Faith-based organisations - analysis

The first stage was to establish how engaging with faith-based organisations (FBOs) supported the theme of 'Opening Doors to Volunteering'. The research undertaken highlighted the following rationale:

1. FBOs have significant reach into communities and people who are traditionally less likely to volunteer, with an impact that encourages social inclusion.

2. When FBOs and the secular voluntary/community sector work effectively in partnership there is a positive impact on the partners involved and on the wider community.

3. There is much untapped potential to develop partnership working.

4. FBOs are already involved in a wide variety of volunteering activity in the community.

5. The current research available is too generic to identify what makes partnerships with FBOs work.

It is clear that FBOs have a significant role to play in engaging with those people who are traditionally less likely to volunteer, and the associated consequences of working in partnership with FBOs.

Therefore, this theme, focusing on the barriers and enabling factors of partnership-working warranted further exploration.

The analysis of the literature review on working in partnership with FBOs is based on the 3 'talent' components as follows:

Commitment

1. There can be limited motivation to invest time and resources into partnership-working.

2. There is a research gap around the roles of men and women in faith-based volunteering.

3. FBOs concern they will be viewed as 'a bit weird' when expressing their values in a secular context is likely to reduce involvement.

4. The concern from secular organisations that FBOs will use volunteering to proselytise undermines the potential for partnership-working.

5. There is potential to tap into the 'status/influence' motivators when promoting the value of partnership-working.

6. Examples of how FBOs work in partnership without compromising their core values would be useful.

Competence

1. Partnership activities often have limited strategic focus and coordination. Good practice principles exist, but the availability of practical examples of these is limited.

2. FBOs have limited 'VCS-related' capability (e.g. fundraising, networking, negotiating government procedures etc.).

3. There are clearly problems around misunderstandings of FBOs from secular and local infrastructure organisations, although there are a number of solutions available to develop this. Examples of these in practice would be useful.

4. FBOs can have difficulty in translating their expression of faith into secular outputs and outcomes.

5. The use of full-time (council) workers could help to resolve many of the above issues, however there is little knowledge available of the remit of these roles and the working arrangements.

6. More work is needed around how the issues of equal opportunities and cultural difference are managed.

7. There is a lack of guidance in how religious life can be legitimately applied in service-delivery.

Contribution

1. There are limited examples of strategies in place to move 'helpless victims to 'beneficiaries'.

2. The fragmented nature of the wider sector (both secular and faith-based) results in many 'bystanders' unaware of the potential benefits of partnership working.

3. A range of strategies are available to encourage those who could positively influence partnership working, although examples of these in practice would be useful.

4. Both the role of faith forums, and strategy of a 'slow and continuous process of engagement lasting years', have much potential is managing 'blockers' and encouraging 'influencers' to become involved.

5. A range of strategies are available to encourage effective 'sponsors' to be established, although examples of these in practice would be useful.

In addition to the above areas, there needs to be further research focused on how FBOs engage disadvantaged groups as volunteers (e.g. those with mental health needs, learning disabilities, homeless people etc.).

Faith-based organisations – further areas of research

The above analysis has highlighted a number of gaps in research, strategies and initiatives to encourage partnership-working with faith-Based organisations.

These gaps have been framed as further research questions to be explored with relevant volunteer-involving organisations and practitioners. Further, a model of human resource management (Ulrich 1998) has been adapted to portray the trends of the current gaps in research, strategies and initiatives for engaging with faith-based organisation.

Focus on processes   **Focus on people**

Strategic focus

Strategic Partner	**Change Agent**

1. How is the value of partnership working promoted to FBOs/secular organisations?

2. What guidance exists that enables FBOs to incorporate and communicate faith values into secular service delivery?

3. What examples exist showing strategic co-ordination of partnership activity?

4. How are secular organisations reassured that FBOs will not use volunteers to proselytise

5. What initiatives exist that promote the understanding of FBOs to secular organisations

6. What are the key principles and practical lessons of 'slow and continuous engagement'

7. What examples exist that encourage those who could positively influence partnership-working to get involved?

Administrative Expert	**Volunteer Champion**

8. How is the capacity of FBOs developed through faith forums and dedicated liaison staff (e.g. income generation, networking etc.)

NB also applicable to **'Strategic Partner'** role.

9. How are cultural differences (including men's and women's roles, and equal opportunities) embraced in partnership working.

NB also applicable to **'Strategic Partner'** and **'Change Agent'** roles.

Operational focus

Focus on processes   **Focus on people**