

West Sussex Crowd Focus Groups

Officers met with Voluntary Sector groups on 28 March and 2 April to discuss the West Sussex Crowd and listen to their perspectives and feedback on the platform and what ideas they felt could improve the process for applicants.

In advance of the sessions, the groups were asked to consider the following questions for discussion.

- What in your opinion are the positives for a crowd funding approach?
- What changes if any would you make to improve the current approach?
- What suggestions would you make to deliver our grant funds more effectively?
- Could your organisation provide additional support that would have a positive impact?

These questions helped focus the sessions and resulted in a good discussion on the West Sussex Crowd.

We have also received comments throughout the year from county councillor regarding the performance of the fund, as yet we have not carried out a formal questionnaire with Members but the comments we have had are consistent with the below information.

What in your opinion are the positives for a crowd funding approach?

The groups felt that the platform was good at gauging public opinion on projects and was an innovative way of improving community engagement. The system helped applicants broaden their appeal to residents and funders and gain new skills. The platform allowed projects to be transparent on costs and also create an appealing campaign. The groups felt the quality of projects was higher than the previous system and the support from Spacehive and the Council was praised, as was the checking that was performed by locality on all projects. Results also showed that the platform was giving the County Council a good return on their spend due to external pledges from third parties.

What changes if any would you make to improve the current approach?

What suggestions would you make to deliver our grant funds more effectively?

These questions were covered simultaneously in the sessions as they both sought to invite comments on what improvements could be made.

Comments were made on the confusion experienced by applicants, such as the blurring of the County Council's role as the host authority of the platform; and as the distributor of Community Initiative Funds. Language on the system was also found to be confusing and repetitive; with concerns also raised on the category system used by Spacehive. It was also difficult for applicants to easily pitch their project to different funds on the platform.

It was felt that a disproportionate amount of time was required for campaigns compared to other large funds. The groups felt that a small fund, held off of the Crowd platform, would be appropriate and welcomed by groups who only need a small amount of funding. Groups felt that a total project cost around £1000/£750 would be suitable for this model.

Concerns were raised on the payments section on the platform, with people pledging raising concerns that they needed to donate via direct debit; and that pledges remained pending until the campaign was complete which could be a long time. It was proposed that the County Council should cover the fees for projects, so applicants would then only be fundraising for the elements of their campaign.

The platform needed to feel more local, and had to incorporate different approaches to suit all demographics; with an increase in alternative social media channels being used.

An advice page was also proposed which would show relevant contact information and who to speak to for different scenarios (Democratic Services, Spacehive, Local Members, etc).

County Local Committee formats were also discussed. The groups felt that Community Initiative Fund agenda items should be placed early on agendas. Applicants should be allowed to speak at the meetings, particularly if they can answer any queries the committee have on the project.

Could your organisation provide additional support that would have a positive impact?

The groups proposed sessions to assist those interesting in creating a project. The sessions would show how the system worked, how much time was required for a project, and also the benefits of the system from successful case studies.

A session for County Council members was also proposed, to assist members in understanding the different types of groups that could apply for funding.

Groups could assist with making the community aware of deadline dates, and when Committee meetings were taking place.