is clear from the feedback that relationship building is the key to developing trust between funder and grant holder, and time must be invested to foster these relationships. Volunteers reported that since hearing about Participating in the Funding Process, community leaders feel that they are more able to trust The Fund and their decisions because they can see that they are listening to the community.

6. Points to Consider

The following recommendations have been made because of the feedback provided by applicants, funding officers and volunteers.

The application forms

- Application forms for smaller funds should be shorter and simpler
- Application forms should explain why they ask that question and what kind of information they're looking for
- Applications should be able to be submitted flexibly, for example by video
- Funders should provide detailed application guidance that is easily accessible both online and in the application documents.

The assessment processes

- Assessment panel members need to be allocated adequate time to interview all applicants or shortlist a certain number of applicants for interview.
- Assessment panel should be allocated time and resources to visit all applicants
- Applicants should have a point of contact throughout the assessment process and be kept up to date
- Funders should clearly outline what elements they prioritise in a funding application, e.g., level of innovation, specific nationality or protected characteristic group, service that isn't currently being provided elsewhere, geographical area
- The assessment panel should have a 3rd decision option which awards funding and offers close monitoring and more support for the organisation
- Conflicts of interest between assessment panel members and applicants should be handled on a case-by-case basis
- Funders should be transparent about the assessment process and funding priorities
- Applicants should receive specific, constructive feedback on unsuccessful applications

Further support for applicants

- Applicants requested training on governance, organisational policies required by funders, storytelling

7. Recommendations for future Participatory Grant Making projects

- Assessment panellist should be given enough time to devote to the process alongside their usual responsibilities.
- Volunteer and funding officer roles should be clearly defined from the outset and induction training should be given, including briefings on the level of influence.
- Volunteer support should be flexible and responsive to the needs of the group. Some training to consider providing includes; funding processes, what is co-production, mediation skills.
- To meaningfully transfer power from funders to communities, participative grant making practices should be a consistent feature of decision making.

8. Conclusion

The Reaching New Scots Fund has provided funding to 34 refugee integration projects across Scotland which will make a significant difference to their communities. It has provided an opportunity for groups to engage with funders and execute projects that would otherwise be forgotten.

New Scots volunteers have designed the funding stream and directly influenced the kinds of organisations and projects that could be funded. They reported that they learned a lot from being part of the project and will share this knowledge with their own networks and community.

By taking part in this project The Fund have seen the value of engaging communities in grant decision making and seen how this can work in practice. Funding officers benefited from the expertise of the volunteers that they worked with and will use this learning in their day-to-day work.

This project is a great first step towards putting communities at the heart of funding decision making. By embedding participative grant practises in decision making, we can make it a true reflection of community need.

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