

**RUS project -
Initial stage Evaluation report**

**REALLY USEFUL STUFF (RUS)
HANDBOOK**

EVALUATION REPORT

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In 2008, Lincolnshire County Council, in partnership with the voluntary & community sector, developed the Really Useful Stuff (RUS) handbook as a simple step-by-step guidance document to support communities in their voluntary activities.

The handbook is a valuable source of information on a variety of subjects such as running the group, equality and diversity, employment law, and policy & procedure, was made available to groups across the county.

The idea for the handbook came about when the European funding, provided through two projects (Multi Use Centres and Regeneration across Communities of Lincolnshire) to support the development of voluntary & community groups, identified an exit strategy. It proposed that an additional, sustainable resource should be provided for groups in case dedicated officer support is no longer available. RUS was developed on the back of the proposal and the cost of development and printing was largely taken from those two budgets.

A year on, and with a full time RUS Development Officer in place, it was time to assess the handbook in terms of its initial effectiveness and impact on groups in order to improve its functioning as a resource to promote self-help in the community.

2. AIMS

This report presents the findings from the consultation undertaken by the RUS Development Officer.

The main objectives of the research were to investigate the following:

- feedback and comments about RUS
- how it was received, used and how useful it is
- its value in the community
- the trust that the target audience places in the publication
- whether the handbook can promote self help in the community, be a valued resource and equip groups with the necessary information tools to help them become more self-sufficient and self-reliant
- what works and what doesn't work with regards to different aspects of the handbook i.e. availability, format, array of information provided.
- analyse general expectations, first impressions, look and feel of the handbook

The target groups for the consultation were:

- Community groups and voluntary organisations that have a copy of RUS
- Community groups and voluntary organisations that are new to RUS
- Officers that work with community groups and voluntary organisations

Variations in responses between different target groups will be explored and the results compared against comments from experts from a certain area.

METHODOLOGY – CONSULTATION METHODS

3.1 Qualitative methodology

Target groups

To ensure the sample is representative, responses were gathered from representatives from all three target groups and included smaller community groups and bigger voluntary organisations, harder to reach and minority groups; voluntary centers and local infrastructure organisations; and other experts in this field i.e. local and regional Community Development and Funding officers, design experts etc.

Methods

Paper copies and online surveys were distributed spanning the period of late April to end of July. Opportunities for consultation were widely promoted across the county through a variety of methods including email to partner organisations and their networks, LCC Community Development Officers and their networks, the RUS owners, LCC community engagement contacts. Additionally, promotion took place through presence at events, forums, conferences, networking meetings and fairs.

3.2 Qualitative Methodology

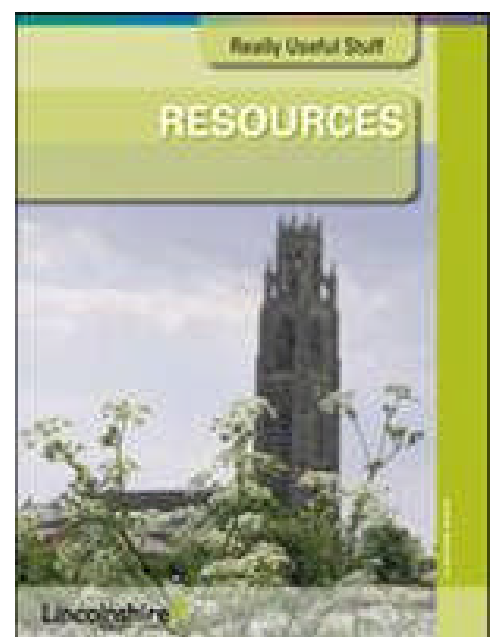
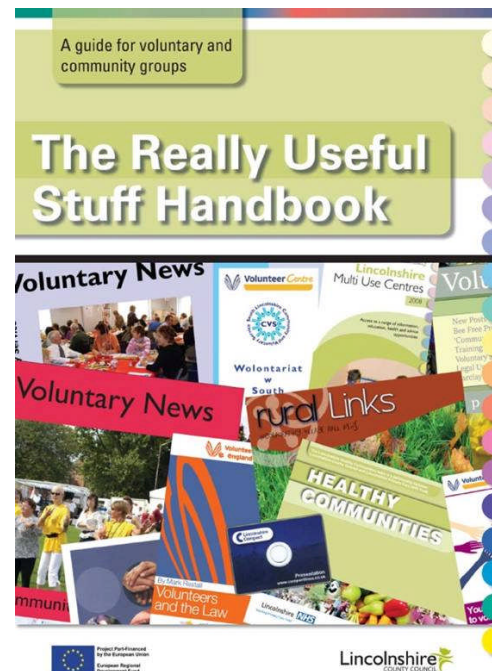
In addition to the quantitative survey, in depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with groups and local infrastructure organisations to allow exploration of some of the issues in greater depth; and to add context and understanding to the qualitative data. The face to face consultation mainly took place at events, meeting, conferences, fairs, and was attended by individuals and support officers, who have an influence on the value groups put into the publication; seemed to be active/inter-active as opposed to groups that are not taking part in such activities.

Where appropriate, participants were asked if they would mind being re-contacted to take part in further research on this project.

3.3 Interpretation of the qualitative data

While qualitative data was an integral part of the study, it is important to bear in mind that in this report qualitative research is based on small samples, and is designed to be illustrative rather than to produce statistics.

The questionnaires distributed are provided at Appendix A
The full analysis and statistics are provided at Appendix B



4. RESULTS: SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

4.1 Success of the project to date?

Based on quotes and statistics from all three target groups (summary provided in Appendix C), most agree that RUS Handbook is a valuable tool that people use, in more or less frequent way, to support their community activity. All respondents recognise the need for the handbook to support their communities.

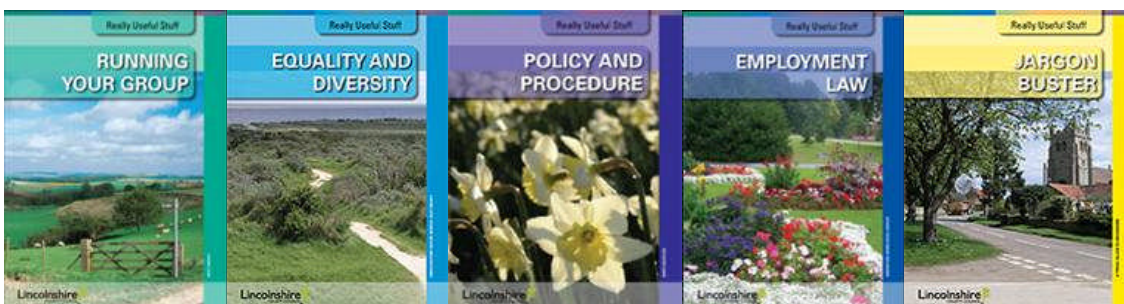
Majority of respondents use RUS as a reference handbook, mostly to double check information or look up specific issues. People who work with groups encourage using RUS as a first resource and then clarify issues through more informed discussion. It is referred to and promoted at training/workshops.

All three groups confirm that they are the target audience for the handbook, however, suggest improvements for updating/development so that they can fully rely on it.

There was a shared opinion that the information content, practicality of the information and language used is good, generic, and easy to follow and understand.

Subjects covered by the handbook proved to be very useful to members of the target audience and proved to be a great information tool.

However, behavioural changes and self help activities are still hard to measure at this point



4.2 The responses related to the following:

- format of RUS
 - groups only had the electronic version of RUS - people who prefer this version seem to have valued and used the electronic handbook more than people who preferred the hard copy format
 - groups that didn't use the electronic PDF mentioned that it was because they didn't like reading from the screen, they forgot using it or didn't have time to use it.
- knowledge of the handbook and what it contained
- first impressions: some people were intimidated by the size and stated that they 'do not have time for this', which may have been a factor that stopped many groups from using it
- ability to find the information: as inability may have discouraged use i.e. even people that used RUS regularly weren't sure where to find information i.e. insurance, risk assessment under the listed chapters.
- wanted to be independent as a group: majority of groups that liked to be independent used RUS as well as consulted with the Officers, if needed.

4.3 Improvements suggested include:

- adding more topics into the handbook
- making RUS more accessible in terms of different formats, languages and making it more user-friendly
- included more practical and advanced applications of those subjects, i.e. constitution for smaller groups and bigger organisations
- included mapping system/index to make the information easier to find and mark:
 - what information is important,
 - what is a legal requirement
 - what is a practical tip
 - what is a background information
 - where possible, include a (visual) route that groups need to go through to achieve something i.e. get funding; this would include all the consideration, options and opportunities that they should consider and direct them to relevant pages

Having suggested the improvements, the respondents mentioned the handbook might increase self-help in the community, become a first port of call for some groups, and even be investment worthy.

Despite a few areas where RUS Handbook can work better, the whole publication is a success.

4.4 Sustaining the document

The groups that took part in the face-to-face consultation generally commented that they would like to buy a copy at cost price. A few of those who responded to the questionnaires said they wouldn't.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the consultation findings and suggestions, the recommendations are, therefore, to:

- Further develop RUS in light of the comments and suggestions from the consultation (as above)
- Set up an update system that will ensure an efficient and cost effective way of keeping the publication up-to-date.
- Identify methods of increasing the use of the handbook and making it more accessible across county
- Investigate external resource opportunities
- Actively promote the handbook and its community engagement potential to all partners and encourage investment in the project and its delivery.
- Support RUS with training provision on topics that have been requested and covered by RUS.
- Identify measures to show behavioural changes – a result of utilising RUS

The Really Useful Stuff Handbook



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