
EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS FUND

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Introduction

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the added value of the Community Champions Fund (CCF), and its benefits to both individuals and local communities, in order to inform the future shape of the fund. The study was undertaken by ASW Consulting on behalf of the DfES.

Key Findings

- CCF is successful in stimulating volunteering. Almost all of the respondents to the telephone survey said they had involved others in their project; giving on average, nearly 10 volunteers per award.
- All CCF awards have intended beneficiaries. A conservative calculation identified an average of 56 beneficiaries per project/award with a high level of attribution to CCF.
- Nearly 35% of respondents had either achieved a qualification or begun studying while in receipt of CCF. Attribution to CCF was at a medium to high level.
- Champions were typically more highly qualified than the average levels across the population as a whole - 44% had qualifications at Level 4 or higher, 49% had qualifications between levels 1-3 and 6% had no qualifications.
- The CCF is successful in attracting black and minority ethnic groups BMEs. About 40% of Champions were from black and minority ethnic communities - a far higher percentage than within the general population.
- Whilst, 28 (7.0%) of the Champions had found employment (including self employment) since starting their project, attribution of the employment to CCF was low.
- The local application process is generally straightforward, with support available from intermediaries but there were wide variations in approaches to recruitment and selection.
- Support during the life of the projects is typically on an ad hoc basis, unless help is sought specifically. Similarly, monitoring is carried out with a light touch. Whilst funding levels are adequate for management and administration, they seem insufficient to support a more proactive regime.
- In Summary - The average award per Champion is £1,250. With some 1500 awards on average per year, the evaluation suggests the CCF attracts each year some 15,000 volunteers and supports some 75,000 beneficiaries.

Background

The aim of CCF (budget £3 million per year) is to increase the skills levels of individuals to enable them to act as inspirational figures, community entrepreneurs, community mentors and community leaders; and to also increase the involvement of communities in regeneration and learning activity.

The national CCF was temporarily supported by two other funds which were also evaluated, namely:

- the Community Champions Support Fund (CCSF), delivered under Millennium Commission funding matched by approximately 10% of CCF funding. Established to offer a range of support for You and Your Community Award winners in the period from April 2002 to March 2004 (total budget of £350k);
- the Pathfinder Young Community Champions Fund (PYCCF), established to respond to the challenges of the community cohesion agenda. PYCCF is funded by the Home Office but administered by the DfES and encourages more young people to become involved in community activities in the 14 Community Cohesion Areas (budget of £675k between February 2003 and December 2004).

Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken between October 2003 and March 2004 and built on the findings from an earlier research project around Skills for Regeneration: Learning by Community Champions. The main components of the study were:

- consultation with those involved at the national level to ensure the study was informed by an awareness of the broader policy, strategy and funding context (5 interviews);
- fieldwork in all nine English regions, including discussions with Government Office (GO) staff, intermediaries, and local community organisations to explore the key issues around the effectiveness of delivery models and the impact of CCF on individuals and communities (47 interviews);
- a telephone survey of 402 Community Champions to secure data from a cross-section of Champions on the impact of CCF and additionality generated;

- face-to-face interviews with 48 Community Champions and 9 Young Community Champions;

Champions assessed attribution of outcomes to the CCF on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 indicated a crucial attribution and 1 indicated not relevant.

Delivery Models - Findings

Performance is measured almost entirely by spend against budget and attainment of specific targets. At present, insufficient focus is given to issues of impact and quality and there is scope for greater discussion between GOs and their intermediary organisations.

Where the CCF allocation is larger and/or where the infrastructure for small grant administration is already in place, the 15% fee seems adequate. However, in the reverse situations, the fee becomes almost negligible in terms of its impact on intermediaries' income and infrastructure.

Intermediaries - and word of mouth - are the main ways in which Champions hear about CCF. The general sense was that CCF was a 'well kept secret'. At the local level, it was not unusual for marketing efforts to be turned on and off like a tap, depending on the extent of funding available at any particular time.

Support to Champions during the life of the projects is typically on an ad hoc basis, unless help is sought specifically. Similarly, monitoring is carried out with a light touch. Whilst funding levels are adequate for management and administration, they seem insufficient to support a more proactive regime.

The Champions

CCF operates across all of the English regions in a way that is reasonably uniform but with a slight emphasis on deprived areas and the relative number of unemployed in the region. The average grant awarded was around £1,250.

The gender balance was 56% (women) and 44% (men). Data on age ranges was not robust but suggested that as many as 40% of Champions were over 50. Approximately 40% of Champions were from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

Around 14% of Champions had a self-reported disability.

Champions were typically more highly qualified than the average levels across the population as a whole - 44% had qualifications at Level 4 or higher. 49% had qualifications between levels 1-3 and 6% had no qualifications. 85% of Champions had some prior experience of community activities.

Impact on Champions

140 respondents to the telephone survey (34.8%) had either achieved a qualification or begun studying while in receipt of CCF. In 11 cases both situations applied. Attribution to CCF was at a medium to high level.

78% of respondents to the telephone survey said they felt more confident as a result of CCF - the attribution was also medium to high. As many as 18 (of 48) Champions in the face-to-face interviews said they had greatly improved their skills and knowledge in relation to community and voluntary activities - for example, leadership skills, organisational, management and administrative skills and understanding of how to move projects forward.

7.0% of those in the telephone survey had found employment (including self-employment) since starting their project. However, attribution was low (i.e. Champions did not necessarily link their job with their CCF experience).

Impact on the Community

Almost all of the respondents to the telephone survey (93.5%) said that they had involved others in their project. In terms of *volunteers*, the average was 8.8 per project. 103 respondents (25.6%) to the telephone survey said they had encouraged others to apply for a CCF award. In total there were 138 'induced' applicants, an average of 1.4 per respondent.

All CCF awards have intended beneficiaries and most Champions (92.5%) were able to quantify their number, at least approximately. A conservative calculation was undertaken which produced average figures of 56 beneficiaries per project, with a high level of attribution to CCF.

Sustainability

The clear majority of respondents to the telephone survey (61.5%) said they planned to increase their level of participation in community activities, whilst a further 34.2% indicated the level would stay the same.

It was clear that the whole package of the Community Champions Support Fund (CCSF) support tools and activities could be used to extend and enhance activities and build capacity. However, many Champions were unaware of CCSF and a few of the participants were critical. CCSF ended in March 2004 with the end of the Millennium Commission funding for which the DfES provided 10% matched funding.

190 respondents to the telephone survey (47.3%) had accessed further funding to supplement their CCF award. On average, Champions accessing additional funding had received income from 1.64 other sources.

Pathfinder Young Community Champions

Data was available on 83 Young Champions. Of these, the gender split was 41% (female) and 59% (male). Around 50% were White or White British and 43% were from BME communities, with the balance not known. In terms of ages, around a quarter were under 18 with the majority being in the 18-25 range. However, there were some older participants in London.

Delivery models were similar to those adopted for the national CCF. Those intermediaries with good contacts at grass roots level with agencies dealing specifically with young people, and with direct access to young people themselves, seemed to be more successful at marketing and recruitment.

In general, recruitment had been slower than anticipated. Several intermediaries were only just making their first awards at the time of fieldwork. Nationally the average grant size was £1,249.

Insufficient Young Champions had completed their projects to undertake a robust cost benefit analysis. However, six of the nine Young Champions interviewed were able to identify personal outcomes from their involvement. Increased confidence was the most common benefit.

Conclusion

One of the key findings from the study is that every project is different (e.g. in terms of scale, duration, involvement of others, stage at which CCF is awarded, community being targeted, and intended beneficiaries). With so many intervening variables - and complex interactions between them - it becomes almost impossible to identify common success factors through statistical analysis. However, fieldwork discussion suggest that the most influential success factors are:

- personal commitment, especially in terms of amount of time and energy put in;
- passion for the particular issue/community/sector/hobby or whatever;
- access to additional funding and the adaptability and flexibility of CCF;
- sizable numbers of learning outcomes result from CCF.
- it is a cost-effective way of raising volunteer involvement in communities and getting others involved. It is estimated that every £1 million of expenditure generates some 5,280 volunteers as well as supporting approximately 600 actual Champions;
- there are many beneficiaries from CCF - estimated at over 33,000 per £1m spent.

Additional Information

Copies of the full report (RR550) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

Cheques should be made payable to "DfES Priced Publications".

Copies of this Research Brief (RB550) are available free of charge from the above address (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/

Further information about this research can be obtained from Alison Solomons, DfES, Room W1129, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ.

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