



Evaluation of ChangeUp
Bedfordshire locality case study
summary

January 2010

Prepared for Capacitybuilders



Hosted by:

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

Funded by:



Cabinet Office
Office of the Third Sector



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1 Bedfordshire locality case study

1.1 Formation of the Consortium

The Consortium was formally established in 2004 following the direction given by the local Government Office (GO EAST) when describing structures needed to manage the ChangeUp programme. This consortium did however, build on an existing informal structure where the four Local Infrastructure Organisations (CVS's) had met as a sub regional network to review, discuss and deliver on countywide projects and initiatives.

The creation of the Consortium provided an opportunity for other infrastructure organisations to take part in strategic developments regarding infrastructure services. This resulted in the Rural Community Council, a Volunteer Centre, the Race Equality Council and a Funding Advice Forum joining the Consortium and playing a role in the creation of the original Investment Development Plan (IDP).

The Consortium developed terms of reference which focused membership on being solely around infrastructure providers; as such statutory bodies or frontline delivery VCS groups are not part of this structure.

At this time, the REC reported as feeling “like an outsider” during the initial planning stages having heard about the consortium from a BME regional body and ‘fought’ for a place on the Consortium. During the early days this organisation felt that they were not strictly viewed as an infrastructure organisation.

From the onset this Consortium decided not to appointment a dedicated ChangeUp Co-ordinator. The partnership took the view that much of the work required in the early stages should happen at a Chief Executive level and charged their time accordingly.

The creation of the IDP was led by the Accountable Body and was seen as secondary due to the initial requirements of Early Spend. The Consortium managed the development of their IDP through internal capacity within the group. It did however engage a consultant to facilitate a number of away days around thematic developments. This process also involved the Regional Government Office where an Officer attended the second away day to support the dialogue around and subsequent development of their initial plan.

The original process was seen as inclusive however acknowledgements were made around the timescales for delivery which forced the pace of its development; your engagement depended on time available. The development of future business planning was viewed as being more inclusive and delivered in an environment of shared understanding and trust had been established within the group.

1.2 Consortium change since 2004

The Consortium became under pressure from Capacitybuilders to widen out its membership and subsequently invited representatives to join from a newly formed Advice Forum and a Children and Young People consortium.

In 2007 it was agreed that the Accountable Body should not hold the role of Chair of the Consortium. A new chair has been appointed from the Rural Community Council this was approved by the Consortium and viewed as a improved way of sharing the management and workload of the Consortium and its myriad projects.

The REC now reports a stronger engagement in the work of the Consortium.

Whilst this a relatively small Consortium (7 organisations, with 2 of these being recent members), members report a number of significant changes in the way they operate from their early days:

- Improved relationships - all members cite an overall improvement in the working relationships (and trust) within the Consortium based on a shared understanding and a focus on common goals.
- Communication – this has improved over time through operational developments and the role of the Chair sitting outside of the Accountable Body structures. The consortium’s web portal is seen as a significant strength in the management and communication of its work.
- Strategic awareness – the various business planning cycles have allowed all Consortium members to understand policy issues relating to infrastructure services and wider issues facing the third sector e.g. procurement.
- Informal skills development across the Consortium set through specific research and development projects.

Collaborative working across the Consortium has significantly improved through the development of a number of specific projects;

- Merger of x2 infrastructure bodies to ensure financial stability and improved service provision.
- The introduction of VolBase across the CVS organisations. This has led to consistent management information reporting systems, mapping of voluntary and community groups and mechanisms to reach frontline organisations.
- The consortium’s sustainable volunteering project has standardised marketing literature and recruitment strategies for volunteering across the locality.
- Research exercises around Social Enterprise, BME and Social Infrastructure has helped to highlight short and medium term issues. These research pieces have been used in myriad environs as solid evidence based research supporting further plans in the locality and have also helped to raise the profile of the Sector, the role of the Consortium and infrastructure bodies locally.

The Consortium has also learned from projects which have not developed in the way originally envisioned, significant learning has come through these projects as well as those which have delivered against expectations:

- Workforce Development project had identified the specific training and development needs of the sector, but the external funding environment changed and as such this project has not progressed further.
- Shared Support project – looked at the potential for shared services within LIO organisations but did not realise the potential expected for it.

Consortium members now feel that there is an equal and shared allocation of projects within the group.

An Equality and Diversity policy has been created for the Consortium with a subsequent agreement that all current and future projects will have an equalities impact assessment carried out.

1.3 Expenditure and Funding

Since 2004 to March 2008 the Consortium has received £898,966 from myriad ChangeUp or Capacitybuilders funding streams.

This funding covers a total of 21 projects.

In addition to Capacitybuilders funding the main funders for infrastructure organisations in this area are:

- Local Authorities;
- Local Trusts;
- PCT Grant (deemed to be difficult to engage with for core funding);
- PCT Projects;
- Small Local Grants;
- Direct service delivery (REC project delivery);

In March 2008 the total income for the infrastructure agencies within the Consortium was £3,138,412 against an expenditure of £3,246,828.

Comments from the Consortium Chair around Capacitybuilders and ChangeUp funding “they are happy to fund the behind the scenes work which other funders don’t want to touch”.

The Consortium is anticipating a further income from Capacitybuilders of c. £643,000 to 2011.

With regards to gaps in funding for infrastructure bodies a number of areas have been identified:

- Training – most VCS organisations wish to access short training courses e.g. am or pm sessions. Most funding available now is focused on accredited learning over a longer period which does not meet the needs of the Sector therefore currently difficult to meet the needs of the Sector.
- Core Work – need to create BME specific community workers as evidenced in research but cannot get funding.
- Core Work – general capacity building limited funds (and too short term).
- Capital funding for a third sector building in Bedfordshire.

This Consortium has had significant investment from the programme, but is still experiencing short term funding gaps. Whilst a number of posts have been created through ChangeUp projects many of the group are uncertain around future funding streams and as such have let people go from their organisations as funding has ended during this project period.

The Consortium review Capacitybuilders as key income stream and have been able to attract other funders e.g. BASIS using Consortium plans. However, it has not been successful in realising additional funds from statutory bodies for its core work through this time period (although there have been changes in LA structures).

1.4 Relations with the Statutory Sector

It is important to note that there have been significant changes with statutory structures during this time period moving to Unitary Authorities.

This Consortium made a strategic decision not to invite statutory partners as members of their group, “it’s not about them influencing the sector, it has to be independent it is not about them exerting influence in this way”.

Whilst the statutory sector was not directly involved each ChangeUp project area or lead had a responsibility to talk to specific officers to share thinking and discuss issues around thematic developments.

Relations are still forming due to changes in the Unitary structures and as such it is difficult to form solid opinions on reporting progress however, the following was found:

- Local Strategic Partnership – VCS has 3 places out of 12 and are also looking to introduce thematic specialists for sub structures.
- The current Local Authority restructure is seen as an opportunity to develop effective representation and engagement through the establishment of a Third Sector Assembly (and has been funded post 2008 as a project by Capacitybuilders).
- Local Area Agreements – VCS involvement was viewed as “significant” and provided key statistics around baselines using VolBase, however, still more work to do as new structures take place.

1.5 National Support Services

There has been a relatively low use of National Support Services across the Consortium set, with only one or two using these services at any meaningful level.

Where they have been accessed this appears to support early projects such as:

- Governance hub – supporting their Good Governance Project;
- Volunteering hub, “but already had a relationship with VE anyway”;
- Finance hub – used work on funding advice and accessed resources;
- Training – workforce development hub.

The subsequent change to the original hubs has now resulted in low engagement, as one Consortium member expressed “just not impressed, it already exists elsewhere”.

It appears that the hubs were helpful for some members in the early days but there is limited evidence of significant engagement or impact by Consortium members.

1.6 Outcomes and Impacts

All of the Consortium members believe that the programme of work within this locality has had a significant impact on front line organisations and the wider community across the locality. Evidence for this has been offered as:

- Good Governance project – worked with a number of Front Line Organisations around governance structures and trustee engagement and recruitment plans.
- Funding Advice – increased the levels of funding advice offered and supporting training courses.
- Improving Reach project – mapped out VCS organisations across the Consortium set resulting in a significant uplift in known VCS organisations. This project included the acquisition of VolBase as a central database to manage and record interventions with VCS groups in the locality.
- Merger – supporting the merger of x2 infrastructure agencies to improve sustainability and service offerings
- Capital Improvements – development of premises and ICT applications within these buildings.
- Volunteering – an increase in overall numbers and hours of opening to raise the profile and use of volunteering in the locality.

In addition some of the research projects have been used to support community planning needs for local development and have such been invaluable e.g. Social Infrastructure project research.

There is however, the recognition that at this stage it is difficult to evidence a baseline of change over this period of time for many of the projects commissioned. Exceptions to this would be around volunteering where the following can be evidenced:

- Organisation A – increased volunteer centre opening hours from 20 to 105.
- Organisation B – increased volunteering figures from c300 in 2004 to c1300 in 2008.

The Improving Reach project realised a growth in known VCS organisations from 1,700 to 3,826 all of whom will now receive regular communication from their respective infrastructure body.

The creation of the web portal and internal ICT developments has also increased the visibility of these infrastructure organisations to frontline organisations.

It is recognised that there is limited evidence to directly attribute the changes these projects have had to an increase in activity or sustainability of front line organisations. It is worth stating that for many of the Consortium members there is not enough administration support to create or monitor such a baseline.

Whilst some projects could demonstrate tangible evidence others were less able to do so with comments made around it being difficult to directly attribute changes realised to ChangeUp funding.

Other Consortium members felt that it was too early to say as systems and structures are still being developed and embedded; with real change being realised at the end of this funding stream i.e. 2011.

1.7 Reflections

This Consortium has a very positive view about its engagement with this funding programme. Whilst it accepts that there were some administrative issues in “the early days” it values the role and contribution this programme of work has had in the locality and what it has meant for infrastructure. “There is only so much we could have done without Capacitybuilders; we would still have been struggling... this provided a safe platform for us to plan, think ahead and deliver change”.

There is a widespread view across the Consortium set that some of the changes would have been realised – but not at the extent to which they have due to funding streams.

The Consortium members on reflection have offered the following as key benefits to this programme of work:

- The development of a considered strategy for the locality focusing on all areas of support, which has stood “the test of time” and allowed for common goals across the Consortium member set.
- A sense of shared ownership and voice for the sector on both infrastructure needs and the wider needs of the Sector (within the Consortium set).
- A visible consortium known to both Statutory Sector and VCS partners that is solid and is funded to deliver strategically.
- Improved collaboration and joint working across a number of strategic themes including the pooling of resources where appropriate.
- Improved sustainability of infrastructure organisations, through mergers and internal capacity development.
- Improved premises for one infrastructure provider (realised additional funding)
- Improved access and reach of volunteering in the locality
- Improved intelligence on the Sector with the following impacts:
 - Access to VCS organisations
 - Communication to VCS organisations
 - Intelligence across LIOs
 - Increased profile with Statutory partners
- A focus on relations with statutory partners, representation and engagement structures for future policy and service challenges.
- A focus on the need to work with statutory partners on Procurement issues to support the sector.

It is the common held belief that the Consortium structure has provided stability to this work plan and “forced” organisations to work together in a professional manner. It is fair to note that concern has been expressed around how long the group would have existed for without this funding support; as such there is concern around future funding for this work - it is seen as vital.

At times the Consortium has expressed concerns around having to “jump through hoops” to get funds, but many of these comments seem to be around historical early

spend days than current funding streams. It is interesting to note that some interventions whilst initially viewed as unnecessary were later viewed to be of value e.g. business planning reviews.

As a rule of thumb there appeared to be an 80/20 view on direct attribution with 80% of what has happened occurring because of ChangeUp.



The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) and the Barrow Cadbury UK Trust is gratefully acknowledged. The work was part of the programme of the joint ESRC, OTS Barrow Cadbury Third Sector Research Centre.

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