**Redcar and Cleveland VCSE Infrastructure Support Service**

**Grant Specification**

**Background:**

The Woodsmith Foundation is working with a number of other funders to collectively support the development needs of organisations in the local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Redcar and Cleveland. The partners for this work are; Lloyds Bank Foundation, National Lottery Community Fund, Rank Foundation, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Tees Foundation, and Woodsmith Foundation.

Earlier this year we conducted a survey of VCSE organisations to find out about what support and services they need now, and in the future, and how they would like those services to be provided. A summary report of the survey is available on the grant application page of the Woodsmith Foundation website [www.woodsmithfoundation.org.uk](http://www.woodsmithfoundation.org.uk)

We now wish to grant fund a support service that will meet the needs of, and advocate for, VCSE organisations in Redcar and Cleveland. We invite applications from suitably qualified not-for-profit organisations and from partnerships or consortia where the lead member is a not-for-profit organisation.

**About Local Infrastructure Support:**

Support for VCSE organisations often happens through a local support provider - often referred to as a VCSE Local Infrastructure Organisation. NAVCA is the national body for Local Infrastructure Organisations and you can read more on their website [www.navca.org.uk](http://www.navca.org.uk)

We recognise, value and support their “Four Functions of Local Infrastructure” and the contribution they make to the success and effectiveness of the VCSE sector. As grant-makers and the local authority, we rely on a robust, thriving and effective VCSE. The four functions are:

* **Leadership and Advocacy:** Local infrastructure organisations are leaders in their communities, strengthening our sector’s voice and influence on key decision-makers and funders. They support and empower vulnerable and marginalised communities, working towards a more equal society.
* **Partnerships and collaborations:** Local infrastructure organisations create opportunities for collaborative working by building networks and partnerships between local organisations and strategic partners. Through nurturing these relationships, communities are better equipped in both the development of ongoing projects and times of crisis.
* **Capacity building:** When local voluntary and community organisations have access to practical support, people and communities become more resilient and able to flourish. Local infrastructure organisations can provide training, resources or advice to facilitate community development.
* **Volunteering:** Volunteering is integral to thriving communities. Local infrastructure organisations encourage and nurture volunteering opportunities, so that people can build connections and work together on things they care about, driving positive change locally.

As a result of our research and consultation, we have developed the following schedule of services that we believe will meet the needs of the VCSE sector in this area. Whilst the initial value of this grant is not sufficient on its own to fully fund all aspects of the Four Functions, we do believe it is sufficient to provide a good quality, core service to the local VCSE sector. We are also hopeful that an effective provider will be successful in the first year of the service in securing additional funding to expand the services.

**Schedule of Services:**

The application form will ask you to demonstrate how you will provide these services. We ask that the grant recipient make use of technology to effectively deliver the service.

1. **An information and advice service**

As a minimum this service will;

* Support VCSE organisations to self assess their capabilities and develop a plan for continuous improvement.
* Provide basic advice to those wishing to set up a new voluntary group; be able to explain the options for legal structures, including social enterprises; give support with registration with relevant bodies such as the Charity Commission and Companies House; give advice on setting up a bank account and basic compliance in running a small group.
* Provide advice and guidance on the recruitment and retention of volunteers.
* Provide more complex advice and support, for example to those developing their organisation, wishing to change legal structure, diversify their income streams, employ staff and develop new projects.
* Ensure the appropriate method of delivery is available for the level of enquiry received e.g. from self serve tools and information for basic requests through to in person, 1-2-1 support for complex support needs.
* Provide advice on compliance and good practice in areas such as financial record-keeping, safeguarding, health and safety and data protection, fundraising, policies and procedures.
* Develop a ‘trusted provider’ list of organisations who can provide further services, such as payroll, independent examinations, HR advice.
* Provide regular, comprehensive information to the sector on key topics such as funding advice, volunteering, local issues.

Consideration should be given to **delivery methods**. These will include, but not be limited to;

* Telephone advice
* Face to face advice
* Provision of online information and ‘self serve’ options such as toolkits, via a website that is regularly updated
* E-newsletters and bulletins
* Social media channels
* Signposting to other available and reliable information sources

1. **A training programme**

This service will use existing feedback, examples from the research we have published, and your own sector surveys, to develop and deliver an annual training programme

We anticipate the **content** will include, but not be limited to;

* Good governance and trustee training
* Financial management
* Safeguarding
* Funding advice
* Demonstrating impact
* Volunteer recruitment, management and retention
* Basic HR advice
* GDPR and data management
* Marketing and communications, such as the use of social media
* Technology, such as the use of AI

Consideration should be given to **methods of delivery;**

* The provision of face-to-face training
* Live online training
* Other options such as pre-recorded modules and podcasts
* The timing of provision, in order to maximise access and take-up
* Referring groups to other high quality training available locally, regionally or nationally that meets their needs and is affordable to them

1. **Strategic working and partnerships**

The service will facilitate the development of positive, trusted and productive relationships with local stakeholders, including the local authority, health and social care, and the private sector. There will be a clear strategy for engagement with stakeholders, with the goal of the VCSE sector being recognised as a valued partner that can contribute to the design and delivery of local services.

Mechanisms will be put in place to gather the views of the VCSE sector and ensure those voices are heard and can influence local, regional and national policy where appropriate.

These could include but not be limited to;

* Systems for electing and supporting VCSE representatives, ensuring that representation reflects the sector and its best interests
* Network meetings to bring together groups with a common purpose or interest such as peer to peer support groups for volunteer managers or treasurers
* Leaders’ meetings for Chief Executives and/or Chairs
* Activities to engage with businesses
* Funders fairs and other partnership events
* Online opportunities for consultation, with feedback and dissemination systems in place
* Responding to sub-regional, regional and national consultations

1. **Organisational infrastructure**

Within the first year of the grant we expect the provider to have in place:

a) Data management system that enables it to track, as a minimum, the following;

* Number of VCSEs; their size, type, location, turnover, number of staff and volunteers
* The type of support given to each organisation
* Key interactions with each organisation e.g. training courses attended, advice sessions given

1. Website that is regularly maintained and updated and which includes, but is not limited to;

* Information on what services are available
* Clear ways to contact provider and service level timescales for when a response can be expected,
* Self-serve information and tools
* Funding advice, sources of funding and bid-writing

1. Selection of social media channels that are used regularly and effectively
2. Regular news bulletin (to include volunteering opportunities) and a regular funding bulletin

**How we will measure the effectiveness of the grant:**

We will work with the successful applicant to develop a set of performance management measures, based on outputs and outcomes within an evaluation framework. For example, **outputs** are likely to be quantitative and to include;

* Number of unique organisations or individuals supported and data on repeat interactions with each organisation
* A service framework that can differentiate levels of need and respond appropriately to different types and sizes of organisations
* The number of advice sessions provided including information on the topics covered and searchable by category of advice for trend analysis
* A training and development offer that is clearly articulated; the number of training sessions provided and total participants
* The volume of communications with the sector e.g. how many news bulletins
* The number of volunteer vacancies promoted
* The number of strategic meeting attended
* The amount of income generated as a result of funding advice given
* Website and social media metrics
* Case studies on each service area showing progress and development as a result of your work
* Feedback from the sector, including client satisfaction measures

**Outcomes,** which will be agreed together with the provider after grant award,are likely to be qualitative and may include;

* A more resilient and sustainable VCSE with increased levels of funding and organisational plans for improvement
* VCSE sector is represented on more strategic or partnership groups and increased influence on policy direction locally

The commissioners of this service are particularly interested in some additional outcomes and how the applicant might engage and support the VCSE to support these outcomes:

* A VCSE sector that plays a pivotal role in supporting the prevention, reduction, and delay of social care needs by addressing the underlying factors contributing to demand within our communities.
* A VCSE sector that works alongside statutory partners to co-produce commissioning systems that lead to improved outcomes for residents.
* The strategic development of volunteering infrastructure within the borough, that maximises opportunities for the recruitment and retention of volunteers, including trustees.

**Budget:**

One grant award will be made to deliver the Redcar and Cleveland VCSE Infrastructure Support Service. The grant budget is as follows:

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| --- | --- |
| Year 1 (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026) | £15,000 for start up costs  £140,000 for service delivery |
| Year 2 (1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027) | £155,000 |
| Year 3 (1 April 2027 – 31 March 2028) | £165,000 |

Following award of grant the funders will work with the grant recipient to agree a detailed three-year budget and how the start up costs budget will be used.

**Governance and Monitoring:**

The partners form a Steering Group which leads this work. They may invite other organisations to join the Steering Group as the work progresses. The Steering Group has nominated the Woodsmith Foundation as the lead partner to manage the grant. The partners have come together in a spirit of collaboration, generous leadership, trust and relational working to create this funding pot and manage the work together. We expect the grant recipient to work to these values alongside the partners.

Following the grant award the partners will work with the grant recipient to agree a detailed plan for the first year of delivery. We anticipate this will include a mobilisation stage before the full service is able to be delivered.

The grant recipient will work with the partners to develop output targets and clear, measurable outcomes. The methods for measuring and demonstrating performance against these will be agreed.

Monitoring will take the form of a written quarterly performance report (format to be agreed in advance with the partners), a quarterly meeting with the partners, and follow up meetings with the lead partner, the Woodsmith Foundation. The meetings will provide an opportunity to discuss any learning, agree changes and seek resolution to problems.

**Data Compliance:**

The grant recipient will need to be registered with the ICO and ensure its activity is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and UK Data Protection Act 2018. The commissioners will ask for copies of all data protection policies and may also check the cyber security levels at the grant recipient’s organisation.

**Application Process and Timescales:**

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| Grant opportunity goes live | Monday 2 December 2024 |
| Final date to submit questions | 5pm Friday 31 January 2025 |
| Deadline to submit grant application | 5pm Friday 14 February 2025 |
| Interviews | 6 and 7 March 2025 |
| Decision on grant recipient communicated to all grant applicants | Tuesday 18 March 2025 |
| Initiation meeting with commissioners | w/c 17 March 2025 |
| Grant agreement commencement | 1 April 2025 |

**How to apply:**

Grant specification, application form, case study form, organisational information form and supporting information will be held on the Woodsmith Foundation website [www.woodsmithfoundation.org.uk](http://www.woodsmithfoundation.org.uk)

If you wish to submit a question you will need to register your intent to submit an application by emailing [info@woodsmithfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@woodsmithfoundation.org.uk) All submitted questions and responses will be circulated to grant applicants who have registered their intent to submit an application. Answers will be circulated fortnightly. The last date to submit a question will be 5pm on Friday 31st January.

The following forms and supporting documents should be submitted:

* The completed and signed application form with all boxes completed.
* The completed and signed organisation information form(s) with all boxes completed.
* The completed case study form with all boxes completed.
* Your organisation’s most recent annual accounts. If you are applying as a partnership or consortium please send this for all parties.
* Your organisation’s current management accounts and your three latest bank statements. If you are applying as a partnership or consortium this should be the lead members documents.
* Your organisation’s current constitution or governing document. If you are applying as a partnership or consortium please send this for all parties.

To apply please return your completed application form, case study form, organisational information form(s) and supporting documents to [info@woodsmithfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@woodsmithfoundation.org.uk) by 5pm on Friday 14th February 2025.