

WORKOUT

Modern mythology tells us that we're all supposed to be floating on a warm sea of best practice. So for those working to strengthen communities and economies throughout the UK, it can be hard to admit that we don't have all the answers, and don't quite know where to get them.

No one wants to admit a weakness to a competitor, much less a funder. No one wants to be labelled a failure or be accused of not contributing to the dreaded floor targets.

Workout, **New Start's** expert adviser, invites you to share your frustrations in confidence in our new monthly column. We also invite readers to write/email their suggestions about how you can move from A to B. So, welcome to Workout – it might just make you stronger.



Time to get off the treadmill

Our organisation seems to go from one bidding round to the next. It uses more effort getting on and off the treadmill than actually delivering the services we are bidding for. How can we get funding to keep us running rather than constantly having to bid for funding for new projects?

First of all, if it is a treadmill, you really do have to get off it. Writing bids for funding is something you do in short bursts to get the money for specific projects. If that is all you are doing and there is no time to actually do the things that got you going in the first place, something is very wrong.

Of course there are people who enjoy writing bids, so you might consider using them. In some areas there are also voluntary organisations that assist other voluntary organisations to find funders and to put in applications. They provide good information but are limited in the time they have to help you and your organisation. Many of them have to be very careful to make sure everybody starts from a level playing field. They will however provide you or your staff with training.

If you want someone to be 'in your corner' you might need to pay for it. Some fundraisers will charge up front. Others will take a percentage of what they bring in on a 'no win no fee' basis. Many of them advertise in *New Start*. Be careful to make sure they have experience.

A more radical way of getting off the bidding treadmill might be to consider whether your organisation could diversify its sources of income. Is it possible there are other sources of income, besides grants? If you provide training, might the Learning and Skills Council pay for it? If you provide care facilities for older people might your local council's social services department do likewise?

Of course that is not a simple solution. You might need some outside help to figure out whether that is a realistic option. There might well be huge expense involved in getting your organisation to the point where it can satisfy the contractor's requirements. It isn't unheard of for organisations to collapse as a result of their success in winning contracts. It's a bit like the problems suppliers have with any large contractor – you win a big contract, you depend on that contract, the contractor changes its mind, you suffer.

It might even be worth considering charging. There, we have said it. The cat is out of the bag. If people can't pay in cash, perhaps they can pay in kind. Perhaps they can offer some voluntary time – which, of course, can be matched with some public money. (*Workout* wonders whether matched funding in kind is used as creatively as it might be, or whether the problems of record keeping actually stop people – let us know).

If statutory bodies and agencies don't want to pay, does that tell you something about how they view the service itself? Perhaps getting off the treadmill has the value of giving you the time and space to evaluate what you have been doing. Maybe the fact that it is hard to get clients to pay for the services you offer, or funders to give you a grant, means that at the present time there is no longer a demand for what you have been delivering.

On the other hand, it often seems that the community wants the service you are providing but the funders are asking for something else. In that case, when writing funding applications it might help to directly relate your achievements to the local community plan to demonstrate that you are doing what they say they want.

Good luck to you and let us know whether this corresponds to our own experience.

To respond to either of the issues in this month's **Workout**, or to submit your own question, email: **news@newstartmag.uk** or write to the address at the front of the magazine.

Photo: www.third-avenue.co.uk

next month: you just can't find the staff

Every time our neighbourhood group successfully bids for funds to pay staff and advertise the posts locally we struggle to find people with the right qualifications.

For the past four years we have been involved with our local strategic partnership and have been trying, wherever possible, to use local people to carry out our regeneration work.

Unfortunately the problem is particularly bad at

the more senior levels and local people are getting restive. They tell us that it is all very well 'the council' saying they are spending millions getting residents in our neighbourhood back to work but the only people they see benefiting from these millions are more council staff who live outside the neighbourhood and spend the first year of their job getting to know the place and the people...

What can we do?