Circuit Rider Project
evaluation

March 2007

by adpconsultancy

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the participating organisations and the Project Advisory Group for taking the time to participate in the evaluation and for providing us with your opinions and views on the Project.

Thanks also to Ian, Sarah and Bijal from the Circuit Rider Project team for all of your time.

Participating organisations

Advisory Centre for Education
Age Concern Hounslow
Age Concern Lewisham
Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group
Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum
CARIS Haringey
Disability Action in the Borough of Barnet
Disability Advice Service Lambeth
Disability Law Service
Environmental Law Foundation
Iranian Association
New Avenues Youth and Community Project
Nubian Life
Southwark Diocesan Welcare
Victim Support Wandsworth
Women's Environmental Network

Executive Summary

The Circuit Rider Project

The Lasa Circuit Rider Project was set up in May 2005 to support a number of voluntary and community sector organisations to build their ICT capacity. Lasa has worked for a number of years using the circuit rider model to help organisations access support on ICT that is flexible and affordable.

Circuit rider is an umbrella term for ICT professionals working primarily in the voluntary and community sector. Circuit riders offer a range of skills including strategic development, technical support, training and action planning.

The Project delivered a number of support function to assist participating organisations to:

- Address specific ICT issues;
- Develop ICT strategies;
- Increase awareness of ICT costs and funding availability;
- Work together to share information and experiences; and
- Increase knowledge and awareness of ICT.

Evaluation

The Lasa Circuit Rider Project team commissioned ADP Consultancy (ADP) to carry out an independent evaluation of the project in order to:

- Measure the distance travelled for participating organisations in relation to the key elements of the project;
- Demonstrate to funders the need to invest in IT support for small voluntary and community organisations; and
- Identify future development opportunities for the use of the circuit rider model in working with organisations from the voluntary and community sector.

The evaluation was based on a series of interviews with key contacts from the participating voluntary and community sector organisations, the Project Team and Project Advisory Group.

Key findings

The evaluation has identified a number of key findings that demonstrate that the Project has been extremely successful in providing a range of support functions to participating organisations. These include:
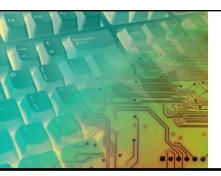
- Organisations participating in the Project made substantial progress in addressing specific ICT issues, such as upgrading old equipment, developing policies and improving networks and databases, which tend to improve their organisational effectiveness;

- General awareness and knowledge of ICT has increased amongst organisational staff involved in the Project, with those staff most involved in the Project much more able to identify their organisation's current and future ICT support needs;

- A substantial increase in the awareness within organisations of the need to budget for ICT and include the costs of ICT in funding applications;

- The provision of support functions, such as technical support, telephone and email support, training and information resources are vital to support smaller voluntary and community organisations develop their ICT capacity;

- The development of ICT strategies within participating organisations is hampered by a general lack of understanding of the need for longer term planning, the need to address immediate ICT issues and competing priorities for limited time and resources;

- The development of peer-to-peer services, where organisations work together to share information and experiences, is not considered an essential component of the Circuit Rider Project with organisations preferring to discuss issues directly with an 'expert';

- Engaging other staff, management and management committee members in ICT capacity building and development is difficult due to a range of competing priorities and lack of confidence in addressing ICT;

- The Circuit Rider Project needs to ensure that it is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of participating organisations to keep organisations engaged in the project;

- There is an increasing understanding of the benefits of the circuit riding method of support to voluntary and community organisations in relation to ICT development, particularly for second tier support agencies. Further work is needed with funders and frontline agencies to promote the benefits of the circuit rider method of ICT development.

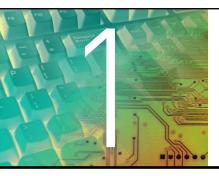## Key learning points and future development opportunities

In commissioning the evaluation the Circuit Rider Project wanted to consider key learning points from the existing project in order to inform future development opportunities for their work on supporting organisations with ICT development.

The evaluation has identified a number of learning points and development opportunities that include:

- There remains a large demand for ICT support and development amongst smaller voluntary and community organisations and access to appropriate support remains an issue for these organisations;

- ICT should be included in organisational development programmes, with circuit riders and development workers learning from each other's skills and experience, to promote the benefits of utilising ICT in service delivery;

- Further work is required on promoting the benefits of ICT support and development to frontline agencies in order to move to a 'critical mass' where large numbers of organisations are actively involved in the circuit rider movement;

- The introduction of a quality assurance system and accreditation for those involved in circuit riding would be beneficial to the movement to convince funders, policymakers and the voluntary and community sector of the benefits of ICT; and

- Further work needs to be undertaken to promote the benefits of strategic planning for ICT across the voluntary and community sector as part of general awareness raising on the benefits of longer term planning across the sector.

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 The Circuit Rider Project

The Lasa Circuit Rider Project was set up in May 2005, with funding from Bridge House Trust[1] and the Big Lottery Fund, to support a number of voluntary and community sector organisations[2] to build their ICT capacity using a circuit rider model.

This is the second Circuit Rider Project that Lasa has run. It follows a Circuit Rider Project that worked primarily with black, minority ethnic and refugee advice groups between September 2002 and August 2004 funded by the Community Fund.

An evaluation of the first project demonstrated that groups involved in the project had generally made significant progress in their awareness and ability to manage and use ICT. However, the evaluation and subsequent Lasa research identified three main areas for further work in the development of future circuit rider projects based on the experience of organisations participating in the first project. These were:

- A lack of strategic understanding of ICT;

- A lack of understanding of the full costs of ICT and a reluctance by funders to meet these costs; and

- Difficulties for organisations in accessing affordable, reliable and relevant advice, information and support on ICT issues that is relevant to voluntary and community sector organisations.

The second Circuit Rider Project sought to address these issues through the provision of a range of services to participating organisations that included:

- A self-assessment exercise carried out by participating organisations to establish their current position in relation to ICT;

- An initial site visit from staff from the Circuit Rider Project consisting of an ICT Healthcheck and consultation on strategic development and project action plans;

- Developing recommendations and Action Plans;

- Assistance with specific ICT problems (where no other technical support existed);

- Periodic follow up meetings;

- Running training sessions and seminars;

- Providing Information resources; and

- Running a telephone and email helpline, dedicated website and private email discussion list.

Organisations selected to participate in the project were required to:

- Involve themselves fully in the project and engage with other participants;

- Nominate a named contact person to work with Lasa;

- Attend training sessions and events;

- Read all documentation from Lasa and respond where necessary;

- Agree to participate in project evaluation exercises; and

- Keep Lasa informed of any difficulties in meeting these requirements.

The majority of participating organisations were selected from a list of around 30 organisations that received funding from The City Bridge Trust and provided some level of advice services to users. One organisation, that was receiving funding

---

1   Bridge House Trust changed its name in January 2007 to The City Bridge Trust. The new name will be used throughout the evaluation report.
2   A full list of participating organisations is available at Appendix 1.

from the Big Lottery Fund, approached Lasa directly seeking to be involved in the project.

All of these organisations were provided with details of the project and information on what was expected of those selected to participate. Organisations were then invited to make an application to participate in the project. The number of applications received was considered manageable by the project team so all organisations applying were invited to take part.

The eighteen organisations that applied were invited to a project launch that provided them with more information on the project. One of the organisations dropped out at this stage with another organisation dropping out following the Healthcheck stage. Both of the organisations that dropped out did not feel able to commit the required amount of time to the project.

At this stage it was recognised that working with one of the organisations, Southwark Diocesan Welcare, would require a different approach to that planned for the other organisations. Welcare were working on integrating systems for ICT development with their central office and 11 satellite Welcare agencies across south London. This required the Circuit Rider Project to provide more comprehensive consultancy services for Welcare including setting up a working group to oversee the work.

The sixteen participating organisations represent a diverse group of projects with a wide-range of awareness and knowledge of ICT and support needs at varying levels. The decision to include all of the organisations that applied has potentially had an impact on the project's aim to develop a community of organisations that could support and help each other on ICT development due to the varied nature of the organisations involved.

1.2 What is a circuit rider?

'A circuit rider is a mobile worker who provides ICT support and development to a caseload of small voluntary organisations and who works in collaboration with other circuit riders.' [3]

Circuit rider is an umbrella term, originating in the United States, for ICT professionals working primarily in the voluntary and community sector.

Circuit riders offer a range of skills including strategic development, technical support, training and action planning.

They come from a range of backgrounds and may be working within infrastructure organisations like a CVS, networks such as Age Concern, operating as a community or social enterprise company or as an independent, self-employed consultant.

Circuit riders generally work with small organisations that do not have their own ICT staff, either because of their size or because they are not able to afford them. They aim to make the organisations they work with become self-reliant in their use of ICT enabling the circuit rider to move on and help other organisations.

As circuit riders share a similar ethos to support organisations they will often work together or in networks to support and share information with each other enabling them to learn from similar work in a range of organisations and enabling them to deliver their services in an effective and efficient way.

1.3 What is ICT?

The concept of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) arose from a broadening of Information Technology to specifically incorporate the field of electronic communication. Information Technology has been defined as *'the study, design, development, implementation, support or management of computer-based information systems, particularly software applications and hardware.'* [4]

It has become more popular to broaden the term to Information and Communication Technology in order to include other communication devices such as telephone networks, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and mobile phones to develop other communication options, for example, SMS messaging. [5]

The Circuit Rider Project has primarily concentrated on office-based computer systems, as the majority of participating organisations are at a fairly early stage in the development of ICT systems within their organisations and required support specifically in this area, although some of the participating organisations have started to consider using or have started to use other ICT applications in their work.

---

3   *Circuit riders 2.0: The evolution of ICT development and support for the voluntary sector*, Simon Pavitt & Sarah Lord Soáres, Lasa, December 2006.
4   As defined by the Information Technology Association of America.
5   *Move On Up*, Lasa computanews, 141, November 2006.

2 Evaluation

2.1 Introduction

The Lasa Circuit Rider Project team commissioned ADP Consultancy (ADP)[6] to carry out an independent evaluation of the project in order to:

- Measure the distance travelled for participating organisations in relation to the key elements of the project;

- Demonstrate to funders the need to invest in IT support for small voluntary and community organisations;

- Identify future development opportunities for the use of the circuit rider model in working with organisations from the voluntary and community sector.

This evaluation report is based on both the methodology, recommendations and conclusions from the interim project evaluation carried out in February 2006, that concentrated on measuring distance travelled for organisations and further research on the potential development opportunities for the circuit rider model.

2.2 The evaluation process

Prior to carrying out the evaluation ADP agreed the evaluation process with the Project team and Project Advisory Group. The key phases of the evaluation process were:

2.2.1 Scoping

This consisted of a review of the existing information available for each of the participating organisations including self-assessment forms, Healthchecks and action plans.

This information has been analysed in order to identify essential baseline data for each organisation and any common themes relating to the aims and objectives of participating organisations.

Analysis of the evaluation carried out during the first circuit rider project and the interim evaluation of this project to summarise findings and identify key issues raised and progress made. The evaluation of the first Circuit Rider Project identified a number of recommendations that have been included in the second project, such as:

- Ensuring that the Project Advisory Group has a clear remit;

- Including the organisation's management committees where possible;

- Providing training on using the information resources available;

- Instigating interaction between participating organisations;

- Making resources available in a more accessible format;

- Considering the impact of changes recommended in the Action Plan and what new support this might require;

- Identifying small changes that are not funding dependent and can have significant impact; and

- Ensuring clarity about the role of the circuit rider especially with regard to technical support provision.

The actions of the current Circuit Rider Project in addressing the recommendations from the first project along with its own specific aims will form the basis of the evaluation.

The information from the review of documentation and the analysis of previous evaluations has been used to inform the interviews

---

6   ADP Consultancy is an independent consultancy organisation with extensive experience in supporting service delivery through its work in both the voluntary and community and statutory sectors.

carried out with participating organisations, the project team and project advisory board.

2.2.2 Interviews with participating organisations

ADP carried out face-to-face interviews with all of the organisations participating in the project. The interviews were semi-structured to enable participating organisations to inform us of their experiences and covered the following key areas:

- Reasons for participating in the project;
- Achievements and progress;
- Planning;
- Support from the project including progress meetings, training and seminars, information resources, telephone and email support, technical support;
- Communication;
- Funding and sustainability; and
- Future needs.

2.2.3 Interviews with the Circuit Rider Project team and key stakeholders

ADP carried out individual interviews with the Circuit Rider Project team and other key stakeholders including the project advisory board to obtain their views on the success of the project, identify current issues and future development.

2.2.4 Future development

ADP has carried out an assessment of key policy developments in relation to the development or ICT infrastructure and other activities in related ICT fields in order to identify key issues for the future development of the circuit rider project. This has been used to place the current scheme and potential developments in the context of wider ICT strategy development and to make recommendations on the future of the project.

2.2.5 Data analysis

This report is based on analysis of the information gathered from the interviews with participating organisations, the circuit rider team and other key stakeholders to evaluate the progress of the project, including distance travelled for individual organisations and the project generally and to determine future developments for the project.

3 Participating organisations' views of the project

Key findings

From the information gathered through the interviews with key contacts we have identified a number of key findings based on the participating organisations' views of the project. These are:

- Organisations participating in the project have made substantial progress in achieving their initial aims and objectives and generally recognise the contribution of the Circuit Rider Project in assisting them achieve those goals;

- There has been a substantial increase in the awareness across organisations in budgeting for and including the costs of ICT in funding applications. The increased awareness has not resulted in significant increases in funding and work needs to continue to convince funders of the need to fund ICT, particularly in relation to obtaining support and upgrading equipment and software;

- The Project's support services including seminars and workshops, information resources, technical support and telephone and email support are generally seen as vital to the success of the project and are identified as one of the key concerns for organisations once the project ends;

- The development of ICT strategies for organisations participating in the project is limited. Many organisations have specific issues to be addressed prior to being able to take time to consider strategic development. Strategic development is hampered by the number of other priorities organisations have and a general lack of understanding of the need for strategic planning;

- The development of a community of organisations providing peer-to-peer support is not considered a vital component to the project for the majority of participating organisations. Interest in developing this may

increase once organisations have addressed their short to medium term aims and are working with stable systems in place;

- Concerns about the amount of detail involved in the self-assessment, Healthcheck and action planning stages are unfounded with organisations welcoming the attention to detail as it increased awareness of issues that they would not necessarily have thought of;

- The use of progress meetings to support organisations and to review Action Plans and distance travelled are beneficial to organisations in engaging with their work on ICT;

- Engaging staff, management and management committee members in ICT development can be difficult due to the range of duties and priorities that they have to deal with; and

- The identification of future needs for organisations shows the range of support needs required by organisations in order to take forward their ICT development and to obtain support. It also demonstrates an increased awareness from key contacts in organisations of the type of services that they consider would best meet their organisation's needs.

3.1 Introduction

This part of the evaluation considers a number of key areas in the delivery of the project based on interviews with key contacts at the participating organisations and on information provided by the Project Team and from the interim evaluation. It is broken down into four distinct sections that evaluate the following aspects of the project:

- Baseline needs, the distance travelled and key achievements of participating organisations;

- Planning and monitoring progress;

- Current support functions;

- Strategic development, interaction between participating organisations, funding and budgeting, and staff and management involvement in the project; and

- Future support needs.

3.2 Baseline needs, key achievements and distance travelled

This section of the evaluation considers the participating organisations baseline needs and key achievements as well as looking at identified barriers to achievements. It also reviews the distance travelled by participating organisations using a new method of self-assessment that all the participating organisations carried out prior to the Healthcheck visit.

3.2.1 Baseline needs of participating organisations

Key contacts from the participating organisations were asked to identify their key reasons for taking part in the project. All of the organisations had identified areas of their work with ICT that they wanted to improve through participation in the project. Organisations responses ranged from general improvement and development of a range of skills and experience to specific tasks. These general improvements and developments include:

- Improving awareness of what ICT could do;

- Reducing the fear of staff of using ICT in their work;

- Improving administration of ICT systems;

- Improving the ICT skills of staff and volunteers;

- Developing a number of policies relating to the use of ICT;

- Accessing support;

- Identifying potential funders;

- Improving organisational efficiency through the use of ICT;

- Increasing confidence in the project from potential funders; and

- Improving organisational communication with members and staff through ICT.

More specific tasks identified include:

- Need to upgrade existing equipment;

- Put a network in place;

- Help putting in place an ICT strategy;

- Develop a new or existing website; and

- Database development to replace number of small databases.

Each of the organisations interviewed believed that they had made progress in achieving these needs at varying levels. A number of organisations reported the completion of a number of identified priorities while others reported significant progress.

3.2.2 Key achievements

As part of the evaluation process organisational contacts were asked to identify what they considered to be their organisation's key achievements. Contacts were asked to consider what they had achieved that had occurred as a direct result of participating in the project.

All of the key contacts interviewed said that their involvement in the project had resulted in some level of achievement for their organisation in relation to their work on ICT. The majority of organisations reported that they had made considerable achievements on specific projects while others reported that they had made general progress in improving their ICT and their awareness of using ICT in their work. The following quotes from contacts demonstrates the range of achievements across the organisations that include:

Improved professionalism of the organisation;

'We have improved our professionalism as a result of being involved in the project. The project has been useful for us to establish a framework for the work that needs to be done.'

Increased recognition in the organisation of the role of ICT;

'We have initially focused on damage limitation and disaster recovery. There is increased recognition in the project of the role of ICT.'

Improvement to back-up systems and anti-virus software;

'We have received lots of support. Improving our back up systems has been a key development. We have set up a file server and are still in the process of making adaptations. We have anti-virus in place and have resolved our website accessibility.'

Replacement of old systems and installed a network;

'We have replaced our old systems and now have network in place. Have been able to do this without much support from the CR project. However, if we had not been in the project then I'm not sure whether it would have happened. Being part of the project and increasing awareness of ICT gave us the motivation to do something about replacing our systems.'

CASE STUDY

Environmental Law Foundation – recycled hardware

The Circuit Rider Project Healthcheck process established that the age and state of some of the Environmental Law Foundation's (ELF) equipment was inhibiting the progression of their ICT plans. The small peer-to-peer network was under strain, email was sometimes lost and it was difficult and time-consuming to back up data successfully. In addition, the Access database that had been redeveloped recently by an IT4Communities volunteer, would benefit from being located on a "real" server.

Being an environmental organisation, ELF wanted an inexpensive, high 'green factor' solution to their issues. JADe, the Project's technical support provider obtained a number of refurbished PCs provided by Action Aid, that ELF were able to use. One of the PCs found new life as a server using an open source operating system. ELF recognise that the PCs, which are around 4 or 5 years old, may have a limited lifespan and that replacement will again be needed soon, but they have some breathing space to develop a plan for a longer term solution.

Improved motivation to address ICT issues;

'We think participating in the project has been really beneficial. We have achieved so many different things some of them big but it is often the little things that make so much difference.'

Improved web site accessibility;

'We have made developments on our website and now have a good knowledge of the priority areas that need attention.'

Identified risk factors and carried out a risk assessment;

'We now know what things we need to deal with and have identified risk factors.'

Identified and amended gaps in acceptable use policy;

'We identified gaps in our staff handbook on acceptable use and have worked on that. Project has also been useful for web development. It's also been useful for informing funders about the way that the organisation works on ICT. We have carried out a risk assessment, are doing work on Data Protection and have developed an induction manual.'

Implemented policies on housekeeping, risk, acceptable use and data protection;

'We have achieved a lot of what we identified in the action plan. We have put in place a number of new policies that have been really useful and would have taken us ages if we hadn't known about the templates that were available.'

Recruited an ICT volunteer to develop a database;

'We have recruited an ICT volunteer who has been helping with developing a database. We have accessed the support and have developed policies on acceptable use and data protection. We are currently developing a website specification and the project is helping with this.'

Saved money through implementing Action Plan priorities to reduce the level of support contract needed.

'We have invested in new equipment which wouldn't have been possible without the project. We now have a network administrator in post that has saved us money, as we have been able to end expenditure on our support contract.'

The achievements of the organisations is extremely varied and demonstrates the range of support offered through the project and highlights the capacity for organisations to address ICT issues with the support, guidance and encouragement in place to assist them.

3.2.3 Barriers to achievements

While discussing their key achievements a number of organisations started to identify factors that had impacted on their ability to achieve their aims and objectives as set out in their Action Plan.

Organisations generally felt that the lifespan of the project was insufficient for them to meet all of the tasks that they had identified in their action plans. The majority of organisations did not expect to achieve this and had spent time identifying priorities that could be completed, or at least started during the project. However, a number of other factors had occurred that had impacted on organisations' capacity to achieve their key aims. These included:

- Staff turnover and changes in key personnel;

- A lack of commitment to ICT from senior management and management committee members;

- A lack of awareness of the benefits or interest in ICT from other staff;

- Staff reluctance to accept change;

- A lack of funding and unstable funding environment;

- Other work taking priority over work on ICT;

- A lack of time;

- No one in the organisation with specific responsibility for ICT;

- A lack of strategic planning in the organisation.

There is no simple solution to removing the barriers to achieving success for organisations working on ICT development. Most organisations thought that the situation might improve over time particularly in relation to the commitment of staff, managers and management committees. A number of organisations thought that the situation wouldn't improve until there was sufficient funding available to enable organisations to commit staff resources specifically to working on ICT.

3.2.4 Distance travelled

The Project initiated a new method of measuring the distance travelled by organisations during the project.[7] This involved organisations carrying out self-assessment checks to provide a numerically scored snapshot of their ICT capacity and competence at the start of the project and again at the end that could then be compared to give a value to show distance travelled for each organisation.

The assessment covered the following categories:

- Technology planning;

- Staff use of ICT;

- ICT administration;

- Networks;

- Internet; and

- Maintenance and support.

All of the participating organisations carried out the initial self-assessment at the start of the project and 11 have so far completed the end assessment. The process has shown that overall organisations have increased their ICT capacity and competence by 13% across all of the categories from a starting point of 40% to an end point of 53%.

The most successful change was in the area of ICT Administration with a 21% increase. The Project has placed considerable emphasis on improving awareness and increasing competency in relation to security, housekeeping and backing up issues that are all included in this category.

Individual organisations have shown a wide range of change with the highest overall change at 31% overall. Two organisations reported that their levels of awareness and competency had decreased. However, both organisations reported that they had changed their key contact person during the project and both reported lower levels of personal ICT knowledge and less awareness of their organisations strengths than their predecessors, as they were just starting to work in this area.

When broken down in to the individual categories some organisations reported substantial increases in awareness and competency, with one organisation reporting a 68% shift in relation to maintenance and support and another reporting a 57% shift in ICT administration.

---

7   See Appendix 4 for a more detailed explanation of the process.

The self-assessment model appears to have generally benefited organisations with organisations reporting that it had been useful to enable them to identify the range of ICT issues that they had to address and it providing a clear indication of how much progress they had made in relation both to individual categories and generally.

3.3 Planning

The planning for organisations participating in the project included an initial self-assessment, followed by an ICT Healthcheck and the development of an organisational Action Plan drawn up with support from the circuit rider.

The development of the Action Plan is seen as crucial to the use of the circuit rider model to support an organisation's ICT development. The Action Plan covers:

- **Technology planning** – including aims, budget, risk assessment, hardware and software purchasing and disposal, training and acceptable use;

- **Staff use** – including health & safety, accessibility, data protection, user induction & training and security;

- **ICT administration** – including technical knowledge, housekeeping and backing up;

- **Networks** – including type, administration and security and stability;

- **Internet** – including email, access, service provider, remote access, security and website;

- **Maintenance and support** – including support contracts and user support; and

- **Special Projects** – identifying specific projects that organisations planned to work on.

The evaluation sought views on whether this planning stage of the Circuit Rider Project had been useful and enabled organisations to effectively plan their work on ICT.

All of the organisations participating in the project generally welcomed the planning process. A number of organisations expressed concern about the amount of detail required and the amount of time spent on planning when they initially received the planning documentation. However, as the project has progressed they have increased their awareness of the benefit of the initial planning stages to enable organisations to measure their progress –

'Although the Action Plan looks quite daunting having done the work we now know what is needed. While the planning may seem daunting devoting time at the beginning means that you get to see the benefits later on.'

The support of the Circuit Rider Project team has also been recognised as a key component in completing the planning process –

'The Action Plan has been constantly used to drive forward our work on ICT. The support from the Circuit Rider project has been invaluable in putting together targets and measuring how far they have gone.'

While support from the Circuit Rider Project was seen as vital to completing the process a number of organisations reported that the Action Plan had ensured that their own organisation took responsibility –

'The Action Plan is really useful to make us take ownership of what we needed to do. I worked with a colleague on the Action Plan who was a complete IT phobe. Doing the planning helped her realise that she could understand it and didn't need to fear it.'

During the interim evaluation concerns had been raised about the size and volume of information included in the Action Plan and whether this could be overwhelming for participants. The interviews with organisations did not support this concern. Organisations generally welcomed the detail included in the plans as it increased awareness of issues that they had not previously thought about. The use of Action Plan summaries were considered to be a useful additional information resource but were not considered sufficient in their own right to replace the detailed Action Plan.

3.4 Monitoring progress

To support organisations achieve the tasks identified through the planning processes and subsequently included in their Action Plans the project delivered a series of follow-up meetings to discuss progress. Progress meetings were agreed with individual organisations depending on the number of meetings they felt were required. Meetings tend to concentrate on progress on specific priorities depending on what tasks each organisation has been working on.

Throughout the lifespan of the project Circuit Rider staff have carried out 80 progress meetings with participating organisations. Interviews with key contacts included consideration of the effectiveness of these meetings and what the meetings had achieved.

The majority of organisations have seen the use of progress meetings as beneficial to helping them achieve their objectives and have used the upcoming meetings as a spur to spend time on working on ICT. All of the key contacts interviewed had responsibility for ICT as one of many tasks that they were required to carry out for their organisations and often found prioritising work on ICT difficult. Knowing that a progress meeting was scheduled provided the necessary incentive to carry out tasks or where this wasn't possible at least take time to consider what needed to be done.

A number of organisations reported that being able to spend a specific amount of time with the Circuit Rider project staff in their own office to talk through issues had been particularly beneficial in reducing the time and resources required to achieve their priorities:

'If progress meetings hadn't taken place we would have spent much more time and resources on trying to sort out our IT.'

'Without the Circuit Rider coming and supporting us then we probably wouldn't have done many of the things that we have done.'

A number of organisations mentioned that they believed that they would have benefited from having set dates for progress meetings either on a quarterly or six-monthly basis. These groups reported that knowing that a progress meeting was coming up ensured that they checked their own progress and were more likely to complete tasks they had identified required attention. They were aware that the nature of the project didn't necessarily fit with this system of planning, with an emphasis being placed on them to carry out the required actions, but felt that knowing that you were due a meeting at a specific time may have helped with completing or progressing tasks.

3.5 Support functions

The Circuit Rider Project offers a range of specific support functions to participating organisations in addition to support with planning and strategic development. For the majority of organisations access to these support functions was one of the key motivations for participating in the project. The support functions provided included:

- Technical support;
- Telephone and email support;
- Information resources;
- Communication tools;
- Website healthchecks and consultancy; and
- Seminars and workshops.

The majority of these support functions have been generally well received by participating organisations with the technical support, information resources, website healthchecks and training and seminars proving particularly popular. The majority of organisations considered the support systems set up to promote the development of an active community of peer-to-peer support, for example the internet mailing list discussion forum have been less useful.

3.5.1 Technical support

The Project provided technical support to eight of the participating organisations[8] through a support contract negotiated between the project and JADe.[9]

The majority of organisations have their own technical support contract. Most were pleased with the services they received and tended to rely on recommendations from other organisations they worked closely with before entering into service contracts.

A number of organisations expressed a preference for a local technical support provider and some had longstanding relationships with their technical support provider. Some organisations raised concerns about the cost of the technical support contracts they had in place and suggested that organisations should form partnerships to get support contracts. The Circuit Rider project should consider how they might be able to negotiate with suppliers to get better deals for organisations involved in the project –

---

8   The organisations receiving technical support are Age Concern Hounslow, Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group, Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum, CARIS Haringey, Environmental Law Foundation, New Avenues Youth & Community Project, Victim Support Wandsworth and Women's Environmental Network.

9   See Appendix 2.

'Buying technical support on an individual basis is too expensive. We need partnerships to bring in a worker or negotiate contracts for a group of organisations rather than doing it on our own.'

The organisations that had received technical support from the project had found that the service had been very useful. A number of organisations had previously used informal networks of family, friends and other contacts to provide technical support. While most organisations had received some benefit from using informal technical support networks having an established relationship with a supplier was considered much more beneficial –

'The service we get is excellent and we've used it a lot. We previously used informal contacts for our technical support but this is much better. It is clear about what we are going to get and it has helped us build a relationship with JADe that we could never have relying on ad hoc help from family and friends.'

3.5.2 Telephone and email support

The project operates a telephone and email support service to provide participating organisations with access to advice and assistance on a range of issues.

The majority of organisations had at some point contacted the project to ask for help with a particular ICT issue. Of those organisations that had used the service they all reported that the service had been extremely useful. Organisations reported that the service was quick, practical, supportive, offered a range of solutions and delivered positively.

A number of organisations reported that one of the main benefits of their participation in the project had been the ability to access the telephone and email support to resolve small issues that were causing significant problems for their organisation. This included contacting the Circuit Rider Project to resolve issues such as broadband connection, backing-up files, updating existing software and dealing with spam emails –

'They may not be able to answer everything you ask them but if they don't know you can be sure they usually know someone who does or where you can find out about it. Just being able to phone or email someone who knows what they are talking about has been brilliant for us.'

Some organisations said that they were sometimes unsure whom they were supposed to contact. In most situations this involved JADe working on an issue and the organisation wanting to ask them a specific query but being referred back to the Circuit Rider project. Organisations thought that this has some impact for them in understanding what was happening –

'We worked with JADe to install the server. The Circuit Rider project acted as a conduit between JADe and us. We think this slowed things down and made it more difficult for us to understand what was going on. They spent time talking to each other when it would have been much easier talking to us.'

When discussing future needs with organisations the end of the provision of technical support and the telephone and email service was raised by the majority of organisations as a major concern for when the project comes to an end. Most organisations had started to think about how they might access future support and specifically how they would pay for it.

3.5.3 Information and communication

The project provides a number of information and communication resources for participating organisations. Organisations have generally found the information produced by the project useful. Although some organisations reported that they had not used any of the information resources provided by the project.

The information resources produced by the project include:

- A monthly information digest;
- A series of templates including housekeeping, staff induction and data protection;
- Access to the ICT Hub Knowledgebase; and
- An internet mailing list.

3.5.4 Monthly information digest

The majority of organisations have used the monthly information digest and have generally found it useful. How groups use the digest varies considerably with some organisations regularly making use of the information included in the digest, others circulating throughout their organisation, with others skimming it and using it

as a reference when they come up against an issue that they think might be included in the digest –

'The monthly information digest has been really useful. I like it as I can use it when I need it, it is concise and you know that if it's got in to the digest it's going to be some use.'

Some organisations made suggestions for improving the information digest. One of the groups suggested that the design of the digest could be improved as it was sometimes indistinguishable from junk email and it is sometimes difficult to spot what it is. Another group suggested that a quarterly index could be produced for the digest to make it easier to find information from previous digests and that information should be updated as it sometimes went out of date.

3.5.5 Templates and ICT Hub Knowledgebase

Organisations also reported regular use of the templates produced by the project and the information on the ICT Hub knowledgebase. Organisations found the adaptable policies extremely useful and have made use of the templates and adaptable policies in their work –

'We've been able to use the information on policies to adapt and adopt them for use by our project. The information on Data Protection has helped us focus on what we needed to do.'

Organisations reported that the style and pitch of the information is at the right level which makes it easier to use –

'The knowledgebase information resource is excellent. I've used it a lot. The budgeting information was excellent. Information is really well pitched. Produced in plain English and not very techie. The fact that the information is available online and can dip in when needed is really useful.'

Some organisations raised concerns about the amount of information that was produced. This was raised as a possible issue for the project in the evaluation of the first Circuit Rider project. Most organisations, however, had fairly well established knowledge management systems and were able to cope with the information provided. The fact that the bulk of the information was available online reduced the amount of information management required by organisations.

3.5.6 Internet mailing list

The least successful communication tool has been the internet mailing list. Most of the organisations were aware of the internet mailing list but only a few had posted questions or responded to request for information.

The additional emails generated by the service were particularly off putting for a number of organisations. Key contacts that used similar tools for other areas of work or outside of work were more likely to see the benefits of the internet mailing list.

Those that had used the tool to post questions reported that they had received useful responses that had provided information that they could use to help them resolve the issue that they had –

'I used the mailing list to ask some questions and got some really useful responses. It really helped to get information from people who'd been through similar things.'

Generally, however, the use of the internet mailing list to promote the development of a peer-to-peer support network amongst the groups has met with only limited success. This is considered in more detail in the section on interaction between participating organisations.

3.5.7 Website healthchecks and consultancy

Based on discussions with some of the participating organisations the Project team identified a need for someone carry out a brief healthcheck on all the participating organisations' websites. The Project engaged a freelance website designer and consultant to look at domain and hosting, the underlying code of the pages, accessibility, content, how up to date the site was and the popularity of the site. A short report was produced for each site and these were discussed at the next progress meeting where appropriate.

The majority of organisations welcomed the report on the current position with their websites –

'We recently had our website checked and received a short report telling us about it. It was really useful to get some external feedback and receive some direction on how we could improve things so people would find it more useful.'

Following the reports some of the participating organisations met with the consultant to discuss the findings and to identify ways in which they could improve their sites further –

'We're just about to start developing a new website. The report from the consultant has just come at the right time so that we don't make the same mistakes that we made with our old one. Sometimes you wonder why you're spending so much time and money on getting on the web but now we know why we're doing it and what benefits it can bring to our users.'

The introduction of the website healthchecks and consultancy demonstrates the need for the Project to be aware of and responsive to the needs of the participating organisations. While the internet had been included in the planning stages of the project it was only through the ongoing progress meetings and through discussions with the groups that the need to introduce healthchecks and consultancy was identified as a key issue for a number of the groups.

3.5.8 Special projects

As part of the planning process participating organisations were provided with an opportunity to identify any special projects that they were planning to work on during the Project that they thought they would benefit from obtaining additional support with.

Organisations identified a range of special projects that included:

- General database development;

- Installing new and improving existing networks;

- Case management database;

- Website development; and

- Developing information management systems.

The development of databases, installing new and existing networks and case recording systems were identified by a number of participating organisations as special projects and resulted in the Project carrying out specific tasks to support organisations with these key elements of ICT development.

The Project worked with several organisations on database development that included developing and introducing new databases, replacing one or several existing databases with a new database or adding new features to an existing database.

CASE STUDY

Nubian Life – Streamlining administration

In their application to join the Project, Nubian Life identified a need to 'streamline the administration' of their services to the local African and African Caribbean elderly community. Through the Healthcheck process and subsequent progress meetings, the Circuit Rider and Nubian Life worked together to identify their key data sources, how data is collected, stored and used and what would significantly help with their workflow management.

The Project's technical support provider, JADe, already had a database product that they had developed for asset tracking for the NHS and the structure was suitable for customising for Nubian Life's needs. The Project team, JADe and Nubian Life held a series of data analysis meetings to inform the database development process by JADe's developers. As a result of this work Nubian Life now hold data on their clients, members, volunteers and referring agencies in one database, are able to record personal details such as healthcare and dietary information in compliance with Data Protection legislation and are able to generate appropriate, useful and flexible reports. The database will be going live in the near future.

Organisations had recognised the benefits of introducing databases that met their needs and reduced the amount of work involved in extracting information –

'We are in the process of putting all our old information on to a new database that will make everyone's job so much easier. We will now be able to use the information to report on our work without having to run around getting information from all over the place. It's brilliant.'

Some organisations had also identified a need to have specific databases in order to record information on their casework with service users. The Project ran an introductory session on Lasa's AIMS database[10] and arranged for those groups

---

10 AIMS (Advice & Information Management System) is a client contact database designed by Lasa to meet the needs of advice and information providers.

interested in the database to receive subsidised administration costs and introductory training for staff. The database has been adopted by four of the participating organisations. In addition, the Project also assisted other groups to develop customised databases through assisting with the recruitment of a ICT volunteer to work on a database to improve reporting and enhance information security and to develop a relationship management database with the technical support providers JADe.

<div style="background-color:#d9e0c8; padding:1em;">

CASE STUDY

Women's Environmental Network – ICT Volunteer

During their involvement in the Circuit Rider Project, Women's Environmental Network (WEN) has had three IT support volunteers. The Project has helped advise WEN on the roles that the volunteers could assist with and helped recruit volunteers by participating in the recruitment process.

The volunteers have taken on a range of responsibilities according to their individual skill set and the amount of time they could spare. The main responsibilities for all of them has been overseeing WEN's network, troubleshooting problems for colleagues and liaising with the Circuit Rider Project's technical support contractor, JADe. WEN is totally dependent on its network and with nobody on the staff team having the time or ICT expertise to take on responsibility for the tasks the work of the volunteers has been invaluable to the organisation.

Having a volunteer with the necessary skills has eased the IT frustrations of other staff and volunteers within WEN and ensured that essential tasks are carried out which has ensured that WEN's IT systems are working more effectively than in the past.

</div>

A number of organisations also identified the need to resolve networking issues or to develop their existing networks as a potential special project. The Project worked with these groups to provide a range of solutions including providing technical help with stabilising existing network environments, installing wireless networks; assisting with procuring hardware and installing networks.

Organisations that had received assistance in dealing with network issues had started to see the benefits of the changes in their work –

'We were constantly experiencing problems that were really having an affect on our work as everything was so slow. We received support to get this sorted out and now we know what to do if we have any other problems. Without this help it would still be driving us mad. It's such a relief that it all seems to work OK.'

Supporting organisations to resolve issues such as updating existing databases and networks to ensure they can be used most effectively appears to have been a significant help to those organisations involved in this aspect of the Project. This has been one of the key developments of this Project compared to the first Circuit Rider Project. Providing staff with a high level of support to resolve issues that can have a major impact on their work in an area in which they have little knowledge or experience is considered a major success factor for those organisations receiving this level of support.

<div style="background-color:#d9e0c8; padding:1em;">

CASE STUDY

CARIS Haringey – a new network

CARIS was operating a peer-to-peer network that was not working efficiently with staff regularly experienced freezing or crashing of computers, losing data, and continuous problems with internet access. There was no IT support prior to the start of the Project and no information was available about how the original network had been set up. This meant that work and services were affected adversely so investigations were made into setting up a server-based network.

CARIS decided that their best option was to upgrade the network and decided to do this in conjunction with a planned office move that was due to take place. They also had to make some tough decisions on what to do and had limited funding available.

Two months prior to the move they began planning the upgrade along with their Circuit Rider who helped to develop a specification and tender document for the IT upgrade. Following the tender process

</div>

and their move into new offices the project had network cabling, new PCs and a Windows server installed.

As a result of the upgrade the previous problems have been successfully resolved. In addition, the project has identified a number of other benefits including the introduction of a shared contacts folder, so they no longer have to keep several lists, personalised email also means that staff are all receiving mail individually, data is backed up on a regular basis and the AIMS case management database has now been installed.

CARIS have said that without the Circuit Rider Project and the help of their individual Circuit Rider it would have been much more difficult set up a new network as none of their current staff had the relevant experience to deal with the complex issues involved in completing the task.

3.5.9 Seminars and workshops

The Circuit Rider project has run a series of seminars and workshops for staff from participating organisations. These included:

- Project launch;
- Project resources;
- ICT Fundraising;
- Security & risk assessment;
- Strategy development;
- ICT volunteers;
- Internet Tools for Communication;
- Data Protection;
- Accessibility.

Nearly all of the key contacts interviewed for the evaluation had attended at least one of the seminars or workshops and in most case other staff from their organisations had also attended. The seminars and workshops are generally thought to have been useful with most organisations saying that they had used knowledge learned from the seminars or workshops in their day-to-day work on ICT –

'A range of staff have attended the seminars. We bring something back from all of the seminars that can be used in our work. The fundraising

seminar was really useful and I passed the information on to our Director who is now using it to help support funding applications.'

During the evaluation of the first Circuit Rider project a number of organisations raised time as an issue. As a result the project reduced the time involved in attending seminars from a full day to half a day. Despite this a number of organisations raised time commitments as the main reason for not being able to attend seminars –

'The difficulties with seminars is finding the time to attend.'

'We have attended some of the seminars and they have been useful but time is a factor.'

This was considered a particular problem for part-time staff who lost a higher percentage of their work time attending seminars and workshops. Despite the central location of the venue for the seminars a number of organisations commented that travel time to the venue was also a factor in deciding whether to attend.

A number of organisations had received in-house training for their staff on issues either specific to their organisation or on a subject relevant to a number of their staff. Organisations welcomed the provision of training at their own venue and on specific subjects as it reduced the amount of time that organisations needed to commit and it removed concerns that the training may not be relevant to them.

Organisations recognised the value of receiving training through the seminars and workshops with a number organisations reporting that ICT training was generally inaccessible to them due to high costs. A number of organisations reported that even where they got charitable or voluntary sector discounts for ICT training most of them were operating on very low or non-existent training budgets with ICT competing with all other staff training needs.

3.6 Strategic development, interaction between organisations, funding and budgeting and staff and management involvement

In addition to providing the range of support functions for participating organisations the Project also sought to address a number of other

issues that were considered relevant to ICT development within the organisations. These issues had been identified as a result of specific recommendations based on the evaluation of first Circuit Rider Project and generally through the development of the circuit rider model both in the USA and UK. These issues include:

- ICT strategic development;
- Interaction between participating organisations;
- Funding and budgeting for ICT; and
- Involvement of staff and management in using ICT.

3.6.1 ICT strategic development

The limited use and awareness of strategic development by smaller voluntary and community sector organisations has been identified as one of the key issues that the Circuit Rider Project hoped to address. The initial evaluation and subsequent research carried out by Lasa found that 'managers and other staff with responsibility often lack the skills to plan use of ICT by developing an ICT strategy.'[11]

The Circuit Rider project has attempted to address the lack of ICT strategic development through engagement with key decision-makers in participating organisations and through support to key contacts to promote the benefits of ICT strategy development.

For a number of organisations participation in the Circuit Rider project has increased awareness of the need to develop a strategy for ICT. Unsurprisingly organisations with experience of strategic planning in other areas of their work, or with an overall organisational strategic plan, appear to have had the most success in taking forward the development of an ICT strategy –

'Working with the Circuit Rider project has raised the profile of ICT for us and it has now become an integral part of our business planning.'

A number of organisations reported that participating in the project had increased awareness of the need for a strategy but dealing with more immediate issues and a lack of time had prevented the development of a strategy –

'We have made significant progress in understanding the need for a strategy. We still don't have a strategy in place and I'm not sure when this will be developed. There are so many other things that we have to deal with. The project has helped us move on significantly in terms of how we think about ICT but we still need to spend time identifying what our future direction will be.'

One of the organisations involved in the project was in the process of developing an organisational strategy and intended to include ICT –

'We are more aware of the need for a strategy but have done nothing to put it in place. We are working to develop our overall business strategy and ICT will be considered as part of this process.'

The Circuit Rider Project's work on developing Action Plans with organisations and commitment to the development of ICT strategies appears to have increased awareness within the majority of the organisations in the project for the need for strategic development.

One of the key issues for the lack of progress on strategic development for many of the participating organisations is the sheer number of priorities that organisations are working on. In many cases ICT is competing with other priorities for organisational time and at this stage is not considered an integral part of organisational development for many organisations. In a number of cases key contacts participating in the project believe they are moving in the right direction with a greater awareness of strategic planning and development within their organisations. However, the benefits of strategic planning are not always clear to senior managers and management committee members while they continue to compete for time with service delivery and financial crises that tend to take precedence over longer term planning.

3.6.2 Interaction between participating organisations

One of the aims of the project was to build a community from the participating organisations that would be able to share knowledge, experiences and information on ICT rather than relying on the expertise provided by the Circuit Rider Project team.

---

11 London ChangeUp ICT Project, Colin Wilson, Lasa, 2004

The project concentrated on developing the community through the internet mailing list and through interaction at seminars and workshops based on evidence gathered from the evaluation of the first Circuit Rider project.

The majority of organisations reported limited or no interaction between themselves and the other participating organisations –

'There isn't a great deal of interaction between the agencies. It hasn't felt like a community of people. It would have been good to know what other groups were doing but don't feel that this has happened.'

A number of organisations reported that the lack of interaction wasn't a problem and the interaction between themselves and the Circuit Rider team was more beneficial, in terms of getting the responses they needed, than sharing information and experiences with the other organisations –

'Generally the interaction between the groups was limited. I didn't view this as a problem. If I needed to ask questions on IT then I want to speak to an expert. Discussions and opinions on how things work are OK but they don't often get you the detail that you need to take things forward.'

A number of organisations suggested ways that interaction between the organisations taking part in the project could be improved. These included:

- Providing organisations with more information on each other at the onset of the project;

- Setting up more informal sessions between groups rather than relying on training and seminars to get groups together as it was felt these didn't always provide the right environment for general discussions with people attending concentrating on learning a specific skill;

- The Circuit Rider Project team identifying an issue common to a number of organisations and bringing them together to discuss either face-to-face or using the mailing list to target specific groups;

- Organising meetings for organisations that are from the same location, eg London Borough, working on the same issue, eg welfare benefits or with the same client group, eg disabled people;

- Building in requirements in the organisation's agreement to joining the project to attend quarterly meetings with other participating organisations. It was suggested that a short half hour demonstration on a common issue or a guest speaker could be used as an incentive for groups to attend.

A number of other groups mentioned that this was an issue that was beyond the remit of the Circuit Riders Project and reported that it was a common issue facing the voluntary and community sector –

'There's a lot of talk about partnership and joint working in the voluntary and community sector. But how often does it really happen. We don't feel that it's necessary unless there is something specific to work on.'

The range of organisations participating in the project was also seen as a deterrent to organisations working more closely together –

'We're all very different organisations which means that it was always unlikely that we would get together. Just because we all come from the voluntary sector doesn't mean we have that much in common. We all do loads of different things.'

The community development aspect of the project has met with limited success. However, taking into account the comments made by organisations it would appear that this is not a key priority for the majority of organisations in their current position in relation to ICT development. The organisations in the project that were most receptive to community development were those who had the most developed ICT systems or who had experienced similar working methods in other elements of their work.

3.6.3 Funding and budgeting

One of the key issues identified in the evaluation of the first Circuit Rider Project was the need to demonstrate to funders to invest in ICT for small voluntary and community organisations and to increase awareness amongst organisations of the need to apply for ICT funding in applications to funders and to consider ICT costs in organisational budgeting.

All of the key contacts interviewed reported that their organisations were more aware of the need to include ICT costs in funding applications and organisational budgets –

'Our fundraiser is now aware of the need to include IT in funding applications and we have included it in recent applications.'

'We have now been able to develop a sustainable IT budget. This is now included in the organisation's overall planning and budgeting processes.'

However, while awareness has increased and some organisations have been successful in obtaining funding the majority had not been able to secure additional funding –

'We've not achieved any additional funding but we now think about it when making bids and include specific funding for ICT. We'll keep trying but it's difficult while funders fail to recognise all the costs involved in using ICT.'

The need for funders to recognise the costs of implementing and supporting ICT systems and provide this to organisations they fund was raised by a number of organisations –

'Working with computers is very expensive for small groups. The increasing dependence on computers means that we have to work with them. Most of our funders require so much information from us for reporting that it is only possible to do this using computer systems. We get some help but funding us to set up systems and to get support would be really useful.'

A number of organisations praised the information and seminar that the project had provided on funding issues and potential funders –

'The information on potential funders and the help in identifying what should be included in funding bids has been really useful.'

The increased awareness of ICT costs and the need to include them in organisational budgets and funding applications appears to be one area where other staff and particularly management, who often have responsibility for funding applications in small voluntary and community organisations, have engaged with the work of the Circuit Rider Project –

'Our Chief Executive is now more aware of including ICT in funding applications. The information we got from the project is now used in all our funding applications.'

'We budget for ICT now. It just used to come out of our general budget if we could find some money from somewhere. We now have a separate entry in our accounts for ICT so we are monitoring our expenditure more effectively. In our experience funders can be persuaded to fund ICT but they need systems in place to be able to identify ICT costs and expenditure in budgets.'

While most of the organisations are still struggling to meet their ICT costs the majority are much more informed about potential sources of funding for specific ICT projects, are including ICT in general funding applications and identifying the costs of ICT in their organisational budgeting.

The cost of ICT development and paying for support remains a problem for most organisations. This is only likely to change when the majority of funders are prepared to recognise the contribution ICT plays in the work of organisations and accept applications for ICT development and support costs as a standard part of funding applications.

3.6.4 Involving other staff and management in the project

The evaluation of the initial Circuit Rider Project that ran between 2002–2004 identified the need to improve the awareness of ICT amongst staff, managers and management committee members and increase their engagement with the project. As a result the Circuit Rider project team built capacity into the project to support organisations by discussing the project with other staff, managers and management committees.

A number of organisations took the opportunity to invite Circuit Rider project staff to attend staff and management committee meetings and the project team ran a number of Dream Big[12] exercises with organisations to identify their ideal use of ICT.

---

12 The Dream Big exercise involved Circuit Rider Project staff working with groups of staff and managers from organisations to identify their thoughts on ICT development. Groups are engaged in a scenario where they have unlimited resources and are asked what they would like to do with ICT in that situation. The group then use the 'ideal' scenario to identify priorities, identify what is currently achievable, measure the possibility of achieving change and what actions they need to take to achieve the change including planning for that change.

Disability Advice Service Lambeth – Dreaming big

At the start of the Project, Disability Advice Service Lambeth (DASL) recognised that their organisational strategic plan included the need for a separate ICT strategy to be developed. After attending the Project's Policy and Strategy Workshop, DASL staff drew up a draft ICT strategy that was subsequently adopted by DASL's Management Committee.

In order to develop the strategy further and to involve a range of staff, DASL organised a half-day workshop that was attended by all staff, including DASL's director. DASL invited their Circuit Rider to attend the meeting.

The Circuit Rider gave an overview of what the Project had achieved so far, and then invited staff to use a planning technique known as Dream Big. This technique is used to get staff to contribute their ideas for making better use of ICT based on the premise that an organisation has unlimited funds. Working in small groups and feeding back, staff came up with a range of ideas from relatively low-cost and 'do-able' improvements which could be implemented fairly easily such as information searching and sharing through to using fairly complex new technologies such as Web 2.0 tools and Voice over Internet Protocol to assist service users. The ideas were all captured and written up with barriers to progression noted and priorities identified.

Where Circuit Rider Project staff had attended meetings and carried out the Dream Big exercises organisations tended to report increased engagement other staff, management and management committee members in the in the work of the project and an increased awareness in the benefits of ICT –

'The Circuit Rider project attended our staff meeting to carry out a Dream Big exercise which was useful for getting staff to think about IT. We've also carried out a training needs analysis to identify knowledge and skills and have started to put training in place. This has been positive and started to get staff engaged with IT.'

Organisations that reported involving other staff in the project including discussions on developing the Action Plan, opportunities to attend training and seminars, circulating information and discussing changes tended to report increased engagement:

'All of the staff have been involved in the project and this has been good for the organisation. It has increased staff awareness of systems and how ICT works and how it can help in their work.'

A number of key contacts reported that despite efforts to engage them in the project other staff and managers remained disinterested –

'The Circuit Rider project worker attended our team meeting to increase awareness of the project and ICT generally. Staff have had updates but they are not necessarily interested.'

The majority of key contacts engaging with the project had taken over responsibility for ICT in their organisation usually as a result of showing some level of interest or an ability to resolve problems either themselves or through contacts. The use of these 'accidental techies'[13] within an organisation can often lead to the devolvement of responsibility from other staff and managers to those who show an interest or aptitude for ICT.

Engaging staff, management and management committee members in ICT development continues to prove difficult for the majority of small voluntary and community organisations. Staff and managers usually have a number of elements to their roles and staff tend to prioritise the delivery of services to users while managers and management committee members often have to prioritise crisis management. Unstable funding situations and lack of resources can place organisations in a position where they have limited capacity to engage with ICT.

A number of the key contacts interviewed reported that only when staff and managers were

---

13 A person who starts off in a post unrelated to ICT, then by evolution, choice, or necessity ends up with the role of looking after an organisation's technology needs.

able to see the benefit to their specific job-related tasks did they begin to appreciate the benefits of developing ICT. However, while the benefits of a new system could be recognised this rarely led to an overall increase in the interest of staff and managers in ICT or acknowledgement of how vital ICT could be in developing systems and services.

3.7 Future support needs and circuit rider development

As part of the evaluation process organisations were asked to identify their ongoing needs once the Circuit Rider Project had ended and to identify the key development issues for any future Circuit Rider Project.

The majority of organisations thought that the project had been too short and felt that despite making significant progress on a number of issues they had identified at the start of the project they were only getting to a point where specific tasks were being completed and they could start thinking about other priorities from their Action Plans. The majority of organisations were unclear of what the future held for them once support from the project ended –

'We're not sure what is going to happen in the future. We have taken lots of first steps. We are now looking at strategic planning and thinking of using a consultant to help drive this forward. We would like to remain in contact. To have someone who is confident about ICT is a real help.'

The majority of organisations also expressed an interest in staying in contact with the project in some capacity and would welcome an extension of the project, in particular, to enable the telephone and email support service to continue –

'We would definitely be interested in staying involved with the project. We've still got lots of things to do from the Action Plan. If the project was longer feel that would be able to achieve a lot more. We're concerned that if we're left alone then we won't be able to do the work we need to as other things will take priority. There are so many demands on time and ICT will not always be our number one priority.'

In addition to the telephone and email support organisations identified a number of other key support needs to enable them to continue their work on ICT development. These included:

- Website development;
- Training for staff and volunteers on how using ICT can benefit their work;
- Basic training for staff and volunteers on using specific applications and systems;
- Technical support;
- Six-monthly progress meeting measured against the Action Plan and to identify on new problems or priorities;
- Working with managers and trustees to develop the ICT strategy; and
- More seminars and workshops.

A number of organisations had started to prepare for the end of the project and were identifying a number of alternative suppliers for technical and general support. These organisations reported that they believed that they had benefited from involvement with the Circuit Rider Project in being able to negotiate with potential suppliers and having a much clearer understanding of that their organisation needed in terms of support.

During the evaluation the key contacts were also asked whether they would recommend the Circuit Rider Project to other organisations that they knew, often dependent on the needs of an organisation. A number of organisations thought that the work of the project could be particularly beneficial to smaller organisations with the most limited resources but recognised that this could be particularly time-consuming for the project. All of the participating organisations said that they would recommend the project to other organisations –

'I would definitely recommend the project to other organisations, particularly smaller less supported organisations. I can think of so many organisations that could benefit from involvement with the project.'

Organisations were also asked to identify potential developments that would benefit another Circuit Rider Project should one be developed in the future. Organisations had a range of suggestions on how the project could develop including:

- Running effective partnerships on computer use between organisations in the voluntary and community sector;
- Concentrating more on problem solving rather than operating in an advisory role;

- Holding a conference on ICT funding bringing together organisations needing funding and funders;

- Further development of information resources;

- Further work on developing communities and peer-to-peer support projects;

- Developing local partnerships;

- Persuading funders to commit to three or five year funding cycles.

The range of identified development opportunities again reflects the diversity of the groups involved in the project, however, it also reflects the progress that organisations have made as a number mentioned that they wouldn't have thought about those kind of things prior to being part of the Circuit Riders Project.

There is a need for any ongoing circuit rider work to address the ongoing and identified support needs of participating organisations. Any project needs to include a degree of flexibility in order to be able to adapt to newly identified needs that were not initially recognised at the outset of the project. The current Project has moved towards delivering this element of flexibility through its existing work and should consider the comments of the participating organisations in any future development.

4 Achieving the Project's aims

Key findings

From the information provided from the interviews with key contacts at participating organisations, the Project team and the Project Advisory Group we have identified a number of key findings for the Project based on its current aims and the lessons learnt from the previous Circuit Rider Project. These are:

- The project has generally met its key aims and objectives. Increasing organisational capacity has produced the most clear-cut results. Progress has been made on all of the other key aims, however, promoting best practice and strategic development still require attention in order for organisations to be more engaged in these key areas;

- The project has effectively increased the capacity for participating organisations in all of the key development phases identified – technology planning, staff use of ICT, ICT administration, networks, internet and maintenance support. ICT administration and maintenance and support have produced the most effective results based on distance travelled;

- All of the support services provided by the project have been used by participating organisations with telephone and email support and technical support viewed as the most useful for organisation's at an early stage of ICT development;

- The Circuit Rider Project needs to ensure that it is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of participating organisations to keep organisations engaged in the project;

- The project has substantially increased organisations' awareness and understanding of the need to include ICT costs in funding applications and to understand the costs involved during organisational budgeting.

Accessing funding, particularly for replacement hardware and software and technical support, remains an issue for the majority of organisations involved in the project;

- There is an increasing understanding of the benefits of the circuit riding method of support to voluntary and community organisations in relation to ICT development, particularly for second tier support agencies. Further work is needed with funders and frontline agencies to promote the benefits of the circuit rider method of ICT development; and

- The Project Advisory Group has worked more effectively in the second project and has benefited from the development of a clear remit and terms of reference at the outset of the project.

4.1 Introduction

This section of the evaluation considers the views of the Circuit Rider Project team. A series of interviews were carried out with the team to obtain their views on the success of the project, identify current issues and future development of the project.

The interviews with the Project team were based on how the far the team considered that the project had achieved its key aims and objectives and had addressed the key issues for development identified in the evaluation of the first Circuit Rider Project. The key aims of the project were to –

- Increase the capacity of small to medium-sized voluntary organisations to manage and support their ICT systems;

- Enable organisations to make more effective use of funding received for ICT equipment and projects;

- Assist organisations to develop strategies to improve their services through the effective use of IT; and

- Promote best practice for effective management and support of ICT with voluntary organisations and funders.

Interviews were also carried out with the Project Advisory Group to obtain their views on the project and the role of the group.

4.2 Aim 1 – Increasing the capacity of small to medium-sized voluntary organisations to manage and support their ICT systems

The Project Team has carried out a range of services in order to assist organisations participating in the project to build their ICT capacity. These have included planning and progress, seminars and workshops, information, technical and telephone and email support.

In order to measure the distance travelled for organisations in relation to increasing capacity the project introduced a new method of self-assessment[14] that enabled organisations to measure their starting position, prior to the organisational Healthcheck at the beginning of the project, and measure how far they had progressed by March 2007. The self-assessment shows that organisations have made progress in all of the key areas with ICT administration and maintenance and support showing the most significant developments.

4.2.1 Planning and progress

The team considered that the selection and planning processes of the project had worked effectively. The team reported that initial visits to organisations to carry out Healthchecks had taken significantly longer than they had in the first Circuit Rider project. They consider this to be attributable to sending self-assessment forms to organisations prior to the initial visit. In contrast the subsequent progress meetings have tended to be shorter than they were in the first Circuit Rider Project.

The self-assessment surveys seem to have resulted in key contacts within organisations becoming more aware of ICT issues and as a result requiring more detailed explanations about concerns at the initial meeting stage. However, the increased awareness due to time spent during the initial self-assessment, Healthchecks and action planning stages has resulted in key contacts requiring less detailed explanations at subsequent meetings.

Organisations had initially expressed concern about the amount of information obtained from the self-assessment, Healthcheck and action planning stages, however, the evaluation has shown that the majority of organisations involved now recognise the usefulness of spending time on this at the outset of the project. The project team believe that investing time at this stage increases organisations' awareness of the tasks that need to be carried out, what working with the Circuit Rider project can achieve and developing skills for key contacts at the outset of the project.

The introduction of a summary of the Action Plan to provide organisations with a manageable overview of their required actions was seen as a positive development by team but what was not considered sufficient in its own right to enable organisations to plan their work.

4.2.2 Seminars and workshops

The seminars and workshops developed by the team were generally well received by the participating organisations with a range of staff attending and positive feedback on both the delivery of the sessions and usefulness in relating the information to their work. The team had developed a programme based on the requirements of the participating organisations to help them meet their own goals and thought these had generally been successful. In addition, some of the seminars and workshops had been reduced to half-day sessions following the guidance from the evaluation from the first Circuit Rider Project.

The team identified attendance at the seminars and workshops as an ongoing issue. Early seminars and workshops had generally received better attendance than the later seminars. Organisations have identified time as a major barrier to attending training and seminars. Time constraints for organisations will continue to be a major issue in relation to training and learning experiences the consideration of some of the organisations' suggestions for alternative training delivery such as short in-house sessions on a specific issue should be considered in any future circuit rider project in order to engage organisations more in training and learning sessions and to increase their awareness of the potential benefits for their own organisation.

14 A more detailed explanation and summary of the findings is available at Appendix 4.

4.2.3 Information

The original evaluation of the first Circuit Rider Project raised the volume of information provided by the project as an issue for some organisations. In response to this the team have reduced the amount of information produced and spent more time referring organisations to existing resources, such as the ICT Hub Knowledgebase, through the monthly information digest and internet mailing list. This has enabled the team to concentrate on providing practical information, for example, templates on risk assessment, housekeeping, staff induction and data protection, a health and safety audit checklist and a budget calculator.

The team generally feel that the levels of information provided by the project are at a manageable level and the emphasis on producing information addressing practical issues has been beneficial to participating organisations.

4.2.4 Technical and telephone and email support

The provision of technical and telephone and email support is viewed by those organisations that needed it and the Circuit Rider Project team as one of the most successful aspects of the project. The high level of demand for these services from organisations has stretched the team's resources at times but the positive aspects reported by the organisations has highlighted the need for these services particularly for those organisations at an early stage in ICT development.

The team reported that the relationship with JADe, the main technical supplier, had been extremely positive and had ensured organisations received the independent support they needed to address the technical issues they needed to resolve. Working with an organisation with an understanding of the way that the voluntary and community sector works was seen as vital to achieving an effective relationship.

4.2.5 Flexibility

One of the key findings for the team in running the second Circuit Rider Project is the increasing need to provide a flexible service. The team reported that organisations will 'pick and choose' the elements of the project that they wish to engage with and it is essential that the project is able to be flexible to keep organisations involved.

CASE STUDY

Southwark Diocesan Welcare – flexible service delivery

On selecting Southwark Diocesan Welcare to participate in the Circuit Rider Project the Project team identified that the ICT requirements of Welcare needed a substantial amount of work and a different approach to the normal Project way of working. Welcare were starting the process of centralising the management of 11 centres based in south London which had previously operated as separate organisations, including integration of ICT systems. In view of this the Project team suggested forming a Working Group of representatives from the Welcare centres and central office to identify priorities and support their work on integration.

The Circuit Rider Project advised on planning for taking forward a number of priorities identified by Welcare as part of the integration of services including centralising email, scoping the introduction of servers and broadband to Welcare centres, scoping for a central database, upgrading and replacing current PCs and introducing centralised storage of documents such as policies and budgets and to develop the organisation's ICT strategy.

The Project assisted the Working Group to develop a strategic plan and funding bid for the integration of the ICT systems across the network of Welcare centres and to engage with senior management and the organisation's Board to make them aware of the ICT needs of the organisation. While the organisation has struggled to obtain funding to implement the strategy the Project has ensured a commitment to ICT development by senior management and the management committee and resulted in a number of significant changes in how the 11 centres use ICT including centralised buying of hardware and charity-discounted software, upgrading equipment, sourcing technical support for four centres and realistic budgeting for IT.

4.3   Aim 2 – Enabling organisations to make more effective use of funding received for ICT equipment and projects

Obtaining funding and budgeting for ICT costs remains a key issue for organisations in relation to their ICT development. The project has concentrated on providing information resources and increasing organisation's awareness of potential funding opportunities and building in the costs of ICT to funding applications and budgets.

The team believe that the provision of a range of services on funding and budgeting, including a seminar, budget calculator and information on potential funding sources has been well-received by participating organisations. This is supported by the organisations themselves who report that there has been considerable progress made in relation to increased awareness of potential funding, what to include in funding applications, the need to incorporate ICT costs in budgets and a recognition of the actual costs of ICT being recognised by all of the organisations participating in the project. While awareness and knowledge on how to apply for funding has increased, actually securing additional funding resources remains difficult for the majority of organisations.

4.4   Aim 3 – Assisting organisations to develop strategies to improve their services through the effective use of IT

Interviews with the participating organisations have generally identified a lack of progression on strategic development either specifically on ICT or the inclusion of ICT in general organisational business and strategic planning. Organisations that have progressed the furthest with strategic development are those where senior managers or management committee members have either been directly involved in the project or where the person with responsibility for the circuit riders project has worked to influence senior management or the management committee.

There is a feeling within the Circuit Rider Project Team that a number of organisations involved in the project were not ready to engage in strategic development. Organisations that were starting from an extremely low level of ICT awareness, knowledge and skills are more likely to want to resolve immediate issues than to concentrate on planning for longer term solutions.

The team believe that there is a wider issue in relation to the development of strategies generally that goes beyond ICT strategic planning. Many organisations involved in the project have either carried out little or no strategic planning or are at an early stage in developing strategic plans. The team believe that those organisations that are currently developing strategic and business plans are concentrating on other key areas with the inclusion of ICT in general strategies at a fairly limited stage at present.

The Circuit Rider Project has started the process of helping strategic development for a number of the organisations, particularly those that had less immediate needs that required attention. However, the Project team feels that this work is currently limited and is generally superseded by an organisation's need to 'firefight' immediate problems with their current ICT systems. One of the key issues in the lack of development of strategies for ICT is that the majority of organisations generally do not have one person who is able to take decisions on strategic development who is sufficiently knowledgeable or aware of ICT issues to include them in any planning that may be taking place.

Both the participating organisations and the Project team reported a potential problem of overload for organisations in relation to organisational development through the work of the national Hubs as part of the ChangeUp programme. The work of the Hubs, to provide support to organisations, is seen to be moving organisations forward in relation to organisational development but the introduction of all of the Hubs them at the same time covering a broad range of issues could have overloaded organisations with limited experience of prioritising work and longer term planning. Where organisations are carrying out organisational development this work ICT is often overlooked or is given limited consideration or priority.

The Project team believe, and this is supported by the views of the participating organisations, that substantial progress has been made in increasing organisation's awareness of the need for strategic planning and development. While only a limited number of organisations have developed strategic plans that are either ICT specific or include ICT in general plans, from the interviews conducted as part of the evaluation the majority of organisations are considering the longer term impacts of ICT on

their work. It is suggested that more work needs to be carried out in order to build on the increasing awareness of participating organisations in this element of the Project. It is likely that support on strategic development is more likely to be successful once organisations have resolved their immediate issues and have well-established and stable ICT systems in place.

4.5 Aim 4 – Promoting best practice for effective management and support of ICT with voluntary organisations and funders

One of the key aims for the project is to promote best practice in relation to ICT management and support throughout the voluntary and community sector and to both funders and policy-makers that can influence how ICT is used throughout the sector.

The Circuit Rider Project team has spent time promoting circuit riding as an effective method for producing support to voluntary and community organisations on ICT. This has resulted in the circuit rider model being accepted as a workable model by a range of voluntary and community organisations, funders and second tier support organisations.

The Project team has developed a range of partnerships with second tier support organisations both through the work on the Circuit Rider Project and through work on the ICT Hub. This work has led to a number of second tier support groups generally accepting circuit riding as an effective method of providing support to meet the ICT needs of smaller voluntary and community organisations. The team believe that there has been less success in promoting circuit riding to frontline agencies, partly due to the sheer numbers of agencies that could benefit from a circuit rider style project and that the model needs to be promoted to a wider range of frontline organisations. The team are currently considering how best to take this forward.
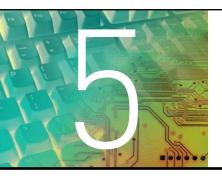
According to the Project team there is still a need to inform funders of the actual costs of ICT

to organisations and the benefits that the circuit rider model can bring to organisations. While many funders now accept the need for organisations to include the initial costs of ICT in funding bids, particularly in relation to start up costs including purchasing hardware and software, there is less acceptance of meeting ongoing costs of updating hardware and software and meeting support costs.

In order to promote best practice between participating organisations the project team put in place a series of services that would enable organisations to learn from each other's experiences, including the internet mailing list and identifying common issues between organisations to enable them to share experiences. This aspect of the project has been relatively unsuccessful with organisations reporting limited use of the services put in place and a preference for speaking to an 'expert' rather than another organisation who may be in a similar position to resolve an ICT issue.

The team believe that as organisations become more confident in their ICT systems there is more scope for developing good practice and shared working opportunities. While organisations are getting their systems to an acceptable level and dealing with regular crises and emergencies this will take priority over working closely with other organisations to learn from their experience.

Throughout the project the Circuit Rider Project team have worked closely with circuit riders from a range of organisations and individual circuit riders to provide support and to facilitate joint working between circuit riders. One of the key issues for consideration for the circuit rider movement is the issue of quality standards and whether that could be used to promote the concept and ensure the quality of the services or whether it would restrict the work of circuit riders thus effecting the general ethos of the movement. The Circuit Rider Project team have been heavily involved in this debate and it was the main theme of the Circuit Rider conference held in Birmingham earlier this year. The team feel that there is a role for developing effective standards that can be used to promote the circuit riding method of providing support and promote the quality of the service to funders and policy-makers. This will be taken forward as part of Lasa's work with the ICT Hub during 2007–2008.

5 Project management and resources

5.1 Project Team

The Project is run by the equivalent of 1.2 full time staff. This comprises a project manager and three part-time circuit riders. Two of the circuit riders are employed directly by Lasa with an external consultant, who has worked with specific organisations from their initial Healthcheck interviews, filling the other part-time post.

The team also receives support from other ICT staff based at Lasa, particularly in dealing with telephone and email support enquiries on specific issues and has contracted with JADe[15] (Joint Application Development enterprises) to provide technical support to a number of participating organisations.

The Circuit Rider Project team has a range of duties and prioritising work can be difficult due to the large number of demands put on the team's time. The team has systems in place to ensure that work is completed but the range of tasks they are required to complete can mean that they spend more time than they would like on dealing with administrative tasks, such as seminar administration and reporting activities. Future circuit rider projects should consider building in more administrative support in any subsequent funding bids to ensure that both the needs of administrative duties and direct support to participating organisations are both met.

5.2 Project Advisory Group

The project has a Project Advisory Group that includes representatives from the funders, development workers and circuit riders.[16] The evaluation of the first Circuit Rider Project recommended that the Advisory Group would benefit from a clearer remit and terms of reference. The second Circuit Rider Project has

developed terms of reference[17] for the Advisory Group that include –

- To support and advise the Project Team;

- To monitor project progress against the Project Plan outcomes;

- To best ensure the project meets the requirements of all participating groups;

- To have an awareness of funding for sustainability of the project; and

- To act as advocates for the Circuit Rider model.

The evaluation process included a short interview with a sample of members from the Advisory Group to obtain their views on the project generally and the role of the Advisory Group. Circuit Rider Project team members were also interviewed to obtain their views on the role of the Project Advisory Group.

All of the Advisory Group members interviewed thought that the Circuit Rider Project had been successful based on the information they had received from the Circuit Rider Project team that provided details on progress for the project generally and on individual organisations.

The Advisory Group all thought that the Terms of Reference had been useful in enabling them to determine their roles in the project and to make a *'useful input and contribution to the project'*. Some members of the Advisory Group thought that it would have been beneficial to carry out a skills audit of the Advisory Group to identify additional skills that existed over and above their defined roles or skills that were missing from the group that could have been filled by adding additional members to the group.

All of the Advisory Group members interviewed and the Circuit Rider Project team

---

15 A description of the services provided by JADe is included in Appendix 2.
16 Information on the Project Advisory Group members is available in Appendix 3.
17 The full Terms of Reference for the Project Advisory Group are in Appendix 3.

thought that the balance of members had been useful and was beneficial to the work of the Project. Inviting members from different backgrounds and with different skills had enabled the Project to receive the support it needed from the Group.

All of the members raised the fact that it was *'fairly unique'* to include one of the project's main funders on the Advisory Group. This was generally considered to be a positive move, although members including the member representing the funder questioned whether this would have been different had there been problems with the project.

The Advisory Group members all thought that they had increased their awareness and understanding of the role of circuit riders in supporting small voluntary and community organisations and were in a stronger position to promote the work of circuit riders in their respective fields.

The Circuit Rider Project team believed that the Advisory Group has been extremely beneficial to the team in contributing to discussions about the direction of the project. The team felt that the balance of skills within the Advisory Group had been really useful and would also have liked to carry out a review of the Advisory Group's role after the first 12 months of the project to see whether additional members needed to be brought in. This had not happened as the Advisory Group had only begun to take shape later in the project development than expected and it was considered too early to consider changing the remit and membership at that stage.

The need to provide a clear remit and Terms of Reference for the Advisory Group identified in the evaluation of the first Circuit Rider Project and its implementation in the second Circuit Rider Project has given both the Advisory Group and the Project Team a clearer understanding of the role of the Advisory Group and its function within the project, providing benefits to both the Project team and the Advisory Group in understanding the direction of the project and the potential benefits for participating organisations.

6 Key learning points and future development opportunities

This section considers the key learning points from the evaluation and identifies potential development opportunities for ICT support and development with small voluntary and community sector organisations and more generally in relation to ICT development within the sector.

The key learning points are included to enable Lasa and other organisations, funders and policymakers to learn from the experience of the Circuit Rider Project Team's experience in delivering the project. The views in this section are based on discussions with the participating projects, the project team and advisory group and from other key stakeholders.

The need for ICT support and development

The evaluation of the Circuit Rider Project, backed up by research[18], indicates that ICT is viewed as a priority support need for London's independent advice sector. In the research findings organisations identified the need to increase ICT resources, access troubleshooting support and implement electronic case management systems as their key priorities.

The research found that access to sufficient levels of ICT remains an issue for the advice sector. Over 50% of organisations interviewed raised the lack of a sufficient number of computers to carry out advice work as an issue for their organisation. Smaller organisations reported that a lack of access to web-based advice resources limited their ability to carry out their work.

Lasa is viewed as one of the key potential suppliers of support along with organisations own advice networks. Of the organisations surveyed 59% of them identified Lasa as the preferred supplier of ICT support.

With the development of the ChangeUp national ICT Hub there is a belief throughout the voluntary and community sector that ICT skills across the sector will have greatly increased by

2014. This is likely to lead to greater expectations from workers about their own ICT skills and usage, which could lead to increased demand for Circuit Rider projects to support these developments.

The transfer of the responsibilities of the Hubs to CapacityBuilders and a lack of clarity about what this means to the future developments in infrastructure development have led to some uncertainty about how the existing work of the hubs will be delivered.

The development of ICT infrastructure

The Circuit Rider Project team consider the role of development workers, particularly those based in second tier support organisations such as VCSs and advice networks, e.g. AdviceUK, as vital to taking forward ICT development.

There is currently reluctance in some quarters to include ICT as a distinct aspect of development work and incorporate it into organisational development programmes. Some funders grant fund organisational development workers to help develop the capacity of the organisations they fund. Including ICT in this type of programme would increase the potential for ICT capacity development for smaller voluntary and community organisations. This could involve making ICT healthchecks a compulsory condition of grant entitlement, or it could involve funding local (borough-wide) or sub-regional levels of circuit rider provision for funded groups, using community or social enterprise models. The inclusion of ICT healthchecks in this type of grant funding by key funders would help promote the importance of ICT development both to organisations that need support and to other potential funders.

During the evaluation a number of groups supported the need to develop a local circuit riding model based on the premise that locally

---

18 *Supporting Advice in London: a review of infrastructure needs* (2006), Alison Lamb/Paul Treloar, Lasa

based circuit riders would be more aware of local situations and the work of the organisations they were working with. While there are clear benefits of a number of local agencies sharing the skills and support of a local circuit rider the evaluation data suggests that a sub-regional or London-wide model could be equally beneficial as long as effective systems are in place to support organisations ICT needs.

Dealing effectively with an organisation's issues appears to be one of the most important factors for organisations participating in the Project rather than locality of the support provider. What is vital to organisations is the ability of the support provider to understand their needs and how it fits with the services they are delivering.

Organisations involved in the Project also suggested that bringing together groups working on similar issues, e.g. environment, housing and homelessness, immigration or with specific groups of people, e.g. disabled people, homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers would benefit from working together on ICT development.

There is a clear need to ensure that organisations and individuals involved in supporting small voluntary and community organisations come together to ensure that the most effective support is provided. Consideration should be given to ensuring that ICT development is included in existing development structures and where necessary existing and new development workers are provided with the skills and knowledge they need to deliver this service or ICT specific development workers are recruited.

One potential solution is to match circuit riders with development workers to enable them to harness some of their skills and embed them into infrastructure organisations enabling them to:

- Explore the commonalities in the posts;

- Share the variety of skills;

- Shadow each other's work;

- Look at ways of improving signposting and referrals to one another.

Promotion of circuit riders to frontline agencies

While the Circuit Rider Project has been able to work with a group of organisations in order to develop the circuit rider movement it is crucial to improve the promotion of the benefit and value of circuit riders to frontline agencies in order to move towards a 'critical mass' where a large number of organisations are involved in the movement. It appears that at a national level through the work of the ChangeUp ICT Hub and at a regional level through the Government Office for London sub-regional CVS projects, there is a general buy-in to the ideals of the circuit rider movement. However, a large number of frontline organisations are unaware of the potential benefits of involvement with circuit riders.

Many networks and second tier organisations appear to support the model as offering good value to them and the groups they support. A key gap in understanding seems to be with frontline agencies, both in terms of recognising the importance of ICT strategy development but also in terms of what is on offer and what they can gain through working with a circuit rider.

The evaluation has identified that working with circuit riders has increased awareness of what benefits an organisation can gain from working with a circuit rider. However, while some organisations have begun to recognise the value in strategic planning at this stage it is less important to them than resolving specific ICT issues. Working with groups who have more stable and developed ICT systems is more likely to be successful in terms of developing strategic planning for future ICT development.

Quality and accreditation

Much of the significance of circuit riders comes from the ethos that informs their work, their attitude to clients and their aims in working with organisations. This is not always apparent to funders, policy makers or clients when considering technology options. The circuit rider movement is currently considering whether the development of an ethos statement, introduction of standards and a logo may help to highlight the concept and improve the identity, recognition and benefit to the sector of circuit riders.[19]

In order to convince sufficient funders, policy makers and organisations of the benefits of the circuit rider method there is a need for organisations using circuit riders and individual circuit riders to decide to take forward a quality and accreditation system for circuit riders. Without this it is unlikely that the movement will be able to develop its support to organisations sufficiently to

---

19 *Circuit Riders 2.0 The evolution of ICT development and support for the voluntary sector* (2006), Simon Pavitt and Sarah Lord Soáres, Lasa.
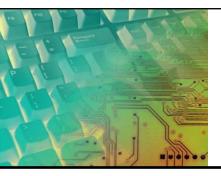
have significant impact on ICT development within the voluntary and community sector. There is a growing dependence on quality measurement that it expected throughout the sector both for organisations and funders and without this the movement unlikely to be able to attract sufficient funding or participation to make the required difference.

Strategic development

Strategic development and engagement with managers and management committee members has improved compared to the first circuit rider project. However, this still remains an area for further work that will ensure that ICT development is included in organisational planning and budgeting.

There is a clear demarcation between the attitude to strategic development of organisations involved in the project that are effectively carrying out crisis management in relation to ICT and those who have more established and stable ICT systems. The key contacts from the latter group of organisations are more interested in obtaining support on strategic development and how to engage with management and management committee members on the inclusion of ICT in organisational strategic planning or concentrating on specific ICT strategic planning.

There is scope for the development of a project that provides specific support to this group of workers to enable them to work with their managers and management committees to convince them of the benefits of ICT development.

Participating organisations

Advisory Centre for Education

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) is an independent registered charity, which offers information about state education in England and Wales for parents of school age children. ACE offers free telephone advice on many subjects including exclusion from school, bullying, special educational needs and schools admission appeals.

www.ace-ed.org.uk

Age Concern Hounslow

Age Concern Hounslow was established in 1993 and provides a social centre, advice and information and other forms of support for older people. The main purpose is one of prevention, encouraging older people to maintain a healthy lifestyle, maximising the physical and psychological well-being of elders in the local community.

www.ageconcernhounslow.org.uk

Age Concern Lewisham

Age Concern Lewisham is a charitable organisation working with a diverse community of older people to make the most of life in Lewisham. They provide a range of services, such as an information and advice service, a befriending scheme and a handy person scheme based on their users needs.

www.ageconcernlewisham.org.uk

Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group

Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group is a long established voluntary organisation and registered charity that aims to improve the quality of life and well being of Greek Cypriot and Greek women and their families. It does so by providing drop-in advice and information sessions, adult education classes, employment and training services, health project, play schemes, recreational and cultural activities.

www.arachne-group.org

Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum

The Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum (BEMCCF) is an umbrella organisation working with black and ethnic minority voluntary groups involved in providing community care services and black and ethnic minority service users and carers in the London Borough of Newham.

www.bemccf.org.uk

CARIS Haringey

CARIS are the only organisation in the London Borough of Haringey that exists solely to work with and for homeless families. Services are open to everyone in temporary accommodation in borough and include advice services on healthcare, education, housing, benefit claims and refugee status; a drop-in service that includes play for children, English classes for adults and a clothing and baby equipment exchange; a toy library and a summer play scheme.

www.carisharingey.org.uk

Disability Action in the Borough of Barnet

Disability Action in the Borough of Barnet (DabB) is a voluntary organisation providing a range of accessible services for disabled people living or working in the London Borough of Barnet, their families and supporters. As an organisation of disabled people DabB ensures that disabled people take part in the planning and management of its work.

www.dabb.org.uk

Disability Advice Service Lambeth

Disability Advice Service Lambeth (DASL) is an independent charity, based in Brixton, which runs a Community Legal Service quality marked Advice and Information Service, including an Enquiry Line, and supports people interested in Direct Payments. The Enquiry Line provides information on any aspect of disability. This includes issues such as welfare benefits, debt, housing, community care, direct payments and transport.

www.disabilitylambeth.org.uk

Disability Law Service

The Disability Law Service is a national registered charity that provides confidential and free legal advice for disabled adults on consumer contract, community care, disability discrimination, education, employment and welfare benefits. The service works to challenge the inequality and poverty of disabled people by securing for them free and equal access to their legal rights and entitlements.

www.dls.org.uk

Environmental Law Foundation

The Environmental Law Foundation (ELF) is the national UK charity linking communities and individuals to legal and technical expertise to prevent damage to the environment and to improve the quality for all. ELF provides education and training, promotes lectures, conferences and seminars, produces publications and encourages policy development.

www.elflaw.org.uk

Iranian Association

The Iranian Association provides a range of services to ethnic minorities and refugees in London including a welfare and immigration advice service providing information and advice on immigration, housing, benefits and women's issues, and an education and advice centre to enable unemployed ethnic minorities and refugees in London to overcome language barriers in having access to training and education opportunities.

www.iranianassociation.org.uk

New Avenues Youth and Community Project

New Avenues Youth and Community Project runs a number of projects including the Youth Forum, the Bangladesh Women and Girls Project, the Itfin Project for local Somali children, young people and their families, the Gardening Project and Community Support to the local Bangladesh and Somali communities.

www.newavenues.org.uk

Nubian Life

Nubian Life provides community care services to African Caribbean elders, both frail and active operating in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The project runs a resource centre providing care and support within a pleasant modern environment. Nubian Life currently has a contract with Hammersmith and Fulham to deliver a wide range of services, including day care for elders with high level need, luncheon club and other social and recreational activities for active elders.

www.nubian-life.org.uk

Southwark Diocesan Welcare

Welcare is a Christian charity, which works preventatively with children and families in need, irrespective of faith, culture, abilities or life choices, to achieve better quality of life for children and families. Services are directed towards supporting and strengthening families and are geared towards improving parenting skills and providing advice, guidance and support so that families can help themselves. The project works with 11 satellite Welcare centres operating across south London.

www.welcare.org.

Victim Support Wandsworth

Victim Support Wandsworth is an independent local charity that helps victims and witnesses in the London Borough of Wandsworth cope with crime. The service offers a free, confidential and non-judgemental service to all sections of the community and works for the rights of victims, witnesses and their families and for greater awareness of the effects of crime. The service provides practical and emotional support to victims and witnesses of crime through trained and experienced staff and volunteers.

www.vswandsworth.org.uk

Women's Environmental Network

Women's Environmental Network (WEN) is the only organisation in the UK working for women and the environment. The project works to educate, inform and empower women and men to care about the environment, campaigns on environmental and health issues from a women's perspective, enable people to use their consumer power as a force of positive environmental change, and carries out independent research to provide information that allows people to make informed and educated decisions on environmental issues.

www.wen.org.uk

APPENDIX 2
Project Team

Sarah Lord Soáres, Project Manager, Lasa

Ian Runeckles, part-time Circuit Rider, Lasa

Bijal Shah, part-time Circuit Rider, Support4IT

Miles Maier, part-time Circuit Rider, London ICT Champion, Lasa

Carl Evans and other members of the technical team, JADe

London Advice Services Alliance (Lasa)

Lasa provides strategic and innovative services to support the provision of expert independent advice for all. It works to secure this by promoting the development of high quality information and advice services, providing an expert resource to advice practitioners, influencing policy and stimulating good practice.

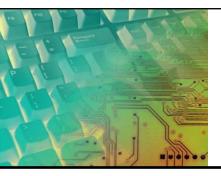**www.lasa.org.uk**

Support4IT

Support4it works with the voluntary and community sector with the key goal of empowering organisations to deliver services effectively. Support can range from providing training needs analysis for staff and volunteers to updating IT procedures.

Support4iT is familiar with the IT needs of voluntary and community organisations, both at a frontline and strategic level. Through strong diagnostic, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation skills in relation to ICT we are able to advise organisations how to effectively carry out their key organisational objectives.

Joint Application Development enterprises (JADe)

JADe is an independent IT company selected as the technical support supplier to the Circuit Rider Project due to their increasing levels of work in providing IT services and products to the voluntary and community sector, their understanding of the way the sector works and their commitment to delivering solutions that best fit the organisation they are working with.

www.jadegroup.co.uk

Lasa Circuit Rider Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Background

The Project Board will work with the Project Team towards the delivery of the Lasa Circuit Rider Project running from May 2005 to April 2007

Function of the Project Board

- To support and advise the Project Team

- To monitor project progress against the Project Plan outcomes

- To make every effort to keep abreast of project developments

- To best ensure the project meets the requirements of all participating groups

- To have an awareness of funding for sustainability of the project

- To participate in and contribute to the evaluation as required

- To attend meetings as necessary

- To act as advocates for the Circuit Rider model.

Membership

Maher Al-Ugaily, Superhighways Partnership
www.superhighways.org.uk

Jenny Field, The City Bridge Trust
www.bridgehousegrants.org.uk

Siobhan Hogan, AdviceUK London
www.adviceuk.org.uk

Terry Stokes, Lasa
www.lasa.org.uk

Mark Walker, Sussex Community Internet Project
www.scip.org.uk

Chair

Sarah Lord Soáres will convene the Circuit Rider Project Board meetings. If the designated Chair is not available then Ian Runeckles will be responsible for convening and conducting the meetings.

Frequency of meetings

Meetings shall be held every 2 months from July 2005.

Review timetable

The Project Board shall be formally assessed for effectiveness at the end of the first year of operation. This is to ensure the roles of the Board are appropriate and to identify any gaps that need attention.

Self-assessment measure of distance travelled

The project initiated a new method of self-assessment that all the participating organisations carried out prior to the Healthcheck visit. The aim of the assessment was to provide a numerically scored snapshot of the organisations' ICT capacity and competence at the start of the project which could then be carried out again at the end and compared to give a value to show distance travelled. The assessment also fed directly into the action plan and provided a capacity "upgrade" path.

Based on the checklists from Lasa's *Managing ICT Guide* the assessment covered the following categories:

- Technology planning
- Staff use of ICT
- ICT administration
- Networks
- Internet
- Maintenance and support.

Each area is split into a number of individual topic areas that are graded in 3 levels – for example, the topic area of Aims in Technology planning are as shown in the table below.

The self-assessments were provided to each organisation at the launch event and most filled them in prior to the first visit. Organisations reported at the time that it had made them realise the breadth of ICT issues that they needed to address. It also helped open up discussion at the health check rather than it being a one-way interview (as experienced on the previous project) and made the healthcheck process more valuable but longer (in some cases necessitating two visits to complete).

The assessments were totalled and scored using a weighting multiplier based on the level achieved (level 1x1, level 2x2 and level 3x3). They were then compared to the maximum level attainable and shown as a percentage. Following the reassessments, carried out by eleven of the participating organisations, the difference in the scores was compared. Table 1.1 opposite shows an average total level of increase of 13% across the organisations with a rise from 40% to 53%.

The highest average change was in the area of ICT Administration with a 21% increase – given the emphasis that the project put on security, housekeeping and backing up and the fact that the contacts in the organisation were (generally) in charge of ICT administration in their respective

Technology planning			
Topic	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**
Aims	• Your organisation has clear aims, which can be related to the way you use IT	• Your organisation's goals for the next year or two are written down, with the IT implications spelled out • There is a timeline for meeting the plan's goals	• Your organisation has a written plan for the next few years which identifies the IT element in each area of activity • You periodically consider the likely impact of future IT developments, and their implications for your organisation

organisations, this is not that surprising

Looking at the results on an organisation by organisation basis, the highest overall change was 31% and the lowest were in negative single figures (for two of the organisations). The latter may perhaps be explained in that, in both cases, the contact at the organisation had changed and that their perception of the organisation's IT ability (especially with regard to staff use of IT and their own administrative knowledge) was different. The highest single increase by an organisation was in the support category with a movement of 68%. Table 1.2 below shows the highest and lowest percentage movements in the different categories.

Table 1.1 Average distance travelled for each topic area

Scoring	Tech planning	Staff use	ICT Administration	Networks	Internet	Maintenance & support	Total
Start of project	24	34	18	8	17	10	112
Possible maximum	75	86	37	25	35	22	280
Percentage at start	32%	40%	50%	33%	50%	45%	40%
End of project	35	44	26	11	19	14	149
Possible maximum	75	86	37	25	35	22	280
Percentage at end	47%	51%	71%	43%	53%	62%	53%
Difference	15%	12%	21%	10%	4%	17%	13%

Table 1.2 Individual organisation highest and lowest percentage moves

Scoring	Tech planning	Staff use	ICT Administration	Networks	Internet	Maintenance & support
Highest percentage	37%	38%	57%	28%	20%	68%
Lowest percentage	−1%	−10%	−32%	−8%	−17%	−14%

Further information

Websites

www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriderproject

www.icthub.org.uk/circuitriders

www.ukriders.info

www.eriders.org

www.icthubknowledgebase.org.uk

www.lasa.org.uk

www.icthub.org.uk

www.it4communities.org.uk

Publications

Circuit Rider Project – Experiences and insights into running a developmental ICT project –
PDF downloadable from www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders.

Circuit Riders 2.0: The evolution of ICT support and development for the voluntary sector –
PDF downloadable from www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders

Managing ICT – published by Lasa – see
www.lasa.org.uk/computanews/guides.shtml

Supporting Advice in London: a review of infrastructure needs –
PDF downloadable from
www.lasa.org.uk/policy/londonreport