Spring 2024 insights and data

A snapshot of our portfolio charities progress in the last year

May 2024

THE FORE

This report highlights the progress and experiences of the 15 charities and social enterprises that participated in The Fore's Spring 2024 monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process.

Our M&E involves an online conversation followed by a brief data survey. Progress is measured by comparing each charity's performance against bespoke transformational targets agreed at the grant's onset.

86%

average score against transformational targets for charities in our Spring 2024 M&E process (cumulative average score for all portfolio charities: 82%)

Despite their success, our recent M&E process has shown that it continues to be tough, especially in the increasingly difficult funding landscape. In fact small and medium-sized charities (under £1 million income) account for 97% of charity closures in the last 10 years.[1] So why are our charities doing so well? We have noticed a number of common factors that seem to enable the organisations we back to outperform their peers:

- The exceptional strength and creativity of their leadership
- Their success in winning unrestricted funding - we provide some but they need more
- Access to training and wraparound support

In these challenging times, leaders of our charities tell us that having an established network of peer support is more important than ever. In response, we are expanding our peer network offering including the establishment of small groups for leaders to support each other on a personal and professional level, share best practice and gain inspiration for new ideas.

Cover image: Grow Cardiff

1 Underfunded and Overlooked, The Centre for Social Justice Foundation.

Tough is getting even tougher

Our charities reported that it is more difficult than ever to secure funding from trusts and foundations, with more time being diverted to submitting applications.

Many charities noted receiving little or no response to grant applications. A lack of constructive feedback is removing the opportunity to learn and strengthen future applications. Where funding is available, it largely continues to be restricted, with charities feeling like they need to force themselves to fit into specific boxes with no opportunity to focus on working on long term financial resilience. Our charities also noted their funders were now less likely to award another grant, ruling out maximising existing sources of funding.

Our charities are consequently looking elsewhere for funding, including seeking fee-paying corporate partnerships – our training in this area is consistently oversubscribed. While there has been success, many noted a trend in in-kind only support from such partners, with difficulties in converting to funded partnerships.

Collaboration not competition

Our charities show that entering joint bids with peers for funding from trusts and foundations makes them more than the sum of their parts.

Joint bids have often been more successful, as many funders find the reduced risk associated with shared delivery appealing. They are a win for charities too; they can share expertise and overcome any individual weaknesses or skill gaps leading to stronger delivery. It also reduces silo working and duplication, resulting in greater impact.

In an increasingly tough funding landscape, it can be tempting for small organisations to see each other as competition; but charities might be missing a trick if they do this. However, while collaboration can be fruitful, actioning a plan can be time-consuming and place further strain on resources.

Resilience: a myth? It doesn't have to be

Many of our charities continue to struggle to build resilience leaving some unable to cope with shocks and key staff absence. This can slow progress and affect delivery.

However, our charities also show that becoming resilient is possible. For example, with our unrestricted funding, one organisation broke free from the grant dependency cycle by developing their commercial offer. This provided the resources needed to build their core team, allowing them to handle unexpected shocks without compromising progress. For others, our funding has given leaders the breathing room to implement contingency plans.

The message is clear on resilience: is it an illusion? Absolutely not. Unrestricted, multi-year core funding, as well as access to high quality skills and training, helps small charities turn resilience from myth to reality. We encourage other funders to take note.

Youth Leads UK

Case study: Build Up Foundation: Charting the path to financial freedom and sustainability
Score against targets: 96%

Build Up Foundation puts young Londoners in control of construction projects that make lasting contributions to their communities, building their skills and confidence to become tomorrow's changemakers.

While Build Up was making a real impact, their model was financially limiting, with projects largely funded by grants, leaving little surplus for reinvestment back into the organisation to support growth. They had plans to transform their business model by securing more financially lucrative commercial contracts but lacked the necessary capacity.

With funding from The Fore, Build Up recruited a Partnerships Manager to build new partnerships and free up the CEO's time to focus on strategy and resilience. This has allowed them to shift their model, reducing dependency on grants and securing commercial contracts with developers and local authorities that generate greater surpluses. In just a year, their unrestricted income has risen from £179,542 to £246,928.

Surpluses generated from their new model is fuelling sustainable expansion. They hired their first young paid staff member and six more in freelance roles that will hopefully evolve into permanent positions. Having worked with 339 young people this year, they plan to use the remaining Fore funding to further expand reach, with a vision to inspire youth-led regeneration in other cities across the UK.

Build Up Foundation

Key stats from our Spring 2024 monitoring and evaluation

86%

score against transformational targets

Based on 53 targets scored across 15 charities

Compared to 77% scored in our Autumn 2023 M&E

26%

increase in beneficiaries reached

33%

increase in programmes/ projects offered

45%

increase in volunteers

18%

increase in staff time

52%

growth in total income

23% growth in restricted income

63% growth in unrestricted income

Increases are from last year to this year. Percentages (excluding target score) represent median increases.

Charities in our Spring 2024 M&E process:

- Build Up Foundation
- Conversation Over Borders CIC
- CRIPtic Arts
- Dress For Success Scotland Limited
- Family Counselling Trust
- Feathers Futures CIO
- Grace Enterprises Nottingham Ltd
- Grow Cardiff
- LMK (Let Me Know)
- Mission Remission
- Ms Independent Careers
- Sisterhood School CIC.
- Split Banana CIC.
- The Goldhill Play Association
- Youth Leads UK

Breakdown of target scores by category

Category of target	Number of targets evaluated	Average score against target	Score as a %	Change since Autumn 2023
Increase financial sustainability	**9**	**3.4**	**69%**	**6%**
Through public sector contracts	4	4	80%	30%
Through grants or donations	3	3	60%	-25%
Through earned income/sales	1	3	60%	13%
Through a mix of the above	1	3	60%	-40%
Expanding charitable activity	**12**	**3.9**	**78%**	**-4%**
By developing new products or services	6	3.3	67%	-21%
By reaching new people	6	4.5	90%	4%
By expanding into new areas	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Improving impact of programmes	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Increasing organisational capacity	**20**	**4.8**	**95%**	**14%**
By improving structure and governance	12	4.8	95%	10%
Through research, evaluation and impact assessment	3	5	100%	12%
By improving marketing or developing profile	1	5	100%	20%
By nurturing partnerships	4	4.5	90%	30%
Increasing efficiency	**9**	**4.9**	**98%**	**38%**
By increasing use of volunteers	4	5	100%	40%
By strengthening systems and processes	5	4.8	96%	n/a
Strategic planning	**3**	**3.3**	**67%**	**-13%**
Total	**53**	**4.3**	**86%**	**9%**