

GAPS & SOLUTIONS executive summary

London is one of the most diverse cities in the world. It needs a third sector that reflects and represents its diversity to deliver

a more equal society for all of us. *Gaps & solutions* considers how support for London's third sector might be developed to build a more diverse and integrated third sector where the needs of frontline equality organisations are better met. It examines the respective roles of specialist equalities and mainstream support organisations and highlights the value of frontline equality organisations, particularly in addressing inequality and strengthening community cohesion.

What are frontline equality organisations?

Frontline equality organisations are those that are ‘led by and for’ specific communities and people who experience discrimination including Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people, children and young people, disabled people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, older people,

people of particular religion or belief, refugees and migrants, and women. They are sometimes referred to as communities of interest and ‘single groups’. Frontline organisations often require support, sometimes referred to as infrastructure, to become more effective and to have a stronger voice.

What is the purpose of frontline equality organisations?

Equality organisations have significant, positive impact on service-users that mainstream organisations find difficult to achieve. As most mainstream organisations would attest, whilst they may in theory provide services which are open to all, they cannot in practice cater for certain of the most marginalised groups. It would be unfair to expect one organisation with

finite resources to deliver all the support services for all the different types of organisations in their geographical area.

Equality organisations empower and fully respond to needs because they understand, and are able to empathise with, service users’ experiences. They are critical to achieving equality of opportunity, which depends on more than meeting needs, and, crucially, on the opportunity to take action and have a collective voice. They are very good at meaningfully engaging isolated communities and bringing them to a position where they can take part in, and shape, wider public and social life.

Despite their value and assets, within the third sector they are often marginalised, undervalued and do not receive adequate support. They are increasingly asked to justify their existence, which is under threat, particularly since the Commission on Integration and Cohesion’s recommendation against funding ‘single groups’.

Support for frontline equality organisations in London

Frontline equality organisations share many support needs with other frontline organisations, for example, governance, ICT, performance and fundraising. Mainstream support organisations have an important role to play in meeting these general needs. As a result of the specialised nature of their work, frontline equality organisations also have additional support

needs that are not widely understood. BAME women's organisations, for example, may have support needs arising from specialist work with women who face domestic violence and have no recourse to public funds. Specialist equalities support organisations are best placed to respond to these distinct support needs, because of their better understanding of equality communities and organisations and the unique challenges they face. They are also needed to represent and strengthen the voice of equality communities and their organisations.

The level of support available to frontline equality organisations varies across equality sectors and boroughs. *Gaps & solutions* reveals a significant proportion do not receive adequate support, impacting on their efficiency and ability to serve and advocate on behalf of their communities.

Whilst there has been some excellent work from mainstream support organisations, there is evidence that frontline equality organisations still face barriers in accessing mainstream support. Typical barriers include:

- frontline equality organisations lacking awareness of mainstream support;
- mainstream support organisations lacking understanding of the ways frontline equality organisations need services delivered (for example, a City Parochial Foundation report found small BAME disabled people's organisations need more intensive support over longer periods than is usually provided by mainstream support organisations);
- mainstream community development workers lacking the support they need to further their understanding of frontline equality organisations as well as equality, diversity and human rights.

As well as barriers in accessing mainstream support, frontline equality organisations also have varying degrees of access to sufficient specialist equalities support. They are, for example, very often under-represented on democratic structures such as Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) and within Local Area Agreements (LAAs), on many ChangeUp Consortia and to funders. *Gaps & solutions* further considers the additional specialist equalities support needed to overcome this under-representation as well as meet unmet specialist needs.

The method

Gaps & solutions is based on information gathered by HEAR since January 2005 through two consultation events, 36 steering group meetings, and HEAR's equality appraisal of ChangeUp Consortia Plans in 2006 and 2008. It builds on HEAR's initial *Gaps and Solutions* report of 2006 and a report commissioned by Capacitybuilders in July 2007 which looked at the needs of London's voluntary and community sub-sectors, focusing largely on equality sectors. It also draws on key findings from existing research about the value and support needs of London's frontline equality organisations – no easy task given the diversity of London's equality sector.

Recommendations to improve support for frontline equality organisations

These recommendations involve frontline equality organisations, specialist equalities and mainstream support organisations, ChangeUp and Capacitybuilders bodies including National Support Services and Consortia, central and local government and other statutory agencies, London Funders and the Equality and Human

Rights Commission. HEAR plans to hold an event in Autumn 2008 to bring these actors together to further develop, and then start the process of implementing, these recommendations.

Acknowledge that discrimination exists and be open in discussing its impact. Even if it's difficult for some people to do, this is a critical step to improving understanding.

Recognise equality can be a complicated concept to grasp for those not experiencing inequality. By recognising their roles as educators, those working for equalities organisations can create an atmosphere which fosters open and frank discussion.

Increase opportunities for networking between specialist equalities and mainstream support organisations to exchange expertise and consider how they can collaborate to improve support for frontline equality organisations, and develop lasting working relationships.

Use the support available through the National Equality Partnership to improve understanding and joint working between specialist equalities and mainstream support sectors. The National Equality Partnership is the new ChangeUp National Support Service on equality and diversity that enables support organisations to better understand equality, diversity and human rights and frontline equality organisations. There is more information at www.improvingsupport.org.uk/equality/.

Draw on the expertise of equality organisations to support mainstream support organisations and Consortia to improve their understanding of frontline equality organisations as well as the principles of equality and human rights.

Disseminate information on good practice on equality and human rights in the third sector.

Encourage frontline equality organisations to access mainstream support, where it is likely to meet their needs, particularly those least likely to perhaps because of fear of discrimination.

Encourage support for, and development of single-strand and cross-strand networks of equalities organisations to share good practice, provide a voice, and to engage with mainstream third sector and statutory agencies. These would be at the local, sub-regional and regional level as appropriate.

Use cross-strand networks of equalities organisations to strengthen links with the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Use the race, disability and gender duties to encourage public bodies to support equalities organisations to increase the voices of BAME and disabled people and women.

Develop a communications project to highlight and gather further evidence of the value of organisations led by and for equality communities. This project could build on the Why Women? campaign (www.whywomen.org.uk), which demonstrates the benefits of women's organisations for women and society as a whole.

Further develop human rights support available to London's equality sectors, so human rights tools can be used to address the inequalities experienced by their communities. There is currently a very low level of awareness about human rights and huge gaps in terms of the support available to address this.

Take a proactive approach to the uptake of grants by equality organisations, including actions to overcome the barriers groups face in fundraising, for example, by using outreach and more accessible application processes.

Provide more long-term investment to both mainstream and specialist equalities support organisations in order to provide more sustainability and stability in the support available to frontline equality organisations.

Finally – there is some excellent work already out there, so build on it. We look forward to working with you.



HEAR is a network of equality organisations that represent people who experience discrimination including BAME people, children and young people, disabled people, LGBT people, older people, people of particular religion or belief, refugees and migrants, and women. It also includes organisations interested in using human rights to address inequality and mainstream support organisations. It is underpinned by the belief that people who have direct experience of inequality and discrimination are best placed to develop strategies to achieve equality. HEAR is concerned with the support available to, and issues affecting, equality organisations in the third sector. It was originally set up as the equalities and human rights sub-group of the ChangeUp London Regional Consortium to ensure issues for frontline equality organisations were included in plans to develop support for London's third sector.



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The full *Gaps & solutions* report, by Barbara Nea and Dinah Cox on behalf of HEAR, was funded by Capacitybuilders. It is available to download from the publications pages at www.rota.org.uk. For a hard copy or alternative formats contact ROTA on 020 7729 1310.