

Notes from GAVCA AGM 2011 workshop session.

Workshop Topic – User Involvement.



Introduction: The reasons we decided to look at user involvement:

- Whatever kind of organisation we are work within, we are all accountable to those who use our services, and we wanted to explore how organisations engage with users at every level, including that of accountability;
- Gathering evidence of need for your organisation will in part come back from views of users, which can help in funding applications and reporting back in partnership working;
- VCS are users of Council services so, in this time of commissioning, the VCS needs to identify gaps and needs for new services.

Hoped for outcomes from the discussion group included:

- Sharing 'user involvement' ideas with each other
- Top tips re ways in which organisations have successfully engaged their users
- Sharing ways in which groups listen to their members / constituents' needs
- From funders' point of view – to identify why user involvement is important and what use this involvement is to funding organisations. (*eg provides evidence of needs and highlights gaps in provision*)
- From the Council's point of view – an opportunity to emphasise why and how the Councils need the sector – VCS knowledge and professionalism. We are the Councils' users and wish to be involved in their decision making; workshops might highlight ways in which the VCS can best be involved.

Q1 – *Provide a good example from your own organisation of how users / members are involved in:*

- Governance
- Management
- Direct helping
- Influencing and shaping your work

Responses:

- Board membership
- Forum attendance
- Identification of their training needs
- Identification of local service needs

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- Providing feedback about service provision
- Through volunteering – as a progression from being a service user.
- Through surveys and evaluation forms
- Develop ‘user days’ to provide information sharing opportunities
- Ad hoc feedback and listening to users, to help shape services.
- Websites

Q2 - (A) *What are some of the barriers to effective user involvement? and*
 - (B) *What can you do to overcome these barriers?*

Responses:

- Costs – eg training costs
 - > Local Authority could make free training places available for the VCS when organising their own training sessions
- Rules and regulations – eg Health & Safety
- Transient nature of some user groups, so short term involvement rather than longer term input possible.
 - > Recording of Ad Hoc feedback
- Apathy
- Organisational constraints
- User sense of disempowerment
 - > long term support and confidence building of users
- Sense that: ‘nothing ever changes, so why bother?’
 - > important to provide feedback on actions taken in response to user input and feedback.
- Language – eg - of governance
 of the specific sector
 abbreviations and acronyms
 - > training to assist individuals to participate or contribute.
- Age
- Practical issues – eg venues
 Transport
 Timing of events / meetings