

Learning Process

Survey Summary Briefing - November 2021

Background

In June 2021 Corra launched a pilot fund with the aim of continuing to improve our approach to supportive and accessible grant-making. The [Learning and Pilot work](#) supported and consulted with five partnerships and specifically focused on 'shifting the power' between funders and grantholders and between partners in Scotland and overseas.

Alongside the pilot consultation, Corra shared a survey to gather views from the wider sector. This short briefing presents the key learning points from analysis of the survey responses. To learn more about the wider International Pilot Fund contact chrissie@corra.scot or elaine@corra.scot.

What we did

Corra consulted the eleven organisations participating in the pilot fund and identified issues and aspects of grantmaking and management which they felt were important for international development funding that supported equity and sustainability. These points, and a subsequent round of feedback, fed the development of an intentionally short survey of 10 required questions plus one optional open question, which took approximately 10 minutes to complete. (The full text of the survey is provided at the end of this report.)

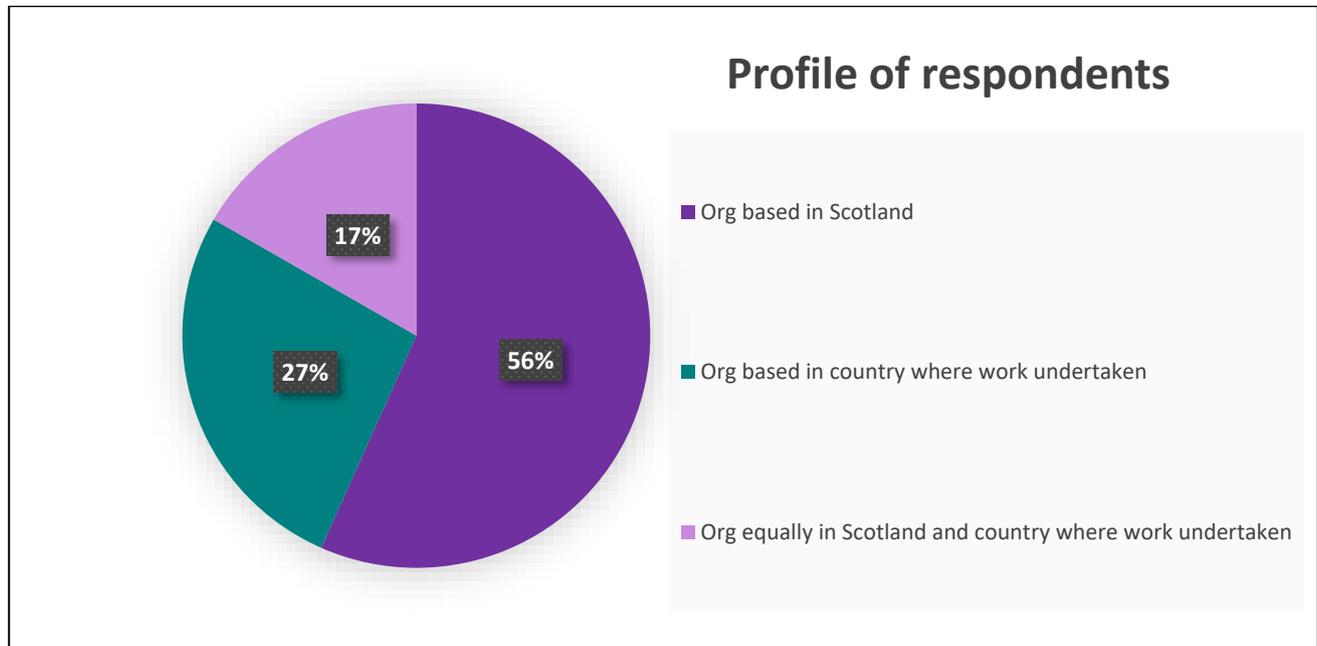
Responses were invited from both Scotland-based organisations and organisations working overseas who work on international development, with circulation kindly assisted by the two networks Scotland's International Development Alliance and the Scotland Malawi Partnership. Launched on 16 September through the online Survey Monkey platform, the survey closed after 6.5 weeks on 31 October 2021.

Key points from the survey results

- The great majority (over 80%) of respondents saw longer-term and more flexible grants as being important for sustainability.
- The majority (over 70%) of respondents supported greater community input and role in project preparation and delivery.
- With one exception, all respondents valued partnerships for other benefits beyond access to funding, noting mutual support, sector awareness, and personal relationships as important.
- The majority of respondents want funders to be clear, transparent and accountable and to support the involvement of overseas partners in applications and assessments.
- The great majority of respondents value learning and want funders to support peer networking and exchange, flexible monitoring and evaluation budgets and programming which can easily adjust/respond to monitoring findings.

What kinds of respondents and organisations shared views?

The survey had 30 responses: 17 from people working with organisations based primarily in Scotland, 8 from organisations based primarily in the country where the work is undertaken, and 5 based equally in both Scotland and the country where the work is undertaken.



Most **organisations based in Scotland** worked in partnership with organisations outside the UK, and just under half work with a mix of partners in Scotland/the UK and overseas, the majority of which are separate, unaffiliated organisations. These organisations had a wide range of staffing, from no full-time staff or volunteers to over 8,000, with almost half having an annual average income of over £1 million, and half of £500,000 or under.

Most **organisations based primarily in the country where the work is undertaken** had a mix of partners in Scotland and overseas, but a quarter partner only with non-UK organisations (one noted that they had worked with a UK NGO but ended the partnership as they found it too controlling) and the great majority of these partners are completely separate organisations. These overseas organisations’ staff and volunteer numbers ranged from a handful to nearly 400, with annual average income spread fairly evenly across the range of over £1 million to under £20,000.

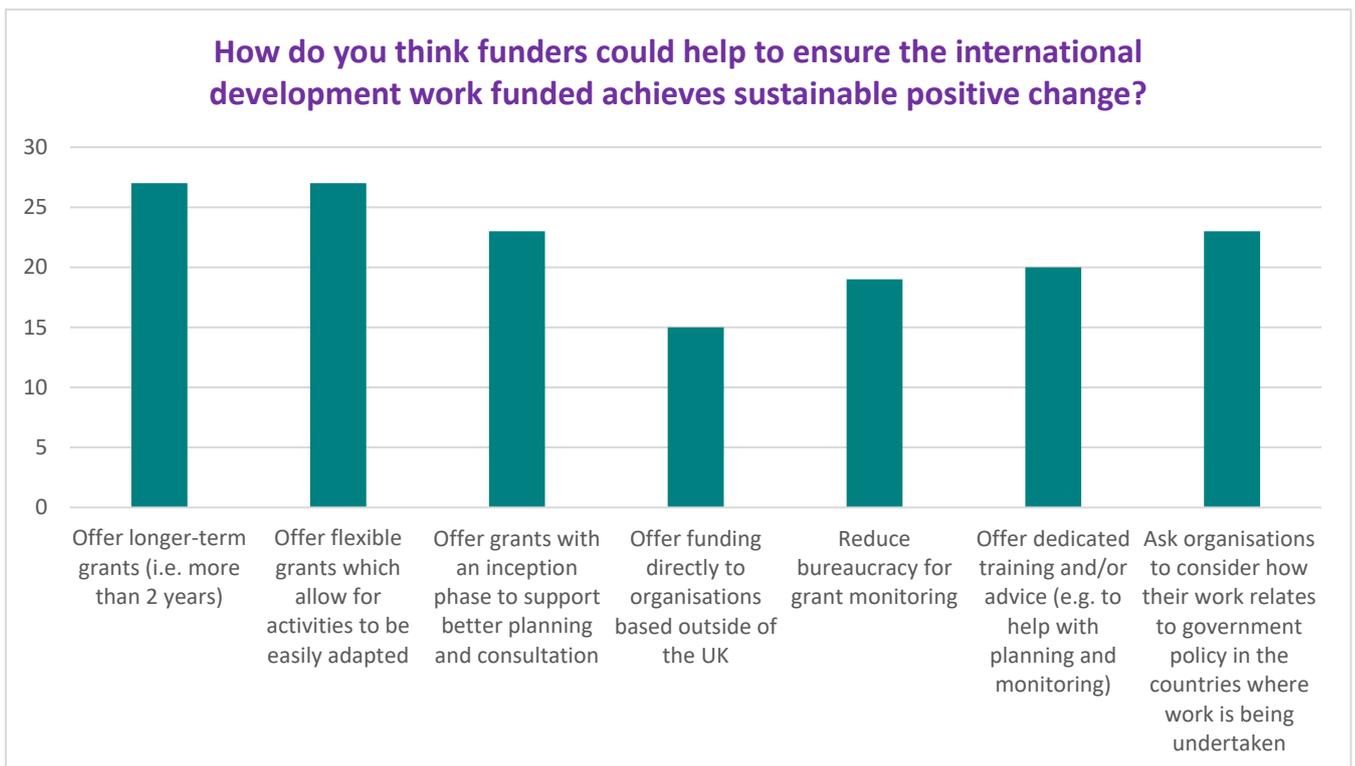
Over half of **organisations based equally in both Scotland and the country where the work is undertaken** also had partners outside of the UK, though some also worked with Scotland-based or overseas partners, and two thirds of these partners were formally affiliated. These organisations’ staff and volunteer numbers ranged from 0 to 30 staff and up to 70,000 volunteers. Just under a half of these organisations had annual average income brackets of over £1 million, with most having annual income over £20,000.

What did people think about how funder practices could be improved?

Sustainable positive change

When asked **how funders could help to ensure the international development work funded achieves sustainable positive change**, over half of respondents selected almost all options offered. The most popular were offering longer-term and flexible grants (over 80% of respondents selected these options), followed by funders asking organisations to relate their work to government policy and offering grants with inception phases (around 70%), and by offering dedicated training/advice and reducing bureaucracy for monitoring (around 60%).

The least popular option among all types of respondents was to offer funding directly to organisations based outside of the UK which less than half (45%) of all respondents selected; just over half of (56%) respondents from Scotland-based organisations felt this would be a useful option, in comparison with fewer (40%) respondents from organisations based equally in Scotland and only a third of (38%) respondents from organisations based overseas.



There were 13 open responses shared on this question with additional recommendations for funders. This included offering technical organisational development support, including for the development of more sustainable funding models and steps towards direct funding to partners based outside the UK (including smaller organisations), funding for post-project reviews and research to better understand impact and sustainability, and overheads/core running costs.

The need and value of flexibility and trust were also underlined in comments, as was longer-term funding. Four responses (all from organisations based fully or partly in Scotland) also recommended that direct funding to organisations based overseas is accompanied by organizational and capacity development to support grantholders in applications and providing information which funders normally expect.

“Provide funding for post-project reviews and/or research, to understand the fuller impact/sustainability of the project over a longer period of time.”

Respondent from Scotland-based organisation

“Best example is where a relationship was based on TRUST not on complex rules and budgets - yes there was accountability but it was proportionate and reasonable.”

Respondent from organisation based overseas, in the country where the work is undertaken

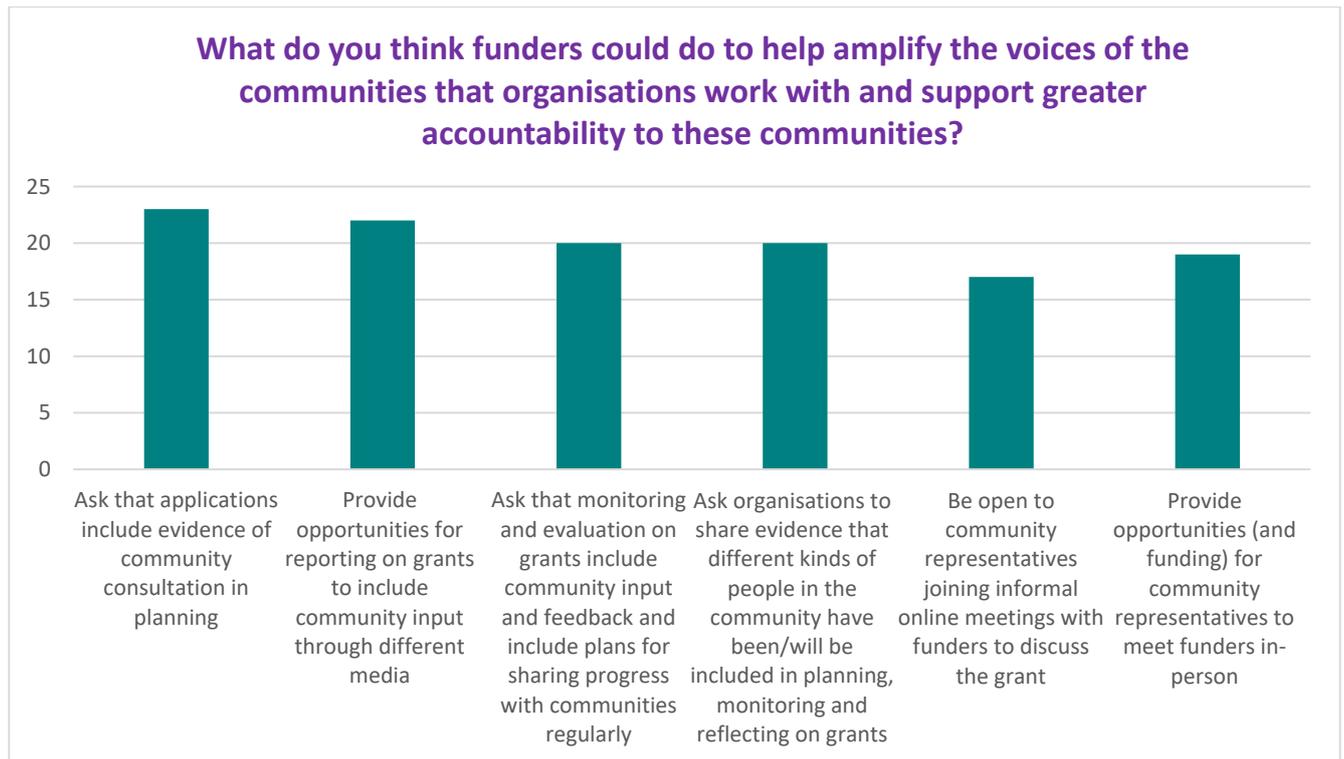
Voice and accountability

Most respondents (two thirds) again selected all options offered for **how funders could help amplify the voices of communities that organisations work with and support greater accountability to these communities**. The most popular option (selected by over 70% of respondents) was for funders to ask that applications include evidence of community consultation in planning.

The four options of providing opportunities for more diverse community input on grant reporting, providing resources for in-person meetings between community members and funders, asking for evidence that diverse community members have been involved in planning and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), and that grantholders ensure regular community input and feedback, were selected by nearly two thirds of respondents (60-70%). The least popular option, selected by just over half of respondents, was to provide opportunities for community representatives joining online meetings with funders (52%).

While perspectives from different types of respondents were generally quite similar on this question regardless of where the respondent’s organisation was based, there were a couple of exceptions. Only 13% of respondents from an overseas organisation felt that online meetings with community members would be helpful, in contrast with 72% and 60% of respondents from organisations based in or partly in Scotland.

More Scotland-based or partly Scotland-based organisations (78% and 80% respectively) than overseas organisations (63%) felt that applications should ask for evidence of community consultation in planning. Relatively fewer overseas respondents (38%) felt that MEL should include community input and feedback, although twice as many overseas respondents (63%) felt that funders should ask for evidence of diverse community members’ involvement in planning and MEL so this may be linked to clarity of the multiple options.



Eight open responses were shared on this question, highlighting a range of issues related to voice and accountability. These were diverse and included underlining the importance and value of community voice and input, but also cautionary notes around the role of funders and inherent power dynamics affecting communication, the challenges of direct communication from communities to funders, and the potential for confusion about the roles of different organisations (if funders are involved in direct communication with communities this might lead to micro-management or undermine the organisations working with communities to implement initiatives). Three comments included a note that funders should ensure financial assistance sufficient for proper consultations.

“Funder to allocate means for ensuring consultation with the direct beneficiaries during project design, implementation and evaluation.”

“The voices of the recipient must be heard directly, not through a UK NGO”

Respondents from organisations based overseas, in the country where the work is undertaken

“Ask communities what messages they would like amplified, and to whom...”

Respondent from Scotland-based organisation

Shift the power

On the question asking **what funders could do to help shift the power between funders and grantholders and to support equity among partner organisations**, nearly half of respondents selected all options offered. The most popular options (70% and over), in order of popularity, were to be clear and transparent on application criteria, requirements and decision-making, to involve

overseas partners in applications and assessments, and for the funder to have a dedicated person available for informal consultation throughout the grant cycle.

These were followed by the options of applications providing space for partners to highlight issues of importance to them (67%), of opportunities for feedback to the funder throughout the grant cycle (64%), and of the funder forming a relationship with both Scotland-based and overseas partners for regular engagement on the grant (61%). The least popular option was for the funder to involve diverse people and former grantholders (in and outside of the UK) in grant assessment and selection (48%).

Option preferences were mostly similar across groups of respondents, with three main exceptions.

- The least popular option of involving diverse perspectives in grant assessment was selected most by respondents from organisations based in Scotland (72%) but by far fewer respondents from organisations based overseas (13%) or partly overseas (20%).
- Fewer respondents from organisations based overseas selected the option of a dedicated person within the funding organisation (50%) than respondents from organisations based in Scotland (89%) or partly in Scotland (80%).
- Additionally, the option of the funder forming a relationship with both partners throughout the grant, popular with both respondents from organisations based overseas (75%) and in Scotland (67%), was selected by fewer respondents from organisations based partly in Scotland and partly overseas (40%).



Six open responses were shared for this question. Three raised common points relating to the importance of funders being friendly, accessible, and respectful of grantees and their time. Additional and more varied points were shared regarding funders' accountability to grantees for prompt action (and that overseas NGOs are less likely to speak out if they find certain practices difficult due to fears about this affecting their funding), and the benefits of funders supporting disability inclusive practices and learning / skills development.

"...reports and contracts need to be two-way - not just about the partner's obligations to the funder but also about the funder's obligations to the partner (e.g. prompt payments & approval of proposed adjustments...) Maybe the funder can have key performance indicators / targets to report to partners against, like they require from partners?"

Respondent from Scotland-based organisation

"...A friendly attitude to grantees is essential, so that we feel we are working towards the same aims. Donors should never be disrespectful to grantees."

Respondent from an organisation based equally in Scotland and overseas

Supporting learning

In responding to the question asking **what funders could do to support learning which improves grantholder internal practice and benefits the wider sector**, the great majority (80%) of respondents felt that providing opportunities for peer exchange and supporting networking with organisations working in similar fields would be valuable. Respondents from Scotland- and overseas-based organisations rated these options very highly (75-89%), and more so than respondents from organisations based equally in Scotland and overseas (60%).

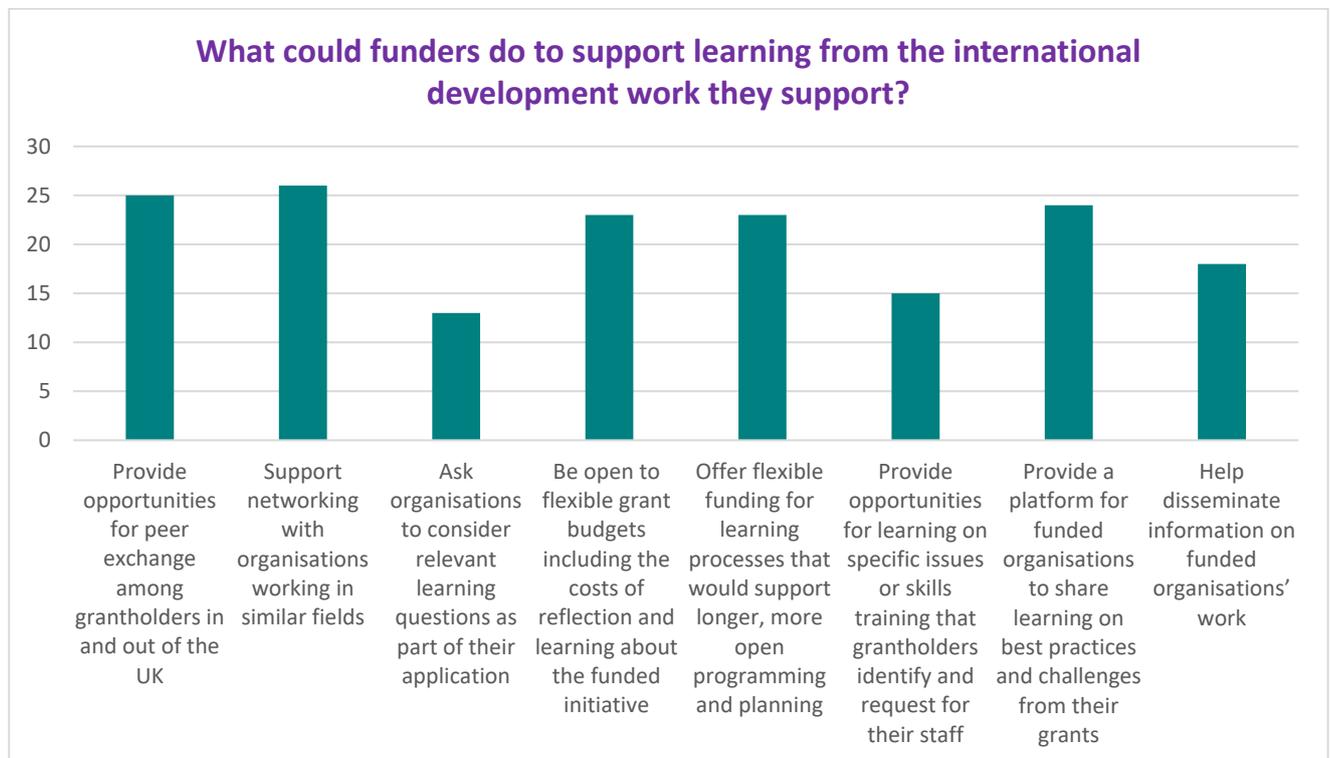
The majority of respondents (70-73%) also indicated that providing a platform to share learning, more flexible MEL budgeting to include reflection/learning costs, and more flexible funding for programming that could respond to learning would be helpful (particularly favoured by respondents from organisations based equally in Scotland and overseas).

The option of funder-provided learning opportunities on specific issues was less popular and selected by less than half of respondents (48%); more Scotland-based organisations felt this would be helpful (61%) in comparison with fewer respondents from overseas organisations (38%) and or from organisations based equally in Scotland and overseas (20%).

The least popular option was to ask organisations to consider relevant learning questions as part of their application (42%); few respondents based overseas selected this (25%), slightly more based in Scotland (44%) or partly in Scotland and overseas (60%).

Only five open responses were shared for this question - all from organisations based in or partly in Scotland. Common themes included the value of funders supporting forums and exchange, but respondents also cautioned against confusing funder roles with delivering learning, as well as the need to recognise the time necessary for learning, and the related importance of ensuring that investments in learning processes meet organisations' needs (and not funders').

Flexible MEL funding to explore particular project aspects was recommended, as was later scheduling of end-of-project evaluations to give time for thorough post-implementation review and reflection.



“Offer flexible funding to enable small scale research activity into particular parts of the project and provide a forum for sharing learnings from the activity that other organisations/projects may benefit from.”

Respondent from Scotland-based organisation

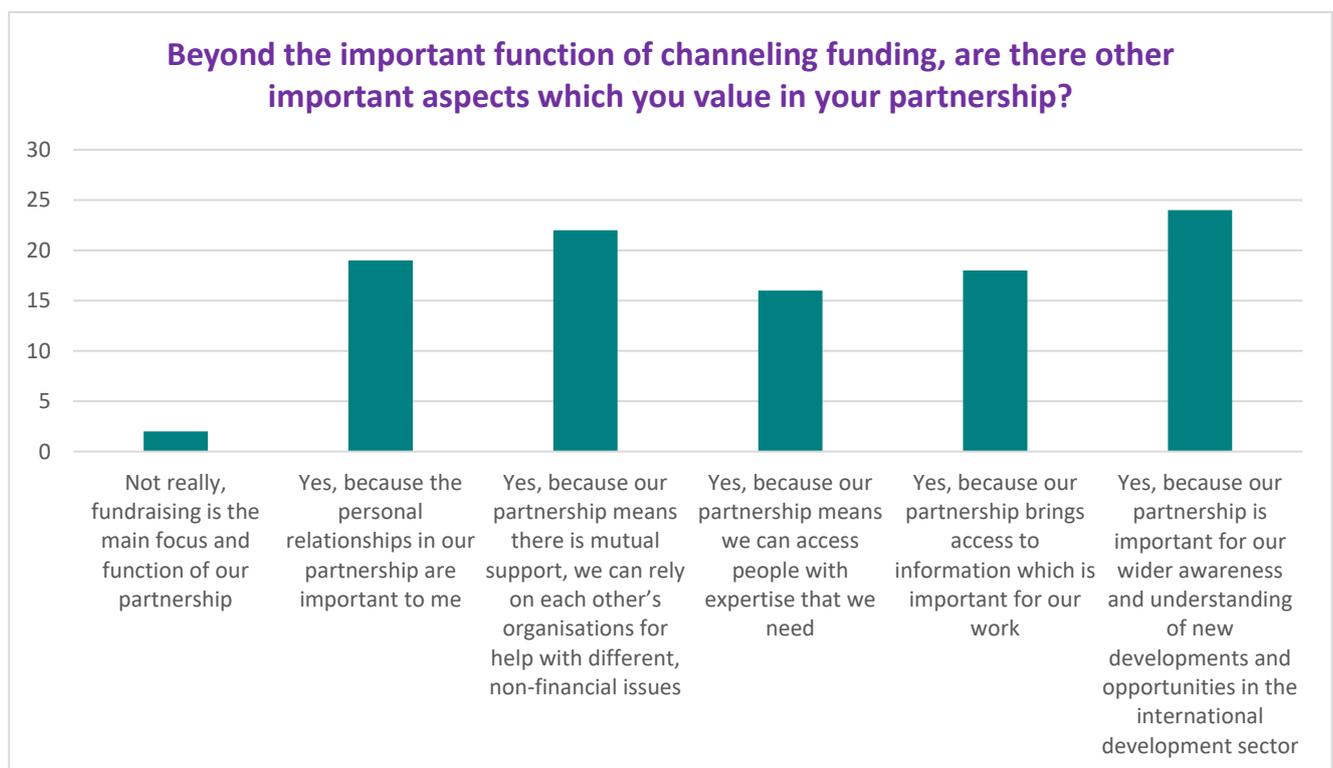
The value of partnership

The final question asked **what important aspects or functions respondents valued in their partnership**. Overall, most respondents selected the two statements that their partnership means mutual support and reliance on partners for non-financial help, and that their partnership is important for their wider awareness of new international development sector developments and opportunities (both 73%): these were the two aspects clearly more favoured than others.

Around half of respondents selected the three statements that their partnership helps them to access information important for their work (61%), that the personal relationships are important to them (58%), and that the partnership helps access needed expertise (51%). Interestingly, only two respondents, one Scotland-based and one overseas-based, selected the statement that fundraising is the main focus and function of their partnership.

Responses differed by type of organisation to some extent, with two main contrasts. The first was that the personal relationships in the partnership were rated as important by far fewer respondents from organisations based partly in Scotland and partly overseas (20%) than respondents from either Scotland-based (67%) or overseas organisations (75%). The other was that accessing expertise was seen as an important aspect of partnership by fewer respondents from organisations based overseas (25%), relative to those who saw this as important in Scotland-based organisations (61%) or organisations based equally in Scotland and overseas (60%).

The seven open responses shared for this question noted a range of factors relevant to partnerships, with half mentioning capacity development, exchange of expertise and learning. Two highlighted the importance of a partnership working towards a common goal or vision.



“Besides funding we benefit a lot from the partnership namely continuous capacity building, exchange of best practices, improvement of grant design, learning together, etc.”

Respondents from an organisation based overseas, in the country where the work is undertaken

“The critical point is that it is the overseas partner that is driving the vision”

Respondent from Scotland-based organisation

Open comments

The survey concluded by offering respondents the opportunity to make an **open comment**: 14 did so, including comments shared by respondents from organisations based in Scotland, overseas and equally in Scotland and non-UK countries.

Some were broadly appreciative of the consultation opportunity, while others offered additional points for consideration by funders. These included:

- Funders should undertake preparatory research and assessments to inform their policies and ensure their grant conditions are appropriate for the project context.
- Funders should understand that fundraising applications require time and ensure realistic timeframes, also recognizing that small organisations have limited capacity.
- Funders should be more willing to respond to overseas partners' priorities, adopt a lighter touch and reduce complexity.
- Funders should be mindful of the urgent pressures on communities affected by poverty and ensure that development funding reaches those facing the most challenges.
- Funders should ensure rigorous selection of grantees, including due diligence that requires annual audited accounts for overseas partners.
- Funders should focus on capacity building, institutional development and financial management to support quality delivery and positive change.

In general, comments from respondents from organisations in / partly in Scotland or overseas did not differ markedly in their content or focus. There was one key exception: the comments which highlighted the social justice aspects of international development funding and importance of capacity building were all made by respondents from overseas organisations.

Survey text

In the analysis text above, some survey questions and answer options have been shortened or summarized for the sake of clarity and brevity. The full text is provided below.

This survey is intended for organisations based either in Scotland or outside of the UK which work in the international development sector. The survey is part of a learning process which Corra Foundation is undertaking with the aim of improving the way that funders work with organisations undertaking international development work. The questions below hope to gather views on how funders can adapt their approaches to better support powerful and equitable partnerships that generate lasting positive change for both partners and the communities involved. The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete and will be open until 31 October 2021. Your responses will be entirely anonymous and Corra will publish a summary of responses on its website in November 2021. Thank you for your time and contributing your thoughts and perspectives.

I. Respondent information questions *(Please select the one most appropriate response option.)*

Your organisation works on international development. Is your organisation

based primarily in Scotland

based primarily in the country where the work is undertaken (outside of the UK)

based equally in Scotland *and* in the country where the work is undertaken (outside of the UK)

Do you undertake this international development work in a continuing, active partnership with another organisation (or organisations)?

No

Yes, with an organisation (or organisations) in Scotland

Yes, with an organisation (or organisations) outside of the UK

Yes, we have a mix of partners, some are in Scotland or the UK and some outside of the UK

Is your partner (or are most of your partners)

affiliated to your organisation (e.g. through a shared board / management structure, through an international federation or similar)

a completely independent organisation

Not applicable (if you don't undertake international development work in partnership)

How is your organisation staffed? *(Please only include those who undertake activities, so don't include board members or trustees unless they regularly get involved in implementation.)*

How many volunteers work with you? ____

How many paid full-time staff do you have? (if you have two staff on 50% part-time, please respond 1) ____

What is your organisation's average level of income?

Less than £20,000 income in an average year

Between £20,000 and £100,000 income in an average year

- Between £100,000 and £500,000 income in an average year
- Between £500,000 and £1 million income in an average year
- Over £1 million income in an average year

II. Substantive questions (Please tick all response options that apply.)

How do you think funders could help to ensure the international development work funded achieves **sustainable positive change**?

- Offer longer-term grants (i.e. more than 2 years)
- Offer flexible grants which allow for activities to be easily adapted
- Offer grants with an inception phase to support better planning and consultation
- Offer funding directly to organisations based outside of the UK
- Reduce bureaucracy for grant monitoring
- Offer dedicated training and/or advice (e.g. to help with planning and monitoring)
- Ask organisations to consider how their work relates to government policy in the countries where work is being undertaken (including supporting co-ordinated positive change and/or advocacy for unmet needs)
- Other, please specify. If you would like to share a positive example from your experience of working with funders, please do so here.

What do you think funders could do to help **amplify the voices of the communities** that organisations work with and support **greater accountability** to these communities?

- Ask that applications include evidence of community consultation in planning
- Provide opportunities for reporting on grants to include community input through different media (e.g. written input, video clips, photographs, etc.)
- Ask that monitoring and evaluation on grants include community input and feedback and include plans for sharing progress with communities regularly
- Ask organisations to share evidence that different kinds of people in the community have been/will be included in planning, monitoring and reflecting on grants (e.g. older/younger people, people of different genders, people with disabilities, people from different ethnic communities or faith groups, etc.)
- Be open to community representatives joining informal online meetings with funders to discuss the grant
- Provide opportunities (and funding) for community representatives to meet funders in-person (through visits to communities or visits to Scotland)
- Other, please specify. If you would like to share a positive example from your experience of working with funders, please do so here.

What do you feel funders could do to help **shift the power** between funders and grantholders and to **support equity** among the organisations in your partnership?

- Provide clarity and transparency on criteria, requirements of applicants and decision-making processes
- Involve partners outside the UK in applications and assessments

Provide space on the application form for partners to offer information that is important to them (for example, the nature and history of the partnership, previous work, any particular challenges they face)

Form a relationship with both partners (Scotland and outside UK) (including sharing information, participating in monitoring meetings, discussing concerns relating to the grant)

Involve diverse people and former grantholders (in and out of the UK) in grant assessment and selection

Provide opportunities for feedback to the funder throughout the grant cycle

Have a dedicated person in the funding organisation available for informal consultation throughout the grant cycle

Other, please specify. If you would like to share a positive example from your experience of working with funders, please do so here.

What could funders do to **support learning** from the international development work they support? This includes learning on the process of implementing a particular initiative which can inform adjusted and improved approaches to future work for those involved and also learning which can benefit the wider sector and other actors and organisations working on similar initiatives elsewhere.

Provide opportunities for peer exchange among grantholders in and out of the UK

Support networking with organisations working in similar fields

Ask organisations to consider relevant learning questions as part of their application

Be open to flexible grant budgets including the costs of reflection and learning about the funded initiative (as well as related costs such as baseline surveys, additional travel, etc.)

Offer flexible funding for learning processes that would support longer, more open programming and planning (e.g. funding proposals which include plans for year 1, but where plans for years 2 and 3 will be shaped by the learning in year 1)

Provide opportunities for learning on specific issues or skills training that grantholders identify and request for their staff

Provide a platform for funded organisations to share learning on best practices and challenges from their grants

Help disseminate information on funded organisations' work

Other, please specify. If you would like to share a positive example from your experience of working with funders, please do so here.

An important function of partnerships between organisations based in Scotland and organisations based in the countries where the international development activity is undertaken can be to help secure funds for the work undertaken outside the UK. Beyond this function of channeling funding, are there other **important aspects which you value in your partnership?**

Not really, fundraising is the main focus and function of our partnership

Yes, because the personal relationships in our partnership are important to me

Yes, because our partnership means there is mutual support, we can rely on each other's organisations for help with different, non-financial issues

Yes, because our partnership means we can access people with expertise that we need

Yes, because our partnership brings access to information which is important for our work

Yes, because our partnership is important for our wider awareness and understanding of new developments and opportunities in the international development sector

Yes, because _____ (Other, please specify)

Optional open comment. If you have any additional comment on any of the issues above that you would like to share, please feel free to add it here. (Max. 100 words)

End page text

Thank you so much for taking the time to respond to these questions and share your perspectives. Corra will prepare a summary analysis of all the anonymous survey responses and publish this on our website during November 2021 (<https://www.corra.scot/grants/international-development/>)

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

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