

# The impact of the Equity Fund on LGBT+ organisations and intersectional communities they serve

November 2023

An independent evaluation by Civil Society Consulting CIC



BLAQ UK Halloween Party. Photo: BLAQ UK

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LGBT+ Consortium would like to thank Comic Relief and Barrow Cadbury Trust for their support on the Equity Fund.



# Foreword



LGBT+ Consortium has been a specialist funder for just 4 years, but over this period over £1.6m of small grants have been awarded to frontline, diverse and intersectional LGBT+ organisations. From the very beginning, our journey has focussed on developing participatory processes, but the LGBT+ Futures: Equity Fund was the first true test of a genuine participatory grant-making process. From the outset, it was designed by the communities it was there to support and it is simply magical to see the difference this work has made to some of the most under-resourced parts of our LGBT+ voluntary and community sectors. I would like to express huge gratitude to The National Lottery Community Fund who trusted in our communities to challenge traditional approaches and shift the power. Also, to Comic Relief and Barrow Cadbury Trust for providing additional financial resource to ensure we had a Fund that could reach as many parts of our communities as possible.

Power and control isn't something those who traditionally hold it like to give up—is it uncomfortable, it is challenging, but if this programme shows us anything, it says it is the right thing to do. Those with lived experience know how things affect their own communities the most, and are in the best position to offer the best solutions to tackle structural and deeply ingrained inequalities. I am beyond proud of every single person who has been part of this programme—from the scoping meetings where we literally started with a blank page; the Community Collaborators who supported the initial development phase; our Community Panellists; our Grantees and applicants; our passionate and community-orientated evaluators; and of course the incredible team I have the privilege of working alongside every day here at Consortium.

This evaluation has made me smile so much as I read through it. Through an independent lens, we can now shout from the rooftops that participatory grantmaking for LGBT+ communities truly makes a difference, even within a relatively short time period. Imagine what our communities can achieve if we continue to shift the power, the control, and push hard for real structural change!

This is not a time to just self-congratulate, although it is also important that we take a breadth to celebrate these initial successes. This is the time to open the starting blocks and use this evaluation to bring in further investment that supports a well-resourced, resilient and sustainable LGBT+ sector. We know the flow of funds and resources into our communities remains disproportionately low, and at a time when parts of our communities are under intense strain. There is so much opportunity that this evaluation opens up, both for the Equity Fund family, but also those we want to collaborate with across the wider funding sector.

Thank you once again to everyone who has been part of the journey to date. The work of LGBT+ organisations up and down the country is inspiring and we will be forever grateful for the energy, commitment and drive that so many individuals give each and every day. We will continue to use our privileged position to drive collaborative change.

The hard work now continues behind the scenes to secure the next stage of investment for this work. The next few years have the potential to be pivotal in creating structural change for our diverse communities and I am excited at what comes next.

**Paul Roberts OBE**  
Chief Executive, LGBT+ Consortium



# Executive summary

This report evaluates the outcomes and impacts of LGBT+ Consortium's innovative and participatory **LGBT+ Futures: Equity Fund**, a fund for organisations supporting intersectional LGBT+ communities while being led by people from those communities.

From August to December 2022, **£585,000** in grants were awarded to 75 LGBT+ organisations led by and for the following five **communities of focus**:

- D/deaf, Disabled, Neurodivergent LGBT+ people;
- LGBT+ People of Colour and People from Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnicities;
- LGBTQI+ Women;
- Older LGBT+ people;
- Trans and Non-Binary people.

Through its role as an infrastructure organisation in the LGBT+ sector, and following successful grant-giving programmes, Consortium identified the need for deeper investment in intersectional and targeted LGBT+ organisations and the communities they serve. In response, Consortium launched the Equity Fund to address this need, a two-year partnership between Consortium and The National Lottery Community Fund, thanks to National Lottery players. Comic Relief came on board to support with additional reach to the devolved nations, along with further funds from Barrow Cadbury Trust for greater investment for Trans and Non Binary organisations.

Some key features of the Equity Fund include its community-led, participatory decision-making structure, a supportive and accessible application process, and a dedicated development programme for grantees during the funding period. As a result, the Equity Fund has been successful in funding organisations for the first time and strengthened the capacity and influence of intersectional led by and for LGBT+ organisations across the sector.

This evaluation took a mixed methods approach, drawing insights from interviews, surveys, case studies, and findings from the [interim report](#), published in February 2023.

Below, we summarise the findings from this Independent Evaluation:

## Impact of the Equity Fund on intersectional LGBT+ organisations

- Following support from the Equity Fund, a majority of grantees who took part in the survey reflected that their organisations have improved in their ability to assess the needs of their communities, deliver collaborative events, and collect information on the impact of their work on those who use their services.
- More than half of grantees (52%) who responded to the survey said that they are “a great deal” **better equipped with skills to apply to funding opportunities** and that they have a better understanding of fundraising processes.
- 94% of grantees who took part in the survey said that they had **built new relationships or strengthened existing ones** with other LGBT+ organisations through their grant period. 58% achieved this with wider social and public sector organisations.
- At the time of responding to the survey (September 2023), 61% are **concerned about their financial security** – many are in a position where they have not secured further funding or alternative income sources.
- Overall, grantees were **positive about their staff and volunteer morale** and felt **supported by the LGBT+ sector** at the time of responding to the survey.

We measure the impact of the Equity Fund on LGBT+ communities against Consortium's [Common Outcomes Framework](#), which describes outcomes and impacts that LGBT+ organisations contribute to in the communities they work with.

- **Increasing wellbeing:** Grantees delivered and organised activities and meet-ups aimed to reduce social isolation. They also delivered workshops aimed at providing support around issues affecting the wellbeing of LGBT+ people covering a range of topics including mental health, self-care, sexual health, and legal rights and entitlements. Other activities included one-to-one mental health support (e.g. counselling) and providing resources and signposting to trusted and inclusive services.
- **Improved social connectedness:** Many organisations delivered online and in-person peer support and safe spaces to create opportunities for socialising and building connections. They took much care to mitigate barriers and increase the accessibility of these opportunities for social connection.
- **Increasing access to safer and more equal communities:** Grantees working towards this goal often advised local organisations (e.g. healthcare providers, schools, sports centres) on how to make their spaces more inclusive and accessible for LGBT+ people. Others facilitated community consultations or carried out advocacy to ensure that public services and businesses were accessible to LGBT+ communities.
- **Improving access to mainstream services:** Most organisations working toward this outcome worked with healthcare providers, but other bodies include social care, national charities and legal support organisations. They advised these organisations on the issues that LGBT+ face when navigating these services and provided guidance on improving their experience. Others set up referral pathways in partnership with other charities or organisations providing trusted services.
- **Improved policymaking:** Organisations represented the intersectional LGBT+ communities they work with in consultations, working groups, and the boards of professional bodies to work towards improved policymaking. Some organisations represented the interests of their communities in other capacities, such as through informal advice or guidance to policymakers.

## Behind the scenes of the Equity Fund: what works well

- **The equitable and inclusive funding mechanism is impacting intersectional communities.** The structure of the Equity Fund breaks down structural barriers for intersectional LGBT+ organisations at every step, from the well-designed application process to the one-to-one and small group development support available after being awarded funding.
- **Investment, not just funding, creating long-term and lasting impact.** The Equity Fund grants team and community panellists understand grantees' work and take a capacity-building approach to distributing grants. They see grants as investments in the future and sustainability of led by and for LGBT+ organisations, rather than a one-off opportunity for delivering a project.
- **The fund is truly participatory.** The role of Community Panellists who bring a wealth of lived experience and professional/sector experience have been critical to the success of the fund. They can make informed decisions that are both rigorous and appropriate (weighing up risk appropriately), while always keeping intersectional LGBT+ communities at the heart of the process.

# 1. Introduction

**LGBT+ Futures: Equity Fund** is a participatory fund for organisations supporting intersectional LGBT+ communities, which recognised the need for deeper investment in organisations led by and for these communities underserved by mainstream funding.

LGBT+ Consortium, a charitable infrastructure organisation dedicated to supporting voluntary and community sector organisations that support LGBT+ people, managed the fund.

Funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and later supported by Comic Relief and Barrow Cadbury Trust, the Equity Fund has awarded **£585,000** to 75 LGBT+ organisations that are **led by and for**:

- D/deaf, Disabled, Neurodivergent LGBT+ people
- LGBT+ People of Colour and People from Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnicities
- LGBTQI+ Women
- Older LGBT+ people
- Trans and Non-Binary people

Consortium commissioned Civil Society Consulting (CSC) – a values-led not-for-profit consultancy – to:

- **Assess the impact** of the Equity Fund on grantees and the diverse and intersectional communities they serve;
- **Track learnings, successes and challenges of the programme**; and
- **Shape the next steps of LGBT+ Consortium’s specialist funding**, drawing insights from the evaluation.

This evaluation also intends to provide information and serve as a blueprint for other funders interested in exploring participatory models of grant-making.

In February 2023, CSC researched and published an interim report evaluating the first phase of the Equity Fund, focusing on the effectiveness of the mechanisms of the grant-making model, as well as LGBT+ Consortium’s delivery from August 2022 to December 2022, when the final round of grant money was allocated.

This final report evaluates the outcomes and outputs of the second phase of the Equity Fund on grant recipient organisations, as well as the intersectional communities of focus they support, focusing on outcomes achieved as a result of Equity Fund grants and the impacts of capacity-building support delivered by the Grants Team<sup>1</sup>.



Equity Fund showcase. Photo: CSC

<sup>1</sup> The Equity Fund Grants Team delivered a programme of capacity-building support via one-on-one and group sessions. They hosted two grantee events to facilitate networking, collaboration and knowledge-sharing in Leeds (May 2023) and in London (September 2023).

## Background of the Equity Fund

Consortium has been working with diverse, intersectional and targeted LGBT+ voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations over the past few years to explore additional and future income generation for LGBT+ organisations, recognising the low levels of investment into LGBT+ communities.

Following successful grant-giving programmes, such as the Intersections Fund and National Emergencies Trust Fund, which saw the distribution of nearly £1 million to LGBT+ communities in partnership with a range of diverse LGBT+ organisations, Consortium identified the need for deeper investment in intersectional focused and targeted LGBT+ organisations.

In response to the need for deeper investment in organisations led by and for intersectional LGBT+ communities, Consortium launched The LGBT+ Futures: Equity Fund in February 2022.

Drawing on its insight as an infrastructure charity with a membership of over 550 LGBT+ organisations, previous grant-giving data and consultation work with people from intersectional LGBT+ communities with experience in the sector, Consortium identified five intersectional community areas that are under-represented and under-resourced, which Equity Fund grants were available to over the grant period. These 'communities of focus' were:

- D/deaf, Disabled, Neurodivergent LGBT+ people;
- LGBT+ People of Colour and People from Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnicities;
- LGBTQI+ Women;
- Older LGBT+ people;
- Trans and Non-Binary people.

## The rationale behind the Equity Fund

Community groups and organisations that are 'led by and for' marginalised communities have historically faced systemic injustice in funding processes. Whilst these groups are best placed to support their communities, they are often underserved by public bodies and mainstream funder-backed organisations. Barriers to accessing funding are even higher for groups led by intersectional communities, which often prevents support from reaching these communities.

The reasons why groups and organisations 'led by and for' marginalised and/or intersectional communities face additional barriers to funding are complex. From [research](#) conducted with NPC in collaboration with funders and 'led by and for' organisations, CSC summarises these challenges into four barriers below:

- Mainstream funder biases towards large and more established organisations mean that systems to checking due diligence maintain priorities that favour organisations of a particular size;
- Funders lack understanding of groups and organisations led by marginalised and/or intersectional communities because of a lack of lived experience among those at the decision-making level;
- Application processes and due diligence processes are inaccessible;
- Leaders of 'led by and for' organisations themselves experience structural disadvantage.

As a result, there came the Equity Fund. The Fund aims to help intersectional and targeted organisations to be well-resourced, sustainable and resilient, while also, facilitating the flow of funding into under-resourced/represented communities.

The Fund sets out to do this in several ways. It offers:

### **A supportive, inclusive and accessible application process**

- The application process was simplified, and proportional to the amount of funding being applied.
- The Grants Team provided support to applicants, including regular webinars for applicants, one-to-one meetings, and hands-on support when required.

## **Programme work**

- Support does not stop once applicants become grantees; a significant outcome of the Equity Fund was to invest in groups' growth, sustainability and resilience through capacity-building support.
- Through the grant period, Consortium provided one-to-one support, skills workshops, and knowledge-sharing events to support grantees with their development.
- Although most Equity Fund grants funded projects, development grants and core funding were also made available, recognising that the latter is especially important for supporting the growth and sustainability of led by and for organisations.

## **Participatory and community-led decision-making**

- Community-led panels, composed of community panellists, made the funding decisions. There were five community panels, one for each community of focus. Community panellists identified with the intersectional background that the panel represented, but also brought multiple layers of identity. Many had experience working in the sector as well.
- Since the community panellists shared the intersectional identities of the applicants to the Fund, they were able to swiftly understand the context and value of applicants' work. The interim report found that this motivated grantees to apply and develop their applications.
- Additionally, Community panellists' lived experience and expertise of the contexts applicants operate in meant they could make informed decisions about where and how grants could be best spent.

## **Flexible reporting processes**

- Implementing complex monitoring and evaluation processes takes time, which 'led by and for' community groups and organisations do not have. The Equity Fund endeavoured to minimise reporting demands, requiring only a financial report and a reporting survey.
- Consortium provided hands-on support centering around monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure organisations with less experience in this area were able to fulfil reporting requirements and to upskill grantees in general.



## 2. Evaluation Methodology

CSC took a participatory approach to the evaluation of the Equity Fund, involving all stakeholders and centring the voices of community panellists and grant recipient organisations.

Working with LGBT+ Consortium, CSC set up a **steering group** composed of three representatives of grant recipient organisations and three community panellists, with all five communities of focus represented. The steering group has had direct input throughout the evaluation, inputting on the evaluation research, design, analysis, and recommendations.

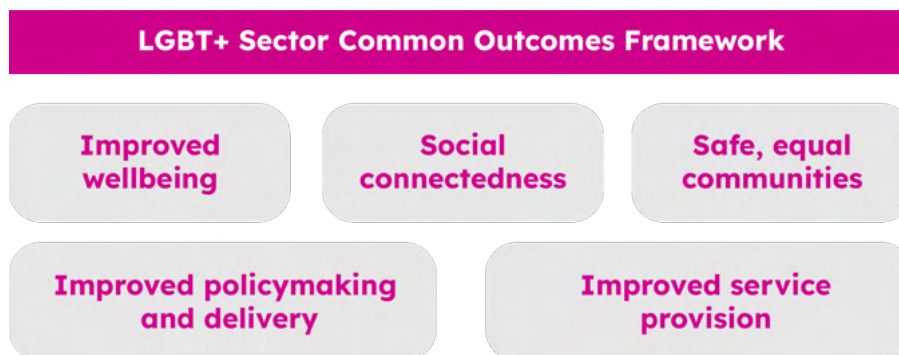
In consultation with LGBT+ Consortium and the steering group, CSC agreed on an approach that would minimise the burden on grant recipient organisations, while collecting rich and informative data. We combined **qualitative** and **quantitative** methods:

- A concise 3-question baseline questionnaire for all grant recipients;
  - Observations of the grant panel;
  - Interviews with grant recipients, panellists and Equity Fund staff; and
  - A final questionnaire for all grant recipients.
- Detailed information about grant allocation was gathered through the Equity Fund's grant reporting dashboard.

An additional interview was carried out with the Equity Fund team to gain insight into the impact of Equity Fund and how it was delivered from Consortium's perspective.

### Evaluation framework

LGBT+ Consortium's [LGBT+ Sector Common Outcomes Framework](#), which sets out five areas of impact that benefit LGBT+ communities in the UK, informed the evaluation framework.



Additionally, the evaluation responds to the three broad impact areas of the Equity Fund as agreed between The National Lottery Community Fund and LGBT+ Consortium.



## Interim report

Findings and analysis for the interim report drew on:

- All the baseline surveys that have so far been returned (n=28);
- Interviews with 12 grant recipients organisations;
- Interviews with four community panellists, the Equity Fund Project Officer and Grants Officer.

All the interviews were carried out in November and December 2022 – online. The baseline surveys were collected on a rolling basis from October 2022 to December 2022.

## Final report

In addition to data collected for the interim report, a final survey was launched in Summer 2023, after most grant funded activities have taken place. This survey was developed in close consultation with the steering group and Equity Fund staff to ensure they will facilitate nuanced and rich discussions while being accessible for grantees.

The final survey aimed to capture:

- The impact of the grant-funded activities on the intersectional communities that grantees are working with;
- The impact of the grant – and capacity-building-support delivered by the Grants team – on the funded organisations themselves;
- The challenges that grantees face in delivering their activities, as well as future concerns to inform recommendations on how grantees can be better supported moving forward.

Grantees mostly completed the survey online, but they also had the option of speaking with a member of the evaluation team via phone or video call to complete the survey. The survey was completed by 53 grantees.

Survey responses were analysed thematically to understand how grants were used, identify the range and depth of their impact, and inform recommendations for future iterations of the grant.

This final report builds on the insights from the interim report. While the interim report focused on the mechanisms of the grant-making process and the effectiveness of its delivery, the final report captures the overall impact. See **section 7** for a summary of findings across both reports.

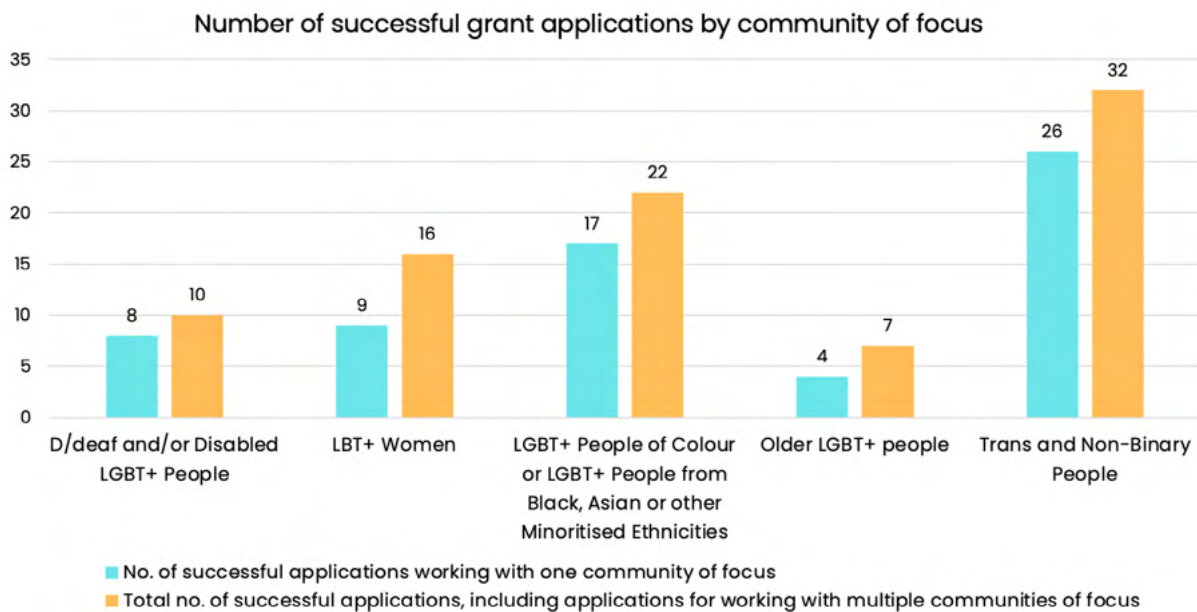
### 3. Snapshot of the grantmaking data

This section provides information on the awards that were made through the Equity Fund, including the location and types of organisations that were successful, and the distribution of awards across panels.

#### How many grants were awarded?

There were 75 successful awards funded through the Equity Fund.

The chart below shows the number of successful grants based on the communities of focus which the applicants stated they work with<sup>1</sup>. The number of grants awarded are proportionate to the number of applicants to each panel. A low number of successful grant applicants reflect a low number of applications overall. For example, the older LGBT+ people’s panel awarded the lowest number of grants proportionate to the low number of applications they received.



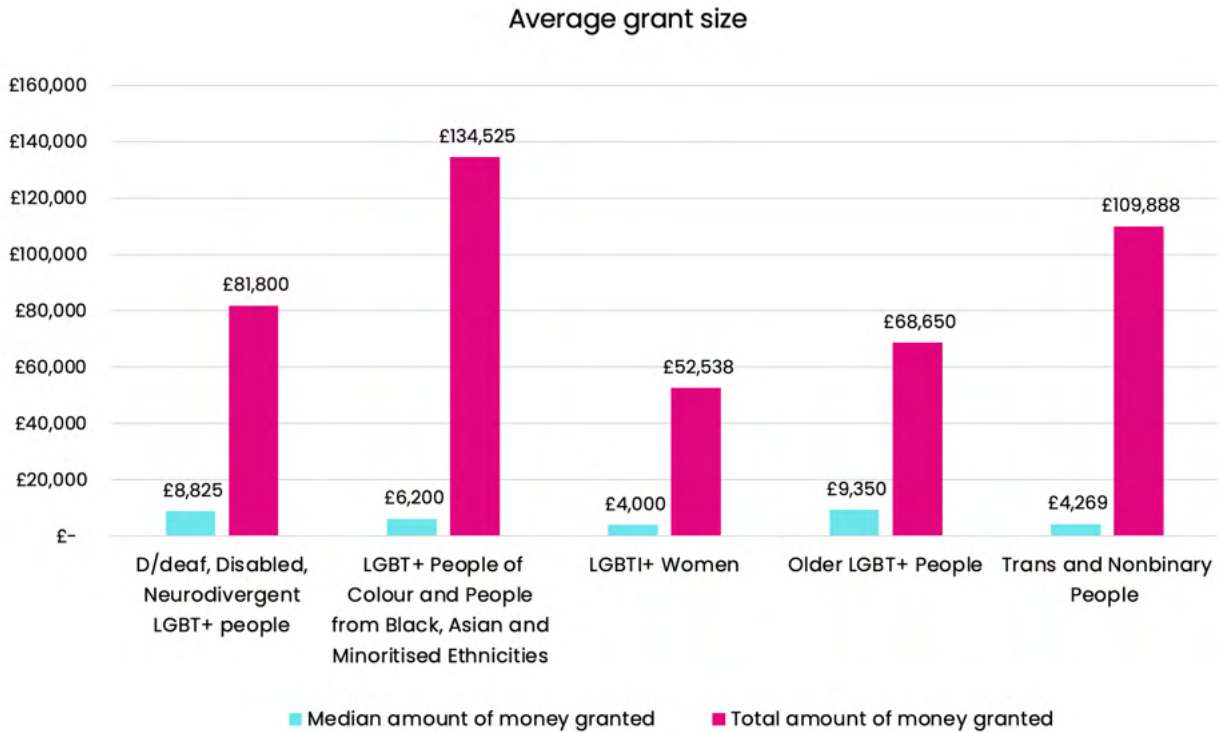
Almost half of successful applicants were either unincorporated associations (24%) or informal groups (24%). Community interest companies were the most common formal organisational structure (20%), followed by charitable incorporated organisations (15%).

#### Organisational/legal structure of awarded grantees

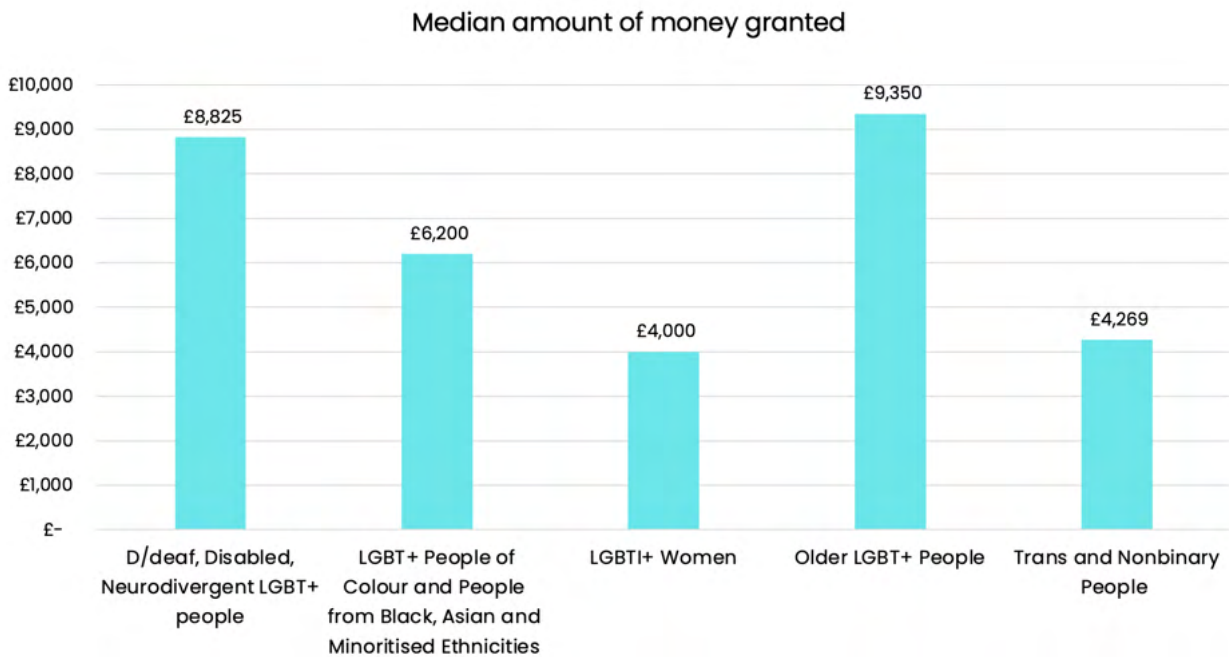


<sup>1</sup> The dataset “No. of successful applications working with one community of focus” omits the successful applications that were submitted to **multiple** panels, resulting in a total lower than 75. The dataset “Total no. of successful applicants, including applications for working with multiple communities of focus” has a total greater than 75 because successful applications submitted to multiple panels are **counted separately** for each community of focus.

Comparing the median grant size to the total amount awarded provides an indication of the size of grants in each panel. For example, a relatively high median grant size for older LGBT+ people compared to the total amount of money granted suggests that grants in this panel tend to be larger.

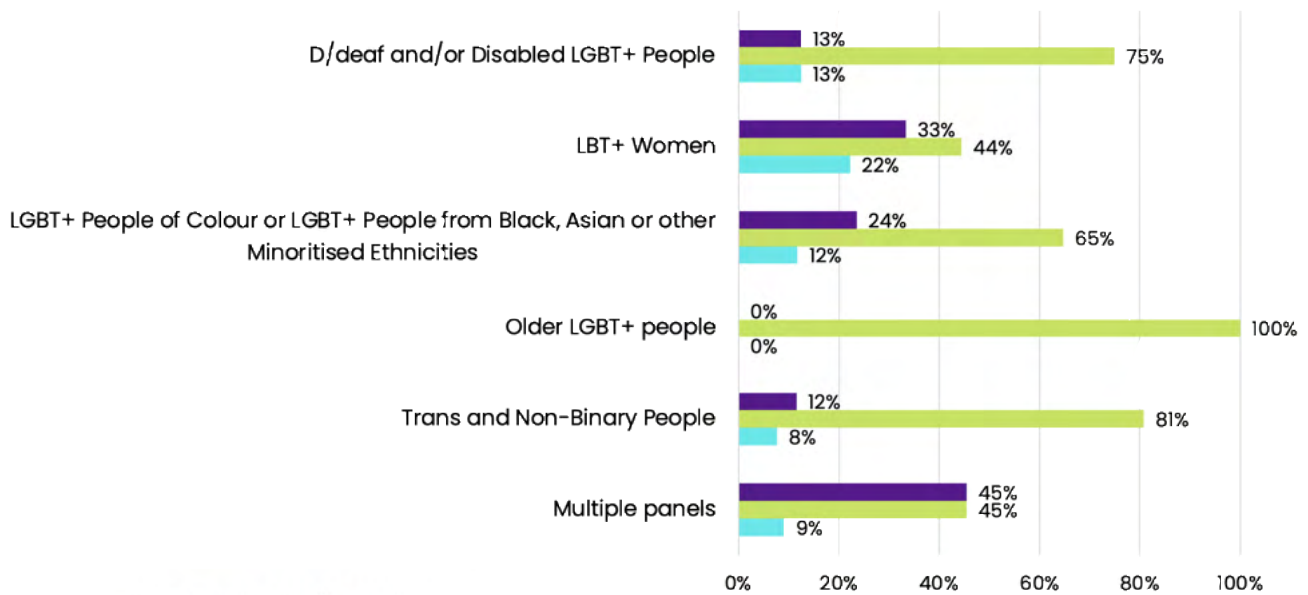


Note that each panel started with the same amount of money to allocate, but panels that did not spend all their funding could allocate their money to a central pot that other panels could spend.

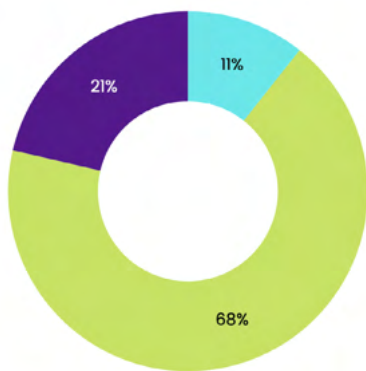


The amount awarded is not always the amount requested, and is subject to panel discussions. Note that some small grant applications were awarded more money than requested. In other cases, applications were partially-funded.

### How were grants awarded?



### Grants across all panels



■ Awarded more ■ Fully awarded ■ Partially awarded

*The breakdown of successful grants by panels only accounts for applications that are submitted to that panel exclusively. If an application was submitted to multiple panels, it is included only in the 'multiple panels' category; it is not included in the categories of individual panels.*

### Partial awards

While the majority of successful applicants received the amount that they requested, grants assessed by multiple panels and those assessed by the LBT+ women panel were most likely to receive partial funding. The LBT+ women's panel were also most likely to award additional money to the amount requested.

The Grants Team created awareness among panels about avoiding leaving organisations poorer when they first applied to Consortium when considering partial awards. Partial awards also meant delivery expectations were reduced.

## Number of grants awarded by region

The Equity Fund has reached every region in the UK. However, there is a high concentration of grants awarded in London and the south of the country, which is likely to be reflective of a higher proportion of LGBT+ people living in these regions.



## 4. Snapshots of grantees' proudest moments

“ Being able to support the employment of queer people in the charity sector, and developing a strong ethical stance on our funding that has led us to guiding other charities on their ethical standards and approval tools.

– Live Through This

“ We're incredibly proud of how our organisation has grown and the strength of our reputation. 100% of those who completed our post-workshop survey told us that they'd recommend our workshops to a friend. Our health inequalities articles helped us to raise the voices of trans people facing multiple forms of marginalisation.

– TransActual

“ Two girls came out with HIV/AIDS. The pageant brings friendship and solidarity.

– Miss Trans Global CIC

“ Being given extra money by the grantmaking panel because they had seen how far we had come.

– TransSober

“ Seeing LGBTQ+ women from a whole variety of backgrounds and walks of life come together. The social interactions were as important as the activities themselves. The smiles and laughter during the wild swimming were uplifting, inspiring and empowering.

– Pembrokeshire Pride

“ Seeing them [our community] walk at Pride. It is incredible how much their confidence in themselves has grown since starting. We made banners to take, and it was amazing to see how proud they were of their identity as well as how amazingly they represented Rumpus Room.

– Rumpus Room

“ Having our article accepted by the What Good Looks Like report on people with a learning disability and autistic people.

– United Pride Friends

“ Printing our first issue and organising two launches surrounding it. The issue represents a medal of the power of transfeminine voices.

– Oestrogenation

“ Launching our a trans healthcare toolkit, which was nominated at the National Diversity Awards.

– Trans Pride South West

“ The feedback after a day out in Skegness was awesome. None of our members had seen the sea since they left Africa. The train journeys were fun with everyone chatting and laughing together. The Sealife Centre animals were a big hit – creatures our members had never seen before. The trip was much more beneficial than we expected both for well-being and group relationships.

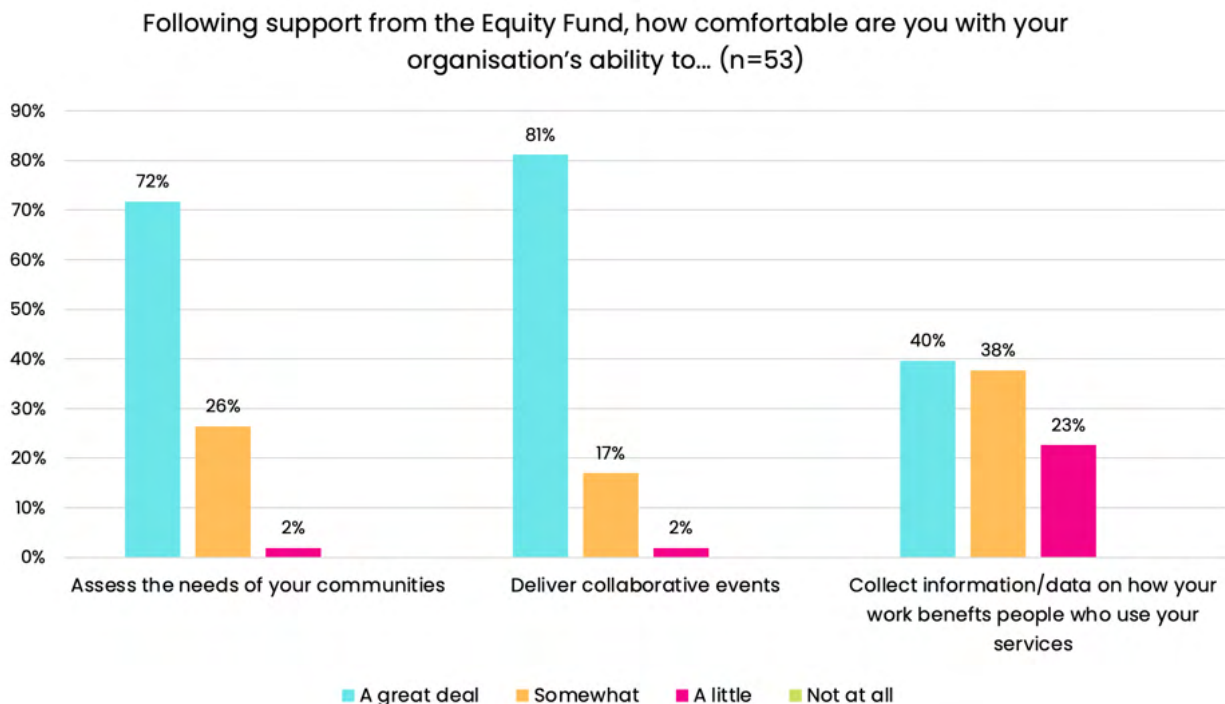
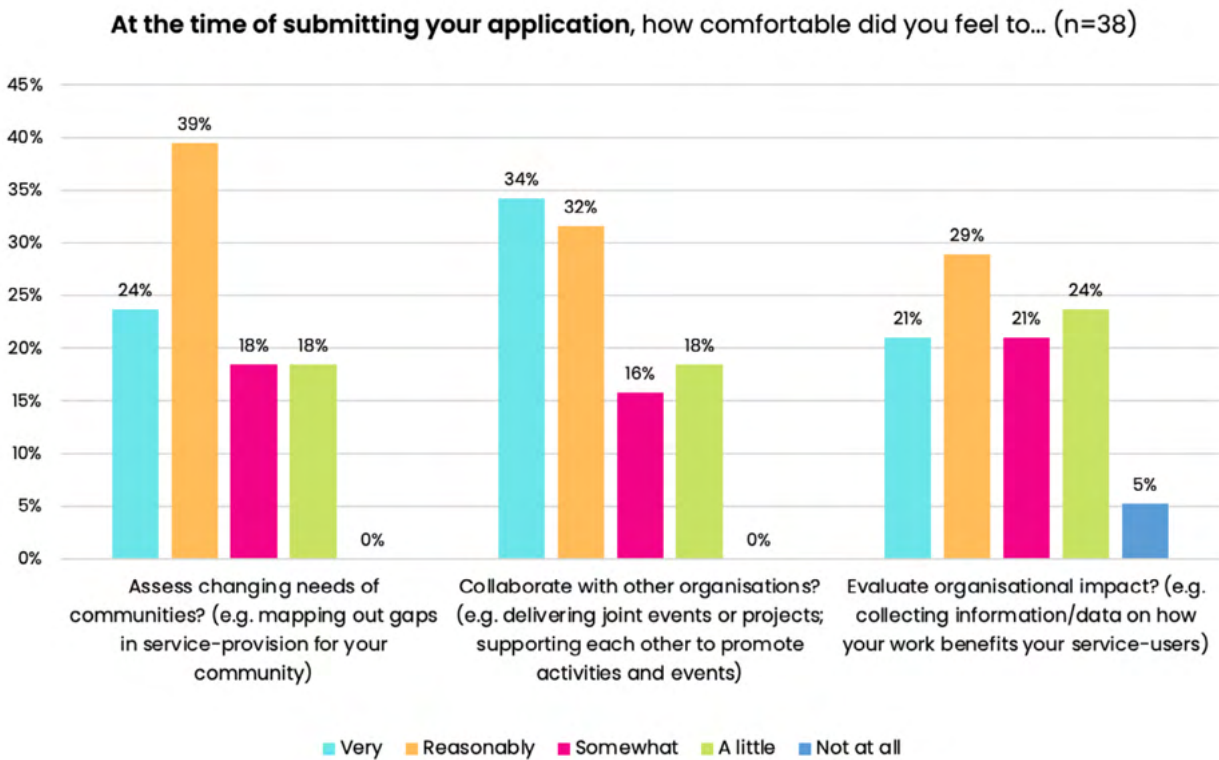
– Kairos Nottingham Lesbian Immigration Support Group

# 5. Findings: Impact of the Equity Fund

## How has the Fund impacted LGBT+ organisations?

### a) Baseline comparison

The baseline and final survey asked grantees about their organisational skills and capacity in assessing the needs of the communities they work with, delivering collaborative events and projects, and collecting information to understand how their work benefits people who use their services.





In the baseline survey, grantees were most comfortable collaborating with other organisations with 66% of respondents feeling “very” or “reasonably” comfortable. This was also the ability that improved the most over time, with 98% of organisations saying that they are “a great deal” or “somewhat” more comfortable in this, up +48%.

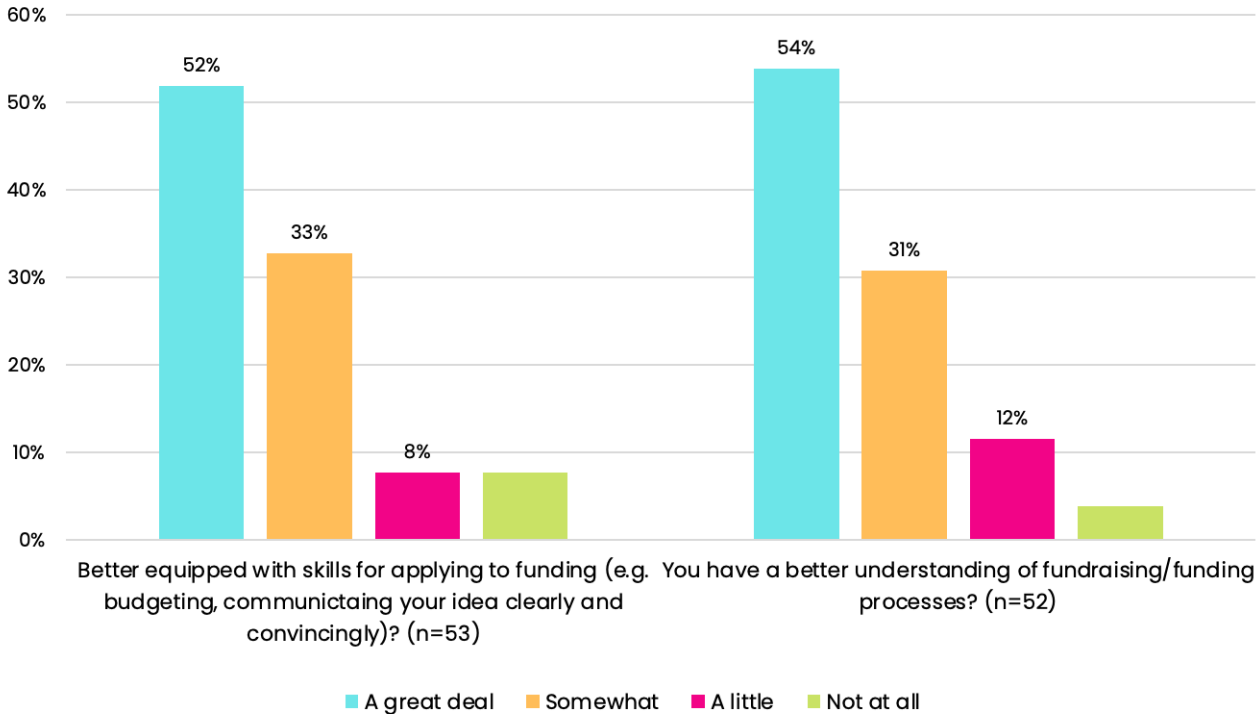
Evaluating organisational impact is an area where grantees would benefit from additional support. 29% of grantees in the baseline survey said that they were only “a little” or “not at all” comfortable collecting information on how their work benefits service users. In the final survey, this was also the area where grantees reflected the lowest improvement.

Most grantees responded in the baseline survey that they are relatively comfortable assessing the needs of their communities, and 72% reflected that their ability in this area had improved “a great deal” in the final survey.

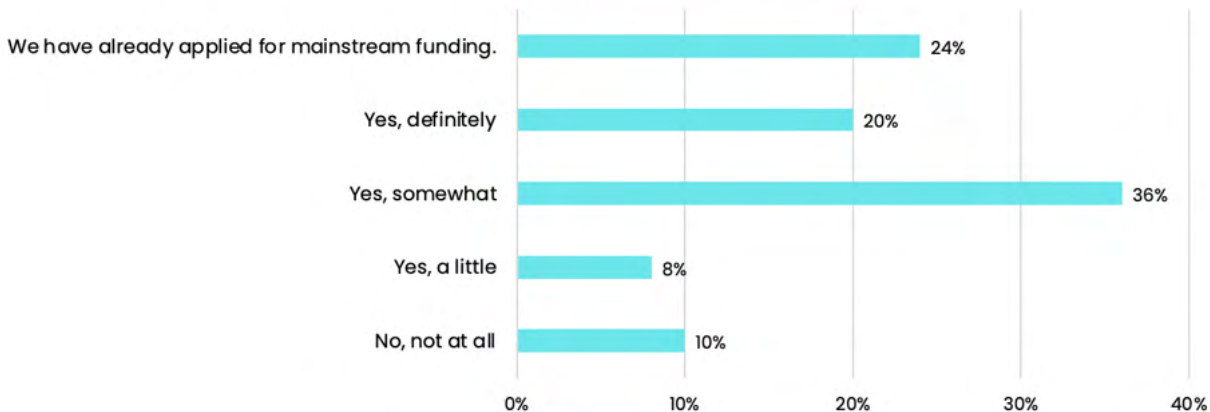
The next sections will look at these areas in greater depth.

**b) Fundraising capacity**

Thanks to the Equity Fund, do you feel...



Do you feel ready to apply for mainstream funding? (n=50)



More than half of grantees who responded to the final survey said that they are “a great deal” better equipped with skills for applying to funding opportunities and have a better understanding of the fundraising process.

At the time of the final survey, a quarter of grantees had already applied for mainstream funding. 36% of organisations felt somewhat ready, while 18% felt only “a little” or “not at all” ready to apply for mainstream funding.

The survey asked those who did not feel ready to apply for mainstream funding about what additional support they would need in order to feel ready, which prompted grantees to explain barriers to applying for mainstream funding. Lack of organisational finance and budgeting skills was a common reason.

**“ Putting an application together requires a range of skills...but we do not have the financial expertise to the level we would like.**

Another barrier was a lack of knowledge of other grants available, particularly grants that are suitable for grassroots and small organisations. One grantee felt that their work is “challenging to fund”, pointing to the value of specialist funders in supporting less mainstream but valuable work.

**“ We would like some help in identifying other sources of funding and organisations where we can apply for funding.**

Several grantees were aware of the fundraising workshops that Consortium hosted, but could not attend because of capacity or schedule. However, they expressed interest in attending future workshops, which would improve their confidence around mainstream funding.

Grantees appreciated the one-to-one support Consortium offered grantees when applying to the Equity Fund. Several said that they would benefit from similar tailored support in the future when applying to mainstream grants.

**“ We have successfully received funding from [two mainstream funders] – the skills developed through the application for the Consortium funding have helped us apply for these awards, but we’d still like more support.**

### **c) Understanding community needs**

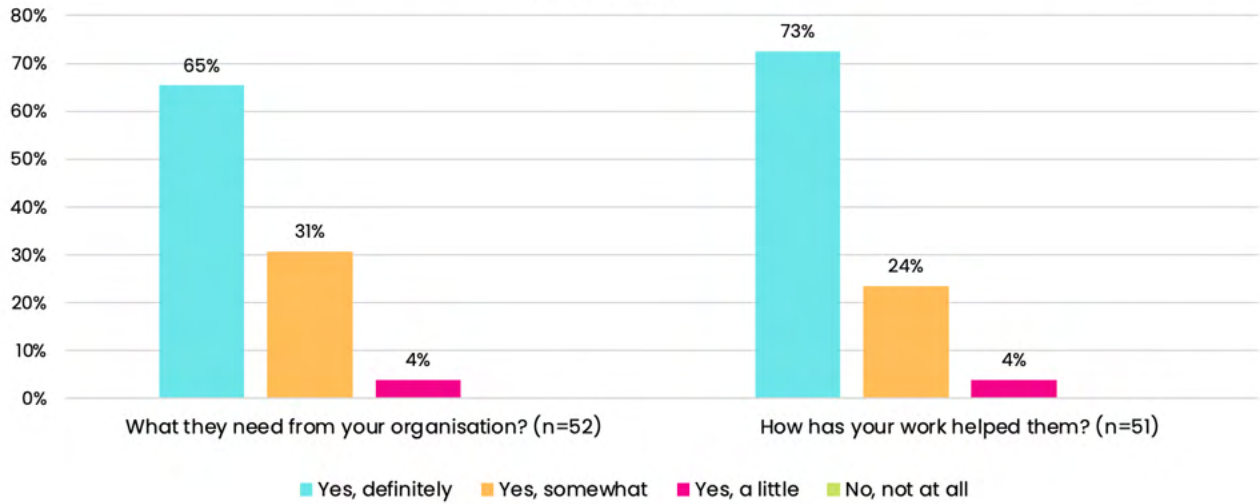
The majority of grantees have been able to engage with the people who use their services to understand what they need from their organisations and how their work has helped them.

Grantees varied in their strategies to engage with and collect this information, with some using a more ad hoc approach while others carried out questionnaires or consultation sessions. Some organisations relied on anecdotal feedback, for example new members joining through word-of-mouth as demonstration of the value of their work.

A few grantees discussed they would like to collect feedback from communities through more formal approaches, but identified organisational capacity as a limiting factor.

Some grantees also provided reasons they do not, or limit the amount of information they collect from people who use their services, for example being mindful of consultation fatigue or to prevent a sense of stigma.

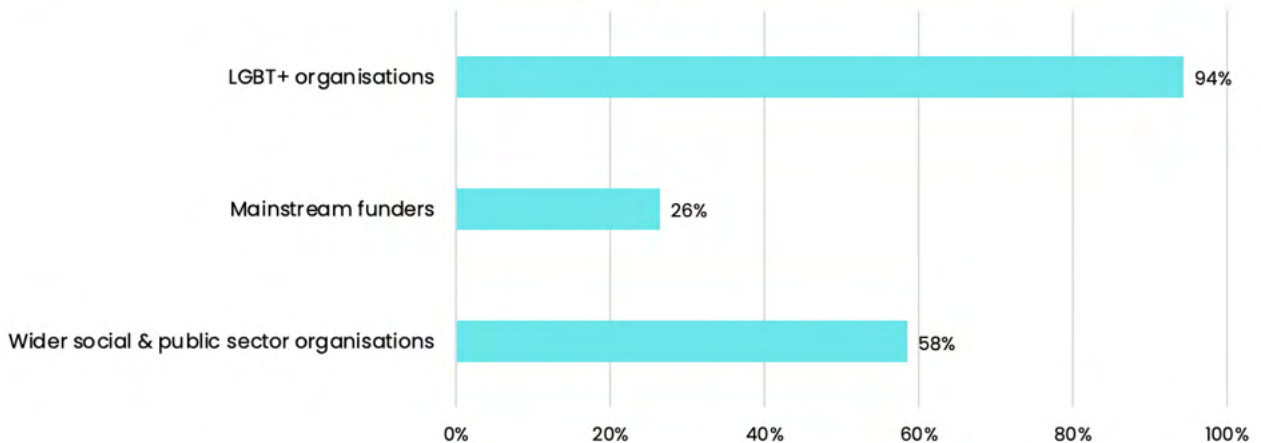
Have you been able to engage with your communities/people who use your services to understand...



**“ We deliberately do not store any information about anyone who attends our groups as these are low-trust community members and we want them to feel safe...Therefore, we don't collect feedback in a structured way, but ask each group how things are going and what else we might do.**

#### d) Collaborative/partnership working

Have you built new relationships or strengthened existing relationships with the following groups? (n=53)



Relationships with other LGBT+ sector organisations and wider social and public sector organisations are important for ensuring that the perspectives and the work of intersectional LGBT+ organisations are represented and have influence in these sectors.

Promisingly, 94% of grantees who took part in the survey said that they had built new relationships or strengthened existing ones with other LGBT+ organisations. 58% had done so with wider social and public sector organisations. In contrast, grantees were least positive about relationships with mainstream funders, with only 26% having built new or strengthened existing relationships with them.

Some grantees discussed these relationships in further detail. Many experienced that they had strengthened or developed their relationships with other organisations because of carrying out their project, which provided them with more visibility. Others did this with more intention, such as through marketing and outreach or developing strategic partnerships for future

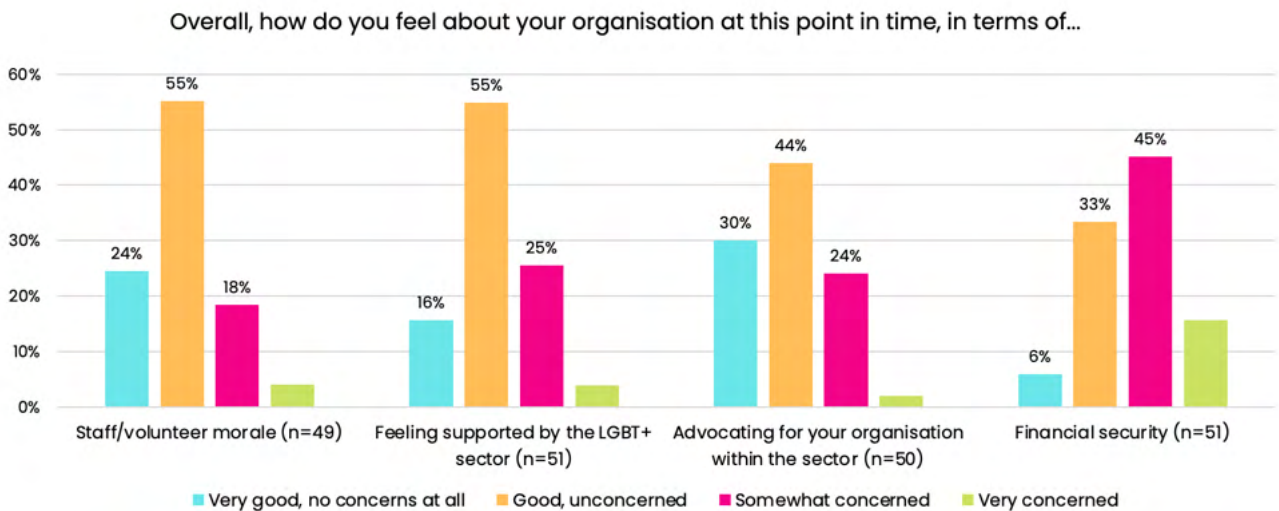
projects. Several people mentioned that being funded by the Equity Fund itself has led to more opportunities, as they can credibly show the demand and value of their work.

**“ The sessions we have run have enabled us to prove to other funders that there is a demand for the service we are providing to the LGBTQ+ community. ”**



Rumpus Room’s Showcase stall. Photo: CSC

**e) How the Equity Fund has supported grantees in their organisational development**



The majority of grantees who took part in the survey are not concerned about their staff/volunteer morale (79%), support from the LGBTQ+ sector (71%) or advocating for their organisation within the sector (74%).

The majority (61%) of grantees are concerned about their financial security at this point in time. Several grantees are in a position where they are nearing the end of their grant period with the Equity Fund, but have not successfully secured further funding streams or alternative income sources. Financial sustainability is a key concern for grantees.

**“ We have spent the grant so we now need to think of how to obtain a similar grant to help us continue with the same level of services that we provide.**

**“ We are looking for more funding [...] and are currently filling out some applications in the hopes of making it more secure in the long term.**

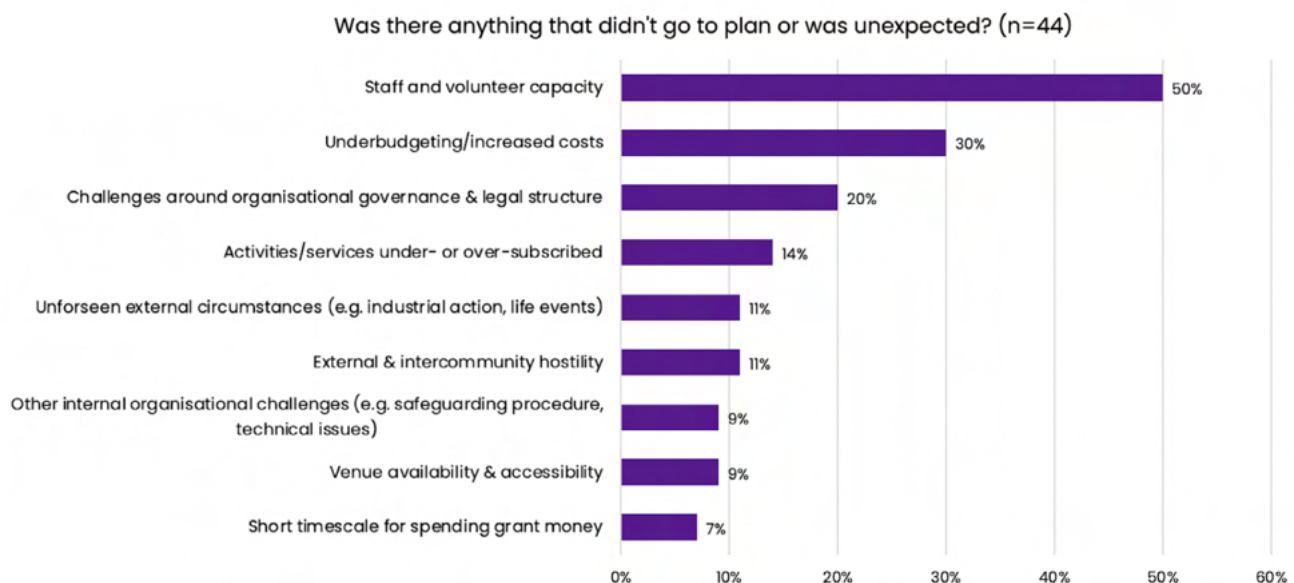
For those who are concerned about the support they receive from the LGBT+ sector (29%), or their ability to advocate for their organisation within the sector (26%), one commonly cited reason is that they experience difficulty in engaging with mainstream LGBT+ organisations and funders. This is because they feel the nature of their work and intersectional identities of the communities they work with are not fully understood by these organisations.

**“ We often find it difficult to engage with mainstream LGBT+ spaces and groups, perhaps due to the differences in demographics and needs of our service users. We have had an easier time engaging with [...] organisations that serve a particular intersection of the LGBT+ community.**

**“ As an LGBTQ organisation but working with a marginalised community, we still come across big orgs who don't consider us worth investing.**

There were fewer responses explaining concerns around staff and volunteer morale. Those who provided an explanation commented on the hostile media coverage and wider economic and social challenges (e.g. cost-of-living crisis, discrimination in daily lives) as causes for concern.

## What challenges did grantees face?



Grantees were asked about challenges experienced delivering their projects: things that did not go to plan, or was unexpected, which affected their ability to carry out their projects.

The most common issue that grantees experienced was around staff and volunteer capacity, with 50% of responses mentioning this. Several grantees explained they work in very small teams and their roles at their community group or organisation are not always their full-time job, so projects are heavily impacted by changes in personal circumstances or other work/life commitments. Some also commented that it has been more difficult than expected to recruit volunteers, or that volunteers can be inconsistent.

**“ We have had to delay events due to issues with our staff capacity—we are a small team of five volunteer trustees, and so if anyone has personal commitments or emergencies come up, that limits our ability to deliver events, particularly as we are all full-time workers and several are parents.**

Another common challenge related to project budgeting and the cost-of-living crisis – 30% of grantees discussed this in their responses. Several people found that they had underestimated staffing, venue or supplier costs when delivering their projects, often because of inflation. Some had covered these costs through securing additional funding, while others had to pay out-of-pocket or change their plans.

**“ We under-budgeted costs...A number of venues which were previously free of charge started charging an entry fee as a result of losses during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

**“ Costs of performance venues rose dramatically during the year and the cost of living crisis made ticket sales difficult. We offset this by [a member of staff] doing voluntary hours and not claiming travel.**

20% of grantees reported challenges because of their organisational structure or governance. Grantees – who are predominantly grassroots organisations with informal organisational structures – sometimes faced barriers as a result of this in some contexts where organisations are expected to have a formal structure. Some organisations also experienced tensions or changes to their board of trustees or organisational management during the grant period.

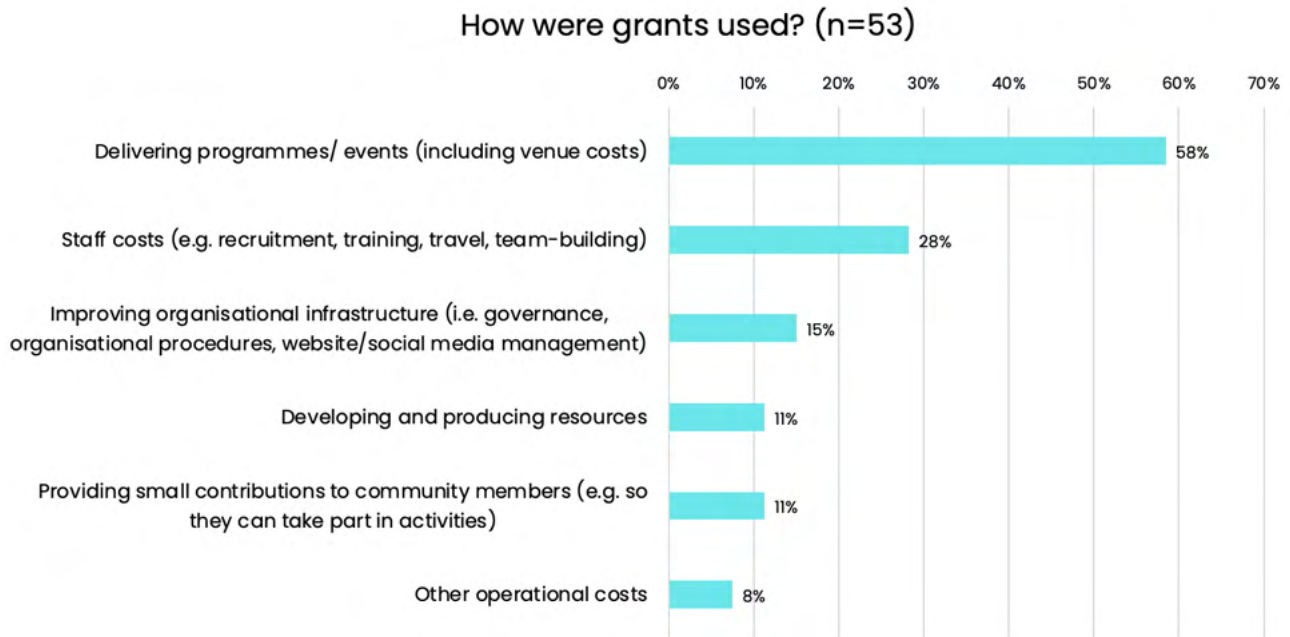
**“ [1] can see us still being excluded from some grant applications as we are not a registered charity.**

Transport strikes and other industrial action affected several projects as did difficulty finding accessible venues. 10% of responses referenced hostility from within the community (i.e. LGBT+ individuals or organisations) and externally, directed against grant organisations.

A few grantees felt the timescales within which they had to spend their grant money was challenging, and sometimes led them to change plans. Those who had received their grant in the last round of panel decisions said that this meant they had less time to deliver their project.

## How did grantees use their grants to support their communities?

This chart represents the proportion of grantees who used their grants in the following ways. Note that grantees often used their grant in more than one way and this list is not exhaustive



We asked grantees how they spent their Equity Fund grants. Over half (58%) of the grantees spent their grant delivering programmes and events. Grantees put a wide diversity of events and programmes on, including monthly and weekly meet-ups; beauty pageants; wellbeing workshops, art exhibitions; talks and discussions; art therapy; skills-building sessions: CV writing and employability, trips to the seaside and countryside; celebrations and parties; poetry and creative writing competitions; yoga and meditation; gym and strength training sessions; board games events; speed dating; trips to Pride events; sports tournaments; choirs; filmmaking workshops; zine-making and placard-making workshops; and film screenings.

A significant proportion of groups spent their grant, or a large part of their grant, on staff costs. Grants funded new part-time positions in operations, support, engagement, development, and social media. Grantees were also able to continue to pay sessional or temporary workers. Being able to pay staff 'properly' – who are from intersectional communities themselves – was cited as a huge challenge for grantees, and the Equity Fund enabled them to do this. As well as funding new and existing staff and sessional positions, grants were used to invest in teams' happiness and development, including in-person socials and training. One group used the fund to 'have a safe office to work from'.

15% of grantees focused on improving their organisational infrastructure in areas such as governance, organisational procedures, and website and social media management. One group described the many tasks they were able to achieve thanks to their Equity Fund grant:

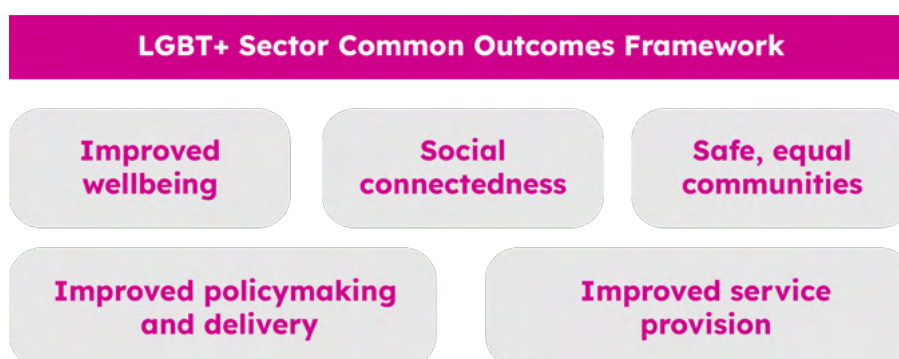
**“ We created a website and social accounts, commissioned a logo, registered with Companies House, and got ourselves a bank account. Furthermore, we've allocated roles, and spent time creating a mission statement and ethos around which we will base our actions as a co-op. We're also making merch, and paying ourselves for creating documents and operating procedures to ensure the best format for our affiliates and members. As we're putting on shows and other events, we've invested in banners for stages so we can spread the word about this disabled and queer artists' co-op!**

11% organisations used the grant to develop resources for their community and service provider, including digital and printed zines, as well as information packs for health professionals. Another 11% provided small contributions to the community who faced financial barriers to taking part in activities and events.

Some organisations used the grant to cover operational costs such as Zoom, web hosting, purchasing rights for screening films and websites.

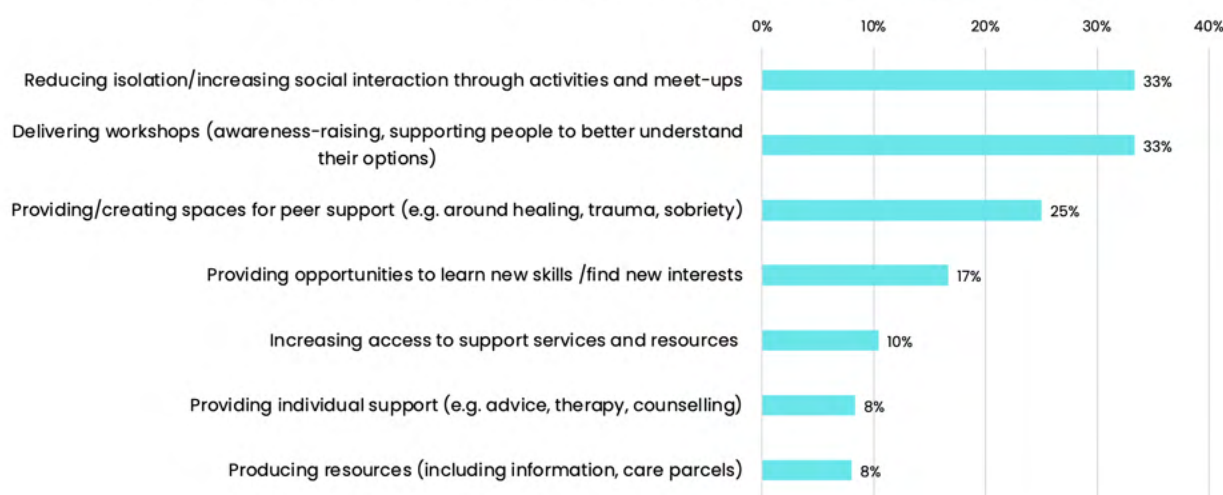
## How has the Equity Fund impacted intersectional LGBT+ communities?

Grantees were asked about how their Equity Fund-supported projects and activities contributed to the Common Outcomes Framework. These outcomes describe the changes LGBT+ organisations contribute to, but it is not intended to be exhaustive:



### a) Improving wellbeing

How is your work impacting the wellbeing of your communities? (n=48)



Grantees were asked how their work funded by the Equity Fund contributed to the wellbeing of the communities that they support.

A third of grantees reported that they delivered and organised activities and meet-ups aimed to reduce social isolation which disproportionately affects LGBT+ communities. These activities included regional and local Pride events and social events such as ‘tea and cake’ meetings.

A third of grantees also reported that they delivered workshops to provide support around issues affecting the wellbeing of LGBT+ people. These workshops covered a range of topics ranging from mental health; physical health and self care; sexual health; asylum, legal processes and rights; self-expression; combatting disinformation, and neurodiversity and disability support. Some grantees held workshops that explored LGBT+ topics and issues



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Around a quarter of grantees created and facilitated safe and trusted spaces for peer support, enabling people to work through trauma and difficulties, heal, manage sobriety, and have deeper conversations around health and wellbeing. Communities benefited from peer support groups in a number of ways, as 'container[s] for more difficult emotions', a way to validate feelings and experiences and share information and resources, and to collaboratively come up solutions to commonly-faced challenges. Grantees reported positive changes in people accessing peer support, including increased self-esteem, self-acceptance, ability to make new friends, and confidence in accessing gender-affirming healthcare. One organisation told us about the transformative power of this peer support:

**“ One of our Carer group attendees...felt alone, misunderstood and discriminated against because the healthcare staff she was engaging with really couldn't comprehend her being in a same sex relationship and kept making the assumption that they were sisters. Coming to the group made her feel empowered to correct them and ask them to respect their relationship.**

17% of grantees focused on providing opportunities for people to discover new interests and hobbies, such as creative-writing, drawing, filmmaking, basketball, and walking, which nurtures self-esteem and friendships.

One organisation commented that facilitating individuals to find new interests has a wide range of benefits:

**“ [Our work] has allowed people to express themselves in new ways through techniques like creative writing and drawing which in itself is very healing. We frequently see people feeling empowered to take control of their health and wellbeing, often leaving inspired to take steps forward. Our sessions serve as a reminder that we are powerful, creative beings and that we can change how we feel about life.**

To improve the wellbeing of their communities, 10% of grantees worked on increasing communities' access to healthcare and other support through providing resources and signposting to trusted and inclusive services.

A smaller number of grantees (8%) produced resources to support the wellbeing of communities, such as information sheets on neurodivergence, gender-affirming healthcare, LGBT+ parenthood and more.

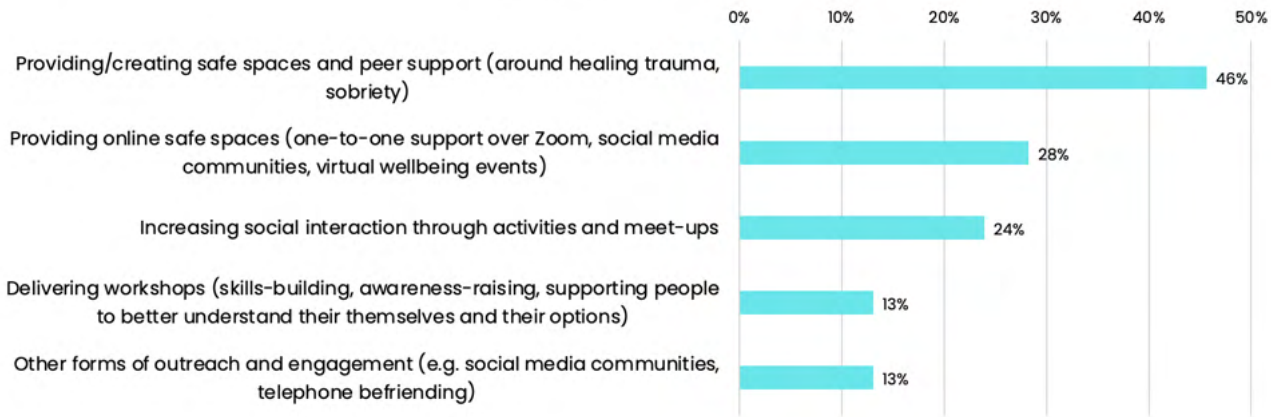
Another 8% of grantees used their Equity Fund grant to deliver direct one-to-one mental health support to individuals including therapy and counselling.

As a result of grantees' work improving wellbeing, supported communities commonly reported a boost in their mental health and wellbeing, reduced anxiety and an increased confidence from a sense of belonging.



**b) Improving social connectedness**

How is the funding helping you improve social connectedness in your communities?  
communities? (n=46)



We asked grantees how their Equity Fund project improved social connectedness in their communities. Almost half of the grantees focused on providing safe spaces and peer support, enabling communities to support each other with the day-to-day challenges and barriers they face, as well as longer term healing and sobriety journeys.

In order to improve social connectedness, grantees commonly used their Equity Fund grants to deliver online safe spaces, including one-to-one support over Zoom, creating social media communities, and virtual wellbeing events, which are often delivered alongside in-person meet-ups and events:

**“ We have a weekly meeting as well as a private Facebook group and Discord server. This allows the chance for people to make one to one connections as well as to join other community activities in informal groups so they feel more able to attend. You cannot overstate the importance of a safe space for the trans community especially when they are first exploring their identity.**

Some grantees commented that they opted for ‘online safe spaces’ to mitigate barriers communities often experience accessing in-person safe spaces, such as anxiety, transport and childcare. One grantee commented ‘We’re building our online presence – something which is vital to many in our community as they can’t always leave the house.’

Another grantee mentioned that in order for their support to reach digitally excluded communities, they introduced a telefriending scheme.

As well as building online communities, grantees have also delivered in-person meet-ups, events and workshops as an opportunity for individuals to socialise:

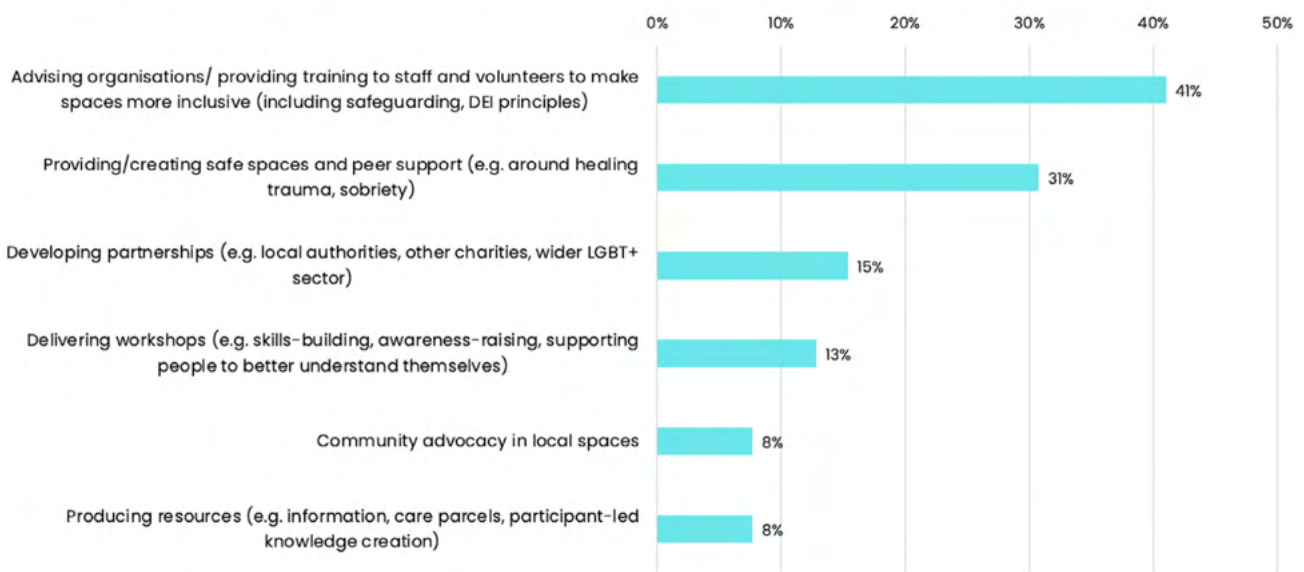
**“ We have facilitated... connection by organising social activities where people can come by themselves, and make new friends; like through board games or writing workshops or the more traditional speed dating/friending.**

Grantees used their Equity Grant funding as an opportunity to invest in widening their reach in the community in order to support more people, as one grantee mentioned:

**“ Before the funding, there were limited resources to raise the profile of the organisation. By being able to go out into the community in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, more young people have been able to access the group.**

### c) Increasing access to safer and more equal communities

How are you helping people who use your services to be a part of safer and more equal communities? (n=39)



We asked grantees how their Equity Fund-supported work supported the communities they worked with to be part of safe and more equal communities.

The most common strand of work grantees pursued in pursuit of this goal (41%) was advising local organisations, including schools, healthcare providers, sports centres, community spaces and large- and small-scale arts organisations, on how to make their spaces more inclusive and accessible for LGBT+ communities. Several grantees facilitated community consultations to support local public services and businesses to make their spaces safer and more accessible to LGBT+ communities.

One organisation organised a ‘trans swimming party’ to give trans people the opportunity to enjoy a space where they may not have felt safe or welcome in the past. This initiative created

enthusiasm and buy-in for management at the swimming centre to make changes to make the space more inclusive:

**“ [The Swimming Centre] have learnt from us about the needs of trans people which has helped them be prepared in future for welcoming trans guests.**

Some grantees invested funding in providing training to their staff on inclusive practices to inform future delivery and design, as well as improving and extending existing safeguarding and DEI policies and procedures:

**“ We have been working on...reporting policy and procedure[s] for when things happen during our events or spaces... [including when we need to hold team members accountable]. Although our team are also young people, we do hold social power when working with our members despite being the same age. Introducing policies like this has ensured there are strong guidelines on how to deal with these instances... [so our] community members [know]...we take their concerns and safety seriously.**

Other grantees decided to invest funding in training for other organisations in the community to support them to make their services and spaces more inclusive.

Grantees again identified peer support as key to creating safer and more inclusive places for LGBT+ communities. A key element of this is empowering individuals themselves – through the confidence- and self-esteem building that peer support can offer – to advocate for themselves with the services they already access. In the same way, knowledge-sharing, workshops on safety and wellbeing, and providing practical guidance has supported people to navigate existing services and spaces in a safer way.

15% of organisations prioritised developing partnerships with local bodies and organisations including local authorities, police, schools and universities, museums and cultural organisations, and the wider LGBT+ sector to improve safety for the community.

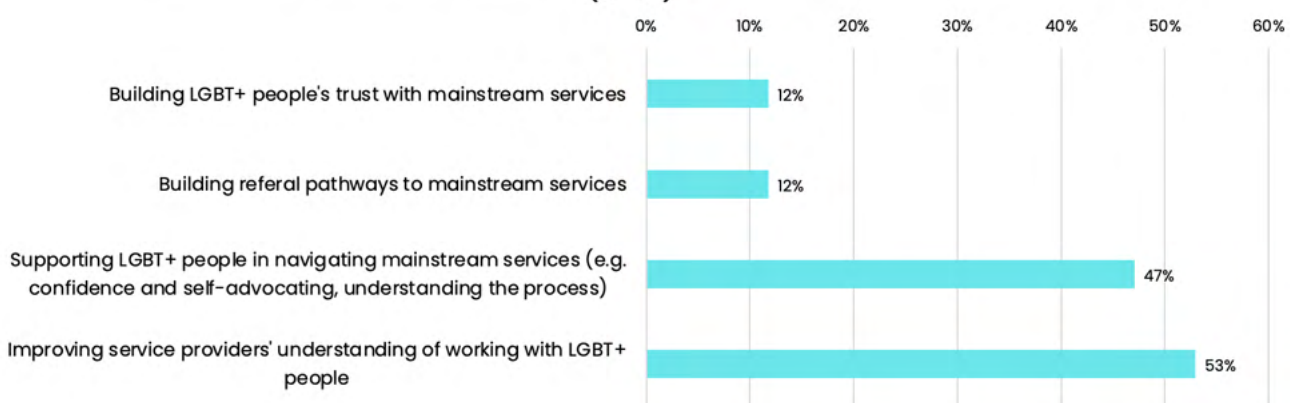
A small number of organisations (8%) have been focusing on raising awareness of their communities’ lived experiences, including discrimination and health inequalities, to inform service providers, as well as increasing their visibility in certain spaces and sectors so communities feel safer and more represented in those spaces.

A minority of organisations (8%) created resources to inform service providers, for example, films, toolkits for healthcare providers, participant-led media.

**d) Improving service provision and access to mainstream services**

How is your work improving your community's access to mainstream services?

(n=17)



This outcome area is related to the work that grantees have done in improving intersectional LGBT+ communities' access to and experience of mainstream services. Primarily, grantees whose projects addressed this outcome worked with healthcare providers, but other providers included legal support, social care, and services provided by national charities.

In total, 72% (38 out of 53) of grantees responded that their project worked towards improving their community's access to mainstream services. 17 provided additional information about how their project met this outcome.

The most common type of work that grantees were involved in was working with service providers to improve their understanding of the experiences and issues that LGBT+ people face when navigating these services, and how they can improve these experiences. This includes providing training to service provider staff, outreach and engagement with service providers, and informal ad-hoc conversations

**“ Over the funding period we've been able to be more proactive in making contact with healthcare providers, finding ways to work together and developing a greater understanding of their [trans and non-binary people] needs. This has helped us to develop our consultancy and training offer, enabling us to help more healthcare providers to provide trans-inclusive healthcare.**

Many funded organisations worked with their service users and communities to build their confidence and when engaging with mainstream services. This involved providing information about rights; how to navigate services; and how to advocate for themselves, as well as providing practical support when accessing support and dispelling misconceptions about services.

**“ We have made guidelines [from service providers] more accessible for the LGBTQ+ community by adjusting the language. We have also been able to give the community the tools to communicate effectively with service providers.**

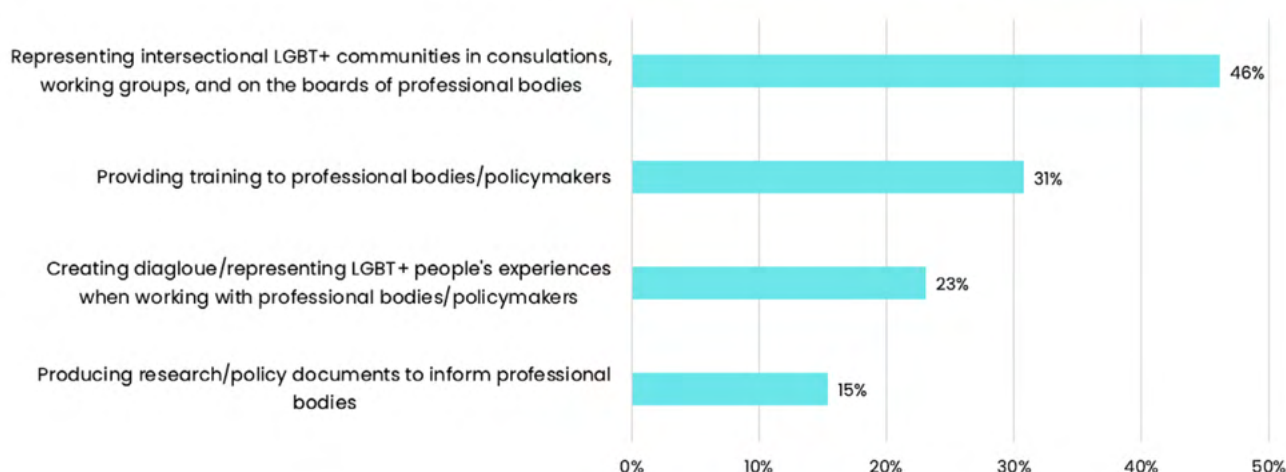
**“ The pre-bunking and debunking work we do through our health education and resource development, and the signposting function we have, remind members of our community that it is okay to seek help.**

Several organisations were able to build relationships with other mainstream charities or service providers to set up referral pathways for their service-users. Others worked towards building trust between LGBT+ communities and service providers, for example through open dialogue or through representing communities' voices when working with services.

**“ We feed back to them [Welsh Gender Service] every month on the communities' concerns and worries. Being able to inform the community that they are being heard, and that we have raised their concerns with the gender service has really fostered a better sense of trust between the services.**

## e) Improving policymaking

How has the funding helped you work towards improved policy making? (n=13)



The fewest number of grantees (14) indicated that their Equity Funded project worked towards improved policymaking compared to the other outcomes. 13 of these provided additional detail about how they worked towards this.

Around half of grantees who worked towards improved policymaking did this through representing the intersectional LGBT+ community they work with through consultations, working groups and in some cases on the boards of professional bodies. They also played a role in spreading the word and encouraging their community members to attend public consultations.

**“ [Our] volunteers attended grant aid consultation to explain why LGBTQ groups should continue to receive funding – the Council were planning to make all funding area based which would exclude city-wide groups like ours. In addition, we have talked to housing providers to improve safety for LGBTQ tenants in shared housing.**

Other groups were not directly involved in consultations or working groups, but were able to represent the communities they work with when working with professional bodies or policymakers in a different capacity, and provide guidance or informal advice about working with intersectional LGBT+ communities.

**“ We are working with the police, with GPs locally, CPS and others to develop better understanding of how provision of services and engagement with the trans community should work. As a voluntary and largely unfunded (and unstaffed) group, this is necessarily patchy and intermittent but we are making (local) progress.**

Importantly, several grantees reflected that they were able to increase their profile as a result of the funding and carrying out funded activities, which has meant that they are in a better position to engage with and influence professional bodies and policymakers.

**“ ...the funding has helped us to develop our organisation and our organisational reputation. This has resulted in us being invited to meetings and events that we previously hadn't been, enabling us to meet and network with professionals and with policy makers. Our growing reputation as a reliable organisation has also resulted in professional bodies reaching out to us for information and guidance, enabling us to start developing ongoing relationships.**

**“ With our improved profile, we are able to gain credibility to make an impact at national level...we have been contacted by the government's cancer team as an expert charity added to their roster.**

Other ways that grantees have worked towards improved policymaking include providing training to professional bodies and policymakers, and producing research or policy documents intended for this audience.

**“ Thanks to this funding, we have been able to provide a wider selection of training facilities. We've teamed up with three local councils and will be working closely with them to improve policies and advocate for the community.**

**“ We are developing an accessible piece of research on the needs of trans communities struggling/recovering from drug and alcohol [addiction]. This will be evidence-base to start working with public bodies more effectively.**

## 6. Case studies

### BLAQ UK

#### Community of focus: LGBT+ people of colour

BLAQ UK is the UK's first youth-led LGBTQIA+ organisation which aims to provide a space for Black queer young people (18-24) in the UK to come together, collaborate, celebrate, and construct long-lasting community partnerships and hubs in the UK.

BLAQ UK decided not to use their Equity Fund grant for event and programme delivery, but instead invested in organisational development, including strategy development, website development, developing partnerships, and team training and salary. However, a small amount of the grant did support BLAQ UK's Halloween Party in October 2022.

BLAQ UK decided to focus on organisational development because at the time of applying to the Fund, although the team were working hard delivering events, internal priorities differed drastically which had a negative impact on work and team member relationships. The decision to focus on development has meant BLAQ UK has been more absent in the community, which has not gone unnoticed. However, it has enabled the organisation to slow down and prioritise as a team which they believe is better for the organisation and community they serve in the long-run.

BLAQ UK have been able to make significant strides in their organisational development. Since being an Equity Fund grantee, they have a greater understanding of how to assess communities' needs and deliver collaborative events, as well as improved skills for applying to funding and knowledge around funding processes. BLAQ UK also reported being much better connected to organisations that are supportive of their work. They are now working in close partnership with Black Beetle Health CIO who are delivering six capacity-building sessions to BLAQ UK on topics such as governance, compliance, and project management.



BLAQ UK approached their organisational development in a number of ways. Due to the nature of their work, it is essential that the organisation is equipped with the tools to ensure not only the wellbeing of the community they serve, but also the team as vulnerable young people themselves. BLAQ spent time developing their safeguarding practice by reviewing safeguarding procedures and undergoing training.

The grant was also used to invest in team happiness and workflows, making BLAQ UK a better place to work. The grant funded a work social which supported team members to get to know each other, as well as a workspace platform which supported team communication.

BLAQ UK have also been afforded the time and space to strategise around financial sustainability and diversifying income: the team have been developing a strategy to boost donations, as well as develop their consulting services offering.

In the last year, one of BLAQ UK's proudest moments was putting on their Halloween Party. Although much of the year has been focused on development, returning to the community felt rewarding for the team. Attendees commented that it was 'such a welcoming and



friendly space' and felt like a community.

Another proud moment for BLAQ UK was that they have been able to pay a number of Black queer young people that support them to deliver their work which they would have not been able to do before. Equally it means that they have been able to also pay team members for additional time delivering our strategy outcomes.

**“ We would firstly like to say a MASSIVE thank you to the Grants team. This is ground-breaking work and demanding work which requires a certain level of understanding, attentiveness and concern. The Grants Team have done an impeccable job, so shout out to Leyla and LJ for these two years.**

## Black Beetle Health

### Community of focus: LGBT+ People of Colour

Black Beetle Health is dedicated to promoting the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ communities of colour through research, outreach and advocacy. The organisation creates and distributes extensive resources on health and wellbeing, addressing health misinformation; provides signposting to safe and inclusive health services; and empowers people to become more informed with their own health.



As a result of the Equity Fund, Black Beetle Health was able to publish its participatory research study 'InsideOUT: Perspectives on Health, Wellbeing and Equality for LGBTQ+ Black and People of Colour', which has won two awards. This research has also been presented to members of the community and to a wider audience to inform of the challenges that the community experiences. The funding has also been used to develop additional resources and cover operational costs. Through the funding period, Black Beetle Health also built new partnerships with NHS trusts who are interested in receiving training from the organisation, and deepened existing relationships with LGBTQ+ sector organisations.

Black Beetle Health feels that their fundraising skills and knowledge of the fundraising process has improved as a result of the grant. They reported that:

**“ We have also been able to make connections with other funders who have become interested in our work as a result of the funding received from Consortium.**

Part of the grant has been used by Black Beetle Health to organise its first in-person event for its delivery team, advisory board, and board members:

**“ Our proudest moment was definitely being able to come together in a physical space as an organisation, as we have never been able to do this...This reminded us that we were 'real', that we were not an invisible charity working on an invisible project on behalf of an invisible community. Instead, it reminds us of the value our work brings to both us as expert lived experience practitioners and the wider community we serve.**

## Safe Ageing No Discrimination

### Community of focus: Older LGBT+ People

Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) is a community organisation focused on improving the experiences and increasing the expectation of LGBT+ people as they age. SAND believes if we can identify and address the barriers that impact on LGBT+ wellbeing in late life; bring about change in organisations' working practice, and tap into influential policymaking channels, then we can fundamentally influence the way LGBT+ people and those who care for them experience – and expect to experience ageing.

SAND used their Equity Fund to deliver 'The Wave Project' – a campaign-based creative project designed to increase the visibility and profile of older LGBT+ people in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. SAND have collected around 60 photographs of people over the age of 50 who work or live in Shropshire – whether in rural areas or suburbs – waving at the camera. Participants range in ages, genders, sexualities, and gender identities.

In June 2023, SAND produced an exhibition in Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, where 16,000 people saw 'The Wave Project' exhibition that month.

The Wave Project had an enormous impact on SAND's community. The group learned from feedback they received that for the community the experience of being featured in the exhibition was overwhelmingly positive and being part of the project created a huge sense of belonging. One individual which the Project had a particular impact was Ray who uses a wheelchair and lives in a care home. Ray and his family were delighted to take part in the project, as well his care home manager and carers who brought him in a taxi to the event.



Photo: Safe Ageing No Discrimination

The Wave Project has been an overwhelming success; so much that SAND are running an Arts Council project centering on photography in Birmingham.

SAND also aims to influence service providers through their work. The main WAVE exhibition has been adapted into a mini-exhibition to raise awareness of older LGBT+ people at a local housing provider. The plan is for the photographs to continue being shared at different venues – whether it is the whole exhibition, or just parts of it.

SAND have greatly benefited from being an Equity Fund grantee, reporting improvement in several organisations areas including fundraising, monitoring and evaluation and delivering events.

Crucially SAND wants to empower other organisations in Telford where there is limited infrastructure for LGBT+ organisations. Through the Equity Fund, SAND have also been able to foster new relationships with smaller and newer LGBT+ organisations in and around Telford.

SAND commented that they have really enjoyed working on the SAND Project during their grant period commenting:

**“ It's done its job, raising the visibility of older LGBT+ communities... it's been nice to do something joyful!**

## GenderPhoria

### Community of focus: Trans and non-binary people

GenderPhoria is a Nottingham youth group for young people aged 13–18 who identify as gender variant (trans/non-binary/fluid), offering a safe and supportive place to explore gender identity.

The group's Equity Fund paid for a support coordinator to facilitate the weekly sessions for the young people each week. This was a particularly proud moment for GenderPhoria since this new staff member was an ex-member of the group – and now they're facilitating it!

The grant also supported the re-design of leaflets which were distributed at local Pride stalls, and paid sessional facilitators to run first-aid sessions tailored to the needs of the group focusing on substance overdose and self-harm.

This funding has benefitted GenderPhoria and the community it serves in multiple ways: the weekly group sessions welcome facilitators from the gender variant community who share lived experience-informed knowledge on topics such as trans feminisation and mental health coping mechanisms. GenderPhoria has received feedback that knowledge-exchange and validation has greatly increased the wellbeing and confidence of young people attending the group.

GenderPhoria has also been able to collaborate more effectively with professional bodies/ local providers, and provide data to assist them to better support the community. Whilst being an Equity Fund grantee, GenderPhoria has strengthened its relationship with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) in Nottingham. CAHMS have consulted young GenderPhoria's youth group on their new vision going forward, and some group GenderPhoria members have been acting as advocates for the gender diverse community in mental health services, as well as education. Working with the group has helped collect data about the mental health experiences of young gender diverse people 'that you can't get that data elsewhere' which pointed out gaps in service provision and highlighted how the community can be supported.

Genderphoria is happy with its status as an informal group, like many others supporting LGBT+ communities. However as mainstream funders are currently set up, informal groups are often excluded from funding due to high-level due diligence requirements. According to GenderPhoria's, what is exciting about the Equity Fund is that it is focused on community groups, which make up a large proportion of the LGBT+ sector, and is a way for funding to reach them.



## Q:alliance

### Community of focus: d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent LGBT+ people

Q:alliance is a LGBTQ+ charity working across Milton Keynes and Bedford. Thanks to the Equity Fund, Q:alliance has been able to develop and facilitate a weekly Neurodiverse Safe Space, led by a staff member or volunteer who identifies as neurodivergent. These sessions are a calm and nurturing space where the neurodiverse community in Milton Keynes are able to connect, while taking part in a wide range of activities, ranging from crafts, skills development, workshops and guest speakers. Additionally, Q:alliance have also used the grant to run more support services for their neurodivergent service users, such as CV writing and employment support, advice on navigating healthcare, and general support, such as with reading and writing.

For Q:alliance, their proudest outcome as a result of the grant was in being able to grow and flourish in their collaborations with other organisations.

**“ We’ve teamed up with three local councils and will be working closely with them to improve policies and advocate for the community.**

The organisation also reported having greatly grown in their fundraising abilities and the ability to assess the needs of their community, as a result of the Equity Fund.

## London Cruisers Basketball

### Community of focus: LBT+ Women

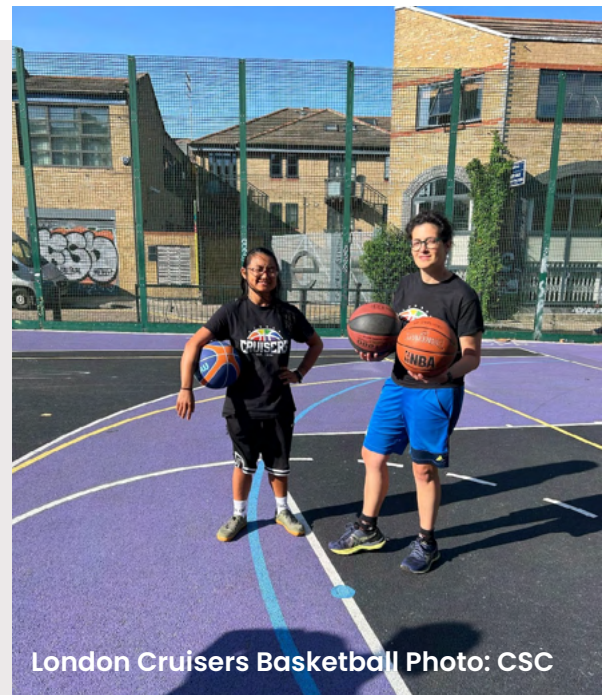
The London Cruisers is London’s longest running LGBTQ+ basketball club, offering a supportive and inclusive atmosphere for both experienced players and newcomers to the sport. The award from the Equity Fund has enabled them to organise a basketball tournament for LGBTQ+ teams from across the UK. They have also established a beginner’s group, allowing over 60 LGBT+ women and non-binary people to try basketball over the funding period. Additionally, basketball training was provided to both the experienced team and new players. A small portion of the grant was used to update their website and social media, in order to enhance outreach.

The London Cruisers’ proudest moment was running the national basketball tournament, which involved almost 80 players.

**“ The event’s success highlights our commitment to inclusivity and encourages us to plan for its return next year. Equally gratifying was our ability to introduce basketball to a diverse range of newcomers, particularly those who had never before experienced the sport.**

London Cruisers Basketball reported feeling more confident in their ability to fundraise, and a better understanding of the fundraising process as a result of the Equity Fund. The organisation says:

**“ Thanks to the funding, we’re fostering stronger social connections in our community through the power of team sport. By creating a welcoming space for LGBT+ women and non-binary people to come together and play as a team, we’re not only building friendships but also a sense of belonging. Being part of our basketball team means more than just the game – it’s about forming lasting bonds, enjoying the sport, and embracing a supportive community where everyone can thrive.**



London Cruisers Basketball Photo: CSC

## 7. Behind the scenes: reflections and key learnings

This section combines insights from the interim report and the final report to discuss the structure and delivery of the Equity Fund: what is working well, and opportunities for improvement. Findings from this section relate to both phases of the Fund – the Grantmaking phase and the Programmes phase. For a more specific discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the mechanisms of the grantmaking process, please refer to the interim report.

### What works well

#### **The equitable and inclusive funding mechanism is impacting intersectional communities.**

The structure of the Equity Fund breaks down barriers for intersectional LGBT+ organisations who are best placed to support their communities but experience structural disadvantages to accessing funding.

The specificity of the eligibility criteria supported the ‘led by and for’ LGBT+ organisations feel that the Fund is for them. Grantees benefit from the well-designed application process and additional support that addressed accessibility needs and de-mystified the process for less-experienced applicants. The dedication and approachability of the Grants Team were key to the funding process. Grantees were comfortable to ask for help and clarification which ensured Grantees were set up for success. Many organisations received funding for the first time through the Equity Fund, equipping them with the skills and confidence to apply for other pots of funding in the future.

As a result, and as the findings of this evaluation show, the Equity Fund made a considerable difference to intersectional communities: connecting people and communities; improving health and wellbeing (much of which is around identity, building social connection, reducing emotional loneliness); complementing gaps in overstretched public health service; and providing advocacy (improved policy-making, improved service provision).

#### **Investment, not just funding, creates long-term and lasting impact.**

The Equity Fund Grants team and community panellists understood grantees’ work and took a long-termist approach to distributing grants. Grantees reported they felt those managing the Fund saw grants as investments in the future and sustainability of ‘led by and for’ LGBT+ organisations, rather than a one-off opportunity.

Assistance during the application process and one-to-one support during the ‘Programmes’ phase of the grant period enabled organisations to develop relevant skills for securing funding and delivering programmes in the future. Grantees reported having improved ability to increase their reach and build or strengthen relationships with other organisations and mainstream funders.

The Grants team delivered a programme of capacity-building support during the second phase of the Equity Fund programme via one-on-one and group sessions when the majority of grants had been distributed. The Equity Fund also hosted two grantee events for networking, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing: the Equity Fund Grantee Day in Leeds (May 2023) and the Equity Fund Showcase in London (September 2023). These events allowed grantees to meet and connect, and some of these connections have flourished into close working relationships or partnerships.

## **The Fund is truly participatory.**

The role of community panellists who bring a wealth of lived experience and professional/sector experience have been critical to the success of the Fund. They are able to make informed decisions that are both rigorous and appropriate, for example, weighing up risk appropriately, while always keeping intersectional LGBT+ communities at the heart of the process.

“ *The communication from LGBT+ Consortium is always inclusive and accessible which is really appreciated. Leyla has been a fantastic support.* ”

## **Opportunities for improvement**

### **Staff capacity is limited**

In the first phase of the Equity Fund, the two members of the Grants team provided pre- and post-application support, while also maintaining one-to-one contact with panellists and coordinating panel meetings. Their workload meant that their capacities were limited, which delayed communication with grantees and applicants.

During the development phase, the Grants team reported that they did not have enough time and resources to ensure all grantees received the support they needed “real community engagement takes a lot of time!”

The flexible structure of the Equity Fund programme, while minimising burden on grantees, resulted in additional stress, and sometimes work, for the Grants team. Due to the fact there were no regular check-ins or reporting requirements, the Grants team had to “assume no news was good news” while some grantees were struggling with delivering their grant and were non-communicative. Some grantees were not fully aware of their commitments, for example financial reporting, which led to additional chasing up to ensure the information was returned.

A greater degree of formality and technical structure could have reduced burden on the Grants team, for example, incorporating an “award kick-off meeting” where grantees were briefed on their commitments. A ‘halfway checkpoint’ for financial reporting could have been useful to ensure that groups who were struggling could access additional support.

Consortium provided fiscal hosting for several grantees who were not formally set up to receive public grant funding. While this lowered barriers to access, in some cases it also caused additional administrative, financial, and logistical burden for both grantees and the Grants team.

### **Grantee engagement and development support**

Whilst the Equity Fund was designed to lower barriers so groups run by intersectional communities can better access funding, it also aimed to prepare grantees to apply for mainstream funding through familiarising with the grantmaking process. The Grants team felt that while they were able to provide information and guidance about the requirements of mainstream funders, for example strong governance, through one-to-one and group support, there could have been a stronger emphasis on this aspect. In the future, the Programme work could have a stronger emphasis on the expectations of mainstream funders, so grantees feel more confident to apply for mainstream funding after the Equity Fund.

Some grantees lacked capacity to engage with the Programme work. Many at the helm of organisations do not work full time on their funded projects or volunteer their time. The Grants team had to carefully think carefully about how often to communicate so as not to overwhelm.

## Relationship between funders, panellists and grantees

As a participatory fund, those involved in the Equity Fund have reflected on the power dynamic and relationship between funders and the communities and organisations that they are funding. For example, there is a potential risk of conflict of interest as the Grants team is providing pre-application support to applicants while also chairing panel meetings where funding decisions are made.

The Equity Fund intends to shift power from funders to communities. The community panellist model of decision-making has been critical as it creates a situation where decision-making power lies with people who are a part of the communities they are funding. Similarly, the Programme aimed to validate grantees' expertise of the intersectional communities they serve and that they are the leaders when it comes to supporting those communities.

Despite these measures, the Grants team at Consortium sometimes felt that grantees expected them to have 'all the answers' simply because they were the funder. Although the Grants team acknowledged this may be down to lack of grantees' lack of experience with funders, they recalled grantees asking for guidance on organisational decisions and frequently checking in about tiny changes to their funded activities. Addressing the funder-grantee power imbalance continues to be a work in progress and should be a focus of future iterations of the Equity Fund and other participatory funding models.

## 8. The success of the Equity Fund: What the findings say

Overall, the Equity Fund – which set out to be a participatory Fund – has facilitated the flow of funding to intersectional communities and the ‘led by for’ organisations that support them who are deeply underserved by mainstream funders.

The design of the Equity Fund – which incorporates a supportive application process; capacity-building post-grant; and a unique and innovative participatory grantmaking model – meant that grantees felt supported, understood and well-represented in decision making processes.

Ultimately, the Equity Fund is one of the only viable funding sources for grassroots LGBT+ organisations serving intersectional communities.

Below, we assess the Equity Fund’s achievement and success against each of its impact areas:

### **Intersectional LGBT+ organisations are able to grow and influence the LGBT+ voluntary sector in more equitable ways as a result of new funding.**

The ability of the Equity Fund to get funding to intersectional LGBT+ organisations, and the support it provided, has had a transformational impact on the development of grantee organisations.

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate that the Equity Fund has been instrumental in providing organisations with the capacity and resources to develop their organisations in terms of governance, community consultation, monitoring and evaluation, developing partnerships, as well as enabling them to produce successful programmes and events cementing their reputations and bolstering their visibility, profile and reach in the sector.

However, despite the opportunities that arose from being an Equity Grant grantee, a significant area of concern for grantees was financial security. Although some organisations had lined up new pots of funding, many had not, and grantees felt that long-term sustainability (ie. overcoming reliance on grants, and becoming financially self-sustaining) was not currently in reach. Although the Equity Fund could do more capacity-building around financial sustainability, financial insecurity is a sector-wide trend and dependent on external factors which are not always able to be addressed through individual support.

Many funded intersectional LGBT+ organisations were able to influence the LGBT+ voluntary sector indirectly through partnership work. For example, funded projects which worked with mainstream LGBT+ organisations increased their understanding of the issues and best practices when working with intersectional LGBT+ communities. Nonetheless, influencing the LGBT+ voluntary sector was not a direct aim of the organisations that were funded; their projects were focused more on their own communities of focus.

There was a greater sense of cohesion between LGBT+ organisations built through the Fund. At the end of their grant period, the majority of grantees reported they felt more included/ supported by the LGBT+ sector and able to advocate for their organisation within the sector.

### **Intersectional LGBT+ organisations are better equipped to work with their beneficiaries as a result of receiving funding and support through the development programme.**

As a result of funding and receiving support, grantees have been better equipped to work with beneficiaries. At the end of their grant period, the majority of grantees reported they had more confidence regarding understanding the needs of their grantees and how their work had helped them through improved knowledge/skills around monitoring and evaluation. Grantees also reported improved knowledge and confidence in delivering events and programming.



As a result, grantees were able to better/more effectively deliver programmes and support that contribute to the Common Outcomes Framework: the areas of change which Consortium aimed to bring about through funding organisations led by and for intersectional LGBT+ organisations.

**Intersectional LGBT+ organisations will have more confidence to develop relationships with, and access to, further funding through The National Lottery Community Fund's wider programmes as a result of the development programme.**

The Equity Fund supported intersectional LGBT+ organisations to have more confidence to access further funding through The National Lottery Community Fund's wider programmes, as well as other mainstream funding.

At the end of the grant period, 52% of grantees reported they were better equipped with skills for applying to funding 54% reported they had a better understanding of fundraising and funding processes. 24% of organisations had already applied for mainstream funding, whilst 56% reported they felt ready to apply for funding.

From Consortium's perspective, there could have been more done to prepare grantees to apply for mainstream funding in the future, particularly around the requirements of funders and the steps they can take to make sure they get these things in place. However, this requires ongoing engagement and support to build fundraising skills.

## 9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, we've compiled a list of recommendations for Consortium, mainstream funders, and local partners to improve future service delivery and design and to amplify the impact of the many benefits of the Equity Fund for the future.

### For Consortium

- **Provide more in-depth monitoring and evaluation training.** At the end of the grant period, grantees were least confident in this area compared to other skills. This could be done via compulsory one-hour workshops for grantees, followed by a one-to-one session with a Grants Team member who can support grantees to implement their new knowledge into their organisational contexts.
- **Create more opportunities to support income generation** and ways to buffer the cost of the cost-of-living-crisis. 45% grantees reported that they were 'somewhat concerned' by their organisation's financial security at the end of the grant period.
- **More skills-based development on staff and volunteer capacity, governance and legal structure, and budgeting.** These were additional areas that grantees felt they lacked confidence at the end of the grant period. In particular, many grantees felt they had under budgeted for their programmes, and would benefit from support to ensure they are costing more accurately.
- **More technical structure to the post-grantmaking process** would reduce burden on the Grants team, who reported that the highly flexible and informal structure, while minimising burden on grantees, resulted in additional work for them. This meant that the already-stretched Grants team lacked time to ensure all grantees received what they needed through the Programme work.
  - A greater degree of formality and technical structure could have reduced burden on the Grants team, for example, incorporating an 'award kick-off meeting where grantees were briefed on their commitments.
  - A 'halfway checkpoint' for financial reporting would be useful and ensure that groups who were struggling could access additional support.
- **Greater emphasis on mainstream funders' requirements for the mainstream funders.** Although many grantees reported they felt prepared to apply and/or had already applied for mainstream funding, the Grants team felt that they could have done more to inform grantees of the requirements of mainstream funding, but also how their grantmaking processes. Consortium could create a formal structure for this, such as organising quarterly workshops with a mainstream funder.
- **Skills training for influencing the LGBT+ voluntary sector.** One of the outcome areas of the Equity Fund was to equip organisations to be better able to influence the LGBT+ sector. Although this has been achieved in some capacity (ie. organisations are more resilient, and therefore have more capacity to influence and they've built with mainstream LGBT+ organisations), skills training workshops could be included in programming to improve groups' confidence and skills in advocating, influencing, and campaigning.
- **Stronger messaging that the grantees are the 'experts'.** The Grants team reported that grantees would defer to them, when the Equity Fund aimed to empower them as 'experts of their field' and break down power dynamics of the funder-grantee relationship. This could be improved by simply providing stronger messaging that the grantees are experts in delivering to their community and they should trust themselves.
- **Embed flexibility for grantees experiencing 'burnout'.** The Grants team were praised for their flexibility and understanding of the constraints of grantees who were often burnout. The team should continue with this approach. However, the Programme itself could be designed to accommodate for this structurally – for example grantees could be given

extra funding to delegate in their team, so organisational leaders and participate and attending from the Programme work (ie. events and skills-based workshops). Equally more technical structure to the grantmaking process could reduce the burden on grantees, as well as the Grants team.

- **Pooled resources for grantees.** Grantees reported there were still expenses that were difficult to cover despite their grant, for example subscriptions to Zoom and Canva. Consortium could agree with providers to provide discounted rates to grantees.

## For The National Lottery Community Fund and other mainstream funders

- **Understand the value of 'local knowledge' and targeted funds for funding intersectional communities.** The lived experience and professional knowledge of LGBT+ Consortium's Grants team and community panellists were critical to the successful distribution and the deep impact of the Fund. Because they were embedded in their communities, they were able to ask the "right" questions and prioritise issues based on their understanding of the challenges that their communities are facing. Grantees felt that the specificity of the funding criteria were "for them" and were encouraged to apply. The combination of the two ensured that intersectional LGBT+ communities benefited from the funding.
- **Share power and resources.** Related to the point above, mainstream funders should leverage their strengths and recognise their weaknesses when funding intersectional communities. It may be the case that infrastructure organisations already working in the sector, such as Consortium, have existing connections, trust, and convening power which will ensure that funding reaches the intended communities. Sharing or delegating the management of the Fund (i.e. intermediary grantmaking) facilitates this process.
- **Build relationships with and invest in 'led by and for' organisations long term, rather than only providing one-off project funding.** The Equity Fund demonstrates the value of an approach that values the sustainability of funded organisations, as well as the impact of their projects. When grant decisions are made by panellists, there is consideration around whether the proposed budget is appropriate for the scope of their project, but also its implications on the long-term viability of the organisation. The development support and personalised support helps ensure that organisations are not only funded once, but are equipped with the skills and confidence to keep their work going.
- **Recognise that organisations need to be supported differently.** Genuinely supporting intersectional led by and for organisations means understanding that they may require additional support, or different ways of being supported in order to access funding. Considering different professional and lived experiences, expectations, abilities and levels of knowledge when designing funding processes, means that organisations benefit from an individualised, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to grantmaking. In providing this, Consortium ensured that organisations who have never received funding before were able to be successful through the Equity Fund, reaching previously underserved communities.

## For local partners (local public services and organisations)

- **Ensure that working with intersectional LGBT+ organisations is mutually beneficial.** Intersectional LGBT+ organisations have a wealth of knowledge and experience to offer local partners, including supporting them to develop more inclusive practices and spaces and broadening their reach. However, intersectional organisations are also more likely to lack resources and capacity. While financial remuneration is a necessary starting point, explore other forms of support - for example through sharing resources and space or providing fiscal hosting.

- **Value lived experience and embed it in organisational practice.** Many grantees working with local public services and organisations are providing training and advice and facilitating community consultations to ensure that their practices are appropriate and inclusive of the intersectional communities they work with. Public services and mainstream organisations should recognise that if they are not intentionally working to include the voices of intersectional communities, they risk actively excluding people from their services. They should seek out opportunities to work with intersectional LGBT+ organisations to ensure that their practice is inclusive of all.
- **Use principles from the Equity Fund when developing participatory practices.** For organisations and public services seeking to adopt a more participatory approach to their work, the Equity Fund is an exemplary model for how this can be achieved. From designing decision-making processes that centre lived experience and shift power to intersectional communities, to investing adequate time and maximising accessibility, these are principles which should inform all community-centred participatory models of working.

## 10. Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank Equity Fund grantees and the Steering Group members for generously offering their time, reflections and expertise in this evaluation. We also appreciate the warmth, enthusiasm and dedication of the Equity Fund Grants Team in supporting and facilitating this evaluation.

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### **Equity Fund Grantees**

African Equality Foundation Limited

Black Beetle Health

BLAQ UK

British Asian Queer Community for East and Southeast Asians (BAQC ESEA)

Buff Bar Bristol

Cara-Friend

Club Kali Network

Deaf Rainbow UK

Eclipse

Forge MCR

G(end)er Swap CIC

GIN LGBTQIA Indian Network UK

HERe NI

Imaan LGBTQI+ Muslim support

Kairos Nottingham Lesbian Immigration Support Group

Kemptown Wave

Last Frame Film Club

Learnest CIC

Leeds LGBTQ+ Community Consortium

Lesbians Talk Issues Revisited

LGBT UNITY GLASGOW

Living Free U.K CIC

London Cruisers Basketball Club

MagicUs!

Marlborough Theatre Productions Ltd

Miss Trans Global Organisation CIC

National Survivor User Network

Not Alone Plymouth

OASIS (NORFOLK) TRANSGENDER SUPPORT GROUP

oestrogenation

Opening Doors

Out & Proud African LGBTI

Out In The City  
Out Together (Friends of Dorothy)  
OUTpatients  
Outreach youth  
Pembrokeshire Pride  
Planet Nation  
ProudMinds  
Q:alliance  
Queer China UK  
Queer Stage Revolution  
Radical Weavers (formerly Coorie Creative)  
Rainbows Across Borders  
Rumpus Room LTD  
Safe Ageing No Discrimination  
Sappho Events  
Scottish Bi+ Network  
Songbirds Choir  
Spirit Level Transgender Association  
Spiritual Lesbians and Wellbeing  
SQIFF: Scottish Queer International Film Festival  
The Black Boy Joy Club  
The Clare Project  
The Open Minds Project  
The Queer Parenting Partnership  
TNB Connect  
Trans Aid Cymru  
Trans Creative  
Trans Grampian  
Trans Harm Reduction  
Trans Hull  
Trans Pride Brighton & Hove  
Trans Pride Manchester CIC  
Trans Pride South West  
Trans Writes  
Trans+ on Screen  
TRANS4ME  
TransActual UK  
Transparent Presence CIC  
TransSober  
United Pride Friends  
University of Edinburgh East and Southeast Asian Queer Society  
Uplifted  
We're Still Here

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