



## NAVCA Member Experience of the Community Recovery Fund – Autumn 2024

16 January 2025

### Introduction

The Community Recovery Fund was released by MHCLG on 18 September 2024 to eligible local authorities – those that experienced extensive racist rioting and disorder over the summer.

Each local authority received a flat rate of £600,000, 85% of which was for resource spending, and 15% capital, to be spent by 31 March 2025. The remainder, up to £3 million was made available to Sefton Council in recognition of the additional recovery work required. Local authorities were able to decide where and how to allocate the money.

Full details available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-recovery-fund-guidance/community-recovery-fund-guidance>

Funding was provided for the rebuilding required for physical infrastructure; and beginning work to repair fractured communities and bring people back together. This was to respond to the violent disorder that took place in July and August 2024, funding could be used in connection with:

- i. Immediate action to safeguard life or property
- ii. To prevent suffering or severe inconvenience
- iii. To reduce the risk of further disorder in the future
- iv. To rebuild social trust and promote cohesion between communities

The response of local authorities and their engagement with the VCFSE sector and local infrastructure organisations [LIOs] differed in different council areas. This resulted in good practice in partnership working and collaboration in some areas, but also examples of poor practice in others.

NAVCA has compiled member experience to demonstrate how providing straightforward guidance to local authorities could improve the targeting and effectiveness of future schemes for communities allocated via local authorities.

## Local Implementation

NAVCA member LIOs are present in all local authority areas eligible for the Fund apart from two.

Broad and flexible schemes like this that allow local needs to be met, priorities identified and responded to are very welcome. Local decision making in these circumstances is very important. The need to rebuild trust with and within targeted communities, and to help bring people back together really needs the direct involvement of affected communities and groups. This needs to sit alongside and complement any rebuilding or repair of physical infrastructure.

To have the most impact, this dual approach requires affected communities to be front and centre of consultation and decision making on how the allocated funds are used.

## Good Practice

A council in a large northern city planned an evidence-led and targeted approach rather than running an open grant process, which risked introducing competition. This in part recognised the particular issues faced following earlier community unrest. The LIO on behalf of a network of larger community organisations, worked on a proposal to secure around £75k of funding for community anchor organisations to hold and distribute as micro-grants within their local places, to support community level activities that bring people together from within and across communities. The council have worked on a list of targeted grant recipients from the VCFSE and other relevant sectors and reserved £200k for council work and activities.

A council in the Midlands convened a Strategic Board to decide how the funds would be spent. The board had mixed membership drawn from statutory, business, VCFSE and community partners with bi-weekly meetings to develop a strategy and plan the use of resources.

In other areas local authorities have convened groups including the VCFSE sector and local community groups to help inform funding decisions. In a seaside town, after the costs of the clean-up had been covered, the fund supported community based activities including a listening event, some community cohesion events and youth specific work. VCFSE were invited to bid for funding.

The positive learning points are:

- the avoidance of unintended competition by using an evidence led or strategy led approach to planning and decision making
- small/micro sums of money made available directly to communities to address one of the core aims of the fund, to bring people back together
- grant support for rebuilding community cohesion and youth work
- VCFSE organisations invited to submit funding applications, avoiding competition [though there is a risk of some groups being excluded with this approach]

- open public consultation event to listen directly to affected communities, and a number of other consultations and workshops
- cross-sectoral consultation with community, VCFSE, statutory and business stakeholders
- direct consultation with key community anchor organisations closest to communities and so with extensive knowledge of the needs and concerns.

### Poor Practice

Poorer practices by local authorities risk potentially limiting the impact of the fund. The examples below have been anonymised.

- Open, purely competitive application processes that mitigate against collaboration between VCFSE and other organisations / businesses and limit the ability of VCFSE organisations from excluded communities to participate.
- Short notice deadlines [in one example two weeks] to submit applications resulting in a high level of competition between eligible VCFSE organisations.
- The majority of funds c.£500K or more kept by the council, with limited amounts spent on affected communities or bringing people back together.
- Limited consultation with affected communities or partners on the use and allocation of funds by the local authority.
- No engagement with VCFSE sector or affected communities. Council decisions on spending taken without external consultation.

### Recommendations for Future Schemes

NAVCA recommends that when constructing similar schemes in the future Government provides guidance to local authorities to help build on good practice in consultation with and decision making by affected communities.

1. Create an expectation that councils consult widely, openly and to actively listen to relevant communities and community groups. Ensure that the means of decision-making on how funding is allocated and spent is open and transparent.
2. Use an evidence or strategy led approach to forming a local response, bringing together evidence from community representatives, VCFSE sector, health, police and other statutory partners.
3. Avoid creating short notice and/or competitive rounds of funding – use the opportunity to foster collaboration between different organisations and sectors as part of the response. This takes more time, but it is likely that funding will be well used as a result.
4. Ask repeatedly who is missing or excluded from the process and why, and take the steps needed for inclusion. Seek specialist support and advice to do this, particularly in reaching marginalised communities or those furthest from public services.
5. Wherever possible, make use of micro or small grants directly to grassroots community groups.
6. Partner with local organisations that are able to convene the VCFSE sector in all its diversity and who work with people furthest from public services, such as community anchor organisations or local infrastructure organisations.