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RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Infrastructure Needs of the VCSE Sector in Oxfordshire

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## Introduction

[**Community First Oxfordshire**](https://www.communityfirstoxon.org/): CFO is a community development charity which helps diverse communities and individuals to identify issues that affect them and find their own solutions. We support volunteer-led actions such as community engagement and planning activities, the running of community halls, community transport schemes, community shops as well as health-based projects. CFO is the host organisation of Collaborative Housing, a community-led housing hub and a new community stewardship service.

We also run Neighbourhood Planning, Town Planning and Placemaking Consultancies, helping communities identify infrastructure requirements and develop the policies and projects necessary to achieve them.

CFO works to the principles of Asset-Based Community Development: ABCD is a bottom-up way of strengthening communities through recognising, identifying, and harnessing existing ‘assets’ that individuals and communities have which can help to strengthen and improve things locally.

CFO is an independent charity (900560) and CLG (2461552).

[**Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action**](https://ocva.org.uk/): OCVA’s mission is to enable a diverse voluntary and community sector to flourish in Oxfordshire. We provide the sector with information and advice, training, networking and collaboration opportunities, support for volunteering, and advocacy on behalf of all charities, social enterprises, community groups and not for profit organisations working for the benefit of our county.

## Overview

Oxfordshire has a diverse and rich VCSE sector, which collectively provides a high level of services in areas such as health prevention, social care and all age activities and services from a hyper local community group to communities and individuals based throughout the county.

However, the voices we hear and see in the evidence so far (*see Appendix 3 – below*) are often from the medium/large VCSE organisations.

**With the support of our staff, CFO and OCVA are seeking an independent supplier/s to use community research techniques to proactively engage with the micro and small parts of the VCSE sector (and medium/large VCSE organisations where they play a key part in infrastructure support). This work is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.**

Building on the research of the BOB Health Alliance and the OCVA/CFO Volunteer Vision community research carried out in 2022-23, there is a clear need to independently engage with and better understand the infrastructure needs of the micro/small VCSE sector. These voices, ideas and actions need to be brought together into an overall delivery model, which currently does not exist.

This research project will:

* Engage with multiple groups across the sector (formal and informal).
* Provide a general overview of the ‘state of the sector’: challenges and opportunities.
* Explore any key convergence and divergence of issues, opinion, and challenge within the sector.
* Let people and organisations ‘tell their stories’ - what is the reality of place-based community work, what is needed to thrive?

The research and framework of delivery will also look into the VCSE sector as whole in order to draw the best practice and collaborative work from all sizes of organisations and activities.

## Available Contracts

There are two contracts available – both may be carried out by the same (preferred option) or a different supplier:

* Contract 1 – Infrastructure Needs Research Report: maximum contract value = £15,625 (incl. VAT)
* Contract 2 – Infrastructure Framework and Delivery Model = £5,000 (incl. VAT)

The lead organisation is CFO, which has overall management responsibilities for this project. CFO will work with OCVA to support the research project work.

## Contract Award Criteria

CFO and OCVA will assess applications according to the following scoring matrix:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **0** | **Completely fails to meet required standard or does not provide a proposal.** |
| **1** | **Proposal significantly fails to meet the standards required, contains significant shortcomings or is inconsistent with other proposals.** |
| **2** | **Proposal falls short of achieving expected standard in a number of identifiable respects.** |
| **3** | **Proposal meets the required standard in most material respects but is lacking or inconsistent in others.** |
| **4** | **Proposal meets the required standard in all material respects.** |
| **5** | **Proposal meets the required standard in all material respects and exceeds some or all of the major requirements.** |

## Appendix 1 – Specification

The successful consultant will have a thorough understanding and experience of community research and will work independently and proactively with CFO and OCVA to map existing and relevant research, survey a wide range of VCSE community groups and organisations from the diverse sector in the county, and evaluate the evidence of infrastructure needs versus existing support infrastructure support offers via the LIOs and partners.

The second part of the research, which may be carried out by the same (preferred option) or a different consultant, will draw out of the findings and good practice models found outside of the county, an overall framework and delivery model required to address the infrastructure needs of the VCSE sector, with particular attention to the micro/small VCSE organisations.

CFO’s requirements from an appointed supplier/s for each contract are summarised below:

Infrastructure Needs Research Report

1. Desk research of existing (current) community research on infrastructure services and resources.
2. Short survey designed for micro/small VCSE organisations and a separate survey for medium and large[[1]](#footnote-1): a **minimum of 700 responses** across a broad geographic spectrum.
3. A **minimum of 8 x focus groups** (online and in-person) with a good representational mix of Oxfordshire’s demographics.
4. A **minimum of 10 x 1-1 interviews**.
5. Full report of methodology and findings with **at least 8 case studies/stories**. A concise summary report of the key findings that will lead into the framework and delivery model.

Infrastructure Framework and Delivery Model

1. Desk research of existing learning and impactful frameworks and delivery models across the UK – linked to Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs).
2. A clear, evidence-based and place-based infrastructure framework and delivery model.
3. Recommendations and next steps for LIOs and partners to galvanise existing resources and assets to make the ‘step change’ necessary to achieve the new delivery framework and model.
4. An estimated budget to resource the delivery model activities.

## Appendix 2 - Timetable

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Date** |
| Publication of this opportunity. | **29.5.24** |
| Deadline for submission of applicant response  (Annexes 1, 2, and 3):  ***Send completed response to Emily Lewis-***  ***Edwards (email below)*** | **21.6.24** |
| Award decision notification via email: | **By 28.6.24** |
| Contract concluded with successful applicant: | **By 1.7.24** |
| Contract 1 start/ completion date: | **ASAP following contract**  **award** |
| Contract 2- start/ completion date: | **TBD** |

## Appendix 3 – Application Process

**Suppliers should complete Annexes 1, 2 and 3 and return by the deadline to Emily Lewis-Edwards (**[**emily@communityfirstoxon.org**](mailto:emily@communityfirstoxon.org)**).**

**Please email any questions about the contract/s/ your application/s to Emily.**

## Appendix 4 – Background: the VCSE sector in Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire has a diverse and rich VCSE sector, which collectively provides a high level of services in areas such as health prevention, social care and all age activities and services from a hyper local community group to communities and individuals based throughout the county.

The report produced by Durham University, funded by BOB ICB via the VCSE Health Alliance, suggests that Oxfordshire has a higher proportion of VCSE organisations and employees than Buckinghamshire and Berkshire West (Oxfordshire has an estimated 24,000 employees working in the VCSE sector along with approximately 80,200 volunteers compared to an estimated 11,000 employees and 46,900 volunteers in Buckinghamshire, for example[[2]](#footnote-2)).

The challenges that the sector faces have been exacerbated by trends in falling numbers of volunteers, problems in recruitment and retainment within the VCSE sector, and narrowing channels of sustainable funding or fundraising. These challenges were echoed in the findings of the CFO/OCVA Volunteer Vision research (report published in 2023), which highlighted the complex and individual reasons why a person chooses to volunteer (it must be enjoyable and flexible), the need for rounded support for both the voluntary organisations and the volunteer, and the need for clear roots to accessible and sustainable funding for smaller organisations. At the same time, we see that the traditional infrastructure support and funding from local authorities and other statutory organisations have dramatically changed and/or reduced over the years which has had negative impacts on the ability of many VCSE organisations to adapt to changing needs.

The consequences of this change in funding patterns, particularly for Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIO), such as Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) and Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA), is that funding is often project specific (i.e. funds for themed areas: social care, health and wellbeing or COVID aftermath and cost of living challenges) the end result is that the core functions of LIOs which provide coordinated information and advice, training and networking, community engagement and capacity building, strategic representation and advocacy and volunteering support for the VCSE sector have all suffered since austerity measures were brought in; leading to a significant reduction in coordinated infrastructure support offered to our VCSE sector.

The majority of the VCSE sector in the BOB area, that many of us rely on, is made up of micro and small organisations (almost 75% of the entire VCSE sector[[3]](#footnote-3)). It is these organisations and community groups – the bedrock of the sector - which rely on volunteers to keep their services running and are often not part of formal networks. CFO and OCVA would like to primarily focus this infrastructure research project on these groups and organisations to better shape our coordinated service delivery.

# Annex 1 - Applicant Information

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Applicant response** |
| Name (if registered, please give the registered name) |  |
| Date of registration (if applicable) or date of formation. |  |
| Registered website address (if  applicable) |  |
| Registered address (if applicable) or head office address |  |
| Trading status  a) - public limited company  b) - private limited company  c) - limited liability partnership  d) - other partnership  e) - sole trader  f) - third sector  g) - other (please specify your trading  status) |  |
| Registration number (company,  partnership, charity, etc if applicable) |  |
| Registered VAT number |  |
| Please provide details of your current insurance coverage and related limits of cover – *we will ask the successful supplier/s to provide documentary proof* |  |
| Contact name for enquiries related to your Tender |  |
| * + Role in organisation |  |
| * + Email and postal address of contact |  |
| * + Phone number |  |

# Annex 2 – Applicant questionnaire

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CONTRACT 1** | |
| **1** | **Describe you/ your organisation’s experience of community research.**  You should support your response with examples and any client/ customer endorsements relative to them. |
|  |  |
| **Supplier Response** | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **2** | **Describe your experience in working with the VCSE sector.** |
| **Supplier Response** | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **3** | **Describe how you will identify and engage with the target audiences.**  Include details and processes of how you will achieve and measure this success. |
| **Supplier Response** | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **4** | **Describe – broadly – your strategy for exploring existing (current) community research on infrastructure services and resources.** |
| **Supplier Response** | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CONTRACT 2** | |
| **1** | **Describe you/ your organisation’s experience of community research.**  You should support your response with examples and any client/ customer endorsements relative to them. |
|  |  |
| **Supplier Response** | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **2** | **Describe your experience in working with the VCSE sector.** |
| **Supplier Response** | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **3** | **Describe – broadly – your strategy for identifying and analysing existing learning and impactful frameworks and delivery models across the UK.** |
| **Supplier Response** | |

# Annex 3 – Pricing Schedule

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **PRICING SCHEDULE – Contract 1** | **Price (excluding VAT)** |
| *Tell us your day rate and the number of days you will spend on the contract.* |  |
| *Details of any other disbursements you intend to seek remuneration for, under this contract.* |  |
| **TOTAL** |  |
| **PRICING SCHEDULE – Contract 2** | **Price (excluding VAT)** |
| *Tell us your day rate and the number of days you will spend on the contract.* |  |
| *Details of any other disbursements you intend to seek remuneration for, under this contract.* |  |
| **TOTAL** |  |

1. Stakeholders include: volunteer driver schemes; community hall committees; lunch clubs; activity clubs; intergenerational activities; Good Neighbour Scheme: youth clubs/ groups; Community Action Groups; food projects; health and wellbeing groups; nature, climate and environmental groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Local health and Wellbeing: the contribution of the VCSE sector in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West, Policy & Practice, St Chads College, Durham University, June 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)