



RUNNYMEDE TRUST CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO:

Cohesion Guidance for Funders (Communities and Local Government)

26 May 2008

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The Runnymede Trust welcomes this opportunity to respond to the *Cohesion Guidance for Funders* consultation.

Runnymede is an independent action research and social policy charity focused on equality and justice, offering timely, practical and strategic thinking on realizing the full potential of cultural diversity in Britain. Runnymede's core mandate since inception has been to challenge racial discrimination, to influence anti-racist legislation and to promote the inclusion of Black and minority ethnic people and communities in all areas of life in Britain and the rest of Europe. We fulfil our mandate by providing information, research and advice to promote the value of diversity in all of our communities and to encourage the development of a successful multi-ethnic society – “a society where citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talents, lead fulfilling lives and accept collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging” (from the Runnymede report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*).

Having read the consultation with great care, we have decided not to respond to the individual questions, but rather discuss the underlying assumptions guiding the proposals. This is because we are very concerned about where the ‘single-group funding’ discourse is heading, and the policy implications it may have. The questions raised in the consultation document, it seems to us, are not the right questions to ask.

Is Diversity or Inequality the Biggest Threat to Cohesion?

We particularly welcome the intention to include funders in delivering community cohesion and hope this leads to better distribution of resources for charitable aims. Hazel Blears' statements that she is “aware of concerns raised about this recommendation” and that “outcome should not be the loss of services targeting particular communities” (p.5) are commendable. It was therefore with some dismay to us that, when speaking at the Connecting Communities Plus conference on 21 May 2008, the Secretary of State

for Communities stated that she ‘believes’ that the proposal to restrict single groups funding to only exceptional circumstances is the right way to achieve cohesion, evidence for which is lacking, as we point out through this consultation response. Indeed, a close reading of the consultation document suggests to us that it is the intention of this draft guidance to severely restrict funding to single groups and it also has the effect of discrediting the impact of the work these groups have had on community cohesion and integration.

We find this extremely alarming, as the negative repercussions of such a position could be severe. The guidance, as it stands, could have an impact on all of Britain’s disadvantaged groups, but we are particularly concerned about the impact on race equality. Of the five guiding principles, only one is concerned with inequality. This is remarkable considering the CLG’s own analysis of the Citizenship Survey which concludes that disadvantage is a stronger negative predictor of cohesion than diversity. As the authors argue:

...social interactions improve perceptions of a neighbourhood, no matter what its economic status or racial composition, but these interactions are far less frequent in poorer neighbourhoods. While there is no deficiency of social capital networks in diverse communities, there is a shortage of them in the economically disadvantaged ones.¹

The conclusion, then, is that **disadvantage** and **inequality** are the greatest threat to community cohesion, not diversity. Nonetheless, the last four principles – which are obviously targeting diversity and not inequality – are framed in such a way that they largely override the first principle of equality. As a result, organizations working with “particular groups to tackle evidenced need amongst particular communities or groups experiencing inequalities” (first principle) should only receive funding if they demonstrate ‘bridging’ activities, since “all groups need to consider how they can promote cohesion and integration as well as meeting the diverse needs of the community” (second principle). This is, in essence, where we most strongly object to the proposals set out in the consultation. We believe that the government has not only got its priorities back-to-front, but by focusing on diversity rather than inequality, it has fundamentally misunderstood what constitutes cohesive communities.

The question of inequality and disadvantage is central to the issue of single group funding. Critics discuss the issue of community funding and organizations in the context of terms such as ‘ghettoization’, ‘sectarianism’, ‘segregation’ and ‘Balkanization’. The consultation does not engage in such language, but is clearly responding to these voices. Not only do such words invoke normatively irresponsible comparisons between unjust discrimination against disadvantaged groups and single-group funding, but they also fail to recognize the benefits we all receive when disadvantaged groups participate as equals in our society. Single-group funding for some minority-ethnic groups contributes directly to community cohesion and integration, but it also encourages individuals to participate in wider society. This, in turn, benefits all of us by improving the quality of public institutions and debate in Britain. It is good for all of us when our institutions respond to the needs of all citizens and when people from all backgrounds participate. If certain groups are unable for whatever reason to access opportunities for participation in public services more generally, we need to think of ways to enable them to do so.

Runnymede’s Community Studies: The Case for Single-Group Funding²

Runnymede’s ongoing Community Studies programme has provided a number of examples of how single-group funding contributes to community cohesion. The purpose of the Community Studies programme is to explore the changing nature of diversity in Britain, focusing on communities, their

¹ James Laurence and Anthony Heath (2008) *Predictors of Community Cohesion: Multi-Level Modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey*. London: CLG.

² Runnymede’s Community Studies can be downloaded at:
<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/communityStudies.html>

demography, links to civil society, and key political and social issues. One of the most important findings is that these groups use community organizations and services because they do not have the confidence or knowledge of how to engage with major British social institutions. Single-group organizations are in many ways a gateway for people who may either lack the confidence, language skills or knowledge of how to activate some of the basics of UK life, from opening a bank account to getting a driver's licence, from accessing English-language training to passing a citizenship test.

In the Francophone Cameroonian study, a number of interviewees expressed a feeling of being forgotten and neglected by mainstream British society, which had the consequence of a lack of service provision that take into account the distinct problems of Francophone Africans. The lack of information – or more accurately, the barriers that language and understanding of the British system place on accessing information – for many of the groups covered by the Community Studies meant that they would rely on community organizations for advice – where available. However, exactly because of the invisibility and voicelessness of these smaller ethnic minority groups, it is hard for organizations to prove to potential funders that there is a need for their services.

Organizations like us, we don't even have money. Because the community is not having the voice, they're not heard. So sometimes you find it difficult to justify the people you're working with. And because they're not there, they're not visible, you cannot claim money, and say, 'OK, I'm asking for money for these people.' Sometimes they will ask you, 'How many people do you have?' Even when you come with the statistics, people will not believe you. If I tell you that in Enfield alone, there are hundreds of Cameroonians living in Enfield alone, sometimes people will not believe. *Alain, Francophone Cameroonian study*

We're quiet, we don't make a lot of noise. And that is a disadvantage, that people in the community don't make themselves known to the wider society, so the funders don't think there is a need. *Mr. Le, Vietnamese study*

The Vietnamese are very shy – or how can I put it – frightened of everything and everyone. Maybe, the political system in Vietnam makes them like that. They're so weak, not very confident, and not there to do anything like complain in writing. Maybe because they're illiterate and they can't put it in writing, but also they are unable to confirm whatever they complain in writing. It's very difficult for you to advocate for them because you don't have any proof in writing to supply. Because of that, maybe the officer listening to their complaint can't do anything without proof to show. That is one of the difficulties the Vietnamese community still faces. *Informant, Vietnamese study*

To call such funding 'separatist' is then to miss the key reasons why black and minority ethnic people engage in those institutions. By building confidence, many individuals are able to access wider social and political institutions and so engage fully in our society. That is to say, interaction within community spaces provides an excellent stepping-stone towards community cohesion and integration. None of our studies have indicated that any of the recent migrant groups engage only in their own community organizations and use them to insulate themselves from the rest of British society. Indeed, one of the clearest findings in Runnymede's Community Studies programme has been that economic migrants generally have strong instrumental reasons for wanting to integrate to British society. Integration enhances prospects on the labour market, which is a primary reason for economic migration. Furthermore, we have not seen any evidence that the more settled BME groups who engage with single-group communities are less cohesive or integrated than those who do not. What our community studies *have* shown is the value of community organizations that have the resources to work with individuals in order to build their confidence to engage in wider society. These have included accessing

basic public services, finding information about rights and entitlements and developing confidence to participate in wider society. Especially for BME communities that are small and go unmonitored by national surveys, there was a feeling of invisibility and voicelessness that these organisations helped to alleviate.

Many of the organizations consulted for the Community Study reports were funded by local authorities. There is a fear that this guidance will prompt local authorities to cease funding community organizations, forcing them to close. There is evidence that local authorities have anticipated the recommendations of this draft guidance and are already informing organizations that they no longer qualify for council funding despite the current draft status of this guidance. By doing this, councils are not allowing for the necessary transition time for, a) organizations to adapt to the new policy and implement activities that 'bridge', 'bond' or 'link' groups, b) mainstream services to have the capacity to absorb the shock of diverse service users, and c) planning activities that promote community cohesion. Instead of promoting cohesion, this abrupt change in policy will only serve to create a situation of panic and frustration in local communities that already feel marginalised by mainstream organizations and society. Below is a case study of the Greenwich Vietnamese Community organization which has felt the reverberations of these changes in funding policy.

The Reverberations of CLG Draft Guidance on Local Communities

Greenwich has traditionally been home to Vietnamese migrants. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Vietnamese refugees were sent to Greenwich as part of the Government's refugee dispersal plans. More Vietnamese people became attracted to the area because of community support services there. There is no accurate Vietnamese population estimate in Greenwich because the group continues to be excluded from national survey monitoring. The Greenwich Vietnam Community (GVC) organization emerged in 1984 initially to work with Vietnamese refugees because mainstream services were not able to tailor services to their language needs. Since then, the organization has been keeping a drop-in session to translate documents, assist in form filling for their clients, as well as providing a Vietnamese language supplementary school for 75 children aged 5-15.

Recently the GVC has been informed that the organization will not receive further funding by Greenwich Council in preparation for the phasing out of funding directed to single groups. As Mr. Ly Vong, coordinator of GVC reported, this means they will not have the resources to continue the weekly drop-in session and will possibly have to close the language school. He is not aware of any plans by the council to provide alternative replacement services for either the drop-in or language school. He stated that currently the council and other mainstream service providers direct Vietnamese speakers to the community centre if they require information or assistance; he doubts Greenwich Council has the capacity or experience to absorb the service needs of the GVC client group in their mainstream services.

In this case, Greenwich Council has anticipated the change in funding policy before this draft guidance has been implemented. This confirms our worry that local councils will use this guidance as justification to end funding to groups without giving them adequate transition time to adjust their services to be more outward facing. Unless Greenwich Council provides language and culturally sensitive services immediately after the close of GVC, there may be a situation of increased stress on clients. In one study conducted in Lewisham and Southwark – neighbouring boroughs of Greenwich with large Vietnamese populations – participants there reported that they were too intimidated to call emergency services because of language barriers, and admitted their inability to communicate made them feel 'helpless'. An abrupt end of funding for 'single group' organizations without adequate adjustment to mainstream service provision can have potentially disastrous results on the health and wellbeing of individuals.

Conclusion

The consultation guidance is lacking robust understanding of the ways in which organizations promote community cohesion. This consultation guidance has identified the activities of organizations that cater to 'single groups' as potentially divisive, without fully recognising the benefit these organizations can have on their clients or the wider society. As we have argued in our response to the consultation *Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side*, for some groups 'single group' funding may be necessary to provide individuals with the confidence to access important social and political institutions that they would otherwise fail to engage with, and so can increase civic engagement for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Therefore we are concerned that the lack of substantive guidance regarding what is a 'single group', as well as the lack of recognition by Government on the value of organizations that cater to these 'single groups' may be used as justification by local authorities to divert funds away from organizations which are in fact contributing towards social justice and community cohesion through the empowerment of individuals.

Therefore we urge the Government to recognize that **disadvantage** and **inequality** are the greatest threats to community cohesion, not diversity. By focusing on diversity rather than inequality, Government has not only got its priorities back-to-front but has also fundamentally misunderstood what constitutes cohesive communities. The potential threat to cohesion that the implementation of these draft guidelines could lead to needs to be recognized and addressed urgently.

Thank you for considering our response and the concerns and issues we highlight. We look forward to learning the result of the consultation process and the intentions of government on implementing the changes.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this response, please contact Michelynn Laflèche (Director) or Rob Berkeley (Deputy Director) at the Runnymede Trust, 7 Plough Yard, Shoreditch, London EC2A 3LP
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Further information about the Runnymede Trust can be found on our website –
www.runnymedetrust.org