

Funders – looking to improve your relationship with the organisations you fund? This case study shows how the Big Lottery Fund supports the organisations they fund throughout the application stage and reporting

Introduction

At Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) we know that open communication can help strengthen relationships between funders and the organisations they fund. In this case study we show how practical steps by funders can make a difference.

Befrienders Highlands shares their experiences of applying for and securing funding from the Big Lottery Fund. They run one-to-one and group befriending services across Highland and Argyll and Bute to improve the lives of people who are lonely and isolated and have experience of mental ill health, have memory difficulties or dementia, or are carers. Keith Walker, Executive Director, Befrienders Highlands shares a few of the key points that made a difference to them in their relationship with their funder.

Getting feedback during the application process



"We've had a very positive experience in applying to the Big Lottery Fund. When we got through Stage 1 we were appointed a Funding Officer. We had a lot of support at Stage 2 from the Funding Officer at the Big Lottery Fund. They gave us guidance and worked with us to sharpen the focus in our application. We had the same Funding Officer throughout the process which gave us a sense of continuity".

Befrienders Highland found the feedback through the application process constructive, helping them to secure funding for 5 years.



Where possible, **funders** should offer a point of contact to answer questions and provide feedback throughout the application process – and at grant management as well.

Flexible approach to reporting

"We are approaching the end of our first year of funding and are due to report soon. Big Lottery Fund have made it clear that they are happy to accommodate our approach. They have provided a pro forma for reporting, but we can use our own format. We are taking a report we have written for another funder and will share this with Big Lottery Fund, which will save about 3 hours of my time. They seem to be doing all they can to make life easier".



We suggest **funders** consider whether they can accept a report that has been written for other funders to help reduce the amount of reporting organisations have to do.

Clear and timely communication

"Be clear. For example, we found it helpful to have guidance about how we should acknowledge the funder's support (use of logos on letterheads and website) when we received the grant offer letter. The Big Lottery Fund gave us clear information in advance about press releases they would make about funding us. This helped us to get local coverage for Befrienders Highland which we wouldn't have otherwise got".



We suggest **funders** keep in mind that many of the organisations they fund are very small, so keep communications clear and give as much notice as you can.

It's great to see that ongoing relationships with our grantholders through visits and conversations allow for learning to be shared with each other more regularly and efficiently. It is also music to our ears to hear that a more flexible approach to annual reporting is not only valued by a grantholder but is also freeing up their time to focus on the impactful work they do with people and communities. We would encourage all grantholders to have a discussion with their Funding Officer about how and when learning and progress updates will be shared.

Mhairi Reid, Big Lottery Fund

For more information about building positive relationships with the organisations you fund check out

- [*Building mutually beneficial relationships - Top Tips for Funders*](#)
- [*Harmonising Reporting*](#)
- [*Martin Cawley, Scotland Director, Big Lottery Fund - Why learning from others is important*](#)

Contact details

If you need ESS's support please email Evaluation Support Scotland info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk or phone 0131 243 2770

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