



**Regional Forum
Research Digest No. 1**

So What?

Community Engagement Research in Yorkshire and Humber

Themes: Clarity of Purpose of Community Engagement
A Stronger Voice for the Voluntary & Community Sector

January 2006

So What?

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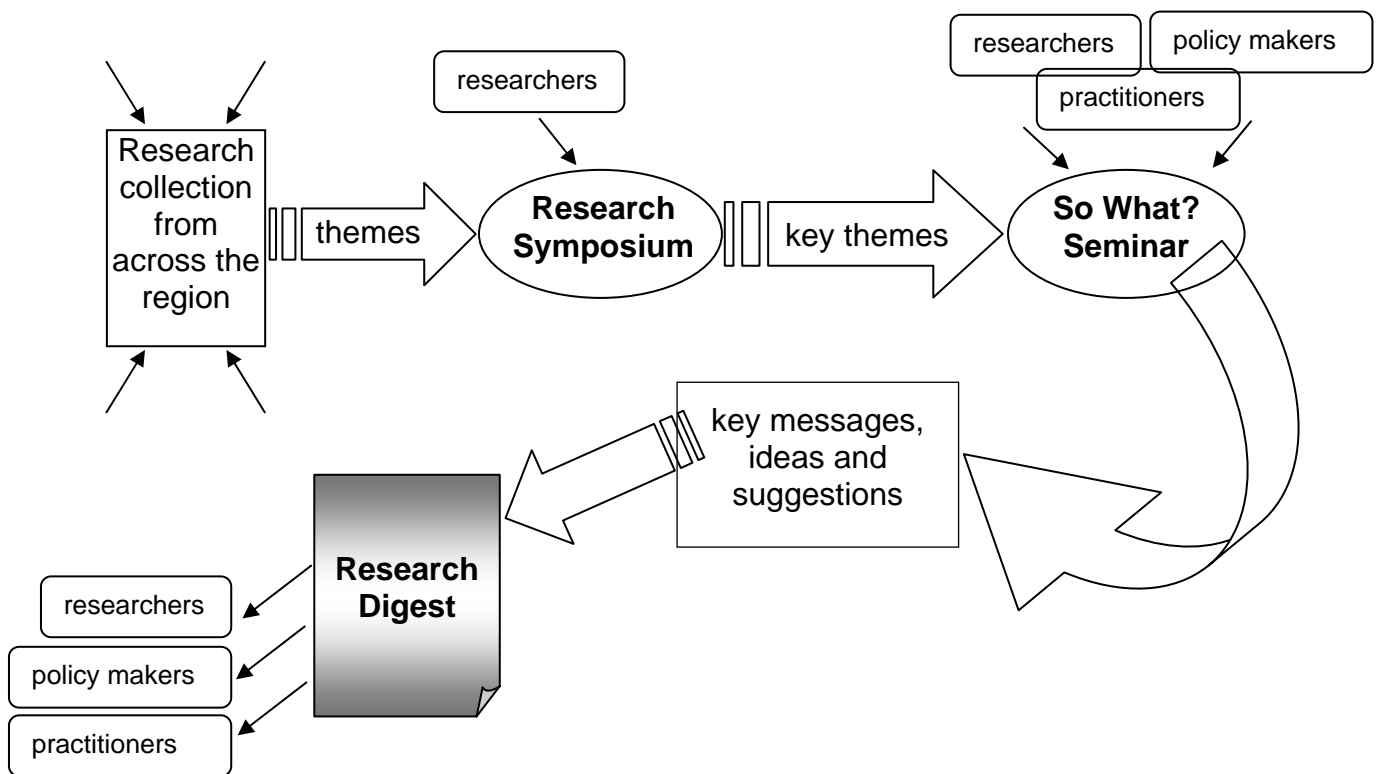
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Foreword

Research is undertaken – but what difference does it make? Often research is directed at a specific situation and makes a huge difference in that one place, but are there lessons to be learnt across the whole region? What are the common themes across different pieces of research? And what does research say we need to change in our policies and our practice?

Funded by the Active Citizenship Centre of the Home Office, the “So What?” pilot process (see diagram below) seeks to find answers to these questions. This first round of symposium and seminar identified sixteen community engagement themes that all could be explored further. In this round we focused in more detail on two key themes:

- Clarity of Purpose of Community Engagement
- A Stronger Voice for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)



The “So What?” process identified clear issues and generated ideas to tackle issues and move forward. It is important that the “So What?” process doesn’t end here. At the Regional Forum we will be looking at how we can turn the ideas into reality and looking for how we can work with policy makers, practitioners and researchers to make changes. I would challenge you to consider the same – what ideas can you use to change your policies or practice and where can you exert influence on others?

We are undertaking a second round of the “So What?” process early in 2006 and look forward to discovering new themes and ideas.

The So What? process

The initial research collation phase identified seventeen pieces of research (detailed in the appendix). Research was selected that encompassed a community engagement element and had reference to the Yorkshire and Humber region. This allowed us to identify academic, regional and locally based research. A review of the research identified sixteen cross-cutting themes. These were:

- Barriers to engagement
- How to improve engagement/overcome barriers
- Benefits of engagement
- Role of the voluntary and community sector
- Representation and accountability
- Impact
- Networking
- Communication
- Capacity
- Influence versus powerlessness
- Inclusion
- Relationships
- Partnership
- Policy issues
- Skills
- Theories and principles of engagement

A symposium was held with a group of researchers from the Universities of Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield Hallam to review the research collectively and for the researchers to share their experience of working within the community engagement field, so adding to the knowledge on each theme. The symposium identified two themes to take forward to the So What? seminar for analysis and discussion by the wider group. Selection was based on identifying key issues where there was potential for significant improvement in the engagement process. The themes chosen were:

- Clarity of Purpose of Community Engagement
- A Stronger Voice for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

The So What? seminar then brought together the researchers with a group of policy makers and community engagement practitioners to consider these themes and to identify what changes and improvements could make community engagement more effective. The focus of the event was to get beyond simply identifying issues and to use the collective expertise and experience to creatively identify action and activities that will be put into practice to make a positive difference.

Clarity of Purpose of Community Engagement

There was universal agreement on the need for greater clarity of purpose from policy makers and organisations when engaging with a particular community.

Organisations may feel that they are clear about the purpose of engagement but, in many cases, this is not communicated to the communities and organisations invited to participate. Discussions highlighted four common reasons for involving the community:

1. It is morally right to involve people in a process that affects them
2. To secure agreement on, or to legitimate a particular agenda
3. To deliver improved, more sensitive services to a community
4. To bring about change

It was identified that a disinclination to “get involved” often extends from a sense of powerlessness and a general lack of trust that the people holding power are seriously committed to change. Greater clarity is particularly necessary in relation to the amount of power and influence a community group would have on the final outcome or decision in a process. Much discussion focused around the importance of partnership but partnership can only be effective when there is an open acknowledgement of the balance of power.

“an effective system of participation clearly rests on supporting individuals’ sense of their own power to create change within the system.” – Sharing Voices Bradford p. 24.

So What is the role of the voluntary and community sector in the engagement process?

- To provide a wide range of opportunity for involvement and pathways for increasing involvement, improving accessibility and reducing formality.
- To ensure plans are relevant to the needs of a community and feasible in the timeframe allocated.
- To support the tailoring of a community engagement process to meet the needs of the community.
- To call for greater transparency about the scope and decision making process.
- To encourage diverging views and provide a mechanism for addressing conflicting agendas, both for conflicts within communities and between different parties.

So What can we do to improve the clarity of purpose of community engagement?

Key points	Existing activities	Ideas for moving forward
<p>There needs to be a mechanism to measure the influence community engagement has on policy and record changes as a result of community engagement.</p>	<p>We are currently unaware of work being undertaken to measure how much community engagement directly influences policy or to track changes resulting from engagement.</p> <p>Professor Jenny Pearce (University of Bradford) is developing a measuring tool to assess the effectiveness of Bradford University's community engagement work.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Tracking tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools for Local Authorities and others to track ideas and changes that result from engagement. • Track progress on community engagement in Local Area Agreements. For example select one area to track process, changes and improvements. 2) Research to track changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake research around one policy currently undergoing review to track changes. For example, to track changes from first draft to final version of the new Regional Economic Strategy to see where suggestions have come from and what changes have been made as a result. 3) Community engagement measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include "changes as a result of engagement" as an indicator of success in Performance Management Frameworks and other monitoring systems.
<p>Improve best practice sharing.</p>	<p>Practice Makes Perfect: published by the Regional Forum uses 13 case studies.</p> <p>Active Citizenship Centre website has case studies.</p> <p>BURA (British Urban Regeneration Association) gives annual regeneration awards.</p> <p>www.renewal.net is the online guide to what works in neighbourhood renewal.</p> <p>Regional Forum Building Bridges learning programme is sharing learning and good practice in built environment projects.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Best practice criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop key criteria for deciding what is best practice. • Encourage best practice examples to include "what hasn't worked" and "what we would do differently." 5) Best practice award scheme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up an independent "best practice in community engagement" award scheme. 6) Directory of best practice sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A directory that points to the many existing sources of best practice. This directory would need to say what is available, what format, how it is categorised, how it is selected, etc.

Key points	Existing activities	Ideas for moving forward
Develop a compact style agreement between all partners to move forward when the needs of the community are clear.	<p>General information about compacts: www.thecompact.org.uk</p> <p>The 9 Community Empowerment Networks and Local Strategic Partnerships have each developed Protocols of how to work and communicate together.</p>	<p>7) Engagement Compact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an Engagement Compact template that can be adapted and used by partnerships. The template would need to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people involved and who they are “representing.” • an outline of what change is possible as a result of the engagement. • a description of the communication methods to be used. • a description of how feedback will be given about changes resulting from engagement. • a description of the likely engagement processes including how minority groups will be included. • a timetable.
Develop a set of “Golden Rules” for community engagement.	Active Partners benchmarks provide 4 themes of community engagement that can be useful when planning engagement.	<p>8) Golden Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop golden rules of engagement such as “Don’t start until you know what can change as a result of engagement.” • “Golden Rules” could be incorporated into a leaflet for those planning community engagement. • Develop a series of leaflets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top tips for good engagement. • To engage or not to engage? • Engagement – survive the minefield.

A Stronger Voice for the Voluntary and Community Sector

The focus within this discussion concentrated on the following two points:

- How can the VCS participate effectively in the policy making process?
- How can the VCS address its differences to make it a stronger player?

Policy Empowerment for the VCS

How does the VCS translate its learning into policy friendly concepts and strategies? The VCS needs time to absorb the implications of government policies. VCS research and experience may supply evidence that conflicts with government policies and the VCS then needs to develop its own constructive alternatives and gain consensus from the sector on these alternatives.

The VCS also needs to get better at describing its work in terms of current emerging policy themes. Often the sector is undertaking work of prime importance to achieving key national targets, but it is poor at communicating its success in policy terms.

Discussing Differences within the VCS

The VCS needs to come together to discuss different views and to build consensus around key positions to allow a stronger focused representation externally. This process will include:

- The importance of space, time and skills to reflect and learn.
- Strengthening existing networks.
- Seeking opportunities to build consensus – but not at the expense of silencing minorities.
- Reducing internal conflict and fragmentation.

So What can be done to give a stronger voice?

Key points	Existing Activities	Ideas for moving forward
Improve mechanisms for VCS involvement in policy making.	<p>Policy consultations frequently take place in the sector.</p> <p>The VCS has representatives on many boards and commissions from regional to local level.</p> <p>Community Empowerment Networks have been established to provide, select and support VCS representatives on Local Strategic Partnerships.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) VCS link to higher education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve links to capitalise on research, evaluation and writing capabilities. 2) Programme of policy engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use existing networks: Regional Forum, National Council for Voluntary Organisations to develop a structured programme of policy engagement. 3) Set up regular policy foresight events. 4) Set up a jury service type of arrangement where organisations are paid to attend meetings and provide points of view. 5) Networks of organisations shadowing local policy makers. 6) Policy and targets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produce tools, resources and examples to help the VCS more clearly link its work to policies and targets.

Key points	Existing Activities	Ideas for moving forward
<p>Business case for using VCS knowledge and expertise in community engagement.</p>	<p>Work is currently underway to develop evidence of VCS contribution to learning and skill first steps, progression etc.</p> <p>The Regional Forum is part of the National Outcomes Dissemination Programme to help the VCS capture and describe what they do in a way that will attract funding.</p>	<p>7) Community Engagement Procurement guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guide for statutory authorities – listing legal community engagement requirements and suggestions of how these could be met by the VCS. Link to Performance Management Frameworks, Floor Targets, Public Service Agreement targets, etc. • A guide for the VCS, about where the statutory authority has a community engagement requirement and suggestions about how to sell the services of the VCS to meet these requirements. <p>8) Experienced at Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a brochure demonstrating the experience of the VCS in community engagement that highlights key lessons. <p>9) Benefits of Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a brochure demonstrating how good community engagement can benefit each sector, e.g. Local Authority, Police, Planners, Built environment professionals, etc.
<p>Make more use of existing networks to communicate a structured response to policy.</p>	<p>Community Empowerment Networks provide a conduit between Local Strategic Partnerships and the VCS.</p> <p>Community Empowerment Networks have established mechanisms for representatives on Local Strategic Partnerships – including Accountability structures, election/selection procedures and feedback mechanisms.</p> <p>South Yorkshire Open Forum has established an Advocates Programme.</p>	<p>10) Regional Representatives Guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing who is on what, where they are from, how to contact them, how they feedback information. • Develop the Regional Forum website to include a section on advocates and representatives.
<p>Focused training for voluntary and community representatives involved in decision making processes and committees.</p>	<p>Regional Forum ran a conference for VCS representatives on Neighbourhood Management, Local Strategic Partnerships and New Deal for Communities programmes. Involving skills audit and skills development sessions.</p>	<p>11) The Right Representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the right people in the right place – e.g. housing support organisations putting forward a representative to housing related agencies. • Link into the Regional Representatives Guide – see 10) above. <p>12) Training in “strategic reading.”</p>

Acknowledgements

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Appendix – The Research

General Background to Community Engagement

Joachim, Pratten & Wilding.

Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship: A Guide to the Debate, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2005.

The voluntary and community sector is one of the key elements of the Government's civil renewal agenda in building active communities. But what does this mean for those involved and how do organisations see their role in developing active citizenship? The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is undertaking a programme of work to examine the sector's view of active citizenship.

Download from www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/asp/uploads/uploadedfiles/1/637/civilrenewalactivecitizenship.pdf

Gumbs, Kiesha.

Taking the Bait or Getting Some Teeth? The Voluntary Statutory Sector Relationship in Britain: the Case of Compact Plus Uptake in Yorkshire and the Humber, SLSP 5115 Social Policy Dissertation, University of Leeds, September 2005.

This paper examines the effect of policy shifts especially partnership policies on voluntary sector independence, with many people arguing that the sector's independence has been continually compromised by policy shifts. The policy shift entitled 'Compact Plus' is studied in consultation with regional practitioners in voluntary and statutory agencies in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

A copy of the dissertation can be obtained through the Library of the University of Leeds or can be downloaded from www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/knowledgebase/500/560/179.pdf

Lending a Hand – The Value of 'light touch' support in empowering communities, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 2005.

In January 2003, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation launched its Neighbourhood Programme, which sought to support community empowerment not through a major funding programme, but through 'light touch' support and networking. This summary has been written by the team evaluating the Programme and highlights the lessons so far.

Download from www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859354149.pdf

Regionwide Research

Alexander, Peg.

Positively Perceived, Regional Forum, 2005.

The Regional Forum wanted to find out the views of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) about the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Six LSPs from the region were interviewed and responses indicated that the sector is particularly valued for its perspective, which most closely represents what people want and need. Relationships between LSPs and VCS representatives are good and community strategies have improved by gathering input directly from local people.

Download from www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/research.php

Crouch, Alison.

You Know It Makes CENse, Regional Forum, 2005.

In partnership with Government Office, the Regional Forum brought together Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) to celebrate achievements and to discuss policy issues around Neighbourhood Level work and Local Area Agreements.

Download from

www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/knowledgebase/200/176.pdf

Crouch, Alison.

A Picture of Performance, Regional Forum, 2005.

This report provides an insight into the development of Community Empowerment Network (CEN) activities in the Yorkshire and Humber region. There are clearly positive advancements being made by CENs and this report provides a regional overview of CEN performance in terms of representation, inclusivity, influence and how CENs are working together with LSPs.

Download from www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/research.php

Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber.

Briefing – the Single Community Programme: Developing the Neighbourhood Dimension, Oct 2005.

This briefing sheet is based on the experience of two Community Empowerment Networks in the Yorkshire and Humber region. They are both developing a strategy for neighbourhood activity and networks need to assess the difference they are making and how people are influencing and benefiting from this difference. The document outlines their approaches and what has been achieved as well as some of the difficulties they are facing.

Copies of this publication are available by contacting the Community Policy and Programmes Team at Government Office on 0113 280 0600 or it can be downloaded from www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/knowledgebase/500/530/177.pdf

Sub-Regional Research

Gilbertson, Jan et al.

The Dynamic Social Capital, Health and Economy – The Impact of Regeneration in South Yorkshire Coalfield Communities, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, Summer 2005.

The South Yorkshire Coalfield areas of Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham continue to present challenges for health and sustainable economic regeneration. This social capital survey represents one of the largest such surveys ever undertaken in England. The survey assesses the impact of the Health Action Zone and the Single Regeneration Budget Programme on social capital, health and people's economic prospects.

Copies of this publication are available from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research on 0114 225 3073. The cost is £15 inc p&p.

Hunter, S.C, Lee, A.J, Taylor, A.J.

Social Capital, Health and Neighbourhood Renewal in the City of Hull – A Baseline Assessment, National Health Service, Summer 2005.

This research focuses on the quality of life of a group of adults, representative of the population of Hull. It draws together people's views on living in Hull, how involved they are with their communities and the range of support networks available to people.

Copies of this publication are available from the Public Health Development Team at West Hull Primary Care Trust on 01482 672070.

Rimington, Barbara.

Understanding Local Neighbourhoods Using Community Researchers, Sheffield East End Quality of Life, 2005.

Research by the East End Quality of Life undertaking an audit of environmental audit problems and developing quality of life indicators in the east end of Sheffield. The report illustrates community consultation schemes being carried out by community researchers recruited locally.

Download from

www.sheffieldeastend.org.uk/Downloadable%20docs/CommunityResearchersReport.pdf

District Level Research

Blakey, Heather.

Participation.....Why Bother? The views of Black and Minority Ethnic mental health users on participation in the NHS in Bradford, ICPS Working Paper 2, International Centre for Participation Studies, University of Bradford, 2005.

This research involved participants from South Asian and African-Caribbean communities, who were asked the reasons why they might want to get involved in participation processes in the health service. The main motivations were identified as using experience to make change for the better and working towards wider community benefit. Participants were generally critical of current initiatives and needed to be convinced of policymakers' commitment to change.

Download from

www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/knowledgebase/500/560/180.pdf

Trescom Research and Consultancy Ltd.

Calderdale Community Cohesion Research Project, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, March 2003.

Exploring the views of young adults living in Calderdale on issues relating to community cohesion, these research findings are particularly pertinent for both statutory and voluntary organisations working in Calderdale. The findings are categorised into the following three sections: Community, Community Interaction and Community Engagement.

Copies of this research are available from Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council on 01422 392467.

Hawtin, Murray.

Developing Community Leadership Scheme – Review and Evaluation, Final Report, Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University, Sept 2002.

This report evaluates a Community Leadership Scheme undertaken in Doncaster by the Local Authority between 1999 and 2001. The aim of the project was to train a number of local residents as community workers in preparation for the increased demand for such skills as a range of community based initiatives was introduced into the area.

Download from

www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/knowledgebase/500/560/178.pdf

Leeds Initiative.

Women and Poverty in Leeds, Leeds Initiative.

An overview of the research undertaken into the issue of women and poverty in Leeds. The report argues that a gender audit of proposed policies is needed to consider their effect on women and on women's poverty.

Download the full report from www.leedsinitiative.org

Percy-Smith, Janie.

Bradford Trident Neighbourhood Management Interim Evaluation, Nov 2004.

This report reviews the progress of the Neighbourhood Management project in Bradford against the objectives and targets agreed by the Neighbourhood Manager and the Neighbourhood Action Team.

Download from

www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/knowledgebase/500/560/181.pdf

Quilgars, Deborah.

Communities Caring and Developing – Lessons from Hull, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004.

An evaluation of a project called the Community Care Development Project based in Hull, which was set up to test a new approach to working with the community sector to address unmet care and support needs at a small-area level. The research aimed to test the effectiveness of this community care model and how far it represents a replicable model of community development.

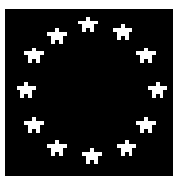
Download from www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859351905.pdf

Building a Culture of Responsibility, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, 2004.

A review of the progress made by Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council towards developing a comprehensive community engagement strategy and practice. The authority views this development as a step towards "building a culture of responsibility" and the report evaluates different methods of engaging with the community.

For copies of the evaluation, please contact the Neighbourhood and Communities Directorate of Doncaster Council on 01302 736930.

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