

New Citizens Voice – Marshalling the Rights of New Citizens

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the New Citizens Voice's Marshalling the Rights of New Citizens project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by New Citizens Voice.

Introduction

New Citizens Voice is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2003. It works to promote civic education and social responsibilities among Britain's new citizens, who include migrants, and refugees with permanent leave to remain in the UK and who are eligible to vote. The organisation seeks to encourage the active involvement of non-indigenous citizens in the country's social, political and economic life.

Aims and objectives

The objectives of Marshalling the Rights of New Citizens were to:

- Encourage voter turnout among the growing population of new citizens in Britain by targeting people who have traditionally not voted at British elections.
- Provide them with the skills, information and knowledge required for more effective participation in elections, whether at local, national or European levels.

Funding

New Citizens Voice were awarded a grant of **£10,900** in June 2004. The project was to target 10 London boroughs and ran from September 2004 to May 2005.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were:

- 10 workshops to be held across London with 10 boroughs benefiting; and
- 500 workshop participants.

How successful was the project?

The project delivered 10 workshops in four London boroughs (Waltham Forest, Westminster, Lambeth and Kensington & Chelsea). They worked with 281 beneficiaries (between 9–53 participants per workshop) representing 48 countries, the majority from the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia. In addition, they developed handouts, booklets and training materials.

At the start of the workshops, 65% of the questionnaire respondents declared themselves non-voters and 50% said they were not registered to vote. The project's overall objectives were achieved, but the targets were not. The project encountered a number of difficulties in delivering the project's original plans. The most significant of these was realising the original targets were too ambitious for the staff resources available. The staff did not have time to build contacts before the project started: New Citizens Voice was able to deliver 10 workshops but only in four boroughs.

Sessions were delivered at adult education centres, community centres, church halls and colleges, and were targeted at students of English as a second language (ESOL). The project was effective at developing partnerships with teachers of ESOL classes in order to incorporate the workshop into their regular language training.

The project was independently evaluated by the Latin American CDP Association through reviewing evaluation forms completed at each workshop and reports prepared by project staff and volunteers.

Their findings suggest the workshops helped participants become more aware of the UK's democratic processes and a majority of participants stated they found the workshops very helpful.

Good practice

- Integrating citizenship training into ESOL classes was an effective way of reaching a broad target audience. It was also an effective means of using the project's limited resources.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- Building links with colleges and other community venues took longer than anticipated and impacted on the ability of the project staff to meet their targets.
- More realistic planning before the project started would have improved the ability of project staff to meet all their target outcomes.

Further information

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Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of The Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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