The Bristol Method

how to use grants to support grassroots change

In it for good
Contents

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 3

Green Capital Strategic Grant Fund .................................................................................. 4
Criteria
Assessing the applications
The judging process
Supporting successful applicants

Neighbourhood Partnerships Grants .................................................................................. 8

The Small Grants Fund ....................................................................................................... 9

What we've learned ............................................................................................................. 10
Introduction

To celebrate Bristol’s ambitions and achievements in sustainability, a £2m grants programme was created with the intention of promoting a wide range of events, projects and activities that showcase the efforts of this unique city and its people during 2015.

Bristol 2015 is the first winner of the European Green Capital designation to set up a dedicated grants programme to support existing initiatives, organisations and projects to run activities throughout the year.

The programme was divided into three separate funds: Strategic Grants, Neighbourhood Partnerships Grants; and Small Grants. Taken together, these funds represent the city’s largest ever environmental grant fund. The £2m was provided by central government as part of a £7m funding package for the city announced in April 2014.

Bristol City Council administered the Strategic Grant Fund of £1.5m, awarding up to £50,000 to 28 different organisations.

Bristol City Council also managed the Neighbourhood Partnerships Grants fund of £250,000, which provided a minimum allocation of £10,000 to each of the 14 neighbourhood partnerships in Bristol and the balance of £110,000 was allocated out to the partnerships based on social deprivation indices by ward. The aim of the fund was to enable every neighbourhood in the city to play an active part in identifying and delivering projects for Bristol’s European Green Capital year. Decisions were made on an individual neighbourhood level, meaning that ward councillors and local people made the choices about the projects that were selected for their area.

The Small Grants fund of £250,000 was handled by Quartet Community Foundation which awarded grants of £10,000 or less to local voluntary and community organisations where a small amount of money was expected to make a significant difference. In total, 38 Small Grants were provided.

More information about how the largest fund – the Strategic Grant Fund – was delivered is shared below, with the intention of supporting other cities looking to replicate the model.
Green Capital Strategic Grant Fund

The Green Capital Strategic Grant Fund was introduced in order to ensure that a wide variety of not-for-profit groups were able to make a meaningful contribution to sustainability as part of Bristol’s year as European Green Capital.

The city is home to a great many well-run, successful third sector organisations and their presence is one of the reasons the city won the European Green Capital designation. It was therefore fitting that they be able to expand their work by sharing in the funding awarded by central government.

The fund was launched on 24th September 2014 and applicants were encouraged to submit an ‘Intention to Bid’ notification to aid resource planning, with final applications to be submitted on 5th November 2014. The application process was advertised on the Bristol 2015 website and in a press release was advertised on a range of websites such as VOSCUR, Theatre Bristol, and Quartet.

Not-for-profit organisations were invited to apply for grants of between £25,000 and £50,000 and all projects were required to commence in 2015, during the Green Capital year. Applications were particularly welcomed from organisations which chose to work collaboratively to develop and deliver projects and events for 2015. 184 applications were received by the deadline representing 136 different organisations, with bids totalling £8.1 million.

In total, £1.5m was allocated to strategic grants, of which 10% was retained for administration costs, leaving £1.35 million available for project awards. The same ‘top slice’ arrangement has been adopted in respect of the Small Grants. The city council’s neighbourhoods team were able to absorb the cost of administration thereby enabling the full £250,000 as grant aid.

One of the first priorities of the Bristol 2015 Company was to create an application process than was scrupulously fair and open, and that delivered what the city needed most. This meant providing detailed criteria, specifying exactly what the grant was intended to fund.

To achieve this, the Company engaged with teams of experts and interested parties drawn from the Bristol Green Capital Partnership theme groups, to define what outcomes were sought for the five main themes for 2015: Energy, Resources, Transport, Food and Nature. These then drove the application process.

Applicants were invited to submit bids for strategic projects which:

- Empower organisations and communities across Bristol to celebrate Bristol’s year as European Capital.
- Support organisations making tangible progress against Bristol 2015’s outcomes for environmental changes in the city.
- Ensure a vibrant set of projects during 2015 which can be shared with other European cities during Bristol’s year as a role model.

All applicants were required to complete the same application form and in addition to organisational, financial and governance details demonstrate how their proposed programme of work would contribute to a minimum of one of the five core themes: Energy, Food, Nature, Resources and Transport. All applicants were required to describe the activities and outcomes, who the beneficiaries would be and how they would benefit.

“There are many organisations in this city which do an excellent job of changing attitudes and behaviour around sustainability. Rather than reinventing the wheel during 2015, we wanted to amplify and grow existing programmes. We knew this would have an instant impact, and would allow us to reach communities all over the city.”

Stephen Wray, Project Manager of Strategic Grants
In addition the grant guidance stated that consideration would be given to applications which contribute to the broad goals of the 2015 programme but which may not deliver a specific outcome. To meet this criterion applicants had to demonstrate:

- A high degree of innovation, or
- Engage a specific audience who have specific needs which may not be met by other elements of the programme, or
- Deliver a significant social benefit, or
- Enable Bristol to show international leadership by exploring and showcasing specific issues relevant to Bristol.

To support applicants, four question and answer surgeries for interested organisations were held where they could discuss the application process. Over 100 people representing 80 organisations took up the offer and attended a surgery. These also provided an opportunity for some organisations with similar ideas to collaborate in their submission for funding. In the event, joint funding applications were particularly successful – with the attendant legacy benefits.

Assessing the applications

All applications were firstly subject to a three-stage technical assessment by KPMG who undertook an initial assessment and scoring, including a benchmarking exercise to ensure consistency of approach. They also did a review and moderation exercise with the ‘sustainability’ lead for each theme and provided an overview of the whole process and sign off by the lead consultant.

KPMG then provided a completed template report which summarised and scored each application. This was made available to the Assessment Panel, along with an independent financial assessment of each application conducted by City Council finance staff. The judges used these two inputs as a check after they had agreed their recommendations to the council’s Cabinet.

The panel was given a week to read the applications before coming together for six days to assess each application and make recommendations to Cabinet. The panel at its first meeting debated and agreed their approach which included seeking to ensure the widest possible distribution of projects across the city, a commitment to support new initiatives and organisations where possible but ultimately a recognition that every recommended project should show significant environmental benefits to go forward for consideration at Cabinet.

The application process was overseen by the project manager in the Mayor’s Office to ensure that the process was accessible, fair, consistent and robust. An Equality Impact Relevance Check was completed which found no evidence to suggest that any organisation that was either led by equality groups, or aimed to serve a particular equality group was disadvantaged by the process.

All applicants were required to have an environmental management and sustainability plan. If a plan was not available they were required to demonstrate in their application how their organisation met the Bristol 2015 Sustainability Principles.

Three judges were selected to review the applications, chosen by the board of the Bristol 2015 Company for their expertise in sustainability as well as their differing perspectives.

Professor James Longhurst from the University of the West of England (UWE) is the university’s lead on sustainability. He is a well-regarded expert and is viewed as having integrity and good judgement.

Alex Minshull is Bristol City Council’s sustainable city and climate change manager. He has been with the council for many years and has a deep understanding of what the city’s needs are in this space.

Doctor Anna Farthing is a Bristol-based creator of drama for theatre, film and live-action performances who specialises in working with hard to reach groups. She was chosen to provide a cultural balance to the panel, able to judge the creative merits of an idea, as well as for her insights in reaching the widest number of people possible.

The judges were given a week to read all 183 Strategic Grants applications. This was a huge task since the average application was accompanied by 12 further documents. Each judge came to the first meeting of the judging panel having whittled down the list to their top 30 recommendations. The three judges had virtually no overlap between their top choices, indicating that the choice of judges represented a spread of opinions.
The three judges met every day for six days to deliberate. A Bristol City Council project manager, Stephen Wray, attended the meetings as a note-taker and to offer challenges but did not influence the decision-making process.

Each application was also assessed by a technical team at KPMG to confirm they were practical and possible and by accountants at Bristol City Council who conducted financial due diligence on the applicants by checking information held by Companies House and requesting previous year’s budgets and accounts. However, this information was withheld from the three judges until they had created a shortlist, so as not to prejudice the process.

The final recommendations were made public five days ahead of the meeting of Bristol City Council Cabinet (the mayor and his executive team) meaning that applicants had the opportunity to make direct representations to Cabinet – including speaking at the meeting on the day should they wish. The Cabinet then granted final approval. The mayor himself absented himself from the voting process because of a conflict of interest (his daughter was a party to one of the bidding organisations). The final selection was then made public for a further five days to allow for challenges (there were none) before the successful applicants were notified.

In total, 28 different organisations were awarded funding through the Strategic Grant Fund.

The unsuccessful applicants were invited to apply for an explanation. In total, 60 organisations requested and the BCC project manager, Stephen Wray, personally replied to each one.

“The panel sought to strike the right balance between ‘big bang’ projects which would have a high profile during the year and more enduring, long-term projects which would have a sustainable legacy for the year.”

Stephen Wray, Project Manager of Strategic Grants
In early 2015, BCC project manager, Stephen Wray sat down with each of the successful applicants (comprised of 32 projects from 28 different organisations) and took them through the funding agreement paperwork. This comprised of nine documents in total, including guidance on branding, as well as licensing agreements for DECC and the Bristol 2015 Company. This paperwork had to be completed before the organisations could draw down the first tranche of money. All but five completed this on time.

The payments were divided into numerous instalments, depending on the project. The final payment was not made until the projects had been completed and performance data had been provided to the council. Typically, most organisations received four instalments, one each quarter. In some instances, projects stretched beyond 2015 so payment has been spread to accommodate that.

The council project manager continued to help many of the organisations throughout the year with mentoring and coaching, particularly those with a lower level of expertise in administration. Part of that support included helping them to unlock future funding opportunities.

Examples of organisations that received funding:

**91 Ways to Build a Global City**

£25,000

This project was named after the estimated number of languages and dialects spoken in Bristol. It comprised a series of events to engage Bristolians of all backgrounds in leading more sustainable lives. The aim was to bring people together to share stories, food, experience and ideas using the power of food to encourage dialogue and action.

**Children’s Bike Exchange**

£49,342

APE Project – standing for ‘art, play and environment’ – is a non-profit organisation passionate about the importance of play and its ability to transform the lives of individuals and communities. Its Children’s Bike Exchange enables families to exchange dangerous, damaged or outgrown children’s bikes at a very low cost in their local primary schools, at city-wide events or at their workshop in St George. The bicycles are repaired by young offenders, apprentices and APE Project mechanics to ensure they’re in perfect order and of suitable size for new owners.

**The Energy Tree**

The 20ft Energy Tree, hosted by the at-Bristol Science Centre, is a ground-breaking public exhibit designed by artist John Packer and Bristol-based Demand Energy Equality to encourage public involvement in energy issues. The metal sculpture uses bio-mimicry to imitate a natural tree form and provides a number of interactive functions for the public – including phone charging and Wi-Fi. Its leaves are composed of solar photo-voltaic panels made at the Demand Energy Equality workshop by participants from Bristol Drugs Project.
Neighbourhood Partnerships Grants

Bristol City Council managed the Neighbourhood Partnerships Grants fund of £250,000, which provided a minimum allocation of £10,000 to each of the 14 neighbourhood partnerships in Bristol. The balance of £110,000 was allocated out to the partnerships based on social deprivation indices by ward.

The aim of the fund was to enable every neighbourhood in the city to play an active part in identifying and delivering projects for Bristol’s European Green Capital year. Decisions were made on an individual neighbourhood level, meaning that ward councillors and local people made the choices about the projects that were selected for their area.

Examples of how the funds were spent:

**The Big Picnic**

The Soil Association held picnics in schools in nine of the 14 Neighbourhood Partnership Areas. The intention was to celebrate and raise awareness of how school food culture has changed using the Food For Life Partnership and the Bristol Mayoral award programmes.

The Big Picnic provided an opportunity for schools to demonstrate what additional skills and knowledge the young people had gained in food growing and food preparation and allowed them to share school grown produce.

**Family activities at St Werberghs City Farm**

St Werberghs City Farm is a community garden with allotments and a café. To mark the year as European Green Capital, it developed and delivered a series of bi-monthly weekend / evening drop-in workshops for families across the neighbourhood throughout the year. Events included foraging walks across Narrowways Nature reserve, taster gardening days for families, outdoor cooking course at Bolgin Wells, and a harvest feast street party.

**Community garden at Arnos Vale Cemetery**

When Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust began improving and restoring the cemetery, there was a serious problem with graffiti, littering and fly-tipping due to its previously neglected state. Community engagement has significantly reduced these issues and, in 2015, the Trust set out to improve a 90m square area and turn it into a native species garden site. This community partnership provided new volunteering opportunities and resulted in the creation of a community garden and compost-sharing arrangement.
The Small Grants Fund

While this module is focused on the Strategic Grants Fund, the Small Grants Fund is worth explaining in a little more depth. The fund was designed to ‘empower Bristol’s citizens to live sustainably’ by offering grants of £10,000 or less to small, local voluntary and community organisations. The organisation managing the fund – Quartet Community Fund – was particularly interested in receiving applications of up to £5,000 where a smaller amount of money would make a big difference.

Applicants did not have to be a registered charity, as long as they had charitable aims and a constitution (or set of rules) and a management committee. It also required applicants to have use of a group bank account with at least two signatories and, if applicable, a child protection safeguarding policy.

"Grassroots organisations are typically run by passionate volunteers who make amazing things happen on a shoe string. We knew the Small Grants Fund could have a huge impact on these organisations, enabling them to scale up their existing activities and play a role in celebrating sustainability throughout 2015. We were not disappointed and have been so impressed by what people have managed to achieve with just a few thousand pounds."

Ronnie Brown, Philanthropy Director, Quartet Community Fund.

Examples include:

The Dame Emily Park Project
A community garden project in a Bedminster park was awarded £1,500 to allow it to develop a sustainable herb garden and community composting area. By making the garden a source of edible and sensory plants, more local people got involved in park activities creating a wider sense of ownership.

Bristol Avon Rivers Trust
This community-led, non-profitmaking organisation delivers education, land and river management advice and practical river restoration work. A £5,000 grant enabled it to organise clean-up days to reduce litter alongside the city’s waterways. Local residents and community groups were encouraged to take part and become ‘litter champions’.

Schumacher Institute for Sustainable Systems
This independent charity and ‘think-and-do’ tank believes our planet faces complex social, economic and environmental crises that are hard to solve. To engage more people in the debate, it visited many parts of Bristol with a pop-up ‘geodesic dome’ to illustrate a “future” Bristol affected by various environmental, technological, commercial and social changes.
What we’ve learned

Having delivered three grant programmes during 2015, the various project teams are well placed to advise others on what you need to get right and what challenges you should look out for.

Ensure the scheme is open and fair
The council anticipated the high level of interest in all three grants programmes. With so many different organisations in the city able to deliver projects on the five sustainability themes of the year, the project manager was well aware that many would be disappointed when they did not secure funding. The team tried, wherever possible, to refer unsuccessful projects on to other funding providers.

It was therefore of paramount importance that the scheme was run transparently and that the judging process was carefully explained and expertly run. You need to make sure you can answer any questions, and should be prepared to share the decision making process with the wider world. We took detailed minutes and kept a very thorough paper trail.

This meant that we were able to quickly neutralise criticism of the process – which are inevitable when people are disappointed because they didn’t receive funding.

Give yourself enough time to get it right
The Strategic Grants fund was announced in September 2014 and the board of the Bristol 2015 Company wanted the first tranche of winners to be announced before Christmas that year. This meant there was a very rapid turnaround time in which to deliver a robust and objective process. Unsurprisingly, it was a subject of some concern and criticism from applicants.

This tight timeframe meant it simply was not possible to run an absolutely watertight process. However, the team implemented a series of checks and balances to identify any concerns about inequity in the chosen assessment method.

In an ideal world, the project team would be given longer to devise the application process before the award was opened to the public and applications were invited. The team would also have preferred to agree a standardised approach to reporting to ensure that accurate data was provided on all funded programmes. In retrospect, it would have been preferable to issue template data captures forms at the point at which funds were allocated.

Don’t be a slave to the process
Although the applications process should be transparent, watertight and fair, it is important to allow the judges some flexibility in their decision making – otherwise the judging might as well be done by computer!

A scrutiny committee identified a concern that the Strategic Grant funding would be given to the ‘usual suspects’, who were most proficient at completing grant applications. To ensure a level of diversity, the board of the 2015 Company agreed to allow the judges to put forward high risk applications – those who may not have ticked all the right boxes but who were proposing something particularly interesting and worthwhile.

Be ready to help the successful applicants
Bristol City Council has experience of awarding grants so we knew that it can take time for a grassroots, third-sector organisation to comply with our necessary bureaucracy. We supported them through this process and then stuck by them once they were up and running – some aspects of administering an organisation require a great deal of experience to get right and we didn’t want projects being derailed because of poor planning or budget management.

Save the final payment until after completion
As with any business contract, make sure you withhold final payment until the project is completed, and all performance data has been collected. This is a much-needed motivation for the grant recipients at the end of a long process, and ensures that the funding body has evidence of the impact of the grant at the end of it.
ABOUT BRISTOL 2015

European Green Capital is a prestigious annual award designed to promote and reward the efforts of cities to improve the environment. Bristol is the first ever UK city to win the award.

European Green Capital is run by The European Commission, recognising that Europe’s urban societies face many environmental challenges – and that sustainable, low-carbon living is vital to the future of our cities and our people.

The award was first won by Stockholm in 2010. Since then, Hamburg, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Nantes and Copenhagen have carried the torch. Bristol will hand over to Ljubljana at the end of the year.

THE BRISTOL METHOD

The Bristol Method is a knowledge-transfer programme aimed at helping people in other cities understand and apply the lessons that Bristol has learned in becoming a more sustainable city, not just in 2015 but in the last decade.

Each module of the Bristol Method is presented as an easy-to-digest ‘how to’ guide on a particular topic, which use Bristol’s experiences as a case study. The modules contain generic advice and recommendations that each reader can tailor to their own circumstances.

The Bristol Method modules are published on the Bristol 2015 website at www.bristol2015.co.uk/method

CONTACT

hello@bristol2015.co.uk
+44 (0)117 379 0115
Bristol 2015 Ltd
Units 5-61 Canon’s Road
Bristol BS1 5TX
www.bristol2015.co.uk

Disclaimer: The information contained herein is of a general nature and is not intended to address the circumstances of any particular individual or entity. Although we endeavour to provide accurate and timely information, there can be no guarantee that such information is accurate as of the date it is received or that it will continue to be accurate in the future. No one should act on such information without appropriate professional advice after a thorough examination of the particular situation.