



Involving Lincs Survey

November - 2023

By HWLincs

Background

Over the last two years the Lincolnshire voluntary and community sector has spoken openly about the challenges they face in delivering vital support to local people. These challenges include:

- Volunteer availability
- Workforce recruitment and retention
- Disengagement of communities
- Accessing funding

To better understand the challenges the sector faces, Involving Lincs (IL) and HWLincs launched a countywide survey.

Over the coming months, members of IL will be sharing these compounding issues with both statutory and private sector organisations to explore ways of keeping our much needed voluntary and community sector alive.

*Listen to Sue Fortune,
Chair of Involving Lincs,
explain the aim of the
survey*

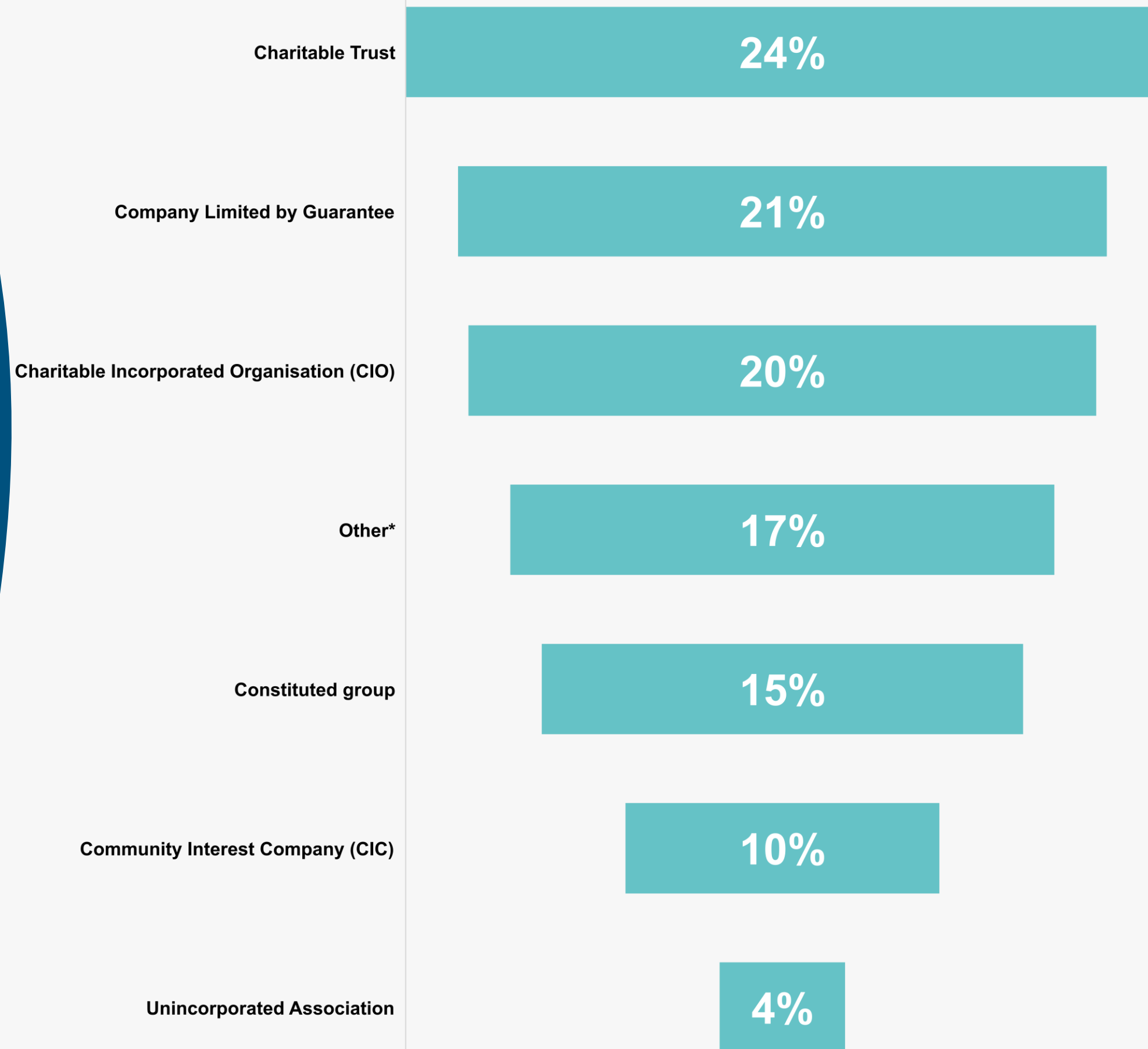


Who shared their views?

238 responses...

- The survey was distributed via the VCSE network and social media.
- The survey was open from 3rd July to 1st November 2023.
- Not all responses were complete, some groups only completed one priority area.
- We can see a good spread from the funded organisations right through to grass root.

What type of organisation are you?



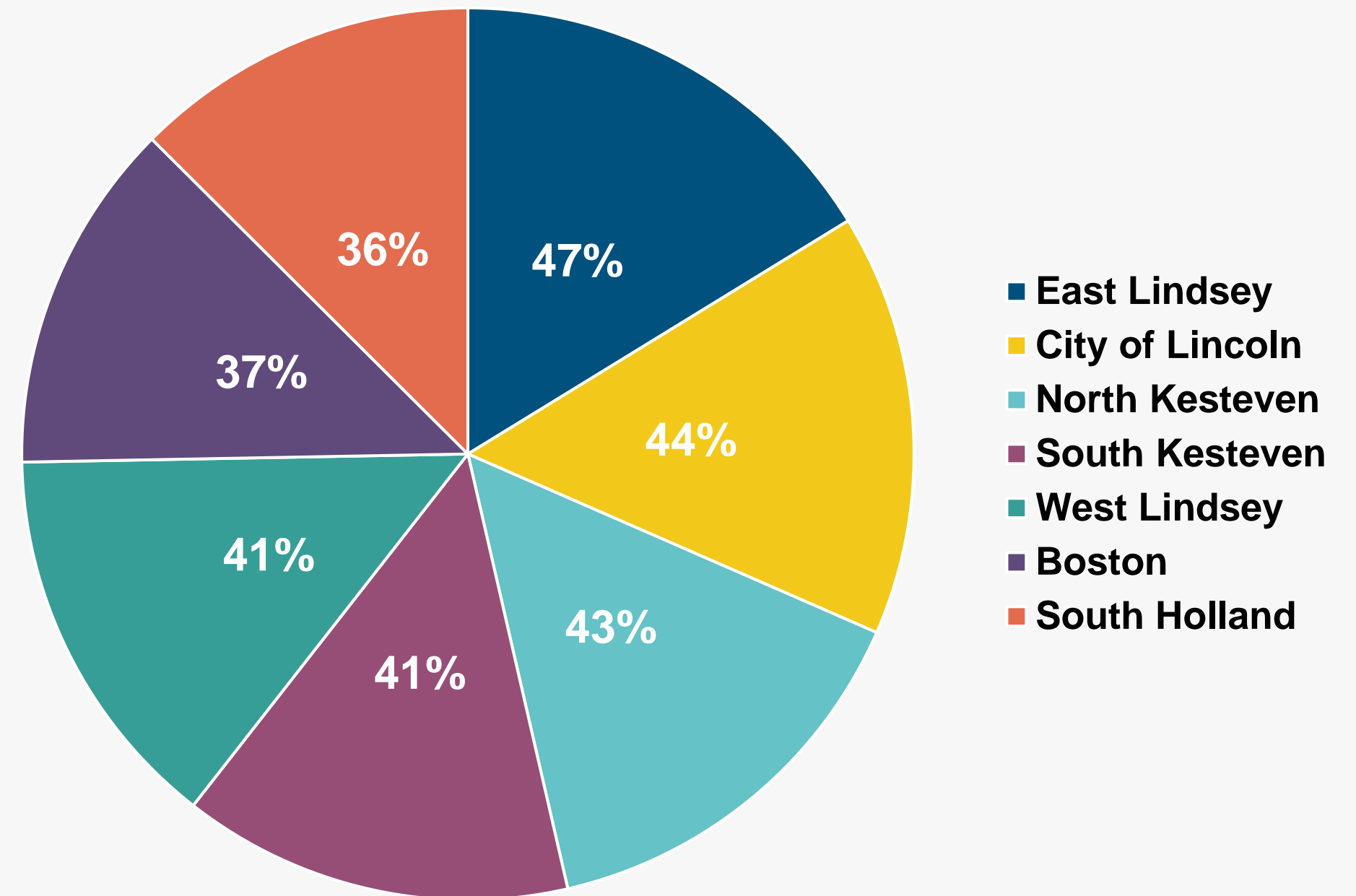
**Place of Worship, Resident's Association, Friend's Group, Sports Club, Not For Profit Voluntary Group, Educational Organisation etc.*

Locality

The following provides an overview of the locality the services cover.

Unsurprisingly there is a reasonable even split around the county, with a marginally higher concentration in East Lindsey but not a variation that substantiates any notable difference.

Which Lincolnshire district/s do you cover?

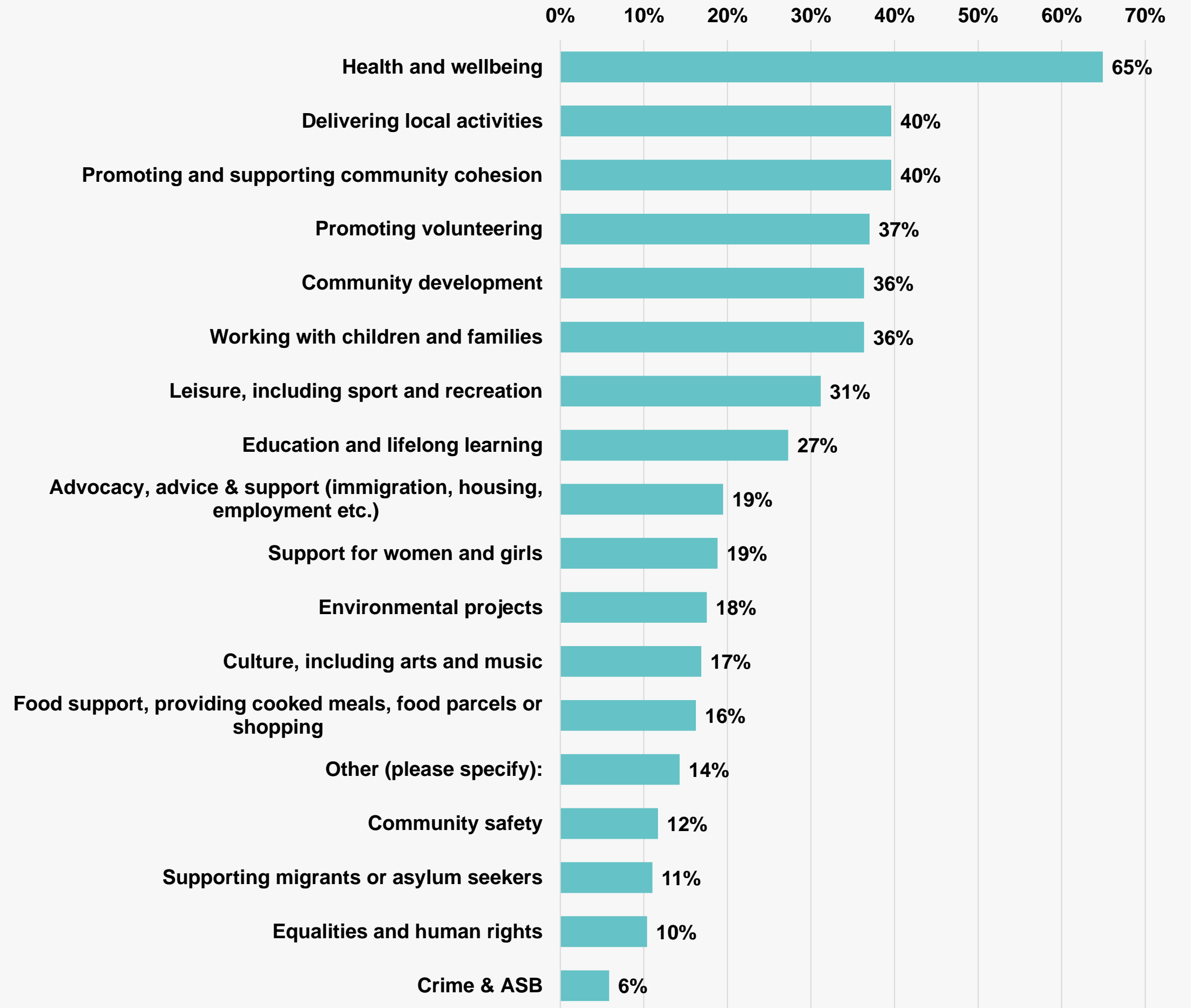


Service Areas

Top three service areas:

- Health and wellbeing - 65%
- Delivering local activities - 40%
- Promoting and supporting community cohesion - 40%

In which of these service areas does your organisation work (tick all that apply)?



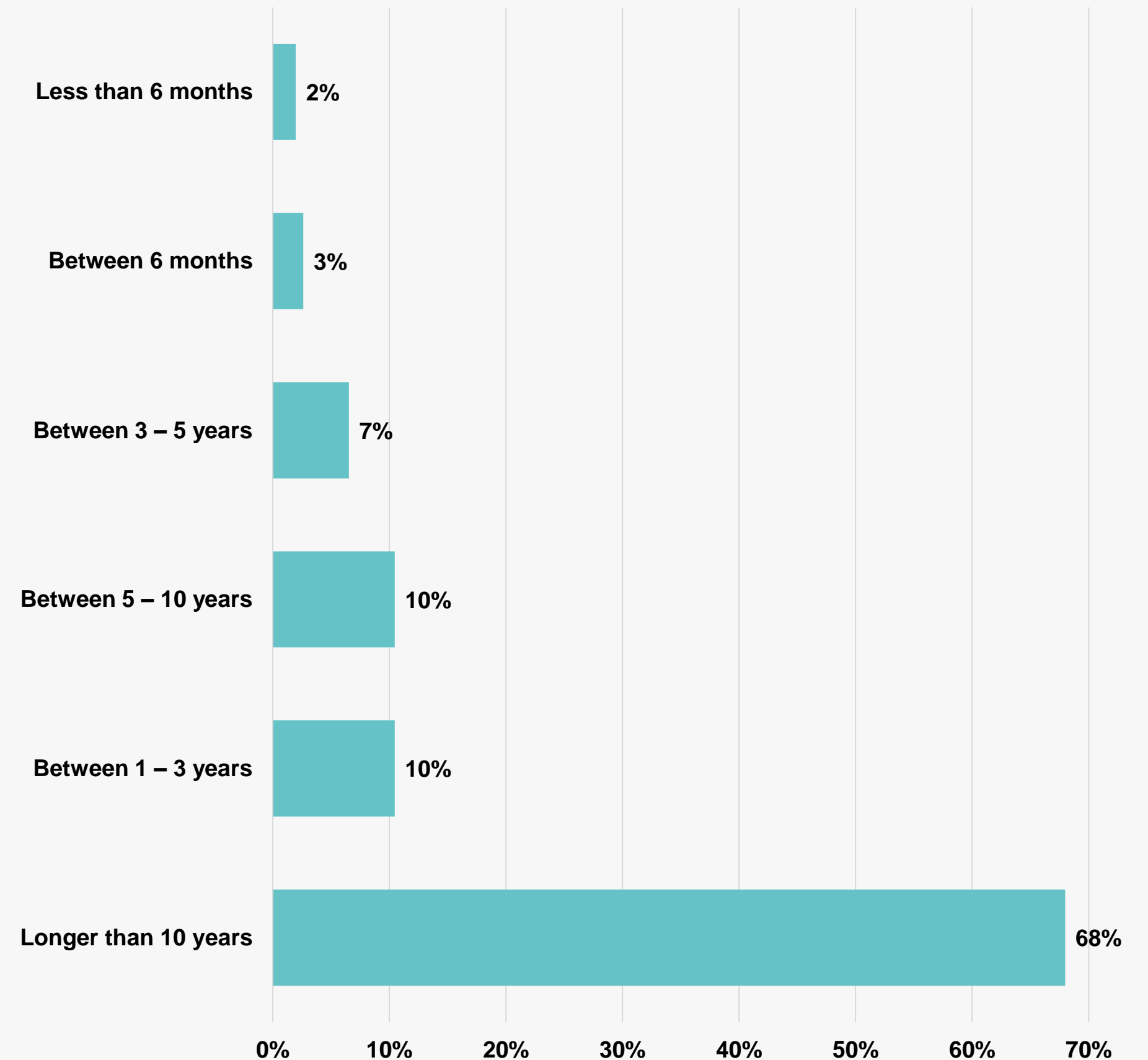
Time in operation

68%
have been
operating for
over 10 years

27%
have been
operating between
3 - 10 years

This shows a sector with established organisations.

How long have you been operating?



What you told us - Top Themes

Many of these issues were interlinked and had an affect on each other e.g. a limited number of volunteers impacted on project delivery and thus the ability to apply for funding.

Funding

Volunteers

Rising costs

Lack of engagement

Longevity

Staff

Trustees

Lack of collaboration



Funding

The issues raised in relation to funding included:



Lack of long term,
continuous and
sustainable funding



Funding only covers initial
projects/basic activity and not
long-term projects or salaries

27%
of all comments
related to
funding



Competition (everyone going
for the same pots of funding)



Time it takes to apply for
funding and hear outcomes
so becomes difficult to plan

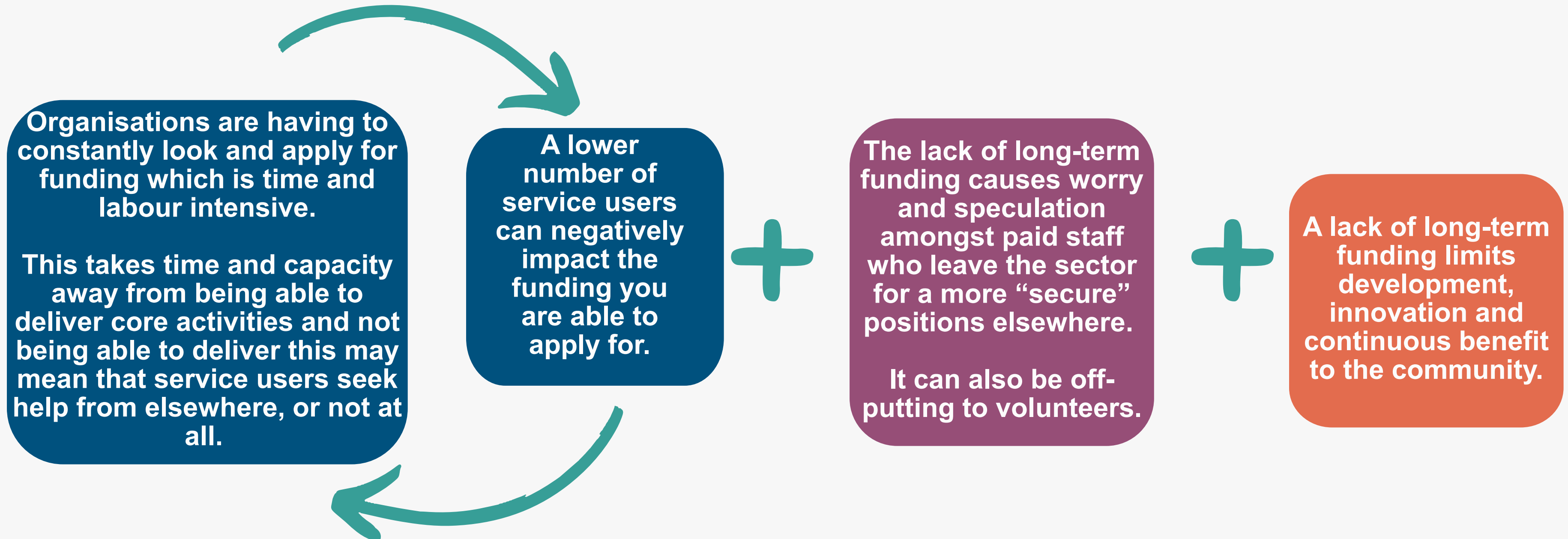


Difficulties writing stand-out
applications

Funding - Impact

Many noted a rise in demand for their service, but the lack of available funding meant they are struggling to cope with that demand.

The current funding landscape is highly competitive and mainly consists of short-term bids and often of low monetary value. For some this means they cannot cover basic costs, yet alone deliver a high-quality service which can evolve and develop further. The lack of long-term funding also means:



Funding – Impact - What the sector said

"Not having enough funding to increase the workforce to cope with expansion and increased demand for services."

"Balancing all of this at the same time as current service delivery and whilst there is an increase in demand and delivery cost but a decrease in workforce and volunteers. Impact lack of funding has on attracting staff and volunteers."

"Constantly spending time chasing funding opportunities. Lack of long-term funding available. High local competition for funds. Reluctance to fund programs with evidence of impact - focus on constantly creating new ideas."

"Reliance on short term funding or payment by results inhibits our opportunities for growth and innovation and leads to piecemeal delivery across the region."

"It limits our work, limits our ability to commit to longer term work, wastes time tracking down funding."

"Short term funding - the funding usually only just covers costs and doesn't allow for strategic development. The organisation must continually seek new business rather than sustained long term work with a relatively stable platform for delivery. Longer contracts would assist with sustainability."

"We have some really good ideas and some piloted projects but are unable to identify or succeed in getting suitable funds. Constantly aware of the deadlines and cessation of funding can impact on the ability to attract and retain good quality staff and volunteers."

"Longer term contracts that provide staff with more security. Currently staff often leave as the end of a contract approaches to ensure they remain employed."

Funding - Solutions

The following ideas were suggested to help mitigate some of the issues around funding: *(some of which are outside the control of the VCS)*



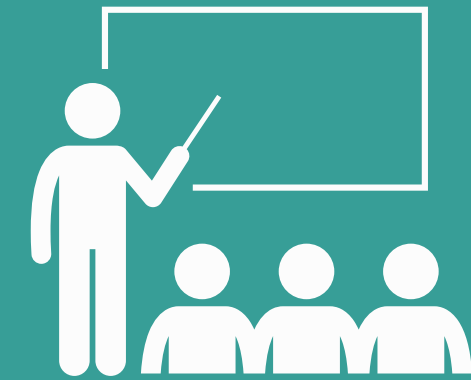
An increase in the number
longer term and more
sustainable bids



Higher monetary
value bids



A free and
accessible single
database of
funders and
grants



Support to write bids
that stand out in a
competitive market



Finding out the
outcomes of bids
more quickly



More opportunities
for group funding
applications which
are transparent and
not dominated by
the usual big
players



More flexible funding
opportunities e.g., chance
for charities to be involved
in planning commissioning



Financial relief structures
e.g., to help in situations
such as the rising cost of
living

Volunteers (inc. Trustees)

The key issues raised in relation to volunteers included:



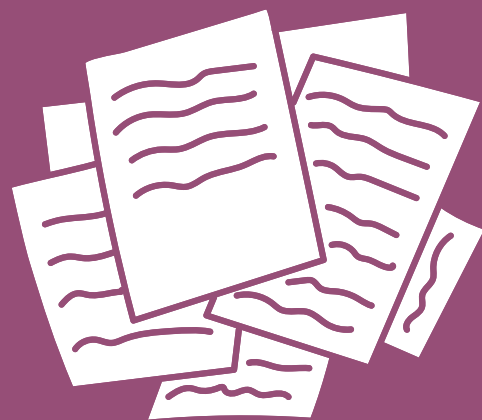
Lack of volunteers and trustees (limits service delivery)



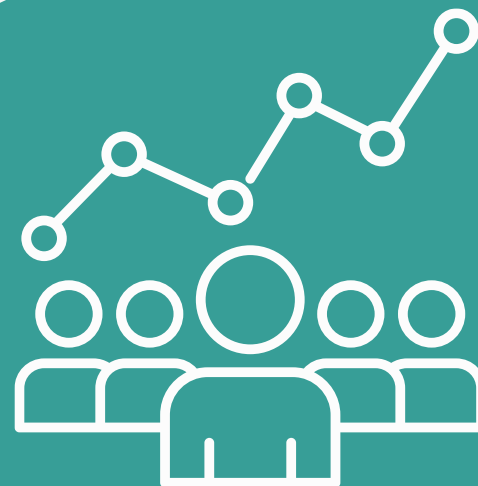
Difficulties engaging existing volunteers in projects and activities

24%

of all comments related to volunteers



Excessive training and checks are off-putting



Aging population of volunteers sees natural issues relating to aging (longevity)



Difficulties filling skill gaps and specific roles within volunteering, particularly within Trustees



Difficulties recruiting and retaining diverse volunteers

Volunteers - Impact- What the sector said

“Following COVID a number of our volunteers felt unable to return. This was due to health, age related issues and time. Lack of volunteers help with events and our community fundraising groups means we are not keeping up the awareness of the service and so attendance at our fundraising events has been limited.”

“Many people want to volunteer but feel overwhelmed by the training and checks involved and end up not volunteering.”

“Aging volunteer workforce. Not having enough volunteers for specific roles. This is always a problem as we find it is the same few people who help all of the time.”

“Due to shortage of volunteer drivers, we are having to turn some clients down for their requests for journeys for medical appointments.”

“The volunteers we have are older people. They have more time to give to activities but physically are not always able to deliver.”

“Reliance on small core of volunteers which limits availability and range of volunteers to match with clients
Volunteers are additional to paid staff but provided 'added value' for clients with whom they work.”

“Without adequate availability of Trustees with skills we are required to outsource some of the areas for expertise and secondly we are not representative of the community we serve.”

"We are seeing natural patterns of people leaving in clusters due to older age-related issues, but they aren't being replaced by a readily available volunteer network"

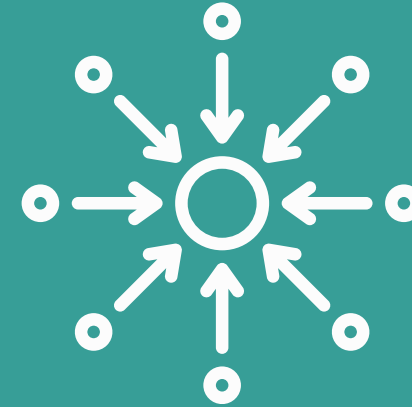
Volunteers - Solutions



A Lincolnshire wide recruitment campaign (focusing on young people)



Promote working in the VCS sector



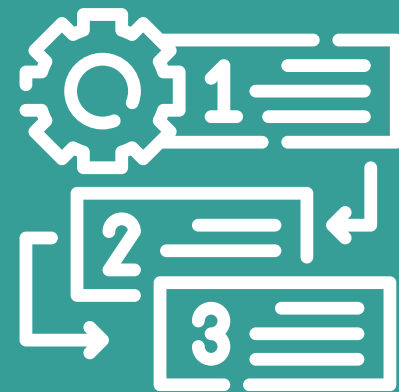
Central training hub and reduced cost of training



Greater use of business networks and campaigns for employers to strengthen volunteer programs within workplace policies



Build up peoples' confidence to volunteer



Volunteering scheme/programme for those who are unemployed



A communal list/group of volunteers who help across multiple organisations



Relief bank of volunteers

Volunteers - Solutions- What the sector said

“A Lincolnshire wide campaign encouraging young people to volunteer could be helpful.”

“It can help to have a bank of relief volunteers to step in last minute and continue to support all our volunteers, make them feel valued and part of a team.”

“Increased numbers of volunteers and better access to training in the area - ideally at reduced cost for volunteers or the organisation they serve.”

“Promotion of volunteering on a wider scale/business initiatives to release staff for volunteering/unemployed to provide some volunteer time etc.”

“Access to a wider pool of volunteers across the county who are able to work across several organisations.”

“Allow individuals who are unemployed to have structured volunteering schemes that they can attend and operate a system that allows them to train within certain roles, under volunteering structures and this will encourage them to want to help others. Incorporate this as compulsory towards them gaining certain allowances.”

“Promotion of VCS as a career option. Employment support programmes to promote volunteering opportunities in VCS as way of developing skills for future job opportunities.”

“Promotion of benefits of volunteering, and volunteering opportunities, across county. Continued training opportunities for volunteer coordinators / opportunities to network.”

Collaboration

“Charitable/community organisations continue to fight each other for the limited funding that is available rather than working together to create collaborative bids. This reduces the overall effectiveness of the services that can be delivered to the community.”

“Better collaboration and joint working between organisations. It feels like a competition at times when in reality we should all be helping each other out.”

“There is a lack of County-wide understanding as to the overlaps and gaps in charitable/community services.”

There should be an over-arching organization that has an holistic view of the charitable/community landscape across the County that can bring like-minded charitable/community organizations together to work on collaborative projects and initiatives.”

“Better connection between statutory bodies and voluntary sector and a real working together, hands on input on the ground and in our groups.”

At present organisations are competing for volunteers, funding and opportunities.

Some felt that currently there was a lack of collaboration between organisations, which was seen as a wasted opportunity and detrimental to the sector and community it serves.

Others also felt disconnected from the VCSE.

Collaboration

There were calls for:

- **Identification of the skills, coverage and gaps of the sector.**
- **More and better collaboration and harness be synergistic in the approach to funding opportunities for all.**
- **The VCSE to be more visible.**
- **A better connection between statutory bodies, businesses and the voluntary sector.**
- **A go to person for advice and guidance on e.g. funding raising, recruitment and legal matters.**

“We feel disconnected from VCS in county which impacts on collaborative working, development of partnerships etc.”

“A fully transparent review of VCS umbrella organisations with input out of county from a national CVS organisation. We do not engage them currently due to this malign presence.”

“An over-arching organization that focusses on the coordination/value of charitable/community services in order to build a single, trusted and accessible picture that allows a future strategy to be developed to ensure funding and available resources are maximized across the County.”

“Overarching task groups that can focus on national events and topics that can feed into and resource local charities could help to save time where there is little capacity and avoid multiple orgs doing the same piece of work in response. Shared learning / resourcing.”

“Practical advice being available to charities. It would be helpful to have a panel of experts available to provide advice on legal affairs, buildings, insurance to name a few. Utility Aid is a great example of an organisation that provides advice and guidance as well as setting up contracts on behalf of voluntary organisations.”

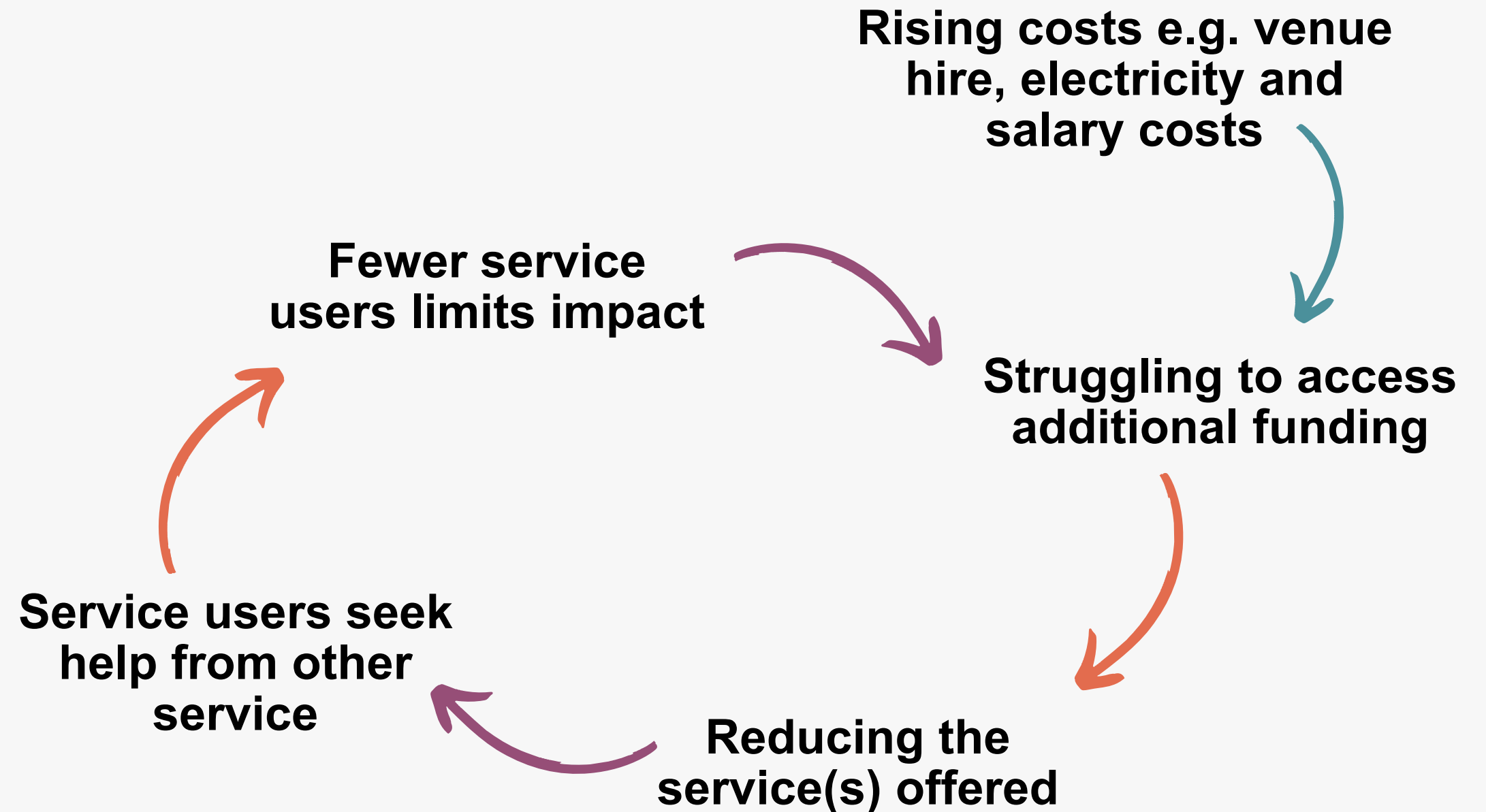
Rising costs

In addition to funding in general, comments cited concerns around spiralling running costs e.g. venue hire/rent energy costs. Some noted a rise in demand for their service, but a rise too in delivery costs with no extra funding available.

The money to cover these costs is often taken from the budget set aside for development. Furthermore, rising costs are negatively impacting the service(s) some can offer, which some fear will lead to a dangerous cycle.

The following was suggested to help tackle this issue:

- Separate funding/grants to cover these costs.
- Charitable rates for venues, electricity and legal fees.



Knock-on impact of rising costs.

Rising costs - What the sector said

“Funding for our group's premises. Premises have been the biggest issue. We need to move to new premises immediately. The cheapest we found, the size we need, cost 18.000, additionally electricity costs. We cannot fundraise from our clubs so much. Premises mean stability and sustainability for our group. Without premises- community Hub-,we cannot run children's clubs, ESOL sessions, give support for the group. Without having funding for premises, we cannot sign a new lease contract because do not know how much funds we will raise from different projects. Most of our events, support and projects are free.”

“Running costs especially electricity. Constant fight to balance budget prevents resources being used for development of new community services.”

“Premises are cold in winter. Cost of heating is prohibitive. This means the valuable social benefits of groups meeting together is compromised.”

“Managing increased energy bills, both gas and electric, despite having entered into reasonable contracts.”

“The cost of overheads e.g. electricity for the visitor centre rooms for visitors and the museum's stores. Some of our buildings were built for the duration of WW2 so are single skin and not build to last.”

“Increased demand, bringing with it increased running costs.”

“Encourage businesses to rent premises to organisations that are working in the community to assist people, especially some of their employees, and offer incentive schemes from the government to enable affordable rents, legal fees, accountancy fees to be given relief.”

Lack of engagement

Beside from some organisations struggling to engage volunteers in their work, others shared they are struggling to involve the public/service users. A widespread sense of apathy was noted. There were concerns that this too would create a negative cycle. Fewer people getting involved in surveys or using a service could reduce the impact of an organisation which could be detrimental to accessing funding.

“Apathy amongst the population to get involved in projects (even those talking about why people do not want to take part).”

“A lack of engagement creates less meaningful and substantive evidence to create influence to enact change. It also creates a divide between statutory/commercial organizations and the communities they serve.”

“People not getting involved in training, workshops or focus groups etc reduces the 'power' of our work in the sense that 10 people taking part in a focus groups looks better than 5 people taking part. The data could be richer and of better quality with the 5, but commissioners seem to get hung up on numbers as opposed to the actual content.”

“Understanding why there is widespread apathy and how to engage with people.”

“Apathy. Lack of support from local people.”



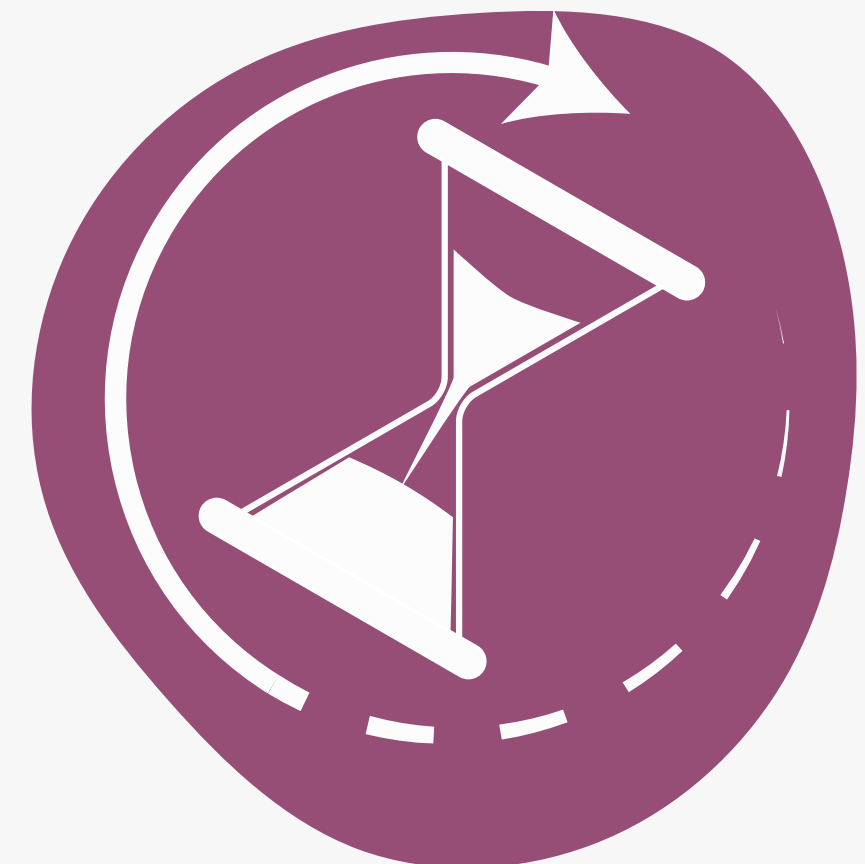
Furthermore, the current climate of short-term, low monetary value bids is also negatively impacting the ability to build trust, long term relationships and conduct meaningful engagement. Building trust is key to engaging with seldom heard communities.

“We want to ensure we hear from those whose voices are often not heard. We want to ensure these groups are represented and included. The best way to do this is to build a relationship with these groups, however, this takes time. Also, there is an issue of capacity, having a close-working relationship with all these groups is limited by our capacity. We have tried to work with partner organisations to include these populations, however, some still prefer to work in silos. Instead of working together for a common goal it feels some still want all the credit, or funding to themselves.”

Longevity

The compounding issues of lack of funding, volunteers and collaboration, difficulties recruiting and retaining trustees and staff and rising energy costs were all seen to potentially limit the longevity of services, projects and organisations themselves.

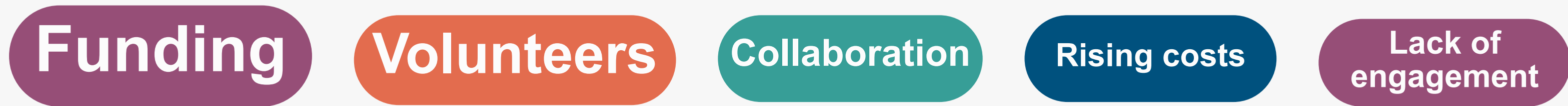
Concerns about viability and the future were then also causing people to leave the sector which then limits capacity and service delivery, and the cycle starts again.



Concluding comments

As a result of the findings shared it is hoped members of IL will be sharing these compounding issues with both statutory and private organisations to explore ways of keeping our much needed voluntary and community sector alive.

Of the 238 organisations that shared their views through this survey, they shared the same core themes.



Funding and volunteers were by far the biggest concerns raised. All these issues have a compounding, potential recurrent impact.

- Limited funding can deter paid staff and volunteers from joining or staying with an organisation.
- A lack of manpower may mean organisations have to scale back service delivery.
- Service delivery is also affected by rising costs.
- Reduced service delivery can contribute to a lack of engagement and service users seek help from elsewhere.
- Low numbers can limit impact and the ability to apply for funding, which becomes a cyclical challenge.

Concluding comments

The following ideas were suggested by respondents to help solve/mitigate some of these issues.

Funding

An increase in the number longer term, more sustainable and higher monetary value bids.

A database of funders and grants.

Financial relief structures.

Support to write bids.

More group funding applications.

More flexible funding opportunities e.g. chance for charities to be involved in commissioning.

Volunteers

A county recruitment campaign.

Promote working in the VCSE sector.

Central training hub and reduce cost of training.

Build up peoples' confidence to volunteer.

Volunteering scheme/programme for those who are unemployed.

A communal list/group of volunteers who help across multiple organisations.

Collaboration

Identification of the skills, coverage and gaps of the sector.

More and better collaboration and harness this to apply for joint funding.

The VCSE to be more visible.

A better connection between statutory bodies, businesses and the voluntary sector.

A go to person for advice and guidance on e.g. funding raising, recruitment and legal matters.

Rising costs

Separate funding/grants to cover these costs.

Charitable rates for venues, electricity and legal fees.



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