

Capability Scotland

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

This evaluation report provides information about Capability Scotland's Vote 2004 project, funded by the New Initiatives Fund. The report highlights the aims and objectives of Vote 2004 and the achievements of the project.

The grant

The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a sum of £1,552 to Capability Scotland for the Vote 2004 project and an amount of **£1,552** was paid out. Vote 2004's primary aim was to build on the successes of their Vote 2003 website and update it for the 2004 European Parliamentary elections held 10 June 2004.

Capability Scotland is one of the largest disability organisations in Scotland and takes the lead on campaigning for electoral access for disabled people at all elections in Scotland.

The Commission's grant covered the costs of updating and hosting the Vote 2004 website, as well as promoting the site to Capability Scotland stakeholders. The primary activities of the project were conducted over the two-month period May to June 2004.

Aims and objectives

The primary objectives of Vote 2004 were to:

- alter the structure of the Vote 2003 website;
- input new content relevant to 10 June 2004 elections;
- update information on European elections;
- create links to relevant disability organisations and disability media; and
- provide disabled voters with news of events, activities, advice and information on how to vote, including a special section for first time voters.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were to:

- update the Vote 2003 website;
- mail a postcard to everyone who registered on the Vote 2003 database;
- launch the new website on 13 May 2004;
- encourage over 1,000 disabled people and organisations to access the updated information on the website; and
- support over 1,000 disabled people to vote in the

European elections between 13 May and 10 June 2004.

Evaluation

Capability Scotland's Director of Communications, Michelle Hegarty evaluated the Vote 2004 project with data collected from website hits and visits, calls to their advice service, and media attention received around the launch of the new website.

Deliverables

Over the two-month project Vote 2004 delivered the following:

- an updated website complete by 10 May 2004;
- a website launch event on 13 May 2004 with special guest Maria Eagle, Minister for Disabled People, and representatives from the Scottish Executive, COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) Scotland Office, SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) and Electoral Registrars;
- over 1,000 advertising postcards were mailed to disabled people, their carers and like-minded organisations about the new Vote 2004 website;
- advertising for the newly updated website was published on Capability Scotland's own website and in their monthly e-zine; and
- launch of a re-developed virtual polling station, the first of its kind in the UK.

Resources and project management

Michelle Hegarty, project manager for the Vote 2004 website oversaw the activities of the project. Records of budgeted and actual income and expenditures were maintained and monitored at Capability Scotland's offices.

The project delivered the above activities within the budget, allocated as documented below:

- print and distribution of 1,000 postcards: **£771**;
- website hosting and database facilities: **£499**; and
- staff costs to update the website: **£282**.

Total: **£1,552**.

How successful was the project?

Short-term outcomes

Capability Scotland's Vote 2004 project delivered all of its objectives and target outcomes on time and to budget. Three key short-term outcomes resulted from their efforts, which are outlined below.

The first outcome was the launch of the Vote 2004 website on 13 May 2004 by Capability Scotland and Maria Eagle, Minister for Disabled People. Twenty-five political and voluntary sector representatives attended the event and gave their support for the newly updated website. Vote 2004 provided specific details about how disabled people could participate in the European

Parliamentary elections, and updated the previous election year's highly successfully Vote 2003 website. Vote 2003 was created to provide disabled voters with information about accessible voting practices in Scotland, and a virtual polling station was piloted on the website. Vote 2004 re-designed and re-launched this unique online polling station, which enabled disabled voters and their carers to have the opportunity to practice their visit to the polling station prior to election day.

The second key outcome was more than 4,000 visits to the Vote 2004 website during the period leading up to 10 June 2004.¹ Capability Scotland's primary method of announcing the newly updated website was a postcard mail-out to a database of over 1,000 disabled people and organisations across Scotland. This mail-out used a contact database compiled during the Vote 2003 project, which collected stakeholder information through Capability Scotland's '1 in 4 poll' – a national information gathering survey completed by disabled people and their families.

¹ The figure of 4,000 visits does include multiple visits from the same computer IP address. Because it is impossible to know how many 'visitors' were either single individuals making multiple visits from their home computer, or many different individuals using public computers such as at a library or a drop-in centre. As a result, 'visits' is one of the closest measurements to a representation of individual visitors that can be made.

This pre-existing contact database from Vote 2003 enabled Capability Scotland to reach a large and specific audience quickly and effectively. With over 4,000 visitors logging onto the site in a period of only two months, this method of reaching the disabled electorate appears to be an excellent means for Capability Scotland to reach their target audience who are interested in the information published on the Vote 2004 website.

The third key outcome of publishing the Vote 2004 website was the local media attention that Capability Scotland received during the launch period. In the lead up to the elections, three newspaper articles were published in local media, and Michelle Hegarty, Director of Communications, participated in three separate radio interviews. This free media provided Capability Scotland with additional opportunities to reach disabled people, their families and their carers and inform them of both the website and accessible voting practices at the European Parliamentary elections.

Longer-term evaluation

The Vote 2004 website remains available to the public even though its primary purpose was to assist disabled voters and their carers and families in the lead up to the 10 June elections. Capability Scotland plans to use this updated website as the basis for developing a Vote 2005

website, which will continue to build on their efforts over the last two election periods. Vote 2005 will specifically focus on the next UK Parliamentary election, which is anticipated to take place sometime in 2005.

Capability Scotland's national '1 in 4 poll' on voting and elections conducted in 2003, collected research that demonstrated disabled voters are motivated voters. Ninety-six per cent of those surveyed had voted in the Scottish elections in 2003 and 93% stated they intended to vote on 10 June 2004.² The 2003 elections were declared to be the most accessible elections to date and Capability Scotland hopes that trend continues at every election. The next '1 in 4 poll' related to disabled electoral behaviour and accessibility is planned for the period surrounding the next UK Parliamentary election. It will be important to monitor the results of that survey to determine what changes or improvements have occurred since the 2003 poll, and what impact the Vote 2004 website has had for Scottish disabled voters.

Conclusions

Capability Scotland's Vote 2004 website appears to have achieved high levels of success, particularly for the size of grant provided by the New Initiatives Fund. Because a significant amount of information was already available on the Vote 2003 website, limited work was required to update the website

and make it relevant to the 10 June 2004 European Parliamentary elections. The primary result was that a small grant of only £1,552 was able to generate over 4,000 visits to their newly upgraded website, which offered specific information about how to participate in the European Parliamentary elections, launched the UK's first online virtual polling station, and detailed important accessibility measures for disabled voters and their carers.

While it is impossible to know how many disabled voters turned out at the 10 June 2004 elections as a result of logging onto the Capability Scotland website, it is clear that a large number of people visited the Vote 2004 website during the two months leading up to the elections, and that it provided valuable information to voters and their carers about how to participate in the European Parliamentary elections. Media attention and local political and voluntary sector support around the launch event also illustrated community support for the Vote 2004 website. The site is a valued resource for increasing knowledge about accessibility for disabled voters across Scotland.

² The Electoral Commission (2003) *Scottish elections 2003. The official report on the Scottish Parliament and local government elections 1 May 2003.*

Through the evaluation of this project it has been possible to identify a number of elements of good practice that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

Good practice

- Developing a website that can be re-used and upgraded easily is an efficient and cost-effective way for any organisation to update their target audience with important information on a regular basis.
- Securing agreement from stakeholders to remain in contact with them for future purposes is essential to accessing a large and specific target market on short notice.
- Involving politicians in the launch of a project or programme helps to secure local media attention, which in turn provides free advertising about new programmes and services available to the target group.

New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Michelle Hegarty from Capability Scotland at: capability@capability-scotland.org.uk or visit their website at www.capability-scotland.org.uk

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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