

# Introducing the Local Sustainability Fund

**We want to help Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations which are delivering important services, but currently facing challenges, to plan for the future.**

Delivered by the Big Lottery Fund on behalf of the Office for Civil Society, the Local Sustainability Fund aims to help these organisations become stronger, more sustainable, and more resilient, to ensure they prosper and continue to support beneficiaries in future years. There are two aspects to the programme a VCSE Diagnostic Tool and the Local Sustainability Fund.

## VCSE Diagnostic Tool

### What's it all about?

*Our experience is that the very best VCSE organisations have a strong understanding of their strengths and how they can improve further.*

*We want to make it easy for you to assess your organisation's strengths, build on what you do well and identify where you need to focus on changing how you work.*

The VCSE Diagnostic Tool will help you to do this. It takes about an hour to complete. It will help you analyse key information about your organisation, and provide you with a report highlighting areas where you may wish to develop. The report will provide indicators that will help you decide on your short and long term planning strategy, and help to ensure your long term success and relevance to your beneficiaries.

Our experience tells us that many VCSEs which provide an excellent service struggle to find the time to focus on this critical activity, and hence become vulnerable, and liable to closure.

For the diagnostic to be successful it is really important you answer the questions openly and honestly.

You may find it best to complete the diagnostic as an organisational management team. It may also be useful to involve an external 'critical friend' to challenge your understanding of what you do and how you work.

Organisations are encouraged to access and use the online VCSE Diagnostic Tool regardless of whether they are eligible or interested in financial support from the Local Sustainability Fund.

## The Local Sustainability Fund

*The Office for Civil Society has made funding available for medium sized voluntary organisations to plan for and start to change the way they work.*

*The organisations which can apply for this funding will be chosen from those who complete the VCSE Diagnostic Tool.*

The organisations that are offered funding will be those with a strong track record of delivering services and empowering their beneficiaries, who are experiencing some current challenges, and which with targeted support, can have a strong long term future.

We will choose a number of organisations representing a range of beneficiaries, areas of work, locations and challenges, and give them the opportunity to apply for funding to help them with their transformation work.

We are keen that each organisation takes ownership and control of their own change plans and long term transformation. This will be a key consideration when deciding which organisations are invited to apply for funding.

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### **Working with an advisor**

*If you are invited to apply for funding, we don't expect you to do this by yourself. You will need to work with an advisor, someone with the experience and expertise to advise and help you evaluate, plan, and deliver the change that is best for your organisation.*

The advisor could be someone you have worked with before, a consultant, or someone from a similar organisation - but you must be able to explain how and why you chose them, and how they will be able to help you. You will also need to be sure you can develop an effective working relationship with them; and that they have relevant knowledge and experience.

Initially your advisor will be involved if you are invited to submit a full application. They will help diagnose the changes you want to make, work with you to produce a business change plan, and help you write your application.

If you are successful, and we offer you funding, the advisor should help you deliver the changes to your organisation. Paying the advisor is likely to be one of your key project delivery costs, although please note that we are not making funding available to pay the advisor to help develop your application and business change plan.

If you do not know of a suitable advisor to provide support and advice, we may be able to offer you some advice on how to find one.

### **Working with a local business**

We are aware that charities and social enterprises partnering with local businesses can be of great benefit to both parties. As such, we are keen that any organisation invited to make an application for funding from the LSF also work with a local business. We would expect applicants to be able to identify a business or businesses that could offer advice on their plans for change. We would also expect applicants to include in the steps of their change plans information on how they plan to develop volunteering opportunities with local businesses. These opportunities would form part of a plan for achieving sustainability over the medium to long-term.

### **How much is available?**

*We hope to be able to fund about 260 projects across England at an average grant size of around £70,000.*

We will provide more information about the Local Sustainability Fund to you if you are invited to apply.

## What happens when?

What happens when?	Dates	What you should be doing or thinking about.....
VCSE Diagnostic Tool is open	25 June until 26 July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Completing the diagnostic tool and starting to think about the changes you want to make to your organisation.</li> </ul>
	June to August 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Using the results of the VCSE Diagnostic Tool, think about the changes you want to make, and how you will make them, either with or without funding. What help and advice can you get, and what advisor would you use if you were invited to apply for funding? Have you identified a local business that can also advise you? Have you identified a local business that might support you through volunteering?</li> <li>▶ If you are not looking for funding and there are changes you wish to make to your organisation, you should begin to write a change plan, including a timescale for implementation.</li> <li>▶ If you are waiting to hear whether you have been invited to apply for funding, you should still work on your change plans. You will need to have two clear scenarios, one if you get funding and one if you don't. Remember that demand will be high, and not all of those who would like funding will get it.</li> </ul>
Organisations that have expressed an interest in the Local Sustainability Fund are told if they have been invited to submit an application	Early September 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ If you are invited to apply for funding you will have eight weeks to complete your change plan and application form.</li> </ul>
Deadline for submitting applications and associated documents	End October 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Once the application deadline has passed you should continue planning and doing as much as you can so you can move quickly once you have the decision about funding.</li> </ul>
Assessment of applications		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ You need to have plans in place to cover both situations - whether you get funding or not.</li> </ul>
Assessment of applications	November - December 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Continue planning and preparing. Be ready to move quickly once you have the funding decision.</li> <li>▶ You need to have plans in place to cover both situations - whether you get funding or not.</li> </ul>
Applicants informed if they have been awarded funding	Late January/ Early February 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Return of information so that we can set up your grant and make payment. It is important you complete this requirement as quickly as possible.</li> </ul>
Projects must start	As soon as you receive your funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ You have the funding decision. Start work now.</li> </ul>

**These dates may change so please check our website for precise dates and the latest information**