

Christian Funders and Grant-making: An Analysis

Ben Ryan

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executive summary

The Christian charitable sector is growing, and it plays an increasingly critical role in a wide range of services. There has, however, been little analysis of the Christian funding sector that is so important in supporting the Christian – and indeed wider – charitable world. This report looks specifically at who Christian funders are, what they are doing and what the future of the sector might look like. It is based on quantitative analysis of funders registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales and interviews with 21 different Christian funders and 16 grant recipients.

1. the landscape of Christian funding today

For the purposes of creating a picture of this sector we have limited Christian funders to those registered charities that make grants to organisations (as opposed to individuals) and that have some form of Christian ethos. It also excludes such small funders as support only a single church, school or hospital.

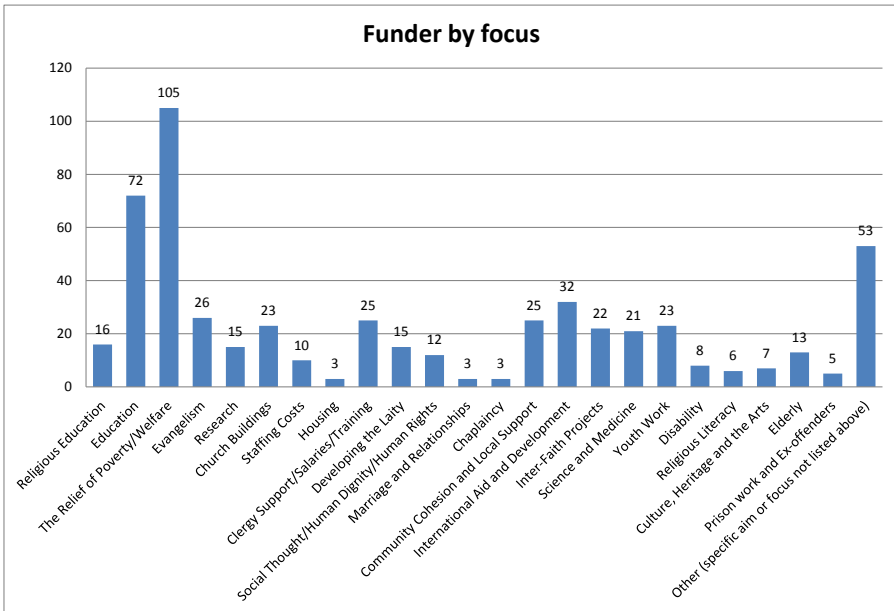
Within those boundaries there are 268 Christian funders currently registered in England and Wales today.

In terms of what these funders actually support in practice, using the information they supply to the Charity Commission it is possible to chart those interests as follows:

Education and the relief of poverty/welfare are by far the most common focuses for Christian funders, though it should be noted that these are often “meta-categories” that include many of the other areas. Many of the funders do not give lengthy details of what they support on the Charity Commission website, which makes it difficult to get the full picture of who funds what.

Those data do, however, illustrate something of the breadth of interests in the field. In fact, breadth is something of a theme of this research, since Christian funders are so varied in almost every aspect of what they do and their identities as to make it extremely difficult to conclude that this is a cohesive sector at all.

Looking at the size of these trusts illustrates this range well:



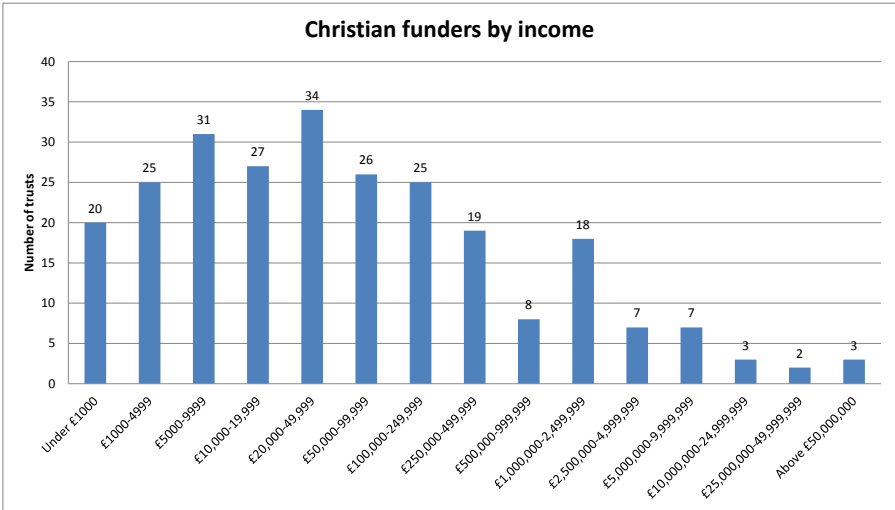
Clearly there is a significant spread in terms of the size of Christian funders, though it is fair to say that, as a whole, the sector is dominated by smaller funders, with 74% having an income of less than £250,000 a year.

In theological terms there is also a reasonable amount of diversity in the sector:

A significant majority have a Christian identity, but no specific denominational identity. In some cases this is due to a definite decision to work in an ecumenical manner. It may well be that in many cases this is less a definite decision and more a vaguer sense of whether that identity as a Christian funder is really critical to the organisation's identity. From the interviews conducted it would seem that there is a range of perspectives on that issue.

2. what it means to be a Christian funder today

Based on interview data the following themes emerged as critical issues for the Christian funding sector.



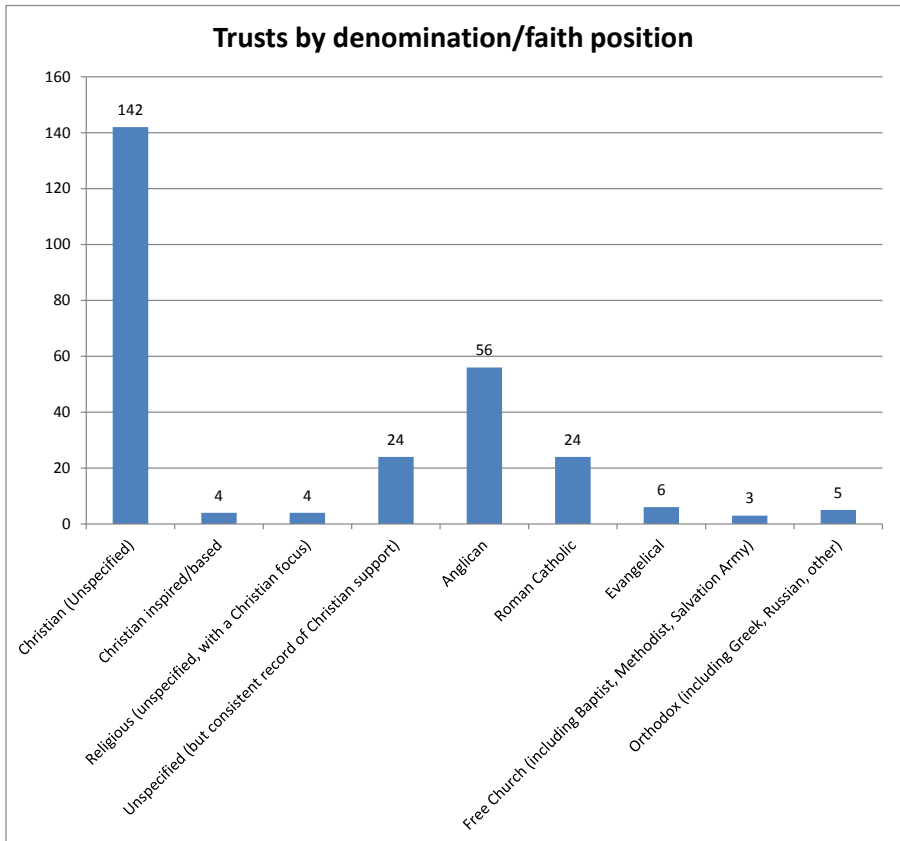
2.1 “the advancement of the Christian religion”

The advancement of the Christian religion is a stock expression used by many funders to describe their charitable activities to the Charity Commission. However, how it is understood varies significantly. There are some trusts who believe that advancement is something that requires evangelism and ‘winning souls for the Kingdom’. For others the key to the advancement of the Christian religion lay more in causing change within the Church. Some, for example, are keen to see Christians act or think differently. “Advancement” in this sense is about creating a perceived change for the better within the lives of existing Christians. In many cases, however, interviewees struggled to answer what they meant by the term. It was often found listed as a charitable object, but in many cases seemed to be shorthand for a fairly vague understanding of being a Christian charity.

2.2 focus

The areas on which Christian funders focus can essentially be divided into three categories. First, there are popular areas for which there are a large number of available funders. By far the most common here (as the data exercise suggested) were poverty and education, though there was a significant range in what that meant in practice.

Second, were a number of ‘Marmite’ issues – areas which trusts either very consciously supported or explicitly rejected. The key example here is evangelism, with around half of



our interviewees explicitly stating they would not fund evangelistic activities under any circumstances, while a few saw that as their primary purpose. Church buildings and staff salaries were another such issue, sometimes for simply pragmatic reasons (buildings are very expensive and many funders felt were simply too large for them to support), others for the ideological reason that they felt religious groups should pay for those things themselves. Research was the final Marmite area – with many rejecting funding that work on the grounds that they couldn’t see the practical outcome from it.

Finally, there were a large number of relatively niche concerns and interests that were unique to particular trusts or only found in particular small groups of trusts.

2.3 mechanics

There was a major philosophical divide in funders between supply- and demand-led funding. Supply-led funders had a very particular mission and purpose for which they provided funds (e.g. they had seen the need to confront a particular educational problem and provided grants to those contributing to the solution). Demand-led tended to have a less clear sense of their own purpose and instead funded the things they were approached with that seemed most impactful to them at the time.

Supply-led funders could get bogged down in their own criteria and struggle to adapt to the way demand from applicants was changing. Conversely, they tended to be clearer about why they existed and avoided a drift into undefined, arbitrary funding that could sometimes be a risk with demand-led funders.

2.4 process

For some Christian funders their faith identity was expressed entirely in the areas that they funded. For others, however, part of being a Christian funder was being Christian in all aspects of their existence. So, for example, many placed a premium on relationships between funder and recipient. This might take the form of funders going out and finding the causes they wanted to fund, or of maintaining an ongoing relationship with causes they particularly value.

This was tied to a process favoured by a number of funders of empowering recipients – with several having policies of providing not only funds to recipients, but networking opportunities or in some cases management staff to help grow the charity in the future.

Inevitably the question of impact assessment was growing across the sector, though many still did not have particularly developed or sophisticated models for how to do this.

2.5 gaps

There was a surprising uniformity between interviewees on what the gaps in the Christian funding sector were. It was widely agreed that the most difficult thing to fund was core costs and infrastructure, with many trusts prioritising novelty or 'glamorous' areas. Otherwise the difficult areas broadly conformed to the 'Marmite' issues above – with evangelism, buildings and research having a far more limited pool of potential funders than social action work.

2.6 barriers

The main barrier to the Christian funding sector was one of over-demand. Many trusts are simply over-saturated with applications, short on time and manpower with which to review them and insufficiently resourced to fund everything that is worthy of help.

3. recommendations

There are five proposed recommendations for the future of this sector. Note that these should not be taken as a criticism of any particular funder at present, but as means by which the limited resources presently available might be optimised in the future.

3.1 gaps

Given the consensus that there is a serious issue with the lack of funding available for core costs and infrastructure, this will have to be reviewed, either by some trusts changing their focus, or perhaps by different funders joining together to meet particular needs. The issue of the advancement of the Christian religion and, within that, evangelism is also becoming more urgent; Christianity in the UK is facing certain pressures and churches will need to find ways to grow numerically over the coming years if Christianity is going to have a sustainable future in the country.

There is a need to confront the challenge about faith ethos. Secular charities can apply to both secular and Christian sources of funding, and most of our interviewees were prepared to fund non-Christian charities. By contrast, though Christian charities certainly can apply to both Christian and secular funders, in practice many secular funders do not like funding faith-based charities, particularly if what is being funded includes some sort of religious dimension. Christian charities in practice, therefore, become incentivised to limit their Christian activities in order to appeal to secular funders. This is apparent in looking at the difference between the number of funders who fund social action work as opposed to the relatively few who fund more explicitly religious work (albeit that many do fund social action work with a conscious missional aspect to it). If Christian funders operate in the same way, this presents a serious challenge to the future of the Christian charitable sector.

3.2 research and theology

The sense of understanding what a Christian ethos or identity meant in practice was often one that funders found difficult to articulate. With greater clarity of what a Christian identity means it should be easier to answer questions about what sort of areas should be prioritised for funding and how to embody the ethos into all aspects of the operation. Further research that combines the practical needs of funders into a broader theological model could be useful.

3.3 collaboration

There are opportunities in some areas for better networks and collaboration between funders (to help make sure that they are sharing best knowledge and practice in the sector) and also between funders and recipients (to improve communication and to clarify what each expects of the other).

3.4 process

The means by which applications and impact reporting are done vary significantly between different funders. This has also been the subject of significant debate across the philanthropic sector, but was not much in evidence among smaller funders. Individual funders need to consider whether they currently have clear, proportional procedures that are understood by recipients.

3.5 impact

Christian funders play a critical role in supporting a wide range of activities in a growing faith charity sector. However, the resources are limited and so there does need to be a wider appreciation of impact – and how we can assure value for money. This is not easy in all sectors, and should also remain proportionate to the amount of money being given. There is a genuine debate to be had about how possible (or even desirable) measuring some outcomes might be. There is no easy way to assure the impact of some more spiritual proposals. Yet this is in tension with the very real need to focus and improve the performance of the charity sector as a whole so that these limited resources are fully maximised – a concept of stewardship which is also critical to Christian understandings of finance.

introduction

This is a study of the Christian grant-making sector in England and Wales. Little has been written about Christian grant giving organisations, yet they play a critically important role in supporting a diverse range of faith (and non-faith) activity, including social action work, international development, education, churches (including training, salaries and buildings), research and others. In a period when significant cut-backs in government funding and declining congregation sizes are putting a squeeze on traditional church incomes, these organisations are absolutely critical to the support of a wide range of Christian and other voluntary activity in the UK.

This is all the more true when the faith charity sector as a whole is growing. An NPC report in 2016 showed that 27% of UK charities are now faith-based, including nearly half of all overseas aid charities (49%) and human rights charities (45%), as well as four in ten anti-poverty charities (39%). Furthermore, the report showed that in the past ten years a higher proportion of faith-based charities (34%) were registered with the Charity Commission than non-faith-based (25%): the faith sector is growing, and at a disproportionately fast rate.¹ Who funds this work (and that of other faith-based activities not registered with the Charity Commission) is a critical question.

This report attempts to answer just who the Christian grant makers are and why they do what they do, and to assess the way the sector as a whole is moving. The research consisted of three strands:

1. A data study of Christian funders from the Charity Commission database. The sector is sufficiently large and difficult to define that in practice we looked only at charities that make grants to organisations (i.e. not those that only fund individuals), with some sort of Christian basis (so far as can be detected from their charitable objects or websites), and excluding those that only fund one particular school, parish or church.
2. Twenty-one semi-structured qualitative interviews. These were conducted with a range of funders (including CEOs, grant managers, trustees and secretaries). The range of funders included those from very large funds to very small and from

the explicitly Christian to those with a loose Christian ethos or background (and covering a range of denominations).

3. Sixteen interviews with a range of Christian organisations that had applied for money from funders, Christian and otherwise. These explore their experience of raising funds from different kinds of grant-making bodies.

For the purpose of this report, all interviews have here been anonymised, as have any identifying details within quotations used.

It should be noted that in conducting this research it is not our intention to pass judgement on the way in which these trusts operate. The report is intended to be a survey and analysis of the sector as it currently stands rather than a criticism of any particular model within it. Recommendations are intended only to help maximise the effectiveness of what is already being done.

The report is divided into three sections:

1. Landscape. What does the Christian funder landscape look like according to data taken from the Charity Commission?
2. What does it mean to be a *Christian* funder? Based on interview data what do these funders think they are doing and what do they see as the trajectory of the sector as a whole?
3. Recommendations.

references – introduction

- 1 David Bull, Lucy de Las Casas and Rachel Wharton, *Faith Matters: Understanding the Size, Income and Focus of Faith-Based Charities* (London: New Philanthropy Capital, 2016).

the landscape

The Christian funding sector is extremely broad, and defies easy definition or categorisation. For the purposes of establishing useable data this research uses a number of criteria. First, the data only include grant-making organisations (i.e. it does not include individuals who give charitable donations, unless they do so through an established charitable trust). The data also include only those organisations that are registered charities with the Charity Commission for England and Wales, which therefore excludes various companies that might make grants to Christian causes but are not themselves charities, as well as various philanthropic bodies that are only registered in Scotland or abroad.

From those that remained, we further eliminated funders that did not make grants to organisations (i.e. we excluded a number of trusts that only funded individuals). As far as it was possible to do so we also eliminated those trusts that exist for the sole purpose of supporting a single parish, church, or school, because we were looking for those organisations that existed to fund a range of causes. In practice many of the descriptions and details of charities as provided on the Charity Commission website are sufficiently vague that we expect a number to have got through the net, an unavoidable problem given the quality of the data available.

Finally, and in some ways most subjectively, we tried to assure that all the charities included had some sort of Christian basis. There was no straightforward way of finding that information. Our criteria incorporated those charities that include “the advancement of the Christian religion” in their charitable objects as well as those with an explicit concern for various churches (Church of England, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Methodist etc.) and those that stated some sort of Christian basis in their submission or description of themselves to the charity commission. This is an imperfect measure – again largely due to limitations in what is available from searching the Charity Commission.

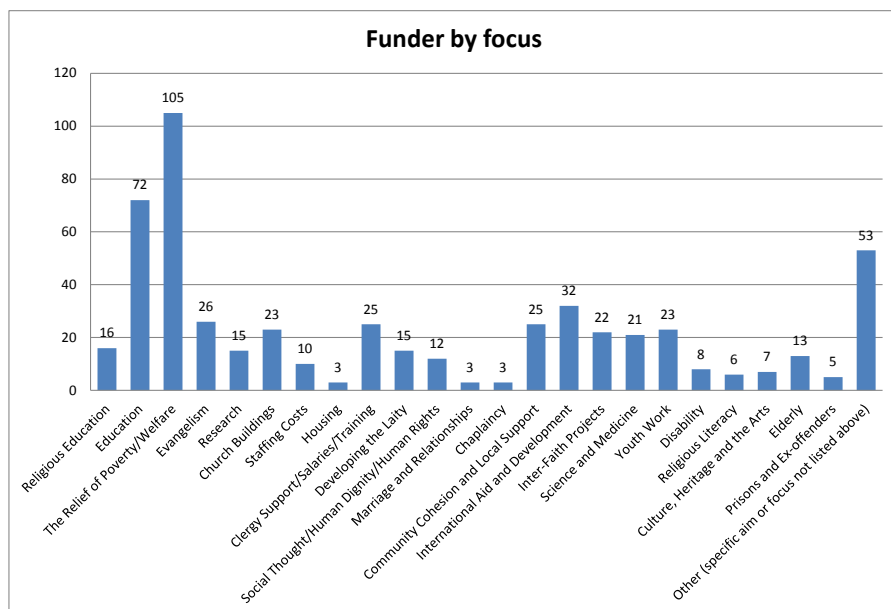
Those caveats noted, we were left with a figure of 268 Christian funders. That will strike many as a surprisingly large number. In practice, for any organisation seeking funding, the list to which they are eligible to apply will be far smaller. As we shall see below, these 268 represent a huge range in terms of their size, the size of their grants and the issues on

which they focus. Many are extremely small. What follows is a breakdown of a number of those issues.

focus

It can be difficult to get an accurate picture of the splits in focus of the various Christian funders, not least due to limitations in the way in which data are recorded with the Charity Commission. Registered charities all provide details of their activities (or 'objects'), but these are often kept quite vague. For example, a standard formula for a charity is to describe its activities as the 'Relief of poverty' or 'Education', but without any content to define what that actually means in practice. Others will provide much more significant detail as to what they fund and support. The only way of unpacking many of the categories is via qualitative interviews, which make up the next section of the report. Based on the data available from the Charity Commission, we can record the following spread of focuses:

The fact that the relief of poverty and education are so far ahead of other categories is in part because they are 'meta-categories' that include many other things which may or may not have been specified by any given trust. It seems highly likely, for example, that more than 13 trusts fund work with the elderly but have not said that explicitly in their charitable



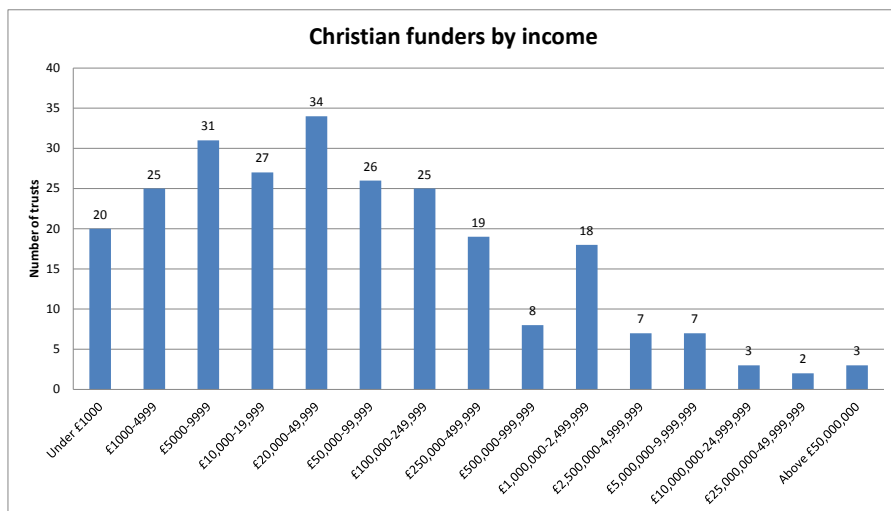
objects. Otherwise the data show a very broad spread of areas in which Christian funders take an interest, but with a particular trend towards supporting social action work.

income

For this section we are missing data from 13 of the trusts for a variety of reasons (some were too newly registered to have yet had to submit accounts to the Charity Commission, while others have simply yet to declare finances for the latest year, for example). Otherwise, the data are from the last year's submitted reports to the Charity Commission.

the data show a very broad spread of areas in which Christian funders take an interest, but with a particular trend towards supporting social action work.

The range in the size of Christian funders is perhaps best shown by looking at their income), as recorded in accounts submitted to the Charity Commission (note that this does not necessarily equate to grant sizes, which are discussed further below):



The obvious take away from these data is that while there are some very large Christian funders the sector as a whole is 'bottom heavy' – which is to say that most funders meeting our criteria are really quite small. Of the 255 for which we have data, 74% have an income of less than £250,000 a year. There is a huge range in terms of income, but in practice a high proportion of the money is concentrated in a relatively small pool of funders.

Several of these statistics are also somewhat deceptive (particularly at the higher end), since some of the larger funders have many activities that are nothing to do with awarding grants. Two of the largest charities in the data do provide grants to external organisations, but have a primary role which is to deliver their own activity (one as a religious group, the other as a development agency in its own right). That which is specific to their funding operations, were it possible to split that off, would be much lower.

For that reason, to get a more accurate reflection of the scale of grant giving it can be better to look at the range of grant sizes instead.

size of grant

Unsurprisingly, given the difference in size between funders in terms of their income, there is also a considerable range in the size of any one grant that can be given by a funder. This is not necessarily tied to the size of the funder – for example one charity with a very large turnover specialises in ‘micro grants’ – lots of small grants given to local projects. Another charity was mid-table in terms of turnover, but gave relatively large grants, choosing to put all its money into only a few grants per year.

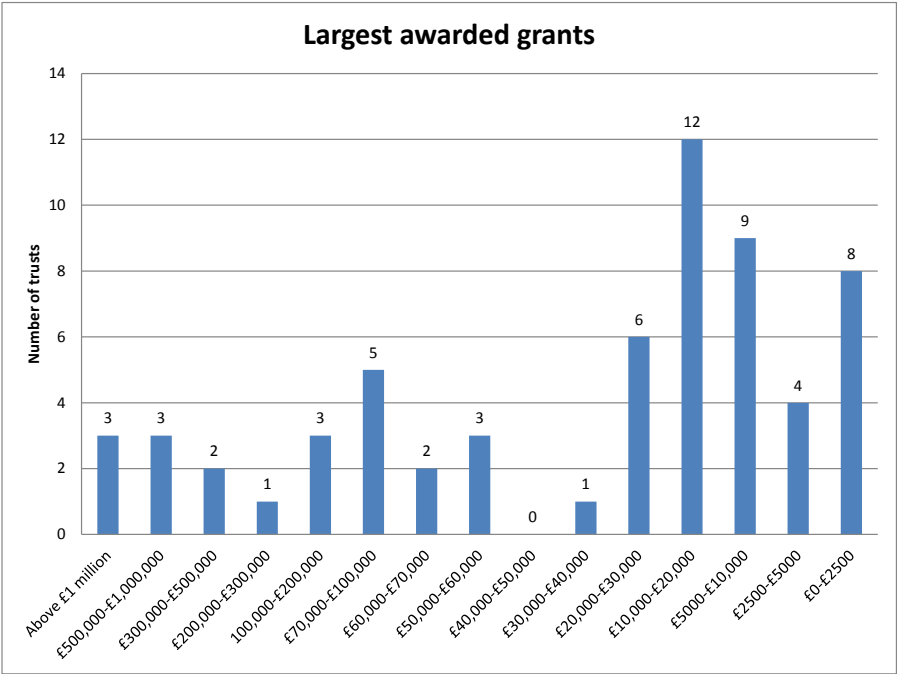
It should be noted that this is the area for which we have the least data. Only charities over a certain size are required to submit detailed audited accounts to the Charity Commission, and even those do not always break down how the total grants expenditure is divided between recipients. Nor is such information always readily available from funders’ websites (if indeed they have a website). As a result, we only have data on grant sizes from 62 Christian funders.

It is impossible from the data available to extract those grants made for purely Christian causes from other grants. Many of the funders give money to various causes, of which things to do with their Christian ethos make up only one stream.

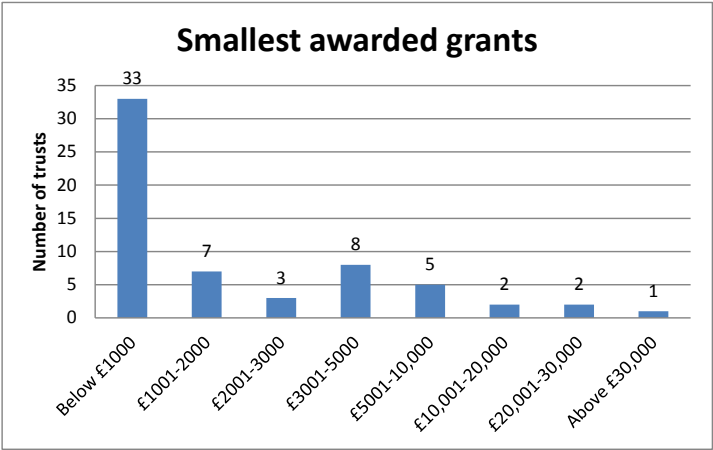
From the available data we can see that some charities have no lower limit on grant size (with some grants being made in the tens or hundreds of pounds), while others only make grants of £50,000 and over. Similarly, some charities state that they have no upper limit on grants they will make, while others give no more than £300 to any one recipient.

The chart below illustrates the range of maximum grants from the available data:

While this illustrates the range in minimum grants:

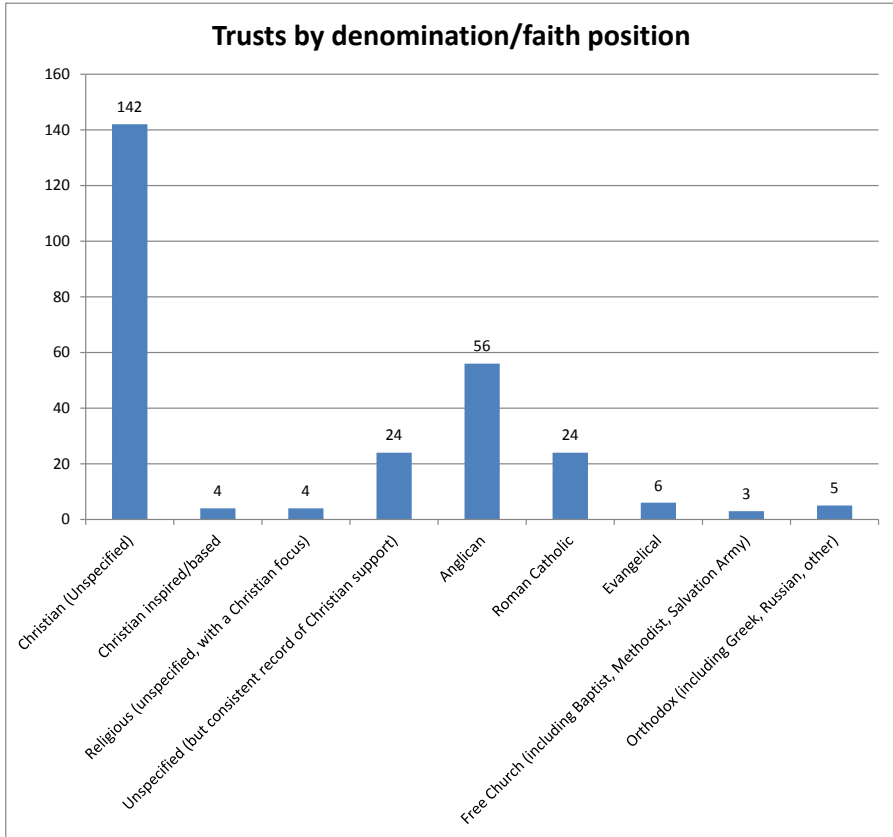


It is probably fair to assume that many of the missing trusts from this data are drawn from that ‘bottom heavy’ part of the funder population and would, accordingly, likely be able to make only small grants.



faith breakdown

Apart from their focus and financial details we can also get a sense of funders' denominational or faith position. These are charted below:



It is notable that by far the most common description of Christian funders' faith basis is of a generic or unspecified Christianity. This makes sense in that many of the funders are explicitly ecumenical or were founded out of a Christian belief, but without any specific denominational content. It is clear from going through many of the websites or accounts of funders that a number have, in fact, got origins more associated with one particular denomination but over time have moved away from that status for a variety of reasons (both ideological and practical).

The desire to avoid being pinned down denominationally or theologically (either by being an unspecified type of Christianity, or else by defining itself as only based in or inspired by Christianity) may more broadly be an indicator that many Christian funders do not necessarily have a nuanced or worked-out understanding of their faith basis (though, of course, many will). This cannot be proved from the data alone, but does link to some of the findings from the interviews discussed below. This is not to say that to be a Christian funder without a denomination is evidence of a lack of clarity over identity, since many interviews highlighted a very clear sense of ecumenical purpose, but it is to suggest that such understandings may not be widespread.

Of those that do have a specific denomination there are more than twice as many Anglican charities as those of the next largest group (56, versus 24 Roman Catholics). There are various factors that may be behind this, beyond the obvious point that according to the census Anglicans remain the largest single faith group in the UK. A number of the

*the data collected here
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Anglican charities were the result of the sale of former Church of England colleges that were closed in the 1960s and 1970s due to changes in the way that the education sector as a whole worked. No other denomination had nearly so many colleges affected by this change. Others are associated with Anglican dioceses or parishes but have a public facing status (i.e. they do not simply fund the church in that diocese).

conclusion

The data collected here give a snapshot image of the Christian funder sector so far as we can ascertain from the imperfect data available publicly from the Charity Commission. They illustrate something of the chaos and spread of the sector that covers a huge range of focuses, with charities that range dramatically in terms of size. To try and unpack these findings in more depth requires insights drawn from qualitative interviews, which are explored in depth in chapter 2.

what does it mean to be a Christian funder?

overview

The first thing to be quite clear on is that the Christian funder sector is not really a coherent or even self-conscious sector at all. The evidence of both the data analysis in the previous chapter and the interviews that form the basis of this, is that there is a vast difference on virtually every issue. We have already seen that the difference in size of these trusts, in terms of their income and expenditure and the size of their grants is so large as to make meaningful comparisons between the biggest and smallest effectively impossible. The same could be said of their respective faith positions and ethos. We have called all these charities 'Christian funders' yet the very nature of what it means to be Christian provokes a significant range of possible positions.

We have already seen a spread on the issue of denomination, but there are also stark differences in the simple question of how important being Christian actually is to any of the funders, and what they think the decision to call themselves Christian entails in practice.

There is, for example, a gap between those funders that fund other Christian organisations (such as social action charities) but without any requirement that the work itself has a particular Christian element to it, and those that demand a more clearly and explicitly Christian aspect to everything they fund (though there are admittedly grey areas in between those poles). A number of funders (especially Catholic ones) are particularly committed to supporting theological concepts like human dignity, or ideas from Catholic Social Teaching. Another group, particularly associated with evangelical funders, is keener to see evangelism and a very clear Christian identity to projects. A third group, containing a number of Anglican charities in particular, is most keen to support multi-faith or inter-faith work. Often members of this third group share a particular model associated with the Established Church, which sees part of the role of establishment as being in the support of a broader national cohesion.

This chapter of the report explores those challenges and differences, and based on interview data examines how the sector is working today. It is divided into several sub-sections:

1. What does “the advancement of the Christian religion” mean to different funders?
2. What sort of areas are actually funded and why?
3. What are the mechanics of Christian grant giving and are these funders demand-led (funding such things as appear to be needed) or supply-led (where funding is directed at a very specific purpose of the funder’s particular choice)?
4. What does the process of grant-making, and particularly a *Christian* approach, look like in that context?
5. What are the funding gaps that funders don’t currently seem to be filling?
6. What are the barriers to grant-making?
7. How do recipients view the Christian grant-making sector?

These findings are drawn from interviews with 21 different funders and 16 different recipients. The funders represent a range of positions from the data exercise above. In faith and denomination terms they include funders who are ‘Catholic’, ‘Anglican’, ‘Evangelical’, ‘Christian inspired’, ‘ecumenical’, and ‘unspecified but with a history of supporting Christian causes in particular’. Grant sizes range from several trusts whose maximum grant is less than £3,500 up to a few which have given grants of in excess of £1,000,000. The recipients’ responses are particularly covered in section seven, though, where relevant, some recipients have also been quoted at other points. These 16 interviewees include representatives of several social action charities (involved in youth work, pastoral care for seafarers, homelessness and prisons), churches, education bodies, an evangelistic charity, international development charities and others. Again they vary significantly in terms of turnover and also in terms of how long they have been established (with some dating back to the nineteenth century or further, and others having only been founded in the past few years).

1. the advancement of the Christian religion

One feature that unites many of the surveyed funders is the term “the advancement of the Christian religion”. This is a stock phrase that appears in the charitable objects of many Christian funders. How it is understood in practice, however, varies significantly.

At one end of the spectrum are those funders that view the advancement of the Christian religion as being at least in part about evangelism and 'winning souls for the Kingdom of God'. As we shall see below, this is something of a 'Marmite' issue for funders, some seeing it as a key component of their support, others actively rejecting the idea. One interviewee in the former category, for example, explained this as being about supporting

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advancement rather than simple maintenance of Christianity. We are not terribly interested in funding stuff that already exists. Advancing the Christian religion means doing something new and reaching new people.

For others, the key to the advancement of the Christian religion lay more in causing change within the Church. Some, for example, were keen on seeing Christians act or think differently. 'Advancement' in this sense is about creating a perceived change for the better within the lives of existing Christians. This might involve funding research to change mindsets (perhaps to emphasise a new approach to working with other faiths, or one of interaction with the sciences) or to see particular theological ideas more embedded in practice.

Several Catholic funders, in particular, seemed to emphasise that latter idea, with a focus on deepening rather than widening the faith. They stressed the need to develop the laity with a greater focus on Catholic Social Teaching or spiritual resources. One, for example, talked about the desire to "raise up a generation of Catholic social activists" and to see "young people transformed". This was a focus of some other funders too, particularly those with an educational focus on providing resources or training for Christian purposes.

Another approach was to see advancement as being in the support for projects that were signs of the Kingdom or of the love of God through social action. Social action is, of course, an impossibly broad category and perhaps not surprisingly therefore, accounts for the focus of a huge number of funders (105 work in the area of poverty and welfare alone). Those funders who thought about their support for social action in terms of the "advancement of the Christian religion" tended to view it in this light – that Christianity would be advanced through people witnessing Christians doing good. At least one funder was especially explicit in talking about the point of their trust being to support "transformation in people's lives" which would "advance the Kingdom".

In many cases, however, interviewees simply struggled to answer what they meant by the term. It was often found listed as a charitable object, but in many cases seemed to be shorthand for a fairly vague understanding of being a Christian charity. One

interviewee made this into a virtue, arguing that good stewardship required the ability to be responsive and evolve to meet the particular needs of Christianity at any given time. Several others noted that it was good practice to keep things as vague as possible in the charitable objects to allow for maximum flexibility and the ability to change how the funder operated in a way which was “future-proof” (safe from changes in policy or practice that would otherwise put them in a difficult situation).

what precisely made their work about Christianity was often only implied, rather than explicitly thought through

The evidence of this issue is that some funders have a very clear theological model for funding a particular conception of the advancement of the Christian religion, which can vary significantly from others. More broadly, however, the overall picture was often one of a lack of clarity over quite what it meant. What precisely made their work about Christianity was

often only implied, rather than explicitly thought through, and in some cases essentially amounted to a generic commitment to “doing good”.

2. what areas do they focus on?

This section is divided between those areas that are very commonly funded across a number of different funders, those that are ‘Marmite’ issues (areas that really divide funders) and those niche roles that are more or less unique to particular funders.

2.1 popular funding areas

We have already seen from the data exercise above that there is a spectrum of areas in which these funders work, but that by far the biggest two sections are welfare and the relief of poverty (105 funders out of 268) and education (72 funders). In the qualitative interviews, we attempted to unpick in more detail what the different funding areas were and why they had been selected.

Poverty and welfare most commonly covered the funding of social action work. Within that, our interviewees represented funders who had supported action on disability, food banks, debt advice, refugees, women’s refuges, and many others. A typical comment from funders who prioritised this area was the desire to be “practical” or to be able to see the impact of the work. As a funding area it was the most common, but also arguably one of the least distinctively Christian. For many trusts, the practical benefit of the work was valued significantly higher than any faith aspect (and indeed many were at pains to stress that they didn’t only fund Christian charities, but would fund anyone doing good work in

that area). This was not universal – several were very clear about their Christian identity and that their role was in challenging an explicit aspect of poverty or social need from a theological start point.

Education was the second most common area supported by Christian funders. For some, this was about supporting resources and materials that would advance the Christian religion by providing educational tools. The essential logic here was that if people were better educated about Christianity then Christianity would benefit. This is tied closely into a concern that was shared by many funders of the need to promote and support better religious literacy, particularly but not exclusively, about Christianity.

Many funders with an education focus, however, did not have such a marked concern on Christian issues. Those interviewees with particular focus on education also tended to be among the most likely to prioritise and support multi-faith projects. For those with an interest in RE this is a necessity given the way that subject is developing. However, even more broadly than that there was a consistent line of argument from a number of trusts that education was about preparing young people for the world, and that meant religious literacy that was genuinely multi-faith.

those interviewees with particular focus on education also tended to be among the most likely to prioritise and support multi-faith projects

This was less true of those trusts who prioritised education, but whose focus lay outside formal education (i.e. schools, colleges and universities). These models of education, which tended to focus more on developing adult Christians, perhaps by informing them and resourcing them with theological tools, were by their nature far more explicitly Christian. One trust, for example, had provided funding for a charity to train its volunteers in their Christian understanding of social justice.

International development or aid work was another popular area. Although the data exercise only identified 32 funders in the area, this can be in part explained by a lack of information provided by charities in their self-description on the Charity Commission website. Many, for example, will count their international work under the heading of “relief of poverty” without being clear that they support work abroad. There is a divide on this; many of our interviewees’ charities only supported work in the UK (or more exclusively in England, or sometimes with a smaller focus even than that).

The NPC report *Faith Matters* showed that almost half of all overseas aid charities are now faith based,¹ so it is no surprise to find that many Christian funders are involved in supporting that work. In some cases this support was given, in part, because

almost half of all overseas aid charities are now faith based

the work in question found it difficult to find secular funders. Within the development world, issues like contraception and abortion, or even simply the appropriateness of faith agencies at all, are fiercely contested. Some of our funders were, therefore, involved in funding those charities that sought faith funding because they had difficulties finding secular funding for their work. This was by no means universal; plenty of others, as with social action work against poverty (see above), were relatively blind to any theological reason for this – they just felt they were supporting good and important work, regardless of any faith content.

Youth work, like international aid and development, is one of those areas for which support is probably more widespread than the data would immediately suggest, since it often gets subsumed under either relief of poverty or education. A number of our interviewees had a very particular focus on youth work – with the observation being made more than once that the Church had to engage more with young people or it would, relatively soon, cease to exist.

2.2 ‘Marmite’ issues

Aside from those areas that were relatively widely funded, there were a number of issues that provoked strong reactions from funders as areas they would either very actively support or reject.

nine different funder interviewees stressed that they would explicitly not fund either ‘proselytism’ or ‘evangelism’

One of these, as intimated above, was the issue of evangelism. Nine different funder interviewees (almost half the total) stressed that they would explicitly not fund either ‘proselytism’ or ‘evangelism’. Others implied the same, or stated that while they had no particular opposition, they felt it fell beyond the remit of what their trust was set up to fund.

On one level, this might be expected. ‘Proselytism’ has gained a particularly negative connotation as something which is inappropriate when working with vulnerable people, or within a multi-faith context, or as something which is simply considered to be impolite.² Unsurprisingly, those funders with a more muted Christian identity were particularly likely to reject evangelism, but they were not alone, and the nine interviewees included some from some of the most explicitly Christian funders. This fact – that so many funders have a commitment to advancing the Christian religion and are clear in their Christian identity and yet take a strong stance against evangelism – is certainly worth pondering further.

There was also something of a denominational split on this issue. Those funders that were prepared to fund evangelism work tended (as might be expected) to be from an evangelical Christian background. By contrast, there was little money available from explicitly Anglican trusts to fund evangelistic work (certainly very little from Liberal or Anglo-Catholic sources), and almost nothing at all for Catholics.

In a similar 'Marmite' category, is the issue of funding of church buildings, staff and training. Buildings proved particularly divisive, with a majority of interviewees explicitly ruling out funding building projects. Unlike evangelism, this was less commonly for ideological reasons and more usually pragmatic, since building costs tend to be very high and many trusts simply felt they couldn't afford them. There are a number of trusts that do exist purely or primarily for the purpose of supporting church buildings, and also a small number of trusts that have an interest in funding buildings which are changing purpose (i.e. instead of helping to keep a church building standing they are more interested in seeing buildings converted to other uses).

buildings proved particularly divisive, with a majority of interviewees explicitly ruling out funding building projects

The other explanations for not funding buildings fell into two camps. One was that funders felt the Church (or in some cases the state) ought to be funding those costs, whilst the other was a preference for funding new or innovative projects, rather than the maintenance of pre-existing resources. In the case of the former, this was also frequently the explanation for not funding clergy salaries or training, or other things which it was felt the church should be funding for itself, rather than relying on funders.

A final 'Marmite' issue was that of research. A number of the trusts with which we conducted interviews did commission or fund research, sometimes as a separate funding stream. Their support included research in education and RE, into the impact of charities, and in some cases into science and healthcare research. Many funders, however, ruled out research funding on the basis either that it was harder to assess its impact, or more simply that their preference was for funding things that were particularly practical.

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2.3 niche interests

Beyond these popular areas, and the ones that divided funders, it is important to note that many trusts have a specific interest that is hard to group thematically. Among those that we spoke to were some with a particular focus on healthcare and science, publishing,

the support of interfaith community projects, the specific interests of funders, and supporting art and culture. There were also many trusts which, while they had a clear Christian ethos, supported religious work as only one stream among others. In a number of cases the majority of a funder's grants went towards interests that had nothing to do with Christianity, with a subset of grants limited for particular Christian activity. There is something of a divide here between those trusts and funds that are strategically designed to meet a particular Christian purpose, and those that are broader than that but maintain a Christian ethos. That divide is explored in more detail in the next section.

3. mechanics – supply or demand

some trusts have a very clear mission in terms of what they were set up to do

Of all the differences across the sector of Christian grant-making, one of the less obvious but more important is the question of mechanics. Some trusts have a very clear mission in terms of what they were set up to do. They have diagnosed a particular problem and are providing grants to those organisations or individuals best suited to challenge it. These trusts are 'supply-led', in that their funding is directed towards what the funder has identified as the key issue, and exist to supply funds to meet those needs. In some cases this reflected the very particular interests of a particular founder.

At the other end of the spectrum are those trusts which do not have a clear mission but instead are 'demand-led' – putting their grants towards those areas that recipients suggest are most pressing. This scenario is particularly common among those trusts set up by an individual or family as part of their personal philanthropy. These trusts are not commonly set up with a very clear mission or purpose (though there are certainly exceptions to that rule), but instead exist to support the personal concerns of their founder.

would respond to a range of applications across a broad spectrum and make decisions on which most appealed

The difference was very clear in a number of interviews when discussing the criteria by which grants are offered. Some seemed almost arbitrary, with little clear pattern to the sorts of project funded. They would respond to a range of applications across a broad spectrum and make decisions on which most appealed. Other trusts had extremely exacting criteria, and were often frustrated by applications that clearly did not take that into account.

This should not be taken as a criticism of either approach. On the one hand, those trusts with looser criteria are often best expressing the wishes of the founder (or family), and retain a flexibility that can be useful to potential recipients who can otherwise struggle

to twist applications to meet the more exacting criteria of the supply-led trusts. Supply-led trusts can at times, as some recipient interviews noted, get trapped with criteria that simply don't meet the sort of demand needed by Christian organisations today. On the other hand, having a clear supply-led model leaves potential recipients of grants in no doubt as to what they need to do and helps them to target their applications without wasting time on applications to trusts who may or may not like the idea for the project. From a funder's perspective being a supply-led trust also has the advantage of preventing drift from a focused mission to a situation in which neither funder or recipient is quite clear what the grants are designed to do.

4. process: what does a *Christian* grant-making approach look like?

This section looks at the actual process of grant-making to Christian funders and whether there is anything within that process which is itself particularly Christian or distinct from secular funders. How is the process evolving, and changing to best meet the needs of recipients today from a Christian perspective? There are a number of aspects to this:

4.1 relationships

Many of the funders put a premium on relationships between themselves and their recipients. There were several aspects to this. One was that a number of trusts did not accept unsolicited applications, but only those from recipients they knew who had been in contact with the trust in advance. In some cases they only funded recipients that they themselves had identified. There was a practical element to this which was about reducing the burden on trusts that would otherwise receive an unmanageable number of applications, and at its more positive end an idea of being able to better provide tailored, helpful support for grantees. There was also a more theological/ideological sense in which developing a relationship between funder and recipient was seen as part of what it was to be a Christian funder. This is not to say that secular funders are not often wrestling with similar concerns – only that many of the Christian funders viewed this aspect of their work in quite explicitly Christian terms.

many of the funders put a premium on relationships between themselves and their recipients

Even for those who had a more open approach to accepting applications there was often a focus on building relationships. One example was in how recipients were expected to

report on and assess their impact to their funder (a point we shall return to in more detail below). Many funders liked to visit the projects they had funded, and almost all liked to collect stories of the sort of change their money had caused. One put this into biblical language by referring to the parable of the ten lepers, in which only one of those healed comes back to thank Jesus. In other cases, trusts particularly liked repeat funding (though others discouraged this), with a regular relationship between themselves and projects and ideas that they liked and which they enjoyed working with.

From the perspective of both funders and recipients there was consensus that it was far easier to get money if both sides knew each other. At its worst, however, this could stray a little too close to clientelism, with some organisations skipping the hoops through which others had to jump, due to their personal connections. One funder noted his frustration that a lot of money seemed to “go round in circles” between people who knew each other.

4.2 impact and assessment

the question of how to assess impact and value for money is one that has significantly increased over recent years

The question of how to assess impact and value for money is one that has significantly increased over recent years. Those charities working with public sector money in particular, have for years now been expected to demonstrate quantitative evidence of the efficacy of their work and their use of money. Within the Christian

funding sector, it is fair to say that there is a significant range in what different funders expect of their recipients.

It is worth stating upfront that many of the larger, more established funders will find nothing new in the points that follow on impact. This has been a live, and much discussed, issue within large parts of the philanthropy world for many years, and there are many funders (particularly among the larger trusts) that have been involved in such discussions for a long time.³ There are others, however, who are smaller, or newer to the sector for whom such discussions are only just beginning, or who have never been exposed to these issues previously.

Some of the trusts we spoke to had developed sophisticated means of demonstrating impact and expected extensive reporting practices from their recipients. This was easier if they were consistently funding the same or similar projects. Two, for example, operated franchise models, in which they provided funding for different organisations in different parts of the country to replicate the same service, with the same resources and support from the funder. This consistency, backed up by the funders having research and impact

staff who worked specifically on measures and assessment, allowed those funders to demonstrate quantitative evidence for the work they were funding.

One or two others had been developing much more complicated models for proving impact as part of the application process and wouldn't fund any work that wasn't able to demonstrate its value on those criteria. This was something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it meant funders could be confident in the value of their giving and the point of the projects being supported. On the other, however, as noted by more than one recipient, it could trap the trust into only funding very specific projects, preventing them from funding work that was too difficult to fit into these complex criteria. In one interviewee's experience, there was more than one trust that had "gone so far with their assessment that they end up not giving their money because it's too hard, or else they end up crow-barring things in to meet their weird criteria."

That said, those approaches are the exception rather than the norm. Most of our funders (though not all), expected a final report presented back to the funder, though in some cases this amounted to little more than a thank you note. For the smaller trusts, and those representing the philanthropic giving of an individual or family, there were often less strenuous (if any) reporting procedures, in part because these trusts tended to lack the staff to manage applications and reports in any depth.

At its best, reporting and impact assessment is extremely useful in clarifying what funders and recipients expect and want from one another and in improving best practice to ensure that money really is spent as effectively as possible. There are caveats associated with this. One is that some things are simply very difficult to assess. The impact of research, or pastoral care, or even of evangelism can be hard to prove. A number of recipients shared this frustration: they could tell funders how many people had used a particular service over the course of a project, or how many had visited a website, but it was much harder to demonstrate the long-term impact of many projects.

There is a wider question there as to whether faith outcomes (those outputs which are most explicitly religious in content) are simply different. Several funders used the Biblical metaphor of "planting a seed" and waiting to see what flourished. In those instances funders can only seek for indicators, and trust in God.

the impact of research, or pastoral care, or even of evangelism can be hard to prove

The tension with that position is another Biblical position – that of stewardship, and responsible management. To expand upon the Biblical metaphor of the sower, perhaps a more responsible sower, learning from previous efforts, would have been careful to sow more on the fertile soil and less on the road. Given the limited resources available to funders there is surely some obligation on funders to ensure that even on these difficult

to assess areas there is effort made to find some ways to guarantee responsibility and at least some collecting of indicative evidence of impact.

making an application or impact report that is long or time-consuming for only a small chance of success or for a small financial gain was widely viewed as being a waste of precious time and resources

There was also a concern over proportionality. Applying for funds is an increasingly time-consuming activity. Making an application or impact report that is long or time-consuming for only a small chance of success or for a small financial gain was widely viewed as being a waste of precious time and resources – especially for smaller recipients with fewer (or no) professional fundraising staff.

Several trusts had recognised that issue. One was trying to model a particularly Christian model of ‘doing unto others’ and keeping the burden on potential recipients as low as possible. Others, returning to the idea of relationships, felt it was important as a Christian trust to operate with a high degree of trust in the recipient, even accepting the potential for things to go wrong.

The potential for things to go wrong was also an important feature of a number of Christian trusts who tried to measure impact but kept a very open mind to the issue of risk. More than one trust particularly liked funding those projects which otherwise would find it especially difficult to get funding – perhaps because the impact was so difficult to assess, or because no one had tried it before and so it was unclear what would happen. The role of these trusts in ‘pump priming’ or taking a chance on projects that were difficult to fund was an essential one that was highly valued by many recipients. For it to work, it requires trusts to provide some leeway on judging the effectiveness of such projects – there needs to be an acceptance that some of them simply won’t work out. It is worth noting that in the

wider funding world there is an increasing body of best practice on risk profiles – but this was only really brought up in the larger and more historically established trusts at which interviews were conducted.

more than one trust particularly liked funding those projects which otherwise would find it especially difficult to get funding the most important thing was clarity between recipient and funder over exactly what was expected of both parties

Both recipients and funders tended to note that the most important thing was clarity between recipient and funder over exactly what was expected of both parties at all times.

4.3 beneficiary involvement

This was a developing trend noted in several funders, which may well grow further in the future. Essentially, some funders were developing a particular wish for beneficiaries and service users to be active agents in the proposed projects. Rather than being the passive recipients of services, they would become part of the process of meeting their own needs. This ties into a broader trend in the medical and caring professions which increasingly values the agency of clients and patients in having a role in defining their own treatment and needs. For example, one funder was looking at bringing in a type of grant which could only be awarded to those applicants who could demonstrate that their clients or service users would be actively involved in the delivery of the project. Another saw that as a particular point of favour for any applicant who could demonstrate beneficiary involvement.

In a Christian context, some funders reflected this more in terms of the theological ideas surrounding human dignity. Of course, as a model it has its limitations. It functions better in youth and social action work than in other settings, and even in those it can vary in how plausibly it works. Some service users in particular settings are much easier to involve in such processes than others (one recipient noted their experience of applying for such grants and the impossibility of getting their severely disabled clients involved to the extent that the trust would have ideally like). This is an area to watch as it develops in future.

4.4 empowerment and governance

A number of trusts were increasingly recognising that they had the ability (in some cases they phrased it as a responsibility) to do more than simply provide money, but to actively help recipients to build their capacity through supporting their governance or management.

There were different models of how to do this in practice. One trust now operated a model that saw a member of the trust go onto the management board of the recipient to help manage the work and help to empower the recipient to be in a stronger position in the future. Several provided help through things like making their own premises available to small projects, saving them money on office or meeting space. One helped to provide fundraising and management advice to help ensure longevity for its recipients.

a number of trusts were increasingly recognising that they had the ability to actively help recipients to build their capacity through supporting their governance or management

The issue of longevity was important to many trusts. One interviewee went so far as to call it “morally insufficient” to offer funding and then to cease to engage with a project or an area. To do that, for this interviewee, could do more harm than good. You might provide a grant, but simply pumping money in could cause divisions and fallouts without proper management, and if the project isn’t sustainable beyond a year or two, that can leave communities that were dependent on a service worse off than if there had never been a grant in the first place. That interviewee’s trust accordingly focused on continuing support (though not necessarily financial support), including help with networking and introductions to other funders.

As above, this ties into the importance of relationships to Christian funders – a theme that was noticeable throughout almost all of the interviews in one sense or another.

4.5 Christian ethos

A theme going through all of those above is the question of how to maintain a Christian ethos as a funder. As we have already noted, precisely how a Christian ethos is understood naturally varies between those funders of different denominations, theologies, and understandings of the “advancement of Christianity”. The key point here, however, is more about what it means to be different from secular funders. For some of our interviewees there was little real difference in terms of the processing and assessing of grants. Their Christian ethos was apparent in the choice of areas to prioritise their funding, but otherwise they sought to be professional bodies adhering to professional and secular standards.

For others, being a Christian funder also entailed living out gospel values in every aspect of their operations. Aspects of this were apparent in the commitment to operate as a funder with the ‘do unto others...’ model mentioned above, or in the consistency of the focus on relationships, but were also there in other aspects. For example, some interviews mentioned the importance of prayer in their trustee meetings for helping to discern what they ought to most usefully support. Another example was the effort being put in by a few trusts to use their investment policy to maximise their Christian social impact. Most had some sort of ethical investment policy (of more or less developed varieties), but some were increasingly interested in social impact investing; getting together with others to gain large numbers of shares and compel companies to change policies.

5. funding gaps

There was a remarkable degree of consensus among interviewees about where the biggest gaps in Christian fundraising lay. Core costs, funding for pre-existing projects and infrastructure were widely recognised by both funders and recipients as the hardest things to get funded. This had become a critical issue for a number of recipients who were becoming reliant on what one referred to as a “house of cards funding strategy” in which they were forced to constantly apply for funding for new projects to cover the costs of pre-existing work, with a huge fear that eventually they would dramatically over-commit themselves or else fail to secure a new project, at which point the entire organisation would be at significant risk. These stories, in more or less extreme varieties, arose again and again in different contexts.

core costs, funding for pre-existing projects and infrastructure were widely recognised as the hardest things to get funded

There was an interesting tension here, which is that most funders recognised that those costs, including things like premises, salaries and office supplies were by far the most difficult to meet, and yet few were keen to fund them. People want to be able to see the direct benefits of their support, and those things which, in one recipient’s words, “you can put a plaque on” are the easiest to identify that in. We have already seen that many trusts particularly liked the idea of innovation and novelty – with some seeing that as a critical component of what “the advance of the Christian religion” meant in practice. This is clearly difficult to square with meeting the needs of core costs, since these are, by definition, not innovative or novel but simply what is required to keep an organisation going.

There was also a widely shared consensus that some things (including, but not limited to infrastructure and core costs) were hard to fund because they lacked glamour, or popularity. One interviewee said that most funders were only really interested in “donkeys, lifeboats and kids”. His point was that there are particular issues that go and in and out of fashion and are correspondingly easy to fund, while other issues rarely if ever get the same attention. There is a challenge there for funders to work harder to identify the work most in need of financial assistance at any given time.

there are particular issues that are easy to fund, while other issues rarely get the same attention

The other most commonly identified gaps in the Christian funding world tended to be the same as the ‘Marmite’ issues identified above. Evangelism work, for example, by virtue of being so emphatically rejected by such a high proportion of Christian funders, is left with a far smaller pool of available funders than other issues. This was especially true

outside explicitly evangelical funders, with very little money being available to Anglican or Catholic evangelism campaigns other than those funded by the churches themselves.

Buildings, clergy costs, and research work, similarly, were either very explicitly supported or rejected by trusts, leaving a relatively small pool of available funds for those activities.

6. barriers

This section looks at what, according to funders, are the key barriers to effective grant-making in the Christian philanthropic sector. The first point to make in response to that question is that there is huge demand on funders. One interviewee was typical in noting that “we are happy with the areas we focus on, our issue is that we don’t have the money to support more badly needed work in those areas”. They estimated that they received 10-12 applications for each grant they were able to give. Granted that a few of those tended to be badly produced or manifestly unsuitable, that still left an average of six to seven good applicants for each grant.

funders are overloaded with applications, and there simply isn’t enough available money for all the Christian charitable activity happening at present

At other trusts that ratio was even more daunting. One reported as many as 100 applicants for each successful grant. Some were in a fortunate position of having no upper limit on the number of grants they could give, and others were so specific that, in effect, they significantly limited the number of potential applicants. The sense of the field as a whole, however, was that funders are

overloaded with applications, and that there simply isn’t enough available money for all the Christian charitable activity happening at present. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that the Christian charitable sector is increasing even as state funding is at its most limited and when declining congregation sizes are hurting the finances of many churches.

The increase in demand is also no doubt partly responsible for something of a professionalisation arms race across the sector. One funder described his shock at how rapidly the professional standards of applications have improved over the past five years. For him, it had become clear that almost everyone who applied to their trust now had either a professional fundraiser writing their bids, or at least someone in their team with extensive experience of writing ever more polished applications. This had two impacts on the trust in question. The first was that they had reached the point where they were dismissing bids that would previously have been given strong consideration, simply because they were not written to the standards of other applications. This meant that applicants without fundraising expertise were effectively excluded from ever succeeding

in a bid to the trust. Second, the standard was now so high that it had become incredibly difficult to discern between bids.

The trust in question was a fairly small one, with no paid staff to help manage bids. This is also illustrative of a barrier which is simply that, with demand and professionalisation, the time commitment for funders to assess, manage and make grants was becoming seriously burdensome for any trust not large enough to have any staff. Many of our interviewees were in some sort of managerial role with a trust and a number of them were relatively recent appointments, made in recognition of the fact that being a funder increasingly required paid support staff – even if that meant that less money was available to actually make in grants.

Although it would be difficult to definitively prove, it seems likely that the combination of the increased professionalism of funding applications and the premium placed on relationships serves to make applications particularly difficult for smaller local projects and those based outside the South East. These projects are less likely to have professional fundraiser staff, and since most (though by no means all) trusts are concentrated in London or the South East they are less likely to have personal connections with funders.

7. recipients

Apart from interviews with funders we also conducted a number of interviews with a range of recipients, including several social action charities (involved in youth work, pastoral care for seafarers, homelessness and prisons), churches, education bodies, an evangelistic charity, international development charities and others. The purpose of these interviews was to see whether the experience of the charities at the other end of the process from funders mirrored the findings and expectations of the other interviews.

For the most part there was genuine overlap, with many of the same themes being repeated. Most interviewees noted that the sector was so large and had such disparities between charities that their biggest concern was that it was difficult to navigate and know where (and how) best to apply for particular projects. One practical difficulty this caused was that because different funders had very different expectations and requirements from applications, applicants were forced to commit a disproportionate amount of time and effort to tailoring very different proposals for the same project.

The difficulty in finding core funding and infrastructure costs was a constant concern. This tied into what one interviewee called an “obsession with novelty” which made life difficult when, in their sector, “the solutions

the difficulty in finding core funding and infrastructure costs was a constant concern

aren't novel, they're just common sense, and they work!" Another noted that they didn't really have the capacity to apply constantly for new, exciting projects but desperately needed another employee to cover the work they already did. This also tied into another point made above about the appeal of 'glamorous' projects or issues.

That said, many interviewees were also appreciative of the ability of some Christian funders to 'pump prime' or fund projects that were very difficult to get funded through secular channels. A number of social action charities noted the difficulties of getting secular funding for anything with a spiritual or religious dimension – particularly if the idea was unusual. Christian funders had been more open to taking chances and supporting those ideas, even if there was more risk involved. Even Christian funders, though, were often hard to convince on evangelistic projects or any sort of religious work within a school context.

Christian charities become incentivised to limit their Christian activities in order to appeal to secular funders

The particular problem with that is it puts a significant strain on the Christian charity sector as a whole. Secular charities can apply to both secular and Christian sources of funding, and most of our interviewees were prepared to fund non-Christian charities. By contrast, though Christian charities certainly can apply to both Christian

and secular funders, in practice many secular funders do not like funding faith charities, particularly if what is being funded includes an obviously religious dimension. Christian charities in practice, therefore, become incentivised to limit their Christian activities in order to appeal to secular funders. If Christian funders operate in the same way this presents a serious challenge to the future of the Christian charitable sector.

One observation of a few recipients was that many of the Christian funders are quite old organisations and have very specific intentions and objects. From the perspective of recipients this could make it difficult to sell new ideas, or else forced them to excessively shape and twist projects to meet the criteria.

One thing recognised consistently was that many organisations' most successful interaction with trusts came through personal connections, with very few having significant, consistent success in making applications without some sort of prior personal interaction. Some had found that they were much more successful meeting with trustees than ever putting in applications at all. For others this was a source of frustration as it seemed like some rivals had an inside track or were able to get access to money without jumping through the same time-consuming hoops.

At the most positive end of the scale, consistent relationships were valued by recipients as much as funders, since such relationships gave a strong basis to funding and could bring

other advantages through networking and other resources that would not have arisen through a more arms-length relationship.

The desire for clarity was noticeable – recipients were happy to put in the work on applications and impact assessments and recognised the difficulties faced by funders, but often felt they would benefit from a clearer understanding of what funders actually wanted. Tailoring applications to meet the particular needs of different funders is already the norm for most recipients, but does require clear communication of what those needs are and what they entail for an applicant in practice.

references – chapter 2

- 1 Bull et al. *Faith Matters* (2016).
- 2 See Paul Bickley, *The Problem of Proselytism* (London: Theos, 2016).
- 3 There is a fairly significant developing academic and research field in this area. Among others the NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) provides a number of resources including *CES Practical Monitoring and Evaluation: A Guide for Voluntary Organisations* (2008).

recommendations

Based on the interviews and data from the Charity Commission website this section presents five recommendations for the future of the Christian funding sector. These recommendations should not be seen as a criticism of any given funder or particular funding model, but are suggested as a means of optimising the good work that funders are already doing. Given the importance of Christian funders in supporting such a wide range of projects and the limitations on their resources, it is important to point to ways in which the current situation can be maximally effective.

1. gaps in the Christian funding world

Many trusts have good reasons for funding in quite specific areas. Some will be accurately carrying out the wishes of their founder and the family. Others exist to fund work in a particular area. It would be unreasonable to ask trusts to radically change these criteria (not least when many will not be able to do so for legal reasons).

That said, there clearly are gaps in the Christian funding landscape. In particular, the difficulty in raising money for infrastructure or core costs is a serious challenge for a number of Christian charities. In some cases, the difficulty in doing so poses a threat to their very existence.

There is then an apparent need for Christian funders to take more account of this particular issue. There are also several other gaps discussed above which might benefit from additional support, notably evangelism, buildings and research. Some funders may want to review the specific areas that they support in light of these perceived gaps. Alternatively, there are an increasing number of networks of funders developing, and perhaps on some of these issues the solutions lies in trusts getting together to discuss how these areas can be best covered in future, perhaps in collaboration between funders.

The evangelism issue, in particular, is important. It is easy to recognise the fears of funders – ‘proselytism’ is a word with a bad reputation, and often is taken to mean something crass, unproductive or embarrassing. However, Christianity has shown significant signs

of decline in the UK over recent generations, and Christians are also significantly older than the population at large.¹ Without serious attention to the issue of evangelism today, there is unlikely to be anything like as rich an ecology of Christian charities or causes to fund tomorrow. Rather than being afraid of the idea of evangelism, it would be good to see Christian funders challenging the secular understanding and fears in the area and presenting a positive, balanced and courageous engagement with the idea.² Various Theos reports, such as *The Problem of Proselytism and Doing Good: A future for Christianity in 21st century Britain*, argue that the hard division between ‘evangelism’ and ‘social action’ is an artificial one and that it is, theologically and practically, possible to combine the two without doing injury to either. Whatever else, this is an important area for further debate and exploration.

2. theology/ideology – getting clarity on Christian identity

the sense of understanding what a Christian ethos or identity meant in practice was often one that funders found difficult to articulate

The sense of understanding what a Christian ethos or identity meant in practice was often one that funders found difficult to articulate. If there is a theology, or consistent set of principles by which one exhibits Christianity as a funder, then it is not currently much in evidence from interviews. This is not to say that individual trusts and funders did not have a clear sense of what made them Christian; only that, as a whole, interviewees often found such questions difficult to answer.

With a greater clarity of what a Christian identity means it should be easier to answer questions about what sort of areas should be prioritised for funding and how to embody the ethos more broadly into all aspects of the operation. Throughout the Christian charity world there is a level of fear and reticence about what a Christian identity means in practice and how publicly acceptable such an ethos is. It may be that further research that combines the practical needs of funders into a broader theological model could be useful. That is not to say that there is only one possible model or theology, or that theology will clear up all the potential problems affecting the sector. However, it is to suggest that a conscious theological reflection on these issues might serve to better articulate and guide funders through the future that the sector is facing.

3. collaboration

There is a wider sense in which more deliberate and conscious collaboration and intentional knowledge sharing might help the sector as a whole. To an extent this is already happening with various networks and connections between funders. This could benefit from being expanded further, since greater interaction between funders may help to better fill the gaps and share examples of best practice in application and assessments.

There is probably also more work to be done in connecting funders and recipients, so that both sides better understand what the other needs and expects of any partnership. One persistent criticism from recipients was that there was a lack of clarity from funders about what exactly they wanted; one persistent criticism from funders was that recipients had not done enough work to meet the trust's criteria. Both sides would benefit from greater understanding that could come from expanded collaboration work.

4. making applications and evaluation procedures clear, proportional and fair

Recipients recognise the difficulties facing trusts and funders and, on the whole, are happy to put in work to deliver quality applications and reporting on their work. However, many application procedures are unclear or needlessly time consuming. One recipient summarised the issue when they said:

both sides would benefit from greater understanding that could come from expanded collaboration work

No one minds going through a big application to secure a large grant, but it's when you find yourself devoting hours for an outside chance of securing a couple of thousand pounds that you have to question whether it's really worth it.

There was broad consensus that there should be a sense of proportionality attached to both applications and reporting. Again, perhaps through increased knowledge-sharing it might be easier to find levels of practice that are more widespread across the sector to prevent excessive rewriting of bids and differences in expectations.

5. delivering best practice in impact, while balancing with healthy levels of risk

There is a very high level of demand for a fairly limited amount of available funding in the sector as a whole. Given the limitations of resources it makes great sense to develop sensible models for professionalism and impact assessment (while keeping in mind the need for proportionality highlighted above). Such measures should help to make the most of limited resources by raising the standards of proposals and projects.

some trusts are already developing quite sophisticated models for evaluation – some of which could usefully be made publicly available for other funders to use.

There does need to be a recognition that some things are far more easily assessed than others (it is easier to count the number of people using a service than to assess the long-term value of a piece of research, for example), and also that it is those areas that are hardest to assess that are often most difficult to get funded (e.g. research and evangelism). Nevertheless, given the limitations, it is important to try and make sure that all funded projects are completed and, as far as possible, provide some genuine impact and value. Some trusts

are already developing quite sophisticated models for evaluation – some of which could usefully be made publicly available for other funders to use.

There does need to be consideration of the fact that one of the things highlighted above as an advantage of Christian funders is that they are often prepared to take risks on pump priming projects or funding those ideas that organisations found it particularly difficult to secure finance for from secular funders. These projects, by their nature, will find it impossible to guarantee impact, and may simply not work. Keeping those possibilities alive is an important goal for the sector.

references – chapter 3

- 1 The median age of a Christian is now 45, six years older than the median for the general population. Muslims are the youngest religious group, with a median age of 25, according to the ONS: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_310514.pdf Accessed 22 September 2016.
- 2 See Bickley, *Proselytism* (2016).

appendix

This report is based on in-depth interviews with representatives and spokespersons of the organizations listed below.* We are grateful to them for providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of Christian funding in the UK.

Grant makers

- Hinchley Charitable Trust
- The Hintze Family Charitable Foundation
- Porticus
- The Dulverton Trust
- Hymns Ancient and Modern
- The Joseph Rank Trust
- Charles Plater Trust
- Million Minutes
- M B Reckitt Trust
- K P Ladd Charitable Trust
- Culham St Gabriel's Education Trust
- Childs Charitable Foundation
- The Jerusalem Trust
- Church Urban Fund (CUF)
- The Cinnamon Network
- Sir Halley Stewart Trust
- Hockerill Educational Foundation
- The John Templeton Foundation
- Templeton World Charity Foundation
- Andrews Charitable Trust

Recipients

- Apostleship of the Sea
- Cardinal Hume Centre
- The Faraday Institute
- Prison Fellowship
- London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC)
- Together for the Common Good (T4CG)
- Youthscape
- Lambeth Palace
- Jesmond United Reformed Church
- Christians in Sport
- Off the Fence Trust
- The Message Trust
- Tearfund
- Bible Society
- Faith to share (Faith2Share)

* Some organizations have requested not to be included in this appendix.

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Christian Funders and Grant-making: An Analysis

Ben Ryan

The Christian charitable sector is growing, and playing an increasingly important role in a wide range of services in the UK.

There has, however, been little analysis of the Christian funding sector, which is critical in supporting the Christian – and indeed wider – charitable world.

This report looks specifically at who Christian funders are, what they are doing, and what the future of the sector might look like.

Drawing on data analysis from the Charity Commission website and on a range of in-depth interviews with both funders and

grant recipients, it begins by mapping the field of Christian funding, looking at the size, denomination, areas of focus and grant sizes of 268 different funders.

The report goes on to analyse these factors in greater detail, exploring critical questions about the ethos and theological basis of Christian grant making, as well as the practical issues facing the sector as a whole.

The report ends with a set of conclusions and recommendations regarding the present and future of this major and vital sector.