

**Mentoring+
Befriending
Foundation**



The national body for
mentoring and befriending

Response to The Big Thinking consultation (BIG)

Jeanette Boyd
0161 787 8600
jeanette.boyd@mandbf.org.uk

27 February 2009

About the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) provides guidance and support to organisations and practitioners involved in mentoring and befriending. As the **national strategic body**, MBF also works to influence policy and practice in the sector and across government.

MBF currently represents over 3,000 projects in the VCS and public sector, this figure continues to rise as mentoring and befriending becomes increasingly seen as an effective way of tackling social exclusion.

As a **strategic partner of the Office of the Third Sector** within the Cabinet Office, MBF provides a co-ordinated national and regional infrastructure support including leadership, training, networking, resources and best-practice guidance to the mentoring and befriending community in England. It works in partnership with other voluntary sector infrastructure bodies and through its Regional Advisory Group structure, is able to involve and engage with mentoring and befriending providers and represent their views to government.

MBF sets standards of best practice for mentoring and befriending projects and awards the **Approved Provider Standard**, the national benchmark for **safe and effective practice**.

Our **vision** is of a society where the potential for mentoring and befriending to transform peoples' lives and communities is fully realised and where mentoring and befriending is seen as part of mainstream volunteering strategy.

For further information please see www.mandbf.org.uk

Response to the consultation questions

General points

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Big Lottery's consultation in order to help influence their future funding plans and priorities. As the national strategic body supporting mentoring and befriending across England, we recently undertook a survey to assess the current funding climate and to identify the main issues faced by mentoring and befriending projects. The survey showed that more than a quarter of the projects who responded (28%), currently receive funding from the Big Lottery which indicates how significant this funding is to mentoring and befriending activity and MBF hopes that the Big Lottery will continue to be a strong supporter into the future. With an increased move towards contracting/tendering for funds the grants that the Big Lottery fund are now even more important. Some of the views revealed by projects through the survey are represented in the answers given below.

Responses to consultation questions

UK 1.1 Do you agree that the theme of transitions provides a useful starting point for our funding and UK 1.2 Do you agree that the theme of isolation provides a useful starting point for our funding

MBF welcomes the themes of 'transitions' and 'isolation' as useful starting points for Big Lottery funding as they provide a close fit with the aims of many mentoring and befriending projects. projects are set up in response to the needs of individuals at times of transition e.g., this might include transition to adulthood, independent living, education and employment. Client groups might be refugees, young people in care, ex-offenders and offenders, disabled people, students etc. Also, in tackling

isolation, befriending projects make a major contribution by supporting a range of people including older people, carers, those with a disability/illness or mental health problem. The outcomes from mentoring and befriending projects aim to produce benefits which may include improving self-esteem and confidence, raising aspirations, reducing isolation, empowering individuals to move forwards and make positive lifestyle choices – all of which impact on the individual and ultimately the communities around them. Many project evaluations and research study findings provide evidence of the successes of mentoring and befriending in this area which MBF can provide.

UK 1.3 Are there other themes you would suggest?

“Widening participation” could be another useful theme as a starting point for funding decisions. Widening access and participation for under-represented groups is closely connected with that of social inclusion and impacts on many voluntary and community groups. Ensuring that all individuals reach their full potential is central to mentoring and befriending and the personal support that is offered. Broad categories such as raising aspirations or positive role models could be considered.

UK 2.1 Do you agree we should have a greater focus in our funding to benefit those most in need?

MBF agrees that the Big Lottery should focus in the main on people who are most in need or disadvantaged and where support has been identified as helpful for them. Mentoring and befriending projects work closely with those at the margins of society (disaffected young people, people with mental health issues and refugees are just some examples). Smaller, local projects, working at the grassroots in their communities, are best placed to deliver services such as mentoring and befriending to those identified as most in need. MBF therefore welcomes the open funding programmes with broad outcomes that Big Lottery

provides and we support continuation of this type of programme alongside targeted funding.

We hope that the Big Lottery will continue to ensure that smaller projects can receive funding as they provide much needed support to the most disadvantaged groups in our society. As competition for funding intensifies, our research indicates that it is these smaller specialised providers that are losing out.

In addition, mentoring and befriending projects that work with specific client groups tell us that they are often considered “unfashionable to fund” or not high on policy agendas e.g., mental health, BME and older people were offered as examples. MBF feels that there should be a focus on monitoring of funding to ensure that funding reaches a diverse range of different needs groups and that the Big Lottery links its funding to regional priorities to ensure that those most in need are supported.

With the current economic downturn, voluntary and community sector projects are even more vulnerable and funding should be secured to support projects during this difficult time. There has been an increased demand for mentoring and befriending activities and the need for projects supporting people into education and employment, dealing with debt and mental health issues or homeless people for example may require funding as the demand increases with the economic climate. Also, mentoring and befriending projects provide valued support to individuals in signposting them to local services where appropriate which will play an increasingly significant role as demand for services increase.

UK2.2 Tell us if you think BIG should have a different focus

No response given

UK 3.1 How can BIG best help build lasting partnerships and networks that support communities and people most in need?

MBF supports partnership working both cross-sector and between sectors and would like to highlight the importance of partnerships and networks as a means to promote collaboration and sharing of good practice. It is imperative for partnerships to build strong and effective relationships with the communities and people they hope to support.

MBF has built up good regional links with the Big Lottery regional offices across England through our own network of regional co-ordinators and we hope that we can build on this to help raise awareness of the benefits of mentoring and befriending and its impact further. Working with Big Lottery and other major funders in this way will help strengthen learning, understanding and move our priorities forward. Any opportunities for further collaboration with MBF would be welcome e.g., joint networking events to bring projects together that have been funded to share good practice.

Whilst recognising the importance of partnership working, MBF would also like to stress that smaller projects can face difficulties in getting involved with. The Big Lottery needs to recognise the value of smaller, local networks and partnerships in addition to the larger ones. Support in helping the smaller projects build partnerships at all levels would also be welcomed. We see this as particularly relevant with the increase in competitive tendering and the increase in contracts at the expense of grants and the difficulties small organisations face in competing for these contracts when there hasn't been the investment to improve their capacity to do so.

MBF would be happy to develop our communication with Big Lottery commissioning officers to work in partnership to develop guidelines for assessors and share knowledge about the Approved Provider Standard (APS), MBF's quality standard for safe and effective practice in mentoring and befriending service provision. Those mentoring and befriending projects that have achieved APS are demonstrating that they are sustainable, operate safe and effective practices and are well managed. We believe that the Approved Provider Standard is something that the Big Lottery can use as a benchmark to reduce the risks for themselves when looking at which projects to fund.

UK 3.2 How can we get better at engaging with the private sector

Building networks and forums where different sectors, including the private sector, can talk about how to work together better to support projects in communities would be valuable. Promoting the value of mentoring and befriending and the benefits of volunteering for private sector organisations and their employees and providing case study examples of successful engagement between these sectors would be helpful.

Big Lottery should encourage collaboration between the private and voluntary sectors as part of its funding strategy so that resources, skills and expertise could be harnessed from the private sector and used to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector.

MBF would be interested in providing a brokerage service for private sector employees wanting to volunteer in mentoring and befriending projects and this might be one way of engaging positively with this sector.

UK3.3 Are there opportunities for joint funding that BIG should take up

No response given

UK4 After 2012, when our 60-70 per cent undertaking ends, should we continue to guarantee that a percentage of our funding goes to the voluntary and community sector?

MBF requests that the Big Lottery guarantees the continued minimum of 60-70% of its funding to the voluntary and community sector with a guarantee of 100% the ideal. Local projects working in the voluntary and community sector are often best placed to deliver the outcomes of Big Lottery funding to people most in need, as many mentoring and befriending projects are able to demonstrate. The added value of volunteer based projects in working with the most hard to reach groups should be recognised and encouraged. To do this more targeted funding will be required, particularly with the current economic challenges that are facing the sector.

As to the future possibility of funding schools, we work with many schools implementing peer mentoring programmes for children and young people. We believe that every school should establish one-to-one mentoring, peer mentoring and/or buddying approaches for every child so that all young people are provided with the opportunity to succeed at an early stage in life. We feel that Big Lottery could offer funding to school mentoring schemes that are not likely to be funded by their local education authority e.g., projects using adult volunteers from business in the community. Overall, we feel that a strong and well-resourced voluntary and community sector should be the priority.

UK5 Over and above giving out grants, what would make BIG a better funder in the way we work?

The Big Lottery should continue to offer clear guidance, timescales, information and personal contact and also to ensure there is good understanding at the

assessor level about mentoring and befriending and its potential and impact. Our recent survey with projects identified that the development of closer relationships between projects and funders was hugely beneficial in terms of developing stronger outcomes and the contribution that projects working with hard to reach groups make.

MBF would be willing to facilitate links between projects and Big Lottery at a regional level and to help promote good practice in areas such as bid writing, monitoring and evaluation, and project reporting.

Highlighting benefits of successful projects and helping to build an evidence base that can help support future funding applications will help to ensure that future funding builds upon good practice and avoids re-inventing the wheel. MBF would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the Big Lottery to facilitate this.

As highlighted earlier, we believe that there is also scope for the Big Lottery to encourage funding applications from organisations that have achieved and/or are working towards the MBF Approved Provider Standard. We have helped to develop assessment tools for funders based on the standards which are designed to support the assessment of funding applications.

We also believe that mentoring and befriending projects, particularly the smaller ones, would benefit from investment to improve their capacity to compete for contracts. We believe that some Big Lottery funding could be directed at building the capacity of smaller voluntary organisations to compete thereby encouraging their sustainability. We would be happy to work with Big Lottery to develop appropriate training and/or toolkits in support of this objective.

MBF would also encourage more dialogue between the Big Lottery and the sector to ensure that there is clear understanding on both sides around funding expectations and outcomes. We would specifically encourage Big Lottery to visit a range of mentoring and befriending projects to see at firsthand how they operate, what outcomes they are achieving to raise understanding and awareness about the difference that mentoring and befriending can make. Projects have also told us about the effectiveness of Big Lottery application forms and MBF requests that they are kept simple, straightforward and outcome focused.

UK6 Should we aim to fund fewer projects, but fund for a longer period? Or have we got the balance about right?

MBF thinks the balance is about right. Mentoring and befriending projects tell us that they need longer-term funding (with the norm being for three years) but that a range of grant options are desirable. The value of Awards for All as a small grants provider has been recognised by many projects but some of these would also welcome opportunities for longer term funding.

Although innovation and new ideas also need to be funded, MBF would like to see more projects that have been successful and can demonstrate an ongoing need obtain continuation funding without having to create 'new' aspects to their service in order to secure grants. Sustainability for projects is a big issue and should be recognised in the priorities for future funding. Longer term funding gives projects the ability to plan better, retain staff and achieve better outcomes. It also enables organisation to develop more sustainable funding strategies.

Full cost recovery has also been highlighted as an ongoing issue for organisations providing mentoring and befriending services. Big Lottery needs to encourage organisations to plan for full cost recovery so that services like mentoring and

befriending are costed on a sustainable basis.

UK7 Do you think BIG should take more risks with our funding to promote innovative solutions?

Some Big Lottery funding should be available to fund new approaches and projects working with perceived 'higher risk' clients. However, it is also very important that BIG supports continuation funding for projects that are working well and want to continue and develop. Mentoring and befriending projects tell us that they feel there are more funds available for 'new' and 'innovative' projects and would like to see a more balanced funding environment.

In order for the Big Lottery to take risks, it needs to challenge perceptions around certain activities and client groups to ensure that they are adequately funded and represented. Mentoring and befriending projects have highlighted to us the gaps in funding for working with people with mental health issues, refugees, BME groups etc., so we would recommend that Big Lottery addresses this.

MBF also recognises that smaller organisations feel very vulnerable and should not be penalised because of their size. Many smaller projects are doing valuable work with those on the very margins of society and the very fact that they are at the grassroots and small in size enables them to do this. The economic downturn puts these smaller projects at even higher risk and the Big Lottery should look to make support for these projects a priority.

UK8 Are there areas beyond those described in BIG thinking, where you think it is important to operate at a UK level rather than at a country level?

No response given

UK9 Which ways of increasing public involvement do you think would work best?

Raising the profile of projects that have been funded and achieved their outcomes successfully would help. We would be willing to provide case studies and work with Big Lottery to develop an awareness raising campaign specifically around mentoring and befriending programmes to encourage more volunteers to get involved in this activity and help meet the increased demand for these services.

Mentoring and befriending activity in particular attracts individuals from all backgrounds and walks of life, and as such encourages active citizenship and increased public involvement. In addition, local volunteers and service users are often involved in the planning and decision making of mentoring and befriending services which is a great example of increasing civic engagement.

UK10 BIG is not restricted to distributing Lottery money alone. Are there other sources of funding that BIG would be the right organisation to manage, either on our own or in partnership?

MBF would welcome the Big Lottery's involvement in distributing funds from the Dormant Accounts Bill if it is enacted. We agree that the Big Lottery has the experience to manage this funding in the most effective way and ensure funding gets to those people and communities who need it most.