SFF consultation report: executive summary

01/07/2019

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The consultation is a timely opportunity to respond to political and economic shifts since the previous Framework and an opportunity to collaboratively define the priorities for the new framework to be launched in early 2019. The full report is available on request.

HLF has broad support for the key strategic plans proposed to its sector stakeholders. The organisation is perceived to be uniquely well-placed to offer a combination of financial support, training and examples of best practice, brokering of partnerships and collaborative working, and influential advocacy for the sector. The proposal to prioritise those beneficiaries who have previously been under-served or underrepresented by the heritage sector is welcomed by the majority of stakeholders. While HLF's proposed direction of travel is accepted by most stakeholders, a small but vocal minority question whether HLF is operating beyond its remit.

The sector predominantly demonstrates an awareness that they will need to become more financially resilient, diversifying funding streams, and finding efficiencies through partnerships. There is also a desire for the sector to continue to develop and future-proof its offer, investing in local outreach, digital skills etc. However, there is a sense that many heritage organisations feel underprepared for these priorities, and HLF is considered to perform a vital role in providing support, building skills, and sharing knowledge.

In terms of HLF's portfolio, stakeholders naturally place importance on maximum flexibility and opportunity to apply for grants, preferring options for the size of grant, and an equal weight given for open grants and strategic interventions. There is support for the increase of the ceiling for single-round grants to £2 5 0,000, and for the introduction of an E xpression of I nterest stage for larger grants.

HLF's role now and in the future

HLF's proposed focus going forward to 'inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities' has a broad support from those working in and with the heritage sector (82% agreed). Support for HLF's plan is driven by HLF's reputation and capacity, being perceived as fulfilling an important role of guide, funder and advocate for the sector.

However, a minority of those who responded to the consultation are resistant to HLF's proposed role (14% disagree), questioning whether HLF may be reaching beyond its remit – and in so doing, may be duplicating the work being done by other organisations. Those who work for faith-based or church organisations or as freelancers are most likely to disagree with the proposition.

When considering HLF's role beyond its core grant-giving function, stakeholders consider supporting the capacity and resilience to be the top priority, with particular emphasis from charity and third sector organisations. HLF is considered to be uniquely well-placed to act as an enabler for partnerships and collaboration, to share its substantial knowledge of the heritage sector to guide organisations, and in collating and sharing data that may help organisations to make more informed strategic decisions.

Advocating for the value of heritage is also considered a priority for HLF's role, enabled by HLF's influence and credibility in the sector. Stakeholders express a desire for HLF to be a high-profile champion for heritage, whether by influencing government, or acting as a lodestar for the development of the sector.

Strategic priorities for heritage and people, and measuring HLF's impact

Stakeholders naturally consider HLF's priorities for supporting heritage to be as diverse as the sector – and indeed, as those responding to the consultation. However, community and local heritage emerged as the type of heritage which stakeholders would like to see supported by HLF (22%), followed by natural heritage (19%), and built or physical heritage (12%).

There is consistency between these priorities and the perceived heritage needs in stakeholders' countries and regions; natural heritage is prominent again (17%), and local and community heritage (10%), built heritage (10%), and churches or places of worship (7%). Stakeholders from England and Northern Ireland were particularly likely to say that investment from the National Lottery should address built or physical heritage needs in their country or region. Stakeholders express support for ensuring that regional and local needs are catered for within a UK-wide framework, saying that HLF should consider this balance when setting out project objectives, as well as consulting with local experts to ensure that local variation can be catered for.

The majority of stakeholders are supportive of the protection of heritage which may be 'at risk' (70% agree). However, while there is broad agreement with the high-level concept, there is some variation in the perceptions of 'at risk' would cover; the top suggestion is heritage that is likely to be lost, damaged or forgotten (40%), followed by physical heritage sites that are decaying or neglected (29%). One in ten stakeholders (10%) disagreed with prioritisation of 'at risk' heritage.

HLF's suggestion of addressing under-representation of geographical areas that have received least funding in the past is met with agreement from most stakeholders (69%), saying that these areas are likely to have greater need, may have more heritage which is at risk, and that all areas should have a fair access to heritage and heritage investment. However, this proposition does also prompt relatively higher disagreement (20%) than seen to others in the consultation, with stakeholders suggesting that heritage should be supported based on need rather than location, and that as heritage isn't geographically evenly distributed uneven funding is inevitable. There is even higher support amongst stakeholders (73%) for HLF to support under-representation in funding areas that experience deprivation.

Support for the prioritisation of specific social groups is fairly divided, with 45% of stakeholders agreeing that at least one specific social group should be prioritised and 34% disagreeing, and HLF will need to consider how this might be constructively framed and defined for their stakeholders. The groups stakeholders would most like to support are young people (aged 11-25), and those on low incomes or benefits.

HLF should work to address barriers to certain groups applying for funding by providing training and financial and time support to applicants, especially at the early stages of the application process. It is also suggested that simplifying the application process may help it be less of a daunting undertaking. HLF also could be more proactive in encouraging these groups to apply, such as via outreach to the groups themselves and local communities; this would also work to shift the perception that HLF funding is only for large, well-known organisations.

Similarly, stakeholders feel that training and sharing learning are the key ways to help organisations reach a wider range of beneficiaries. Building relationships with communities and community organisations are also seen as a way to

encourage greater breadth in heritage beneficiaries.

It is felt that HLF can best provide support on the collection of data to demonstrate who is benefiting from heritage projects by providing training and toolkits. Some also suggest that making this evidence collection a prerequisite of the funding or providing funding to enable this would also be helpful.

HLF receive a strong vote of support for the proposed nine outcomes (86% agree), with stakeholder responses suggesting that they intuitively make sense. However, the small proportion who do disagree with the outcomes (8%), again suggest that some of the areas may stretch beyond HLF's role, or that the outcomes may be challenging or too numerous to evidence.

The move to place a more explicit emphasis on the wellbeing that heritage can provide is welcomed by stakeholders who consider community belonging and involvement, local pride, and green spaces to be effective ways of delivering wellbeing. However, HLF will need to provide guidance on how wellbeing should be measured.

Strategic interventions and partnerships

HLF receives high-level agreement to the proposal that heritage is placed at the heart of place-making (80% agree, 9% disagree), with stakeholders expressing the view that there is scope for heritage to be considered as an important dimension of place-making and that heritage can contribute towards local identity and pride. Establishing partnerships and cross-sector collaborations are considered to be important in place-making, with the expectation that HLF might play a central role in brokering these partnerships. Local government (in particular local authorities and parish councils) is considered a promising partner for delivering this, as are local heritage and community bodies. Those who disagreed suggest that HLF should keep its focus on preserving heritage, or in some cases, challenging place- making as jargon which isn't widely understood.

HLF stakeholders respond with mixed feelings on the question of encouraging more commercially- focused projects with an emphasis on enterprise and skills (44% support, 24% do not support, 24% are unsure). Those who are supportive of a more commercial approach feel that it may present a longer term solution for the resilience and sustainability of the heritage sector – but HLF will need to address a degree of cautiousness amongst stakeholders with regard to how private sector or commercial approaches can be successfully applied to heritage without putting the value or quality of a project at risk.

It was also suggested that HLF might work with local people and community bodies, and in partnership with local authorities or parish councils, to support the viable reuse of existing buildings for heritage. The Heritage Enterprise scheme was cited as a good example of this approach.

Small-scale funding to build capacity and skills and funding to test and develop new ideas were the most popular suggestions for how HLF might support organisations to be more financially sustainable.

Few stakeholders currently use non-grant-finance (21%), although a further 16% say that while they don't currently use it they are open to exploring it – in contrast to the 17% who say they aren't interested in exploring it. Naturally, stakeholders are most focused on securing a means of repaying the loan if they are to consider this route.

A small majority of HLF's stakeholders are in favour of HLF offering match-funding to organisations who use crowd-funding to finance their heritage projects (59%), saying that crowd-finding is a useful means of demonstrating support to a project and increases community awareness and involvement. While few disagree (7%), a significant proportion are

unsure (23%), and this may be an approach on which HLF will need to inform and guide their stakeholders.

Stakeholders welcome support in developing their digital offer or infrastructure, and in particular would like HLF to offer training, examples of best practice, and grants specifically for this purpose.

HLF's suggestions for how they might support the sector to have better international reach are positively received, with working strategically to develop inbound heritage tourism receiving particular support (47%).

Stakeholders are divided on whether the public should be involved in decision-making (51% agree, 19% disagree), with some expressing concerns about the public being influenced or decisions being made on the basis of popularity. However, amongst those who agree with involving the public, there is support for the inclusion of local communities in setting funding priorities (59% agree).

HLF's portfolio

Stakeholders mostly respond positively to the suggestion of an open grant programme for all types of project, considered to give applicants a greater degree of flexibility and potentially widening the pool of applicants.

The proposed increase of the ceiling for single-round grants from £100,000 to £250,000 is met with a high level of agreement (71% agree, 6% disagree), with reasons for support of the idea including the rising costs of delivering heritage projects and that it would be a welcome simplification of the process.

HLF stakeholders are divided on the question of whether there should be an upper limit on awards (50% agree, 37% disagree), with those who agree saying that it would enable smaller projects to be funded and it encourages a fairer way of distributing funds. Those in agreement mostly support an upper limit of £5m (39%) or £10m (34%), while just 12% support an upper limit of £15m. However, those with concerns about this approach point out that this would prevent the funding of exceptional large projects which are worthy of funding, and that large projects can also have the greatest impact.

Stakeholders' views on whether smaller or larger grants should be prioritised show a majority preference for equal weight to be given to both (55%), to offer maximum flexibility for applicants and potentially offers the best way of prioritising need or value. A quarter (25%) say that smaller grants should be prioritised, reasoning that this is the best way to spread the reach and benefit of heritage investment.

There is little appetite for the prioritisation of larger grants (4% agree), but those who express a preference for this option explain that these projects can have the biggest impact and that HLF are amongst the few bodies who are able to fund at this scale.

Perceptions of fixed rate grants are evenly split, with 26% seeing a benefit while 24% do not. Support for this approach is predominantly reasoned as a means of addressing identified priorities, and may make things easier for applicants. However, those who question this approach feel that it would add additional constraints and may mean applicants engineering their projects to fit a particular campaign.

The majority of stakeholders feel that HLF should not change the current approach to partnership funding (58%) as the current approach works well, although some do express some difficulties in securing the partnership funding at the moment. Those who feel HLF should require more (13%)

consider there to be a benefit in working with partners, while those who feel there should be less (11%) again suggest that it can be challenging to do this.

When asked about the prioritisation of the open grant programme versus strategic interventions, stakeholders express support for prioritisation of the open grant programme (34%) as it's seen to be responsive to need, or that they are given equal weight (33%) for a balanced approach. Few (3%) support prioritisation of strategic interventions.

There is strong support for embedding environmental sustainability in all projects and application assessments (77% agree, 8% disagree), with most stakeholders suggesting that this is in line with either their personal views or existing organisational priorities. However, the few who disagree suggest that this may not be relevant for all projects or may be difficult to evidence, especially for intangible heritage.

In the early years of the new Strategic Funding Framework, stakeholders most would like to see HLF focus on the upskilling of the sector, again reflecting the view that HLF has knowledge and experience from which the sector would benefit. Other suggested priorities include natural heritage and biodiversity, and the diversification and growth of heritage audiences.

Customer experience

A strong majority of stakeholders (83% agree, just 1% disagree) express support for the proposition of including an expression of interest stage for larger grants, although some caution was recommended in ensuring that this encouraged greater efficiency of time and/ money and doesn't result in greater bureaucracy.

Almost half of stakeholders (47%) said that they felt the work required for their grant application was proportionate to the size of the grant, while almost a third (29%) disagreed. Those receiving higher value grants were more likely to feel that the investment in the process was reasonable, while those applying for smaller grants were more likely to report finding it cumbersome.

When preparing project proposals, stakeholders feel that the most useful resources for support are tailored advice (59%) and guidance documents and help notes (56%). Ways that stakeholders suggest the process could be made easier again feature a preference for individual support, and also a desire for a simpler process overall. Post-award, stakeholders felt that the grants process could again be made easier through simplification and better guidance, although most find that the current process works well.