

Evaluation Report: KVA Resilience: Thriving in a Tough Environment



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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the KVA Resilience Programme delivered from November 2024 to March 2025. The programme was designed to support voluntary, community sector and social enterprise organisations in Kingston upon Thames. The programme aimed to strengthen organisational resilience, improve strategic clarity and make them more funder ready, or increase their income generating capacity. Delivery was through a combination of in person masterclasses, organisational 'health check' (diagnostic), and online one-on-one support. Opportunities were provided for peer learning.

Key findings show that the programme was positively received, with participants reporting increased confidence, improved understanding of strategic planning, stronger awareness of how they were making a difference to their users lives and deeper sector connections. However, areas such as more explicit eligibility criteria, improved attendance tracking, and a more flexible delivery schedule were identified as opportunities for enhancement.

Programme Overview

In the summer of 2024, Kingston Voluntary Action (KVA) entered discussions with Hugh Stultz (Orange Consulting & Training) and Kemar Walford (KN Walford Consultancy) regarding the delivery of a capacity-building programme following the successful delivery of a pilot programme of capacity-building support to Kingston-based Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations (October 2023 – February 2024).

This new programme had two broad aims:

- To use learning from the delivery of the pilot to create a model of capacity building training, advice and support to a broad range of VCS organisations
- To enhance the capabilities of a select number of VCS organisations to make them more resilient, fundable, and adaptable in difficult times.

Because of the focus of the second programme and KVA's growing concern over the current challenges VCS organisations face, it was decided to name this programme Resilience: Thriving in a Tough Environment. The aim was to recruit 10 organisations. Confirmed participants ranged from small, recently formed social enterprises with minimal income to long-established charities with six-figure funding.

It was agreed to offer a capacity-building programme that ran over several weeks, connected thematically, as opposed to the one-off training programmes, which are more usually provided to the voluntary and community sector by agents involved in supporting the sector. A start date of November 2024 was agreed with an initially expected end date of March 2025. Unlike the pilot, it was decided that Super Highways would deliver at least one of the workshops, focusing on impact reporting and creating data collection and analysis tools. It was hoped that this would widen the programme's interest while utilising the assets of a well-known local training agent. The initial discussion around the programme's scope looked at delivering networking and a Meet the Funder session. KVA, however, decided to bring this element of delivery in-house.

The Resilience Programme

The Resilience programme was advertised as helping organisations thrive and successfully navigate the difficult funding environment, which puts smaller, less well-funded organisations at risk of being unable to grow to meet demand, having to curtail or reduce current service delivery or close altogether. This was based on current research around the state of the VCS sector and consultants' extensive work within the sector over the past five years, particularly within the London area. The programme was

also pitched to help the commissioner, Kingston Voluntary Action, fulfil its core objectives of supporting ‘local voluntary and community groups to develop their skills, build resources, and amplify their voice.’

The Resilience programme comprised the following components.

1. An introductory session outlining programme aims, schedule and timetable of events.
2. An organisational diagnostic review of organisations and the feedback process.
3. Four masterclass workshops covered - developing a funding strategy, Mission, vision, and planning, Governance and recruiting trustees, and using data to enhance impact. Super Highways delivered the data collection workshop.
4. Four 1:1 advice sessions with participating organisations. Themes for 1:1s were informed by development needs highlighted at the diagnostic stage and discussion topics or development needs highlighted by the groups.

Delivery

Delivery was hybrid; all workshops were in-person in Kingston at a set location, while the 1:1 sessions were online. Organisations were encouraged to send at least two participants. We believe organisational learning works best when two or more board or senior team members attend sessions to facilitate discussions, share knowledge, and strategise their implementation within their organisation. Some groups, e.g., the River Thames Boat Project, occasionally sent two members, and Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness regularly sent two members to each session.

The programme was designed to build the capacity of organisations in the six areas identified by Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) as essential to effective organisations: purpose, awareness, financial and operational fit, impact, effective leadership, and well-networked. These can be further aligned to New Philanthropy Capital’s four key areas of organisational strengthⁱⁱ

- Purpose
- Impact practice (reflective practice and evaluation)
- Leadership
- Finance and operations

The questions for the diagnostic review tool and the follow-up interview with each group followed these four broad headings.

Summary of the Resilience Programme

MODULE	CONTENT	DATE DELIVERED
Introduction	Explaining the aims, purpose, content and duration of the programme	7 th November 2024
Diagnostic Review	Questionnaire allowing organisations to reflect and report on internal processes and systems and levels of internal competence & experience. Focus areas: governance, impact, leadership, finance & fundraising	8 th – 14 th November
Diagnostic review – interview sessions	Follow-up discussion and interview following diagnostic review using evaluation tool. Findings were presented and analysed, and recommendations were made. The summary presented for each organisation	21 st & 22 nd November
One to one support sessions	Following on from 'areas for development' highlighted during the diagnostic stage details below	28 th Nov, 9 th Jan 2025, 23 rd Jan, 6 th Feb
1 st masterclass workshop <i>Developing a funding strategy</i>	What a funding plan is, key components of the plan, how the business plan underpins the FR strategy. Main types of fundraising available to organisations, pros and cons	12 th December
2 nd masterclass workshop <i>Mission, vision and planning</i>	How mission and vision are central to being an effective organisation, avoiding mission drift and help make organisations more fundable	16 January 2025
3 rd master class workshop <i>Governance & recruiting trustees</i>	Defining what good governance, why it matters, how to create good governance, tips on recruiting trustees	30 th January
4 th Masterclass – Enhancing impact through planning – data collection tools NB delivered by Superhighways	Developing and using data collection tools	13 th February

One to one support

Findings from the diagnostic review informed themes for discussion in the 1:1 sessions. Topics included

- Fundraising and fundraising planning

- Monitoring & evaluation – particularly understanding and capturing soft outcome data as this leads to hard outcomes
- Understanding their theory of change
- Governance – understanding if their governance model is appropriate
- How strengthen their board
- Marketing their services, audience development
- Mission, vision and purpose
- Business planning

Peer Learning & Sharing

The programme allowed opportunities to share experiences which was encouraged during workshops. This helped share experience and solutions and build an understanding of best practice.

Participant Profile

A summary of groups invited to join the pilot capacity-building programme.

ORGANISATION	SERVICE AREA / THEME	TYPE OF ORGANISATION	COMMENTS
Aulaw Organic Farm	Local farming	CIC	
Connect North Korea	Migrants and refugees support for the Korean community	CIO	
Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness	Homelessness	Registered charity / CLG	
New Malden Town Centre	Town Centre rejuvenation / local business development	CIC	Participant focused their attention on another organisation, Hive, with which they are involved – an environmentalist organisation
Hive	Environment / climate disaster awareness	Unregistered	This took over the focus of NMTC
River Thames Boat Project	Educational and fun cruises on the River Thames	Registered charity / CLG	
Refugee Action Kingston	Migrants and refugees	Registered charity	
True Honour	Women and domestic abuse	Registered charity	
Vegecoopia	Local farming	CIC Ltd by shares	

Attendance and Engagement

Two organisations that signed up to the programme dropped out early: Refugee Action Kingston and True Honour. RAK later signed up to attend some of the workshops but never participated. KVA opened workshops for organisations not originally signed up for the programme. However, 1:1 sessions were not extended to organisations not originally signed up to the programme. One guest organisation attended the second workshop and expressed interest in attending the third workshop. The organisations attended both workshops and 1:1 sessions throughout the programme, given the availability of their trustees or lead workers. A few of the 1:1 sessions were delivered on days outside the programme schedule to accommodate the availability of participants. It should be noted that while Connect North Korea was among the first to complete the diagnostic review and sign up for and attend most workshops and 1:1s, they rarely attended a 1:1 session, citing various reasons when we contacted them.

Attendance was generally strong in-person but for some groups inconsistent for the online sessions. Reasons for non-attendance included scheduling conflicts and capacity limitations e.g. one group that was the first to complete its DRC and attended most workshops rarely attended a 1:1 session. A more transparent communication of expectations and participant availability could improve future engagement.

Expectations of joining the programme

Groups gave various reasons for joining the programme but mainly grouped.

“We are going through a planning process and are looking for insights to help us”

“We are looking for funding and how to grow our organisations”

“We want to strengthen our organisation”

“We are looking at how to better explain the work that we do”

Outcomes and Impact

The programme brought together a collective of local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, some of whom were already acquainted, while others were not, to share experiences and reflect upon their challenges and those of their counterparts. This initiative allowed participants to assimilate their learning through other attendees' perspectives and exchange insights on sources of assistance or resources that could be accessed. This aspect exemplifies one of the principal advantages of in-person training: the informal learning and camaraderie.

“Sessions have covered areas we need to be considering as an organisation”

Resilience programme participant January 2025

Resilience Programme - User quotes

A thematic analysis of feedback identified the following key benefits:

Strategic Clarity

Improved vision, confidence in future planning

“Attending the course has given me an understanding what it is ?? all parts of an effective charity. What has been useful is the mirror that this course has given us. ‘we have a challenge to present [all of] what we do to the outside world’. We need to approach our qualitative data with more energy.”

I plan to look at vision and mission to help build the organisation

Fundraising Knowledge

Greater awareness of funder needs and effective communication techniques

“I am clearer now on what funders are looking for”

“This has been really useful as I am just preparing some bids and I am new to the organisation.”

“We have been missing out on telling funders some of the things they really need to hear, things that really make a difference. I feel we will do that next time.”

Leadership Development

Enhanced self-awareness and leadership capacity

"I learned the difference between different types of CIC and how to generate income"

"The sessions taught me to move out of my comfort zone"

"It gave me the mirror I needed to understand what was working and what wasn't."

Peer Support

"Valued time to connect and share experiences with other organisations"

"I enjoyed the opportunity to meet other organisations"

"a very good opportunity for our community. 'I think I will ask KVA because they are helping our community"

Asked what course they would like to see

"A course on 'unlocking the door. How to approach corporates and what to ask for."

What Worked Well

- Blend of diagnostic and developmental support: this helped move training from purely theoretical to practical that they could apply to their own organisation
- High-quality facilitation and specialist input: participants valued presenters insights and experience
- Combination of practical tools and strategic thinking -
- Safe space for open conversation and vulnerability: participants could share successes and challenges they had faced and how they had solved these or could approach them in the future

Areas for Improvement

- Eligibility Criteria: Clearly define who the programme is for
- Recruitment & Introduction: Strengthen induction and introductions to clarify expectations and boost commitment
- Session Timing: Allow more space between sessions for reflection and follow up work
- Attendance Tracking: Monitor participation actively to address early drop-offs
- Additional Support provision: follow up low attendance organisation to determine what support they might need
- Follow-up Support: Include post-programme touchpoints to sustain momentum
- Swifter follow-up with organisations not attending 1:1 sessions to understand barriers to participation.

Case Studies: Spotlight on Impact

Organisation X used the programme to reassess its mission and fundraising strategy. After participating in the diagnostics and attending the fundraising masterclass, they restructured their board and submitted a major funding application using tools gained from the programme. They credit the course with catalysing this shift.

Organisation Y used the programme to undertake reflection on their impact and outcomes, including softer outcomes which were essential to achieving change. This led them to revisit their theory of change and also reflect on how their approach was underpinned by values i.e. empowering their users to determine solutions that best suit them. The organisation said the process helped it better understand some information they could share with commissioners beyond preset KPI's.

Organisation Z also used the session to reflect on its softer outcomes and how these, although essential for longer term outcomes were not always reflected in the KPI's they were reporting on. The organisation used the sessions to understand how their activities and outcomes were linked to their mission and values and ways they could begin to report this. The organisation undertook a review of its business plan which it felt did not effectively articulate its growth targets and strategies. Participant attributed this critical thinking space and its impact to the programme.

Recommendations for Future Iterations

Short-Term Improvements

- Use attendance dashboards to monitor engagement.
- Extend delivery timeframe to reduce pressure and enhance reflection.
- Consider various engagement approaches that would allow KVA to a) build a stronger understanding of the support needs and b) identify training themes that resonate most strongly with organisations.
- Continue strengthening engagement with BAME communities and other underrepresented groups within the borough.
- Consider aligning a support programme to recipients of local funding, i.e. implement a funder-plus approach.

Medium-Term Enhancements

- Develop a companion resource hub for recorded content and tools.
- Consider offering hybrid session options for greater accessibility.
- Use KVA's local intelligence and state of the sector information to understand whether there are smaller unincorporated organisations who would benefit from being aligned to small grants funding opportunities and use this as an opportunity to offer 'light' training to help them become more fundable and embed sound governance principles.
- Include session(s) that examines leaders' well-being, issues of burnout, and succession planning.
- Consider offering light or bite-sized training at network events or training topics to reach organisations that may not have been able to attend a longer training programme.

Long-Term Strategy

- Create an alumni network for peer learning and support.
- Establish evaluation metrics to track long-term impact.
- Consider offering training to themed organisations, such as youth organisations, health and wellbeing organisations, and older people.

Conclusion

The Resilience programme attracted a broad range of organisations from small community-led initiatives, e.g. Aulaw and Vegecoopia, to well-established charities such as KCAH and Oxygen. This is to be applauded and shows the breadth of KVA's reach. It can present a challenge where some attendees feel that the information presented is not for them, i.e. too entry-level or too advanced. However, groups have voluntarily signed up for a training programme, and as long as the programme description has been accurate, participants should be aware of what content will be covered. The primary focus and aims of the programme seemed to have resonated with participants as they told us they were looking to secure funding or sustainability for their organisation, which suggests the programme was correctly timed. The fact that participants sought alternative dates for their 1:1 sessions showed that they valued the interaction and chance for knowledge sharing; as one person said, 'the critical thinking space was invaluable.'

The Resilience Programme has demonstrated strong demand for accessible, flexible, and relational capacity building within the voluntary sector. With refinements to structure and delivery, the model has significant potential to support organisational resilience and growth at scale. The next steps include sharing findings with stakeholders, refining the delivery model, and exploring further funding and scaling opportunities.

Appendices

Appendix A: Full List of Participating Organisations

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A list of the participating and attending organisations for the KVA Resilience programme 2024-25.

NAME OF ORGANISATION	TYPE OF ORGANISATION	REGISTRATION NUMBER	ANNUAL INCOME SIZE	SERVICE AREA / THEME
AULAW Organic Farm UK C.I.C.	CIC	14168680 (CH)	£40,953	Local farming
Connect North Korea	CIO	1176563 (CC)	£353,591	Migrants and refugees support for the Korean community.
Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness	Registered charity / CLG	1075890 (CC) 3735702 (CG)	£1,09M	Homelessness
New Malden Town Centre	CIC	15192899 (CH)	£8750	Town Centre rejuvenation / local business development
River Thames Boat Project	Registered charity / CLG	1080281 (CC) 3953201 (CH)	£187,333	Educational and fun cruises on the River Thames
Refugee Action Kingston	Registered charity	1176768 (CC)	£632,894	Migrants and refugees
True Honour	Registered charity	1165849 (CC)	£33,791	Women and domestic abuse
Vegecoopia C.I.C	CIC Ltd by shares	14812396 (CH)	£4950	Local farming
HIVE	Unincorporated	n/a	n/k	Environment / climate disaster awareness

Appendix C: Feedback Summary Data