End of programme report: Community Chest - Small Grants
14 March 2024

1. Introduction

Hackney Giving, London Borough of Hackney (LBH), NEL Personalised Care programme and the City and Hackney Neighbourhoods programme worked together to pilot a small grants programme for not-for-profit sector organisations working in City and Hackney.

Hackney Giving is a local giving programme run by Hackney CVS. It is designed to offer a simple, effective and co-ordinated way for individuals and businesses to support grassroots community projects by giving funding, time or skills to organisations that are delivering projects and services in the area.

During the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, both Hackney Council and the NHS recognised the value of the not-for-profit sector in supporting communities. The City and Hackney Public Health team as well as City and Hackney Clinical Commissioning Group used Hackney Giving to distribute funding to not-for-profit organisations. This funding was distributed over several programmes, reflecting the changing circumstances: a Coronavirus Response Fund, providing food and essentials to people shielding at home, led to COVID-19 Information Grants, designed to communicate the information people needed to stay safe and within the law, and more recently a programme supporting people living with Long COVID.

The effectiveness of not-for-profit organisations providing health information to their communities was recognised in a programme evaluation. In parallel, Hackney CVS continued to advocate for the role of these community partners in transforming healthcare.

It is recognised that people living in City and Hackney experience barriers to accessing the health provision and financial support that they are entitled to. A grants programme, known as the Community Chest Small Grants programme, was proposed, to help reduce these barriers. It was delivered by Hackney Giving and funded by London Borough of Hackney and NHS North East London, using funding designed to tackle health inequalities.

This report summarises the programme.

2. Programme Overview

Budgets
£25,000 was available for distribution to not-for-profit organisations in Hackney and/or the City of London.

£3,750 was allocated to Hackney CVS to cover the administration of the programme.

Programme Development
Initial discussions were between Susan Masters, Director, Health Transformation, Policy and Neighbourhoods at Hackney CVS and NHS colleagues, together with Oli Clayton, a consultant supporting the delivery of small grants programmes across North East London.

Susan proposed Hackney Giving as an ideal mechanism for distributing the funds. Once use of Hackney Giving was agreed, its Programme Manager, Sarah Watson, worked with colleagues from NHS North East London to establish programme priorities, funding levels, eligibility criteria and timelines for programme delivery.

Hackney Giving then produced application guidance giving details of the funding.

It was agreed that grants of £2,500 would be awarded for work towards the following outcome:

> "Increasing access to health services and financial support for people living in Hackney and the City who experience barriers to provision."

This wording was chosen over "reducing barriers to access", because Hackney Giving pointed out that small grants of £2,500 would not be able to make a significant difference to reducing the barriers that people experience. More realistically, grants of this size would help people to get past those barriers.

Full programme guidance is included at **Appendix 1**.

Hackney Giving developed an application form that accompanied the project guidance. Hackney Giving ensured the form was as simple as possible, whilst still providing sufficient information to justify the award of funding.

For previous applicants, whose supporting documents (e.g. constitution and policies) were held on file, Hackney Giving requested only the latest set of accounts, further simplifying the process.

The application form is included at **Appendix 2.**

Eligibility

To be eligible for a grant, organisations had to declare that they:

- Work in Hackney and/or the City.
- Have a formal constitution or governing document.
- Are constituted to be not-for-profit.
- Had a turnover of under £300,000 in their last financial year.
- Have at least two people on their Board of Trustees or Management Committee.
- Are not in overall financial deficit.
- Have a bank account, requiring at least two signatories.
- Have bank account signatories that are unrelated (by blood or marriage) and live at separate addresses.

Timescale

The grants programme pilot was proposed in 2022. In January 2023, it was agreed that Hackney Giving would distribute the funding in Hackney and the City.

Hackney Giving and NHS colleagues met on 10 February 2023. At this meeting, Oli requested completion of programme delivery ready for evaluation in August 2023. Hackney Giving produced a timetable (Table 1) and advised partnership colleagues that it was "extremely tight at every stage".

Table 1 - Timetable proposed by Hackney Giving on 13 February 2023, to meet evaluation deadline of August 2023

Stage	Date	Duration
Grant/ contract with Hackney CVS agreed	By 01 March	
Finalise guidance and application form	By 01 March	
Launch programme (and open for applications)	01 March	20 working days
Application deadline	28 March	
Assess applications	12 April	10 working days
Decision making panel	19 April	
Publicise outcome	21 April	
Delivery starts	01 May	13 weeks
Delivery stops	31 July	

Hackney Giving produced draft grants guidance by 13 February 2023. Following feedback, it was revised by 17 February 2023. An application form was produced by 22 February 2023. This is in line with the timetable above.

Hackney Giving stated throughout the development process that the programme could not launch publicly until a grant agreement and PO for funding was in place, and that grants could not be disbursed until the money was received. The grant agreement was not in place in time to launch on 1 March.

In order to secure the funding, £25k was routed via LBH. Funding for programme administration (£3,750) was to be paid directly by NHS North East London.

On 23 March 2023, Hackney Giving was told:

> "Unfortunately, the money needs to go through LBH's procurement processes, when it was placed there I don't think this was considered.
>
> I've had the following update this morning 'We do have to present a brief paper on this at the Public Health SMT meeting on 4th April but after that we can submit the STA and hopefully get the funding out asap.'"

This process meant that a grant agreement was not issued to Hackney Giving until 22 May 2023, a significant delay from the timeline initially requested.

Before the launch, it was agreed that project delivery could last up to six months, rather than the three months (13 weeks) shown in Table 1 above.

The programme opened for applications on 2 June 2023, with a deadline of 6 July 2023. The earliest that projects could begin was 7 August 2023, for completion by 31 January 2024. Applicants were informed it was their choice how long their project would last, depending on the nature of the project.

3. Pre-application Support and Outreach

The opportunity to apply for funding was publicised in the Hackney CVS newsletter on 8, 15, 22 and 29 June 2023. It was also promoted in the City and Hackney Public Health Community Champions newsletter on 16 June 2023.

Three How to Apply workshops were held online, on 13, 16 and 22 June 2023. These were deliberately held on different days of the week and at different times of day, to give a greater breadth of access.

The workshops were free to attend, open to all potential applicants and were advertised in the Hackney CVS newsletter. At the workshops, the Programme Manager explained the guidance and the application form as well as giving examples of how to answer the questions.

4. Application and Assessment Process

23 applications were received. Two were from organisations that did not meet the programme eligibility criteria.

The application and assessment process used was as follows:

1. Applications for funding were submitted via a written application form.
2. Hackney Giving assessed the eligibility of applicant organisations.
3. Eligible applications were assessed against a written score framework by two scorers, working independently. They then met to discuss each application and agree a final score.
4. Final scores were analysed by Hackney Giving to provide a recommended package of projects. Recommendations were categorised into "approve", "for consideration" and "decline".
5. A grants panel meeting to decide the final package of projects to be approved was held. The panel consisted of representatives from NHS North East London, Hackney CVS and the wider voluntary and community sector.
6. All applicants were notified of the outcome. Successful applicants received a formal offer letter and details of how to submit an invoice for payment. Unsuccessful applicants were invited to request feedback on why their application was declined.

This process has been used on other Hackney Giving rounds and is considered to be fair and robust.

5. Grants Awarded

As planned, 10 grants of £2,500 were awarded. A list of the grants awarded is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Grants awarded

Organisation	Project summary
Agroforestry & Environmental Protection (AGROFOREP)	The project seeks to break existing barriers and mistrusts and increase access to health services and financial support.
Apex Community Hub CIC	The Apex Family Support Service was set up in 2021 and provides welfare advice, guidance and support, including 1-2-1 to young people and families focusing on addressing barriers of digital divide by accessing e-services and digital applications for health, education, financial, employment and benefits services.
Beersheba-Living Well	Increase access to equity-led health services for African and Caribbean heritage residents at high risk of Type 2 diabetes and Poverty.
Crohn's and Colitis Relief	Supporting IBD patients in Hackney with awareness, guidance, interpreter services, and signposting to relevant healthcare and community support.
Hawa Trust Ltd	Twice monthly sessions for 6 months for migrant BAME women to access local health services and financial advice.

Organisation	Project summary
SAIL - Summer Adventures for Inner Londoners	Mental Health convention giving young people awareness, skills and signposting to emotional health recovery.
Shepherdfold Ministry	Community-based signposting & referral outreach to raise awareness and increase access to health and financial support for people in Hackney.
Skillspool Training	Embrace IT - supporting older residents to get online through peer support.
Sunrise after Cancer	Providing advice to inform people of the services they can access.
WHEAT Mentor Support Trust	This project involves organising and running workshops and focus group discussions where Tigrayan refugees and asylum seekers living in Hackney are made aware of the health system and how they need to access the health services.

6. Programme Delivery

Hackney Giving undertook programme management activities throughout the delivery period including:

- Receiving and processing invoices for payment.
- Acting as a point of contact for grant holders who needed information about the programme.
- Supporting an organisation whose original project plan became undeliverable when the premises it planned to use was no longer available. Initially the organisation suggested returning the funding, but Hackney Giving Programme Manager provided flexibility and reassurance, which gave the project manager the space, time and confidence to source an alternative venue.
- Visiting several projects in delivery.
- Receiving and processing final monitoring forms.

7. Successes

Several areas of success were highlighted by grant-holders. Each reported how they are able to help people access health and financial services:

> *"By addressing language, cultural, and digital barriers, our ongoing project is empowering individuals with IBD to access crucial health services and financial support, and is enhancing their well-being and quality of life."*
>
> Crohn's and Colitis Relief

> *"The convention empowered young people to take charge of their mental health. They felt more confident in seeking help, engaging in self-care, and accessing community resources. This empowerment has led to greater independence and self-advocacy."*
>
> SAIL London

> *"Participants were able to avail themselves of technology in the modern world given the increasing need to use technology post Covid 19 pandemic in accessing GP services and engaging with the outside world... Many who have had negative experiences with learning new skills and technology were able to overcome their fears and anxiety in accessing online services."*
>
> Skillspool Training

> *"Fatmata (not her name) told us that she has lived in Hackney for over 15 years but has not understood the various health options available in Hackney or had the courage to approach them. But after the various sessions she attended she told us she will now be going to the local clinics and health centres. She said: 'I now feel confident to go for my flu jabs and vaccines. Thank you'."*
>
> Hawa Trust

Projects reported how participants' engagement had wider benefits:

> *"Engagement was supported by word of mouth from residents … The impact of community-led discussions and health information etc, was evidenced through, for example, observations, group social connectedness, feedback forms indicating residents feeling positive at the end of each session that conveyed their level of satisfaction with words that included "very helpful", "supportive", "encouraging", "motivating", "learned something new"."*
>
> Beersheba Living Well

> *"They took part in activities that helped them with their mental health and removed their loneliness and gave them buddies to speak to who understood their new life after cancer."*
>
> Sunrise After Cancer

Grant-holders appeared grateful for Hackney Giving's approach:

> *"Very pleasant and transparent. Thank you!"*
>
> SAIL London

> *"I found the entire process enabling and supportive."*
>
> Beersheba Living Well

Nature of activities

Grant-holders were asked to report if their grant had funded new activities the organisation had not done before, allowed them to do more of an activity they were already running or allowed them to re-start an activity that had previously finished. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 - Number of projects undertaking new activities, extending activities or re-starting

Nature of activity	Number of projects
The grant funded new activities your organisation had not done before.	4
The grant allowed you to do more of an activity you were already running.	3
The grant allowed you to re-start an activity that had previously finished.	2

Reach

Grant-holders were also asked to report how many people benefited over the lifetime of the project. Due to the nature of the projects, the numbers were varied. These are given in Table 4.

Table 4 - Number of beneficiaries, by project

Organisation	Number of beneficiaries
Agroforestry & Environmental Protection (AGROFOREP)	Over 80
Apex Community Hub CIC	Yet to report
Beersheba-Living Well	12
Crohn's and Colitis Relief	50
Hawa Trust Ltd	49
SAIL - Summer Adventures for Inner Londoners	150
Shepherdfold Ministry	311
Skillspool Training	12
Sunrise after Cancer	40
WHEAT Mentor Support Trust	300

Final project reports from all grant-holders are included in **Appendix 3**.

8. Challenges and Learning Points

Timing
A challenge for Hackney Giving was the programme timescale presented at the start, which we worked to meet, and the subsequent delay, detailed above. As a consequence of the delay, Hackney Giving's small team interleaved two grants assessment processes for different funders at the same time.

Level of funding
The level of funding provided was low. This was raised as a challenge by several organisations:

> *"We are eager to continue engagement with this cohort of residents and increase wider engagement of Black and Global Majority … However, the project budget was vastly insufficient and could not have been delivered had it not been for the good will gestures of community organisations to significantly reduce the costs and also the resourcefulness of the project manager otherwise the project could not have been successfully delivered."*
>
> Beersheba Living Well

> *"Small organisations such as ours need support to enable us deliver crucial support to those who do not have viable alternative centres to turn to, due mainly to linguistic and cultural barriers."*
>
> AGROFOREP

In addition, an administration fee of £3,750 has not covered Hackney Giving's costs. Without grant funding from other sources, meaning staff are already in place and operational, we would not have been able to run this programme.

Expectations
As detailed above, the language around programme outcomes is important. With the level of funding available, it was unrealistic to expect grant-holders to reduce barriers to access, which have been entrenched. It was appropriate to alter the wording to "increasing access".

9. Conclusion
The not-for-profit sector continued to demonstrate its effectiveness in increasing access to health and financial information. The value of working in partnership with the statutory sector was proven once again with many success stories and examples of how these projects made a difference to people living in the City and Hackney.

However, the levels of funding provided were low, meaning that projects were small in nature and not sustainable. Not-for-profit sector organisations need adequate resources to be able to undertake work of this value: funding is key for effective delivery.