

Community Media Association

Your Community Media! Your Vote 2006

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 Community Media Association's Your Community Media! Your Vote 2006 project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by the Community Media Association.

Introduction

The Community Media Association (CMA) is the UK membership association for community media. It is a non-profit making organisation, supporting community radio and television and community-based internet projects. Your Community Media! Your Vote 2006! was run in the lead up to the local elections of 4 May 2006, and is a continuation of a previously funded project that focused on broadcasting during the general election.

The project consisted of workshops developed in conjunction with the Electoral Commission, the Office of Communications (Ofcom) and the BBC. The workshops, delivered over two days in Manchester and London, were structured into four sessions: explaining the electoral process, regulations for broadcasters, the practicalities of undertaking broadcasting during the 2006 local elections, and guidelines for broadcasting. An elections handbook was produced and distributed at the workshops, and a supporting website was set up. In addition, public service announcements (PSAs)

were produced and broadcast by the community media organisations.

Aim

The project's aim was to assist community media organisations in promoting voter participation during local elections.

Funding

CMA was awarded a grant of £35,040 in February 2006. The project lasted four months.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were:

- to increase awareness and/or understanding of elections and government in the UK
- to promote voter participation in areas where community media projects provide election programming
- to provide community media projects with the information and resources needed to produce imaginative programming within the regulations set for broadcasters during election time

- to produce a set of guidelines for use by community broadcasters during elections

How successful was the project?

Sixty-two people representing local community media stations attended the workshops. The project was evaluated through forms, telephone calls and tracking website usage. Overall the project achieved its key aims and objectives, but not all the targets were met. Participants indicated a high level of understanding of the electoral process and that they felt more confident to broadcast during an election.

The standard of the workshops was high. Participants found the practical sessions delivered by the Electoral Commission, the BBC and Ofcom useful. They indicated that the handbook was an effective tool and they would like to see more workshops in future. The workshops followed the same programme that had proved successful in 2005, with the addition of a presentation by a community radio station experienced in covering elections. Each workshop was hosted by a local partner. In London this was the Women's Radio Group and in Manchester, Radio Regan.

A website for the project was created as a sub-site of the Community Media Association's site. It contained extensive

information on covering the local elections and the project's activities. Although the site had fewer than anticipated visits, it was judged to be helpful by most of the interviewees who used it.

Twenty-four PSAs were produced, covering a wide range of topics and in a variety of languages, including Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic, Eritrean, Farsi, Spanish, Urdu, and Portuguese. Unlike in 2005, there was no evidence of PSAs produced by one group being re-broadcast by another; the most likely reason for this is that the elections were local and so PSAs produced in one geographic area were not suitable for another.

Community media organisations made 49 programmes with an estimated 50 hours of programming. The broadcast of election issues reached estimated audiences of 756,800 people, representing an increase on the previously funded project. Some stations found covering the local elections more resource-intensive than covering the general election had been, because they broadcast to a number of wards, and did not have the resources to cover every candidate in every ward.

Good practice

- Inviting community radio groups with experience of broadcasting to contribute to

the workshops was a new development for the project and was well received.

- Encouraging use of the website wherever possible reduced administration for the project.

Lessons learnt

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

- The timing of the marketing could have been linked to the wider press coverage of elections to increase interest.
- Many groups felt that covering the elections is part of their year-long coverage, and would welcome a project supporting them through the year.
- Groups reported that they need extra resources in order to produce high-quality programming about elections. In future it might be more effective to focus the funding currently used for PSAs on a fewer number of projects producing higher quality programming.

Further information

For further information about this project please contact:

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We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Our mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process. For more information see: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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