

## The Big Lottery Fund

The Advice Services Alliance's response to the  
Big Lottery Fund's consultation paper

# Contents

- 1 Introduction ..... 1
- 2 About the Advice Services Alliance ..... 1
- 3 What we fund (Q1)..... 2
- 4 Funding for the voluntary and community sector (Q2) ..... 4
- 5 Funding for health, education and the environment (Q3) ..... 5
- 6 Transformational funding (Q4)..... 6
- 7 Specialist programmes (Q5)..... 6
- 8 How we involve the public in our work (Q7) ..... 7
- 9 How we reach the hard to reach (Q8) ..... 7
- 10 Funding long-term change (Q9)..... 8
- 11 Helping organisations and communities develop (Q10) ..... 9
- 12 General questions ..... 9

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Advice Services Alliance (ASA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Big Lottery Fund Consultation. Our response will follow the broad format of the on-line questionnaire, although we will not respond to every question.
- 1.2 As a third-tier organisation, our response will aim to reflect the views and experiences of:
- the wider not-for-profit advice sector;
  - our members – the advice networks;
  - and ASA as an organisation.

## 2 About the Advice Services Alliance

- 2.1 ASA is the umbrella organisation for independent advice networks in the U.K. Full membership of ASA is open to national networks of independent advice services. Currently, our full members are:
- adviceUK
  - Age Concern England
  - Citizens Advice
  - Citizens Advice Scotland
  - DIAL UK (the disability information and advice service)
  - Law Centres Federation
  - Scottish Association of Law Centres
  - Shelter
  - Shelter Cymru
  - Youth Access
- 2.2 We define the term *advice* broadly. It is largely concerned with the provision of help to individuals and groups in connection with areas of law which most affect disadvantaged people, e.g. benefits, debt, housing, immigration, community care, education and employment law (now commonly referred to as social welfare law). It also involves helping people to gain access to services.
- 2.3 The term *advice* covers a range of activities, including:
- providing information;
  - providing advice;
  - negotiating on behalf of clients;
  - representing clients in courts and tribunals.
- 2.4 Advice services frequently undertake other activities connected with or arising from advice giving, including:
- social policy work and campaigning for reform of the law or improvements in services;
  - working with other community organisations to develop local services;
  - legal education;
  - providing mediation services;

- providing counselling services.
- 2.5 Our members represent over 2,000 organisations which provide advice services. The advice sector is very diverse – members range between small volunteer-led community organisations and specialist national charities.
- 2.6 ASA's aims are to:
- champion the development of high quality advice services;
  - ensure that people are not denied access to such services on account of lack of means, discrimination or other disadvantage;
  - encourage co-operation between organisations providing such services;
  - provide a forum for the discussion of issues of common interest or concern to advice organisations.
- 2.7 ASA undertakes policy and development work in agreed areas on behalf our members. Such work focuses on issues relating to:
- the role of advice provision and its relationship to other information and legal services;
  - planning and funding of advice services;
  - methods of delivering advice services;
  - quality and standards of advice giving;
  - the impact and outcomes of advice services;
  - relations between different advice providers.
- 2.8 This response has been drafted following discussion and consultation with our members. However, it may not reflect our members' views in their entirety and we are aware that some members will submit their own response.

### **3 What we fund (Q1)**

*Q1A. What have been the best things about the work of:*

*Community Fund*

- 3.1 The Community Fund (CF) is a substantial and important funder of the UK advice sector. We understand that, over the lifetime of the CF, some 15% of its funding has been distributed to advice services, broadly defined.
- 3.2 We believe that this level of funding reflects the importance of advice services in achieving many of the CF priorities in tackling disadvantage and promoting inclusion. Many advice services rely on volunteer contributions and thereby enhance community involvement. Further, through training programmes such as Citizens Advice volunteer training programme and adviceUK's "learning to advise" scheme, volunteers develop skills which enable their retention and can lead to paid employment – in the advice sector or elsewhere.
- 3.3 This level of funding of the advice sector has also significantly enhanced our contribution to the government's Community Legal Services initiative to improve the quality and strategic planning of advice services. By funding generalist and community-based advice, which is often essential to making services accessible to the most disadvantaged, the CF has added value to Legal Services Commission funding.

- 3.4 The CF has also acknowledged the importance of infrastructure support for small and medium sized voluntary organisations providing advice, and has been an important funder of several ASA members.
- 3.5 Using Law Centres as an example, CF funding has:
- enabled the Law Centres Federation to establish a website and provide computers, email and internet access to every Law Centre;
  - supported an LCF development programme, resulting in the establishment of seven new Law Centres, including innovative projects such as the second tier Surrey Law Centre;
  - supported the Wandsworth Law Centre Employment Tribunal Project to provide employment advice and representation to clients across most of South West London;
  - provided infrastructure funding for Enfield Law Centre, which enabled the first Law Centre for twenty years to come into being.
- 3.6 Similarly, Citizens Advice and its members have been important beneficiaries of lottery support, receiving over £80 million from the CF, New Opportunities Fund and Awards for All. A total of 733 CABx have received funding in the last nine years, mainly for:
- training and development of staff, especially volunteers;
  - capacity building and infrastructure;
  - improving access to advice, especially for hard to reach groups in the community;
  - specialist advice.
- 3.7 ASA itself has received funding from the CF to support its policy and development role. This support has, amongst other things, enabled ASA to:
- contribute to the debate about the future of the Community Legal Service through its reports and research on the impact of CLS Partnerships on advice agencies;
  - organise a high profile national conference, jointly with the Legal Action Group, about the future of the Community Legal Service;
  - publish a ground-breaking report about the use of peer review in improving the quality of advice;
  - develop thinking within the sector about an outcome based approach;
  - represent the views of the sector to the government in a wide range of fora.

*The New Opportunities Fund*

- 3.8 The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) priorities have meant that the advice sector as a whole has not benefited significantly from this funding stream. However, two important and innovative projects received funding under the digitisation programme - Advicenow (an ASA project) and Multikulti, both aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of web based legal information. Both of these projects have proved to be successful and sustainable, and now attract funding from the Legal Services Commission, Department of Constitutional Affairs and other bodies.
- 3.9 In addition, several CABx have been involved in partnership projects under the NOF Healthy Living Centre and Palliative Care programmes.

*Q1B. What did you think was less successful about the work of:*

### *The Community Fund*

- 3.10 As stated earlier, we consider that the open programme approach of the CF has been extremely important for the advice sector and would wish the BLF to continue to allocate a significant proportion of its funding in this way.
- 3.11 However, we believe that this approach to funding has led to some missed opportunities in making a longer-term and strategic impact on the advice sector – particularly in the area of capacity building at network level, although there have been success stories in this area, e.g. *CASE*, a computerised case management system for CABx developed by Citizens Advice with CF funding.
- 3.12 In particular, the three-year grant limit has frustrated some important projects. For example, the LCF IT project referred to in paragraph 3.5 above would definitely have benefited from longer term funding. The project ran successfully for two years but then stalled due to lack of expertise and capacity at the LCF.
- 3.13 It also needs to be recognised that some projects, e.g. preventative work around financial literacy, inherently take time to begin to produce benefits for disadvantaged people.

### *The New Opportunities Fund*

- 3.14 As stated earlier, the advice sector was largely excluded from most NOF programmes because of the priorities set for the scheme. This is regrettable, as the sector has an important role in tackling disadvantage and in working with hard to reach groups (see below).

## **4 Funding for the voluntary and community sector (Q2)**

### *How should we prioritise funding for the voluntary and community sector?*

- 4.1 We welcome the Government's proposal that open programmes within broad parameters will continue. For the advice sector, this has been an important feature of the Community Fund, and has encouraged innovation in service delivery and a commitment to making our services more accessible. It has enabled organisations to apply for funding to meet their priorities.
- 4.2 For example, Hackney Community Law Centre and Tower Hamlets Law Centre received CF funding for capacity building. Hackney employed both a manager, thereby releasing staff from management duties to concentrate on developing the Centre's contracting arrangements with the Legal Services Commission, and a volunteer co-ordinator to develop the Centre's pro bono activities. Similarly, Tower Hamlets Law Centre employed a co-ordinator.
- 4.3 We agree that the overall aim of BLF funding should be to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged. In our view, the BLF will need to prioritise on the basis of a combination of particular groups, geographical areas and themes.
- 4.4 Further, priorities will need to be linked to the desired outcomes. We note the proposed "themes, outcomes and priorities" published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and have no doubt that the advice sector can and does make a significant contribution to the themes and outcomes outlined.
- 4.5 However, we hope that in setting priorities that the BLF acknowledges that the advice sector works with some of the most disadvantaged people in the country. It is

often the case that advice needs must be met *before* such people can participate in their communities or access their local environment.

- 4.6 For example, there is an established link between low income, homelessness and poor diet. Therefore, ensuring that people know about the benefits to which they are entitled and have access to secure housing is a pre-requisite for making healthier eating choices. Similarly, an understanding of and compliance with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are fundamental to ensuring that disabled people can be actively involved in their communities.
- 4.7 In relation to the “healthier eating choices” outcome, we urge the BLF to take into account the link between mental ill health and the ability to make healthy life choices. The advice sector has an important role in preventing problems, for example there is a link between indebtedness and depression – with debt advice having an important role here.
- 4.8 Further, we suggest that any priorities set will need to be flexible so that funding can respond to changing circumstances e.g. the impact of the Foot & Mouth outbreak on rural economies and the large redundancies that occurred at Heathrow Airport following the 9/11 terrorism attack. Many factors can affect the need for advice within a relatively short timescale, e.g. international events (for example war, expansion of EU); national economic factors (for example increasing interest rates, the closing down of factories); and changes in the law.
- 4.9 We consider that the BLF will need to consider the different levels at which a difference can be made. We welcome the DCMS’ position paper, dated August 2004, which acknowledges the importance of capacity-building, infrastructure and social enterprise. As stated earlier, the Community Fund has enabled network organisation to provide support to local-based community groups in relation to the quality of their advice and their capacity to secure funding for work. It has also enabled ASA and its members to effectively represent the views of the advice sector to policy makers.

*What size of grants do you think we should award?*

- 4.10 In our view, there is a need for different grant sizes. Whilst the CF grants to advice organisations range between £730 and over £800,000, it is clear that over 93% of the grants made were between £25,000 and £500,000 with 62% of grants being between £100,000 and £500,000. We therefore consider that it is very important that the Big Lottery Fund has the flexibility to make grants that are appropriate to the projects being funded.

## **5 Funding for health, education and the environment (Q3)**

- 5.1 We welcome the DCMS position paper which indicates that the final decisions on programmes will be the responsibility of the Big Lottery Fund and that there will be a greatly reduced level of government prescription.
- 5.2 Having said this, we consider that the advice sector has much to offer in support of desired outcomes in health, education and, perhaps, environment. A recent evaluation by the University of Wales – Bangor<sup>1</sup> illustrates the contribution to health services of “the provision of locally planned and flexible advice services to individual

---

<sup>1</sup> Better Advice, Better Health, Final Evaluation Report by the University of Wales, March 2004. This projects relates to a joint Citizens Advice Cymru and National Assembly Government project.

clients referred by primary health care team members or self-referrals within primary health care settings” in Wales.

- 5.3 To take just three examples of the importance of providing advice in a health setting, the lottery has funded the Combined Hospitals CAB in Salford to run a project giving advice to people with brain and spinal injuries, Camden and Islington CABx to provide a home-visiting service and referral service for the terminally ill, and Swansea CAB to run an outreach service to four health centres and a hospital.
- 5.4 Similarly, there is a growing interest in supporting citizenship education. For example, three Young Community Legal Service Partnerships in the South East are providing legal education in schools.

## **6 Transformational funding (Q4)**

*Do you have any suggestions about the Big Lottery Fund's transformational programmes?*

- 6.1 We agree with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations that the transformational funding stream should not divert attention from the BLF's main function.

## **7 Specialist programmes (Q5)**

*How could we prioritise our research funding in future?*

- 7.1 It would be useful for funding to be allocated to funding research into the outcomes of advice and also into the best ways of making advice accessible to the most disadvantaged.

*How could we prioritise our international funding in future?*

- 7.2 UK advice networks have already contributed to international development schemes for example in countries such as China (attending conferences about legal aid), Caribbean (a project to set up advice agencies) and especially Eastern Europe (supporting the development of advice agencies in several countries). We consider that this is important work and we would welcome the opportunity to apply for funding to develop and maintain these international links.

*Do you have any other suggestions about the Big Lottery Fund's specialist programmes?*

- 7.3 The CF has enabled a few advice agencies to purchase premises, and similar opportunities should be afforded by the BLF

*What are the benefits to the Big Lottery Fund communities and stakeholder of having a regional structure?*

- 7.4 ASA considers that a regional structure is the most appropriate way to fund organisations, which work on a regional or local level. It means that such agencies have closer links with the funder and this enhances flexibility and responsiveness.
- 7.5 However, we believe that it is essential for there to be a national office(s) to ensure that support for national service provision and infrastructure is strategic and co-

ordinated. ASA and most of its member networks receive only limited government support for these functions.

## **8 How we involve the public in our work (Q7)**

8.1 Whilst we accept that there are advantages to public involvement in the work of the BLF, we have a number of concerns.

8.2 We agree with the Culture, Media and Sport Committee that “meritorious applicants [should] not lose out to publicly popular projects” (p36, HC196-1). Public involvement should not be at the expense of unpopular causes or the overall aim of improving the lives of the disadvantaged. If the BLF is to be truly “additional” to government funding, it is important that it supports work that is not politically attractive.

8.3 We believe that this point is particularly important for advice services. Whereas, most people are frequent users of health and education services, this is not true of advice services. Many people appreciate the value and importance of advice services only when they are unfortunate enough to need them.

*Do you have any other ideas about how we might involve the public?*

8.4 It is important to acknowledge that voluntary and community groups often have an important role in reflecting the views and needs of their members and users. This is particularly important in situations where users are stigmatised or frightened. Advice services often work with people who feel disempowered and feel unable to speak for themselves.

*How could we ensure that our grant-making committees have credibility in the communities they serve?*

8.5 We consider that it is important that there are transparent processes and priorities. We also believe that the BLF must be robust in defence of its decisions. Credibility is damaged when external pressure allowed to influence justified decision.

## **9 How we reach the hard to reach (Q8)**

9.1 It is important to note that many organisations within the advice sector have been set up by and/or work with people who are considered to be “hard to reach” by many government services. The CF has provided significant support for such projects, for example:

- two projects run by Bridgnorth CAB, targeted at people in rural areas and carers and their families respectively;
- High Wycombe CAB’s service to people from the Mirpuri region of Pakistan, where a very specific dialect is spoken.

9.2 Youth Access has undertaken pioneering work to draw public attention to the specific advice needs of young people. Enfield Law Centre’s Streetlegal project, based on a model for advice devised by Youth Access and the Law Centres Federation, provides an outreach casework service to children and young people between the ages of eight to nineteen.

9.3 Many self-help groups respond to the needs of others in similar circumstances and then develop into organisations that provide advice. The list of advice organisations

that have received CF funding over the past nine years provides countless examples of this.

- 9.4 Further, more specialist advice organisations, such as Law Centres, have long been aware of their obligations to promote equality of opportunity for decades and have been at the forefront of anti-discrimination work. Indeed, they often work with self-help and community groups to ensure that legal services are accessible to all.

*From the list below number the approaches you think are most effective*

- 9.5 We do not consider that it is appropriate for the BLF to work directly with disadvantaged groups or individuals. Such work could compromise the transparency of the grant-making processes.

- 9.6 However, we think that it is important that the BLF supports organisations which provide services to those who are hard to reach. Further, the BLF should support infrastructure organisations that demonstrate a commitment and ability to work with hard to reach groups. In London, the LCF has been working with a group of deaf and blind representatives to improve access to advice. It has found that while there is provision for help in relation to discrimination in employment and access to goods and services, there is a shortage of advice in relation to “traditional” social welfare law areas such as debt, housing and immigration.

*Do you have any other suggestions about how we could promote equality of opportunity and equalities in grant-making?*

- 9.7 It is essential that the priorities set by the BLF reflect the concerns and different needs of the different communities in the UK.

## **10 Funding long-term change (Q9)**

*What length of funding do you believe would be the most likely to lead to long-term change?*

- 10.1 We do not consider that it is possible to specify which length of funding would lead to long-term change. We can envisage a situation where short term funding to many organisations might have a greater impact than longer term funding to a few, and vice versa.

- 10.2 Having said this, we welcome the suggestion that the BLF will consider making grants for longer than three years. This is particularly important for more strategic services.

*What other approaches could help promote long-term change?*

- 10.3 We welcome the suggestion that the BLF may consider funding innovation and supporting partnerships. In our view, one of the lessons of the Community Legal Service is that partnerships are unlikely to flourish without resources.

- 10.4 We also welcome the idea of support for organisations to develop other sources of income through trading. However, we doubt that “trading” will be a major development in the advice sector where users are very unlikely to have to means to pay for services.

*Do you have any other suggestion about how we can promote long-term change?*

- 10.5 We consider that it is important that the BLF acknowledges the importance of educational, campaigning and policy work in achieving long-term change.
- 10.6 Public awareness of their legal obligations and rights need to be raised. Further, government, policy makers and administrators benefit from feedback about the impact of their work, intended and unintended.

## 11 Helping organisations and communities develop (Q10)

*What approaches would be effective in helping organisations to develop?*

- 11.1 The advice sector has an experienced and co-ordinated infrastructure. Our members do their best to work with advice providers to improve their quality, support their development, represent their interests and views to government, and provide advice and support services such as professional indemnity insurance.
- 11.2 However, for the most part, the national infrastructure bodies (our members) have not had the strategic support they need to develop the services they want to develop. Secure, longer-term funding is required, tied to aims such as quality, work on impact and outcome, and developing relationships with government.

*Which types of support do you think we should prioritise for funding? e.g. help with fundraising, developing new groups, IT, staffing, communications, training for trustees, and networks*

- 11.3 We do not think that it is possible to decide fixed priorities for support needs. The advice sector is very diverse and different parts of the sector will have different support needs.

*How do you think we can best support the development of new and existing community groups and voluntary organisations?*

- 11.4 The BLF should fund national and regional infrastructure projects to support the development of local services. In relation to the advice sector, this will take the form of support to the networks, working alone or in partnership. For example, adviceUK, DIAL UK and Youth Access have collaborated in running the Inclusive Quality Project to help their members obtain the Community Legal Service Quality Mark.
- 11.5 Also, Awards for All type grants are very useful to get groups onto the ladder. Law Centres undertake development work with community groups, including advice on setting up projects, constitutions and management, and the law in areas such as employment and health and safety.

## 12 General questions

*Do you have any other comments or suggestions about our mission and values described on page 6 of Part One?*

- 12.1 We strongly support the focus on improving the lives of disadvantaged people and agree broadly with the values which are set out.
- 12.2 However, as stated earlier, whilst we appreciate the value of involving people in the work of the BLF, we have concerns about the need to protect causes which are unpopular with some.

12.3 We strongly support the need to build a strong evidence base for future programmes and hope that the advice sector can work the BLF to achieve this.