



Institute of Community Cohesion

Cohesion Guidance for Funders: iCoCo response

Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo)

The Institute of Community Cohesion was established in 2005 to provide a new approach to race, diversity and multiculturalism. Our work focuses on building positive and harmonious community relations, using applied research to constantly develop practice and to build capacity of all the agencies and individuals involved.

iCoCo represents a unique partnership of academic, statutory and non-governmental bodies, which combine the experience and expertise of four Universities - Coventry, Warwick, DeMontfort and Leicester, with practitioners from a range of diverse backgrounds and professions.

It has grown its portfolio work substantially since its inception, combining detailed knowledge of local issues and practice with a rigorous intellectual approach and aims to reflect this through advocacy, policy-making and debate-shaping terms.

In less than three years, the Institute has expanded rapidly, taking on a wider range and greater number of projects. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has designated iCoCo as “the one stop shop” for cohesion, following the report of the Commission for Integration and Cohesion.

These have included over 50 projects on community cohesion including:

- Major city/borough-wide reviews of community cohesion for local authorities and local strategic partners.
- Creation of a network sharing advice and good practice of over 200 cohesion practitioners across the country
- Production of toolkits and online resources for tension monitoring, the power of sport, inward migration and other areas.
- A major review of the scale and impacts of migration at the local level.
- The development of an innovative methodology for mapping the diversity of communities and understanding rapid population change.
- Leadership development programme.
- The delivery of a range of learning events, including 9 regional conferences on the new duty for schools to promote cohesion
- A new awards scheme to celebrate grass roots organisations and their contribution to cohesion and inter cultural dialogue
- Providing support to an extensive range of partners and clients including CLG, DCSF, IDeA, the LGA, the British Council, Sport England and many local authorities and other public service providers.
- The creation of a number of international collaborative projects

The **Institute of Community Cohesion** works to build a more cohesive society.

We believe that:

- Diversity is good for society – socially, culturally, economically
- But, diverse societies work best when they have a sense of social solidarity and mutual responsibility
- Every individual will benefit from a richer notion of citizenship and fuller involvement in civil society

Our Response to the Proposed Guidance

Any proposal which seeks to change the basis of funding to a wide range of community and voluntary organizations is bound to be controversial. So it is perhaps worth considering what lay behind the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC) recommendation that 'Single Group funding should be the exception rather than the rule'.

We recognise that there are several drivers behind this proposal which the Guidance – and the responses to it – should address. These are a mixture of matters of principle and practicality:

- Separate and ongoing funding to groups which are identified as 'special' tends to reduce the pressure on mainstream funders to develop provision for the widest range of diverse groups. Britain has been a multicultural society for over 40 years and mainstream provision now needs to tailor services for both individual and community interests on the basis that they are all 'special'.
- Separate provision reduces the opportunities for interaction between people of different backgrounds and thereby minimizes the possibility that people will meet and build understanding and trust on a reciprocal basis. If such interaction does not take place as part of everyday activities it will have to be 'engineered' through twinning and other schemes as compensatory mechanisms.
- Separate provision developed several decades ago, based upon a handful of minority communities and there is now a huge practical problem of making such provision on the basis of a 'super diverse' set of communities - most cities now have over 150 ethnic and linguistic groups, London has 300 and it is unrealistic to expect specific provision such as community centres to be extended on this scale.
- Provision tends to be skewed towards longstanding minority groups, who often have well established community centres, staff and services, which now stands in contrast to many other newer communities.

However, it is important to be clear about the terms of the debate and we feel that the draft Guidance did not establish and clarify a number of critical points.

Our principal concerns are therefore:

Firstly, the CIC recommendation defined Single Group Funding ‘as that awarded on the basis of a particular identity, such as ethnic, religious or cultural’. The Guidance is therefore not intended to cover projects which are aimed at women, disabled people, LGBT, or age related groups, unless they are very narrowly focused on a single identity. Some of the discussion in the draft Guidance did create the impression that these groups would automatically be classed as ‘single identity’ and this should be corrected.

Secondly, projects and services catering for multi-minority identities are not single identity – again in an era of super diversity, there should be no assumption that provision has to cross the White-Black divide. We think it is sufficient that projects embrace a number of significantly different groups, for example an Asian womens refuge that caters for women of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu (or equivalent ethno-national) origin.

Thirdly, the aim should not be to reduce funding or provision overall. We believe that more needs to be done by voluntary and community organisations in this field to bring communities together, develop social capital and to build trust. Any move away from single group funding should not therefore be used to reduce funding but to improve provision of services to communities as a whole.

Fourthly, we do see the need to target new communities and to provide them with some support, which may, in the short term, be on a separate basis. In social capital terms, bonding and bridging are not competing philosophies. Indeed, some form of bonding might well serve as a platform towards bridging. So, while we would naturally prefer and promote funding regimes that encourages cohesion and integration, we should be prepared to consider all options, including initial separate funding, providing that an exit strategy is clearly established from the outset.

Fifthly, and most importantly, the Guidance should make it explicitly clear that it is not intended to prevent the use of funding to focus on single identity needs, such as those of Bangaldeshi girls, or White working class boys. The guidance should be about how they are tackled not whether they are, and whether those needs can be met by some form of multi-needs or mainstream programme, thus providing a valuable opportunity to enable communities to learn about each other and grow together.

Conclusion

The consultation suggests some challenging questions for funders and proposes that these questions should be addressed prior to a grant being made. These include: whether there is a clear case for a single group and whether the money would be better spent on a combined activity that was better able to promote cohesion; can the delivery organization include measures to build inter-community links; can communications be improved to anticipate some of the perceptions of preferential treatment; and does the funding align with the broader cohesion strategy.

We believe that these are the right questions, but perhaps, as suggested above, confuse whether it is desirable to be able to identify and respond to particular needs in one or more disadvantaged community (which hopefully no one would disagree with) and whether it is appropriate to respond to those needs via single identity organizations. This issue will, in particular, need to be clarified in the final guidance, along with the other four points set out above.