



Response to

The BIG Lottery Fund  
Strategic Framework 2009-2015

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) is a partnership of four lead regional women's organisations linking with fourteen frontline women's organisations across Northern Ireland to provide support and services to women living in disadvantaged areas.
- 1.2 The four key lead partners of the Partnership are the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA), Women's Support Network (WSN), Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and The Women's Centre, Derry. The fourteen Women's Centres are spread across Northern Ireland with seven from the Greater Belfast and Lisburn area, four in the North West and three in Dungannon, Magherafelt and Craigavon. Together the WCRP seeks to develop and strengthen a regional infrastructure which will support community based women's organisations across Northern Ireland.
- 1.3 The Women's sector have played a key role in building and promoting, social, economic and political change in Northern Ireland. A review carried out in 2001 highlighted that through its infrastructure, comprising regional support organisations, networks, women's centres, and local groups engaged in a diverse range of activities, it has made a valuable contribution to promoting equality, social and economic inclusion, peace-building, and the development of the voluntary sector and volunteering.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.4 The WCRP infrastructure has benefited from a number of National Lottery grants. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the important contribution that Lottery funding has made to enable the Women's Sector to continue to build capacity in Northern Ireland
- 1.5 WCRP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Big Lottery Fund's consultation on the proposed Strategic Plan 2009 -2015 for Northern Ireland. Our responses to specific consultation questions are set out below.

## **2.0 UK Questions**

### **2.1 Transitions and isolation**

We believe that the proposed themes are sufficiently broad to encompass a broad spectrum of projects. We particularly welcome the focus on those living alone and people living in remote rural areas. It is essential that the most vulnerable groups in society benefit from funding.

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<sup>1</sup> Where to from Here: A New Paradigm for the Women's Sector in Northern Ireland. NIVT, 2001.

Transition is a relevant theme for Northern Ireland, given its transition from conflict to peace. Women and women's organisations have played a key role in this process. It is vital that funding to build capacity of women at grass roots levels to address inequalities continues. The preoccupation of 'the troubles' with green and orange, and the focus on men, has ignored the important role that women in Northern Ireland have, and continue to play in this transition process.

Also the Review of Public Administration (RPA) will present huge changes in the decentralisation of decision making. It is vital that women are key players in new Community Planning structures. Women are currently under represented on regional, sub regional and grass roots decision making bodies/groups. Yet women make up 51% of the population in Northern Ireland (NI). The development and improvement of our public services will benefit women in many ways. Northern Ireland's public services must work for women, be accountable to them, and listen to what women have to say.

Regional and sub-regional women's organisations will need the necessary resources to empower women and women's groups, from different geographic areas to come together within their new RPA council areas to facilitate this engagement.

Isolation is pertinent to women. Social exclusion is perceived to be a problem predominantly for a random collection of individuals in poverty rather than specific groups of people who are systematically disadvantaged due to structural inequalities.

The theme of Isolation should consider the social barriers that exclude women from public life and representation for example: reproductive, physical and mental health; language and cultural barriers; domestic and sexual violence; low paid employment; traditional roles and gender stereotyping; caring responsibilities; access to education and affordable accessible childcare.

Front line women's services in NI, both rural and urban, have developed expertise in addressing these social issues, and play a vital role providing services to meet the needs of women who are disadvantaged, marginalized and isolated. This work has a positive impact on their families, local communities and NI society. However, women's organisations have found it difficult to access adequate and sustainable funding from traditional sources. The WCRP therefore encourages the BIG Lottery Fund to continue its support to the women's sector by specifically addressing gender equality measures within the 2009-2015 Strategic Framework.

We would like clarification if the themes will mean that there will be 2 separate funding programmes? This may complicate the process, and we would recommend a streamlined system of funding. For example one funding programme with a number of outcomes to address the 2 themes.

## **2.2 Marginalised groups/targeted funding**

WCRP agree that funding should be targeted at those in most need. We welcome the recognition of social enterprises and the important role in the future will be in supporting organisations that work to help people get back on their feet and improve their quality of life.

The point of targeting groups in prosperous areas is essential. This is especially true in rural areas, where relative wealth and poverty can be neighbouring contradictions.

WCRP seek further clarification on the proposals of assistance through loans. No detail into how they intend to approach this has been considered. Given the current economic climate, our initial response would be to remain a grant given body. Other organisations already exist that offer loans. Many smaller community-based organisations may have no scope for using loans effectively.

## **3.0 Partnership work**

We wholeheartedly agree with the ethos of partnership working. We do not feel that the private sector should receive funding through BIG. BIG could encourage involvement from the private sector through Corporate responsibility. Resources do not have to be financial but in the form of specialist advice, and training to the community and voluntary sector, which could prove invaluable.

## **4.0 Focus on community and voluntary sector**

We feel it is important to continue to focus the majority of funding to the community and voluntary sector. We would advocate 100% of funding should be allocated to the community and voluntary sector.

## **5.0 Additional support**

Maintaining as wide a range of support as possible would best meet the needs of the sector. Feedback from community groups indicates that they can feel overwhelmed by the application and monitoring processes of multiple funders. Community and voluntary organisations may lack the expertise and time to cope with the different application and monitoring requirements of multiple funders. It would be helpful if the Big Lottery Fund

raised the profile of greater integration and sharing amongst funders by advocating a streamlined approach.

Pre-application support, such as talking through ideas, explaining funding available, development grants, and guides on matters such as effective project management would be welcome. Fundraising advice may be useful also, as this may allow groups to secure income from a diverse range of sources, making them more sustainable in the long term.

## **6.0 Sustained intervention and flexibility**

We believe that BIG has the correct balance.

## **7.0 New approaches/risk taking and challenging the norm**

For a small proportion of funding yes calculated risks should be taken.

## **8.0 UK level**

In view of the fact that lottery funding is shrinking, it may be more appropriate to reduce the proportion of funding spent on such initiatives to 5% and allocate the balances to country level.

## **9.0 Public Engagement**

We agree that there is a need for those who play the Lottery, and the wider public, to know where funds have been allocated. In particular we believe that it will be increasingly important for people to understand how and why resources have been allocated. However care must be taken not to promote playing the National Lottery as an effective way of giving to charity. A £1.00 donation given directly to charity tax effectively (e.g. Gift Aid) is worth £1.28 to the charity, whereas only 28p in every pound spent on the Lottery goes to the good causes.

## **10. Northern Ireland Questions**

### **10.1 Under the themes of isolation and transition, what are the emerging issues and areas of need in Northern Ireland? What are the gaps in what BIG or others have funded?**

WCRP believe that the themes of transition and isolation will incorporate a wide spectrum of projects. Projects that build on social capital will play a vital role under the themes. It's important that isolation is all encompassing. Transition has to acknowledge the special circumstances of Northern Ireland ie take cognisance of the conflict.

### **10.2 In the future, we assume that demand will continue to exceed funding. How can BIG better manage demand for programmes?**

BIG must support a range of different activities and provide a variety of grants. This needs to be accompanied by a proportionate application process, and consideration of sustainable support. In particular a focus on supporting the needs of small and medium-sized community and voluntary organisations must be given, due to the current economic climate.

Improved communications between different funding bodies is essential. BIG and other major sources of funding: Government departments and European funders such as: International Fund for Ireland (IFI) PEACE III and Rural Development Programme (RDP) have significant resources for at least some of the same timescales and have clear synergies with the outcomes BIG wishes to contribute funding towards. Funding programmes should seek to align their programmes were possible in order to avoid duplication of intended outcomes, and streamline their processes. This would both add value and reduce the situation where multi-funded partnership projects often have to answer to many masters.

### **10.3 In future programmes should we focus more resources in Northern Ireland on development support activities?**

Maintaining as wide a range of support as possible would best meet the needs of the sector. Assistance with the application and monitoring processes of multiple funders can be a daunting process. Smaller community and voluntary groups may lack the expertise and time to cope with the different application and monitoring requirements of multiple funders.

Pre-application support, such as talking through ideas, explaining funding available, development grants, and guides on matters such as effective project management would be welcome. Fundraising advice may be

useful also, as this may allow groups to secure income from a diverse range of sources, making them more sustainable in the long term.

The use of Plain English in information and written communication; small community groups can find the jargon intimidating and confusing.

#### **10.4 What role should BIG play in supporting the development of skills for the voluntary and community sector?**

On a more localised level, BIG could allocate dedicated officers for geographic areas who could work with existing networks to provide opportunities for the roll out of information/advice.

#### **10.5 How can BIG best support Community Planning?**

Partnership working is a core concept of Community Planning. We would advocate that BIG encourages the community and voluntary sector to work in partnership to deliver projects, to lead by example by delivering outcomes through a partnership approach.

The identification of dedicated BIG Officers for particular areas may be a good starting point, to signpost/encourage a joint up approach. There are already existing networks in place that have the principles of community planning at their centre: Local Action Groups (LAGs), PEACE III clusters, Community Safety partnerships (CSPs) and Neighbour Renewal Partnerships. An examination of the Community and Voluntary sector roles on such partnerships should be examined.

WCRP feel that it is appropriate for funding to be targeted to assist regional and sub regional organisations/partnerships to facilitate third sector involvement in community planning partnerships. To build capacity on the ground to ensure that the community and voluntary sector have the appropriate representation and voice on new structures.