



Olympics 2012: Making the communication work

**Research by
Aston-Mansfield Community Involvement Unit**

April 2007



Aston-Mansfield

Generating community wealth for social change

Community Involvement Unit

About the research

Aston-Mansfield Community Involvement Unit (CIU) was commissioned by the London Civic Forum to carry out a short, intensive piece of work in Newham “to look at effective methods and lay foundations for London Development Agency to engage with voluntary and community sector groups about aspects of the planning and delivery of the 2012 Games and Paralympic Games.” Similar studies have taken place in the other four Olympic boroughs and the information from the five studies will form a report by London Civic Forum and presented to the London Development Agency (LDA).

The London Civic Forum’s aim is to establish how communities feel about whether have been consulted about their contribution to the Games and to understand how diverse communities perceive engagement at the grassroots. The London Civic Forum also hopes that this will provide a platform to secure further resources from the LDA for 2007-08 to set up information and referral services for the voluntary, community and faith sectors.

Remembering that this is particularly about information and communication, we looked to find out:

- How people currently feel/perceive communication from the LDA about the Olympic Games in 2012.
- Where people are getting their information and how it is reaching them
- What works about getting information that they can act on, and what doesn’t.

Profile of those who took part in the research

We approached voluntary, community and faith sector organisations based or working in the London Borough of Newham to take part in the research.

We asked those we questioned to self-identify themselves according to standard definitions we use for initial assessment of groups seeking capacity building support, with respondents able to give more than one answer.

Four groups described themselves as voluntary organisations, four as community organisations, four were companies limited by guarantee and seven were registered charities. Fifteen had paid staff and six no paid employees. Significantly, thirteen groups who responded to our request to take part were religious organisations, which is perhaps a reflection on the fact that the faith sector in Newham is alone in already having significant discussions on the impact of the Olympics.

Key findings

The Community Involvement Unit asked groups to identify whether they had ever received information or communication about the role of the voluntary, community or faith sectors in shaping the Olympics, with 13 organisations indicating that had. This information had come from the following sources

Local Authority	6 responses
London Development Agency	4 responses
Local second tier organisation	6 responses
National voluntary organisation	4 responses

Five groups had received information from other sources, which included LOCOG, The East London Community Organisation (TELCO), Churches Together in England, other church networks and the London Mayor's office.

The 13 groups were then asked to state whether they knew how their organisation had been identified to receive information, with 7 respondents indicating that they were aware, 5 unaware and one not sure. Comments indicated that a number of groups had been proactive in contacting Olympic authorities.

We asked groups how confident they felt that their views and experiences were wanted, which received mixed results – groups were broadly positive, with a minority very confident, but a small number were very pessimistic. Asked to answer on a Likert scale from 1 to 10, the responses were as follows:

1 to 4 on the scale:	5 respondents
5 to 7 on the scale:	9 respondents
8+ on the scale:	7 respondents

We also asked whether groups felt that they have the skills and experience to respond to consultation with confidence, with over half (12) indicating that they did. Five groups said they did not and 4 were unable to answer. One respondent was *“unsure what freedom of action those planning the Olympics have for responding to local concerns.”* Another indicated that the bidding process for the Games had itself raised the level of knowledge locally about its impact.

When asked for examples where groups felt that they had been consulted on the role of the voluntary, community or faith sectors in shaping the Olympics, few were able to give specific examples since the successful Olympic bid, although one group noted that:

“The TELCO organisation has [consulted] through asking its members, over the main issues of concern, which were presented to Ken Livingstone before London was selected.”

Christian groups also mentioned a “a consultation day with church leaders at Stratford Circus in 2006.” This has been followed up with the establishment of “More than Gold”, an umbrella body that acts as a clearinghouse for church groups and deals directly with LOCOG. However, there was no mention of the LDA or the ODA organising its own consultation events or activities.

Methods of communication

Groups were asked for one or more ways that they would prefer to be kept informed and consulted. The breakdown was as follows:

By e-mail bulletin	14 responses
By mailing	13 responses
Through consultation meetings on specific issues	10 responses
Through general consultation meetings	8 responses
Through public Information events	7 responses

We asked about the contribution voluntary, community and faith sector groups could make to shaping the Olympics, starting first with the biggest contribution that could be made. Comments included:

“Small voluntary groups work at a grassroots level in meeting the needs of local people who cannot or will not access mainstream institutions, therefore we can easily identify needs and ways to encourage development, We can start shaping and training our young people now for the Olympics... in business skills and vocational skills in customer service, office skills, hospitality and other vocational programmes.”

“Contribute local knowledge and support.”

“Providing volunteers.”

“To help formulate the legacy gains of the Olympics.”

“Offering accommodation to the families and friends of athletes from the majority world nations who can maybe afford the flight to the UK but not afford to pay for hotels in London.”

“The faith sector can offer space for visitors to relax.”

“By becoming a partner and provider in events that raise awareness amongst community members.”

One group noted that the Games in 2012 will fall within Ramadan and that the faith sector could be involved in organising events that coincide with this. Another noted that the rich diversity of the local population was a chance to “celebrate the international flavour” of the host city. More than one group noted that with visitors and competitors representing all of the world’s faiths, and with facilities run by Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and many different Christian denominations in the borough, faith sector organisations were uniquely placed

to offer “spiritual support to visitors to the Games.” One respondent is the chaplain for Olympic Construction and focusing on supporting the workforce constructing both Stratford City and the Olympic stradia.

Asked for the biggest obstacle preventing the involvement of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, there was more agreement that lack of information, connections, resources and recognition were groups’ biggest fears. One group said that they worried about *“LOCOG and the LDA having fixed ideas, only considering the needs of developers and financial heavyweights on decisions,”* a view shared by a number of respondents. One said, *“commercial business may not want to include voluntary, community or faith groups involved in the project”*.

Another group felt that the number of different bodies involved in planning the Olympics would mean a lack of coordination on consultation with local people. There was also a sense that failure to engage soon would lead to “apathy amongst groups”. Finally, one group noted that *“the biggest obstacle for community and voluntary groups is funding being taken away from the Big Lottery, as a result they are finding it increasingly difficult to support the Games.”*

Asked what discussions about the Olympics had taken place within organisations or within the communities they work with, and whether people speak positively or negatively about the Games, many groups noted mixed views, mainly optimistic but also tinged with scepticism that local people’s views would be listened to. Again, it was clear that religious groups, especially the churches, have had far a greater level of discussion between themselves and with their congregations they work with.

The following comments were interesting to note:

“The young people we work with have many great ideas as to what they see as a future for them in the Olympics. They have ideas for trading and entertaining and would like a voice on matters concerning young people.”

“{There is a} positive view of the event but a negative view of the environmental disruption and the retention of redundant ‘Millennium Dome’ type buildings after the Games.”

“What will the legacy really be?”

“Unfortunately there is a jaded attitude that they [parishioners] expect it to happen ‘around them’... whilst they trust me to put forward their hopes and fears as best I can, they are unsure how much people will listen.”

“Some are looking forward to it [the Games] but believe that Newham will be deserted once the Olympics comes.”

“The initial excitement and optimism has been eroded through the loss of community sports such as football on the Hackney Marshes... and the loss of Eastway Cycle Circuit.”

Organising the voluntary, community and faith sectors

When asked whether the voluntary, community and faith sectors should start to get organised at a local level and at a regional level, 18 of the 21 respondents supported the creation of local structures and 11 supported regional structures.

The faith sector is already ahead in this regard, but ideas put forward included the formation of a local Olympics Forum in Newham, which came up in both the answers to our questionnaire and in the focus group. It was felt that this could provide a catalyst for smaller networks or ‘liaison groups’ to work on researching ways for voluntary, community and faith sector groups to maximise their potential and identify partnership work with Olympic authorities. The latter activities should be participatory – groups wanted to be directly involved in areas like publicity, awareness raising, volunteering and planning, so that there is a greater degree of ‘ownership’ of the Games by those most affected by it. A number of groups felt that it was important for the three sectors to decide on some clear goals for themselves. One of the faith sector organisations noted that:

“[The churches’] ‘More than Gold’ will probably be a bit light on ‘legacy’ issues. It would be good if more of the VCF sector could focus on this.”

One group that supported establishing structures locally worried that *“organising at a regional level may offer networking opportunities but swamp smaller groups.”*

Parallel to (not instead of) initiatives within the voluntary, community and faith sectors, several groups thought that Newham Council’s nine Community Forums should also start to discuss the impact of the Olympics.

Asked about training and development support that might be necessary to enhance participation, groups argued for networking and training for leaders within the three sectors and one suggestion was *“learning from those involved locally near previous major international sporting events.”* Other support needed to be directed to the specific differences between the sectors. One groups felt that the first step should be a *“map of the main Olympic organisations and how they relate”*, whilst another felt that early information on what was under consideration for tendering would be extremely helpful.

On volunteering, one suggestion was for the development of accreditation, *“something like NVQ level”*, on issues such as crowd control, so that *“certification could then be a visible record of the volunteers’ involvement and a possible aid in work employment.”*

Feedback from the Focus Group

The focus group took place on 19 April at Durning Hall and the following useful ideas came up in discussions:

One issue seems to be that groups want to be involved in the Olympics but are not sure how they can be involved or what, specifically, they want to do.

An important focus for the VCF sector and local residents in general is the promise of a cultural legacy

The traditional methods of consultation that are usually adopted under these circumstances, such as sending information out in the post to a set mailing list, are unlikely to get good, if any, responses. Therefore, one solution would be to use intermediary organisations to filter information down to groups and to retrieve information from them

It would also be better if correspondence was more local and second-tier organisations could be kept better informed of any consultation carried out by the council and the LDA so that there is no duplication and everyone is able to see the effect that it is having.

A key concern from groups is that there is direct involvement in the Olympics in 2012 and that local people and local groups are chosen to take part in various ways, such as performing or working, rather than groups from outside the borough, and possibly outside of the country, taking the majority of these roles

Some groups, particularly performing arts groups, are meeting informally already but there is no structure or reporting system for their thoughts and ideas to be heard and addressed

It is important, therefore, that there is some structure put in place that is on an east London level.

It was suggested that second-tier organisations in Newham start to put in place some structure for the borough to start consulting with the VCF sector as a means of getting their thoughts and suggestions to the council and the LDA.

Information received from the LDA is often out of date and not locally relevant

Borough representatives attend London Civic Forum Olympic meetings but little information is fed back to second-tier organisations and VCF sector groups. It was thought that maybe there is just not much information to feed back.

One of the biggest issues with consultation processes is that time is so limited. Groups do not have enough time and resources to attend lengthy

consultation sessions so other methods of consultation need to be considered that are more innovative and less timely so more people will take part

There was also a suggestion that people want to know as much as possible but, at the moment, there is little to know. This sometimes leads to speculation and misinformation

A monthly or bi-monthly information bulletin with the latest developments and listing people to contact for information would be a good way to communicate

Other, more innovative, suggestions were made about setting up a 'citizens panel' or filming people voicing their feelings about the Olympics and how they would like to be involved, so that this could be used to trigger discussion locally. People could also talk about their hopes and fears for the Olympics. Some of these fears were discussed and include:

- Increase in street sex workers
- heightened security and surveillance on Muslim communities.
- Ensuring living wages are being met
- Housing for worker
- Childcare for workers
- Increase in population
- Resentment between local people and those brought in to work
- Anti-social behaviour

On every issue raised, it was felt that there is a positive role for voluntary, community and faith sectors to ease local concerns, whether it be through conflict resolution, health work with sex workers and in supporting victims of human trafficking, providing childcare facilities and utilising the enormous experience that Newham's voluntary and community and faith groups have in integrating new communities within the borough's borders.

A walk around the site for second-tier organisations and VCF groups would give people an idea of the size and the facilities that will be there

A permanent Olympics Resource Centre should be based in one of the vacant units at Stratford Shopping Centre, with interactive maps, information, help, advice, contact details and 'suggestion walls'. This would provide a focal point for people to go for any information about the Olympics and to find out what the LDA was seeking consultation on. It was also suggested that a walk-in video booth, similar to the one that was used on Channel Four's 'Right To Reply' series, would be a useful way of collecting local people's opinions.

It was noted that whilst there is someone in post in the Community Participation Unit of Newham Council who is apparently the contact point for the Olympics, there has as yet been little engagement with the VCF sectors and groups and residents alike are therefore unlikely to contact her directly for information, unless it is to enquire about volunteering. If a similar post was held somewhere within the VCF sector then it would be much more effectively utilised.

It was also noted that although the 5 east London boroughs should be at the core of the consultation, peripheral boroughs should also be encouraged to respond.

It was agreed that, if feasible, second-tier organisations in Newham should start to form an effective Olympic Forum to consult with and inform the VCF sectors.

Additional comments by the CIU to the London Civic Forum

The level of participation in the research by faith sector organisations is, as has been noted, a result of the sector being much further ahead in considering the ways that voluntary, community or faith groups in Newham can help shape the Olympics. There is therefore an urgent need for the establishment of an Olympic Forum, bringing the three sectors together, so that the faith sectors can encourage voluntary and community groups to engage in the process.

A challenge for voluntary and community groups is deciding what they want to do and how they can contribute. This is far more dependent upon the plans of the Olympic bodies than the vision of the faith sector, which in a number of areas has a clearer set of ideas around 'pastoral care' and its specific role in 2012 itself. Overcoming this obstacle requires greater clarity from the LDA on what *it* thinks the role of voluntary and community groups might be, so that a process of negotiation can begin. The LDA and other Olympic bodies need to consider the role that can be played by the three sectors in addressing the social impacts of construction and of hosting the Games, as well as in participating in plans for the legacy.

As hopefully has been made clear in this report, there is a *fundamentally positive* and often innovative role to be played by faith organisations and communities, which cannot be written off simply because of any bias against religious organisations. Umbrella bodies such as Transform Newham, which bring together 50+ church groups in the borough, have a vital role to play and should be seen as a key contact.

It is also important to recognise that, unlike other Olympic boroughs, there is not a CVS in Newham, but instead a network of 'local infrastructure organisations' including Aston-Mansfield's Community Involvement Unit, Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium and the Black & Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum, who have an established track record of working closely together to ensure that the estimated 1400 groups making up the three sectors are supported. Through the ChangeUp steering group, they are in a position to mobilise the engagement of groups, but only if funding is made available to pay for their expertise and time.

Recommendations

- The creation of a permanent Olympics Resource Centre based in one of the vacant units at Stratford Shopping Centre.
- Funding for an Olympic Consultation post in each of the five boroughs, based within existing second-tier organisations, with the role of organising local structures including an Olympic Forum. In Newham, this should probably be based within Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium.
- The creation of a sub-regional East London VCF Olympic Steering Group, perhaps under the auspices of the East London CVS Network.
- A commitment by the LDA to constructive engagement and dialogue with these structures.
- The drafting of a VCF Consultation Plan, which looks at different levels of participation, from simply providing information through to consultation events and active participation in decision-making where appropriate. This should consider the support registered in this research for consultation meetings on specific or specialist issues and how best to ensure that those most likely to be interested in participation can be reached. Serious consideration should also be given to more innovative consultation methods, including participatory appraisal, citizen's panels, the use of film as a means of recording local people's views to trigger debate in meetings and the idea of a 'consultation video booth'.
- The drafting of a VCF Information Strategy, which looks at how to best provide information by e-mail or post without overwhelming voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, and what role second-tier organisations can play in targeting this information.
- Support from the LDA for a programme of leadership training, perhaps learning from local community organisations that had been involved locally during the Commonwealth Games in Manchester and the last European Olympiad in Athens.
- Support from the LDA to develop NVQ accreditation for Olympic volunteering.
- Positive support from the LDA for the 'More than Gold' initiative and the development of a strategy for involving faith sector organisations in providing support to athletes, their families and international visitors of different faiths.