

Charities in the driving seat

*Findings from the first
Open and Trusting
Grant-making
accountability process*

June 2023

Authorship and acknowledgements

This report has been written by Emily Dyson, Keeva Rooney and Ben Cairns, based on materials produced for the Open and Trusting accountability process carried out by the authors with Eliza Buckley, Natalie Corlett and Gilly Green.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in this process for engaging respectfully and sharing your experiences so freely and openly:

- The 1,200+ charities who took time to respond to the Funding Experience Survey.
- The 70 Open and Trusting Grantmakers who took part in the accountability process described in this paper.
- The 30 charity reviewers who led discussions with funders.
- Our Steering Group of charities and funders who supported and advised us on the development of this process.

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Introduction

When we launched Open and Trusting Grant-making in February 2021, we wanted it to be more than a set of commitments that people signed up to, and then ignored. This paper shares how we have brought this aspiration to life, and what we found through holding funders to account in a process that had charities¹ needs and voices at its heart.

Why start with charity voice?

A fundamental premise of Open and Trusting Grant-making is that a shift in funder/charity relationships is necessary if civil society is to become a true force for effective and equitable social change. That is why charity voice is central to this movement. Charities framed the eight commitments by sharing concerns and ideas as participants in IVAR's action research projects. Through their continued contribution to Open and Trusting research, and their involvement in this accountability process, they are helping to change the dynamics between funder and funded.

We have been researching the relationship between grantmakers and funded organisations since IVAR's establishment in 2000 – and for most of that time we have been a charity ourselves, with direct experience as an applicant and grantee. Over that period, we have seen many trends come and go – a small number have stuck; many have faded away. What characterises the approaches and experiences that have felt most useful, and which have enduring value – both to organisations seeking funds and the funders committed to supporting their work – is a sense of mutuality. It's what our colleagues in the trust-based philanthropy movement in the US describe as being '*partners in a spirit of service, leading with trust, respect, and humility*'². That is the essence of the Open and Trusting movement, and those are the values that we hope will continue to shape and drive our work together.

That is why we designed the accountability process to be a *conversation*, a *dialogue* between funders and charities: to reinforce a sense of community on a positive journey, learning and improving together. Open and Trusting Grant-making is *not only* about foundations valuing and respecting the time, expertise, and judgement of charities. It is also about nurturing relationships where charities feel invited and safe enough to challenge the thinking and assumptions of the foundation, and where the foundation behaves in a trustworthy manner as an ally and partner in social change.

¹ We use charities as a shorthand for all kinds of social sector organisations, from unincorporated community groups to social enterprises.

² Trust-Based Philanthropy <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/>

Who is this report for?

This report is for charities and funders – both those who have been involved in the accountability process, and those who haven't but are interested in the Open and Trusting initiative.

We hope that it provides a level of clarity about what it means to be an Open and Trusting Grantmaker, as we grow the movement and focus more of everyone's attention on the communities and causes they care about. We at IVAR also want to live by the commitments we are helping others to put into practice – by opening up the process and our findings for comment and question, and being accountable to those we seek to serve.

Overview of the accountability process

What were we holding people to account for?

When people sign up to Open and Trusting Grant-making, they are making eight commitments, and this was our starting point for holding people to account:

The eight commitments

1. **Don't waste time:** We will explain our funding priorities clearly; we will be open and transparent about all our requirements and exclusions.
2. **Ask relevant questions:** We will only collect information that we must have to make funding decisions; we will test our application forms rigorously to make sure our questions are clear and do not overlap.
3. **Accept risk:** We will be realistic about how much assurance applicants can reasonably give us; we will clearly explain how we assess risk when we make our funding decisions.
4. **Act with urgency:** We will seek to work at a pace that meets the needs of applicants; we will publish and stick to our timetables; we will make our decisions as quickly as possible.
5. **Be open:** We will give feedback; we will analyse and publish success rates and reasons for rejection; we will share our data.
6. **Enable flexibility:** We will enable funded organisations to respond flexibly to changing priorities and needs – we will give unrestricted funding; if we can't (or are a specialist funder), we will make our funding as flexible as possible.
7. **Communicate with purpose:** We will be clear about our relationship from the start; we will be realistic about time commitments; we will ensure that our contact is positive and purposeful.
8. **Be proportionate:** We will ensure that our formal reporting requirements are well understood, proportionate and meaningful.

Our approach

There were four steps to the accountability process:

1. Feedback from charities through the Funding Experience Survey.
2. A self-reflection form, in which Open and Trusting Grantmakers were asked to reflect on progress against their own statements (which they shared when signing up to Open and Trusting) about how they would bring the eight commitments to life in their foundation. They were also asked to identify possible adaptations to their open and trusting practice, in light of what charities said matters most (through the Funding Experience Survey).
3. A review meeting led by a charity professional ('the charity reviewer') who was recruited, trained and paid for their time.
4. Finally, participating funders updated their commitments to Open and Trusting Grant-making.

Our message to Open and Trusting Grantmakers taking part in this process, was:

We recognise that everyone is on a journey in relation to Open and Trusting Grant-making – all we're asking is that you continue to reflect, engage and learn. We can see opportunities for adaptations across all foundations who are part of this community. We hope that this process will bring a fresh perspective on what matters most to charities.

1. Funding Experience Survey

Purpose: To identify the things that matter most to charities in relation to funder practice, and what difference these practices can make.

Approach: We analysed existing funder commitments – the things that funders say they are going to do differently – and then produced a survey based on this. You can find the charity survey questions and findings [here](#). Over 1,200 charities took part, and using the results we identified 10 actions for Open and Trusting Grantmakers:

1. Offer charities the chance to ask questions before they make an application
2. Have a two-stage application process
3. Be clear about success rates at each stage of your process
4. Don't ask for detailed supporting information until you know a charity has a good chance of funding
5. Give meaningful feedback to charities whose applications are turned down
6. Give multi-year funding
7. Allow grantees to adapt and change project plans and budgets if needed
8. Give unrestricted funding
9. Only request information from grantees that you really need and will definitely use
10. Allow grantees to use existing reports (e.g. to other funders, annual reports etc.)

2. Self-reflection

Purpose: For funders to look back at what they have done/wanted to do (*source: their commitments*) and look ahead to what they will do in the future in light of what is most important for charities (*source: 10 actions for funders identified by Funding Experience Survey*).

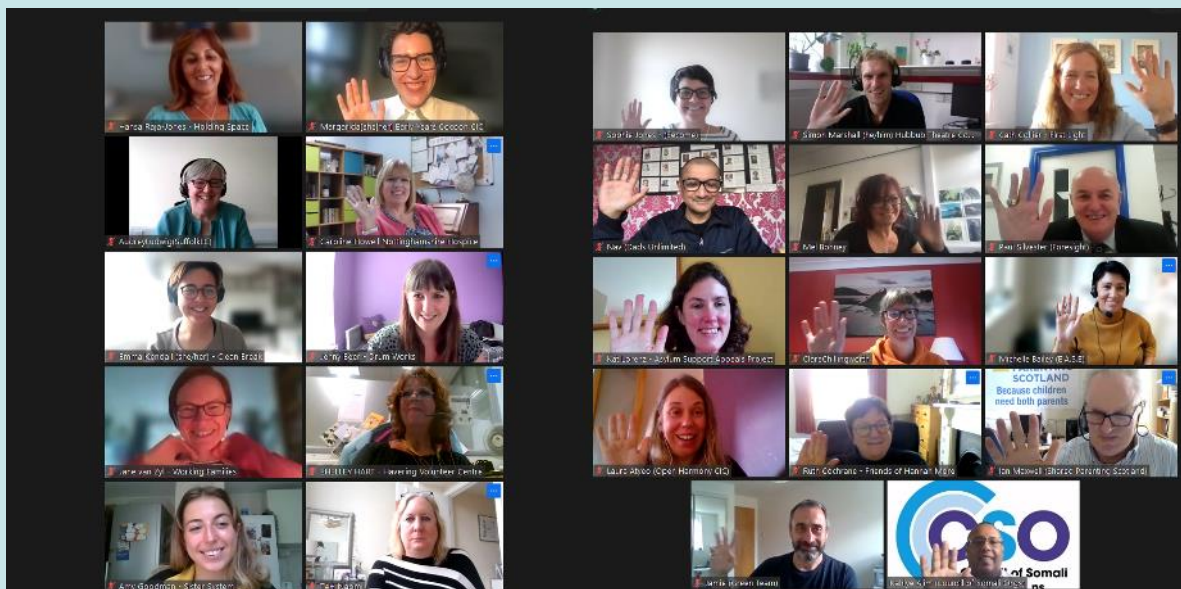
Approach: We created an online form where each funder's commitments were pre-populated. Funders were asked to:

- Select two commitments where they have made progress
- Select two where progress has been harder
- Indicate their current/potential future practice in relation to the 10 actions most important to charities (identified above)

Charity reviewers were then sent these forms to prepare for the peer review. Responses were also sent to another member of the Open and Trusting community who acted as their peer reviewer in the session.

Charity reviewers

We recruited just under 30 charity reviewers from people taking part in the Funding Experience Survey, whom we trained and resourced to facilitate peer review discussions with our Open and Trusting funders. The reviewers brought charity voice into the accountability conversations – alongside the results of the charity survey – and supported funders to reflect and think creatively about how to keep moving forward.



3. Peer review

Purpose: A space for funders to review their commitments and to be held accountable by charities and their peers on their future commitments.

Approach: 70 Open and Trusting Grantmakers attended a half-day session. People were split into groups with two charity reviewers, and two grant-making organisations. Their conversation was broken into two parts – each funder spent part of the session being reviewed and part of the session helping to review another funder. The charity reviewers took it in turns to be ‘lead reviewer’ and notetaker.

We wanted these sessions to strike a balance between support/encouragement and challenge. We asked the charity reviewers to play a facilitation role, creating an environment to get the best from people and recognising that:

- Funders are here because they want to do better.
- It’s likely to be the first time for many that they have been held accountable to those they fund in this way – so it’s vital that you are able to create an environment that’s open and trusting, emphasising you are not here to judge but to facilitate a space for funders where, with your help, they can step back and reflect on their progress and identify how they can go further. The process aims to ‘walk the walk’ of open and trusting: the more ‘open and trusting’ this review environment feels, the more open people are likely to be.
- It will be good to recognise that just as you all have constraints, funders do too. The person you’re speaking with may have struggled to get colleagues and trustees on board; they may feel under-resourced to make the changes they want to; and further change may require a real shift in the organisation’s grant-making culture. This isn’t always easy work.
- It may be useful to recognise that, as applicants, you may not always be aware of some of the constraints or challenges that they are experiencing.

During the charity training, we worked with four funders to pilot the approach and explore how to set a tone that was both supportive and challenging. For the peer review sessions, we provided our charity reviewers with a conversation outline and prompt questions to dig deeper.

4. Refreshing commitments

Our final step was to invite all those who participated in the accountability process to refresh their commitments to Open and Trusting Grant-making, in light of their reflections and the findings from the Funding Experience Survey. Updated commitments have now been published on our [Open and Trusting webpage](#).

Who participated?

- Of the 100 funders signed up to Open and Trusting, the accountability process was 'compulsory' for 80 who had been signed up for at least one year by September 2022. Others were invited to opt-in.
- 70 funders took part in our accountability process.
- Six 'compulsory' organisations told us they weren't able to participate in November 2022, because of exceptional circumstances. They were offered a later date in April 2023.
- Eight 'compulsory' organisations haven't replied to any correspondence about the accountability process. They will no longer be part of the Open and Trusting community and we have removed them from the webpage and mailing list.

What was the experience like?

We asked some of the charities and funders who participated in this process to share their reflections and takeaways.

Charity perspective: Nav Mirza, Chief Executive, Dads Unlimited



“ *It was great to take part in this process, as there are few – if any – opportunities to talk to funders about our needs and issues, and what is happening at the coal face. It was also good to talk about the vital importance of unrestricted funding, and the fact that it can have a huge impact on a charity's sustainability.*

I took away that there IS an appetite to understand and adapt funding strategies. And although there is anxiety about unrestricted funding – it can be measured and monitored. Just because a funder gives unrestricted, it doesn't mean they can't ask how it was spent.

Funders need to see the organisations they fund as partners, in bringing value and impact to the communities they serve. Just as important are the employees of the charity: look after your staff well, and they will help their communities just as well. That requires funders to listen to our experiences and recognise the importance of stable and flexible funding.”

Charity perspective: Jamie Leitch, Business Development Manager, The Green Team



When signing up for the Open and Trusting accountability sessions, it was difficult to know what to expect – as a relative newcomer to the charity sector, I felt that the funding landscape could be improved. But thinking it, and challenging the funders at the heart of it, are two entirely different things.

The training process provided a lot of clarification, and the framework that IVAR put in place made being involved feel a lot less daunting – as a charity reviewer I felt both supported and valued.

I took part in five review sessions, and each one generated an open forum for discussion. Funders were honest, self-critical and very open to feedback and ideas... Managing time in the session, ensuring focus on key discussion points and responding to what was being said, all presented challenges. However, in every session I felt that I could see lightbulb moments when a funder was inspired by a suggestion or an insight into another funder's practices.

Some of the challenges that funders face provided me with food for thought into my own practices. I took away a real sense that everybody involved was determined to be the best that they could be, and it was great to be involved in follow-up discussions with funders who wanted to explore ideas further. I strongly believe that the sessions were of incredible value, and that such collaboration can bring about positive change to the sector – and ultimately to the beneficiaries of charities, who are so important to charities and funders alike.”

Charity perspective: Ruth Cochrane, Trustee, Friends of Hannah More



“ This was a very new piece of work for me – I had never done anything like it before! It felt challenging but also empowering to be ‘in the driving seat’ and to have the full attention of some big funders. It also felt very important – I knew I was speaking for other charities and applicants and conveying some messages that affect lots of us.

For a very small charity like ours, the opportunity to talk to grant makers in a trusting and investigative way was really useful. I learned from them that they do really want to be in touch with projects, they want the funds to reach the right places, that they also are pressed for time and keen to look for new and better ways to work. They are real people!

One thing we have done as a result is to invite some of our current funders to a lunch hosted by some local mums who are currently involved in a family cooking project. We’re delighted that two Chief Executives, one Director, two Trustees, one President and a Corporate Responsibility specialist are all coming and will see for themselves the sort of projects and participants that their funding supports.

There are still many frustrations facing us when chasing funds, but hopefully the ripples from IVAR’s work will lead to greater understanding from all.”

Funder perspective: Helen Wray, Head of Philanthropy and Quality, Foundation Scotland



I really enjoyed taking part in the accountability process. It is such an important part of the success of the Open and Trusting initiative. It is easy to sign up for initiatives, and to make commitments, but when you are managing a busy workload the danger is they fall down the priority list and you then don't stick to them. The accountability process meant that we had to reflect on how we were doing.

This was a helpful process for us internally to ensure we were making progress and also to understand where we weren't. It was really interesting and helpful to have charity leaders facilitate that conversation and challenge us on our responses giving their perspective. I think having other funders as part of the conversation was helpful too, to compare experiences and approaches.

The process helped us to see where we needed to make improvements and what steps we could take to make our processes easier for applicants. We are beginning to publish the success rate and amount of money available for our funding programmes. We were also challenged on one specific question in our application form so we need to review if this is removed. It's been so interesting to hear feedback from grantees about getting the basics right. Often when asking for feedback from applicants you can tell they are guarded so as not to upset their funder but with this initiative, it's been a much more open process and with very practical solutions. It's been helpful in challenging us on the more traditional and perhaps old-fashioned grant-making approaches and processes."

Funder perspective: Carla Marshall, Trust Manager, Sir George Martin Trust



We're a relatively small family charitable trust giving out grants to registered charities and local churches that support disadvantaged and vulnerable people living in West Yorkshire. When I first heard about IVAR's Open and Trusting Initiative and completed the self-reflection summary, I immediately felt very positive and engaged as we have placed an emphasis on being approachable, supportive and flexible for decades.

My father-in-law who ran the Trust for many years often visited applicants and I continue to do this as often as possible. Our aim is to make the grant application process as enjoyable as possible for grant seekers and so as I wrote our summary, each section started with: "Continue to..."

I went into the peer and charity review session again feeling positive and when one of the charity reviewers started off by sharing that she had applied to the Sir George Martin Trust a few years ago, I held my breath and hoped for the best. Thankfully it was all good and she said she had enjoyed liaising with me and received a grant. The other funder in our group was London-based and larger, but had a similar ethos to our organisation and it was really interesting to hear how they worked very much in partnership with their grant seekers and grant holders.

But we know we aren't perfect, what funder is?! The key learning for us both was that although we put a great deal of time and effort into being open and trusting at the front-end of the application process, we weren't doing the same at the back-end once a charity had been given the grant. So, the next day I updated our Grant Awarded confirmation email template to read:

'Attached is our Sir George Martin Trust Grant Impact Form for you to complete and return... If you would prefer to use another funder's template impact form or you have your own template that you could use to save you time, that is absolutely fine with us.'...

And when I receive an Impact Report, I send a thank you email, but now also include some specific feedback on what I particularly liked or found interesting in the report to show that we really appreciate the time and effort they have put into the summary. We are also planning to launch a Sir George Martin Trust newsletter later in the year to stay more connected with all our grant holders, and at our Autumn Strategy Day the trustees and I will be discussing how we can improve the evaluation and learning aspects of our work.”

Funder perspective: Bruce Warnes, Trustee & Grants Manager, The Shears Foundation



In November last year I took part in IVAR’s Open and Trusting accountability process. I have to be really honest and say that I joined the session with some

trepidation. It’s never an easy ask to have a spotlight shone on your practice as a grantmaker, but nervousness was unfounded. The interviews and critical evaluation from grant recipients; the sharing of progress with a fellow funder and the opportunity to discuss some of the challenges The Shears Foundation has

faced in meeting the eight commitments were all invaluable. They combined into the perfect opportunity for true self-reflection.

Getting involved in this process widened my lens for looking at our grant-making process. By the time the session ended, I felt empowered to re-consider the progress we’ve made and better understand our next steps.

My biggest take aways from this experience were: Having devoted a lot of time to our front end, The Shears Foundation now needs to look at the rest of our processes to make sure these equally reflect the eight IVAR commitments to being a flexible funder. Those commitments don’t stop when we “write the cheque”. We needed to tighten up our flexible funder commitments. Looking back on when we first made these, they were a bit woolly and non-quantifiable. It was important for me to revisit these with our trustees and make them tighter and better suited to shaping our future direction. We needed to start asking how people found our grant-making process. We’ve actually introduced a short five-minute survey for both successful and non-successful applicants for feedback. This uses the eight IVAR commitments as a basis for the questions. Responses are looking really positive, but I’m already seeing some really valuable evidence that my perceptions of the process might differ from the applicant experience.”

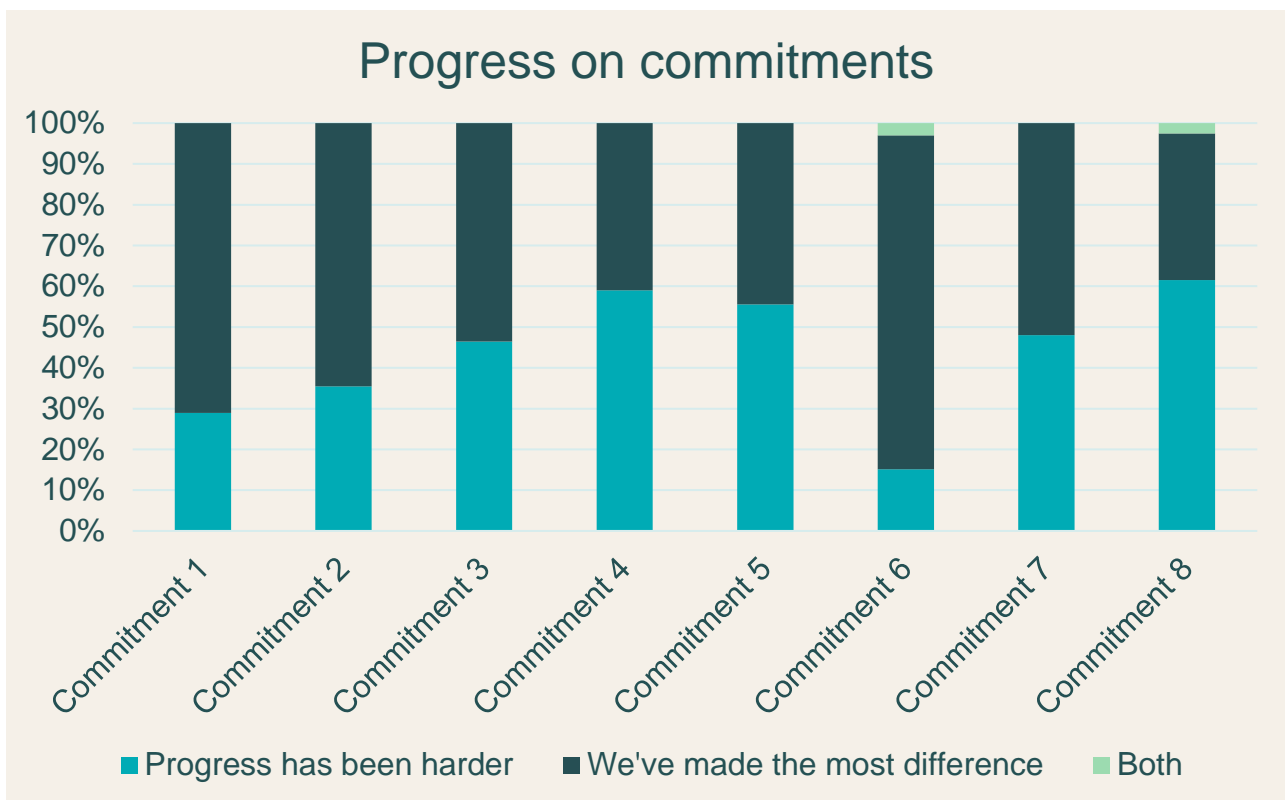
Findings

This material is based on:

- Self-reflection forms completed by the 70 funders who took part
- Notes from the peer review sessions facilitated by charity leaders
- Feedback from both funders and charity facilitators
- Analysis of refreshed commitments provided by members of the community

Progress on the eight commitments

As part of the self-reflection, we asked participants to select up to two commitments where they had *made the most difference* and two where *progress had been harder*.



Where funders have done well

The commitments where funders have made the most difference, with some practical examples, are:

- **Commitment 6:** *We will enable them to respond flexibly to changing priorities and needs (82%):*
 - Responding flexibly to grant extensions/changes
 - Introducing unrestricted funding and multi-year grants
- **Commitment 1:** *We will not waste their time (71%):*
 - Publishing application timelines/deadlines
 - Publishing success rates for application stages
 - Providing opportunities for applicants to ask questions before applying (such as drop-in sessions, webinars, phone calls, etc.)
- **Commitment 2:** *We will only ask relevant questions (65%):*
 - Using existing available information about applicants during the application process

Areas for development

The commitments where progress has been harder, with some practical examples, are:

- **Commitment 8:** *We will commit to light touch reporting (62%):*
 - Struggling to convince key decision makers – trustees, panel members, auditors, donors, etc. – of the value of Open and Trusting
 - Overcoming Trustees' attitudes towards risk
 - Managing funds/match funding with statutory funders means having to comply with their stricter funding practices
- **Commitment 4:** *We will act with urgency (59%):*
 - Concerns about lack of capacity/resource/time
 - Struggling with increased demand
- **Commitment 5:** *We will be transparent about our decisions (56%):*
 - Lack of good tech (e.g. websites, automated systems, etc.) and specialised knowledge
 - Difficulty giving detailed feedback to unsuccessful applicants
 - Long decision times due to panels/trustees only meeting up every few months

Progress on what matters most to charities

Funders taking part in the accountability process were asked to indicate their current/potential/future practice in relation to the 10 actions highlighted in the Funding Experience Survey (see Approach: 2, Self-reflection, on page 7):

Survey actions they are 'already doing':	Survey actions they are 'interested but not started':	Survey actions that are 'not a priority':
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 1: <i>Offer charities the chance to ask questions before they make an application (95%)</i>• Action 7: <i>Allow grantees to adapt and change project plans and budgets if needed (95%)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 10: <i>Allow grantees to use existing reports (e.g. to other funders, annual reports, etc.) (33%)</i>• Action 3: <i>Be clear about success rates at each stage of your process (21%)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 2: <i>Have a two-stage application process (23%)</i>• Action 10: <i>Allow grantees to use existing reports (e.g. to other funders, annual reports, etc.) (20%)</i>

Practical actions in response to the peer reviews

Based on conversations during and after the peer review sessions, as well as analysis of the refreshed commitments submitted by members of the community, we can highlight four areas where Open and Trusting funders are already planning further adaptations to their practice:

1. Applications

- Use plain English and move away from terminology that creates barriers.
- Give clearer guidance on our eligibility requirements and priorities: *'If we find ourselves receiving applications for certain types of work that are unlikely to be funded, then we will update our criteria accordingly; and recommend to applicants that they do not reapply and explore whether they deliver other work that is a better match with our priorities or signpost them to other funders'*.
- Look into scope for pre-application calls, continue to work on reducing barriers, e.g. non-charity structures and going beyond existing networks.
- Provide a space for applicants to ask questions before applying and/or a named contact for applicants to contact: *'Phone conversations with applicants (stage two) are currently quite informal. We will introduce a greater degree of structure to ensure consistent information is provided/questions are asked without losing the personal/friendly dimension'*.
- Provide a review webinar for unsuccessful applicants.

2. Reporting

- Explore further *‘how much of the reporting we need from charities could be done in conversation’*.
- Continue to challenge upwards and to partners about realistic expectations around impact data from grants.
- Pilot removing 6-month reporting.
- Introduce calls/meetings instead of written reports.

3. Types of funding

- Bring unrestricted funding model to the board table for discussion.
- Pilot core and unrestricted grant-making.

4. Communication with applicants and funded organisations

- *‘Communicate better with our grant holders and applicants about success rates at different stages of the process, and communicate and explain better why we request monitoring information in the way that we do and how this helps us secure more funds for them and the sector’*.
- Share and ask for feedback from funded and non-funded organisations on our new application forms and guidance.
- Update our website to tell applicants the decision-making process we use.
- Hold welcome sessions for new funded organisations which set out our expectations about the funding relationship.

What next?

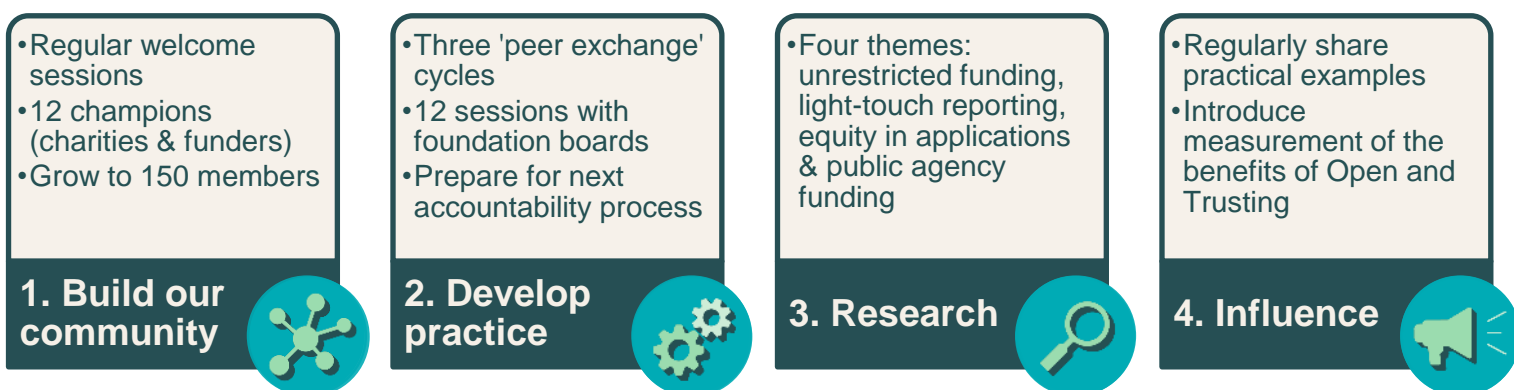
The Open and Trusting Grant-making initiative is at a critical inflection point. There is real willingness across a growing community of funders to engage in the open and trusting conversation – both with each other and with funded organisations – and to go further with adaptations and improvements to grant-making practice.

At the same time, there is widespread acknowledgement that actually embedding meaningful, long-term change is an arduous and complicated task. Not least because of a growing acceptance that tactical changes in the grant-making process are only one step towards a far more transformative change. Open and Trusting Grant-making is not simply about reducing the burden and time pressures on busy charities. It is also about changing funder/charity relationships, so that funded organisations have the agility and agency to represent the interests and needs of the communities and causes they serve. An open and trusting relationship between funder and charity is, ultimately, about changing culture.

We have shaped our plans for the next 12 months in response to what we heard through the accountability process; with particular attention to:

1. **Our own accountability to charities** – in particular, responding to the 10 calls to action arising from the Funding Experience Survey; and ensuring that charities' voices and experiences are threaded through all of our activities.
2. **Our accountability to funders** – in particular, what we have heard directly from members through the peer reviews – for example, insights about barriers to change, including the attitude of trustees.
3. **Insights and intelligence about funding from IVAR's current research portfolio, including:**
 - Our Leading in Uncertainty support sessions for over 200 charity leaders in 2022
 - Our [Community-led Social Justice project](#), supporting local organisations working with Black and minoritised communities
 - A series of projects on funding for long-term 'systems change'
4. **An acknowledgement that this is a diverse community, with funders operating with different constraints and opportunities.** That pluralism is a strength, recognised by the Steering Group³ and endorsed at our March 2023 event where we confirmed that the 'conditions' of membership of the Open and Trusting community are to:
 - Adopt the eight commitments to Open and Trusting Grant-making.
 - Share what you are doing to put them into practice.
 - Be part of a 'community of practice' with other funders to help us all adapt and improve.
 - Be held to account within the Open and Trusting community through a collaborative review, involving charities.

Our offer over the next 12 months comprises four distinct but related areas, each a balance of new and ongoing activities:



You can find out more about Open and Trusting and join the community at www.ivar.org.uk/flexible-funders – there is a sign-up form in the top right of the page.

³ The current membership of our Steering Group is: Counselling All Nations Services; One25; Refugee Action; Sport4Health; Ubele Initiative; Comic Relief; Community Foundation Northern Ireland; Corra Foundation; Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; London Funders; Texel Foundation; United St Saviour's Charity

Conclusion

We are seeing some good progress towards more Open and Trusting Grant-making, but more needs to be done. As members of the Open and Trusting community refresh their commitments, we want to stress the importance of maintaining momentum, continuing to be ambitious, and challenging ourselves to go further.

Starting with applicants and funded organisations

A key feature of Open and Trusting is our commitment to rooting change in the direct experience of applicants and funded organisations. They know best what will make a difference. But they are realistic. They understand funder constraints and challenges. Their comments in the Funding Experience Survey reveal:

- Empathy for the tough choices funders have to make in a situation where there is too much need chasing too little money
- Appreciation that funders also face constraints on their capacity which affect the way they are able to work

While they acknowledge the challenges, funded organisations are also ambitious for change – not soon, but now. They know what would make a difference to their experience, and although some are looking for more radical transformation, it is clear that the top priority for most is *‘making better use of everyone’s precious time’*.

This is important: it tells us that bringing meaningful change is within the scope of all funders, and it reinforces how essential it is that charities have a powerful stake in funders’ efforts to improve their practice. A strong, diverse charity voice is critical to this effort – but hard to achieve. Power dynamics mean charities are wary of giving robust feedback to funders. Too often, new rhetoric makes little or no difference to what funders do in practice. With extreme pressure on capacity and widespread cynicism about the influence they have, many charities see no point in engaging. We will all benefit from broader and deeper conversations between the charity sector and the funding sector – but only if these conversations lead to visible and meaningful change.

Small steps make a difference...

As we think about changes, drawing on the innovations and adaptations taking place across the Open and Trusting community, it’s important to acknowledge that even small steps can make a difference. The things that matter most to charities are not wasting their time and giving them as much financial flexibility and stability as possible. Even small changes in practice by grantmakers – a more streamlined application form, the opportunity to pick up the phone and ask a question, quick replies to emails – make a real difference to charities. So, some change here is within everyone's grasp.

... But they aren't enough

However, open, trusting and respectful practice cannot flourish unless it mirrors and is supported by organisational culture, structure and leadership. In a busy foundation, it can be hard to step back and scrutinise – at all levels – how well-established assumptions and ways of working are supporting the commitment to be more open and trusting. But this is an essential step in achieving the best possible alignment between ‘how we do things’ and ‘what we are trying to achieve’. And it is a step worth taking: the benefits of Open and Trusting are significant. As a result, charities are able to:

- **Be more responsive to their beneficiaries’ priorities:** *‘It enables us to develop and deliver services with and for our beneficiaries that are the most responsive they can be’.*
- **Be more agile in the light of changing needs:** *‘It gives us flexibility to react to need which makes us more agile and effective as a charity and less stressed as individuals’.*
- **Focus more energy on mission and outcomes**
- **Learn and share openly**
- **Plan more effectively:** *‘It allows us to plan for the future ... be more strategic and innovative and build a stronger organisation’.*

This is the simpler, more respectful, and more inclusive philanthropy that the Open and Trusting movement aspires to. Our ambition remains largely unchanged from the initiative’s launch in February 2021. We want funders to make grants in a way that reflects the realities facing charities now and for the foreseeable future.

105 grantmakers have now signed up to the eight Open and Trusting commitments. With them, our vision of success is that:

- Funding processes feel easy, straightforward, quick and trusting
- Charities are respected and trusted to know best how to deliver for the communities and causes they serve
- Funders and charities decide together what success looks like
- A culture of mutuality and reciprocity becomes the norm

We believe that by making changes to practice, we will begin to influence the culture of UK grant-making, enabling both funders and charities to reduce wasted time, effort and stress: ***‘Working towards shared goals, by making the most use of precious resources on both sides, will lead to greater impact and benefit.’⁴***



Kamna Muralidharan – IVAR Chair



Ben Cairns – IVAR Director

⁴ Making the value case of Open and Trusting, second anniversary event, 16 March 2023.