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Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRR)

A rapid evaluation of the first £1,000,000
distributed in the initial Response phase by
Foundation Scotland

27 March – 14 April 2020



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1 Introduction

Foundation Scotland is Scotland’s Community Foundation. It works to a vision of confident, thriving, resilient communities across Scotland. It combines knowledge, finance, and expertise to work with communities across the country. Each year Foundation Scotland distributes thousands of grant awards, to support local charities and community growth. It takes a developmental approach, alongside responding to immediate and vital demands.

Foundation Scotland launched the Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund on Friday 27th March 2020 with funding from the National Emergencies Trust (NET). The overall aim of the Fund was to help those (most) affected by the recent coronavirus outbreak. The purpose of NET is to raise and distribute money and support victims at the time of a domestic disaster.

The initial ‘Response’ phase of the Fund was designed to get funding to grassroots activity as swiftly as possible. A rapid application and assessment process was quickly established to enable groups to receive funds within 72 hours of lodging an application. Within 12 days the first million pounds had been distributed with some 300 projects in receipt of funding.

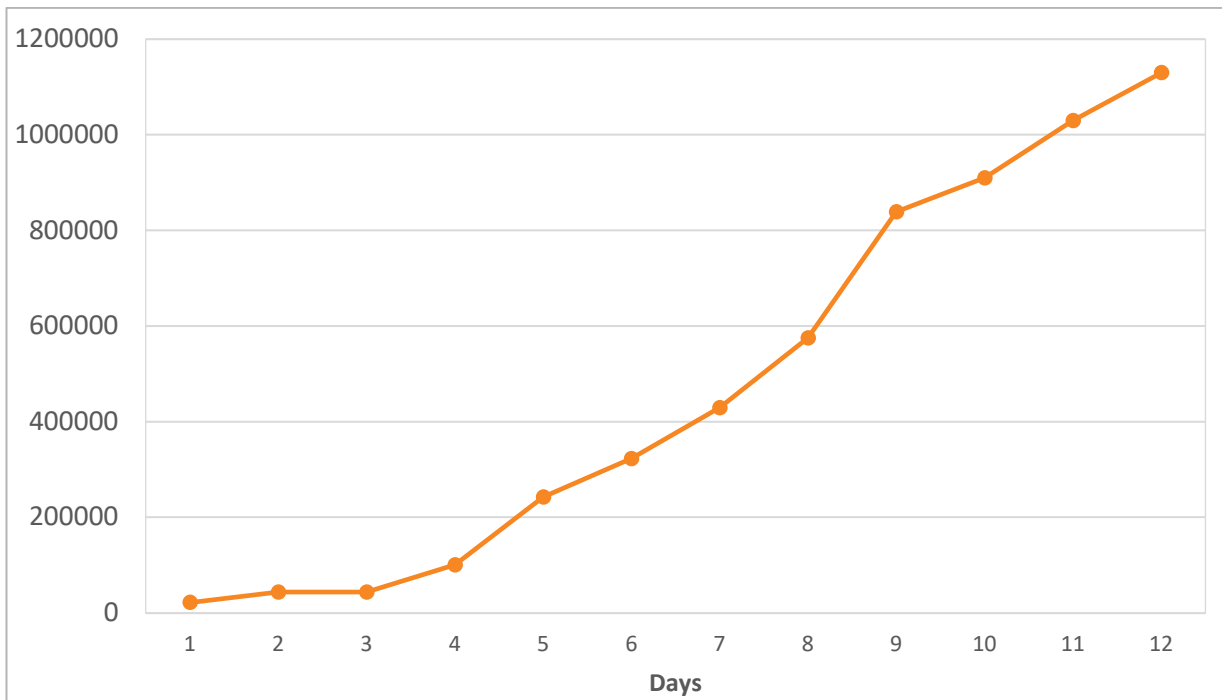


Figure 1 Cumulative Grant Distribution

In early April 2020, Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) was asked by Foundation Scotland (FS) to undertake an impact evaluation of the first (Response) phase of the Response, Recovery and Resilience (RRR) Fund. SCDC is the lead body for community development in Scotland. It works to a vision of an active, inclusive, and just Scotland where communities are strong, equitable and sustainable.

The aim of this evaluation was to gain insight into the difference the funding has made to groups and communities and understand their next set of challenges in the short, medium and longer term. This evaluation captures the views of a wide range of recipients of the RRR Fund first phase. This was conducted by means of an electronic survey to all grant recipients (291 at the 14th April) which was completed by 135 recipients, and a series of 31 telephone interviews with a cross-section of the grantees.

The response to both the survey and the request for interviews was very encouraging and shows how important this funding has been to the recipients and their commitment to continuing to support those people who are most vulnerable and at risk during the crisis and in the aftermath.

This report draws on the survey returns and the interviews to give an account of what the key impacts of the funding are, and the main challenges that the grantees are now facing. From this we have developed a set of recommendations for FS (and other funders) to consider when developing and delivering future phases of the Fund. The report combines an overall analysis of the findings with illustrative examples, along with a set of key findings and recommendations for Foundation Scotland and their partners in the RRR Fund.

2 Executive Summary and Recommendations

This section provides a summary of findings (which are covered in more detail in Section 3) along with a set of recommendations based on the priority themes emerging from the research. These recommendations highlight emerging priorities and will provide suggested areas of focus for the next phase(s) of the Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund.

2.1 Activities supported by RRR funding

Most of the organisations who responded have used the funding to change or expand their services to respond to the Covid-19 emergency. In most cases this has involved changing how their services are delivered from face-to-face to online or remote. In many cases they have also had to expand their service due to an increase in people self-identifying as needing support, or being identified by the project, or referred by other services.

2.2 Impact of RRR funding

The strongest short-term impact of the funding has been on ***meeting the immediate practical needs of isolated people***. Activities which have featured heavily in this category include: the provision of meals, food packages, IT support, and crisis grants.

The second highest category has been in ***developing working practices to operate remotely and meet increased need***. The funding has facilitated the purchase of equipment; training and familiarisation for staff, volunteers and service users; and the development of systems to allow the projects to deal with greater numbers and collaborate more effectively with other service providers.

The third highest impact (but still significant) category has been in ***tackling loneliness and promoting positive living, wellbeing and resilience***. Grantees are ensuring that people have what they need to isolate at home and are checking in to ensure that people are physically, financially and mentally fit. This area links closely to the previous category in that the provision of emergency food supplies, money and IT support/phone support has helped people to stay healthy and socially engaged.

The lowest impact category has been in ***easing the burden on statutory health and care services***. In most cases this has not been an explicit aim of the projects when they have applied for the funding but has turned out to be an unintended outcome. Grantees have indicated an increased number of referrals from statutory service providers and indicate that the work that they are doing will be able to relieve some of the burden on the statutory sector into the future.

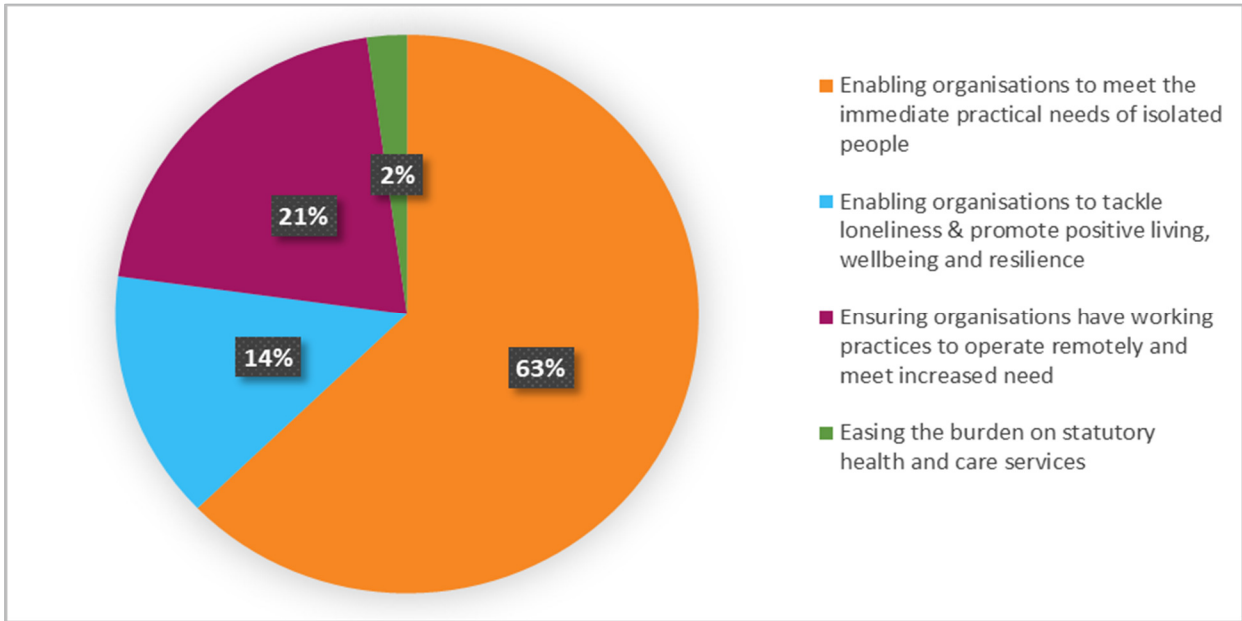


Figure 2 - Impact of RRR funding – breakdown by proportion of grant awards

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities

Our evaluation generated a wide range of responses both in terms of challenges and opportunities. These are summarised into four broad themes as follows:

- Responding to increased levels of need which have been identified and/or exacerbated through the pandemic.
- Mental health – dealing with and responding to the additional stresses caused by social isolation, and the economic impact of lockdown.
- Adjusting to the new ‘normal’ after the emergency phase has passed – this includes adapting working practices and the provision of continued financial and emergency support to vulnerable groups.
- The long-term viability and sustainability of the projects once the initial emergency funding period has passed.

2.4 Recommendations

Based on these key themes we have compiled a set of recommendations/ suggestions to consider when developing the next phases of the RRR Fund and future funding responses. These are listed below and discussed overleaf.

- Invest in core funding and capacity building
- Plan for implications of increased poverty and inequality
- Recognise mental health as a primary issue in communities
- Support groups to adjust to a ‘new normal’
- Collaborate for community resilience

2.4.1 Invest in core funding and capacity building

People welcomed the rapid response and simple approach employed during the application process for the first phase of the RRR fund. While recognising that bigger sums of money will need more intensive processes, they argued strongly for an approach that is proportionate, flexible, and as light touch as possible. In the light of the Covid-19 pandemic there is also a strong case for core costs to build the capacity of local organisations to not only respond to emergency situations but to plan and work collaboratively to build the resilience of local communities.

Recommendations

R1 There should be increased collaboration between funders and intermediaries (national and local) to identify trusted local organisations who can both provide an emergency response and work with others to build community resilience on an on-going basis.

R2 Funders should develop an approach to core funding which recognises the key contribution that community organisations make to community resilience and emergency responses. This approach could be co-produced with key community sector partners to ensure that it is informed by the frontline projects themselves.

R3 There should be more opportunities for funders and those that they fund to share learning and develop better working practices.

2.4.2 Plan for implications of increased poverty and inequality

The increased financial hardship caused by Covid-19 will fall more heavily on certain groups and will be a major factor in increased levels of need that local organisations will be dealing with. The type of need varies greatly and there will also be new groups coming through who haven't previously needed support. Community and voluntary sector organisations will need to meet increased demand while maintaining their service to existing client groups.

Recommendations

R4 Funders should recognise different types of need (e.g. crisis financial support, emotional support, social contact) and the impact these have on various groups within the community. Funders should work with local organisations to develop appropriate and proportionate responses to this increased need to ensure that there are no gaps in funding or response.

R5 Funders should have a focus on building the capacity of organisations, including funding volunteer recruitment, retention, and support; staffing; and IT/systems infrastructure support.

2.4.3 Recognise mental health as a primary issue in communities

Mental health issues have increased and/or become more apparent due to the pandemic and many organisations are not set up to provide this kind of support.

Recommendations

R6 Priority should be given to funding training and awareness-raising around mental health in the community for both organisations and communities

R7 Funders should continue to invest in social prescribing models, particularly those models that resource voluntary and community organisations to support mental health in their communities.

R8 Funders should support local projects to develop specific resources/infrastructure to deal with mental health issues e.g. employing counselling staff, or appropriate training for staff and volunteers, and mental health support for staff and volunteers.

2.4.4 Support groups to adjust to a 'new normal'

Many of the grantees are already thinking about what they will need to change after the immediate crisis has passed. Practical issues exist around maintaining social distancing and, where this is not possible, the protection of staff, volunteers and service users.

Building new working practices has been identified as a key issue and opportunity for the future. This includes continuing some element of remote working as a clear strand of delivery whilst recognising the importance of face-to-face contact in the way projects work.

Recommendations

R9 Funders should prioritise practical measures that will help organisations practice safe social distancing in their service delivery e.g. adaptation of workspaces and social spaces and procuring appropriate protective equipment.

R10 Funders should prioritise funding for training and support for staff and volunteers in operating safely and following official guidance.

R11 Funders should fund general support to staff and volunteers in the new context e.g. setting up supervision/guidance systems.

R12 Funding is needed to support training and organisational development for local organisations along with the IT infrastructure and hardware that will support this development to happen.

2.4.5 Collaborate for community resilience

There is a clear need emerging for there to be a much more joined-up, collaborative response, and approach to emergency response and developing community resilience. Local organisations are becoming increasingly recognised as a vital part of that picture but need resourcing to enable them to participate on an equitable basis.

Recommendation

R13 Funding priority should be given to support collaborative working practices between community/voluntary organisations and between these organisations and the statutory sector.

The breakdown of funding by local authority area is shown below.

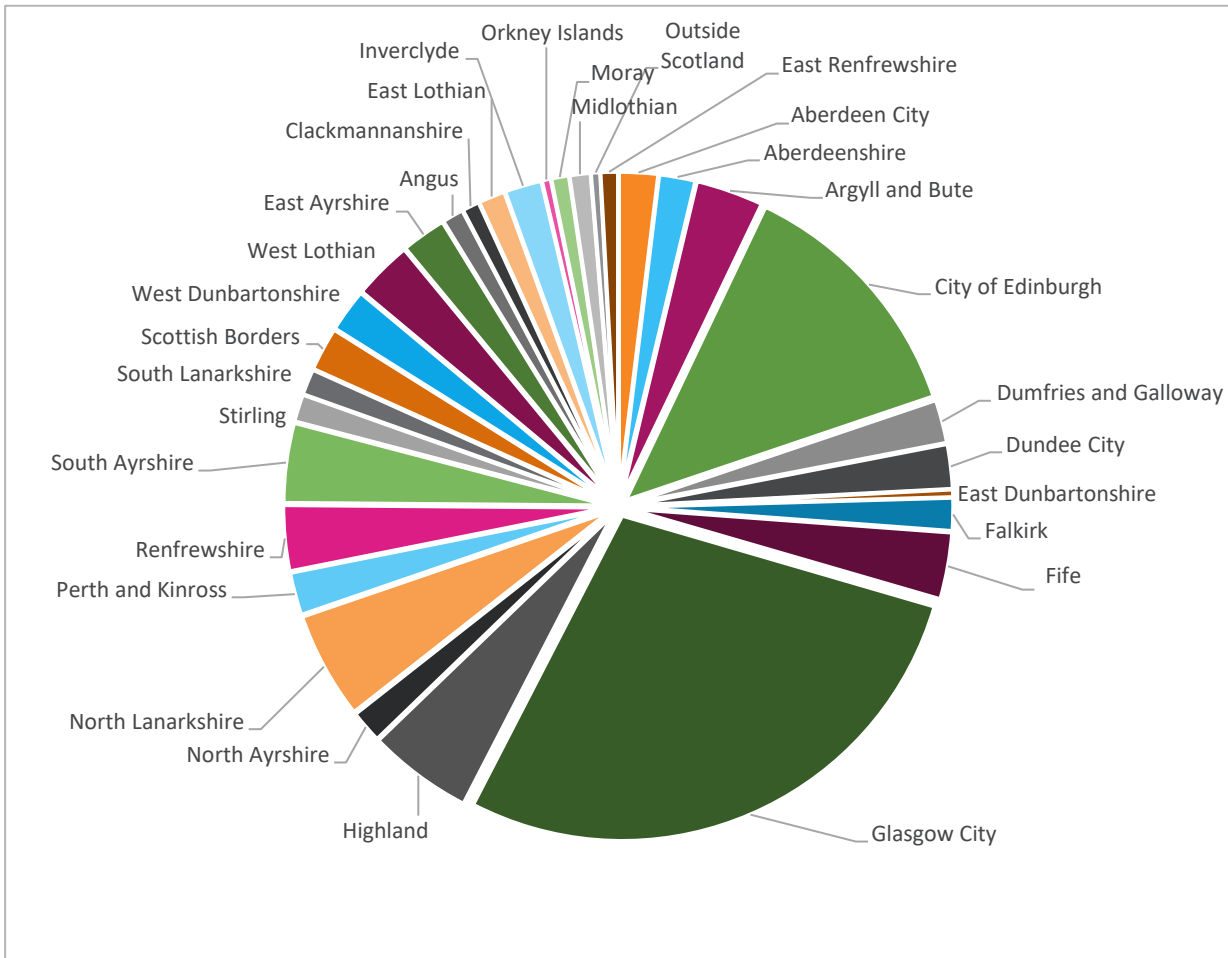


Figure 3 – Funding by local authority area