

**LEICESTERSHIRE TOGETHER (LOCAL STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIP) BOARD**

Monday 3rd July 2006

FUNDING TOOLKIT PROJECT

REPORT OF LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Purpose of the Report

To report to the Board on progress with the development of the Funding Toolkit

1. Background

- 1.1 The decision to develop a “Funding Toolkit” was made in 2004. The project is highlighted in the Community Strategy (page 28).
- 1.2 The purpose of the toolkit is to provide “on-line” support that improves the ability of voluntary and community sector organisations to successfully bid for grants and other funding from outside Leicestershire
- 1.3 During 2005, a number of activities were undertaken to move the project forward;
- A development day was held, attended mostly by representatives from statutory organisations, to develop a framework for the Funding Toolkit
 - A discussion about the Funding Toolkit was held with voluntary and community sector organisations as part of a wider discussion about Leicestershire Together
 - A paper consultation was undertaken with voluntary and community sector organisations to test the need and desire for the funding toolkit
- 1.4 These activities resulted in a clear view that the development of a Funding Toolkit would be a welcome addition to the armoury of support for voluntary and community sector organisations. The elements of the funding toolkit that are considered particularly important are:
- A searchable database of funding sources
 - Guidance notes on making applications
 - Access to LSORA (statistics on local economic and social conditions)
 - Some form of “virtual” networking
- 1.5 Funding was sought from Leicester Shire Economic Partnership to support the appointment of a project manager for the project and a budget to enable the design and development of the funding toolkit. The bid for funding was unsuccessful.
- 1.6 Despite the bid to Leicester Shire Economic Partnership being unsuccessful sufficient resources were secured from Leicestershire Together and Leicester County Council to appoint a project officer to take forward the project. This project officer (Oliver Savage) was appointed in early November.

2. Current and future activity

2.1 A Project Board was established to guide the project and has met 5 times since January. The Leicestershire Together representative on the Project Board is Mo Murray. The Board has worked closely with the Project Manager to guide the development of the toolkit and also to develop ideas and proposals for its future operation. There have been the two major tasks over the past six months.

2.2 Development of the Leicestershire Funding Toolkit

The original project plan was to launch the Toolkit at the end of May 2006.

Unfortunately the development of the site has not been as smooth as was desired and there has been a delay in the launch of the live site. However, we are happy to report that the Leicestershire Funding Toolkit is now live and operational. The official launch date is today (Monday 3rd July).

2.3 The site has been developed as a separate site from the Leicestershire Together website. It has a look that we believe is attractive and user friendly for the target groups and organisations that are likely to be searching for support and advice about funding.

2.4 The site address is www.fundingtoolkit.org

2.5 The promotion of the toolkit has begun in earnest. The principle approach to the promotion of the site has been the distribution of a "postcard" through libraries and direct to voluntary and community organisations through the Councils for Voluntary Service and other voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations. An article has been prepared for inclusion in newsletters and other publications that are targeted at voluntary and community groups. A number of copies of the promotional postcard have been included with the papers for the Board meeting.

2.6 We are also in the process of establishing links to the site from voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations and from District and County Council websites.

2.7 At the time of writing this report it is too early to report back on any user figures from the initial promotion.

2.8 Developing an operational approach for the Funding Toolkit

Many individuals and organisations have been approached to discuss ways in which the Funding Toolkit can be operated and developed to maximise its value and the additionality it can bring to the voluntary and community sector in securing funding. What has become clear in those discussions is that while many people recognise that the Funding Toolkit will be a valuable "information" resource in its own right, it could add significantly more value if it also provides a means of users accessing more practical help with preparing funding applications.

2.9 As a result an "Options Paper" was developed for the future operation and development of the Funding Toolkit and these options were discussed at workshop with Funding Advisors, infrastructure organisations, local authority representatives and the Project Board Members held in May 2006.

2.10 The outcome from this discussion was that a clear and specific proposal should be developed to secure funding to go beyond simply managing the Funding Toolkit as an information resource. The three specific areas that the proposal should build on will be:

- Developing a Funding Advice Workers Network that would develop a robust approach to improving the quality and consistency of funding advice to the sector in the medium term (i.e. a shared vision and delivery approach to funding advice and support by summer 2008) across the city and the county.
- Providing a co-ordination role in brokering specific assistance to voluntary and community groups from the funding advice network members, so that the assistance to groups goes well beyond providing lists of funders and offers an application review service to groups to help them improve their applications and so the likelihood of success.
- Develop the Funding Toolkit site in line with comments from the users, continually improving the information value of the website.

2.11 In light of the above it has been proposed to extend the contract of the current project manager for 3 months to develop the proposal and to seek, and hopefully secure, the resources to deliver on the proposal. A decision about the availability of the resources to do this will be made in late June 2006.

3. Contact

3.1 Any specific requests for further information, suggestions or offers of help should be directed to Oliver Savage, (Tel: 0116 2656010 or email: osavage@leics.gov.uk)

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Notes this report**
- b) Promotes the Funding Toolkit to appropriate organisations and individuals**
- c) Supports the decision to develop a further proposal to secure funding to extend the operation and development of the Funding Toolkit beyond its initial remit.**