



Voluntary Value ESF Bulletin February 2010

Welcome to the tenth European Social Fund (ESF) bulletin for Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) in the South West Competitiveness area.¹ This bulletin summarises the opportunities for VCO engagement with ESF.

1. ESF Opportunities in 2010

Huge opportunities for funding are coming your way in autumn 2010 – providing they fit with your core mission, and that preparation for the tenders starts now. Of the 42 ESF contracts currently delivered across the region, 39 expire at the end of December 2010. In anticipation, significant numbers of ESF contracts will be put out to open and competitive tendering during autumn 2010. More specific timelines are outlined below.

1.1 National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Opportunities

- **The opportunity:** NOMS is the one ESF agency going to tender before the autumn. The contract will last for 4-years from 2011, and aims to improve the employability of ex-offenders, focussing on individuals with ex-Forces profiles, and those transitioning from the youth offender support system.
- **The timescale:** The window for providers opens on 26 February 2010, with a Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire, available at <http://procurement.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/about/procurementinitiatives/esfprogramme200713/>.
- **What to do now:** Interested sub-contractors should approach providers to be part of their bid – see the grid below.
- **Key contacts:** Of the providers listed below, A4E was successful in 2009, and the Probation Services were also very competitive (but unsuccessful) – both are worth an approach.

Company Name	Contact Name	Email address	Phone	Mobile Phone Number
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¹ The Competitiveness area serves all of the South West except for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, who are served by the Convergence area for ESF.

A4e Ltd	Donna Andrew	Rkhokher@A4e.co.uk	0114 2236769	
Alabare Christian Care Centres	Rachel Wetton	r.wetton@alabare.co.uk	01722 344478	
Avon and Somerset Probation Area	Suzanne Thompson	suzanne.thompson@avon-somerset.probaton.gsi.gov.uk	0117 9597272	+0044078 46425614
Devon & Cornwall Probation Area	Greg Willson	greg.willson@devon-cornwall.probaton.gsi.gov.uk	01752-827584	
Dorset Probation Area	Matthew Douglas	matthew.douglas@dorset.probaton.gsi.gov.uk	01202 664071	+4407794 148724
Gloucestershire Probation Area	Erik Wilkinson	Erik.Wilkinson@gloucestershire.probaton.gsi.gov.uk	01453 760100	+4407774 240793
Wiltshire Probation Board	Gavin Henderson	gavin.henderson@wiltshire.probaton.gsi.gov.uk ; veronica.franklin@wiltshire.probaton.gsi.gov.uk	01225 710904	+4478675 38082

2.2 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Opportunities

- **The opportunity:** DWP will be finalising the tender specifications for £13million of ESF projects in late summer 2010. Tenders will have a likely focus on individuals experiencing drug abuse/homelessness, and Job Seeker Allowance claimants who have been on the register over 6 months.
- **The timescale:** The tendering window will be late autumn 2010.
- **Key Contacts:** Current DWP providers.
- **What to do now:** Promote yourself to DWP providers – [reply to this email for a list](#); or, consider collaborating with VCOs in your area in a consortia.

2.3 Skills Funding Agency (SFA) Opportunities:

- **The opportunity:** SFA will have a total of £75m to spend across the region, representing approximately 80% of all ESF monies. Tenders will have a likely focus on higher level skills (level 3), 'green' learning and 'employer responsive learning'. More details on what this means in practice will emerge in late March.
- **The timescale:** The tendering window is from the late autumn.
- **Key Contacts:** Current Learning and Skills Council (LSC) providers.
- **What to do now:** Promote yourself to current LSC providers – [reply to this email for a list](#); or, consider collaborating with VCOs in your area in a consortia.

2.4 Community Grants

- **The opportunity:** The funding pot called Community Grants, which reserves ESF money for the third sector, will be re-launched. Under previous

programmes (including 'Global Grants') this allowed for frontline third sector organisations to bid for a maximum of £12,000 per organisation, representing an ESF in 'bite-size' opportunity. In the South West, approximately 50 VCOs benefitted from Community Grants the last time around.

- **The timescale:** Likely to be 2011 at the earliest.
- **Key contacts:** Learning Curve, South West Foundation – and the Voluntary Value project.
- **What to do now:** Wait!

3. Engaging with Up-Coming ESF Tendering Opportunities

The Voluntary Value project believes that VCOs seeking to engage with ESF tendering opportunities have two options:

3.1 Become a sub-contractor

All ESF projects will be delivered by a lead provider, but because of the size and scope of the contracts, smaller frontline VCOs struggle to access this opportunity. Lead providers across the South West currently sub-contract ESF outputs to 288 organisations, one-third of which are from the third sector. Opportunities for VCOs to draw down ESF money are therefore greatest at this sub-contracting level.

Providers are not obliged to seek sub-contractors through an open and competitive process; some do, but many do not. The most reliable way for a VCO to become a sub-contractor is to make a direct approach to the provider in advance. The list of current providers is a very useful guide to who will be lead providers in future ESF contracts – reply by email to receive a list of providers operating in your area.

3.2 Form a Consortium

By collaborating with other VCOs engaged in skills and employment, you could be part of a body that can realistically compete as an ESF provider. But to do this in time for the DWP and SFA tendering rounds in the autumn, VCOs are encouraged to start pro-active preparations now.

4. The Feasibility of Consortia Working

As part of the Voluntary Value project, two VCO meetings in Bristol and Gloucester in February 2010 debated the feasibility of establishing consortia for ESF bids. The following advantages and challenges were identified:

4.1 Advantages of Consortia

- Consortia allow VCOs to access high value contracts such as ESF, without going through the 'middle man' provider.
- Consortia allow VCOs to be more competitive without abandoning their core mission/values.
- The SFA is pro-third sector consortia, and will reflect this in its commissioning guidelines.

- A third sector 'managing agent' would streamline the administration of consortia.
- Consortia are effective when formed around an issue (skills and employment) rather than a specific fund, such as ESF.

4.2 Challenges of Consortia

- Evidence is sought that proves that consortia-working is the answer. (NB: Reports suggest Voluntary Action Sheffield has developed a successful consortia model.)
- Resources have to be invested in consortia preparation without any guarantee of success.
- The risks/liabilities of formally partnering with other VCOs are not fully known.
- Capacity-building of VCOs is required to prepare them for consortia bidding.

4.3 Next Steps

- Requests were made for training in consortia working; if you would like to receive this training, please press 'reply'.
- Requests were made for a document on 'what VCOs need to do to be bid-ready'.
- Further Voluntary Value meetings will enhance local VCO collaboration around employment and skills; they are:

1. **Plymouth**, organised by Plymouth Third Sector Consortium and SWF, 3rd March, 10.00am, at Wolesey Community Building. Email simon@southwestforum.org.uk for a flyer.
2. **Chippenham**, organised by Learning Curve, 16th March. Email jaclyn@learningcurve.org.uk for further details.
3. **Dorset** (location to be confirmed), organised by Learning Curve, 27th April. Email marisa@learningcurve.org.uk for further details.

5. Opportunity for VCOs who Benefit Older Workers

VCOs specialising in delivering employment and skills programmes to the 50+ age group have an excellent opportunity to promote themselves to ESF providers at a half-day seminar at Taunton Cricket Club, 9 March 2009, 10am to 1.30pm (followed by lunch). The seminar is organised by The Age and Employment Network (TAEN). It is aimed at improving the capacity for ESF providers to deliver to the 50+ age group, an area identified for improvement in the next round of commissioning. To book, go to: <http://taen.org.uk/esf/events>

6. Compact Report on European Funding Highlights ESF Shortfalls

A new Compact report supports the key concerns of the Voluntary Value project:

- 'Short timescales (generally four to six weeks), between the publication of the invitation to tender and the closing date, do not allow time to establish new partnerships or develop new programmes that would be necessary to meet the specification.'

- 'DWP agreed that the tendering timetables for ESF contracts are shorter than ideal, and do not allow sufficient time for prime contractors to develop strong and reliable relationships with subcontractors, or vice versa.'
- LSC 'considered that, generally, delivery works best when partnerships are established well before the bidding exercise'.

See the full report at

http://www.tsen.org.uk/documents/FINALEuropean%20structural%20funding_report_webinteractive_080110.pdf

7. Review and Learn from Other ESF Projects

Voluntary Value is seeking VCOs to take part in a peer review of ESF projects in other European countries – an exciting opportunity to gain experience of project evaluation, and learn about skills and employment projects elsewhere. Those interested must have competence, knowledge, experience and understanding of EU-funded projects related to migrant and ethnic minority employment, training and support. All expenses would be covered.

The deadline is tight if you are interested – please email sandra.turner@tsen.org.uk of Third Sector European Network by 25th February.

8. Free Course to Help Smaller Firms Bid for Government Contracts

A free online public procurement course designed to help smaller organisations bid for the public sector contracts can be accessed at <http://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-news-1.nsf/lfi/410549>

This bulletin was prepared by Simon Charters, Regional Coordinator (SWF), and enabled through support from the ESF and South West Regional Development Agency. Your feedback on the style and content of the bulletin are very welcome – please contact Simon directly on simon@southwestforum.org.uk / 01392 823758.