

INVESTING FOR INCLUSION

- AN AGENDA FOR ACTION



This statement describes the current state of voluntary and community organisations in the South West, the values which underpin their work, what they can offer to the people of the region and the actions which should be taken by funders and investors to enable this to happen.

It has been produced by South West Forum following consultation with voluntary and community organisations within the region.

The statement seeks to reflect the aspirations of voluntary and community organisations and to challenge investors and funders to implement and move beyond what has already been agreed in the national, regional and local Compacts.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN THE SOUTH WEST

It is estimated that the region has at least 52,000 voluntary and community organisations including over 17,500 general charities, the third highest of any English region and the highest number per head of population, at 4.3 per 1000, of all English regions. General charities in the region employ about 54,000 paid staff.

VALUES AND MISSION

Voluntary and community organisations:

- ▶ are set up by voluntary initiative to fulfil social purposes
- ▶ are not set up by statute and are not part of the apparatus of the state
- ▶ are self governing and independent
- ▶ do not operate for personal gain or distribute profits to owners or shareholders
- ▶ help people control the decisions which affect their lives and encourage initiative, self-help and cooperation so that everyone can play a full part in society
- ▶ seek to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity and is treated fairly and with dignity
- ▶ help people make their voices heard so that they can secure their rights and access the services they need
- ▶ work to change the conditions which blight our society such as poverty, inequality and discrimination
- ▶ try to be accountable to their members and the communities they serve and involve users of their services in shaping, influencing and delivering services
- ▶ enable volunteers and paid staff to find fulfilment in the work they do in that they are inspired by the values which drive it and have the opportunity to associate with people who share these values
- ▶ ensure their work improves the quality of life for all

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE – FURTHER HELP AND INFORMATION

The following sources have been used in preparing this statement and will help those seeking to adopt best practice:

- Improving financial relationships with the third sector: Guidance to funders and purchasers, HM Treasury May 2006 www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk
- South West Regional Compact 2004, (available from South West Forum, SWRDA and GOSW) www.southwestforum.org.uk
- Funding and Procurement. Compact Code of Good Practice. NCVO 2005 www.thecomcompact.org.uk
- Funders Footprints Impressions from the Voluntary and Community Sector of funding and its delivery. South West Foundation 2006 www.southwestfoundation.org.uk
- Mind the gap: A funders guide to full cost recovery. Big Lottery Fund and ACEVO 2006 www.acevo.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/FCRfundersmanual.pdf
- Full cost recovery website hosted by ACEVO www.fullcostrecovery.org.uk

BETTER INVESTMENT, IMPROVED FUNDING

It is recognised that there is much good practice amongst the wide range of funders operating in the region. However there is also considerable room for improvement. The following key areas have been identified.

CLARITY AND COMMUNICATION – Funders should communicate clearly their criteria and funding process, and make this information easily available.

SHORT TERM FUNDING – The length of funding agreements should be tied to the length of time required to achieve the objectives. As a general rule funding agreements should be for a minimum three year period except where short term projects are concerned.

BREAKS IN FUNDING – Breaks in funding of an ongoing activity should be avoided at all costs. This requires funders to plan well ahead and ensure that funded organisations have appropriate notice of changes.

FULL COST RECOVERY – Funding should cover the entire cost of providing a service including appropriate management and overhead costs.

TIMING – Payments should be made on time and in advance. Funders should keep to timetable when introducing new programmes.

TRUST – Funders should not impose unduly onerous reporting requirements on recipients. Reporting and monitoring arrangements should be proportionate to the funding involved.

RISKS OF SEEKING INNOVATION – Funders should not allow their desire to fund new and innovative projects detract from the importance of maintaining existing successful and needed activities.

SMALL ORGANISATIONS – Funders should not allow their wish to reduce risks to lead them to only funding larger or more established organisations. Funders should be prepared to accept that some funded activities may be unsuccessful or achieve unexpected outcomes.

DISCRIMINATION – Funders should make decisions on the basis of need and should not allow themselves to discriminate against groups perceived as unworthy or unpopular.

INFRASTRUCTURE – Funders should recognise the need to fund infrastructure services providing funding advice, capacity building and development support to front line organisations.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE SOUTH WEST

The South West region faces a number of challenges. These include a shortage of affordable housing, relatively low wages, poor transport infrastructure, persistent pockets of deprivation, young people leaving, and an overall increase in population.

In order to meet these challenges the South West Regional Assembly has produced an integrated regional strategy "Just Connect" which has five key aims.

- ▶ To harness the benefits of population growth and to manage the implications of population change
- ▶ To enhance our economic prosperity and quality of employment opportunity
- ▶ To make sure that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society
- ▶ To address deprivation and disadvantage to reduce significant intraregional inequalities
- ▶ To enhance our distinctive environments and the quality and diversity of our cultural life

Voluntary and community organisations contribute to the achievement of these aims in many ways. Housing associations have overtaken local authorities as the main providers of social housing within the region yet there is still a massive waiting list. Numerous organisations supply services for older people such as transport, day centres and domiciliary support. Similarly VCOs provide services for young people giving training and routes into employment.

VCOs such as conservation groups and wildlife trusts work to enhance and conserve our environment while community waste groups tackle issues around excessive waste production and recycling of resources. Other VCOs work with equalities, arts and cultural groups to enhance the quality and diversity of culture within the region.

VCOs give high priority to developing a skilled workforce and good employment practice and have also developed a regional Workforce Development Plan for the sector, which identifies specific priorities for development.

VCOs undertake a wide range of activities aimed at reducing inequalities, including information and advice services, and other forms of practical support for disadvantaged communities and individuals.

VCOs have pioneered work with socially excluded and discriminated against groups within society. In particular VCOs have been set up by and for these groups and have led the way in fighting for a better deal.

However in all these areas of work voluntary and community organisations find it difficult to achieve their full potential to enhance the quality of life in the South West due to difficulties in obtaining appropriate funding and achieving financial stability.

MAY 2007 – WWW.SOUTHWESTFORUM.ORG.UK