

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR INDEPENDENCE

Making sure that organisations remain independent can be a challenging task for voluntary and community organisations. Independence is integral to the ethos of voluntary action, and the legitimacy of voluntary organisations depends on their independence from other actors – particularly state and market actors.

At the same time, making sense of independence can be a daunting task. It means different things to different organisations, and consists of a complex set of issues that brings together the roles of beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, trustees, other organisations, the broader environment, funding sources and the activities of the organisation.

Independence is therefore relative and context specific. It is not something that lends itself to measurement as its meaning can vary from organisation to organisation.

Instead of measurements or questionnaires that 'rate' an organisation's independence, we can first think of core parameters of independence, and then break these down to questions about organisational experiences that resonate with the given organisational context.

SECTION A

QUESTIONS ABOUT ORGANISATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS:

- 1 Size of organisation (income or staff numbers)
- 2 Council area of operations
- 3 Geographic remit of the organisation
- 4 Subsectors and activities that best describe the work of your organisation
- 5 Primary beneficiaries
- 6 Primary funding sources (if known)

SECTION B

INDEPENDENCE OF PURPOSE

(The mission and values of organisations)

1 Our organisation has a clearly defined purpose and mission.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Sure

Comments/evidence:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 2 Our organisation has defined principles that guide its work. | True / False |
| 3 Staying true to our mission is central to our activities. | True / False |
| 4 Staying true to our principles is central to our activities. | True / False |
| 5 Our organisation's mission always reflects the needs of our service users. | True / False |
| 6 Independence of purpose and mission is important to our organisation. | True / False |
| 7 Our organisation has a clear understanding of the rules governing charities (e.g. campaigning and lobbying and charity law). | True / False |

INDEPENDENCE OF VOICE

(The ability to protest and campaign, or defend a cause, without fear of consequences)

1 Our organisation participates in important public debates.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Sure

Comments/evidence:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 2 Our organisation engages with politicians to try to influence their decisions. | True / False |
| 3 Our organisation engages with government departments to try to influence decisions. | True / False |
| 4 Our organisation involves beneficiaries when trying to influence government decisions. | True / False |
| 5 Our organisation engages with the broader public when trying to influence government decisions. | True / False |
| 6 Our organisation has the freedom to be critical of decision-makers in government. | True / False |
| 7 Our organisation has been publicly critical of decision-makers in the past. | True / False |
| 8 All staff have their voices heard in internal decision-making processes, including volunteers. | True / False |
| 9 Our organisation has the freedom to be critical of decision-makers in government. | True / False |

INDEPENDENCE OF ACTION

(The ability to design innovative activities that best meet needs)

1 Our services and activities are shaped by our service users.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Sure

Comments/evidence:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 2 Our organisation consults widely with service users before speaking on their behalf. | True / False |
| 3 Our organisation is open and transparent about its activities. | True / False |
| 4 Voicing criticism of government had negative consequences for our organisation, or we have avoided being critical of government for fear of negative consequences. | True / False |
| 5 Our services are shaped more by our service users than the demands of funders. | True / False |
| 6 The funding environment (e.g. competition for funding) has made our organisation less able to provide innovative services, or other activities, that best meet the needs of our beneficiaries. | True / False |
| 7 Our organisation retains its distinctiveness as a VCSE organisation when compared with public sector or private sector organisations engaged in similar work. | True / False |