



UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY





At the start of 2025 we commissioned two independent evaluators – Kelly Bradshaw-Walsh and Oliver Carrington – to carry out research amongst the voluntary sector in our local community of Merton and Wandsworth.

The aim was to gain a clear understanding of the funding priorities of local organisations and their perceptions of our grant making, and to use those findings to inform our future grant-making strategy.

IN THIS REPORT

The research was split into three areas:

01 Understanding the needs of local people

02 Understanding the needs of local voluntary sector organisations

03 Understanding perceptions of the Wimbledon Foundation and our grant making

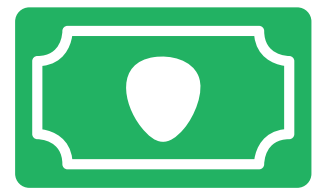
Based on the results of the research, a series of recommendations were made by the evaluators.

This report provides a summary of the research findings and the seven key recommendations which stemmed from the results.

It also outlines the changes we will be making to our grant making strategy in response to the recommendations.

LISTENING TO OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

A survey was sent to 523 voluntary sector organisations in Merton and Wandsworth and representatives from **189 charities responded**. Of those:



122

had received a grant from the Foundation



24

had been unsuccessful at applying for a grant from the Foundation



43

had not previously applied for funding from the Foundation

Three **online focus groups** and three **interviews** were conducted with a cross-section of the survey respondents. Seven further interviews were held with local stakeholders including funders, infrastructure bodies, and local authority representatives.

External research and datasets were also used to form the recommendations.



189

Voluntary sector respondents



22

Qualitative research participants

01

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE



Financial insecurity and cost of living pressures were identified by the voluntary sector as the top challenges for local people.



Poor mental health and wellbeing was also identified as a top challenge facing local people.



Physical health and inactivity was also of concern, although less commonly reported.



Qualitative research reinforced these findings and identified **housing** as another significant challenge. It also highlighted how these issues are deeply interconnected.



I feel that financial insecurity is probably the most significant underlying issue and one that causes (or exacerbates) the other struggles that people are facing.

Survey respondent

02 UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS



Organisations in Merton and Wandsworth face challenges accessing **multi-year** and **unrestricted or core funding**. These financial pressures are worsened by rising demand for services and the cost-of-living crisis.



Recruitment and retention of volunteers, staff and trustees also emerged as clear challenges. Burnout of these groups is a growing concern, as many face overwhelming workloads, emotional strain and a lack of wellbeing support.



Small organisations are always living hand to mouth and unable to strategically plan, retain skilled staff, pay them appropriately and sustain delivery of service.

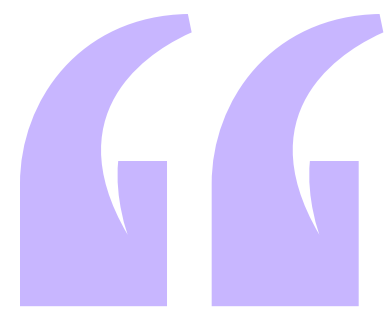
Survey respondent

03 PERCEPTIONS OF THE WIMBLEDON FOUNDATION

The Foundation was highly praised for our relationship-building, generosity and engaged approach to grant-making. In the survey and qualitative research, most respondents found the Foundation's grant application processes straight-forward.

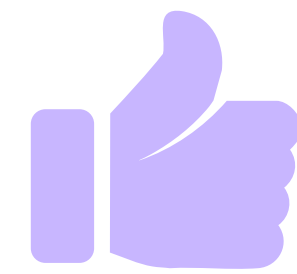
A benchmark on applicant experience from external research was used to compare the Foundation to other funders. We received higher ratings for helpful staff and providing useful feedback on applications.

Applicants estimate spending **18 hours** per application to us which is significantly lower than the funder benchmark of 37 hours.



We don't often get funding from the Wimbledon Foundation, but I know we can always reach out if we need to. Some grant funders aren't as open to that, but the Wimbledon Foundation's approach makes working together feel like a genuine partnership.

Survey respondent



122

Agree the application process was a good experience



81%

Found the online grant application form easy to use



87%

Found the application process very or quite reasonable for the size of grant they applied for



81%

Agree the Foundation was extremely or quite helpful during the application process



82%

Agree they feel they were treated like a partner

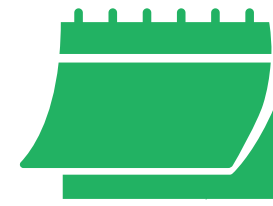


92%

Received enough support during the grant period

SEVEN KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The research found we already have a good grantmaking approach, especially in terms of providing personalised support, visits and feedback, awarding a mix of grant sizes, and our focus on Merton and Wandsworth. However, the findings support seven recommendations for the Foundation to become even more effective and impactful going forwards:



01 Encourage multi-year grants



02 Offer more core and unrestricted funding



03 Focus on community priorities highlighted in the research



04 Consider targeting some funding based on areas of high deprivation



05 Enhance non-financial support

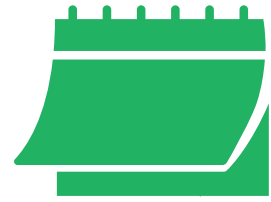


06 Pilot improvements to the application process



07 Explore local participation in decision-making and collaboration with local stakeholders

01 ENCOURAGE MULTI-YEAR GRANTS



Recommendation

Increase the ratio of multi-year grants to single-year grants.

Evidence

60%

of respondents said accessing multi-year funding was a challenge. 18% said it was their most significant challenge.

41%

of the Foundation's grant holders, received more than one single-year grant in a five-year period.

- A limited number of eligible organisations in the two boroughs means this is likely to keep occurring.
- The Foundation team and applicants could have saved time if a multi-year grant had been awarded.

87%

of the Foundation's grants are for a single year, compared to 51% of grants made by other grantmakers.

Multi-year grants also provide stability, sustainability and help to retain staff who would otherwise start seeking work before the end of a one-year project. This best practice finding was reinforced in the qualitative research.



Action

Our Wimbledon Foundation Community Fund and Get Set, Get Active Fund grants will change from one-year grants to multi-year grants from 2026.

02 OFFER MORE CORE AND UNRESTRICTED FUNDING



Recommendation

Offer more opportunities for organisations to access core and unrestricted funding. Unlike project funding, core funding pays for essential expenses like salaries, rent, and utilities, while unrestricted funding can be used for any purpose aligned with a grant holder's mission.

Evidence

57%

of survey respondents selected this as a challenge. 19% said it was their most significant challenge.

- Qualitative research participants highlighted concerns over funder bias towards innovation and new projects, whilst core and unrestricted funding were seen as giving the flexibility required to sustain and grow operations.
- Core funding would help the Foundation's applicants and grant holders tackle growing financial concerns such as the rise in national insurance, increased venue costs, and difficulties recruiting and retaining employees.
- Best practice research on unrestricted funding shows grant holders feel trusted and able to be more strategic.



The challenge of attracting core funding to voluntary organisations is the biggest, because it is fundamental to moving an organisation from a smaller operation to a more significant service provider.

Survey respondent



Action

We'll pilot the Wimbledon Foundation Community Fund (WFCF) as a core cost fund.

03 FOCUS ON PRIORITY AREAS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE RESEARCH



Recommendation

- Continue funding mental health and physical activity initiatives.
- Focus on financial insecurity by naming ‘financial wellbeing’ as a priority area under existing themes.
- Acknowledge housing as a rising concern by encouraging applications from voluntary sector organisations working with people experiencing housing insecurity and poor housing conditions.
- Tackle the root causes of interrelated needs by funding work which addresses the links between money, housing, and mental health, rather than tackling these issues in isolation.
- Build capacity for community leadership by expanding the Foundation’s focus on user-led small organisations.

Evidence

These recommendations are based on the survey finding that financial insecurity and mental health are identified as the most significant local needs. Housing did not feature as prominently but was a strong theme in the survey comments and qualitative responses. Finding ways to focus funding can lead to more impact in those specific areas.



Action

- We’ll continue funding mental health initiatives through our Health & Wellbeing Fund and keep mental health as a priority theme of our Community Fund.
- We’ll pilot making financial wellbeing a priority theme for a round of our Community Fund.
- We’ll increase the size of our annual grants to local homelessness shelters from £20k to £30k per year.
- We’ll continue our support of physical activity initiatives by increasing the size of Get Set, Get Active Fund grants to £5k to enable groups to deliver for an entire year. We’ll also create a new sports fund which offers larger grants to larger sports charities locally.
- We’ll emphasise that we offer funding for established programmes and that we proactively encourage user-led groups to apply.

04 CONSIDER TARGETING SOME FUNDING BASED ON AREAS OF HIGH DEPRIVATION



Recommendation

Target funding towards areas with the highest levels of deprivation, for example, by encouraging applications from specific areas, or asking applicants if their service-users live in the most deprived postcodes within Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) deciles 1-3.

Evidence

- There are areas of high and low deprivation in Merton and Wandsworth, with people living in IMD deciles 1-3 considered to be living in the most deprived areas.
- Financial insecurity was identified as one of the most significant local needs in the survey and poor housing conditions was a strong theme in the qualitative research. These issues and other indicators of disadvantage are more likely to apply to people living in areas of high deprivation.
- Targeting would help ensure funding addresses the most pressing local challenges and reaches those most in need.



Action

We'll seek to target user-led groups and/or groups working in the areas of highest deprivation for our Wimbledon Foundation Community Fund Plus and Love Local Fund grants.

05 ENHANCE NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT

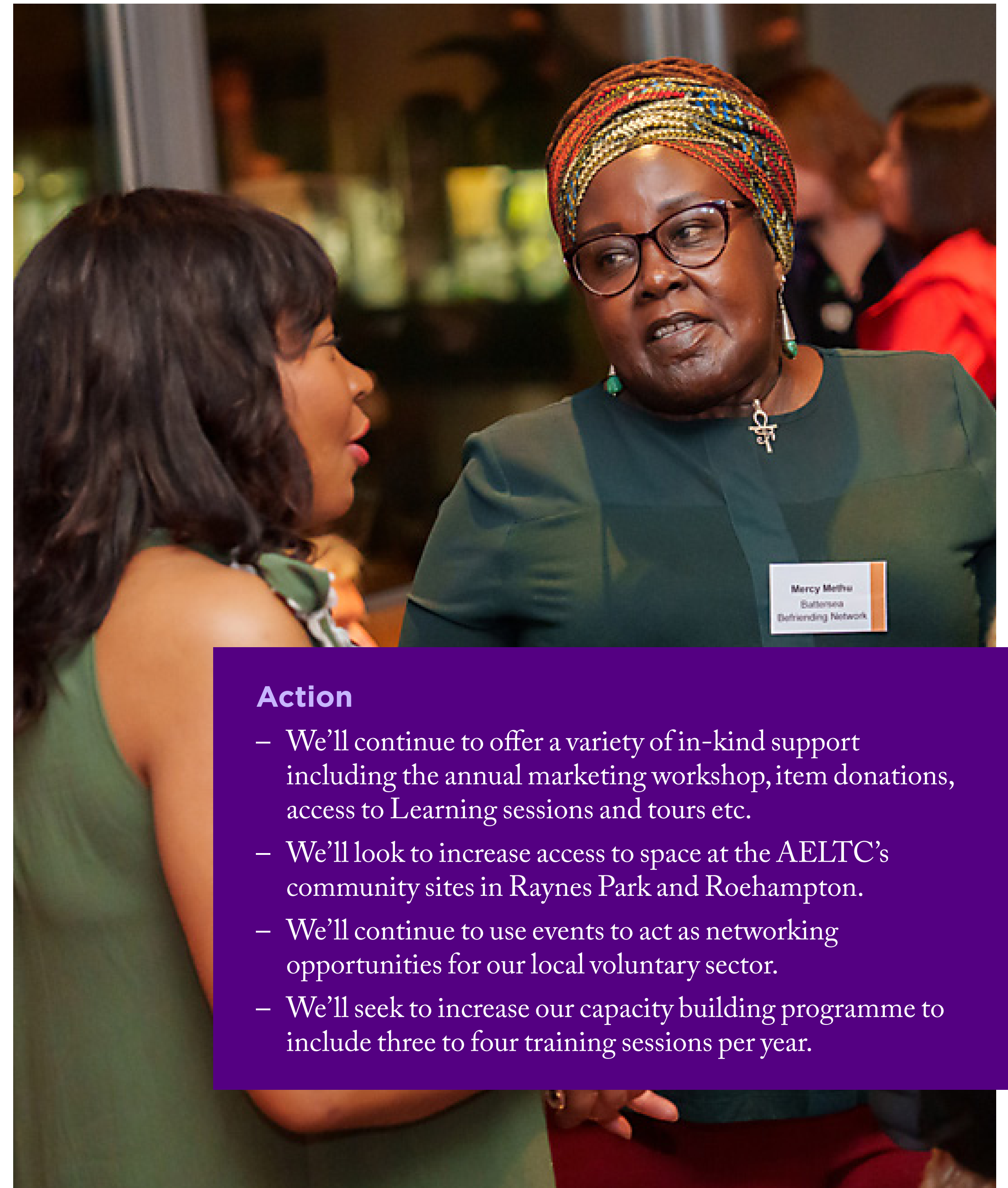


Recommendation

- Continue offering in-kind donations, whilst considering additional non-financial support that organisations might value.
- Strengthen the Foundation's current role as a convener of grant holders by making improvements to the existing calendar of events. For example, ensure events have a clear structure and aim and deliver clear benefits, whilst also acknowledging the power imbalance between funder and grantee and making it clear that all invites are optional.
- Explore the possibility of delivering a capacity building programme for groups of grant holders. This could cover useful topics such as equity, diversity and inclusion, volunteer management, fraud, marketing, and evaluation.

Evidence

- The Foundation supports mostly small teams, with several reporting burnout or a lack of access to vital training.
- In the survey comments and qualitative research, grant holders reported high satisfaction with the Foundation's non-financial support, but there was a strong appetite for more of it, as well as opportunities to build relationships with other grant holders in the local area that could lead to collaboration in charitable activities and referrals.



Action

- We'll continue to offer a variety of in-kind support including the annual marketing workshop, item donations, access to Learning sessions and tours etc.
- We'll look to increase access to space at the AELTC's community sites in Raynes Park and Roehampton.
- We'll continue to use events to act as networking opportunities for our local voluntary sector.
- We'll seek to increase our capacity building programme to include three to four training sessions per year.

06 PILOT IMPROVEMENTS TO THE APPLICATION PROCESS



Recommendation

Regularly review the content and functionality of the application forms, as well as the accessibility requirements of people with disabilities and the length of the process for grassroots organisations.

Evidence

- Most applicants found their experience to be straight-forward, however, the application form was still the most common topic of difficulties. Specific areas of improvement mentioned the word count being too low, the financial section being too time-consuming, problems saving the application and not receiving a copy of what was submitted, and struggling to find out what the questions are in advance of completing the form.
- The 2025 Foundation Practice Review highlighted the Wimbledon Foundation as an example of good practice in accessibility, for providing information on the grant application process in various formats including Webtext, PDF, Word and videos. The Foundation should build on this by following best practice.
- Unsuccessful applicants estimate spending an average of 22 hours on their application to the Foundation.
- Many foundations are currently paused, closed to planning to spend out. Funders are also reporting an increase in applications meaning the Foundation may also face an increase in demand.
- Best practice research highlights how two-stage application approaches requiring an EOI can filter out ineligible organisations and those unlikely to be successful. This saves both the applicant and Foundation time, whilst managing expectations, simplifying forms and providing more opportunities to provide feedback.
- Two-stage processes need to be carefully planned as they can lengthen application timelines. Website eligibility quizzes can also be useful in helping to reduce the number of applicants that are likely to be successful.



Applying for grants can be complex and time-consuming, especially for smaller, grassroots organisations without dedicated fundraising teams.

Survey respondent

Action

- We'll continue to review and improve our application forms to make them as straightforward and accessible as possible.
- We'll ask Disability Inc to review our application materials and processes and seek their advice on how to we can further improve them from an accessibility angle.
- We'll help to reduce the time charities spend applying for funding by moving to more multi-year grants.
- We'll look to improve the level of support offered in the application process, especially for smaller charities by offering bookable chats with our Grants Officers.

07 EXPLORE LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS



Recommendation

- Collaborate with funders to align priorities and avoid duplication of efforts. Low-resource options include informal catch-ups and joint assessments. Moderate investments could involve convening networks or working groups on local issues or aligning application and reporting processes. Higher-resource approaches might include shared grant programmes, collaborative strategies, or joint impact frameworks.
- Build on this research to explore further engagement of local people with lived experience in the Foundation's work, such as advisers, trustees and involvement in the process of awarding grants or creating a new strategy.

Evidence

- As a place-based funder, the Foundation is well placed to be a local leader using its relationships with community stakeholders and charities and its knowledge of local needs.
- Best practice funder research highlights the importance of meaningful collaboration and local engagement.
- In the qualitative research, stakeholders expressed an appetite for more joined-up working between funders.



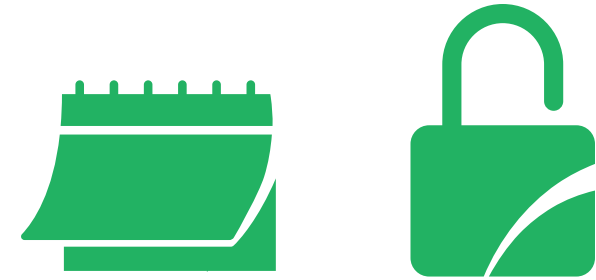
Action

- We'll continue to include up to three independent panel members in each of our grant panels.
- We'll continue to work with local stakeholders to identify opportunities for collaboration.

IN SUMMARY



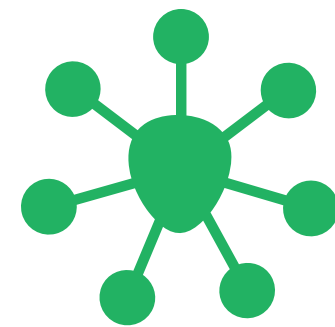
Financial insecurity and poor mental health were identified as the most significant needs of local people.



Voluntary sector organisations find accessing multi-year and core or unrestricted funding as their most significant challenges.



Most applicants see the Wimbledon Foundation as a supportive and engaged funder.



The findings support seven key recommendations to help the Wimbledon Foundation become an even more effective and impactful funder.



These seven key recommendations have led us to make changes to our grant making going forwards by moving towards more multi-year grants and core funding on offer, targeting user-led groups in areas of higher deprivation, improving our application process to ensure ease and accessibility and enhancing our in-kind support offering.