

## **WRC feminist research into women's organisations working locally**

Does your organisation work in one or more local areas?

Are you engaged with your Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) or other local networks, such as your local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)?

Are you trying to influence your local priorities through your Sustainable Community Strategy, National Indicator targets in your Local Area Agreement (LAA), your local Gender Equality Scheme, or some other way?

Are you lobbying your local council or councillors, your PCT or other local partners, or your MP?

Are you planning to do any work like this soon?

We are about to start a research project into women's organisations' experiences of influencing local priorities. We want to hear about your experiences (for case studies) and we are also looking for women's organisations wanting to play a bigger part in the research.

### **Why we are doing this research**

There are massive changes happening at local government level, with more power being devolved to local government through LSPs. This is where local priorities and decision making happens, where local funding and service provision is allocated – yet we know from previous research that very few women's organisations are engaging with their LSP in a formal way. Only 1.8% of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) representatives on LSPs in England in 2007 were from the women's sector, despite making up 7% of the VCS<sup>1</sup>. Not all groups have the capacity - or desire - to engage with their LSP or attempt to strategically influence local priorities, and we have grave concerns about the future of the women's sector if groups are not able to engage locally in any way.

Our hope is that through this research process, we will develop a greater understanding of the different ways women's organisations are able to influence and engage locally, and what key factors support or hinder women's organisations' ability to influence their local priorities, including service delivery and funding. Research findings, with practical tools and tips, will be disseminated in July 2010 to support women's groups to do more effective local engagement and influencing work and to lobby for better local government policy and practice to meet local women's needs. Through this research, we will also support four women's organisations to build their skills and knowledge to influence locally, which will inform the development of our capacity building training and resources for the women's sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Gudnadottir, E., Smith, S., et al. (2007) *Where are the women in LSPs?: Women's representation in Local Strategic Partnerships*. Urban Forum: London.

## **How we are doing the research**

For this project we are using a feminist participatory action research model. This is a social justice model of research which aims to empower research participants to take action to improve conditions in their lives. It also has a gendered analysis which acknowledges and challenges structural discrimination against women and values women's experiences and voices.

The main body of the research will involve recruiting four women's organisations (or networks) to be active **research participants** from March 2009 to July 2010. WRC will actively support and work with these women's organisations to engage with their local networks and influence their local priorities.

### **Research participants' role:**

The four research participants will develop their own strategic action plan of engagement and influencing, based on what changes they would like to make at a local level. Actions might include developing key local relationships, doing presentations or training at the LSP, organising a community petition, etc. As part of this action plan, groups will undertake some local research, such as mapping their LSP membership, or surveying their LSP about gender equality and women's organisations.

The organisations will identify what they need in terms of skills or knowledge, and WRC will develop or buy-in relevant capacity-building training or support for groups to access, such as training on National Indicators and local government policy, research skills, and public law principles. Finally, the research participants will do an in-depth interview or focus group at the beginning and end of the research process, to explore in depth their experiences at local level.

### **WRC's role:**

WRC will provide ongoing support to the groups, such as support to develop an action plan; templates for various actions; brokering support with local public bodies; guidance on doing research, etc. WRC will also provide tailored training in June 2009, based on organisations' identified needs, and pay a small contribution (£2,000 per organisation or network) to support organisations to be involved in the research, along with a small shared budget to support travel for the meetings.

### **How we will work together:**

The research participants and WRC will need to meet regularly (every three months) to reflect on their progress, their learnings and the research process itself, and plan the next phase of action. We expect this to involve seven face-to-face meetings (including the research launch) between March 2009 and July 2010. We estimate work outside these days will be about one-two days a month.

While much of the research process will be flexible, there are three key factors about the research that are non-negotiable. The basic research aim must remain the exploration of women's organisations' experiences of engaging and influencing locally. The timeframe for this research is to do research from March 2009 –

March 2010, and to produce a final report in early July 2010. This will give women's organisations some time to use the findings to lobby before their next round of Local Area Agreements is finalised in mid-2011. Finally, while the groups will have considerable scope to shape the research, they will need to keep working closely with WRC throughout the research project. This includes a commitment to meeting up regularly and completing the action plan.

### **Other parts of the research:**

Alongside this action research with four women's organisations, WRC will also:

- Develop a survey of women's organisations working on influencing local priorities across England, to map women's organisations' local experiences. This will build up our library of 'case studies' of the work of women's organisations and the challenges and successes of local working. **We are keen to hear about your experiences, and will let you know when this survey is open later in the year.**
- Undertake a gendered analysis of key relevant policy documents in a number of local areas (such as the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement, Gender Equality Scheme and local community engagement activities or mechanisms ) to explore how well gender equality is mainstreamed across local policy and service provision.
- Undertake a literature review, focusing on key policy drivers, good practice of VCS local engagement and feminist participatory action research.

### **Process for choosing the action research participants**

We are looking for:

- four women's organisations (or network of women's organisations)
- working in England
- that are willing to commit some time and resources to working with us from March 2009 till July 2010
- on engaging with their local networks and influencing their local priorities.

As four is a very small number of case studies, we are keen to ensure that between these four organisations, they can cover as large a range of diverse factors as possible. These factors include regional differences; different kinds of local engagement and lobbying by groups; capacity of groups; range of services provided; different issues covered; groups working very locally and also across district boundaries; groups led by and for specific communities of women; groups working in partnership; groups that are successfully lobbying; local areas doing good work on gender equality, women's organisations or community engagement, and local areas being challenged for not meeting the needs of women.

You can apply to be one of four research participant online at [www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=\\_2fZt\\_2fZBSgBoTVEmg8\\_2fwdNIQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=_2fZt_2fZBSgBoTVEmg8_2fwdNIQ_3d_3d) or download the survey from [www.wrc.org.uk/actionresearch](http://www.wrc.org.uk/actionresearch) and send it back to us, or you can contact Darlene on [darlene@wrc.org.uk](mailto:darlene@wrc.org.uk) or ring 020 7324 3036 to complete the survey over the phone. **The deadline to apply is 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009.**

## **About the Women's Resource Centre**

WRC is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including health, violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women. There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

For more information about this feminist participatory action research, contact:

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