

Voice4Change England Cascade Performance Support

Case Example 5: MENTER

In 2009/10 Voice4Change England ran a Cascade Performance Improvement Support project for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) third sector infrastructure organisations as part of its National Performance Programme work. The project aimed to 'skill up' and support five organisations to cascade performance support to at least ten frontline BME third sector organisations. The five organisations initially met with Charities Evaluation Services (CES) performance consultants to discuss their support needs and were offered training on: Introducing Performance; Strategic Planning; Monitoring and Evaluation; and Quality. Each organisation then had a follow up meeting and further support from Voice4Change England to cascade their learning. Voice4Change England also provided support to help the organisations monitor the impact of their cascade support. We have produced this case example as part of a series of five to follow the journey of each of the organisations and share good practice.

About MENTER

MENTER is the BME regional network for the East of England region.

It was established in 2001 with the aims of:

1. Developing the BME third sector;
2. Promoting equalities particularly race equality;
3. Building a strong and representative regional BME network.



MENTER's strategic functions are:

- To be an advocate and catalyst for the BME third sector.
- Strategic navigation/facilitation via intelligence/information collection.
- To influence external policy and delivery.

MENTER has reach to 420 BME third sector organisations in the East of England region.

Why did they take part?

MENTER see performance improvement as an important route to working better, achieving funding and becoming sustainable. They believe that organisations have to monitor performance well if they want to successfully plan for the future and if they are to meet the challenges the current environment is creating. They feel that there are still many obstacles for BME third sector organisations in accessing funding. This includes issues around cohesion/mainstreaming which requires even more from BME third sector organisations to provide the evidence that their work is needed.



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MENTER have been supporting BME third sector organisations since they began and are currently funded to provide capacity building support through BASIS and the East of England Development Agency. They work with organisations on various aspects of development and delivery as and when organisations need it. As a result they have formed long lasting relationships with many of their beneficiaries. MENTER's organisational support involves a strong element of performance support. The bulk of their work starts with strategic planning as groups consider what they want to achieve and how best to deliver this. MENTER identifies the support needed and what tools will help.

MENTER feel that most BME third sector organisations are performing well, but do not know how to demonstrate this or evidence their success. They got involved in the Cascade Support project because they felt it would give them time to assess the support they offered to see that they are on track and providing the best service to BME third sector organisations. It would also help them develop targeted support for different types of organisations. They felt that the project would particularly benefit frontline organisations by helping them to demonstrate greater accountability to the communities they work with and by developing sustainability for good work.



MENTER have also been involved in Voice4Change England's Promote Performance Campaign and in a direct support programme where they have received one to one support from CES on their own performance needs with a focus on PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations).

What did the project involve?

Six MENTER staff members, funded to provide capacity building support to BME third sector organisations, took part in the project. This included four Strategic Development Officers who are county based and deliver capacity building and performance management support to BME third sector organisations, the Head of Infrastructure who could assess infrastructure needs for performance improvement support and the Chief Officer who has ultimate responsibility from the Board for developing the organisational support programme. The CES training provided a good update to the knowledge and skills for the staff that attended.

MENTER offered support to twelve organisations. At the beginning of the support programme, each Strategic Development Officer listed the support needed, the success measure and the time this would take. This was shared with the beneficiary organisation. Support ranged from set up advice, funding advice (including income diversification), business plan advice, performance monitoring and management. A core part of this support was tailoring it to be appropriate to the level of the group. For example, meeting the needs of a group with fairly straightforward aims e.g. to run cultural activities and social evenings and the needs of one with a complex series of aims ranging from activities to policy influence and tackling discrimination.

In addition to this one to one support, MENTER has helped BME third sector organisations to form partnerships to increase influence with service providers and local partnerships and has run workshops on using the Compact and funding / income diversification.

How the support made a difference

For MENTER the project improved the level of support that could be offered to BME organisations as well as the confidence to deliver more on performance in the future.

“It was really useful to meet other participants and the networking and learning from others in a similar position was very valuable. It was the right mix of delivery and interaction and the information provided was well structured.” MENTER staff member

MENTER’s one to one work with organisations demonstrated some clear benefits:

“MENTER support helped us translate ambitions into clear and concise workplans. It gave us a good understanding of how we could achieve what we wanted, show this to others as well as gave us a feeling of what we aspired to in the future.” Beneficiary organisation

“We do not know how to talk or write, how to convince funders that our service is essential for our group and the community as a whole I am new to this and have found the help from MENTER very useful” Beneficiary organisation

The future

MENTER expect to build on the knowledge and confidence gained through the project and deliver more focussed work on performance including referring groups to training support from CES. MENTER have already booked two more of their staff on the strategic planning course to be held later in the year.

Key Learning from MENTER

Any performance improvement support has to be targeted for a range of different organisations. With a few geographical exceptions, the BME communities in the East of England exist in small numbers with a diverse range of communities. The East has seen one of the largest numbers of inward migration from new communities such as Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Portuguese communities. These new communities need help with organisational set up coupled with advice on meeting basic needs in language training, housing and health. The region also has one of the largest numbers of Gypsy/Traveller communities, who are on the whole, extremely separate from the general third sector. This is further complicated by the largely rural nature which makes outreach and infrastructure support problematic. This is not wholly a BME issue – the East receives low levels of funding and general infrastructure support is patchy and poorly resourced. This creates further burdens on BME infrastructure organisations where expectations and demands are high.

These issues have to be taken on board with brokerage to help BME communities increase influence and access a diverse range of opportunities. The support has to take into account the fact that the majority of groups are run by volunteers. The support received through this programme will help MENTER develop a fit for purpose performance management and business planning support service that is deliverable in future years.

Further information

This Voice4Change England Cascade Performance Support project is part of Voice4Change England's National Performance Programme work. This case example is one of a series of five:

1. Case Example 1: Derby Millennium Network
2. Case Example 2: Black South West Network
3. Case Example 3: Black Training and Enterprise Group
4. Case Example 4: Imkaan
5. Case Example 5: MENTER

To download the other case examples and for more information on Voice4Change England's Performance work including the Promote Performance campaign visit:
www.voice4change-england.co.uk/performance

For more information on the work MENTER are doing please contact Liesbeth ten Ham on 01223 355034, liesbeth@mentor.org.uk or visit the website at <http://www.mentor.org.uk>

Charities Evaluation Services' National Performance Programme has commissioned this work from Voice4Change England. The National Performance Programme is funded by Capacitybuilders' National Support Services programme and is led by Charities Evaluation Services (CES) in partnership with acevo, the New Economics Foundation, New Philanthropy Capital and Voice4Change England.

 www.improvingsupport.org.uk/performance
Your gateway to third sector support, information and resources.



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To find out more about what we do and how you can get involved contact:
www.voice4change-england.co.uk • 020 7843 6130 • info@voice4change-england.co.uk