



## **Third Sector Capacity Fund – Round 1 Customer Survey**

### **Background**

Rocket Science's, as managing agent of the Third Sector Capacity Fund, undertook an e-survey of individuals and organisations with an interest in the Fund – whether as prospective applicants or as stakeholders – as part of the ongoing evaluation of the Fund's administration and management. The survey would also provide an opportunity for third sector organisations to contribute to and help shape the Fund's ongoing development and improvement.

### **Survey Overview**

#### **Survey respondents**

Rocket Science has been maintaining a contacts database of individuals and organisations who have expressed an interest in the Fund and this was used as the basis for inviting participants to undertake the survey. Whilst the database includes organisations with an interest in the sector (such as the LSC, local authorities, Government Office and other funders such as Capacitybuilders and BIG Lottery) it predominantly comprises third sector front line and infrastructure organisations – some of whom will have submitted an application for Round 1 funding.

In total, 267 individuals or organisations were invited to participate in the survey.

#### **Survey content and format**

The survey ran for two weeks between 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009 inclusive and comprised a series of 21 questions that were designed to draw out respondents' views and experiences of:

- the Fund's promotion and publicity;
- the Round 1 application process;
- the support provided to prospective applicants by the managing agent;
- and
- the Fund website - including its content and ease of use.

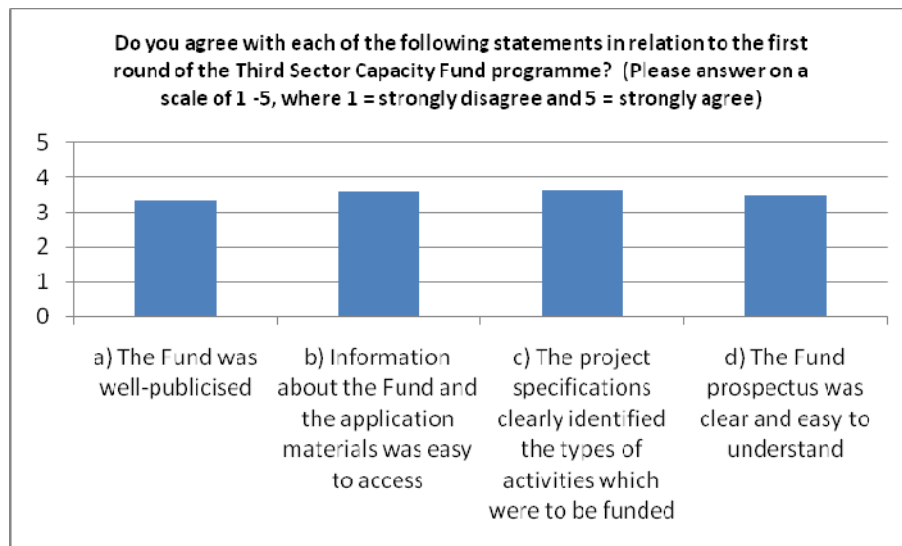
In all, there were 70 respondents to the survey – a response rate of more than 26%. Of these, 13 completed the survey in part with 57 completing the full survey – representing a response rate of 21% overall.

## Summary of Key Survey Findings

Overall, most respondents' views about the Fund, its publicity and promotion and the level and quality of support and information provided by the Fund's managing agent and dedicated Fund website, were extremely positive. The main issue that concerned most respondents related to the accessibility and suitability of the venues used for the April applicant support workshops in Darlington and Newcastle. The following provides brief synopsis of the main findings under each of the survey's themes:

### 1. Publicity and Information about the Fund

Nearly two thirds of survey respondents agreed that the information provided about the Fund – through the Fund prospectus and application materials - was clear and easy to understand and access. The majority of respondents (63%) also agreed that the project specifications clearly identified the types of activities which were to be funded:



Slightly fewer respondents (52%) agreed that the Fund was well-publicised and a number of suggestions were made for how that might be improved for future funding rounds.

Primarily, these suggestions centred on making better use of established third sector and local communication channels – including existing infrastructure organisations, local forums such as the Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council (GVOC) newsletter and other third sector information networks such as Third Sector Daily.

Some specific comments included:

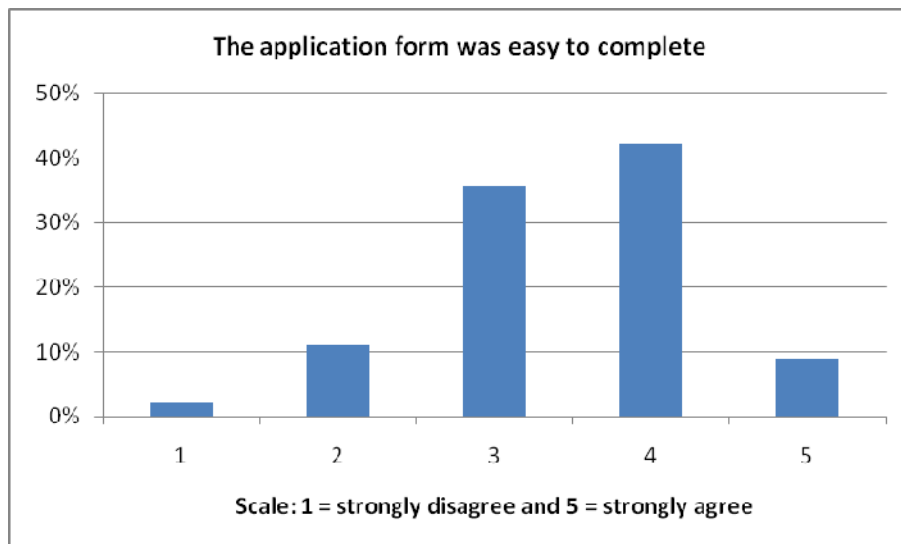
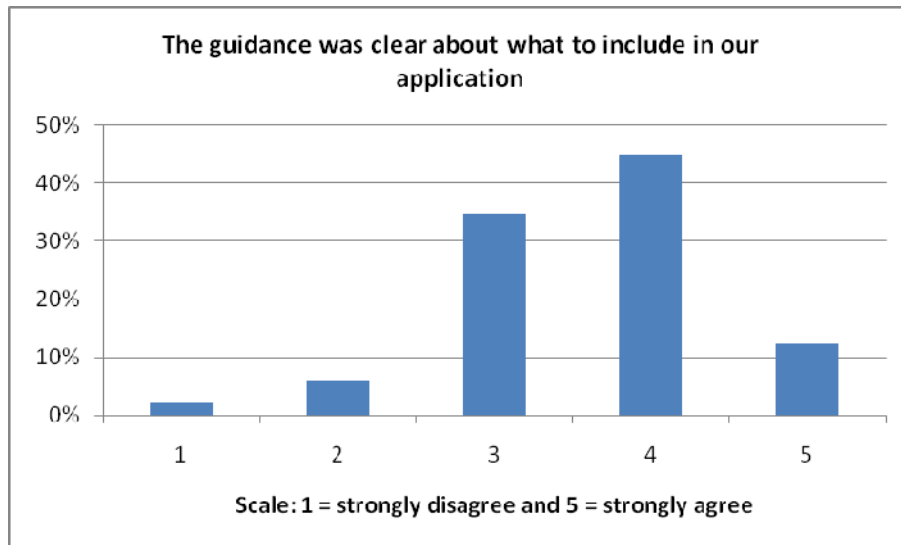
*“Use of broader range of community news in order to ensure local penetration of information”*

*“Utilise more of the Third Sector information networks - 3rd sector daily, voluntaryskills.com, etc”*

## 2. Application Process

Only 50% of the respondents had actually submitted an application for Round 1 funding with the main reason, cited by 43% of those who had not, being that they felt they had too little time to prepare a full application. A further 33% said they would prefer to wait until a later funding round.

More than half of respondents (57%) agreed that the grant application form and associated guidance documents were clear and easy to complete with very few (less than 5%) disagreeing.



However, around a third of respondents were ambivalent about this, suggesting that there is certainly scope for improving the process for future funding rounds.

One of the recurring issues highlighted by respondent comments is that the application form included questions that overlapped or were repetitive:

*“Some of the questions seemed to require the same information but I found the support from the agent in explaining what was required excellent”*

*“...the forms themselves looked like an average application, not as complicated as BIG Lottery or ESF but less friendly than Northern Rock or Community Foundation”*

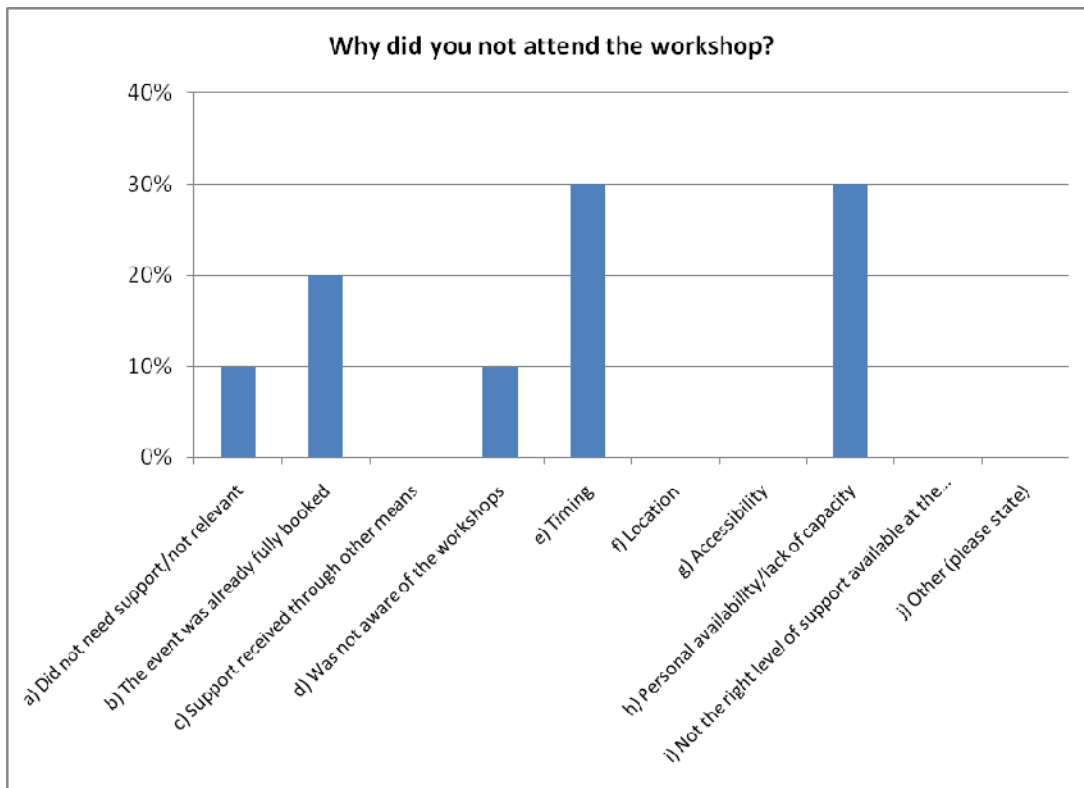
*“The application was extremely long and in parts quite complex. Questions seemed to be repeated but just phrased differently throughout the document”*

### 3. Support to prospective applicants

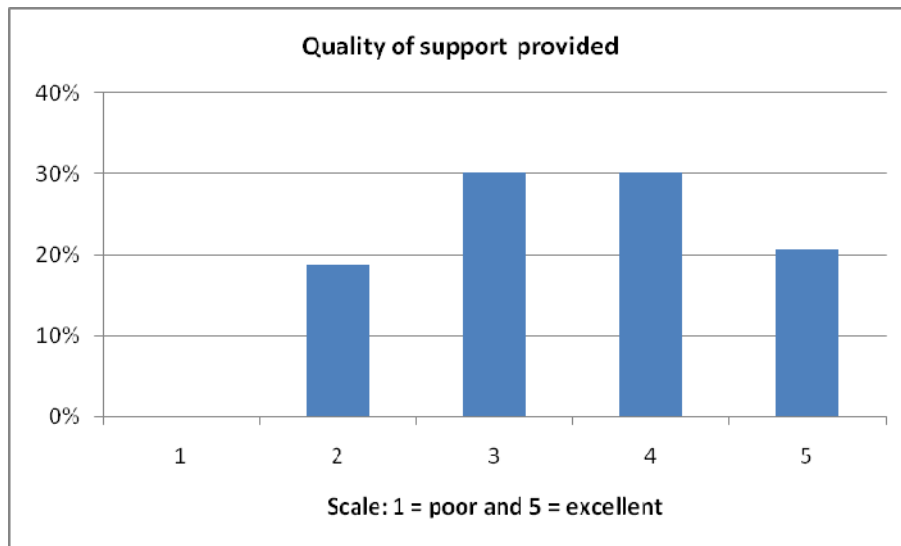
Support provided to prospective applicants by the Fund managing agent comprised two elements – the provision of telephone and email advice and guidance and the delivery of specific support workshops in advance of the first funding round.

#### a. Support workshops

More than 84% of respondents had attended one of the two support workshops that were held in Darlington and Newcastle during April. Whilst that figure is encouraging, it does disguise the fact that a fifth of those who did not attend either of the workshops did so because the events were already fully booked. This figure might have been even higher had it not been possible to increase the available delegate places for the Newcastle workshop and offer these to people on the workshop waiting list.



A majority of respondents (51%) rated the quality of support provided at the workshops as 4 or 5 (on a scale where 1 is Poor and 5 is excellent) with around 30% registering concerns about the quality and accessibility of the venues and location (rating them only as 1 or 2). The managing agent was already aware – from delegate comments made on the day – of the venues’ shortcomings (particularly Darlington) and has already put in place appropriate procedures to ensure that any future workshop venues are adequately checked and evaluated beforehand to ensure they are suitable and accessible. Other feedback from respondents also highlighted a preference for more workshops and the possible inclusion of one-to-one surgery-type sessions.



Specific respondent comments include:

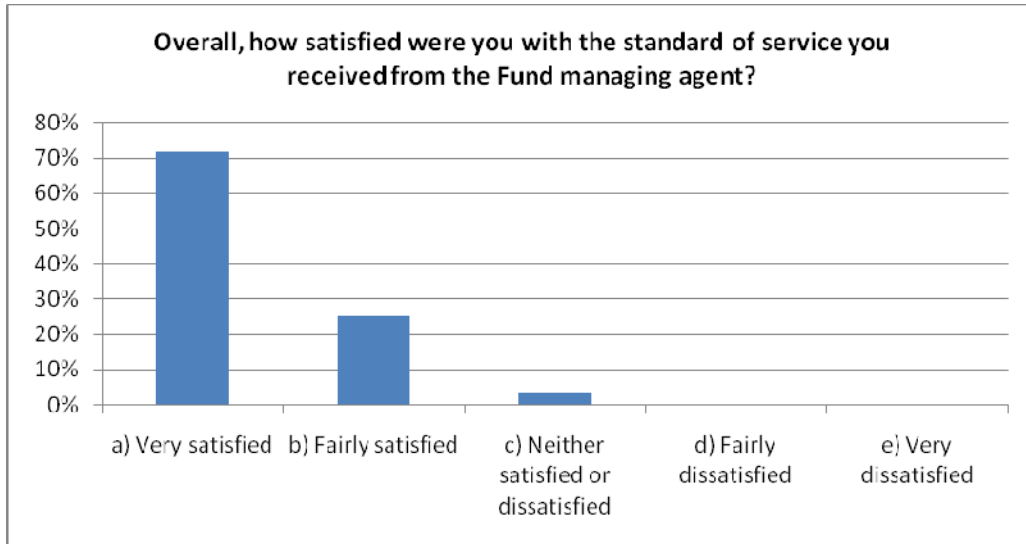
*“Visit any prospective venues to make sure that they are fully accessible for wheelchair users”*

*“The workshops was excellent and gave a good opportunity to clarify any questions, both Mike and Cherri were extremely helpful and informative”*

*“Better venue - hard to hear! 1:1 surgery at the end could have been longer and a bit more private when discussing own organisation/proposals”*

b. Telephone and email support

56% of respondents had contacted the managing agent by telephone or email. Overall, 97% of those were satisfied or very satisfied with the standard of service they received.



In terms of providing information, advice and support that was:

- relevant and responsive to respondent needs;
- treated respondents in a professional and courteous manner; and
- underpinned by sufficient knowledge and understanding

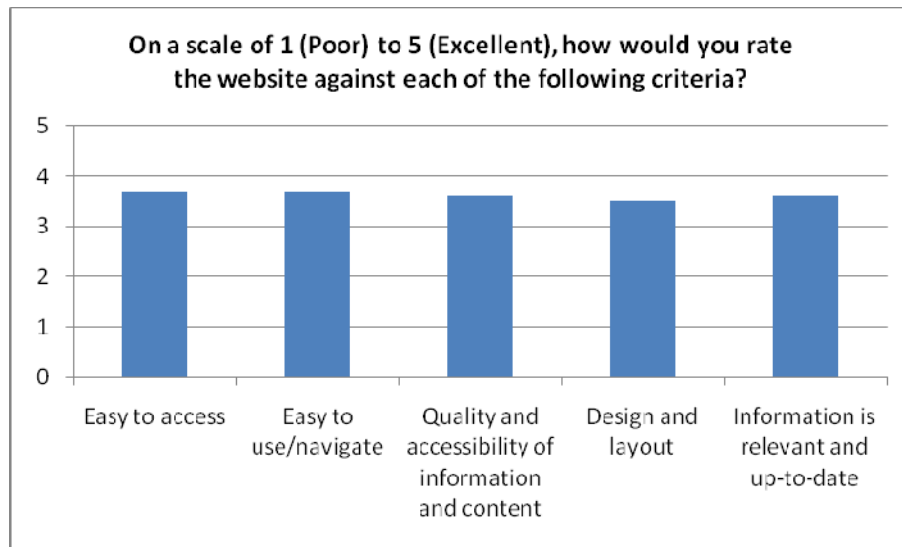
80%-90% of all respondents rated the managing agent as 4 or 5. Around half of all respondents rated the managing agent as excellent against each of these criteria.

However, a third of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the view that the Fund managing agent provided an appropriate level of support to applicants, though this may have been due to support being provided by email or by phone, rather than face-to-face as many organisations seemed to prefer.

c. Website ([www.thirdsectorfund.org.uk](http://www.thirdsectorfund.org.uk))

97% of respondents had accessed the website and of these, nearly two thirds (63%) rated it as either 4 or 5 in terms of ease of access. A similar percentage (61%) rated the website as either 4 or 5 in terms of ease of use/navigation, and the same percentage again (61%) gave either 4 or 5 for the quality of its information and content.

The chart below summarises the mean ratings from all respondents – it can be seen that there was a very consistent level of satisfaction across all the different aspects of the website, with mean approval ratings all lying between 3 and 4.



The FAQs section of the website was used by over half of respondents, with 43% finding them to be quite helpful and only 9% finding them not particularly helpful.

Specific respondent comments centred around: improving the website design, providing case studies in future and improved accessibility/ease of use.

### **Some Conclusions**

Following the receipt of this survey data and in preparation for future funding rounds several steps have been taken to improve and simplify the Fund's application process:

- The inclusion of an 'Expression of Interest' stage with a simplified and shorter form to ensure only suitable projects progress to the full application.
- Longer timescales for organisations to submit applications.
- Clearer prospectus with less overlap between specifications.
- More guidance on outputs, outcomes and match funding.