Waveney Community Forum CVS

Resilience Project: Research into Effects of the Recession on Community Groups in Suffolk

Headline Results from the Resilience Survey

- A majority of organisations across Suffolk are experiencing and/or expect an increase in demand for their services, and a smaller proportion are experiencing and/or expect a **considerable** increase in demand.
- At the moment organizations feel they are coping ok with the recession, as only 10% are feeling under **a lot** of pressure. However, there's 36% reporting feeling some pressure, which could easily become of greater significance.
- Similarly, organisations appear to be positive about their future, with a substantial 56% feeling optimistic or very optimistic. This appeared to be reflected in both volunteers and employees attitude, with over half or more feeling optimistic.
- Though they feel positive, most organisations feel they will need increased financial support in the future. Many are looking to alternative funding sources. Advice about fundraising is seen as an important support which they feel they need.
- 53% of respondents were registered charities
- 21% were voluntary organisations with a constitution
- 4% were social enterprises

Recommendations

Supporting infrastructure organisations focus on increasing advice workshops on:

- fundraising (not restricted to grant applications)
- Alternative funding sources
- Monitoring and evaluation (vital to maintaining and generating funds)
- Partnerships
- Tendering and Commissioning skills (Procurement)
- Supporting infrastructure organisations should expect to receive increased need for advice on staff redundancies and managing change in general.
- They should also be proactive in providing information and advice in the areas of **governance and financial management**, directed at management committees and trustees. (The sense of optimism the organisations currently present could mask weaknesses in the structure of groups which could fracture rapidly under the forces of recession).

Questions Summary

(Qs 1 and 2 were contact details)

Q3. Please select the type of organisation you are:

Type of Organisation	Total	Respondents who answered Question	Total Survey Respondents
Unincorporated Association (essentially, a voluntary group with a constitution)	15	22%	21%
Charitable Trust	4	4%	6%
Registered Charity	38	57%	53%
Company Limited by Guarantee	13	19%	18%
Community Interest Company (CIC)	3	4%	4%
Social Enterprise Company (if you are a CIC, don't tick here)	1	1%	1%
Industrial and Provident Society	2	3%	3%
Other	5	7%	7%

(Total is more than number of organisations as some are more than one type)

Not surprisingly, the majority of the organisations were charities and constituted groups. Their main purposes covered a huge range, indicating the significance of the services they provide to a wide part of the public.

- *Training, Social, Competitions and Charity activities for Young People in Rural areas between the ages of 10 and 30.*
- *The Poetry Trust promotes the reading, writing and enjoyment of contemporary poetry through a year-round programme of live events, including the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival, creative education opportunities, courses, prizes and publications.*
- *Tennis in the village for Club Members and residents who just wish to pay and play*
- *Employment Training for people with Mental Health Problems Educational courses, corporate embroidery service, engraving and ID badge service, furniture making, quilting service, textiles service. retail premises. CNC cutting service*

- *Christian-based input into local Middle and Upper schools - assemblies, lessons, lunch clubs. Networking for local church-based youth workers Providing opportunities for schools to host relevant events / organisations which creatively input into the curriculum Encouraging local churches to build and maintain mutually beneficial links with local schools Town-wide events and initiatives involving and supporting local Christian young people*
- *Visiting in people's homes Volunteer drivers taking people to Dr's, dentists , Hospital outpatients in own cars Minibus and drivers Senior centre activities every Wednesday with pickup by Minibus Freshly cooked 3 course lunch and tea. Funding in community of Clare eg A youth Club worker. Support of Pre school and recently 2 defibrillators.*

Question 4

Is your organisation experiencing or expecting any increase or decrease in demand on your services?

	Already Experiencing		**Expect to experience**	
Demand increasing	26	36%	17	24%
Demand increasing a lot	13	18%	9	13%
Demand lessening	2	3%	4	6%
Demand lessening a lot	0	0%	1	1%
Demand is unchanged	13	18%	3	4%

A majority of organisations are experiencing and/or expect an increase in demand, and a smaller proportion are experiencing and/or expect a considerable increase in demand. This is not, of course, an unexpected response, but it does confirm anecdotal information.

On the other hand, in February, WCF carried out a survey of voluntary and community organisations which contained a section called “Current concerns, and looking ahead”, which did indicate that though wide questions can generate apparently strong responses, if supplementary questions ask what caused the response, a different picture may emerge.

Is your organisation experiencing any increase in demand on your services?			
Answer Options			
Nothing has changed recently (please go to next relevant question by clicking 'Next')	**39**	**57%**	39%
Demand is up but this is normal for time of year (please go to next relevant question by clicking 'next')	2	3%	2%
Demand has increased in the last few months (please go to next relevant question by clicking 'next')	**26**	**38%**	26%
Demand has increased hugely in the last few months (please go to next relevant question by clicking 'next')	2	3%	2%

Though not directly comparable, it is interesting that there is a roughly similar indication that demand on services had recently been experienced. However, only about a quarter of those who gave reasons connect this increase to the recession.

"*Reduction of services from statutory sector*" and "*Credit crunch, active sharing of faith by members, activities for children and youth"* and *"Current global economic instability".*

The majority of the comments linked the increase to factors to do with the organisation's activities. For example "*availability of new hall*" and "*Museum reopened after 18 month closure*" and "*Shop" and* "*New services and [have?] recently been introduced*"

Question 5

On a scale of 1 to 5, does your organisation feel under additional pressure? (1 is 'no pressure at all'; 5 is 'close to collapse')

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5
	9	22	26	7	1
all Survey Respondents	**13%**	**31%**	**36%**	**10%**	**1%**
Question respondents	14%	34%	40%	11%	2%

Only 10% felt they were under a lot of pressure, which suggests that at the moment organizations feel they are coping alright, though 36% indicate feeling noticeable extra pressure.

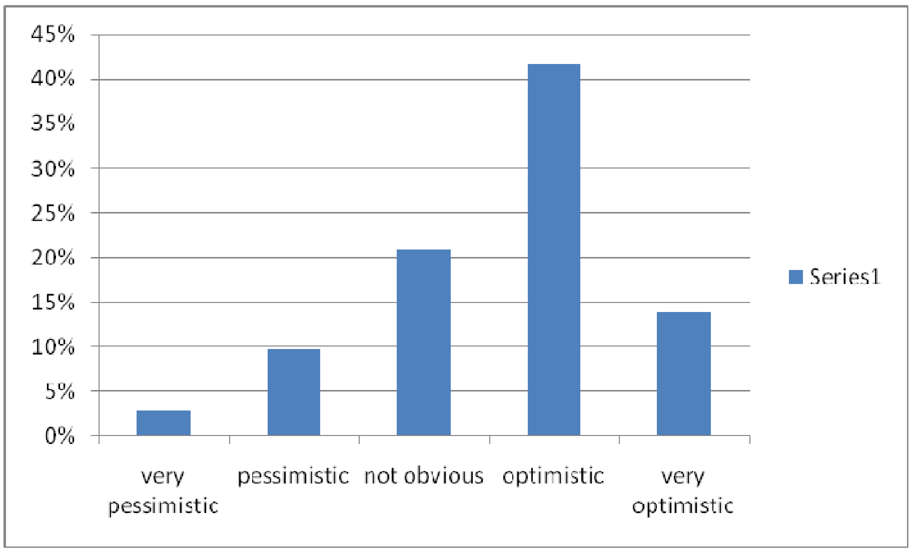
In the Waveney survey, a similar amount of pressure was perceived, but this correlation should be caveated with the reasons offered in the previous question.

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5
Pressure being felt	6	7	11	4	3

	19%	23%	35%	13%	10%

Question 6

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe the overall perspective of your organisation about its future? (1 equals Very pessimistic, 2 pessimistic, 3 not obvious either way, 4 optimistic, 5 very optimistic)



Similarly, organisations appear to be quite positive about its future, with a substantial 56% feeling optimistic or very optimistic

Question 7

Breaking this down a bit: on a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your employees' attitude towards the future of your organisation? (1 equals Very pessimistic, 2 pessimistic, 3 not obvious either way, 4 optimistic, 5 very optimistic)

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5
Number of respondents	1	4	10	29	5
All respondents	1%	6%	14%	40%	7%
Question respondents	2%	8%	20%	59%	10%

Organisations suggested their employees were generally feeling optimistic (though 32% didn't answer, presumably because they don't have employees or didn't feel able to make a judgment).

Question 8

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your volunteers' attitude towards the future of your organisation? (1 equals Very pessimistic, 2 pessimistic, 3 not obvious either way, 4 optimistic, 5 very optimistic)

Volunteer attitude	1	2	3	4	5
Number of respondents	1	3	18	29	8
All responders	1%	4%	25%	40%	11%
Question Responders	2%	5%	31%	49%	14%

Organisations felt the same of their volunteers morale, again with over half feeling pretty positive about the future. (18% of respondents skipped the question)

Question 9

Do you expect funding/income to change over the next 12 months?

	All respondents	Question responders
Funding likely to/will increase	13%	14%
Funding likely to/will decrease	33%	38%
Funding likely to/will remain the same	25%	29%
Don't know at the moment	18%	21%
Other (please specify)	7%	8%

Around a third expected that funding is likely to get less in the future, and **far fewer** expected any increase, though a significant number were unsure which way it would swing, for example because they are "*Awaiting the outcome of a tendering bid"* or *"We have not started bidding for funds yet".* One respondent mentioned the significance of Full Cost Recovery as being important in the funding arena.

Question 9

How will this affect your organisation? Negatively? Positively?

Answer Options	all respondents	question respondents
Reduce number of employees	4%	5%
Reduce level of service to clients	14%	16%
Increase number of employees	3%	3%
Increase level of service to clients	10%	11%
Not sure either way yet	38%	42%
No expected effects	21%	23%

Respondents suggested there could be some noticeable reduction in service levels, though an almost equal number thought they would be increasing the level of service they would provide. However, nearly half weren't sure what was going to happen. This may indicate an underlying threat to the strong expressions of confidence expressed earlier, as financial security would normally be seen as a core factor in future stability and survival.

Question 10

If the recession is affecting or you think it will affect your organisation, what steps are you likely to take to deal with it?

Answer Options		All respondents	Respondents who answered
Looking for MORE funding?	32	44%	54%
Looking for ALTERNATIVE sources of funding?	40	**56%**	**68%**
Reviewing expenditure	34	**47%**	**58%**
Reviewing staff levels	16	22%	27%
Using financial reserves	11	15%	19%
Reviewing Services	18	25%	31%
Looking for partnerships	20	28%	34%

Other actions being taken	8	11%	14%

Over half the organisations are **looking for alternative sources of funding**, and a significant number are looking at their overall expenditure, and some are looking at reviewing staff levels, the last implying staff cut-backs. A significant proportion are considering partnerships. Other actions being taken include *"Might have close it down"* and *"We don't employ anyone and don't have or need much money, but we will increase our subscription and fees."*

Question 11

What support might your organisation need over the next year or so?

Answer Options	Number who answered	Total survey	Those who answered question
Increased financial support	31	43%	58%
Advice on funding sources	27	38%	51%
Advice on governance	3	4%	6%
Advice on redundancy	4	6%	8%
Advice on research	5	7%	9%
Training	14	19%	26%
Other	10	14%	19%

The strongest answer is, perhaps naturally, the need for increased financial support. Almost as strong (51% of those who responded to the question) is a need for **advice on finding that increased funding**. **Training** was also seen as being a needed support activity.

Comments included

"Our bigest problem is geting sustainable funding for staffing and day to day operational costs"

and *"cic regulation to be overhauled"*

and *"It is unclear at the moment we have increased our funding for services and need to adjust to cover core costs in a way that really takes on full cost recovery. We do not* *anticipate making anyone redundant but will need to constantly relview our services to ensure we are making best use of resource."*

Organisations were asked what extra funds they felt they might need. This came in at over £1.6m. However, this is a very skewed figure, as just one organisation was looking for a million, so in fact the amount could be seen as considerably more modest.

Many organizations responded with information about what they would do with then extra funding: A necessarily rough analysis suggests about two thirds of funds are needed for revenue, with several pointing at core costs (which I have interpreted as revenue). This is perhaps significant in indicating how close to the financial edge some organisations are.

What for?	**Capital or Revenue**
Renew the roof of the tennis pavillion	C
essential extras such as uniforms, computer system etc., renewal of equipment	C
subsidising kit/equipment	C
Regeneration of the church building	C
To replace old equipment	C
Launching Centeneray Celebrations and Promoting Organisation	C
The construction of the building which should show a profit to plough back into other projects	C
Staff Costs	R
Administration and staff salaries	R
running cost to maintain & improve cancer services	R
Staff costs	R
salary costs	R
Running office to facilitate projects and fund raising	R
activities and staff/volunteers supporting these	R
Debt and Employment advice	R
Provide ongoing services. Upgrade services. Go towards the relocation of the centre.	R
Part time volunteer coordinator	R
Core funding	R
staff and operational costs	R
Core Costs	R
staff	R
core funding	R
just to maintain current levels of service	R
Increasing level of staffing	R
core funding - premises / staff	R

The Original Brief

In February SAVO contacted WCF with the information that CapacityBuilders had some funding to be distributed and consumed rapidly. We constructed a project which fulfilled the funder's criteria.

The project was in two main parts, and one less substantial activity.

1. We would carry out a survey of voluntary and community groups across Suffolk. The survey would try to find out what effect the recession was having, if it was affecting volunteer and staff morale, what actions they were taking or intended to take, and what support they felt they would need. The survey report would be made available to infrastructure and community groups, and used to inform support strategies of regional and local (sub-regional) organisations. A low target of 40 completed surveys was set, as the time scale was constricted.

2. We would write and circulate a 'Top Ten Tips' for Navigating the Recession, to be offered to community groups via links to a WCF website download.

3. Two events would be organised, bringing together Community Development Workers from across Suffolk, an expert speaker, and a Navigating the Recession Toolkit.

The project was accepted by SAVO and they sent it to CapacityBuilders for approval. This was received on March 2009.

The Resilience Survey Process

The onset of the recession has triggered a flurry of activity across the Voluntary Sector. Major national organisations carried out surveys, and published articles on the likely effects of the economic downturn. (See Appendix 3 for a list of articles, reports, and associated publications).

Local organisations also undertook some research. For example, eighty-two per cent of the 62 groups surveyed for *The Big Squeeze*, compiled by the London Voluntary Service Council to examine the impact of the economic downturn on community groups, said they were not confident about their ability to cope with demand.

Waveney Community Forum had recently completed an in depth survey, called *Value Added*, of local voluntary and community organisations in Waveney, via email and post. (Completion of the report on the survey was deferred to accommodate carrying out the *Resilience Survey*). The *Value Added* survey contained some questions about the effects of the recession on groups.

The section from *Value Added* was developed slightly, but using the same approach, which would enable the two sets of data to be compared and collated. (See appendix 1 for the *Resilience Survey*, and Appendix 2 for the relevant section from *Value Added).*

The survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey. It works like this: the user creates their survey online, and then sends links to potential respondents. Respondents click and key their way through the survey, which is automatically saved. All the responses are recorded on a spreadsheet, which is then downloaded by the surveyor for analysis.

My experience when doing the previous survey taught me to 1) use as little verification as possible, as this sometimes confused respondents when they were unable to continue to the next question, didn't understand why, which in turn generated 'survey rage', and instant logging off. 2) keep 'you must answer' demands to a minimum, for the same reason.

The survey was then piloted on a small number of recipients (3) and some adjustments made to the wording.

In the meantime, SAVO sent to me their database list of organisations, which I trawled through and removed any obviously unsuitable (for the purposes of the survey) recipients: stray Parish Councils, non Social Enterprises businesses, and the like. This amended list was returned to SAVO, with explanatory text. (See Appendix 4).

Though it creates a statistical skew (because it weights potential responders geographically) I also emailed 146 organisations in Waveney. (approx 20% of responding organisations were based in Waveney, so 80% came from the rest of Suffolk).

On Thursday 20th March 2009 the link to the survey was sent out to 240 Suffolk organisations.

On Thursday 26th March 2009 a reminder was sent to all organisations who hadn't replied (I stripped them out of the original database) asking them again to complete the survey.

A volunteer colleague and I also phoned over several days a total of 36 organisations to prompt them to complete the survey. This resulted in 3 surveys being completed on the phone, and around 10 promises to do so (most of which were fulfilled).

The last survey to be completed was on Thursday 8th of April. However, the majority of surveys were filled in within four days of receiving the initial email, and the same pattern was repeated for the reminder email.

24 surveys were completed on the first run, another 45 after the reminder, plus 3 on the phone, giving a raw total of 72. The original target was 40 surveys completed, which was therefore easily surpassed. The 72 surveys represent 18% of the organisations contacted.

To anyone familiar with survey analysis, it will be obvious that these numbers are statistically not very reliable, and probably give a plus/minus range on question answers of 20% at least! Nevertheless, the nature of the survey and its purpose suggests that they will provide a clear enough picture for useful inferences to be drawn. Just as importantly, some of the questions generate information which can be directly followed up – support required, for example