



Innovation Amidst Crisis

The Fore's Impact

2020-21

THE
FORE

Executive Summary

The Fore offers unrestricted grant funding and pro bono professional support to small charities and social enterprises. Our unique, venture philanthropy approach identifies organisations that are on the cusp of a step change in their social impact, and provides the resources to catalyse that transformational shift.

This report looks at the experiences of 108 grantees who took part in our monitoring and evaluation calls between summer 2020 and summer 2021, and explores how COVID-19 shaped their situation and post-grant outcomes.

The Fore's grantees are active in every sector, throughout the UK and beyond. We have found that despite the significant challenges of COVID-19, our grantees successfully used The Fore's funding to innovate and develop their programmes, expand their reach through online delivery, and unlock new revenue streams. However, this comes against a backdrop of high pressure on charity staff, and new challenges arising from interdependence with other

70%

of Fore grantees developed online programmes in response to COVID-19

43%

of grantees cited The Fore's flexible terms and speed of grant-making as a critical factor in their ability to survive and adapt

108 grantees interviewed

33%

average increase in grantees' income in the past year

40,000

new beneficiaries reached across grantees' largest programmes

organisations who have struggled during the pandemic.

This report highlights the three key themes that emerged from our conversations with grantees:

- **flexibility and sustainability through income generation** (p.4)
- **innovating and learning** (p.5)
- **organisational capacity and resilience** (p.7)

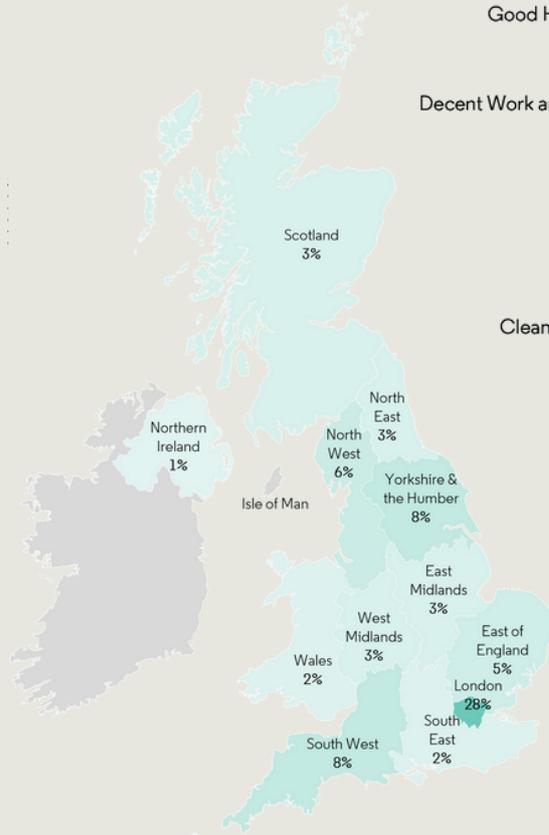
Grantees also provided insights into the benefits of the broader support offered which is an integral part of **The Fore's methodology** (p. 11)

- **pro bono** (p.12)
- **impact management and training workshops** (p.13)

We aim to be a charity led, responsive and supportive funder. We present the findings of this report alongside key learning points which will allow us to improve our offer. We hope these might also offer insight for others.

Our grantees in snapshot

Geographical distribution

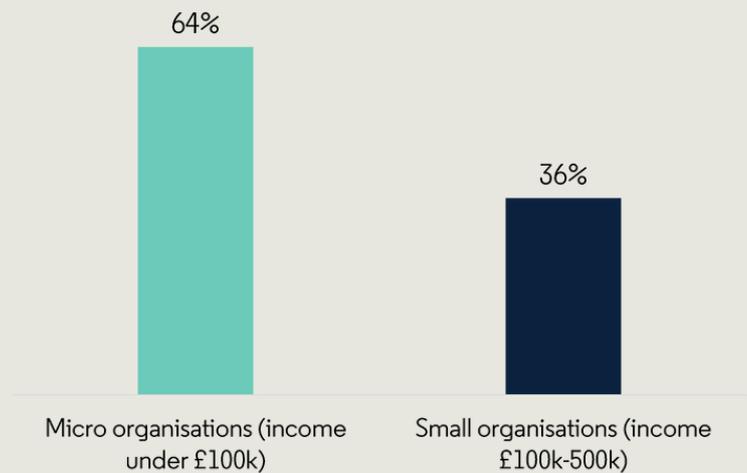


The Fore funds organisations that work throughout the UK, as well as those based in the UK that work overseas (not shown on this map).

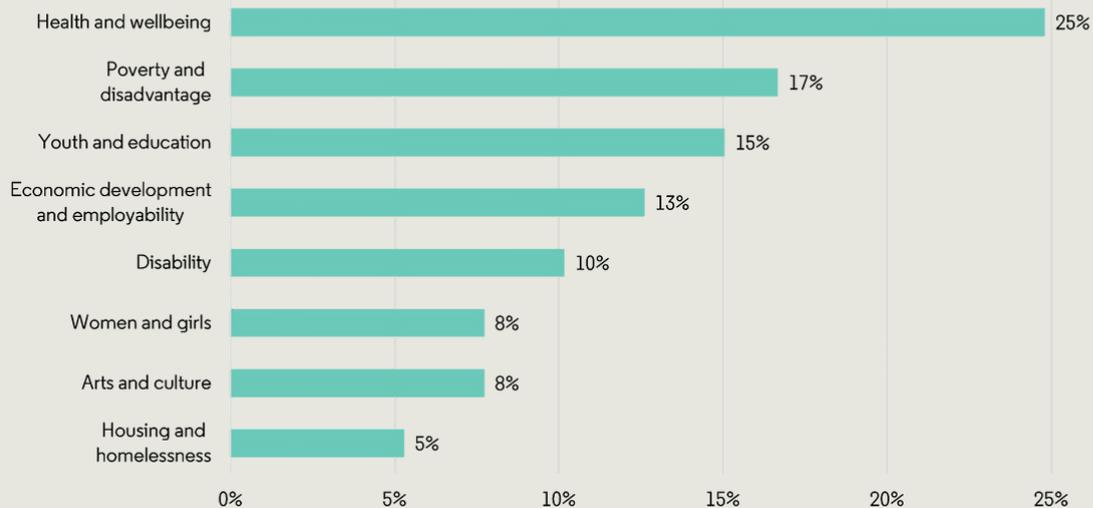
Funding by Sustainable Development Goal



Grantees by income level



Sector distribution

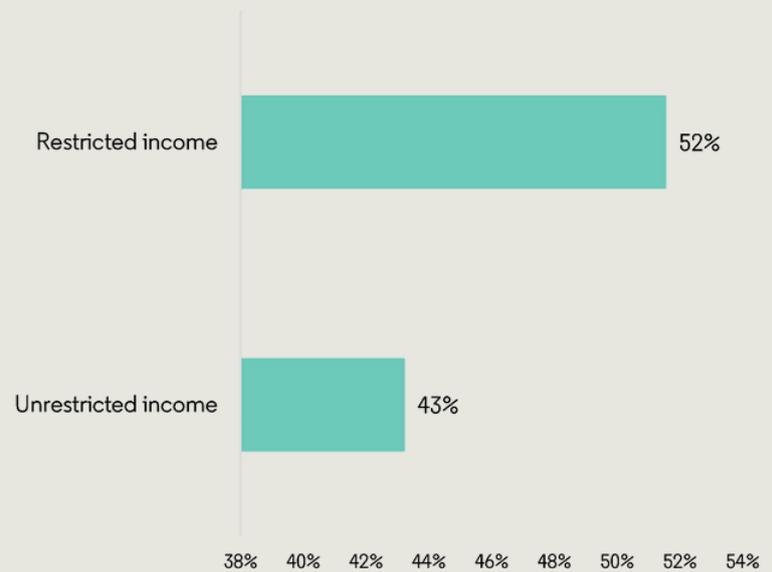


Please note: These visualisations relate only to the cohort of grantees analysed for this report, not to all Fore grantees.

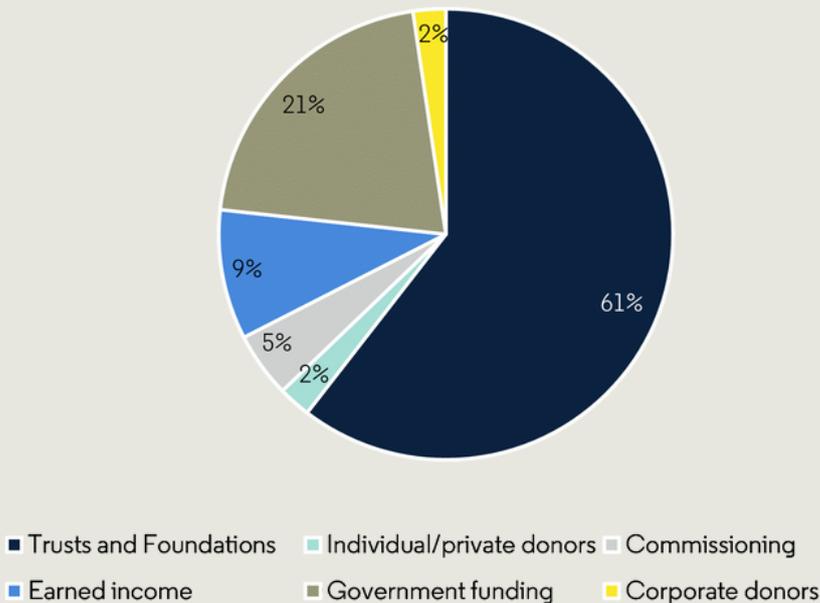
Flexibility and sustainability through income generation

Fore grantees on average demonstrated impressive income growth in the past year, despite the wind-down of COVID-19 related emergency funding. Looking at overall income, grantees saw an average increase of 33% from last year to this year. The largest growth was seen in restricted income; the majority of this income is from trusts and foundations. Whilst Trusts and Foundations remain key to income generation for our grantees, there has been a slight increase the proportion of organisations receiving government funding as their largest source, from 16% last year to 21% this year, reflecting the increased availability of local government funding pots to support the COVID-19 response.

Average change in grantees' income



Source of largest income - this year



Iconic Steps: Improving financial sustainability

Iconic Steps helps diverse and under-represented young people build careers in the creative industry. They run a series of free courses in technical and personal skills to prepare participants for entry into the industry. The demand for their services is out-stripping the supply of grant funding from corporate donors as well as trusts and foundations. As a result, IS has used The Fore grant to build its commercial arm, becoming an agency that will take its participants and provide them with employment opportunities whilst providing the organisation with operating revenue. It is now largely becoming self-funded from this income.

Many grantees have been able to leverage The Fore's unrestricted funding to diversify their sources of income, enabling them to secure unrestricted resources, increase sustainability and build confidence with funders. A key trend in income diversification this year was the pursuit of earned income, with 31% of our grantees reporting introducing this stream as a way to build unrestricted core funding that scaled with their growth.

Speed of funding is critical

More than one in six Fore grantees found their efforts to adapt their programmes and respond to increased demand during the pandemic were negatively impacted by funder inflexibility and delay. 22% of organisations reported funding shortfalls from grant inflexibility, and 17% of grantees encountered funder delays that threatened their programme delivery.

43%

said the Fore's flexible terms and speed of grant-making were critical to their survival

The length of the grant making cycle of many funders can be debilitating for charities. This was recognised to some degree in 2020 by the funding community, which extended emergency coronavirus response grants and gave them more rapidly and with fewer restrictions. However, as the emergency funding streams wound down in 2021, for some organisations this led to the bulk of their grants expiring all at once. The Fore's flexible approach of providing unrestricted grants for core costs as organisations scale played a crucial role in grantees' sustainability.

Flexibility and sustainability through income generation: Learning Point

Given that a third of our grantees have introduced income generating streams to diversify income, there is an opportunity for the Fore to better support organisations pursuing such income growth strategies, through our pro bono support network. Skilled volunteers can work with charities on business development strategies for income generating work which is aligned with their mission.

Innovating and learning

The past year has been immensely challenging, but also provided our grantees with opportunities for learning and innovation in response to evolving needs. This included coping with increased demand from beneficiaries, and the uncovering of further needs, which led organisations to shift focus, redesign or develop new programmes.

60% of grantees found that their beneficiaries' needs had changed, and that this warranted changes to their programmes. Frequently these proved to be even more effective than their previous activities. This was particularly true for organisations who provided advice, therapy, or training. In interviews, grantees frequently reported that the core benefit of their services was different than they had initially understood, or that they had learned that beneficiaries needed a related but different intervention to move forward. The Fore's unrestricted funding enabled our grantees to make rapid changes to adapt to emerging needs.

60%

of grantees found beneficiary needs had changed due to the pandemic

Meeting emerging needs: Veterans Outdoors

Veterans Outdoors provides wellbeing support for all veterans including those suffering with trauma and other mental health conditions. It runs programmes of therapeutic outdoor activities and events including horticulture courses, adventure and craft skills days. During lockdown, Veterans Outdoors also provided online therapy which was popular, but veterans still wanted the feeling of belonging that came from face-to-face conversations with other veterans during in-person activities. Staying closely within COVID guidelines, Veterans Outdoors maintained some outdoor activities where participants were able to meet people who had had similar experiences. Even as rules allowed a return to indoor in-person activities, some of these activities have become a permanent addition to Veterans Outdoors' programmes.

Efficiency through innovation: RIFT

RIFT Social Enterprise works with prisoners before their release. RIFT helps individuals resolve HMRC issues e.g. debt accrual whilst in prison, that if left unattended, might cause them to resort to crime once more upon release. They also offer a 12-month Programme for people with convictions who are interested in becoming self-employed. All their services were suspended due to prisons going into lockdown during Covid, meaning that they couldn't offer any in-cell provision. In response, RIFT created a remote version of its self-employment programme that included an accredited workbook. As a result of this shift and the ability to use staff time far more efficiently, RIFT has tripled its beneficiary population while maintaining a significant impact on recidivism: participants on their programme have only been recalled to prison 5% of the time, far below the 50% average. The Fore also connected RIFT to Social Business Trust, who are helping them to scale up their operations sustainably.

Moving online

For most organisations during this period, the most significant opportunity for innovation was the move online: 70% of Fore grantees had to find ways to engage their beneficiaries and deliver their programmes over the internet. For 83% of those, this had a net positive effect: the focus on online delivery allowed them to expand the reach of their services and deepen their engagement. The pandemic often made potential beneficiaries more willing to engage - with fewer alternative activities to occupy them, and increased comfort with online engagement, programmes found larger and more committed audiences. For example, some arts organisations gained larger online audiences, particularly if they were focused on serving a specific niche (e.g. parents of children with special needs). Regional organisations were suddenly able to work with beneficiaries from across the country, leading to dramatic growth.

70%

developed online
programmes in response
to COVID-19

83%

who moved online were
able to expand their reach
and deepen engagement

55%

said the process of rapid
adaptation deepened their
understanding of beneficiary
need

Many grantees learned more about the value of their programmes through examining beneficiaries' responses to online delivery. 60% of grantees who had shifted online found that new learnings necessitated further changes to their programmes even after lockdowns lifted. However, 30% of organisations could not shift their programmes online, due to the nature of their work and/or the characteristics of their beneficiaries. Some therapy services, skills and training programmes, and physical activity providers could not adapt their model and needed to suspend operations. The Fore grant helped many of these organisations survive the impact of lockdowns, and so far no Fore grantee has been forced to close down entirely.

Innovating and learning: Learning Point

The pandemic has embedded online ways of working into the programmes of the majority of our grantees. The Fore could facilitate ways for grantees to share knowledge on good practice and showcase the approaches of grantees who have been successful in moving online. We are exploring the value of pro-bono support for improving grantees' digital capabilities through our partnership with UBS.

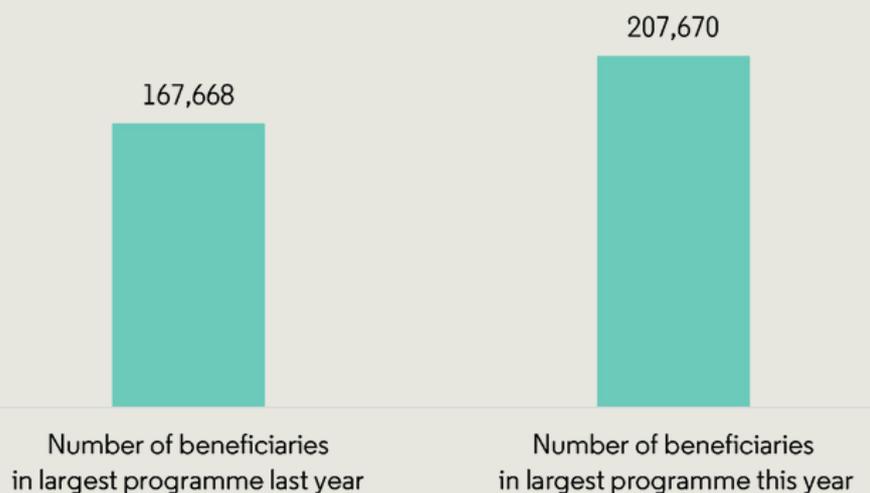
Capacity and resilience

Grantees' capacity and resilience were affected greatly by wider societal developments as the pandemic continued into 2021. Amongst successes in increasing paid staff hours and reducing 'key person risk', two key themes were the impact of other organisations closing or reducing services; and decreasing levels of wellbeing amongst charity staff.

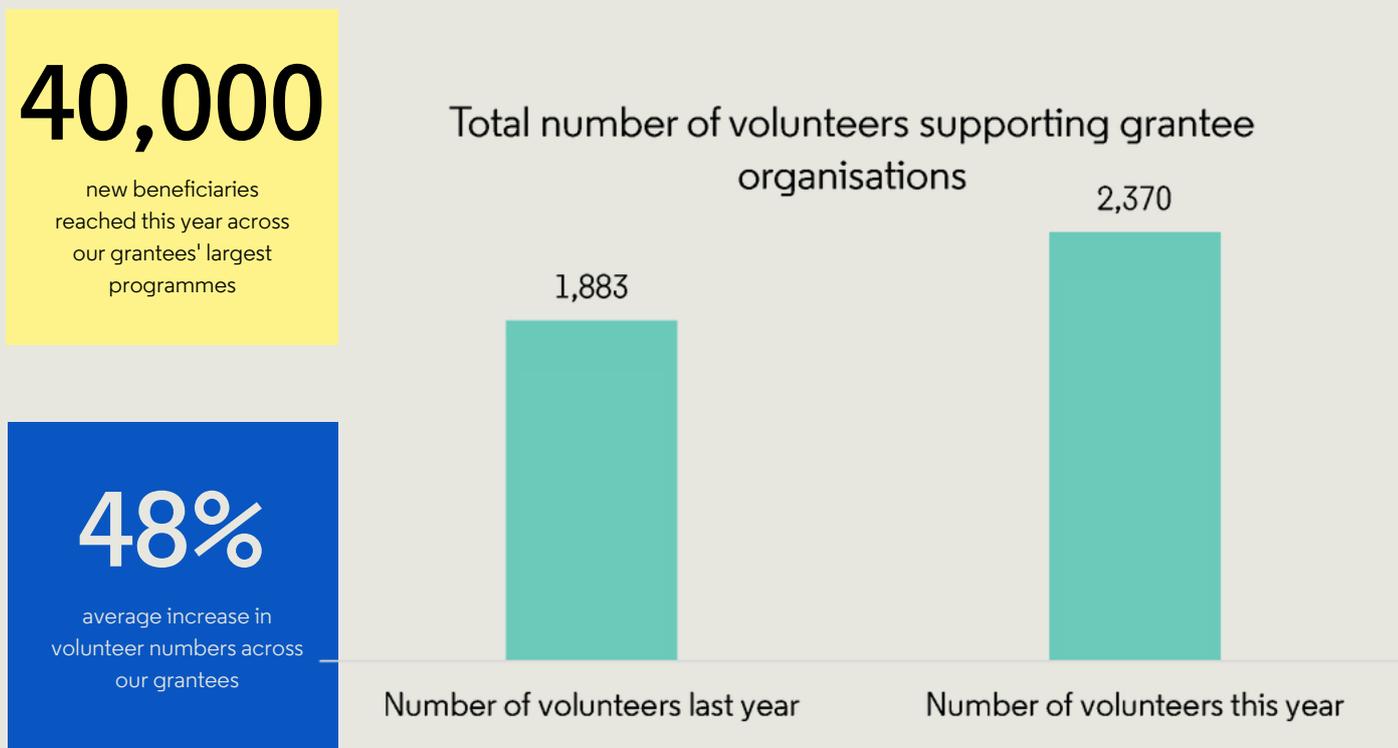
Growth in capacity

On average our grantees demonstrated impressive levels of growth across their programmes, volunteer numbers and numbers of beneficiaries during this period. We saw a 61% average change in the number of beneficiaries reached across our grantees' largest programmes. This may be explained partly by the move online, with local charities finding wider national audiences for their online work.

Number of beneficiaries in largest programmes

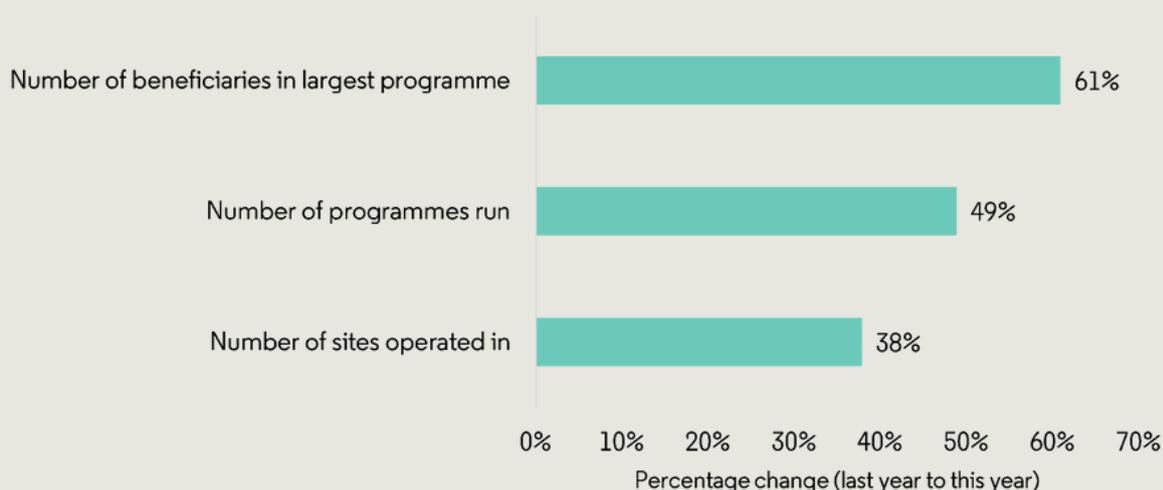


Grantees also saw their volunteer numbers increase, with an average change of 48% from last year to this year. This suggests that Fore grantees have had more success in activating volunteers than the sector at large – a report by NCVO found that only 24% of organisations reported an increase in volunteers between March 2020 and March 2021, whilst 36% reported a decline.*



The number of programmes run by our grantees also increased on average by 49%, suggesting that grantees were able to develop their delivery and introduce new services to meet emerging needs. Grantees expanded their reach geographically, operating across a total of 206 sites this year compared to 154 sites last year. The increase in online working facilitated some of this expansion, for example, one grantee who provides training in NHS trusts was able to expand to deliver within multiple new trust partner sites, thanks to the efficiencies of working online via zoom.

Expansion in grantee activities in the last year



*'Respond, Recover, Reset : the voluntary sector and COVID-19' (NCVO, Nottingham Trent University, Sheffield Hallam University, 2021)

Challenges: reliance on other organisations

One in ten Fore grantees found their programmes were negatively affected in a significant way by other organisations' challenges during the pandemic. As beneficiary needs increased and some organisations closed or became overwhelmed, a small proportion of Fore grantees adapted by expanding their services to meet needs that were previously met elsewhere.

Other organisations set aside their work altogether to replace services that had once been offered by others. Some grantees were unable to do either of these, and had to scale back the support they provided as a result.

A challenge for organisations seeking such rapid adaptations are the restrictions that many funders place on grants. Grantees singled out the Fore's grant for being flexible, and highlighted how our funding enabled them to adapt their work immediately.



Meeting urgent needs: Iraqi Association

Iraqi Association helps Iraqis living in the UK to settle and integrate. Before the pandemic IA sponsored cultural programmes and activities and connected members of the community to advice from external experts.

The crisis hit this community hard. Many members of the community began to struggle with immigration and welfare issues. Many of the advice and support providers the IA had referred people to had shut down or were at capacity already. In response, IA shut down its community and cultural programmes, and reoriented entirely to casework for debt issues, immigration, and help with welfare applications. Their beneficiary volume has gone up 50% in one year.

Adapting support for young people through the crisis: Empire Fighting Chance

Empire Fighting Chance combines non-contact boxing and intensive personal support to challenge and inspire young people facing disadvantage and adversity. They use the sport as a platform to mentor, deliver therapy and offer careers support. 78% of participants improve their mental health and 70% no longer commit anti-social or criminal acts. During lockdown the young people they supported were facing food insecurity, partially as a result of school closures. The charity pivoted to offering food parcels to these young people and their families to support their primary needs, whilst also developing an outdoor boxing venue that enabled them to return to delivering their work in a safe way.

Pressure on staff

The adaptations to programmes necessitated by the pandemic, whilst admirable, have come at a cost to the wellbeing of charity sector staff. A key theme highlighted in our research was the immense pressure on staff and increasing levels of burnout. Grantees in our cohort told us that the lack of flexibility in some funding streams contributed to the pressures they felt. Grantee leaders experiencing large increases in demand felt an acute responsibility to meet this demand, leading to capacity challenges. Despite the increases in staff capacity enabled by Fore grants, 30% of grantees reported significant strain on staff as a notable challenge in this period.

30%

of grantees reported significant strain on staff in the past year

Capacity and resilience: Learning Point

Organisations are better equipped to mitigate the challenges of staff capacity and wellbeing issues when they have access to unrestricted, core funding. The Fore will continue to leverage its platform and influence in the grant-making space to further advocate for the value of funder flexibility, and to encourage more grant makers to recognise that staff capacity and good staff wellbeing (including paid annual leave and realistic working hours) are key to organisational resilience.



This image was drawn by one of the young people supported by Comics Youth, Josh M, who created this work to focus on connection during lockdown. The picture shows his network of people that were important for him to stay in touch with, and things that helped him to cope including music and his dog.

Capacity in a time of crisis: Comics Youth

Comics Youth helps marginalised young people who have experienced poor mental health, abuse and trauma. CY uses therapeutic creativity to overcome and navigate these difficulties. During lockdown, CY transformed itself to offer wide-ranging social support for neuro-atypical, LGBTQ+ and other marginalised young people. At the same time, their staff, many of whom have lived experience of these challenges, faced significant health issues alongside the young people they work with. They rapidly expanded both the number of beneficiaries, and the depth of their work to become a responsive lifeline for these young people, but this has placed greater pressure on their leadership and staff team from a capacity and wellness standpoint.

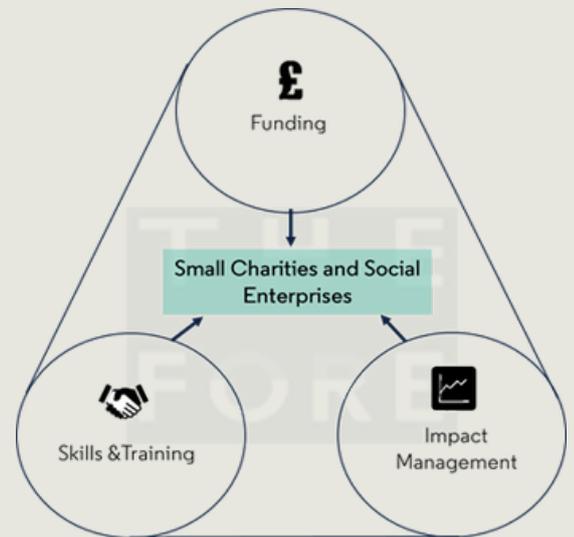
The Fore's methodology

The Fore's ambition is for a more just, sustainable and fairer society where visionary leaders from all backgrounds drive social change. We find, empower and accelerate innovative young charities and social enterprises with exceptional leadership that have the potential to transform society. We bring together the highest-potential organisations with business, donors and experts to ensure they have the networks, funds and skills they need to flourish and succeed.



Sector Stagnation

- Despite making up 90% of the sector, small charities with annual incomes under £500,000 receive less than 10% of all funding
- Funders often find it too expensive to find young organisations or too risky to support small charities over established ones
- Small charities lack access to the business expertise needed to develop their organisation and strengthen governance



Our Funding Process

Online application portal

No arduous online forms – applicants write one short pitch document in their own words.

Due diligence

Expert 'low-bono' consultants take top 30% to interview where applicants get the chance to test ideas and strategy one-to-one. All applicants guaranteed feedback.

Funding panels

Assessors represent applicants before funders, partners and our previous grantees at panel where final decisions are made. This levels the playing field for those without experienced fundraisers.

Award

Funding and access to skills and impact management support

Monitoring and Evaluation

Fore staff interview grantees via phone calls, reducing the burden of reporting on small charities

Giving Differently

The Fore challenges the status quo. Unrestricted grants of up to £30,000 over up to 3 years give small charities and social enterprises a chance to grow their sustainability, efficiency, scale and/or impact. We look for visionary leadership and the potential for our funding to transform the organisation in some way.

Our assumptions:

- Non-profits are experts in their fields
- Time writing funding applications is time away from beneficiaries



More than funding: we help grantees identify skills support needs, and source that support through our sector and corporate partner networks. Our workshops and bespoke pro bono support put charities on a path to greater growth and impact



Impact management: demonstrating impact is key to attracting funding so we provide impact measurement courses free of charge to all grantees.

Pro bono support

Alongside our flexible grants, The Fore leverages the often untapped resources of the corporate sector to provide highly skilled support to organisations on a pro bono basis.

Young People's Counselling Service: drawing on the skills of the private sector

YPCS provides psychoanalytical and integrative counselling and play therapies to children and young people through a team of experienced therapists. The team is run by a highly experienced Clinical Director who understands local needs and has the expertise to deliver services for them.

Jim Vizzini, equities trader at UBS, became an Ambassador for the charity and helped with strategic and financial development, enabling the organisation to transform from being volunteer-led to a structured, employee-led operation with strong operating systems in place. Jim has now become a trustee of YPCS, and his support was described by the organisation as 'invaluable'.

Grantees' interest in this service escalated sharply during the pandemic, leading us to launch a new online directory during the first wave in 2020 to expedite match-making between organisations and skilled volunteers. Between March 2020 and June 2021, over 120 successful matches were made.

Some of this increased demand may be attributed to the need to engage beneficiaries primarily online, with increasing requests for IT and digital marketing expertise. Going forwards, our new partnership with the IT staff at UBS (a pool of 1,800 employees) will provide grantees with support in digital transformation and online strategy.

The pandemic also saw an upswing in requests for fundraising and communications support. Requests for finance and strategic support have remained consistently high.

120+

matches made between charities and highly skilled volunteers

“Pro bono support from Rothschild & Co. has been absolutely fantastic and transformational. It enabled us to successfully pitch for a partnership with a local housing association. Without this support, is difficult to say if we would have been able to provide housing as a strategic priority.”

– Nightingales Recovery Café CIC

Skills support for scaling up: Dogs for Autism

Dogs for Autism provides assistance dogs to autistic people of any age, using a similar model to Guide Dogs for the Blind. Their dogs transform the lives of whole families, reducing anxiety and assisting social engagement through a range of bespoke tasks and unconditional friendship. They were struggling with the skyrocketing demand for their dogs and needed help to secure the resources to scale up. They were matched with two pro bono volunteers from Rothschild, who helped Dogs for Autism develop its fundraising strategy and financial model.

Impact management

In addition to pro bono support, The Fore offers all grantees the opportunity to develop their impact measurement, through attending a series of specialist courses and 1:1 consultancy sessions run by The Foundation for Social Improvement.

We also offer an 'Introduction to Impact' course which has proved very popular with micro and early-stage organisations. This support is offered free of charge, as we believe that effective impact measurement is crucial to enable small organisations to demonstrate the incredible impact they have in their communities, and in turn to use this to leverage follow on funding and larger grants after The Fore's investment.

"Impact measurement support from The Fore was instrumental in helping us develop and refine our Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and processes, and make a plan for future developments. The support has helped us develop more creative ways to capture feedback in the short-term, and improve our impact measurement processes in the longer term. "

- Jacari

Training workshops

At the Fore, we also offer a comprehensive programme of training and skills development workshops at a subsidised rate to current and former grantees and applicants. The most frequent topics addressed in our workshops were fundraising and governance, as shown by the chart below.



"Mindsum could have not existed today without The Fore grant. It was not just a one-off grant, the ongoing pro bono support, resources, and webinars by The Fore also played a role in our success. "

- Mindsum

Skills support: Learning Point

Fundraising advice is always in high demand but increasing numbers of Fore grantees are exploring new opportunities for financing such as crowdfunding, social investment and the scaling of earned income streams. We will build on our work with partners to make sure grantees have access to advice and training on new fundraising models so they can take advantage of all opportunities, regardless of prior fundraising knowledge or experience.

Appendix: The Fore's approach to monitoring and evaluation

In past years the Fore used the targets set at the beginning of the grant term as the primary success metrics for each grant, scoring progress against these on a 5 point scale. However, from March 2020 onwards we found that the constantly changing pandemic situation meant that our grantees were having to rework their programmes repeatedly to adapt to social distancing requirements and shifting beneficiary needs. Targets that normally provided a useful yardstick for impact measurement seemed obsolete soon after they were made.

For the grants extending through the period of the pandemic that we have looked at for this report, we have instead analysed qualitative data collected from 108 grantees who participated in the Fore's monitoring and evaluation conversations between Summer 2020 and Summer 2021, to learn about the challenges the crisis brought, the adaptations grantees made to their programmes, and the results they were able to achieve. For the quantitative data on grantees' income growth, programmes, volunteers and beneficiaries, we worked with survey responses from grantees. 45 out of 57 grantees surveyed responded (79% response rate). Outliers were excluded from the income data before analysis.

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