

Overview of research in the Voluntary and Community Sector

Greg Piper, NCVO



Outline

- What research?
- Is it connecting?
- Who's doing the research?
- How do we improve things?

Types of research

- Monitoring
- Needs analysis
- Impact assessment
- Theory / explanation
- “Market” research
- Strategic thinking / futurology

Themes of research 1

- Volunteering
 - Management
 - Workforce issues
 - Inclusion and discrimination
- Charitable giving and philanthropy
 - Monitoring
 - Demographics
 - Motivations

Themes of research 2

- VCS relationship with government
 - Independence
 - Public service delivery
- Size and scope of the sector
- Community
- Accountability
- Impact
- Infrastructure

Who's doing Third Sector Research?

- Infrastructure organisations
 - policy recommendations
 - pass on benefits to members
- Large charities
 - e.g. Barnado's has about 30 researchers
- Other VCS organisations
 - Difficult for small organisations – lack of resource and of specialist staff

Who's doing Third Sector Research?

- Academics
 - Independent
- Independent consultants
 - Connected to many organisations

Is it connecting?

- Increasing professionalism in the sector
- In NCVO, we have plenty of interest in our research
- Strong interest among policy makers and funders
 - BIG and OTS
- But is the research genuinely used?

What drives this engagement?

- Accountability to funders
- Public Service Delivery, kite marks
- Demand for evidence-based policy

“Useful” research

- Quality
- Relevance
- Capacity building
- Progress

Quality of research

- Methodology
 - Planning
 - Good sampling
 - Survey questionnaires
 - Appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative
- Analysis
 - Statistical validity
 - Triangulation of data
 - Collaboration

Relevance of research

- What is it for?
 - Policy
 - Practice
 - Building understanding
- Who is it for?
 - The beneficiaries of TS organisations
 - Funders
 - Staff
 - Policy makers

Capacity building

- People
 - Training, CASE studentships
- Networks
 - E.g. VSSN
 - Also links between different kinds of researcher
- Knowledge management
 - Strong potential for ICT to help here
 - Web 2.0

Giving Research Centre

- A good example of capacity building
- £2m from OTS, CarnegieUK Trust, ESRC and the Scottish Executive
- A lot depends on who runs the Centre

Purpose of the centre

- Develop the evidence base
- Bring together existing research
- Conduct and commission research
- Develop research capacity

Progress

- Time series
- Development of robust theory
- Monitoring of impact of research

What next?

- Positive signs but there's still a long way to go
- Initiatives like the Giving Research Centre must deliver
- Research must be communicated responsibly
- Collaboration will be essential
- Strategic approach needed