

RESEARCH REPORT

The Emergence and Impact of Local Ground-up Initiatives



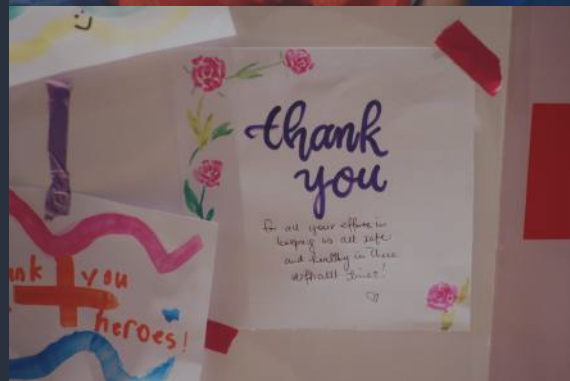
A RESEARCH COMMISSIONED BY

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it apparent that societies everywhere have complex and persistent problems to address which call for concerted action. As reports of the virus spread and its adverse economic impact grew, more individuals stepped forward to help those in need.

Singapore witnessed many individuals and groups initiate voluntary, ground-up initiatives to support the vulnerable in various communities through a wide variety of projects. Responding to this and the need for a culture of solidarity amidst crisis, in February 2020 The Majurity Trust (TMT) launched the Singapore Strong Fund aimed at galvanising and supporting such civic-minded efforts.

This report presents findings from a survey of SG Strong grantees who started ground-up initiatives. Our focus was on individuals who initiated and led ground-up initiatives ('civil society activators', henceforth 'activators'). In the survey, respondents were asked about their backgrounds, motivations and experiences of

running community projects, as well as their feedback on the grant scheme. Our goal was to study the emergence of local ground-up initiatives and their challenges, so as to better understand how such informal groups operate and how they can be better supported.

Following a brief literature review on the topic of ground-up initiatives, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with leaders from a total of 11 selected funded projects, to glean preliminary insights into their backgrounds, motivations and experiences with running their projects. An online survey was then developed based on the interview findings and administered to the full population of SG Strong ground-up initiatives.

Our key findings from the research study are:

(i) Approximately one-third of the funded ground-up initiatives were started by new activators who were leading a community project for the first time.

Naturally, these individuals reported lower levels of confidence in their ability to execute projects than more experienced activators¹ did, and the types of projects they undertook may also have been simpler, at least in terms of self-reported manpower needs. This is a heartening outcome, however, that was likely made possible in part by the SG Strong Fund’s accessibility to individual citizens and informal, unregistered groups.

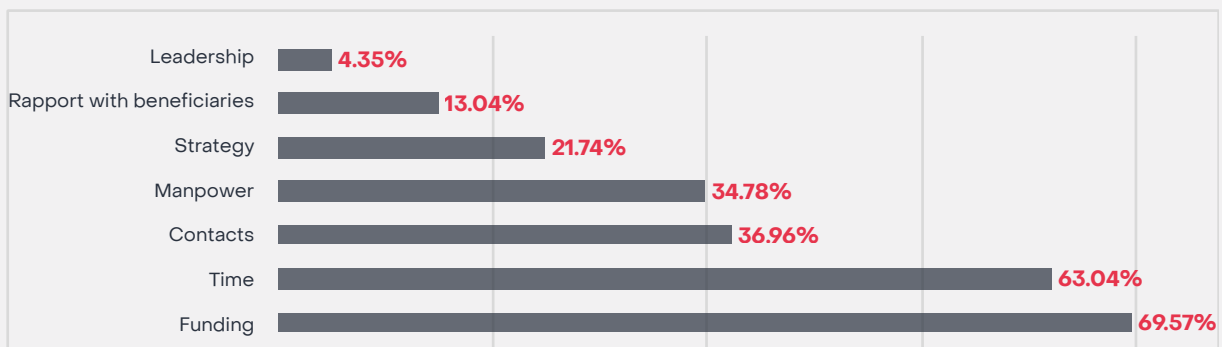
Question	New activators	Experienced activators	
Before you began your project, how confident were you of your ability to execute the project well? (1 = Not Confident at all; 5 = Extremely Confident)	Mean = 3.29 (out of 5)	Mean = 3.93 (out of 5)	
Which of the following best describes your project’s manpower needs? (Choose One)			
	New activators	Experienced activators	Total
Simple - volunteers are optional, I can do it by myself	23.5%	10.3%	7
Slightly Complex - I only need a few volunteers, and anyone will do	23.5%	10.3%	7
Complex - I need a team that is organized, which can include anyone willing to help	29.4%	44.8%	18
Very Complex - I need a moderately specialised team, comprising a mix of people with specific skillsets and anyone willing to help	17.7%	31.0%	12
Extremely Complex - I need a highly specialised team, with specific skillsets	5.8%	3.5%	2
Total	17	29	46

¹ ‘Experienced’ activators are defined here as those who answered no to question 1.5 of the survey, “Is this your first time initiating a non-profit project to meet a community need?”, with all who answered yes considered ‘new activators’.

(ii) The three greatest challenges faced by ground-up teams were funding, time, and contacts.

Correspondingly most leaders expressed a preference for support in terms of finding connections to potential funders and partners, as well as media coverage or other publicity of their project. The survey data also revealed challenges specific to the ongoing public health crisis: many felt time was an overwhelming concern due to the urgent needs of certain vulnerable groups and the quick implementation of Singapore’s ‘Circuit Breaker’ restrictions in

early April 2020. Others highlighted difficulties with logistics and doing volunteer management virtually amidst social distancing. Interestingly, most respondents did not rate ‘higher order’ concerns such as strategy and establishing rapport with their beneficiaries among their foremost concerns, which might reflect the relatively short-term nature of most SG Strong projects.



How useful would the following types of support be to you, for future projects?	Not useful at all					Extremely useful	Mean
	0	1	3	14	27		
Connections to other potential funders and partners	0	1	3	14	27	4.49	
Media coverage or other publicity facilitated by The Majority Trust	2	2	6	10	25	4.2	
Networking sessions with other ground-up initiatives	3	6	12	10	14	3.58	
Training opportunities, such as workshops on relevant skills	5	7	8	15	11	3.43	
Online resources on aspects of project planning, implementation and evaluation – such as toolkits or podcasts	4	10	6	12	12	3.41	
Direct mentoring and guidance	8	8	13	7	9	3.02	

(iii) Most people surveyed plan to continue the work they have embarked on, but more existing activators with prior experience do compared to new activators

Naturally, this raises the question: why don't new activators want to continue? One reason could be that the pandemic crisis situation changed individuals' assessments of their resource availability, whether in terms of time, money, or ability – perhaps some who felt ill-equipped or reluctant to volunteer under normal circumstances were compelled to do what they could given the crisis. Another likely reason is that

in some cases it was also irrelevant for activators to continue the work; projects such as crisis response efforts to provide large numbers of displaced workers food and shelter would eventually become unnecessary as the situation changes. Lastly, the converse could also be true, as many who plan to continue may already have been doing similar work well before COVID-19.

	New activators	Experienced activators
Likely to continue	10	24
Not likely to continue	7	5

Next Steps

As our analysis of the data found some statistically significant differences in motivations and priorities between new and ground-up activators, more in-depth research on a larger sample of new activators may be beneficial to understand the extent of these differences and their implications for efforts to encourage more volunteering in Singapore. For now the current study captures a snapshot of who ground-up leaders are and how their teams work, which sheds light on the research agenda ahead.

Our report concludes with brief recommendations on ways for organisations like The Majority Trust to better support ground-up initiatives, as summarised below:

- (i) Continue existing grant models that provide a small funding quantum but quick turnaround time to applicants, with a selection process that prioritises project proposal over track record
- (ii) Supplement financial support with programmes or events that are designed for structured introductions between corporate funders (whether business or non-profit) and ground-up leaders
- (iii) Facilitates peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and community-building among all activators, e.g. via an online platform
- (iv) Facilitate connections with grassroots organisations to increase ground-up initiatives' marketing efforts via more localised, offline means



Research Methodology

Research Methodology

This research study adopted a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the following research questions:

- 1. How effective has the SG Strong grant scheme been?**
- 2. What conditions and factors enable ground-up initiatives to start and gain traction?**

Its focus was on the individuals who initiated and led ground-up initiatives ('civil society activators', henceforth 'activators') that received support from the SG Strong Fund. Our goal was to study grant recipients' perceptions on the value of the funding, their project outcomes (from the perspective of project leaders), and to understand the factors that led such individuals to start collective ground-up action in communities, as well as their experiences of doing so.

Following a brief literature review on the topic of ground-up initiatives (including examples

from Singapore), we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with selected grant recipients to glean preliminary insights about their backgrounds, motivations and experiences.

These interviews were conducted via video-conferencing with leaders from a total of 11 funded projects. The findings from this population subset were then used to inform the development of an online survey which was administered to the full list of SG Strong ground-up initiatives.

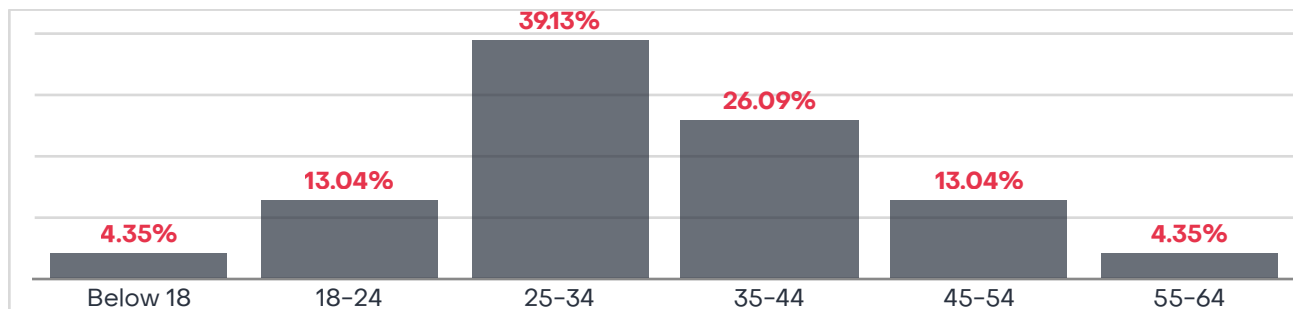
Profile of Survey Respondents

Profile of Survey Respondents

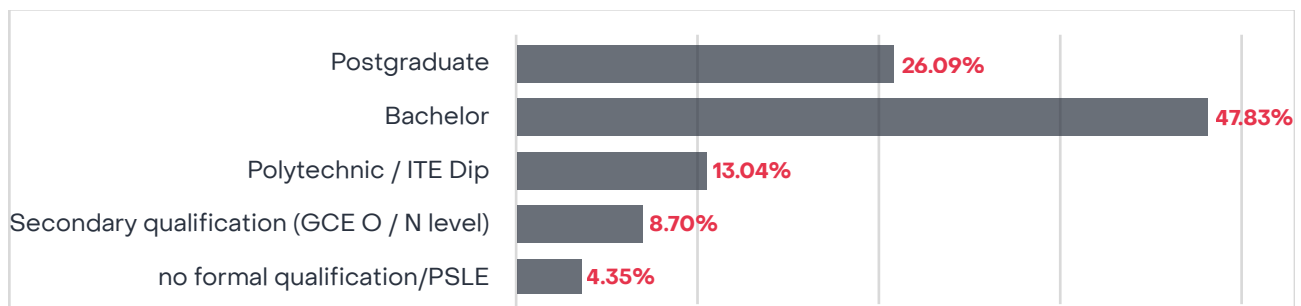
A total of 46 individuals completed the survey, representing 60% of the population of 76 ground-up initiatives among the SG Strong grant recipients.

Of these, more were female (20 males, 26 females) and most respondents were aged between 25 to 44 years old.

Age Distribution



Educational levels – Current Educational Qualification



As shown above, a high proportion of the survey respondents had either a Bachelor's degree (47.8%) or Postgraduate degree (26.1%). These two categories together formed almost three-quarters of the total sample, which may reflect underrepresentation in the Polytechnic / ITE Diploma category (typically 20% of all students) given population norms.

First timers

Demographic profiles aside, we also asked survey respondents whether the project they led with TMT funds was their first time initiating a non-profit project to meet a community need.

Just over one third of the respondents were first-time civil society activators ('new activators'), while the remainder ('experienced activators') had prior experience.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
New activator	1	17	36.96
Experienced activator	2	29	63.04
Total		46	100.0

Further analysis on possible differences between 'new activators' and 'experienced activators' showed that there are significantly fewer males than females among new activators.

The distribution of gender is as follows:

	New activators	Experienced activators
Male	4	16
Female	13	13

No significant differences were found for age except for those in the 25 – 34 category, which had the highest number of respondents across age categories (39% of total). This age group had significantly fewer new activators (6 new vs 12 experienced).

For education level, a significant difference was again found only in the largest category of respondents: among those with a Bachelor degree (47.8%), more than twice as many were experienced activators (7 new vs 15 experienced). In terms of the target communities that projects served, more new activators than experienced activators ran projects aimed at helping Children & Youth, with the opposite true for the more general area of need, Community.

Project Duration

More than half of all funded projects lasted 1- 3 months. This likely reflects a focus on addressing immediate needs that were directly related to the escalating COVID-19 pandemic (some of which may not have persisted as the local situation improved), and also the \$5,000 funding cap of the SG Strong grant.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
1-3 months	1	27	58.70
4-6 months	2	8	17.39
more than 6 months	3	11	23.91
Total		46	100.0

No significant difference in the duration of projects undertaken was found between new and existing activators (two-tailed Chi-Sq=.49, d.f = 2, p-value=.781, not significant).



Why and How Ground-ups Begin

Why and How Ground Ups Begin

Reasons to start

Survey respondents were asked about their motivations for starting the projects. They identified most strongly with altruistic reasons, as well as the desire to contribute to something meaningful.

Q: “Why did you start this project? Please rate the following reasons on a scale of 1 to 5 based on how relevant they were.”

Why did you start this project?	Not relevant at all					Extremely relevant	Mean
	1	2	3	4	5		
I wanted to do meaningful work.	0	0	0	8	38	4.83	
I felt compelled to help given the current COVID-19 crisis.	0	0	1	6	39	4.83	
I saw a need that I could meet.	0	1	2	10	33	4.63	
I wanted to support a specific group of people.	2	0	1	7	36	4.63	
I had a message to share.	2	2	6	12	24	4.17	
I saw others around me taking action to help and felt led to do likewise.	4	6	13	10	13	3.48	
I was inspired by a person or past encounter.	8	6	10	8	14	3.3	
The project is a continuation or extension of what I had already been doing.	14	3	8	8	13	3.07	
It was something I chanced upon - it wasn't something I intentionally set out to do.	10	10	15	6	5	2.7	
A close contact asked me to help.	20	9	10	5	2	2.13	

As expected, the motivations behind ground-up initiatives were largely intrinsic. Nearly 50% of the respondents felt “A close contact asked me to help” was irrelevant, and chance did not seem to feature. External factors such as “I was inspired by a person or past encounter” and “I saw others around me taking action” were also only secondary motivations.

However, our analysis of new vs experienced activators revealed some differences between the two:

Continuation of ongoing work

Experienced activators tended to report that their TMT-funded projects are extensions of work that they are already involved in (F=8.15, p=.007, highly significant).

	New activators	Experienced activators
“The project is a continuation or extension of what I had already been doing”	Mean = 2.25 (out of 5)	Mean = 3.55 (out of 5)

Seeing others take action

Relative to new activators, more experienced activators also tended to report being motivated by others’ efforts to help people in the community (F=4.03, p=.05, significant).

	New activators	Experienced activators
“I saw others around me take action and felt led to do likewise”	Mean = 3.0 (out of 5)	Mean = 3.76 (out of 5)

Altruistic reasons for helping

There were also significant differences in the following:

	New activators	Experienced activators
“I saw a need that I could meet” (F=4.9, p=.03)	Mean = 4.35 (out of 5)	Mean = 4.79 (out of 5)
“I wanted to support a specific group of people.” (F=3.05, p=.05)	Mean = 4.29	Mean = 4.83
“I had a message to share” (F=3.97, p=.05)	Mean = 3.76	Mean = 4.41

The data shows that experienced activators are more likely to advocate (“message to share”), perpetuate (“continuation or extension” of existing work), and be moved to act for altruistic reasons. These differences raise several questions. With regard to specific reasons for altruism, for instance, it could be that experienced activators identify more with the three above due to their greater knowledge about their target communities, compared to new activators.

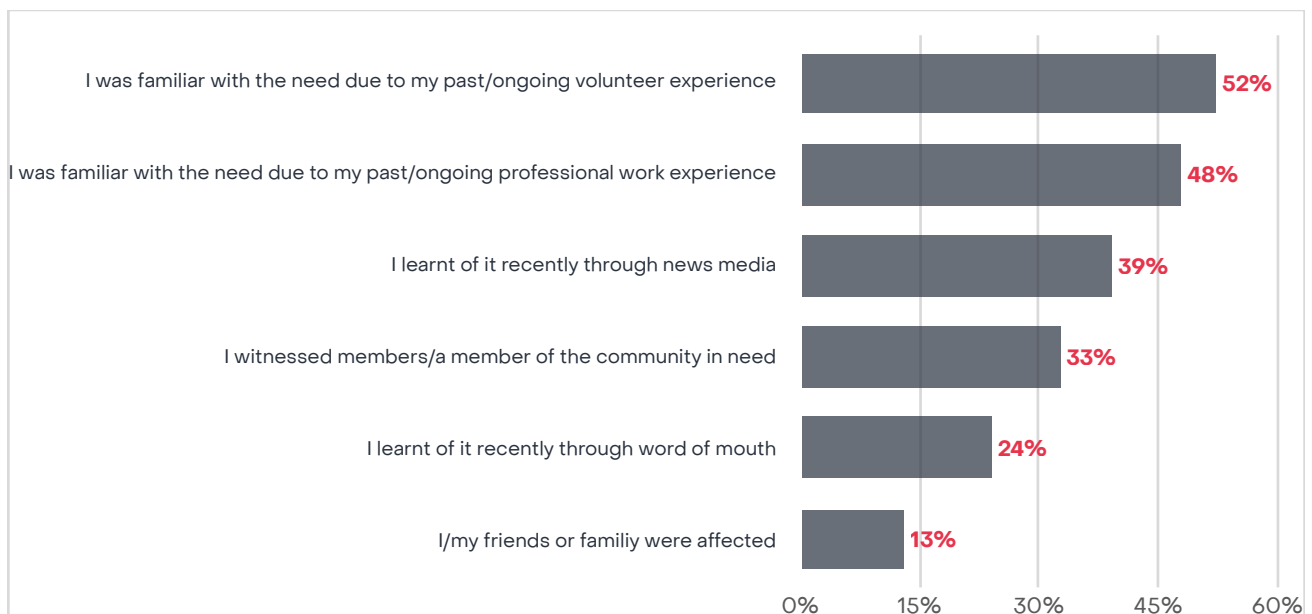
For experienced activators, the increased relevance of seeing others take action could also hint at the effect of community norms within circles of civil society activators. As an individual’s interpersonal networks typically socialise him/her into certain values and identities, it might be that experienced activators encounter ideas about social justice or what it means to be an active citizen more frequently or in ways that predispose them to act (e.g. when ideas become normalized and form social expectations, or are internalized as personal beliefs).

Ultimately, to parse the nuanced reasons behind why individuals decide to start ground-up initiatives, more focused qualitative research is needed. Activators' motivations vary, and factors such as biographical availability and alignment with personal interests can also be important considerations. One project leader we interviewed even remarked that the cost of his time is low since he enjoys the work of developing technological products, which is both the nature of his team's ground-up project and his livelihood. The survey results are a necessarily limited picture of varied and complex motivations.

Awareness of need

Two questions were asked to gauge whether respondents had prior exposure to or any direct involvement with the issues they sought to address. Results for the first question are shown below:

How did you become aware of the community need you identified? (Choose as many as you like)



To the second question, “Had you already been in contact with your target community (the intended recipients of help) prior to the start of your project?”, exactly 50% of the respondents (23 out of 46) answered ‘yes’. No significant differences were found between new and experienced activators for both questions.



Confidence

Although beyond the scope of this survey to test, we hypothesized that individuals who stepped forward to initiate and lead ground-up initiatives had more positive self-perceptions of their abilities compared to those who join such initiatives in more of a ‘follower’ capacity.

Survey responses indicate that most project leaders at least did indeed tend to be confident of their abilities and skills, as seen below.

Q: “Before you began your project, how confident were you of your ability to execute the project well?”

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
Not Confident at all	1	3	6.52
Slightly Confident	2	2	4.35
Moderately Confident	3	12	26.09
Very Confident	4	18	39.13
Extremely Confident	5	11	23.91
Total		46	100.0

The mean response of 3.7 would be higher if not for just 5 respondents who were slightly or not confident at all. This may indicate subjective affect (i.e. the respondent could be skilled, or determined, but still not confident).

As expected, new activators are significantly less confident than experienced activators ($F=3.87$, $p=.05$).

	New activators	Experienced activators
Before you began your project, how confident were you of your ability to execute the project well?	Mean = 3.29 (out of 5)	Mean = 3.93 (out of 5)



Role of personal networks

Q: “How important was the support of your personal network in your decision to start the project? Please rate each of the following relationship types based on their importance”

How important was the support of your personal network in your decision to start the project?	Not important at all			Extremely Important		Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
The Majority Trust / Other funders	0	0	2	12	32	4.65
Friends	2	3	4	13	24	4.17
Newly-connected collaborators	3	4	5	17	17	3.89
Family	5	11	3	12	15	3.46
Colleagues	10	5	9	9	13	3.22

Funders (including TMT) and friends were the top two most valuable relationships that factored into individuals’ decisions to start their projects.

Comparing the importance of these networks between new and experienced activators, only the importance of “TMT / Other Funders” was significantly different, with experienced activators rating it higher than new ones. ($F=5.33$, $p=.026$)

	New activators	Experienced activators
How important was the support of TMT/ Other funders in your decision to start the project?	Mean = 4.41 (out of 5)	Mean = 4.79 (out of 5)



Reliance on professional background/training

To better understand how important professional skills were as a resource and/or as possible contributor to project leaders' level of confidence, survey respondents were asked to rate their reliance on this.

Q: "To what extent did you rely on your professional background and training when planning and executing your project?"

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	1	6	13.04
A Little	2	5	10.87
Somewhat	3	2	4.35
Quite a bit	4	13	28.26
A Great Deal	5	20	43.48
Total		46	100.0

Results showed a mean rating of 3.78, which suggests moderately strong reliance. This aligns with our preliminary interview research with selected grant recipients, which included several new activators whose projects involved work that had clear connections to their professions. One probable reason is that people are more likely to feel equipped to start something in a familiar domain, when considering how they can help others.

No significant difference was found between new and experienced activators in terms of their reliance on professional skills. However, the data showed a significant trend based on age: older individuals tended to report greater reliance on their professional training, which may not be surprising given cumulative experience.



There was insufficient data to analyse activators' reliance on professional skills by area of need (target community).



Ground-ups and their Teams

Ground Ups and their Teams

Team Composition

Q: How many members of your core team are there in each of the following categories?

Relationship type	% of respondents who relied on this	Mean number in core team
a. Close friends / Family	63%	1.9
b. Acquaintances	70%	2.8*
c. Co-workers	48%	2.1
d. Strangers	50%	2.2

**Based on a revised sample of 29 respondents after excluding two outliers: project #1130 with 30pax, and project #1001 with 20pax.*

On the whole, for those who had the above relationship categories in their team, new activators also tended to have fewer acquaintances, co-workers and strangers compared to experienced activators. On the other hand, the number of close friends and

family members are roughly the same (1.9 for new activators vs 1.8 for experienced activators). As the types of relationships listed generally vary in terms of the strength of social ties, the data could mean that new activators either are less open to working with unfamiliar people or have fewer opportunities than experienced activators do to meet potential teammates in the three categories.

	New activators	Experienced activators
Close Friends/Family	1.9	1.8
Acquaintances	1.7	3.4
Co-Workers	1.8	2.3
Strangers	1.7	2.5
Average Team Size (excluding Volunteers)	7.1	10.0

Q: How many volunteers (excluding the core team and project founders) have you engaged over the course of your project? Please provide an estimate.

Mean number**	% of teams who engaged volunteers
43	76%

**After excluding 2 projects that are outliers, one with 930 volunteers and the other with 5,000.

	New activators	Experienced activators
Volunteers	28	35

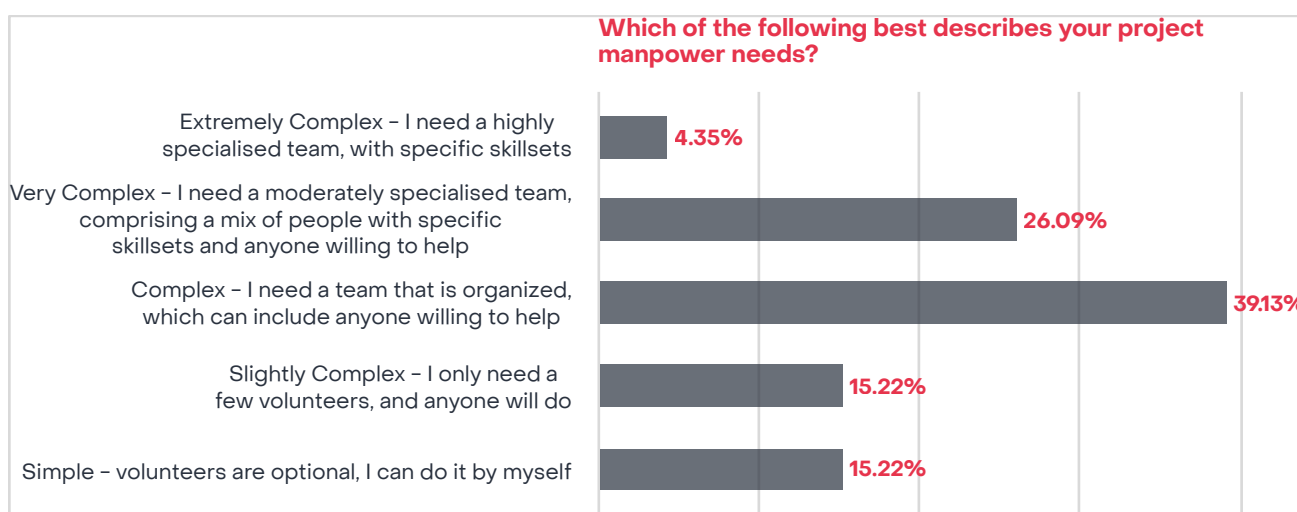
The same finding is true of volunteers: experienced activators tended to engage a higher number of volunteers than new activators did.

Nonetheless, it is clear that while ground-up teams tend to be varied in scope and types of core team composition, unsurprisingly common to all is their heavy reliance on volunteers.



Manpower needs

To achieve a fuller picture of each project’s team and further contextualise their leaders’ answers in other sections in the survey, we also asked respondents about their manpower needs – particularly in terms of a crude distinction between ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ volunteers. In this regard, manpower needs served as a proxy for project complexity as well.



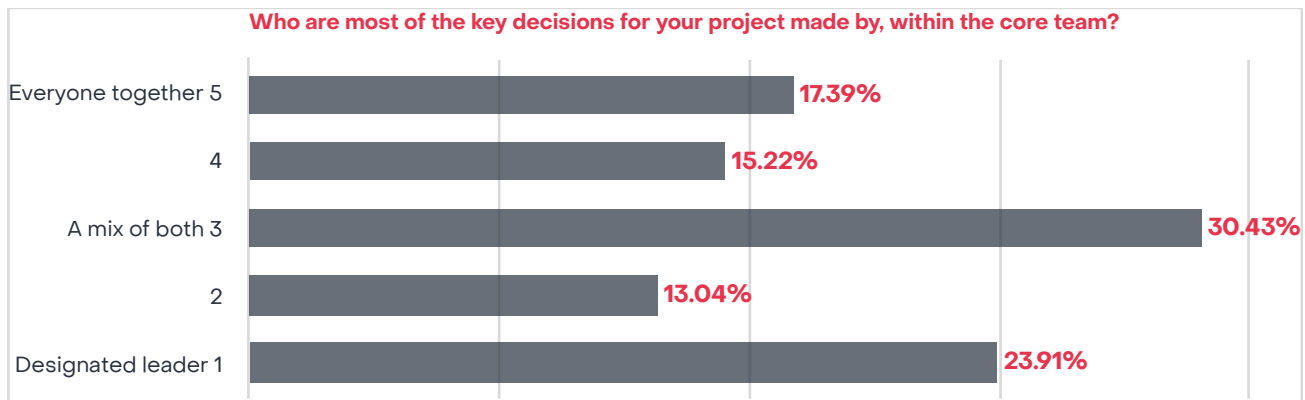
As shown above, most projects (about 70% of all surveyed) required teams, which is not unusual since projects of a certain scale and thus budget may be more likely to seek out grant funding.

	New activators	Experienced activators	Total
Simple – volunteers are optional, I can do it by myself	23.5%	10.3%	7
Slightly Complex – I only need a few volunteers, and anyone will do	23.5%	10.3%	7
Complex – I need a team that is organized, which can include anyone willing to help	29.4%	44.8%	18
Very Complex – I need a moderately specialised team, comprising a mix of people with specific skillsets and anyone willing to help	17.7%	31.0%	12
Extremely Complex – I need a highly specialised team, with specific skillsets	5.8%	3.5%	2
Total	17	29	46

New, first-time activators tended to have simpler manpower needs compared to experienced activators.

Decision-making in Team

Following the previous questions which sought to clarify *who* ground-up teams comprise of, this next question below is the first in a cluster that aims to understand *how* teams work together.



The results suggest that most teams approach decision-making in a fairly democratic, participatory way, as opposed to more centralised means. No significant difference was found between new and experienced activators.

Interestingly, though there may be a tendency for the project leaders surveyed to select the middle option ('A mix of both') and though we might expect them to frame their leadership more favourably (i.e. by avoiding the hierarchy implied by 'Designated leader'), almost a quarter of the respondents said that their team followed a designated leader / leaders.

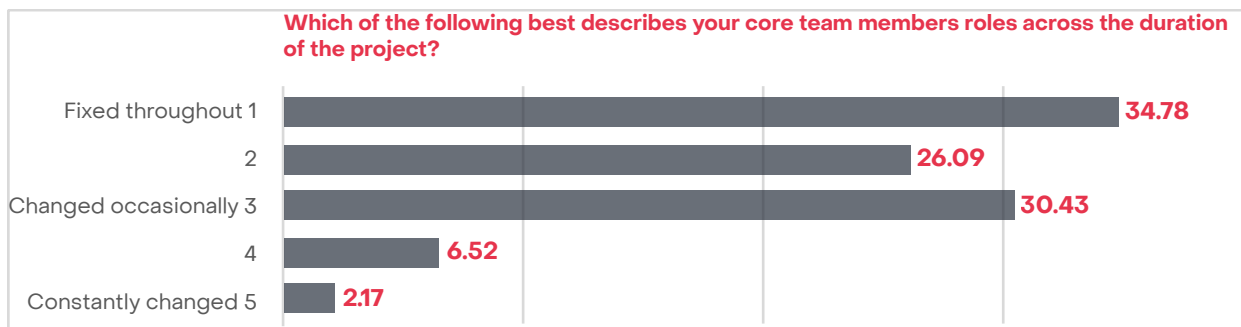
Admittedly, as the types of decisions that leaders must make can vary widely depending on the nature of a project and circumstance, it is also possible that ground-up leaders did not view any of the survey anchors normatively. In other words – respondents may not see it as inherently more desirable that team members

hold more autonomy in decision-making, given the variety of decisions a leader faces and especially in light of the prevalent sense of urgency amidst the COVID-19 crisis.

One role leaders play is to manage the workload of their team members. This was an important consideration for Project Providence, for example, which focused on crisis relief for foreigners stranded without shelter or food. As one of the initiative's leaders shared in an interview, given the fast pace of the work "[the leaders had] constant conversations about whether we need to help certain individuals realise they are near max and take a break ... to look out for the welfare of the core team and volunteers. I would time out them, so they're not allowed to take cases, just take a break." Managing volunteers in a way that avoids the risk of burnout may seem like an unusual thing to consider for most short-term projects, but it is one of many decisions leaders might face.

Core Team Member Roles

Survey respondents were next asked about how stable their roles were across the duration of their projects. Overall, a large majority (91.3%) reported that their roles did not change much throughout, if at all.



Together with information on the autonomy of team members in decision-making, the goal of such a question was to gauge the level of organization involved in each project – specifically, its balance between autonomy and coordination.

The finding above suggests that most projects are fairly well-organised and might involve less coordination among team members, at least in terms of updating one another on what

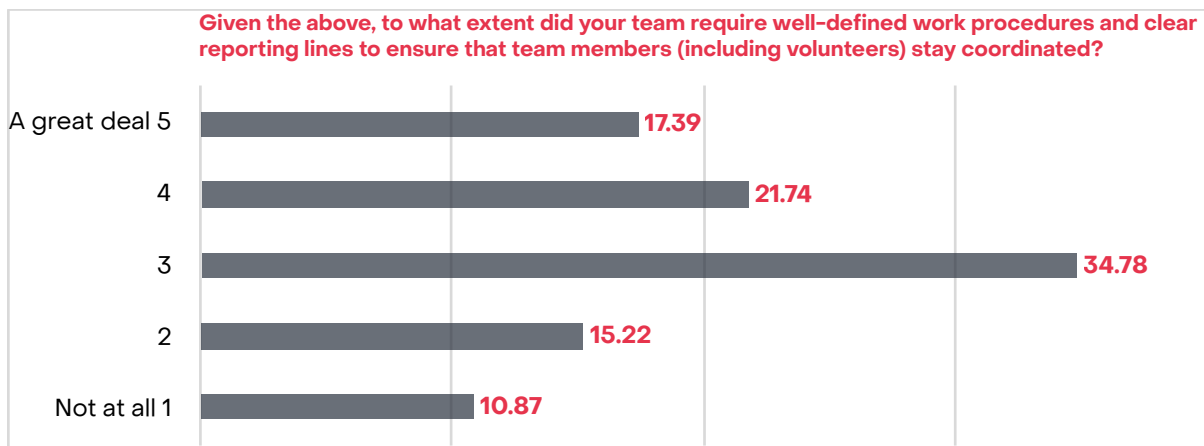
everyone is working on, since roles are clear and generally unchanging. More details might be necessary to clarify how activators interpreted ‘change’ (e.g. roles vs tasks), but the current data contributes to a slightly clearer picture of how ground-up teams operate.

No difference in results was found between new activators and experienced activators.



Need for well-defined processes

Again, the question below was included to better understand how coordinated ground-up teams felt they had to be for overall effectiveness. It was prefaced by a statement that listed factors which might influence how teams are organized, such as the number of different areas of work a project involves and their interconnectedness as well as whether members' roles generally change or remain fixed.



Responses to this question were more varied than the last, but most activators reported needing more organized internal processes – in other words, a higher level of coordination among team members. No significant difference was found between new and experienced activators.





Challenges faced by Ground-ups

Challenges faced by Ground Ups

Skills profile of teams

Q: What skills do you think your team lacked or was weaker at overall, if any?

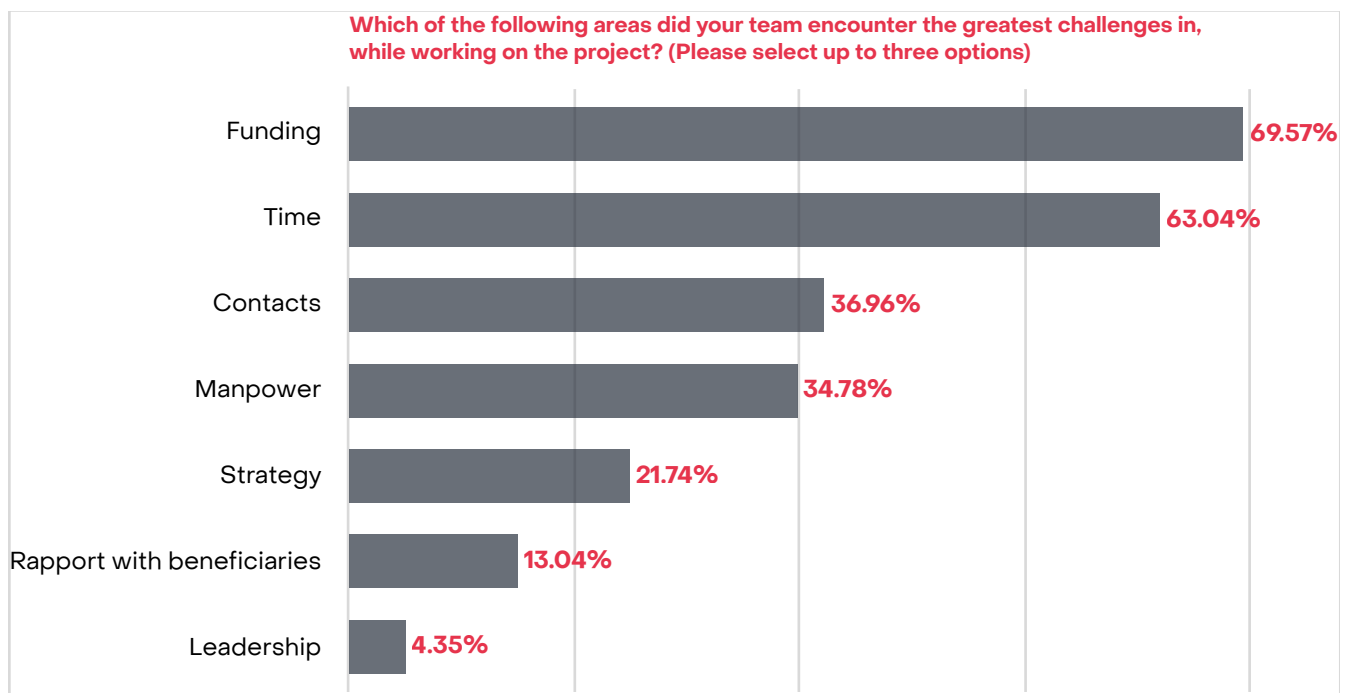
Areas	Examples	No. of mentions
Communication	[No specific examples provided]	6
Relationship management / Public engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting core team members • Coordinating with different stakeholders • Networking • Language skills to communicate with seniors 	6
Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising, including finding sponsors • Budgeting 	5
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating systems to reduce manual work • Digital editing • Livestreaming 	5

The table above summarises types of skills which were most frequently mentioned among the qualitative responses.

28% (13) of the 46 project leaders replied 'none / not applicable' when asked to identify skill gaps within their core team. One possible reason for this is that activators may make efforts to recruit strategically and fill skill gaps at the outset or early stages of a project, which was apparent in a few of our interviews with project leaders.



Areas of Challenge



No difference was found between new and experienced activators.

Unfortunately the survey data gathered does not provide answers to why the three least consequential areas of challenges above were less important to ground-ups, and whether it is likely that these were either (i) overlooked challenges, or (ii) areas in which ground-up leaders were better-equipped than others.

However, in view of the SG Strong Fund's focus on short-term projects that prioritise direct services to communities in need, it may be that 'Leadership', 'Rapport with beneficiaries' and 'Strategy' were less relevant concerns for the project ideas implemented.

The above finding regarding 'Rapport with beneficiaries' is especially intriguing as the importance of this factor was a consistent theme in our initial interviews with ground-up leaders. Among the few projects in our interview sample that were led by new activators, one in fact decided to pivot and change their target community as

unanticipated needs meant that their original project idea turned out to be less effective than hoped. In addition, several experienced activators emphasised how rapport with their 'beneficiaries' through sustained, collaborative relationships was key to identifying needs, devising solutions to these, and effectively implementing them in ways that also treat beneficiaries with dignity.

Overall, the responses to this question partly align with the earlier findings on skill gaps that activators reported: fundraising was a significant concern, as were the closely related skills of communication, relationship management and public engagement, which could fall in categories like 'Contacts', 'Manpower' and 'Rapport with beneficiaries'. 'Funding' and 'Time' were nonetheless by far the greatest challenges for the surveyed ground-up projects.

Overcoming challenges

Those surveyed were next asked to provide explanations in response to the open-ended question “How did your team overcome the two greatest challenges that you faced?”. Their responses are clustered below.

Challenge	Activators' responses
1. Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) <u>Apply to grant schemes like the SG Strong Fund</u>. TMT's funding was especially helpful – one ground-up leader felt it was a “challenge to fundraise as we are not a registered charity”, and another echoed this sentiment (b) <u>Find multiple funding sources</u>: Examples cited were Temasek's Oscar Fund and public fundraising via platforms like giving.sg (c) <u>Keep publicising the project</u>: “Funds go up slightly when there's a PR push then fall silent again” (d) <u>Adjust the project's scope, or somehow work with available resources</u>: “We re-budgeted our project to meet the most basic of our project needs”, “reduce the project scope”, “work on shoe-string budgets & minimize spending” (e) <u>Source cheaply and in bulk</u>: However, one respondent expressed regret over multiple delays due to the ‘cheap rates’ of the chosen vendor
2. Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) <u>Simply make do</u>: “just do it”, “we worked 24/7 with little sleep”, “picked up each other's slack”, (b) <u>Optimise manpower resources</u>: “Effective allocation of work to combat short time span from planning to execution, and clear delegation”, “be strategic about [time and] how volunteers can help”, “running a well-coordinated team” (c) <u>Recruit more manpower</u>: Including volunteers as well as core team members (d) <u>Use technology</u>: Meet virtually for greater team efficiency, and distributing goods online where possible (e.g. ebooks) for project efficacy and to address constraints (e.g. time, need to mitigate virus spread)

Challenge

Activators' responses

3. Contacts

- (a) Tap on personal networks: “Reach[ed] out to immediate friends and family”, “shared
- (b) Explore different avenues for publicity: Including cold-calling organisations

4. Manpower

- (a) Recruit more volunteers: “several digital channels [to] reach out to volunteers for help” in response to rapid growth of project scale and need for “specialised skills – e.g. marketing, design, tech”, “tap on contacts to mobilise volunteers”, “switched to a year-round rolling basis recruitment and provided open information on portfolios to make the process less intimidating”
- (b) Get help from organisations: One team “got connected very quickly with other Ground-Up Movements (GUMs) and social service organisations who were key to our success in sourcing for help in various areas of [its] operations”; another team worked with both non-profits and government agencies
- (c) Make do: “the core team pitched in more” to overcome changes in manpower across project phases

5. Strategy

- (a) Seek advice from those more knowledgeable: Several respondents sought out individuals who had more experience with their target community, and one also “did relevant research”
- (b) Adapt where needed: “Being creative to adapt to the situation”, “being flexible to change strategy”
- (c) Plan well: Make detailed “contingency plans for all situations and outcomes that were not definite”
- (d) Rely on contacts who know more: Such as depending on “ground contacts” to find distribution points for goods

6. Leadership

- (a) Ask more volunteers to lead: Mentioned only once by a project of longer-than-average duration, in which most founders eventually left for work commitments. However, another respondent noted that it was a “challenge to find volunteers to step up and take leadership roles”

7. Rapport

- (a) Seek advice from relevant experts: “we sought the help of a social worker [who] gave us very good tips”, another asked children book authors about how to develop a good book
- (b) Collaborate with the targeted recipients of help

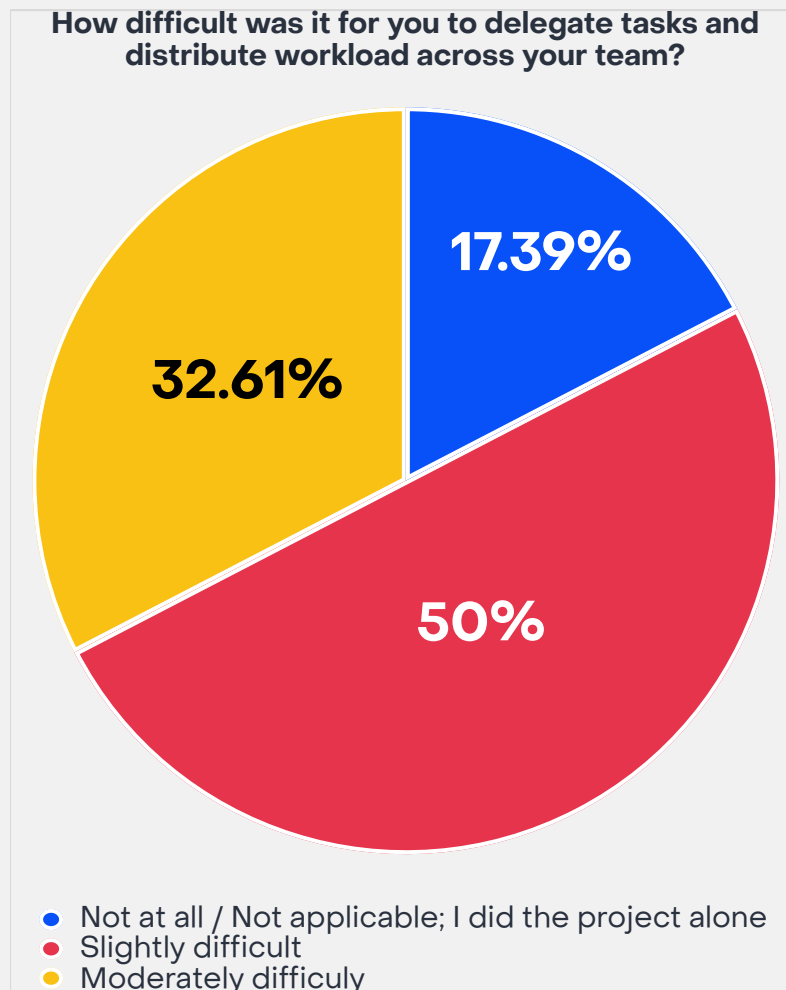
Personal challenges faced by leaders

Responses to the question “What did you personally find most challenging, while working on the project?” are summarised below. Overall, these echoed team challenges raised earlier, with time constraints again a key challenge.

Issue	No. of responses	Examples of responses
Time and energy	12	“balancing my day job and managing this project”
Logistics during COVID-19	6	“Sourcing for materials that were in shortage at the point in time, reaching targeted beneficiaries” “no mingling or gathering, max. number of volunteers to pack the care packs, no venue, suppliers had their warehouses closed etc”
Coordination / Volunteer mgt	5	“Coordinating among different volunteers who had different roles” “Ensuring that volunteers are clear on our direction, and that our perspectives / assumptions of children and youth are aligned and positive” “Recruiting volunteers who are strangers online and building trust”
Funding	4	“Had to apply to multiple sources of funding for such a straightforward project”
Use of technology	3	“Figuring out how to produce, direct, and host a livestreamed show”
Project ideation	2	“Understanding what the vulnerable families really needed and used in their daily lives” “We were not entirely sure what would be the best to help them with initially”
Others	-	“Actually thinking about the strategy and sustainability of the project, especially after it ends” “[Not meeting in person] made it tough to connect and gauge the effectiveness of our programme”

Task Delegation

One personal challenge that we anticipated project leaders would have was delegating work to members of their teams.



Not surprisingly, new activators found it slightly more difficult to delegate work than experienced activators did (mean of 2.41 vs mean 2.0, $F=3.97$, $p=0.05$).

However, none of the respondents found this very or extremely difficult (both response options were blank). On the whole, it is thus not a key issue to address.

Usefulness of Support

Q: “How useful would the following types of support be to you, for future projects?”

How useful would the following types of support be to you, for future projects?	Not useful at all			Extremely useful		Mean
Connections to other potential funders and partners	0	1	3	14	27	4.49
Media coverage or other publicity facilitated by The Majority Trust	2	2	6	10	25	4.2
Networking sessions with other ground-up initiatives	3	6	12	10	14	3.58
Training opportunities, such as workshops on relevant skills	5	7	8	15	11	3.43
Online resources on aspects of project planning, implementation and evaluation – such as toolkits or podcasts	4	10	6	12	12	3.41
Direct mentoring and guidance	8	8	13	7	9	3.02

The top two most requested resources are connections to other funders or partners and media coverage.

Although new activators were found to be significantly less confident than experienced activators elsewhere in the survey, no significant difference was found between the two groups here in terms of the types of support wanted.

Drawing on data from elsewhere in the survey, it appears that activators value increased media coverage as it is a means to connect with a wider pool of potential funders, partners or volunteers beyond their personal networks. ‘Contacts’ emerged as the third most important area of challenge (see question 6.1), and besides reaching out to friends and family, publicity via traditional news outlets or social media seems like the next natural solution.

Media coverage did not seem to feature as a primary concern during our interviews with selected activators. However, certain projects (e.g. one focused on shaping public dialogue on COVID-19 and mental health issues, another structured as a public education campaign via social media) may have found the role of media more relevant to their project strategy. Approximately 70% of the interviewees also turned out to be experienced activators, so media coverage might have felt no less important but more accessible to them given their existing networks from past volunteer work.

Meanwhile, funding clearly remains one of the foremost challenges that ground-up initiatives struggle with. A few of our interviewees felt that their resource constraints prevented them from achieving the project outputs and quality they knew would be more ideal, and viewed this as a ‘chicken or egg’ situation because a strong project performance is often the basis for securing funding, but can be tricky to achieve *and* measure. The work of tracking metrics for comprehensive project evaluation requires resources ground-ups might not be able to spare, as well as relevant digital skills for efficiency. In this regard at least two activators we spoke with shared that they would have liked to better plan and invest more resources in collecting feedback from beneficiaries and partners.

Another funding-related issue raised was that the disbursement schedule of funding installments mattered. Activators had different views on this: some were content with two tranches of 50%, while others pointed out that this was difficult at times for small teams with little resources, and also for longer-term projects in which a team would receive the final tranche of payment much later after project completion. One experienced activator in particular highlighted the difficulty this poses for projects that call for a great deal of creative ideation or extensive planning, which is time-consuming but frequently overlooked by funders who tend to support only material costs and concrete outputs, not the cost of a team’s manpower.

Relationship management

The following question was asked with a view to identifying areas in which organisations like TMT can play a facilitator role to help activators more effectively build social capital outside their teams.

Q: “... In the course of your project, what did you rely on most to build trust with people outside your team? Please rate each of the following factors.”

In the course of your project, what did you rely on most to build trust with people outside your team?	Not important at all			Extremely important		Mean
My / the core team members' understanding of the community needs that we wanted to address	1	1	4	10	30	4.46
My / the core team's good performance and execution of the project	0	1	5	19	21	4.3
My / the core team's good performance and execution of the project	1	4	4	15	22	4.15
Increased credibility due to support from funders such as The Majority Trust	0	2	11	12	21	4.13
Social media publicity for the project	3	2	8	10	23	4.04
Partnerships with non-profit organisations and leaders	0	4	7	18	17	4.04
My / the core team's detailed plans for the project	2	2	5	23	14	3.98
My / the core team's timely accountability to stakeholders for our work	4	2	8	13	19	3.89
Partnerships with government agencies	6	2	12	11	15	3.59
My / the core team members' personal reputation	5	6	8	13	14	3.54
References – Someone helped to vouch for my or the core team members' credibility	6	10	8	11	11	3.24
My / the core team members' prior track record of success in other projects	9	6	9	12	10	3.17

In order of importance, the top 5 trust-building factors that project leaders felt they relied on are:

- (i) My / the core team members' understanding of the community needs that we wanted to address
- (ii) My / the core team's good performance and execution of the project
- (iii) My / the core team members' prior networks
- (iv) Increased credibility due to support from funders such as The Majority Trust
- (v) Social media publicity for the project
- (vi) Partnerships with non-profit organisations and leaders (*same mean rating as point (v)*)

In comparison, factors such as prior track record and references for credibility were rated significantly less important than other factors.

New and experienced activators were also significantly different in the following:

	New activators	Experienced activators
My / the core team members' prior track record of success in other projects F=8.96, p=.005	Mean = 2.41	Mean = 3.62
My / the core team members' understanding of the community needs that we wanted to address F=3.97, p=.05	Mean = 4.12	Mean = 4.66
My / the core team's detailed plans for the project F=4.10, p=.04	Mean = 3.59	Mean = 4.21
Partnerships with government agencies F=7.08, p=.011	Mean = 2.94	Mean = 3.97

In other words, experienced activators saw their team members' understanding of community needs, detailed plans and track records as more important in trust-building compared to new activators. It is unclear why this is so, but one possible explanation is that their increased familiarity with community needs, the landscape of key players, and processes specific to those issues lends experienced activators a different vantage point and awareness of the complexities surrounding what they seek to address.

Similarly, experienced activators' reportedly greater reliance on partnerships with government could be reflective of a focus on upstream interventions and systemic changes in response to societal issues. In contrast, new activators may concentrate on less on this by virtue of their shorter span of involvement in volunteer work.

Survey respondents were also invited to list other trust-building factors not captured in the survey, but few responses directly addressed this question. **Those that did identified the following points (some of which overlap with the survey anchors):**

- **Word of mouth:**
“A WhatsApp group chat with our changemakers where we share about initiatives and resources need or available”

- **Good administration:**
“to deal with funders reporting and claims disbursement”
- **Following through / Continued action:**
“follow up on a larger scale to all persons with disabilities”
- **Media coverage:**
Specifically, legitimation from state actors in the example cited – “Our project caught the attention of PM Lee and he shared the eBook with the cabinet. Mrs Josephine Teo then share it on her FB page”

All in all, for this aspect of ground-up initiatives' work more qualitative research is needed to better understand the dynamics of their relationships with external parties.

Our interview research prior to the survey allowed a glimpse of how experienced activators may be embedded in multiple, dense networks of relationships, which can include other ground-ups, registered non-profits in the same field of work, their beneficiaries, individual volunteers or donors, as well as various government actors.

Such ground-up leaders undoubtedly have a rich arsenal of informal knowledge and skills to share with newer activators.

A woman with glasses and a patterned top is shown in profile, pointing upwards with her right hand while holding a tablet in her left hand. The background is dark and slightly blurred.

Plans to Continue

Plans to Continue

Nearly three-quarters (74%, 34 out of 46) of the survey respondents said yes to the question “Do you plan to continue the work you have begun with your project?”, which is heartening.

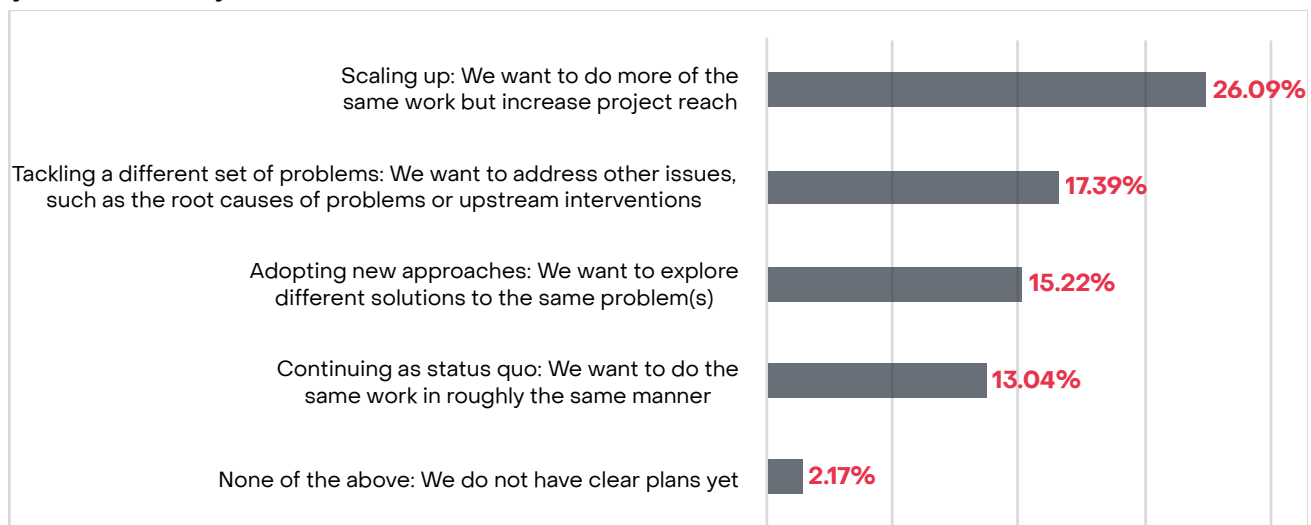
The majority of these individuals were experienced activators, however: 82.7% of experienced activators plan to continue, compared to only 58.8% of new activators. The breakdown by number is shown below (almost significant results for likelihood ratios (likelihood ratios of 3.11, d.f. =1, p-value = .078):

	New activators	Experienced activators
Likely to continue	10	24
Not likely to continue	7	5

This perhaps supports the idea that during times of crisis more people step forward to volunteer temporarily. Two experienced activators among our interviewees did in fact note this phenomenon, and that such ‘spontaneous volunteering’ might tend to focus on symptomatic issues such as distributing goods to meet the immediate needs of people, as opposed to systemic issues and solutions which more established ground-up leaders and organisations try to tackle *in addition* to direct services.

For respondents who said ‘yes’ to continuing, the question below was then posed.

If you plan to continue the work you have begun, beyond the completion of your current project, what would your foremost objective be?



Almost two-fifths of all surveyed grantees indicated that they would like to do the same work as their current project. In this group, 2 out of 3 planned to do so at a larger scale. Of the roughly 34% remaining, responses were quite evenly divided between tackling new issues and finding different ways to address the same need they previously worked on. So approximately one-third of all surveyed grantees plan to find new ways to meet community needs.

Finally, respondents were asked if they plan to formalize their current projects through incorporation as a registered legal entity (e.g. non-profit organization, social enterprise).

The results for this were also varied: 33% (of the total of survey population) said they were still considering, 28% indicated 'no', and 13% 'yes'. Those 'still considering' accounted for almost half of the population subset that said they plan to continue the work (76% of total).

No difference was found in the response between new and experienced activators.

Overall, the majority of the respondents seem comfortable with continuing to operate as informal groups; incorporating legally does not seem to be an immediate concern.



Measures of Success

Measures of Success

Which of the following measures of success do you consider most important?



Overwhelmingly, meeting identified needs was a clear focus. More interestingly, the four lowest-ranking measures above are those that arguably take a longer-term perspective of volunteer work. This suggests that most SG Strong projects had short-term goals for their projects, likely as a result of the focus on crisis response but also possibly because people felt a need to scope their projects to be feasible within the maximum possible budget allowed by the grant, given the funding cap.

No significant differences between new and experienced activators were found in all above categories except one: more experienced activators viewed 'Influencing others' attitudes'

as more important compared to new activators (F=4.21, p=.04).

As an alternative way of approaching the same question, we also asked respondents what they would definitely not include as a measure of success. Most responses centered on media attention and the number of people reached. 'Quality over quantity' was a clear theme, although a few noted that such measures are valid and important, just not ends in and of themselves. Publicity does little "unless it helps to bring partners on board", for instance, and success should not be defined by "fund raising/media mentions as these are processes to reach target needs".

The Way Ahead

TO OUR HEROES
FIGHTING
AGAINST
COVID-19

THANK YOU AND

WE LOVE YOU

#谢谢

#TERIMA KASIH

#SALAMAT

#KAMSIAM

#DÒJEH

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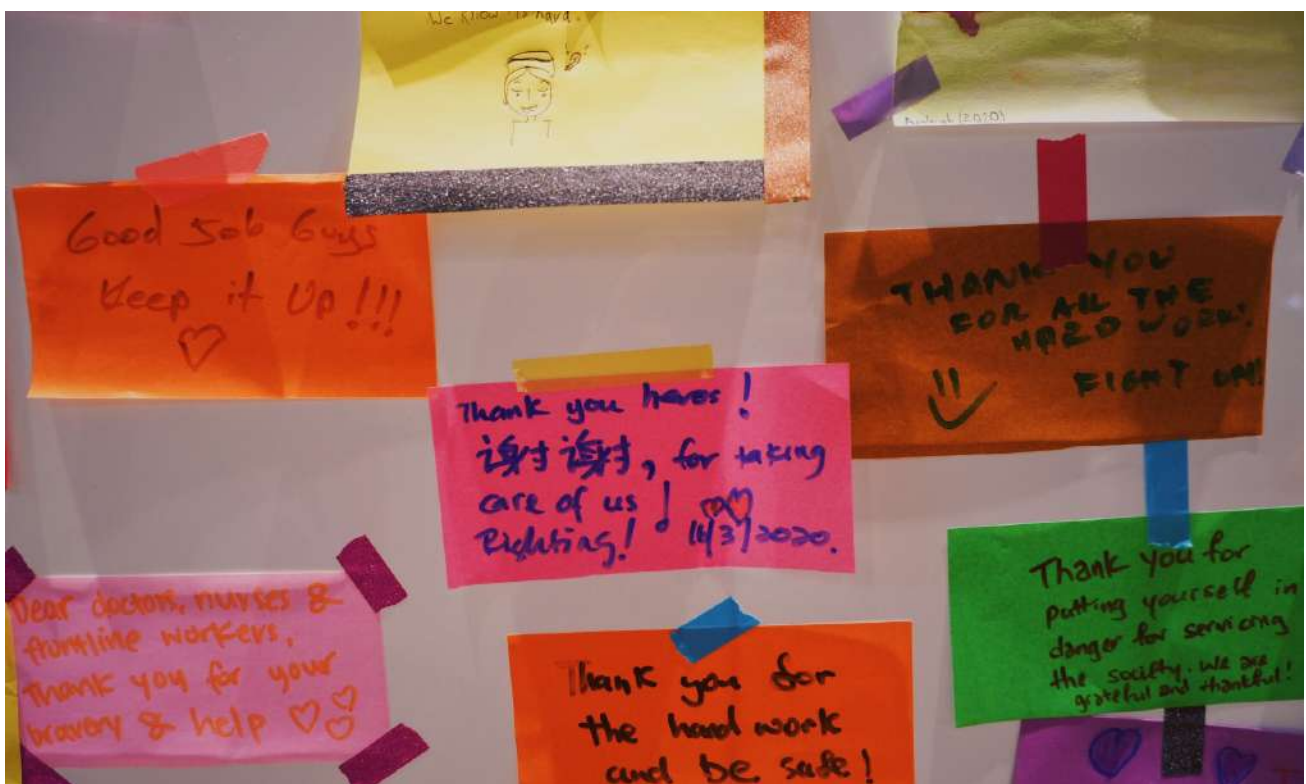
The Way Ahead

In many ways, the data gathered offers a hopeful picture that affirms individual agency. It's clear that people can inspire one another to take action, join forces to tackle big and complex issues, and – as several of our interviewees demonstrate – achieve far more than initially planned, often with help from many quarters.

These findings provide tentative answers to the two key questions of what might encourage more individuals to start ground-up initiatives, and how formal organisations can better support such groups. Our analysis shows that funding remains a pressing concern among all activators regardless of length of volunteering experience, though the data also suggests that the availability of funding alone does not explain why individuals chose to initiate community projects and mobilize others with them. Rather, their

awareness of needs and others' active efforts contributed to such decisions.

One limitation of the current study is that its respondents included only project leaders and not also their team members. In this respect, a more comprehensive look at ground-up initiatives through in-depth case studies would provide a fuller picture and may allow for better comparisons between new and experienced activators that address questions concerning sustainability.



In closing, the following recommendations are made in view of activators' foremost challenges:

- (i) Continue existing grant models that provide a small funding quantum but quick turnaround time, with a selection process that prioritises project proposal over track record**

Survey respondents consistently reported that TMT's support for a wide variety of projects and applicants, the simplicity of its application process, and the speed of application outcomes were surprising and extremely helpful. Within the landscape of philanthropic organisations that fund similar projects, this seems to be a gap that was well met by the SG Strong Fund especially given the COVID-19 crisis situation.

- (ii) Supplement financial support with programmes or events that are designed for structured introductions between corporate funders (whether business or non-profit) and ground-up leaders**

Examples might include company-backed ideation/design sprints or mentorships involving individual corporate volunteers as advisors, among other forms. This recommendation aims to address ground-up leaders' need to expand their network of funding sources beyond crowdsourcing platforms that reach mostly individual givers.

- (iii) Facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and community-building among all activators, such as via an online platform**

While informal networks already exist among activators working to address similar needs or serve the same communities, more can be done to help new activators tap on the hard-won experiences of longer-serving ones, as well as enable all – whether new or experienced – to better identify potential synergies in their work. Facebook and text messaging groups seem to be where such conversations are mostly happening now, but perhaps a website organised by types of resources (rather than chronologically documenting members' posts on varied topics) would be helpful, especially to activators too pressed for time to attend networking events.

- (iv) Facilitate connections with grassroots organisations to increase marketing efforts via more localised, offline means**

This recommendation aims to overcome the challenge of content saturation in online platforms such as social media and news websites. As ground-up initiatives' digital marketing efforts often compete with a wide range of other content to reach potential volunteers or donors, it may be beneficial to consider more offline methods that also engage people in closer physical proximity to a ground-up's target community – albeit in ways that respect the dignity and privacy of those who need help. 'Going local' could also be an opportunity to tap on a community's assets in the process of developing solutions to needs, and to thus build social capital within neighbourhoods.

Resources

Resources

Appendix 1: List of Ground-Ups Interviewed

	Project Title	Interviewees	Area of Need
1	Play@Home	Grace Koh Reynard Lye	Children & Youth
2	Project Love Lunch	Priscilla Ong	Low-income families, Elderly
3	#ShareandCare campaign	Ang Huan Ting	Migrant workers
4	Art packages for children with special needs	Esther Joosa	Persons with disabilities
5	GoodHoodSG	Nigel Teo	Community
6	Project Stable Staples	Francesca Wah David Hoe	Low-income families
7	BraveheartSG	Wally Tham	Frontline – Healthcare workers
8	Call Home	Meera Sachdeva David Chia	Migrant workers
9	SG Gamers Unite: Online Charity Tournaments	Mohamad Azmi	Community
10	SG Cares Community Support Group x One Bag, One Book	Jevon Ng Zakir Hossain Khokan	Migrant workers
11	Project Providence	Project representative [name held upon request]	Rough sleepers and displaced workers

Appendix 2: Format of Interview

Interviews were semi-structured and based on the questions developed below. Each interview lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours, and was conducted by two researchers (1 lead interviewer).

Category	Questions to the Activator Interviewee
Aims & goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is at the project at now? • What are your goals for this initiative? What did you aim to achieve from this project? • Share your motivations – why did you want to start something like this? (story, snippet, life experience, spirituality, etc) • What concerns / fears did you have before you embarked upon your project? • [If the project is ongoing] Are there milestones you wish to achieve <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over the next 6 months? - Over the next 1 year?
Project personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are your core team members? • Could you share more about yourself and the core team members behind this project? [Prompt if necessary: How do you know each other? Who started the project?] • What are the project roles of the different team members? How are project tasks allocated between the team members?
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your experience, rank the following resources in order of your project need? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time - Money - Network/connections - Project management and execution skills • Which were more available or scarce than others? Why? • How do you recruit volunteers, and who do you look for? • Were any volunteers involved, beyond the core team?
Funds & Expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sources of funds do you have? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-funding - Government grants - External funders / grants such as SSF - Donations from the public, including crowdsourcing - Donations from corporate sponsors • What key expenses are the funds used for? • Were there unexpected costs? • What percentage of your total project cost does SSF cover, approximately?

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Category	Questions to the Activator Interviewee
Partnerships & Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the process of planning/implementing this initiative, have you actively sought out partnerships and collaborations, such as with ground-ups, VWOs, corporates, government agencies? • If yes, what has your experience with these partnerships been like to date? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How successful do you think they have been? - What were some challenges? - How do you maintain alignment in objectives and expectations?
Future plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did your project go as planned? Highlight key changes. [Interviewer can raise or summarise points from sections covered, e.g. resources, partnerships] • Do you have any future plans for growth or sustainability of the project? • Are there plans to incorporate or achieve greater formality in structure? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If yes: as a CLG / charity? - What are your reasons for and against incorporation, and the various types of incorporation? • Has the project affected your career plans? [Prompt if necessary: Do you or any core team members plan to adjust your careers so as to provide more focused leadership/operational support for the project?] • Do you plan to end or exit this project? If so, when do you think is a good time to do that? • How do you see yourself applying what you have learnt elsewhere? (other voluntary work, or professionally)
Grant application & administration process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any general feedback about the grant experience? (Application process / after confirmation of grant award) • What would you hope for TMT to provide, should TMT run the SSF again? • [If there are future plans to scale up] What would you need from SSF in order to scale up? What do you think would help take your project to the next level? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Money - Volunteer database - Mentors - Connections to potential partners • Money aside, have there been any other benefits to obtaining TMT's grant funding? • What has been the greatest benefit / advantage of receiving TMT funding?

Appendix 3: Key Themes from Interviews

Theme

Interview excerpts / Examples

A. Understanding community needs

(1) Being strategic to meet needs and achieve impact

One activator shared how she and her co-founders identified gaps within the nonprofit landscape from the outset, then chose to concentrate on a specific tier of vulnerable migrant workers to deliberately tackle the area of greatest need: *"We were very clear that our goal was not to replicate efforts by existing NGOs or ground-ups, by government agencies etc. So we had to go study data to find out which groups would be most affected by COVID-19, but would not (in that sense) be covered quickly."* Similarly, a different team described carefully prioritising distribution of their activity packs to social service agencies according to certain criteria, which relied on the core team's in-depth understanding of the many different situations that a broad category like 'low-income families' can encompass.

Another interviewee pointed out that existing research might not match popular opinion. When newspapers began reporting high rates of COVID-19 infection among Singapore's migrant worker population, public discussion seemed to focus on workers' dorms and their poor living conditions – but research published by a local nonprofit showed that dorm conditions were not among workers' key concerns at all, and that wage issues in fact topped the list.

Interestingly, one team remarked that may be tricky to secure funding from potential NGO partners as the need met by their project is not a high priority relative to other issues in the target community. Earlier on, the team had pivoted from its original plan to address an urgent need in a different community, using the same product – but their initial idea ran into problems as the activators' had not anticipated certain safety considerations specific to the intended users.

Among the approx. 4 out of 11 projects interviewed that were led by new activators, it is also perhaps noteworthy that 2 teams did projects for more general 'beneficiaries' (fundraising for the Red Cross, connecting individuals for mutual aid through technology) and 1 team changed focus midway to serve a different target group instead. The remaining team was led by activators who, though new, had extensive professional experience with their target beneficiaries prior to starting the project.

(2) Experienced activators were able to envision end goals and had a clear sense of priorities

When asked about their future plans, experienced activators were generally more able to easily identify other possible steps towards addressing the community need in question (or adjacent/related needs). Several individuals spoke of short-term versus long-term goals, such as:

- Encouraging good practices among employers of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) to combat COVID-19 spread, vs promoting better employer-employee relationships in which responsible employers care for their FDWs
- Distributing grocery vouchers to tide large low-income families through COVID-19 economic crisis, vs finding their breadwinners stable employment
- Providing children with special needs access to art materials during COVID-19 vs ensuring their continued access to quality arts education designed for their learning needs

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Appendix 3: Key Themes from Interviews

Continued from above

Theme

Interview excerpts / Examples

B. Building trust

(1) Helped with speed and efficacy

By one team's estimate, 80% of the people they partnered with in distributing activity packs were individuals they knew directly from professional work. Often, they were thus able to first seek help from organisations through informal correspondence (text messaging) with these contacts before following up over through official channels (email): *"I think one thing that helped our project was we had a lot of trust. ... so it moved quite fast"*.

Establishing trust with new contacts was also seen as important. On proposing a solution to private businesses and government authorities, and everyone's receptiveness to discussing possibilities further, one activator commented: *"The fact that they are willing to work with us on it shows the depth of friendship, of relationship – partnership. They trust us. ... We started from the ground with no credentials whatsoever, and nobody had to trust us. But they did, when they saw we worked differently and delivered results effectively."*

(2) Collaborating widely and engaging multiple stakeholders

Two projects in particular are interesting studies, as both place a high premium on engaging a diverse range of stakeholders. This can be seen instrumentally, as a strategy to achieve certain goals, but also partly as an end in itself – which the grantees' implicit values might suggest.

Partnering 'beneficiaries' as equals

When asked to list her project's core team members one grantee included the foreign domestic workers (FDWs) they consulted, and later made a passing comment about having these individuals over at her home for meals. This experienced activator had earlier helped distribute masks with migrant workers who wanted to do their part to help amidst the pandemic, and also learnt of the need her project sought to address by keeping a ear to the ground via Facebook, where FDWs shared their difficulties.

Throughout the interview, the picture that gradually emerged was one of friendship with various individuals in the target community. The process of how a collaboration might arise was described thus:

"Generally these community leaders (heads of informal migrant worker groups) themselves are very motivated to organise events or gatherings for their community, but there are some barriers for them in terms of them not being Singaporean. ...That's how some of our partnerships start, right – the migrant workers, they have an idea, and then they need a partner to work with to bring this idea to fruition. So I help him in terms of getting the police permit, ... getting funding... all these administrative things so that the event can actually run. So a lot of times, it's in partnership – but it's also because of the difference in power – they cannot do certain things, they can only do it if they have a Singaporean on board, and that helps makes things a lot easier."

Partnering others in a spirit of service

"Our aim has always been to find other businesses and entities we can support. ... we try to find win-win solutions. Your objectives must also be a part of how we are working, because we do not want to take from you, we want to work with you. And we understand – everyone is just trying to survive in this COVID 19 crisis."

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Appendix 3: Key Themes from Interviews

Continued from above

Theme

Interview excerpts / Examples

... that's why we are very selective with our team leads. Because they need to understand the value of honouring someone else. If we approach this whole process by wanting to take from them, it's not gonna work. We must give value. So – why are hawkers willing to come on board SecondMeal and partner with us? It's because we're giving them business, we're directing traffic to their stalls. Why are we working with certain businesses? Because we knew that small boutique hotels weren't seeing the same demand as other places. So we help you take up that, you know, 50+ cases of bookings that you usually do in a month. We help with all sorts of things. Everyone who's a team lead understands this: you cannot hope to be in a partnership without first honouring and giving back to others what they need for the survival of their staff, etc. We're in an ecosystem together."

Forging connections and building networks

The fact that activators collaborated widely to achieve project goals suggests a recognition of the complexity of the problems tackled as well as belief in the value of cultivating social capital as part of a long-term outlook.

The same two grantees interviewed each contacted several types of actors in the course of their project, including government institutions, grassroots organisations, embassies, non-profits, and businesses such as hotels, dorm operators and restaurants. In both cases, it seems that access to local authorities and their resources (e.g. information, networks) was a crucial enabler of the projects' efficacy – whether in terms of having a broad reach or resolving COVID-related issues well.

Besides actively looking for ways to work in concert with external parties, these ground-ups also sought to collaborate with other ground-ups and formal organisations in the non-profit scene. One grantee noted that because of past efforts to “bring all the different NGOs and everybody in the migrant worker space together” in conversation (even simply through text messaging platforms), they “already have these communities that we can tap on to run anything”. Such dense networks of relationships are useful both short-term initiatives (e.g. case work, short-term projects) as well as longer-term work (e.g. towards legislative change).

(3) Forging a shared vision

Though not a point that was frequently mentioned across the interviews, the idea of creating and working together towards shared goals was a clear theme in two activators' responses. One person felt that formal organisations like The Majority Trust and government agencies can play a role in facilitating this: a “shared vision, shared action”.

“What I feel is lacking is a holistic follow-up. ... I wish there was a greater continuity from, for example, the government – to take it over, some parts, so that it is not a charity movement but – a project could then be part of something more holistic.”

Intriguingly, the other activator's project demonstrates the power ground-ups have to mobilise disparate actors for a cause. It seems likely that *both* approaches are needed – both ground-up and top-down facilitation can help establish shared visions and shape the paths ahead.

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Appendix 3: Key Themes from Interviews

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Theme

Interview excerpts / Examples

C. Professional experience

(1) Professional expertise was a valuable resource

At least a few activators were evidently able to tap on their professional expertise and connections for their SG Strong projects, as their role within a team or the nature of their project's work had direct relevance to their professions.

For instance, one activator described her team's "insider knowledge" (e.g. familiarity with different types of agencies and organisational processes in the social service sector, distribution channels) as critical to the speed of their crisis response and their ability to identify areas of need. *"When we knew we wanted to do it, a few of us already asked our own contacts – like, is this something we really want and need. And then when we got the affirmative, we felt, OK, we can get the first batch out first..."*

(2) Team roles matched to skills and professional training

"A lot of it is driven by our field of expertise, and what we do in our everyday jobs. [My project co-leader] is a product manager at Facebook so he's a product manager [in the ground-up team]. [Another core team member] is a designer – that's what she does as her day job and that's where her skills lie. Same with [the last member]. With me, I am a management consultant and so ... I sort of just fill in all other gaps, like helping with the funding strategy and how we launch to market, and partnerships, and general business development stuff, because that's what I do at work as well."

Regarding a project's food operations team, which was led by a baker and included food technology students: *"Because of their connections to the food industry, we were able to do things like cater emergency food where restaurants would usually ignore you. Usually you need minimum order quantity, but a lot of them waived it for us."*

Similarly, the same project's Placements sub-team that helped displaced workers find shelter mostly comprised people with backgrounds in the hospitality industry, who had close relationships with hotels and understood their procedures as well as potential concerns.

D. Supporting new activators

(1) Knowledge

Responding to a question about what support activators would find helpful, one grantee commented on the value of "insider knowledge" and made a comparison between two different teams of new activators she knew. One had approached her team for advice on how to plan their own project, while the other also found the process of starting up challenging but was able to mostly troubleshoot issues herself.

The grantee pointed out that one difference between the two groups was age, and older activators may have the maturity and knowledge to figure things out more easily – these individuals would thus need only ideas and practical resources (e.g. suggestions for goods suppliers) to run a project smoothly, but others may want more help with strategy and contacts. Other interviews also affirmed this need for the right knowledge to successfully plan and execute a project, such as an accurate understanding of the target community's needs.

"If there are people who have already done it and they are a few steps down the road – maybe they don't want to do the projects anymore, but don't mind sharing some of their experiences... that could help the younger ones? I think among us we are quite well-connected, so we can ask people for some help in certain areas. But for those who want to do ground-up, but may have less resources – then mentoring could meet the need."

Appendix 3: Key Themes from Interviews

Continued from above

Theme	Interview excerpts / Examples
(2) Skills	<p>New activators may benefit from closer guidance when starting a project, though this depends partly on their personal resources.</p> <p><i>“... it’s really around the process, right, having someone to sit through and ask you questions – fundamental questions, or questions to guide you – so that you know what to do in the next step, what to look out for etc. Sharing documents [e.g. templates mentioned earlier] is not the difficult part, I think it’s more around the thought process ... what kind of questions to look out for, and also the connections with resource persons, or just leads. I think that is definitely important [because, for instance: people from corporate backgrounds may not be well plugged into the social service sector.]”</i></p> <p>For instance, the interviews revealed a marked contrast between two new activators who required different levels of non-financial support from The Majority Trust. It seemed one person had asked for more guidance with the grant application and project planning process than the other, probably due to differences in their project scope, how aligned it was with their professional experience, and perhaps education.</p> <p>If funders like The Majority Trust aim to elevate more new activators who might not feel well-equipped to start on an idea, support that goes beyond funding is important.</p>

E. Informal collective action

(1) Allows more flexibility	<p><u>Flexibility to reach the underserved</u></p> <p>One activator felt that by working informally was a more effective way to reach people who do not qualify for financial aid from social service agencies but still require help.</p> <p>By the time such individuals overcome obstacles to eligibility for institutional support, if they do, a key concern is that <i>“they may have dipped even further into the crack. And by then – will your help be sufficient? ... We’re just there to be the bridge to ensure that they don’t fall further in. It’s like, I give you a raft to hold onto while you wait for the boat. That’s my logic.”</i></p> <p><u>Flexibility to collaborate and form networks</u></p> <p>Networks are generally unbounded, unlike entities. For this reason perhaps activators may see informal, loose networks as preferable because they afford an individual greater freedom to act and collaborate than if s/he had a primary duty to an organization and its agendas or obligations.</p> <p>One activator hinted at this notion while contemplating the many informal groups involved in advocacy and welfare for migrant workers in Singapore, and whether these can be somehow structured: <i>“...when you formalise it, then there will be some groups that will be left out, then, like – I’m not very sure also. ... It’s good enough for now. Also, [her project co-founder] runs an email thread/subscription where he emails everybody in the migrant worker space that he knows, to disseminate info on what each organisation is doing.”</i></p>
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Appendix 3: Key Themes from Interviews

Continued from above

Theme

Interview excerpts / Examples

Flexibility for more spontaneous creative work

Examples cited in the interviews include storytelling, concept and content development for public education efforts, and arts education or participatory art projects. While spontaneity alone is certainly insufficient to make such projects happen, activators' underlying concern seems to be about time: since planning processes are less restrictive when operating informally, this allows more time and better timing for producing and sharing work.

"The truth is, there are problems that are systemic that need programmed response, right. We are not that group. ... Problems also tend to become complex and weigh you down, so for us to be responsive is to be reading what's going on and generating stories in response. Then when we meet other programmes that hit their own crisis, we will sometimes do pro bono work and draw attention to what they're doing."

(2) Lacks continuity and systemic impact

Most grantees shared a desire for sustainability, whether it take the form of extending their project to continue the same work or finding ways to tackle different but related issues among those the people they aim to serve, among other options. However, when the work initiated by informal groups is not embedded in larger organisational or institutional structures this can be difficult due to inadequate planning or resources:

"When you work informal, you have great opportunities to do things spontaneously. And what comes out of something spontaneous is often something very artistic and creative. When you work as part of an organization... it becomes part of the budget, you get part of planning, you get part of people who want to have SOPs, whatever acronyms they give it – so the spontaneity is gone. It becomes rehearsed; OK this year we do this, we allocate this budget – but when you work informal, and often you don't have budget, you can still do amazing things. The problem is, when you do informal, it may not have continuity. ... Both have their strengths and their weaknesses. ... Working informal, it can be spontaneous, can be an enormous success. But then, will there be continuation?"

(3) May pose funding issues

Most grantees generally recognised that operating as informal groups might restrict their funding options, as institutions sometimes support only registered organisations so as to manage risk.

"[The] SG Strong funds have been helpful because we could never get an IPC status, because – what is [our team], what do we do? We don't devote ourselves to one particular area. But we seem to be very good at getting people to respond quickly to what Singapore needs. ... So, we're in this very funny place – often I'll meet a corporate sponsor and they say, oh, we can't give directly to you, because you're not IPC, but we like what you do. Then they'll look around, and they'll find no NGO who's doing what we do. ... In the past I've often been in this no man's land, and what will happen is my company, [name of interviewee's personal company], will fund the work. And then hope that later on someone will notice and maybe help out. But that slowed us down. In the first 2 years of [our ground-up initiative], everything was self-funded. ... It was rewarding but punishing. We could only do one campaign a year. ... The giving part was whole-hearted but finite. I think now, after 8 years, people get that we do care, and campaigns need some resource to attract public attention."

"...we may actually incorporate ourselves as a social enterprise, in a worst-case scenario. Mostly just for legal issues on taking funds."

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Appendix 3: Key Themes from Interviews

Continued from above

Theme

Interview excerpts / Examples

F. Value of TMT grant

(1) Not critical for projects to start, but augmented their work in significant ways

For many projects that cast a wide net for potential funding, the SG Strong grant was one of multiple funding sources – though an important one nonetheless. The grant covered the bulk of a few interviewees’ project expenses and enabled at least one project to scale up.

Several responses below to the question “What has been the greatest benefit or advantage of receiving the SG Strong Fund?” illustrate other ways in which funding helped ground-up teams, such as by covering administrative costs so activators can better frame their fundraising pitch, and by enabling less affluent volunteers to give in their own capacity what they are able.

“Definitely one thing is publicity. ... I think [the grant] does lend us credibility, in the things that we do. And it was able to help us to reach out to a wider audience, to get more of their support.”

“... we could collect donations from online, but we want to tell people that, you know, 100% of the donations will go towards the beneficiaries. We’re very thankful that we can get The Majority Trust’s funds so that we can tell donors this. Because otherwise without this contribution... we would tell people that a portion of your donation will go towards the purchasing of envelopes, stamps, and people wouldn’t – I mean, it still wouldn’t be a lot, but it’d affect the donor’s mindset.”

“The greatest benefit is that I was able to reimburse volunteers who themselves didn’t have anything but were willing to contribute out of pocket for emergency needs. To give them claims immediately. ... even when I saw them claiming just \$20, \$10 or whatever – it made a difference. They were able to do much, much more because they felt there were resources for them to continue doing so. To be able to do immediate disbursements to them was super helpful. Sometimes our volunteers have to accompany people to go take PCR tests. Those cost about \$120 – 250. For a student or low-wage worker who decided to be a volunteer, this is not money you can easily spend, but because we can approve it on our end and pay out immediately to them via SG Strong fund – it enables them to do what they want to do.”

(2) Helpful because informal groups are eligible

“I think this funding set-up was good because it included ground-up initiatives. It was great because as a support group, we could apply as a group of individuals instead of an organization. ... We really appreciate that TMT trusted us and our volunteers to carry out the work in good faith without any corporate backing and reporting.”

“[The] SG Strong funds have been helpful because we could never get an IPC status...”

(3) Limits of funding

Several grantees raised the question of whether funding for ground-up projects can be used to provide monetary support to volunteers in return for their time and effort – though not specifically to incentivize it.

In one instance, this was more a question of what expenses are supportable under the grant, such as meals for volunteers working long hours. Others felt that while volunteers are generally committed to doing the work they do, unpaid, it would be a nice gesture to offer something (e.g. grocery vouchers) that helps offset people’s daily expenses while they devote time and energy to societal good.

Appendix 4: Survey Questions

Preface

This research study aims to understand local ground-up initiatives from the perspective of those who are **founders and/or leaders of projects that received support from the SG Strong Fund.**

We hope to learn more about your experience with starting and running the project, so as to consider how we can better support such projects in the future.

Section 0: Project identifiers

0.1 What is your project title?

0.2 Grant reference number

Section 1: Demographic Factors

1. Gender: [M/F]

2. How old are you?

- 18 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 and above

1.3 What is your current educational qualification?

- No formal qualification / PSLE
- Secondary qualification (GCE 'O' / 'N' Level)
- Polytechnic / ITE Diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Postgraduate degree

1.4 Occupation: _____

1.5 Is this your first time initiating a non-profit project to meet a community need?
[Yes / No]

Section 2: Project Information

2.1 What is the approximate total duration of your project, from planning to completion?

- 1 – 3 months
 - 4 – 6 months
 - > 6 months
-

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Appendix 4: Survey Questions

Continued from above

*Section 3: Motivations for Starting Up

3.1 Why did you start the project? Please rate the following reasons on a scale of 1 to 5 based on how relevant they were.

If any reasons are not applicable, please answer with "N.A".

- I saw a need that I could meet
 - I had a message to share
 - I wanted to support a specific group of people
 - I was inspired by a person or past encounter
 - I wanted to do meaningful work
 - I felt compelled to help given the current COVID-19 crisis
 - I saw others around me taking action to help and I felt led to do likewise
 - A close contact asked me to help
 - This is a continuation or extension of what I had already been doing
 - This was something I chanced upon – it wasn't something I intentionally set out to do
-

*Section 4: Factors influencing readiness to start up

4.1 How did you become aware of the community need you identified? [Check all that apply]

- I was familiar with the need due to my past/ongoing professional work experience
- I was familiar with the need due to my past/ongoing volunteer experience
- I learnt of it recently through news media
- I learnt of it recently through word of mouth
- I witnessed members/a member of the community in need
- I/my friends or family were affected
- Others: _____

4.2 Had you already been in contact with the target community (the intended recipients of help) prior to the start of your project?
[Yes / No]

4.3 Before you began your project, how confident were you of your ability to execute the project well?

- Extremely confident
 - Very confident
 - Moderately confident
 - Slightly confident
 - Not confident at all
-

4.4 How important was the support of your personal network in your decision to start the project? Please rate each of the following relationships types on a scale of 1 to 5.

- Family
 - Friends
 - Colleagues
 - Newly-connected collaborators
 - The Majority Trust / Other funders
-

4.5 To what extent did you rely on your professional background and training when planning and executing your project?

- A great deal
 - Quite a bit
 - Somewhat
 - A little
 - Not at all
-

Appendix 4: Survey Questions

Continued from above

Section 5: Team Profile and Organisational Structure

5.1 How many members of your core team are there in each of the following categories? [Put a number into the categories]

- Close friends – we've known each other for a long time
- Acquaintances – we knew each other before the project, but interacted infrequently
- Co-workers – we knew each other before the project, and interacted frequently as part of professional or volunteer commitments
- Strangers – we did not know each other before, but met online or through mutual contacts

5.2 That makes a total of ____ people in your core team. [How many people are there in your core team?]

5.3 How many volunteers (excluding the core team and project founders) have you engaged over the course of your project? Please provide an estimate.

5.4 Which of the following best describes your project's manpower needs?

- Extremely Complex – I need a highly specialised team, with specific skillsets
- Very Complex – I need a moderately specialised team, comprising a mix of people with specific skillsets and anyone willing to help
- Complex – I need a team that is organised, which can include anyone willing to help
- Slightly Complex – I only need a few volunteers, and anyone will do
- Simple – Volunteers were optional; I could have done it by myself

5.5 Who are most of the key decisions for your project made by, within the core team? [Rate from 1 to 5]

- 1 = By a designated leader
- 3 = A mix of both (Sometimes by a leader and sometimes by another team member, in roughly the same proportion of the time)
- 5 = By everyone, together

5.6 Which of the following best describes your core team members' roles across the duration of the project?

[Rate from 1 to 5]

- 1 = Fixed throughout
- 3 = Changed occasionally
- 5 = Constantly changed

5.7 Ground-up teams can be organised in a wide variety of ways, which may depend on factors such as the number of different areas of work that your project involves, how dependent these are on each other, and whether each team member's role changes over the course of the project.

Given the above, to what extent did your team require well-defined work procedures and clear reporting lines to ensure that team members (including volunteers) stay coordinated? [Rate from 1 to 5]

- 1 = None at all
- 5 = A great deal

5.8 What skills do you think your team lacked or was weaker at overall, if any?

Appendix 4: Survey Questions

Continued from above

*Section 6: Challenges faced

6.1 Which of the following areas did your team encounter challenges in while working on the project? Please select up to **three** options.

- Funding
- Time
- Contacts
- Strategy
- Manpower
- Leadership
- Rapport with beneficiaries

6.2 How did your team overcome the two greatest challenges that you faced?

6.3 What did you personally find most challenging, while working on the project?

6.4 How difficult was it for you to delegate tasks and distribute workload across your team?

- Not at all / Not applicable; I did the project alone
- Slightly
- Moderately
- Very
- Extremely

6.5 How useful would the following types of support be to you, for future projects? Please rate each on a scale from 1 to 5.

[1 = Not useful at all, 5 = Extremely Useful]

- Direct mentoring and guidance
 - Networking sessions with other ground-up initiatives
 - Connections to other potential funders and partners
 - Training opportunities, such as workshops on relevant skills
 - Online resources on aspects of planning, implementation and evaluation, such as guides/toolkits or podcasts
 - Media coverage or other publicity facilitated by The Majority Trust
-

Appendix 4: Survey Questions

Continued from above

Section 7: Relationship management

7.1 Relationship-building is often an integral part of starting and running ground-up initiatives. In the course of your project, what did you rely on most to build trust with people outside your team?

Please rate each of the following factors on a scale of 1 to 5 based on their importance.
[1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important]

- My/the core team members' prior networks
- My/the core team members' prior track record of success in other projects
- My/the core team members' personal reputation / brand
- References / Someone helped to vouch for my/the core team members' credibility
- My/the core team members' understanding of the community needs which we wanted to address
- My/the core team members' detailed plans for the project
- My/the core team members' timely accountability to stakeholders for our work
- My/the core team members' good performance and execution of the project
- Increased credibility due to support from funders such as The Majoriry Trust
- Partnerships with non-profit organizations and leaders
- Partnerships with government agencies
- Social media publicity for the project

If any relevant factors are not listed above, please share what they are and rate the importance of each on a scale of 1 to 5. _____

Section 8: Future plans

8.1 Do you plan to continue the work you have begun with your project?
[Yes / No]

8.2 If you plan to continue the work you have begun, beyond the completion of your current project, what would your foremost objective be?

- Continuing as status quo – We want to do the same work in roughly the same manner
- Scaling up – We want to do more of the same work but increase project reach
- Adopting new approaches – We want to explore different solutions to the same problem(s)
- Tackling a different set of problems – We want to address other issues, such as the root causes of problems or upstream interventions
- None of the above – We do not have clear plans yet

8.3 Are you planning to formalise your current project by registering it as a legal entity (e.g. a nonprofit organisation or social enterprise)?
[Yes / No / Still considering]

8.4 If yes, at what point in your project timeline do you think it would be appropriate to do so?

Appendix 4: Survey Questions

Continued from above

Section 9: Measurement of Success

- 9.1 Which of the following measures of success do you consider most important? [Check all that apply]
- Meeting targeted project reach
 - Meeting identified needs
 - Satisfaction of communities helped / of volunteers
 - Empowering and equipping people
 - Facilitating increased dialogue around important societal issues
 - Building and strengthening networks of cooperation / Recruiting more people to the cause
 - Influencing others' attitudes
 - Training more ground-up leaders

9.2 What would you definitely NOT include as a measure of success?

*Section 10: TMT Value-add / Feedback on grant

- 10.1 How was your experience of applying for the SG Strong Fund? Please rate the quality of each aspect below from 1 to 5. [1 = Very Poor, 5 = Excellent]
- Ease of grant application process
 - Efficiency in processing your grant application
 - Clarity of funding guidelines from TMT (e.g. supportable costs, reporting requirements)
 - Timely disbursement of funding
 - TMT's responsiveness to enquiries

10.2 If any relevant factors are not listed above, please share what they are and rate the importance of each on a scale of 1 to 5. _____

10.3 Name two things about the SG Strong grant that were most beneficial to you.

Please rate the following statements: [1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree]

- 10.4 I would not have implemented my proposed project if I did not receive the SG Strong grant.
[SA / A / N / D / SD]
- 10.5 The availability of the SG Strong grant encouraged me to take on more project activities.
[SA / A / N / D / SD]
- 10.6 I would consider The Majority Trust's funding schemes and programmes for my future projects.
[SA / A / N / D / SD]
- 10.7 I would recommend The Majority Trust's funding schemes and/or programmes to others for future projects.
[SA / A / N / D / SD]
- 10.8 I would be open to considering a [long-term / sustained] [working relationship / collaboration] with The Majority Trust.
[SA / A / N / D / SD]
-