

Survey of community development workers and managers 2009

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As the economy worsens, and government policy strives to strengthen and engage England's communities, a better understanding of the community development (CD) workforce is urgently needed. Whether they are implementing the equalities and cohesion agenda, incorporating the Duty to Involve into their work, or improving National Indicator (NI) 4¹ scores, CD workers are going to continue to play a crucial role in achieving government's and communities' objectives. CD workers' knowledge of local communities gives their employers vital insight into what communities need from public services and how they can be delivered more effectively. As the recession deepens, community members need to do more to help themselves and CD workers are ideally positioned to continue to deliver this support.

The Community Development Foundation (CDF) conducted a survey of over 1,000 CD workers and managers in England in autumn 2009, the first survey since 2002.² This briefing highlights the key findings of this research.

Summary of key findings

- The survey identified one of the main benefits of CD as assisting people and communities to take action that can result in greater control over decisions that affect their lives.
- CD workers focus on top government priorities. The majority of survey respondents work on engagement (71 per cent), empowerment (71 per cent), social inclusion (65 per cent), and cohesion (63 per cent). They support work such as Healthy Living, Every Child Matters, Building Stronger Communities, Sustainable Communities, and Real People, Real Power.
- Barriers facing CD workers are the lack of funding, working to political/policy agendas that conflict with CD values or practice, and short-term contracts or project funding.
- More than one-third of survey respondents (36 per cent) are between 45 and 55 years old and one-quarter are over 55.
- Almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of respondents are female. Men, although fewer in number, are more likely to be in management roles than women.
- Just under a fifth (18 per cent) of CD workers surveyed are volunteers, and just over half have been volunteering for ten years or more.
- CD workers are to be found mostly in the voluntary and community sector (39 per cent) and in local government (25 per cent). Respondents' roles are funded primarily by the local authority (35 per cent), central government (15 per cent), or regional/regeneration development funds (8 per cent).
- Most respondents (76 per cent) work with all community members as well as focusing on specific groups.

Aims of the survey

The aims of the survey were twofold. The first was to gather information on the characteristics of people working, both in paid and unpaid capacities, as CD practitioners and managers in England. The second aim was to collect information on CD work itself, including the impact of CD activities, and how communities are involved in influencing and monitoring. This included collecting information on the challenges and barriers facing the CD workforce.

KEY FINDINGS

Who are CD workers?

Demographics

The survey shows that the majority (64 per cent) of the survey respondents are female. Sixty-two per cent of respondents are also aged 45 years or older, with men slightly more likely to be older than women.

Qualifications and training

Over two-thirds (69 per cent) of respondents are educated to graduate or postgraduate level, and the majority have received formal or informal training over the course of their careers. For a fifth of respondents, their degrees are specifically on CD issues.

The survey also identified experience as a common requirement for CD workers' current positions. Almost three-quarters of respondents (71 per cent) were required to have previous CD experience. Thirty-seven per cent of all respondents currently in paid positions had been in the roles for between two and six years. Twenty-eight per cent had been in their jobs for six years or more.

Where CD workers work

Paid and unpaid CD workers and managers work primarily in two sectors: the voluntary and community sector (39 per cent), and local government (25 per cent). However, the survey shows that a variety of organisations employ CD workers, including the fire service, social housing, the NHS, partnerships of local organisations, social enterprises, and faith-based organisations. Of those who responded with how their roles were funded, 35 per cent are funded by the local authority, 15 per cent by central government, and 8 per cent

by regional/regeneration development funds. Charities, trusts and the private sector are other funders.

The survey received responses from all England regions.

Hours worked

The survey shows that 60 per cent of paid practitioners and managers were contracted to work on average 36 to 40 hours per week. Eighteen per cent of respondents work on a part-time basis (less than 30 hours per week). However, 73 per cent of respondents report working more hours than they are contracted. Ninety-six per cent of those working additional hours are not able to claim overtime pay, although 73 per cent receive time off in lieu.

Volunteers

Eighteen per cent of respondents specified that their main CD roles are unpaid. More than half (51 per cent) of unpaid respondents have been volunteering for ten years or more.

National Occupational Standards for CD

Survey respondents were asked if they worked to the standards set out in Key Areas One 'Understand and Practise Community Development' and Seven 'Manage and Develop Community Development Practice' of the revised National Occupation Standards (NOS) for CD. Respondents were also asked how easy it was to demonstrate that they were working to the five core values that underpin CD: social justice, collective action, working and learning together, community empowerment, and equality and anti-discrimination.

Three-quarters of CD workers work across three or more standards in Key Area One: Understand and Practise Community Development, and 58 per cent of CD managers work across five or more standards within Key Areas One (as above) and Seven: Manage and Develop Community Development Practice. Respondents find it easy or fairly easy to demonstrate that they work towards the core values of CD. They are more confident in demonstrating their influence on collective action and community empowerment than any other values: 77 per cent say they could demonstrate how they were working to enable collective action, and 70 per cent say they could demonstrate working towards community empowerment. Respondents find it more challenging to demonstrate their influence on social justice:

53 per cent felt they could easily or fairly easily demonstrate this.

How do CD workers work with government?

Policy areas and National Indicators

Survey respondents reported working in a variety of government policy areas. The main four areas are engagement (71 per cent), empowerment (71 per cent), social inclusion (65 per cent), and cohesion (63 per cent). They are also working on several specific policy agendas, including Healthy Living, Every Child Matters, Building Stronger Communities, Sustainable Communities, and Real People, Real Power.

The majority of respondents (55 per cent) state that their organisations' approach to CD is most influenced by NI4 – percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality, NI1 – percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area, NI2 – percentage of people who feel that they belong in their neighbourhood, NI3 – civic participation in the local area, and NI6 – participation in regular volunteering – also influence 40 to 50 per cent of respondents' organisations.

Changes in local administrations

The upcoming election has the survey respondents concerned with associated changes in local administration, and a potential shift in government agendas that may undermine CD. Some believe that political will to support CD at a local level could diminish. However, others see the potential changes to local administration as an opportunity to increase commitment to CD work, in part by actively demonstrating the value and impact of CD.

How do CD workers work with communities?

Working with different groups

CD workers and managers work with a variety of different groups. Seventy-six per cent of respondents stated that they work with 'all community members within a local area'. CD workers and managers also work with specific beneficiaries, including black and minority ethnic groups (53 per cent), older people

(47 per cent), young people (43 per cent), families (43 per cent) and disabled people (42 per cent).

Engaging with communities

Seventy-four per cent of survey respondents report that local community members' views and needs are an important influencing factor on their organisations' commitment to CD. Encouragingly, 72 per cent of respondents receive ongoing feedback from the community, helping respondents measure the long-term benefits of their work. Fifty-six per cent record stories and events to show the effect of CD on communities, and 19 per cent specified that they used the NOS for CD as a measurement tool.

Benefits to community members

Respondents frequently mentioned the role of CD in empowering and engaging communities, through capacity building, increasing knowledge and skills, and building confidence and self esteem. When asked to identify the key benefits of their work, one respondent answered:

'Empowerment of local communities and supporting the role that communities can play to make positive change for their area and themselves.'

CD workers also feel they influence service provision by identifying gaps and helping groups access the services they are entitled to. One respondent stated that CD work means that:

'Community groups can have their voice heard at higher level, and influence the services they use and require.'

CD workers also work to bridge the divides between diverse groups, resulting in greater tolerance and easing of conflicts, and also identified improving people's life chances, and alleviating the effects of disadvantaged communities as benefits of their work.

Reduction in frontline staff

Survey respondents identify the reduction of frontline staff working directly with communities as a challenge they face. Some are currently experiencing or expect to experience staff shortages, and some are experiencing reduced face-to-face contact with communities due to increasing bureaucracy and the need to complete extensive paperwork.

Challenges ahead

The respondents to the CD workforce survey identified a range of challenges and opportunities over the next two years. A number of barriers were identified as affecting the delivery of CD. The main barriers highlighted by survey respondents are lack of funding (62 per cent), working to other political/policy agendas that conflict with CD (48 per cent), and working on short-term contracts or project funding (41 per cent). Other reported barriers include: limited understanding of CD across senior management (21 per cent), a perceived lack of leadership within the organisation to promote CD (13 per cent), communities are unaware of CD (14 per cent), and communities are resistant to either CD or the organisations providing CD (14 per cent).

Funding

The biggest area of concern for the survey respondents is securing funding. Respondents expressed anxiety about funding in times of economic recession, and about anticipated public spending cuts. One specific problem is time-limited funding that does not necessarily give sufficient time to achieve their results or sustain the benefits of CD activities. Short-term funding increases the risk of failure. CD workers and managers are concerned that a lack of sustainable funding could potentially affect the success of their work.

CD in the recession

A strong sentiment among survey respondents is that the economic hardship may lead to renewed enthusiasm for collective action. It is felt that hard times will strengthen communities, as the need to work together and support one another will be greater. There is also an understanding amongst respondents that this will require more help from those involved in CD.

Respondents feel the consequences of the downturn, particularly unemployment, will result in a greater need for CD workers, who can offer advice, guidance and support:

'Changing the negative impact of recession in people's lives (e.g. unemployment) into positive opportunities for mutual aid and greater understanding in communities.'

The economic downturn is also increasing the number of people volunteering. Volunteering roles in community activities provide people with valuable work experience and skill development that may help them to re-enter employment.

References

- 1 NI4 refers to the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.
- 2 Glen, A., Henderson, P., Humm, J., Meszaros, H. & Gaffney, M. (2004) *Survey of Community Development Workers in the UK* London: Community Development Foundation.

About the survey

CDF's survey of CD workers and managers was a self-completion questionnaire using cascade sampling conducted between October and November 2009. In total, 1,005 people completed or partially completed the survey. This briefing paper is the first in a series that presents evidence on the type of CD work taking place across England. Future briefings will explore how the workforce is recording impact and how communities are engaged in directing the work. CDF will also examine the networks that the CD workforce accesses, and what CDF can do to ensure that CD workers and their managers have the tools to positively influence community wellbeing.

For more information on CDF's research, or to get involved in future studies of the CD workforce, please contact Helen Sender at Helen.Sender@cdf.org.uk or Barbra Carlisle at Barbra.Carlisle@cdf.org.uk. The full findings from the 2009 survey will be published in spring 2010. If you would like to receive a copy, please contact Helen Sender.

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