

## Questions and Answers on the SURF Chief Executive position

28<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Collated here is a set of questions received from prospective candidates by email, to which I append the answers I provided:

- *What approach works best for your colleagues in Rwanda with regard to you supporting/providing supervision?*

Most of the supervision I undertake by email and skype with the staff team in Rwanda, supplemented by the more intensive project visits that I undertake three times a year for 2-4 weeks at a time. The nature of the organisation is that most of the staff are relatively independent, but I provide coordination and guidance where required – and I am open to communication at all times. However, mostly that supervision is through email – which admittedly I commit several hours a day towards, as there is also communication/supervision of our partner organisations in Rwanda too, to which I contribute.

- *As a single post-holder in UK, how do you meet the logistical requirements of the organisation e.g. meeting payment deadlines, getting authorised signatures etc.?*

Most of the logistics we handle electronically too. Our treasurer is London-based, and our accountant is US-based. We process all payments now electronically, so we do not need physically to have cheques signed off by two trustees – which previously was the case. I can process payments, which are then authorised by the trustees. That is more efficient. We are also in regular contact with the coordinator/accountant in Rwanda, to ensure that we are overseeing all key funding decisions that they are making as well.

- *2014 is clearly a great opportunity to commemorate the events of 1994. From the other perspective what do you see as the main challenges for SURF over the next few years?*

Some of the main challenges will be to sustain interest in support for survivors post-2014 internationally (in particular from funders). Ensuring that the Government of Rwanda maintains its commitment to support survivors. Supporting our partners to sustain and grown their own capacity to deliver support to survivors in membership of them.

- *Other than funding, what do you see as the main areas where SURF should and could aspire to support Foundation Rwanda, AERG, AVEGA and other partners going forward?*

Capacity-building definitely in the form of organisational development, leadership development, and their own capacity to fundraise, manage, monitor and evaluate their own work.

- *In terms of advocacy do you feel we have strong support from the different UN agencies and the likes of Danida, Finnida and other international development departments? Where would you see the main areas of focus for future advocacy?*

We have very little support from UN agencies, or other international development agencies (except DFID). So that would definitely be a key area for future advocacy. Some of that advocacy can be undertaken internationally, though a lot can be undertaken in-country (Rwanda).

- *I have looked at the SURF website, which is helpful, and have read the most recent Annual Report. It is clear that the organisation is still in a process of transition and I wonder if you have any strategy or planning documents which expand on this which you would be willing to share? I note in particular that major donor funds have, or are about to, come to an end, but it looks as though further sources of income have been secured in the past year. I'd be interested to know more about the current financial position and about strategic and operational priorities going forward.*

At present, our three main donors this year will be DFID (£330,000) which is for a project which runs until March 2015, Big Lottery Fund (£170,000) which is a project which runs until November 2015, and Foundation Rwanda (£150,000) which is a project which will run through to at least 2016. We also receive around £150,000 a year from Charities Advisory Trust, which has been the case since 2004, and though there is no formal commitment, we would expect to continue in future. That is true as well for individual donations we receive of around £50,000.

We are currently applying for additional grants from both DFID and BLF for new three years projects, so I would be hopeful at least one of them should be in by the year's end. As well, we have a history of funding from Comic Relief, and would expect that it is likely we could secure further funding from them too, at least at a similar level to DFID and BLF, once they reopen applications for funding later this year.

The strategic question we ask ourselves is whether we would want to grow our income much beyond the £1 million mark anyhow. Though we need to be raising at least at this level to maintain the strong team that I consider we now have in place in Rwanda – and to sustain our key projects - our focus is as much (and increasingly more) on supporting our partners to directly grown their funding base instead.

There is further information on some of the bigger strategic questions in our strategic plan, which can be downloaded here:

<http://survivors-fund.org.uk/news/who-we-are/strategic-plan-2012/>

<http://survivors-fund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/SURF-Strategic-Plan-2012-2014-rev.Jan12.pdf>

One of the tasks in the first year of the post, will be to begin to consider the new strategic plan, in light of their views, and in consultation with our stakeholders.

- *I would also be interested to know more about the supervisory structure for the Chief Executive. It is clear that you work closely with a group of active and committed trustees, but I am wondering how your line management is arranged, and how this relationship works in terms of executive authority, decision-making, accountability and clarity of lines of reporting.*

In terms of line-management, then I essentially manage myself. I report into the board of trustees, though they meet only five times a year. Bigger questions/issues then I would run by the trustees in periods between meetings - but the delegate all authority to me to make

operational decisions. I liaise most regularly with the treasurer on financial matters, who signs off on transfers to Rwanda - which are our principal disbursements.

- *I am also not clear whether Mary K. Blewitt is still actively involved with SURF, and if so in what capacity?*

Mary is not actively involved. I requested that she stay involved as an informal mentor/advisor to me whilst I have been in post - which she has done so, and I have found invaluable. There would be no expectation that she would have any further involvement, unless you requested her to do so.

- *In terms of the Rwandan team, is it possible to see a staff structure? It would also be helpful to understand more about the supervisory structure for those staff, and the Chief Executive's role in that.*

Most of my management work is with Gabo (our country coordinator), Jemma (our clinical psychologist) and Albert (our legal coordinator). Though I do not directly manage Alex and Sam (our programme managers), they do report directly into me on some projects, as required to ensure that the delivery and reporting on some of our flagship grants (such as DFID, Foundation Rwanda) so that I can feed into and guide that work too.

- *The job description suggests that location is flexible at this stage, with a need to be accessible for London meetings and travel to Rwanda. Does this mean that the Chief Executive would need to work from home initially, or is there an option to use office space in London when needed? Also, the situation with regard to administrative support is a little unclear: is it envisaged that some administrative support to the Chief Executive will be restored in the future or is that provision now removed?*

Decisions on office space and administrative support will largely depend on the new director. There may be a rationale for both, though if required then the funding will need to be either reappropriated or raised accordingly to make that possible. My view was that the value of having an office and an administrator, at almost £30,000 a year, did not merit the cost. Though for others, that may not be the case, and that there will be value in having either or both.

- *With the recent successes in bringing SURF income up to over £1 million do you see this as something that can be sustained or given the generally tough fundraising climate a difficult one to maintain?*

Most of our funding is in the form of long-term grants, so I would be expectant that we can retain them. For example the DFID and BLF grants are for funding until 2015. We are currently applying for additional grants from each for other projects for a further three years. As well, we have a history of funding from Comic Relief, and would expect that it is likely we could secure further funding from them too, at least at a similar level to DFID and BLF. The strategic question we ask ourselves is whether we would want to grow our income beyond this mark, or whether we are best focused on supporting the partners to directly grow their funding base instead. Though we need to be raising at least at this level to maintain the strong team that I consider we now have in place in Rwanda – and to sustain our key projects.

- *What percentage of the annual donor contributions is recurring (ie: on longer term contracts) vs. non-recurring? In other words, approximately how much new money needs to be raised each year to meet SURF's current budget needs.*

In respect to our funding position, then there is no simple answer to that – as the needs of SURF can adapt to the funding that we have available.

At present, our three main donors this year will be DFID (£330,000) which is a project which runs until March 2015, Big Lottery Fund (£170,000) which is a project which runs until November 2015, and Foundation Rwanda (£150,000) which is a project which will run through to at least 2016. We also receive around £150,000 a year from Charities Advisory Trust, which has been the case since 2004, and though there is no formal commitment, we would expect to continue in future. That is true as well for individual donations we receive of around £50,000. So on that basis, around 65-70%.

If we raise less funding than for which we budgeted, we just streamline our staffing and programmes accordingly.

- *You mentioned in the job posting that location was “flexible”. Do you consider it feasible that a person, assuming they are the best fit and right candidate for the job, could fulfill the job responsibilities from outside of the UK? You mention that two months per year would need to be spent in Rwanda, but how many weeks/months per year on top of that would be required in the UK, if the applicant served remotely? Thanks in advance for your clarification.*

It would definitely be possible to undertake the position from outside of the UK, so why we left that open.

It would be necessary to be in the UK at least three times during the year for the major board meetings, but the view is that it would be easily possible to coordinate that with the visits to Rwanda, flying through London and stopping off here for a few days on the way either to or from Rwanda – on the basis that they would split the visits up, similar to how I have done, travelling for 2-4 weeks at a time, three times a year. That way, could also follow up with any meetings with donors that are based here at that time.

The only other challenge would be the time difference – in order to manage the communication with Rwanda – so that may necessitate some earlier starts. But definitely logistically possible too.

So location then should not be a deterrent.