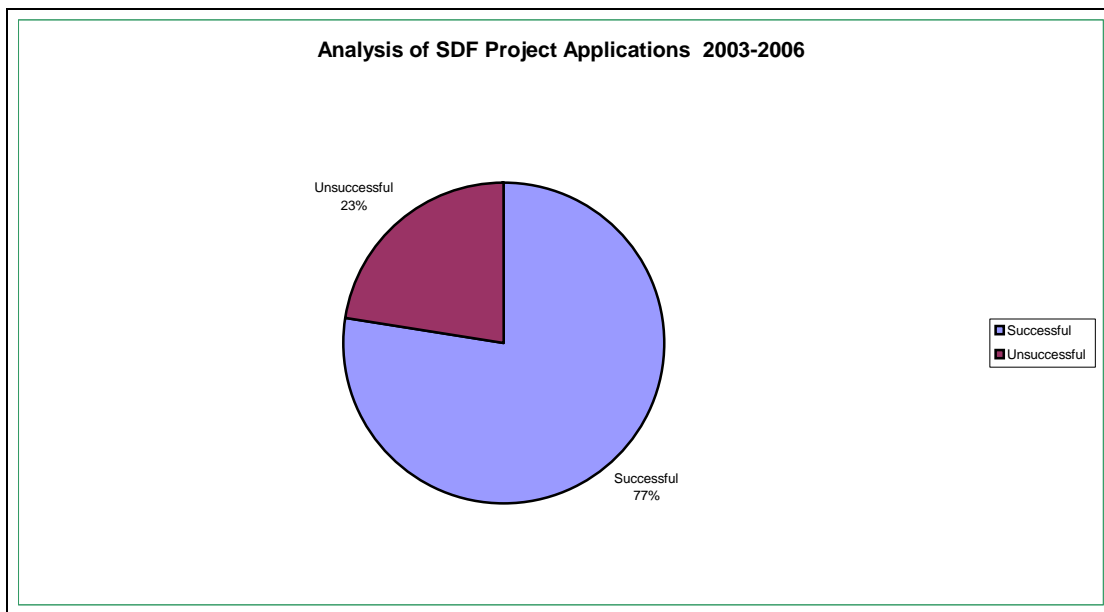


Analysis of Sustainable Development Fund Applicants Questionnaire

Background

A questionnaire was sent out to all Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Project applicants, in September / October 2006 and January 2007. In total 184 questionnaires were sent out to both successful and unsuccessful applicants dating from the start of the fund in 2003 to the end of June 2006. During this period there were 168 successful and 51 unsuccessful applications; the numbers do not total 184 due to repeat applications and incomplete paperwork on file from several very early applicants.



It was the first such survey to be undertaken by the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) with the aim of assessing how applicants found the grant process in order that future applicants can receive the best service possible.

Seventy-eight questionnaires were returned of which six were uncompleted or illegible mainly due to applicants having changed address therefore they were returned to sender. The following analysis is therefore based on the legible seventy-two returns which is a return rate of 39%. Not all respondents supplied their details therefore it is not possible to analyse further the breakdown of successful / unsuccessful applicants though taking into consideration the high number of questionnaires which contained additional comments and responses to questions eight, nine and ten which were for successful candidates only, it indicates a very high proportion of the returns are from successful applicants.

As the time period covered is very wide, it is worth noting that some of the comments made by respondents will/may have been addressed by improvements made to the operating systems during this time frame.

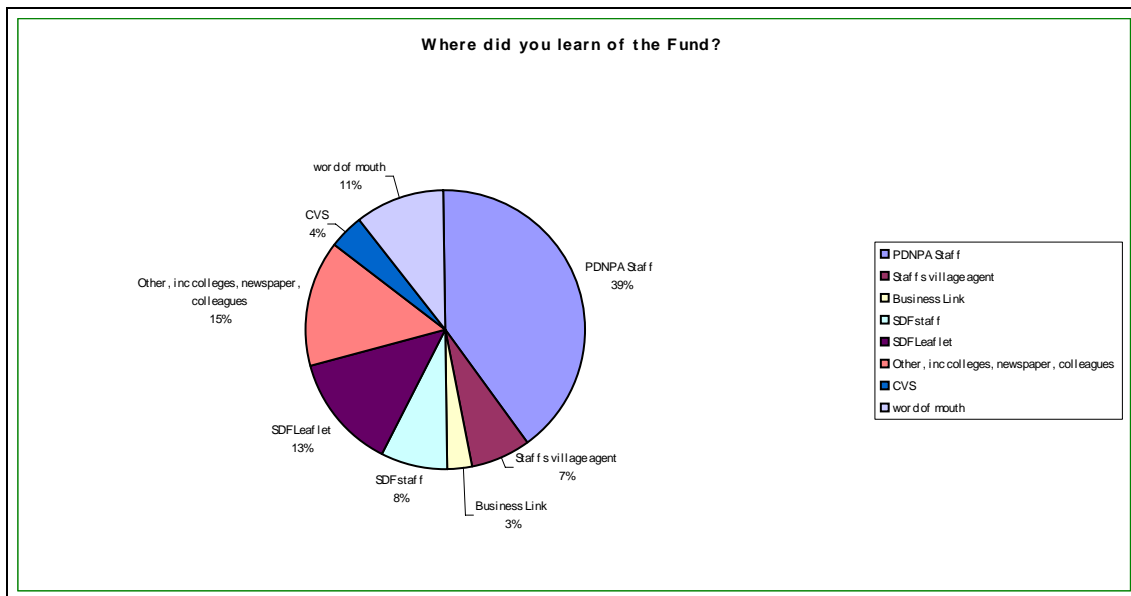
Summary

Top line findings indicate that satisfaction levels are exceedingly high for all aspects of how the SDF is managed and administrated. Throughout the returns the comments reflected the provision of a high quality service and a grant fund that was very well received for its light touch and inclusive nature.

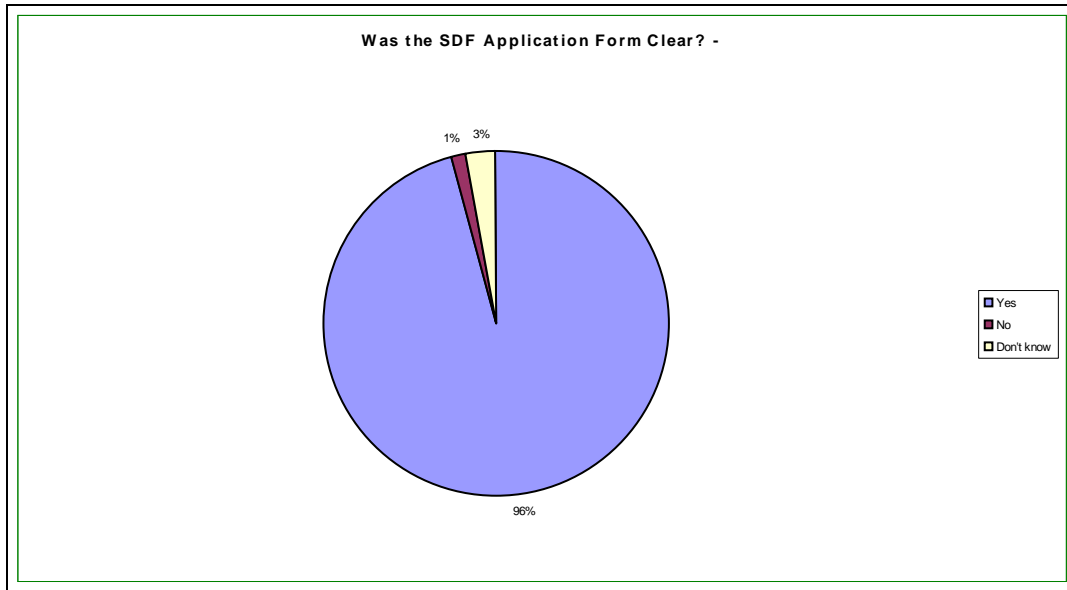
Analysis

This follows the format of the questionnaire illustrated in Appendix 1. The paragraph numbers refer to the question numbers.

1) It is interesting to note that the majority of applicants (36) had learnt of the fund from PDNPA staff with rangers providing the link in one third of those. A further ten cite the SDF marketing leaflet as their initial contact with the fund. In the Staffordshire Moorlands area a proactive village agent had generated five successful projects and High Peak CVS three projects illustrating the benefits of collaborative working to both the National Park and partner organisations.



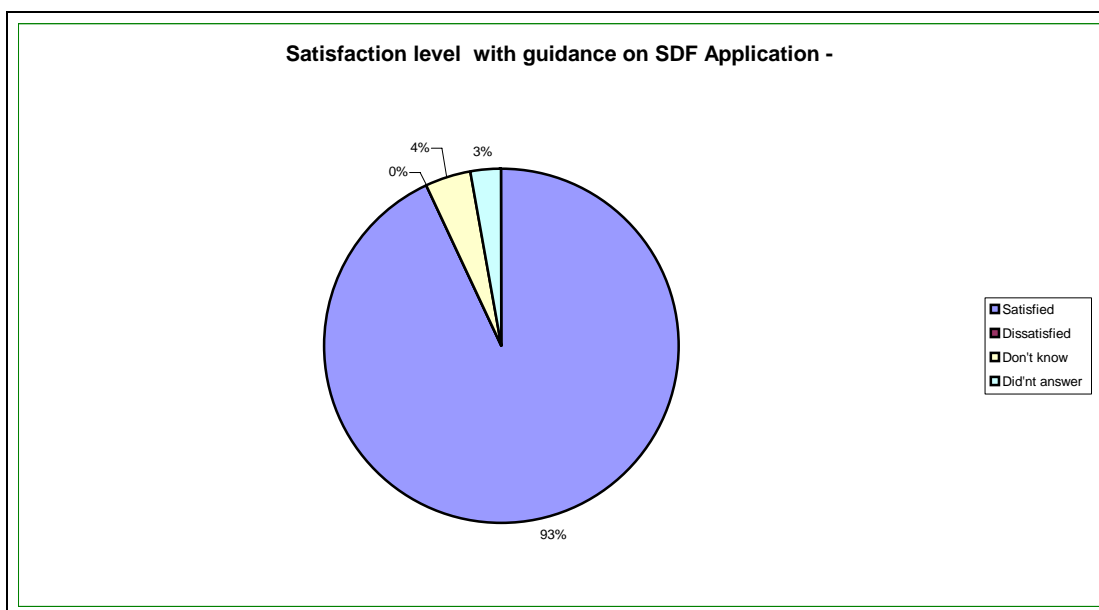
2) The clarity of the application form was highly rated with 95% of applicants finding it clear. This relates to the one page initial application form as there were a few comments recorded relating to the second form being complicated, harder, too long and off-putting.

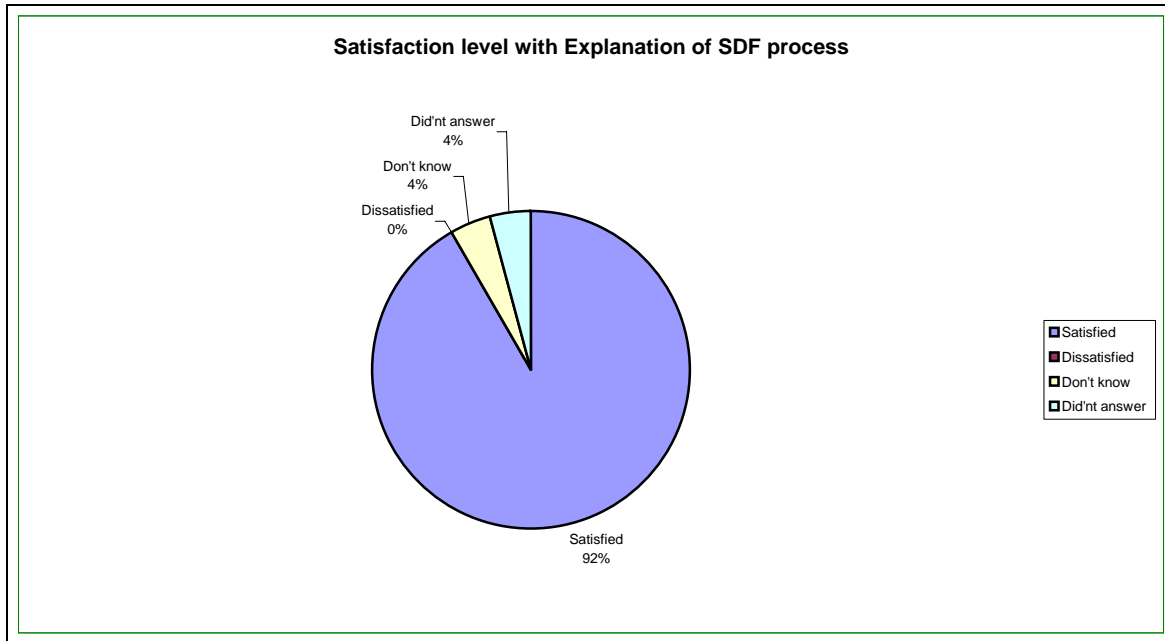


3) Very encouraging results were received as regards contact with SDF staff prior to an application being submitted to Panel or for approval for projects up to a value of £1,000.

Satisfaction levels were recorded of 93% for guidance on the application process and 92% for explanations provided on the process.

Numerous comments were recorded; all were very supportive praising the helpfulness, professionalism, courteous service and support of staff. Several commented that without an officer helping, the process would have been very difficult / far harder and the site visits were exceedingly well received in that they helped validate projects and extend the scope. Several respondents stated that the service was down to earth and meaningful for their particular projects and that the team were easy to contact and responsive to queries.





4) The fourth question asked respondents to comment on any changes or improvements they would like to see.

A reoccurring theme from many of the questions was that small groups found it difficult to finance a project in advance and requested whether it would be possible for them to be paid in advance and not retrospectively.

Concerns were expressed at the length and complexity of the second application form and several considered it to be off-putting to those not experienced in grant applications.

More information / guidance was requested on what can and cannot be funded and when a project did not fit the criteria a clearer explanation was desired.

It was commented that at times, particularly in specialist areas, it was hard to get more than one quote for works so a request was made for grant requirements to be more realistic.

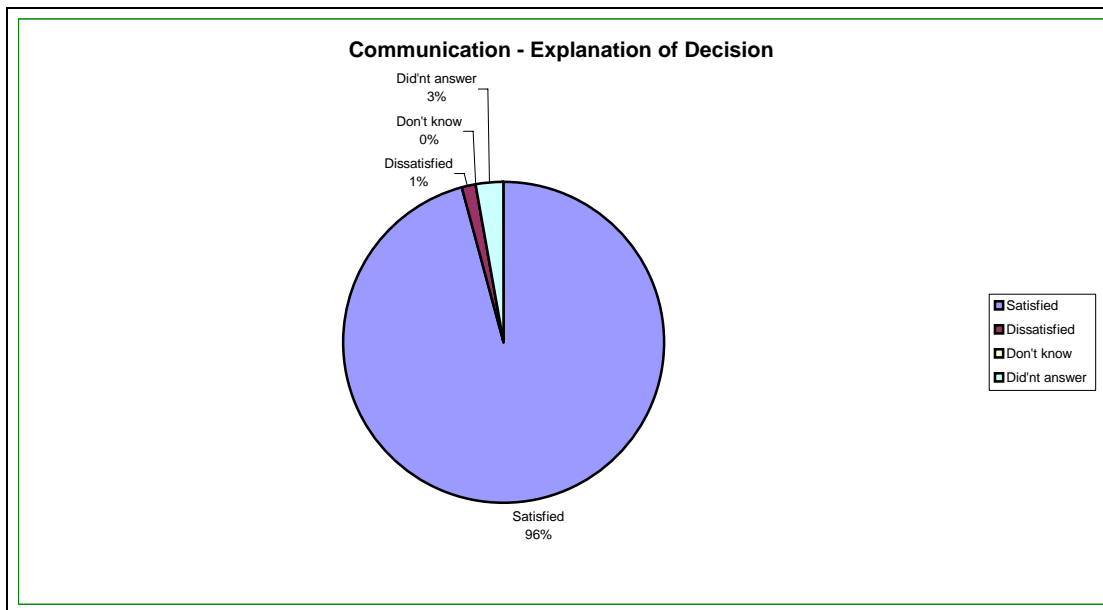
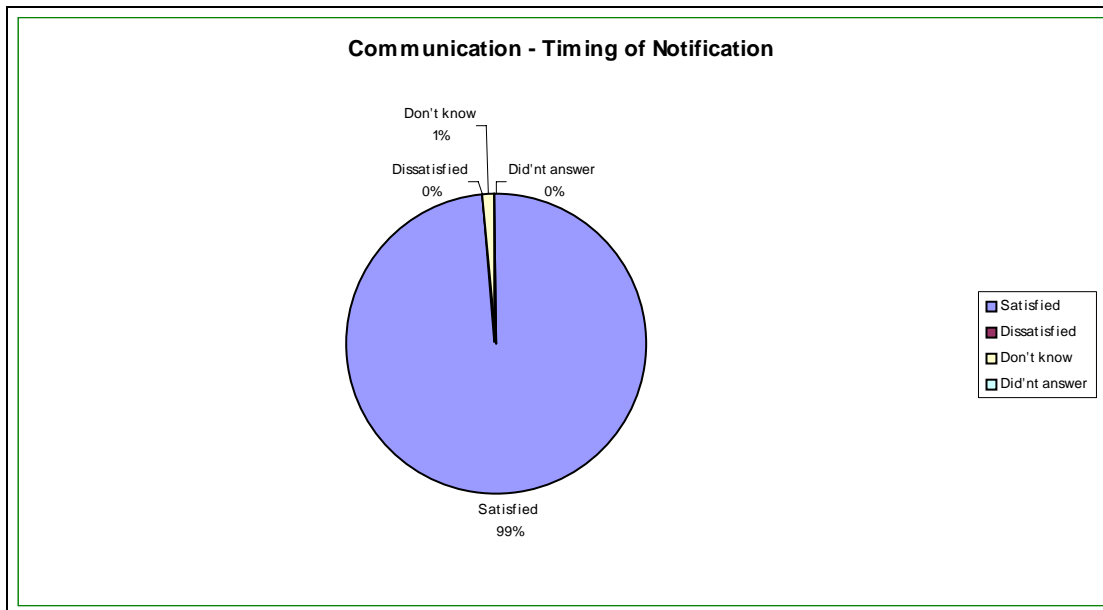
Contradictory comments were received about the second application form with some comments saying the boxes were too small however those that received the electronic version were full of praise for the ease of completion.

It was commented that the grant should be more widely advertised particularly to smaller groups, as many were unaware of its existence.

Finally several comments were noted that feedback forms / questionnaires of this nature should be sent out promptly and not years later.

5) Recipients of grants in excess of £1,000 were asked whether they were informed in advance of their Panel meeting day. Forty respondents confirmed that they were and two said that they were not. This question did not apply to all respondents and only one comment was recorded requesting that the Parish Council (presumably the project applicant) would have liked to have attended the Panel meeting.

6) The post decision communication process was very highly rated by respondents with 99% stating they were satisfied with the timing of the notification and 96% with the explanation of the decision.



One respondent summarised their comments as “SDF has helped me achieve a dream”. Others comments included respondents being very satisfied, impressed with prompt notification / not being kept waiting / timely response, good use of email to inform results, effective communication. One respondent stated they were pleased with the speed of the verbal response however considered the “written explanation could have arrived earlier”.

7) The seventh question asked respondents how they considered the SDF process compares with other funding bodies.

Overall the response was exceedingly positive with comments ranging from less bureaucratic, process much easier than other funds, excellent support, staff help first class, simple and painless, good communications, easy, clear to understand, one of the best, excellent to have staff on hand or at the end of the phone to help, most other applications forms over complicated even at initial stage, good as can include volunteer time, aims / objectives clearer than other grants giving a better sense of projects eligible for funding.

It was encouraging to read comments such as "it makes you think about sustainability", "the team were excellent to liaise with" and that "they are passionate about their work" and "speaking to a person direct about what was needed made me feel positive about the funding" and on a practical level applicants appreciated feedback given during the process even if it meant they were not eligible, "quite a good process as we were given a decision before doing too much work".

Others considered the process a "refreshing change as linked to our case and not socio economic characteristics of school" however an artist stated "as an artist prefer Arts Council structure as can describe project in own terms and format".

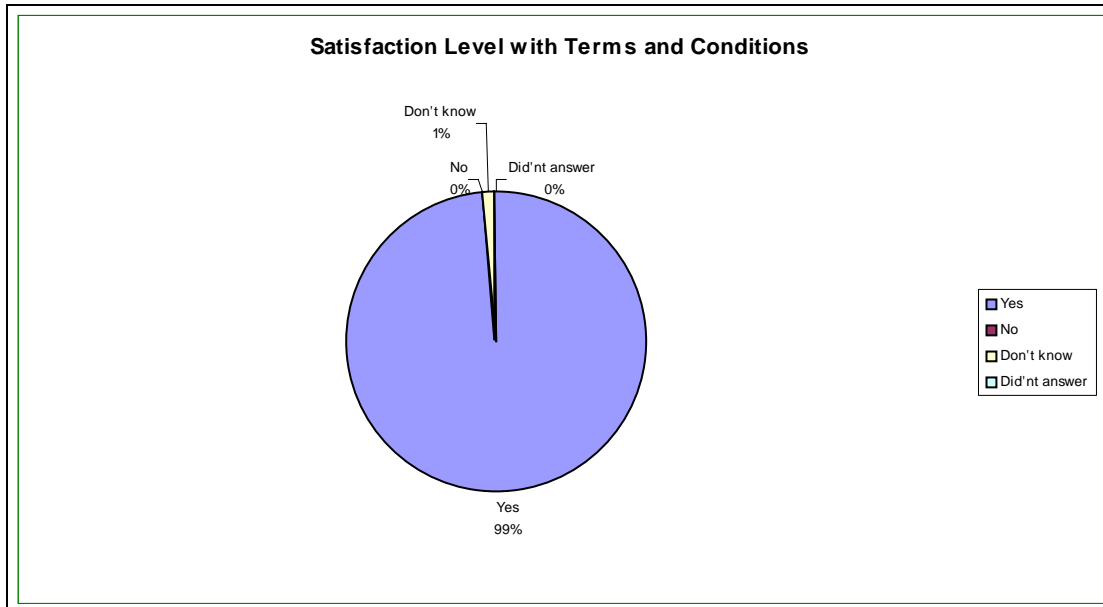
The "cutting edge" nature of the SDF grant was appreciated as summarised by one respondent "no other funding body would fund the project as all had arbitrary rules".

However others felt that lottery money was more readily available, a query was raised whether the second application form could be made simpler for smaller grants, turnaround time was considered to be average, and several considered it to be a poor process for smaller groups or groups that were not cash rich as they considered the process caused them cash flow problems.

Questions eight, nine and ten were for successful candidates only.

8) Again a very high percentage of 99% of respondents were satisfied with the terms and conditions of their grant.

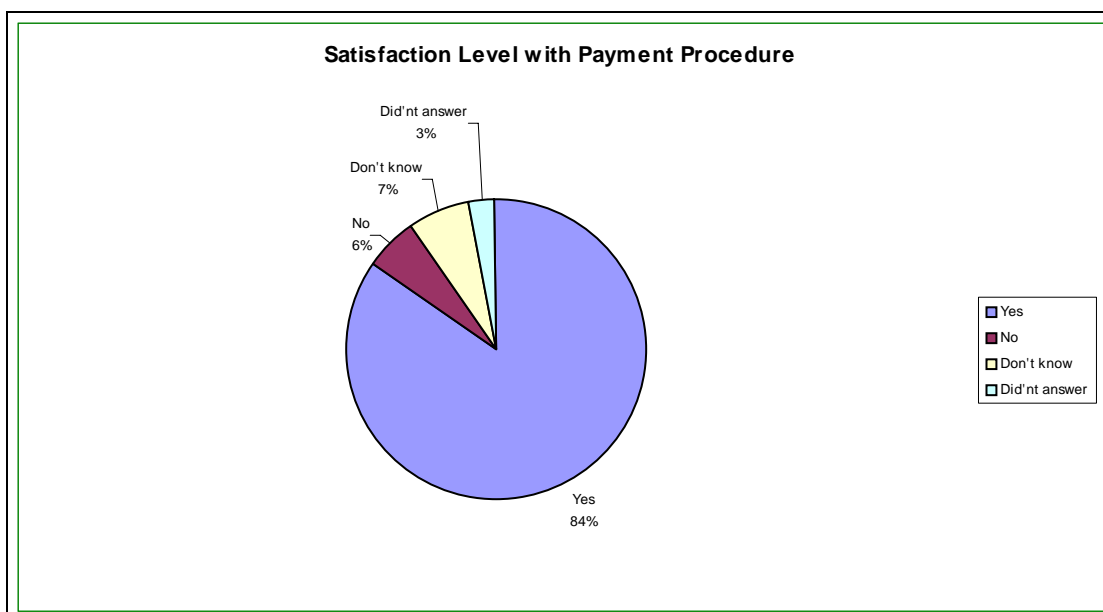
The process was considered to be prompt and straightforward and the flexibility of the grant scheme was praised for example not having tight deadlines or being able to approach the team if problems / delays were encountered were considered to be definite advantages.



9) Overall a high satisfaction level of 84% was recorded as regards the payment procedure for the grant however the reoccurring theme of difficulties experienced with cash flow problems by smaller groups was noticeable within the comments section.

Comments ranged from “cash flow is difficult for charities with not receiving the grant in advance”, “payment in arrears is not always possible for small grants”, “retrospective payments cause difficulties for small / medium groups, slow payment process, quarterly payments would be useful”, “easier if grant paid in blocks to help cash flow for smaller groups”, “tedious claims process”, “slow internal system awaiting authorisation and more work for admin staff having to claim expenditure”.

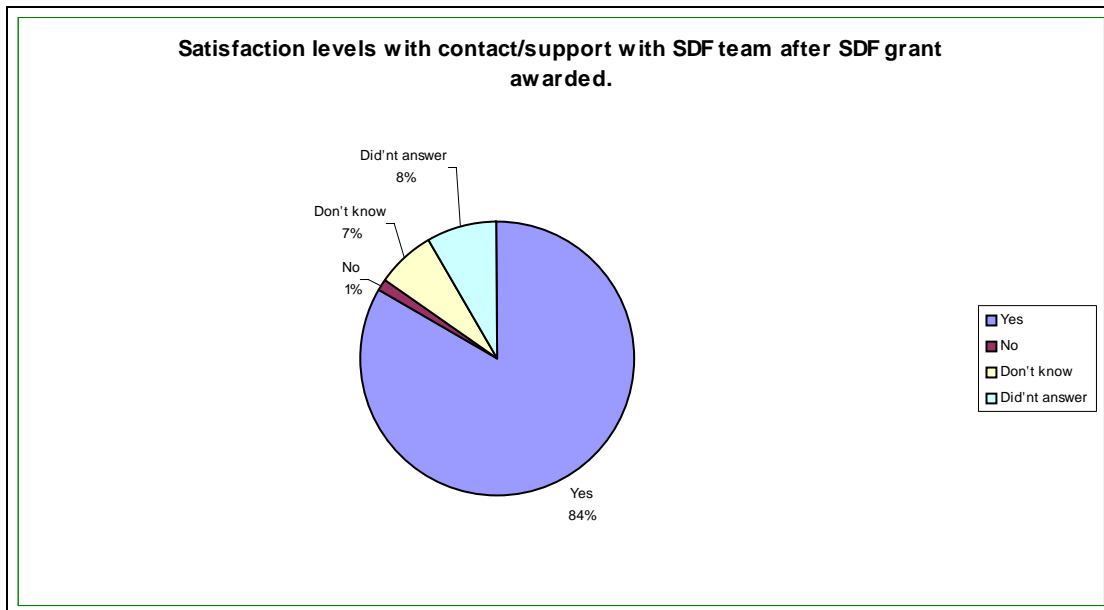
Conversely others considered the process prompt and straightforward, very supportive and helpful staff, “very helpful regarding submitting claim and prompt payment” and “exemplary support in chasing up payments”.



10) Overall an 84% satisfaction level was recorded for contact / support with the SDF team after the grant was awarded.

As already recorded many comments praised the staff as friendly, supportive, knowledge rich, excellent and accessible, with comments such as “can’t praise the staff enough” and “very supportive staff who kept in touch throughout the project”.

Two respondents stated they had received no contact after the grant was awarded.



11) The final question asked for any further comments on the grant procedure and / or the SDF as a grant scheme.

Though some of the responses reflected what has already been recorded above, particularly with reference to smaller grants being paid in advance to alleviate cash flow problems, many touched on new / more general issues in particular relating to the breadth of the fund.

The SDF grant is considered to be a “valuable scheme” and many commented on similar lines “that it is good to have a rural scheme when so much appears to be currently targeted at urban areas”. The local nature was welcomed and considered to be “very good for supporting small rural enterprises” and the simple format was applauded with numerous requests stated for this to continue.

Many stated how they considered it to be “excellent to have a scheme that promotes sustainable living”. Several respondents celebrated that the benefits are still being felt by their communities from grants received in the past, one quoting that the sale of books (from a grant award) is still proving invaluable to village hall funds several years later.

Overall many respondents considered the whole process to be clear, simple, and supportive and user friendly with the range of eligibility / areas covered stated to be excellent. Many groups considered it to be an excellent scheme, which encouraged communities to together achieve their objectives. Furthermore several stated that they

considered it to be a scheme that was “very supportive in helping low income organisations educate children and adults” and a similar comment was made about encouraging access to the National Park for disadvantaged groups.

Numerous respondents stated that they hoped the fund would be around for a long time, “please let it carry on” and the “scheme needs to be continued to promote sustainability” being a familiar type of statement with one comment even requesting that “longer term projects are better for us so it would be useful if SDF knew what funding it had three to five years in advance”.

Conclusion

Overall the SDF grant fund is proving very popular, is well received and appreciated by grant recipients. The professionalism of the PDNPA SDF staff, their support, knowledge and approachability are major contributors in ensuring the scheme works well. Equally appreciated was the informal, light touch approach to the management of the grant fund.

Action Points

The following are areas arising from the above analysis that may benefit from a review / change to the current way of operating to facilitate improvements to the current system.

- Monitoring questionnaires are sent out on a more frequent basis to both successful and unsuccessful applicants.
- The second application form or method of completion is reviewed eg always completed with an applicant.
- The area of retrospective funding for small groups is reviewed though consideration must be given to financial regulations.
- The time period in the internal system for authorisation of payments is improved.
- A full written explanation is provided when a project is rejected.

APPENDIX 1

Copy of questionnaire sent out. There were two return dates one in October 2006 and the other in January 2007.

A stamped addressed envelope was included with the questionnaire to encourage returns.



**Peak District National Park Authority
Sustainable Development Fund**

Applicants Questionnaire

We are seeking to find out and assess how you as an applicant found the grant process. This will ensure we give future applicants the best service possible. We would appreciate if you could spend some time to fill in the questionnaire.

<i>Section 1 Application process</i>			
<i>Pre Decision (for all applicants)</i>			
1. Where did you first learn of the Sustainable Development Fund?			
2. Was the application form clear and easy to understand? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know If no what part of the form was unclear (please specify)			
3. If you had contact with the National Park's Sustainable Development staff before your application went to the panel how satisfied were you with;			
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't Know
Guidance on your application			
Explanation on application process			
Comments			
4. Are there any other aspects of the application process you can suggest any changes/improvements to? Please explain			
<i>Panel (for applications for grants above £1,000)</i>			
5. Were you informed in advance of the panel meeting at which your application was to be discussed in?			

Yes No Don't know
 Comments

Post Decision (for all applicants)

6. How do you think we communicated the decision on the application? Were you:

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't Know
Timing of notification			
Explanation of decision			

Comments

7. How does the SDF process compare with other funding bodies? E.g. application process, project assessment etc. Please give examples of good practice elsewhere if possible.

Section 2 is for successful applicants only.

Section 2 for successful applicants

8. Are you satisfied with the terms and conditions of your grant?
 Yes No Don't know
 Comments

9. Are you satisfied with the payment procedure for your grant?
 Yes No Don't know
 Comments

10. Are you satisfied with the contact/support you have had with the Sustainable Development Fund Team after you were awarded the grant?
 Yes No Don't know
 Comments

11. Do you have any further comments on the grant procedure and/or the SDF as a grant scheme?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Name and contact details (essential for successful grantees)

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire

Please return to: by post or fax

**Sustainable Development Team
Peak District National Park Authority
Aldern House
Baslow Road
Bakewell
Derbyshire
DE45 1AE**

FAX 01629 810194

Please return by: Friday October 13th