



Communities Scotland
**Survey of management and
performance information systems in
voluntary sector organisations whose
main function is community capacity
building**

FINAL REPORT

May 2006



Communities Scotland

Survey of management and performance information systems in voluntary sector organisations whose main function is community capacity building

May 2006

Discussions with voluntary sector representatives have been both invaluable and stimulating and we would like to record our appreciation for the time and consideration taken to engage with us.



Communities Scotland

Survey of management and performance information systems in voluntary sector organisations whose main function is community capacity building

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	1
1.1 What we were asked to do	1
1.2 What we have done	2
2. Key Findings	5
2.1 Systems	5
2.2 Data collection	7
2.3 How data is used	13
2.4 Development and support needs	16
3. Views of Performance and Management Information	18
5. Conclusions and Recommendations	21
Appendices	24
Appendix A – Voluntary Sector Aide Memoire	24
Appendix B – Agree/disagree questions	29
Appendix C – PIP Definitions	30



1. Introduction

1.1 What we were asked to do

As part of its Performance Information Project (PIP) Learning Connections, Communities Scotland, commissioned Rocket Science to undertake research / analysis of the current status of management or performance information use across two specific sectors of Community Learning and Development (CLD). The initial stage of this work involved a survey of local authorities' identification and recording of inputs, outputs, and outcomes in relation to CLD, and the findings of this were submitted to Communities Scotland in March 2006. The most recent element of the research has been to examine current practice in voluntary sector organisations whose primary purpose is community capacity building. To enable a relatively in-depth analysis this was done with a focus on three local authority areas (Glasgow, Dundee and Angus). The following report provides a 'snapshot' of the current state of development in this area and is intended to provide Learning Connections with an understanding of the starting point from which they can support the development of good practice.

The PIP has been based on recommendations from an earlier Scottish Executive investigation into the feasibility of '*developing and implementing a suitable management information system capable of measuring the contribution of the community learning and development (CLD) sector against key public policy outcomes*'. In this context Learning Connections will use the improved intelligence to:

- Document effective practice in the development of management or performance information systems
- Identify common elements in current practice and provide indications of a possible common core of data definitions
- Indicate future support and development needs in relation to building enhanced use of such systems in community learning and development.

1.2 What we have done

1.2.1 Methodology

The approach taken by Rocket Science to the completion of this research involved seven stages:

1. **Initial discussions with Learning Connections** – discussion of the parameters of the research, identification of fields of data and geographical areas to be investigated, agreement of timescales and reporting formats
2. **Development of interview framework / online survey** – informed by the previous stage of this work (survey with local authority CLD) an interview schedule and online questionnaire was produced and agreed with Learning Connections. This included a short survey to explore attitudinal perspectives.
3. **Discussions with Lead Officers from local authorities** – initial discussions with leads from three local authorities with some responsibility, or insight into community capacity building, to gather intelligence on what they know about this sector and also to obtain contact details for Volunteer Centres (VC) and Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS)
4. **Interviews with Volunteer Centres (VCs) and Council of Voluntary Services (CVS)** – face-to-face interviews with managers of the VC and CVS in each of the three areas. Discussion and write up of interviews, including identification of lessons learnt. Each interview was written up and sent to the interviewee to be checked for accuracy. VCs and CVS were also asked to provide lists of local voluntary organisations (whose primary purpose is community capacity building)
5. **Survey/interviews with voluntary organisations** – contact with voluntary organisations to participate in short telephone interviews and to complete an online survey
6. **Production of Draft Report** – A draft report was circulated to Learning Connections staff for comment
7. **Production of Final report** – This final version of the report was completed following feedback from Learning Connections

The next chapter outlines the key findings from the survey and interviews. We have also included commentary to illustrate our observations.

Chapter three provides information on the opinions and perceptions of individuals regarding performance/management information.

Chapter four discusses conclusions and recommendations informed by the findings of the research. We hope that these will provide a useful insight to help inform future development and anticipate that they will be considered in light of the other PIP strands.

1.2.2 Definition of Community Capacity Building

Communities Scotland provided the following definition of Community Capacity Building (CCB):

The purpose of this activity will be to work with communities to bring about social change and justice. This can involve work with communities to:

- *Identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities;*
- *Plan, organise and take action; and,*
- *Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action.*

Included in this will be activities such as:

- *Working on assessments of needs and aspirations with communities;*
- *Supporting them to develop plans to meet those needs;*
- *Promotion of broad-based participation in community affairs;*
- *Developing the skills and confidence of active community members and community leaders;*
- *Assisting communities to exercise power and influence;*
- *Supporting community engagement and representation;*
- *Supporting the development of community networks and organisations;*
- *Supporting community organisations to improve the quality of community life and contribute to social justice.*

Such support can include face-to-face meetings and support by email or telephone, during the reporting period. The support may be provided to one or more individual members of the groups, as well as to the whole group or organisation.

When organisations were approached to participate in this research they were provided with the definition of CCB and asked whether this was their primary purpose. The definition was also available at the start of the electronic survey to enable respondents to check that it applied to them.

It should be noted at the outset of this report that some of the organisations had a broader purpose than solely CCB (although all defined themselves as having CCB as their core function). In particular the VCs and CVS undertake a range of activities and in discussing their information systems often referred to the whole scope of their work and not just CCB as their systems were not differentiated for this purpose. For example the VCs described the database they use to manage information about individual volunteers and volunteering opportunities. We have tried to be clear throughout the report about where VCs and CVS differ significantly from other voluntary sector organisations, for example specific attention is given to the role of the nationally developed VC database and CVS Core Activities Framework. However it is not always possible to separate out what activities are solely CCB and what are not.

1.2.3 Response level

Three local authorities were targeted for involvement in this review: Angus, Dundee and Glasgow. Two cities were selected as it was felt there may be a greater number of voluntary organisations with this remit. One mixed rural/urban area was also selected. However, engagement in the survey was disappointing. The CVS and VC in Angus reported that there were no voluntary organisations in that geographical area whose primary purpose was community capacity building (although one of the organisations based in Dundee identified themselves in the survey as also operating in Angus).

Interviews were carried out with the Volunteer Centres (VC) and Councils of Voluntary Service (CVS) in each of the three local authority areas. Ten local voluntary organisations, primarily from Glasgow and Dundee, also completed the survey, five of which participated in an additional telephone interview. Additionally, telephone interviews were held with people from Glasgow City Council and Dundee City Council with knowledge of the support provided by the local authority to voluntary sector CCB organisations. The table below provides a list of organisations who participated in the survey and interviews.

Area	Organisation	Participation
Angus	Angus Volunteer Centre	Interview & Survey
	Forfar CVS	Interview & Survey
	Wellbank Amenities Association	Survey
Dundee	Dundee Volunteer Centre	Interview & Survey
	Dundee Voluntary Action (CVS)	Interview & Survey
	CraigOwl Communities	Interview & Survey
	Swap East	Interview & Survey
	Dundee City Council	Interview Only
	Kirkton Community Support	Survey
Glasgow	Community Support Service - Greater Easterhouse	Interview & Survey
	Volunteer Centre Glasgow	Interview & Survey
	East End Training and Resource Centre	Interview & Survey
	GCVS	Interview & Survey
	Glasgow City Council	Interview Only
	Greater Govan Community Forum	Survey
	Churches Action	Survey
	Castlemilk Community Forum	Survey
	DRC Community Forum	Survey

A significant proportion of time was spent attempting to identify and contact voluntary organisations to participate in an interview and/or the online survey. It proved difficult to identify organisations that considered their primary purpose to be community capacity building as most were funded to provide a range of services of which capacity building was only one element. Indeed in Angus it was reported that the CVS was the only organisation providing community capacity building support. In another area it was not possible to obtain a list of voluntary organisations via the CVS. As a result these had to be found by conducting an internet search and then contacting organisations to confirm that they fitted the criteria of this research before asking them to complete the survey and/or participate in an interview.

Another barrier to accessing participants was that many of the voluntary organisations were small community groups with few, or no, full time staff. It was therefore difficult in many cases to make contact by phone and was frequently necessary to leave a number of messages and emails. A shortage of staff time also resulted in many organisations being unable to complete the survey or participate in an interview.

2. Key Findings

As outlined in our methodology, the aim of this research was to provide a 'snapshot' of current practice in voluntary organisations, whose main function was CCB, in relation to performance or management information. The findings do not seek to be statistically representative but to broadly show the current situation in three areas and highlight the existing range of trends, issues and development needs. The survey asked a range of questions about the types of systems used, the data collected, and use of information by the organisations. In addition the interviews sought to understand organisations' development needs and explore in more depth the issues they encounter in relation to performance and management information.

As our findings include data from organisations in particular constituent groups (i.e. CVS and VCs) as well as other voluntary organisations, we have attempted to identify where there are differences between these groups. However, in general, while there was a tendency for the CVS and VCs to record slightly more information, there was no striking difference in the types of data recorded.

2.1 Systems

The systems used were primarily a mixture of paper and IT based and tended to include a registration form alongside an IT database. No organisation had a solely paper based system.

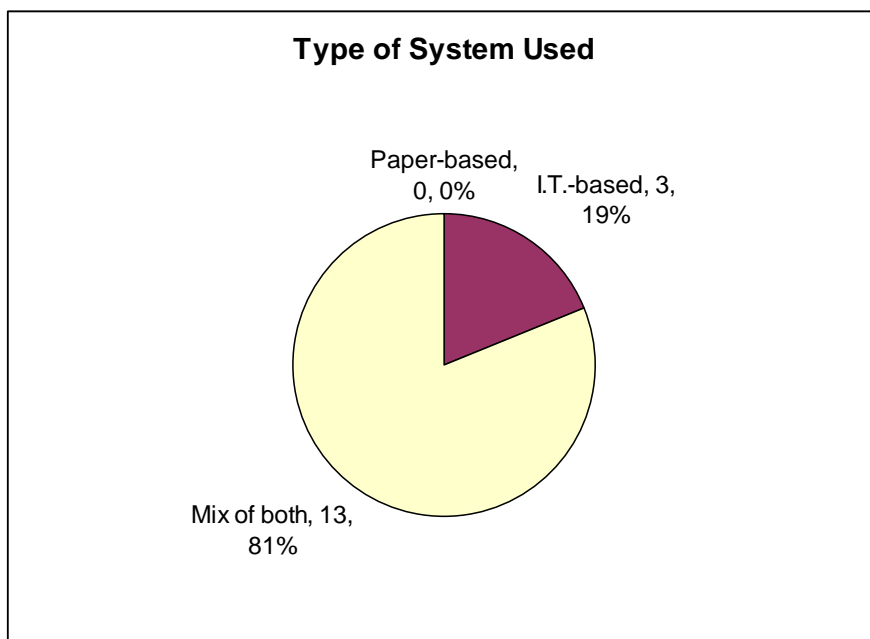


Figure 1 – type of system used

Respondents to the survey used a range of IT packages with the most common being Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access. Other programmes used were

- Outlook
- Claris Filemaker Pro
- Nationally developed VC database
- Customised database
- Microsoft Office

Commentary

Organisations tended to be in the process of moving towards greater use of IT and this appeared to be part of the general trend towards the increasingly important role of IT. For many organisations the use of IT had been a relatively recent development and one which was ongoing.

Being connected to a national network has also increased the development of IT systems for recording information. In the case of CVS, it appears that the introduction of the Core Activities Framework (CAF) (*outlined in section 2.3*) played a significant part in prompting the development of more effective and robust monitoring and evaluation systems. This appears to have been viewed as an opportunity to improve systems and move towards greater use of IT. The development of the volunteering database at a national level has also supported the VCs to use IT systems more to manage information on volunteering opportunities, although one organisation had previously developed their own system.

IT was a key area where the need for support was identified. All organisations were using some element of IT, and some found the effectiveness of their system limited by the software package they used. For example one organisation said that using Outlook meant they were restricted in the fields of data they could use and that it did not allow for cross correlation (as a result the organisation does this manually when required).

Staff trained to use the system

The large majority of respondents said that their staff were trained on using the performance and management information system. Staff were trained on a number of different aspects of the system and this generally includes data inputting (see figure 3 below for full results). The interviewees suggested that staff tend to have responsibility for using and reporting on information relating to their own work and that a manager has the task of doing this at an organisational level. One Volunteer Centre had developed a manual in addition to training on using the system.

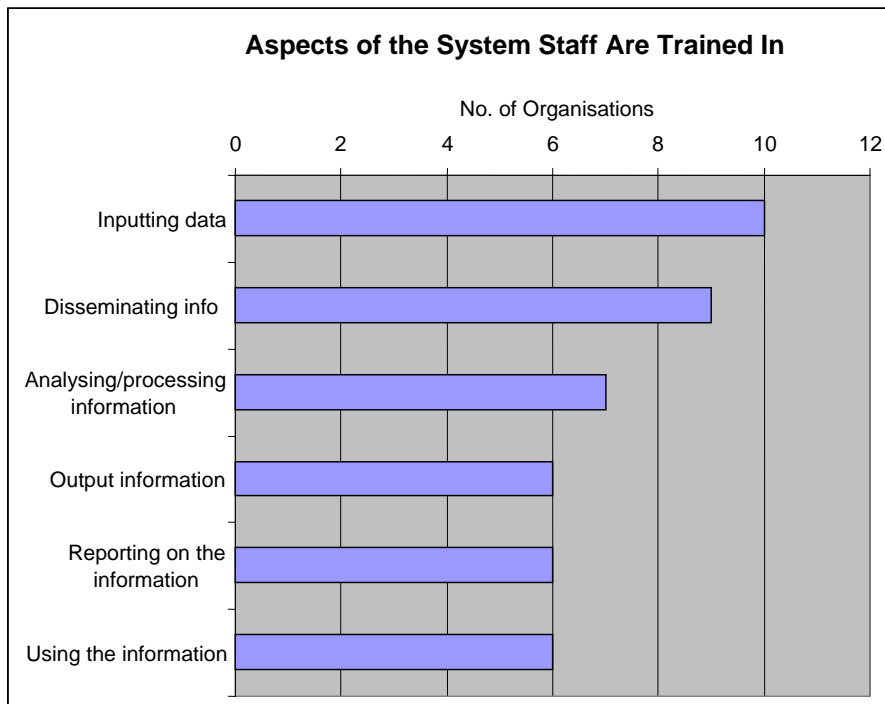


Figure 2 – aspects of the system staff trained in

2.2 Data collection

In general respondents reported that it was ‘averagely’ easy to collect information using their systems or processes (see figure 3 below). The interviewees suggested that this may apply primarily to quantitative data showing *what* the organisation is doing and less to qualitative information or intelligence about what *impact* the organisation is having. Over a quarter of respondents reported it was difficult/very difficult to collect this information. The collection and use of qualitative data was identified as an area of difficulty for many organisations and this is discussed further in section 2.4 of this report.

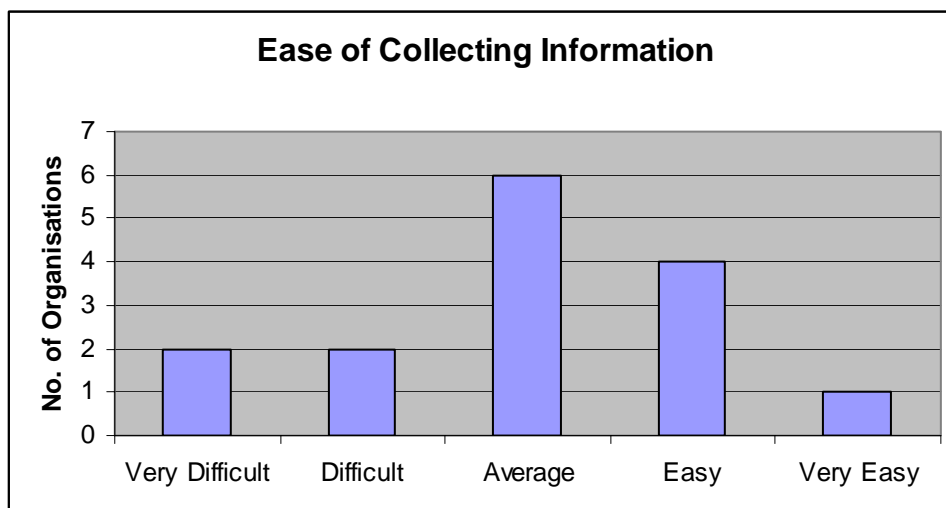


Figure 3 – ease of data collection

The CVS and VCs tended to say that collecting information using their systems was easier (mean = 3.2) than the other organisations did (mean = 2.9), although this was not a substantial difference.

Baseline Information gathered

Participants were asked if they collect baseline data on individuals, groups or both. The results showed that:

- 4 (25%) organisations collected information on individuals only;
- 4 (25%) organisations collected information on groups only;
- 7 (44%) organisations collected information on both groups and individuals;
- 1 (6%) organisation did not record any baseline information.

Of the 11 organisations who collected information on individuals, the following data was gathered:

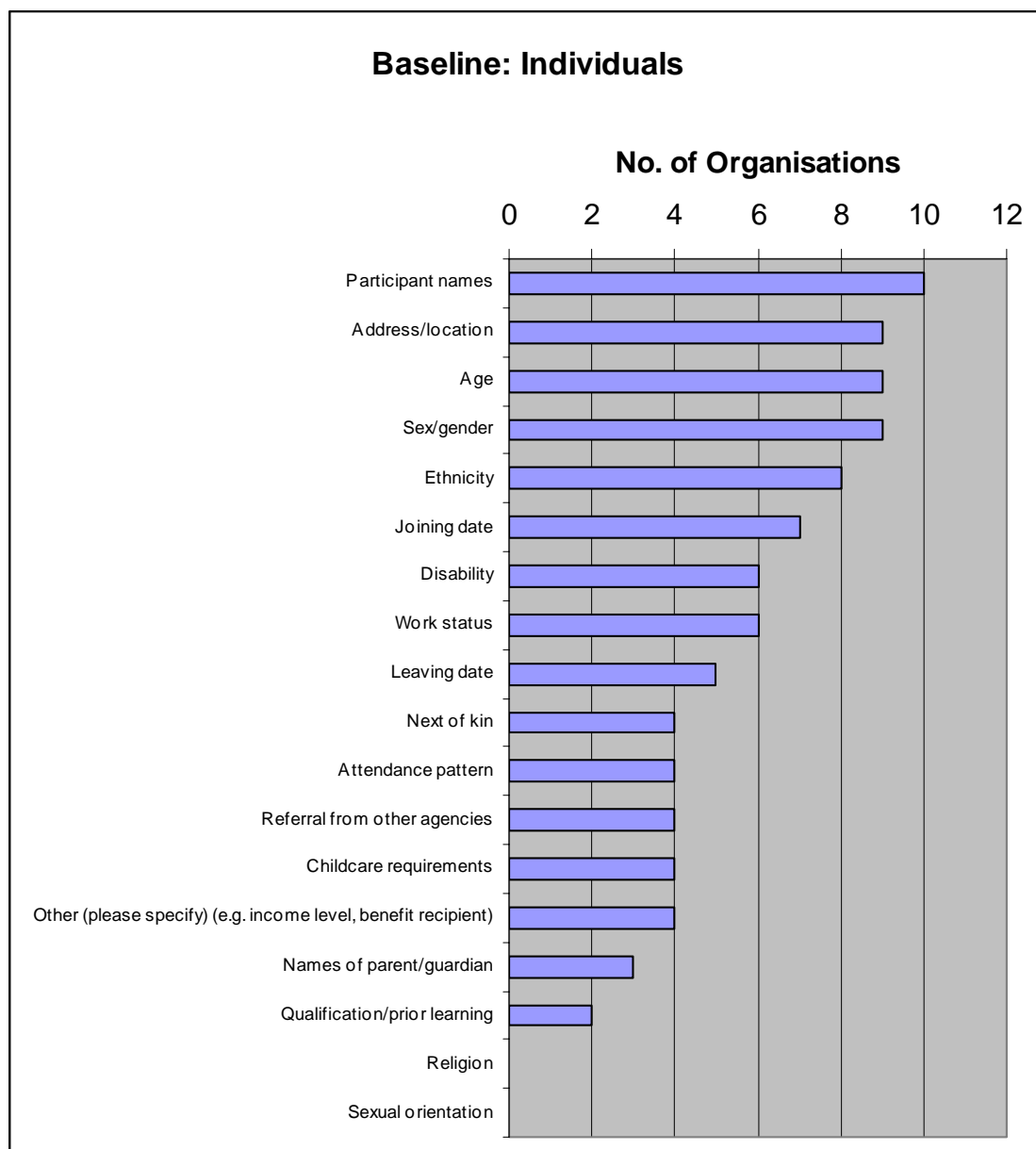


Figure 4 – baseline data gathered on individuals

Only one CVS recorded information on individuals, compared to all three VCs. Volunteer Centres also tended to record more items of information on individuals (mean = 10.3) than

the CVS or other organisations (mean = 8.4). This is likely due to the core role of volunteer centres in matching individuals to volunteering opportunities.

Additionally, the types of information recorded by organisations other than the VCs tended to be more variable; although name, address, age, gender and ethnicity were common across most organisations who record information on individuals. The only other identifiable differences between the groups were:

- All of the VCs recorded information on referrals, while only one of the small organisation reported recording this;
- None of the CVS and VCs reported recording information on childcare requirements while 4 of the other organisations did.

Four participants indicated that they also collect additional data (*not all respondents collected each of these categories*):

Other voluntary organisations:

- Benefit receipt / status
- Barriers to progression
- Barriers to involvement (e.g. childcare)
- Name and address of the group they are part of and role in group/organisation (i.e. staff, volunteer, management committee or member)

Volunteer Centre only:

- Availability (for volunteering)
- Interests
- Disclosure Scotland/CRBS results for a volunteer (if they are police checked, a note is kept on database which says when they were checked, certificate issue date, when application was sent, whether there was a trace or no trace of criminal record)

Of the 11 organisations who collected information on groups, the following data was gathered:

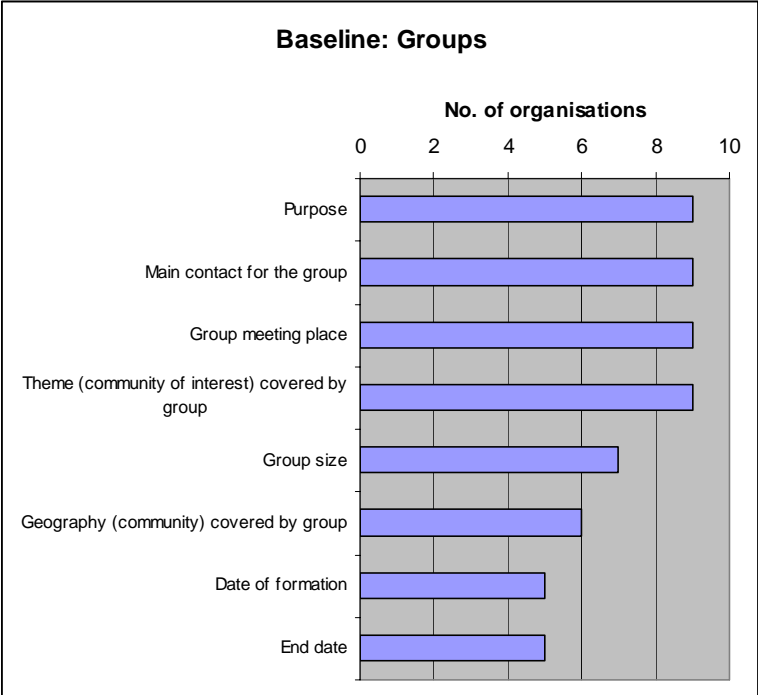


Figure 5 – baseline information on groups

All three CVS reported recording every type of data shown in figure 5, while the VCs and other organisations were more variable in what they recorded. This is likely to be a reflection of the core role of CVS to support other voluntary organisations and groups in an area.

Commentary

As figure 4 shows, the most commonly collected baseline data on individuals is:

- Participant names
- Address/location
- Age
- Sex/gender
- Ethnicity

This reflects the interview findings that many organisations use their information systems to show what they are doing and who they are reaching and in some cases to target resources. It is notable that most organisations gathered information on sex/gender, age and ethnicity but fewer than half gathered data on disability and none on sexual orientation. This may suggest the need to improve awareness of particular equalities groups.

Information relating to Inputs

Respondents were asked what information they gather systematically in relation to the inputs required to deliver their work:

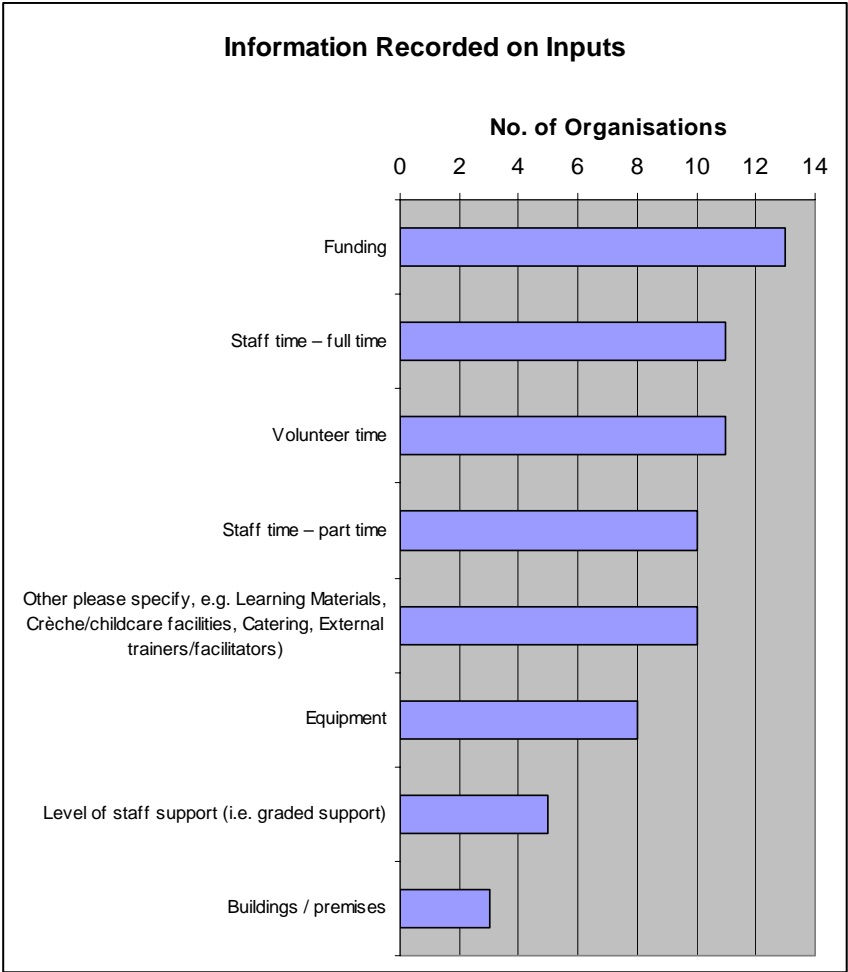


Figure 6 – information on inputs

Additional types of information gathered were:

- External facilitators
- Childcare facilities
- Trainers
- Training (internal/external)
- External resources that have either been bought in or given in kind (e.g. free print run of leaflets)
- Catering costs
- Learning materials
- Expenses, publicity, Management costs and a range of other costs associated with each project
- Use of computer suite by groups and use of photocopier, fax, telephone, database of voluntary organisations, induction loop, use of window for advertisement purposes
- Newsletters requested and enquiries about articles in newsletters
- Consultants' time
- Interpreters (e.g. BSL) / translators

Commentary

As can be seen in figure 6, the most commonly gathered information related to funding followed by staff and volunteer time. This was common across all types of organisation. This may reflect the central importance of financial and people resources in delivering voluntary organisations' work and the importance of reporting on these aspects.

Information relating to Outputs

Participants were asked to identify what aspects of their activities or products they collect information on:

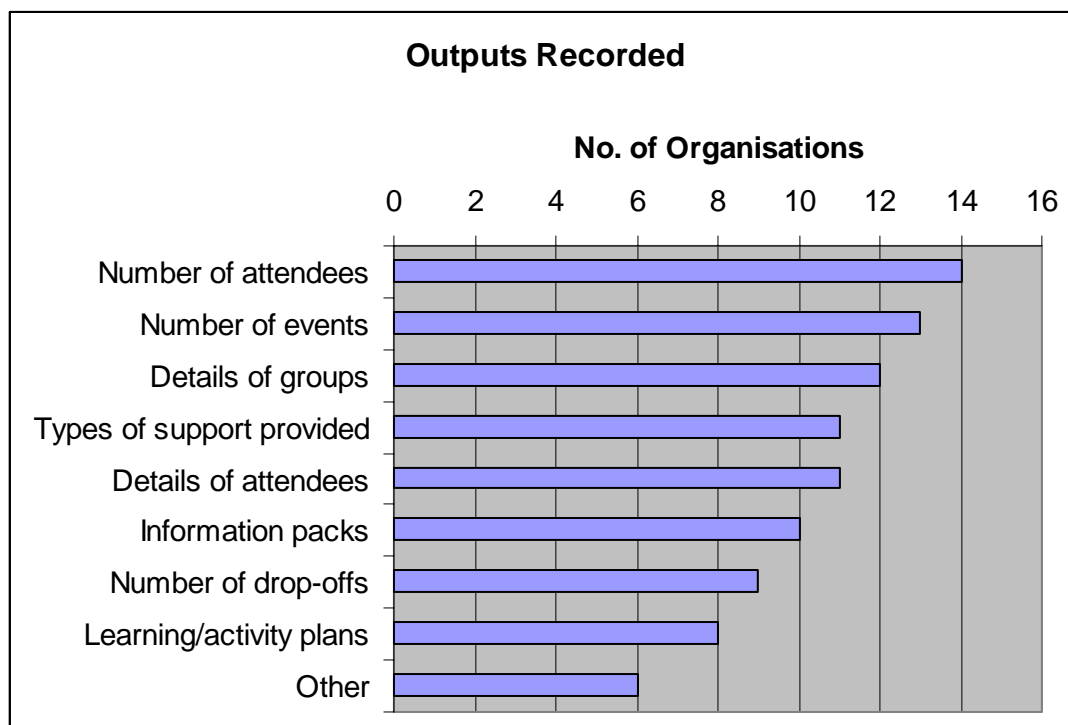


Figure 7 – information on outputs

The CVS and VCs tended to record more items of information (mean = 7.2) than the other organisations (mean = 5.2). The types of information recorded was also more variable, and this may be due to a more specific focus of activity in these organisations. For example, one small organisation only recorded the number of events they have delivered, while some others do not run events.

Additional information gathered was:

- Business plans/action plans
- Any activity the churches are involved in
- Unique visits to website
- Newsletters/newsletter inserts
- Frequency of groups meeting
- Number of: mailings; newsletters / bulletins / briefing papers; evaluation reports; enquiries
- Specific outputs for each team in the organisation

Commentary

The results shown in figure 7 reinforce the interview findings which suggested that organisations tend to collect basic statistics quantifying what they do, for example, how many groups they work with or how many events they run. In many cases these are used as part of organisations' general marketing (for example by being mentioned in an organisation's newsletter).

The information gathered by fewest of the respondents is learning/activity plans and this may reflect the nature of community capacity building work where, in some cases, those using services may do so on a flexible, informal basis (for example attending a one-off event or using a drop in facility).

Information relating to Outcomes

The large majority (n=11, 69%) of the respondents reported that they set desired outcomes to assess the impact of CLD work in their organisation. All of these set both qualitative and quantitative outcomes and eight of these (73%) said that they record measures and indicators of outcomes (again these are both qualitative and quantitative). A quarter of the respondents said that they also use wider community outcomes.

One of those interviewed reported that they also contribute to a specific outcome of a local Community Regeneration Fund project. Another described its role within the local CLD Plan and recorded indicators of outcomes as part of this.

In the case of CVS and VCs information relating to outcomes was likely to be linked to the CVS Core Activities Framework (see section 2.3 of this report) and the nationally developed VC Work Plan respectively. For other voluntary organisations information on outcomes was not necessarily recorded as systematically and tended to relate to funding reporting requirements (although this was not the only way in which the data was subsequently used).

VC Work Plan

The VCs use a work plan developed at a national level using the LEAP framework and based on the Scottish Executive's Volunteer Strategy and VC National Standards. Within this, each VC should: describe the local picture and vision for change; create desired outcomes and indicators; identify specific outputs in an action plan; and develop a system for monitoring and evaluation review. The five key outcomes set in the national work plan are:

- Young people are enthused by, and involved in, volunteering
- Barriers to volunteering are being dismantled and the opportunity gap is closing
- Volunteers are welcomed and valued, and are given guidance, training and support by those organisations that engage them
- Through understanding the volunteering landscape, the value and impact of volunteering can be measured, and then maximised by influencing policy development
- The volunteer centre develops its staff, directors and volunteers to ensure continuous improvement, growth and development by applying the Volunteer Centre Standards

The work plan also contains specific quantitative and qualitative indicators, for example indicators in the Glasgow work plan included:

- 350 young people across Glasgow in the process of achieving a Millennium Volunteers Award; 5% provided case study information
- Increase in volunteer involving organisations attending best practice training workshops (20%)
- Engaged more effectively with the development of local Community Learning and Development plans

2.3 How data is used

Capacity to manage information

Participants were asked to assess their organisations' capacity to manage the performance and management information produced by their system. As shown in figure 9, the most common response was 'good', with a quarter rating their organisation's capacity as 'excellent'. There were no common features between the organisations who rated a particular category.

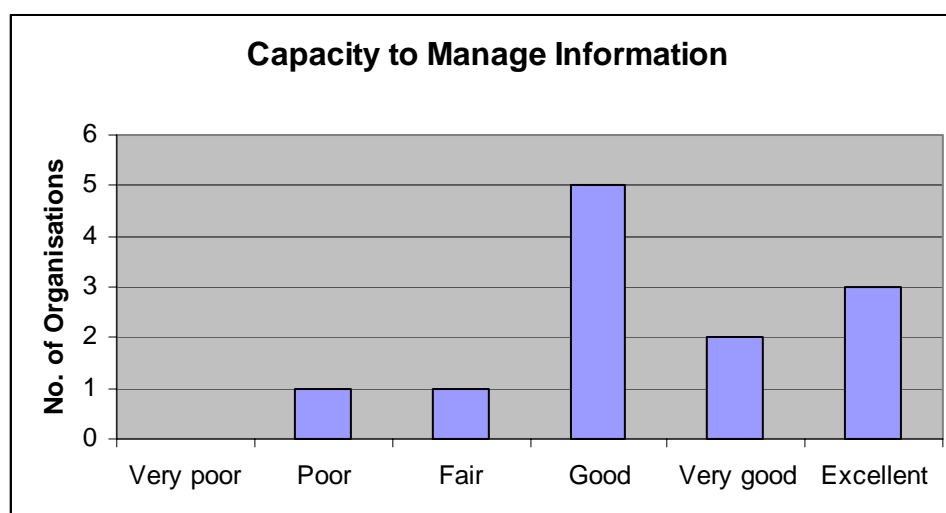


Figure 8 – capacity of organisation to manage information produced

Commentary

Figure 8 shows a fairly high level of capacity amongst voluntary organisations to manage information produced by their systems. However the results do not suggest a great deal of spare capacity and they relate to the level of information currently produced. Therefore it

should be noted that any future developments to increase the level or vary the type of information produced may prove difficult.

Use of data

All those surveyed used their information to some extent in the management of their organisation. Half said this was done regularly, when the information is available and just under a third said it is critical for management. A number of those interviewed reported that they considered the information to be critical for management but also that it was used regularly when available. Again, there were no common features between the organisations who rated a particular category.

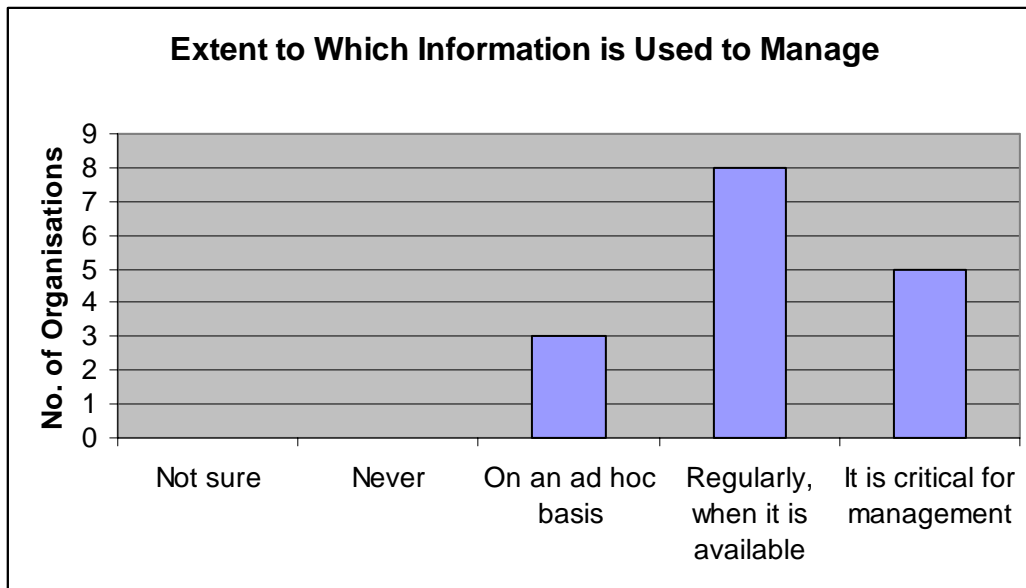


Figure 9 – extent to which information is used to manage organisation

Commentary

The data collected was used in a number of ways including (listed in order of frequency mentioned):

- Organisational development
- Marketing, demonstrating value and making a case to funders
- Measuring progress against outcomes
- Staff development and supervision
- Reporting to funders and others (e.g. steering groups)

The most frequently discussed use of information was for organisational development including: planning; identifying gaps and targeting services; redirecting resources; and identifying efficiency savings. Organisations use performance and management information to inform their annual planning processes as well as for ongoing development and adaptation of their services. Most organisations use their systems to identify who they are, and are not, reaching and used this to target particular client groups or geographical areas.

Another significant use of performance and management data was to demonstrate the value of the organisations' work. This was mentioned by a number of those interviewed and related to how they were viewed by funders, partners (for example local authorities) and the general public. Some also discussed the need to promote their sector (for example

volunteering) in the context of national policy making. One organisation also mentioned using its data to feedback to the community groups it supports.

Performance and management information was also used for measuring progress against outcomes. This tended to be done in relation to a work plan, for example the CVS CAF (see below) or volunteer centre LEAP plan, and to be linked to funding reporting requirements. For example one voluntary organisation had developed a robust system to enable it to report easily to its sixteen funders (although it also reported using the information extensively for its own internal management purposes).

Organisations also reported using data as part of their arrangements for staff supervision, monitoring and development. This tended to be done as part of one-to-one support and supervision between staff and their line managers and through regular team meetings and planning.

CVS Core Activities Framework

The CVS interviewed all collected information systematically in relation to the Core Activities Framework (CAF). This framework has been adopted across the CVS network to ensure that voluntary and community organisations, funders, partner agencies and members of the public have a clear understanding of the services they can expect from their local CVS. The CAF comprises six key themes agreed across all CVS:

- Understanding the voluntary sector
- Communicating with the voluntary sector
- Representing the interests of the voluntary sector
- Providing support services
- Promoting good practice
- Growing the sector

Within this, individual CVS are likely to identify their own specific objectives, targets and indicators. The table overleaf shows examples of specific activities and objectives set by the policy and strategy team of Glasgow CVS.

Team objective	Outputs / Outcomes
Core Activity: Communicating with the voluntary sector	
Produce regular information bulletins, briefing papers and publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of e. interchange, equalities updates • No. of Interchange, Equality Bulletins • No. of briefing papers
Develop capacity to host high quality city-wide events for the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of events • Evaluation report on each event
Core Activity: Providing support services	
Provide ongoing support to equalities networks in the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reported improvement in support provided by GCVS
Core Activity: Representing the interests of the voluntary sector	
Improve level of involvement and representation of member organisations in consultations and wider policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased numbers and range of member organisations involved in consultation events
Carry out impact review of sector networks we currently support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks review with recommendations for future action and models for providing network support

2.4 Development and support needs

Support received to develop the system

Less than one third of the respondents had received support to develop their performance information system. The type of assistance received included use of the national Volunteer Centre database (2 respondents) and connection to a Social Inclusion Partnership (Greater Easterhouse SIP). One CVS respondent also said that they were currently working with SCVO and other CVS to identify common data definitions.

The majority of voluntary organisations had developed systems using internal resources. There was a tendency for systems to have been put together by an existing member of staff with sufficient skills as opposed to by a specialist in performance and management information or IT. Interviewees recognised the limitations of this type of development but highlighted the advantages of having a system designed by someone with practical knowledge of the work of the organisation.

Some interviewees were involved in providing support to other organisations. This is usually related to broader organisational development support which often included assistance with data collection/reporting and evaluation in relation to funding requirements. They also identified informal support mechanisms, e.g. allowing others to use their pro forma and adapt for their own purposes.

It was suggested by a number of participants that their organisation had a more robust system due to their connection with a larger structure such as a SIP or Community Learning and Development Partnership. Many aspects of the systems they now use were developed in response to broader, more systematic, requests for information for such initiatives.

Barriers, issues and development needs

Participants were asked how likely they thought it was that other voluntary organisations would have systems for gathering performance or management information. Most (n=9) thought it was quite likely, with three suggesting it was not at all likely and only one saying this was very likely.

Participants identified a number of key barriers to voluntary organisations developing, maintaining and using robust systems:

- Lack of staff time – staff are often ‘stretched to the limit’ just doing the front line work of the project or organisation and therefore have little capacity to develop systems or make full use of performance and management information
- Difficulties dealing with qualitative data – organisations appeared to be far more confident in collecting statistics about what they were doing but were far less sure of how to collect and use qualitative data and softer indicators effectively. This was despite a strong desire to use qualitative information and a general feeling that this would provide an improved picture of the impacts of capacity building work
- Nature of capacity building work – this type of work can be difficult to quantify as much of it is person centred. It may also be hard to set expected outcomes at the outset as capacity building work can evolve fairly organically
- Diversity of work within organisations – many organisations have multiple funders and a high proportion of project work. This gives rise to difficulties of fragmented data collection with different mechanisms for different aspects of an organisation’s work. A number of respondents described attempting – with difficulty – to integrate their systems and using them to produce organisation wide data

- Lack of external support – it was reported that there is little affordable IT support available to voluntary organisations.

In identifying barriers respondents also made suggestions for the type of support they would find useful in developing their systems. These included a toolkit that could be used by all sizes of voluntary organisations and would help to ensure consistency across the sector. One interviewee suggested that this could include: example pro forma; impact assessment tools; recording software; and staff training materials. Another option was the introduction of a charter mark to assist organisations to work towards good practice in monitoring and evaluation. There was also a desire for affordable and accessible external support such as IT expertise and coaching from someone with experience of developing systems. In addition respondents raised the need for greater opportunities to compare and benchmark themselves against each other in order to make their performance and management information more meaningful.



3. Views of Performance and Management Information

Figure 10 on page 20 shows the results of the attitudes scorecard completed as part of the survey and interviews. A series of statements were scored from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree'. The main points from this scorecard are as follows (the numbers in brackets represent the average score received out of 5):

- Performance and management information systems are valued highly with strong agreement (3.92) that the amount of resource involved in setting up a system and the amount of staff time for using/maintaining data is appropriate to its usefulness (4). Respondents also strongly agreed that they understand why collecting information is important to their own organisation (4.21) and for the Scottish Executive and wider policy (4.1)
- The results show a strong desire to develop and improve performance information systems with this statement scoring the highest (4.31) although respondents also agreed (3.92) that their current systems are fit for purpose
- The results indicate that performance information tends to be linked to staff development and this is reinforced by the interview findings (see section 2.3)
- Also consistent with the results of the interviews is the strong disagreement (1.79) that organisations see the only use of information as being to report to funders
- Responses suggest that systems are not sufficiently adaptable to new requirements
- Information produced is well understood by staff involved in delivering CLD but respondents suggested that it is not readily understood by other voluntary organisations (2.92)
- There was fairly strong agreement (3.23) that a nationally developed system would be useful

While most responses were consistent, there were interesting differences in some areas between the attitudes of those responding from CVS, VCs and other organisations:

- CVS and VC respondents tended to disagree more (2.4) than the other organisations (3.71) with the statement '*we only gather information that we use*'. This indicates that the CVS and VCs gather more data than they analyse, and perhaps ties in to earlier findings that show that these organisations tend to collect more data overall.
- CVS and VCs respondents disagreed strongly (1.3) with the statement '*developing management information and performance information systems is not worth the amount of time and energy required*', while other organisations were more neutral (2.42). This perhaps reflects comments from some interviewees who felt that they lacked the capacity and skills to develop systems and felt that it detracted from their core activity.

- CVS and VCs were also more positive about a system being developed nationally (3.7) than the other organisations (2.9), which is perhaps due to these organisations already having links to national systems and networks.

Overall, the results clearly indicate an understanding of the need for performance and management information for an organisation's own use and for use at a national level. They also suggest a largely positive view and willingness to commit time to further improving their systems, if support was made available.

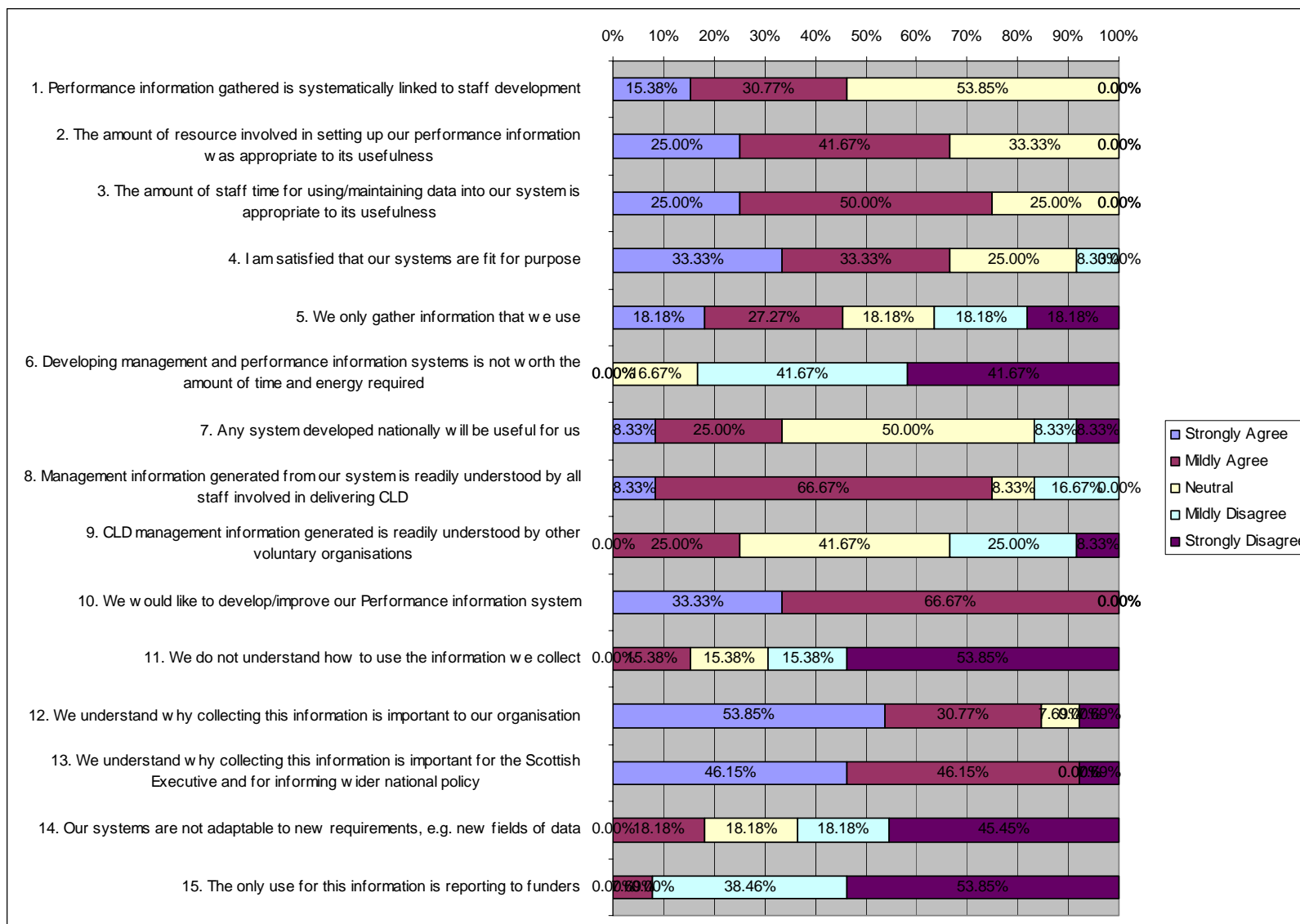


Figure 10 – views of performance and management information



5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Voluntary sector community capacity building organisations are at varying stages of development in terms of performance and management information. All the organisations involved in this research collect information to some level and this is generally related to funding requirements. However the quality and depth of the information and the way in which it is used appears to vary significantly across the sector. It was notable that most of the organisations involved in this research were continually attempting to develop their systems and trying to achieve a balance between high quality, comprehensive data and avoiding a system that was unnecessarily cumbersome for staff.

It seems likely that attachment to a national structure plays a significant role in organisations developing more robust systems. In particular the CVS CAF and the VC Work Plan have informed data collection and use in CVS and VCs, particularly in terms of measuring outcomes and progress against objectives. Other voluntary sector organisations that had significant funding connections to a SIP (Social Inclusion Partnership) or that were involved in local planning mechanisms (such as CLD Partnerships) benefited from this connection in terms of developing and using systems. This also ensured the organisation was likely to be concerned with wider community outcomes and how the work of the organisation affected these outcomes.

Role of funders

The greatest influence on the type of information gathered was the reporting requirements of funding bodies. This suggests that funding bodies have a key role to play in improving the use of performance and management information in the voluntary sector.

Emphasis on numbers

It was noted that funders place emphasis on quantitative data and it was suggested that they are 'happy as long as you give them numbers'. This contributed to organisations perceiving reporting to satisfy bureaucratic requirements rather than providing meaningful data. One participant suggested that it would be helpful if funders provided feedback in response to reporting along with suggestions about how the voluntary organisation might develop. An example of where this had occurred was feedback given by Volunteer Development Scotland in relation to a VC's LEAP plan and the interviewee hoped that further feedback would be given when the centre reports on the plan.

It is vital that funding bodies themselves demonstrate good practice in performance and management information. This requires them to request meaningful data from the organisations they fund and to use this to properly assess the impact of the funding given.

Lack of co-ordination between funders

In many cases organisations are funded by multiple agencies, for example one reported that it had around twelve funders and another had sixteen. This presents difficulties for voluntary sector organisations in developing coherent, comprehensive systems that meet the needs of

all their funding providers. It was suggested that reporting requirements need to be streamlined but there was acknowledgement that this is complicated by the diverse range of funding sources and activities being undertaken within the sector. One organisation had succeeded in developing a system whereby an initial paper form included all the information required across their different reporting requirements and the appropriate reports produced easily using their IT system. Greater cooperation between funding agencies is likely to support more effective and efficient collection and use of performance and management information by voluntary sector organisations. The Scottish Executive's Strategic Funding Review of the voluntary sector may offer opportunities to address this as part of its objective of improving co-ordination between funders.

Support with qualitative data

The collection and use of qualitative information is a key area where development of greater support is likely to significantly improve practice. There was a notable desire among respondents to use qualitative information as this was likely to better suit capacity building work. However there appeared to be little expertise in doing this systematically or robustly. Where qualitative data was used this tended to be done on a fairly ad hoc basis, often through one off case studies. We suggest that a focus on support to systematically collect qualitative data would be likely to produce a greater 'buy in' from voluntary organisations.

Marketing as key driver for improving practice

There was a strong sense of the need for voluntary organisations to 'market' themselves, to funders, but also more generally to the public, policy makers and other stakeholders. This seemed to be a key driver for organisations to attempt to assess and demonstrate their impact. This interest in the marketing use of performance information can be a key driver to build on in efforts to improve practice in this area.

Future developments

The findings of this research will be considered in light of the PIP as a whole and voluntary sector organisations should be fully involved, alongside statutory agencies, in any activities resulting from the project. In earlier research into local authority CLD, Rocket Science recommended that Learning Connections should consider the development of bespoke consultancy as well as facilitating the sharing of practice between authorities. Similar types of support, particularly affordable IT consultancy, are likely to meet the needs of voluntary sector organisations delivering CLD. In addition there may be value in considering the development of an 'off the shelf' tool (as described in section 2.4 of this report) to assist organisations, especially those which are smaller and/or are not linked to any national network or wider body. In taking forward any such development it will be essential to co-ordinate with existing mechanisms offering support to the voluntary sector such as the CVS and SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations).

The findings of this research must also be viewed in light of wider policy as many of the issues raised overlap significantly with other current activities, for example the Scottish Executive's current review of support services available to the voluntary sector. There may be opportunities for some aspects of these findings to be addressed as part of other initiatives and similarly any action taken by Learning Connections might have the potential to contribute more broadly. In particular future developments should take account of the equalities agenda and the move towards best value and full cost recovery within the voluntary sector as performance and management information is crucial to both these aspects.

The Big Lottery Funders' Forum is considering, amongst other aspects, a common assessment programme and output measurements. Communities Scotland has representation on this committee. Learning Connections should ensure that the findings from this survey (and broader PIP) inform, and are informed by, decisions made at this Forum.

The 'snapshot' provided by this report suggests that there is a willingness on the part of voluntary sector organisations to develop and improve their performance and management information systems. Organisations seem to be engaged in collecting data about *what* they do and using this to plan and target their resources. The next step should build upon this and assist voluntary organisations to move towards more effectively demonstrating the impact they have.



Appendices

Appendix A – Voluntary Sector Aide Memoire

Introduction

Learning Connections has developed the performance information project (PIP). This has been based on recommendations from an earlier Scottish Executive investigation into the feasibility of *'developing and implementing a suitable management information system capable of measuring the contribution of the community learning and development (CLD) sector against key public policy outcomes'*. Learning Connections want improved intelligence about the current status of management or performance information use across CLD. This intelligence will be used to:

- Document effective practice in the development of management or performance information systems
- Identify common elements in current practice and provide indications of a possible common core of data definitions
- Indicate future support and development needs in relation to building enhanced use of such systems in community learning and development.

They have contracted Rocket Science UK Ltd to undertake a survey of voluntary organisations, whose main function is community capacity building, to get a 'snapshot' of the current state of development in this area. Learning Connections want to support the development of good practice in this area and, therefore, need to understand the starting point.

We want to identify voluntary organisations who consider community capacity building to be their primary function (not community groups themselves) – please see definition below.

'Definition: community development, community work, or community capacity building support

The purpose of this activity will be to work with communities to bring about social change and justice. This can involve work with communities to:

- *Identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities;*
- *Plan, organise and take action; and,*
- *Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action.*

Included in this will be activities such as:

- *Working on assessments of needs and aspirations with communities;*
- *Supporting them to develop plans to meet those needs;*

- *Promotion of broad-based participation in community affairs;*
- *Developing the skills and confidence of active community members and community leaders;*
- *Assisting communities to exercise power and influence;*
- *Supporting community engagement and representation;*
- *Supporting the development of community networks and organisations;*
- *Supporting community organisations to improve the quality of community life and contribute to social justice.*

Such support can include face-to-face meetings and support by email or telephone, during the reporting period. The support may be provided to one or more individual members of the groups, as well as to the whole group or organisation.'

SECTION A

General intro

We want to understand the **systems** used, not necessarily reporting for grant funders. If there is not a system in place it would be useful to understand what info is gathered that **could** become systematic

In the main, we want to understand what is gathered in relation to 'input', 'output' and 'outcome'. Ask if they are familiar with these terms. If not, use definition sheet attached at end of this note,

1. Quick overview - Ask people to tell you about how they gather performance/management information.
 - Would you regard this as 'systematic'? Yes/No

SECTION B – BASELINE: the general information collected by your organisation

- B1. What baseline information does your organisation record?
 - Baseline info on individuals only
 - Baseline info on groups only
 - Baseline info on group and individuals
 - We don't record any baseline information

They may not gather any information on individuals, in which case go to question B2.

If you do collect info on individuals, please tick all aspects you gather info on...

- Participant names
- Names of parent/guardian
- Next of kin
- Address/location
- Age
- Sex/gender
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Work status
- Joining date
- Leaving date
- Attendance pattern
- Qualification/prior learning

- Referral from other agencies
- Childcare requirements
- Other (please specify) (e.g. income level, benefit recipient)

If you do collect information on group, please tick all that apply...

- Group size
- Purpose
- Main contact for group
- Group meeting place
- Geography (community) covered by group
- Theme (community of interest) covered by group
- Date of formation
- End date

B2 How do you collect and store information on groups of participants?

SECTION C – INPUTS: the resources you use to deliver a programme, project or policy

C1. Does your organisation gather information regarding inputs? (yes/no for each one)

- Funding
- Staff time – full time
- Staff time – part time
- Level of staff support (i.e. do they grade the different level of support required from basic info provision to more ongoing regular support? IF so, please ask for details of the kind of levels)
- Volunteer time
- Equipment
- Buildings/premises
- Other (please specify, e.g. Learning Materials, Crèche/childcare facilities, Catering, External trainers/facilitators)

SECTION D: OUTPUTS: the specific products and activities you deliver

D1 Does your organisation gather information regarding outputs?

- Number of events
- Learning/activity plans
- Number of attendees
- Details of attendees
- Details of groups
- Number of drop-offs
- Information packs
- Other resources, e.g. websites, books, etc
- Other

SECTION E – OUTCOMES: the impact and changes that result from what you do

E1 Do you set desired outcomes to assess the impact of CLD work in your area? (yes/no)

- Are they quantitative or qualitative or both?
- Is there is baseline data to measure against? (yes/no)
- When is this done?

- Start
- Middle
- End
- All of the above

E2 Does your organisation record measures and indicators of outcomes? (yes/no)
If yes, ask for some examples.

E3 Do you use wider community outcomes? (if yes, which ones?)

E5 When/how do you measure outcomes?

SECTION F – THE SYSTEM

This section will ask questions about the system for gathering information

F1 How is this information gathered? (E.g. where kept, is it paper-based/IT, who gathers information, how often)
If it is IT-based, what type of IT system?

F2. How easy is it to collect this information using your systems/processes?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Average
- Difficult
- Very difficult

F3. How do you use this information? (E.g. what does it tell you, how does it influence decisions, etc)

F4 To what extent is this information used to manage your organisation?

- Never
- On an ad hoc basis
- Regularly when it is available
- It is critical for management
- Not sure

History

G1 What was the driver for developing this system?

G2 How long have you used this system? (answers may include, bespoke system in place for x years, developed over x years, incremental stages as resources available, etc)

G3 How was it created?

G4 What support did you have to develop it (e.g. support from the LA, another vol org, internal expertise)

G5 Are your staff trained in how to use this system? (yes/No)

If yes, ask about which aspect are they trained in (tick all that apply)?

- Inputting data
- Analysing/processing information
- Output information
- Disseminating info
- Reporting on the information
- Using the information
- Other (please specify)

G6 What are the development needs in relation to performance and management information?

Additional question for local organisations (i.e. not CVS/VCS)

- Who provides you with support in this area? (i.e. CVS, VC, local authority, no one)

If they receive no support...

- Who should you receive support from? What format should this support be provided?

G7 Do you have an individual(s) with dedicated time to develop/manage this system? (yes/no)

G8 What type of reports can your system produce, e.g. how many young women involved in community fora?

G9 Strengths/weakness of this system?

G10 What does your system not tell you that would be useful to know?

G11 How would you rate your organisation's capacity to manage all of the information discussed here?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

H Other organisations you support (only for CVS/VCS)

H1 How likely is it that other voluntary organisations like you have systems for gathering this information?

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Not at all likely

H2 Do you provide support to voluntary organisations with CCB remit to develop performance/management information?

If so, in what way?

H3 What supports CCB voluntary organisations to develop these systems?
What barriers exist?


Any other comments?

Appendix B – Agree/disagree questions

Agree/Disagree Questionnaire

Please quickly complete the following:

Agree/Disagree statements (respondents will have the opportunity to 'Strongly agree/disagree and mildly agree/disagree')

		Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Performance information gathered is systematically linked to staff development						
2	The amount of resource involved in setting up our performance information was appropriate to its usefulness						
3	The amount of staff time for using/maintaining data into our system is appropriate to its usefulness						
4	I am satisfied that our systems are fit for purpose						
5	We only gather information that we use						
6	Developing management and performance information systems is not worth the amount of time and energy required						
7	Any system developed nationally will be useful for us						
8	Management information generated from our system is readily understood by all staff involved in delivering CLD						
9	CLD management information generated is readily understood by other voluntary organisations						
10	We would like to develop/improve our Performance information system						
11	We do not understand how to use the information we collect						
12	We understand why collecting this information is important to our organisation						
13	We understand why collecting this information is important for the Scottish Executive and for informing wider national policy						
14	Our systems are not adaptable to new requirements, e.g. new fields of data						
15	The only use for this information is reporting to funders						

Appendix C – PIP Definitions

(provided by Learning Connections, Communities Scotland)

Performance Information Project Definitions – 29/9/05

Performance Information

The set of performance indicators of a particular organisation, used to describe how well it is performing against its objectives. Performance information is used by the organisation to inform decision making, support policy development and monitor progress.

Performance Indicators (PI)

Measures of how well a service is performing against its objectives.¹

Performance Information System

A set of performance indicators for an organisation and the processes for producing that information.¹

Inputs

The resources used to formulate or execute a programme, policy or project. Includes: staff, time, budgets equipment, buildings, policy.¹

Outputs

The specific products of the process activities involved in a programme or project.¹

Outcome

The impacts, or consequences for the community, of the activities of the organisation. Outcomes are normally what an organisation is trying to achieve². Outcomes may follow immediately from outputs e.g. increase in learner confidence. These are intermediate outcomes. They may however take longer to develop e.g. increase the chances of sustained employment for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups – these are end outcomes. The outcome should follow as a consequence from the output.

Process

The manner in which the inputs are applied to achieve the intended outputs – what we do with the resources.¹

Objective

The desired result of some action or process undertaken by the organisation. The objective may be linked to inputs, outputs and/or outcomes. Different groups involved in the same action or process may have different objectives depending on their individual context.

Example

Objective ‘to provide community capacity building (CCB) services’

An associated **PI** linked with the **input** ‘staff’ may be ‘% of vacant posts within the community work team throughout the year’. The associated **performance information system** may include a **process** where the CLD manager reports to the HR department the number of

¹ Taken from Learning Evaluation and Planning (LEAP) Handbook, page 6

² Taken from Choosing the Right Fabric; A Framework for Performance Management, page 8

vacant posts within the team on the first day of each quarter. The **objective** of the CLD manager of this process is secure additional staff to fill the vacancies.

A further **PI** linked with the **output** 'deliver CCB support' may be 'total number of community organisations engaged with in the year'. The **process** within the **performance information system** to collect this information may be that all community workers record on a weekly basis the community organisations they have engaged with. The CLD manager annually collates the total number of organisations from the records of the individual community workers. The **objective** of this **process** may be to display to the chief executive the broad range of organisations being supported.

A final **PI** linked with the **outcome** 'communities influence decision making' may be '% of community defined priorities achieved in the year'. The **process** to collect this within the **performance information system** may be that the community group records their priorities to be achieved within the year and notes them as complete when they have been achieved. At the end of the year they report their performance against their targets to their community. The community worker reads the report and reports back to the CLD manager. The **objective** of this **process** for the community group may be to display to the wider community the benefits they are delivering to them. The **objective** of the community worker may be to monitor their own performance in supporting their community groups.