"Communities Can"

Final Evaluation Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Programme impact

Communities Can was set up as a pilot to test and learn how best to provide development support for smaller, more informal community groups.

This kind of programme is needed. Community organisations are an essential part of civil society with limited access to support or the encouragement to develop and fulfil their ambitions.

The support delivered through *Communities Can* appears to have had significant impact for some community organisations. We have strong anecdotal evidence of organisations improving their effectiveness, attracting more funding and expanding their reach.

This impact was achieved in different ways. We draw a distinction between organisations that used the support 'instrumentally', to help get some tangible things done like charity registration or an improved website, and 'developmentally', to think about what they really want to do. The latter seems to have had greater impact.

The most effective support was delivered by providers who were seen by organisations as flexible, reliable, knowledgeable and useful. When it failed, it was generally down to providers letting organisations down, for example, not meeting their commitments etc.

At the time of writing, a total of 355 support packages were approved and delivered, with 238 completed.

Ninety-five percent of those providing feedback said they found the support useful; and 79% said it was either 'extremely' or 'very useful'. Taking into account non-response, our best estimate is that between 30% and 50% of these packages were regarded by organisations as 'extremely useful', with the majority of the rest saying the support was at least 'fairly useful'.

It is important to remember that the wider context for community organisations is difficult. Funding is in short supply and institutions like local authorities are stretched. *Communities Can* may have equipped organisations to better, but the lack of availability of funding or other support will limit their potential.

Programme delivery

Behind the scenes, there have been some important learning points about how to deliver programmes for community groups.

Proactive community based outreach is essential for reaching this target group. Conventional communication channels can only reach so far. It also helps to apply clear eligibility criteria that go beyond organisation's financial situation.

Community groups are diverse and not everyone who is signed-up will actually engage or benefit, even if they do appear to meet the eligibility criteria. For future programmes, there is an argument for better segmentation of organisations to determine both eligibility and the type of support they need. The two main criteria informing this should be; a) the stage of their development; b) the level of their ambition. It should also be noted that time-bound programmes like this could risk promoting the programme to the wrong people to meet targets.

The main improvement asked for by providers and community organisations was more time with organisations over a longer period. This was not always needed, but very often providers did find they needed to do a lot more work than anticipated (and often did this pro-bono). The idea of a two-stage process was popular: time up front to assess needs, followed by more time to address those needs.

The assessment and application process was difficult at times. *Communities Can* was designed to appeal to organisations by having informal, 'light touch' processes, but the flip side was that there was limited or inaccurate information from which to make decisions and design support. An online self-assessment was used, which most organisations were fine with, but only produced limited information. The consensus amongst those running the project is that needs assessment is best done face-to-face, possibly as part of outreach, when better information and trust can be established. Online approaches might be part of this, but they should do one of three things: encourage engagement, help organisations better understand what the programme is for and / or collect useful information.

A wide range of providers were engaged to provide support through *Communities Can.* Nearly half the support was provided by local CVSs but a small number of independent providers also did high volumes of support. There were also 20-30 providers delivering only one or two packages. This 'market' ensured organisations had access to specialist support if they needed it, there is also some evidence to indicate that the best providers were rewarded with more packages as time went by while the average daily rate fell.

But arguably it wasn't the *market* that worked, rather just the fact that a range of providers were available to add capacity and capability. Most organisations preferred to be guided to a provider than choose one, and those that did make a choice would often find it overruled during the application panel. Moreover, the process for allocating work to providers caused tension between delivery partners and providers, confused organisations themselves and created perceptions of impropriety. Future programmes need to think through how to ensure the benefits of a wide pool of providers without the fuss and expense of a marketplace.

Finally, the administration of the programme improved as time went by. By the end, sign-up, delivery and feedback processes were running smoothly. This suggests future programmes would benefit from longer lead-in times or starting on a smaller scale to iron-out challenges.

Summary

The headline is that through *Communities Can* a good number of organisations to get valuable support that will help them have greater impact for their communities. Through the programme we also learned more about how best to organise and deliver that support. For example; the importance of outreach to engage the right organisations; more comprehensive assessment of need / potential to benefit; and the benefit of a wide pool of different support providers.

Recommendations

To summarise, future capability building programmes for this target audience could consider:

- Develop a more robust / assessment process that produces an accurate assessment of needs without putting organisations off. We appreciate that this might be hard to do in practice, but it is likely to involve more local and face-to-face interaction.

- Longer support packages are sometimes needed. In particular, building in the facility for more ongoing / follow-up support was the main change suggested by users, providers and coordinators alike.

- Similarly, longer time periods should be allowed. For practical reasons—because it can take time to get to know different people in an organisation and build mutual understanding—but also to allow more time for reflection.

- Provide a more segmented offer. The needs of a new, less experienced organisation appear to be very different to those of an organisation using *Communities Can* more 'instrumentally'.

- Proactive, local marketing is clearly needed to reach out to more genuinely small informal organisations. Capability building support needs to go beyond established networks and use different types of communication approaches / materials, e.g. local knowledge and people on the ground.

- The best approach to marketing support may be to focus on the issue of fundraising—as this is what most community organisations expressed an interest in. Funding-readiness can then work as a 'hook' and a lens through which to draw out the importance of other organisational characteristics and processes upon which funding success depends. That said, there is the risk of undervaluing wider aspects of support or of raising expectations of funding that may not be met in a constrained financial environment.

- Were programmes like *Communities Can* to be introduced on a longer-term footing, careful thought should be given to how to manage the dual role of the CVSs and how to avoid conflicts of interest. It may make sense to only apply future projects to areas where there is a sufficient local market so that the CVS can act as the local administrator, gatekeeper and coordinator, stimulating, connecting and strengthening other providers. Alternatively, to consider partnering with local authorities to administer the scheme so CVSs can apply their expertise to support provision.

- Future programmes might be improved by a greater focus on networking and peer-to-peer approaches. While helping organisations to feel more connected was part of the *Communities Can* theory of change, we found less evidence of this happening; both from our surveys and qualitative research. Moreover, peer approaches and helping groups to appreciate what they have in common may help to exemplify the benefits of engaging with capability building. This finding is applicable to providers as well as organisations themselves; both of whom said they would have welcomed more opportunities to get together and share learning / experiences.

INTRODUCTION

About Communities Can

Communities Can was a pilot programme that aimed to test new ways of developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of community groups. It ran between 2015 - 2017 in five local authority areas: Blackpool, Barking & Dagenham, Peterborough, Sunderland and Torbay.

The target group for support was individuals or groups with a turnover under £25,000 (in February 2016, this was reduced to £10,000 to encourage a greater focus on smaller, informal organisations.). To be eligible organisations needed to have clear social impact objectives and ideally not accessing support already (see Appendix A for a full description of the programme's priority framework).

Communities Can was delivered as a partnership between the Young Foundation (YF) and local CVSs in Blackpool, Barging & Dagenham, Peterborough, Torbay and Sunderland. The Young Foundation provided strategic leadership, organised the different partners and conducted proactive outreach to organisations within communities. The CVSs marketed the programme and had input into the application process and local market, they also operated as providers of support for some community organisations. The aim of this arrangement was to combine the national reach and clear independence of YF, alongside the specialist local knowledge and ongoing presence of the CVSs. The programme was supported by the Big Lottery Fund using funding from the National Lottery.

Community organisations were identified and encouraged to apply in a number of different ways. Initial application was through an online Organisational Health Scorecard followed by a telephone call with the Young Foundation team. Applicants were then matched to local, regional or national support providers that were best suited to support their development needs.

Support was allocated from a £1.2million fund, provided through vouchers at a maximum value of £2,500, which paid for the providers' support time.

The context for *Communities Can*

The characteristics of the *Communities* Can target group

Communities Can was targeted at 'small informal' charities or community organisations. The precise definition of small charities varies, with the Small Charities Coalition defining it as organisations with an income under £1 million, while the Charity Commission itself see small as an income between £10,000 and £100,000. But the largest group of organisations within the sector is smaller than this. Micro-organisations, those with an income of no greater than £10,000, make up slightly fewer than 50% of all voluntary organisations.

In terms of their contribution to society, alongside the capacity they bring, a recent report by the Lloyds Bank Foundation[1] stresses the expertise of small charities; the unique skills in understanding the day-to-day needs of

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[1]

their community alongside their enhanced understanding of how to engage with and empower local people. This allows them to be more agile responding to the needs communities and shaping their services accordingly.

'Small local providers provide better tailored services and keep personal touch which is extremely important in terms of community and trust.'

<div align="right">Lloyds Bank Foundation</div>

'Having worked in the statutory sector, managed large voluntary sector organisations and developed and led community partnerships, it is clear to me that whilst they all have their part to play, it is the small community groups which really make a difference. They are the unsung heroes of communities. We should be doing everything we can to ensure they survive.'

<div align="right">Communities Can Provider</div>

During an early stage of *Communities Can,* we convened a group of CVSs to define some of the general characteristics of these organisations, which are listed below. In outlining these, it is important to stress that we still see each organisation as fundamentally unique, rather these are traits that organisations have to greater or lesser extent.

The basics

- Small organisations: Turnover between £2k-25k.
- Volunteer-led, no professional paid staff: Only one or two people driving the work forward. Leaders do a disproportionate share of the work (potentially overworked).
- Based on personal / informal relationships.
- Informal funding (rely on subs).
- Serving a specific locality.
- Occupy niches—high level of specialisation. Locally focussed.

Ethos and values

- Values and solutions driven. Committed and passionate. Ideas people. Leader figures. Community activists and champions.
- Many-hatted people. They can see themselves as unique / distinct / irreplaceable.
- Practical and pragmatic. 'Can do' people. Make-do-and-mend. Self-sufficient. Responsive to the need they see in communities. Nimble / flexible. Source of innovation.
- Integrity. Activities are mission based. They value first-hand personal experience over more formal processes / evidence. Undiluted / untainted by association with formal structures.
- Unprofessional, unpredictable, maverick (which can be both positive and negative).

Challenges

- 'Founder syndrome': Maybe reluctant to grow and lose their ethos / original purpose.
- Identity may not be clear / not fully developed.
- Networked / connected with local communities—but not wider society / institutions.

Championing small but vital charities, Lloyds Bank Foundation (2015)
https://www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk/Championing%20small%20charities%20-%206pg%20handout%20digital.pdf

- Apprehensive / fearful of change. Resistant to red tape / bureaucracy. Resistant to the idea of growth. Animosity / suspicion of institutions. Not 'paperwork people'. Protective e.g. of their own ideas.

- Little insight into how organisations work. Naïve / unrealistic expectations about funding.

- Little publicity, only known about anecdotally. Uncontrollable (e.g. from the local authority perspective).

However, the wider context for small informal community organisations is difficult. Constraints on public sector and charitable resources have made it harder to attract funds, while reductions in public services may have increased needs. The level of support from larger charities and infrastructure bodies has also diminished over the last ten years; CVSs are operating on lower budgets, the Community Development Foundation is closing in March 2017 and Government sponsored programmes such as Capacity Builders are a distant memory. Despite these challenges, the small informal sector seems resilient, and new groups continue to be formed.

Support needs

The kinds of support that these kinds of organisations need can be summarised as follows:

- **Funding.** Monetary resources.

- **Consultation and advice**. Practical / informative information. Support to become formalised / grow: e.g. CICs, policies, legal requirements, compliance, governance, constitution, tools to help them be ambitious.

- **Coaching and mentoring:** Someone to listen to them, hear what they are doing and why. Hand-holding. Checking and validating service for bids. Referees.

- Introduction to **wider networks / people**. They need other / similar people to help them achieve their aspirations. Peer support.

- **Access to facilities and resources:** community equipment. 'Exchange and change.'

- **Role:** Awareness of where they fit in. What they achieve. Recognition and value for their work.

- **Long-term thinking:** Awareness of potential impact / where they can go / what they can achieve. Succession planning, how to go beyond founder.
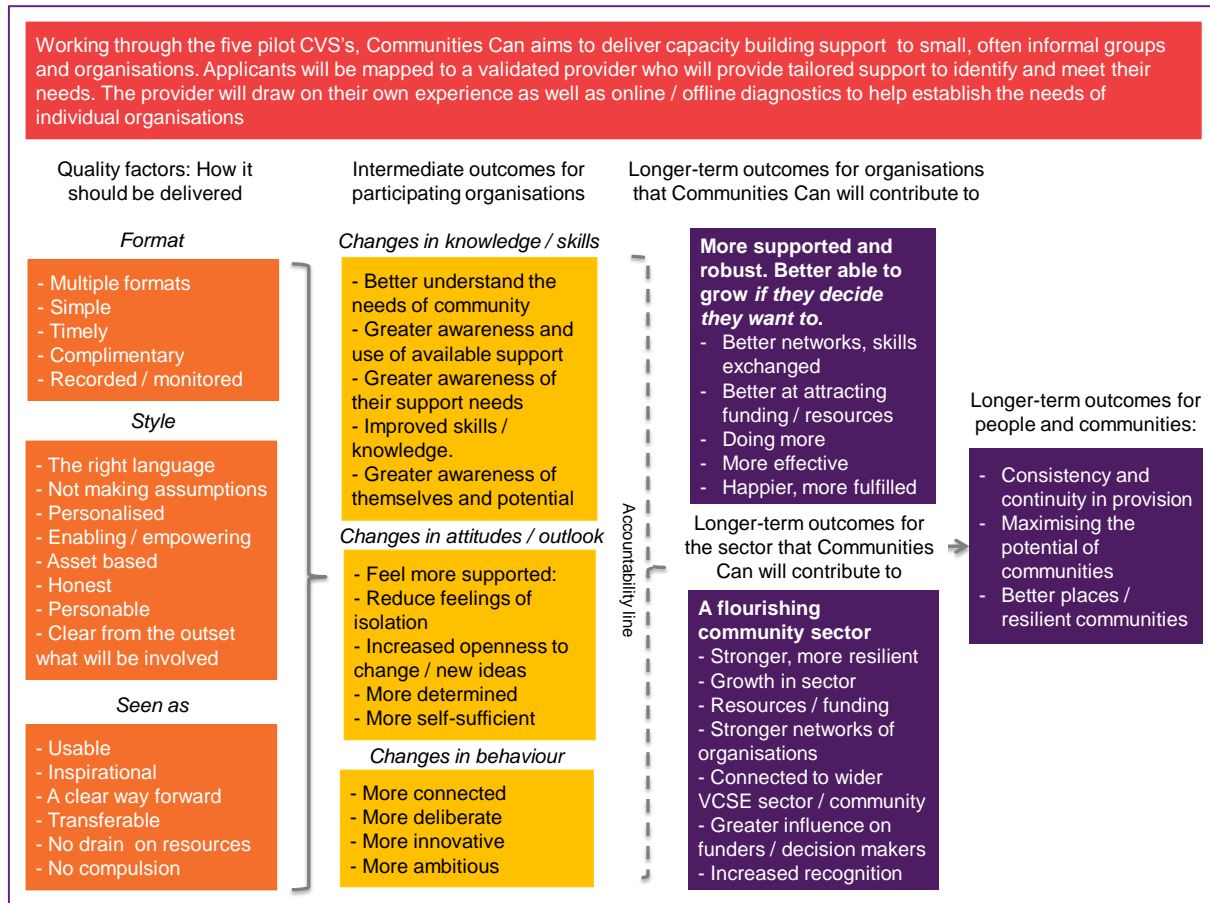
Existing capability building advice and support for small charities has been relatively common, ranging from information and guidance from groups like the small charities commission to more tailored capability building by funders such as CAF's *Consultancy and Training Fund and Collaborative Fund*. However, there has been less support specifically tailored to the smallest organisations. Even capability building projects specifically designed to target small community groups tend to target organisations larger than micro organisations, for example the Cabinet Offices' 2011 *Grassroots Grants* programme targeted organisations with an income of up to £35,000. Alternatively, programmes like Unltd[2] only target specific parts of the sector such as social enterprises.

The lack of support for smaller informal organisations is arguably an oversight and a missed opportunity to support organisations that deliver real benefits to communities. Moreover, the scale at which these organisations are operating and their lack of experience might mean that a lot of benefit might be achieved through a relatively small amount of support. A challenge in delivering support to community organisations is that due to their scale is that their lack of formal structures or full-time paid employees is likely to drastically affect their ability to engage with support designed for larger organisations.

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[2] https://unltd.org.uk/

Communities Can 'theory of change'

At the start of the project, NPC worked with the Young Foundation, CVSs and Big Lottery Fund to agree a 'theory of change'[3] for what *Communities Can* was trying to achieve and how it intended to deliver against this. This theory of change was refined through further consultation with providers, CVSs and the Big Lottery Fund. A summary of the theory of change is shown in the chart below.

Working through the five pilot CVS's, Communities Can aims to deliver capacity building support to small, often informal groups and organisations. Applicants will be mapped to a validated provider who will provide tailored support to identify and meet their needs. The provider will draw on their own experience as well as online / offline diagnostics to help establish the needs of individual organisations

Quality factors: How it should be delivered

Format
- Multiple formats
- Simple
- Timely
- Complimentary
- Recorded / monitored

Style
- The right language
- Not making assumptions
- Personalised
- Enabling / empowering
- Asset based
- Honest
- Personable
- Clear from the outset what will be involved

Seen as
- Usable
- Inspirational
- A clear way forward
- Transferable
- No drain on resources
- No compulsion

Intermediate outcomes for participating organisations

Changes in knowledge / skills
- Better understand the needs of community
- Greater awareness and use of available support
- Greater awareness of their support needs
- Improved skills / knowledge.
- Greater awareness of themselves and potential

Changes in attitudes / outlook
- Feel more supported:
- Reduce feelings of isolation
- Increased openness to change / new ideas
- More determined
- More self-sufficient

Changes in behaviour
- More connected
- More deliberate
- More innovative
- More ambitious

Accountability line

Longer-term outcomes for organisations that Communities Can will contribute to

More supported and robust. Better able to grow *if they decide they want to.*
- Better networks, skills exchanged
- Better at attracting funding / resources
- Doing more
- More effective
- Happier, more fulfilled

Longer-term outcomes for the sector that Communities Can will contribute to

A flourishing community sector
- Stronger, more resilient
- Growth in sector
- Resources / funding
- Stronger networks of organisations
- Connected to wider VCSE sector / community
- Greater influence on funders / decision makers
- Increased recognition

Longer-term outcomes for people and communities:
- Consistency and continuity in provision
- Maximising the potential of communities
- Better places / resilient communities

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[3] Kail, A. and Lumley, T. (2013) A Theory of Change: The beginning of making a difference http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/theory-of-change/ New Philanthropy Capital

Evaluation aims

This evaluation can be seen as an attempt to test whether the theory of change is delivered and what can be learned to inform the design of future programmes with similar aims. More specifically:

- To provide a clear picture of what the service provider has delivered and to whom. Partly to monitor where funds were allocated but also to understand the scale of activity and how much potential impact there may have been.

- To test the quality of delivery and the strength of user engagement—as defined in the quality section of the theory of change.

- To gain a deeper understanding of the different activities delivered and how valuable they have been—reflecting participating organisations' varying aims, circumstances and stage of development.

- To contribute to a better understanding of the needs of the sector and how support can work (but also what does not work).

- To draw out lessons for the delivery of grant support to community organisations, including consideration of the assumptions outlined in the theory of change.

- To develop recommendations for future programmes.

Limitations of the evaluation

The extent to which we have been able to answer these questions is dependent on the data and funding available for evaluation. We have worked within constraints:

- The evaluation was quite small scale which limited the capacity for primary research or detailed analysis. This means that the report is primarily descriptive rather than analytical. In particular, we have not been funded to draw comparisons with other programmes targeted at the same audience.

- The evaluation report has been requested by the Big Lottery Fund before the programme is completed. At the time of writing, 33% of the support vouchers are still being delivered and as such the results of these packages are not included in the findings. Moreover, the schedule has limited the amount of follow-up research we can do (i.e. to test longer-term effects).

- The programme deliberately did not generate a lot of consistent monitoring data. At an early stage of the programme it was decided not to impose much—if any—structure or bureaucracy on applicants. Hence there was no attempt to categorise applicants in terms of what they do, who they target, how long they have been operating etc. This 'light touch' approach could have helped organisations to engage in *Communities Can*, but it also means that we have limited data from which to draw conclusions about reach, activities delivered or outcomes achieved. This important tension needs to be considered in any evaluations of future programmes aimed at this target group.

Evaluation methodologies

The findings presented in this report come from the following sources:

Feedback from community organisations whose vouchers have been delivered. There have been two mechanisms for this:

- A **star rating system** that asks recipients to rate completed support on a scale from 1 to 5 and provide some written feedback. This has been administered as part of the payment system. To date, 194 'star ratings' have been received (82% of completed vouchers).

- A **feedback questionnaire** that goes into more detail on aspects of the support (related to the theory of change) and was completed by 59% of organisations that completed vouchers.

- **"Impact survey" responses** This is a more comprehensive email survey sent 6 months after voucher completion. Because the evaluation is being completed before most organisations have reached this point, the survey was sent to only 91 organisations. However through persistent reminders a very high response rate of 66 (71%) was achieved, meaning that we can be reasonably confident in the representativeness of these findings.

- **Administrative data** provided by the Young Foundation team on vouchers issued etc. As noted above this has not been comprehensive and has focussed mainly on the amount of support provided and who provided it. There has been a large amount of 'free text' data generated by the programme but this could not be analysed within the evaluation budget.

- **Qualitative telephone interviews** with 12 community organisations that have received support.

- **Provider feedback** from an online 'learning platform' for providers and CVSs. A total of 41 providers contributed to this.

- **Informal feedback** collected at events in Blackpool, Barking Dagenham and London.

- **Application data** from the Young Foundation's Organisational Health Scorecard (OHS). This was an early part of the application process for vouchers and includes organisation's self-assessment of their development.

- A **mapping study** conducted during the early stages of the project by the Young Foundation. The study employed researchers who were themselves members of the community with the aim of learning more about community organisations in each area.

- A **"learning event"** held with CVS and Big Lottery Fund colleagues in January 2017, in which the main themes raised by the programme were discussed.

Structure of this report

The report has six main sections:

1. Assessment of marketing and outreach of the programme;

2. A brief account of what was delivered through the programme;

3. Feedback about the programme from community organisations;

4. Perceived impact of the programme from community organisations and providers;

5. Assessment of the application process and matching of providers to organisations;

6. Conclusions and recommendations for the future.

HOW EFFECTIVE WAS OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS?

Defining the target group

A critical question for *Communities Can* was whether it could reach and engage with the right sorts of community organisations. In particular, the programme was aimed at small informal community organisations; meaning those which are fairly informal, nascent and not receiving support from other sources.

At the beginning of the programme this aim was translated into targeting organisations whose annual income was less than £25,000. But after c.6 months (in February 2016) this was reduced to £10,000 to encourage a greater focus on smaller, informal organisations. This change was reflected in a more detailed 'priority framework'[4] that applied to all applications. The framework considered three further variables (alongside the turnover eligibility requirement):

- Whether the organisation delivered clear social impact;

- Whether they were receiving or had received similar support;

- Whether the support requested had clear value.

Under exceptional circumstances, organisations with a turnover between £10,000 and £25,000 were still considered. For example, if there had been a structural change that led to loss of prior income and they were re-grouping as a smaller organisation.

The priority framework was well received by CVSs, Young Foundation and local Big Lottery Fund staff who felt that it brought greater clarity and ensured the right organisations were targeted. It also helped with the communication of negative decisions by helping the panel to cite specific criteria.
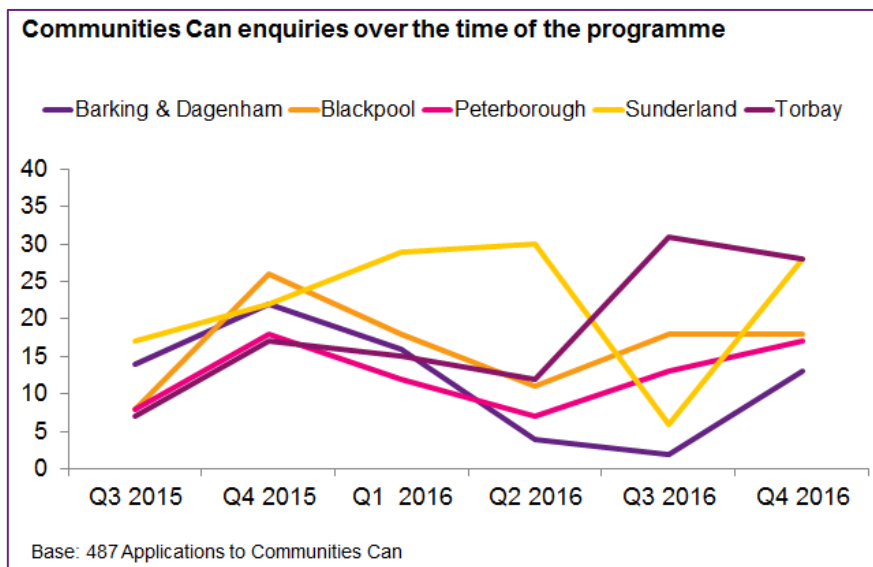
Marketing and outreach approach

Marketing of the programme and outreach to community organisations was essentially divided into two broad phases:

- **Phase 1:** During the first few months a mixed media approach was taken. The Young Foundation promoted the programme through news channels, social media, and local venues and events. Meanwhile, the local CVSs marketed it through newsletters and events and sent direct marketing to community organisations that were already part of their network and were those whom they felt would benefit. During this phase local Young Foundation staff had to balance their time between outreach and processing applications. Because initial demand was strong, proactive outreach was sometimes not feasible.

- **Phase 2:** Following a review of the first year, roles and resources were re-focused to enable better targeting of the highest priority groups in the 'priority framework', in particular those that were not already participating in local support networks. Partners adopted an 'assertive outreach' approach, seeking introductions from groups already participating in the programme and medium sized organisations serving as 'anchors' in local neighbourhoods, reaching out to specialist interest networks and so on. The Young Foundation doubled capacity at a local level to ensure outreach workers could give equal time to identifying new groups and

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[4] See Appendix A for more detail

supporting them through the awards process. The CVSs limited their role to continuing to list *Communities Can* opportunities through more formal channels and supporting awards panels with local knowledge.

The effect of the two phase approach was to create two peaks in uptake; the first tranche of organisations consisted mainly of more established community organisations known to the CVSs; while the second peak (towards the end of the programme) brought in a higher proportion of 'newer, small and informal' organisations. This is helpful in that it shows the value of both methods. In both phases support was given to groups that needed it, but active outreach was needed to find and attract more groups in the precise target group.

Communities Can enquiries over the time of the programme

Base: 487 Applications to Communities Can

Feedback on marketing and outreach

NPC received mixed feedback on the quality of marketing and outreach.

The evidence from applicants themselves was positive. Slightly over half (52%) strongly agreed that it was 'easy for them to find out about *Communities Can*' and an even higher proportion (58%) felt they saw the relevance of the programme from the beginning.

While this is encouraging, it should be noted that because these results are from our impact survey they only reflect the views of successful applicants from the first phase of the programme, and so may not represent the views of those who either failed to take their application forward or were unsuccessful (up to 38% of applicants), or those from the harder-to-reach group that were more prominent later on.

Views on the application process

■ Disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Tend to agree   ■ Strongly agree

From the beginning, it was clear that Communities Can was relevant to the needs of the organisation / group: 3% 5% 35% 58%

It was easy for us to find out about Communities Can: 11% 15% 23% 52%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Base: 66 respondents to the impact survey
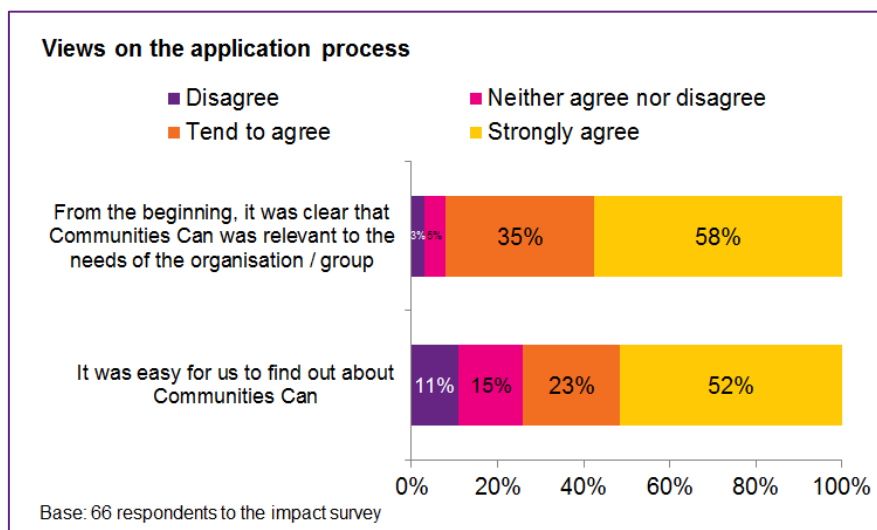
Other feedback was more critical of both the quality and reach of the programme's marketing, especially during the early part of the programme. In particular there was concern from some providers that *very* small-scale community-based groups were missing out. CVSs felt that *Communities Can* occasionally came across as 'transactional' and 'remote', whereas the key to engaging organisations is more about developing relationships.

'I only learnt about Communities Can *by chance after a talk with the people who later became our provider.'*

Community organisation

'The marketing materials produced centrally were very poor. It was impossible to gain a quick impression about what the leaflets were about.'

Outreach worker

'Better communication and targeting—don't do everything online… very small rural groups struggle to access adequate internet.'

Communities Can **Provider**

Another way in which outreach might have been improved was by helping users to better understand what the project was really about. In particular, many organisations misunderstood the concept of the 'voucher' for support, believing they would receive funding themselves, while others were not sure what the project was trying to achieve because the communication materials were pitched at the wrong level (e.g., too complex language, objectives that did not resonate). *Communities Can* outreach staff recognised these challenges and characterised the challenge differently, reporting that they needed to take time to engage groups on a one-to-one basis to explain what support or organisational development involved.

The feedback above prompted changes in the way the programme sought to engage organisations and here is very good evidence that the programme became more effective at engaging the hardest-to-reach as time went by. As shown below (page 16), the priority framework and more investment in outreach did take the support into new areas, and anecdotal evidence supports this view.

'With the involvement of a black & minority ethnic infrastructure organisation like ours, Communities Can *has been far more effective at reaching hard to reach and involve groups. These groups are by far the most in need, often isolated because*

they do not, will not or feel unable to engage with mainstream organisations. Engaging with Community Organisations has many barriers to it. Communities Can *seems to have struck a very good balance.'*

'The final 8 months have seen a vast difference in the type of group—they are much smaller, have had very little formal support in the past. I feel the 'right' groups are now being reached.'

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Communities Can **Providers**

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A more challenging question is whether all local agencies were committed enough to *Communities Can*? Some providers mentioned a failure to link with other initiatives and organisations - and a lack of collaboration between providers. There was also criticism of the commitment shown by some CVSs, particularly in the 2nd phase.

What can we learn?

The clear message is that proactive, sustained, face-to-face outreach work is vital to engaging the target group: CVSs were able to draw on existing contacts to deliver that during the early part of the programme, while in the later phase very effective efforts were made by local outreach workers.

'One-to-one support is incredibly valuable to these groups. Oftentimes, our researchers and project workers would speak to them about Communities Can *two or three times before they expressed an interest. Our team found that it helps to meet them on their own terms first and speak more generally about their activities before speaking about what the programme can offer them.'*

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Community Mapping Report

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On marketing there are some obvious learning points about limiting the use of jargon, being consistent about messaging and the focus of the programme, and using a variety of different channels and opportunities to get the message out. A suggestion that we heard from some stakeholders was that the communication and messaging of the programme would have benefited from a more explicit focus on funding (which was generally seen as the main motivating factor for organisations). The argument is that the funding message would attract people but could also be a platform for looking at other factors that contribute to effectiveness and sustainability. Another learning point was the value of using alternative and informal local networks, and encouraging organisations themselves to disseminate to peers. For example, faith groups were targeted in the second phase and sent information around their networks.

'In addition to publicizing the programme through usual channels, an alternative way would be through local papers/parish magazines and even postcards in shop windows and through community buildings and places of worship— many groups are linked through these and offer valuable and under reported community services. The offer could also be reworded—many smaller groups are unaware of the benefits of a business plan or being sustainable but do understand recruiting more volunteers or getting more people to come to events and finding funding to continue service.'

<div align="right">

Communities Can Provider

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'There could be a clearer and concise description of services available and a breakdown of what support is available for the funds provided.'

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Community organisation

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In summary, *Communities Can*—and by extension future programmes—might have benefited from a dedicated start-up phase with time to design and test marketing materials and plans with service users, and with upfront primary research into the right channels to use for reaching particular communities (the 'community mapping' part of *Communities Can* was actually conducted several months into the programme). A longer time period overall, and a longer development phase, would have been needed for *Communities Can* and should be built into future programmes.

What types of community organisations were engaged?

All successful applicants met the financial eligibility criteria but more precise data on income was not collected so we do not know how this was distributed; for example, how many had an income above / below £10,000.

However, data from the priority framework gives us some indication of programme reach. Positively, the majority of vouchers—particularly in the final two quarters of the programme—were approved for organisations in the top priorities (1 & 2); which meant they were delivering clear social impact and had an appropriate support request, with a slightly higher number already accessing some support (100 compared to 76). Another quite large group of 38 had a clear support request while delivering 'some social value' and there were 10 organisations who met the right conditions except that their request had 'vaguer elements'.

Priority	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
1: Delivering clear social impact. Not currently known to the local support network. The support requested has clear value.	6	9	32	29	**76**
2: Delivering clear social impact. Currently known to the local support network and have accessed some form of formal support previous to the Communities Can application. The support requested has clear value.	18	30	18	34	**100**
3: Delivering clear social impact. Not currently known to the local support network. The support requested has 'vaguer elements or elements that will not have a lasting legacy'.	3	3	0	4	**10**
4: Delivering clear social impact. Not currently known to the local support network. The support requested has mainly quick fix elements rather than lasting skills.	2	0	0	1	**3**
5: Delivering some social impact. Not currently known to the local support network. The support requested has clear value.	4	6	5	7	**22**
6: Delivering some social impact. Currently known to the local support network and have accessed some form of formal support previous to the CC application. The support requested has clear value.	3	3	5	5	**16**
7: Delivering some social impact. Not currently known to the local support network. Support requested has 'vaguer elements or elements that will not have a lasting legacy'.	1	0	0	0	**1**
8: Delivering some social impact. Not currently known to the local support network. The support requested has mainly quick fix elements rather than lasting skills.	0	0	0	3	**3**
Data missing[5]	13	0	0	0	**13**
Total	**50**	**51**	**60**	**83**	**244**

[5] Applications from January 2016 before the priority framework was implemented

The next table shows the data aggregated across the main categories, which gives an overall picture of the reach of *Communities Can.* It shows that most support requests were assessed as having a clear value (93%) and delivering clear social impact (82%). However only 48% of applications approved were for organisations not already receiving support from other sources, which tells us this was the main challenge for engaging genuinely small informal organisations (but is positive in the sense that organisations have been getting support from other sources).

Composite analysis	Number / percentage of packages
Delivering clear social impact	189 (82%)
Delivering some social impact	42 (23%)
Not currently known to the local support network	112 (48%)
Currently known to the local support network and have accessed some form of formal support previous to the CC application	119 (52%)
Supported request has clear value	214 (93%)
Support requested has "vaguer elements or elements that will not have a lasting legacy"	11 (5%)
The support requested has mainly quick fix elements rather than lasting skills	6 (2%)

There is a possible contradiction here in that the mapping study undertaken towards the beginning of the programme highlighted that many of the community organisations in the *Communities Can* target group had not previously accessed support from any sources, while all our programme data shows relatively high levels of access to previous support. The two explanations for this are:

- *Communities Can* did not fully reach its precise target group;
- *Communities Can* participants overstated their access to previous support during the application process, possibly because they thought it would help their case. Moreover, it is possible that organisations had received a small amount of support before, but not at the level being offered by *Communities Can.*

We have good evidence to support the latter of these two explanations from our impact survey, which was conducted well after the support was over (and when there was no incentive to overstate things). Among the 66 respondents to this, 85% said they had not received similar support to that provided by *Communities Can*—which is even more striking when we consider that the respondents from the survey were amongst the first to go through the programme and before the more assertive outreach properly began.

Have you ever received similar support to that provided through Communities Can?

Base: 66 respondents to the impact survey
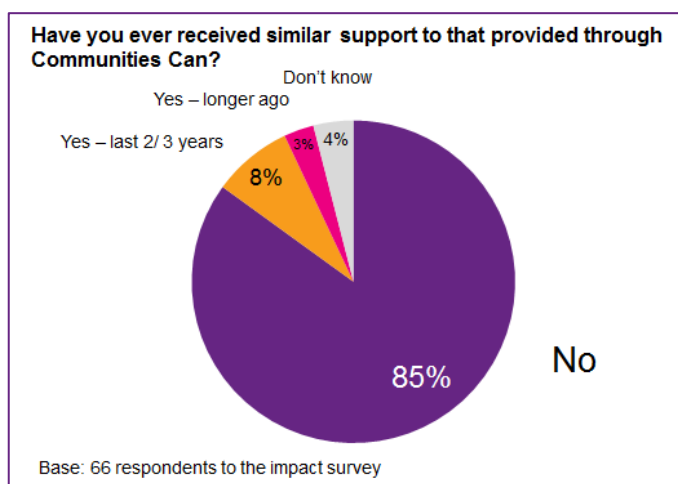
Similarly, feedback from providers suggested that many of the organisations they worked with were in the very early stages of development.

'It has been enjoyable to work with very small, often volunteer-led organisations. These are the type of embryonic organisations that do not usually get this type of

support—particularly since so many CVSs are unable to undertake intensive one-to-one work these days.

'I have been involved with two organisations and they are both the sort I think the programme was aiming at (i.e. smaller community group).'

Communities Can **Provider**

What were the other characteristics of the organisations that applied?

As noted above (page 10), at the beginning of the programme the project team opted to take a 'light touch' approach to project administration and minimise bureaucracy. As such applicants were not asked to categorise themselves or complete any 'tick box' data. This may have encouraged organisations to engage, but it has also meant that the evaluation team lacks any standardised or reliable data about the nature of organisations that engaged in *Communities Can*—only free-text descriptions. Hence it is not possible to comment much further on the reach or diversity of the programme.

Illustrative applicants

To help the reader better understand the kinds of organisations supported the following table shows an illustrative sample of 10 organisations supported (selected at random).

Examples of successful applicants
Top Yard School of Boxing & Fitness: Currently host boxing sessions twice a week and the Arena Boxing Gym based on York Road, Peterborough in the Millfield area. They have both males and females who fit these ethnic origins as members. Due to the increase in demand for the classes they required a larger space to operate from, as the current base is too small to fit the large number of participants that regular attend. The group has recently secured a prefabricated building in the Can Do area, which they have received a small grant from the council to renovate. It will take approximately two months to renovate the building. They currently have a two year lease on the building and will need further funding in the future. The group have identified they will need some assistance with selecting the best legal structure for them to ensure the longevity of their service and to allows them to continue to expand. The group would like to be able to put on more sessions in particular women's only classes as the group has noticed that 'these sessions will be vital since the women in the local community generally suffer from high levels of diabetes and poor fitness levels. We will look to partner with local agencies and offer regular health checks at our venue which in turn will help promote our club to these individuals to ensure maximum participation'. In the future they hope to extend the classes to be able to offer sessions to disabled people and disadvantaged youths.
Diaspora arts: I am leading a community unincorporated organisation which delivers arts and educational courses. Also I am looking to develop ESOL for the local community and create a CIC for this aspect of the work under my business activities.
Sunderland West End Football Club: A community based football club which is looking to expand and increase the activities and support available to the local community, with specific attention to women, disability football and to engage and work with local schools in order to breakdown neighbourhood based differences. The committee is new with a brand new cohort of people drafted in during April 2016 which is inexperienced but want to develop the community focus of the club.
Claremont Gala Committee: The committee organise a yearly Gala in July which involves a procession ending in a local community event. The community event combines practical information/signposting (working with other local groups, organisations and services, providing health checks on the day) with fun activities. The Gala is a main focal point in the community and provides an opportunity to bring people together and let them know about other things going on locally throughout the year (children's activities, support groups, art in the park etc.)

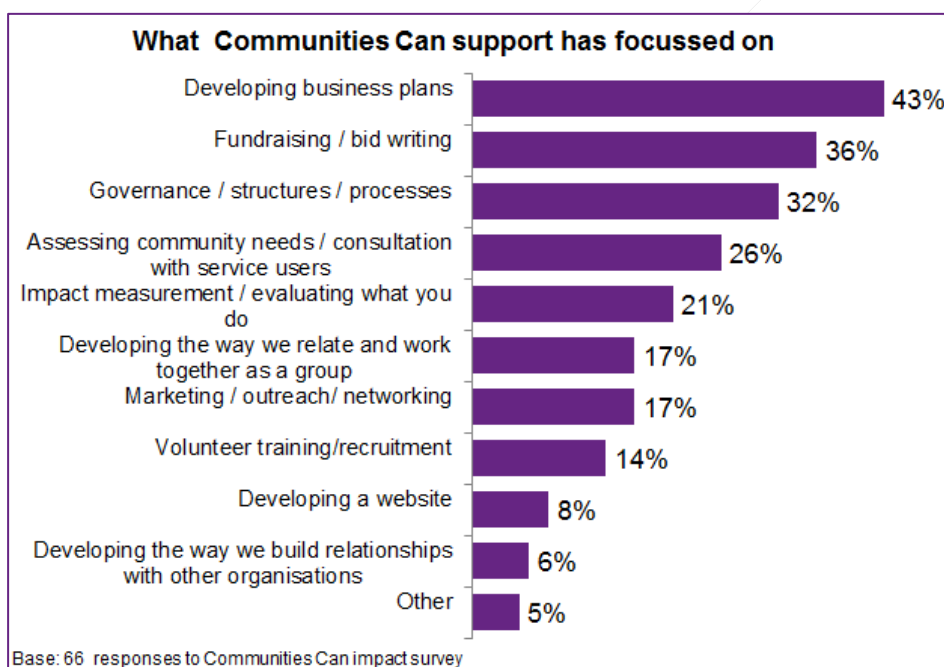| Examples of successful applicants |
|---|
| **Blackpool Buddies:** The group focuses on mental illnesses with people, who have lived experience, supporting other people. |
| **Riverside Wellness** is a community interest company established last month for the benefit of residents in Barking reach area of Barking. Although the CIC itself is new, they have lots of experience working in her local community and is now trying to make this more joined up and sustainable. Their work has largely been focussed on cohesion events; bringing people together in her neighbourhood (where there is rapid urban development and significant population churn) and providing befriending, advice and signposting to other support services. |
| **Devon Clinic CIC:** The clinic was set up as a CIC two years ago to provide a range of alternative therapies. Profits from main stream clients are used to support those on benefits or low incomes who would not otherwise be able to access these services. |
| **Milan group:** A group for women over 50 with their roots in the Indian diaspora expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin. They are entirely voluntary and receive no external funding, engaging in cookery, craft work, singing, flower arranging, and other social activities. |
| **Lions Barber Collective:** The organisation was formed in 2015 with the aim of raising awareness of mental health and suicide prevention. They provide education and training for barbers so that they are able to recognise mental health issues and know how to signpost or provide help. Men, especially, open up to barbers and with proper training barbers can respond to their support needs. |

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WAS PROVIDED TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS?

The only analysable data we have on the type of support provided comes from the impact survey—which is shown in the chart below.

Type of support

The most commonly cited objective for support was around funding: either 'developing business plans' or 'fundraising / bid writing'. About one in three packages included elements of governance and about one in four looked at community / user needs. Conversely, only around one in twenty organisations reported that their support had addressed how they 'build relationships with other organisations'.

What Communities Can support has focussed on

Developing business plans	43%
Fundraising / bid writing	36%
Governance / structures / processes	32%
Assessing community needs / consultation with service users	26%
Impact measurement / evaluating what you do	21%
Developing the way we relate and work together as a group	17%
Marketing / outreach/ networking	17%
Volunteer training/recruitment	14%
Developing a website	8%
Developing the way we build relationships with other organisations	6%
Other	5%

Base: 66 responses to Communities Can impact survey

Qualitative feedback suggests another way in which the type of support varied. Very generally, there seems to have been two varieties of packages, which we characterise as:

- **Instrumental:** Focussed on specific tasks requirements such as websites and other IT, bank accounts, Charity Commission registration, terms of reference, etc.;
- **Developmental:** Focussed on more fundamental questions like overall aims and business plans, and including elements of mentoring / coaching and developing new skills.

Based on feedback, our impression is that the majority of packages were developmental. Moreover, the distinction appears to have been apparent not only in the tasks undertaken but also in organisations' and providers' perception of the kind of support they were receiving / providing; with the best feedback being achieved when the two were aligned (see pages 25 and 36).

To give the reader a little bit more of a flavour of the type of support provided and the outcomes expected we have randomly selected 10 examples of support packages below:[6]

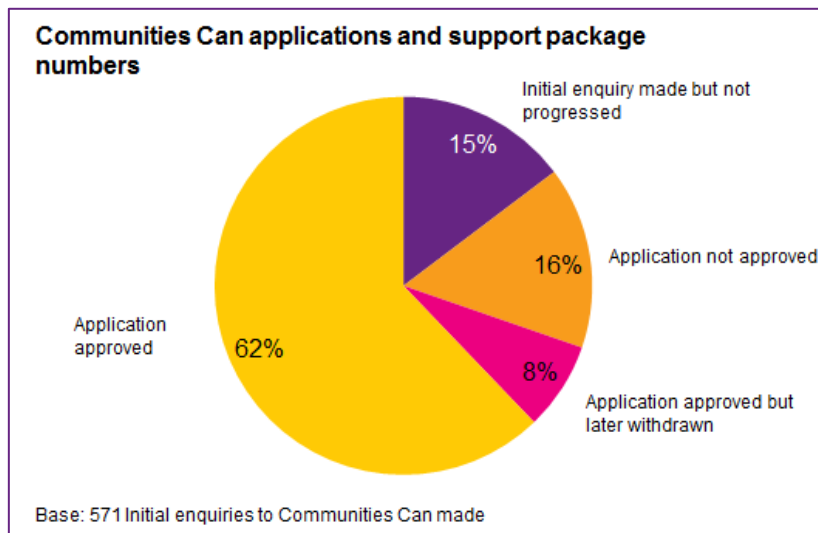| Package details	Expected outcomes
3 day support package: - To facilitate development of a fundraising plan - To research available funding streams, including trusts, etc. - To support the group to construct a bid	The group has been supported to think through the range of fundraising actions they should accomplish to achieve their goals, and have developed a wider understanding of, and ability to secure, grants from a range of funding streams available, including trusts.
- 4 days for organisation structure and bid writing; - 3 days website and social media platform development	Short Term: Smooth transition to bigger location to enable helping more individuals. Long Term: Set up and running in new location, greater publicity for the work being carried out.
- Review of existing constitution, processes and procedures to ensure still fit for purpose (1 day) - Capacity Building for key individuals—"how to do it" translated as coaching and mentoring of core team - (2 Days) - Development of an effective fund raising strategies—(1 Day) - Volunteering and Networking Strategy— (1 Day)	Constitution is enhanced to ensure it supports groups current and future needs. Management group able to fully contribute to requirements and outcomes. The group is able to grow, is sustainable and is fully integrated with the wider VCS community in Sunderland. The group are able to identify and complete successful bids focused on their community's needs and Management group able to fully contribute to requirements and outcomes.
5 days developing a funding strategy linked to a communication strategy to help promote the income generation options. The group would also benefit from support with identifying and applying for further grants to support their work.	5 days developing a funding strategy linked to a communication strategy to help promote the income generation options. The group would also benefit from support with identifying and applying for further grants to support their work.
3 days to support initial scoping to assess viability of the offer and to identify key actions that are required to achieve an appropriate organisational structure, with a view to submitting a second CC application during the next financial year when ready.	Anticipated outcomes: The organisation will have been supported to establish with the most appropriate structure and governance.
2 days to support the group to identify relevant funding sources, raise awareness of funders and guidance on bid writing to empower the organisation to develop their own fund raising strategy. 2 days to review the governance structure, policies and procedures with some focus on the overlap between the organisation and others.	Greater awareness of how to research and identify fundraising opportunities and up skilled to write their own funding applications. Improve the governance of the organisation and encourage the introduction of more transparent operational infrastructure.
1 day reviewing governance. 2 days horizon scanning and outline forward plan. 4 days completing a funding strategy with short and long term objectives and help with completing at least one funding application.	The group will have completed a review of governance which will help with becoming funding ready. Will have a forward plan which maximises the potential of the club and will have a funding strategy to meet its short and long term requirements.

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[6] Data presented precisely as it was relayed to NPC

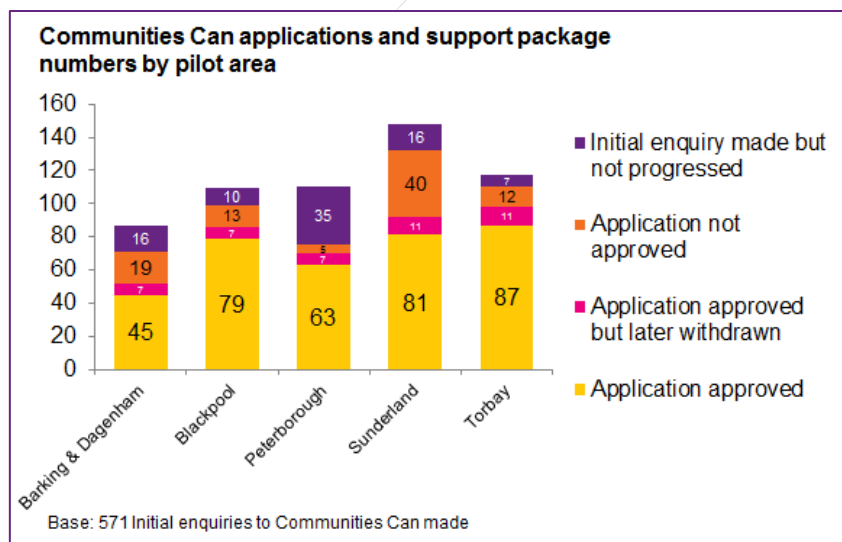| Package details	Expected outcomes
5 day support package to work with committee to ensure policies and procedures are fit for purpose and to provide training to committee to enable the policies to be implemented and managed (2 days.) Help the group develop an action plan for delivering an increased range of disability based activity (1 day). Support group to develop an income strategy not specifically grant funding, but incorporates brokerage around Personal Independence Packages (2 days).	Short term: The group is fit for purpose in respect of the policies and procedures that will enable it to extend its offer to disabled people in the area. It understands the range of income streams it can utilise to develop the group's reach further. Long term: The group consolidates its position as a key provider of social, cultural and recreational activities for disabled people and has the skills and confidence to expand its offer.
5 days support to: enable the group to fully understand the governance structures options and processes required and to help them select the best in order to achieve their goal (1.5 days); Support them to undertake any feasibility and consultation processes with local stakeholders/community interests with a clear plan for their way forward (3 days); Help them develop a financial sustainability plan to show how aspirations may be sustainable (0.5 days).	Short term— the group has the best structure, governance, and processes in place in order to help them achieve their goals and they will have a well-evidenced proposal that is costed, sustainable, and fits with the wider development of youth provision in the city. Long term—the group will have been supported to restructure its contribution to local young people in a priority area of the city, have well developed networks with key partners and stakeholders, and will have influenced the positive development of programmes and opportunities.
4 day support package to: • Help develop a consultation process with users and potential users to assess the impact of the group and articulate their future offer to blind/visually impaired people in the area. • Help to broker a relationship with another group with similar demographic who could engage as enablers on trips etc.	The group has the basis on which to develop their offer aligned specifically to their target beneficiaries' needs and a clear narrative that will enable them to secure funding in the future should they require to do so. The group will have been introduced to and have networked with another social group within the area with different needs but similar interests thus promoting further social cohesion and integration.

Volume of support

Applications and vouchers issued

Through the course of the whole programme there were 571 initial applications to *Communities Can* from 543 individual community organisations. Seven in ten of these applications were approved—a total of 400 approved applications (from 389 different organisations). However a proportion of approved applications were later withdrawn, usually because of a lack of capacity to engage amongst organisations. So in total, 355 support vouchers were / are being delivered, as shown in the following chart.

Communities Can applications and support package numbers

- Initial enquiry made but not progressed: 15%
- Application not approved: 16%
- Application approved but later withdrawn: 8%
- Application approved: 62%

Base: 571 Initial enquiries to Communities Can made

The following chart shows this distributed across the five pilot areas. It shows that Sunderland and Torbay have been the busiest area and Barking & Dagenham the least busy.

Communities Can applications and support package numbers by pilot area

- Initial enquiry made but not progressed
- Application not approved
- Application approved but later withdrawn
- Application approved

Barking & Dagenham: 45, 7, 19, 16
Blackpool: 79, 7, 13, 10
Peterborough: 63, 7, 5, 35
Sunderland: 81, 11, 40, 16
Torbay: 87, 11, 12, 7

Base: 571 Initial enquiries to Communities Can made

Number of days and monetary value

The total value of the vouchers issued and not later withdrawn was £559,294, broken down as follows:

Area	Number of vouchers approved (& not withdrawn)	Number of days support approved	Total value of vouchers issued	Average voucher value
Barking & Dagenham	45	150	£79,230	£1,760.67
Blackpool	79	402.5	£129,238	£1,635.92
Peterborough	63	281	£99,100	£1,573.02
Sunderland	81	348.25	£128,000	£1,580.25
Torbay	87	409	£123,726	£1,422.14
Total	**355**	**1590.75**	**£559,294**	**£1,575.48**

Voucher completion

A total of 238 of approved vouchers were completed by February 2017, which represents two thirds (67%) of all those approved. Of those vouchers not yet completed, the majority (71) were only approved after September 2016 but 46 (13% of all approved vouchers) had been outstanding for at least six months, with a large number of these being in Torbay (22).

FEEDBACK ON THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT

Feedback mechanisms

Quantitative feedback from voucher recipients has been sought in two main ways:

- A star rating system, which asked recipients to rate the support on a scale from 1 to 5 and provide some written feedback. At the time of writing, 194 star ratings have been received out of a total of 238 completed vouchers (response rate of 82%).

- A feedback questionnaire that went into more detail on aspects of the support (related to the theory of change). Initially this was administered separately to the star rating but very few questionnaires were returned (n=4 in the first three months). From May 2016, NPC administered the star rating and feedback survey together and attempted to retrospectively collect data. This boosted the response to 141 (60% of vouchers completed).

Star rating data

The overwhelming majority of star ratings have been positive with 137 recipients (71%) rating the support they received as 'five stars'. A further 37 gave it four stars (19%). This is a good result in our experience.

STAR RATING

Overall, how would you rate the support you received? One star means you through the support was 'very poor' and five stars means it was 'excellent'?

1/2/3 stars

2% 3% 6%

19%

4 stars

5 stars

71%

Base: 194 ratings out of 238 completed vouchers
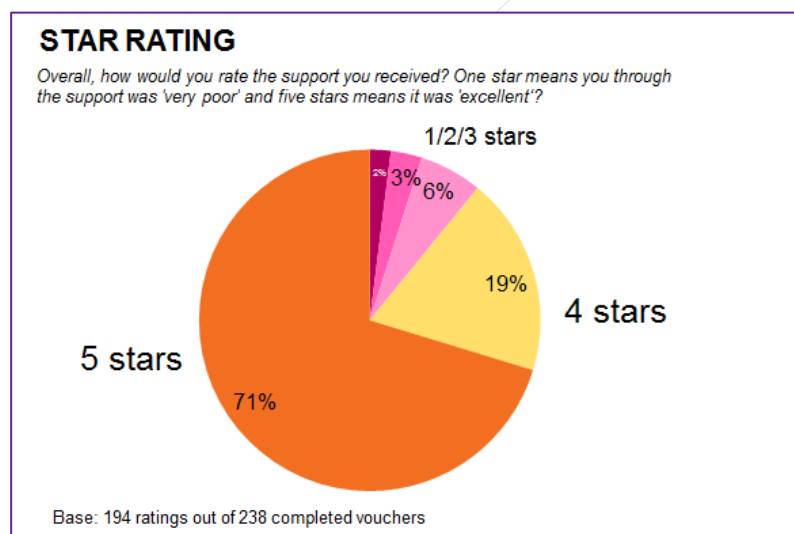
Only 20 recipients gave scores below four. Of these, the main frustration was around delays in setting up the support, and in one or two cases, failure of the support to materialise at all (see below page 31).

However, 44 recipients did not complete the star rating (nor, indeed, provide any feedback at all). Most of this missing data was from the early part of the programme before an effective system wasn't established. However, even if we assume the worst case scenario that all these organisation would have given *Communities Can* a rating of 1-3 stars, then the programme would still have been rated at 4 or 5 stars by 73% of the organisations involved.

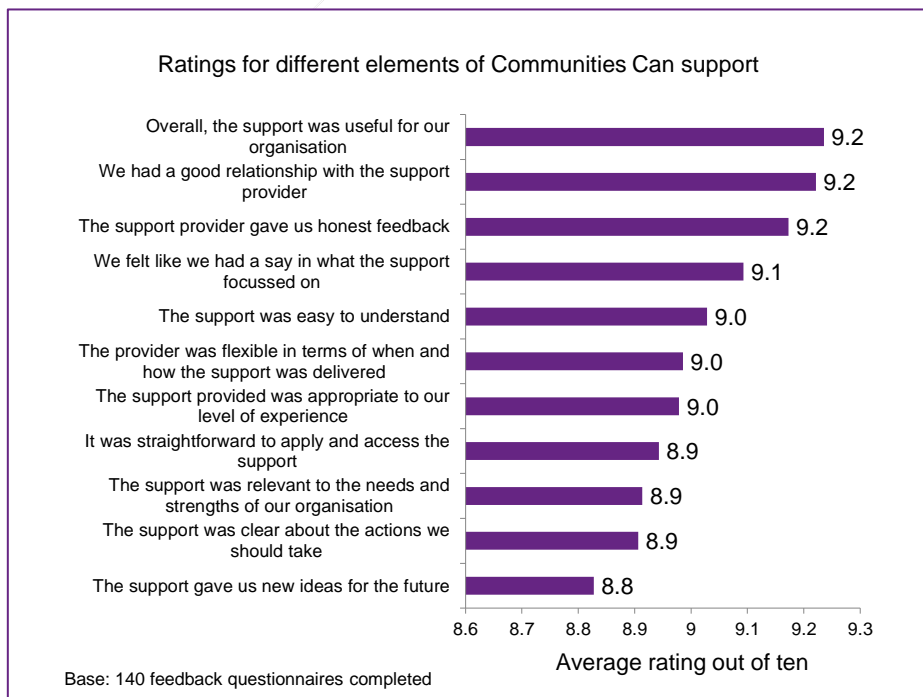Factors associated with variations in star rating were:

- **Location:** The highest average was in Peterborough (4.7) and Torbay (4.6), the lowest was Barking and Dagenham (4.3).

- **Priority:** Encouragingly, star ratings were slightly higher on average for applications in the priority 1 and 2 categories (see Appendix A). Indeed, the key distinguishing factor appeared to be if the organisation was seen to be delivering 'clear social impact'; where the average star rating was 4.8 compared to 4.3 for those delivering 'some social impact'.

- **Time:** Star ratings appear to have risen slightly as the programme matured—which could either be attributable to improvements in quality and / or the engagement of different types of organisations.

- **Duration:** Shorter vouchers (1-3) months had an average star rating of 4.9 compared to 4.3 for those that took over six months to deliver. This is likely due to longer time period being indicative of other problems in delivering the support, but it also highlights the potential need for more sustained support (see page 33 below).

Conversely, the average star rating did not appear to be particularly affected by the number of days support approved in the package or the type of provider (i.e. CVS vs other).

Feedback survey

Our more detailed data about the quality of support provided also shows very good results; around nine out of ten for each measure covered. Many respondents actually gave top marks (10) for everything, which is positive, but could also tell us that respondents did not put too much effort into completing the questionnaire.

Because of the limited variation across questions we should be careful about reading too much into the ranking of responses. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the most highly rated aspects were around the relationships established between support provider and recipient, while the least well rated were broadly around the future; being clear about what actions to take and getting new ideas. Our interpretation of this result is that it reflects that not all packages were about 'giving new ideas'; a proportion of packages just related to getting specific things done.

Ratings for different elements of Communities Can support

Element	Average rating out of ten
Overall, the support was useful for our organisation	9.2
We had a good relationship with the support provider	9.2
The support provider gave us honest feedback	9.2
We felt like we had a say in what the support focussed on	9.1
The support was easy to understand	9.0
The provider was flexible in terms of when and how the support was delivered	9.0
The support provided was appropriate to our level of experience	9.0
It was straightforward to apply and access the support	8.9
The support was relevant to the needs and strengths of our organisation	8.9
The support was clear about the actions we should take	8.9
The support gave us new ideas for the future	8.8

Base: 140 feedback questionnaires completed

Basic correlations between these factors and the overall star rating tell us that the most strongly correlated factors are 'overall value of support' (which you would expect) and provider flexibility: which indicates that when providers were perceived as inflexible there is a more negative assessment of the overall package. The weakest correlations were for 'feeling they had a say in what the support focussed on' and 'the support being easy to understand'; indicating that organisations felt that support could still be valuable without these things. Another particularly weak correlation was found for 'it was straightforward to apply and access the support'.

The impact survey posed some further questions about the support received, as shown in the chart below. It highlights that, above all, providers were able to establish good connections with their support providers and that providers were seen to have the right level of knowledge (which were also the things that providers themselves tended to think were important). Though still positive, there was slightly less agreement that the support had addressed *all* the needs identified and the support was *sufficient*. This was also a feature of the qualitative findings and feedback from providers, who all cited ways in which the support could have been extended or developed further (*see further discussion below*).

Views on the quality of support

Legend: Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Tend to agree | Strongly agree

	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
We made a good connection with our support provider	3%	8%	17%	72%
The support provider had the right knowledge and experience to help us	3%	6%	22%	69%
The support fully addressed the needs identified in the application process	3%	9%	30%	58%
The amount of support available through the voucher was sufficient to meet our needs	19%	14%	38%	27%

Base: 66 respondents to the impact survey

Written feedback

We had some kind of written feedback on the support from 194 organisations, representing about 82% of completed vouchers. In our view this means we can be fairly confident in the conclusions drawn.

As per the data described above, the written feedback received generally suggests a positive experience of *Communities Can*, in some cases exceptionally positive, even effusive. We describe this in more detail below using the headings set out in the theory of change.

Format

The format of the support seemed to have worked well for organisations, particularly when there were a lot of face-to-face contact time. The two attributes that impressed organisations the most were:

1. When providers were flexible and accommodating of the organisations' needs. Comments referred to how their provider would be responsive, patient and generally on-hand to support them. This was often important because smaller volunteer led organisations could sometimes struggle to make themselves available compared to larger, more traditionally structured charities. Being flexible also allowed providers to effectively

support users at different stages of their journey, sometimes creating a perception amongst organisations that they had received 'holistic' support.

'Brilliant. Very responsive and accommodating.'

'Great service, we were dealt with immediately, they listened, formed a great understanding of our requirements and delivered beyond our expectations promptly and efficiently.'

Community organisations

2. A sense of professionalism. Comments focussed on how their provider was reliable, punctual, and well organised.

'[The providers] were very professional, were available whenever I needed them and responded to requests/queries with little delay. They met all agreed targets and were on time with their work.'

Community organisation

Indeed, as noted below (page 31), the few occasions where feedback about the support was more underwhelming often seemed to relate to not getting these factors right; such as too much communication by email, delays in responding to people, delays setting things up, etc.

In terms of the other aspects of the theory of change, a smaller number of organisations commented on how they found the support easy to set up and use, and quite quick and timely. But we had little feedback suggesting that organisations found the support to be 'complimentary' or any comment about it being properly 'recorded / monitored'. This does not mean that the support did not meet these objectives, rather that it was less salient to service users themselves and so less relevant to the theory of change.

Style

A number of aspects of the style of delivery were seen favourably by organisations.

Knowledgeable. Interestingly, the most commonly cited positive attribute of the support was not actually an explicit part of the theory of change. This is that providers were seen to know what they are talking about, could cover different topics, and were able to understand what the organisation needs and gave good advice. Possibly, two different types of knowledge were in evidence; most often providers were seen to have good general knowledge about what was needed (for example a new constitution to providing advice around funding); but also on occasions quite specific knowledge and technical skills (which supports the argument for a market of diverse providers).

'Their help was invaluable. [The Provider] was our mentor and knew exactly what we needed. They were full of productive advice to help us move forward with our organisation.'

'A strong knowledge in "green" businesses as well as co-ops and Community Interest Companies.'

Community organisations

Personalised / tailored. Lots of feedback related to how they felt the support was adapted and tailored to people's needs, as well as the provider taking time to listen and engage. Organisations commented on how the providers quickly adapted to areas they found difficult. For example, one user found legal terminology and the legal complexities trickier and was very impressed with how his provider adapted. This was even the case when

the issues themselves were complex: A user who received support around the design and launch of a new app had many detailed conversations with his provider, who he felt was able to effectively guide him with the information he needed while making sure to never force his hand, or push him into developing the product in a way that he felt uncomfortable with.

There were also examples of providers reaching out beyond their immediate contacts to engage other groups such as service users and trustees. Other organisations talked about how the advice and support encouraged openness, and a sense that organisations had a 'choice' over the best way forward.

'[The Provider] has carefully listened to and acknowledged our aims for the club and steered us in the right direction to achieve them.'

'[The provider] has worked with our trustees, staff, and volunteers to build our capacity and improve our governance, business plan, financial strategy, and monitoring and evaluation framework. The [provider] have been brilliant and their support came at the right time for us.'

'Great support helped us to have open discussions and guide us with options for setting up as a separate charity.'

Community organisations

However, there were some occasions where users felt that support had not been tailored enough. One user commented that she felt her provider had drawn too heavily on existing tools and not thought creatively enough about what the group needed. Another remarked that she had got the same advice and material as another organisation working out of the same office.

Clear and easy to understand. We had a number of positive comments about how the advice and support was clear and intelligible and that efforts were clearly made to engage people.

'He engaged with the Forum for the Elderly and did not talk down to the group aged 60 - 90. We are all volunteers and he spoke about forming a charity to enable us to access funding, and suggested various methods, funders, etc.'

'The support was given without prejudice, with much patience and understanding. It was delivered at a level which I understood. I have been encouraged and inspired.'

Community organisations

Friendly / personable. Feedback often also referred to how providers were friendly, engaging, polite etc. Providers were usually seen as approachable and likeable which allowed them to quickly build effective relationships with users. Related to this, providers were clearly able to reach out and engage with users seeking out the best way to make the relationship work. Particularly positive were comments that the providers seemed to really *care* about the organisation concerned. Providers themselves also emphasised the importance of building trust and the quality of the relationship.

'[Name] has been a blessing, a highly professional person with a friendly personality.'

'I found that there was attentive care given to find exactly what our support needs are…Very friendly and willing to help.'

Community organisations

The best feedback often related to how they felt the provider had gone beyond the brief or the 'extra mile.'

'We were paired perfectly with our provider. They were brilliant: so helpful. They went above and beyond and we wouldn't have progressed as far as we have without this support. I have a book of things to work on and been given the tools, by [The Provider] to do so. [The Provider] also gave right encouragement to continue.'

Community organisations

As above, some aspects of the theory of change were not mentioned in the feedback we received from organisations. In particular support that is 'asset-based', 'honest', and 'clear from the outset about what would be involved'. Most likely these things were important but more 'taken as given' than an active part of the theory of change. Also, we have some evidence that where these things were not evident, the support was not so well received (see following section).

Seen as…

Above all, the feedback we received described the support as useful / helpful / practical and offering a clear way forward, which are the key aspects of the theory of change.

'The workshops were incredibly useful and were led by someone who already had a clear knowledge of our company and the specific concerns / challenges we need to navigate. This was really helpful for ensuring that the advice was tailored and relevant. We are at a stage in our company business development where we need to be looking at a range of potential routes and the implications of each—and the sessions were a great tool for allowing us to look at a range of considerations that were appropriate to the context of our specific needs / aims.'

Community organisations

Aside from this, a smaller amount of the feedback described how people felt a greater sense of being supported and on a few occasions the sense that the provider shared their own enthusiasm / passion for the organisation.

'The support we received greatly helped us to set up and run a Mental Health Social Inclusion Group which we had lost in Blackpool due to cuts. It was very supportive and has taken us a huge way forward as a mental health service users' forum. [The Provider] from CVS was extremely helpful.'

Community organisations

One part of the theory of change that was not mentioned much in the feedback was that the support is 'transferable'. Explanations for this are that transferability is not as immediately important to organisations, and that whether support is 'transferable' is only really apparent after a period of time. However, other feedback suggests that many organisations felt they gained new skills and knowledge through their support (see page 43), and it is not unreasonable to assume that these will applied elsewhere in future.

The other missing elements are 'no drain on resources' and 'no compulsion'. We do not expect these to be mentioned as often because; they will only be raised if there is a problem. But while the majority of positive

feedback fails to mention these issues, there is evidence that it was a problem in some cases. In particular the fairly large number of packages that were withdrawn (page 23) are indicative of some organisations feeling they did not have the time to be involved or were inappropriate applications in the first place.

Challenges

While we should continue to remember that nearly all feedback was positive, some issues and challenges emerged as good learning points for future programmes:

1) Quality and reliability

A relatively small number of users reported delays in receiving their support or in some cases support that did not appear at all. Others had experiences in which providers failed to deliver on promises.

'At the beginning in December, I was promised a working version within five days—this failed to materialise. I have had to chase him every step of the way—each time the excuse was that he had been ill—so I gave him plenty of latitude. It is now June almost seven months after our initial contact and still has a few things left to sort out— although in the main it is now working correctly—just needs a few things which were promised being sorted out.'

Community organisation

'The level of support offered to groups by some providers was very questionable. One group reported that for seven days support they received one meeting with the provider who then wrote an "Awards for All" application which was not successful.'

Community outreach worker

Although issues like these were pretty isolated, they do appear to have been the main cause of dissatisfaction with the programme. Some of this can be explained by the usual difficulties that can occur, such as staff sickness and communication breakdowns. In some cases, problems were attributed to too great a geographical difference between organisation and provider and providers who were 'outside of the area'. More seriously, one or two consultants (both CVS and private) developed something of a track record for not delivering. Work was removed from providers when problems like this came to light.

'The person working with me had his own agenda of what we wanted and needed. He became uncontactable and did not provide us with anything at all. We were then passed to someone at CVS who dealt with me.'

Community organisation

The other issue that is raised occasionally in the feedback was the feeling that the support was insufficiently tailored to organisations' needs. The feedback presented above (page 28), highlights how important this was seen to be, and that in the most part providers achieved this, but there were occasions where it appeared to fall short. Doubtless, the relatively small size of the packages (see following section) placed constraints on how much providers could tailor their work, it may also be that some providers were aiming to deliver a more 'instrumental' package when their 'developmental' needs still needed addressing.

'The organisation needed training that addressed their particular needs rather than an "off the peg" package. I think the training providers should have listened more
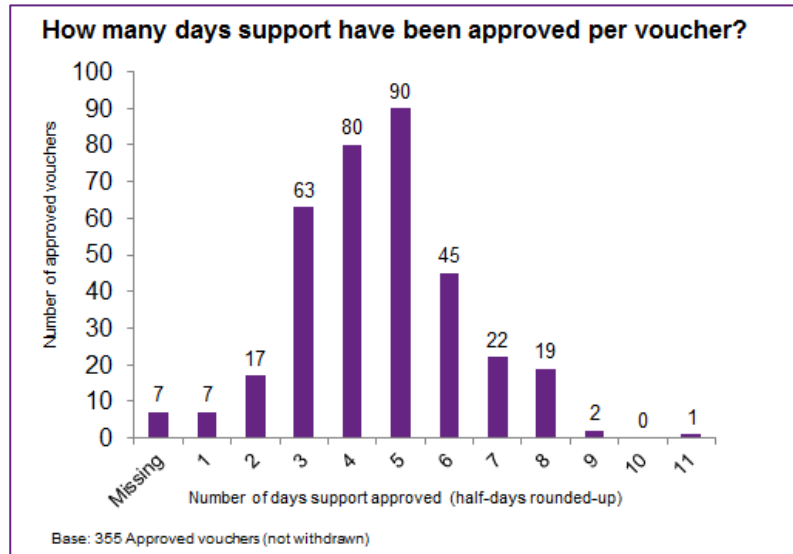
carefully and asked more challenging / thought provoking questions about the experience, aspirations, and limitations of the group and the individuals in it.'

The wider question this raises is how to balance quality against the need to deliver high volumes of support and having a diverse range of skills / experience in the market. We would conclude that on-the-whole *Communities Can* has got this right but was not able to eliminate poor quality completely.

2) Sufficiency

The sizes of individual support packages ranged from 1 to 11 days, but the bulk were between 3 and 5 days, as shown in the chart to the right. Possibly the most frequently heard criticism of *Communities Can*, particularly from providers, was that this amount of time was often not enough to meet users' needs. In particular, providers mentioned how they would often have to spend time on practical things like filling in paperwork and arranging meetings with different individuals, as well as getting up-to-speed with the

How many days support have been approved per voucher?

Number of approved vouchers

Number of days support approved (half-days rounded-up)

Base: 355 Approved vouchers (not withdrawn)

organisation and the challenges it faced. An added complication was that in many cases it would only became clear what help was truly needed after some initial training and support was delivered. Many providers commented on both the scale of need they found in community organisations. This was often attributed to the very embryonic nature of the organisations being supported. As a result of this many providers reported spending much more time than they were paid for, while others disengaged from the programme because it was uneconomical for them.

'The time allocations often appear to be poorly judged and too short. One day for a fundraising plan and help with bidding is ridiculous. But we frequently see briefs with this offer or simply too few days to complete the assignment.'

This frustration was shared by community organisations themselves. As noted above (page 27), one in three organisations did not agree that the amount of support was sufficient to meet their needs, and there were some who, while they gained a lot of benefit from their initial involvement, felt they would have benefited from more time and follow-up discussions to keep them on track.

'Everything we discussed was done in the time available to us, but we would benefit from more support from her to tutor us in writing our own bids and taking us to the next level. More hand holding.'

'Would be nice to get our support team back and see how they feel we are progressing and maybe offer a bit more support to take is forward again.'
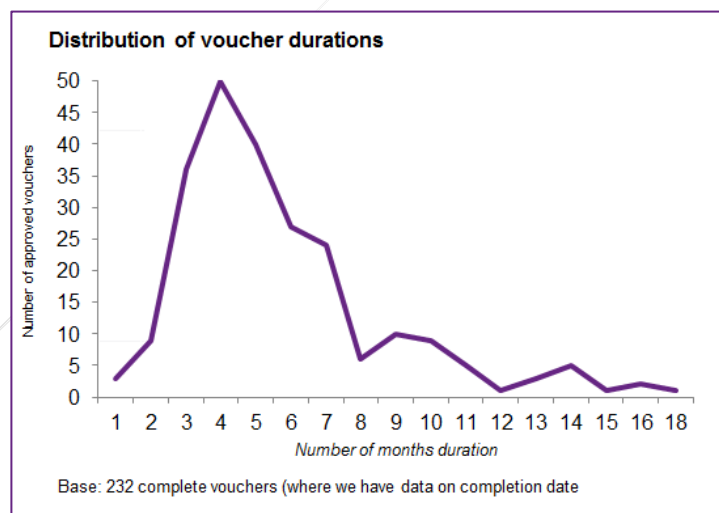
In one respect these findings can be viewed positively; people will want more of a good thing. However, clearly the 'small packages' model works well for some organisations and not others, and it is not sustainable or appropriate to rely on the provider's largesse to fill in the gaps. What is likely is that where the support was focussed on more specific, tangible things the amount of time available was enough, whereas if the challenges were more strategic and complex then more than a few days are needed. Ideally, this would have been addressed during the application and panel process, but these judgements will not be right every time, and there were clearly organisations that would have benefited from more support than was possible through *Communities Can*.

As noted above (page 24), the average voucher value was £1,600, out of a maximum of £2,500, and the average number of days support allocated per package was 4.6. Given that feedback about packages being too small was heard from the beginning of the programme, and that funding was available, it is curious why panels did not begin to allocate more days. Possibly panels developed 'rules of thumb' about what sorts of packages were appropriate, as well as a conscientious approach to ensuring value for money. Another hypothesis is that CVS staff, who had existing materials available to support groups, underestimated how long it would take independent providers to get up to speed.

3) Timescales

Support packages were expected to be delivered within three months, but most took longer.

The average voucher took 172 days (or roughly six months) to deliver from approval to completion. However, this is affected by some significant outliers, hence the median duration was 147 days (five months). The chart shows how many months all vouchers took to complete and that the overwhelming majority of vouchers were completed in a period of between three and seven months.

There were some variations in average

Distribution of voucher durations

Base: 232 complete vouchers (where we have data on completion date

package lengths. Those delivered by CVSs took about 25% longer to complete than those delivered by other providers (average of 205 days compared to 146 days). However, there was significant variation between CVSs; Sunderland took on average five months to complete packages, compared to over seven months for the others (and over eight months for Peterborough). Feedback received from providers and CVSs suggest that it was often difficult to deliver support packages within the three months allocated, largely for practical reasons of availability. Providers felt that this timescale was arbitrary and too tight, especially when it didn't allow enough time for delays on the side of the community organisation (fairly common) or building relationships with the organisation as-a-whole (i.e. beyond the applicant themselves). Because of this, providers would sometimes find themselves rushed to complete the project reducing the quality of the final output.

It was also felt that three months was insufficient funding / time to achieve ***sustainable*** impact. For example, organisations might need time to see how interventions actually worked before fully buying into them. This is particularly the case for support aimed at helping organisations to be become 'funding ready' or where measuring impact is concerned.

'Allow consultants a longer time to help as volunteer groups are often slower at getting things done because they may only meet once a month. Our project is complicated and has been ongoing for five years already, so to get this all done in three months was almost impossible.'

'There has been so much information to read, digest, and assimilate that it would have been better to have had it spread over a longer period so that there was more time to ask questions, go back, and clarify things, etc. As a volunteer chair and also a working parent, trying to manage all the information has been hard. I would also have liked more face-to-face time to discuss things.'

Community organisations

'How does the group get follow up? Nearly always there will be issues and need support about the work they have done. It is very hard for me as a consultant working with them to say no. I think from this that you need to give more time to getting to know the group and have a few hours that can be used to follow up the group to ensure they are progressing.'

Communities Can Provider

In response to this feedback, during the later part of the programme the amount of support potentially available to organisations and split it into **two pathways**. Groups with a clear idea of their support needs could continue as before with a single package. Those who welcomed / needed a deeper exploration of their needs, or sought more informal help initially to create buy-in for a direction of travel could apply for an initial tranche of support to build awareness and capacity, and identify needs. This could then be followed by a further package to provide more technical support. This model started to be tested in the final months of *Communities Can*[7] and might be worth exploring further for future programmes.

'This support package came at a crucial time for me as I am in the set up process of a CIO and had reached a brick wall. The provider helped me scale that wall and continue to move the project forward. Without them, particularly with the first package you gave me I would have given up—I am so grateful—The second package has again moved the project to its next critical phase and I am about ready to submit my application to the Charities Commission which is very exciting.'

Community organisation

Even if this twin track process is not practical, greater flexibility around the precise services offered as part of the funding would be worth exploring for future programmes, including facilities for light-touch support over a longer period.

'The main change I would suggest would be to have longer support roles which work with the organisations over a period of time. Much better than parachuting in and them leaving them to sink or swim on the information they have been given.'

***Communities Can* Provider**

'We felt the allotted time given to us could have been longer. We are a new group and need a lot of 'hand holding' at present. Maybe provide ad hoc support either by email or telephone with the same worker and regular meetings in the first year or so.'

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[7] Although often these bids were rejected because of concerns about duplication / going over old ground.

Case study: Tangible impact, but more support needed

This interviewee led a faith group which provides local community events to support vulnerable people, such as coffee meet-ups for the homeless and trips to the seaside.

The group was founded by a local family. They started having real difficulties and need extra support to progress. None of the founding group had any experience in the voluntary sector, or in doing anything like this before.

When he applied for *Communities Can* funding he found the application process very simple, and was happy with it. His provider was the same organisation that introduced him to the programme, talked him through the application process…they sat with him and helped complete the online diagnostic. He had limited engagement with the actual marketplace.

The support received was providing guidance and advice on how to write grants. The interviewee felt this this helped him develop his skills, and he now feels much more confident in applying for grant funding.

'It [Communities Can] is a very good thing.'

He has however still found applying for grant funding really hard. He is still very interested in receiving more help and especially felt he could have done with more direction in signposting towards the best grants to apply for.

4) **Ability to engage in the support**

An important challenge from the provider perspective was whether some organisations were really ready to engage in this type of support. Some providers argued that the type of support approved by the panel was pitched at too high a level. For example, organisations might apply wanting help with funding, and a package might be approved to support this, but it became quite apparent that the organisation was **not 'funding ready'** and in many cases **not even 'consultant ready'**. Some of these organisations were felt by providers to actually have very minimal needs—just whatever it is to keep them going—and budgets as little as £200 per year. These organisations could end up feeling a bit puzzled by the support; thinking they could get a quick solution to a problem but instead presented with thinking and work to do. Again our distinction between 'instrumental' and 'developmental' support might help us interpret this; the organisations were expecting something instrumental while the provider saw developmental issues as the priority.

'For a new group the most important issue is correct governance structure, identification of need, and user group. To offer these types of groups support with funding before all the other boxes are ticked is inappropriate and offers false hope of quick access to future finance.'

Communities Can Provider

'Some of the groups have been open to ideas and new challenges; others have not and have actually been very difficult to work with. Many of the groups don't understand the different approach you need to take to secure larger investments. They often get frustrated when you set out the steps you need to do to evidence need, outcomes, and beneficiary involvement.'

Communities Can Provider

This could sometimes mean that the impact of an intervention was different to, or less than, what had initially been expected, and sometimes did not include the same immediate payoff (although it may have put the organisation into a stronger position to engage with future support).

5) Capacity to engage in support

Other organisations may not have been able or willing to engage with their support. Importantly, organisations needed the time and resources to carry out actions suggested by the provider, and it was sometimes hard to get them to do this. Providers said they found themselves spending lots of time 'chasing' organisations to engage and there were times when users didn't even seem to want help, or at least not prioritise receiving it. The causes of this varied, in some cases there was a perception that providers had pushed organisations to apply, for others it was that one member of the organisation applied for the support, but a different member being the person who would receive it (and not interested in it). Or simply the organisation lacked the time and resources to engage.

The obvious recommendation is to spend more time up front to explain to organisations what is involved and in particular that they will have to contribute time and effort. There's also a case for better sifting of applications to ensure people have the right outlook going into the programme, possibly using the segmentation outlined below (page 37). Both these things happened during *Communities Can*, but the fact that problems persisted suggest that more could have been done to prevent it.

6) Misunderstanding what the support was about

Some community organisations seemed to want to be 'given something' or 'tick a box' rather than learning something new or developing skills. As such, providers could sometimes find it difficult to persuade organisations to commit time and resources. Some providers responded to this by giving the community organisation what they wanted, because as consultants they felt obliged to satisfy the customer, but this led to less impact.

Conversely, some organisations had wrong, or unrealistic expectations about what could be achieved.

'We only received five days' support rather than the 10-15 we might have expected.'

Community organisation

'I requested guidance to increase funding opportunities and the opportunity to shadow someone in another larger organisation—I received the one to one support for funding through the CVS but the opportunity to shadow was never arranged.'

Community organisation

Some misunderstanding of what support actually entails is perhaps inevitable when targeting such a diverse audience as community groups. It reinforces the need for clear communications that are tested in advance, and the importance of face-to-face engagement.

Another solution to these sorts of problems could be more use of peer support / peer mentoring so that organisations can see what the next stage looks like and how they can reach it. More emphasis on peer approaches may also be a good way to deliver support efficiently to a range of organisations as well as give potential applicants a quicker insight into what the programme is about before making a commitment.

'It was very clear that a number of organisations have the same training needs and the ability to deliver one to many training sessions on basic "stuff" would not only provide a richer experience for the groups but would also enable them to develop peer networking opportunities.'

Communities Can provider

Segmentation

Having run through the various challenges above it bears repeating that the majority of feedback was positive. Rather this discussion should hopefully highlight some of the pitfalls and difficulties faced.

An important conclusion from the above, that most key stakeholders seemed to share, was the potential for greater segmentation of the target audience and a more conscious recognition of the split between 'instrumental' and some support is 'development'. In truth the range of organisations with up to £25,000 per year income is enormous, from loose associations, people with ideas or something in common through to long-established organisations with track records, contracts, and budgets.

The Community Mapping report suggested a rough segmentation based on size and 'formality'—essentially whether formal governance structures and constitutions were in place. In addition, discussions with CVSs indicate that there might be two main areas around which segmentation might be developed:

1. **How well developed or established the group is.** Some organisations were described as being 'embryonic'. Often these organisations are unsure about their ambitions and the kind of support they needed. In these cases, 'developmental'; support was most valuable at helping organisations to think about their future, create realistic plans and explore partnership and funding options. Other organisations were more established and their use of *Communities Can* was often described as 'instrumental'—i.e. the need to get something more specific sorted, or to access a particular funding stream.

2. **Ambition.** Groups varied a lot by what they wanted to achieve; some wanted to grow and make as much difference as possible, others had more modest aims and were focussed on sustaining what they do. Respecting this distinction was an important part of the *Communities Can* theory of change; providers should help people to explore their ambitions but not impose ambitions on them. The nature of a group's ambition appeared to affect what type of support was relevant. Less ambitious organisations tended to need help around governance and small-scale funding, while ambitious organisations would benefit from wider packages of support covering things like impact measurement.

In outlining these factors it is important to stress that we are not saying longevity of ambition should be a determinant of support. Indeed, it is evident that *Communities Can* was flexible enough to be valuable for organisations in all of the four possible combinations above. Our conclusion is that future programmes could benefit from starting with a clearer understanding of how support might be marketed and tailored to reflect these different circumstances, albeit without losing the flexibility and encouragement to access everything available.

Case Study

The community organisation itself is relatively new. The individual applicant was not a direct beneficiary of the group, but rather a trustee; a former professional and someone who is active in the community. He acts as a voluntary advisor to the community organisation, and so could be thought of as an intermediary between *Communities Can* and in the group itself.

The applicant found out about *Communities Can* through a local voluntary sector area meeting. He saw it as an opportunity to support his existing work with the community group on governance, organisation, and planning. More generally he hoped the support might help the organisation become more empowered and confident.

'We pretty much knew what we wanted. We had already run sessions about governance. It was a chance to reinforce their existing learning… to look at how they could be funded. Meet other people. Empowering them to take control.'

He feels that without his involvement the group would have been less likely to apply or receive *Communities Can* support. This highlights the concerns about whether enough was done to reach and engage with priority groups (which was addressed in the later part of the programme).

'Sometimes people don't have the contacts, don't have the links, don't know what the right questions are, or how to phrase them. So having conversations with them and trying to understand and help them is good.'

He regards the support they received as high quality and valuable. But it could have been improved in two main ways.

Firstly, it should have been seen as part of an ongoing support package rather than a 'one off'. Essentially, the support has identified what needs to happen next but then it stopped.

It shouldn't just be about doing a piece of training. More is needed. The group could be very influential, but they have been a bit left alone now… I still don't think they have taken upon the responsibility to go to the next stage… There are so many things they want to do but the support is too ad hoc.

Secondly, he felt that the support could have been a bit more creative. Partly this is greater effort to understand the group and its needs, and partly it's about not relying on the same materials and tools.

'They utilised what was already there, and perhaps there was an opportunity to be a bit more creative about what was available. It needs to be more bespoke… It had more potential than that.'

Overall, the applicant saw *Communities Can* as an effective programme with a clear need, but whose impact could be enhanced further through more proactive engagement, follow-up support, and creativity in delivery.
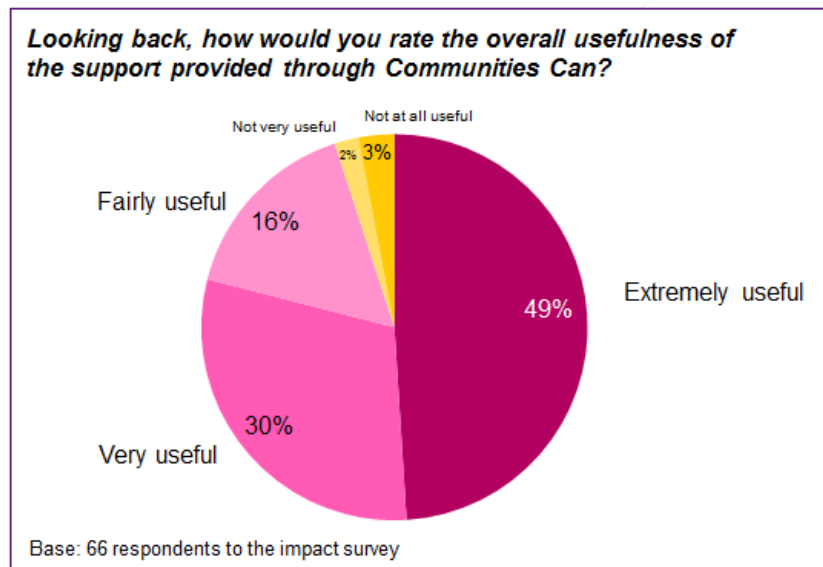
THE IMPACT OF *COMMUNITIES CAN*

Sources of information on impact

Our source of information on the difference that *Communities Can* has made for community organisations are the impact survey, completed with a sub-sample of participants six months after the completion of the support, and qualitative research with participants, providers and staff involved in the delivery of the programme. It is a partial picture, but one that gives us a reasonable indication that the programme had a positive effect for many of those involved.

Overall usefulness of the support

The headline finding is that nearly all Community Organisations said they found the support useful and that a fraction under half said that it was 'extremely useful'.

Looking back, how would you rate the overall usefulness of the support provided through Communities Can?

Not very useful
Not at all useful
2% 3%
Fairly useful 16%
Extremely useful 49%
Very useful 30%

Base: 66 respondents to the impact survey

This data comes from the impact survey, which although had only 66 respondents also had a 71% response rate so we can be reasonably confident in these findings.

Ninety-five percent of those providing feedback said they found the support useful; and 79% said it was either 'extremely' or 'very useful'. Assuming no systematic bias in the impact survey response, then the margin of error on the figure of 79% saying either 'extremely' or 'very' useful is $\pm$ 9 percentage points - meaning that the real figure would be between 70% and 88%. Of course there may be systematic bias: if we assume the worst case scenario, that all those who did not respond did not find the support "at all useful", it would still mean that over half (54%) found the support 'extremely' or 'very' useful (with one in three (34%) saying 'extremely useful').

The final caveat to note is that the impact survey was only conducted with those community organisations engaged towards the beginning of the programme, which is before the priority framework and before the main phase of outreach.[8] However, while we cannot rule out the possibility that the findings would change slightly if all

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[8] This was to meet the funders' requirements for this report to coincide with the end of programme delivery.
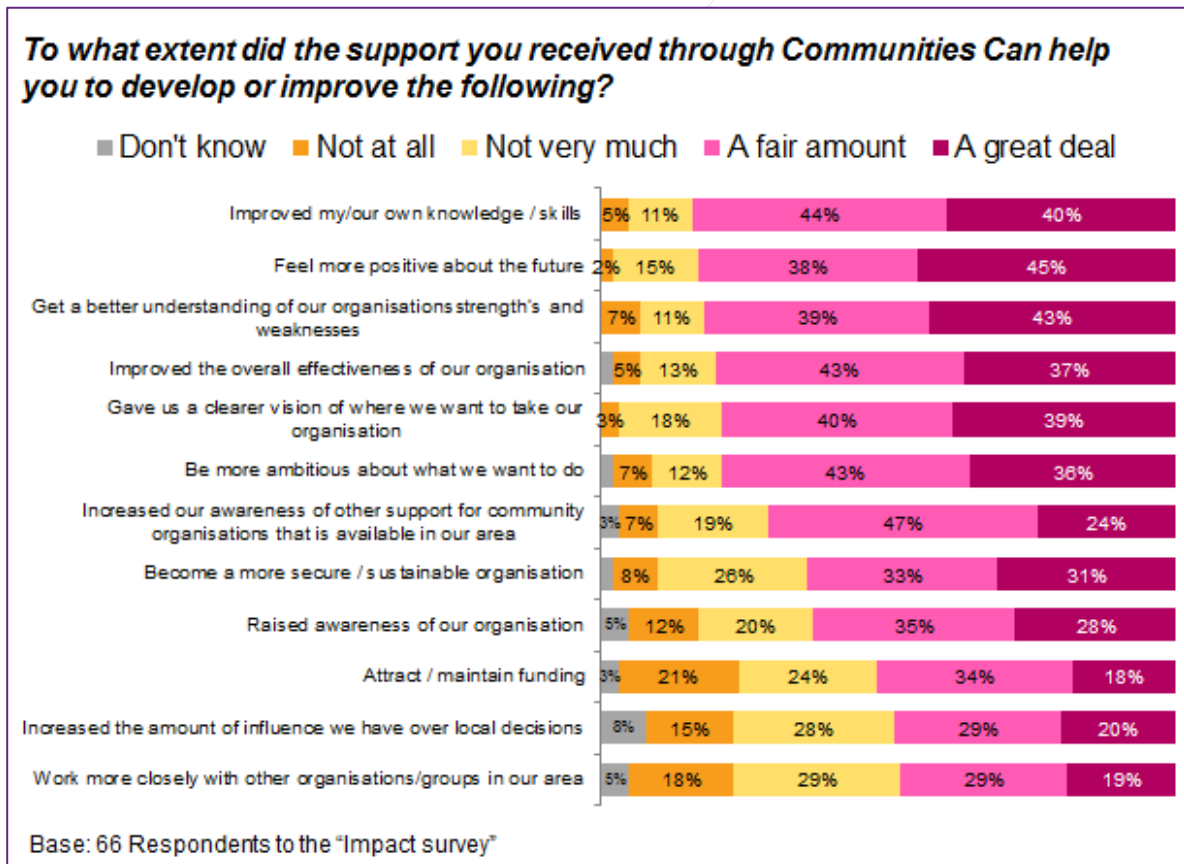
organisations had been surveyed, any significant change in the results seems very unlikely. Indeed, feedback received after the cut off point for this report seems to continue to be very positive.

Impact in more detail

The chart below shows the response to a more detailed set of questions about the difference made by *Communities Can* support. It includes some very positive findings for the programme:

- The most likely impacts appear to have been slightly more personal ones like improved understanding or skills, feeling more positive and having a clearer vision. This can be taken as a good indication for the sustainability of the programme's impact, which depends upon increasing the capacity and capability of the sector.

- There are good scores also for increased effectiveness and awareness of other support available.

- Half (52%) felt that there had been benefits around 'more funding' and 64% said they thought it had helped the organisation to be more sustainable. While this is lower down the benefits received it is still a strong result, especially when considering that this is more tangible and harder to achieve impact than some of the others.

Meanwhile, the lowest scores were achieved for 'increasing the amount of influence' groups had and 'working more closely with others'. This supports some of the other findings from the evaluation that show that, while this was part of the programme's theory of change, it was not prioritised in the actual support provided—which as shown on page 20 mainly focussed on more internal objectives.

To what extent did the support you received through Communities Can help you to develop or improve the following?

Base: 66 Respondents to the "Impact survey"

We are able to get an indication of how important each of these measures are to Community Organisations by correlating them with the question on overall usefulness of support. The scatterplot below shows the results of this and suggests a good association between what *Communities Can* was best at and what people valued the most.

There is a group of variables towards the top right that are most strongly associated with 'overall usefulness' and are rated highest by participants. In particular, 'feeling positive' is highest on both measures. This indicates that it is particularly important to the success of support.

Understanding strengths and weakness is something many organisations felt *Communities Can* had helped them with, although it has a slightly weaker association with overall usefulness compared to vision and improved skills.

Whether an organisation thinks they secured funding as a result of *Communities Can* is not as strongly associated with overall usefulness, and is well below feeling 'more positive'. This tells us that the support can be seen as useful even without a direct link to funding.
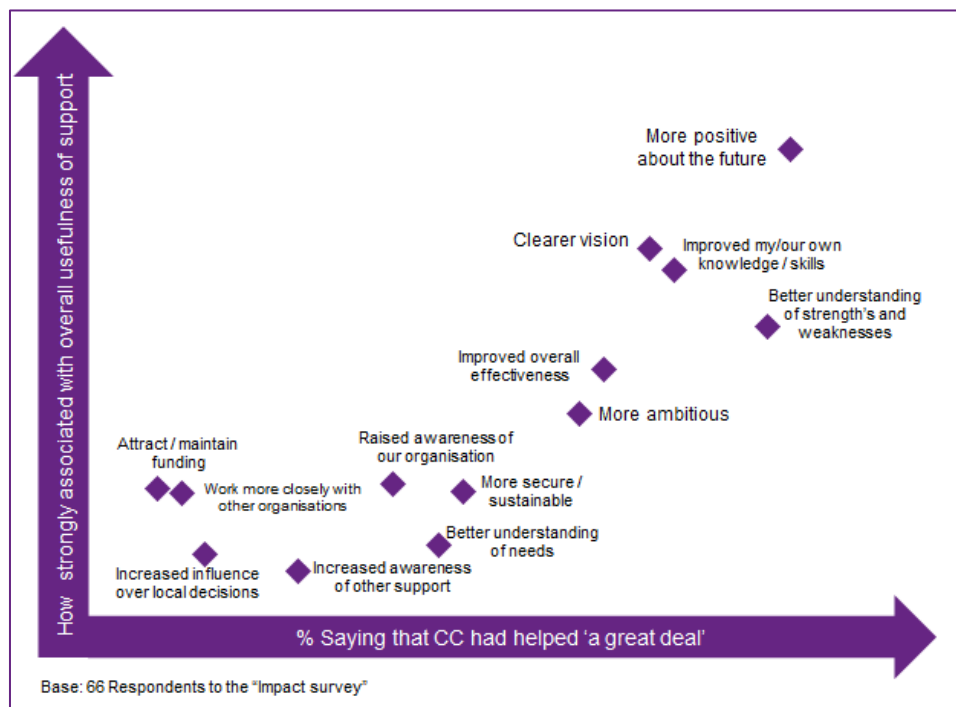
Finally, we are able to look a bit more at the nature of the support provided with some data from the feedback survey. It shows that about one in seven packages (15%) were felt to be more instrumental in nature, in which the provider 'did' things for the community organisations, compared to one in five (20%) where it focussed on upskilling. By far the largest group felt there was a balance between the two, which is broadly what the programme intended.
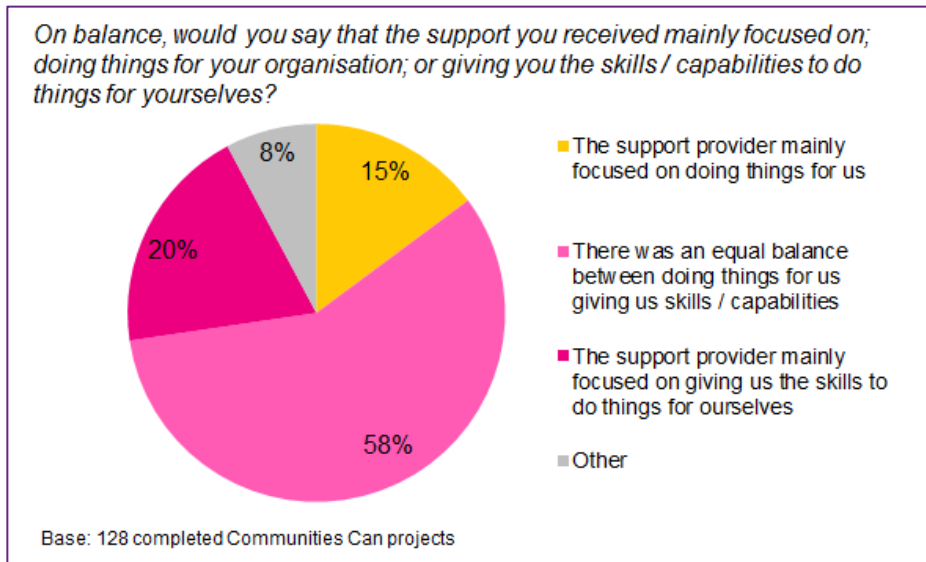
It is worth noting that the star rating given by community organisations saying the provider only did things for them is lower than average at 3.9, compared to 4.7 for both the other two categories. It suggests that support with a skills and capabilities element is generally better received by organisations and that possibly the best model is to get a balance between the two.

Case study: Understanding the impact of building tools

Transfigurations is a transgender support group based in the south-west of England. *Communities Can* funded the creation of an online tool which lets users rate how trans-friendly their GP is in a searchable online database, with their location then mapped onto an interactive map. The tool allows people to check their local healthcare providers and identify those who are likely to be most helpful and understanding. The tool is easy to use, and now has over 400 GPs recorded in the system. The tool is the most visited page on the website, attracting slightly over 2.5 times more visits than the next most popular page.

Transfigurations did not expect to come out of the support able to build such a tool themselves, but by getting and using the tool have clearly seen their capacity increase.

Written and qualitative evidence about impact

This section describes some of the qualitative and written feedback from community organisations and providers about the perceived impact of *Communities Can*. It is not an 'impact assessment' because we do not have the tools or resources to measure the long-term difference made. Rather it is intended to give a flavour of how, if at all, organisations have benefited—and in what ways they may have benefited the most.

Scale of impact

It is evident from the feedback that some organisations were changed quite profoundly while others simply got something useful--that is, something that helped them a bit or sorted something out. There are suggestions in the data that the levels of impact are linked to the segmentation factors highlighted above (page 37), with the more embryonic and ambitious organisations more likely to benefit from support to think carefully about and design their organisation.

'Working as a social enterprise can mean you have big ideas; it can be hard to break these ideas down into bite-size pieces as you always have the end vision in mind. This process has directed me well and being able to stand back and be objective has been the help I have needed.'

Community organisation

Organisations outside this group, particularly those that had been around for a while, may still benefited from the support but the reported impact has a somewhat different tone; it was often more about refining and improving, and identifying new opportunities. These organisations tended to be slightly less effusive in their feedback, but it was still apparent that they had benefited, possibly in ways that would strengthen their organisation significantly.

'There are certain parts of our business plan that I will revisit as a result of understanding what funders are looking for. We hope to start our CIC from the funding bid we were supported to put together and have the necessary skills to look at others if this is not successful.'

Community organisation

Reflecting on this, the CVSs who attended the learning event guessed that the impact may have been the greatest for organisations around that £5-10k turnover size group. This is those organisations of a reasonable size and with some ambition—not too small to struggle with what they were being told and not too big or established that not much difference can be made (or for the challenges to go beyond the scale of support available through the programme).

'For some you can really see the difference, they are more reflective and looking outside the box. Others just ticked the box—but we always have them.'

CVS

Categories from the theory of change

The theory of change had three broad categories of intended intermediate outcomes which are discussed in turn below.

1) Knowledge and skills

There were four main areas around which users felt their knowledge and skills had been developed through *Communities Can*.

General sense that they knew more about what they are doing and what they needed to do: A lot of users talked in quite general terms about 'knowing more' and being better able to manage and sustain their organisations. Specific examples are numerous and cover a wide range of activities including management and governance skills, better volunteer management, and improving measurement scales.

'[The Provider] helped us to understand how to set up an organisation, helped with constitution and fund raising, helped us to keep track with spending and incoming money.'

Community organisation

Having new tools, frameworks, and processes to draw on and apply. Reflecting the slightly more 'instrumental' use of *Communities Can* by some organisations, a lot of users talked about the benefits in terms of having new tools or approaches to deploy. Many were quite positive about the difference this had made for them.

'[The Provider] provided a lot of information about preparing bids and actually prepared basic bids in different formats for us to use and amend as necessary. We now have a greater understanding of bid writing and the confidence to prepare others when needed.'

Community organisation

'We helped them to take in new concepts like developing an "aim"; they didn't know how to frame it before. They didn't know how to think through ideas.'

Communities Can Provider

New opportunities and ideas. Another more practical benefit mentioned by quite a few community organisations was new information and ideas from their providers. For example, what their opportunities might be, who might fund them, or to whom they could connect.

'[The Provider] was very helpful in helping to find new funding streams that we would never have considered otherwise.'

Community organisation

Clearer understanding of themselves and their potential. An important benefit, that was perhaps not clear enough in the theory of change, was how some organisations felt the support had helped them to reflect upon and develop their ideas or ambitions, and to develop a more coherent plan. In other words, it helped to turn their idea into a reality. Indeed, a relatively small but significant portion of respondents reported that they had made drastic changes to their organisation due to their participation in the programme. One user reported that they have completely changed how their organisation functions and designed a new three-year plan based on this support. Another realised that charitable status was not actually right for them and instead looked into working with a larger, more established charity. This indicates that providers were able to confidently give difficult and challenging advice to users, and an indication that the programme had the potential to impact organisations in more complex ways.

'[The provider] helped me sort out my confusion as to how I wanted to take my project forward and helped me get back on track of my long term original vision. More than this he reminded me of my personal life goal and whether my plans would work towards or against both my own and the organisation's goals. I have since had the confidence to make some radical changes to my group and I now have a clearly defined three year plan. [This is] exactly what I needed at just the right time.'

'Helped us take a good long look at what we were doing right, and what could be improved on.'

However, where we heard fewer reported impacts was around:

- 'Better understanding the needs of the community'— which organisations might feel they know enough about already and was only a focus of around one in four support packages.
- 'Greater awareness and use of available support'—we found little evidence of this happening, possibly because not much other support *is* available.
- 'Greater awareness of their own support needs'—again, providers may have reasoned that there is no point developing needs that cannot be met.

2) Attitudes

The attitudinal change picked up in our research is of a slightly different complexion to what was predicted in the theory of change. Few people said they felt 'more supported' or 'less isolated', and there was not the sense that users were more 'open to new ideas'. Instead, the main benefits were defined in terms of:

Confidence: As identified in the Community Mapping Research at the start of the programme, confidence can be a decisive factor in expanding or limiting organisation's activities. Positively, many organisations reported that they felt more confident in their operations following their support from *Communities Can*. This included confidence in demonstrating skills, such as bid writing, and confidence more broadly in their day-to-day working.

'[The provider] helped us massively to improve as a business and enabled us to feel more confident that we are going on the right path to success.'

'Have confidence to approach companies we don't know about the project. Complete further funding applications with increased confidence and competence.'

Community organisations

Determination: Related to confidence, a number of organisations reported feeling a bit more positive and determined. Potentially, the support from *Communities Can* helped them to see what they wanted to achieve, and have a more robust plan for getting there.

'I have realised that our community residents' association needs to work harder for what we want to achieve. We have had a bit of a wake-up call, and our community has become stronger from the guidance we have received from [the provider].'

Community organisations

Less confused / worried: The third area of attitudinal change that we can attribute to Communities Can for some organisations is helping people to feel more assured and less anxious about their organisation. In some cases this was simply about reassurance that they had things in place, in others it was helping the organisations to make changes that dealt with problems or concerns they were having.

'[The provider] has helped us to set our feet in the right trail going forward and put our minds at ease for doing everything correctly.'

Community organisation

'We had just lost project manager and other staff and the centre looked as if it may have to close. The support we got has allowed us to continue providing community services, so I can't place enough emphasis on how the Communities Can *support helped this happen, and it gave us the knowledge and belief and direction in what we needed to do going forward.'*

Community organisation

3) Changes in behaviour

Ambitious: The change we heard most often from feedback related to feeling more ambitious and positive about the future of their organisation, and acting in more positive, forward-looking ways.

'I aim to push for more bid writing opportunities so that we can continue as a group into the future.'

Community organisation

More deliberate: Many organisations also talked about acting on their plans, taking more steps to keep going or to get started:

'We now have a better understanding of how to keep a group like this going and to recruit new members. It also helped me to get involved with other similar groups.'

'This has made our foundation to start off much easier after struggling for over three years to take off the ground.'

Community organisations

More connected: We have noted elsewhere that the networking and connectedness part of the *Communities Can* theory of change seems to have been slightly less prominent in the support provided, and while it was mentioned less often in the feedback, there were organisations that talked about feeling more open and connected with other organisations (including other community organisations, as well as funders, NHS, and local authorities). Also, some users said they had been able to establish an ongoing relationship with a provider who they could rely on and trust. For example, one interviewee noted they are currently applying for more funding through this provider, while another said that if they needed to do more work in the same area, its provider would be the first port of call. This suggests the project is creating strong links which are likely to be sustained.

'I met lot of new people who are ready to support me and our community on this project.'

'We will network and establish formal ways of ensuring we are representative and we are heard and listened to.'

Community organisations

Case study: A transformative experience

This interviewee is a retired art teacher. He works with local groups to create pieces of art for the community. He was new to the voluntary sector and applied for help around determining the legal structure of his organisation, and broader strategic planning advice. He was happy with the application process and with the information given to make a choice, although he ultimately went with a provider he already knew well and did not seem to have heavily engaged with the market element of the programme.

He found the support transformative. It led to him establishing the organisation as a formal community interest company, and gave him the skills and confidence he needed to expand his work. He is now looking at taking on more members of staff and branching out the sort of work he does.

'*The effect has been enormous really, it has been a springboard to a second career… I have big plans. [L]legacy is important: I want to pass this on, it's gone from just me to an organisation.*'

He has since received a second tranche of *Communities Can* funding to help improve his measurement, which as of the time of the interview was going well. He felt getting this funding in two chunks had helped him to really know what was needed for the second set of funding, and felt the program could be made to work even better if this model was the norm.

Longer-term, more tangible impacts

Feedback from organisations and providers also highlights instances where some of the longer-term impacts in the theory of change may have occurred.

Better at attracting funding and resources: A common success reported was around greater skills in fundraising. Looking at the table above (page 40), 17% said that *Communities Can* had helped them 'a great deal' to attract funding, and a further 34% said that it helped them 'a fair amount'. Whilst this impact is not universal, it should be remembered that not all support packages focussed on this issue, and that the survey was undertaken only a few months after the delivery of support, so it may be that more time is needed for impacts on funding to be achieved.

The precise nature and scale of this varied from developing skills in micro-fundraising, allowing an organisation to bid to buy a new van, to developing the skills they need to appeal to large funders, such as the Big Lottery Fund. It is particularly exciting to see this as one of the main areas that users report as successful. It suggests that community organisations are developing the skills they need to equip themselves to raise funds and become sustainable in the long-term.

'Our group has been successful with a bid for two new tents and cookers for our celebratory 70th Camp next year, 2017. We could not take all our young people away without this bid and are so happy to be able to do this. Step by step support ... Brilliant. Thank you.'

'The support helped us refine our business plan and offer ideas for further development and opportunities. This has subsequently led to us accessing £25,000 in funding to run a pilot project.'

Community organisations

Providers also commented on funding being one of the main areas of success, in particular helping organisations to have more confidence around fundraising. Much of this was realised through developing basic skills around

writing funding applications or greater awareness about what funders think might be worth pursuing and what funders value. Feedback from one provider noted that two of its clients have already been successful in gaining new sources of funds.

'Two groups have secured additional funding based on their learning from the programme.'

'Groups are now properly constituted and have also been able to access funding (current rate of success for applications supported is 100%).'

Communities Can **Providers**

More effective: The second most frequently cited longer term impact was around simply being more effective; having the right systems and processes in place, being better run etc.

'We are better organised, we have hopefully the right requirements and facilities for our service users tailored to their needs. We continue to listen to our users and change and adapt our services accordingly.'

'The information provided will provide our organisation with a smoother and better run organisation through accurate governance, application and monitoring processes in place for the future. The trustees will be able to make better informed decisions in the future.'

Community organisations

Doing more: Related to both of the above impacts, a number of organisations talked about how *Communities Can* had helped them to expand their services and reach more people.

'We have been awarded funding because some of the work done which has put us in a better position. This funding will enable us to provide further free cookery sessions to the local community and spread [our] message. We hope to keep growing as an organisation.'

Community organisation

Happier, more fulfilled: The final impact, motioned by one or two organisations, was the personal benefits they derived from the support.

'The effect [of the provider] has been enormous really. It has been a springboard to a second career… [It] gave me more confidence… I have big plans.'

Community organisation

Higher profile: Finally, a small number of organisations also mentioned having a higher profile in the community. This seems to apply particularly to those who have been able to expand their services or reach, or those whose support explicitly focussed on communications activities—in particular help with setting up a website.

'We have a much higher profile in the communities we represent.'

'I think the help and advice in improving our website in particular will significantly raise awareness of our core operations and through the benefits of this media make us more accessible to our current and future service users.'

Community organisations

Summary

The information in the previous section risks presenting a slightly too positive picture. This feedback is not representative of everyone's experience, as some reported not benefiting at all. Rather, it is there to illustrate that *Communities Can* did have a very positive effect for some, and there are grounds to believe this could lead to some longer term impact. However, there is more that could be done. An important lesson for the future is to have a better understanding of which types of organisations will benefit the most and what personal qualities people need to take advantage of this kind of support.

It also highlights how the theory of change can be refined for future programmes.

From all this we have learned that the key aspects of how the support should be delivered include:

- Flexibility of the provider, to meet them on their own terms and timescales;
- Professionalism and reliability;
- Being personable and friendly;
- Being knowledgeable and expert;
- Providing tailored advice at the right level and language; and,
- Above all the support should be useful and practical, and show a clear way forward.

When there were outcomes from the support they were around:

- Improved skills generally;
- Tools and approaches they could use in future;
- For some organisations, a clearer sense of purpose, and a plan to get there;
- Feeling more confident, determined and less confused; and,
- Acting with more ambition, with a deliberate plan for the future.

The main longer term outcomes achieved for organisations were:

- Better at attracting funding and resources;
- Smoother running, more effective management and processes;
- Doing more and reaching more people; and,
- Higher profile.

The main thing missing from this is the impact of organisations feeling and being more connected to one another. If this is an aim for future programmes then it would need a different approach, or at least more conscious efforts to achieve this connectedness.

Case study: New community centre

The organisation wanted to set up a community centre in an unused church building. The applicant had no real experience of setting up a community project of this nature, and had reached out to a consultancy in the past but had not had a good experience. A provider suggested that he apply for *Communities Can* to support him to set up the legal and social infrastructure for the new community centre.

He began the application process and found it really easy to understand and use.

When he received the funding, the provider got to work in giving him the support he needed. This included mapping local community needs to understand the groups that the community centre should work with and engage, and support him to develop the suitable legal structures for the organisation.

The experience of working with the provider gave the programme participant more confidence to work on these sorts of community projects independently in the future.

The programme participant successfully applied for a second tranche of funding with the same provider to do some further work on the community centre. His positive experiences also led to another local community leader looking into applying for a similar grant themselves.

Limits to impact

There are two obvious limits to the impact achieved by *Communities Can.*

Delivery limit

This is simply a reiteration of the point that not all organisations benefited from the support. Our best estimate, based on the 'impact survey', is that between a third and half of organisations found the support 'extremely useful'. This corresponds to between 120 -180 of the 355 packages approved. Most of the rest of the packages were seen as useful to a degree.

This accords with estimates made by CVSs at the learning event at the end of the programme. Here it was guessed that the ratio of organisations 'growing and developing' to 'little signs of development' was somewhere between 60:40 and 50:50.

Limits imposed by the context in which organisations are working

Stakeholders also articulated fears about the external environment that is affecting the prospects for community organisations and could mean that even if *Communities Can* had a significant impact on people it might not make any difference if there is no further support or funding for them. The two related challenges mentioned were austerity and local authorities that are disengaging from community organisations or making cuts that severely affected what they could do.

'The bid never materialised because of uncertainty over the club continuing through Council cuts for green maintenance. In fact, the Council has reduced the greens from 24 to 11 and there is only one green to be shared by two clubs and the future of outdoor bowling in [area] is still uncertain.'

'The provider did everything they possibly could to assist and went above and beyond. However, we found there is no support for arts or heritage organisations.'

Community organisations

Some providers talked in terms of an 'increasingly hostile environment for community organisations' that limits potential in subtle ways as well as impacting on funding. For example, the stress of running an organisation might mean that organisations cannot spare the time and resources to embed the developmental change that *Communities Can* encouraged. It might also mean that organisations become disillusioned because of the lack of support. In this context a possible unintended consequence of *Communities Can* is that it has raised expectations around the support available and possibilities for funding that cannot be met, thereby discouraging more social action in the future.

'Organisations I have worked with tend to have very tenuous futures because of limited or diminishing funds. In particular, sport and arts groups are finding funding very difficult and whilst I have been able to help them develop funding strategies, have worked with them on applications, and offered on-going support until they feel more confident, you can see the lack of funding success really affecting them on a personal level.'

'I worry that if the support does not lead to quite quick results, they will feel deflated by the experience. Yet in most cases any lack of success has little to do with their ideas or bid writing skills but everything to do with the very difficult funding climate we are in…'

Communities Can Provider

However, programmes like *Communities Can*, were they to be established beyond a pilot, could contribute to shifting support in a local context, shining a light on sustainable community action and the value for money it represents at a time when resources are scarce.

Impact on CVSs and providers

There was a mixed response from CVSs about whether the programme had affected them positively. All shared the view that the funding had been helpful, although it was not long-term or reliable enough to help them significantly (and it did not prevent one CVS—Blackpool—effectively closing while the programme was ongoing).

Other ways in which some CVSs reported benefiting were:

A chance to experiment with different ways of working: This included new templates and frameworks that were developed through working with Community Organisations and new providers.

'We have templates so we know where to start, but we need more quality time with people.'

CVS

Reach: Running *Communities Can*, and in particular the outreach work, was an opportunity for CVSs to reach out to new organisations and communities. Some also felt that it had raised their raised their profile across the community, as well as in specific subgroups.

'We found people who had never raised their hands before. [We] reached and engaged the seldom heard.'

CVS

A different way of working. Some CVSs reported that the *Communities Can* model encouraged a more focussed and disciplined approach. In particular, the fact that support had to be delivered quickly and over a short period may have helped increased efficiency.

'We have learned to be smarter about the way we deliver. It was a learning curve; our organisation is stronger for it. [We are] more robust in the way we are operating.'

CVS

'It prompted me to analyse time quite scientifically—to utilise time better.'

CVS

Some concerns were raised about **potential negative impact of the programme for CVSs**. One way of framing these was in terms of how CVSs are going to meet the now-increased demand, as the programme has succeeded in reaching out to a large number of organisations they didn't know existed. Another worry was how CVSs are going to manage the relationships with organisations who now expect too much or who they did have prior contact with—these organisations may now feel slightly hostile towards the CVS after having been turned down for funding, or due to the stresses of going through the support itself (for instance, being rushed through the support over three months when really they needed six).

One area of criticism from independent providers was the lack of effort invested in linking providers to one another or to the CVSs. Providers often appeared to be working in isolation and there seems to have been little evidence of providers sharing information or resources. This could be seen as a missed opportunity to establish stronger and more collaborative local networks of providers.

'We attended the one session where supplier and groups were asked to contribute their thoughts and I can see some changes were made but I think an opportunity was lost to really bring together a network of suppliers with great resources that could really impact on the voluntary and community sector as a whole.'

Communities Can provider

Despite this issue there is good evidence to suggest that independent providers benefited from the process and might be better equipped to support community organisations in future.

'As a provider, we got involved in Communities Can to take on the challenge of working with much smaller and much earlier stage organisations than we are used to. From this point of view, our involvement has been a great success and we have learned a great deal.'

'As a provider we have enjoyed this work—it is very rewarding as the changes in the people we worked with are quite lovely to see. It is about confidence-building and showing to them they are appreciated and doing a good job. It's about enabling them to see further afield and have a vision for the future. It's also humbling to find out just how much time and effort they put in to their passion to help others.'

Communities Can **Providers**

APPLICATION AND APPROVAL PROCESS

Aims of the application and approval process

Aims

The application and approval process for *Communities Can* was designed to:

- encourage engagement from targeted organisations;

- collect the right sort of information in the least intimidating ways possible; and

- ensure the correct decision was made by the approval panel.

One of the main challenges for potential users of *Communities Can*—as outlined in the community mapping study—was a perceived fear and lack of understanding of bureaucracy among community organisations.

How it was designed

The process was broadly as follows.

- Following preliminary outreach and engagement the applicant was directed to an online application process. Each applicant was asked to confirm eligibility, and then complete the Organisational Health Scorecard (OHS) which comprised 12 questions related to four aspects of the organisation: people, impact, support, networks.[9]

- This was followed by a short meeting or a phone call with the Young Foundation outreach worker (workers' capacity allowed typically for 30 mins-1hr). The focus of the assessment was to develop an understanding of the organisation's needs and identify the core elements of the proposed support package, so that a full application could be developed. The worker then undertook due diligence, specified the support package, identified the most suitable provider to deliver it and confirmed their availability.

- The application would be reviewed at a panel consisting of Young Foundation, the Fund and CVS staff (unless the CVS was the suggested provider, in which case it would leave the discussion). A decision would be made to approve, reject or defer pending further information.

- The organisation and provider would be informed of the decision and expected to complete the package within three months.

How it worked in practice

Our data on how well the application and approval process worked is slightly contradictory.

On the one hand community organisations themselves were generally positive. For example, when asked to give the programme a score out ten for how straightforward it was to *'apply and access the support'*, over half of successful applicants (52%) gave a score of ten out of ten and the average score was 8.9. Similarly, over half

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[9] This data is available to the evaluation team but we have opted not to report it because it is not particularly compelling. As we outline below (page 54) it was based on self-assessment by applicants with wide range of knowledge and backgrounds, and in a context in which applicants might feel pressured to answer in certain ways.

(55%) strongly agreed that *'the Communities Can application process was effective at identifying our needs'*, with a further 32% saying that they *'tended to agree'*— with only very small numbers disagreeing.

Qualitative feedback on the application process was also positive. Users said they found the online diagnostic easy to navigate and not a particular burden. This is encouraging given the wide set of experiences and backgrounds of those applying for support. Similarly, all those we spoke to found the application process easy and none of them felt they were having their hands held, which suggests the right balance was being struck in making the application accessible.

'The online diagnostic was lovely…asked for just enough without being threatening.'

Community Organisation

On the other hand, we have to note once more that our surveys were only representative of those who successfully navigated the process and that quite a number of initial enquiries did not progress any further or were withdrawn at a later stage—nearly one in four of all applications made (23%).

Furthermore, providers and CVSs highlighted some problems with the application process, particularly around the OHS.

Firstly, it was reported that while it was easy to use for some applicants, others struggled. CVSs said they sometimes had to sit down with organisations to help them fill it in[10] and reassure them the programme was appropriate. Unsurprisingly, it tended to be the smaller, less sophisticated organisations that struggled the most, and it is possible that some of these may have been discouraged by the process. Having said this, there may have also been a positive benefit of the OHS helping to signal what *Communities Can* was about, and we can speculate that the process might have filtered out some organisations that were less suitable or committed.

Secondly, the results of the OHS were generally inaccurate, with high levels of over- claiming. There will always be inaccuracy and inconsistency in self-assessment because no two applicants will interpret questions in exactly the same way. But this may have been further exaggerated in Communities Can because applicants had such a wide range of experience in running community organisations in the first place. Furthermore CVSs suspected that organisations were seeing it more as a 'test' with correct answers, leading to responses which overestimated organisations' current ability.

'The diagnostic was reasonably accurate though inevitably capacity building work always requires a degree of tailoring and adjustment once you begin work.'

'For the organisations I was given, the reality on the ground did not match the application/diagnostic. In reality, much of what the programme had been told was wishful thinking.'

Communities Can **Providers**

There is a risk of overstating this problem. The aim of the OHS was not to provide a definitive picture of organisations but rather collect some basic information, signal what the programme was about and be the starting point for more detailed conversations. Arguably it achieved these aims, even if some of the information collected was wrong. Also, it should be noted that problems were not down to it being online, but rather that it involved self-assessment. An online method that focusses on more tangible, factual questions that support the application process might be a better approach. The following questions are examples of what might be asked in this instance.

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[10] There is evidence to suggest that CVSs/providers sometimes completed the OHS on behalf of groups.

- How long has the organisation been operating?

- How many people are involved in delivery?

- How many service users are reached?

- What area does it operate over?

- What are the funding sources?

- Whether the ambition is to grow or simply sustain itself? (see page 37)

While we have learned that Community Organisations are willing to complete online applications, they would be better directed at questions from which accurate and useful data can be obtained[11] or whatever information the outreach worker needs to begin a useful assessment. Otherwise, we suggest, this element of the programme could be eliminated to make the user journey simpler.

From the outset, partners knew that data from the OHS alone would be an insufficient basis for decisions, and that it would be vital to follow-up the OHS with a phone call or meeting between organisations and the Young Foundation. However this process was constrained by the resources available, so while frontline workers, partners and providers all called for *more* information, it was not always possible to provide it. A modest increase in the resources at this stage in the process might have been enough to improve the reliability of assessment and support package design. Finally, it should also be noted that for many groups, this light-touch approach provided a good enough indication of the type and quantity of support needed—particularly when the need was more 'instrumental' than 'developmental' (see page 20).

Approval panel

The approval panel process was positively regarded by all those involved, particularly towards the end of the programme. It was generally seen as a productive discussion that usually reached the right decisions, especially in cases where panel members knew some of the local context.

Nonetheless there were some challenges that had to be ironed-out as the programme progressed.

- Some felt panels were ambivalent about social enterprise start-ups, questioning their social value and commitment to the local community, even though they were eligible. In the final stage of the programme a clear policy to support them was adopted.

- Different perspectives at the panel could mean that the support package was substantially revised during the process, such that the Community Organisation didn't recognise what they ended up with. This could cause tensions to emerge.

- There could be delays in the application process, which could occasionally take a few months. Reasons cited for delays were patchy information, communication difficulties between partners, workload, and changing staff.

- There was not always enough communication, both during and after this process. This meant applicants did not always know what was happening or found out that they had been approved for support from providers rather than the programme itself. These delays could cause challenges for those managing the relationships on the ground and suggest that any future programmes need to be mindful of keeping everyone involved in the loop.

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[11] The counterpoint to this is that some organisations might find these sorts of questions more intimidating, but this has not been tested to our knowledge.

'The application process was a bit slow and protracted. At times it very fragmented. As the CVS, we could [get the blame]. Relationships were harmed; people didn't always know what was going on. One or two groups became disenfranchised and gave up. Although it became more seamless later in the programme.'

CVS

Rejected applications

Ninety applications were rejected at the panel stage, which represents 18% of all applications. This varied significantly by area. In Sunderland, 31% of applications were rejected, in Barking & Dagenham 25%, while in Peterborough only 8% were. It also changed over time. Only 2% of applications were rejected in the first six months of the programme, increasing to 25% in 2016, after the 'priority framework' was introduced (see page 16).

What can we learn?

Communities Can processes were designed to minimise the burden on organisations themselves—to feel 'different' and not 'off-putting'. There's evidence to suggest this was achieved but that behind the scenes some challenges emerged around:

- trying to effectively understanding and assess organisations in a 'light touch' way;

- panels having to deal with difficult decisions and engage a number of people; and

- the capacity available for outreach and administration, particularly at the start of the programme.

A recommendation to come from this is—as above—the need for more on-the-ground interactions with community organisations. This would help build trust from the outset and better understand their needs. There might be a role for online approaches but for this type of audience it can be off-putting, and it should not be seen as a shortcut to making proper links. If online self-assessment approaches are used then the success criteria for them should be that they:

- collect accurate information;

- help clarify what the programme is about; and

- encourage further engagement.

There was also a sense in the most recent reflections from partners that there is a longer-term component to building trust and relationships. *Communities Can*, at least as a pilot, was time-limited, a one-off intervention and organisations may be more likely to invest in relationships that they believe will be around for some time. Were similar programmes to be developed in the future, there would be value in considering how they could be better embedded within a wider local support offer.

## Matching providers to applicants

Establishing a market

Part of the initial design of *Communities Can* was to create a 'market place' in which applicants could choose the most suitable provider from a menu of options. This was supported by an online platform and rating system[12] that was intended to help the best provider to be identified in each case. The aim of having a market was to ensure a diverse range of providers that could give organisations choice and improve the quality of support provided by organisations providing public feedback on their experience.

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[12] https://communitiescan.org.uk/find-help

What happened in practice?

We tested whether these benefits of a market actually happened through a question in the feedback survey. It shows that only a small proportion of community organisations actually chose their provider through the market (7%) and that the majority felt they were either allocated a provider (47%) or chose a provider they had worked with before (37%).
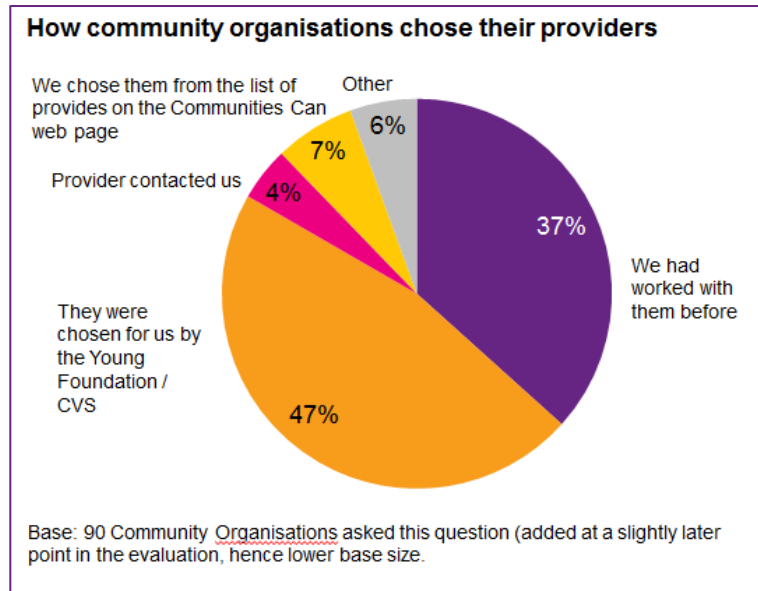
Qualitative research also suggests that the selection of providers was generally more influenced by existing relationships. Interviewees reported that many applied for support from *Communities Can* at the suggestion of a provider they had worked with before and then stuck with that provider. There were usually good reasons for this in that community organisations tended not to have a full understanding of their needs from which to base a decision. This reflects the wider point—made elsewhere in this report—that many organisations need some initial coaching to get themselves 'consultancy-ready', and so will tend to want to be guided towards a provider rather than face a choice. Indeed, because the choice is unwelcome a 'market place' might even discourage engagement in the programme.

Some interviewees also noted there was actually only a small amount of information available about alternative providers—so no genuine opportunity for informed choice. To make the market place more effective, there would need to be more guidance and signposting ideally from an independent source.

Provider selection

Fifty-six different providers were engaged to deliver *Communities Can* vouchers (out of 114 providers who registered in the programme initially).

To be part of *Communities Can* providers had to register online and provide two references covering a set of questions about their previous work experience with the target audience, testimonials and areas of support they could provide. Once approved, providers would appear on the website within their region with a description of areas of expertise. Providers themselves found their initial contact with *Communities Can* quite positive; with many of them commenting that they found the provider application simple and easy to use. However, there were a sub-group of providers who signed-up for the programme and received no work (nor any further contact).

Actual work was not spread evenly across the providers who registered. Just over four in ten of the vouchers were allocated to one of the 5 main CVS organisations (151 or 42%) and six other providers have delivered more

than 10 support packages. Conversely, 16 providers were allocated only one package of support. The following shows how the number of packages was distributed across the providers (see Appendix B for a more detailed account).

- More than 20 packages: 5 providers;
- 10 – 19 packages: 5 providers;
- 5 – 9 packages: 7 providers;
- 3-4 packages: 11 providers;
- 2 packages: 11 providers;
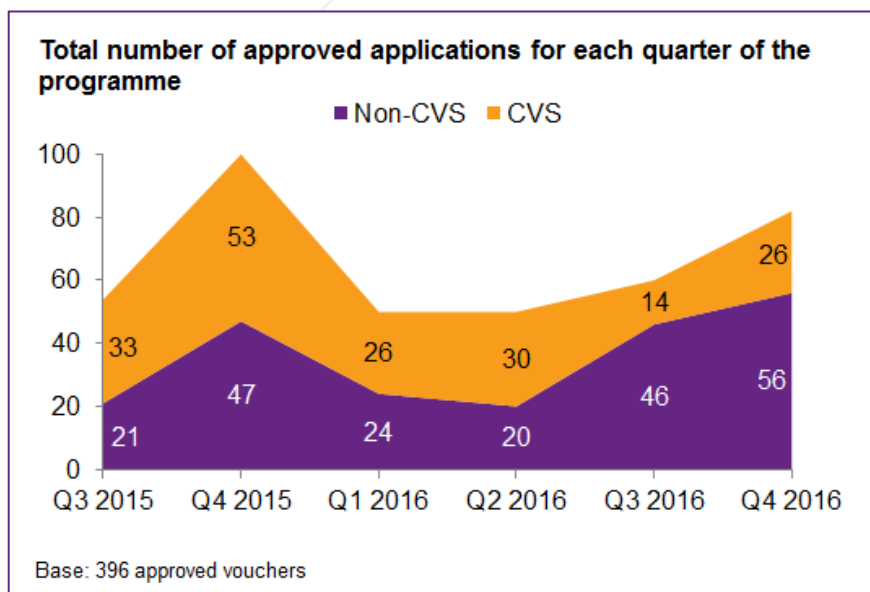- 1 package: 16 providers.

Daily rates

The lowest **daily rate** for support was £75 and the highest was £500 (which was the maximum limit set). The mean daily rate was £360 and the median was £325. This varied by the following factors:

- Provider: Average CVS daily rates were £374 and non-CVS providers were £347
- Area: Ranging from £484 in Barking & Dagenham to £320 - £339 in Blackpool and Torbay.
- Time: Rates got lower as the programme progressed, from £419 in the first quarter to £355 in the last.

Changes in the selection of providers over time

There is evidence to suggest that process of linking organisations to providers changed as the programme developed. As shown below, during the early stages of the programme when CVSs were leading the outreach work, CVSs were also doing most of the delivery work. Towards the end of the programme, when community development workers were doing more outreach, other providers were being allocated more support. Distribution was also affected by provider capacity— those delivering several packages would have less capacity to accept new ones.

Total number of approved applications for each quarter of the programme

■ Non-CVS ■ CVS

Quarter	Non-CVS	CVS
Q3 2015	21	33
Q4 2015	47	53
Q1 2016	24	26
Q2 2016	20	30
Q3 2016	46	14
Q4 2016	56	26

Base: 396 approved vouchers

Issues to emerge through the allocation process

Both providers and community organisations felt that the decision about provider allocation was not always clear and when they did make a choice about a provider this was not always respected. For example, there was an occasion when a particular provider had done some of the outreach and preparatory work for an application only to find the work allocated to someone else. In another case, one provider delivered a package and another was assigned to the follow-up support.

In all, it seems provider allocation could sometimes seem quite a murky process, with possibly not enough information been given to applicants themselves during the process. In essence, it cannot not be regarded as a genuine market if a customer's choices can be overruled by someone else.

'Organisations should be directly involved in the process from the start, and any ongoing correspondence should involve the organisations in tandem.'

Community organisation

'We were given the offer of multiple providers but the one selected was rejected with no real explanation, after trying to chase up what happened I was told it was because their rate was too high but it wasn't very clear.'

Community organisation

Some independent providers expressed concern about the apparent conflict of interest between CVSs' role as partners in the local programme and as a provider themselves; in particular, there was concern about the presence of CVSs in the selection panel for successful grants. In some instances there was a perception that CVSs were using their position to gain as large a share of resources as possible (although the reality was less than half). Another provider reported that they had concerns that CVSs' were effectively awarding themselves the *best* work. This perception turned some independent providers off the programme, which they thought was biased against them. The important learning point here is the need to manage roles and the *perception* of conflicts of interest and fairness to ensure buy-in by independent providers.

'We weren't aware that the CVSs had a formal management role in the programme… This 'management' and 'delivery' role that they have clearly put them in conflict of interest. We have found this to be a real issue with lots of examples of the CVSs awarding itself assignments they weren't best qualified for.'

Provider

This dual role also had the potential to negatively affect the CVSs themselves. Though not directly tasked with delivering the programme, their position in the local community sector meant they could be held accountable for it by some groups, leading to awkward conversations with small community groups with which they had long-standing relationships.

CVSs themselves recognised the potential conflict of interest, but were less likely to see it as a problem in practice. Some also felt that a market of providers was being pursued for its own sake, and without enough regard to quality assurance (or whether it was really needed). When pressed on the best approach, some CVSs held the view that organisations should be assigned an appropriate provider which in almost all cases would be the CVS (excluding some specialities like website designs) -- although others did recognise that some kind of market was useful. Some were more direct: they did not wish to support the process when work would be given to a competitor.

It should also be remembered that CVSs were very often an excellent choice to deliver the support, as is evidenced by the equivalent levels of feedback received (see below page 26). Moreover there were difficulties for CVSs created by the way the programme was set up. For example, it was hard for them to plan because they didn't know how much support they would be delivering. And, like all providers engaged in the programme, they were working in difficult financial circumstances.

'We employed a freelance worker on a consultancy basis but he is Manchester-based which caused problems in meeting community groups and our daily rate only just covered his costs. Our Board of Trustees could not be expected to employ a member of staff on the basis of predicted but uncertain income.'

CVS

For a programme like *Communities Can* to enter this market creates opportunities for these organisations, which some definitely took, but it was also awkward for them to handle because it was time-limited and unpredictable. Despite these challenges, the fact that the CVSs have been sustained through a difficult programme could be regarded as a positive outcome for the programme.

What have we learned?

In reflecting on these issues we should remember that the figures on page 58 above suggest that actually quite a decent market operated, with a large number of providers involved and overall high levels of customer satisfaction. There is also evidence that some providers received more work as time went by because of the successful delivery of projects, while the price of support dropped—both of which can be taken as evidence of functioning market.

'Towards the end of the programme a wider range of providers were engaged with the programme; providing more capacity and the opportunity for new external insight.'

Community development worker

But difficulties emerged because of a number of factors:

- Customers with limited information upon which to make a choice.

- Customers with variable levels of experience, and different objectives for the support (and sometimes inappropriate objectives).

- The competing objectives of maximising the amount of support delivered, while reaching those organisations that are genuinely in need.

- Vouchers being too small to encourage new providers.

- A conflict of interest between CVSs being involved in administering the programme, communications/ outreach as well as delivering support.

- Some providers disengaged from the programme because they thought the odds were stacked against them.

There is little doubt that having a range of providers added capacity, new skills / perspectives and diversified the type of support available (and that most independent providers delivered excellent work). But there was little evidence of choices being made by organisations or market mechanisms really working (at least early on). Future programmes will need to consider how important the market mechanism really is, particularly given how expensive it is to set up and run, and that the smaller organisations are generally unwilling or unable to shop around. There might be other ways to ensure a diverse selection of providers is available at reasonable cost without the conflict of interests and variable quality that,

Case study: Positive experience but dislikes the marketplace

This interviewee ran a small social enterprise. She had a strong background in the voluntary sector and felt confident with a lot of the elements of day-to-day operations and fundraising. She was seeking support to develop the enterprise's broader business strategy and develop its board.

She found the support really helpful and felt the amount of capacity building was appropriate for her needs. She suspected she wouldn't need any more capacity building in this area for the next two years, and hoped by that point the enterprise would have the capacity to manage without external help.

She did however find the wider process around *Communities Can* quite difficult. When the application offered a choice of organisations to work with she felt she didn't really have the expertise to know who was best to choose. She spent time researching the options and was ultimately happy with who she worked with, but would have preferred to have had an expert choose someone that was right for her.

The interviewee also expressed concerns about how much of her time was taken up by engaging with the project. She spent 3 to 4 days in meetings as part of the work being delivered. While this was clearly useful to build capacity it was more time than she felt she could comfortably give while running the social enterprise. She strongly felt any future versions of *Communities Can* should include a degree of subsidy for grantees to compensate them for lost staff time/costs.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall summary

Since the start of the programme, *Communities Can* has delivered a large amount of support to community organisations: 355 packages of support have been approved, of which 237 were completed by February 20th 2017.

There is a unanimous view across all stakeholders that this support was / is needed. There is a severe shortage of capability building support for small organisations across the country, and *Communities Can* was an effective way to deliver that support, particularly towards the end of the pilot when more proactive outreach was undertaken and the programme's processes were ironed out and became routine.

'Without Communities Can we would have done no community development in this time.'

Communities Can **provider**

In terms of the effectiveness of the support, two slightly different pictures emerge from our evaluation:

- On the one hand, feedback from community organisations has been almost entirely positive. It is clear that organisations welcomed the support; created strong working relationships with service providers; and saw value in what has been delivered for them. Feedback on the application process was also positive and there was a good balance between doing activities for community organisations and increasing their skills so that they can do things for themselves in the future.

- On the other hand, feedback from those involved in the delivery of the programme has been more mixed. While no one appears to doubt that valuable support has been delivered through *Communities Can*, many felt that it could have reached more groups, been more consistent in quality and possibly been slightly more tailored to different needs and organised more effectively. Many of these learning points were taken on board as the programme developed and there is good evidence to suggest that effective processes for outreach and administration were in place by the end.

Did *Communities Can* engage the right sort of organisations?

Throughout the programme, everyone involved has rightly continued to question whether *Communities Can* is reaching the right sorts of organisations. Encouragingly, providers and CVSs said they feel it did, but with doubts—particularly during the early stages—about whether *Communities Can* was being promoted well enough and in the right places to consistently do so.

Evidence drawn from the priority framework introduced after the first six months of the programme supports the view that *Communities Can* was effective at reaching organisations delivering clear social impact. And that around half of these organisations had not received support from elsewhere (a proportion which increased during the later stages of the programme when community outreach workers were active). Nearly all approved packages of support were judged by the assessment panel to deliver 'clear value'. Similarly, providers and CVS also felt that by and large *Communities Can* did engage with new groups, with the right set of needs.

We conclude that most of those engaged by the programme were probably in the right target group, but that there may have been more groups to find and engage. Increased capacity for community outreach workers in the latter

stages of the programme clearly had a positive effect on programme reach, and should be a key component of any future programmes that share the same aims.

'[Communities Can] will help some real diamonds in the rough, a great use of resources.'

<div align="right">

Community Organisation

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Application and approval process

Communities Can processes were designed to minimise the burden on organisations themselves, and to feel 'different' and not off-putting. There is evidence to suggest this was achieved because community organisations themselves were broadly satisfied with the application process. But behind the scenes some challenges emerged due to difficulties getting accurate information from organisations and an occasionally fragmented process for assessing need and determining the right provider.

The Occupational Health Scorecard (OHS) used by applicants to self-assess at the start of the process was not especially well regarded by providers or those arranging the support packages. Most importantly, there was a difference between what organisations said in the OHS and what providers found when they started working with them. In particular, applicants tended to overstate the strength of their current practice, possibly thinking it would help the application. Others were likely to have simply misunderstood some of the questions.

All stakeholders agreed that the assessment meeting or call was most useful to establish needs and could sometimes prompt a substantial rethink of what the programme could offer people. However, even after this, providers continued to comment that they did not have a detailed view of organisations and that extra time could be needed to develop this before effective support could really be planned and delivered.

The prevailing message from providers and CVSs was that a programme like this cannot rely on a self-assessment, or even a phone call to establish what an organisation needs. This does not mean that self-assessment has no role, but that it needs to be augmented by a more comprehensive review, ideally conducted face-to-face by someone who is local and who the organisation feels they can trust.

Another option for the future would be more tailoring of the application process to suit the level of those the programme is trying to reach. For example, a process in which there is initial face-to-face contact / information to clarify the aims of the programme, with more proactive support for those who need help to put an application forward.

Segmentation

Stakeholders agreed that future programmes aimed at community organisations could benefit from a more conscious effort to tailor or adapt the support offer to different segments within the population. The two main dimensions around which segmentation could be structured are:

3. **How well developed or established the group is.** Some organisations were described as being 'embryonic'. Often these organisations are unsure about their ambitions and the kind of support they needed. In these cases, support was most valuable in helping them to think about their future, develop realistic plans and explore partnership and funding options. Other organisations were more established and their use of *Communities Can* was often described as 'instrumental'-- i.e., the need to get something more specific sorted, or to access a particular funding stream.

4. **Ambition.** At the outset support groups varied a lot by what they wanted to achieve; some wanted to make as much difference as possible others were more focussed on sustaining what they did or growing gradually. Respecting this distinction was an important part of the *Communities Can* theory of change; providers should help people to explore their ambitions but not impose ambitions on them. The nature of a group's ambition

appeared to affect what type of support was most relevant. From help around governance and small scale funding to wider packages of support covering things like impact measurement for those looking to grow more quickly.

A positive aspect of *Communities Can* was that it was able to accommodate all the needs above. Nonetheless future programmes might benefit from starting with a clearer understanding of how support might be marketed and tailored to reflect these different circumstances.

What was the quality of support provided?

Feedback from organisations supported was very positive, 71% of organisations gave their support five marks out of five and the average score was 4.5. The main reason for dissatisfaction with support was delays in the set up and delivery of support, as well as occasional lack of tailored support - but this seems to have been rare.

The attributes that organisations valued the most were flexibility, professionalism, knowledge and the providers' personal qualities. Most importantly, support needed to be seen as useful / actionable.

However, for embryonic organisations in particular, the amount of support available through *Communities Can* was often not enough. Providers commented that the relatively small number of days available per package limited what they were able to realistically achieve, whilst also sometimes raising expectations. The most repeated request we heard from providers was to be funded to do more follow-up work, and possibly even a two-stage process that allows providers to develop a more detailed understanding of needs before defining what the support package should actually include.

'We felt the allotted time given to us could have been longer. We are a new group and need a lot of 'hand holding' at present. Maybe provide ad hoc support either by email or telephone with the same worker and regular meetings in the first year or so.'

Community Organisation

'I would suggest making a follow up on how organisations which you have supported are doing and if there are any gaps, or are struggling, try to help so that they don't fall back.'

Community Organisation

Did *Communities Can* support make a difference?

We are confident that *Communities Can* made a positive difference for many of the organisations engaged; possibly between 1/3 and ½ were helped a lot, with most of the rest finding it least fairly useful.

In terms of specific benefits, community organisations themselves were most likely to mention tangible things like policies and structures in place, as well as personal things like new skills and feeling more confident and the opportunity to really think through what they were trying to do and feel supported in developing new plans. A number of organisations also mentioned funding and we have anecdotal evidence of some real successes. For example, one user apparently succeeded in a £195,000 Big Lottery Fund bid through a business plan created through *Communities Can*.

There is some evidence to suggest that the benefits of the programme were internal, strengthening organisational capacity, rather than outward looking, strengthening networks and participation in local systems. Fewer organisations reported that they felt more connected to other organisations or more influential. We conclude that If this really is an objective of a programme like this, then it possibly needs to be more consciously pursued; by encouraging groups to get together, arranging joint training, and by working harder to establish links and collaboration. Otherwise it seems likely that organisations and providers will default to more internal issues like governance and business modelling.

Challenges

While *Committees Can* was broadly successful in its goals, the way it was designed created some tensions between partners; which may have limited its reach and impact on the ground.

Chiefly, there was an unresolved conflict of interest between CVSs' role as both a delivery partner and provider of support packages. The large number of packages awarded to CVSs in the early stages led to perceptions that the programme was being used to subsidise existing work and that 'familiar faces' rather than genuinely 'under the radar' organisations were benefiting. Meanwhile, CVSs felt that a market of providers was being pursued for its own sake, without enough regard to quality assurance (or whether it was really needed). To some extent these issues affected the programme for the worse, and an important conclusion for the future is the need to have a clearer delineation between roles.

Data and information systems were not set up well. Programmes on the scale of *Communities* Can require an up-to-date management information system with data entered into a single database and consistent fields and processes. This would have minimised duplication, confusion and improved accuracy, and automated real-time data and reporting across stakeholders.

'The weakest part of the whole programme has been the project management - this is not to say individuals in the Communities Can team aren't helpful - it's just the systems in place are inadequate - more thought and technology should have been put in around the process.'

Communities Can provider

Overall, programme resources were probably stretched too thin during the pilot. Future programmes with similar goals should consider putting more resources into communication and outreach, and more generous allocations of days to individual support packages. Staffing could be increased to ensure sustainable work rates. For a pilot programme, arguably more should have been spent on evaluation.

Some of the challenges faced may have been due to trying to deliver a large programme over a short period of time. For instance, some CVSs felt an informal pressure towards increasing the number of organisations involved, leading to somewhat rushed decision-making. Also, processes and ways of working improved as time went by, and staff became more efficient as the programme bedded-in. But the benefits of these efficiency gains are limited in a short term programme. A longer lead-in time might have helped to resolve many of the tensions discussed above.

Provider perspective

Providers were broadly very positive about what the programme was trying to achieve, particularly those that did a lot of work through it. They felt that they were engaging the right groups that could make a difference to their communities, and were able to make a positive difference for them—even with the limited time available.

The main area of improvement was providers would have liked more time and better quality of information about organisations, to avoid needing to spend more time getting to know them and building trust. Hence the support packages were often seen as too limited and too short and many providers reported doing much more work than they were funded to deliver. Providers would also have welcomed more opportunities to work together and collaborate and more contact from their local CVS.

Marketplace

In some key respects the marketplace of providers was a success:

- A wide range of different providers were involved in the programme, mostly providing good quality work.

- CVSs reported benefits from working with other providers in terms of developing new skills and approaches.

- Providers who did a large number of packages could find some economies of scale; such as standard presentations, models.

- Some ongoing relationships between providers and community organisations have been established.

However, there were some respects in which it did not work as hoped:

- There was little evidence of community organisations exercising choice on which provider to work with—most were happy to be recommended someone.

- The online menu of providers contained limited information about each provider and little feedback data to support it.

- The market created tensions between providers and delivery organisations (see above).

- There was sometimes a lack of clarity about how some packages of support were allocated to providers— which could be a source of tension.

- One or two bad quality providers slipped through the net.

- The market was expensive to set up and run.

For future programmes there is an important strategic question around how to get the benefits of a marketplace without some of these risks and costs. Key components might include a slightly more rigorous provider assessment process and more work upfront to build partnerships between providers and the local administration by an organisation that is completely independent.

Recommendations

To summarise, future capability building programmes for this target audience could consider:

- Develop a more robust assessment process which produces an accurate assessment of needs without putting organisations off. We appreciate that this might be hard to do in practice, but it is likely to involve more local and face-to-face interaction.

- Longer support packages are needed. Unless the organisation is already well established, two or three days will not make the kind of impact envisaged in the theory of change. In particular, building in more ongoing / follow-up support into packages was supported by users, providers and coordinators alike.

- Similarly, more time should be allowed. For practical reasons—because it can take time to get to know different people in an organisation and build mutual understanding—but also to allow more time for reflection.

- A more segmented offer. The needs of a new, inexperienced organisation appear to be very different to those of an organisation using *Communities Can* more 'instrumentally'.

- Proactive, local marketing is clearly needed to reach out to more genuinely 'under the radar' organisations. Capability building support needs to go beyond established networks and use different types of communication approaches / materials, e.g., local knowledge and people on the ground.

- The best approach to marketing support may be to focus on the issue of fundraising-- as this is what most community organisations expressed interested in. Funding-readiness can then work as a 'hook' and a lens through which to draw out the importance of other organisational characteristics and processes upon which funding success depends. That said, there is the risk of undervaluing wider aspects of support or of raising expectations of funding that may not be met in a constrained financial environment.

- Were programmes like *Communities* Can to be introduced on a longer term footing, careful thought should be given to how to manage the dual role of the CVSs and how to avoid conflicts of interest. It may make sense to only apply future projects to areas where there is a sufficient local market, so that the CVS can act as the local administrator, gatekeeper and coordinator, stimulating, connecting and strengthening other providers, or

for funders to consider partnering with local authorities to administer the scheme so CVSs can apply their expertise to support provision.

- Future programmes might be improved by a greater focus on networking and peer-to-peer approaches. While helping organisations to feel more connected was part of the *Communities Can* theory of change, we found less evidence of this happening; both from our surveys and qualitative research. Moreover, peer approaches and helping groups to appreciate what they have in common may help to exemplify the benefits of engaging with capability building. This finding is applicable to providers as well as organisations themselves; both of whom said they would have welcomed more opportunities to get together and share learning / experiences.

'Communities Can provides free advice and practical support to groups, which not only help the groups to grow in a healthy way but also protect the many volunteers who give their time, energy and skills freely to run the group. So hats off to Communities Can! We can't thank you enough!'

Community organisation

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Funding priority framework

Points to Note:

- Social Impact—*Communities Can* should take a liberal stance on the assessment of social impact and to what extent the applicant is able to articulate this up front. We should collectively be more focussed on why the group / activity formed and therefore what impact is being delivered rather than the activity itself. The activity is therefore secondary to the social impact delivered and should only play a primary role in the assessment of an application where the activity clearly does not relate to the desired impact or where the activity is not lawful or poses significant reputational risk. For further clarity this means that the programme can consider applications (where eligible) relating to arts, sports or heritage where the activity is a vehicle for social change.

- It is expected that all applications supported through *Communities Can* will have income levels up to £10,000 and that applications where income levels of between £10,001 and £25,000 will be recommended on an exception basis. By exception we mean that in all other areas they meet the agreed funding priority parameters, will very clearly meet a community need and the support will have a significant skills impact on the applicant (capability building focussed).

- As standard the Funding priorities we would like to limit support to be priorities 1 to 9. Priorities 1-5 are where we require the majority of funds to be targeted however with clear rationale we may consider priorities 6 to 9 but it is less likely the Fund would agree to support and expectations should be managed in line with this. At any point and with reasonable notice the Fund may limit the preferred priorities to 1-5 only. For the avoidance of doubt this provided clarity rather than change in relation to what *Communities Can* is piloting.

- There should be a clear understanding internally and externally that the programme is competitive and even when an applicant meets any one of the preferred criteria grant funding is not guaranteed and expectations should be managed along this understanding.

- Recommendations presented to the Fund must contain the relevant priority number that most closely matches the applicant profile detailing any differentials for consideration. All panel members and outreach workers should have access to and be applying this when deciding suitable applications.

- The Service provider is expected to monitor the applications against profiles taking appropriate action when pipeline appears to be mostly at the lower end of the agreed priority list (1-5). Demand management information is required to be shared with the Fund on an agreed regular basis.

Priority profiles
1) A community based group delivering clear social impact (whether or not they can articulate this at this point but we can). The activity / group is already in existence in some form (formal or not). They are not currently known to the local support network and have not accessed any form of formal support previous to the CC application. The support requested has clear value in terms of supporting this group to do what they do better and will have a strong legacy in terms of skills acquired.
2) As per 1 except, they are currently known to the local support network and have accessed some form of formal support previous to the CC application. The CC application is for new support tailored to their current

Priority profiles
needs, has clear value terms of supporting this group to do what they do better and will have a legacy in terms of skills acquired.
3) As per 1 except, the CC application is for some new support and has some elements of skills acquisition but includes vaguer elements or elements that will not have a lasting legacy. They are either not known by local support Networks currently or are known but have not accessed support.
4) As per 1 except, the application has mainly quick fix elements rather than lasting skills it is less clear how the support will result in better social impact. They are either not known by local support Networks currently or are known but have not accessed support. They sit in an income bracket £10k or below.
5) A community based group delivering some social impact. The activity / group is already in existence in some form (formal or not). They are not currently known to the local support network and have not accessed any form of formal support previous to the CC application. The support requested has clear value in terms of supporting this group to do what they do better, includes some element of addressing the social impact, and will have a legacy in terms of skills acquired. Income bracket is within programme max cap.
None priority profiles.
6) As per 5 except, they are currently known to the local support network and have accessed some form of formal support previous to the CC application. The CC application is for new support tailored to their current needs, has clear value terms of supporting this group to do what they do better and will have a legacy in terms of skills acquired.
7) As per 5 except, the CC application is for some new support and has some elements of skills acquisition but includes vaguer elements or elements that will not have a lasting legacy. Income bracket is within programme max cap. They are currently known by the local support network.
8) As per 5 except, the application has mainly quick fix elements rather than lasting skills it is less clear how the support will result in better social impact. Income bracket is within programme max cap. They are currently known by the local support network.
9) An as yet unformed formal or informal group where no activity has yet taken place – this is a clear start up proposition of social action. However the activity has a clear social benefit and is considered viable. They have yet to access any support whether they are known or not to the local support networks and the support package will clearly lead to a strong start up social activity and group that will be networked and able to move forwards.

What we don't want to consider:

Any proposition where the group's current or historical financial position takes them over the income cap (e.g. this year income is £15k but for the last 5 it's been £40k).
Applications from entities where profits can be used for private gain, whether or not the ambition is to move towards a social purpose (we cannot assure that this will happen and therefore that our Funds will not be used for profit purpose it also contravenes the aims of CC).
Applications from groups that are already well supported and well known to the local support network.
Applications for support packages that have low or no elements of skill building focussing in on only quick fix solutions that will be done for them.
Applications form those where the only eligible definer is the income levels.
Applications for start-up activity where the social impact potential and need cannot be established, where the proposition looks not viable.
Applications where it is clear another route would best serve their current and future needs.
Applications that involve support to deliver statutory services.

Applications from sports / arts / heritage focussed groups where the primary aim is not social impact but the sport/ art or heritage outcome.

Appendix B: Amount allocated to each provider and average star rating

Provider name	Vouchers approved	Number of days	Value of support	Average duration of vouchers	Average star rating
Voluntary & Community Action Sunderland	44	200.75	79,800	5.0	4.4
Peterborough CVS	33	143.5	48,400	7.6	4.8
Torbay Community Development Trust	32	140	37,976	6.9	4.6
Blackpool with Fylde CVS	25	121.5	38,063	8.6	3.9
Big Society Funding CIC	21	92.5	36,400	4.3	4.8
Simon Lawton	20	104	34,150	5.0	5.0
Clarity CIC	19	100	30,600	5.3	4.8
Social Enterprise Solutions	12	48	15,500	4.4	4.7
Barking & Dagenham CVS	17	61.5	31,500	7.6	4.5
Emma Frew	10	43	12,900	4.8	4.7
Sunderland BME Network	10	40.5	12,150	3.5	5.0
Social Enterprise Solutions	6	31	9,975	8.0	5.0
Christine Mottley	6	39	11,700	2.5	5.0
The FSI	5	19.5	10,250	4.8	5.0
UR Potential	5	27	9,450	7.5	5.0
Claremont Community Centre	5	31	9,300	3.0	5.0
Devon Voluntary Action	5	31	9,300		
Funding Torbay	5	18	4,086	2.6	4.8
Just Ideas	4	13	6,500	5.0	5.0
WSA Community Consultants	4	9	7,500	5.8	3.5
Fruit Tree for Business LLP	4	14	6,000	3.0	5.0
Peach consultancy	4	10.5	6,500	7.0	4.0
South West Forum	3	12	4,900	6.0	2.0
WhyNotChange	3	12	5,500	5.0	5.0
Torbay Social Enterprise Network CIC	3	13	3,250	2.7	5.0
4George	3	18	6,300		
Exeter CVS	3	14.5	5,739	16.0	2.0
Eat That Frog	3	15	4,500		
Echo Web Solutions	3	16.5	6,400	6.0	5.0
North East Social Enterprise Partnership	2	8	3,200	4.0	4.0
SES	2	7	2,800		
Northwest Business Development Co	2	8	3,300	5.0	5.0
Praxis Proactive Solutions	2	8	2,880	4.5	4.5
ATQ Consultants	2	10	4,000	5.0	4.0
Riviera FM	2	16	3,800	4.0	5.0
Paper Rhino	2	10.5	2,750	3.5	4.5
Sentient Business Development	2	8	2,800	5.0	5.0

Provider name	Vouchers approved	Number of days	Value of support	Average duration of vouchers	Average star rating
DABD	2	5.5	3,500	9.0	4.0
SES	2	8	2,800	4.0	5.0
Swift Fundraising	2	7	4,200	3.0	5.0
St Marks CA	1	5	1,250		
Peterborough City College	1	4	1,400	6.0	4.0
Make Your Way CIC	1	5	1,300	5.0	5.0
Hunts Forum	1	5	750	7.0	5.0
Peterborough Pro-help	1	4	1,400	4.0	
Montgomery Masters	1	6	2,100	4.0	5.0
Torbay Play	1	1.5	450		
Community IT Academy	1	0	1,000	4.0	5.0
New Leaf New Life CIC	1	2	700	6.0	
Plus People	1	2	1,500	5.0	5.0
Almond Tree Consulting	1	3	1,200	4.0	5.0
Devon Voluntary Action	1	6	1,800		
Voluntary Sector Training (VST)	1	3	1,500	2.0	4.0
VOYC Devon	1	3	825	5.0	5.0
The Box	1	6	1,500	10.0	3.0
Missing (no provider information provided)	1	Missing	Missing	1.0	Missing
Total / average	**355**	**1590.75**	**559293.5**	**5.2**	**4.6**