

# Better Governance Project Year 2 Evaluation

## Summary




### Introduction

This report summarises the results of a telephone survey of participants in the Better Governance Project Trustee Training Programme 2009-10. The project aims to build the capacity (and increase the sustainability) of small community organisations in Camden by enhancing the knowledge and skills of their trustees through a unique trustee training and support programme.


The six-session training programme is delivered by appropriately qualified VAC staff over a period of six weeks with day-time and evening options available. It targets trustees working with disadvantaged communities in Camden and seeks to develop their skills through training, and additional one-to-one support as needed to help trustees put their learning into practice within their own organisations.

The project also offers participants the opportunity to take part in a further training module – a three-day ‘introduction to teaching and learning’ course offered by the a local Adult Education College. The premise behind this additional training opportunity is that participants can develop the skills to participate as co-trainers on the Better Governance Trustee Training Programme in the future. It is seen as a developmental opportunity for individuals to enhance their own career prospects, and also as a means to ensure the sustainability of the Better Governance programme in the future.

The feedback we summarise in this report comes from 15 telephone interviews with trustees who opted to participate (out of a potential sample of 31). The interviews were conducted over a period of 10 days in May 2010 by an independent researcher.



## Key Findings – A Summary



### Feedback on Better Governance Training Programme

**Meeting Expectations:** Participants feel the Better Governance course is well-managed and organised and the VAC trainers are felt to be knowledgeable and helpful. Participants find the course generally useful and feel it meets their needs, and it provides trustees with a body of written information that many subsequently find useful to support them in their work.

*“It was a very good quality course ... very well organised.”*

*“You can see they have put a lot of effort into this and they are trying their best to make it a good course for people like us in their sector. VAC are to be applauded for this.”*

*“Generally the trainers were very good and very informative.”*

*“You could ask any questions and get them answered. You got the feeling that they really know their stuff.”*


**Content:** For the most part trustees feel the course covers the right topics. However, the course may be trying to share too much information and there might need to be a better balance between theory and practice within the content as participants stated a preference for ‘applied’ rather than ‘academic’ content. VAC should continue to work to ensure the course content is pitched at a level that understands the kinds of organisations the majority of participants work within, and their level of prior knowledge.

*“I thought it was great, just what’s needed. I’m not aware of anything else that covers everything you need in this way. It was very helpful to me.”*

*“It made me more aware of issues like risk management, made me focus on a number of areas ... I have more understanding how to read a budget, it showed me the importance of a number of areas, helped me focus, and also helped me be more aware of sources of help, websites and stuff, policies you need, insurance, data protection, a lot of things really.”*

*“It gave me a good indepth view of all the topics. Of course some things were not so relevant to me, but on fundraising and the legal issues I’m much clearer about my responsibilities.”*

*“I’d say don’t try to achieve too much. It was obviously tempting for the trainer to give lots of information ... It would be better to cover less perhaps and then just point people where to go to follow up ...”*



**Delivery:** The course may benefit from incorporating a greater diversity of training styles, methods and activities, and from including more participatory approaches and building in more opportunities for participants to learn from other trustees. The delivery methods, like some parts of the content, may need to be adapted to better reflect the diversity of participants' skills, needs and experience.

*“It would be great to have heard from other people, invited speakers or something like that, to hear different voices, get a few different perspectives.”*

*“There was some opportunity to learn from others but I think there could have been more”*

**Impact on Trustees:** The course contributes to raised awareness amongst trustees of their roles and responsibilities, and to understanding of good practice in the governance of voluntary and community organisations. It also improves trustees' understanding of the voluntary and community sector context (particularly the legal and funding framework) and 'culture'. Overall it builds trustees' confidence, can increase their motivation, and enhances their ability to fulfil their roles more effectively.

*“You do get to see more clearly what's your role and what's the manager's role and the difference between them. I think that's important.”*

*“To an extent it brought stuff I already knew more to the surface and helped me think how what I already know can help me as a trustee.”*


*“It has made a big difference to me. It gave me a confidence boost and also some motivation. I'm much more aware of time management, keeping focus, our roles as trustees, and a bit more strategic – especially in making funding applications, recruiting volunteers ... overall how to plan and balance things. It was very helpful for this.”*

*“Very useful. I feel I'm a more effective member of the board as a result.”*

*“I'd say before I was not so active, now I'm more involved, I know what I should be doing.”*

**Impact on Organisations:** Learning from the course can support trustees to create stronger, more knowledgeable, more effective committees. It can also help committees develop a more strategic approach to issues of planning and funding. The ability to implement organisational changes can be enhanced by VAC's follow-up support and advice, but organisational support for participating trustees might be a more crucial factor.

*“It's like a toolbox that you can go back to when you need it. I've actually enjoyed reading through my handouts as a reminder of some of the things we learnt.”*



*“We talked about some of the issues and we are all more aware of our boundaries now.”*

*“There are three challenges ... to absorb the information for yourself, to apply it for yourself, and then to discuss with others ... that’s a lot and maybe takes more time and that last bit is affected by other factors outside the control of the course.”*

*“I have definitely taken back things to my trustees and been able to explain important things about how to run an organisation. They have been interested. I think it will make a difference in time.”*

## **Feedback on ‘Teaching and Learning’ Course**

Levels of satisfaction are high and this is felt to be a high quality, well-delivered course. The diversity of the group - in terms of experience, abilities and expectations – poses challenges for the tutors, but this has generally been well managed to ensure the best possible experience of the course for all. The link between stage 1 (training sessions on governance and management) and stage 2 (accredited course on teaching and learning) is not entirely clear and this can cause confusion. For those wanting to develop a career in training, there was some interest in attending a course with a higher level of accreditation.

Overall the course contributes to improved knowledge, skills and confidence amongst participants and the opportunity to actually co-train on the governance course (stage 3 of the project) further builds participants’ skills and confidence. The co-training has been, to date, a very positive experience for all concerned.

*“The tutor was excellent, just excellent.”*

*“I have enjoyed it. It was a very good course.”*

*“It’s really one of the best things I’ve done in the last few years.”*

*“It was different from what I expected. It was done in a very imaginative way I did not expect.”*

*“It was a very, very good quality course, the tutor was very effective in getting the learning across in a low key, low stress kind of way that I really appreciated.”*

*“I’ll be training and facilitating more in my work in the future and it was very helpful to have taken part ... that’s about getting new ideas and a bit of practice, also understanding the theories a bit better.”*

*“The trainer was absolutely excellent ... I never really understood before the difference between learning and teaching and how people learn. It has helped me co-train, added another dimension to the process.”*

*“The co-training is a great experience. If you get to do that you’re realising what you learnt and doing something with it. I’d actually like to do more.”*



## Recommendations & Conclusion




### Recommendations (based on trustees' feedback)

- The content and delivery methods could be better tailored to meet the needs of participants
- VAC could consider ways of supporting participants' learning outside the classroom
- Areas of special interest for trustees could be usefully explored through additional optional sessions or networks
- VAC could consider the need for work with senior managers on the trustees' role
- The link between the first and second stages of the project should be clarified
- In the future VAC might usefully explore more advanced options for those with prior experience of training – possibly further accredited training courses

### Conclusion

Our evaluation revealed that the project is delivering to a high standard, meeting trustees' needs, and beginning to achieve its intended outcomes as regards building the skills of individuals and the capacity of community organisations. Likewise, though it is still early days, participants on the 'introduction to teaching and learning' programme rated this very highly and hoped to reap benefits from their work either in their own training-related work, or in the attempts to cascade their learning on governance within their own organisation.

Participants suggested a number of ways in which both stages of the project might be improved, though at the same time recognising the challenges for both VAC and the Mary Ward Centre of meeting the needs of such a diverse range of participants, and working flexibly to maximise the opportunities for people to take part. The level of engagement in this survey and the number of ideas participants came up with for how the course might be improved suggest that both courses have stimulated participants' interest in the issues covered and the potential of the project to make a difference. We found a real enthusiasm amongst those we spoke to for the project and it was clear that those who have taken part clearly feel the project is useful, brings benefits for them as individuals, and has the potential to make a real difference to the quality of governance within their own and other organisations' governance over time.



We leave the concluding remarks to those we interviewed with warm thanks for sharing with us their time, their enthusiasm for the project and their views and ideas:

*“They deserve a lot of credit for this whole thing really because overall it’s very good, a much-needed course.”*

*“The staff worked very hard to make it the best possible for people and you see that.”*

*“I would like to thank VAC for putting it on. I was so pleased to find out about it. There isn’t anything else that is so comprehensive and I know much of what I learnt will come in handy one day.”*

*“I’m definitely recommending it to other trustees in our organisation. I’d like to see it available, or something like it, for all new trustees.”*

*“More people should do it. It’s a great introduction for new trustees. It was wonderful.”*

*“I think most trustees don’t know these things. We have to do so many things, consider so many things, and we don’t always have the proper procedures. This course makes you aware and makes you think of these things and I’m sure it will have an impact on the quality of the sector as more people do it.”*