

**The London  
Community  
Foundation**

# Voices from the Frontline

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**Highlights from The London Community  
Foundation's engagement with London's grassroots**

2018/19



**The Manna**  
*Islington*

**[londoncf.org.uk](https://londoncf.org.uk)**



# This is not our story...

Trusted, expert and deeply rooted. These are profoundly important words to The London Community Foundation (LCF). Why? Because they are often used to describe the grassroots organisations we support. Amidst London's gloriously diverse and opportunity-laden landscape, these are the people and organisations connecting with London's most vulnerable.

This is the largest engagement with grassroots organisations LCF has conducted in recent years, featuring a large-scale survey and focus groups. We wanted to listen to what matters to them and the London they serve; understand how they see London's biggest challenges; tell their story of the wider funding environment; and what they need to continue to reach the people they exist for. And how we – LCF with donors now, and in the future – can better support them.

What is the picture? In many cases, it's one of fighting to keep the lights on whilst trying to meet increased, and more complex, demand for their services. A struggle to secure basic long-term, core income, underpins their need to be better connected to London's funders and to articulate grassroots impact in a world demanding scale, replication and growth. Relentless competition for funding across the capital is a significant time and emotional commitment, when almost a quarter of the organisations we support have no full-time staff. And what about London's most pressing needs over the next five years? Community cohesion, isolation and homelessness were some of the primary issues raised by those we support.

So this is not our story but rather one of the people and organisations working deep in London's communities. And this report won't exist in isolation. We will build on it by continuing to listen to small charities and community groups and use it to work alongside others we know who – like us – are inspired and committed to supporting London's every day, incredible impact.

Kate Markey, Chief Executive, *The London Community Foundation*

**South London  
Special League**

*Greenwich*



## Find out more

We will be exploring these findings in more depth over the coming months in a blog series:

[Voices from the Frontline.](#)



# Who does LCF support?

To start at the beginning, it was important we could tell the story of who LCF supports: the people involved; how they structure themselves; where they work; and how best they describe themselves.

We reached out to 1,700 organisations with a detailed survey and we received 201 responses in return. This work then informed a series of follow-up focus groups with 35 charities and community groups.

## The people involved:

**24%**

have 0 FTE

**45%**

have less than 2 FTE

**75%**

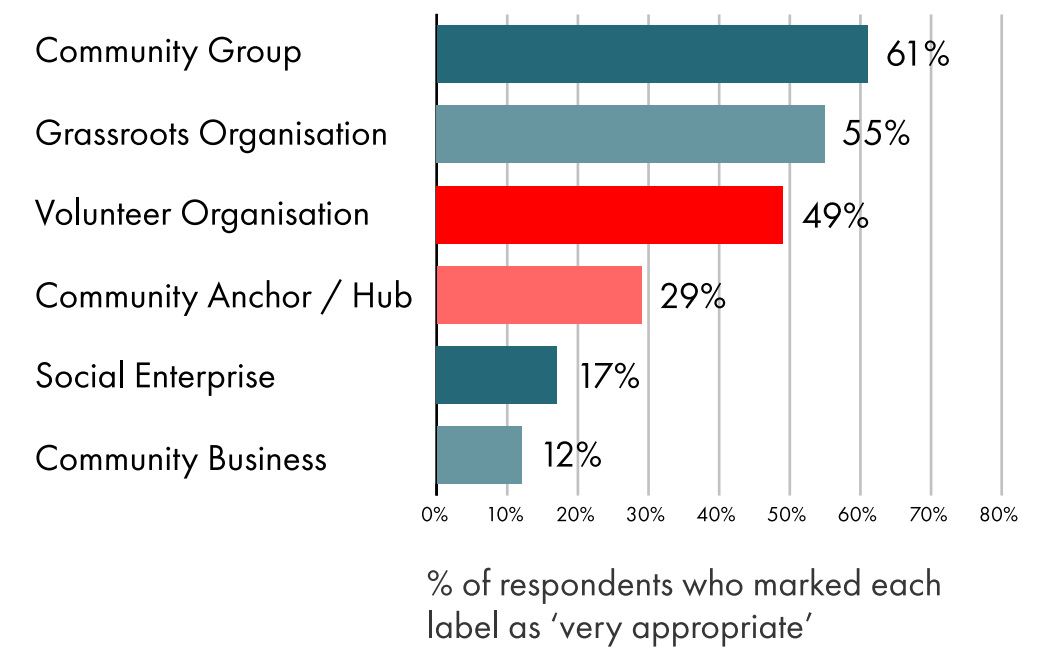
have less than 5 FTE

**90%**

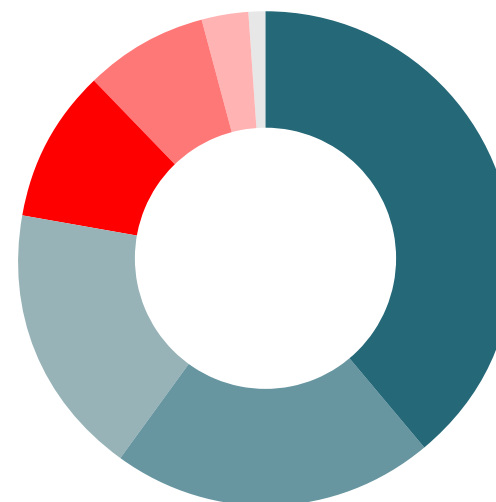
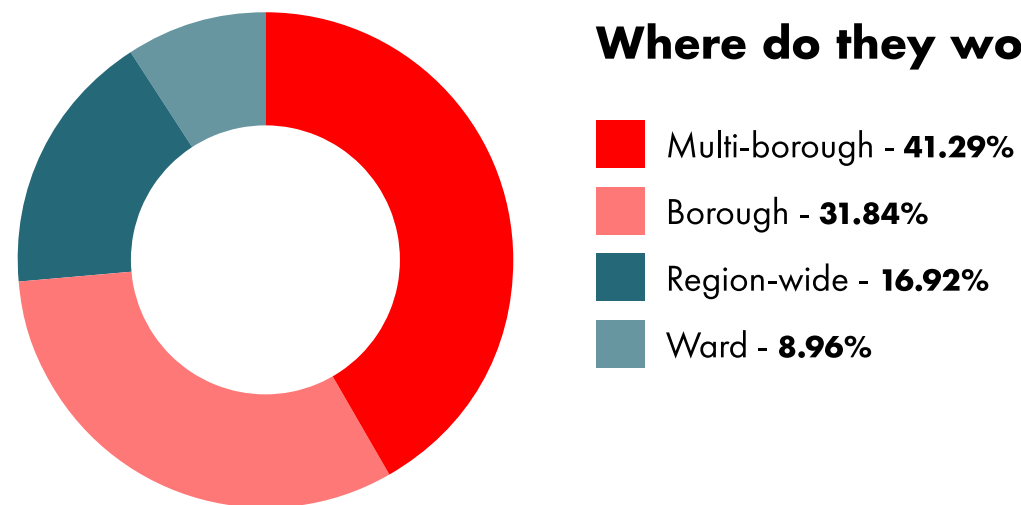
have less than 10 FTE

FTE = full-time equivalent paid staff

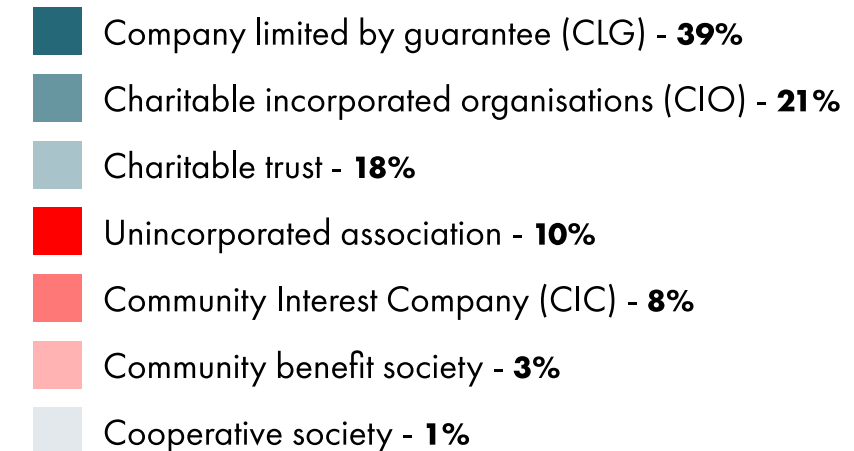
## How organisations describe themselves



## Where do they work?



## Legal structure of respondents



# Who does LCF support?

## Key insights

- 67% of organisations responding to the survey had received funding from LCF.
- Organisations operating at a hyper-local level (i.e. ward and single borough) were more successful in securing funds from LCF than those working multi-borough and beyond (78% versus 42% respectively).
- Critically, ambition within grassroots organisations wasn't characterised by respondents in terms of scale, replication or diversity of services but, instead, deepening trust and connectivity to their mission.
- This is demonstrated in both the strong preference in how respondents refer to themselves and also their operating models; just 17% (social enterprise) and 12% (community business) align themselves with terms typically relating to trading models of business.
- Almost one quarter of responding organisations have no full-time paid staff. This demonstrates the reality of people doing multiple roles and a heavy reliance on volunteers.

"LCF are well respected in the community."

"We are truly local. Our staff and most of our volunteers live locally. We know our 'manor' well, we know local services."



**Learn to Love  
to Read**  
*Wandsworth*

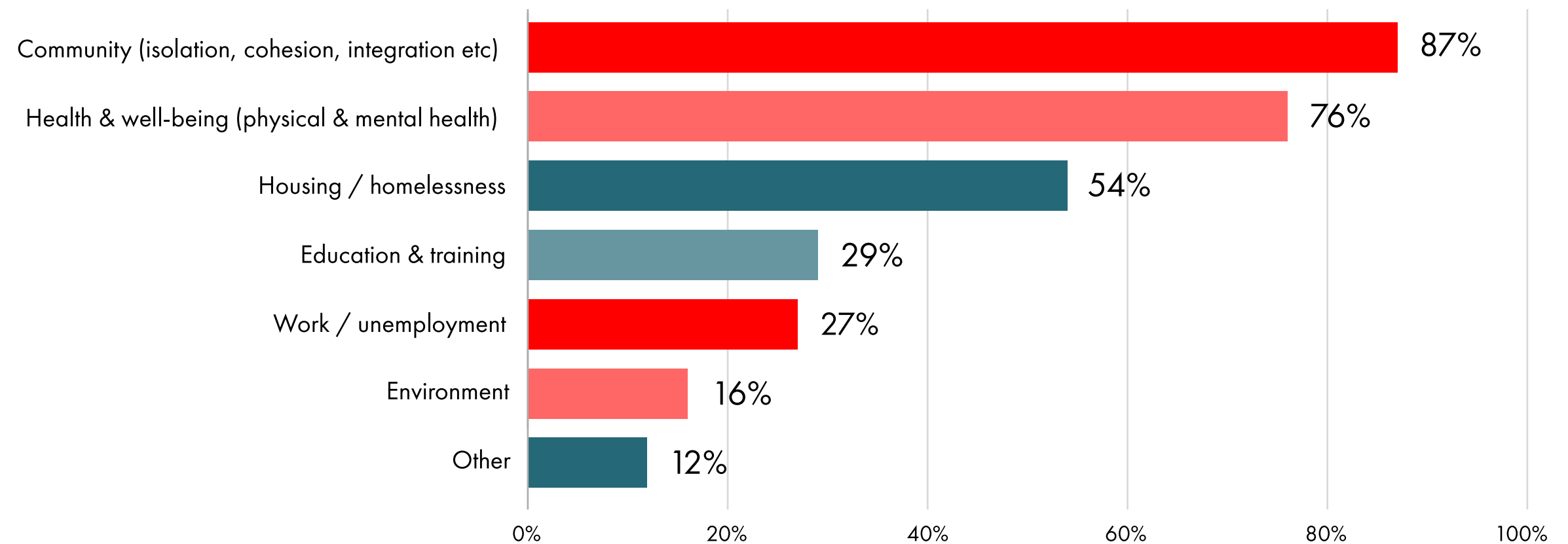
# About London's needs

Grassroots organisations are experts by experience. They offer an intimate perspective because of their closeness to those in need. They are invariably characterised by local leadership and also often by lived or peer experience of the issues they are working to tackle.

"We are using our own experience to help young people. We're not saying it for the sake of saying it. They are listening to it, soaking it up and taking it on board."

So we asked survey respondents to indicate – aside from the mission of their own organisation – what they thought were London's most pressing issues over the next five years. The opposite chart indicates the percentage of respondents who ranked each issue in their top three.

## The capital's biggest issues





# About London's needs

## Key insights

- As a donor-advised service and a grant maker, LCF's role is to connect expertise on the ground with those in London who can offer financial support. It's also vital that we continue to listen to grantees as a means of evidencing our accountability to them and how their views help shape our services. That's how we can ensure our donors continue to see LCF as their expert window on London's frontline.
- Respondents definitively prioritised issues where grassroots organisations have historically performed a vital role. Tackling isolation, building community cohesion and wellbeing reflect the common characteristics of small, local charities: intimate local knowledge; highly personalised service; and fleet of foot. It's also a complex picture of potential root causes and symptomatic issues. For example, one third of responses under the 'other' category reported gang and violent crime as a top priority. Arguably other respondents may have considered gang or youth violence as a symptom of another underlying issue, like community cohesion or meaningful employment.
- The findings also show issues not typically viewed as 'grassroots' issues but increasingly where small organisations in London are playing their part. Housing, homelessness, employment and skills have traditionally, at least perhaps in the eyes of the public, been viewed as the domains of large or even 'big brand' charities.
- Position this against a backdrop of ongoing austerity cuts at local authority level; increased devolution; and greater demands on the corporate 'social footprint', and traditional ideas start to look different. Who is the primary provider? Who is the commissioner? Who is the funder and what does community mean?
- Where grassroots organisations may be the only service some people in need are engaging with, then how best do we respond? And how do we evidence the characteristics of high-impact grassroots to help inspire more donors? And how do we, as a funder, meet their long-term funding needs?

"Everything we do comes from lived experience of the issues faced. Involvement isn't just bid candy – it's what we do!"



**The Healthy  
Living Club**  
*Lambeth*



# About London's needs

## What next?

Over the next 12 months, we will continue to evidence the compelling and intimate role grassroots organisations play in London. We will do this through reporting on key areas of need and demonstrating how they are being tackled at a local community level. We will also promote those changemakers, the impact stars, who demonstrate the great characteristics of what it means to be anchored, effective and vital to people in need.



**Learn to Love to Read**  
*Wandsworth*



# What's needed to deliver impact...

Understanding the wider operating environment of the organisations LCF supports is a critical part of our decision-making as a grant maker. As a Community Foundation, it is also how we help to advise donors on how best they can have philanthropic impact.

So we asked organisations to rank their top funding priorities over the next year. The findings reveal a worrying echo of some excellent long-term research by fellow funders listed overleaf.

## Top funding priorities

74%

indicated increasing core funding was their top priority over the next year

59%

want to diversify their fundraising sources

54%

want funding assistance by being connected to other funders

25%

wanted capacity building support

52%

indicated a need to better demonstrate their impact

"We'd like more available grants for core funding to support smaller organisations to grow. Perhaps more business development funds too."

"Our contracts generally only last for a year and have to be renegotiated annually, which is very resource intensive and limits our ability to plan ahead. "

"Continue to look out for grassroots organisations by allocating capacity-building funding for the development of the little fish."



# What's needed to deliver impact...

## Key insights

- Competition for funding is crippling organisations, particularly when one considers their average staffing profile (see page 3). Across funders, including LCF, promoting success probability and clear eligibility criteria are critical to managing demand.
- All the top funding priorities demonstrate increased competition and a fear of losing funds or donors. Whether it is access to other funders, capacity-building or support to demonstrate impact - all point to a desperate need for survival.
- Over half of respondents reported a need to better demonstrate impact. In an environment of engaged, long-term venture philanthropy focused on scalability and innovation, funders like LCF must continue to define and champion impact at a grassroots level.

These findings echo concerning trends from other external research:

- Giving to London-serving charities is falling as their growth is stagnating.<sup>1</sup>
- Despite being the first-responders to London's complex problems, charities with an income under £1 m make up 97% of all charities but only receive 19% of all income.<sup>2</sup>
- 28% of charities with an income under £1 m say they are struggling to survive and only 47% actively say they are confident of survival.<sup>3</sup>

1. Centre for London: More, better, together: A strategic review of giving in London

2. Value of Small, Lloyds Bank Foundation, 2018)

3. (CAF, Social Landscape, 2017)



**Football Beyond  
Borders**  
Lambeth



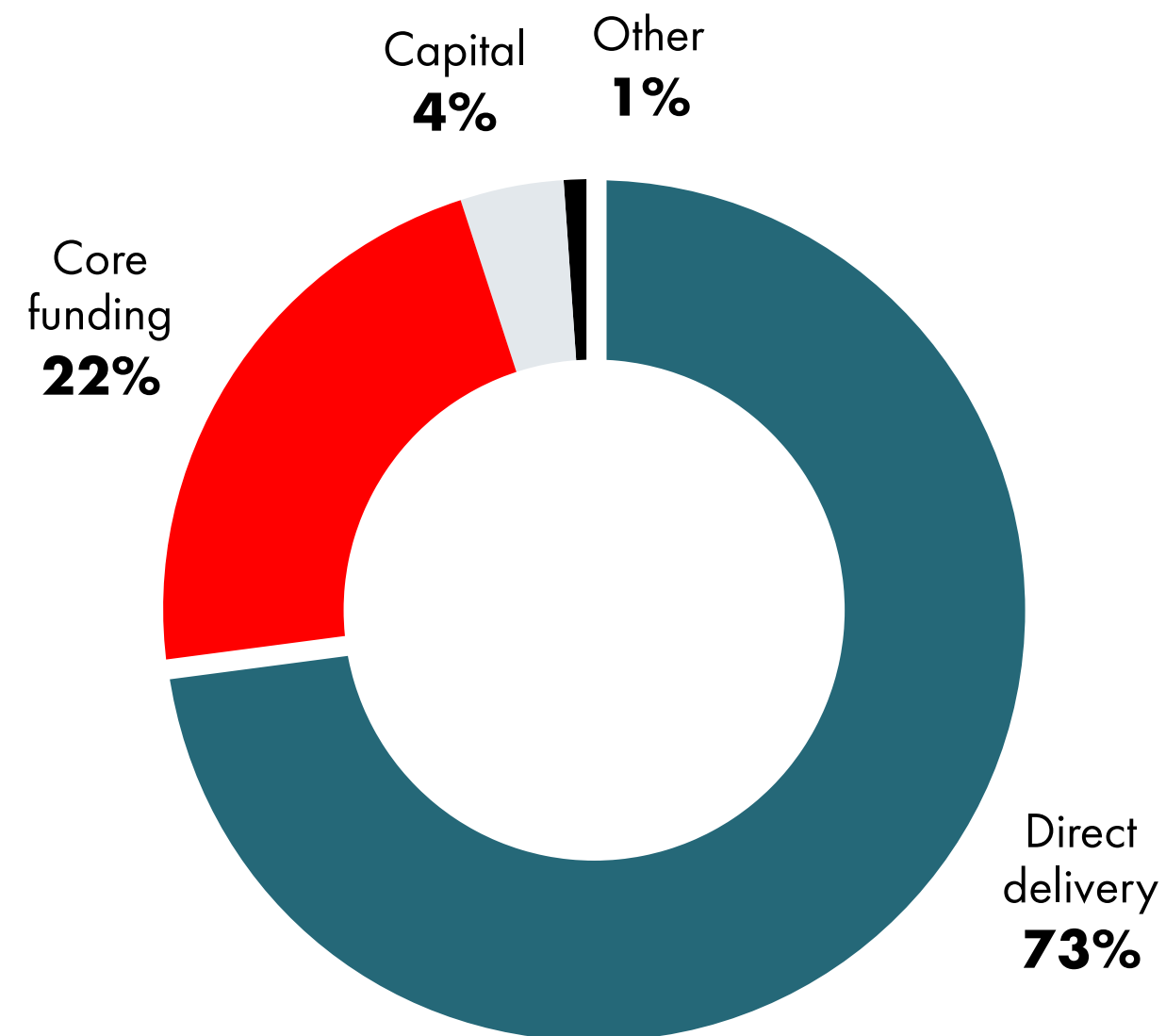
# What happened with LCF's support?

We know LCF is just one player in the world of the organisations we support. But understanding what has happened with, or conversely without, our funding tells a valuable story of the role we perform. How we deploy funds to the frontline, alongside our donors, is a fundamental feature of the impact we can have.

We asked organisations the primary ways they used funding from us.

"We were able to pilot new things, which shows the funder believes in us."

## Primary use of LCF funding



## Perceived impact of receiving LCF funding:

**53%** of respondents indicated they were supported to retain current outputs rather than growth, including ability to continue delivery in the same area with same beneficiaries and being able to stay open another year.

**43%** were supported into new territories including ability to expand service into new area or pilot a new service.

## Perceived impact of not receiving LCF funding:

**51%** of the previous LCF grantees would have experienced delays or reductions in their delivery.

**36%** of respondents said delivery would not have been able to happen at all.

**16%** said they would have had to reduce staff numbers.



# What happened with LCF's support?

## Key insights

- Part of our role is to advocate to donors about the changing needs of grassroots organisations, in particular their funding needs. Over 70% of respondents used LCF funding for direct delivery yet today their overwhelming need is for core costs.
- However respondents do value how funds from LCF supported them to try new local services or pilot new approaches.
- Simple survival and continuation of every day work feature heavily for respondents. Where once local authority small grants funds may have been key funders, LCF is playing an increasingly vital role.
- 42% of organisations say replicating their services into another location isn't a priority and 29% report delivering their service to a new type of beneficiary isn't relevant. Being anchors in their local community is a key objective.
- We have a role – with other funders – to help define and promote what impact and ambition look like for a grassroots organisation, where traditional ideas of scalability don't apply.
- Deepening reach, survival and embedding trust take primacy, and are also fundamental to the people benefiting from the local services.

"We really need multi-year core funding to help us become sustainable."

"We are a new organisation and have received funding only from LCF so far. Getting funding from LCF has given us the confidence to apply to other funders."



**Myatt's Fields  
Park Project**  
*Lambeth*

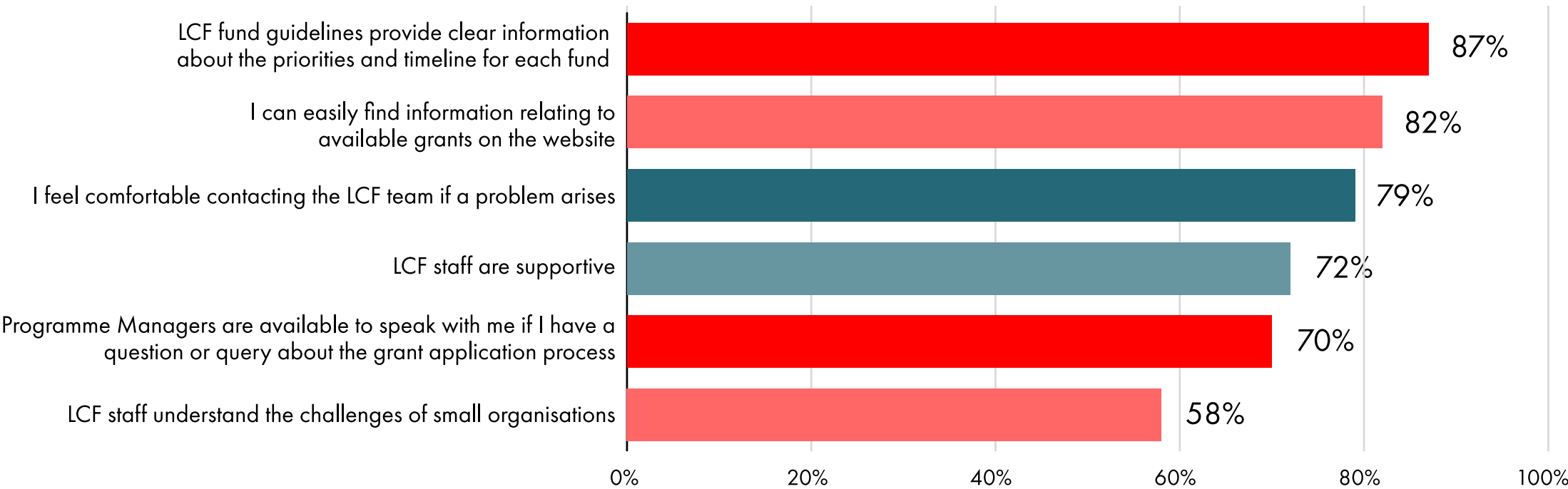


# LCF as a funder to the grassroots

As a funder to the grassroots in London, our reputation ‘on the ground’ is driven primarily by the service organisations receive from staff at LCF, through our systems and our processes. It’s a reputation we take seriously and want to continue to improve on, both for London’s frontline and to the donors seeking to support it.

We asked responding organisations to consider how much they agreed with the statements below. Percentages indicate those who ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement.

## Statements about LCF’s service to London’s grassroots



“I feel that the selection process involved a conversation which made me feel more involved with the process.”

“LCF is an organisation that is at the grassroots and understands.”

“LCF’s model is really important to the sector and we don’t know anyone else like it really.”



# Committed to improving what we do

Every aspect of how we work impacts applicants and grantees. And as a Community Foundation, our work with grassroots organisations must inspire our supporters and donors by connecting them to the community changemakers and issues they work to tackle. Respondents reported key areas for our development that highlight both the demand for funds and how our grant-making processes can respond. There is a need for LCF to invest in its own digital capabilities as a charity and to challenge ourselves to ensure our grantmaking can be as proportionate as possible. We will be returning to both of these as part of our 'Voices from the Frontline' blog series.

1.

## Improving grantee journey

- Shorter and simpler application forms proportionate to grant sizes.
- Investment in digital capabilities to support grantees.
- A streamlined online application and grantee management process to reduce potential duplication at application stage for small groups.

2.

## Promoting our role as a grant maker and Community Foundation

- More comprehensive guidance on funds available.
- Encouraging donors to increase grant sizes and duration.
- Increasing visits and other ways of engaging with grantees.

3.

## Types of support available

- More core funding (*sic: instead of project funding*).
- Capacity and competency-building (pre- and post-grant award).
- Promoting other funders supporting grassroots London.



# What grassroots London says about LCF





# Working together for London

This is a story of grassroots organisations in London all working to achieve different missions, but who share a common belief in the resilience of community and the transformational power of human connection.

If you are a grassroots organisation working in London; an existing or future donor with LCF; or indeed another funder, we hope the picture told here resonates with you.

Listening is how LCF will grow its mission to help build resilient communities by supporting grassroots organisations and inspiring and advising London's generosity. We want to ensure our grantmaking continues to reflect the needs of grassroots organisations and that our expertise inspires more individual donors and companies to fund London's frontline local charitable groups.

A series of blogs, Voices from the Frontline, will build on some of the key themes identified in this report. And as we take action on the challenges presented here, grassroots organisations will be at the heart of how we develop our services as a grantmaker and a donor-advised charitable foundation.

"LCF gave us our first opportunity. We may not be in existence without them."

## About The London Community Foundation

The London Community Foundation exists to build strong and connected communities. We do this by inspiring London's generosity and raising funds to invest in the capital's local charities and community groups. To date, we have committed over £100 million into charitable groups across London.

We are one of 46 Community Foundations around the UK and accredited by UKCF, our membership organisation. You can find out more about UKCF here:

<https://www.ukcommunityfoundations.org>



**Resonate Arts**  
Westminster



# Thank you

**The London  
Community  
Foundation**

In November 2018 we got in touch with 1,700 organisations with the opportunity to take part in a survey and/or a focus group. We received 201 responses to the survey (almost 12%), making it the largest survey of its kind for LCF in recent years, whilst 35 charities and community groups took part in focus groups.

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey and joined the focus groups. We are immensely grateful for the time, candidness and commitment shown by the charities and community groups whose views are expressed in this report. We know that time taken out, is time away from delivery or fundraising. So on behalf of all the team at LCF, thank you.

We'd also like to thank CAN Invest, whom we commissioned to independently design and conduct the surveys and focus groups. You can find out more about CAN Invest here: <https://can-invest.org.uk>.

## Inspired by our work in London?

Apply for a grant:  
[applications@londoncf.org.uk](mailto:applications@londoncf.org.uk)

Talk to us about your giving at:  
[yourphilanthropy@londoncf.org.uk](mailto:yourphilanthropy@londoncf.org.uk) or  
[corporatephilanthropy@londoncf.org.uk](mailto:corporatephilanthropy@londoncf.org.uk)

Talk to us about how we can support  
your clients' giving:  
[advisers@londoncf.org.uk](mailto:advisers@londoncf.org.uk)

Or read our blog series:  
['Voices from the Frontline'](#)



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Living Club**  
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