

Assembly Business Plan 2009 – 2010*

VISION: We will have an inclusive, diverse, innovative and thriving VCS which brings about change and makes a real difference in the lives of communities and individuals in Gloucestershire.

MISSION: Gloucestershire Assembly for the Voluntary and Community Sector (the Assembly) is based on the belief that collective action is more influential than a series of individual voices, and that co-operation between people generates shared strength through a pooling of energy, ideas and resources.

The Assembly will provide an opportunity for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) throughout Gloucestershire to develop a collective voice and to ensure that issues important to the VCS are brought to the fore, always acknowledging that a diversity of views may exist. It will also provide a space for voluntary and community organisations throughout Gloucestershire to meet and exchange information, ideas and good practice.

The Assembly is open to all Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations in Gloucestershire. Its work is driven by the Assembly Board (AB) made up of representatives from member organisations and through the activity of its Strategy Groups (SG). Administrative Support is provided by the Assembly Team (AT).

The Assembly will provide leadership and advocacy on behalf of the VCS and actively provide and support different routes of influence.

AIM: The aim of the Assembly is to strengthen and support the VCS in Gloucestershire, by providing a strategic voice for the sector, as well as an arena for discussion and action.

Objectives

- 3.1 Ensuring that the collective views of the VCS influence strategic planning and policy decisions.
- 3.2 Promoting dialogue between the VCS and the statutory sector to enable effective consultation, and to encourage partnership working between the sectors.
- 3.3 Use VCS Strategy Groups to build the strategic capacity of the VCS, and facilitate networking and enabling the sharing of skills, information, experience, good practice and resources.
- 3.4 Ensuring that the strengths of the VCS are known and promoted and that weaknesses are understood, identified and addressed.
- 3.5 Ensuring that VCS nominated representation on key strategic partnership bodies is active and effective.
- 3.6 Supporting the implementation of the Gloucestershire Compact and delivering it especially in the VCS.

** This Business Plan was agreed by the Assembly Board on 25 Feb 09 and will be reviewed quarterly.*

Objectives Outcomes and Activities

EHRC R R	Ob	Outcome	Task	Who	When	Funding
	3.1	<p>The collective views of the VCS influence the strategic planning and policy decisions of key private sector providers of public sector services</p> <p>The collective views of the VCS influence the strategic planning and policy decisions of public sector agencies</p>	<p>Develop relationship with Business Link and 2 key private sector providers of public sector services.</p> <p>Hold regular Strategy Group and Assembly Board meetings. Ensure appropriate communication between the VCS and decision-making bodies and people</p> <p>All VCS Strategy Groups have clearly identified work areas that are regularly updated and communicated to VCS constituencies and the Assembly Board.</p>	<p>AT AB</p> <p>Reps AT</p> <p>Reps AT</p>	<p>March 10</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>ongoing</p>	
<p>8.1 8.2 8.3 8.4 8.5 8.6 8.7</p>	3.3	<p>All VCOs have equal chance to understand and access Assembly structures, and have an influencing role</p>	<p>Capture the outcomes of the Assembly and publicise these. Use Strategy Group and Assembly Board meetings to increase awareness of what Assembly achieves.</p> <p>Illustrate the effectiveness of VCS engagement in the context of time contributed.</p> <p>Ensure new attendees at Strategy Group meetings are buddied with</p>	<p>AT Reps</p> <p>AT Reps</p> <p>AT</p>	<p>May 09</p> <p>May 09</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	

		<p>experienced members to increase understanding and involvement.</p> <p>Analyse attendance of Strategy Group meetings over last year, identify any gaps in equalities strands and target groups to increase awareness of Assembly and engagement if appropriate.</p> <p>Produce simple 'Guide to the Assembly' for VCS groups and public sector to increase understanding.</p> <p>Produce toolkit for Assembly Board members 'what is the Assembly' to use in their networks to increase understanding.</p> <p>Deliver 6 awareness raising sessions, ensuring geographical spread across county, for VCS groups on 'what is the Assembly' to increase understanding.</p> <p>Complete redesign of Gloshub website to increase understanding and accessibility.</p> <p>Support EDAG representation and involvement on Assembly Board and Strategy Groups.</p> <p>Use local forums and other networks for disseminating information and actively market the</p>	<p>AT</p> <p>AT</p> <p>AT</p> <p>AT</p> <p>AT and IO</p> <p>AB AT SG</p> <p>GIG members</p>	<p>May 09</p> <p>March 09</p> <p>March 09</p> <p>June 09</p> <p>May 09</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	
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			<p>Assembly to increase understanding and engagement among local VCOs</p> <p>Update volbase by identifying un - updated areas and finding effective partners to update in future</p> <p>Review Assembly governance arrangements, role descriptions, structures and processes – complete an Equality Impact Assessment</p>	<p>GIG members</p> <p>AT</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>July 09</p>	
	3.4	<p>Strengths of the VCS are known and promoted. Weaknesses known and addressed</p>	<p>Hold event to capture VCS contribution to responding to the recession</p> <p>Work jointly with other infrastructure projects that support the VCS and with GIG Board.</p> <p>Hold annual event for Assembly – celebrate achievements</p> <p>Hold annual Assembly Board development day</p>	<p>AT</p> <p>All</p> <p>All</p> <p>AT</p>	<p>February 2009</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>July 09</p> <p>January 10</p>	
8.8 8.9	3.2 and 3.5	<p>True “equal partnership” with public sector e.g. designing services together</p>	<p>A place for active, supported, accountable VCS reps on all key multi sector partnerships , and other partnerships as determined from time to time</p> <p>Representatives shadowing exercise completed to encourage new reps</p> <p>Representatives support pack</p>	<p>AB AT</p> <p>AT</p> <p>AT</p>	<p>May 09</p> <p>March 09</p> <p>March 09</p>	

			<p>revised</p> <p>New representatives briefings to include training on promoting equality and diversity</p> <p>Representatives annual event and thank you</p> <p>Raise the issue of backfill with relevant partners</p> <p>Support Gloucestershire Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership and Gloucestershire First Partnership to work effectively.</p>	<p>AT</p> <p>AT</p> <p>All reps AT</p> <p>AB AT reps</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Sept 09</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>ongoing</p>	
8.9	3.6	Gloucestershire Compact is implemented effectively	See Compact Group action plan			
All	All	There is enough money to pay for good quality, co-ordinated infrastructure provision to support the Assembly in the county	Support of Assembly members active involvement with the County funder's group in development of infrastructure contracts.	AB AT	ongoing	

Key:	SG: Strategy Group
Ob: Assembly objectives	
EHRC R R: Equalities and Human Rights Commission research recommendations	IO: Information Officer
VCS: voluntary and community sector	EDAG: VCS Equality and Diversity Advisory Group
AT: Assembly Team	Reps: VCS representatives
AB: Assembly Board members	GIG: Gloucestershire Infrastructure Group

Minding the Gap

A research project investigating the engagement of under-represented groups in the work of the Gloucestershire Assembly for the Voluntary and Community Sector

Assembly Team preface

It may be helpful to remember when reading the research report that it is

- A tool to support the Assembly realize its full potential in acting as a strategic forum for all VCS groups and ensure full and equal engagement with previously under-represented groups.
- Capturing and reflecting the views of 34 under-represented groups
- Reflecting the involvement of under-represented groups in the wider voluntary and community sector
- An attempt by the Assembly to do something about these groups not being heard.

What this report is not:

- a review or analysis of the Assembly, but the voices of 34 groups

Hasnah Sheriff Associates
December 2008

Section 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

In September 2008, Hasnah Sheriff Associates was commissioned to undertake research on behalf of the Gloucestershire Assembly for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) “investigating the engagement of under-represented VCS groups in the work of Assembly”.

The research project was funded by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and was designed to:

- increase awareness and understanding of the current levels of involvement of under-represented voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in the Assembly and issues surrounding this involvement
- provide the Assembly with clear ways forward to further the involvement of under-represented groups
- inform and empower participant groups and increase their engagement with the Assembly as part of the research process.

Hasnah Sheriff Associates was also commissioned at the same time to undertake a project, funded by the Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust, to establish an Equalities and Diversity Advisory group (EDAG) on behalf of the Assembly. EDAG’s aim is to:

To advise, lobby and provide leadership in matters concerning equality, diversity, and human rights to and on behalf of the Gloucestershire Assembly for the Voluntary and Community Sector, and contribute to increased community cohesion in Gloucestershire (Draft EDAG Terms of Reference December 2008).

Both of the above projects were steered by a Project Steering Group comprising:

Robin Agascar - Assembly Board Member
Anis Ghanti - Equality and Diversity Manger, Gloucestershire PCT
Jess Mace - Assembly Team Manager

This report aims to communicate the findings of the research project and provide the Assembly with recommendations which begin to address them.

1.2 Background

The Gloucestershire Assembly for the VCS was set up in 2003 with the aim of strengthening and supporting the VCS in Gloucestershire by providing a countywide strategic voice for the sector.

One of the underlying values in its terms of reference relates specifically to equality and inclusion:

The Assembly will undertake creative positive action to encourage the involvement of groups within the VCS who tend to be marginalised or excluded.

The Assembly has a reputation both locally and nationally for having significantly increased the strategic influence of the VCS in Gloucestershire through providing forums and mechanisms in which groups can engage in policy and planning issues.

However, it is recognised that many VCS groups falling within one of more of the 7 Equality Strands (ie. age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, reassignment of gender, sexual orientation) are still less likely to access or be engaged in the work of the Assembly.

This research project aims to support the Assembly realize its full potential in acting as a strategic forum for all VCS groups and ensure full and equal engagement with previously under-represented groups.

1.3 Acknowledgments

A special thanks is given to all those under -represented groups who made the time and effort to “step forward”, share their experience and perceptions and make this research project possible. Also to the Project Steering Group members and Roisin Harte, Assembly Team Development Worker for shaping and inputting to this project.

Section 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In line with the terms of funding and requirements of the Project Steering group, the research was expected to be:

- Based on a sample group of 25 under represented groups
- Use a mixture of interviews and focus groups
- Completed within 7 days of consultant time across a 3 month period.

Given the inherent challenges in engaging with under-represented groups, these requirements represented a relatively limited time and resource and therefore demanded a clear and robust methodology. This section outlines the principles and limitations upon which the methodology was based and the stages it involved.

2.1 Principles and limitations

In order to take account of the above challenges and requirements, the research methodology was developed according to the principles and limitations outlined below

2.1.1 Definition of under-represented groups

There are many factors which may lead to a group being considered as “under- represented “ but for the purposes of this research, the methodology focused on groups who may experience disadvantage primarily in relation to one of the equalities strands (see Section 2.2).

2.1.2 Limitations of sample group

A reliance on Volbase (the countywide VCS database) to identify groups and the relatively small sample group may not sufficiently reflect the range of experiences of under-represented groups. For example, more resources and time than available through this project may be required to reach particularly under-represented groups i.e. interpreters may be needed to communicate effectively with some groups. The research will therefore directly address the limitations of working with the small sample group by building in recommendations for the Assembly to continue to develop and extend contact with other groups in future.

2.1.3 Quality not quantity

The research aimed to provide a voice for relatively few organisations that perhaps had not been heard before, rather than a robust statistical analysis of a larger number of organisations.

2.1.4 Range of experience

The research aimed to create a sample group who could represent a range of experience in terms of their:

- Identification with different equalities strands
- Levels of previous contact with the Assembly
- Geographical locations and service delivery areas.

2.1.5 Inclusive and accessible

Given the known difficulties of establishing meaningful engagement with under-represented groups the research aimed to provide flexible and inclusive ways in which they could participate. For example giving the groups options about how they could be involved and including any organisation that identified itself as under-represented.

2.1.6 Limit to information requested

There was a limit to the information which could be requested from participants within the time and contact established. For example, organisations were not asked about their legal and financial status.

2.1.7 Empowering and experiential

The research wanted to ensure that participating organisations had a positive and empowering experience of taking part in the research. For example through participation they were also able to access information about the Assembly and so be able to make decisions about how they might choose to engage in future. And for some who had little or no experience of networking, the focus groups were designed to provide them with an experience of networking.

2.1.8 Anonymity and representation

It was recognised that many groups may be concerned about the consequences of “speaking out” and therefore they were given the opportunity to take part without their views being attributed. It should also be noted that the views given are that of the individual “representing” the organisation and not necessarily the collective views of the organisation.

2.1.9 Consultant’s role

The consultant’s previous employment as Participation and Partnership Manager with responsibility for the development and operation of the Assembly could be seen to both enable and limit participants’ ability to critically appraise the work with which she may be associated with.

2.2 Definition and identification of under represented groups

For the purpose of the research, the Project Steering Group agreed the following definition of an under represented group/s:

Locally initiated organisations led by individuals and serving people who are identified as coming from one or more of the 7 equality strands (age, disability, gender, race or nationality, religion or belief, reassignment of gender and sexual orientation).

288 organisations falling within this definition were identified on Volbase (the countywide VCS database). They had varied levels of involvement with the Assembly to date. For example of those 288 URGs:

15 groups have had no direct contact with the Assembly

228 groups have received information but not engaged in any other way

45 groups have received information and gone on to participate in training or networking events.

2.3 Invitation and survey

An invitation was sent out via letter or email to all of the above 288 organisations informing them about the research project and giving them the option of participating in one or more of the following ways:

- completing a survey questionnaire (copy from the Assembly Team)
- expressing their interest in attending a focus group
- taking part in an phone/face to face interview.

As expected the response was very low to this written invitation. A total of 13 organisations returned the survey and only 2 organisations expressed an interest in being part of a focus group/interview.

It was also evident at this stage that the contact details for many of these groups were out of date or not complete on Volbase.

2.4 Focus Groups

Following the above stage, 4 focus groups were designed to bring together a small number of organisations to:

- Provide feedback regarding issues raised in the survey
- Share information and network with others
- Seek and receive information about the Assembly.

Each of the 4 focus groups was designed to be held as locally to organisations as possible and target specific groupings of organisations as follows:

- Cheltenham urban based organisations
- Forest of Dean rural based organisations
- Cotswold rural disability focused organisations
- Gloucester based black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations.

Local development agencies and potential participant organisations were consulted about possible timings and venues for meetings.

Written invites were sent to organisations either by post or email. Again there was very little response to this written contact and most organisations attended meetings as a result of direct phone contact made by consultant.

A total of 22 people representing 16 organisations attended the focus groups (see Appendix 2).

The Cotswold disability focus group only attracted one participant group and was therefore cancelled. Many of these disability groups chose to return the survey instead and highlighted a high level of concern about access to meetings as well as lower interest/experience of networking (see Section 6)

The focus group format followed the following outline:

- Introduction and background to research project
- Facilitated feedback from participants according to headings in survey
- Presentation on Assembly by Assembly Development Worker and question time
- Opportunity for participants to identify future ways in which their organisation might engage with Assembly including sign up to strategy groups
- Review of what participants had gained from participating in focus group.

Feedback from participants highlighted that they had found the following aspects of the focus groups most helpful:

- Networking with other groups
- Information and learning about the Assembly
- Enabling more than one member of an organisation to attend
- The friendly and welcoming invite.

2.4 Interviews

Following the focus groups, gaps in participation from particular groups were identified and organisations addressing the following issues were contacted by phone:

- Mental health
- Gender
- Children and Young People
- Sexual orientation
- Gypsy and Travellers (the Gypsy and Traveller liaison officer at Gloucestershire County Council was contacted in the absence of any direct contacts for this community).

As a result of this contact 5 phone/face to face survey based interviews were conducted.

2.5 Collation of findings

The findings of the surveys, focus groups and interviews were collated and combined to form this report. Many direct quotes and examples from groups have been included to ensure that groups see themselves directly reflected in the report. However, as requested, quotes and views have not been directly attributed.

Section 3. PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

A total of 34 organisations (see Appendix 3) took part in the research via the following means:

- 16 participated in focus groups
- 13 returned written survey
- 5 completed survey via phone/face to face interviews.

This section provides an overview of these organisations in terms of their:

- Equality strand
- Purpose
- Geographical area
- Age
- Staffing levels
- Volunteering levels.

3.1 Equality Strand

Organisations from all the different equality strands were represented, with one exception; there was no specific organisation relating to gender reassignment.

Equality Strands	No. of organisations
Age	5
Disability	11
Gender	1
Race and nationality	10
Religion and belief	4
Sexual Orientation	1
Multiple deprivation	2

The majority of participating organisations were disability organisations (32%) and BME organisations (29%).

There were two organisations that identified themselves as working with communities facing multiple deprivation by virtue of their geographical focus and location.

3.2 Purpose

The majority of participant organisations had been established to provide direct support to their members/communities of interest eg information and advice, social activities and care. Many combined this with campaign and advocacy work on behalf of their members/communities.

3.3 Geographical Area

50% of participating organisations were providing county-wide (and in some case beyond county) services and there was a spread of rural and urban based organisations. The table below gives the district in which the organisation operates.

Districts\Equality Strands	Chelt	Cotswold	FOD	Glouc.	Stroud	Tewks.	County
Age	1		1		1		2
Dis.	1	3	2	1			3
Gender							1
Race	2			1			9
Religion				1		1	1
Sexual Orientation							1
Multiple Deprivation			1	1			
Total	4	3	4	4	1	1	17

3.4 Length of time established

The majority (65%) of participating organisations had been established for over 5 years and 47% had been established for over 15 years.

Length (years)\Equality Strands	0-1	1-5	5-15	15-30	30+	Unknown
Age		1	2		1	
Disability	1		1	8	1	
Gender					1	
Race and nationality		1	3	2		1
Religion and belief	1			1	1	
Sexual Orientation				1		
Multiple Dep.	1					1
Total	3	2	6	12	4	2

3.5 Staff Levels

35% of participating organisations had no paid staff.

No. of staff\Equality Strands	0	1-5	5-15	15-30	30+	Unknown
Age		1	1	1		2
Disability	2	1	2	1	1	4
Gender		1				

Race and nationality	5	5				
Religion and belief	3	1				
Sexual Orientation	1					
Multi Dep.	1	1				
Total	12	10	3	2	1	6

3.6 Volunteers

Organisations reported to being supported by between 5 and 50 volunteers. For some groups the management committee members were the only volunteers.

Section 4. PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE ASSEMBLY

41% of organisations participating in the research said they had not heard of or come across the Assembly before.

This section looks at the perceptions and experience of organisations participating in the research in relation to the Assembly's:

- Role and effectiveness
- Provision of information
- Facilitation of meetings and events.

4.1 Role of the Assembly

Most commonly, participant organisations assumed the Assembly was a statutory body and perceptions of the Assembly reported at the focus groups included:

- Related to Welsh Assembly
- A legislative body
- Part of local authority
- A body set up to police the VCS
- Something to do with Primary Care Trust
- Local initiative following government legislation to pretend they are doing something
- Led by GAVCA
- Association with school assembly
- Scary and intimidating.

Both the organisations that had and hadn't had previous contact with the Assembly saw it as having a very generic VCS support role and reported the following perceptions of its role:

- To help clubs who have no help financially
- Get more action and more volunteers who generally care
- Support the voluntary sector - disseminating knowledge - with training
- Bring the VCS together, assist with whatever is needed
- Enable groups in the voluntary sector to help and encourage each other.

Only 14% of participating organisations correctly identified the Assembly's key role as a strategic countywide voice for the VCS and were able to distinguish between its role and the support role of local VCS infrastructure agencies.

4.2 Effectiveness of the Assembly

Only 3 organisations specifically stated that they felt the Assembly was "effective" in its strategic role and 2 identified it as "very effective".

An age related organisation said it was a “great way of supporting the VCS and sifting and disseminating the mountains of information/ consultations out there”

Other organisations said they were unsure about the Assembly’s effectiveness and one organisation questioned whether the Assembly’s voice “disappeared into the ether”.

The majority of organisations felt that the Assembly was ineffective and gave the following reasons:

- Too “remote” from what was going on the ground
- Represents the interests of more professional organisations as opposed to volunteer led community organisations
- Doesn’t reflect the diversity of the sector
- Represents a practical example of how institutional racism works
- Not accountable enough or monitoring the impact it has, especially in relation to equality and diversity
- Failed to consult about the way it develops, eg establishment of Equality and Diversity Group
- Pulling resources away from direct service delivery
- Needs to go back to the original reasons it was set up
- Its name is off putting for many groups
- Concern about use of the term Third Sector further marginalizing community groups.

4.2 Provision of information

35% organisations reported receiving information from the Assembly Team from one of the following sources:

Information source	No of orgs
Gloshub website	8
Gloshub Bulletin	12
Email updates	7
Invitations to VCS meetings and events	12

The majority of organisations said they welcomed the use of email as a channel of communication and reported finding the following most useful about the information they received:

- The information enables us to see if we would like to participate
- Updates knowledge and supports liaison
- Everything; without Gloshub it would be very difficult to access information especially as I am the only experienced member of the organisation
- Keeping abreast of developments and any opportunities for involvement.

However, smaller groups with no paid staff predominantly reported the information not being relevant to them.

A disability organisation said “It so often just doesn’t apply to our group”

An age based organisation said that training courses advertised in the bulletin looked interesting but were unaffordable to people reliant on personal pensions

A BME organisation questioned why the Gloshub sign up sheet asked for persons "job title" as this didn't appear inclusive of volunteers

It was also observed that in non hierarchical, unstaffed organisations the flow of information through the organisation may be uncertain. Therefore information needed to be made available to all members of an organisation.

4.3 Improving information

Suggestions from organisations for increasing the accessibility and relevance of information provided by the Assembly to VCOs included:

- Continuing to provide information via email
- Ensuring hard copies are also available for people without access to internet
- Giving as much notice as possible for events and consultations
- Enabling organisations to advertise staff vacancies and other events in Bulletin
- Ensuring there is direct contact and outreach with under represented groups
- Targeted briefings for disadvantaged groups
- Summarised information for particular groups, highlighting relevant issues and drawing attention to issues likely to have impact on them
- Briefings and training regarding structures and processes of local decision making.

4.4 Facilitation of meetings and events

58% of participant organisations said they hadn't participated in any meetings or events organised by the Assembly Team and reasons reported included:

- Not aware of date/venue
- Do not think they are relevant to us
- Not considered useful

A faith based organisation said "timing and the publicity didn't seem to indicate that it was for us"

A disability organisation said "I think we are just happy as we are in our small way and members do not seem to want more than we have; in the company of each other who understand their needs"

41% of organisations reported participation in the events organised by the Assembly Team as follows:

Meetings or Events	No of organisations
VCS Assembly Annual Event	8
VCS Assembly Board Meeting	4
VCS Children and Young People's Strategy Group	4
VCS Economic Development Strategy Groups	1
VCS Environmental Strategy Group	1
VCS Faith Strategy Group	0
VCS Health and Well Being Strategy Group	5
VCS Safer & Stronger Communities Strategy Group	1
Other - Compact Shadowing Exercise	1

Participating organisations reported finding the following the most useful about the meetings:

- Networking, learning about other work going on and seeking opportunities to link with/contribute to such work
- Opportunity for contact with Commissioners
- Meetings about Gloucestershire Children and Young People's Plan have been most helpful in recent years
- Gaining breadth of perspective

Organisations reported finding the following the least useful about the meetings:

- Too many meetings
- Size of meetings
- Bad timings and daytime meetings often inaccessible for volunteers

- Not enough outcomes from meetings
- Not inclusive enough
- Maintain status quo
- Intimidating for volunteers
- Overwhelming amount of information
- People who dominate discussions about their own sector/interest for too long
- Lack of patience and understanding from paid staff who are better able to keep abreast of strategic developments
- AGM business at Annual event (but recognise collective responsibility for is also essential).

Suggestions from organisations to make the meetings more relevant and accessible include:

- Varying venues, eg hold meetings in Barton and Tredworth
- Ensure that older people can hear, some participants mumble, use portable loop system
- Feedback is crucial, as is clarity, purpose and outcomes of the meetings
- Papers sent out in advance or put on website so people can choose to go depending on relevance of items to them
- Accessible venues and meeting times
- Targeted meetings and specific briefings for particular groupings of disadvantaged groups, eg BME groups.

Section 5. PERCEPTIONS & EXPERIENCE OF INFLUENCE

As one of the key roles of the Assembly is to influence the planning and delivery of public services, organisations were asked about the importance they placed on influencing. This section reports on their responses regarding:

- The importance of influence to them
- The effectiveness of their influence
- Factors helping and hindering their ability to influence.

5.1 Importance of influence

Organisations were asked to rate how important it was for them to raise awareness of their group/communities needs and influence the planning and delivery of public services. The results are reported in the table below.

Importance of influence	No. of organisations
Very important	25
Important	5
Unsure	1
Not important	1
Very unimportant	0
No response	2
Total no. of orgs	34

The majority of organisations (88.2%) saw their ability to influence as fundamental to their organisation and rated it as “important” or “very important”.

The only group who did not see it as important was a disability organisation who said “it was not the philosophy of their group” and the “only interest of the group had been attempting to get specialist nurse in”.

5.2 Effectiveness of influence

Organisations were asked to rate how effective they were at influencing the planning and delivery of public services and the results are recorded in the table below:

Effectiveness of influence	No. of organisations
Very effective	3
Effective	7
Unsure	12

Not effective	8
Very ineffective	3
No response	1
Total no. of orgs	34

35% were unable to make a judgment as to how effective they were at influencing and 32% did not see them as effective at influencing.

Only 9% of organisations rated themselves as “very effective” at influencing and one was a BME organisation which had never come across the Assembly and had developed its own mechanisms for influence.

5.3 Factors enabling influence

Organisations reported the factors, outlined below, as positively contributing to their ability to influence effectively:

5.3.1 Direct relationships with public sector organisations

Establishing direct relationships (ie not using intermediary bodies) with public sector organisations was seen as crucial to the ability to influence.

A community organisation reported that they had identified 5 key public sector agencies and established relationships direct with their Chief Executive Officers in order to influence the delivery of services through management teams and they would use these Officers as arbitrators should difficulties arise.

5.3.2 Use of influential people

A few organisations had identified key people who could act on their behalf.

A BME organisation who had no previous contact with the Assembly had said it had sought relationships with influential people such as their Member of Parliament or community police officer to act on their behalf.

5.3.3 Effective community engagement and awareness of needs

An organisation’s ability to influence was seen as related to its ability to engage with community and be aware of and have evidence of need.

An age related organisation said that key to their ability to influence was “having strong respectful relationships with children, families and the communities we work in and advocating on behalf of the children and families we work with”.

5.3.4 Representation

Organisations felt it was important that they were represented on service user forums, local strategic partnerships, district VCS forums and other specific interest/strategy groups and one disability organisation said they needed to know “the right people” to represent them.

5.3.5 Strategic approach and credibility

Organisations said working strategically and understanding the different frameworks within which VCS and public sector work and establishing common goals and targets for delivery was vital.

One community organisation said “to be taken seriously the VCS needs to prove it can deliver effectively against any targets agreed”.

5.3.6 Commitment and motivation

Commitment and motivation are required to achieve results and these results could then fuel further action.

One age related organisation reported working “really hard to overcome any barriers to influence” and another said influence depended on the “commitment of volunteers and committee members who represent older people in their locality and bring local experience”.

A faith based organisation said that people need to believe in what they are doing and some people would see themselves as earning a reward from God through the voluntary work they do.

5.3.7 Awareness raising

A small number of organisations mentioned using the local media to raise their profile but most used more direct contact with other people.

A disability organisation said they aimed to increase awareness by “encouraging people with a disability to get out and about in the local community and be seen, involving volunteers in our work, and giving talks to groups”.

5.3.8 Independence and authority

In order to influence, organisations needed to have a sense of their own independence and/or authority.

A BME organisation said that they felt more able to influence because of the realization that they “can hold statutory organisations to account for being non compliant”.

5.3.9 Support

Organisations said support with influencing was important, but very few groups identified sources of local support.

- Only 5 organisations referred to the Assembly or a local development agency as a source of support
- 2 organisations said they relied on support from their national organisations
- 1 BME organisation referred to receiving support from Gloucestershire Race Equality Council.

5.4 Factors hindering influence

Organisations reported different factors as hindering their ability to influence effectively, as outlined below.

5.4.1 Time, resources and access to meetings

Influence was often equated with the ability to attend meetings and many organisations said they did not have time or capacity to get to meetings, and that travel costs and inaccessible venues were often an inhibitive factor too.

An age related organisation reported that “despite government emphasis on engagement with older people only one district council provides us with any funding and current funding ends in 2009”.

A disability organisation said “too few people willing to undertake the liaison - staff too busy but possibly unwilling at times. Volunteer trustees have day jobs and are too thinly spread”.

5.4.2 Lack of knowledge of “place “and decision making structures and processes

Lack of familiarity with decision making structures and processes was seen to be a barrier to knowing how to influence.

A BME organisation said that they were “unfamiliar with UK systems”.

In particular, county wide groups said it was difficult to keep up with the complexity of policy and planning initiatives across the two-tier county.

5.4.3 Poor engagement with service providers

Low confidence in public sector agencies openness to influence was seen as crucial factor and organisations reported the following perceptions of service providers (including VCS organisations):

- People do not really listen

- Lack of vision regarding engaging with equalities and diversity groups
- Resistant to change
- Statutory officers choose to ignore the needs on the grounds
- As a club we feel it's a battle to make people have more understandingthey often listen but then nothing changes
- Statutory agencies are bound by old restrictions.

The majority of BME organisations reported use of inaccessible language and use of jargon as a barrier to their engagement.

An older people's group reported consultation timescales as a problem saying: "effective involvement of older people requires at least three months - preparing discussion papers, sending out to local groups who may meet only monthly, collating feedback".

A disability organisation reported how it no longer has service advisory groups which had enabled it to talk directly to service providers.

5.4.4 Lack of credibility

Lack of credibility was felt to be a barrier for some groups in providing effective representation.

2 disability organisations said they felt that volunteers weren't always taken seriously or seen as reliable representatives by the public sector.

5.4.5 Funding Conditions

Funding conditions were identified as a factor restricting some groups' ability to represent its interests effectively.

A BME organisation reported "Conditions attached to funding which are not in line with our aims".

5.4.6 Lack of understanding regarding access issues

Predominantly disability and rural based groups reported a general lack of understanding by others of the social isolation and access issues they face.

A disability organisation referred to the "social isolation experienced particularly in rural areas".

5.4.7 Hierarchy of equalities issues

Organisations commented on how different equality strands may often have to compete for influence.

A BME organisation perceived a “tendency for race equality to become submerged by other diversity strands”.

Section 6 .PERCEPTIONS & EXPERIENCE OF NETWORKING

As one of the key roles of the Assembly is to support networking within the voluntary and community sector (VCS), participant organisations were asked about the importance they placed on networking with other voluntary and community organisations. This section reports on their responses regarding:

- The importance of networking
- The effectiveness of their networking
- Factors that help and hinder their networking.

6.1 Importance of networking

Organisations were asked to rate how important networking was for their organisation and the results are reported in the table below.

Importance of networking	No. of organisations
Very important	27
Important	0
Unsure	2
Not important	2
Very unimportant	1
No response	2
Total no.of orgs	34

The majority of organisations (79%) saw networking as very important.

Those who were unsure or who saw it as unimportant were predominantly disability organisations with an emphasis on self reliance and who had little previous experience of networking.

6.2 Effectiveness of networking

Organisations were asked to rate how effective their organisation was at networking and the results are reported in the table below.

Effectiveness at networking	No. of organisations
Very effective	3

Effective	9
Unsure	9
Not effective	7
Very ineffective	2
No response	4
Total no. of orgs	34

35% of organisations saw themselves as being “not effective” or “very ineffective” at networking and these were predominantly BME and faith organisations.

26% were unsure as to how effective they were at networking including one older people’s organisation who said they had never considered it.

26% rated themselves as being effective at networking and these were predominantly longer established organisations.

6.3 Factors enabling networking

Organisations reported the following factors as positively contributing to their ability to network effectively:

6.3.1. Commitment and approach

An openness and commitment to working with other groups, and not just an interest in own groups issues, was seen to be a prerequisite to effective networking.

A disability organisation talked about “majoring on hospitality” and a faith groups reported a “willingness to give time to meet and share”.

A BME organisation described themselves as “outgoing and welcoming of new groups”.

6.3.2 Trust and respect

Trust and respect between organisations was seen as crucial.

1 organisation reported that because of the sensitive and confidential nature of its work it needed to be assured that organisations with which it networked were able to respect this.

6.3.3 Support with networking

5 organisations said they found the support offered by the Assembly vital to their ability to network. This support included:

- Gloshub website and the Bulletin
- Facilitated consultation and focus groups

2 disability organisations said they left all external liaison to their national organisations.

6.4 Factors hindering networking

Organisations reported the following factors as hindering their ability to network effectively:

6.4.1 Time

Availability of people and time was perceived as a major factor in groups' ability to network and networking was often equated with attending meetings.

A BME group reported that they had limited staff and “ability to mingle and attend meetings”.

A disability group also reported “lack of capacity within organisation to be able to spare staff to attend”.

6.4.2 Reluctance to network

A reluctance of other organisations to be open to networking was seen as a barrier especially by a number of BME groups who reported:

- Networking was hampered by reluctance on the part of other groups to engage with them
- Perceived competition between groups sometimes hindered networking
- Gate keeping from community leaders

6.4.3. Networking facilitation and support

Many groups said that they were not aware of what other groups existed and would like help with networking.

2 BME organisations said they had “no idea of who other organisations or other key staff are” or “knowledge of places to go”.

The majority of organisations said they would like more support with networking and said that:

- Networking was often too meeting based
- Good communication was often lacking
- Invitations to meetings were not friendly and even off putting
- There are not enough opportunities for informal networking.

Section 7 : KEY FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

- 1.1 The research has successfully engaged with and received **important feedback from a sample group of 34 voluntary and community organisations** which address a range of equality strands and span different geographical locations in the county.
- 1.2 However, it is also recognised that this limited sample group will not represent the full range of organisations which could be considered “under-represented”. Therefore **ongoing outreach and research** is required including groups which this research has not been able to include. For example, Eastern European communities and some rural communities.
- 1.3 There is a wide diversity of characteristics and experience amongst the sample group. However, in general **they represent organisations working with particularly disadvantaged communities, often with few or no paid staff (35% had no paid staff) and covering large geographical areas (50% provided services across the county.** These characteristics and apparent “stretched capacity” are likely to be shared by a considerable percentage of the total voluntary and community sector in Gloucestershire.
- 1.4 The research shows that the **41 % of VCOs had no knowledge or previous contact with the Assembly.** The vast majority is put off by its name and/or a misperception of its role, and have struggled to engage with it for a variety of reasons including inaccessibility of information and events.
- 1.5 It appears, therefore, that the **Assembly’s current style of governance and operation is not relating to or addressing the needs of these disadvantaged groups.** Indeed it could be argued that it favours the needs of urban based organisations with capacity to engage. As one community organisation said “its strength is engaging with the public sector on behalf of professionalised organisations as opposed to engaging with volunteer-based organisations that may be more aware and up-to-date about community need”.
- 1.6 Importantly, the research highlights **the important role the majority of under-represented groups see themselves playing in influencing the planning and delivery of public services.** However, few (9%) see themselves as being able to do this effectively at the moment and require further support. On the other hand, there are groups who have valuable experience to share with the Assembly regarding different approaches to raising awareness of community need and influence.
- 1.7 The research also shows that the **networking was high on the agenda for the majority of organisations (79%)** and that they can benefit from and would appreciate greater assistance in this area.
- 1.8 The research clearly indicates that there is a need for the key functions the Assembly seeks to provide on behalf of the VCS in Gloucestershire, especially influencing the planning and delivering of services and facilitating networking and information sharing within the VCS. However, **a significant review and development of its governance and operation,** including the role of local development agencies and specialist infrastructure agencies within it, would be needed to ensure it can perform these function on behalf of all VCOs in the county.

7.9 Critically, any such review and development would need to be undertaken in partnership and consultation with current under-represented groups, in order to win back their confidence and address the considerable gap between themselves and the Assembly at the moment.

Section 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the findings of the report, it is recommended that the Assembly Board considers the following recommendations and develops an action plan to progress each one, guided by the VCS Equalities and Diversity Advisory Group:

8.1 Relationship with under-represented groups

- 8.1.1 Acknowledges the value of the feedback received from the sample group of 34 under-represented groups but recognizes the limitations of the time, resources and approach of the research in providing more extensive and in depth feedback.
- 8.1.2. Identifies ways of ensuring that there is ongoing research and outreach into the needs of under-represented groups especially those groups not reached by the current research eg Eastern European communities, rural communities.
- 8.1.3 Commits to disseminating the results of the research and providing feedback sessions to participating groups.
- 8.1.4. Work in partnership and fully consult under-represented groups re. actions developed in response to findings and recommendations.
- 8.1.5 Create opportunities for under-represented groups to deliver and contribute to the above actions eg provision of equality and diversity awareness training.

8.2 Review of Assembly role and model of influence

- 8.2.1 Acknowledge that the vast majority of under-represented groups seek and see themselves having a fundamental role in influencing the planning and delivery of public services
- 8.2.3 Recognise that a diversity of influencing techniques and methods are necessary and are being used successfully by a range of organisations operating outside of Assembly structures at the moment.
- 8.2.4 Review Assembly's role in providing a strategic voice for the VCS and develop Assembly's model of influence to support and incorporate the diversity of influencing techniques used within the sector.
- 8.2.5 Establish accountable monitoring processes for reviewing the effectiveness of the Assembly's influence particularly in respect of the needs of under-represented groups.

8.3 Equalities impact assessment and review

- 8.3.1 Undertakes a full review and analysis of current Assembly governance, structures, processes, operational mechanisms and related documents to assess its impact on equality and diversity groups.

- 8.3.2 Revises above to ensure that they are inclusive, representative of the diversity of the sector, and promote anti - discriminatory practice.
- 8.3.4 Reviews Board members and Assembly Team's staff understanding and awareness of equality and diversity issues and puts in place appropriate support and training.
- 8.3.5 Ensure role descriptions for leadership positions (eg Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons) and staff job descriptions recognise the Assembly's role in promoting equality, diversity and human rights.

8.4 Development of equality and diversity strategy

- 8.4.1 Work with Gloucestershire Infrastructure Group to establish targets for raising the level of engagement with URGs according to a non hierarchical approach to equalities strands.
- 8.4.2 Commit to equality proofing /undertaking equalities impact assessment of any new initiatives taken by the Assembly.
- 8.4.3 Highlight and work with Gloucestershire Infrastructure Group to address the specific resource deficiencies and development needs of under represented groups.

8.5 Marketing and communication

- 8.5.1 Recognise that written information and or invitations are not an effective way of engaging or establishing with under represented groups. There is a need to engage directly with under represented groups (visits to organisations, 1:1 meetings) by creating time *within current resources or accessing additional resources to do so*.
- 8.5.2 Recognise the high rate of under-represented groups who have not come across the Assembly and take measures to compensate for the alienation experienced by the name and term third sector by the name.
- 8.5.3 Develop strategy for effectively consulting, promoting and raising awareness of the Assembly's role amongst under-represented groups
Eg train staff and board members, improve publicity materials, provide briefings etc..
- 8.5.4 Make use of local media to reach under-represented groups especially those not currently registered on Volbase.
- 8.5.5 Ensure local development agencies and specialist infrastructure groups to support them in helping under-represented groups to be informed and engage with the Assembly.

8.6 Providing information

- 8.6.1 Ensure that all VCOs are aware of the Bulletin and encouraged to sign up to it and cater for the needs of groups without internet access or with specific language format requirements.
- 8.6.2 Ensure the provision of summarized information and targeted briefings to particular groupings of under -represented groups.

8.7 Facilitating events and networking

- 8.7.1 Continue the Assembly's role in supporting networking and information sharing between all VCOs.
- 8.7.2 Recognise that under represented groups may have limited contact with other communities and interest groups and facilitate informal networking where possible.
- 8.7.3 Recognise that the predominance of daytime meetings is significantly excluding under-represented groups without paid staff or available volunteers.
- 8.7.4 Develop mechanisms by which under-represented groups can feed into necessary daytime meeting and target these groups through specific meetings at accessible times and venues.
- 8.7.5 Ensure that all meetings and events use participative methods which engage and encourage input from under-represented groups eg small group discussions.

8.7.6 Recognise that under-represented groups may lack the confidence and skills to participate at meetings and consider the use of buddies from existing group to support their participation.

8.8 Training in representational skills and influence

8.8.1 Recognise that the majority of under-represented groups see their ability to influence as a vital part of their role but do not feel they are effective in doing this.

8.8.2 Seek to provide training regarding influencing, negotiating, representational skills for under-represented groups and support monitoring to evaluate their effectiveness.

8.8.3 Promote and ensure the provision of knowledge of place training to ensure under-represented groups have an understanding of the decision making processes and structures within Gloucestershire.

8.9 Improve partnership working and engagement with public sector

8.9.1 Continue to find ways of improving partnership working and VCS engagement with the public sector using the Gloucestershire Compact and other means which can specifically address the needs of under-represented groups.