



**Developing grants that transform lives within the
Armed Forces community:
Results from our consultation activities**





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Introduction

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust makes grants which deliver real change to Armed Forces Communities. We are keen to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to help us develop and inform our activities. On 20th January 2022; the Trust launched an online survey to inform the Trust of views relating to funding programmes. Themes of grant size, grant length, impact and sustainability were explored. The findings from this consultation helped to shape the Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities programme and Force for Change programmes which launched in April 2022.

Further consultation activity was undertaken in May 2022 with a series of round table discussions to inform the development of the Transformational Grants programme. This programme launched in July 2022.

Summary of the Survey Results

The survey which ran in January 2022 resulted in the highest ever response to a survey or consultation run by the Trust with 465 responses. They were evenly split between people taking part as individuals (49.4%) and organisations (50.6%). Veterans and local charities had strong representation in the data.

We asked about the size of grants we should make. There is overall support for grants in all size categories. There is significant support for medium size grants, but very small and very large grants have strong support. It is interesting that there was strong support for microgrants (grants of under £5000). These can be costly to administer. There was a very slight preference across all audiences for smaller grants to enable more awards to be made.

There was strong support for the concept of fixed level grants where all applicants apply for a fixed sum, but a sizable minority felt that they were not helpful. It may be a good idea for the Trust to offer a range of funding options across the programmes that it funds.

There was strongest support for grants over a two-year period, and distinct views that the Trust should not fund projects less than a year in length.

The most important issues for participants in respect of decisions about what projects to support was if there is evidence that the project is well planned; where there is a clear strategy to ensure that the project will have a lasting impact after the programme ends and whether veterans or Armed Forces families have shaped the project.

Within free text responses where participants could write their own views, there were significant and recurring themes on support for smaller organisations that may not have professional funders, the importance of involvement from veterans and their families, the length of grant, and themes of collaboration and partnership building.

Survey respondents strongly lent towards outcomes linked to the experiences and support given to specific beneficiaries, that can have an ongoing positive impact on their lives. Concepts on the ability of projects to seek ongoing funding did not score as strongly. This suggests that participants have a nuanced view of sustainability; with collaborative approaches that connect vulnerable beneficiaries to other sources of ongoing support being of particular importance.

A final free text question was asked to give participants the opportunity to raise other topics of importance to them. Findings include positive comments for the Trust and the recurring theme of support for smaller



Summary of the Roundtable discussions

The round table events were held online; and attended by 26 organisations.

In groups, detailed discussions were held on four key topics...

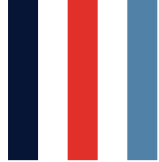
- **Is it better to make a small number of very large grants, or to fund a larger range of projects?**
- **What would be transformational in addressing hidden needs within Armed Forces communities?**
- **Should projects have to work collaboratively? What would this look like?**
- **What should be the ongoing legacy of the projects that we fund?**

The roundtable discussions were energised and engaging. Members of the Trust's Senior Management Team were in attendance. All groups discussed the same core themes, but there were important differences.

The core themes of consensus were...

- That the length of grant was far more important than size of grant (with significant support for grants of up to 5 years)
- Projects should be highly specific, and work collaboratively across sectors
- For projects to be transformational, they will require higher levels of resource
- Learning from projects should support wider policy changes
- Collaboration is crucial for successful delivery but it can take time to build effective partnerships
- The legacy of any grants is important- particularly ensuring that people don't feel like services are being 'taken away' at the end of the project
- Legacy approaches should explore mainstreaming of services, and this could include the project legacy being mainstreamed into other organisations

The Trust is most grateful to all the organisations who participated in the discussions.



How have we used the findings of the consultation activities?

The findings from the survey helped to directly shape the Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities and the Force for Change programmes.

Force for Change

Through this programme, we fund projects which make a real difference to Armed Forces communities locally. We will support projects that offer support to Armed Forces communities to help with needs that may not have been addressed in the past. This can also include funding for pilot projects or to try new ways of offering local support. It can also include projects that build on earlier work that an organisation has done. Grants of up to £10,000 are available.

Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities

This programme will award grants of up to £100,000 over a period of up to three years. For exceptional projects, larger grants may be available. We are looking for projects that are specific and targeted; and this could include addressing hidden needs, as well as needs that are more well known.

We are also looking for applications that can be clear about the evidence of why their project is needed, and how the impact of the project will continue after the grant has ended. We will be more likely to fund projects that focus on specific groups of people within Armed Forces communities, rather than more general approaches. We are also keen to see that the people who will benefit from the project have been able to shape how it will be delivered.

We used information from the survey; and from the roundtable discussions to inform the development of the Transformational Grants programme.

Transformational Grants

This programme will make between 5 and 7 grants of up to £300,000 towards innovative projects that have a national focus and can evidence that the project will deliver long term systemic change for specific unmet needs within Armed Forces communities. We are expecting to fund projects that demonstrate an intent for long term transformation which extends much further than the initial beneficiaries and the organisation receiving the grant to deliver systemic change. This may relate to how, what, where and by whom services are delivered in the future to this specific cohort or instigate wholly new strategic solutions. The application must describe how the impact of the project will continue after the grant has ended.

Applicants should be able to show how the people who will benefit from this project will be able to shape it; and that the project will work collaboratively with other organisations over the life of any grant.

Details of all grant programmes offered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust are available at our website www.covenantfund.org.uk

We will continue to use the insights from the consultation activities to shape our future work and further grant programmes that we may deliver.



Survey Results and Insights

What themes were being explored in the survey

The Trust was keen to explore the following

- **What sustainability means to different stakeholder groups**
- **Whether it is better to fund more projects; with smaller grants, or give larger grants to fewer projects**

The Covenant Fund 2022/23 programmes are likely to focus on programmes that support those people from Armed Forces communities that may have particular needs, cutting across the four overarching themes of the Covenant Fund. There are some core questions to be explored within wider programme development of the role of capacity building for newer; user led organisations.

These could be summarised as

How, when developing programmes to support groups of people that may not have been well supported in the past, can we:

- **Ensure that we are not setting up projects to fail.**
- **Ensure lasting legacy post grant; which might include sustainability of provision.**
- **Be confident that vulnerable cohorts of beneficiaries will be able to have lasting access to support?**

The survey gives a mechanism for these ideas to be explored with stakeholders.

Participants were asked their views on the following...

- **Questions about the types of grants we make, and how we ensure that these can have good impacts for Armed Forces communities.**
- **Grant size**
- **Grant length**
- **Impact and sustainability**
- **Open questions to capture additional views**

Exploring the survey data in detail

465 participants took part in the survey, which was the largest response that the Trust has received to any consultation. They were evenly split between people taking part as individuals (49.4%) and organisations (50.6%). Individuals were asked why they had taken part in the survey. Most responses were from veterans.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ I'm a veteran	51.38%	167
▼ I'm currently serving in HM Forces	5.85%	19
▼ My partner or spouse is currently serving in HM Forces	5.85%	19
▼ My partner or spouse is a veteran	5.23%	17
▼ My parent or parents are currently serving in HM Forces	0.00%	0
▼ My parent or parents are a veteran	2.77%	9
▼ I'm an academic with interest in the Armed Forces	1.23%	4
▼ I'm not from the Armed Forces community, but I care about this issue within my local area	13.85%	45
▼ I'm a local councillor	0.62%	2
▼ I'm a member of a Local Covenant Partnership.	13.23%	43
TOTAL		325

Organisations were asked to define the type of organisation that they are. The largest category of responses was from local organisations that support Armed Forces communities.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ A school	0.63%	2
▼ A local voluntary organisation which is not a charity	2.21%	7
▼ A private sector company	2.84%	9
▼ Another type of local charity or CIC	3.47%	11
▼ A NHS organisation	3.47%	11
▼ Another type of national charity	3.79%	12
▼ A local branch of a national charity that supports the Armed Forces Community	4.10%	13
▼ An Armed Forces Base	5.68%	18
▼ A Local Authority	9.46%	30
▼ None of the above	16.09%	51
▼ A national charity that supports the Armed Forces Community	20.82%	66
▼ A local charity or CIC that supports the Armed Forces Community	27.44%	87
TOTAL		317



Responses were received from across the UK

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ England	70.09%	232
▼ Northern Ireland	5.74%	19
▼ Scotland	6.95%	23
▼ Wales	7.85%	26
▼ I am from a national organisation	9.37%	31
TOTAL		331

Participants were given the following information

- **We have a fixed amount of funding that we can spend each year. If we make smaller grants, we might be able to fund more projects across the UK, but these projects might have less of an impact. We are interested to know what you think is important.**
- **We've run programmes that make small grants of £10,000 and small grants of up to £20,000. On other programmes that we have run, we've offered larger grants. Our grants have ranged from grants where organisations can apply for a fixed amount, or for large amounts of money, sometimes over £100,0000**
- **We are interested to know what you think about the size of grants that we award.**

The results were as follows...



	DONT FUND THIS	NOT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
£5000 or less	2.81% 13	9.74% 45	18.18% 84	28.14% 130	41.13% 190	462	3.95
£5,001-£9,999?	1.08% 5	3.69% 17	20.82% 96	36.23% 167	38.18% 176	461	4.07
£10,000-£14,999?	1.10% 5	2.42% 11	19.60% 89	40.75% 185	36.12% 164	454	4.08
£15,000-£20,000?	1.09% 5	1.75% 8	17.69% 81	41.70% 191	37.77% 173	458	4.13
£20,000-£50,000?	1.77% 8	1.99% 9	18.36% 83	36.73% 166	41.15% 186	452	4.13
£50,000 and £100,000?	4.58% 21	4.58% 21	21.35% 98	32.68% 150	36.82% 169	459	3.93
£100,000 and £300,000?	9.35% 43	8.48% 39	23.26% 107	24.13% 111	34.78% 160	460	3.67

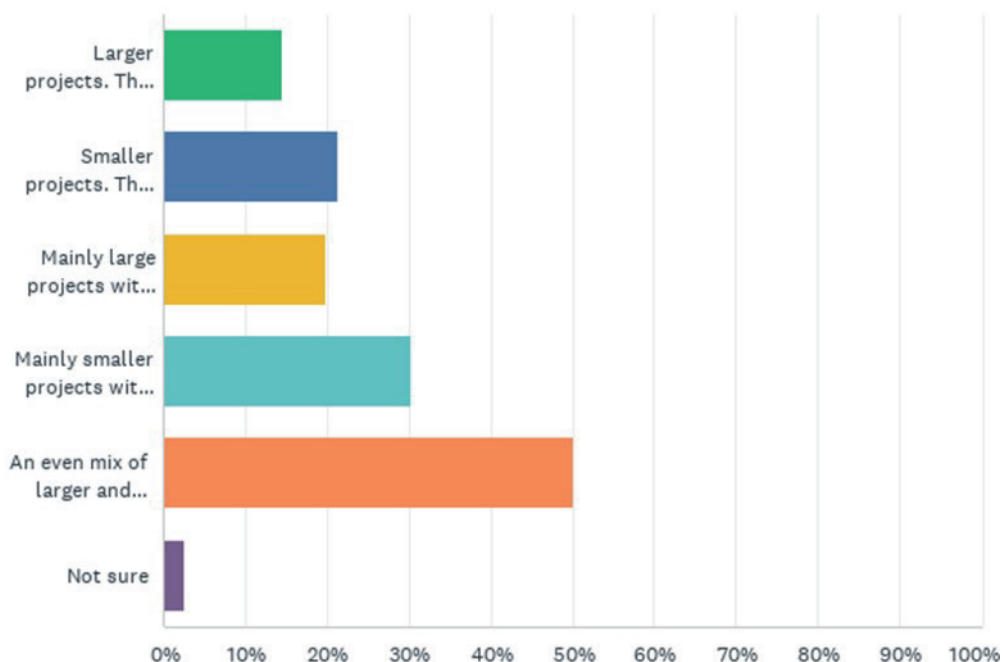
There is overall support for grants in all size categories. There is significant support for medium size grants, but very small and very large grants have strong support. It is interesting that there was strong support for microgrants (grants of under £5000). These can be costly to administer.

We asked

Should we try to fund larger or smaller projects? (Respondents can choose up to 3)

- **Larger projects. This gives projects more funding so they can achieve more**
- **Smaller projects. This means more projects get supported**
- **Mainly large projects with some smaller projects**
- **Mainly smaller projects with some large projects**
- **An even mix of larger and smaller grants**
- **Not sure**

There was strongest support for an even mix of large and small projects.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Larger projects. This gives projects more funding so they can achieve more	14.41%	67
Smaller projects. This means more projects get supported	21.29%	99
Mainly large projects with some smaller projects	19.78%	92
Mainly smaller projects with some large projects	30.32%	141
An even mix of larger and smaller grants	50.11%	233
Not sure	2.58%	12
Total Respondents: 465		

We asked people to choose on a sliding scale which was better to fund

Larger Projects
This gives projects more funding so they can achieve more

Smaller Projects
This means that more projects get supported

53

The average score of where participants fell on this scale was 53. There is a very slight preference across all audiences for smaller programmes. Most people gave answers around the middle of the scale. Where people chose one end of the scale; they were more likely to choose the smaller projects end.

We asked a question on fixed grant amounts (such as in the Positive Pathways programme). The Trust had received some prior feedback from stakeholders that fixed grant amounts may be unhelpful for organisations.

The question was...

We've run some programmes that offer a fixed amount of grant; and applicants provide a budget showing how they would spend the funding if offered a grant.

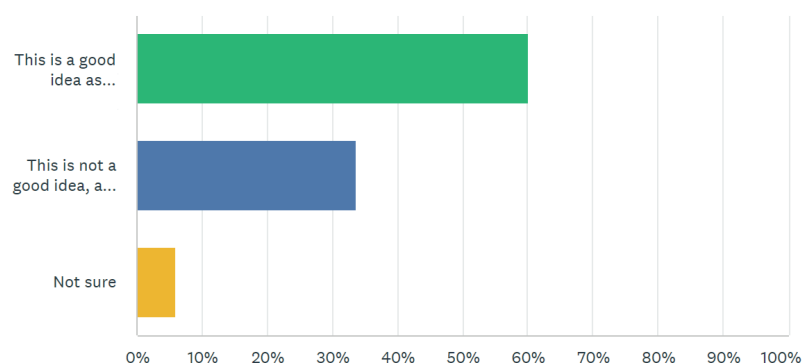
The fixed amount is normally £35,000 for one year

Do you think that (choose one option only)

- **This is a good idea as organisations know what the size of grant on offer is; and can plan for how they would best use it**
- **This is not a good idea, as it takes away flexibility for the applicant to ask for the amount of funding that they would like for their work**
- **Not sure**

We've run some programmes that offer a fixed amount of grant; and applicants provide a budget showing how they would spend the funding if offered a grant. The fixed amount is normally £35,000 for one year. Do you think that...

Answered: 465 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ This is a good idea as organisations know what the size of grant on offer is; and can plan for how they would best use it.	60.22% 280
▼ This is not a good idea, as it takes away flexibility for the applicant to ask for the amount of funding that they would like for their work.	33.76% 157
▼ Not sure	6.02% 28
TOTAL	465

There was strong support for the concept of fixed grants, but a sizable minority felt that they were not helpful. It may be a good idea for the Trust to offer a range of funding options across the programmes that it funds.

A free text response question was asked about fixed grant amounts.

Free text answers were more likely to be supportive of the concept of fixed grant amounts. 206 participants gave a response. Answers included...

- **You know what money you will receive so you can plan ahead to set up programmes for your beneficiaries.**
- **Inflation will always push materials higher so flexibility is key with any grant**
- **The amount is less than the operational cost of a F/T member of staff plus their delivery and management costs. Suggest a budget of £50,000.**
- **We have achieved significant impact which has led to improvements in veterans' quality of life with the fixed £35k pa for two years**
- **Fixed grants can be impactful, however they can also restrict the level of impact - 1yr funding is also restrictive as programmes aiming for a sustainable legacy need more than 1yr to build and implement effectively.**
- **The £35k grants are a perfect size to allow a project to launch, then mature for a year. Where such projects have been successful, they should be considered as priorities for continuation funding.**



- Interesting idea, quite an unusual way of approaching grant making. I can see it working in combination with a more flexible grant scheme
- There has been a lot of flexibility, given the challenges of covid - it would be beneficial for this flex in delivery to continue, especially when delivering new and pioneering activities and supports.

Answers highlighting challenges on fixed grants include

- This way of working has proved difficulty through the pandemic as the budget can be ineffective if the flexibility isn't there.
- The funding needs to be allocated based on the benefit that will be derived.
- I believe having a funding range is more useful as it allows organisations to ask for funding for the project they are hoping to deliver rather than developing a project to match the funding grant.
- It depends on the cost of administrating smaller projects. If this can be reduced to less than 10% of the overall project budget, then it is probably worth it. Otherwise the cost of administration becomes too large for the size of the project to be worthwhile.

Views on the length of time that grants should be awarded over

Participants were asked about the length of time that grant should be awarded over.

The question was...

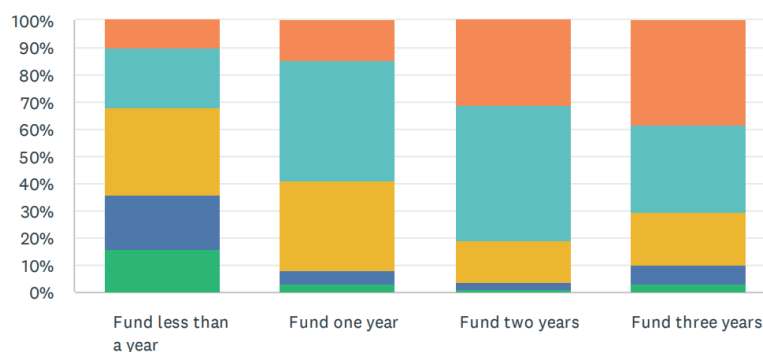
We have funded projects that take place over one year, two years or three years. If we make grants over three years, we have less funding in the overall funding pot; and can support fewer projects. If we fund projects for a year; they may have less opportunities to deliver lasting impact.

We are interested to know what you think about the length of time that we should award a grant over

There was strongest support for grants over a two year period, and distinct views that the Trust should not fund projects less than a year in length.

Q6 We are interested to know what you think about the length of time that we should award a grant over.

Answered: 445 Skipped: 20



■ This should not be funded
 ■ Not important
 ■ Somewhat important
 ■ Important
 ■ Very important

	THIS SHOULD NOT BE FUNDED	NOT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Fund less than a year	15.87% 70	19.73% 87	32.43% 143	22.00% 97	9.98% 44	441	2.90
Fund one year	2.98% 13	5.05% 22	32.80% 143	44.27% 193	14.91% 65	436	3.63
Fund two years	1.14% 5	2.74% 12	15.30% 67	49.77% 218	31.05% 136	438	4.07
Fund three years	2.95% 13	7.27% 32	19.09% 84	32.05% 141	38.64% 170	440	3.96

We asked a question to explore views on what was most important to consider when awarding a grant. The question was...

We generally receive more good applications than we can support. Your views that you share with us, in this and in the other sections of the consultation will help to shape our programme guidance

Please rank all of these statements in order, with the most important item for you at the top, and the least important at the bottom

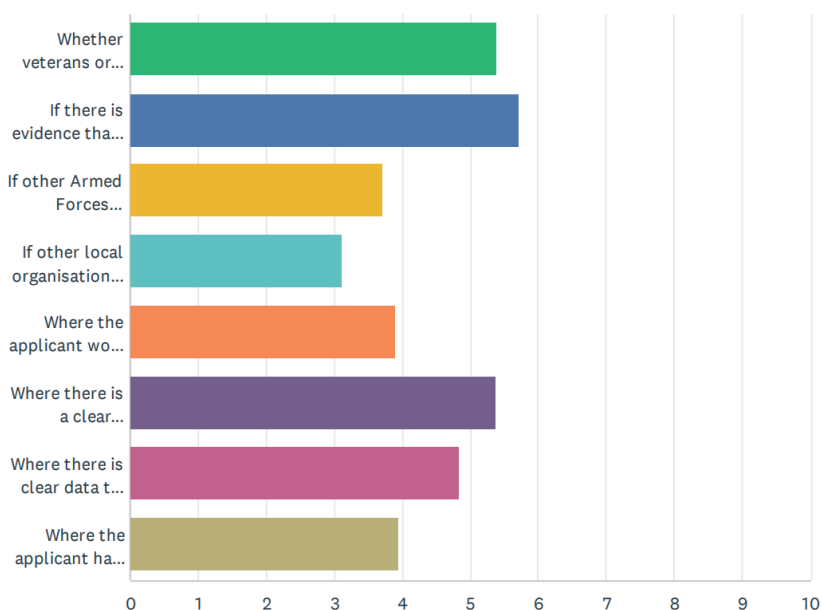
- **Whether veterans or Armed forces families have shaped the project**
- **If there is evidence that the project is well planned**
- **If other Armed Forces organisations support the project**
- **If other local organisations support the project**
- **Where the applicant would find it hard to get the funding from a different source**
- **Where there is a clear strategy to ensure that the project will have a lasting impact after the programme ends**
- **Where there is clear data to support the needs that are discussed in the application**
- **Where the applicant has an established track record in the work that they are doing**

The three most important factors for respondents were...

- **If there is evidence that the project is well planned**
- **Where there is a clear strategy to ensure that the project will have a lasting impact after the programme ends**
- **Whether veterans or Armed forces families have shaped the project**

Q7 Please rank all of these statements in order, with the most important item for you at the top, and the least important at the bottom

Answered: 407 Skipped: 58



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL	SCORE
Whether veterans or Armed forces families have shaped the project	26.04% 106	14.50% 59	10.57% 43	14.74% 60	10.07% 41	9.58% 39	8.60% 35	5.90% 24	407	5.39
If there is evidence that the project is well planned	14.00% 57	27.03% 110	22.85% 93	11.79% 48	10.81% 44	6.63% 27	3.93% 16	2.95% 12	407	5.71
If other Armed Forces organisations support the project	2.70% 11	6.88% 28	11.06% 45	13.76% 56	13.27% 54	20.15% 82	20.39% 83	11.79% 48	407	3.71
If other local organisations support the project	3.69% 15	2.70% 11	5.41% 22	12.04% 49	14.00% 57	15.48% 63	21.87% 89	24.82% 101	407	3.12
Where the applicant would find it hard to get the funding from a different source	8.60% 35	9.83% 40	7.86% 32	10.32% 42	16.22% 66	14.74% 60	12.29% 50	20.15% 82	407	3.90
Where there is a clear strategy to ensure that the project will have a lasting impact after the programme ends	23.10% 94	13.51% 55	16.95% 69	11.30% 46	12.29% 50	9.83% 40	8.35% 34	4.67% 19	407	5.38
Where there is clear data to support the needs that are discussed in the application	14.50% 59	14.00% 57	15.72% 64	13.02% 53	11.06% 45	11.30% 46	13.27% 54	7.13% 29	407	4.85
Where the applicant has an established track record in the work that they are doing	7.37% 30	11.55% 47	9.58% 39	13.02% 53	12.29% 50	12.29% 50	11.30% 46	22.60% 92	407	3.94



We asked a free text question to help enable more views to be shared. 165 participants responded There were themes on support for smaller organisations that may not have professional funders, the importance of involvement from veterans and their families and length of grant, and themes of collaboration and partnership building. There were a small number of comments on local insights into need, and on reducing risk of duplication.

If shaped by veterans and armed forces families, how many were involved in the process and how were they included? I feel quite often that these projects are unknown to people they would benefit or with lived experience to help them shape the service.

Beneficiaries should always be involved in design and delivery of projects. Need should also be about traction not just quotes from research that say why something might be needed

Supporting smaller community based organisations over a 3 year period rather than having to reapply every year for small amounts would be very helpful

Accountability is vital. Continuity regarding delivery various for applicant to applicant. There needs to be a 'kite' mark that shows the veteran community that they are dealing with an agency that is accountable and will provide a quality service.

AFCTF usually invites bids based on a topic /needs it has determined. There should be more opportunity for 'open bids' based on concepts or needs that the support organisations have discovered themselves and that are not part of a pre-prescribed programme.

There needs to be a mix of grants sizes and timeframes. Some small third sector organisations are providing invaluable services and need small grants to continue their work. These need to be easy to access as they do not have the resources to dedicate to fundraising and monitoring. Larger grants would be for larger organisations and partnerships. Middling grants with variable timescales are also useful - for a new project, it can take a year or so to establish and assess viability/sustainability.

The volume you receive must be massive. However, we are not all bid writing wizards or wealthy enough to pay for this service. Potentially scheduling conversations with some applicants under certain circumstances might give an opportunity for clarity.

Don't consider grants to large charities. ie (large charity was named here) Don't consider grants to projects that HM government should fund. ie Hadley Court

Where there are areas of deprivation there are likely to be armed forces veterans in need. My experience is that an activity, companionship and somewhere to meet are all necessary but outreach is also needed to find and draw in the most needy veterans and their families.

Greater emphasis on collaborative working where one significant organisation would be the lead applicant and who would also then involve partners in delivering aspects of the overall project such as in the case of VPPP. This would also encourage mentoring, sharing best practice, greater effectiveness, widening access etc

Questions on Sustainability and Impact

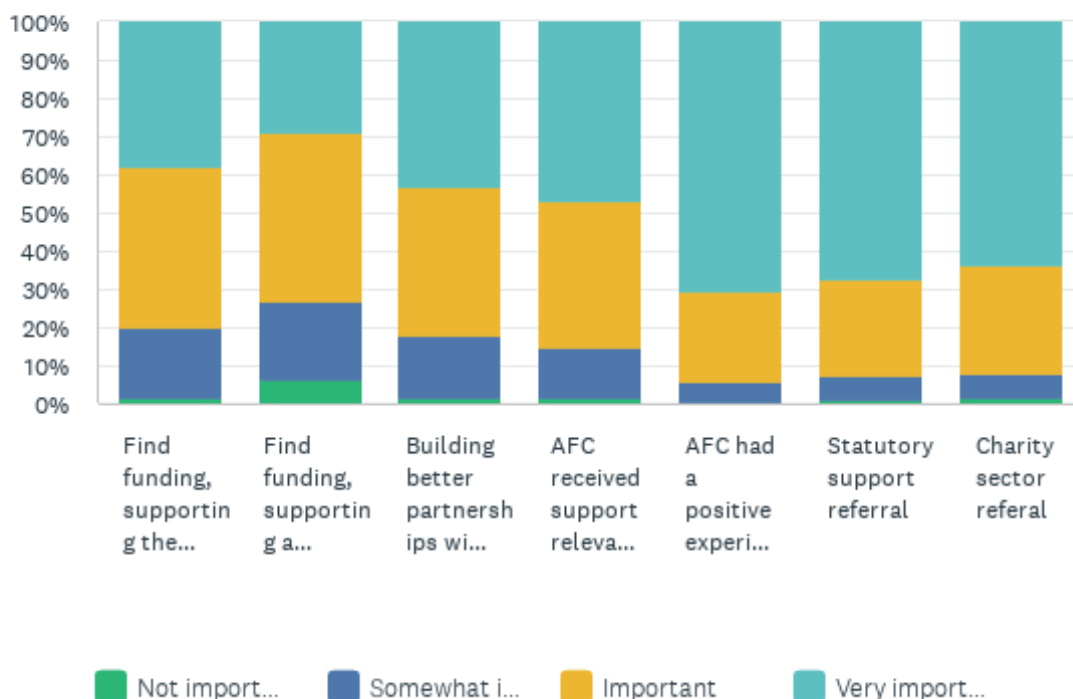
Participants were asked the following question

There are different ways in which projects can sustain their work after their funding with us ends. This is normally called project sustainability

Projects that we have funded have told us about different ways that their work continues to have impact after the project ends.

Please tell us your views on the importance of different types of longer term legacy that projects we fund can have.

Survey respondents strongly lent towards outcomes linked to the experiences and support given to specific beneficiaries, that can have an ongoing positive impact on their lives. Concepts on the ability of projects to seek ongoing funding did not score as strongly. This suggests that participants have a nuanced view of sustainability; with collaborative approaches that connect vulnerable beneficiaries to other sources of ongoing support being of particular importance.

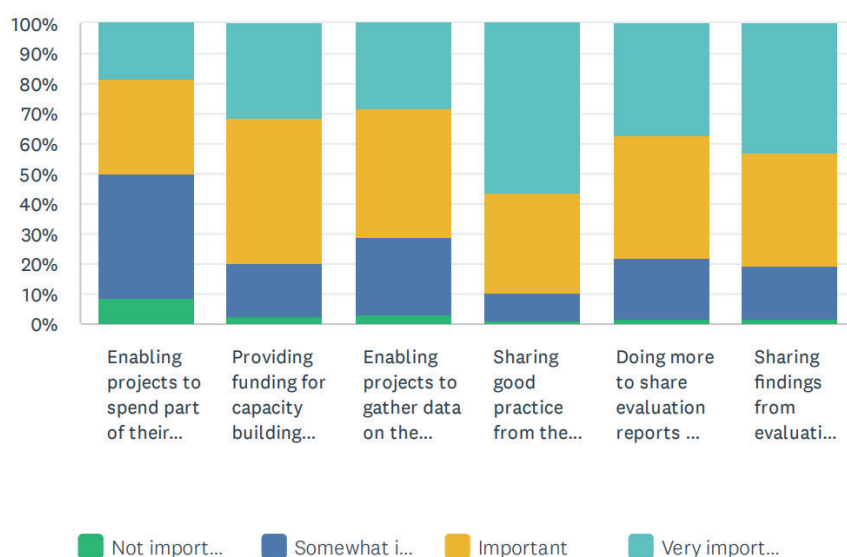


	NOT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Being able to find funding to continue their project, supporting the same people from Armed Forces communities.	1.64% 6	18.58% 68	41.80% 153	37.98% 139	366	3.16
Being able to find funding to continue their project, supporting a different group of people from Armed Forces communities.	6.28% 23	20.77% 76	44.26% 162	28.69% 105	366	2.95
Building better partnerships with other organisations that continue after the end of the grant.	1.64% 6	16.39% 60	39.07% 143	42.90% 157	366	3.23
That people from Armed Forces communities received support relevant to their needs; and they are now less in need of that support.	1.36% 5	13.62% 50	38.15% 140	46.87% 172	367	3.31
That people from Armed Forces communities who took part in the project have had a positive experience that has provided a personal benefit to them	0.55% 2	5.49% 20	23.35% 85	70.60% 257	364	3.64
That people from Armed Forces communities who have more complex needs have been referred to appropriate sources of statutory support that can support them.	1.09% 4	6.27% 23	25.34% 93	67.30% 247	367	3.59
That people from Armed Forces communities who have more complex needs have been referred to appropriate sources of support run by charities or voluntary organisations that can support them.	1.64% 6	6.01% 22	28.42% 104	63.93% 234	366	3.55

Participants were asked about their views on additional factors linked to impact and sustainability. They were given a list of options, and asked to give their views on how important each option was.

The options were

- **Enabling projects to spend part of their budget on evaluation activities**
- **Providing funding for capacity building activities. By this we mean access to training, organisational development, mentoring and other similar types of support**
- **Enabling projects to gather data on the impact of their work; which they can then use within their own organisations**
- **Sharing good practice from the projects that we fund so that it can be used by more organisations**
- **Doing more to share evaluation reports and findings from projects across more people and organisations**
- **Sharing findings from evaluations with policy makers and others in the sector**
- **The most important areas were the sharing of good practice and the sharing of evaluations, with policy makers and the wider sector.**




	NOT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Enabling projects to spend part of their budget on evaluation activities.	8.48% 29	41.52% 142	31.58% 108	18.42% 63	342	2.60
Providing funding for capacity building activities. By this we mean access to training, organisational development, mentoring and other similar types of support.	2.63% 9	17.54% 60	48.25% 165	31.58% 108	342	3.09
Enabling projects to gather data on the impact of their work; which they can then use within their own organisations.	2.92% 10	26.02% 89	42.40% 145	28.65% 98	342	2.97
Sharing good practice from the projects that we fund so that it can be used by more organisations.	1.17% 4	9.38% 32	33.14% 113	56.30% 192	341	3.45
Doing more to share evaluation reports and findings from projects across more people and organisations.	1.75% 6	20.47% 70	40.64% 139	37.13% 127	342	3.13
Sharing findings from evaluations with policy makers and others in the sector.	1.76% 6	17.60% 60	37.54% 128	43.11% 147	341	3.22

Participants were asked to choose where they sat between two options on a continuum.

Invest more funding in activities to help projects be more sustainable (even if that means that fewer projects are funded)

Focus on funding as many projects as possible


41



There was more support towards the idea of investing more funding in activities to help projects be more sustainable (even if that means that fewer projects are funded); but a significant minority felt that there should be a focus on funding as many projects as possible. However where participants had strong views, placing themselves at one end of the continuum, they were significantly more likely to choose the option of investing more to help projects be more sustainable.

Participants were able to give free text responses on impact and sustainability. There were comments on collaboration, outcomes and data gathering. As in other free text areas, there were also themes regarding smaller charities

- **More work is needed to ensure that organisations are sharing evaluations and data with others. the current barriers around this can be seen due to funding being competitive**
- **Sustainability is important but sustained projects must continue to provide increasing and demonstrable value and impact, and must not just become a gravy train.**
- **Our organisation is struggling with sustainability in 2022, having received excellent support in 2021 and currently no support in 2022 we are unable to offer the same level of support to the veterans currently involved with our charity. Additionally, we will have to turn away the majority of new veterans that have applied to benefit from our services this year due to lack of funding. A consideration might be to offer multi-year grants where the proportion of the project costs supported is reduced each year giving organisations the chance to build up other income streams.**
- **Helping veterans to develop tools / strategies that they can apply in their everyday lives is the best way for projects to be sustainable / impactful.**
- **Data gathering = reporting time. AFC already places a serious reporting burden on charities. As an organisation, my charity has a system in place to gather activity which I then report to my funders. AFC takes reporting to a whole new level.....I truly appreciate the need to report, but if I feedback on the excessive nature of reporting, then I risk being black-listed. This is a common thread on Trust Fundraising forum. Not all military charities are huge like RBL etc.**
- **There are existing organisations that are not specifically for the Armed Forces Community but can and do assist them. They have proven track records, partnerships and sustainability. It is important that they are not overlooked because their main client base is not the Armed Forces Community. I have seen a small Armed Forces charity in our area fold having spent huge amounts of money on a scheme that would never have been viable in the longer term. They did no research on need and did not have the skills or partnerships to deliver. Equally, I've seen a large, national Armed Forces charity, waste resources with the same approach. It was 'if we build it they will come'... they did not. Local data/evidence; partnership working and communication is key.**
- **You need to encourage organisations to seek other funding and matching grants to help improve sustainability, tapering grants from yourselves over three years would help with this.**
- **Endeavouring to work with other Third Sector organisations, not just those focussed on the AF and statutory services is paramount for sustainability issues. The veteran or member of the AF Community is at the centre of the impact, not individual organisations.**



A final free text question was asked to give participants the opportunity to raise other topics of importance to them. A full analysis will be done of all the free text responses. Initial findings include positive comments for the Trust and the recurring theme of support for smaller organisations, including those without fundraising capacity. There was also a desire for the Trust to offer more direct engagement with applicants. There were supportive comments on the value of bringing in non-Armed Forces charities with the right expertise.

**You are an excellent organisation.
Thank you & please keep up the
good work!**

**No, I have been unsuccessful
numerous times when applying,
but the feedback was good & I
understood the mistakes before
reapplying and being accepted.**


**There has been a lot of flexibility,
given the challenges of covid. It
would be beneficial for this flex
in delivery to continue, especially
when delivering new & pioneering
activities & supports.**

**Whilst we recognise eligibility for
different funds has focused more
on charities with a track record
of supporting the armed forces
community, there are specialist
service providers - civilian
charities that could bring a lot of
experience to support members
of the armed forces community.
Conscious of sign-posting projects
rather than direct delivery.**

**Love what you do. I am passionate
about supporting veterans and
families and I don't get involved in the
politics of charities and I love what
you do. I hope you continue to support
smaller charities instead of big ones
that under deliver.**

**It is important for the AFCFT to
continue to working with charities
from outside the Armed Forces Sector,
as they can bring new approaches
and huge benefits.**

**I would love senior representatives
of the fund to come and see the
impact that grants have made to our
organisation and to our veterans. I
know that this is not always possible
but it would give those making the
decisions powerful testaments useful
for making future decisions and
shaping grants in the future.**



Themes from the roundtable discussions on transformational grants

The round table events were held online; and attended by 26 organisations. In groups; detailed discussions were held on four key topics

- **Is it better to make a small number of very large grants, or to fund a larger range of projects?**
- **What would be transformational in addressing hidden needs within Armed Forces communities?**
- **Should projects have to work collaboratively? What would this look like?**
- **What should be the ongoing legacy of the projects that we fund?**

Is it better to make a small number of very large grants, or to fund a larger range of projects?

Larger grants make it almost impossible not to work with other organisations. There can be a multiplier effect to larger grants; which participants felt could lead to larger regional/national impact. Large grants were felt to offer organisations stability; and enable better collaboration to take place.

Participants felt that there could be challenges with making smaller grants for transformative purposes; and that the overall strategic objectives might be diluted. There were also concerns that the Trust would need to be more directive within programme guidance; summarised through the comment **“you’ll need to make it clearer what needs to be delivered”**.

Length of grant was discussed extensively. Timeframe could be 2-3 years to help embed collaborative working. Larger grants were felt to be better as could deliver greater impact and opportunities to develop trust with partners and beneficiaries. Larger grants can also give greater levels of security or stability to the organisation that has received the funding.

Participants were keen to avoid approaches that were brand new; and felt that it would be better to support applicants to scale up a pilot for example.

Issues relating to complex trauma in veterans were raised.

Difference across the UK were discussed; including within Northern Ireland. Participants felt that there No UK wide one size fits all answer. Devolved nations should be part of thinking and decisions.

Impact was discussed

- **What is the intended impact – how can we forge relationships that go beyond the money.**
- **What about incentives like awards? Promoting positive behaviours?**
- **How can we get Veterans to access good quality access across the board?**
- **Flexibility is important. What communities are we trying to support?**



What would be transformational in addressing hidden needs within Armed Forces communities?

Themes exploring meaningful engagement, people from deprived backgrounds, duty of care, women, BME communities and early service leavers were discussed.

Boosting connection and enabling people to participate in activities can have a transformational impact for the individual; as can approaches that build confidence and also support the family and carers around the veteran; and that can be flexible in approach.

Enabling grants of a longer timescale was considered to be highly important; as it gave longer to build impact and evidence; and there were discussions on the importance of soft outcomes as well as the value of preventive work.

It was felt that projects which are highly specific should be considered; so that project were not trying to do too much at once. There should be strong understanding of the group that the project is; and flexibility in approach. Evidence that comes from projects was considered to be highly important in terms of driving wider policy change. Veterans with complex mental health needs to 'come back round' and into services were discussed; as was provision of dedicated services.

Armed Forces Children were felt to be in need more support; particularly where the children have had disruption to education or Special Education Needs; and ensuring that there is access to support. Participants felt that it was important to be flexible and mindful of all protected characteristics, but also looking at family as wider unit. Bereaved families were discussed, and there was a concern that the cost of living crisis is going to have a big impact, on families.

Sustainability was discussed. A legacy risk of services ceasing at the end of a project may mean that veterans think things have been taken away. How do we make sure that legacy is continued from project from project?

Participants discussed working with the NHS more strategically and working together to bring in new policy. Working with local government and non-veteran spaces/charities to help avoid any blocks to access was also discussed. Efficient collaboration was discussed (not just organisations known, but organisations that have the skill to deliver). It was noted that the types of support that people might need could already be in existence, but that there are multiple barriers for that community in being able to access it. It could be transformational to ensure that Armed Forces communities can fully access statutory services.



Should projects have to work collaboratively? What would this look like?

Participants were generally highly positive about collaborative approaches. They discussed experiences on the Veterans Places, Pathways and People programme; with reflections of receiving encouragement to work collaboratively, reducing duplication of effort and opportunity to bring experience together. The whole should be greater than the sum of the parts. Participants discussed past experiences of applying to other programmes run by the Trust, with criteria that projects must be delivered collaboratively causing challenges at first; but ultimately leading to stronger project delivery.

Participants felt that there should be general guiding principle of collaboration but that there should be the capacity for a standalone if it's justified. It was noted that it can take time to build effective collaborations.

Having a minimum number of partners was discussed; along with potential negative consequences of this. Participants felt that projects should incorporate the networks that are already working and not duplicate effort. One participant stated

"making sure the best project get funded and not money for old rope. Tell people to collaborate or they probably wont."

What should be the ongoing legacy of the projects that we fund?

Participants felt that sustainability aligns with collaboration; including how other organisations can continue the work/project with funding from outside the sector. It was felt important that transformational change projects receive higher levels of resource to better sustain the change going forward. Participants discussed the potential for aligning outcomes to the Veterans Strategy or Families Strategy. Trustees of funded projects were seen to have an important role in setting sustainability goals.

Collaboration between mature projects was discussed to explore if there is better capacity deliver ongoing legacy works or embed some infrastructure to support more efficient delivery going forward.

Sustainable benefits for individuals were also discussed. Sustainable outcomes might leave beneficiaries feeling more confident, with the confidence to go back and access further provision, and experience empowerment. Getting rid of the stigma that stops Veterans getting access to services; and ensuring that there are no wrong doors, enabling Armed Forces communities to access service they need.

Sharing of good practice was discussed; particularly sharing of data and embedding project learning within wider statutory services.



Thinking ahead to future programmes

Participants also gave the Trust some additional insights to help with wider thinking on future programme development.

It was felt less helpful to have approaches that require organisations to come up with new proposals year on year; particularly if there is high evidence of impact in the delivery of existing grants. Match-funding contributions could be considered more widely within the Trust's programmes to enable more grants to be made.

Participants were also keen for the Trust to consider how organisations move through the funding programmes offered by the Trust; and consider if there could be routes to enable projects to build up to greater complexity of work and work up to larger grants.



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Supporting the Armed Forces Covenant through funding real change

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