National Emergencies Trust Coronavirus Appeal Evaluation

Phase 2 Report

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NATIONAL EMERGENCIES TRUST

UKRI | Economic and Social Research Council

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BAME – Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnicity[1]

CF – Community Foundation

DCMS – Department for Digital, Culture, Media, & Sport

DP – Distribution Partner

ESG – Equity Scrutiny Group

ESRC – Economic & Social Research Council

LA – Local Authority

LRF – Local Resilience Forum

NET – The National Emergencies Trust[2]

NFP – National Funding Partner

NTU – Nottingham Trent University

SAF – Survivor's Advisory Forum

The Trust – The National Emergencies Trust

UKCF – UK Community Foundations

VCSO – Voluntary & Community Sector Organisation

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[1]The UK Government Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended a cessation in the use of the term Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnicity groups (GOV.UK, 2021). To recognise this, we use the term ethnic minorities in this report. However, the term BAME was commonly used at the time of the pandemic, and some participants use BAME to refer to ethnic minority groups within the date. To retain authenticity of the quotes, we retain participants' own words, which may use the term BAME.

[2]The National Emergencies Trust underwent a rebranding in 2022, following which the organisation now abbreviates to 'The Trust'. Prior to this, the National Emergencies Trust was often referred to in its abbreviated form of NET. To recognise the updated branding, we refer to The Trust throughout this report. However, where included quotes refer to The Trust, we retain the participants' own words, which may refer to NET.

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Executive Summary

Report Overview

This report evaluates the impact of the National Emergencies Trust's Coronavirus Appeal from its launch on 18 March 2020 to end February 2021, which follows from an earlier report evaluating the process of the National Emergencies Trust's Coronavirus Appeal.

The specific evaluation criteria for phase 2 of the two-phase evaluation of The Trust's first activation and subsequent were to explore the relevance, efficacy, effectiveness, and sustainability, applied to various aspects of the implementation. Specifically reviewing:

- Decision Making:
    - The impact of the decisions made against The National Emergencies Trust's objectives
    - The extent to which the appeal provided support to those most in need
- Relationships:
    - The strength of relationships
    - Awareness of The National Emergencies Trust and its aims and objectives
    - Trust in The National Emergencies Trust
    - Communication structures and transparency of operations
- Evaluation
    - The extent to which The National Emergencies Trust's evaluation accurately identifies need

The report draws on data from five case study Community Foundations (CFs) and their beneficiary organisations, and from surveys that were sent to the distribution partners funded by the National Emergencies Trust during the Coronavirus Appeal. Interviews were conducted with Case Study CFs through December 2021 to February 2022, focus groups and interviews were conducted with recipient Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs) through December 2021 to February 2022, and surveys with distribution partners were conducted in November 2021. All interviews, focus groups, and surveys refer to the period between March 2020 and March 2021.

This report begins with an Executive Summary, which summarises key findings of relevance for the National Emergencies Trust (The Trust) and which we link to the original evaluation criteria in italics. The Executive Summary concludes with key recommendations to The Trust for future appeals, based on these key findings.

Key Findings

The key findings from Phase 2 of the evaluation are summarised below and are discussed in greater detail in the main body of this report.

Speed of response

- The National Emergencies Trust distributed its first funds to CFs (CFs) on 26 March 2020. This speedy response meant that money got out when it was needed, as many CFs reported that they had already begun establishing their coronavirus responses, and the initial £50k to each CF afforded CFs the knowledge of sustainability of their approaches and meant that they were able to on-grant to Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs) with confidence *(decision making; impact)*

- The sense of urgency for immediate response needs co-exists with longer term recovery needs of communities, which is recognised by CFs and VCSOs. As CFS and VCSOs support communities all year round, they recognise the long-term impacts of disasters, and identified that there is a gap in funding for longer-term needs and recovery, that isn't being met by funders. While The Trust's primary purpose is the distribution of emergency response funding, there is space to reconsider how it perceives and understands its role in relation to meeting longer-term response and recovery needs. *(decision making; impact)*

Identification of need

- The Trust is a lean organisation, which means that it has limited resource when scaling up to the needs required at times of emergency. Decision making structures like the Allocations Committee add value by directing focus and resource. However, given the nuance in the needs of the nation at this point these structures are not able to accurately identify the localised needs of those across the UK. As such, The Trust could consider a flexible model for holding Allocations Committee meetings at times of strategic importance to use its resource most efficiently, supported by the more localised needs identification processes below. *(decision making)*

- CFs and VCSOs both reported a localised, active intelligence process using several cross-cutting methods and a network of localised relationships, supported by regional and national information coming from organisations such as The Trust, other funders, infrastructure organisations and local authorities to assess and map need within

their communities. In this way, CFs were able to identify and extend support to emerging need in diverse communities, as well as reduce risk of the duplication and uneven distribution of the funding received from The Trust and their own donors. Simultaneously, localised giving should be situated within the national picture, and localised organisations should be supported with the provision of national intelligence. With this in mind, the Trust should recognise and map the multiple sources of intelligence, research and data capture drawn on by distribution partners and VCSOs to develop a framework to gather and analyse complex data, thereby reducing the burden of granular needs identification on the structures above. (relationships; trust; communication; decision making) It was through information coming upstream from national bodies (including infrastructure and advocacy organisations) that the question of equitable funding arose, particularly for ethnic minority groups. The Trust used this information to influence its later allocations decisions, and there is scope to recognise this this upstream channel as a strength and open formal channels to identify gaps in provision. *(relationships; trust; communication; decision making)*

Reach

- The Trust's funding to CFs reached 10,662 unique VCSOs across England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Crown Dependencies during the evaluation period. Funding to National Funding Partners (NFPs) was targeted at ten beneficiary organisations, whom The Trust had identified as being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and required additional funding where there was a risk of unmet needs. (impact)
- VCSOs recognised that they couldn't reach everyone, due to capacity limits in their own resources or because they didn't have the requisite reach into their communities for those groups. (need; impact; relationships)
- As The Trust took a multi-pronged approach to distribute funds through different avenues – CFs with place-based ability to identify and address need and NFPs with need-based ability to identify and address need – there was more potential to have the capacity and reach to meet more need, however 'hidden' need remains a challenge for disaster response. *(impact; decision making)*

Impact:

- The Trust's direct and primary impact was on its distribution partners' capacity to distribute grants widely and consistently throughout the duration of the evaluation period. Through a networked distribution framework, distribution partners and VCSOs were able to ensure that this impact reached individuals in need. *(impact)*

- The Trust have data with qualitative descriptions of what grants were awarded for and categorical data of the groups and needs served from CFs (UKCF) which affords quantitative and qualitative accounts from formal reporting mechanisms. This reporting effectively captures the breadth of giving but may miss nuances in the impact of services, and subsequently those who benefitted and the intersectionality of community needs. *(evaluation; impact)*

- CFs reported a wide range of additional quantitative, qualitive and relational methods for evaluating the impact of their distribution, which the formal reporting mechanisms used by The Trust were not able to fully utilise. This led to gaps in understanding of impact and efficacy which may have assisted with developing a broader, more wholistic understanding of community need. *(evaluation; impact; need identification; communication)*

- VCSOs found it difficult to accurately capture the impact of their support when reporting back on end-of-grant reports. From the focus groups, we identified that the support provided by VCSOs (whatever the intended purpose) was often impactful because those VCSOs were often the only social contact a person would have in a week. This meant that those who were impacted by the pandemic felt that someone cared about them; they appreciated the simple human connection. This impact would not be captured by formal reporting mechanisms – for example Salesforce but is essential impact that likely has implications – for example of reducing subsequent long-term psychological distress. *(impact; evaluation)*

- The Trust should work with distribution partners to develop an evaluation and reporting framework that allows for the live capture of complex data from various statistical, qualitative, and relational sources. Thereby developing a less-constrained reciprocal evaluation process to further enhance the agile and responsive decision-making developed during the evaluation period. *(relationships; evaluation)*

Key Recommendations

The key recommendations from Phase 2 of the evaluation are summarised below. Please refer to full report for supporting analysis.

- **Recognise the Impact of Trust** – The Trust's funding worked through a network of giving, which was possible due to the inter-organisational relationships that were developed within the network, and which effectively meant that distribution partners were trusted to use the funding where most appropriate in supporting their communities. Where distribution partners used this funding to on-grant to VCSOs, they were able to pass on the flexible criteria which enabled VCSOs to feel trusted to use funding as appropriate. Distribution partners and VCSOs all recognised the impact of this trust on their ability to use the funding as most appropriate, and therefore on their impact to most effectively support their communities, indicating the significance of this trust for The Trust's success. As such, we recommend that The Trust continue to develop these trusted relationships with distribution partners, which not only facilitates the use of funding where it is most effective, but also facilitates effective intelligence sharing.

- **Reflect on the Importance of Speed** – In future appeals, initial speed of distribution is essential. Following initial allocation to relevant distribution partners, The Trust can decelerate while understanding the nature of the disaster and deciding how to allocate funds across its course. In the Phase 1 report (Andrews, Alborough et al 2022), we made the recommendation for The Trust to consider the extent to which it will respond to immediate response need, short-term recovery, and long-term recovery. We recommend that the Trust spend time following the initial distribution to acquire intelligence from distribution partners to evaluate the need for ongoing response and recovery funding. *(decision making)*

- **Select Distribution Partners Flexibly** – The Trust is developing relationships with a wide network of organisations with expertise in supporting different place-based or need-based communities. At times of disaster, we recommend that The Trust draws on this network flexibly, using those distribution partners who have the pre-existing reach, trust, and knowledge to get the funding out to where it is needed, when it is needed. This will likely vary depending on disaster, but pre-existing relationships are paramount to ensure timely funding can be distributed confidently – especially for shorter emergencies. *(relationships; decision making)*

- **Reconsider Frequency of Allocations Committee** – In the phase 1 report (Andrews, Alborough et al, 2022), we discuss the finding that The Trust invested significant resource in its Allocations Committee, to identify the needs of the nation throughout the appeal. As communities each face unique and diverse challenges during emergencies, this need identification presents a significant – if not impossible – challenge to a national organisation, especially one as lean as The Trust. By trusting DPs and VCSOs to identify need and use funding to support or to on-grant as required to address these needs, The Trust can relax the requirement on Allocations Committee to identify granulised need at the local and individual levels. This reduces the necessity of meetings to when a strategic-level change in decision making in allocations is required. We recommend that The Trust continue to invest in trusted relationships to determine if and where The Trust's funding is not reaching need and use the agile approach developed during the Coronavirus appeal to address any gap accordingly. This would enable The Trust to use less time and resource for Allocations Committee and in developing complex allocations formulae. *(decision making)*

- **Fund for Recovery** – Funding for disaster response is regularly recognised as a vital need. Because of this, disaster response is often funded through many and various routes. The long-term impacts of disasters are also vital, but there is limited funding available for this purpose and recovery needs often become evident in different timeframes. The Trust made funding available for recovery during its coronavirus appeal, and we would recommend continuing allocating funding for recovery in future emergencies and consider allocating this earlier and with longer timeframes for spending. *(decision making; impact)*

- **Consider Reporting Needs** – Before the launch of an appeal, we recommend that The Trust consider the needs and purposes of the information required of distribution partners, know what purpose this information will serve, in what timeframes this is needed, and distribution partners' resource requirements and challenges of capturing, collating, and reporting back. We recommend that The Trust understand and communicate how the information will be used and communicate this with distribution partners at the beginning of the appeal. Consider whether grant reporting is the most effective means of meeting information needs; for example, if the information is required for understanding what needs are not being met, consider asking distribution partners as trusted partners what they are missing,

and they can ask their trusted partners. If the information is for feeding back to donors on what their gifts are being used for, consider asking DPs for narrative accounts later in the emergency. *(evaluation; communicating; decision making)*

- **Understand and Support Capacity Limits of the Sector** – The non-emergency Community and Voluntary Sector is resourced for supporting communities during non-emergency periods. At times of emergency, the support needs increase while there is limited opportunity to upscale resource for existing work accordingly. We recognise supporting this directly is outside The Trust's primary remit and that The Trust included capacity support for NFPs later in the Coronavirus Appeal in response to this emerging issue. We recommend that by recognising these resource limitations across all of their distribution network, The Trust may be able to adapt its requirements to support distribution partners and the VCSOs they support at times when there may be particular stress on resourcing. *(relationships; impact)*

Introduction and Context

Following the tragic incidents at Grenfell Tower and the Manchester Arena, the UK Government and civil society developed a series of plans to help create a more enhanced and integrated approach to respond to the need of those people and communities most impacted by a national emergency. One aim was to create a single point of contact for all charitable giving, gifts, and donations to be processed, analysed, and shared with those most in need.

The National Emergencies Trust was created in response to this, to "collaborate with charities and other bodies to raise and distribute money and support victims at the time of a domestic disaster" (National Emergencies Trust, 2020). The National Emergencies Trust was established as an organisation in November 2019 and based on the available evidence was expecting to activate on average every 2.4 years when a nationally significant domestic emergency occurred. It was one of the first UK-based organisations to launch an appeal in response to the Covid-19 pandemic a mere four months later, on 18 March 2020. The pandemic represents the largest and most long-lasting state of emergency in peacetime in the UK. The human toll (177,977 people with Covid-19 on their death certificate and 15.9 million cases as of 19 June 2022; GOV.UK, 2022), the impact on societal functioning, and uncertainty around its evolution was unprecedented.

As a learning organisation dedicated to developing the best way to help those affected by disasters, the National Emergencies Trust committed to evaluate its first appeal to ensure lessons could be learnt for its own processes and actions and for the voluntary and community (VCS) and philanthropic sectors in the UK and globally. As a trusted academic partner, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) was selected to undertake this evaluation, securing funding from the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) to complete a two-phase evaluation of the National Emergencies Trust's first appeal.

This 2-phase evaluation has had a particular focus on the processes used to identify community need and groups, the evidence base used, how funds were allocated, the processes used in communications, the structures used to facilitate decision making and finally the way these enabled the National Emergencies Trust and its network of distribution partners to determine the effectiveness of this action.

This report is written and presented with the acknowledgement that disasters are complex and often unpredictable in nature. This means that successful disaster management requires working with unknowns.

Disaster philanthropy sits within this context of statutory response, voluntary and community response, charitable organisations, and other philanthropic organisations. The following quote exemplifies the challenging nature of this context:

> "Arguably, there is no right way to distribute charitable funds in disaster situations; rather there are difficult choices with varying costs and benefits" (Leat, 2018; Distributing Funds in Disaster, London Emergencies Trust)

Within this context and the unprecedented scale of the pandemic, the National Emergencies Trust and its distribution network's staff teams, trustees, and associated volunteers worked tirelessly to raise and distribute more than £97m[3] of funding to support need across the UK during a time of national emergency. As the first appeal of a new organisation the scale of the pandemic presented a series of challenges, and a need to rapidly evolve. This evaluation is intended to support the ongoing development of the National Emergencies Trust and the broader sector to ensure leading practice is shared and lessons acted upon.

During the first 12 months of its Coronavirus Appeal, the National Emergencies Trust distributed over £90 million in total; £74 million distributed through CFs and over £16 million distributed to NFPs. Figure 1 visualises the chronological timeline of distributions.
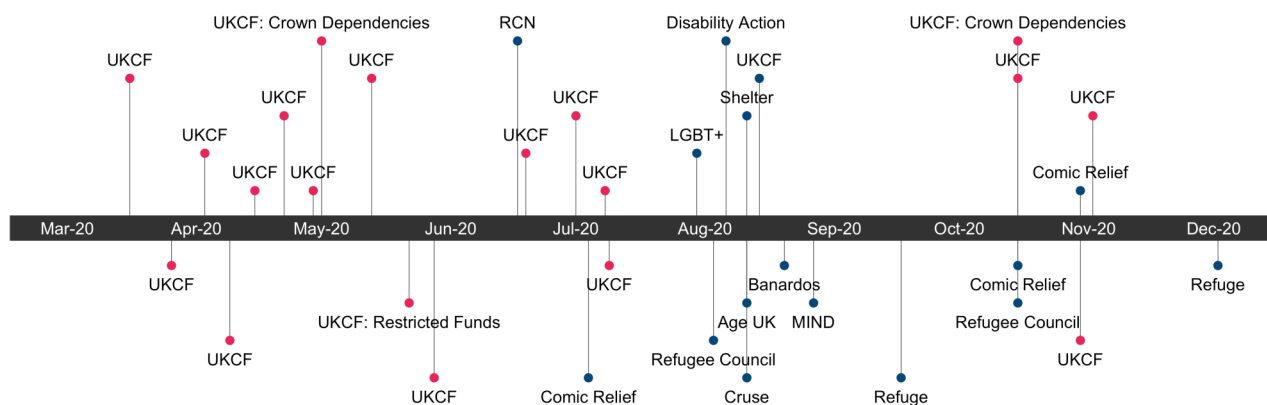
Figure 1. The Trust's Distribution of funding to CFs (pink) and NFPs (blue)

As NFPs were funded to complete evaluations of their own responses, this report focusses primarily on the role of CFs, who made 13,286 grants to over 10,000 VCSOs reaching an estimated 13 million people across the United Kingdom between March 2020 and March 2021. Figure 1 represents the nature of CFs' granting, including the three biggest formats of support offered – food and essentials, mental health, and information & advice, as captured by the UKCF reporting data.

3. The Trust's Coronavirus Appeal has continued beyond the evaluation period into 2022. This figure is correct as of March 2021 and relevant to the period of evaluation.
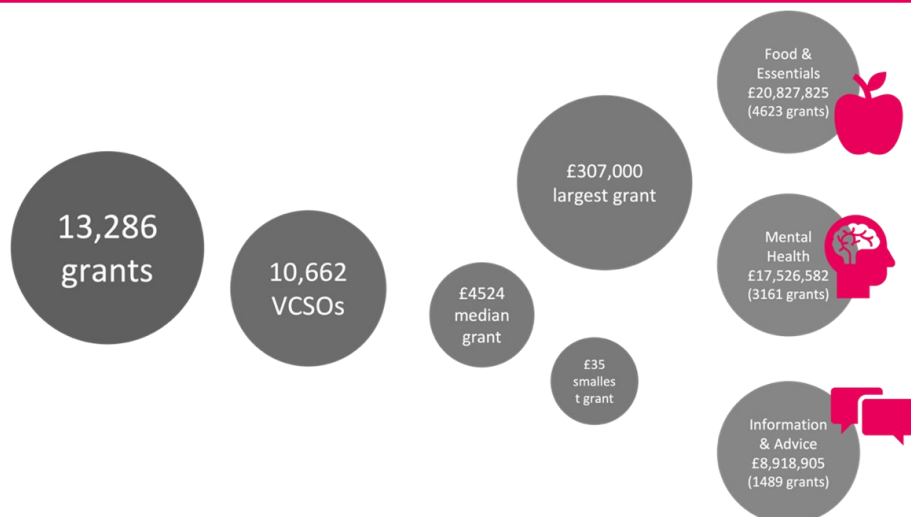
Figure 2. Quantifying the path of The Trust's funds between March 2020 and March 2021

Between 18 March 2020 and March 2021, The National Emergencies Trust raised in excess of £97 million to help alleviate some of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic across the UK, distributing funding through the national network of CFs and a selected network of National Funding Partners (NFPs). During this period, 13,286 grants were distributed to 10,662 Voluntary & Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs) through UK CFs, supporting those with differing, altering, and developing need across the course of the pandemic. Figure 3 shows a visual representation of grants funded by The Trust, which were awarded to VCSOs through CFs during the first 12 months of the pandemic. Later in the appeal, The Trust adapted their distribution model to include direct distribution to ten NFPs: Age UK, Barnardo's, Comic Relief, Cruse, DPO, LGBT+ Consortium, Mind, Shelter, Refuge, and Refugee Action.

Figure 3. Distribution of grants funded by The Trust, to VCSOs across the CFs in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales between March 2020 and March 2021. Pink points represent CFs, white points represent recipient VCSOs, and connect lines join the distributing CF to the receiving VCSO.

This report draws on data from Community Foundations (CFs), National Funding Partners (NFPs) – collectively referred to as distribution partners – and Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs). As NFPs were funded to provide their own evaluation of their response, this report focusses most directly on CF and VCSO response to the pandemic and draws on survey data from NFPs to contextualise these findings. Through findings from phase 1 of the evaluation, which we have corroborated with findings from phase 2, we conceptualise the nature of this distribution model as the Network of Giving, which we discuss in greater detail later in this report. The Network of Giving highlights the distribution framework of The Trust through to the end beneficiaries, which filters through a network of distribution partners and VCSOs. The network recognises The Trust as distributing funds alongside other Trusts, Foundations, and individual donors.

"[…] actually, what we were doing was, we were funding organisations to help individuals." CF09

"[…] that's the area I think that was really strong with the NET funding. It wasn't just about getting food to people, or getting other things going; it was actually just ensuring that every individual group could deal with it the best way that they needed to be able to do." CF11

"[…] a client said to me, you saved my life during lockdown, because I would have gone under if you hadn't. So there's that aspect of things. There's our staff who all kind of you know, despite furlough, and despite working at you know, kitchen tables and all of that, did what they were supposed to do. And there were the people you know, in London who made sense of this. There were the people at NET who pulled it together really quickly. I think that kind of collective effort… it's easy sometimes to just think, well you know, that's what we do. But I think it was extraordinary actually, I do feel like you know, I feel quite pleased at having been a cog in that machine. And I think, hope other people would as well. Even if they're not at the sharp end you know, I didn't deliver food to people, I didn't take those risks, but you know, I did what I you know." CF14

As this evaluation concerns The Trust's Coronavirus Appeal, the report will concentrate on the ways in which CFs and VCSOs were enabled through The Trust's funding to meet individual need as, with a focus on the relevance of this for The Trust's response to subsequent disasters of national significance:
When exploring impact three clear themes emerge:
1. Responding to uncertainty
2. The role of trust and flexibility
3. The complexities of identifying need and evaluating impact.

Network of Giving

The impact of The Trust on those impacted at time of disaster is discussed throughout this report. Key to this impact was the indirect method of distribution, as The Trust did not give directly to individuals. Findings from CFs, National Funding Partners, and VCSOs suggest that this was the preferred mode of operating, with CFs and National Funding Partners highlighting the importance of pre-existing and emerging relationships with individuals and / or local VCSOs, and local VCSOs highlighting the importance of pre-existing and emerging relationships with individuals and / or smaller VCSOs.

These relationships were integral to ensuring trust with CFs, NFPs, and VCSOs, which in turn was necessary for understanding the emerging and changing needs of communities during the disaster. As The Trust itself identified, it would have been impossible to identify and meet these needs of individuals given the enduring and extensive scale of the pandemic in line with recent disasters such as the Cumbrian Floods (Cumbria Community Foundation, 2015) or Grenfell Tower disasters (Plastow, 2018). This is corroborated by the data, suggesting that an individual model of giving would not be suitable in more localised disasters of national significance; while there would likely be fewer individuals impacted by the disaster, identifying and supporting those needs would still rely on localised or group knowledge, trust, and relationships.
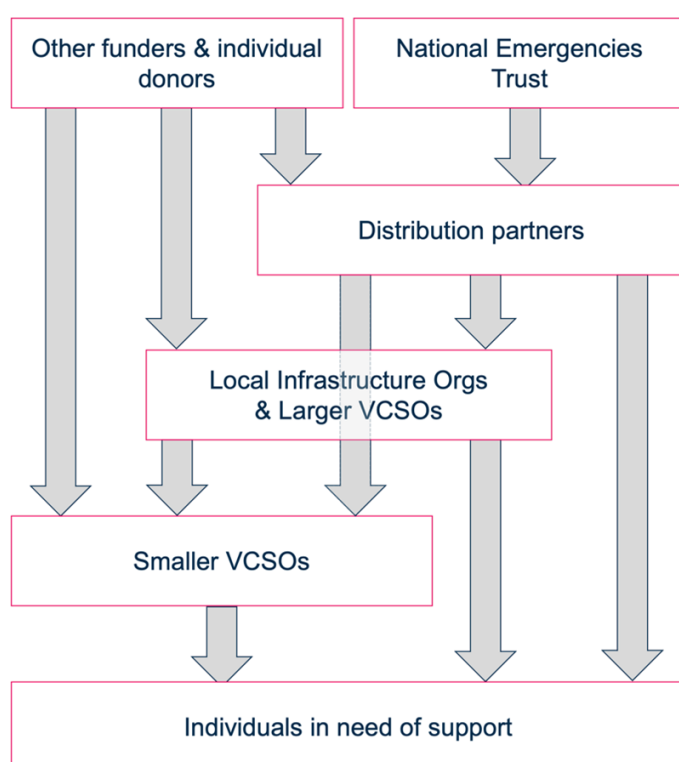
Figure 4. The network of giving - from the National Emergencies Trust through to the end beneficiary

We have visualised the Network of Giving to conceptualise and frame the resulting findings of the role of The Trust in supporting people at times of disaster, which is shown in Figure 3; The Trust gave to Distribution Partners (CFs and NFPs), who themselves distributed funds to larger VCSOs, local infrastructure orgs, smaller VCSOs, and/or individuals. Larger VCSOs and local infrastructure orgs gave to smaller VCSOs and/ or individuals. Each of these levels of the network were funded through other routes simultaneously.

The focus of The Trust was to invest its resource in identifying those organisations with the reach, trust, and knowledge to distribute The Trust's funding to where it was most needed. In some cases, The Trust's distribution partners had these direct relationships already with individuals in need of support (e.g., NFPs) but where this was not possible, distribution partners invested time during the pandemic in using and developing their reach, trust, and knowledge of VCSOs to facilitate them in on-granting to those organisations who had the knowledge and ability to reach those individuals.

We do not know what the next disaster will be, or when it will be. However, by continuing to develop a wide network with reach into all sectors of society, The Trust will be well placed to trust that their funding will reach those most impacted, when they need it.

The impact of Covid-19 and The Trust's appeal

The difficulty in assessing philanthropic impact is recognised across the sector, and this is especially challenging in times of crisis or disaster response. Decisions are made at pace and recipient communities are focussed on meeting urgent, emerging, and fast-changing need. Spending and allocation data can demonstrate where and to whom grants have been distributed, but information on impact and what grants have achieved can lag. Spending and allocation data collected by CFs and The Trust, undoubtedly demonstrate that grants were distributed widely and responsively to communities across the country. The qualitative and survey data collected for this evaluation nine months later has enabled an assessment of the impact these grants have had on VCSOs' capacity to identify and respond to the needs of their communities over the course of The Trust's Coronavirus Appeal.

Below we explore how CFs and the VCSOs they supported navigated and mitigated the uncertainty presented by the pandemic. Findings are illustrated with examples from the data collected by the evaluation team throughout.

Community Foundations

In interviews and the CF survey, CF staff reflected on the general uncertainty that the onset of coronavirus crisis presented – including developing the tools and resources to enable remote working; the possible impacts of disease on their workforce; and the impact on income from both their investments and their donor-base. However, whilst CFs described the same initial concerns as most organisations at the time did around having to develop new digital and remote systems and navigating workforce issues, most described this as surprisingly straightforward to resolve, with many describing the new regimes as ultimately enabling. Similarly, after an initial brief concern regarding levels of income, most CFs appear not to have been affected by the same resourcing issues described by VSCOs further on in this report as investment income recovered and remained unexpectantly stable; further funds were raised, and it became clear that transition to digital remote working patterns were both possible and effective.

Of the pandemic on Community Foundations' response

Most CFs describe anticipating crisis even before lockdown, as the likely impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was becoming evident and established. Like The Trust, many launched their own crisis appeals or programmes in

the same week as The Trust launched their appeal (all five Case Study Foundations report this).

Each knew that their communities would need support, but didn't know the extent or nature of need, or how long crisis would last. Like the rest of the country, they had no idea about how long the pandemic would persist, or how needs would manifest and develop over time. This impacted on CF's ability to plan and prioritise, especially in the initial phases of the pandemic. As one CF interviewee notes:

> "...when we were putting together the Covid Response sort of guide for applicants, I remember that being a tricky one in terms of, what's our priorities here? Because we were going into the unknown you know.... this was a completely new and unprecedented, where there was no learning from elsewhere really. So that was one of the biggest challenges as to how are we going to prioritise ...as time went on, and very quickly, you clearly could see that actually it was going to affect a lot of people in different ways.... [and] very quickly, it became apparent that actually, no, it's going to be far bigger than that." CF01

In the initial phases of the crisis, CFs had little sense of how much external funding would be available to support with response efforts. The uncertainty of external funding impacted CFs differently, depending on the size of CFs' endowments and donor pools that were available to draw from, if required. Most were initially concerned about the impact of the market on income levels both for themselves, as well as their donors. Additionally, many CFs noted that their pre-Covid models of funding relied heavily on restricted grant programmes based on the needs and interests of their donors/clients and did not lend themselves well to meeting the urgent, crisis response needed. There was additional concern that local appeals were likely to be limited, in a wider environment where fundraising income was dropping across the sector (see King et al, 2022).

Thus, whilst CFs reported knowing that they would adjust to respond to the impact of the crisis on their communities, there was initial uncertainty as to the level of support they would be able to generate and implement without the subsequent influx of funding that The Trust had generated, as observed by the CF interviewee below:

> "We know we can get the money out, but we don't necessarily have the means to get the money in. Obviously, we made an ask to our existing donors so I think if we didn't have NET, we still would have made that ask to our donors. So, I think we would have run something, just not to the scale in which we were able to because of the NET funding." CF23

Accompanying this internal uncertainty, CFs were aware that they were operating in a broader environment where normal routes of service provision and help were either absent or slow to respond both for the VSCOs they supported as well as the communities within which they were embedded. This was particularly so in terms of the provision of resources from traditional funders, as well as services from statutory providers. Within this context, CFs felt acutely aware that they and the VSCOs they supported had become, in essence, the frontline of crisis response in many communities.

Within this context, The Trust's funding extended CFs' reach and granting ability to support this frontline work. This was not just in terms of providing fund for direct, but also in terms of allowing CFs to secure further funds locally through their own appeals to the public and their own donor base which is explored later in this report. However, more significantly CFs reported that the influx of emergency funding allowed CFs to make decisions about how to use their own locally sourced resources to meet emerging longer term need as the crisis progressed and developed.

> "I think it's made me aware how [our Community Foundation] is sort of a vital resource. Because actually, government funding is struggling to keep up. The third sector is the place where they hold up some of these functions through community groups having to do it for themselves, and stuff like that." CF03

As such, CFs were able to use The Trust's emergency funding to meet initial need quickly and kick-start their own responses, whilst they assessed need and developed their own ongoing responses:

> "NET we used mainly for the, well you know what I mean, the initial let's help, let's get things, you know, moving, which is what it was for. "CF13

In doing so, The Trust's funding enabled sustained emergency response granting, whilst CFs were able to use their own endowments and locally sourced funds for longer-term adaptation and recovery need, or for work that didn't fit the urgent or direct response criteria associated with The Trust's funding. Some CFs reported that the consistent influx of emergency funding from The Trust, in combination with that raised locally enabled them to facilitate the gifting of larger grants to specific groups. These grants of greater value meant that VCSOs did not have to spend extra resource and time in reapplying for grants as need emerged, thereby enabling them to plan their own responses in a more holistically and considered manner:

"It was just, you know, at the start of each meeting it was just a reminder, this is the criteria for NET grants, this is the criteria for the Community Foundation's response and recovery [programme], and sometimes we were able to go, right, well that one wouldn't fit with NET, but it can fit with ours because that one's slightly different. And so we were able to then channel that and make sure that we got the money out. And actually what did happen quite a bit was, we were always prioritising wherever we could the NET spend because our fund we deliberately called coronavirus response and recovery which meant that we didn't have to spend on the response phase, we could just spend on the recovery phase, whereas obviously NET was very much response. So having made that title of the fund quite clearly gave us... I felt that we were able to make best use of the available funds of our local organisations and the people who use them." CF16

As noted, central to each CFs' capacity to respond to both emerging need, as well as recovery and adaptation needs was incoming funding from both The Trust and gifts from local, regional and sometimes national funders. The percentage of The Trust's versus CF's locally raised funds varied across each Foundation. Whilst this enabled each Foundation to provide the consistent, responsive granting outlined above, CFs also aimed to provide a single point of access to a variety of funding resources for VSCOs with limited human resource and fundraising capacity. In doing so, each Case Study CF described adaptations to their grant making processes to enable simpler, easier, faster, and more accessible grant applications for VSCOs and communities focussed on meeting need on the ground. In this way, the CF participant below notes that the value and reach of each funding stream was enhanced:

"So, I guess the, the synergy, the added value I think, was perhaps to have in one place through Community Foundations, both local funding and national funding, coming together in one place so that it was easy for local groups. Rather than having to put in separate applications to separate pots, they had one single portal through which they could make an application, which was the Community Foundation. And I'm sure that's the same for other community foundations around the country." CF02

However, whilst the use of a combination of incoming funding to meet varied needs, along with the implementation of simpler, single points of application appear to have been common to all CF responses, CFs structured their Covid-19 responses in various ways that included one or a combination of the following four approaches:

1. **Allowed VCSOs to repurpose existing CF grants, to respond to existing need.** For example, CF Case Study 1 notes how this involved altering delivery and reporting deadlines, as well as using discretion in utilising existing grants for Covid-19- response:

> *"When we went into lockdown, we completely changed that. We said to groups, you don't need to report back to us now. We extended all the due dates, and actually also, one of the things we said to… so this is people already in receipt of a grant from pre-Covid. Another thing that we did say was, if you want to use the money we've previously given you to help you respond to Covid, you can do that." CF01*

2. **Negotiated with other CF donors to adapt, repurpose or add to their grants or funds given through the CF.** As observed by the interview participant involved, this was enabled by the existing relationships of trust that had been previously established between CFs and donors:

> *"And in terms of the donors, I would say the donors all went into complete trust mode. Not that they don't trust us already, but the conversations we were having with them, they were just saying, right, you know, we've got five grand balance left in our fund this year, just put it into the Coronavirus fund and do with it what you will, or just let us know what needs to happen. And they, you know, they mostly were just sort of… totally trusted us to just do that, and that was just the natural and normal conversation that people were having with our donors." CF16*

3. **Put other non-Covid-19 grant programmes on hold either throughout crisis or initially throughout Wave 1, depending on nature of local VCSO delivery mechanisms and response.** For example, CF Case Study 4, a smaller Foundation serving a largely rural community found it necessary to put non-Covid-19 programmes on hold throughout the first two lockdowns due to their own limited capacity, but also in response to local VSCOs remaining in response mode for longer. CF Case Studies 1, 2 and 3 initially closed all other non-Covid-19 responses, but then opened others back up as VCSOs adapted their own practice and each CF was able to establish the extent of both The Trust's and their own Covid-19 response programmes going where possible, as both their staffing and income capacity allowed.

4. **Had established own Covid-19 programme through approaching own donors and or local fundraising campaign that was enhanced by incoming Trust funding (CF Case Studies 1, 2, 3 & 4) with Case Study 4 launching its own public appeal.** CF Case Study 5 established a separate National Emergencies Trust response fund from its own Covid19 response and recovery fund. However, they assessed incoming applications to both with the same approach as other CFs,

where The Trust's funding was used for immediate response and other funding to address longer-term adaptation and recovery work. As noted previously this response provided greater flexibility and sustainability in CFs' response to local need as it changed and developed over the course of 4 lockdowns. Additionally, this approach allowed CFs to utilise Trust funding on immediate response, whilst providing space and resource to negotiate additional resources from other donors and sources, thereby extending the length, depth and reach of their various responses to the crisis.

However, it is the continued and consistent receipt of funding that The Trust provided over this period that enabled CFs to think about and develop more "strategic" and networked grant-making as the variable impact on differing communities outside of CFs' networks and the complexities of some emerging needs became more evident and more refined. As these needs and the sector's ability to support them became clearer, The Trust's consistent funding and their adjustments to funding criteria, provided the space and stability to allow CFs to provide and actively seek out additional opportunities. The funds for local VCSO infrastructure, umbrella organisations and consortia facilitated on-granting to communities and groups not within CFs' normal sphere of influence or existing networks, or with limited capacity to either seek out, manage, or receive funding directly. Observations provided by the three participants below, illustrate the varied issues faced by groups and the subsequent approaches adopted across CFs in response:

> *"But I think what became really clear is, organisations like [local VCSO umbrella organisation] who had the infrastructure and the management, and the facility to either use volunteers or their own staffing. They in turn, were working with some of the really small grassroots groups. So they would get the contacts, and maintain them, whereas those individual small volunteer groups couldn't actually deal with things themselves. Not least, even just accepting the money. There are elements like that that were just so difficult for some organisations, or putting the applications in online if they weren't able to go into an office. All of those things were factors." CF 11*
>
> *"Yeah, so particularly with the BAME organisations. We knew already, because we'd done a lot of work with the [VCSO Consortia Name], to try and support refugee and asylum seeker community led organisations, because they don't apply. So English isn't their first language; our systems are sometimes complicated. So we did a lot of work with them. So actually, we gave them quite a significant grant to run a separate programme. So separately for refugee and asylum seeker communities, because we were aware that they wouldn't have all this access to public Coronavirus funds. " CF22*

> ""So it was very difficult to address that priority through individual small applications. Because people were too busy fighting fires to deal with the aftermath of what had happened in the communities. So that's why they [The Trust] enabled us to make strategic grants. And we worked with [VCSO] for example, and made a fairly chunky grant to them. Who worked with people that were affected by bereavement. "
> CF24

On the whole CFs describe The Trust's funding and approach as positive and as enhancing their own Coronavirus Pandemic responses overall. Some issues around consistency in communication were identified both by interview participants and via the CF Survey. Whilst participants recognised that The Trust itself was fundraising and couldn't predict income levels, some clarity around anticipated levels of funding and timing of allocations would have enabled CFs to plan and manage their own spending more effectively. This was especially the case for the smallest of the CFs to participate in the study:

> "I guess the level of funding, would have been quite nice to know what kind of category we would be in, and how long they would run the appeal for. I know the pandemic, it's all up in the air anyway, but maybe we can learn from this pandemic as to timeframes, and like how long the appeal was going for, and how much money they generated. How much of that was going to be spent towards you know the different organisations and that. We just didn't know when it was going to stop. And then [phase] 15a and 15b I think were a surprise. And that was a bit like, kind of us being reactive again to that money, because we didn't know it was going to come. Which is a bonus, but we obviously didn't plan for that." CF21

Relatedly, some CFs described having to manage their other donors' expectations and balance spending their funds with the fast output required by The Trust's speedy distribution requirement. As the participant below notes, whilst most donors appeared to be understanding in this case, there may well have been potential to compromise relationships and supporting funding when trying to meet and match The Trust's requirements for immediate and speedy onward distribution of their allocations:

> *"But if they'd [other Community Foundation donors] come to us and said, has my hundred grand gone out the door yet we'd have had to go, no because we've just been getting loads of this central money from NET and that's our priority because we want to get as much support as we can to local communities, so we need to spend that first or else we won't get the next tranche down. So we are parking almost the money you gave us. But I think we were aware that …potentially people might have got miffed. I just think we were aware of that as, you know, in terms of messaging and people's expectations. And I suppose, you know, at the start, I don't suppose anyone – well I certainly didn't have any idea how much money was going to come through from NET."* CF16

There was also some concern about The Trust's perceived slowness or initial reticence to consider longer-term recovery funding. CFs were able to navigate this by drawing on their own locally sourced resources and endowments to meet these longer-term essential needs, although some were concerned that there were emerging uncertainties related to large influxes of funding for VCSOs related to Covid-19 response which just dropped off during the period of continuing adaptation and recovery. There was recognition that when the transitions between response and recovery occurs is hard to judge and can often run concurrently.

Some CFs noted that it was difficult to gauge when the change in response was needed for funding. Some suggested there needed to be recognition by The Trust that their funding targeted VCSOs that provide longer term and enduring support for communities beyond the pandemic and very quickly had to be thinking about the next step and how they would need to adapt if they were to both survive and remain effective. As such, CFs within the survey and interviews described needing to think about and develop recovery responses much sooner than The Trust's funding criteria and spend requirements had accommodated. These are part of wider conversations which could inform Voluntary and Community Sector resilience and broader philanthropic disaster response timelines, but CFs felt that funding that adapts in this way would have enhanced their response further. For The Trust to meet need throughout the lifespan of an emergency, transitions between response and recovery giving may need to be considered, or The Trust may consider trusting Distribution Partners to use funding for response and recovery flexibly.

"... it's difficult isn't it because the clue is in the title, National Emergencies Trust, but there is a big piece of work on recovery and actually whether we were able to get the money out. Would it have been better for us internally if NET had gone X percent you can hold back because we understand that your communities are going to need this money in the recovery phase, and we acknowledge that as part of our learning that actually when there is an emergency it's not just the immediate response, the recovery piece from these organisations that have managed to function are now on their knees, is actually just as important in the bigger response to an emergency? And if that had been the case and we had known that we had, for instance, X percent that we could spend out within a year of the close of the response call we could then have used more of what we had raised and we would have then felt less uncomfortable about hanging onto it. So I think just being aware that local people and organisations do and will want to respond, but they will also be thinking their money is being used for immediate response and someone in this picture has to go, we're big enough and sensible enough to know it is not just about the first emergency response... and that would need to be maybe some messaging in how and what NET says is that depending on the response, depending on the emergency we're aware that communities will need some recovery money and we we'll allow a percentage of our support to go into the recovery for local people. I just think that would be an interesting thing to explore." CF16

Of funding on CFs' reach and ability to support many groups

A key theme to emerge from both the interviews and the survey with CF staff was the combined impact of their response to the Covid19 pandemic and the availability of funding via The Trust, of raising the profile of CFs within their locales in the three distinct ways outlined below. There was a general sense amongst CF participants that this resulted in the dual impact of extending their ability to fund a much wider range of Covid-19 community need, as well as establish their potential to impact communities more effectively in future - whether this be at a time of disaster/crisis or in tackling some of the wider issues that had made some communities more susceptible to the negative impacts of the crisis than others:

1. **Increased communities' awareness of and confidence in their local CF.** This presented in two ways, as noted by the participant below. The increase in funding available via The Trust and CFs' other donors enabled each foundation to increase their granting activity, which led to more and deeper engagement with VCSOs who needed localised, easy to access funding. This increasing awareness amongst VCSOs also resulted in a more generalised awareness within local communities, which in the case below enabled more local public fundraising and additional opportunities to increase public awareness of the work carried out by CFs:

> *"The opportunities for us were that I think we got closer to more community groups because we were more fundamental to their future and their activities. I think we got more general awareness, which has helped and will help our fundraising. We ran a fantastic six-month campaign with BBC Radio [place name] and I was quite surprised that they were prepared to get close enough to it to say that, you know, people should be supporting us and what great work we were doing, and that was a six-month piece. I think it's caused us to think in terms of ensuring we're in a position to give out larger grants than we did previously that make more of a difference. So yeah, I think really we've both broadened and deepened relationships with community groups."*
> *CF19*

2. **Improved relationships with and altered existing and new donors' / clients' behaviours.** As noted above increasing community awareness aided CFs' own local fundraising both from the public, but also from their existing donor-base. CFs universally described how relationships with existing donors facilitated conversations around the reallocation of their funds into a more flexible, Covid-19 response fund, as well as in many cases the prompting of additional giving considering the crisis. Additionally, some CFs explained that other regional and national donors noted the influx of funding coming into CFs from The Trust, as well as CFs capacity to effectively distribute the funding. In these cases, CFs noted the interplay between this demonstration of their capacity to distribute funding to meet need and a resulting increase in giving from both existing and new donors, as described by the interview participant below:

> *"So the opportunities I think, because we knew we were getting NET funding, we did do an ask to our current clients, and I think we pulled in £850,000 from current clients. And some new clients came to us as well, because they saw the advertisement for NET. I think the biggest benefit for us from NET has been profile raising. People really didn't know who [CF] were. Particularly because a lot of the funding we do that's public is branded with somebody else's logo. So this was [CF] in the press, talking about [CF's Covid-19 response fund]. Our donors had bankrolled the first two weeks, because we were waiting for NET funds to come through. So we were able to use our branding, push that out, and then the media really picked it up. And I think for us, that's been a game changer, which wouldn't have happened without NET's fund."*
> *CF22.*

Similarly, CFs noted that both the pandemic and the influx of flexible funding from The Trust encouraged changing giving behaviours amongst CF donors, especially in terms of asking donors to commit to giving unrestricted and core funding and allowing CFs and VCSOs to decided where best to spend incoming grants. As noted by both the participants below there were attempts or plans to encourage more donors towards considering this more trust-based, confidence-based approach to giving prior to the pandemic, however, most CFs felt that their activities during the crisis precipitated a faster-paced move towards this approach:

> *"I think yeah, and hopefully actually that's probably an ongoing benefit of making donors who are still involved see the benefit of unrestricted funding rather than it's got to be for a particular project and it's got to be for a printer that's £500, that type of thing, you know… just moving away from that extreme and saying, actually just give them [VSCOs] the funding, they know what they're doing. And I think that's probably been a benefit of it. And I'd like to think, well I do think, we already were aware of that and had it in our strategy to address that, but I think this maybe just gave it a little bit of a push."* CF13

> *"But also encouraging our donors to make core grants, funding for core. Again, something we had already been talking about quite a lot, and we were always big advocates of. But the pandemic absolutely switched some donors onto the understanding that organisations just need money to do what they do. And I think that's something that's not going away, thank goodness… We have to convince each one of those, or a few of those, or you know that family, or that panel, that corporate, that yes, the project where you can get photos of smiling children is lovely, but actually, funding them to be able to create that project in the first place, is as, if not more vital that the project."* CF14

3. **Strengthened and extended existing local donor and funder networks and developed funding collaborations with larger VCSOs and sector infrastructure organisations.** The ways in which this impact played out varied across the CFs, both within Case Studies and the wider CF survey. However, CFs reported a consistent increase in the development of local funding relations with external funders and larger infrastructure organisations that allowed for the on-granting of larger gifts, as well as the development of mutually trustful relationships that further increased the reach and capacity of each CF and, by implication of The Trust's incoming funding:

> *"So we didn't have that sort of relationship with [local BAME network] before. We had funded them you know, we'd supported them wherever we could, but we didn't have that kind of, that close relationship where we were talking all the time, and where they were helping us build relationships with groups that we weren't reaching otherwise."* CF 04
>
> *"So, we've always kind of had like a funder's forum. But I have to say, that's been one of the benefits of the, the pandemic… it actually kind of brought everybody together and I think, because it was that, we were all dealing with the same issue for the same time. "* CF23

Central to their raised profiles is that CFs report feeling trusted by The Trust and other donors to know and understand their communities and make appropriate distribution decisions accordingly. This many stated was demonstrated in The Trust's broad, flexible criteria. This allowed CFs and, consequently VCSOs to respond creatively and agilely as needs emerged and changed, and as their own resources flexed and developed. More importantly, as the interview participant below notes this "devolved decision-making" allowed for a speedy, responsive, and unhampered distribution of funds:

> *"And the fact that NET was flexible enough to accommodate our local priorities, the local criteria that we drew up that wasn't too prescriptive, was also a very, very positive thing. Because what we didn't need was lots of different funders with lots of different funding requirements, telling us they needed lots of different bits of information in different ways. And The Trust, in devolving the decision-making to local community foundations, was also a real positive…. There was a flexibility for us to respond in the way that we wanted to, or needed to, depending on the circumstances of the communities and the applications we were receiving. So, I think that, that flexibility and that trust were really, really, really important for us, because we didn't have to frontload everything by saying oh, we've got to go back to NET to find*

> *out if it meets their criteria. Then it, it would have slowed everything down. So, the fact that they were so accommodating and flexible made a huge difference to us. We were able to make the decisions on the basis of the organisations coming to us, based on our knowledge of the local needs as we saw them. Without having to, to shuffle stuff through different hoops to conform to an alien set of criteria devised in London."*
> *CF02*

This trust in distributing organisations by donors made active use not only of existing local networks and relationships, but also served to enable local distributors to make judgements on need and VCSOs adaptations in meeting emerging need – not just in terms of urgency as previous observations note, but also in terms of whether applicants were making reasonable requests. In this way, participants describe how CFs were able to make judgements based on past interactions with organisations to extend and/or maintain their reach and impact. The participant below provides some examples:

> *"And again, knowing the size of the group, knowing the sort of capacity they had, if they were asking for four laptops, that made sense. Other people might be asking for four laptops and you'd be going hum really? So you know that's that inner knowledge that you have from having those relationships across the board. What I found very interesting was that initially individuals and other donations were going into foodbanks. And as ever, it was some of the groups that wouldn't necessarily be a headline group, or the first group that you would think of, who were still keeping the befriending going, and keep them starting up Zoom sessions with people that never used to use their computers in that sort of way at all. That's the area I think that was really strong with the NET funding. It wasn't just about getting food to people, or getting other things going; it was actually just ensuring that every individual group could deal with it the best way that they needed to be able to do." CF11*

Some CF participants were quick to observe that, in some respects, the reach of their own networks of smaller, social service organisations was sometimes limited. However, these same CFs went on to describe how The Trust's flexibility in determining how need was meet, coupled with a responsiveness to local expertise and judgement enabled CFs to slowly and reactively extend their networks. This was achieved either through the funding of adaptations to service delivery as described above, the acceptance of funding applications from organisations new to CFs, as well as through the on-granting relationships with larger, more experience organisations explored on page 65 and reiterated by the interview participant below:

> *"I think they [The Trust] were willing to respond to the needs that we put to them. And if we made suggestions…. So I would say they were fairly flexible, and were willing to listen to advice from us as a funder. And looked for and were appreciative of our expertise in the area."* CF24

In this way, CFs describe how in conjunction with funding commitments from local donors (who also agreed to fund Covid-19 response work in a less restrictive and more flexible manner) acted as natural co-ordinating spaces for local and national donors by building up local relationships and extending networks with local VSCOs, infrastructure organisations and to some extent local decision-makers. More importantly, as noted by the interview participant below, this co-ordinated approach by donors through CFs, provided a single point of access to funding for VCSOs, which became a key feature of CFs' described response to the crisis:

> *"And they came back and said yes [other CF donors], but it was also very good to have that supplemented by the national funding as well. So, I guess the, the synergy, the added value I think, was to have in one place through Community Foundations, both local funding and national funding, coming together in one place so that it was easy for local groups. Rather than having to put in separate applications to separate pots, they had one single portal through which they could make an application, which was the Community Foundation."* CF02

A key element to extending CFs' ability to distribute The Trust's and other donors' influx of emergency funding at pace, were the changes made in CFs grant-making processes. Across the board, both interview and survey participants noted a move towards more trust-based, confidence-based giving that reflected The Trust and confidence displayed by CFs' own donors. Whilst some observed that many CFs had started considering a move to such practices prior to the pandemic, almost all interview participants agreed that the crisis in combination with the receipt of large amounts of funding with a speedy distribution criterion attached to it, both precipitated and provided a ready testbed for these processes. Changes included:

- The development of a simpler application process for VSCOs both in terms of a single application, but also asking for less information. Prior to this, applicants were asked to identify a grant programme within each Foundation's suite and develop bespoke applications for each programme they wished to apply for. The introduction of a single CF application allowed VSCOs to apply for funding directly, and CF staff would make a judgement from which grant programme to

- distribute funding to a particular VSCO. Simultaneously, application forms were pared down, with applicants being asked to provide only information related to the work they were seeking support for and due diligence checks. As noted by several participants the aim was to relieve the administrative and fundraising burden on applicants and ensure that each project was funded utilising the most appropriate donor's funding.

- A simpler application process allowed for the implementation of faster decision making, through the restructuring of decisions making processes. These were implemented in differing ways across CFs, depending on the size and capacity of staff teams and the level of dependence on external volunteer grant panels. This reduced waiting time for funding decisions and granted to a few days, from 12 - 24 weeks in some cases.

- As noted previously, a key element of CFs' longer-term and wide-reaching emergency response was the on-granting of funds through "trusted" larger and infrastructure VSCOs. Thus, we see networked trust-based granting process emerging, whilst raising awareness of each local CFs as noted below:

> *"Almost, we enable that [on-granting], we allow it. Where there's a bit organisation that we know and trust, that's happy to take responsibility for a grant. If another group doing excellent work doesn't have our required documents, we enable them to accept the grant on that groups behalf. Provided they take responsibility for ensuring that it's spent appropriately. So lots of larger groups do that with us. And it helps us you know, it helps small groups know about us, and it enables our funding to reach further than it would, given our quite stringent due diligence rules." C04*

CF participants describe the institution of the above trust-based granting processes with a sense of pride. Most described felt that this had both enabled their speedy, relevant and agile distribution of their donors' emergency funding, but also most importantly the extension of their support to communities who were most in need. However, some noted that there have been consequences to the incorporation of simpler, quicker application and grant-making processes and flexible criteria that needed to be accounted for in across future practices and in crises:

- Inconsistencies in information requests created challenges, especially when processes/situations are new and there is no clear steer on what information either CFs or other donors may need. As the participant below notes, this often required more work post-grant to collect further information from grantees:

> *"And you don't know what you don't know, that's the problem. We ask groups for information from, on grants we've made to them, and we try to think, what*

> *is the kind of information we're going to need. And we don't always get it right. And so therefore, there's a bit of additional work on our part, and also on the applicant's part, they then have to go back and find out information that we didn't ask them up front. And I think that's just the nature of an emergency. You don't know. But it is something, obviously, that the more anticipation about what are the common bits of information that we, we're all going to need to help us understand the impact of our funding, the better." CF02*

- Data collection and reporting become challenging when data collection methodologies and reporting practices differ from that of other distributors and the originating donor or donors. In the case of The Trust and distribution partners, there was a perception that reporting categories on the shared reporting platform were regularly adapted, which CFs felt resulted in an extra time and labour burden on CF staff and grantees. Additional reporting requirements were later introduced by other donors such as the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) funding later on in the appeal. The extent to which reporting structures or criteria were changed by The Trust or other funders / bodies is unclear from the data, however the findings from interview data point to the importance of communication with distribution partners to understand the impact of any changes to reporting[4]:

> *"Reporting back became quite time consuming with the constant changes to the google docs form we needed to use and was particularly frustrating as we [CFs] use a central shared database which should negate the need for extra spreadsheets… The constant change of columns meant that data became confused and so corrections were constantly required. It would have been helpful for NET to have a clearer idea at the start the areas that they would like to report on. Being an emergency response, we paired our application forms back to support applicants and then had to retrospectively add data. The BAME data was also not asked for until quite a way into the programme and so we manually had to look at the names of committee members and staff or go back and ask ground to confirm the slip of staff/trustees. The level of reporting required for DCMS was disproportionate to the grant size for grantees. The CF provided copies of application and assessment on some applicant and then follow up on receipts etc was required it was more excessive*

4. The Trust has indicated that there was only one request for additional BAME data early in the appeal with no changes to the reporting requirements outside of this addition. The evaluation team has not been able to identify evidence of how and when reporting criteria did or did not change but note the perception of change by CFs through the evaluation.

> *han non-emergency funding and some groups were very upset about this. While it's important that the CFs and grantees are accountable in an emergency situation there needs to be more trust. We also felt we supplied the same information on a number of occasions particularly around income received and fees charged" CF28*

- Difficulty arises when simpler, faster processes slow down or are altered. Decisions made by donors and distributors result in adjusted practices and planning at VSCO-level:

> *"... and one of the things that happened actually, after we'd finished with the emergency grants, people still thought we were doing fortnightly everything. So it has been a bit of a shock for one or two applicants that have applied, and they don't realise we've gone back to much longer assessment time. And you know, they're wanting to do something next week almost. So that's had a bit of a lag afterwards I suppose." CF09*

Thus, CFs noted that the greatest impact for distribution of funding was not necessarily speed, but rather 'how' and 'who' funding was used for. In other words, the value of funding was not how much funding was distributed to the greatest population most quickly. Getting funds allocated to distribution partners quickly and efficiently remained important; but distribution and spend timings need to be more flexible and responsive to intelligence produced from the process of distributing grants. This means a trade-off in impact and spend reporting but allowed for flexibility of response demonstrated by CFs and VCSOs who had to make these assessments on the ground.

Voluntary & Community Sector Organisations

In focus groups and interviews, VCSO representatives reflected openly about the uncertainty that they found themselves in at the beginning of the pandemic, and the enduring nature of this uncertainty – similarly to CFs. The diverse nature and context of these Trust-funded VCSOs meant that the nature of the uncertainty varied, but largely concerned their ability to support their communities. Topics such as funding and organisational stability, the unknowns of the pandemic, and the needs of their communities were most prevalent throughout the data.

Of the pandemic on VCSOs

As the pandemic arrived in the UK, VCSOs describe identifying how the disaster was impacting on their communities and feeling compelled to act. VCSOs discussed whether they had the capacity and resource to respond to

these needs and how to adapt services accordingly. This ability and drive to respond gave VCSOs and volunteers a sense of purpose.

> "We gathered a group of managers when we realised we were probably going to go into a lockdown. So quite a sort of nerve wracking moment thinking you know. [We got] quite a few management staff together, and there's a virus out there, so is this a really bad idea? But actually we had to you know, it was all very safely organised. But we got together and decided you know, we were kind of consulted really I suppose, by senior leadership in the organisation. You know, do we have a duty here to support our clients, or do we close? And it was just a resounding, we must not close, we have to stay open, we have to find a way." FG5
>
> "Some services kind of went quite defiant and actually like, we're the only people left, we've got to still get out there and still help people. And were pushing into areas where they weren't commissioned to support, really. And kind of quite risk adverse, not, sorry, not risk adverse at all." FG1

The impact of the pandemic required a change to the services that VCSOs provided. VCSOs reported needing to adapt their regular service provision, respond to persistent covid need post-pandemic, support communities' pre-existing needs, respond to increased demand for services, multiple transition between covid-response and covid-recovery, and manage a variable voluntary workforce.

Adapt regular service provision

At the beginning of the pandemic, adaptations concerned changing existing provision to work within national, and then local, restrictions. For many this included moving online due to practical constraints of lockdown, including the purchase of plastic screens, digital equipment to support with remote working, and PPE. It also included creative ideas for translating services that could typically only be provided face to face (e.g. fitness classes, community theatre, etc.) so that communities' existing needs were still being met, but within safe and restricted ways of operating. VCSOs reported that they were able to adapt so quickly and effectively was due to their flexibility as non-statutory organisations.

> "Now, non-stat, you can be super flexible. We recruited and trained volunteers during that period, we started a whole new service, you know, and we basically did that sat in our sitting rooms chatting on Zoom, you know. Let's do this, okay, what, what are the things we need to think about, bomp, bomp, bomp, and it's done. You know, we transitioned the whole group work programme online in two weeks." FG1

Many of these organisations had little to no prior experience of working remotely or working digitally to the extent that they would be required to through the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, many of these organisations used paper-based systems, without digital infrastructure to support the transition. This was an additional impact for these organisations to overcome, some organisations found this challenging to navigate, while others found the transition more successful.

> *"The other team used to all of that stuff, having to learn how to work remotely, learn new tech that they'd never had to, you know, was never a requirement of the job in the past. Everything was done, we didn't have an online client management system at that time, we had paper." FG1*
> *"Obviously impacted in a number of ways. The working from home, that was quite a shock for us I think, initially." FG6*
>
> *"But there was just a real need for everyone to continue working you know, admin staff were sent home, to work from home, that worked really well. We kind of put ourselves with Teams like quite recently before that, which was good. Amazing actually, we had no idea what was coming." FG5*
> *"trying to deliver a community project from all of our kitchens, our living rooms, was a real challenge. Like you, we moved to, basically we had to turn the whole project on its head really and do that in a very short period of time, which did take a lot of work from myself and my job share colleague, and all the staff team." FG6*

Adaptations were also required when VCSOs identified needs that became apparent during the pandemic, such as people not being able to use public transport to get to the shops. In this case adaptations including changing the nature of the services that were being provided. In other cases, VCSOs were able to identify additional complex needs through the relationships with beneficiaries. Beneficiaries would present with needing food – for example, but through conversations the VCSO would identify other unmet needs. The flexibility of The Trust's granting criteria meant that VCSOs were able to access funds to make these adaptations.

> *"But actually, you know, we were able to discover then, through that, what they needed as well. So they may have presented with needing food, but as you, you know, with wanting food. But as you started working with there were other issues there that, you know, you got to understand." FG4*

Respond to persistent covid need post-pandemic

VCSOs benefitted from the recovery-focussed funding from The Trust later into the appeal. Across the sector, Covid-19 specific response and recovery funding became increasingly limited towards the end of the scope of this evaluation (March 2021). However, communities continued to experience needs as an impact of the pandemic which were not supported or funded elsewhere. These were often the longer-term recovery needs of the individuals, including mental health and food poverty, and for which statutory services were also experiencing an increased demand such that access to these services was often impossible. VCSOs felt a responsibility to support their communities, and so continued to experience the same high levels of demand, but without access to the funding needed to do so.

"Yes businesses and the NHS and stuff are great, but they need support. And I think we had one referral the other day with something like a 36 month wait. You've got someone who's self-harming severely, and is having sort of suicidal ideation and stuff, and you think, 36 months, he might not be here. So it's having that first crisis intervention really, and we're seeing more and more of it now, especially after the pandemic. FG5 But not because there's not been the need, but actually just because we work in schools, so it's kind of been in and out of schools because when we're doing face-to-face and wanting to prioritise that, actually, you know, I think everybody, but we're just finding teenagers, you know, they were, they were in school or then they were isolating, they were out of isolation, we were switching on-line, we were then trying to come back to face-to-face, we were… and actually, it's just, for a programme that normally takes us kind of four, six months, is taking us kind of eighteen months to get through." FG4

Support communities' pre-existing needs

In addition to responding to the increased demand and changing needs presented by the pandemic, VCSOs were also providing support for the same needs as they were prior to the pandemic. Many of these services were adapted to accommodate the national and regional restrictions, but others remained the same as pre-pandemic. Again, the flexibility of Trust's criteria meant that CF could fund a wide range of needs, which included the maintenance of vital existing services.

Respond to increased demand for services

VCSOs reported that demand increased massively as more people needed services. This was in part caused by statutory bodies and other

organisations unable to continue to deliver services for long-term physical and psychological needs, and in some cases that the demand doubled overnight.

> "I mean come March 23rd, if I can remember correctly, I mean basically our numbers was doubled; we had double the amount of people needing food. And we also had an issue with people needing food to be delivered. Historically, we always had food to be collected by clients from one of the centres. I think we only had two centres open at the time, and now we've got six distribution centred. So it meant that we had to open centres closer you know, in each sort of area, so that we went to the east of the city as well as the west of the city." FG
>
> "It didn't seem to matter how many hours we worked, it just wasn't, just wasn't enough to, to support everybody that needed support." FG
>
> "So, we got almost this, this parallel of, of closed services and then an increased demand in another area. And it was trying to balance those two, because we'd got staff who were working on one section who we had to try and move over into working into another so we could keep activities going. But also keep to the guidance." FG
>
> "And so, I think for us, it's just that actually, all of that has taken longer whilst statutory services are taking longer to do everything. So, yeah, we, we just can't, you know, for us, just referrals to, to CAMS or mental health support, or even just schools' emotional wellbeing support, they're just saying we just don't know what to do with young people. So, our, we, we've got so many referrals and it's just that ongoing stuff, it's Covid related, but it's not necessarily a new Covid exciting initiative, which is what people are wanting to fund for us." FG

Multiple transitions between covid-response and covid-recovery

As the pandemic progressed, VCSOs managed response and recovery activities simultaneously as the nation went through waves of increased risk. Recovery included the direct covid impacts outlined above as well as indirect impacts of the emergency, and the need for the community to heal. For many, deteriorating psychological wellbeing is a prevailing issue within communities, with domestic abuse and older adult health as additional concerns.

"And so, I think for us, it's just that actually, all of that has taken longer whilst statutory services are taking longer to do everything. So, yeah, we, we just can't, you know, for us, just referrals to, to CAMS or mental health support, or even just schools' emotional wellbeing support, they're just saying we just don't know what to do with young people. So, our, we, we've got so many referrals and it's just that ongoing stuff, it's Covid related, but it's not necessarily a new Covid exciting initiative, which is what people are wanting to fund for us." FG4

"And we… the problem is, the NHS is so overwhelmed, I think there were figures at Young Minds put up the other day, it said something like 374,000 young people are waiting on the NHS list for mental health care. It's just not good enough. So there's all these charities out here that are trying to help, but there's no funding for them. So until the world kind of goes, oh hang on a second, charities are filling this gap and we need them. Just something, there needs to be a change I think in the way things are thought of and stuff. Yes businesses and the NHS and stuff are great, but they need support. And I think we had one referral the other day with something like a 36 month wait. You've got someone who's self harming severely, and is having sort of suicidal ideation and stuff, and you think, 36 months, he might not be here. So it's having that first crisis intervention really, and we're seeing more and more of it now, especially after the pandemic." FG5

"I, I think for us it's that it's the longer term has been the, is the issue. So, I know it's going to be different for everyone and, and some of the organisations will need funding to deliver stuff. But that was, that was one of our, I guess, things is, a lot of the funding was around, was particularly around food and that sort of thing. And there wasn't, there wasn't a lot of kind of options or variations on offer around, outside of that." FG4

"It's only in terms of expansion, because lockdown's thrown up a lot of [unclear at 00:54:52]. I mean the women's refuge are reporting an enormous increase in domestic abuse. So we're now looking at a dedicated unit that will only take very vulnerable women, who don't like being in a mixed sex environment, they find that very threatening. So that's a new project, and that's, but that's coming directly in response to Covid." FG5

"But, yeah, something, sort of the positives… I think, well, you know, our telephone services, obviously, was never meant to be a long-term thing but we, you'll have seen it as well, I'm sure, [Par2], a real decline, unfortunately for some older people, in their physical and cognitive abilities. And where two years ago, they were going to groups and activities, that's maybe much more difficult for them now." FG5

The nature of VCSOs sitting outside many bureaucratic policies meant that they were able to continue to adapt and provide support, but in doing so meant that those who would normally receive support from other organisations were instead turning to VCSOs to meet the continued needs. Others found that local authorities and NHS referred people to the organisation when additional needs were identified, which also contributed to the increased demand.

> So I think we ended up, we had to do about 150 doorstep deliveries a week. The demand was incredibly high. Some of those were requests from referral agencies, some were coming directly from council to look after sort of council supported families. And then as that moved forward… so they could collect the food in bulk, in cardboard boxes, as opposed to open crates, and fill their vans up. And then they'd have all the delivery addresses to dot around, and get food to the people who needed it. FG3

Later into the pandemic, VCSOs discuss how statutory bodies re-opened services which removed some demand from VCSOs. Thus, the scale of this increased demand varied across the course of the pandemic, but the prevailing theme of increased and persistent demand was evident.

> "So, for, really for us it was balancing that demand we'd never seen before, and some new clients as well, new beneficiaries were coming forward all of the time. And then closing down services and managing those two, two things. But also, the pressure put on us by the statutory sector, because they'd got this massive gap, between when the army came in and set up all of these food hubs and, you know, they, they wanted things done." FG4

Manage a variable voluntary workforce

VCSOs whose volunteer base was predominantly those over 65 lost a lot of their workforce due to shielding. This was often reluctant, as VCSOs reported these older adults wanted to continue volunteering. As many of the working population were later furloughed, these then volunteered with charities, helping to respond to demand. Once furlough ended or volunteers perceived that they had 'done their bit', this volunteer workforce could no longer be relied upon, leaving a large gap in VCSOs ability to maintain the same level of service. VCSOs spoke a lot about the impact of the pandemic on their volunteer workforce, and the uncertainty of their workforce made it more challenging to plan and respond effectively. Some VCSOs reported difficulty in recruiting volunteers.

VCSOs reported that volunteers do not share the same reliability of paid staff, as they can decide to take a 6-week holiday without telling anyone and would be within their rights to do that. This was especially prominent for the workforce later in the pandemic; once the nation was beginning to 'return to normal'. As the focus on the impacts of the disaster on the most vulnerable reduced, volunteer input reduced. However, VCSOs reported that some communities continued to have increased needs due to the pandemic, and most reported increased needs due to long-term impacts and recovery. By funding recovery as well as response, The Trust can mitigate the impact of volunteer losses on VCOs following the initial response phase.

Of funding on VCSOs ability to evaluate and meet need

Responding to emerging need

Fundamentally, The Trust's funding facilitated VCSOs to respond to the emerging and increasing needs of their communities. VCSOs reported that they were already responding to the needs of their communities when the pandemic started – they identified a need there and were drawn to support people however they could. The funding meant that they could do so sustainably, without having to worry about where funding was coming from etc. VCSOs developed their own emergency response:

"I, I think we would have done what we were going to do anyway, we would have just used our reserves. But it would have wiped us out because we, we already made a start and then it was just opportune that it came along. And we applied for it, and it fitted perfectly for what we were doing. But it was very, it was a very simple process, I think they made the processes even simpler. The decision making was extremely quick, and the monitoring afterwards, has been, you know, as easy as it could possibly have been. So I think that combination of everything made it possible. So, you know, we were able to react, but that funding enabled that, you know, quickness, if you like, the fact we could, we were all flipping on a coin, because that's what we needed to do." FG4

"And actually, our food project started, like we shut our office on whatever day it was, like the Tuesday, and because we've got an amazing, very active Chair, who also works with older people. So, he'd been round, spoke to everyone by Monday, he was already in discussions with the café about setting up a food project. So, we were kind of running along behind going, right, if we're going to do this, we need to do it, we need to make it safe and we need to bring in the money. And that, that's what we did." FG5

For others, the funding allowed them the scope to think bigger about what they could do, and respond to an increasing demand:

> "So, to have some of that quick funding took that, took, allowed us, I think, to, to lead and to kind of, make those decisions quickly and to work out, how do we, you know… for us, there was a heck of a lot of kind of new safeguarding thoughts that we needed to put in place. There was a lot more kind of communication with parents and, you know, taking out of the school setting, which was very different for us. And so it enabled us to think about that, rather than just what, you know, where's the pay going to come from in the next kind of couple of weeks. How are we going to make sure we, we continue as a charity? So that, for us, was really helpful." FG4

VCSOs felt trusted to identify and respond to the needs of their communities. This trust was a change from previous experiences of applying for funding and made a noticeable impact on VCSOs' ability to address the needs of their communities, reduce apparent bureaucracy, and increase their confidence and self-efficacy.

> "NET allowed [CF22] to identify local need and draw on local expertise to direct its grant making. In this way NET provided the most valuable support possible i.e. to allow us to determine the most effective way to support local communities. It was refreshing to work with NET who trusted us to deliver without bureaucracy and constraining restrictions." CF22
>
> And we were working in a pandemic. But with this funding, it was understood that we were working in emergency situations, it was a crisis, and it needed a crisis response. So, I found The Trust to be something that boosted our confidence as an organisation, and it was something that we hadn't really had before with funders." FG3

Managing uncertainty

No-one knew how long the pandemic would impact society, and VCSOs were no exception to this. This uncertainty impacted decision making, which intersected with the available funding. Early into the appeal, there was ample funding available for covid-response, which was highly beneficial to VCSOs. As VCSOs were launching their covid-response, the timeliness of The Trust's funding meant that VCSOs were able to begin these responses with greater confidence in their organisational survivability, and to provide sustainable support.

> *"And I feel that that funding kickstarted our whole response really. Because it was the first, I think it was the first funding that we got. So, yeah, it kind of gave us the, the strength to start, and then obviously, it, it kind of snowballed from there."* FG6

As The Trust's funding was received with limited restrictions, VCSOs felt trusted and empowered to respond as necessary. This flexibility and trust meant that VCSOs found it easier to support their communities, and able to adjust their plans based on real-time intelligence.

> *"And, and you felt that you were trusted, particularly when it was statutory money, because often statutory money, I don't know what other people's experiences are, they look at you like, well, who are you, you know, voluntary sector don't know what they're doing. But we, I, I felt, during the pandemic, that all of a sudden, the voluntary sector were trusted to have this money without having to prove everything. And that was really refreshing for us. So, yeah."* FG4
>
> *"But I think the funders were great, and there was a lot of trust. And actually, I think, this is a general thing about funding, like the best funders to me are the, the funders that trust what you do. And they can give you the money and they say, you know what to do."* FG6
>
> *"So, like, doing this report and just comparing, I think the way that this fund was handled was really commendable. And yeah, we just, we, most organisations get on with the work and they're doing it from the heart. And when there's a, an element of mistrust, it then just makes it more, more difficult. So, I think that's a wider, bigger conversation. But generally, with this funding, it was very good the way everything worked."* FG3

For example, when developing a response, one VCSO realised that it would be more effective to run the support program in a different way than originally conceived, which the VCSO was able to adapt to without going through a lengthy request process.

> *"It, it was really just to say it's built up some trust as well, I think. Because they, because there was that flexibility and you felt that you could, like [NAME]'s just been saying, you could change things a little bit. So, it's that trust between the two of you. So, going back to, I think it was [Name]'s point about feeling like it's more of a partnership. So, you do feel as if you've got that autonomy, if you like, to be able to make those decisions without massive repercussions. I mean, okay, they were only small change we're making, but we're making them, and they trust us, and we trust them, to know that we're doing them for the best of our community, and the best of the project outcomes."* FG4

VCSOs were able to adjust projects and purchases as they identified what worked and what was needed within the parameters of the pandemic.

> *"Well I think that the money, the fact that it... so it wasn't a huge amount, but the fact... relative to our budget, but the fact that it came quickly, and flexible, and that we could use it in the way that we knew would... well we didn't know, but with our expertise, meant that we could do something really effective, but that also was really good for the organisation. Because it was like a whole tap you know, a whole sway of our funding wasn't accessible to us. So we would have had a crisis of finances if it wasn't for the support." FG4*
>
> *"I think there was flexibility, there was a little flexibility as well for me, in terms of that monitoring and not having it when it, when it's very exact. And actually, you applied for a grant and sometimes you know exactly what you're going to be doing with that. And sometimes, actually, there's a bit of, you know, especially during, during a pandemic. So, part of what we were doing was writing some material that was about boosting emotional resilience, we had to start that on, on Zoom, and it was a complete learning curve for us. So, actually having that kind of, if we say that we're going to run that with groups of four in, it felt like actually, there was a bit of flexibility to go oh actually, we feel that we can actually do that with six young people on Zoom. Or actually, just really practically, how many young people's faces fit on a screen, and then that actually... and, and that was just all new for us. And so, when it's really like, yeah, when it's very descriptive and monitoring is, you just don't feel like you can actually use your professional judgement to go, actually, this is going to work better. Or actually, that's just not worked and actually, let's scrap this, but we're still going to be doing something. And so, there's, and I think being, yeah, so I think [CF], for me, there's a sense that you can go back to them and that you can adjust things. And part of that monitoring being more descriptive for me was, was about that.." FG4*

And highlighted the importance of the nature of their relationships with CFs, which meant that they could make these changes. In considering future appeals, the understanding of the nature of these relationships may be beneficial for The Trust in understanding and using the network of giving to its maximum effectiveness.

> *"It, it was really just to say it's built up some trust as well, I think. Because they, because there was that flexibility and you felt that you could, like [Name]'s just been saying, you could change things a little bit. So, it's that trust between the two of you. So, going back to, I think it was [Name]'s point about feeling like it's more of a partnership. So, you do feel as if you've got that autonomy, if you like, to be able to make those decisions without massive repercussions. I mean, okay, they were only small change we're*

> *making, but we're making them, and they trust us, and we trust them, to know that we're doing them for the best of our community, and the best of the project outcomes." FG4*

Sustainability

VCSOs were in a variety of different financial positions prior to the pandemic; some had reserves and were reasonably financially secure, while others reported being financially vulnerable and close to collapse. The impact of the availability of funding for smaller VCSOs increased financial resilience and meant an ability to concentrate on identifying need and providing services to communities, rather than focussing on fundraising. The speed and accessibility of The Trust's funding formed a key part in this, especially in the security of VCSOs in the early stages of the pandemic.

Core costs

The unrestricted nature of the funds meant that VCSOs could use funding where it was needed and for the purposes it was needed for. This included core costs for some organisations, which allowed them to do the mainstay work. In need identification terms, VCSOs report that is what they ultimately find most effective for their communities.

> *"Well I think it was fine the way it was. It was quick, it was accessible, and it wasn't too many questions asked or restricted. It was, do you need some money for core costs? Here you are. And that was the greatest game, was the restrictions weren't there, so we could apply it where it was needed. Which was very, very helpful." FG5*
>
> *"No, I'm quite annoyed actually at the number of ones who want new projects. Innovation and new projects, they want me to devise new projects. And at the moment, I think there's every so many people struggling for core costs just to come out of it. Because if you've got anything like a social enterprise, like a café of a charity shop, of course, that's all been shut down. So you've had no income, and we haven't been able to go to any community events, we've not done any community fundraising for two years. So although that doesn't make up our, a significant proportion of our income, it is a loss. And we could do with some core costs right now. But they all seemed, all the funders I'm going to, seem to be wanting me to build something, or come up with an innovative project that's going to drive the business forward. Which we will be doing in due course, but at the moment, I think there's a lot of people out there struggling to just survive." FG5*

Organisational Structures

Non-statutory nature

VCSOs were able to operate flexibly due to the non-statutory nature of their organisations; one participant who had worked in both a statutory and non-statutory role during the pandemic reflected that the ability to develop this emergency response was possible because of the flexibility that non-statutory organisations had:

> "Now, non-stat, you can be super flexible. We recruited and trained volunteers during that period, we started a whole new service, you know, and we basically did that sat in our sitting rooms chatting on Zoom, you know. Let's do this, okay, what, what are the things we need to think about, bomp, bomp, bomp, and it's done. You know, we transitioned the whole group work programme online in two weeks."

Volunteers

Volunteers were key to success, but there was a lot of instability here in numbers; during 1st lockdown lots wanted to help, but this waned and then left a gap in provision. Older adults wanted to help but couldn't because they were shielding, and lots of volunteers really needed the services / found a sense of purpose

Cross-sectoral response

VCSOs operate within a network of public, private, and voluntary and community sectors to support communities. During the pandemic, many of these relationships strengthened, as each focussed on serving their communities. Collaborations allowed organisations to develop a shared understanding of who and what the needs of communities were, and to provide more integrated support.

VCSOs formed and strengthened collaborations and coalitions where need was identified, but where the VCSO did not have the trust or reach into the communities to provide the necessary support. Figure 1 highlights a food partnership coalition funded through The Trust. This coalition addressed the gap in provision of culturally appropriate food to local Black and Asian communities. The coalition recognised that they lacked the resources to be able to provide a response on their own, but with the support of a larger VCSO, were able to provide a high level of support to so-called 'hard-to-reach' communities.

Figure 5. Case Study of a VCSO food partnership coalition for Black and Asian communities during the coronavirus appeal

Of funded services on beneficiaries

VCSOs reported finding it difficult to really measure impact, and not knowing how to do this. Numbers aren't everything

> *"I was worried about the people that don't ask for food, they're the ones that scare me the most, that they don't do" (Community Group focus group participant)*

Direct interaction with people through testimonials - VCSOs reported that their services helped by being the only consistent service in people's lives; retaining trust when others had let them down, or simply being a friendly face; perhaps the only person in the week with whom they had social contact. Received informal narrative feedback from beneficiaries, rather than numeric feedback:

> *"And quite a few people were saying you know, you've stopped me from developing some mental ill health, as we'll as reaching our sort of usual service users and helping them through the lockdown as well." FG5*
>
> *"And one of the things I think we found with our older people is, even though there were volunteers only just going to the door for like, a couple of minutes, people said it made them feel that they weren't forgotten about. And, for some people, that was their only social contact of the week." FG6*
>
> *"And we, we've done quite a lot of evaluation over the last couple of years, our community engagement, and some of the comments you've had have been so uplifting and amazing. Some of them really sad as well, actually, to think that sometimes we were maybe the only people in someone's life." FG6*

This was especially the case for people who would normally be receiving services from stat providers as well; a lot of the effective work being done is based on the building of a trusting relationship, so the ability of these VCSOs to continue to provide this service meant that they could retain and develop trust with those who felt they had been let down by other services.

VCSOs' understanding of need and ability to reach communities was facilitated by developing and maintaining trust within their communities:

"Yeah. It was one of the things we found when we started, that you, you had to get to know people a bit to, to, you know, especially if you think about it, in the smaller villages and farming areas, people are terribly insular and, you know, not wanting to go out. And, and that's not just necessarily older people either, that's how people are brought up." FG1

It was also impaired when trust was damaged. This was especially the case for beneficiary groups who are mistrusting – e.g. those that may have felt let down by organisations in the past.

"And we're talking about people who have had just so many experiences that make them very untrusting and have really unhelpful coping mechanisms and, or, you know, coping mechanisms that worked for a moment in a traumatic experience, no longer so. But it's so kind of embedded in their blueprint if you like." FG1

"So, it's taken us a really long time to re-establish strong, trusting, meaningful relationships with a lot of those people. And to kind of rebuild their relationships with all of those other services because they were abandoned, they experienced abandonment." FG1

"The people out in the HMOs, we went to telephone support, because that's what we were directed to do by our commissioners. And I think it was really disastrous for people. It was really disastrous for their mental health because then, then every service had disappeared. Like, we were available on the phone, but then it, it went to absolutely zero connection and I think in that service it's taken us quite a lot longer to re-establish and rebuild really good trusting relationships with people." FG1

"And if you're being psychologically informed, in order to help people, they have to trust you. Right. And we're talking about people who have had just so many experiences that make them very untrusting and have really unhelpful coping mechanisms and, or, you know, coping mechanisms that worked for a moment in a traumatic experience, no longer so. But it's so kind of embedded in their blueprint if you like." FG1

Needs of beneficiaries weren't the same as were being presented with, and through working with them, VCSOs were able to identify new needs:

> "So, you know, we reacted to what people needed, we gave them what they, what they wanted. But actually, you know, we were able to discover then, through that, what they needed as well. So they may have presented with needing food, but as you, you know, with wanting food. But as you started working with there were other issues there that, you know, you got to understand. So, so it's a legacy there I think, of greater understanding about communities." FG4

VCSOs responded to the needs of their communities, even where this wasn't what they were set up to do:

> "And made sure that, you know, we were supplying food to those people who weren't, you know, not able to get out and were like, most vulnerable. And then we still continued actually, with that service to some extent. It's a much, it's much more reduced now. But it's, what's really interesting is, most organisations were focussed around food delivery and food provision during the time of the, the pandemic. It seems to be like, quite a common theme across the organisations that we, we all reverted to that, you know, supporting the basic needs and the food delivery and supply." FG4

Implications for The Trust / Funders

VCSOs have different challenges and opportunities at times of disaster, and depending on their organisation, infrastructure, skills, and knowledge. As non-statutory organisations, VCSOs respond with flexibility and agility to the immediate needs presented in their communities. As these needs change, evolve, and transition into recovery needs, VCSOs require the support and trust to achieve this flexible response.

Flexible criteria

Funding received with flexible criteria, and which affords VCSOs the autonomy to make small adjustments to how they use funding is particularly beneficial at times of disaster. This is because VCSOs use informal modes of intelligence to gauge the reach and impacts of their work, and then adapt as appropriate. In addition, as VCSOs' impact is driven by their bread-and-butter response, funding for specific innovative projects may be restrictive. Instead, ensure that VCSOs can access funding to support core costs. By continuing to distribute flexible funding to distribution partners, this flexibility can be passed on to VCSOs. For even greater benefit, consider the possibility of a) increasing time frames for VCSOs to spend grants, and b) distributing funding that can be used for

response and recovery needs, so that VCSOs can transition between response and recovery efforts as necessary.

Reporting and evaluating

VCSOs have variable expertise in formal evaluations and in their available resource for reporting. VCSOs' strength is in their narrative understandings on impact from direct relationships and informal feedback with beneficiaries. Funders have an opportunity here to reconsider the nature and timing of the reporting requirement to best address their needs. That is, to understand where funding is not reaching for real-time evaluation, consider requests that allow VCSOs and distribution partners to respond to this, including any identified challenges in overcoming these gaps. For longer-term organisational evaluative purposes and reporting to donors, consider incorporating narrative accounts of reach and impact into reporting requirements, that The Trust / funders can theme and interpret in slower time. As salesforce / UKCF reporting spreadsheet mainly used categorical responses, this means that innovative use of funding, and the core services of organisations may not be captured. Furthermore, by synthesising quantitative and qualitative analysis of UKCF reporting data with analysis form VCSO data, it is apparent that the reach and impact of funding goes far beyond the primary beneficiary and service, and that these categories may not accurately represent those reached by services.

Challenges to the sector

Capacity limits

One of the major challenges, and recurring themes throughout the data with distribution partners and VCSOs was the impact that the disaster had on their resource. In addition to the financial impacts, the predominant challenge was the capacity limits of the organisation. While navigating to varying levels of volunteer support throughout the pandemic, organisations were responding to a high level of demand, changing needs and VCSOs, with pressure to be distributing funding and supporting individuals quickly. The challenge reported by all involved with the disaster response is one of limited capacity. Organisations report working around the clock, and the impacts that the sustained nature of this response had on people's psychological wellbeing. Some organisations reported introducing measures to support staff wellbeing at the time, and these could be learnt from in the future.

The Role of Trust

Through the analysis of interviews, focus groups, and surveys with National Funding Partners and VCSOs, the role of trust and relationships repeatedly emerges as key factors of relevance. Much of this trust relates directly or indirectly to The Trust's criteria. These are discussed in greater detail below.

On relationships & response structures

The nature of disasters means there is greater imperative to facilitate support to beneficiaries quickly, which makes understanding the facilitators and barriers to speedy funding imperative for disaster giving. As has been discussed on page 59, The Trust distributed funding through a networked giving space in a way that meant that it reached beneficiaries quickly and effectively. One of the key factors supporting this was the evidenced trust throughout this network of giving, which distribution partners and VCSOs referred directly and indirectly to, in discussing their ability to support their communities. This trust was evident at all levels of the network of giving and was often described as reciprocal in nature. The basis for this trust was the relationships built between organisations, which meant trust could be used confidently; with reciprocal knowledge and awareness of each other's aims, intentions, and resource, organisations within the network had the requisite understanding of organisations' abilities to get funding and support where it was most needed, and therefore offer greater empowerment to those organisations to do so.

Trusting Distribution Partners

The Trust distributed funding quickly, and in a format that was appreciated by distribution partners for its flexibility. The Trust achieved this through several mechanisms: foremost in trusting their chosen distribution partners. That is, as noted by interview participants on page 20, The Trust set broad parameters for how funding was to be used, which enabled distribution partners to allocate to the prevailing needs of their localised communities. This was complemented by light-touch reporting requirements, as well as an observed responsiveness on the part of The Trust to CFs requests for reconsiderations in funding criteria. For example, some CFs reported that The Trust allowed them to increase grant amounts, which in turn allowed CFs to distribute grants to larger VCSOs and infrastructure organisations for on-granting. This latter decision allowed CFs to both increase and vary their already extension reach into local communities, thereby, ensuring that as many potential gaps in service provision were filled as possible.

Trusting VCSOs

Distribution partners were able to pass on The Trust's broad criteria to VCSOs who recognised the importance and impact of this increased level of trust as explored on page 65. This passing on of trust and flexibility was achieved on CFs part through streamlining grant application processes. While distribution partners continued to complete due diligence checks, they were able to simplify application processes by reducing the information and documentation requirements traditionally placed on VCSOs; making applications shorter and simpler to complete. Doing so required CFs to take something of a risk in demonstrating this trust, but subsequent reflection suggests that in doing so CFs realised that the risk had paid off. VCSOs in turn recognised the increased trust that CFs placed in them and described feeling trusted to identify and respond to the needs of their communities. As explored on page 49, this trust marked a change from previous experiences of applying for funding, with many suggesting that they felt there was an emerging confidence on the sector to deliver services to those most in need. Trust in VCSOs was further evidenced in CFs adopted strategy of allocated larger grants to more networked VCSOs for on-granting or developing wider-reaching programmes of delivery, recognising VCSOs' ability to identify, understand, and address the needs of their communities more effectively than arms-length donors may be able to. The flexibility afforded meant that VCSOs found it easier to support their communities in being able to adjust their plans based on real-time intelligence.

VCSOs' trust with beneficiaries

The role of trust is also evidenced in the interactions between VCSOs and beneficiaries, particularly the most vulnerable in society. At the beginning of the pandemic, many existing support mechanisms ceased operating, due to the restrictions in place. These were support mechanisms that many relied on, and VCSOs report that this impacted on people's trust in those organisations to be there for them. This was especially the case for those in society who already experience mistrust of others. In such cases, trust is critical for effectively supporting beneficiaries, and so VCSOs have spent time ensuring that they maintain or rebuild trusting relationships with their beneficiaries.

The interplay of trust and relationships

This trust was possible because of the relational element of giving; The Trust developed trusted relationships with CFs prior to the pandemic and developed relationships with National Funding Partners during the appeal. CFs in turn had pre-existing relationships with VCSOs and developed more

and stronger relationships throughout the course of the pandemic. Trusted relationships also facilitated collaborations and consortia between VCSOs and cross-sector organisations.

The development of these networks facilitated the support of those experiencing need during the pandemic. The development of new relationships was possible due to the length of the pandemic, and it is recognised that this may not be possible for future disasters whose duration may be shorter. As such, there is a need for all disaster response organisations to continue to develop trusting relationships through the channels of the network of giving, both horizontally with other similar organisations, and vertically with those giving and/or receiving funding. Additionally, whist the network of giving is identified here as a strength of the philanthropic / VSCO crisis response that developed during the Covid-19 crisis, donors, and those their funding support, there are trade-offs to consider. These include:

1. Lack of immediate access to "data" on the nature and distribution of emergent need means that parts of the affected population may remain hidden. This may be especially so when local donors and distributors rely only on existing networks for intelligence. However, findings in this evaluation suggest that this can be partly mitigated through the establishment, and continuous assessment and development of collaborations with local stakeholders, larger VSCOs, networks and infrastructure organisations beyond their traditional networks and relationships.

2. The implementation of simpler trust- and confidence-based grant allocation and onward distribution procedures and processes results in some loss of control at donor level, which has an impact on decisions around the perceived equitable allocation of funding within a space where relational data may lag.

3. There is a greater burden on distributors to manage risk and ensure due diligence. To get funding out to communities quickly and to make the process as simple as possible for VCSOs, simplified the application process, and required VCSOs to provide fewer documents to support their application. This simplified process for VCSOs placed additional responsibility on CFs, who instead performed due diligence checks on VCSOs themselves, thereby increasing workload at times of high-volume decision-making.

Good communications help enhance relationships & trust

Central to mitigating the trade-offs inherent in the emerging relational, trust-based granting approach evident within the network of giving identified above, was the role of adaptable, networked communications. Whilst CFs had their own existing communication strategies for engaging their various stakeholder groups, many reported that these were extended and enhanced during the Coronavirus Appeal. As noted by the interview participant below, The Trust's funding provided material around which to structure communications especially the public and donors, thereby contributing to the raised profile of CFs :

> *"I think it added credibility to our fundraising without question that we were a distribution partner for NET. We used that fact. Obviously, we tried to promote NET on the marketing material that we sent out because, you know, NET was our biggest single funder in the whole campaign, so we endeavoured to promote that. But it probably wasn't, you know, the final determining thing as to whether a larger donor decided to give us significant funding or not. But it was a really good sort of credibility thing to have in the background, and we did use that. And it also of course... very quickly gave our fund a scale which it wouldn't otherwise have had."*
> *CF19)*

More notably, as noted on page 62, CFs' development of local and regional partnerships and collaboration further extended communications with local groups and infrastructure organisations. In this way, Community and distribution partners were able to widen The Trust's communications network, as well as their own with little extra financial or resource investment:

> *"I think one of the, the value of a Community Foundation is that place space were situated, so we have those networks. And you know, as we said before you know, you can just activate them, those relationships are there, that trust is there, you can call up, and you get an honest response you know. If you can say, oh what are the issues right now, what's this group doing, is it valuable" CF04*

Key to extending and managing these external communications, many reported that communications within The Trust/CF network was greatly improved by partnership with and mediation of the UKCF:

> *"Yeah you know, again you know UK Community Foundations, they were holding weekly webinars for the network. And you know, a big part of that webinar was around NET funding. That was on the agenda, and definitely, there was a number of Community Foundations feeding that back. And so it felt like the feedback loop was there, and I think you know, we were eventually able to use NET money towards kind of the ongoing support to organisations. Not necessarily the delivery of an immediate response. So yeah, it felt like the feedback loop was there, definitely."* CF01

However, some CFs reported feeling cut off from The Trust, with some suggesting that they may have preferred direct communication and contact in future crises, whilst still recognising the co-ordinating value of the UKCF in cases where more than one CF was likely to be involved in distribution. An important aspect of communications was recognised as bidirectionality or reciprocity, which facilitates trust and understanding. Both interviewees and survey participants noted, that when communication was top-down only, at any stage of the network, this created a barrier to The Trust's feedback loop, thus impacting on its situational awareness of the needs of their distribution partners. As the survey participant below notes, there was a perceived over-reliance on surveys to groups, which for them meant that allocations may not have been sufficient to meet contextual need:

> *"NET made decisions without consulting the UKCF network first - better if network was consulted first and this was used to inform needs, grant making etc. Allocations decisions were an issue as [region] is rural and had different needs. Less surveys that have had to be sent to groups by [CF24]"*

Additionally, participants reported that communications tended to come from various different parts of The Trust, was multi-channel and, thus, not always linked up. There was also some confusion identified as to whether communications came via The Trust or the UKCF, which at times resulted in a lack of clarity about what was expected from CFs and VCSOs:

> *"So I think there are issues around making sure that the message goes from NET to UKCF, to us, in a reasonable sort of timescale, and in an understandable format.... I know people want to get the money out, but you know, taking time to say like, here's a document that tells you everything you need to know about what we're looking for from you as a funder. And a very straightforward way of reporting back how it's going. You know, we had a kind of combination of communications. So we had a newsletter type communication, we had some direct email, we had some webinars."*

> *So there's lots of different ways of communicating. It's always better I think to have a kind of red line communication that you know that if it comes down there, that's what you've got to do rather than… because sometimes I've sort of thought, do I understand what they're on about you know? And know, well that was discussed at a webinar. Well I wasn't at that webinar because it's you know, I couldn't necessarily attend every webinar there was because there were other priorities. So I think the main thing with anything like that is the communication, is getting the contractual stuff right." CF14*

Simultaneously, it was noted that mechanisms needed to be put in place to further enhance reciprocal communications and a sense of "listening", especially around data collection and evaluation. Both CFs and VCSOs noted that some development was needed to ensure that feedback loops are both live and informative. Most importantly, communications need to be intentionally multidirectional – to ensure that all relevant data and information is clearly communicated not only from The Trust to distributors and The Trust to the public, but also from distributing partners and end VCSO beneficiaries. Thus, whilst general communications were generally well developed and implemented in somewhat difficult circumstances, several recommendations around reporting and evaluation are noted in the next section to improve communications in future activations.

Experiences of Reporting and Evaluation

Identifying need

Central to all CFs' and VSCOs' descriptions of their localised response was the desire to spread the net of their support and grant distribution as widely as possible within their communities. Each expressed an acute awareness that there were groups and individuals that were at risk of being missed out, as well as the risk funding efforts may be duplicated and result in uneven and unfair distribution of the funding received from The Trust and their own donors. However, the VCSO landscape is both complex and during the pandemic – growing – with lots of groups with different reach, focus and potential. Simultaneously, CFs and VCSOs reported that VCSOs were needing to make their own assessments of need and determine what their own crisis responses needed to be. This made need identification a complex, tricky and time-consuming process especially for CFs.

Community Foundations

CFs universally described an active intelligence collection process consisting of three distinct data/ information collection approaches to assess and map need within their communities. These included:

1. Contacting VCSOs and community groups directly to discuss how the crisis was impacting them and their communities. This process allowed for the identification of urgent funding needs and mapping of need as it was emerging, whilst also allowing organisations and CFs themselves to assess their own need and plan for their ongoing response:

"As soon as we saw the pandemic start and everything started to change very quickly, we had people at work ringing up groups and just talking to them about it, just talking to them: how they are surviving, what do they need, that type of thing. So from very early days, we had quite a good level of knowledge of what was happening in communities. Not everything, you know, so we did do more after that, but we had quite a good idea in the early days. And that was just through that contact and our relationships with the groups that we know - we know quite a lot of groups. Which on one side, you know, it sounds like you're favouring just the ones you know, but you knew who was working in certain areas and you could get a feel for, you know, what was needed at that time. So I think that was really successful what we did then, you know, having that conversation with the groups rather than just sitting there going, come on then, give us some applications, we'll think about it." CF13

> *"So we'd note down what was recorded, and then we'd get together and say, right, these guys need money, these guys don't need money right now. We'll speak to them in a few months time to see how the situation changes. So that's how we sorted out those. There's always at least a conversation, if there wasn't an application form, there'd always be a conversation. And then I think in the early days of NET... it was really just a sort of expression of interest. Sort of tell us what you're doing now, tell us how many people you're serving, tell us what money you need, tell us what services you can't run at the minute, and tell us what you need at this moment in time, for the next six months." CF10*

2. Engaging with other funders and local statutory services providers about emerging need within their spheres of work:

> *"Yeah, so quite a bit of engagement, but a lot of information sharing, and a lot of just kind of intelligence you know. So we'd regularly have meetings. There was quite a lot of meetings set up by us, by other people looking at, what's the situation in [place name]? So we'd engage with the local authority, our local infrastructure body you know, what's happening there. Or we'd come together, we'd talk about specific communities, or whatever it might be, just to make sure that if we had any intelligence that we could share, we were sharing it. Or if we needed to know something, we would be able to ask. There was quite a lot of; there was a lot of Zoom calls, a lot of Zoom calls." CF15*

3. Gathering and mapping of existing and emerging need based on applications coming in. This meant, as noted by the CF participant 01 below, that initial granting criteria needed to be specific enough to guide applications, but broad enough to allow for flex and adaptation as understanding of need emerged

> *"There's that whole chicken and egg situation, I suppose. Sometimes it's when you can start awarding the grants, and people come to you applying for funding, you can build up that picture of what the needs are. And so the NET money gave us that ability to make a substantial number of grants and build up that picture and understanding of what's going on. And then that provided more evidence and information that you can use as part of your ongoing appeal." CF01*

Key to these data collection processes was CFs' existing knowledge of their communities built through granting relationships built up through years of engagement. This allowed CFs to ascertain to some extent both where instances of duplication in funding and effort may be taking place, but also to begin to make decisions about what kind of needs presented as more urgent:

"I mean we've been around for over 30 years now, so we're well invested in the region, we have a lot of expert knowledge that we've passed down over the years to new members of staff as they come in. And yeah, we knew the main players, and we knew who to contact. We knew who you know, a good idea of what sort of communities and areas they were serving. So we could yeah, we could direct our support, hopefully with as little duplication as possible." CF10

"....we had really close relationship with the community groups so we knew exactly what were their needs, we knew the people that were knocking on the door, and people were knocking on their door. You know, not for help next month or the month after, they were knocking on their door for urgent help now. And that's what we felt was the need we had to meet, was the need now, you know." CF19

Related to the above point, CFs noted that the need being reported by VCSOs and other stakeholders was not necessarily "new" but rather an exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities that many of the groups that they supported were already addressing. As such, many CF participants considered that disaster/crisis results in a limitation to funding and access to "normal" resources, rather than generated new need. This suggests that there is scope for disaster funders like The Trust and CFs to conduct valuable and information vulnerability mapping prior to disaster and plan accordingly, as the participant below noted their CF had achieved somewhat unintentionally:

"It didn't really change, all that really changed was the lens through which we looked at it, which was Covid. And the fact that I think you know, people were more heightened to the fact that the issues were there. But actually what's quite interesting for us is, the communities that have been most affected by Covid, are the communities that ....we'd pinpointed [as] certain areas we wanted to focus on [pre-pandemic]. They are exactly the areas that are most affected. So you know, diverse communities, people with mental health issue you know, certain geographical parts of our region. They didn't change; they just got even worse affected by Covid, and will continue to be." CF15

VCSOs

VCSOs flexed to the pandemic, reporting that they developed their own emergency response as soon as the need was identified in their communities. Many of these groups were set up to target specific groups or needs, or had particular ways of supporting their communities. Through the pandemic, VCSOs adapted to the need that they saw, and changed their approaches to meet this need. This often meant either identifying new, covid-specific needs with their regular target group, or identifying different groups who were impacted in their communities.

The data collected for the evaluation do not suggest any formalised process for identifying need in communities, rather VCSOs used their existing connections with beneficiaries and external networks to understand the experiences of these communities, to identify what needs presented.

"I mean the, the other thing that I did right at the beginning, was work with, so in [city] we had the [project name], we had about four hundred and fifty odd people brought in to hotels in [city], who were currently rough sleeping. And so in a weird way, that was horrible for them. They were really isolated then, because they were in rooms, whereas normally they're on the street in a community, which we might look at it and be quite judgemental and say, that looks really unhealthy. You're all standing round a bonfire made out of a sofa, and taking, taking drugs. But actually, it's a community with relationships. And then they're all sectioned off into hotel rooms and psychologically that's really bad for that group. So, we worked with, we managed to find a bit of legislation that the MARS group had managed to get through, which was, so that's the Mutual Aids something or other that advises government." FG1

"We whizzed that online really, really rapidly, but then we kind of, which was fine for about two thirds of people, but we hit the sort of digital exclusion barrier fairly hard with some of our more less well members. So, then we kicked, kick started a befriending service, which was sort of one-to-one phone support for people that couldn't access the groups online." FG1 "For everybody there seems to be a common theme of, you know, there's, there's more resilience there now because there are those new services there. So, you know, we reacted to what people needed, we gave them what they, what they wanted. But actually, you know, we were able to discover then, through that, what they needed as well. So they may have presented with needing food, but as you, you know, with wanting food. But as you started working with there were other issues there that, you know, you got to understand. So, so it's a legacy there I think, of greater understanding about communities." FG4

> *"So for the first three weeks, we were working from home, making welfare calls to all of our beneficiaries, for whom we had contact details. And also, and you know, and then liaising with other charities to find out you know, what their needs are"* FG3

In many cases, VCSOs' increased demand arose from new clients requesting support and from referrals from other organisations, as noted by the focus group participants below:

> *And we were still picking up referrals and things like that, when lots of places just, I mean, and weren't able to. And I think that, for us, has just made it, that actually, yeah, people have relied on us and, and that's continued. And we've definitely, like, you know, we're seeing that we've got six times the amount of referrals that we had before pandemic. So, some of that is need, but some of it is also relationship, that we're just getting more of that. FG4*

Thus, the bulk of data on need was collected through local, direct and indirect engagement with VCSOs and various stakeholders, rather than through the mapping of population-based statistics or mapping tools. Whilst interview participants noted that some prior understanding of distribution of vulnerabilities and need would certainly have aided distribution decisions, population-based allocation of funding did not necessarily provide funding that reflected actual and contextual need as experienced by particular CFs and VCSOs, as noted by a CF participant from an area with a relatively smaller, yet more vulnerable demographic:

> *"I'm not quite sure what our allocation was going on, and it's normally population and not need. And I think the need; I think nationally, there needs to be something better compromised, or different elements. Because we always feel as core, we've got a real… obviously in comparison, quite a low population, but the need is very great. But I think at the time you know, we had [amount], that we weren't expecting, so you know, we can't ever complain about that. But I think overall, if something was in place for national grant programmes to consistently [allocate], for need over population, I mean that'd be a great place to get to. But we understand, there has to be fairness, there has to be a work in, whatever that work in might look like."* CF21

Additionally, CF grant assessment staff noted that analysis and assessment of incoming data did not provide information on "missing" groups and individuals or help identify hidden need. Whilst CFs kept records of unsuccessful applications and requests for funding, little is known about groups that did not ask for support or who are/were not within CFs' networks. Engagement with other stakeholders, donors and infrastructure organisations appear to have gone some way to helping address these

"data blank-spots". However, many CF staff remained concerned some populations and groups of need remained hidden and unaddressed. Correspondingly, despite VCSOs efforts to identify and reach groups, there is recognition that not all members of the community would have been reached, due to either the capacity limits of the organisation, or because of the difficulty in identifying those that can't or won't ask for help.

> *I was worried about the people that don't ask for food, they're the ones that scare me the most, that they don't do. FG3*
>
> *But I think it's important to say that I don't think that we met all of the need that was out there. So, when we're saying things like, you know, oh, we didn't need more funding, I think there was still lots of people out there that weren't getting any services, especially as lots of things just shut down. Some things shut down, just that was it. And then places like us, we shut down, so we no longer had a physical presence, but we were trying to keep in touch online and telephones and various ways. So, I do think there is huge need out there. FG6*
>
> *And so, yeah, so I'd be very clear about that when I'm saying things like we kind of were at capacity, but I don't mean that we met the need of everybody in the area. We can't. We're only a tiny, like you [Par1], we've got, we've got six staff, but I think it's probably about three and a half day's full time equivalent. So, we are tiny. And, you know, we're trying to do a big job. But there is no way we could have met the need of, of everybody out there. FG6*

CF and VCSO staff repeatedly note that whilst emerging and immediate needs were both identified and addressed through the emergency phase of funding distribution, this often left donors and CFs staff unaware or struggling to secure evidence of what longer-term need might have been developing within the sector. The interview participant below suggests that understanding of emerging need was and remains cyclical and required constant review, and often required a subjective judgement. Correspondingly, participants across the phase 2 evaluation suggested that a focus on supporting the infrastructure within the sector to ensure capacity to identify and meet longer-term, emerging need was needed both at the height of a crisis, as well as post- and pre-crisis:

> *"It was really good to be able to do, not only the initial emergency grants, but then look at doing things that would be a little bit more long-term for organisations. We talked about, well what shall we do with designing, in terms of the programme, once the first sort of wave of the pandemic had happened. And I think I certainly felt that what organisations need, and I think it was shared by other people, was they now needed their sort of core costs, their overheads, things that, for the grants… where they would have lost all their income if they'd been open and functioning as usual. So just*

> *to keep the roof over their heads kind of costs. And we put a lot into digital infrastructure as well, so that people could carry on activities remotely.. So that was a nice thing to be able to do. I think doing a bit of capacity building, or at least infrastructure. Saving the infrastructure a bit." CF09*

Reporting processes

A key element of this evaluation are the processes used in evaluating impact, and reporting processes are a key part of this. Throughout phase 2 data collection, NFPs and VCSOs discuss reporting back to funders, and these findings are beneficial in understanding the experiences, opportunities, and barriers for The Trust to consider for future appeals. In addition, reporting processes are integral to need identification and impact evaluation. An important element of both CFs' and The Trusts' approach to identifying ongoing need, as well as evaluating the impact of distributed grant with a view to improving allocation and on-ward distribution was the use of incoming data from reports. As explored on page 20, reporting processes across CFs were changed to reduce requirements, which facilitated distribution partners in responding in a timely way, as well as reduce the administrative burden on VCSOs and their beneficiaries. Similarly, CFs reported that The Trust's primary reporting requirements remained largely broad and straightforward. However, both VCSOs and CFs, identified several areas for improvement and development:

1. Both CFs and VCSOs reported not being very certain about what data and information to collect or report on, as grant application and reporting processes were both new and simplified. Key to this uncertainty was:

   - A number of CFs reported that they didn't know or hadn't thought about what data they may need within a more simplified grant application and reporting regime, especially within the highly dynamic and changing context in which granting was taking place. For example, the participant notes that this became a difficulty when trying to ascertain what percentage of ethnic minority groups had received:

> *"Again, learning for us, it was very tricky, because again, we didn't ask groups to submit their management committee details. Unless you could tell from the name, you didn't know if it was BAME led, because you hadn't got that information. From June onwards we did, we had that." CF22*

   - Closely related to the above point, as the participant below

notes, it can be tricky for groups and funders to know which data or information will assist in identifying gaps in distribution. This became an issue during the Coronavirus appeal across the network of giving around identifying gaps in service provision to ethnic minority groups, with questions around whether ethnic minority led organisations equated to meeting the need of ethnic minority service beneficiaries

"It's really interesting, and I struggled with that a little bit. Not struggled, but there are a few areas, like [place name]... here it's a majority, minoritised ethnic community resident base. So it's more than 50%. So I know that organisations working here, like if they're working with people who are disadvantaged [minoritised], like the vast majority. But if it's not in the charitable object, you're not supposed to record it under the funders for race equality. Because it's supposed to be mentioned in the charitable objects, or reasonably so... there are a couple of areas where it's really borderline, and you have to make a judgement, or just call the group up and ask them. But yeah, it's suppose to be in the mission objectives, charitable objects, and the beneficiary group, and the leadership. So it's actually quite hard to achieve. So when I did it, I think we came out at 12% of the... at the time that I did it for the NET analysis, it was 12% of the funding had gone to support minoritised communities, of which 6% had gone to BAME led organisations, so it was around half. And when I looked at it, half of the organisations applying... let me just get this right when I say it. Like half of the organisations working with those communities, were black led, if that makes " CF04

Further analysis of The Trust's and CFs' distribution and spend data, demonstrates the difficulty in identifying which data to capture in a space where need and service provision is likely to be highly intersectional in nature.

2. Over the course of the appeal, The Trust and UKCF used a shared spreadsheet for individual CFs to log details of grants awarded in real time. CFs largely reported that this sheet was easy to use, however some commented on the challenge of what felt like regularly changing columns and categories, requests for additional information or the inclusion of new or different reporting criteria. The most cited and prominent example was the request for information on the ethnicity and governance details of groups discussed above, which was prompted by The Trust developing an awareness that the pandemic was disproportionately affecting ethnic minority groups. Others suggested that the duplication of reporting through CFs' own granting management software (Salesforce) and the shared spreadsheet used time that could have been used on other tasks. For example, the survey and interview participants noted that it would be

useful for future responses to have a clearer and stable indication of reporting criteria prior to launch that worked with distribution partners' existing reporting and data gathering mechanisms:

> "It would have been helpful for NET to have a clearer idea at the start the areas that they would like to report on. Being an emergency response we paired our application forms back to support applicants and then had to retrospectively add data. The BAME data was also not asked for until quite
> a way into the programme and so we manually had to look at the names of committee members and staff or go back and ask ground to confirm the slip of staff/trustees." CF28
>
> "Why couldn't that [Salesforce] be used more effectively than using Google docs which, again, were being corrupted… [and] caused a lot of issues kind of tech based. So, yeah, I think more consideration about what actually what did you want from this, what was the end result, what data did you want. And thinking about, so for, hopefully not a next time, but there will be something that will happen maybe not in this kind of grand scale, but just making sure that there's time set aside to really think about what it is you want on the other side, to make sure all systems are set up and we're collecting the right data from day one. And things not getting added on further down the line, which makes things really difficult." CF23

3. The Trust in Phase 1 of the evaluation reported on the difficulties of obtaining reliable data back regarding need and impact from VCSOs to inform need identification and evaluation. This was in part related to the issues of losing detailed data and information within simplified application and reporting processes discussed above, which meant that at times The Trust reported not having the necessary information to make fully informed decisions. There is some indication that the use of crude reporting criteria may have contributed to this in the same way as simplified, trust-based grant application and reporting requirements impacted CFs evaluations. That is, that there was a trade-off between trust-based, speedy distribution and lack of access to granular, detailed data with which to make finer grained assessment and evaluation. Both survey and interview data suggest that a lot of the detail captured and used by CFs to make their own distribution decisions and assessments were not necessarily captured within the google sheet. For example, most CFs talked about using their own need mapping, surveys, research, and existing data to make local funding decisions, as well as capturing far more information within the grant allocation and reporting process than the google sheet was able to accommodate, as demonstrated by the long interaction with interview participant below:

> *"So in terms of data, day to day data collection, so in terms of grant recipients. So we collect data at an organisational level, and at a grant level. So we have data on organisations. So what they do, where they work, what kind of populations they serve, what their governance structure is, what their income is etc, etc. So we have that, and we have data on their track record with us, as a funder. So we have, we have effectively performance data on their success with previous grants, based on the objectives that grantees set for themselves, and how they report on them. So we have, so that organisation level data was part of that identification of which organisations to go to, which ones to be in touch with, which ones that might need support. So that organisation data, it's critical in terms of what we were doing, and I guess also critical in terms of some of those conversations that came along later about particularly Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities, and reaching to those communities. …*
>
> *So data at the organisation level is held on all grantees, regardless of whether they've had a grant in the past six months or not. So we have that, that kind of data. And then obviously there's the grant level data. So it may be that an organisation is working in a particular place for a particular community that is more specific than its general area of benefit.*
>
> *So we have that kind of information as well. And that, so that might also enable us to be more targeted in terms of knowing that, whilst an organisation is, for example, at an organisation level, its area of benefit is the whole of [place name] that we know we have funded it previously to work in a particular disadvantaged community or etc, etc. So we have that kind of data as well, and demographic data in terms of beneficiaries. And then we do obviously have data on, like I said, at the end of grant, in terms of their performance and in terms of numbers reached etc, etc."*
> CF12

Evaluating impact

As mentioned, at the beginning of the section on trust earlier in the report assessing philanthropic impact is recognised as difficult, particularly in fast changing, networked giving and service delivery spaces that characterise the voluntary & community and philanthropic sectors' crisis response. VCSOs and CFs within the evaluation reported difficulties in evaluating and understanding the impact of their services. This was in part due to the challenges in collecting data and reporting that were explored earlier but was also due to VCSOs having limited knowledge of how to identify and evidence impact. This was particularly evident during the Covid-19 response when many services were delivered both digitally and remotely:

> *"But something I've noticed that might be of interest is that we struggle to know what to count in terms of the people we reached on Social Medial. So I've got a figure in one of the reports that says, that's a regional 110,000. We were meeting enormous numbers, and I didn't really know. Some people here knew a bit more, but nobody was very confident on what figures you would count. So we were counting you know, like I can't actually remember the terminology there without looking it up. But I did come across this in other organisations that we then joined with later. But they have got the similar sorts of problems.... as it [crisis] was one where we all tried to do something, as we couldn't be at the food bank, but we tried to do something online. A lot of organisations, not knowing how to count it, I think the actual feedback was gathered, and it was so variable that it would have... I suppose a little bit of guidance on that could have been helpful. I'm not saying necessarily from the National Emergencies Trust, but from somewhere."* FG3

> *"The only think I have found, which is quite difficult was, some of the questions that were asked were very difficult to evidence. So it's kind of like, some sort of thing saying... there was different questions saying like, I'm just having a quick look through it now, as in number of people reported improved physical health, [unclear in recording] of sport and exercise through activities provided by the project. Some of those things were quite difficult to evidence because of Facebook, and because Facebook report their figures, as to how accurate they were."* FG4

Formal methods of evaluating the impact of services used by different VCSOs included distributing surveys to beneficiaries and measuring social media engagements. However, many VCSOs developed 'informal' narrative accounts of impact through their conversations with beneficiaries, such as the example below:

> *"And one of the things I think we found with our older people is, even though there were volunteers only just going to the door for like, a couple of minutes, people said it made them feel that they weren't forgotten about. And, for some people, that was their only social contact of the week."* FG6

Through this, one of the most often identified impacts of these services may not have been the original explicit aim of the organisation, with VCSOs instead reporting the impact of their services as addressing issues of loneliness and isolation, and the psychological wellbeing the comes from social contact:

> *"And quite a few people were saying you know, you've stopped me from developing some mental ill health, as well as reaching our sort of usual service users and helping them through the lockdown as well."* FG5

> *"And actually, I think it just highlighted to me like, how important we are, and how, even very, very tiny interventions have a huge impact on people's lives. And we, we've done quite a lot of evaluation over the last couple of years, our community engagement, and some of the comments you've had have been so uplifting and amazing. Some of them really sad as well, actually, to think that sometimes we were maybe the only people in someone's life." FG6*
>
> *"And I think it just showed me the importance. And I think we should never underestimate that, and the actual power of connection between people, which is what we are facilitating and supporting all the time, as, as are you, [Par1]. Just that it is incredibly important, and we shouldn't ever think that our projects have to be any, you know, big, amazing like, you know, all singing all dancing. Like, actually, just a friendly face and some thoughtfulness and kindness is, is often enough." FG6*

Thus, the identified impact often was not related to the original stated purpose of the grant at the time of application, thus making it difficult to both evaluate and report back on impact using standardised forms and criteria.

Similarly, CFs noted a more informal process of formative evaluation, where they engaged in a process of what was described by many as regular internal check-ins and evaluations, which involved looking at data/ information from conversations, applications, feedback from VCSOs and other stakeholders, as well as the grant allocation and spend data that had been collected and adapted for The Trust's reports. In doing so, participants described how CFs were able to use incoming data to reconsider their own granting criteria and processes and implement changes to strategies such as working more closely with infrastructure organisations or providing larger grants to specialist VCSOs:

> *"So I think it was at the end of April you know, we'd been sort of in emergency mode, trying to gather as much information as possible, do it as quickly as possible, but make really good decisions. And add that flexibility into our normal processes and procedures to get funding out quickly, which I think we did really well. We sort of took a pause, and I looked at where our funding was going at the end of April. I'm looking at it by beneficiary groups at that point. And then we did a sort of you know, a chat with the team and shared that information, and just things to look out for, and some corrective action." CF04*

However, once again CFs were reliant on impact data coming back from VCSOs in various formats, as well as from various other sources. Most notably, CFs found it particularly difficult to attribute specific impacts to specific donors, including The Trust, particularly within the trust-based,

needs-based funding model that was developed and refined over the course of the Coronavirus Appeal:

> *"But also, how do we then take a step back and try not to over evaluate the impact, and try to understand that we are one part, as a funder, we are one part of many, many funders. And actually, if we're giving core funding, can we really kind of assess that impact?…. But do we want them to try and kind of go, well actually your £10,000 paid for this bit, and then it did that, and then as a result… or equally do we say, well we gave an organisation with a turnover of £100,000 a £10,000 grant, and last year they looked after 3000 people, therefore we have 3000 beneficiaries that we've helped? We haven't, because we've given one tenth." CF15*

Thus, questions around the impact of The Trust's funding may remain. Undoubtedly, The Trusts' funding was distributed both widely and at speed, reaching into communities impacted by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and economic crisis. There remains work to be done around the development of live reporting to aide allocation and distribution decisions, as well as mechanisms through which to capture and evaluate impact which includes the following considerations:

- Incorporate live data collection and analysis.
- Recognise that static criteria-based frameworks won't capture the complex data and data interactions evidenced above.
- Build in ways for more reciprocal interaction with distributor partners that allows for the live capture of complex data from various statistical and qualitative sources.
- Recognise and map the multiple sources of intelligence, research and data capture drawn on across the giving network (including The Trusts' trustees & staff; distribution partners and VCSOs) and develop a framework through to gather and analyse complex data.
- Identify what each stakeholder's role within the giving network is and the corresponding level of detailed and refined need identification is required to enable allocation, distribution and spend.
- Be clear about how impact is defined at The Trust/ donor level and what information is needed to demonstrate and evaluate it.

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