



European Social Fund Community Employment Programme 2014-2020

Tower Hamlets ESF Community Employment Programme Round 1

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Community Employment Programme is part of the 2014-2020 London European Social Fund (ESF) Programme. ESF in London is managed by the Greater London Authority's (GLA) European Programmes Management Unit (EPMU), which has been designated by government as an Intermediate Body for ESF.
- 1.2 The 2014-2020 ESF Programme has two main Priorities, each with several Investment Priorities. The London Councils ESF Community Employment Programme operates under Priority Axis 1 – Inclusive Labour Markets:
 - Priority 1.4 – Active Inclusion - To address the root causes of poverty which creates barriers to work so more people move closer or into employment

2 The Community Employment Programme

- 2.1 The Community Employment Programme operates under ESF Priority 1.4, to support people furthest away from the labour market.
- 2.2 The programme is embedded and delivered at the heart of the community by voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations that have access to and are best positioned to meet the needs of local residents in partnership with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.
- 2.3 Round 1 of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets ESF Community Employment Programme Grants were:
 - small grants (up to £20,000)
 - given to small non-governmental or VCS organisations in Tower Hamlets (eligibility criteria apply)
 - for projects which help long-term unemployed and economically inactive people move into or closer to the labour market in line with the Tower Hamlets Employment Strategy
 - for projects that will run for a maximum of nine months of delivery, with a further three months to close the project

- for projects that contribute to the 2014-20 London European Structural & Investment Funds (ESIF) Strategy for London.
- to help people fulfil their potential by giving them better skills and better job prospects.
- given to organisations that have an annual income of less than £150,000 or £250,000 if the organisation works exclusively with people with a disability.

2.4 The Community Employment Programme targeted and engaged specific priority groups that were at risk of social exclusion:

- Residents housed by Tower Hamlets in temporary accommodation in neighbouring boroughs
- Those in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments
- Women, in particular Somali and Bangladeshi women and those who are economically inactive due to parental and/or caring responsibilities
- People with health issues, particularly mental health or a disability
- Lone parents, particularly those living in temporary accommodation
- Residents who are 50+ years old
- Long-term unemployed and economically inactive residents who have not engaged with any projects or developed their skills in the last two years.

2.5 In addition to supporting long-term unemployed and economically inactive participants, projects need to work with specific targets groups as outlined in table 1 below:

Table 1 – ESF Target Groups

ESF Target Groups	%
Economically Inactive	75%
Long-term Unemployed	25%
Women	51%
Older People (50 years and over)	18%
Ethnic Minorities	60%
Disabled (self-declared)	22%
Lone Parents	16%

3 Programme Outputs and Results

3.1. Organisations were expected to deliver a variety of outputs and results for a grant of £12,500, £15,000 or £20,000 as outlined in the table 2 below:

Table 2 – Outputs and Results

Outputs for payment	Expected Average Number		
	£12,500	£15,000	£20,000
Number of <i>long-term unemployed</i> participants enrolled onto the project	2	4	4
Number of <i>economically inactive</i> participants enrolled onto the project	8	12	12
Minimum total number of participants enrolled	10	16	16

Outputs for payment	Expected Average Number		
	£12,500	£15,000	£20,000
Number of participants receiving 6+ hours of support (IAG, job-search, mentoring, training, 1-2-1)	8	14	16
Results for payment	Expected Average Number		
Number of participants supported towards achieving a Level 2 (or below*) qualification	6	8	10
Number of participants progressing into further education or training provider or specified accredited support service	5	5	6
Number of <i>long-term unemployed</i> participants in employment	1	1	1
Number of <i>economically inactive</i> participants in employment/job search	4	4	5
Number of participants in sustained employment for 26 weeks (6M)	0	0	1
Maximum funding available	£12,500	£15,000	£20,000

4 Application Process

- 4.1 Round 1 of the Community Employment programme was promoted through mail outs, the Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services and the London Councils website. London Councils also promoted Round 1 through a series of workshops, where the application process was explained to potential applicants, giving them a chance to ask questions and network with other voluntary sector organisations.
- 4.2 Applications were assessed for eligibility against a due diligence framework, then scored by London Councils and Tower Hamlets officers. Individual scores were then moderated. A minimum score threshold of over 50 (the maximum score possible was 100) was required for organisations to be considered for funding. The panel recommended successful applicant/s to an external panel
- 4.3 Following scoring and moderation, an internal appraisal panel met to review each project application and the proposed moderated scores. The panel was comprised of senior officers from London Councils and Tower Hamlets Councils Third Sector & Partnerships Development Team. The panel recommended successful applicants to an external panel.
- 4.4 The external panel provided the final judgement on applications. This panel comprised of:
- a representative East End Community Foundation representing the Voluntary sector
 - Tower Hamlets Council representatives
 - representative of the GLA's European Programmes Management Unit
 - officers from the internal panel.

5 Payment of Funding

- 5.1 All successful applicants were paid 50 per cent of their grant on signing their funding agreement (subject to due diligence requirement being met); 30 per cent of the grant

on evidencing that the first payment had been fully spent; final 20 per cent of the grant was paid on submission of evidence of that the entire grant had been spent.

- 5.2 At each stage, payment was released following participant and financial claim submissions, including supporting documentation participants were eligible for ESF support and eligible evidence of financial defrayal.

6 Management of the Programme

- 6.1 The programme was managed by London Councils, which used a process (in consultation with the borough) to deliver the first round of funding. The programme management consisted of:

- Consultation and programme specification – the borough identified priority groups, London Councils drafted the specification, ensuring strong links to other ESF programmes, and local employment and training provision
- Programme promotion - promotion of funding opportunities to community and voluntary organisations
- Scoring, appraisal and approval - assessing applications for eligibility and scoring against agreed priorities, convening and chairing appraisal panels to approve projects for funding
- Due diligence and funding agreements convening and managing pre-agreement meetings, robust due diligence and completion of funding agreements setting out terms and conditions
- Implementation – monthly performance monitoring, quality assurance and compliance checks (delivery and financial), payments and support for funded projects, particularly in relation to ESF regulations
- Project closure - project evaluations, completion of evidence gathering and checks, assessment of performance - project and round level - final payments, round 1 performance report (success and lessons learned).

7 Round 1 funding

- 7.1 A total of 29 applications were received, for round 1 with 17 applicants awarded funding. The total of £302,088 of funding awarded was.

Table 3 - Funding

Borough	Number of applications	Number of grants awarded	Total value of funded applications
Tower Hamlets	29	17	£302,088

Total funding available per round	Funding allocated (round 1)	Unallocated	Payments to date
£382,500	£302,088	£80,412	£233,181.38

- 7.2 To date, programme spend is 78 per cent of the profiled allocated funding. We expect the spend to increase following the closure of the round by the end of September 2019 as several projects are in the process of completing local project closure.
- 7.3 Two projects did not complete delivery of their projects resulting in the recovery of grant funding:

- Sylhet Bawl received their initial 50% payment. Though they submitted one claim, there were numerous inaccuracies with their paperwork. We have sought clarification on the queries and their appointed London Councils officer has made several attempts to contact and visit them, but to no avail. No further payments will be made, and London Councils will be invoicing Sylhet Bawl for a return of their initial payment of £6,225.
- Al Isharah's funding agreement was terminated as the organisation experienced delays in the recruitment of project staff, resulting in the not being able to deliver the agreed programme of activities within the time remaining. London Councils recovered the advance payment of £10,000.

8 Programme Targets, Outputs and Results

- 8.1 Table 4 represents the number participants eligible for ESF support having met the ESF national eligibility requirements and a breakdown of their target group demographic characteristics projects worked with.
- 8.2 A combination of factors has meant that even though the groups have worked with many more participants than those shown in Table 4, they are not eligible for ESF support and cannot be claimed. However, organisations have been paid full eligible project delivery costs, which have been paid from the London Councils management and administration costs. Less

Table 4 – Target groups

Target groups	Round 1 Profile	Actual to Date	Achievement against Profile to date (%)
Participant Starts	331	110	33
long-term unemployed participants	116	45	39
Economically inactive participants	215	63	29
Women	198	83	42
Older people (50 years and over)	60	29	48
Ethnic minorities	292	103	35
Disabled (Self-declared)	40	3	7.5
Lone Parents	39	18	46

- 8.3 Lessons have been learnt from Round 1, with additional support and monitoring being put in place by London Councils officers to quickly support project's in challenges with delivery, including eligibility issues relating to financial and participant paperwork.
- 8.4 Table 5 illustrates the need for continued support for these organisations that are dedicated to reaching out to people in their community who often feel excluded from other training provision. London Councils will also need to ensure that funding agreements are issued on time, to ensure that projects have the maximum time to work with participants and assist them with their journey to employment.
- 8.5 Round 2 Tower Hamlets Community Employment Programme has already commenced delivery with London Councils officers providing support to organisations to ensure that:
- Projects are using their profile to ensure that they are planning ahead to assist participants to make the next step in the journey to employment
 - on-going support is available to projects, particularly participant engagement and progression pathway strategies are in place.
 - monthly quality assurance and performance monitoring visits take place.

Table 5 – Eligible ESF participants

	Round 1 Profile	Actual to Date	Achievement against Profile to Date (%)
Spend	£302,088	£233,181.38	78%
Number of participants enrolled	331	110	33%
Number of participants receiving 6+ hours of support (IAG, job-search, mentoring, training, 1-2-1)	249	95	38%
Number of participants supported towards achieving a Level 2 (or below) qualification	229	73	32%
Number of participants progressing into further education or training provider or specified accredited support service within 4 weeks of leaving the project	89	17	19%
Number of long-term unemployed participants in employment within 4 weeks of leaving the project	35	5	14%
Number of economically inactive participants in employment/ job search within 4 weeks of leaving the project	80	1	1%
Number of participants in sustained employment for 26 weeks	15	1	17%

9 Incorporating equalities into project delivery

9.1 London Councils' ESF Community Employment Programme aims to promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination. All delivery partners were required to adhere to these principles and incorporate equality of opportunity into the design, running and monitoring of their project. This was achieved on a project level by:

- Having bilingual and culturally diverse staff that were best placed to support the participants on their projects.
- Using outreach methods tailored to engage with certain equalities groups, in order to ensure support for them
- Employing tutors to support for participants who may not have English i.e. Newark Youth London employed a Bengali speaking employment and training advisor
- Using participants as peer support/mentors i.e. City Steps Guided Tours employed an ex-participant to act as a mentor to new participants
- Running projects for groups that are often excluded or not encouraged to partake in activities outside the home
- Ensuring that the marketing of their project was relevant by advertising in community newspapers and conducting outreach in community spaces
- Addressing financial barriers to participation by providing childcare and travel costs
- Supporting parents by delivering projects that offer flexible hours i.e. being able to drop in for support at times children are at school
- Ensuring all participants have equality of access to training by locating training venues within the community.

10 Sustainable development

10.1 The overall goal of ESF in England is to contribute to sustainable economic growth and social inclusion by extending opportunities and by developing a skilled and adaptable workforce.

10.2 Social development

- Organisations incorporated social development into their projects by providing training for long term and economically inactive unemployed participants. The training was provided in the hope that it would lead to a better quality of life for the individual and community i.e. education and employment.

10.3 Economic development

- Similar to environmental sustainability, economic sustainability involves organisations generating economic value out of their projects. Economic sustainability means that decisions are made in the fairest and financially sound way possible while considering the other aspects of sustainability.
- Organisations have incorporated economic development into their projects by providing training that will enable them to fulfil their potential and gain skills that they would not have gained elsewhere. Some participants who have never worked or taken part in any training course, have for the first time been enabled to mix with their peers in an educational setting and gained qualifications i.e. AQA certificates, CSCS card and SIA license.

10.4 Environmental development

- Organisations used recycled stationary, promoted the use of public transport amongst staff and participants, used energy-saving resources, minimised waste and selected bio-degradable products when possible.

11 London Living Wage

11.1 The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is an accredited London Living Wage friendly funder/employer and pays all directly employed and agency staff the London Living Wage. The Councils views the Living Wage as a policy priority and as such all grants awarded for the ESF Community Employment programme are required to pay the London Living Wage.

12 Partnership Working

12.1 Partnership working is at the core of improving outcomes and making local services more cost effective. Working in partnership should bring together organisations so that they can benefit from pooled expertise and resources, enhancing the efficiency and quality of service provision.

12.2 As part of gaining funding, organisations were to form partnerships with the Councils employment service WorkPath.

12.3 Organisations made contact with WorkPath, but the consensus is that the assistance offered was not what they expected. Several organisations reported that WorkPath offered to help with referring participants to projects, but expected to claim themselves progressions achieved, which was deemed unfair. They would have to work with the participants i.e. organise training, pay any associated costs and WorkPath would gain the outcome. Organisations were not happy to accept this and instead used other referral routes. Though the working relationship with WorkPath in round 1 was not a positive one for many of the groups, London Councils are arranging a meeting in September 2019 to meet with WorkPath to agree partnership working arrangements for round 2 and 3 projects.

12.4 Job Centre Plus (JCP) was used by several of the organisations as a referral route. Wise Youth Trust had an agreement in place with JCP to give presentations on a regular basis to their clients about their project, which worked well. Wise Youth Trust would gain a regular flow of participants and in turn, JCP would complete the ESF referral form confirming the employment status of participants. Boundary Community School also worked with JCP to refer participants to their project and verify their employment status.

12.5 Several organisations have established relationships with JCP, using them as a referral route and also to confirm participants employment status.

12.6 Organisations are embedded within their local community and have good links with a range of VCS and or training providers. This proved useful for sourcing volunteering opportunities for volunteers. Boundary Community School used their links with Vallance Community Sports Association to provide volunteering opportunities for two participants. Bongobir Osmany Trust also linked with several training providers to progress six participants into education or training.

13 Challenges

13.1 Projects found it difficult to understand and manage the reporting requirements of ESF. London Councils provided extra support to projects, where required in addition to:

- Quality Assurance visits to check and support with participant paperwork
 - appointed London Councils Officer visits to check financial and participant claims and performance monitoring.
- 13.2 Payments to projects were delayed. This was due to London Councils not making payments in a timely manner and delays in paperwork resubmissions from projects. To prevent this from happening again we have spoken with Round 1 projects and changed the way we process claims and ensuring that projects continue to have 5% cashflow available from their grant payments to not impact on project delivery. Round 2 and 3 project claims will be processed within two weeks of submission.
- 13.3 The verification of participants employment status proved difficult for some organisations. Due to cultural barriers, some of the female participants in Tower Hamlets were not been able to provide the documentation needed to verify their employment status. To resolve this, London Councils suggested that verification was sought from alternative sources or other third sector organisations the participant may have received assistance from and would be aware of their circumstances. For round 2 and 3, links will be made with WorkPath and the National Careers Service to assist funded organisations with employment status verification in addition to the provision of impartial careers, information, advice and guidance.
- 13.4 ESF projects are administrative heavy and projects found this an ongoing issue, resulting in insufficient budget allocation for admin support. London Councils have worked with Round 2 and 3 projects to ensure adequate admin costs are factored into budgets.

14 Added Value

- 14.1 The ESF Community Employment programme promotes and supports small organisations in accessing public funding to support individuals, helping them gain experiences and skills that move them closer towards employment through learning and training opportunities. It provides VCS organisations with the support to understand the needs of funders and develops their internal processes to meet more stringent requirements. By supporting local providers in building their capacity to deliver employment support, the programme enhances the quality of the small provider based in London.
- 14.2 The capacity building support on offer can also be seen as a first step in scaling up activities that providers deliver. Helping them deliver publicly funded projects increases their ability to access other potentially larger funding pots.
- 14.3 Emphasis is placed on putting the needs of the participant and the local community at the forefront by developing services that respond to their needs.

15 Effectiveness of ESF Community Employment Programme Grant

- 15.1 If this programme had not been funded, most of the activities would not have occurred. It is not possible to comment on the extent to which funded organisations would have supported individuals in the absence of funding. Indeed, for many small organisations staff often work on a voluntary basis to deliver services in the community.
- 15.2 Feedback from projects who received a grant, suggest the funding and support received has helped them to improve their processes, which may lead to them operating more effectively in the future. In many instances, the experience of being an ESF Community Employment Grant funded project also provided staff with skills they

believe will help them access further public funding. This is an outcome which project staff may not have achieved without participating in this programme.

15.3 In general terms, the ESF Community Employment Programme has ensured capacity-building for organisations in several areas, adding value by ensuring that organisations were better placed to apply for other provision, after their project has ended:

- Setting up and maintaining financial systems
- Setting up and maintaining monitoring systems
- Establishing sustainable progression routes for participants
- Maximising the potential of staff and volunteers
- Raising the profile of the organisation
- Undertaking longer-term business planning.

15.4 Community Employment adds value to existing provision by providing a platform for testing and showcasing innovative methods, tailored to the needs of specific hard-to-reach communities, for building work-readiness.

16 Good practice

16.1 The following are examples of good practice that projects have highlighted as a result of receiving the ESF Community Employment grant and delivering their projects:

- Boundary Community School maximised access to services by offering drop-in sessions to participants. This enabled them to access services on day's activities were not in place. Participants were also able to access face to face one to one advise.
- Bongobir Osmany Trust had a strong outreach model. They employed a female outreach/admin worker, who focused on engaging with potential female participants, who traditionally had not been engaged in any external training or employment. The outreach worker interacted with potential female participants and their families (families who were often reluctant to 'allow' them to do any external employment or training). This model worked and the project engaged eighteen women onto the project.
- To recruit participants Wise Youth Trust based themselves at the local job centre in Poplar on a regular basis. The link they had with the job centre ensured that they were able to recruit eligible long-term unemployed participants. Also, the job centre acted as a verifier of the participants employment status.
- City Steps Guided Tours recruited two previous participants as volunteer mentors. The volunteers provided peer support and disseminated information. The volunteers were in a unique position as they were based within the community and shared the same life and social experiences as the participants. The use of volunteers helps to build capacity of organisations, it also offered opportunities for the individual to gain work experience and gain skills to further their progression to employment.
- Newark Youth London employed a female employment and training advisor. The advisor was also a fluent Bengali speaker which made it easier to work with the women, many of whom were not fluent in English. The project also worked flexibly, taking into consideration their family commitments and religious needs i.e. Ramadan.
- Weavers Community Forum made links with a local nursery who provided work experience for the ESF project participants. This reciprocal relationship has

continued with the nursery expressing their intention to work with Weavers Community Forum on other projects such as recruiting volunteers.

17 Impact on participants

- 17.1 The impact of the programme on the intended participants, individuals who need support, was diverse. For some, the projects helped them to realise that skills they had acquired in a non-work context could be used to enhance employability. For example, a Bengali participant from City Steps Guided Tours was supported to recognise she could use her communication skills to assist other women. She is now volunteering with the organisation to mentor other women.
- 17.2 For some projects, the staff enabled individuals to overcome cultural norms regarding working outside of the home. For example, one organisation employed a female Bangladeshi outreach worker to encourage women to enrol onto their project. Part of her role was to speak to the women and their partners about the project and the evidence requirements. In most cases this worked.
- 17.3 The impacts the projects have on participants are sustainable because they focus on the initial skills, confidence building and support that are essential for individuals to move towards further training or employment. The projects that are funded focus on new experiences and positive opportunities which will benefit the individuals if they enter employment, training or further support. They are the first step to helping individuals enter a wider system of support. They are the outreach into the community through trusted means that larger organisations are not always able to achieve.