

Spotlight Findings Paper 5

Lessons from adapting during emergency circumstances

Evaluation of the Coronavirus Community Support Fund

September 2021

The Coronavirus Community Support Fund (CCSF) is a funding programme supported by a grant of £187 million from Government, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, to help Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations in England respond to the COVID-19 crisis and increase community support to people affected by the pandemic. Ipsos MORI and partners have evaluated the programme. This is one of a series of papers which focus in depth on themes that have emerged from the evaluation.

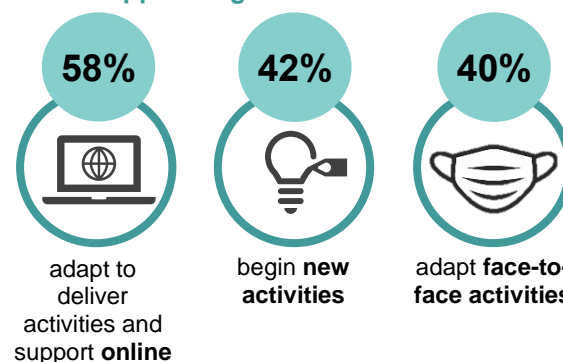
The CCSF provided **emergency grants** to organisations to help them respond to challenges resulting from the pandemic. For some, this included a **sudden reduction in funding** due to the impact of lockdown restrictions on fundraising activities. Most also had to **adapt their delivery models** in response to the pandemic to either respond to changed or increased demand from people and communities in need or to enable them to continue delivering support.

Ways that grantholders adapted

Wider evidence from the VCSE sector has shown that many organisations found themselves in a position where the majority of the ways in which they typically delivered their projects (delivery modes) **were no longer**

feasible in light of the emergency restrictions imposed. The CCSF supported **almost all** (90%) grantholders (an estimated **7,380** grantholders) **to respond to increased and/or changed demand** during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grantholders used the funding to adapt delivery in three main ways.

CCSF supported grantholders to...



Base: All CCSF grantholder survey respondents (6,712)

First, grantholders **switched to remote ways of working**. This included staff working from home and remote management of staff and/or volunteers as well as shifting to telephone or virtual support for beneficiaries. The most common adaptation (reported by more than half of grantholders) was using the CCSF grant to adapt activities and support **from face-to-face to online delivery**. Grantholders invested in equipment and training for staff and volunteers, and in some cases, provided mobiles or tablets

Funded by



In partnership with

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND

Independently evaluated by



Ipsos MORI



for beneficiaries to ensure **continuity of support**.



What we did additionally was the additional phone calls, we gave them mentoring support, we sent things out in the post, so we did lots of extra wraparound stuff, but the actual sessions stayed at the same time, just moved online. I think that worked really well because it was the regularity, the consistency of it that was important.



Grantholder

Second, around two in five (42%) grantholders used the CCSF grant to **begin delivering new activities** in response to changing demand. A common example was **delivering parcels** to doorsteps to provide essential items, such as food or medication, or to support the wellbeing of beneficiaries, for example, activity packs for children and families.



For our new activities, such as providing meals for people in need in the community, [the CCSF helped] to have the resources to be able to do that as well as to obtain equipment that would enable us to continue in the future. As we are now shifting our activity to online, the funding would help us to have the resources to be able to continue that beyond the COVID period. So, it would help us to function on a more long-term basis.



Grantholder

Third, a substantial minority of grantholders (40%) adapted activities and support so that they could **continue to happen face-to-face**. For example, grantholders invested in:

- **personal protective equipment (PPE)** for staff and volunteers;

- **signage for their premises** about how to stay safe and follow COVID-19 safety guidance;
- **training for staff and volunteers** on how to change ways of working to follow guidance and keep them and beneficiaries safe; and
- **recruitment of new volunteers** to substitute those who were shielding and could no longer deliver in-person support.



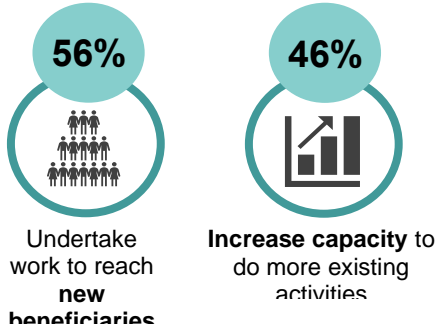
We make sure to get the PPE for the care workers, so what we do is that we give them procedures to the way they contact and to be safer themselves as volunteers. To be safer themselves, they are wearing this PPE, washing hands, giving space from the client, at least 2 metres. All of those things are things that we have adapted with it.



Grantholder

Grantholders also used the CCSF grant to **respond to increased demand**. For example, around half used their grant **to enable them to reach new beneficiaries** (56%). This included through awareness-raising activities, both online (through social media, sector press or email) and in-person (through outreach work within local communities). Around half used the funding to **increase capacity to deliver more of their existing activities** (46%), such as through recruiting more staff or volunteers or sourcing more materials or resources.

CCSF supported grantholders to...



Base: All CCSF grantholder survey respondents (6,712)

Assets that helped grantholders adapt

Adapting ways or working and delivery approaches within the emergency context was challenging for many grantholders. However, grantholders described several **key assets that were vital for supporting their ability to adapt** within the crisis context.

Grantholders were often proud of their ability to continue delivering during the pandemic, especially knowing that other organisations unfortunately had to close. Whilst the CCSF provided critical financial support, grantholders also highlighted the **resilient nature of their organisation** as being key to enabling them to respond and adapt to the ever-changing circumstances. For some, this was already inherent in their **organisational culture**, for example, smaller charities described how they often need to be resourceful because they rely on limited staff and funding.

“ I think, when you work for a small charity, when you are a small charity, you have an incredible level of resilience because you don't have any other option. We don't have an IT department, we don't have such a thing, so we're kind of multi-skilled. The way the world's been in the past 12 months, that resilience, and that strength, and that ability to flick and turn things as quickly as we can has actually served us incredibly well. ”

Grantholder

Grantholders also applauded the **dedication, skills and assets of their staff and volunteers**. The commitment of both staff and volunteers was critical to their ability to adapt.

Grantholders identified ways to **make face-to-face delivery safer**, such as through adaptations to premises to ensure social distancing guidelines could be adhered to. Experienced staff members also supported the **transition to online delivery**, such as through identifying and sourcing appropriate platforms and delivering staff training. **Staff with IT skills were particularly valuable** during this time. While some grantholders had these skills in-house, others **used the CCSF grant to recruit a staff member** who could support the digitalisation of their services. Many staff also learned new skills quickly.

“ We were really lucky in the person we appointed to deliver the project. She came with really savvy IT skills and able to find a platform to use and to develop some learning that's been really engaging and people have really enjoyed it. We engaged people that we thought we wouldn't engage. ”

Grantholder

Similarly, **existing volunteers brought their experience and knowledge** of supporting beneficiaries and the CCSF enabled grantholders to also **recruit and train new volunteers with specific skills and experience**. For example, this included seeking volunteers who could provide virtual support or be drivers for parcel deliveries. Volunteers could also often relate to the experiences of beneficiaries, which helped build trust despite the difficult circumstances.

Grantholders also **worked with other organisations**, which included strengthening existing partnerships and developing new collaborations, to respond to increased or

changed demand. These were particularly valuable when the organisations delivered **complementary activities**, which supported grantholders to deliver new activities and/or reach new beneficiaries through wider networks.

“

We worked with the local authorities and they put things out on their websites. We worked with the police to get [our communications] translated into eight different languages. We'd also started to do some work with a local media company to produce some short YouTube videos on how to stay safe. We mapped all of the community Facebook pages in our area so we could tag those when we were putting things on our own social media and also send things to them directly to share.

”

Grantholder

Grantholders were also sensitive to the needs of their community and how this should inform their approach to engaging them. Many offered **flexible support**, for example, if beneficiaries were uncomfortable engaging in group settings over digital platforms (e.g. Zoom), some offered one-to-one telephone calls.

“

We're quite open and flexible, so we'll quite often say, 'Do you want to do an individual session first before you do a group session?' We're constantly having new people coming in but we also have our regulars. What we've found, for some people, is we almost become part of their life

”

Grantholder

Challenges encountered

Alongside the success of many grantholders and their ability to respond and adapt during the pandemic, there were also challenges.

Although many grantholders successfully moved services online, it was **difficult to engage some**

beneficiaries in this way. Some people were reticent about using technology or did not have the necessary equipment. In some cases, moving online meant that it was more **difficult to build connections and trust** between beneficiaries and staff/volunteers. Grantholders who participated in Learning Hub activities said that it was sometimes more difficult for staff to **build rapport** with people online. This was often exacerbated by **technology issues**, which could sometimes result in sessions being cut off abruptly.

“

It worked in part yes, in part no. There's nothing that really substitutes someone sitting in front of you and you asking them questions and getting a feel about what it is. Most of our clients wouldn't do Zoom, so we would be supporting them over the phone or via an email.

”

Grantholder

Another challenge was that, throughout the grant period, national restrictions also changed. For grantholders still delivering some support in person, this often meant they **needed to adapt on a regular basis** to follow the guidance. This was both **resource-intensive** and stressful for grantholders as they were unable to give assurances to staff, volunteers or beneficiaries.

“

We get through lockdown one and we thought, 'Yay,' and we get to lockdown two and it's, like, 'Oh god,' and then we get to lockdown-, it's just the uncertainty. In terms of strategic planning, when you're delivering support around health, normally there would be a degree of certainty ... the government response in the different regions with the different levels of lockdown, it's been very, very difficult to plan,

”

Grantholder

Although the CCSF helped some grantholders bring back or prevent staff from furlough, or recruit new staff and/or volunteers, some grantholders still **struggled with capacity** during their grant period. Some staff remained on furlough so smaller teams were sometimes responsible for responding to increased demand. Shifting to remote working also took time to adjust to at the start, with some grantholders noting more challenges in communicating effectively across the team without having a physical place to come together.

While these were some of the themes that came from interviews with grantholders, it is also important to note that most grantholders highlighted these challenges and went on to describe how they sought to overcome them. For example, remote working became easier and grantholders adjusted their approaches to engaging people. **Overall, grantholders undoubtedly faced many challenges but were generally positive about how they sought solutions for them.**

Key takeaways

Grantholders had to adapt ways of working to respond to the pandemic and associated restrictions. Almost all grantholders used their CCSF grant to adapt their delivery approaches to respond to increased and/or changed demand. This paper highlights a number of lessons in relation to factors that both supported and challenged grantholders' ability to adapt their support for people and communities:

1. The CCSF provided critical financial support to grantholders, which enabled them to make appropriate adaptations to their delivery models in response to challenges faced as a result of the pandemic.
2. Having a resilient organisational culture prepared grantholders to be resourceful during the pandemic.
3. The dedication, skills and experiences of staff and volunteers were critical to the

successful transition of services (both online and face-to-face).

4. Grantholders who responded flexibly and sensitively to the needs of beneficiaries, for example by offering different ways to engage, were better able to understand what adaptations were required to reach those most in need.
5. Building connections and trust virtually was challenging for some, particularly for those supporting older people who were less confident with digital modes of delivery.
6. Some grantholders were limited in their ability to adapt due to a lack of digital infrastructure or resourcing challenges.

Evidence sources:

Grantholder survey: Ipsos MORI conducted an online survey with grantholders that received funding from the CCSF. Fieldwork was conducted between November 2020 and April 2021 and a total of 6,712 grantholders responded.

Findings from the grantholder survey were extrapolated to estimate the overall figures among all grantholders. This assumes that the findings among those who did not respond to the survey would have been replicated proportionally among those grantholders that did respond to the survey. Numeric data presented in this paper represents the extrapolated data.

Qualitative interviews: Ipsos MORI, NPC and TIHR conducted a total of 266 depth interviews with grantholders, and a further 33 case studies, including interviews with 72 staff members, 25 deliver partners, 28 volunteers, and 49 beneficiaries.

You can read more evaluation findings at the following weblink:

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights/covid-19-resources/responding-to-covid-19/ccsf-grantholder-evaluation>