

Advice Services Fund Q and A's

(for publication on 28/11/11)

Important note: Please carefully read the helpnotes that accompany the Advice Services Fund first.

General

Can I ask for less than £40,000 (or more than £70,000)?

No. We will only be making awards between £40,000 to £70,000, If that means the Advice Services Fund isn't right for you, you may want to visit www.fundingcentral.org.uk and www.biglotteryfund.org.uk to see if there is a different programme to meet your needs.

The reduction in my tax-payer income is under 10 per cent. Can I still apply?

No. To be eligible, you must be able to evidence a reduction in taxpayer sources of income of at least 10 per cent.

What if I've already got funding from elsewhere – can I apply to Advice Services Fund to pay for the same things?

No. You cannot use funding from Advice Services Fund that is not directly needed to deliver the proposed work. You should also read the helpnotes for a full list of ineligible costs.

What about organisations that are not delivering advice services in the four areas?

We have had to focus the Advice Fund on the services for which the demand is greatest.

Organisations that are not eligible to apply may wish to visit the funding central website to check for other funds that are available.

My organisation won't be able to apply and the services we provide are under threat – what is Government going to do about this?

The Government will also launch a review of free advice services, to ensure that people continue to have access to good quality free advice in their communities. This review will conclude early next year. It will look at the funding environment for these services, likely levels of demand, and how government can play a positive role.

In the meantime you may wish to visit the funding central website to check for other funds that are available.

This fund is for England only. What about the rest of the UK?

Cabinet Office is working with Big Fund to deliver this programme in England only. Big Fund is not currently involved in any arrangements for distribution of funding outside England. The devolved administrations will be responsible in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

***NEW* Can we include Transition Fund income in our application?**

No. Whilst the Transition Fund is source of tax-payer funded income, it was not awarded to deliver free advice services. Therefore, do not include your Transition Fund grant in your calculations of eligible income for the purposes of the Advice Services Fund.

Eligibility

My organisation doesn't provide advice services directly to people, but we do signpost to advice providers. Can I apply?

No. This funding is for frontline not-for-profit advice organisations that currently support people with free advice about their rights and responsibilities. We explain in the helpnotes what we mean by that. It is not funding for the wider not-for-profit sector.

What about infrastructure organisations that support not-for-profit advice providers. Can they apply?

The fund is aimed at organisations delivering frontline services that are vital to supporting people and communities.

A separate fund was made available to infrastructure organisations that has now closed for applications.

What can I spend the grant on?

You'll need to tell us how you intend to use the grant in order to continue providing free advice service to people in their communities. That can include specialist or general advice and casework. The Advice Services Fund will support four categories of advice as follows:

- Advice on debt
- Advice on welfare benefits
- Advice on housing
- Advice on employment.

Online application process

Can I change or estimate my income from taxpayer funded sources at the online application stage, and then firm it up later?

No. All information must be accurate when you enter it during the online application stage. You must have all the correct evidence at that time and there will not be a chance to correct it later. If we do offer your organisation an award and we found that your information at the online application stage was incorrect, we may withdraw your award. **This may also adversely affect any future applications you make to either Big Fund or Big Lottery Fund.**

Is there a paper application form instead of applying online?

You must use the online application form. However, we will be able to provide an alternative if you have a specific communication requirement. If that is the case, please contact Big Fund on adviceservicesfund@bigfund.org.uk immediately, and before the online application closes on 22 December 2011.

What questions will I be asked when I fill in the online application form?

You'll need to have all the facts and figures necessary to complete each of the following questions. You should also read the helpnotes and Qs&As carefully before completing the survey. This is a full list of the questions you will be asked:

1. Does your organisation meet our definition of a "not-for-profit advice organisation"? (Y/N)
2. Which of the following categories does your organisation provide advice in (Debt, housing, welfare benefits, employment) (tick)
3. Has your organisation experienced a reduction of at least 10% in taxpayer funded income used to deliver free advice this financial year (1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012) compared to last year (1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011)? (Y/N)
4. Should you be successful, will you be able to start spending your grant immediately and spend the entire grant by 31 March 2013? (Y/N)
5. Organisation name
6. Organisation address
7. Organisation postcode
8. Charity number (if applicable)
9. Company number (if applicable)
10. Website address (if applicable)
11. Who is the main contact for this application?
12. Position in the organisation

13. Landline number (or textphone)
14. Email address
15. Confirm email address
16. What was your total eligible income in respect of free advice services from tax-payer funded sources in 2010/11 financial year (1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 only)? (£)
17. What is your total eligible income in respect of free advice services from tax-payer funded sources in 2011/12 financial year (1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 only)? (£)
18. How much has your total eligible income in respect of free advice services from tax-payer funded sources reduced by? (£)
19. What is the amount as a percentage of your 2010/11 eligible income in respect of free advice services from tax-payer funded sources? (%) To calculate this percentage, divide the figure you gave at Question 18 by the figure you gave at Question 16. Multiple that answer by 100 to find your percentage.
20. Confirmation that the information supplied is accurate.
21. How much funding do you need from the Advice Services Fund? (£)
22. How much of your request is for capital items, such as IT equipment? (£)
23. What specifically will you use this money for, and what difference will it make to your organisation and service users? (maximum 150 words)
24. Where will your services be delivered? (drop down list)
25. Tell us about any evidence you have that your organisation provides quality advice services that meet the needs of the community you support (maximum 150 words)
26. What are your plans for your organisation and its services in the future? (maximum about 150 words)
27. Declaration.

What else do I need to know before I start my online application?

Before starting the online application process please read the helpnotes and all these Qs&As thoroughly. You cannot start the online application form, pause, and then return to it later. However, you will be able to go back and check all your entries for accuracy before completing your submission. We will only accept one online application for an organisation. Any application which is incomplete at the application deadline will be rejected.

What if I'm not happy with the way my application has been handled?

Big Fund will be administering the Advice Services Fund. If you have any concerns about how BIG Fund has done this, you should contact us immediately at adviceservicesfund@bigfund.org.uk.

Reduced income

I don't have a single document that meets all the requirements for evidence of income you set out in your helpnotes - what should I do?

You don't need a single document. Your evidence can be from a range of different documents. But, collectively, you need to make sure you can meet all of the requirements we've set out in the helpnotes.

What about working in partnerships where taxpayer income doesn't come to my organisation directly. Can I still include it?

You should only include eligible income for activities your own organisation has been funded to undertake. If you are part of a wider partnership, just make sure that you only include income that was for your organisation's activities alone, and that you meet all the requirements set out in the helpnotes.

Similarly, lead partners who may have received larger amounts of funding on behalf of a wider partnership should only include income that directly relates to their organisation's activities. You will also need to make sure you meet all the requirements set out in the helpnotes.

What is counted as a "tax-payer funded" source of income?

Taxpayer funded sources are, for example, grants and contracts from local government, central government, local health authorities, Regional Development Agencies or if you have been subcontracted to deliver public services in the areas listed above, by an intermediary.

Funding you have received from the National Lottery, including Lottery funding from Big Lottery Fund, is not taxpayer funded income and should not be included when considering eligibility to the Advice Services Fund.

***Updated, 14 December* What do you mean by "the lost income should have funded, fully or in part, free advice services in at least one of the Advice Services Fund categories..." in the criteria for the Advice Services Fund?**

The online application asks for details of your organisation's total income from all tax-payer funded sources. By this we mean income that is used in some way to deliver free advice on either debt, employment, welfare benefits or housing.

For example, if you receive a grant of £50,000 from your local authority to deliver free advice services, and you use some of it to deliver free advice on debt and welfare benefits, you can include the whole amount of £50,000 in your application. If you also receive another tax-payer funded grant of £75,000 for free family advice services, for example, you should also include that amount in full. That is because it's a free advice service and some of your organisation's total income (i.e. the £50,000 local authority grant for debt and welfare benefits advice) is within the Advice Service categories.

You may receive taxpayer-funded income for other activities, and this should not be included. For example, if you receive a grant of £50,000 from the local authority to fund a community recycling project, this should not be included.

My tax-payer funded income paid for lots of the work we do – it wasn't ring fenced just to the categories of advice that the Advice Services Fund will fund. Does that matter?

To be eligible, the lost income should have been wholly, or in part, for delivering one of the four advice categories: debt, welfare benefits, housing or employment

Do I need to send you my evidence of reduced income when I apply?

Not immediately. We may ask you for more information at any time after you apply though, so make sure you have it ready, complete and available from that point onwards.

My organisation's accounting years don't run March to April –what do I do?

We have to have the same time periods for all groups to tell us about their changes in income. We also needed to consider the timescales of funders. We are therefore asking everyone to tell us about their income between

the set periods of 31 March and 1 April. Organisations that work to different accounting timescales will need to make sure that they only include income within that time period.

Won't organisations will apply the rules of evidence differently?

We have set out clear rules for all groups to use. We will be asking all applicants to declare that they have followed these rules when they apply. We'll also be asking those groups that are offered a provisional grant to supply additional information in hard copy before we can release any payments. We may withdraw a grant where this information does not match the details given in the online application. This may also adversely affect any future applications you make to either Big Fund or Big Lottery Fund.

What if my reduction in income is less than the amount of grant I want – can I still apply?

Yes. There is not a direct connection between the value of the money your organisation has lost and how much you can apply for through Advice Services Fund.

***NEW* (added 2 December) What about a tax-payer source of income that 'straddles' financial years. How do I include that?**

The application asks about your organisation's eligible tax-payer sources of income within financial years (i.e 31 March to 1 April). If an eligible tax-payer source of income covers a different time period, you will need to make sure your evidence can still meet all of the criteria in the Help notes before you include it in your calculations.

For example, if the tax-payer source of income was £100,000 and covered a period from 31 December to 31 December, then you should pro rata it. In this example, 75% of income would fall within the financial year (i.e £75,000). Of course, other eligible income may well be available to you for the remaining 3 months of the financial year and so you would pro rata that in the same way.

***NEW* (added 7 December) What about income from Housing Associations and other Social Housing providers?**

Housing Associations are private organisations that raise their finance and funding through the open market. They are not a source of tax-payer funded income. However, you may consider including income from a social housing provider that is classed as 'Arms Length Management Organisation' (ALMO) where the provider is wholly owned, governed and funded by a local authority (i.e a tax-payer funded source). You are advised to verify which type of social housing provider you receive your funding from before you complete the survey. As with all sources of income, you must meet all the criteria we set out in the Help notes.

***NEW* (added 12 December) How should I consider income from Legal Aid contracts?**

The Advice Services Fund criteria applies to all eligible sources of tax-payer funding equally. You must ensure all your income meets the rules in full. Based on Treasury requirements for spending public money, the Advice Services Fund needs to ensure successful organisations submit evidence of current income. That is not the same as the absence of income, or speculation, or future cuts in income.

In the case of eligible income from Civil Legal Aid budget (i.e Legal Services Commission) we can only accept income you have received to date, at the point at which the application to ASF is submitted. In practice, this is likely to mean you will only be able to evidence income supported by final payments. For the 2011/12 year, that is likely to mean including income across a shorter period of time, ie, up to the date you apply to Advice Services Fund. That will be, at the latest, 22 December 2011. For the previous 2010/11 year, it is likely you will have evidence for the full 12 months.

Decision-making

Who will make funding decisions?

The Cabinet Office in England, which is part of the UK government, will be making decisions on which organisations will receive funds. BIG Fund's role in the Advice Services Fund is to administer the programme.

How will the Cabinet Office in England make decisions about who to fund?

We expect that there will be high demand for the Advice Services Fund so the Government will have some difficult funding decisions to make.

The key decision-making criteria will be:

- The level of cuts your organisation has experienced.
- The quality of the advice services you deliver.
- How you intend to spend the money and the difference this will make.
- The strength of your organisation's plans for the future.
- Whether your organisation has received a grant from the Transition Fund.

In making decisions the Government may also take into account equitable spread across England regions and across the four Advice Services Fund categories: debt, employment, housing and welfare benefits.

When will we hear about the decisions?

Big Fund will be contacting those groups that Cabinet Office have prioritised for funding in early 2012. We will be asking for further information, including evidence to support their reductions in income given at the online application phase. We will also contact those who have been unsuccessful during February 2012. A small number of applicants will be on a reserve list, and we may contact you during February and March.

What is the reserve list for?

There will be a small reserve list identified by Cabinet Office when they make their funding decisions. Big Fund may contact some of those on the reserve list during February and March 2012. This will be the case, for example, if any organisations prioritised for funding has not been able to meet the requirements of our conditional grant offer and we have therefore withdrawn that offer.