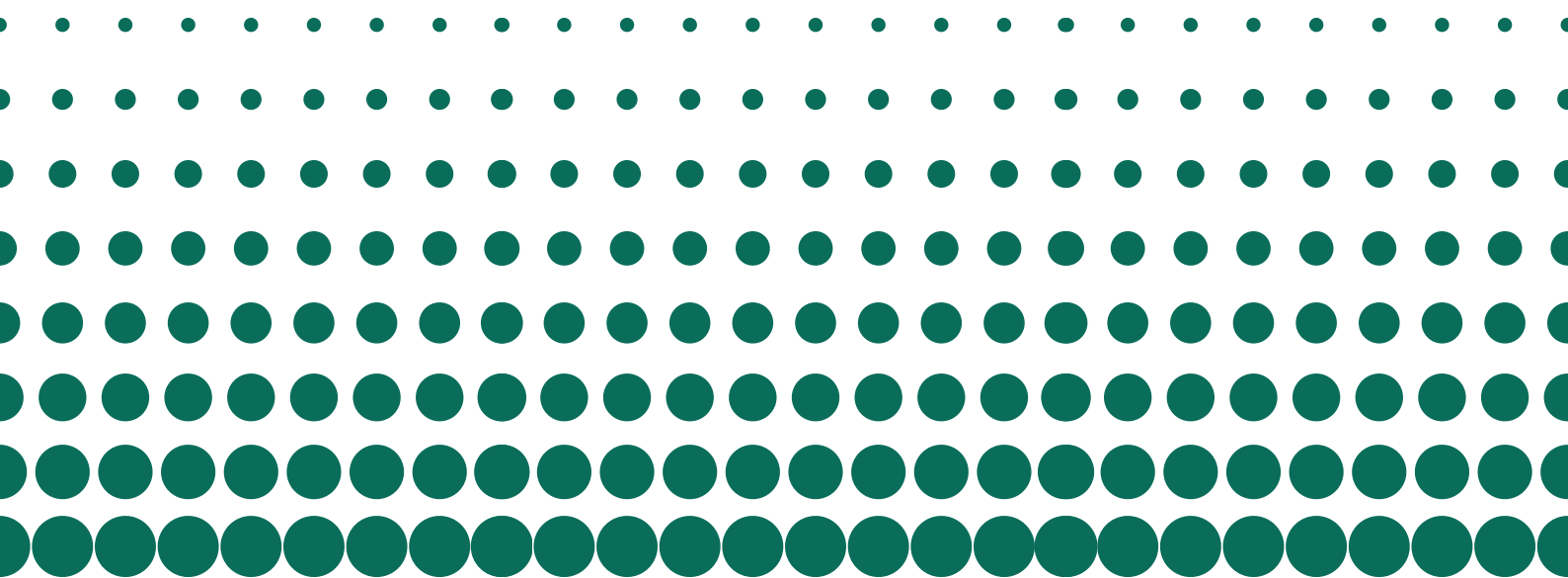




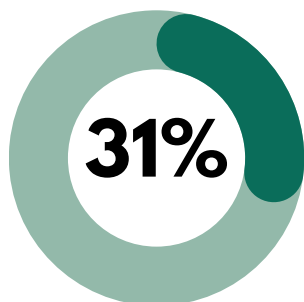
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Pulse Check Report Oct 2024

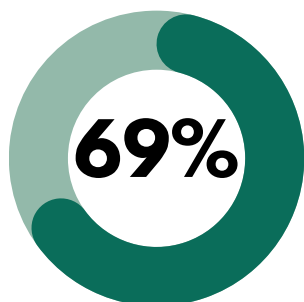


Headlines

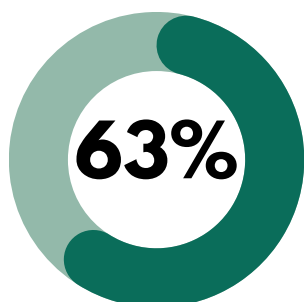
Headline findings based on the responses of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in Bury



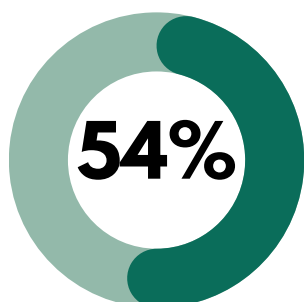
31% of respondents report a decline in their income over the past 12 months.



50% of respondents state that they are using their own reserves to deliver activities and services



63% of respondents have received grant funding from sources other than Bury VCFA administered grants



54% of respondents state lack of capacity as a barrier to applying for further grant funding.



Key Findings

The Bury Pulse Check is an online survey launched in June 2023 that runs periodically to gather a real-time snapshot of some of the issues affecting the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector in Bury. The key theme this edition was around finances and funding.

The insight provided by the respondents is detailed in this report and shared with key partners including the public sector. It will also shape our work as Bury VCFA and the support we offer the sector.

The Financial Stability of the VCSE Sector

31% of respondents reported a decline in their income over the past 12 months, 44% have remained stable and only 25% have experienced an increase. This is mirrored in a similar response regarding how many organisations expect to end the financial year in a deficit.

Further investigation showed that those experiencing an increase were all small and micro organisations where potentially relatively small amounts of funding may influence the results. These figures mirrors national insight with 30% of North West VCSE Organisations reporting a decline in their income in the past three months ([July VCSE Barometer](#)).

Although these figures do not tell the whole picture as 50% of respondents report using their own reserves to deliver services or activities. Of the remaining respondents 7% did not have financial reserves to use.

In exploring some of the causes of the financial challenge the results showed a picture of rising costs (staff and utilities etc) with a drop in income via reductions in trading or grant funding as well as contracts and commissions not keeping up with the cost of living.

“It’s increasingly difficult with no funds towards rent or utility costs. Running costs are much higher as are food costs. Nothing else has increased sadly.”

Key Findings

In response to reduced income several responses highlighted the competitiveness of the current grants funding landscape:

“There has not been much funding to apply for, and the ones we have applied for are only small amounts, so we have not been able to grow in the way we would like to.”

“We regularly apply for grants but we also use our reserves but we never have to use all of our reserves yet”.



The Sectors Income Sources

Unsurprisingly (for a survey distributed by ourselves), 67% of respondents have received a grant administered by ourselves

However, a wide range of other sources were reported.

- 63% also receive grants from other sources
- 44% receive public donations (including crowdfunding)
- 44% earned income (trading products or services) 31% held contracts and commissions
- 25% receive donations from businesses
- 19% gained income from the membership and subs

The only key income area not reported within the survey was social investment, which includes blended finance, loans, bonds, equity investment, and community shares. The reasons for this aren't captured in this pulse survey, but Bury VCFA is exploring this area with the sector.

Key Findings

Grant Funding

In this section of the survey, organisations were given several statements about grant funding and asked to state their preference. This information will help inform and shape future grant funding administered by ourselves.

In some areas, there were split decisions, such as whether grant makers are currently clear enough about their priorities and what matters to them as funders. But in other areas, there were clear areas of preference.

60% of respondents valued the ability to be able to pick up the phone and ask questions to help decide whether to apply for a particular grant. This was a universal response level across all organisational sizes.

74% agreed that it would be helpful if grantmakers told them what percentage of applications get through each stage of their application process.

85% agree that they are more likely to apply for a grant if they enabled core/running costs to be covered in the application. Core costs were a key theme in the additional comments from groups:

“To be able to have sustainable funds to cover core costs, providing much needed quality support within the community and to be able to grow what already works instead of trying to invent new things all the time would be far more beneficial to groups and the community who uses their services.”

“Core funding often relates to the to the proportion of time spent on the project. It would be ideal, and I have heard this from other groups, if there were funding projects available that could possibly target a larger amount of core funding. This in turn would give us flexibility to identify and develop other initiatives”

Key Findings

Grant Processes

From our statement responses, it has become clear that there is no such thing as the perfect application form! 47% of respondents preferred more open questions that allowed them to write about their work, while 53% preferred lots of very specific questions to give the information that the funder wants.

However, written applications proved more popular, with 60% preferring them over video or audio recordings. A mixture of short form and panel pitches also received a lukewarm response, with only 20% preferring them. 47% did not prefer them, and 33% were undecided.

However, it should be noted that we only recorded income size and organisational structure, so we cannot do any form of equality analysis on these responses.

Generally respondents felt comfortable with grants monitoring. The two areas that scored lower were measuring outcomes and telling your story (creating case studies) with only 47% of groups reporting themselves good or excellent in these area.

Barriers to Applying for Grants

Barriers in applying for grants do vary between organisational sizes but the universal response across the sector was around capacity, whether the initial applications or the reporting elements.

“Running on limited funds means that you can’t employ anyone to support me with administrative work. We are a small charity and all tasks fall onto my shoulders.....”

Some comments highlighted the challenges in reporting particularly linked core costs

“We complete a yearly impact report. We have learnt to get better at recording figures and impact within GDPR grounds. But this can be difficult without paying for certain licences to store information.”

Key Findings

Other organisations highlighted the support of Bury VCFA and suggested ways we could do event more:

“Why can’t we be visited on a regular basis so you can see what a difference our community groups makes and workers from the BVCFA who are far more skilled at writing reports and evaluating what is going on and thus freeing up valuable time for the community groups to do what they do best.”

Bury VCFA Administered Grants

As mentioned earlier in this report 67% of respondents had received funding from one of the grant programmes administered by ourselves. 60% of those receiving funding rated their experience as good or excellent with the remainder scoring it as average.

“On a recent application I received support and guidance from one of your Capacity Building Officers. Previously your staff have also been very helpful and supportive. They understand our aims and what we can achieve”





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Further Reading / References

[Quarterly Voluntary Sector Barometer - July 2024](#)

[GM VCSE Leadership Group- Commissioning and Investment Briefing on Contracting Concerns February 2024](#)

A huge thank you to all the groups and organisations who completed the survey



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