

Building Better Governance: Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA)

The Issue

[MVDA](#) recognised the need for voluntary and community sector staff and trustees to have more personal development in effective governance practice. The Agency had attended a seminar series 'Building Better Governance' run in London by Cass CCE in early 2015 and felt that there could be interest in such a programme being run in Teesside.

There were questions though. About the business model – would there be enough interest to cover the costs? About the material – would the pitch of the materials (academic in nature, research based, though primarily about practice) be attractive to people for whom this might be the first exposure to personal development in governance? Would generic material tested in the main on medium to large nonprofits, be seen as relevant and transferable to an audience who might be representatives from small, community based organisations?

Our Approach

We created six seminars that we felt would be of interest to smaller organisations, and that could be run in sets of two: an evening event followed by a breakfast event the next day, to make maximum use of consultant time. We updated our materials to keep them 'cutting edge' and to reflect improvements we'd thought of since running the first series, but didn't change the overall approach:

- Highly interactive using a mix of short inputs sharing research and best practice alongside insightful group work, to create and combine to really extend knowledge of governance for nonprofits.
- Follow up materials on a bespoke website including good practice guides and handouts capturing the new knowledge created by participants during the workshops.
- The topics covered were: Demonstrating accountability, Board evaluation and performance review, Board involvement in strategy, Board reports and dashboards, The relationship between the chair and the CE, Running effective Board meetings.

The [Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland](#) funded a bursary scheme for organisations with an annual turnover of up to £750,000 to encourage attendance, and the [Social Futures Institute](#) at Teesside University supported the events with venues free of charge to help keep the costs as low as possible.

The Outcome

69 people attended the six seminar series, the majority of these attending every seminar. Event evaluation was extremely positive for all six seminars and demonstrates that there is huge appetite for this kind of personal development from across a range of small charities, if it can be made affordable. Indeed many participants reported that the majority of the materials were highly relevant and could be quickly adapted to make immediate and tangible improvements in governance effectiveness. The quality of conversation during the



workshops indicates that bringing experienced practitioners together stimulates new thinking and creates new knowledge.

“After funding, governance is the most pressing concern for MVDA’s members. We provide help with set-up and governance basics, but wanted to find a way of supporting established local organisations to develop their thinking and practice. We’ve been delighted by the response to this series and are looking forward to building on the learning and the networking to support continued improvements in governance in the local Sector.”

- Dinah Lane, Chief Executive Officer, MVDA

What the attendees said

‘Excellent overview of governance, would recommend to anyone’

‘Really enjoyed...the whole series. This has given me lots to think about and to take back to our organisation and trustees’

‘[I enjoyed] networking and sharing experiences with officers and board members from other organisations’

When surveyed, participants who attended the full series showed a **28% increase** in how **confident** they felt about their governance practise.