

Cripplegate and Islington Giving, survey of groups in Islington, April 2021

In January, 2021, we surveyed 159 organisations in the borough. These included groups we had previously funded, either from a Cripplegate or Islington Giving programme, and groups who had either not received funding for a number of years or ever. Groups could respond anonymously or leave an email address if they wanted a reply from us.

We asked four questions. Questions were on two themes. The first asked groups about our application process, how they found it and what could we do more of, or do better, to be a good local funder. The second theme, in questions three and four, asked groups for their views on their funding priorities in the future, firstly in the next 12 months, and then longer term.

1. What was your experience of the application process? Please tell us about accessibility, the time it took to complete, the speed of our response, and anything else you think will be helpful for us to hear. How might we improve any of these processes?
2. Do you have ideas as to how Cripplegate and Islington Giving can be better local funding partners?
3. What do you think Cripplegate and Islington Giving should be focusing on funding over the next 12 months? How should our funding respond to the impact of Covid-19?
4. What do you think Cripplegate and Islington Giving should be focusing on funding over the longer term/24 months?

Eighty-two groups responded. 78 had received funding from us, 4 had not. This was a “light touch” survey. We appreciate that responding groups were perhaps likely to have a favourable view of us, given that most have received funding, and that they are largely working in our current priority areas. However, given that groups could respond anonymously, we hope that gave people some freedom to be honest in their answers.

In this summary, we have identified themes from what groups have told us and outlined actions we plan to take in response.

1. How do groups find our application process?

The overwhelming majority of the responses were positive and encouraging. There were repeated comments on the following themes.

- i. Groups appreciate the quality of the programme team, the depth of their knowledge and the help we offer during the application process and beyond. Several commented that we respond quickly and that, once a grant has been made, there is a good level of support. “Support from Patrick Jones has always been invaluable.” Groups also appreciate having the team visit projects and have missed this face to face interaction during lockdown.
- ii. Largely, responders found the application process straightforward, questions clear and the time taken to complete an application reasonable.

Things we could do better

- i. Some groups thought the process was clear but the form took too long to complete. The “application process has improved over the past few years for Cripplegate main grants. However, I have just completed an application to Community Chest which does require a lot of work; the total number of 'words required' adds up to about 4,000 (i.e. £1 a word for a maximum grant of 4K!)” (Maximum grant is actually £5,000.)
- ii. A few groups asked if the form could also be made available in at Word Document to make it easier to share with others while working on it.
- iii. One group asked whether we could be more flexible in how we ask for financial information.

2. Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving as a local funder

Again, most comments were positive. Groups see us as a supportive local funder.

- i. The team communicate well with groups and responders see working with us as a positive experience. “We normally (outside of Covid) meet with our programme manager once a year and we have a great relationship with her (Nikki Wimborne). She's also incredibly knowledgeable and helpful and I often refer to her for local community / funding advice.”
- ii. Groups repeatedly said they need core and longer-term funding and those who receive this from us, appreciate it.
- iii. Many responders said they would be interested in us acting as more of a convener. One group mentioned finding the catalyst meetings helpful and asked why we wouldn't do the same for all our programmes. There is appetite to share learning between groups, and across themes and issues.
- iv. Some asked for training opportunities and us to host joint discussions/meetings with others e.g., National Lottery Community Fund, the Council, CCG.
- v. Several groups asked for things we are already doing but possibly haven't communicated. For example, one group asked if we can “connect local organisations to develop and deliver cross discipline projects, eg, connecting young and old, connecting knowledge, connecting diverse communities” which is how our current Development Partners project has been working.
- vi. There were a few comments about the challenges for smaller groups. For example, one group said they wanted more support for core costs. “Small charities in particular are over reliant on small grants that tend to be restricted. A core costs programme would really be useful for smaller grassroots organisations.”
- vii. Groups are keen to have forums to share ideas and for our team to start visiting projects again.
- viii. One group said they have the impression that we “tend to fund who [we] have always funded and so it is difficult to break in. Coming into this field a few years ago and applying to Cripplegate and then Islington Giving and the Big Alliance - it was all a bit circular.”

In response to what we have heard, we will:

- Audit our application/monitoring forms to ensure they are appropriate for the amount of funding available.
- Have a version of our forms in Word.

- When possible, start visiting groups again.
- Ensure that the open calls for grants, including those written by participatory grant making panels are clear and straightforward.
- Offer core funding wherever possible and continue to promote Community Chest as a core funding opportunity for smaller organisations.
- Continue to develop our role as a local convener, including building networking into all our grants programmes. We have already held a networking meeting for recipients of our recent Supporting Families resident led fund and will continue to consult with groups when shaping programmes as well as bringing grant recipients together during the course of their grants.
- Ensure that we reach out to groups not known to us. In 2022, we will hold an open call for organisations either not in receipt of a major grant from us in the last five years or who have never had funding from us.
- Ensure that we offer fair and transparent mechanisms for organisations to pitch their ideas, projects and longer-term programmes.

Several of the points above dovetail with actions we will be putting in motion in response to the IVAR code ([Flexible Funders | IVAR](#)), which Cripplegate Foundation has signed, in particular, around looking at accessibility, prioritising core funding, being clear in our calls and transparent in our responses.

3. What should the Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving be funding over the next 12 months?

- i. Overwhelmingly, groups are asking for core funding. There is nervousness about how groups will replace “crisis funding” and a sense that groups need core grants to help them respond to changing provision as a result of Covid-19. One group commented that we should be “investing in programmes/capacity building which really helps people transition out of lockdown as smoothly (practically and psychologically) as possible,” while another said we should be “helping organisations to pivot/recover and become sustainable in the new normal.” Groups don’t yet know what the “new normal” will look like for their residents, and for their organisation, so need the flexibility to change direction within current funding.
- ii. There is concern about sustainability of organisations post-Covid-19, and a possible loss of important VCS groups in the borough. “Already we are seeing that post March 2021 many of Islington’s VCS organisations do not have funding secured for their mid-term to longer-term survival. Now, the focus must be on putting the infrastructure funding in place to ensure that the highly responsive and valuable services provided by the VCS can continue. Islington’s VCS has played a major role in the Covid-19 crisis response, so everything possible must now be done to make sure that they have the best chance of survival.”
- iii. Groups identified a wide range of issues our funding will need to address. Not surprisingly, these reflect the work groups are doing but also our current funding priorities – young people, isolation, mental health. Indeed, concern around mental health pervades many of the comments, whether as a result of isolation, financial stress, pressures on young people and families, lack of physical activity or the opportunity to share social experiences. Groups want to be able to meet again.

- iv. Groups expressed high levels of concern about increasing poverty. The “pandemic crisis has huge impact on the most vulnerable clients in terms of every aspect of their lives.”

4. What should Cripplegate and Islington Giving be focusing on in the longer term?

- Core and longer-term funding were again cited as being important. “It would be fantastic. Having secured funding for longer term gives you peace of mind and you could only concentrate helping people.”
- Not surprisingly, groups identified priorities within the broad categories we already fund (“I would like to see more focus on young people - their wellbeing and opportunities. To be fair that is the priority of the charity I am involved with!”). Several groups talked about employment opportunities for young people and there is theme around recovery and bringing communities together to support each other in this process. The “community needs something positive to look forward to. A place where people can heal, express themselves and share the experiences.”
- A wide range of possible responses were given in response to this question, from broad, recovery themes to specific ideas – “classes to help people make their budgets go further”.
- There is appetite to build on changes which have happened as a result of Covid-19 and to involve residents in this process. “It would be great to encourage local organisations to think about how to involve and empower those communities more by co-designing/ co-producing projects. I can imagine an Innovation Fund in which grantees are trained to adopt these approaches and then try them creatively with their service-users, coming together to share impact.”

In response to what we have heard, detailed below, we will:

1. Continue to engage with groups to listen to their concerns. We will do this through individual conversations with groups, working in partnership, for example, with Voluntary Action Islington, the Council, and other umbrella groups, and continuing with group conversations such as our fortnightly Covid-19 response call.
2. Engaging with wider research and evidence from across the sector, both in terms of need and funder responses.
3. Continue to engage with the needs of residents by listening to what groups tell us about the need they are seeing. We engage directly with residents through our participatory grant making programmes and through our work on the Resident Support Scheme.
4. Evaluate how our Crisis Fund support has impacted groups funded.
5. Spend time looking at our current funding priorities and make changes if appropriate to respond to post-Covid-19 need. This may include some additional research within the borough, including talking to more residents.