

Building evidence and demonstrating effectiveness in a national voluntary sector umbrella network

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Voluntary and community sector umbrella organisations

- second-tier organisations ~ not front-line
- support other voluntary and community organisations to achieve best practice
- pool of specialist resources
- advocate on behalf of the domain (government & wider)
- enables domain sector to “speak with one voice”
- often member organisations
- sometimes offer access to funding

What do we know about the effectiveness of umbrella organisations? (1)

- What is their impact?



What do we know about the effectiveness of umbrella organisations? (2)

- invested heavily in quality assurance
- of those that have invested in evaluation, the focus of their attention has been on getting their members to evaluate
- classic case of “*do as I say, not as I do*”



british association of settlements and social action centres

A '**multi-purpose approach**' is about one organisation providing a range of services and activities tailored to community need. With this holistic approach, the focus is on the person, not the problem

bassac is driven by a desire to find local solutions to national problems. It values innovation in neighbourhood action and a focus on people rather than problems. Because people and communities have many needs, **bassac** supports and promotes a multi-purpose approach to community development.

Seeking to realise the full potential of each community, **bassac** supports members to develop unique solutions to the specific circumstances of their neighbourhood.

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Building Evidence, Demonstrating Effectiveness

year 1

bassac undertakes self evaluation to measure impact

year 2

PiE work with “development partners” (members) to develop and pilot appropriate tools

year 3

Roll out toolkit within bassac network (via website)

T4T some DPs to train other local V&C agencies (paid by BEDE)

bassac rolls out learning to other V&C sector umbrella orgs

component parts of BEDE stage 1

- needs assessment
- contributions assessment
- feedback on services

Conducted in the context of a “review visit”

Review visit

- past experience was that bassac had very incomplete data on its members because return rate of membership survey was only 40%
- so, it was a review visit in order to collect the data

but...

- it created an opportunity to build stronger relationships within the network

Needs assessment (1)

- traditional approach
- conducted in the form of a dialogue ~ didn't just ask "what are your needs and how can we help you?" ~ but helped the organisation to assess its strengths and weaknesses, and to determine its priorities and challenges over the coming year and in what areas bassac might be able to help
- they never had this information before from all their members

Needs assessment (2)

The needs assessment will form a baseline against which the effectiveness of bassac can be measured in a year's time

Contributions assessment (1)

(developed by Madeline Church & Mark Bitel in a DfID funded action research project on evaluating international networks)

- focus is not on need, but on what the organisation can contribute to the network
(from appreciative enquiry)
- bassac's role is to be a network facilitator, facilitating but not controlling information exchange and networking

Contributions assessment (2)

- The contributions assessment will form a baseline against which the effectiveness of bassac can be measured in a year's time (not all information exchanges within the network will be through bassac so bassac can't measure all the traffic directly)

Feedback section (1)

- final stage of the review visit
- member organisations get to rate bassac's services using traditional scaling approaches

but

- because it is done in dialogue, they don't just get a score, they get to understand the reasoning behind the score

and

- they get a 100% return rate!

Feedback section (2)

- the scores from the feedback sheet are aggregated from across the network, giving bassac valuable feedback from their users about the usefulness of their products and services
- will help to focus bassac's attempts to improve their service delivery
- can be used for comparative data over the years to assess improvements in delivery

bassac's experience

- very useful process in terms of meeting their members and improving their relationships, which in turn, means that members make more use of their services
- time consuming
- behind schedule in completing review visits (70% conducted) due to funding crisis

but

- this means that they understand better the experiences that their members will be going through when they implement evaluation in stage 2

Sustainability and relevance to other networks

- it would not be possible to visit every member every year, even for a small member organisation like bassac (75 members)

but

- could develop into a rolling programme
- larger networks ~ could take a manageable sample or conduct thematic reviews

finally...

Stage 2 is now well underway...

- 12 development partners have been recruited
- 2 groups (1 London-based, 1 north of England)
- 2 events in each group (1st looking at needs and possibilities, 2nd looking at suitable methods)
- agreement to pilot 4 approaches:
 - (a) mapping user journey's through the organisation
 - (b) economic evaluation (economies of scale, added value)
 - (c) internal survey of social capital
 - (d) community survey of social capital