

Background to the Mayor's VAWG Grassroots Fund

The London Community Foundation recognises that the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector is a large and varied space. We have chosen terminology based on our consultation and experience with grassroots organisations. We do not want to exclude those who use other languages and we recognise many of these terms are interchangeable.

Overview

The London Community Foundation (LCF) launched the Mayor's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Grassroots Fund in 2020, on behalf of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). The Fund was managed by LCF in partnership with The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) and was the first of its kind, a multi-million-pound fund ringfenced for Led By and For Black and minoritised grassroots organisations working to tackle VAWG.

The second round was launched in 2023 and across its first two rounds, the Fund awarded over £6 million to existing VAWG-specialist grassroots organisations operating across London's diverse communities. The Fund supported organisations to deliver specialist services that better meet the needs of women and girls experiencing violence and exploitation, while also contributing to a more resilient grassroots response to VAWG across London.

Alongside grant funding, the Fund provided a co-designed capacity-building programme, peer networking and relational grant management. This approach supported organisations to strengthen

their services, organisational capacity and resilience, while creating opportunities for learning and collaboration across the funded cohort.

The first round of the Fund supported 41 organisations, with a further 36 organisations supported through the second round, and benefitted over 56,800 women, girls and families. Some organisations were funded in both rounds. Details of the grants awarded across Rounds 1 and 2, including the organisations that made up each cohort, are available [here](#).

The VAWG Grassroots Fund supported organisations to contribute to the outcomes and priorities of the Mayor's Tackling VAWG Strategy. Alignment with the Mayor's Tackling VAWG Strategy remains a requirement of the Fund, with applicants expected to demonstrate how their proposed work contributes to its priorities. The refreshed [Mayor's Tackling VAWG Strategy 2026-2029](#) has a goal to make every woman and girl in London safer and feel safer. It covers work across three priority areas: making women and girls safer by preventing VAWG; supporting victims and survivors of VAWG and stopping perpetrators and holding them to account. The strategy reaffirmed the Mayor's commitment to ensure support is available for all victims and survivors of VAWG including the most marginalised. It recognises that black and minoritised women and girls experiencing VAWG are disproportionately impacted. The third round of the VAWG Grassroots Fund will build on the work of the two previous funds to improve sustainability of organisations and help them to reach thousands more of the most vulnerable victims and survivors in our communities.

Development

The Fund was established during the Mayor of London's first term in office, through his Police and Crime Plan 2017 – 2021 and the first VAWG Strategy.

The first VAWG Strategy set out the priorities including:

- Encouraging more victims of domestic abuse and of sexual violence to come forward and reducing repeat victimisation;
- Reducing the rates of women and girls dropping out of cases of VAWG as they progress through the criminal justice process;
- Encouraging more victims of harmful practices such as FGM, so-called 'honour' based violence and forced marriage to come forward and report.

Evidence

The strategic priorities were underpinned by research carried out by MOPAC and further supported by consultation with the voluntary sector.

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime's (MOPAC) Evidence & Insight [VAWG evidence pack](#) showed how the climate of austerity including cuts in legal aid, housing and welfare benefits had reduced services and consequently the support available to help survivors escape violence. Despite this, the demand for specialist support had grown both in volume and complexity of need.

Small charitable organisations that help specific communities experiencing VAWG struggled to keep services going, amidst reduced or short-term project funding. This was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic which further facilitated opportunities for violence and abuse. Black and minoritised communities were also disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and existing structural inequalities contributed to this.

In a [MOPAC commissioned consultation](#), survivors told of the importance of being able to access support from Black and minoritised -led *by* and *for* ending-VAWG organisations that understood the myriad of issues they faced. This was not simply about the community, family or religious contexts. Women spoke of feeling safer and more trusting of Black and minoritised -led women's organisations.

Women and girls experience violence within a broader context of structural inequality. Women's needs often have direct link to the discrimination they face on the basis of individual or multiple protected characteristics e.g. sex/gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, disability, age and religion. This is true of LGBTQ+, disabled women, so-called 'honour' based violence or those with insecure immigration status – as well as many others.

When survivors of VAWG seek support, they can also encounter barriers and exclusions, which are linked to factors such as race. This can have a direct impact on all aspects of their lives including their safety. By and for services can respond to the complex, intersecting needs of survivors. This means women can disclose in the knowledge that they are understood and believed when able to access services that understand the context in which the abuse happens and the cultural nuances that can be part of the abusive pattern.

That's why this Fund recognises that many women and girls experience a clear relationship between these factors and how they seek, access and engage with services.

Through The London Community Foundation's involvement in the London Community Response Fund, we learnt that VAWG-specific organisations responded to an increase in need by expanding their services to include more holistic service delivery, which includes addressing food insecurity, providing employment support and finding suitable emergency accommodation. Many organisations used reserves to achieve this, leaving them in vulnerable financial positions.

These grassroots organisations also face barriers to different funding sources and how they are promoted, according to MOPAC's Evidence & Insight [VAWG evidence pack](#). This means women and girls experiencing VAWG in London do not have equal access to the support they need. Women and girls experience disproportionate harm from certain types of crime and then face multiple exclusions from mainstream services; whilst grassroots Black and minoritised specific services have been disproportionately affected by funding challenges.

Imkaan is the only UK-based, second-tier women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls. Feedback from their members ([From Survival to Sustainability, 2018](#)) showed that commissioning processes are failing BME focused VAWG organisations in that they:

- a) Privilege larger, more well-resourced providers through, e.g. short bidding timelines, complex tenders, exclusion criteria such as large turnovers;
- b) Do not adequately embed equalities e.g. structured to favour bidders who can provide support at lower costs and have a larger reach in terms of numbers;
- c) Do not allow for meaningful intersectional work across diverse identities and/or strands of VAWG e.g. many BME providers work across the VAWG spectrum addressing issues such as domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, forced marriage and so-called 'honour' based violence as a routine part of their case-work; and
- d) Fail to recognise the added value that BME providers bring which carries no weight in tender processes, with funders ignoring the 'added value' and/or social value that these providers can bring.

The VAWG Grassroots Fund was developed to respond to these issues and provide targeted support for these organisations and redress the imbalance of funding to the grassroots sector.

Two rounds of funding later, the evaluation report showed the Fund has strengthened organisational capacity and stability among funded organisations, but that longer-term sustainability for specialist grassroots VAWG services remains constrained by wider structural challenges in the funding environment.

Co-design

The Social Innovation Partnership conducted a survey and co-design sessions to assess the specific requirements of the grantees. This mainly revealed impacts of the covid-19 pandemic;

- an increase in the complexity of cases
- an increase in demand for specialist VAWG services
- a need for grassroots service expansion to meet emerging needs
- a reinforcement of the need for funding programmes, wider than this fund alone, which contribute to core costs
- concerns about the survival of grassroots organisations

This initial consultation was followed by a programme of learning, training, networking and wellbeing events. Feedback was continuously sought to ensure it remained accessible, flexible and transparent to be able to support and sustain VAWG grassroots organisations.

Working in partnership with grassroots organisations is the foundation of this Fund. Over 70 grassroots organisations delivering VAWG services took part in sessions and calls with LCF and TSIP between January and February 2020. The purpose was to co-design the VAWG Grassroots Fund and programme. Below is a summary of their insights:

The Prospectus

- The application process must be accessible and inclusive, with a range of support options available, including simple and sector-appropriate forms. The Prospectus and application forms should include sample responses and a list of required documents for reference.
- The criteria and scoring process should be transparent.
- VAWG experts and majority BME representation should make up the majority on the Decision-Making Panel for the Fund.

- The Fund must award flexible grants for both core and project costs, and financial status should not be the sole determinant of a funding award.
- The Fund should not be dedicated to one VAWG priority, but should award grants to fund long-term preventative work, as well as crisis response.

Peer learning, training and support

- The needs of grantees must shape the capacity building programme. If grantees need to attend in person, sessions must be held locally or online and should be remunerated.
- Grantees should be able to access different support related to long-term funding strategy, business planning and governance, as well as back-office support, including an online resource hub with bespoke tools and software.
- Grantees must have the chance to network with key decision-makers, like other funders, larger VAWG organisations, universities and policymakers. And the programme should emphasise, encourage and facilitate partnership working across the sector.
- Supporting frontline staff health and wellbeing should be addressed in the Programme, including coaching, mentoring, clinical supervision and wellbeing events.

Impact story and monitoring

- Evaluation support should take different forms and be led by organisational need, recognising the need for different measurement for crisis intervention and long-term support.
- Grantees should not be required to report more than two times per year, and the reporting method should include one easy template or tool. Reporting should encourage and reward honesty and be gender- and trauma- informed.
- Funding for monitoring and evaluation should be ringfenced as part of application budgets, with extra or additional £ to bring in volunteers, advisors, etc. to support evaluation.
- LCF and MOPAC should include different options for face-to-face visits or phone calls to witness the impact of services first-hand