

Routes to power and influence for small and grass roots women's organisations

Invitation to tender

Aim

To better understand the scope and reach of the existing national, regional and local infrastructure¹ serving the women's voluntary and community sector²; to identify routes to power and influence for small and/or grass roots women's organisations (particularly those outside the Violence against Women and Girls sector).

The Commissioners

We are a small group of funders (including Comic Relief, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales, National Lottery Community Fund, Pilgrim Trust, Rosa and Smallwood Trust) with individual track records in funding women's sector organisations and/or women's sector infrastructure.

Context

Given the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on both women and girls and on the women's sector, funders would like to understand the opportunities for small and grassroots women's organisations to catalyse change for women, what works well at the moment and where more support is needed, noting:

- there are some local, regional and national networks that bring together women's organisations but provision of these is patchy and they often lack a clear link through to (and voice in) national conversations
- throughout the conversations about the impact of the pandemic and recovery from it, the specific impacts on women have received relatively little attention or subsequent commitments for change
- women's rights as a broader set of issues have fallen down the agenda, with fewer funders and other institutions identifying women as a priority group
- marginalised women face multiple intersecting barriers to fully participating in "economic, social and cultural life" and "decision-making which affects their lives" (European Commission, 2010: 1). Despite increased attention to participation in decision-making and policy-making in recent years (Bochel et al., 2008), marginalised women are often unheard and unable to influence decisions and policies, demonstrating "a clear gender inequality in the way we determine [social] policy" (Gains et al., 2020: 5).
- there is a lack of a co-ordinated voice talking to central government about women's issues - a gap left when the Women's National Commission was disbanded

¹ We understand effective 'infrastructure' may support a number of different roles including: capacity building activities for member organisations; networking and information sharing; representation, advocacy and campaigning; as a vehicle for joint service provision.

² We define the women's voluntary and community sector organisations as being run by and for women. The work across a wide range of issues including: education, employment and training, health (including mental health), safety and representation.

- the women's VCS is [under-funded](#), has fared badly through austerity and is vulnerable to further cuts post-pandemic
- the sub-set of women's organisations who deal with Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) appear to be better connected and have a stronger policy voice – this contrasts with the rest of the sector

Overall, funders would like to understand what women's organisations need to increase opportunities for transformational change.

Scope of the work

We want to commission an exploration of current women's sector influencing activity, including:

- What infrastructure and networks exist at a local, regional and national level, and/or on particular issues or for specific communities?
- How, and if, existing organisations and networks interact
- What proportion of women's organisations are members of women's infrastructure organisations? Who isn't being represented?
- How are the concerns of grassroots groups heard and amplified?
- What are the examples of effective influencing?
- Where are the gaps?
- What are the specific issues for organisations working with marginalised groups of women, including: Black and minoritised women; and Deaf and disabled women?
- What support do women's organisations get from generic local infrastructure organisations and do any use a gender lens?
- How do different types of women's organisations work together e.g. policy-focused organisations and local community groups?
- What do women's organisations want to achieve together?

Key lines of enquiry will include:

- desktop review of relevant studies, evaluations and reports
- interviews with key staff and volunteers in existing women's sector infrastructure, delivery and grassroots organisations
- interviews with key staff in wider VCS infrastructure and equalities organisations
- facilitating 'open space' or 'town hall' style discussions amongst women's sector organisations and other women activists at both a local and a national level to identify what makes change for women

We recognise the wealth of different experiences across the four nations and are keen to learn from what works in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We do not expect coverage of every area/region but suggest a sample of up to six which includes rural and urban areas, areas where there are active local and regional networks and areas where these are lacking, or under-resourced. We aren't

looking for a comprehensive overview but for examples and exemplars that can inform future developments.³

We are keen to hear about examples of good practice and would **welcome recommendations for funders' further action.**

Key audiences will include:

- national and local women's sector organisations
- other activists and campaigners on women's issues
- funders and commissioners - including those who already use a gender lens, and those who don't yet

Timetable and how to express an interest

We are inviting expressions of interest in this work by **10th January 2022**, to start in February 2022.

We would like a final report and recommendations by **31st May 2022**.

(This is our ideal timeline but we can be flexible on this.)

We are inviting expressions of interest from both organisations and consultants / freelancers. We are particularly interested in hearing from people who have direct experience and understanding of the women's sector.

Expressions of interest, including your CV / track record, a brief description of how you will undertake this piece of work and an outline budget should be sent to [Cullagh Warnock. \(cullaghwarnock@blueyonder.co.uk\)](mailto:cullaghwarnock@blueyonder.co.uk)

Your total submission should be no more than five pages, plus the budget.

Any queries about this tender should also be directed by email to Cullagh at the above address.

The budget for this piece of work is up to £30,000.

Proposals should set out:

- Your / your organisation's relevant experience for carrying out this work, particularly in terms of your work with marginalised groups. You should include details and links of relevant published work.
- How you propose to carry out this work. Although we have set out some parameters for the work above, we welcome proposals that challenge the assumptions we have made and propose realistic alternatives.
- Your capacity to deliver to the proposed deadline – please note, there may be some flexibility around the timeline
- An assessment of the risks to carrying out this work and how you plan to mitigate them

³ There is no expectation that London would be one of the six areas; if you felt it was important to include London, we would suggest a focus on a single borough rather than the whole city.

- Budget for the work including a full breakdown of costings alongside assumptions on time and corresponding day rates for research staff
- Details, including CVs of key staff to be involved in the delivery of this work