National Emergencies Trust Coronavirus Appeal Evaluation

Evaluation Summary

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Overview

This is a summary of the findings and recommendations of the two-stage evaluation of the National Emergencies Trust's first activation and subsequent appeal. This supported the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Phase 1 of the evaluation was designed to address decision making around the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of the appeal. Phase 2 of the evaluation explores the relevance, efficacy, effectiveness, and sustainability, applied to various aspects of the implementation.

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). 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 (175,256 people with Covid-19 on their death certificate and 15.9 million cases as of 24 January 2022; GOV.UK), 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. Nottingham Trent University (NTU) was selected to undertake this evaluation as a trusted, independent, academic partner, securing funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to complete a two-phase evaluation of the National Emergencies Trust's first appeal.

This evaluation focussed on 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, the way these enabled the National Emergencies Trust to determine the effectiveness of this action, and the impact that the Trust's funding had on individuals and communities across the country.

This summary and the accompanying reports are written and presented with the acknowledgement that disasters are complex and often unpredictable in nature, meaning 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, LET)*

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. While the data refer specifically to the Trust's role during the pandemic, the learnings are of relevance for others operating in the VCS, government, and academic sectors.

This summary presents the findings, recommendations and approaches the evaluation team set out in the more detailed reports linked to this two-phase project. An evaluation handrail report is also in development that will outline our evaluation approach and how this can be replicated.

This project would not have been possible without support from the National Emergencies Trust, its partners and funding from the Economic Social Research Council.

Phase 1 Summary

This phase explored organisational decision making at a time of disaster situated within the context of the pandemic through 2020 and 2021. It reviewed extensive minutes, documentation and data from the appeal alongside interviews to understand how the Trust could learn from its first activation.

Findings

Evaluation of data from Phase 1 yielded four key themes, with the specific learning and recommendations drawn out in each of these areas. These are summarised under the following headings:

Allocation of Funds: how decisions around who, how, and when to allocate funds are made

Identification of Need : processes and data used to identify the emergent and latent needs of communities and individuals at times of disaster

Communications, Fundraising and Building Relationships: Building and maintaining successful relationships across the network of giving; with donors, distribution partners, and cross-sectoral partners

Governance, Organisational Infrastructure, and Decision Making: how structural processes support clearer organisational response and purpose at times of disaster

The final section of this summary maps this learning onto the Phase 1 criteria indicated above. The themes/sub-themes identified provide a clear basis from which the National Emergencies Trust can learn and adapt to future appeals, facilitating the development and refinement of its decision-making processes and structural and strategic development.

Recommendations

Sixteen recommendations across the four key findings identified above are described in further detail below. Many of these recommendations have already been addressed by the Trust in preparation for the next activation.

Allocation of Funds

Determine flexible allocation methods: As a disaster progresses, those impacted, and the nature of the needs experienced will vary. As new data are collected and analysed, people or needs that have not been supported may also be revealed. Developing processes which prompt the consideration of when and how to adapt the allocation methodology will facilitate the National Emergencies Trust in ensuring that funding reaches those in greatest need throughout the lifetime of the disaster.

Consider distribution partner function: Distribution partners will each have unique functions and reach with the communities they serve. At times of disaster, some distribution partners may be better suited to addressing and reducing the impact of the disaster on their communities, and this may change as the disaster – and therefore disaster needs – evolve and progress from immediate response, stabilisation, through to short-, medium-, and long-term recovery, and resilience. Developing formal processes which consider the beneficiary groups and the organisational purpose will facilitate the National Emergencies Trust in selecting distribution partners who are best placed to provide disaster relief in response to changing needs.

Develop beneficiary involvement framework: The National Emergencies Trust identified the need to amplify the voices of marginalised and underfunded groups during its first appeal, and as a result set up the Survivor's Advisory Forum and the Equity Scrutiny Group. Including intended beneficiaries in conversations and decisions around allocation helps to develop an understanding about the nature and extent of need that may not otherwise be possible. Developing a more enhanced framework for beneficiary involvement will facilitate the National Emergencies Trust in mobilising this support; in knowing how and when it wishes to benefit from those voices, and how to identify and include these groups during the appeal.

Identification of Need

Ascertain who is most suited to identifying need: As the National Emergencies Trust's identity and purpose have evolved through the Coronavirus Appeal; its position and expertise have also evolved. This leaves an opportunity for the National Emergencies Trust to reconsider the extent to which it is necessary to have centralised responsibility for identifying those who have been impacted at times of disaster, and for whom funding would relieve some of that impact. The National Emergencies Trust's distribution partner organisations may have greater capability, capacity, and resources to identify unmet needs during the initial and later stages of a disaster, depending on the nature of the incident. At times of disaster, ascertaining this suitability and utilising its network of partners and their expertise will facilitate the National Emergencies Trust in effectively understanding the nature of the needs of the disaster.

Consider a flexible policy of distribution: Through the appeal, the National Emergencies Trust has worked alongside voluntary and charity sector organisations (e.g., Community Foundations, the National Emergencies Trusts' National Funding Partners) to distribute funds to those in need. These organisations have various strengths and may each be suited to supporting people affected by disaster at different times, in different demographics, and different disasters. In response to this the National Emergencies Trust developed three distinct allocation and distribution models during the appeal in real time. Adopting a formalised and planned flexible policy would mean that the National Emergencies Trust could harness its evidenced strengths in flexibility and agility to respond in a bespoke way that was most effective in each situation.

Decide and communicate early: Inefficiencies in identifying need arose when different organisations were each attempting to identify it, and when it was unclear where responsibility for need identification lay. Deciding an approach for identifying need early and communicating clearly with all involved will facilitate the timely and efficient distribution of funding to those with greatest unmet need at the time, without placing undue load on key personnel, and without creating duplication of effort.

Incorporate intersectional needs: The most vulnerable at times of disaster are most frequently those with intersectional needs, who may already be at greater risk of impact, and whose needs may be more complex. These needs may be harder to identify and therefore have a greater likelihood of being missed from disaster relief efforts. By incorporating intersectional needs into need identification frameworks, the National Emergencies Trust will increase the likelihood of ensuring that the funding reaches those with the greatest needs at times of disaster.

Develop data expertise: Effective modelling of needs requires data literacy and statistical skills to be available throughout an appeal. These skills should include understanding the types of data that can be drawn upon, and how to ascertain meaningful answers about disaster needs from complex and messy data. This enables need-modelling and allocation formulae to be updated as the nature and impacts of a disaster unfold. By integrating this data expertise availability from the activation of an appeal through to its conclusion, the National Emergencies Trust will be better placed to develop nuanced understandings of need and flexible allocation formulae where required.

Communications, Fundraising, and Building Relationships

Continue to build wide and diverse networks: Identifying and understanding the experiences of people impacted by disaster can often be enhanced by the incorporation of people with related background and experiences, who are well placed to feed into decision making where appropriate. The National Emergencies Trust developed its model of engaging with beneficiaries and expanded the diversity of its trustees throughout the Coronavirus Appeal. It also included processes for drawing on and immersing more diverse networks in the board of trustees and in decision making processes. By continuing to develop and incorporate these processes, the National Emergencies Trust will increase its ability to understand and identify need from diverse and historically marginalised people across diverse socio-demographic and geographic groups.

Consider fundraising approach: The evolution of the fundraising and individual giving trends in recent years highlights that The National Emergencies Trust should continue to reflect on the way it works in this space. The Coronavirus Appeal raised c.40% of its funding from corporate donors, c.20% from major donors, c.20% from government, and c.20% from the public. To some extent this spread of funds across donor types was unexpected but is reflective of the scale of the pandemic and a national level emergency attracting giving from high profile organisations. The National Emergencies Trust's successful fundraising campaign was in large part due to its successful relationships with major donors (especially corporate and trusts & foundations). Formally incorporating these opportunities will enhance the National Emergencies Trust's ability to successfully fundraise in subsequent appeals and mitigate some of the competition for public donations with other charitable organisations that emerged during this first appeal.

Develop a system for sustainable relationships: When volunteers and staff with responsibility for relationship management move on from the organisation, there is a risk that the relationships that have been developed become severed across the National Emergencies Trust, with donors, and with funding partners. By sharing relationship management and stewardship across relevant staff and introducing a process for transferring relationship knowledge, the National Emergencies Trust will increase the likelihood of developing lasting relationships with stakeholders.

Governance, Organisational Infrastructure, and Decision Making

Introduction of decision log: At times of disaster, decisions are made fluidly and in response to information that may change rapidly; this means that the nature and rationale for decisions may be lost, which often results in an inconsistent or disorganised approach as personnel transition into and out of roles and relevant details are forgotten. Introducing a decision log, with brief rationale for decisions will provide the National Emergencies Trust with a resource that can be consulted when making subsequent decisions, and that can be used in the National Emergencies Trust's drive to increase transparency of its operations.

Onboarding staff: The National Emergencies Trust evolved its team structure as it expanded its operations during the first appeal, which meant that it was recruiting for roles that were embryonic in nature, and staff spent a lot of time understanding and developing the parameters and responsibilities of the role. Introducing a formal onboarding process and clear role description and responsibilities would mean that staff are able to join the team confidently and make an efficient contribution to the team from the outset.

Map responsibilities across and between departments: Without formal department responsibilities and frameworks for feeding into each other, departments may inadvertently duplicate effort or miss relevant information when making decisions and recommendations at times of disaster. Introducing a formal process of responsibilities and co-operation will reduce the potential for such redundant effort.

Develop systems to evaluate effectiveness of allocation methods: Determining the efficacy of allocation methods requires an ongoing internal evaluation of how and where funds are being used, and cross-mapping to determine whether any groups or needs are better aided through different distribution routes. Whilst a number of reactive assessments were noted during the appeal, we recommend that the National Emergencies Trust develops a process for evaluating the allocation method suitability at agreed timepoints. This would mean that the National Emergencies Trust can quickly decide when and if to adapt the allocation methodology through an appeal in response to developing or changing circumstances.

Communicate mission: Effective strategic decision making is impaired when staff and trustees have diverging understandings of the appeal's aims. Furthermore, without a clear understanding the team may operate in an unfocussed way and may inadvertently engage in mission creep. Communicating with the National Emergencies Trust's staff, trustees, volunteers, and secondees about the appeal's aims will facilitate the team in working well together towards a shared goal; where the appeal aims change as the National Emergencies Trust responds flexibly and agilely. Communicating clearly about how and why the appeal aims are evolving will facilitate the team in collectively responding to the emerging needs.

Phase 2 Summary

The second phase of our work 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 Phase 1 report evaluating the process of the National Emergencies Trust's Coronavirus Appeal. Links to the full report and Phase 1's outputs can be found at the end of this summary.

This summary outlines the evaluation criteria, four key findings and seven recommendations from Phase 2 of this project.

Evaluation Criteria and Method

The specific evaluation criteria for Phase 2 were to explore the relevance, efficacy, effectiveness, and sustainability, applied to various aspects of the implementation. Specifically reviewing:

- Decision Making
- Relationships
- Evaluation

The report draws on data from five case study Community Foundations (CFs) and their beneficiary organisations, and from surveys sent to the distribution partners funded by the National Emergencies Trust during the Coronavirus Appeal – CFs and National Funding Partners. 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.

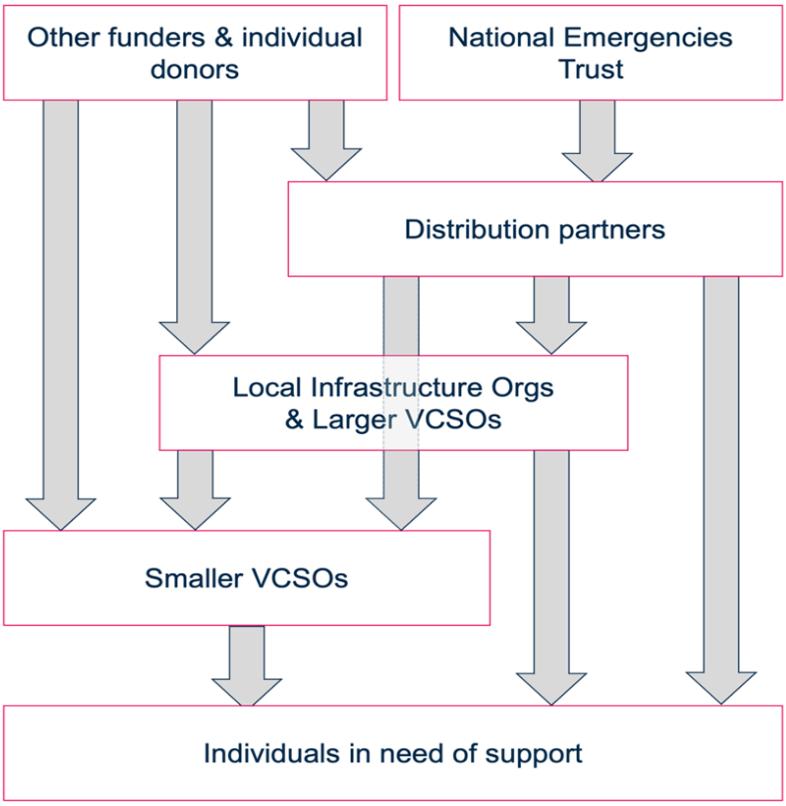
Findings

The four key findings from Phase 2 of the evaluation are summarised below. Alongside these Phase 2 also explores and discusses a model of giving that should be developed and considered by the sector.

What is the Network of Giving?

Our evaluation and wider research highlights that funders reach those with unmet needs through a layered network. This network is made up of distribution partners and VCSOs who have the reach, knowledge, and trust required. This Network of Giving is vital for ensuring that support reaches people in times of need, with Phase Two findings highlighting mechanisms that facilitate this support.

This model illustrates that the ability to reach those people depends on the layers of the network, and working successfully across and between layers. It highlights the need to build and maintain trust and relationships, data and intelligence sharing and balance between differing response and recovery needs. The graphic below illustrates the Network of Giving.



The Phase 2 findings explore the speed of response, identification of need, reach and impact of the appeal. Further detail behind each finding is shared below.

Speed of response: understanding how immediate, longer-term, and recovery needs are understood and approached from the onset of a disaster, and the varying requirement for speed of response throughout.

Identification of need: how data and intelligence across networks can be utilised to support identification of need, particularly for a lean organisation.

Reach: the challenges and opportunities for maximising reach across a diverse network of distribution partners, and realising challenges in identifying reach of funding

Impact : understanding the Trust's impact; not only through the support affording through its flexible funding, but also through increasing distributions partners' capacity to leverage funds. Understanding the challenges for funders to realise their impact.

Recommendations

There are seven key recommendations from Phase 2. Outlines of these are shared below with further evidence and detail shared in the full report.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.

Final summary

This summary provides a high-level view of the evaluation approach, findings and recommendations of our evaluation of the National Emergencies Trust Coronavirus Appeal. We hope this summary provides an accessible introduction to our two full reports. Work is underway to further share this learning across the sector to support preparations for future disasters and emergencies that will befall the UKs individuals and communities. We hope the lessons from this evaluation can support the sector preparedness to help mitigate the impacts of these events on people's lives.

We wish to thank the Trust and its trustees, staff and volunteers alongside all those who engaged with our evaluation to help us produce this evaluation and for there ongoing work to support those dealing with disasters and emergencies across the UK.

To read the reports of Phase One and Phase Two we direct you to the evaluation webpage which hosts the outputs from the teams work.

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