



Small Grants, Big Changes

An overview and analysis

Dean Renshaw

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Registered address: Directory of Social Change, First Floor, 10 Queen Street Place, London EC4R 1BE

Tel: 020 4526 5995

Email: research@dsc.org.uk

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Foreword



Small Grants, Big Changes, a report by the Directory of Social Change (DSC), provides the evidence to support what most people involved in delivering and funding charitable activities believed to be the case - small grants and small grants programmes have a vital role to play in enabling and sustaining critical support for charities and their beneficiaries. As identified in this research, specific advantages of small grants include their ability to target hard-to-reach communities, foster partnerships and attract future funding.

It is often a fact of life that more money equals more resources, more activities, more support and greater impact, but the role of small grants in the funding mix is an important one. Small grants enable recipients to test new ideas or initiatives, typically have fewer strings attached and are usually awarded more quickly. A number of respondents to DSC's survey who work with the Armed Forces community highlighted that the needs of veterans can change and become more complex quite quickly, so quick decisions and grant payments are critical.

But as funders we can do better. A significant number of respondents to the survey disagreed with the statement that the application process for small grants is easier than it is for large grants, with many commenting that some application processes and subsequent reporting requirements need to be less onerous and more proportionate. This is something we at the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust will be reviewing, to make sure we are being as helpful as we can be to applicants and our funded partners directly supporting the Armed Forces community.

DSC's research looks at the varying definitions of what a 'small grant' is and recognises that it is a relative term, with differences in what good grant-making through small grants means in the wider voluntary sector and in the context of supporting the Armed Forces community. The report provides the Good Practice Framework, developed out of a review of the literature on small grants, small grants programmes and their evaluations. The framework gives useful examples of good practice, the considerations needed when implementing these ideas and the potential outcomes. We welcome this framework and commend it to other funders.

Key findings and recommendations of this report include simple measures that could improve the whole process for applicants and funders alike: if it's a small grants programme, call it that; make sure any evaluations are proportionate, but also published and accessible; have multiple funding rounds, so applicants can apply when they are ready for the funding;

have a simple expression of interest form to potentially save unnecessary time on full applications; pay small grants as quickly as possible.

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust is pleased to see that many of its policies, procedures and practices align with those recommended in *Small Grants, Big Changes*, but we are not complacent and never rest on our laurels. We thank DSC's researchers for this insightful research, look forward to implementing their recommendations where needed, and hope that other funders and policymakers will find it interesting and useful.

Anna Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust

About the Directory of Social Change

At the Directory of Social Change (DSC), we believe that the world is made better by people coming together to serve their communities and each other. For us, an independent voluntary sector is at the heart of that social change, and we exist to support charities, voluntary organisations and community groups in the work they do. Our role is to:

- **provide practical information** on a range of topics from fundraising to project management in both our printed publications and our e-books;
- **offer training** through public courses, events and in-house services;
- **research funders** and maintain a subscription database, *Funds Online*, with details on funding from grant-making charities, companies and government sources;
- **offer bespoke research** to voluntary sector organisations in order to evaluate projects, identify new opportunities and help make sense of existing data;
- **stimulate debate and campaign** on key issues that affect the voluntary sector, particularly to champion the concerns of smaller charities.

DSC's researchers are experts in undertaking charity sector research to inform policy and practice. Our bespoke and commissioned research is led by the needs of our clients, and our policy work supports the wider voluntary sector. To find out more about DSC's research services, visit us online at www.dsc.org.uk/research or get in touch with us via research@dsc.org.uk to see how DSC's research can help you and your organisation.

About the author

DEAN RENSHAW



Dean joined DSC in 2019 as a Senior Researcher and works on commissioned research projects in DSC's research team.

Dean has worked with a range of charities to help them better understand their existing data and gather new data from stakeholders in order to improve their vital services, projects and programmes. He uses a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research methods and enjoys working with charities to tailor the methodology to their needs. Dean's interests in the charity sector include charities that support mental health and well-being as well as charities that use gardening and horticultural activities to support their beneficiaries.

Prior to joining DSC, Dean worked as a data analyst in the fast-moving consumer goods industry. He holds a BSc (Hons) in Psychology from the University of Sheffield.

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Executive summary

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report from the Directory of Social Change and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust examines small grants and small grants programmes via a literature review and a survey of organisations that had received or applied for small grants. A small grant is considered to be a grant of £20,000 or less.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings from the literature review

- Definitions of small grants vary considerably. In the literature, small grants range between £500 and £50,000.
- Most grants made in the UK are small grants. Previous research of grant-makers by DSC found that 88.5% of surveyed respondents made an average grant of £10,000 or less (Traynor and Walker, 2015) and 84% of grants made by the National Lottery Community Fund are under £10,000 in value (National Lottery Community Fund, 2022).
- Publicly available research and evaluations on small grants are sparse. Possible explanations given for this include the idea that small grants may not always be labelled as small grants in evaluations; the fact that definitions of small grants vary, so a small grant to one organisation could be a large grant to another; and the tendency for evaluations to be made but not published.
- Small grants are found in the Armed Forces community and have been used for a variety of different programmes and projects, such as telephone befriending services (Arnold et al., 2020).
- Small grants cover a wide range of projects. Advantages of small grants include their ability to target hard-to-reach communities (Crabbe et al., 2020; Howell and Stover, 2021; National Lottery Community Fund, 2022), foster partnerships (Smith, 2021) and attract future funding (Both ENDS and DOB Ecology, 2019).
- There is a sense across the literature that application processes for small grants need to be easy to use and proportionate to the amount awarded (Bennett and Eadson, 2017; Smeaton et al., 2009).
- Evaluations can require a disproportionate amount of information that is not always necessary (Shukru et al., 2016). However, examples of considerate evaluation were found, such as encouraging the recipients of smaller grants to use the same evaluation materials as the recipients of larger grants but not making this mandatory (Office for Public Management, 2016).

Findings from the survey

- The survey had a total of 81 respondents, drawn from a wide range of areas of work. Most had received small grants in the past.
- The respondents agreed that small grants are useful for pilot projects and for responding to new needs.
- The respondents stated that small grants are helpful in covering core costs.
- The respondents also agreed that small grants can help to continue existing projects.
- Small grants are perceived as helpful for attracting additional funding.
- The responses varied considerably when the respondents were asked whether they would like to meet other recipients, with the highest number of respondents remaining neutral on the subject.
- The respondents tend to agree that it is easier to find small grants programmes than larger programmes, but opinions varied on whether it is easier to apply for small grants in comparison to large grants.
- There was a good level of awareness of open small grants programmes while the survey was live.
- The respondents tended to state that the application process for small grants needs to be simple, be easy to use and minimise the burden on applicants, with quick responses to applications.
- Some respondents stressed the importance of funding existing projects that work rather than demanding innovative or novel approaches.
- The responses were more varied when the respondents were asked whether small grants had helped them to access additional funding, although the highest number of respondents agreed that it had.
- The respondents agreed that the impact of projects supported by small grants continued after the funding ended.
- Respondents who worked with the Armed Forces community were able to give some examples of how small grants may differ in the context of the Armed Forces community, including relating to the transition to civilian life and supporting mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the literature review and survey, DSC makes the following recommendations.

Knowledge about small grants

- **Define a small grant.** Definitions of small grants currently vary according to several factors. It would be helpful if grant-makers use an agreed definition of what a small grant is in terms of its value.
- **If an organisation is running a small grants programme, explicitly call it a small grants programme.** This will help future research and similar projects to learn from the organisation's findings.
- **Always publish evaluations from small grants programmes.** Much data is collected and small grants are frequently evaluated, but the data is rarely made available. The format does not have to be perfect, but the data needs to be made available to benefit future programmes and similar services.
- **Include potential beneficiaries where possible when considering applications and designing small grants programmes.** This may require extra resources to organise and the individuals may need to be compensated for their time, but it would ensure decisions are made by people who understand the full context and challenges.

Application processes for small grants

- **Allow unsuccessful applications to be revised and resubmitted.** This allows applicants to learn and improve their skills for future funding.
- **Have multiple rounds for applications.** Applicants can apply when they are ready for the funding.
- **Have a clear timetable for application outcomes.** Applicants need to plan ahead, and a clear timetable helps with this.
- **Use simple and easy-to-understand language in application guidance, with jargon rarely used (and, if it is, clearly define it).** This will create a more inclusive application process with a wider range of applicants.
- **Use a simple, and ideally multistage, application process where the first stage is a simple expression of interest.** Applicants will save time on grant applications, and grant-makers will save time reading and assessing applications.
- **Provide small grants as quickly as possible.** The sooner the money is available, the sooner organisations can serve their beneficiaries.

- **Allow end-of-grant reports to be submitted online.** This can make the process easier, and grantees can add any missing data later. Considerations may need to be made for grantees who cannot submit reports online.

Monitoring and evaluation of small grants

- **Make sure that any monitoring and evaluation at the end of the grant is proportionate and easy to understand, and also allows the use of qualitative data.** This will provide more rich data and will not exclude individuals or organisations that do not have the skills to provide quantitative data.
- **Provide support for monitoring and evaluation.** Examples include how to write a case study and how to report quantitative data.
- **Consider bringing partners together to learn from each other.** But this should be optional if partners do not want to come together.
- **When evaluating a programme, list the full amount awarded each organisation.** This helps potential similar projects to understand how much they may need to run their project.
- **Make any evaluation tools publicly available for similar projects and grant programmes to use.** This would allow similar projects and programmes to learn from each other.

Introduction

ABOUT THIS REPORT AND METHODOLOGY

About this report

This report was funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (the Trust) and written by the Directory of Social Change (DSC). It looks at small grants and small grants programmes, primarily in the UK. For the purposes of this research, a small grant is defined as a grant with a value of £20,000 or less.

This report looks at what the available evidence tells us about small grants and small grants programmes, highlights examples of best practice among this evidence, and features the thoughts and opinions of representatives of organisations with experience in applying for and receiving small grants.

Methodology

DSC's researchers employed two main methodologies to analyse and assess the current state of small grants and small grants programmes. These were a literature review and a survey of organisations with experience applying for and receiving small grants.

With the exception of one source published in 2004, the literature review was conducted on sources from the previous 16 years (2007-2022). This was in order to cover literature from the previous economic crisis (the Great Recession, which started in 2007) up to the current economic crises of high inflation and the knock-on effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. DSC's researchers conducted a search of journal articles, evaluation reports and other relevant sources (for example, application guidance for small grants programmes). These were primarily published in the UK, but there was some allowance for relevant overseas literature. The researchers identified a total of 62 potential sources, and this list was then further refined to reject those that did not fit within the scope of the research, yielding a final total of 37 sources. These sources mainly consist of evaluation reports for small grants programmes.

DSC designed and deployed a survey to collect primary data from organisations with experience of applying for and receiving small grants. The survey launched on 26 October 2022 and ran until 18 November 2022. A total of 82 responses were received. One blank response was removed from the data, leaving a final total of 81 responses.

CHAPTER ONE

What does the current research tell us about small grants?

1.1 OVERVIEW OF SMALL GRANTS IN THE UK

What is a small grant?

A grant is a form of financial help that does not need to be paid back. This can be money paid by a grant-making charity to another charity, but it can also include services or products.

Defining a small grant, however, is a trickier task. There is no set definition of what constitutes a small grant, and the value of a small grant can vary considerably. For example, some of the organisations featured in this literature review define a small grant as up to £50,000 (e.g. Smeaton et al., 2009) whereas others define it as between £500 and £10,000 (e.g. Evaluation Support Scotland, 2015). In another case (Signori and Kennedy, 2019), the organisation defined grants of up to £20,000 as large. The picture is further complicated when international and overseas grants programmes are included. For example, a programme in Canada (Neighbourhood Small Grants) defined small grants as those between Can\$50 and Can\$500 (Howell and Stover, 2021). The exact definition of a small grant will vary according to a variety of factors, including the size of the organisation awarding the grant and the field in which it works.

For the purposes of this research, a small grant is defined as a grant with a value of £20,000 or less.

Previous research by DSC revealed that there are an estimated 8,000 grant-makers in the UK and that they give approximately £3 billion each year (Traynor and Walker, 2015). This research also found that 88.5% of the respondents surveyed reported that their average grant was £10,000 or less, and 51.3% of the respondents stated that their average grant was in the range of £1,001 to £5,000. Furthermore, the National Lottery Community Fund makes over 12,000 grants annually, of which 84% are under £10,000 in value (National Lottery Community Fund, 2022).

Who gets small grants?

Small grants are not exclusive to small charities. Given the voluntary sector's reliance on grant funding and the current extreme pressures on the finances of charities of all sizes, it is not surprising that larger organisations also rely on smaller pots of money to support short-term projects (Smeaton et al., 2009). Research has also found that local authorities increasingly rely on small pots of funding (TRL Insight, 2020).

However, small grants can and do support small organisations. The National Lottery Community Fund (2022) reported that 60% of its awards go to organisations with turnovers of less than £100,000.

Good grant-making

While this research looks specifically at small grants, some of the research that looks at grants more generally has some findings that are still applicable to small grants, and in some cases these findings are especially salient for organisations making small grants.

The Grants for Good coalition of charities has produced a set of principles of good grant-making as part of a campaign to promote government grants for charities and voluntary groups (DSC, 2016), although these principles apply to grant-making in general. The principles of good grant-making are produced in full below:

- **Consultation:** Speaking to charities, funders and other relevant stakeholders leads to better understanding of the market, needs and gaps.
- **Objectives:** Setting clear objectives enables audiences to be targeted and relevant outcomes to be decided.
- **Criteria:** Clear criteria should produce a better pool of applicants and avoid wasted time with ineligible applications. Clarity over who can apply (including organisation size, location, track record), as well as any exclusions, aids transparency and should sit alongside clear communications and guidance.
- **Communication:** All communications need to be clear and targeted effectively so as to reach relevant audiences and support understanding. Make all application information available online and avoid complicated jargon.
- **Proportionality:** All applications and reporting should be proportionate to the grant requested/awarded – information should only be asked for where it will be used.
- **Resources:** The level of resources available to the grant-maker needs to be considered. This will inform the grant process, such as the level of applications that can be dealt with, the opportunity for questions, feedback and frequency of payments. Experts should be brought in to support assessments where the skills/in depth subject knowledge are not available in-house.
- **Timescales:** All timescales need to be realistic both for the grant-maker and the applicant. Appropriate time for planning, lead-in, application and spending the grant will all impact on the success of the grant programme.

- **Flexibility:** Effective grant processes respond to need so have to be flexible to adapt to this.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Monitoring and evaluation need to be built in from the start. It needs to be recognised that failure can happen but that doesn't mean a grant has been wasted. Where monitoring goes beyond a financial audit, there should be opportunities to use the information and share learning.
- **Payments:** Payments should be made up-front (not in arrears). This helps the organisation's viability and ability to deliver (especially smaller ones). Ensure payment systems will not prevent some charities from applying.

One study noted that most grant funding is reactive, as it responds to needs and applications via grant-making (Unwin, 2004). Good grant-making is therefore important to enable charities to respond to these needs. The author noted that 'most voluntary organisations will be in a constant cycle of negotiating grant arrangements' (p. 6) and that good grant-making occurs when the relationship between the grant-maker and applicant is productive for both parties.

Grant-making during an economic crisis

At the time of writing (November 2022), the UK stands once again on the precipice of an economic crisis because of various factors, including high inflation and the knock-on effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This cost-of-living crisis has been a serious cause of concern throughout the voluntary sector, because of rising social needs and increasing pressure on charities' finances.

Although the economic outlook is bleak, earlier research has suggested that grant-making can survive such crises. For example, DSC found that during the previous economic crisis – now dubbed the Great Recession and lasting from 2007 to 2009 – grant-making trusts and foundations were mostly able to weather the recession (Traynor and Walker, 2015). This study also identified that, between 2009/10 and 2011/12, real-terms income dropped but grants (both in real terms and actual) increased slightly.

1.2 HOW MUCH RESEARCH IS THERE ON SMALL GRANTS?

Available research on small grants

The most striking finding from the data-collection phase of this literature review was the apparent dearth of publicly available research specifically on small grants. DSC's researchers identified 37 potential sources.

This was partly due to the scope established for the literature review, where only sources from the past 16 years were considered (with one exception), and the majority of the sources were focused on the UK. However, the 37 publications still represent a surprisingly low volume of research, given how many small grants are made each year. As previously

reported, the National Lottery Community Fund makes over 12,000 small grants each year (National Lottery Community Fund, 2022).

What's in a name?

One possible explanation for the low volume of sources stems from how small grants are reported in evaluations and other research. Small grants are common, but they are not necessarily referred to as small grants in the available literature. For example, the average grant value awarded in round three of the Community Capacity & Resilience Fund was £8,000 but the evaluation of that particular round does not explicitly use the term 'small grants' (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2019). Similarly, one evaluation reports on The Listening Fund, from which organisations could receive up to £20,000, but the evaluation does not refer to these grants as small grants (Williams and Dunne, 2020).

In some cases, small grants are named differently. For example, the Coronavirus Community Support Fund (Craston et al., 2021) reports on two types of funding: 'simple grants' (£10,000 or under) and 'standard grants' (over £10,000). In another example, the National Lottery Community Fund developed 'micro-grants' for some programmes under the theme of 'celebration, pride and belonging' which consisted of grants from £250 to £1,000 (National Lottery Community Fund, 2022).

There are examples of literature that explicitly refers to small grants as such. For example, DSC conducted an evaluation of ten small grants, each of up to £5,000 (Signori and Kennedy, 2019). Similarly, the Office for Public Management (2016) reported on a small grant component of the Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness Grant Fund where small grants of less than £10,000 were available.

As previously discussed, the definition of small grants is arbitrary to a certain degree. However, future research (in addition to future funders of small grants programmes) could benefit from evaluations and other research identifying small grants and small grants programmes using the term 'small grants' explicitly. This would make publications easier to identify so that other grant-makers can learn from their findings.

A further suggestion would be to create more consistency in how different sizes of grant are defined. Any classification system would need to be refined over time. Additionally, it would need to reflect the complex differences between grants, as the definition of a small grant may vary according to the subsector it is in, the purpose of the grant and the duration of the grant. However, it would be a positive step towards better understanding small grants and small grants programmes.

Small grants as part of wider grants programmes

Another factor to consider is that small grants will not always be labelled as small grants programmes and may be part of a more general grants programme. The National Lottery Community Fund (2022) has advocated for small grants to be part of the mix in any funding, and examples of this are found throughout the literature.

For example, one study features an evaluation of the Carers Trust's About Time grant programmes, in which some grants are worth under £20,000, which would be classified as a small grant for the purposes of this research (Needham and Sanders, 2018). Similarly, another evaluated Power to Change's Community Business Fund; while the smallest grant was £16,000, this was part of a wider grants programme that featured small grants (Thornton et al., 2019).

In some cases where small grants are mentioned, they are not defined consistently. For example, Leeds Community Foundation (2018) looked at grants made under the Leeds Third Sector Health Grants programme, where the values of small grants differed between clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). Small grants in the NHS Leeds South and East CCG ranged between £4,770 and £5,000 whereas small grants in the NHS Leeds North CCG ranged between £2,076 and £10,000.

Not all evaluations and funders make the value of their grants publicly available, but this could be crucial information for future applicants. For example, the Office for Public Management (2016) lists the value of each grant awarded under the Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness Grant Fund, and this information could be used by future applicants who wish to fund similar projects. This is particularly important in the context of a finding that 52% of grant-holders felt that they needed more money to achieve their project's aims (Smeaton et al., 2009). Making the full value of grants publicly available helps to give a sense of what can be done with a similar level of funding.

Research that is not publicly available

Another explanation for the apparent dearth of research on small grants is that small grants and small grants programmes are being evaluated but in many cases the findings are not made public. It has been noted that small grants programmes are rarely formally evaluated and so there is little published evidence of their impact (Crabbe et al., 2020). Funders could benefit future research and future small grants programmes by making these findings publicly available.

1.3 SMALL GRANTS AND THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

Small grants are found in a wide variety of subsectors throughout the voluntary sector, and it is not surprising that small grants are found among the Armed Forces community. In 2020, DSC identified 752 Armed Forces charities which stated that they made grants to organisations, which made up 40.8% of the Armed Forces charity sector (Cole et al., 2020). However, the authors suggested that there may have been slightly more charities which stated that they made grants (according to data from the regulators) than did so in reality.

Some of the most notable small grant evaluations made publicly available come from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (the Trust) – for example, the Armed Forces Covenant: Local Grants programme (Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, 2021a; see also 2021b). This programme made grants of up to £20,000 which 'supported the aims of Community Integration and/or the Local Delivery of Services' (p. 2). It highlighted a strength of small

grants in the Armed Forces community: some of the grants encouraged partnerships and collaborative working. For example, Lisburn Sea Cadets partnered with Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office (whose staff had experience applying for grants and so were able to help) to submit a grant funding bid for £20,000, which allowed them to purchase a rigid inflatable boat for cadets (Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, 2021a).

The Trust evaluated the Veterans Should Not Be Forgotten programme, which awarded 120 grants to organisations across the UK totalling £2,394,698, with funding available for up to £20,000 for each organisation for a six-month project (Smith, 2021). Some of these projects funded the purchase of IT equipment and adaptations such as screen readers, and also paid for staff resources to train Veterans to use the equipment to keep in touch with family and friends during the lockdowns or while shielding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers at the University of Bath outline another example of the use of small grants in the Armed Forces community (Arnold et al., 2020). This study looked at the Age UK Joining Forces programme, which consisted of 12 local projects that facilitated person-centred conversations with older Veterans, a well-being hub for Veterans and a telephone befriending service.

Issues around definitions and labelling apply to small grants to Armed Forces charities in the same way that they affect other small grants programmes. For example, a report from the Trust details the Armistice and Armed Forces Communities Programme, which aimed to bring Armed Forces communities together to think about the 11 November 1918 Armistice (Howe, 2021). Whereas some of the projects are implied in the evaluation report to have been smaller than others – ‘smaller projects with smaller audiences were more likely to have an event at one venue’ (p. 7) – it is not clear whether these were small projects funded by small grants (i.e. £20,000 or less). Such issues around definitions and labelling are found elsewhere throughout the available literature (as outlined in section 1.2).

1.4 WHAT ARE SMALL GRANTS USED FOR?

Examples of small grants and small grants programmes

While evaluations of small grants and small grants programmes are rarely publicly available, the extant research shows that small grants are used for a wide variety of projects. Examples from evaluations include:

- small projects or activities to support disabled children, young people and their families (Roberts, 2014);
- grants to tackle social isolation and loneliness (Crabbe et al., 2020; Office for Public Management, 2016);
- a programme to support the growth and sustainability of established community businesses (Thornton et al., 2019);

- a fund to allow small voluntary sector organisations to access Scottish government funding that they would not have been able to access otherwise (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2019);
- projects to help people look after their own health, to improve access to local health care and to encourage people to make healthier lifestyle choices (Shukru et al., 2016);
- support and activities for people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Craston et al., 2021);
- support for specific areas, such as South London (Peter Minet Trust and United St Saviour's Charity, 2018).

What form do small grants take?

It was unusual for the sources identified in this literature review to identify exactly how grants were paid, so it is assumed that these were direct payments made to organisations. One source noted that there can be concerns around accountability with small grants programmes, as these grants are often accessible to small groups that have not had access to funding before (Both ENDS and DOB Ecology, 2019).

The advantages of small grants

The size of small grants can be advantageous. An earlier study by DSC noted that several of the respondents surveyed stated that they were able to pay small grants within a month, while larger grants can take up to six months or longer to be paid (Traynor and Walker, 2015). Another study noted that small organisations 'can do a lot with a small amount of money' (Office for Public Management, 2016, p. 75), a view consistent with other findings that the effect of grant funding on a charity varies according to the size of the charity (Andreoni et al., 2013).

Small grants also appear to be especially effective at targeting specific, or perhaps harder-to-reach, communities. An evaluation of a Canadian small grants scheme found that small projects can have 'expansive and lasting impacts on one's community' (Howell and Stover, 2021, p. 9) and another study found that small grants can fund under-resourced groups and promote new projects within communities (Crabbe et al., 2020). Similarly, a report commissioned by Power to Change found that small grants can help small community enterprises to facilitate community cohesion, create space for communities to deal with issues such as social isolation, and foster a sense of ownership, pride and empowerment (Thornton et al., 2019). A report by the Policy Studies Institute found that small grants were effective for community-based projects and identified improvements in local facilities and community cohesion (Smeaton et al., 2009). Likewise, research published by the Young Foundation found that 'small grants often increase the capacity of organisations to address local problems' (Thomson and Caulier-Grice, 2007, p. 45).

The National Lottery Community Fund (2022) found that its small grants can get money into communities that large grants cannot reach. The authors reported that some communities have low levels of social infrastructure - or 'cold spots', which are areas that do not have an

'anchor' organisation or a charity network in them – but do have local community groups whose members want to address local problems. The authors stated that small grants 'show that it's not always the amount of money that fixes a problem, it's the way in which it reaches those who need it' (p. 5). A similar observation emerged concerning the Bags of Help grant programme, where small grants were found to be 'particularly valuable to smaller, less established groups' (Bennett and Eadson, 2017, p. 3). The Peter Minet Trust and United St Saviour's Charity (2018) reported that small grants can build skills among community groups, and research from the USA has found that microgrants supporting work in health can be useful when a new project is being tried (Hartwig et al., 2009).

Small grants can also help to foster partnerships. For example, the Trust has found that its grants have enabled partnerships with others that may not have been possible without the funding (Smith, 2021). One example is an organisation that partnered with a supported-housing association to provide hot meals to vulnerable Veterans.

While this is not unique to small grants, grants can also include added value, such as access to training from a funder or consultancy support. Additionally, grants from some funders can be considered a 'kite mark' that has value to the applicant, especially when they apply for funding in the future (Both ENDS and DOB Ecology, 2019).

1.5 THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Details on the application process in evaluations

Most of the sources in the literature referred to the application process, but with varying levels of detail. One example that stands out is the evaluation of the 2012-13 Short Breaks Small Grants Programme, which provides a link to the full application form and details about how the application works, including who is on the awards panel, what they value from applications and when the applicants typically receive notification of the decision (Roberts, 2014).

It is also important to point out that the details provided in evaluations about application processes vary because the processes themselves vary. There is no such thing as a single application process that can be successfully lifted and applied to all small grants programmes.

The decision-making process

Some of the sources highlighted the involvement of stakeholders in deciding who should be awarded a grant. For example, a report from the Education and Training Inspectorate (2011) outlined the programme The Big Deal, described as a 'joint initiative between the statutory and voluntary youth sectors' (p. 1), which included a small grants programme. Children and young people were involved in making decisions, which was important because they were the peers of the potential beneficiaries of the small grants programme. Over 120 children and young people participated in 62 small grant panel meetings and this 'enhanced the children and young people's levels of maturity and responsibility' (p. 5). Similarly, an evaluation of the Bristol Ageing Better Community Kick-Start Fund explains how the fund had a selection

panel that included individuals with relevant life experience to the applicants in the small grants programme (Crabbe et al., 2020).

Making applications easy

There was a sense among some of the literature that there is a need to make the application process proportionate to the amount awarded. The Policy Studies Institute used an online system which made the application process easier by allowing potential applicants to add any missing information at a later date (Smeaton et al., 2009). An evaluation of the Bags of Help grant programme displayed an awareness of this by noting that more than half of the organisations applying had no paid staff (Bennett and Eadson, 2017). Another study found that support and easy access to advice were important during the application process (Thomson and Calier-Grice, 2007).

1.6 EVALUATION, THE END OF THE GRANT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Appropriate monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial parts of any grant-funded project, and any findings can be used to improve similar projects and programmes in the future. However, it is important for monitoring and evaluation processes to be proportionate to the value of the grant and only require the information necessary for the evaluation.

In a previous report, DSC noted one example of where end-of-grant reports included huge amounts of information and not all of it was necessary (Signori and Kennedy, 2019). Another source noted that ‘other aspects of evaluation methodologies ... such as consideration of sample sizes, acceptance of data collection procedures and data analysis plans are not addressed in the application form. For many of the applicants this would be asking too much, but the issue is nevertheless a serious one as these processes tend to require specialist skills, are frequently time-consuming and therefore costly’ (Shukru et al., 2016, p. 30).

An example of considerate evaluation can be found in the Office for Public Management’s (2016) evaluation of the Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness Grant Fund. The fund developed evaluation tools that were validated by an evaluation steering group and grant project leads. These tools included a baseline survey, a follow-up survey, an equalities monitoring form and a quarterly project monitoring form. In this case, the recipients of small grants were encouraged to use these tools but this was not mandatory, and the authors noted that using the tools may have been too much for an organisation in receipt of a small grant.

It is particularly important to consider monitoring and evaluation in relation to the length of a project. If a small grant is funding a project over a relatively short timescale, then that time is most likely going to be spent delivering the project, so there will be limited time available for monitoring and evaluation (Finch et al., 2019). Some have also suggested that in the

context of small grants, evaluations tend to only really come at the end via an end-of-grant report (e.g. Smeaton et al., 2009).

It is also vital that any monitoring and evaluation look beyond just facts and figures. One key reflection is the need to 'humanise the data' (Howell and Stover, 2021, p. 72). This can be done through evaluators speaking to project leaders and learning about the project and the impact on the community through feedback.

Making evaluation material available

A lot of time and effort is spent on preparing evaluation materials, and small grants programmes can learn from each other by making their materials available for others to consider and adapt. Good examples of where monitoring and evaluation materials have been shared can be found throughout the literature. For example, the report on the Short Breaks Small Grants Programme shares the end-of-grant form in full (Roberts, 2014), another shares the evaluation form for the Year of Food and Drink 2015 Small Grants Programme (BEMIS, 2016) and a third shares an evaluation form used following an employability skills workshop (Big Local SW11, 2018).

Beyond the small grant

The work enabled by small grants is varied and vital to individuals and communities throughout the world, but there is only a limited amount of funding. Small grants can help to sustain these projects over the long term by attracting additional funding, either in the future or concurrently with the small grant itself.

Several examples of this were found in the literature. Research by Carers Trust found that nearly £400,000 of additional funding came from other sources to complement the small grants programme Time for Change (Needham and Sanders, 2018). An evaluation of the Bristol Ageing Better Community Kick-Start Fund stated that successful applications enabled some of the groups applying for a small grant to apply for additional pots of money (Crabbe et al., 2020). And funding from the Crisis In This Together small grants programme helped grantees to attract further funding as the funding itself 'may have sent a signal about grantees' credibility to other donors' (Crisis Research and Evaluation Team, 2021, p. 30).

When making funding decisions, funders should bear in mind the importance of small grants in keeping essential projects going and their potential to help grantees source further funding for their cause. While smaller pots of money might not in themselves seem like a significant contribution, the potential impact for the recipient may well go beyond the pure monetary value.

CHAPTER TWO

The Good Practice Framework

2.1 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Throughout the literature explored in this report, several examples of good practice were identified. These good practices come from a wide range of organisations delivering a diverse set of projects, and they are presented below in the 'Good Practice Framework' (table 2.1).

These are only some of the examples of good practice found throughout the evaluations of small grants programmes. There are many more examples out there, especially ones in larger grants programmes that can also be applied to small grants programmes. This framework is intended to be the first step in a user-friendly framework that can be adapted and added to over time.

Table 2.1

The Good Practice Framework			
Example of good practice	Source	Challenges	Potential outcomes
Include potential beneficiaries (or their peers) when considering applications and designing small grants programmes.	Roberts (2014) Needham and Sanders (2018)	Individuals reviewing the application may need to be compensated for their time and expertise.	Awards will be decided by peers who understand the projects and their challenges well.
Allow unsuccessful applications to be revised and resubmitted following feedback.	Roberts (2014)	The grant-maker may require more resources to reconsider revised applications.	Unsuccessful applicants will be able to learn from their previous applications and gain valuable experience.

Example of good practice	Source	Challenges	Potential outcomes
Have multiple rounds for applications.	Crabbe et al. (2020)	The grant-maker will require more resources to consider each round of applications.	Applicants will be able to submit bids when they are ready and need the grant.
Have a clear timetable for application outcomes.	National Lottery Community Fund (2022)	Grant-makers will need to adhere to the timetable.	Applicants will be able to plan more effectively if they know when they will receive the outcome.
Use simple and easy-to-understand language in application guidance, avoiding jargon where possible (and, where it is used, clearly define it).	BBC Children in Need (2017)	Time will have to be spent on ensuring the language is clear and simple.	The application guidance will be more inclusive of a wide range of people.
Use a simple, and ideally multistage, application process where the first stage is a simple expression of interest.	Crabbe et al. (2020) Smeaton et al. (2009)	The grant-maker might require more resources to consider a potentially higher number of first-stage applications. Grant-makers might need to redesign their application processes to ensure they obtain the right information at each stage.	Applicants will not have to spend as much time on an application if they are unlikely to receive a grant. Grant-makers are likely to receive second-stage applications that are more relevant.
Require proportionate and easy-to-understand monitoring and evaluation at the end of the grant, allowing the use of qualitative data.	Evaluation Support Scotland (2015) Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (2019)	Qualitative data can be difficult to condense into simple facts and figures.	Applicants will not require quantitative skills and will be able to provide rich data.

Example of good practice	Source	Challenges	Potential outcomes
Provide support for monitoring and evaluation, such as how to write a case study or how to report quantitative data. Partners can be brought together to learn from each other.	Finch et al. (2019) Shukru et al. (2016) Signori and Kennedy (2019)	The grant-maker will have to commit resources to support this. Not all grantees will be able to attend (or even want to attend) meetings together.	Support will help to improve the quality of any data collected.
Provide small grants as quickly as possible.	Crisis Research and Evaluation Team (2021)	The grant-maker will have to ensure that grants are paid quickly while maintaining due diligence.	Grantees will know when they will get the money and will be able to put it to use sooner.
Allow end-of-grant reports to be submitted online.	Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (2021a) Smeaton et al. (2009)	Not everyone will have the skills or resources to submit their reports online, depending on the project.	Grantees with access will be able to submit their reports more easily and add any missing data later.
When evaluating a programme, list the full amount awarded to organisations.	Office for Public Management (2016)	The grant value alone will not provide the full context behind why that amount was awarded.	Similar projects and potential new applicants will be able to gain a better understanding of how much funding their project may require.
Make any evaluation tools publicly available for similar projects and grant programmes to use.	BEMIS (2016) Williams and Dunne (2020)	Organisations will need a way of sharing the tools and publicising them.	Similar grant programmes and similar projects will be able to learn from each other.

CHAPTER THREE

Analysis of survey data

3.1 ABOUT THE SURVEY

As outlined in the introduction to this report, DSC launched a survey of organisations with experience of applying for and receiving small grants. It launched on 26 October 2022 and ran until 18 November 2022. The survey received 82 responses in total, although one response appeared to be a test of the survey and so this response was removed, leaving 81 responses in the data.

Invitations to the survey were shared primarily via social media and newsletters, and the link was also shared with working groups and networks throughout the sector.

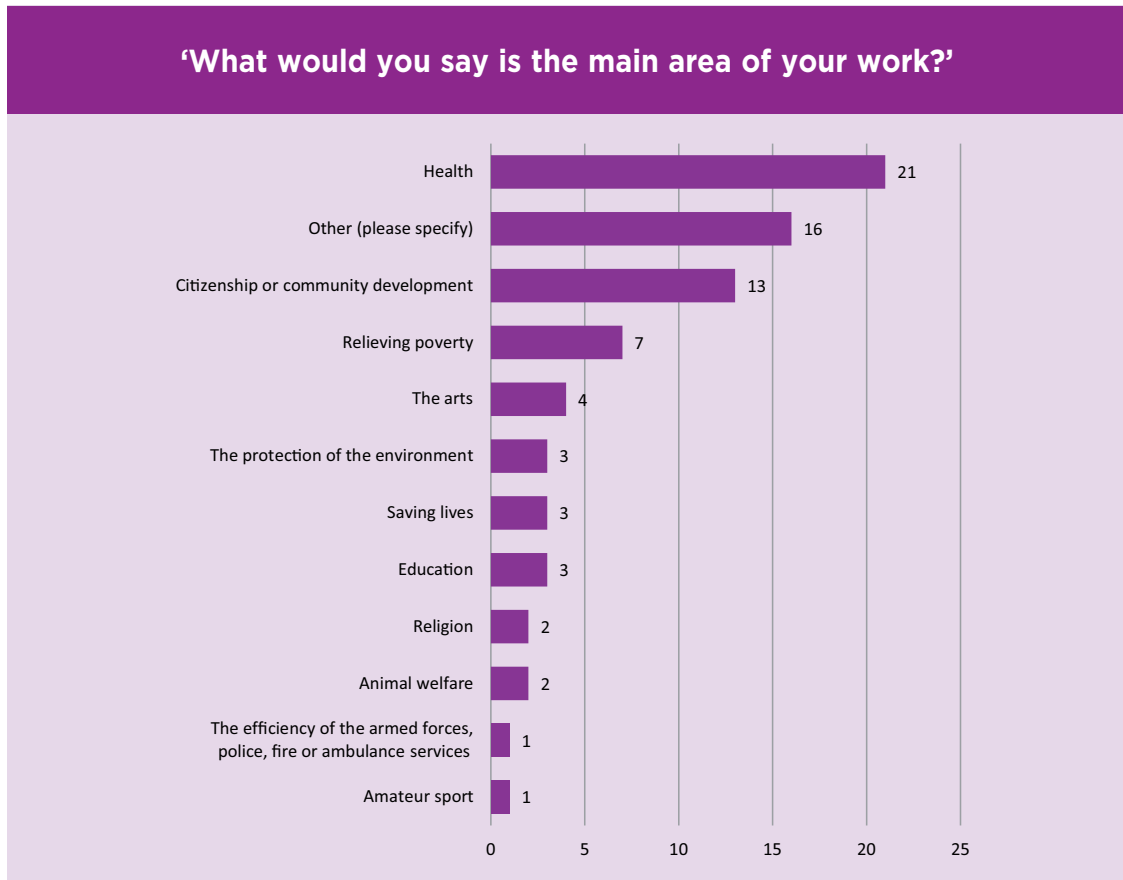
This survey does have some limitations. Firstly, it was open to anyone who wished to complete it as opposed to a random sample of participants. This means that the findings will only reflect the views of those who had the time and facilities to complete the survey and not those of the wider voluntary sector. Secondly, this chapter only features the views and opinions of 81 individuals, which is a tiny proportion of the wider voluntary sector.

However, any survey or similar research method will have limitations, and it would be extremely impractical, if not impossible, to collect data from every organisation and individual who had ever received or been involved in small grants or small grants programmes. Its limitations notwithstanding, this survey presents a rare opportunity to assess the voluntary sector's understanding and perceptions of small grants and small grants programmes.

3.2 PROFILE OF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Figure 3.1 shows a summary of the responses to the question 'What would you say is the main area of your work?' The options provided were based on the 13 'descriptions of purposes' in the Charities Act 2011, and respondents could also select 'other'. The responses suggest that the survey respondents came from a wide variety of areas. The most common response was 'health', followed by 'other'.

Figure 3.1



When asked to elaborate, the respondents who specified ‘other’ gave a range of responses. Some of them arguably fall within the options provided by the survey question, but they are presented below in full:

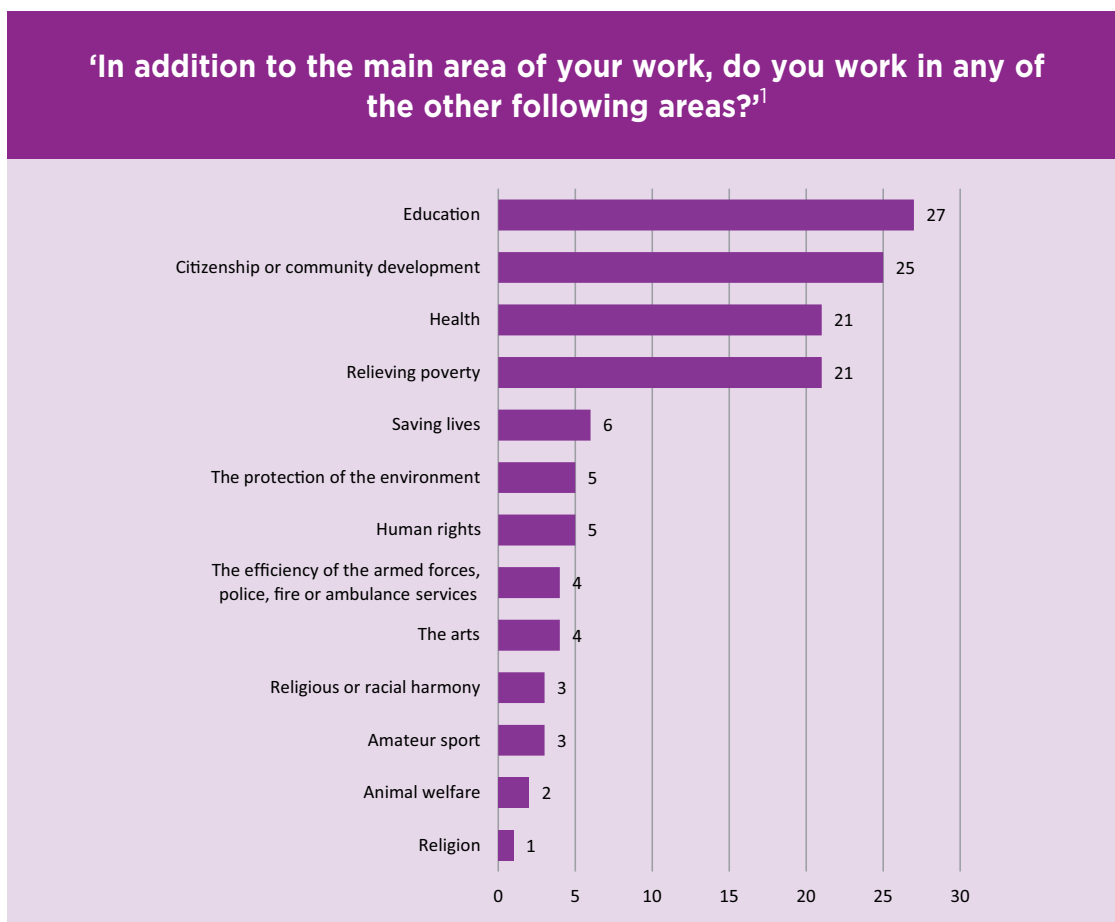
- mental health (two respondents);
- youth work (two respondents);
- children and youth;
- children, young people and families;
- connecting people (and their health) and green spaces (for wider community benefit);
- digital inclusion;
- equality-in-employment opportunities for disabled people;
- ex-offenders;
- older people;

- special educational needs and disability;
- supporting siblings of disabled people;
- tackling poor mental health in disadvantaged teenage girls;
- well-being and its relationship to the environment;
- work with a variety of charities.

The respondents were also asked whether they worked in any additional areas (see figure 3.2). These responses show that the most common additional areas of work were education (27 responses), citizenship or community development (25), health (21) and relieving poverty (21). (Respondents could pick more than one option.)

Some of these additional areas of work include charitable purposes not present in the options for the charities' main area of their work, such as religious or racial harmony (3). The information on additional areas helps to provide a more comprehensive profile of the organisations that responded to the survey.

Figure 3.2

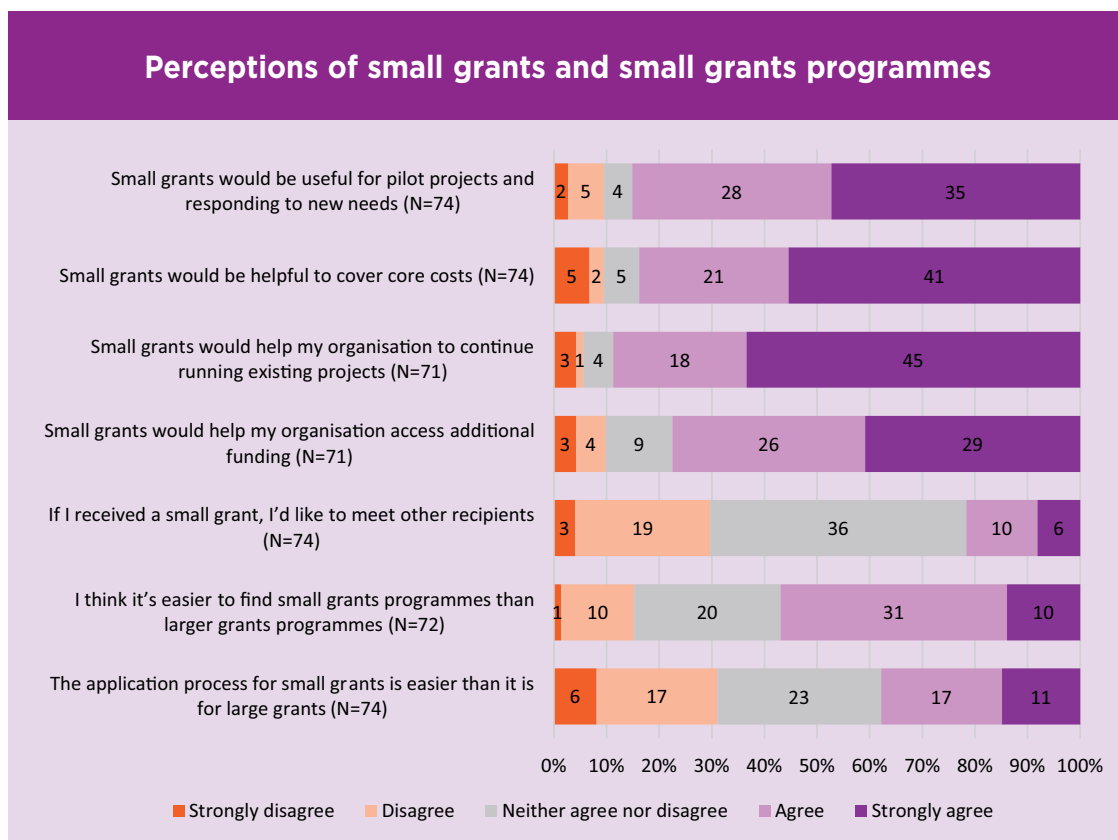


¹ Please note that categories are not mutually exclusive and therefore responses total more than the total number of respondents.

3.3 PERCEPTIONS OF SMALL GRANTS AND SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMMES

The respondents were asked a range of questions with which they could ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’; alternatively, they could skip the question. These questions were designed to elicit a better understanding of the respondents’ current perceptions of small grants and small grants programmes. Figure 3.3 shows the full range of responses to these statements.

Figure 3.3



The survey respondents tended to agree that small grants would be useful for pilot projects and responding to new needs: most respondents (63) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Pilot projects test new ideas or initiatives, and these results suggest that small grants are perceived as a good way of trying these.

A majority of the respondents also agreed that small grants would be helpful to cover core costs: 62 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Core costs are costs that voluntary sector organisations must cover in order to provide their services, such as paying for staff.

More respondents strongly agreed that small grants would help their organisation to continue running existing projects (45) than with any other statement in this question, and 18 further respondents agreed. This suggests that these respondents largely perceive small grants as a good way to continue running projects. This does not necessarily contradict the finding that small grants are good for piloting new projects and initiatives, as both statements can be true at the same time. These responses may suggest that small grants are particularly effective at ensuring that projects and services that have been found to be effective and are known to work can continue to provide benefits for their beneficiaries. Many funders wish to fund new, innovative projects, yet this finding suggests that funding for the continuation of services and projects is a good use of small grants.

Most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that small grants would help their organisation to access additional funding, which is consistent with the findings from the literature review that the funding from small grants programmes is useful for attracting additional funding (Crisis Research and Evaluation Team, 2021; Peter Minet Trust and United St Saviour's Charity, 2018).

Opinions varied more widely when the respondents were asked whether, if they received a small grant, they would like to meet other recipients. For this statement, the respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed (16) were in the minority. Most respondents neither agreed nor disagreed (36), and a large proportion of the respondents (22) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This statement received the highest number of disagreements. While meeting other respondents could be a way of learning about similar projects and organisations, there are two main factors to consider. Firstly, grant funding is competitive by nature, as there is only a limited amount of funding to be awarded and not everyone can receive a small grant. This may make some holders of small grants hesitant to share their ideas as doing so may make it harder for them to attract funding in the future. Secondly, the responses to this question may reflect the fact that many organisations, including charities, simply do not have the time to attend extra events in addition to the work that they conduct for their beneficiaries.

Most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (41) that small grants programmes are easier to find than larger grants programmes, although a large proportion (20) remained neutral in response to this statement. This may be because they find the ease of locating grant programmes to be similar in small and large grants programmes. A notable, but still small, proportion of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (11).

The responses were most evenly spread in response to the question of whether the application process for small grants is easier than it is for large grants, with the largest number of respondents (23) remaining neutral in response to the statement. Slightly more respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (28) but 23 respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. As discussed in section 1.1, one of the principles of good grant-making is proportionality: applications should be proportionate to the grant requested (DSC, 2016). These responses suggest that grant-makers are not adhering to this principle of good grant-making and that the application processes for smaller and larger grants are similar. This stresses the importance of grant-makers assessing their application process and asking themselves whether it is proportional to the amount available.

This survey did not ask about end-of-grant monitoring and evaluation, but one survey respondent contacted DSC separately to provide the following comment in response to a small grants programme they had recently participated in.

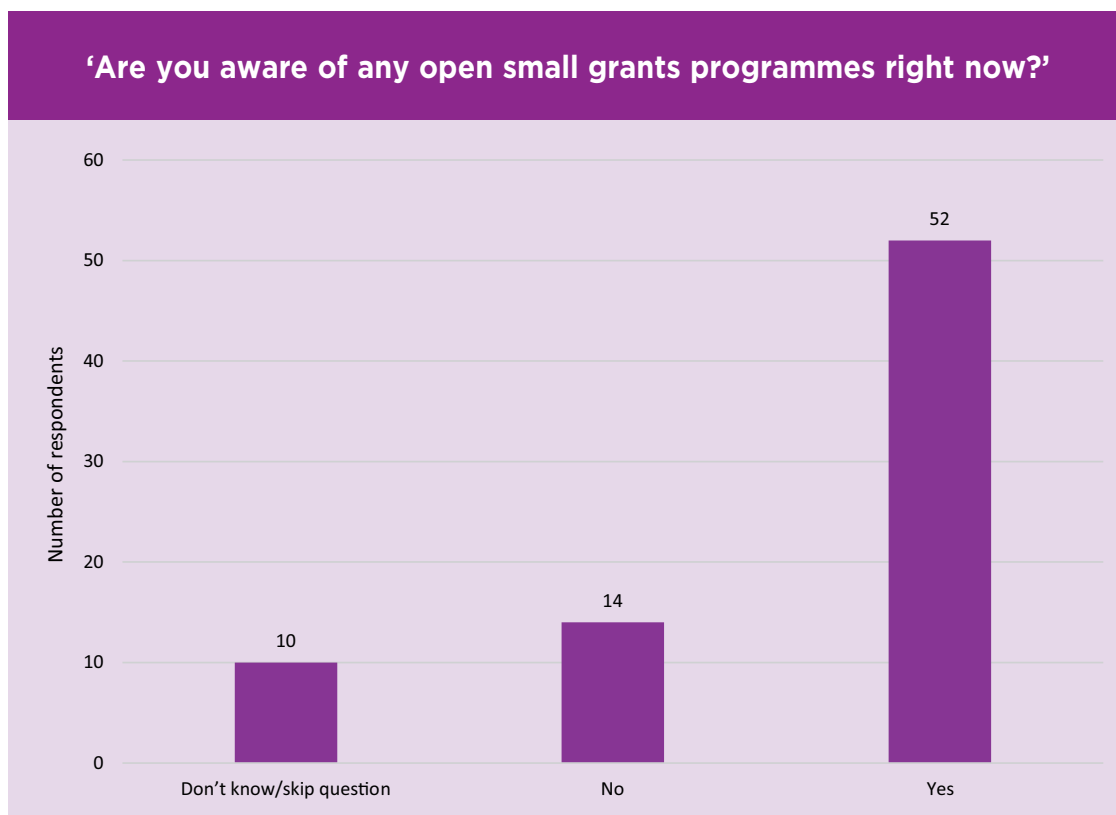
Having been a small grant recipient, I felt the reporting was somewhat too onerous. There was the online End of Project report and then grant recipients were asked to submit an attached report of around 2,000 words. I appreciate this is public funds, however, I'm an experienced grants officer and felt this placed increased expectation on grant recipients and took even more of their time.

Email from a survey respondent

3.4 AWARENESS OF SMALL GRANTS AND SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMMES

Most of the respondents were aware of small grants programmes that were open while the survey was live, and only a relative few were unaware of any open small grants programmes (figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4



When the respondents were asked to elaborate, a common response was that there were lots of open small grants programmes. This suggests a good level of awareness. A selection of responses follows.

There are hundreds!

There are lots!

Various foundations attached to charitable givers (e.g. Rothschild, banks). Local companies supporting aid initiatives (e.g. Red Kite Housing). Big charities (e.g. Children in Need).

There are loads! Including our regional community foundation, but multiple local and national trusts, I apply to 40-50 every year.

Numerous small grant programmes exist, many run by supermarkets (e.g. Tesco, Co-op, Morrisons), other retail companies (e.g. Greggs) and even specific causes (e.g. [South West] Lakes Trust). Then, of course, there is Awards for All (run by the National Lottery Community Fund) and associated funds run by Arts Council England.

Various trusts and foundations, there are plenty out there!

Survey respondents

Some respondents referred to grant-makers related to the Armed Forces community, and the Trust featured frequently in these replies.

Veterans' Foundation [and] Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.

Armed Forces Covenant.

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust - Forces for Change.

AFCFT.

Survey respondents

Applicants were also asked ‘what can funders do to benefit you or your organisation when it comes to small grants?’ The application process featured heavily in these responses, with several respondents stating that the system for small grants needs to be simple and easy to use, with minimal burden for the applicants.

More user-friendly applications, less restrictions.

Keep the application process really simple, maybe by having a simple expression of interest form first to save everyone time.

Ask only for information that is going to actually be used to make a decision about whether or not you will be funded.

Helping with filling [in the] form, because it is not clear what funders want.

Make [the] application form simple to complete.

I think sometimes the application and reporting requirements are too intensive for smaller grants. It can make it not worth it to apply.

Help and support when applying.

Some of them have very onerous application processes which can take as long as a major lottery application, and then they expect onerous reporting as well.

We really benefit from broad criteria and fairly light application and reporting processes.

Application and reporting processes to be proportionate.

Make the application and reporting less onerous.

Make the process [as] simple as possible and the criteria clear so as not to waste too much time and energy on small grants. (Larger grants I understand take much more time and need more questions asked, but for small grants it needs to be simpler and quicker.)

Keep it simple.

I often find the application process takes the same amount of time as for larger grants (even when the funder states that they've 'streamlined' the process). Applications for small grants need to focus simply on need and the outcomes to be achieved and less on the how and budget.

Make the application and reporting proportionate to the size of the grant.

Make the application process simpler and less time-consuming. Provide the outcome of the application as soon as possible.

Make applications straightforward without too much additional documentation required. Concentrate on the achievements of the organisation so far and less on detailed future financial planning/projections. Make terms and outcomes flexible - this is particularly important to allow approaches to be tested for larger pieces of work in future. Allow full cost recovery rather than just direct staff costs. Make the monitoring and evaluation returns flexible and easy to submit. Application forms which are online and allowing completion in stages are important.

Keep applications as simple as possible.

I'm dyslexic and the applications are not easy to complete.

Simplify [the] application process. Make them available throughout the year rather than in tranches [or] occasional. Small charities depend on them and don't have the huge overheads that larger organisations do ... Quickly accessible grants mean we can react quicker to urgent needs. For us especially, when the economy impacts Veterans, it's imperative that we can react and in order to do so, we need to have access to additional funds to meet the demand.

Keep application forms concise but give space for explanations, e.g. if it might be a joint bid from more than one charity. Make it easy to add attachments, e.g. accounts [or] constitution.

Keep the application process and especially the reporting process simple.

Some are so complicated you can have spent £200 worth of staff time for a £500 grant!

Make the paperwork/application process easier. I spend more time as fundraising manager filling in forms for small grants than I do for large. It seems to be inversely proportional to the amount of money on offer!

Survey respondents

Some respondents commented on the nature of the funding, stating that multi-year funding and funding for core costs would help them, as would flexibility in funding.

Allow core costs to be covered; funding a piece of equipment when you can't fund the salary of the person who will use it is not what we need.

Make the funds available for core costs or projects (offer both options).

Give to core costs. If the funder likes the work of the charity, fund it.

Obviously fund our costs!

Money for core costs is essential; [handling] restrictions on how the money can be used is really complicated if you have to choose ahead of time - things change so rapidly these days that what you need one month might change by the time you get the grant and are in the position where you need to spend. We don't mind accounting for the expenditure but it is hard to know in advance what we might need to spend (COVID is a prime example, but changes in the volunteer market also cause difficulties). So flexibility is key.

Cover core costs.

Provide funding for routine operating costs so that we can continue to portray our regimental story and provide a meeting space for ex-servicemen.

Fund basic running costs. Allow further development of charitable causes. Support one-off fundraising events.

Pay for running costs.

Be flexible to cover core costs.

Assist with rents and running costs of our members.

Allow for higher core costs as a percentage; with overheads and utilities soaring, keeping the lights on is a struggle.

Allow underspends to be used for core costs.

Be more open minded to the reasons we ask for small grants. Our charity looks like we have a large income of just over £1 million, but the truth is we run this organisation on a shoestring and small grants towards core costs make a *big* difference.

Survey respondents

Quick responses with useful feedback would also be welcomed.

Many small grant applications are from very small groups not professional fundraisers; feedback would really help.

Increase turnover speed [or] reduce timeline between [application submission and receipt of a decision]. Charities often do not have capacity to plan so far in advance based on a 'maybe' from a small grant. Also [it would be helpful to have] general clarity about when a trust is [or is] not accepting applications and what the timescale might look like.

Provide the outcome of the application as soon as possible.

Not take so long in assessing grant applications.

Publicise the scheme widely, be receptive to different ideas and needs, [and give a] quick response.

Provide straightforward application processes with criteria and guidance that are clear and succinct, followed by notification of [the] outcome as soon as possible.

Survey respondents

Some respondents were also keen to discuss the importance of funding for existing projects or services. Innovation and new ideas are important, and it has already been established in this report that small grants are excellent at supporting such efforts (see section 3.3). However, this cannot come at the expense of funding for projects that work for their beneficiaries.

Don't demand new projects or equipment when the real need is more of the same.

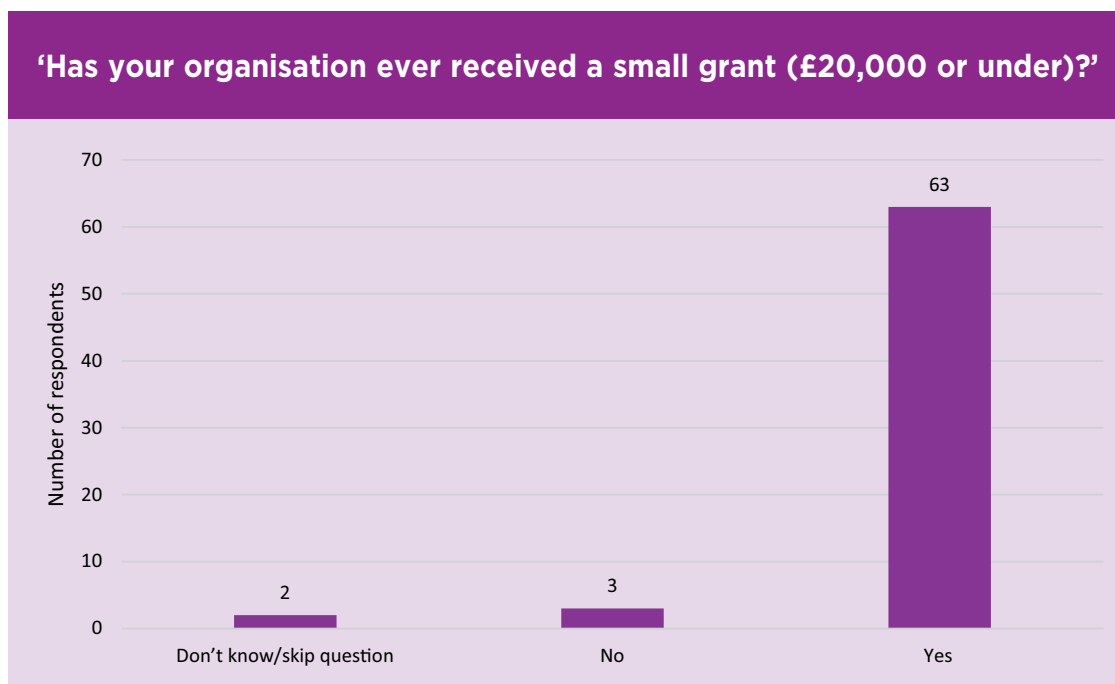
Many want new work - we know what we do works and we don't want to change it!

Survey respondents

3.5 EXPERIENCES OF SMALL GRANTS AND SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMMES

Most respondents (63) stated that they had received a small grant (see figure 3.5). Only a small number (5) said that they had not, said that they were unsure or skipped the question.

Figure 3.5



Respondents who answered 'yes' to this question were asked further questions about their small grant. The needs addressed by the small grants varied considerably across the respondents. For several respondents, these were the broad needs of the beneficiaries they serve in their particular sector or subsector.

We receive many small grants each year. These could be to aid conservation work on our network of nature reserves. Or to support our youth engagement programme. Or to help in the purchase of land to rewild as a nature reserve. Or to reintroduce endangered plants or animals to our reserves. Or to provide input into a wider community project. Mostly we prefer grants that cover at least some of our core sustainable costs.

Mainly for specific projects – needed costs on a local basis.

Business advisory and support to under-represented groups' business start-ups [or] scaling up.

Digital inclusion utilising Veterans' skills as champions.

[The small grant] allowed us to tell the story of sepsis through the eyes of people who had been affected. It allow[ed] us to raise the profile of the charity within the media and raised our social media profile.

Needs addressed: employing young people to deliver elements of our work so that they get paid work experience as many young people cannot afford to volunteer in order to get that experience; making available free digital skills sessions for school-aged children in an area of high levels of poverty; making available digital drop-ins for anyone to get immediate digital help – especially for applying for housing, benefits, health-care support etc.; [and] allowing us to finance a programme of device refurbishing to ensure people without digital devices can access one.

Mainly disadvantaged children's work, occasionally core costs also.

Mental health for children and young people; workshops for children with special needs; work to the building; the list is endless!

Survey respondents

The respondents also commonly mentioned capital costs for funding specific items or services.

Refurbishing houses, building works.

Capital project.

Development of free Let's Dance sessions to improve health and wellbeing.

We have received about ten small grants to support the Share Shed - a travelling library of things which enables people to borrow tools and other appliances they need but only use occasionally. We have also recently obtained a small grant to pilot some wellbeing training.

For specific capital or equipment items [and] to run specific short-term programmes for certain groups.

Accessibility lift in a building. Teaching English to refugees.

[The] local Rotary Club gave us £1,000 to buy a computer for use with online counselling.

Improving our outside and providing garden furniture and flower planters.

Survey respondents

A number of respondents – although not all – also reported that they had been able to use small grants to fund their own core costs. Interestingly, one source identified in the literature review phase of this project found that the staff of one small grants programme said that ‘small pots of money which are intended for a short duration of time are not intended to cover core running costs’ (Smeaton et al., 2009, p. 22), but this does not appear to have been the view of several of the respondents to this survey.

Salaries, core funding.

Most won't fund core costs so these small grants are generally for specific pieces of equipment. When we can use small grants for core costs, they allow us to meet the salaries of our care teams (both in-house and outreach), our medical teams and our support teams (e.g. bereavement support). They allow us to deliver the services people want from us.

Various for our core costs and projects, addressing the educational needs of blind children.

Children in Need gave us £10,000 for each of the last four years; this was to provide core costs and training for the work we do with 13- to 18-year-olds – notably free counselling and support with a range of issues. Red Kite Springboard gave us £4,000 to help increase our volunteer base (recruit and train).

Running costs.

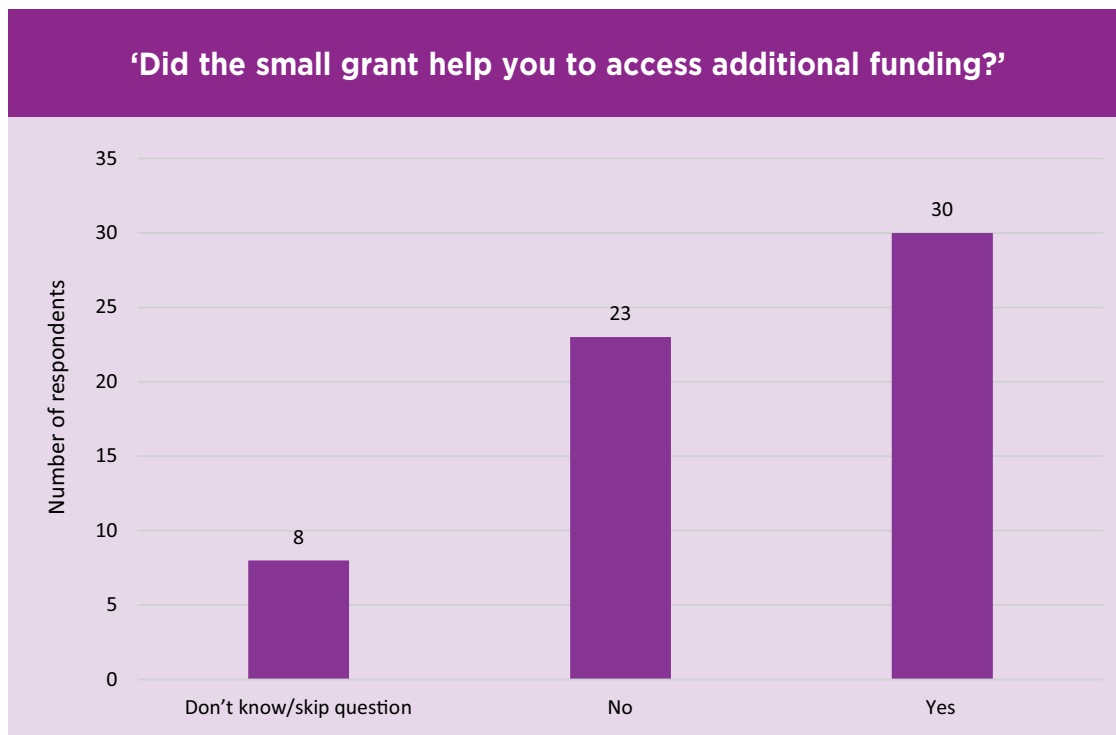
The majority of the grants we receive are small grants. Our particular sector is not that popular with grant-makers and most funding available is small in size. Grants tend to be most commonly awarded for purchase of equipment [or] capital costs. Some funders allow use of small grants towards core costs.

Project funding, salary costs and equipment.

Survey respondents

Figure 3.6 shows the responses to the question ‘Did the small grant help you to access additional funding?’ The responses were mixed. While 30 respondents stated that a small grant had helped them to access additional funding, 23 said that it had not.

Figure 3.6



Some respondents provided further details on how the small grant had helped.

It allowed us to show other funders we were credible and that funding makes such a difference. We can also match fund – knowing we have £5,000 from one charity really helped us ask for another £5,000 to double the impact.

It's always helpful to list other contributions towards a budget.

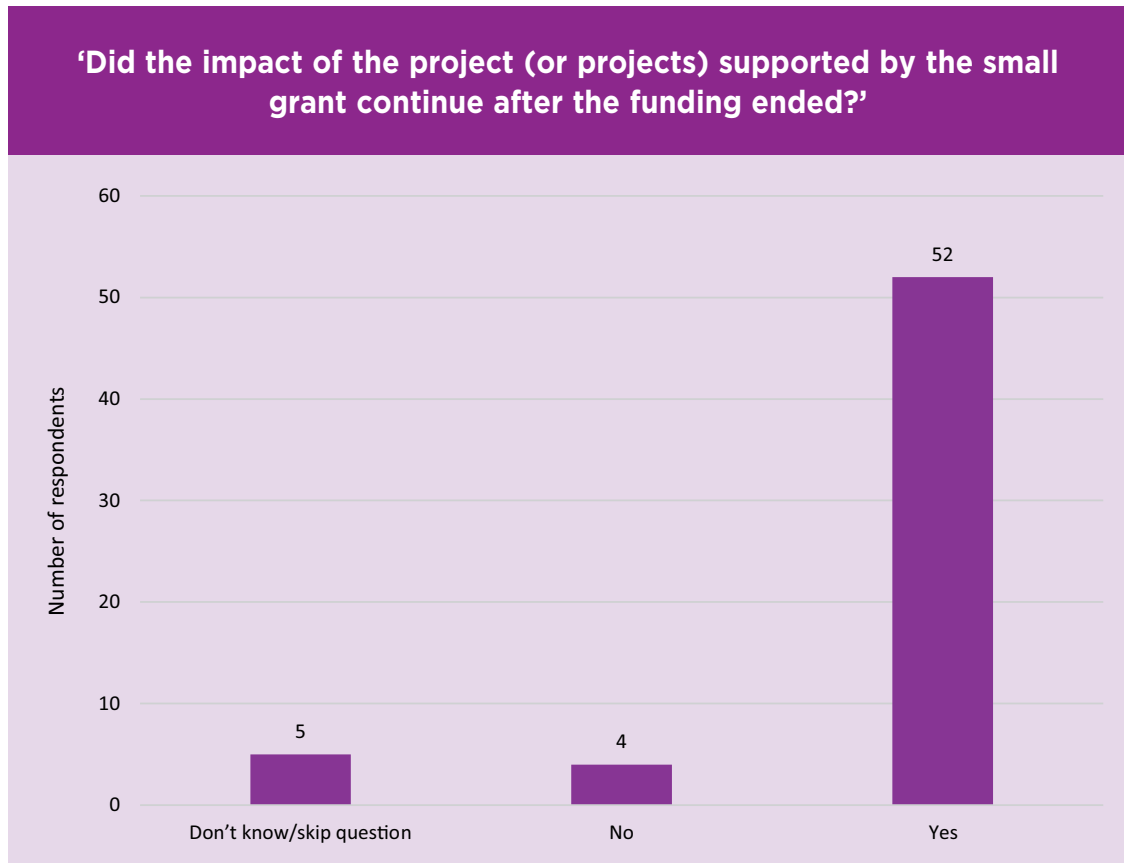
After we received an initial grant of £5,003 from Awards for All, we went on to receive further Lottery grants, including £48,599 via the People's Projects, and a variety of grants from local councils and other trusts.

It's essential to access more funding. No one funds 100%.

Survey respondents

As shown in figure 3.7, most of the respondents stated that the impact of the project (or projects) that had been supported by the small grant continued after the funding ended.

Figure 3.7



Several of those respondents gave evidence of this and some noted that there can be nuances around how continued impact is judged, depending on what a small grant is for.

It is seed money for expansion. It allowed us to make those important small steps in the early days.

In the case of equipment purchase - yes. When it has been used to part fund an activity for a short amount of time, less so.

Sometimes continued funding is needed, but the legacy of the project or equipment bought continues beyond the age of the grant.

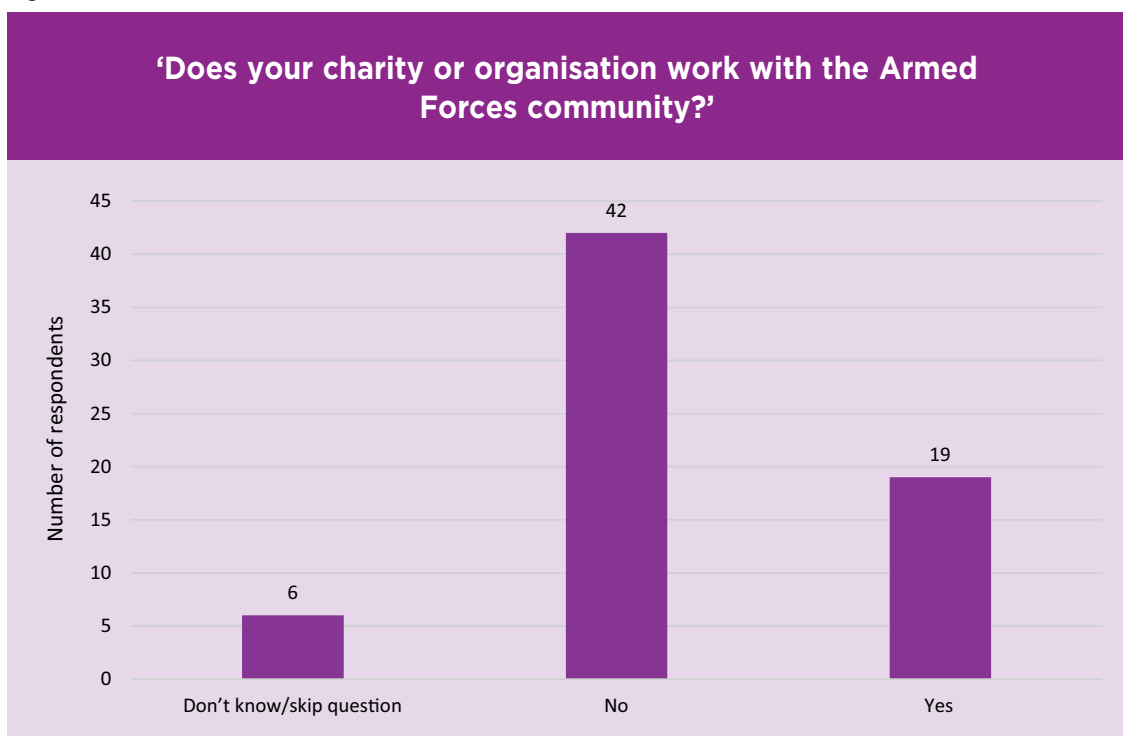
All income helps to make an impact, but a small grant is a small factor in that. It all helps though!

Survey respondents

3.6 PERCEPTIONS OF THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

Figure 3.8 shows that most of the respondents to this survey did not work with the Armed Forces community, although a sizeable number did.

Figure 3.8



The 19 respondents who worked with the Armed Forces community were asked whether there was anything that they wanted to tell funders about small grants that is unique to the Armed Forces community. The responses to this question are presented in full below.

No our charity is all inclusive.

Veterans' mental health needs are so very different to others, especially those with [types of post-traumatic stress disorder], and unfortunately the crisis teams in the hospitals have no understanding of how to deal with this so we waste many, many [hours] sitting in A&E to be seen then [have] three minutes with the crisis team and [the Veteran is] back on the streets and then our phone, which is manned 24/7 365 days of the year by a human, rings again and we start the scenario all over again, often unfortunately ending in suicide.

We find that the homeless ex-servicemen (and it is nearly always men) can be unknown ... for a while before this information is revealed and they don't know that there is help out there for them. It's great [when] we find out that someone has been in the Armed Forces as we know there is lots of help out there for them.

Vulnerable Veterans sometimes need familiar space in which to spend time. We can provide such space but need financial assistance by way of small grants to enable us to continue to operate.

Helping applicants to navigate the range of local Armed Forces groups to build the best connections.

[It would help if funders would] value the costs that are associated with supporting volunteering programmes [and] make it less difficult to seek agreement from military personnel to enable an application to be made.

Because we're not an Armed Forces charity and the Armed Forces community is not our main beneficiary, larger grants are much more helpful.

Supporting Veterans with PTSD [or] poor mental health that do not engage with statutory services. [They are reluctant] to ask for help so we have to front-load projects with hooks to get them on board so they open up and ask for help.

How the transition and confusion surrounding leaving the forces seems to be underestimated. It's really about availability of working-age Veterans to engage, either attending events or activity groups. Due to work and family commitments they often can't attend and therefore we can't deliver to them. Those attending or participating are typically retired Veterans, unemployed and those with diagnosed wellbeing needs.

Small grants could provide emergency funds when a Veteran's mental health drops off and he/she needs immediate assistance. We recently couldn't access any immediate funding to assist a suicidal Veteran.

The needs of our beneficiaries can become more complex quite quickly (we have noticed significant changes since the pandemic) and in order to meet the additional needs, quick funding sources are needed which only small grants programmes can provide.

Survey respondents

3.7 KEY THEMES IN THE SURVEY RESPONSES

The responses to the survey questions showed relatively strong levels of agreement relating to questions about awareness of small grants, what small grants could be used for and why recipient organisations find them valuable. As outlined in section 3.3, many respondents perceived small grants to be useful for both piloting new projects or approaches and supporting core costs or funding ongoing work. There was less consensus around questions related to how easy small grants are to find and whether application processes are easier for small grants than they are for large grants.

The narrative feedback from the respondents also showed some common themes. These included the benefits for applicants of making application processes and forms simple and easy to understand; the importance of making reporting and monitoring proportionate to the size of the grant; the need for grants to fund core costs or overheads; the value of feedback and a quick response from the grant-maker; and the role of small grants as seed funding to help organisations develop further bids or as a proving ground to enable approaches to be tested before they are scaled up.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions and recommendations

The literature review and survey conducted as part of this research project revealed a range of findings and viewpoints about small grants that grant-makers, applicants and other interested parties may wish to consider. The literature review highlighted that small grants can be useful for a variety of purposes, projects and types of organisation. However, it also revealed a lack of agreed definitions around small grants and the existence of challenges around accessing evaluations, which is significant because evaluations can help with improving learning and decision-making about small grants. Improving the practice of making small grants in the future may depend on the attainment of a level of consensus among a diverse community of funders about what 'small' means. There may also be a need to make more evaluation material publicly available for comparison and analysis, to provide a wider sample of qualitative data to draw from.

The survey responses highlighted a range of views about small grants, including their usefulness as a means of piloting new projects or approaches, a route to access additional funding, or a way to fund core costs or existing work. Survey respondents also stressed the importance of ensuring that application processes for small grants are as simple as possible and that evaluation requirements are proportionate to the amount of the grant. These themes are common in the literature not just about small grants but about grant-making more generally, and grant-makers should bear them in mind when designing and reviewing their programmes.

Based on the findings from the literature review and survey, DSC makes the following recommendations.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SMALL GRANTS

- **Define a small grant.** Definitions of small grants currently vary according to several factors. It would be helpful if grant-makers could use an agreed definition of what a small grant is in terms of its value.
- **If an organisation is running a small grants programme, explicitly call it a small grants programme.** This will help future research and similar projects to learn from the organisation's findings.
- **Always publish evaluations from small grants programmes.** Much data is collected and small grants are frequently evaluated, but the data is rarely made available. The format does not have to be perfect, but the data needs to be made available to benefit future programmes and similar services.

- **Include potential beneficiaries where possible when considering applications and designing small grants programmes.** This may require extra resources to organise and the individuals may need to be compensated for their time, but it would ensure decisions are made by people who understand the full context and challenges.

APPLICATION PROCESSES FOR SMALL GRANTS

- **Allow unsuccessful applications to be revised and resubmitted.** This allows applicants to learn and improve their skills for future funding.
- **Have multiple rounds for applications.** Applicants can apply when they are ready for the funding.
- **Have a clear timetable for application outcomes.** Applicants need to plan ahead, and a clear timetable helps with this.
- **Use simple and easy-to-understand language in application guidance, with jargon rarely used (and, if it is, clearly define it).** This will create a more inclusive application process with a wider range of applicants.
- **Use a simple, and ideally multistage, application process where the first stage is a simple expression of interest.** Applicants will save time on grant applications, and grant-makers will save time reading and assessing applications.
- **Provide small grants as quickly as possible.** The sooner the money is available, the sooner organisations can serve their beneficiaries.
- **Allow end-of-grant reports to be submitted online.** This can make the process easier, and grantees can add any missing data later. Considerations may need to be made for grantees who cannot submit reports online.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SMALL GRANTS

- **Make sure that any monitoring and evaluation at the end of the grant is proportionate and easy to understand, and also allows the use of qualitative data.** This will provide more rich data and will not exclude individuals or organisations that do not have the skills to provide quantitative data.
- **Provide support for monitoring and evaluation.** Examples include how to write a case study and how to report quantitative data.
- **Consider bringing partners together to learn from each other.** But this should be optional if partners do not want to come together.
- **When evaluating a programme, list the full amount awarded each organisation.** This helps potential similar projects to understand how much they may need to run their project.
- **Make any evaluation tools publicly available for similar projects and grant programmes to use.** This would allow similar projects and programmes to learn from each other.

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Small Grants, Big Changes

An overview and analysis

This report from the Directory of Social Change, funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, takes a look at small grants and small grants programmes through a literature review, survey and the Good Practice Framework which highlights examples of good practice found across small grants programmes.

This report looks at topics including:

- What is a small grant?
- What does good grant-making look like for small grants?
- How much research is there on small grants?
- What do small grants look like in the context of the Armed Forces community?
- How do organisations apply for small grants?
- How are small grants programmes evaluated?

This is a valuable resource for charities, government and policymakers to understand small grants and small grants programmes, for the entire voluntary sector and beyond.

'Small Grants, Big Changes, a report by the Directory of Social Change (DSC), provides the evidence to support what most people involved in delivering and funding charitable activities believed to be the case – small grants and small grants programmes have a vital role to play in enabling and sustaining critical support for charities and their beneficiaries.'

Anna Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
[from the foreword]