

Data use in voluntary and community organisations

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This study assesses the need and demand within voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) for relevant, analysed and well-presented data to support their work tackling poverty.

The poverty agenda has shifted away from 'top-down' action by central government towards the engagement of local voluntary and community organisations. As small, independent groups with their own ideas about tackling poverty, VCOs represent a powerful, 'bottom-up' approach. Financial support for VCOs increasingly depends on evidence of need and success against outcomes.

This report considers:

- how VCOs use data to support their work;
- what data VCOs find most useful;
- what obstacles there are to accessing data.

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Executive summary

Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) play an important role in current efforts to tackle poverty and its effects. This study examined the need and demand within VCOs for relevant, analysed and well-presented data to assist their work.

VCOs provide advice and assistance to a range of disadvantaged groups, including children and young people, older people, minority ethnic groups, disabled people, unemployed people, women and LGBT groups. They may work with single or multiple client groups or support other VCOs. Many are small, local, independent organisations.

Financial support for VCOs comes from local communities, charitable trusts, local and sometimes central government. Increasingly, funding depends on evidence of need and of desired outcomes being achieved. VCOs need, and already use, official data and research findings to back up their case and keep their organisations running.

This study explored how VCOs use data and how their use of data could be improved to support their work. A questionnaire was circulated via umbrella organisations to VCOs throughout Great Britain, to which 278 groups responded. A broad, non-random sub-sample of these was selected to look further into attitudes to data, with 12 questionnaires being followed-up with telephone interviews.

Most of the VCOs who responded to the questionnaire used some data in their work. Their main use of data was in preparing grant applications and planning and developing projects or services. Data use seemed to be more closely tied with specific pieces of work than with more general strategic operations.

The most common reasons given for not using data were capacity and awareness, which are clearly interlinked. Knowing where to find data and knowing what was 'out there' was the most common barrier preventing VCOs from using data more. Searching for data takes time and clearly carries a cost.

The majority of respondents said they would welcome easier access to data and help in interpreting, analysing and presenting it. When asked what kind of data would be useful, most wanted data on their local area. Several groups also mentioned a need to know if certain data was genuinely unavailable, rather than just hard to find.

While the question of cost was not raised in the questionnaire, it was explored in follow-up telephone interviews. Many interviewees had not even considered paying to obtain data and some felt the sector as a whole would be unlikely to pay for data. Any service providing data would have to prove its worth to individual organisations before charging for any product. In the longer term, such costs could be built into a business plan.

Large organisations tend to have more capacity and require more complex data and data analysis than smaller ones. Small VCOs are harder to reach and support needs to be targeted, built around outreach, partnership and ongoing assessment of needs.

In exploring the needs of VCOs and identifying gaps in the way they currently use data, this report identifies three strands of work that could be undertaken in this area:

- advice and support for VCOs, which could include seminars and presentations to help build capacity in the sector, as well as one-off searches for data;
- provision of basic information, for example local area profiles covering some of the more commonly used statistics; and
- bespoke analysis, including more complex analysis of existing data sources, chiefly the major national datasets. This type of work would be of more use to large, national VCOs than small, local ones.

These approaches would have to be flexible enough for different VCOs to benefit, but such services would also need to be highly visible, approachable, impartial and of high quality.

Introduction

Background and objectives

For over a decade, measures to tackle poverty and its effects have been decidedly 'top-down', focusing on action by central government. The emphasis has been on incomes and tax credits along with pre-school provision and a drive to improve education outcomes in schools.

Recently, the poverty agenda has moved away from centralised policies towards engagement of local and community groups. It is therefore relevant to look at how work on poverty and social exclusion, especially that relying on established data sources, could be made more helpful to voluntary and community organisations (VCOs).

The independent community and voluntary sector endures and grows. The majority of VCOs are tiny and many could be characterised as *of the poor* rather than being *for the poor*. VCOs may be credit unions, debt advice services, or organisations involved in providing affordable childcare, youth work, health services, affordable transport and support for older people, disabled people, offenders, ex-offenders and their families. These groups have their own ideas about how to tackle poverty. They represent an alternative, usually complementary, 'bottom-up' response to poverty.

Financial support for VCOs comes from local communities, charitable trusts, local and sometimes central government. Increasingly, this help depends on evidence of need and of desired outcomes being achieved. VCOs need, and already use, official data and research findings to back up their case.

This study aimed to find out:

- how VCOs use data to support their work;
- what data VCOs find most useful;
- what obstacles there were to accessing data.

Overview of the VCO sector

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations estimates there are over 800,000 civil society groups in the UK, including charities, community groups, faith groups and trade unions. Of these, 180,000 are registered charities, so the vast majority are community groups that have not formally registered as charities. This survey includes both types of group.

It is hard to get reliable data on smaller organisations, but recent reports have looked more closely at the charity sector. Table 1 gives the number of registered charities in England and Wales in 2006.

Table 1 Number of registered charities by region

	Number of charities	Charities per 1,000 people	Number newly formed in 2005
North East	5,268	2.1	96
North West	15,769	2.3	296
Yorkshire and The Humber	12,238	2.4	229
East Midlands	12,801	2.9	221
West Midlands	14,400	2.7	260
East of England	19,431	3.5	333
London	26,634	3.5	761
South East	28,702	3.5	476
South West	20,407	4.0	311
Wales	8,905	3.0	123
England & Wales	164,555	3.1	3,106

Source: GuideStar UK 2006

There is substantial variation in activity across the country. One would expect to find more charities in London and the South East as they are the most populous areas of the UK, and fewer in the North East, a relatively small region. Even when calculated in proportion to population, however, there are more registered charities in the South than the North.

The same source gives information on the client groups of these charities (Table 2).

Table 2 Number of charities by client group and region

	Children and young people	Older people	Disability	Black and minority ethnic groups	Total number of charities
North East	2,693	1,458	1,386	376	5,268
North West	7,758	3,648	3,570	1,075	15,769
Yorkshire and The Humber	6,144	2,991	2,641	738	12,238
East Midlands	6,349	3,304	2,685	552	12,801
West Midlands	6,795	3,648	3,245	930	14,400
East of England	9,119	4,818	3,940	725	19,431
London	11,783	6,012	5,903	4,207	26,634
South East	13,933	6,441	5,913	1,132	28,702
South West	9,918	4,919	4,282	664	20,407
Wales	4,269	2,115	1,984	375	8,905
England & Wales	78,761	39,354	35,549	10,774	164,555

Source: GuideStar UK 2006

Around half of all charities, both nationwide and in most regions, work with children and young people. Around one quarter work with older people; those working with disabled people and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups making up the remainder. London has a much higher number and proportion of BME groups than elsewhere, reflecting its larger BME population.

Table 3 looks at the types of activities charities undertake, again split by region. Charities can, of course, undertake more than one activity, so the totals in the table are greater than the total number of charities.

Table 3 Number of charities by activity and region

	Culture and leisure	Economic well-being	Education and life-long learning	Environment	Health and well-being	Housing
North East	1,596	1,230	2,422	632	1,085	236
North West	3,706	3,297	6,866	1,588	2,948	706
Yorkshire and The Humber	3,202	2,497	5,441	1,330	2,086	601
East Midlands	2,946	2,670	5,476	1,334	1,961	571
West Midlands	3,556	2,866	6,121	1,471	2,539	700
East of England	4,585	3,695	7,945	2,284	3,001	889
London	6,130	7,185	12,934	2,250	6,289	1,704
South East	6,664	5,048	12,696	3,120	5,030	1,369
South West	5,056	3,803	8,720	2,362	3,302	912
Wales	2,451	1,655	3,678	1,041	1,474	289
England & Wales	39,892	33,946	72,299	17,412	29,715	7,977

Source: GuideStar UK 2006

The most common activity is Education and Life-long Learning, which is unsurprising given the high proportion of charities working with children.

Method

A questionnaire was circulated to VCOs throughout Great Britain via four umbrella organisations: the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, the Poverty Alliance, Urban Forum and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

A sub sample of 20 respondents was selected for a follow-up conversation. These were selected non-randomly to give a broad spread of types of organisation and attitudes towards the use of data. Telephone conversations were held with 12 of these, the notes from which can be found in the appendix of this report.

Results from the questionnaire

Who responded to the survey?

In total, 278 organisations filled out at least part of the survey, with 261 completing it. They ranged from small local organisations to large, national groups. Table 4 shows this

distribution by number of full time staff employed. Around half of the groups that responded to this question employed fewer than five people in a paid, full time capacity.

Table 4 Number of VCOs by employment of full time staff

Full time staff	Number of respondents
Less than 5	87
Between 5 and 10	41
Between 10 and 25	45
Between 25 and 50	18
Over 50	20
Not given	67
Total	278

The groups came from all across the country, but there was some clustering, as table 5 shows.

Table 5 Number of VCOs by region

Region	Number of respondents
Eastern	20
London	48
Midlands	21
North East	9
North West	46
Scotland	23
South East	4
South West	36
Wales	10
Yorkshire	55
No answer	7
Total	279

Yorkshire and the North West account for around one third of all responses. Going a little deeper, Bradford (Yorkshire) and Liverpool (North West) account for a substantial number in both of these areas. Both Liverpool and Bradford have thriving voluntary sectors and both have received significant funding in recent years to combat local deprivation.

Fewer responses came from the South East and Midlands, probably because the questionnaire was distributed through different membership organisations, including the Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS). If the local CVS did not forward the message, it would not have reached local groups. This is an important lesson; the VCO sector has no formal structure and is, by its nature, decentralised. Getting total coverage will always be difficult.

As well as being from different parts of the country, Table 6 shows that the groups worked with a range of client groups.

Table 6 VCO groups by client group

Client group	Number of respondents
Multiple client groups locally	71
VCO sector group	55
Children and young people	33
Mental health and disability	26
Housing, environment, neighbourhoods	20
Older people	18
BME or migrant groups	16
Families, parents and carers	13
Benefits advice and training for unemployed	10
Women	5
LGBT	2
Not given/ other	10
Total	279

Around one quarter of respondents worked across a variety of client groups. Also prominent were groups working for the voluntary sector in their area, with most of these being local Councils for Voluntary Service.

A substantial number of groups (33) worked with young people, be they young adults, teenagers or young children, and 18 worked with older people. Another 18 groups worked with the BME population, or a particular national or ethnic group. A small number of groups provided statutory services, such as Sure Start or community care.

How do VCOs use data?

Table 7 shows that most of those who responded to the questionnaire used some data in their work. Larger organisations were more likely to use data than smaller ones, though the difference is not large (or significant).

Table 7 Data use by number of full time staff in organisation

Full time staff	Do not use data	Use data	Total	Proportion using data
Less than 5	10	73	83	88%
Between 5 and 10	1	40	41	98%
Between 10 and 25	10	34	44	77%
Between 25 and 50		17	17	100%
Over 50	1	17	18	94%
Not given	11	52	63	83%
Total	33	233	266	88%

Only 33 groups said they did not use data. They were asked why they did not use data and allowed to give more than one reason. Table 8 shows that capacity and awareness of data appear to be the two main barriers. These are clearly linked in that if an organisation is not aware of the data available to them, they need the capacity to go and look for it.

Table 8 Reasons provided by VCOs for not using data

Reason for not using data	Number of responses
No data available	11
Not aware of data	26
Too expensive	10
No capacity	25

Those using data were asked how they used it and allowed to give more than one response. Table 9 shows that data was popularly used for grant applications and project development, with workforce planning and budgeting being less common uses. Data use seems to be more closely tied in with specific pieces of work than with general strategic running of organisations.

Table 9 Uses of data amongst VCOs

Purpose	Total
Grant applications	129
Project development	139
Workforce planning	32
Budgeting	28

What data would VCOs find most useful?

Over 90 per cent of respondents said they would use more data if it were more readily available to them. They were asked what type of data would be most useful and again allowed to choose more than one category (Table 10).

Table 10 Type of data VCOs would find useful

Subject	Number of respondents	Proportion of respondents
Data on your local area	226	81%
Employment	180	65%
Disability	174	62%
Ethnicity	169	61%
Income	165	59%
Education	162	58%
Housing	144	52%
Pay rates	95	34%
Other	135	48%

Evidently, VCOs want data on their local areas, with 81 per cent of respondents saying they would find this type of data useful. Between half and two thirds of respondents chose data on employment, disability, ethnicity, income, education or housing. While respondents were not restricted in the number of answers they could give, they were selective in their preferences; only 66 groups (around one in four) chose all available categories.

Respondents were allowed to add their own suggestions in the 'other' category as to the type of data they would find most useful. The most common responses were data on health, including access to healthcare, levels of personal debt and data on the activity of the VCO sector in their area. There were also very specific requests for data such as spending per capita on fruit and vegetables, lower level anti-social behaviour and sports.

Telephone interviews

The telephone interviews were used to look more deeply into what kind of data VCOs used, why they used it, what the barriers were and what data they would like to use. The last page of the questionnaire offered respondents the opportunity to leave their contact details for a follow-up conversation and around 80 per cent of respondents (239) did so.

Twenty respondents were contacted by e-mail, of whom 12 agreed to a telephone interview. Five of these were CVS groups, two were social enterprises, one was a credit union, one was a large national charity and the remainder were smaller local charities.

Sources of data used by VCOs

Telephone interviews allowed deeper investigation into the data sources used by VCOs in their work. The sources, and even the definition, of data varied between groups. One group, for example, said they tended to rely on reports that may be a few years old and that recent data was harder to find. Whilst possibly co-incidental, it was notable that groups in Merseyside were very aware of how their areas fared in the Index of Deprivation (Liverpool contains some of the most deprived areas in the country; something they all knew). The Index of Multiple Deprivation was the most frequently cited source of data, though there was some confusion as to where it actually came from. Other government sources were cited, their use often resulting from internet searches on particular topics.

Local data was the top priority, though regional and national data was also used as a comparator. Even the regional and national organisations interviewed used data at local levels to inform their work.

Given this need for local data, it is worth noting that only one organisation had used the neighbourhood statistics website from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Another has used it since their telephone interview. Again, this was because groups did not know the resource was there.

As a part of this study, the Neighbourhood Statistics branch of the Office for National Statistics were contacted to see who was using their website. They receive about 60,000

visitors per month. There is no way of tracking where exactly these visitors come from, though there is the opportunity of registering on the website to receive updates of relevant data. Of those who registered (a tiny minority of all users), VCOs were the fourth largest group, after academics, government and business. Around 300 VCOs registered with the website in the last year.

Barriers to using data

The main barrier to using more data was simply not knowing what was 'out there'. For example, one group from Bath worked with children at risk of exclusion from school, but did not know that data on school exclusions and low attainment was available for that area.

Searching for data takes time, and so has its own cost. Some organisations had a person whose job it was to carry out this task, though it was not always a formal part of their job description.

Several groups said that it would be useful to know if certain data was genuinely unavailable, rather than just hard to find. Obviously it would save time to know this, and would also help, for instance, an application for funding to be able to state categorically that certain evidence was not available.

One organisation mentioned the cost of buying data from third parties, and one talked of looking into contracting consultants to do the work for them. Both found the costs prohibitive. The other groups had not even considered spending money to obtain data.

The CVSs questioned often saw their role as improving the evidence bases upon which local groups were working, encouraging them to use evidence and pointing them in the direction of useful sources. They felt that the groups they worked with often did not understand how to use data or why it would be important to do so.

What data would VCOs find most useful?

All groups emphasised the importance of data on their local areas, with some requiring more geographically specific data than others. For example, two social enterprises based in Liverpool and Bradford were particularly interested in North Liverpool and North Bradford respectively. This meant that whilst data on the local authority was useful, data on individual wards was even more so, because this better reflected their client groups.

One group wanted data at a specific level to look at pockets of deprivation within a more affluent area. Such data would, however, always have to be put in at least a regional, if not national context.

It was initially felt that VCOs would want data relating solely to the population in their areas, but respondents mentioned other data not previously considered. Several respondents mentioned data relating to local activity in the VCO sector. One group, a social enterprise, was interested in local business start-ups as well.

As expected, those groups with specific client groups (children, the unemployed, the financially excluded) had a particular interest in data covering that area. However, several groups expressed an interest in knowing more about areas they were not currently

engaged in. Again, social enterprises were particularly keen that they should be able to spot trends so that they could change their focus accordingly.

How effective is the data used?

Many interviewees saw data as an essential part of any application for funding. One had obtained funding for nine new social enterprises in the last year, all of whom had used data on their local areas to demonstrate evidence of need for their services.

However, the same respondent said that it was hard to know the extent to which data 'tipped the balance' when bidding for funding. It is possible to put together a very well evidenced bid, but still not receive funding for any number of reasons. Conversely, it is surely possible, if unlikely, that bids are successful even if they are not very well evidenced. The consensus was that using data made a difference, but it was hard to say how much of a difference.

Use of data does, of course, go beyond preparing bids for money. Several respondents said that they used new information to expand their work into new areas, and spot emerging patterns and problems.

Support for VCOs using data

One group suggested that organisations providing data services to VCOs should also help build their capacity, to ensure they were not simply generating a dependence on data services. They suggested seminars on how to use data, where to find it and how to avoid pitfalls related to data use. This idea proved popular with other groups in subsequent discussions.

Cost of data services

The questionnaire deliberately avoided any mention of paying for data, but this issue was broached in follow up telephone conversations. Respondents' were split in their reactions.

One respondent could not envisage VCOs being prepared to pay for data they knew could be found free elsewhere (even if they could not find it themselves). Another respondent said that any service providing data would have to prove its worth to individual organisations before expecting them to pay.

Other groups were less opposed to paying for data, with social enterprises being the most accommodating. They said that the cost of data could simply be put into the business plan. No group indicated a price they were willing to pay, though something 'in the hundreds' was cited as too high a price to pay.

Some organisations said that a subscription service would be the best way to pay for any such work, as the cost could then be factored into business planning. Paying for individual pieces of work could be difficult, not least because such a cost cannot be passed on to, for instance, the funder for whom a bid is being prepared.

Data requirements and capacity

One group was significantly different from the rest; in terms of size and resources it was by far the largest organisation to respond to the survey. They have 30 people in their information team; more than many of the other respondents employ in total. They have their own database of statistics relating to their clients and have recently constructed a local information toolkit for local branches. Such a wealth of information on their own client group is probably unique, but the fact that their size gives them the capacity to do their own research and data gathering is not.

This capacity means that the requirements of large organisations tend to be different from those of smaller groups. During the course of this research, several larger organisations have been consulted that were not included in the original survey. They tended to require more complex data and data analysis, rather than a simple service to track down relevant figures.

Conclusion

The report has looked at the demand for data within the VCO sector and identified some gaps in the way data is currently used. The final question is how a service might be structured to meet the existing demand and help plug some of the gaps. Three separate strands of work could be undertaken in this respect:

- advice and support for VCOs, which could include seminars and presentations to help build capacity in the sector, as well as one-off searches for data;
- provision of basic information, for instance local area profiles, covering some of the more commonly used statistics; and
- bespoke analysis, for instance, more complex analysis of existing data sources, (chiefly the major national datasets such as the Labour Force Survey). This type of work would be of more use to large, national VCOs than small, local ones.

These three approaches would be flexible enough for any VCO to take advantage. A seminar could be given to 20 or 30 people. A local profile would be useful to any group in the area. The search and dataset analysis would be tailored towards the particular needs of the VCO in question.

For this to be successful, though, the service would require certain characteristics:

- Visibility – there are already resources that VCOs could use, but do not, largely because they are not visible to the sector.
- Approachability – to help demystify the data, the service should have human beings who can be telephoned or e-mailed for help.
- Clarity – there is a lot of data out there and any service would have to be very clear about what types of data it would deal with.
- Quality – obviously, the data has to be reliable. In particular, when looking at local data, the fact that the numbers are so small can lead to the occasional unreliable result. As well as merely ‘providing the number’, the service would need to give a clear and comprehensible of its reliability.
- Impartiality – linked to the quality issue. In order to be of most use, it is important that the information is presented in an honest way.

Appendix

Summary of telephone interviews

The organisation	Summary of response	Detailed response
<p>VCO 1 has taken on the role of the Council for Voluntary Services in their area. They co-ordinate activity, disseminate information and run elections for the local strategic partnership. They are often used as a 'one stop shop' for people trying to find out more about the voluntary sector in their area. They represent around 1,500 faith, voluntary and community groups.</p>	<p>VCO 1 were aware of some sources of data but said they could not always access them. They were aware of ONS Neighbourhood Statistics and used JRF reports and reports from think tanks to back up grant applications. They used data that was already processed and reported.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neither this specific organisation, nor the sector as a whole, know how to use statistics or where to find them. • Capacity issues could be addressed through seminars. • Data needs to be current; there are lots of good but old reports available. • Data needs to be local to meet funders' requirements.
<p>VCO 2 was set up in the 1980s as a social enterprise organisation working to regenerate parts of Liverpool that were subject to slum clearances. They now run several different social enterprise companies, working across construction, landscaping, gas fitting and environmental work. They employ around 50 full time staff across the organisation.</p>	<p>The interviewee was very familiar with the key statistics regarding North Liverpool, including its high ranking in the deprivation indices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even when an organisation is aware of data on their area, it can be difficult to access and understand. • It would be helpful to have data all in one place, reducing search costs.
<p>VCO 3 is a group offering advice and support to the third sector. It is one of the biggest such groups in the country, employing 50 people in total, and also runs Sure Start centres.</p>	<p>As a large organisation, VCO 3 were well aware of the various data sources. One of their roles is to get local organisations to back up their bids with evidence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to use data to support a bid is a key skill. • It is important to spell out what can be done and what is not possible.
<p>VCO 4 is a development agency. It does not have any of its own money to spend,</p>	<p>The interviewee was familiar with data sources such as Indices of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing what data is not available is as useful as knowing what is, as

<p>but gets paid for brokering funds for VCOs in the Merseyside region. Their work involves helping VCOs build capacity and bid for money. They also provide some financial support.</p>	<p>Deprivation, but pointed out that there is no formal link between the organisation and the data. They have to go looking for data and establish its relevance.</p>	<p>funders need to be made aware of this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some data is needed at a very local level, e.g. ward.
<p>VCO 5 is a CVS and the Rural Communities Council (RCC) for their county. The former focuses on groups, the latter on rural communities. There is an obvious overlap, which they are trying to sharpen by focussing all work on 'communities'. They receive some funding from Defra for their RCC activities.</p>	<p>The interviewee knew a lot about what data was available, e.g. indices of deprivation and the ONS. There was frustration expressed at what was not available, for example data on the third sector itself and financial information in particular. Data on the local district was required, rather than more general data on the South West. The interviewee was interested in knowing more about 'pockets' of deprivation that get lost in the averages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data is needed <i>on</i> the third sector as well as <i>for</i> it. • If data is available elsewhere, then any service providing it would have to be comprehensive.
<p>VCO 6 is an umbrella organisation for north-west England's third sector. It is a small operation, with only six staff, and quite newly established.</p>	<p>The interviewee was interested in knowing everything about north-west England, but did not express a need for specific data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some regional organisations who would be interested in regional data. • Area profiles are useful to umbrella and regional organisations.
<p>VCO 7 is a nationwide children's charity. They work with 14-16 year olds at risk of dropping out of school. They run a vocational GCSE programme, based around outdoor activity. The branch work with 6 schools, and around 200 children. Their funding previously came from the DCSF and MoD, though this has recently been cut. They have a separate</p>	<p>VCO 7 reported that they did use data, but the five people who work in the branch represent very little capacity. They had recently used data on young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in south-west England for a report, but are not aware of any particular repositories of information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue of capacity was highlighted. • Some areas of work, such as that with young people not in education, employment or training, are quite 'data rich'.

fundraising arm.		
<p>VCO 8 is a social enterprise that helps other social enterprises. It provides IT support and governance and carries out an administrative role for start-up social enterprises. They try and secure money for social enterprises, often from EU sources. They were initially tied to a regeneration programme, but continued after that ended. The organisation is currently looking for further funding and may have to move slightly away from social enterprises to offer a service to all businesses.</p>	<p>VCO 8 had a particular interest in employment and worklessness. They were aware of various data sources and the importance of providing evidence for bids. The interviewee also mentioned that an overall deep knowledge of the issues of poverty and exclusion was important, to see where gaps were and take a pragmatic approach to developing new areas of work. They have a specific member of staff whose job it is to gather evidence of need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a single 'port of call' for data would be useful. • Data on business is required as well as data on poverty. • There is a need for regional as well as local data and for comparisons to be made with national trends.
<p>VCO 9 is the national umbrella body for a nationwide organisation. They are a large organisation with 30 people in their information team.</p>	<p>Of all the organisations interviewed, VCO 9 was by far the most accomplished in terms of data use. They have their own database, cataloguing every session they hold with someone seeking their advice. This database includes information on the person and on the reasons they sought help. They have recently spent three years developing a toolkit for local organisations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large organisations are more likely to have the capacity to look after their own needs for data.
<p>VCO 10 is based in Bath and North East Somerset. They are members of the local CVS. Most of their funding comes from the local authority, though they have recently received a grant from a private funder. They have two offices and also undertake outreach work in Bristol.</p>	<p>In the survey, VCO 10 said they did not use data as they had found it too expensive. The person interviewed had looked into some online resources and found costs to be prohibitive. They would, however, be interested in knowing more about any service, regardless of cost.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even in successful organisations, staff may be unaware of what data is available. • As well as data on need, data on the third sector and on funding is of interest to VCOs.

<p>VCO 11 is the Scottish branch of a UK wide organisation that helps social firms start up. Some firms are affiliated to charities, but aim to operate independently. They have recently set up in Scotland and are trying to establish themselves.</p> <p>Their main area of interest used to be disability, but they have recently expanded their focus to people 'far from the job market' including ex-offenders or people with drug or alcohol problems. It is harder to find data on these groups.</p>	<p>VCO 11 had used a combination of national (Scottish) and UK wide data, but were not that concerned about local data. The firms they were trying to help would often be focussed directly on a particular client group, and would know a lot about them. They did not feel a need to know everything about the local area. The best thing a data service could offer them would be reducing the time it takes to get evidence together. They used a variety of different sources, and would like to use more.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of just providing local data, more depth and data analysis could be helpful. • Cutting down search costs is of interest to organisations working with businesses.
<p>VCO 12 was the smallest organisation interviewed. It is a credit union with one full time member of staff, and, while it has around 400 clients, is wholly dependent on funding from one trust . They would require 3,000 clients to be fully self sufficient. They are members of ABCUL, the national umbrella organisation for credit unions.</p>	<p>VCO 12 had recently completed a grant application for the Big Lottery fund, in which the local council helped them find relevant data on low income and financial exclusion in the county. They had also used national statistics for putting together bids, as well as data on benefit recipients in their area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit unions have a requirement for a lot of data, such as bank accounts, repossessions and bankruptcy. • Such data would be largely replicable across different credit unions, many of whom have similar needs.