

# Community research Getting started

## Promoting effective community action through research

ARVAC, the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector, was founded in 1978 as a network for researchers in the voluntary sector. It now provides information and training in research for and about the community sector.

## We believe that

- **healthy, diverse and inclusive communities make a fundamental contribution to people's quality of life and living conditions**
- **effective local organisations help create and sustain healthy communities**
- **research has a major role to play in promoting, supporting and developing the work of local organisations and groups by:**
  - developing awareness of the valuable role played by community organisations
  - informing and improving the ways in which community organisations are led and managed

- informing policy-makers how to encourage and support community organisations

- **participation in the research process and access to its products should be freely and widely available and not restricted to academics and other professional researchers.**

## ARVAC aims

- **to act as a resource for people interested in research in or on community organisations**
- **to promote and help develop effective and appropriate forms of research in or on community organisations**
- **to encourage and facilitate networking and collaboration between people working in this field**
- **to ensure that the findings of research in and on community organisations are made available to policy-makers at all levels**

- **to play a role in identifying gaps in knowledge of the community sector and the need for further research**

Between 1999 and 2001, ARVAC was funded by the National Lottery Charities Board (now the Community Fund) to run an outreach project to help small community groups carry out research by providing training, facilitation and support. With ARVAC support, many community groups undertook small-scale research projects to help them set up new services, evaluate and improve existing organisations, lobby for better services or identify gaps in local provision. This pack is based on material used by the outreach project. It has been produced primarily as a resource for groups that have received training from ARVAC, but other groups may find it a useful starting point.

This pack aims to

- **show your community group it is possible to do research yourself, even with limited time and resources**
- **provide an overview of the research process, from asking the right questions to presenting your findings**
- **help your group plan a well-designed piece of research**
- **Introduce basic research theory, methods and techniques.**

#### **How to use the pack**

Section one 'Why do community research' aims to demystify research. It shows how and why community groups can carry out their own research.

The second section 'Before you start' introduces some key research concepts. You can supplement this with some of the further resources listed in section 7a.

In the third section, we take you step by step through 'Planning your research'. This includes how to design and plan your research so that it provides answers to the questions you are asking.

It also suggests some of the broader management issues you need to consider when undertaking a research project.

The fourth section gives more detailed advice on 'Research methods' such as questionnaires and focus groups.

The fifth section covers the final stages of your research – analysing your findings and presenting them to your audience.

We then include some examples of 'Research for specific purposes', looking at needs assessments and evaluation in more detail.

The final section lists 'Further resources.' This includes material on basic research methods that is easy to get hold of and easy to use, plus some key sources (printed and online) of existing research and statistics relevant to community groups. Throughout we have used examples based on research carried out by other community groups.

You may photocopy any part of the pack but please acknowledge ARVAC as the source.

This pack is just an introduction to research: the best way to find out about research is to get out on the ground and start doing it. We welcome hearing about any research you do.

*The pack was compiled by ARVAC staff, designed by Samson + associates and illustrated by Kate Miller. We are grateful to Jayne Humm of the Community Development Foundation and many of our user groups for comments on draft versions. We would like to thank all contributing groups, as well as all the groups we have worked with over the life of the project, for their wisdom and resourcefulness, and the Community Fund who have made it possible to distribute the pack free to community groups.*

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