

Choose Love

Insights into funding approaches for
volunteer responses in times of crisis.



A study commissioned by Paul Hamlyn Foundation
and conducted by The Social Change Agency

This summary provides insights into effective ways to provide timely funding to volunteer-led responses to a humanitarian crisis, based on research undertaken of Help Refugees.

Introduction

From the London Riots to Grenfell Tower, technology has enabled citizens and local communities to organise, fundraise and advocate in entirely new ways; forming social movements at a speed, scale and reach not seen before. These highly networked movements are often at the expense of the more traditional approaches used by civil society, cutting through accepted forms of governance, accountability as well as challenging power. Similar to start-ups in the financial and technology sectors, these new movements are disrupting the status quo, challenging accepted wisdom and shaping the future.

In 2015, Help Refugees began as a rapid self-initiated volunteer response to the “refugee crisis”. Their experience of scaling rapidly, their ability to mobilise volunteers very quickly and their use of crowdfunding have enabled Help Refugees to achieve high impact in a very short space of time. This new type of

grass-roots directed, networked response has been made possible through technology, crowdfunding, social media, and different approaches to charity and governance support.

In 2017, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation commissioned The Social Change Agency to undertake a case study of the rapid growth of Help Refugees. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation were keen to understand what lessons could be learnt for charitable foundations interested in providing more effective and timely funding and support to volunteer led initiatives which rapidly emerge, often as first respondents to a crisis. They also wanted to share these insights with other existing and future social movements and volunteer led responses to humanitarian crises.

¹<http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html>

Background

From 2014 onwards, the Western media began to draw attention to the huge amounts of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe. In fact, in 2015, UNHCR reported that over 1,000,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe by sea, far surpassing the total number of refugees and migrants arriving in 2014¹. This does not take into account arrivals from other European countries. In the month of October 2015 alone 218,394 arrived by sea - roughly the same as the entire total for 2014 (approx. 219,000), with 10,006 arriving in Greece on a single day. Children made up 20% of the total refugees. Nearly 3,735 people are believed to have died crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, not counting those who lost their lives during other parts of the journey. In 2016, the number of arrivals by seas fell significantly to 363,348 following the closure of the Turkey-Greece route. However the number of fatalities rose to 5,079 in the Mediterranean through 2016.

Civil society groups played a key role in responding to this crisis, with volunteer groups often acting as first responders to the needs of those arriving on the shores.

With the majority of UK press covering the 'Calais Jungle', watching this crisis unfold on the media, members of the public took it upon themselves to respond to it a movement the press have dubbed '*Volunteer Humanitarianism*'. On top of this, newly formed volunteer groups operated across borders. International and multilateral agencies were slower to respond - delayed by a lack of mandate being granted by EU states for both delivery and advocacy work.

In Calais specifically, there were few international non-governmental organisations or multilateral agencies in operation. French NGOs (L'Auberge de Migrants and others), and British volunteers have provided a large amount of support with volunteers mainly channelled through Help Refugees.

Help Refugees

In the summer of 2015, a small group of four friends in London decided they wanted to do something to alleviate the worsening situation for refugees in Europe. They started a crowdfunding campaign, with the aim of raising £1,000 and filling a van with donations to take across to Calais. Within a week, they had raised £56,000, and were soon receiving 7,000 items every day.

On arrival in Calais, they found thousands of people in a camp with limited aid infrastructure such as water, sanitation, food, shelters, and any distribution points. Horrified by what they witnessed, they began a partnership with local French organisation L'Auberge des Migrants to coordinate volunteers and set up a system of aid distribution in the Calais 'Jungle' refugee camp. Help Refugees was born.

Fast forward to January 2018 and Help Refugees have helped over 722,500 people, managed over 15,000 volunteers, ranging from a scores to thousands at any one time, for a period of a few hours to a few years, and have up to 70 projects funded across Europe and the Middle East. They have established a fieldwork first, networked approach to giving aid, researching need at a local level, establishing local networks and working with local partners to deliver projects.

In just over 3 years, they have built a strong charitable brand over social media, recruiting over 17.5k Twitter followers, 34.6k Instagram followers, 56.5k Facebook supporters, and just under 400 YouTube subscribers. They count a whole list of celebrities such as ColdPlay, Paloma Faith, David Morrissey and Gillian Anderson among their supporters and have raised millions of pounds through individual donations and philanthropy.

The following insights for Philanthropy are based on the experience of Help Refugees:

Recommendation 1: Monitor networks

Foundations who are interested in funding this type of networked approach should monitor social media (Twitter seems to be the preferred platform) and crowdfunding platforms such as [Crowdjustice](#) or [Crowdfunder](#), as well as keeping abreast of new campaigners or social innovations that are evolving through sharing information across foundations and/or grantees.

Recommendation 2: Gather local intelligence

To truly understand where and how volunteer responses to crisis evolve, and thus to fund appropriate interventions, it would make sense to adopt the same fieldwork-first approach of Help Refugees. This could involve funding intelligence gathering exercises through local networks as a first point of call when emergencies or disasters strike. If there is no local network, then the commissioning of a community mapper would be recommended.

Recommendation 3: Determine funding conditions

Once identified, suggestions from interviewees for minimum standards or conditions that need to be in place to meet the charitable test, and to provide support for grassroots initiatives include:

- Minimum standards regarding safety / safeguarding and effectiveness (but without being too controlling).

- Track record of success.
- Evidence of impact (and of the money being genuinely used for the agreed purpose), although this may also mean that additional support should be given to volunteer groups to help to do this.
- Provide unrestricted funding, or paying for invoices directly/donations in kind.
- Find an alternative way of funding activities - i.e monzo cards².

Recommendation 4: Take a balanced approach

Interviewees recognise the need for a balanced approach from funders, for example putting in place accountability measures while also providing broad support to grassroots movements.

While some of this support could be light touch, there is a recognition that foundations need to be compliant with the charitable test - especially where a volunteer response is the redistribution of funds.

Recommendation 5: Look beyond core financial support

It is clear that Help Refugees would have benefitted from more than just money throughout its development. In addition to funding immediate impact work, foundations should consider funding support to the volunteer network, which includes well-being support, infrastructure, and good governance support.

For example, this could be a simple tool kit covering recommendation 3, which could be

sent out and used by volunteer groups either through the foundation or a crowdfunding platform. It could include direct support, as well as additional funding for wellbeing leave and self care purposes.

The need to reduce risk around funding early stage volunteer led movements suggests that there is potential in supporting the creation of an entity, much like Prism, which lends governance, compliance and strategic support to new networks. The networks themselves can then focus on delivery, while someone else takes care of setting up processes and compliance - supporting the organisation to grow and develop their capacity, with a view to spinning out and becoming independent.

As access to, and use of, new digital platforms like Twitter and crowdfunding sites increase, supported by physical networks, we will start to see a rise in the number of mobilised networks that develop along a similar path, filling in the gaps that more established NGOs cannot reach. **North London Cares** and **The3Million** are just two examples of organisation following that trajectory - both have received crowdfunding and grant support, and have experienced similar growing pains.

This type of support could be simple back office support, which manages the risks of the grant process and/or the transfer of crowdfunding. However, interviewees suggest that there also needs to be strong support in areas such as compliance, governance and strategy.

We recommend that foundations invest into a feasibility study of this type of service which support the scaling of social justice based volunteer movements.

²<https://monzo.com/>

Recommendation 6: Widen evaluation around how a volunteer group is meeting critical need.

To determine whether or not a volunteer group is meeting a critical need successfully, funders could look to evaluate the journey of potential grantees against key steps such as identification of need, communication of need, mobilisation of resources, distribution of resources, understanding of impact, learning and adaptation of approach, confirmation of impact – applied flexibly depending on the situation.

Recommendation 7: Understand the risks around funding networked change.

Risks associated with funding newly formed groups include lack of governance/organisational structure and impact tracking, as well as replicability or sustainability of a specific model that may have emerged organically in response to a specific set of circumstances.

Recommendation 8: Understand that funding volunteer led movements can more than just about funding critical need.

The energy and responsiveness of agile, on-the-ground groups is a vital resource in times of crisis. Funders have an opportunity to get the money directly to these grassroots organisations, where larger agencies might not have the agility to act so quickly. Funding volunteer-led movements provides an opportunity to support - either directly or indirectly - leadership networks, voice and advocacy at a grassroots level.

Conclusion

The speed at which Help Refugees gained traction and formed as an organization was largely down to having the right message, at the right time, from the right people. Beyond this “good timing”, Help Refugees filled a gap not being met by existing organisations. It was able to operate flexibly and reactively, being unhindered by the legal and financial structures of larger, more established organisations.

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Models such as co-funding, or the development of ‘arms-length’ partners like Prism the Gift Fund, could enable funders to be comfortable with the higher risk appetite necessary for directly funding newer untested initiative. However, it is crucial that new voluntary organisations develop their own governance processes and/or decision making strategies for impact. Any new arms-length partners need to incorporate a ‘governance for impact’ approach to this effect.

In terms of opportunities to fund specific activities, interviewees point to the need for practical support, training and expertise for new organisations, as well as the potential to provide grants to fund specific overheads, in particular salaries (responding to the needs of the core founding groups), projects requiring capital investment, capacity building (either directly or indirectly), fundraising support and/or operational support.

Funding volunteer-led movements provides an opportunity to support - either directly or indirectly - leadership networks, voice and advocacy at a grassroots level. Much like funding wellbeing and self care, this could be ring fenced in order to ensure that it get parity with other activities, rather than be subsumed into emergency responses.



The Social Change Agency is the leading consultancy for movement building. Specialising in community organising, crowdfunding, peer networks, innovation and systemic and organisational change.

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Paul Hamlyn Foundation was established by Paul Hamlyn in 1987. Upon his death in 2001, he left most of his estate to the Foundation, creating one of the largest independent grant-making foundations in the UK. Our mission is to help people overcome disadvantage and lack of opportunity, so that they can realise their potential and enjoy fulfilling and creative lives. We have a particular interest in supporting young people and a strong belief in the importance of the arts. Social justice is the golden thread that links all our work.

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