



Consultation response on the draft prospectus for CLG's Empowerment Fund

Introduction

Race on the Agenda (ROTA) is a social policy think-tank that has been active since 1986. ROTA works with London's Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities towards achieving social justice by the elimination of discrimination and promotion of human rights, diversity and equality of opportunity. ROTA achieves these aims by informing London's strategic decision-makers about the issues affecting the BAME Third Sector and the communities it serves and by making government policy more accessible to London's BAME organisations. ROTA has a broad range of experience relating to the very issues CLG is currently consulting on.

ROTA very much welcomes this consultation alongside the new Empowerment White Paper and indeed that there will be a dedicated programme of funding to third sector organisations supporting community empowerment. However, ROTA would highlight the following points in relation the draft prospectus and the specific questions in it.

Due to competing priorities, unfortunately, we have not had time to comment on the impact assessment that accompanied the draft prospectus.

1. Are the proposed set levels of funding laid out in section 2.3 of the draft prospectus appropriate?

1.1 A large number of national third sector organisations have challenged the funding proposals set out in section 2.3 and we would strongly support this. The thresholds proposed would exclude many equality organisations, which are generally smaller than their mainstream counterparts, but which play a vital role in empowerment, particularly as organisations dedicated to addressing inequality and putting power in to the hands of those who lack it.

1.2 ROTA would suggest that the Fund be able to finance not only national organisations but also regional ones. This is because the situation in each of the English regions is different and national structures can often offer a false 'one size fits all' solution. This is most obvious in London which has very distinctive empowerment issues, arising, for example, from London's devolved regional government, the extent of the diversity of its population and the nature of inequality which exists and which the following snapshot statistics highlight:

- 40% of the working age population were born abroad; 6–7% are refugees or asylum seekers
 - 42% of the population are Black and minority ethnic (BME)
 - At least 14 religion or belief systems are practiced
 - 10% are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB)
 - 19% are disabled
 - 22% are under the age of 18
 - 16% are aged 60 or over
 - 50.5% are women or girls. There are no figures for London’s transgender community;
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- 52% of children in inner London live in poverty
 - 53% of pupils achieve GCSE 5 A*-C8 compared with 23% of Traveller children
 - 75% of the population work, compared with 34% of disabled women in inner London
 - The average wage is £13.46/hr, compared with £5.29 for 16 to 19 yr olds
 - 26% of pensioners in inner London live in poverty
 - More than 60,000 domestic violence offences are recorded
 - More than 1,250 homophobic crimes are reported
 - Service providers lack data on religious, LGB(T) and linguistic minorities.

1.3 Thus, ROTA would encourage applications for funding by regional empowerment organisations of any size even if this means giving a larger number of smaller grants than is currently planned.

1.4 Linked to the above, we would encourage the government to ensure that bids by national organisations to the Empowerment Fund clearly show how they will take account of the situation in each individual region.

1.5 We would also suggest the government encourage partnership bids to: help ensure regional and local factors are taken into account in a more meaningful way; and to improve the funds accessibility to the diversity of equality organisations. The stipulation that applicants must have a corporate body or formal constitution, together with the short time scales over which the Empowerment Fund is to be awarded make it much more difficult, if not impossible, to develop consortia bids for the Fund, as many organisations’ constitutions would not allow them to take on the role of lead corporate body. We also feel measures should be taken to ensure, in such partnership or consortia arrangements, that all partners are meaningful engaged and resourced for their time and expertise. Smaller organisations and those of equality communities are often engage in such partnerships to ‘tick-boxes’ only, without the opportunity to contribute their expertise and benefit from them. Government should include criteria within contracts to funded organisations to ensure this doesn’t happen.

2. Do the empowerment themes set out in section 3 of the draft prospectus merit support from the Empowerment Fund, given the Fund's objectives?

2.1 Any Fund recipients must be able to clearly and specifically show how they can support and motivate equality organisations.

2.2 It is likely that many fund recipients will be well known and already in receipt of national government funding from other programmes. We would suggest an element of peer evaluation in the selection to try to ensure that funding is targeted at organisations fully representative of the third sector. Peers should include representatives from all equality sectors.

3. Should any of the themes in the draft prospectus be omitted or others included if the Empowerment Fund is to be achieved?

3.1 ROTA welcomes the inclusion of the theme around the empowerment of excluded communities. ROTA would encourage the government to ensure organisations receiving funding to carry out work under all themes clearly and explicitly demonstrate how they will engage with equality organisations. As mentioned, equality organisations play a vital role in empowerment, especially because they are dedicated to supporting those that experience most inequality and are therefore least empowered. It is vital that empowerment fund recipients engage with such groups, particularly as they do not always have the resources (especially paid full-time staff) to engage with top down strategies and policies.

3.2 ROTA would also like to highlight that many equality communities, because of their small size and lack of critical mass locally, organise in areas larger than local areas, such as across several boroughs, sub-regionally or regionally. As such, a large proportion of equality organisations are effectively excluded from local processes. This is problematic for people from equality communities, who live in local areas, whose needs, assets and aspirations are not fed into local developments. As equality organisations are best placed to engage with, understand and hold knowledge about their communities, it is essential that they are supported and resourced to engage with local processes even if they operate over larger areas. This issue should be considered by funded organisations delivering under all themes.

3.3 We would also encourage a theme of campaigning for and ensuring the continuation of small grants programmes by statutory agencies as these are often very significant means of supporting the activities of equality organisations. It makes little sense for the government to promote an initiative like Grassroots Grants whilst statutory small grants programmes are being lost in the drive to commissioning and a growing emphasis for the third sector on becoming self-financing social enterprises delivering public services. For many small third sector groups, these outcomes are impossible to achieve. Also, related to the point 3.2, funds such as Grassroots Grants should be available to equality organisations operating over areas larger than local areas.

4. Are different arrangements required for community involvement in planning?

4.1 ROTA notes and welcomes that £1.5m of the Empowerment Fund is to be set aside to encourage community involvement in planning. We would again stress the need for any organisations being funded to have a clear and explicit strategy on how they would involve equality organisations. As highlighted earlier, we believe this would be very hard to be done by national organisations but more likely to be achieved by organisations and partnerships working at regional level.

5. Do you have any comments on the design of the application form (annex A of the draft prospectus)?

5.1 We are pleased that the form is short and we would encourage it to be reviewed to ensure it is fully accessible.

If further information or clarification on this submission is needed, please contact Dr. Theo Gavrielides, Acting Chief Executive, Race on the Agenda, at theo@rota.org.uk or t: 020 7729 1310.