



Organising and deciding

## Statistics and stories – the advantages of community research

Taz Virdee from Heston West shares what his area has learned from community research, and how a new toolkit from ARVAC can help your area get started.

### What we were looking for

"We wanted to check if our mission was still accurate. The previous research we had was a few years old and possibly outdated and we needed to go back and consult to see if our mission still what our community wants and needs.

We also wanted to find out what people thought our legacy should be. We found out that they were keen for us to carry on, and used workshops to find out what we're already doing that people liked and what they wanted us to focus on in the future. We now know that arts and health and wellbeing are really important.

### How we used the findings

As we did the research we found lots of case studies and personal journeys about how Big Local has affected people. There were statistics but also stories. So we've decided to do something creative with them. We're going to produce a documentary and a podcast to get the message out there.

We're also going to apply it to our Big Local plan. We need to adapt to what people want, so they feel empowered. We need to capture their voices all the way through.

It's also made us think about the role of our LTO. From the research we learned people in the community wanted us to support other deprived areas – many of them have got friends and family down the road who are also struggling. The LTO will be used to replicate Heston West Local's approach in other nearby areas, using other funding sources. We've worked out a replicable effective system by training volunteers to become project managers so they can work in other areas if they choose to. That was an idea that came directly from the surveys, and not something we would have thought to try before.

It's also really helpful to have an evidence base to draw from when making decisions. We can show that we've consulted with the community if anyone questions our choices.

The research helped us shape our vision and identity as a group and allowed others in the community to reflect on their own personal journeys. Stories came out about friendships and relationships. People who had lived nearby and never talked now go to the gym or go shopping together. We wanted to get people talking and it's wonderful to see that happening thanks to our work."

### Starting a research project

The approach taken by Heston West is just one of many ways Big Local partnerships can get to know their areas and shape the vision for their community – but there are many others that have difficulty compiling everything they know into something to base decisions on. Research can be perceived as inaccessible, too difficult, academic and something that only specialists can do. And there is a history of 'outsiders' carrying out research on communities without those groups always benefitting from the outputs of that research. But with the right support and guidance, there is no reason communities can't carry out research for their own benefit.

Local Trust have been working with ARVAC to refresh their [community research guide](#) that demystifies some of the assumptions about how to approach a research project and helps community groups deliver the work themselves. It aims to:

- show community groups it is possible to do research themselves, even with limited time and resources
- provide an overview of the research process, from asking the right questions to presenting findings
- help groups plan a well-designed piece of research

- introduce basic research theory, methods and techniques.

[Download 'Getting Started'](#)

#### Additional research support

Local Trust's research team can also support Big Local areas interested in taking on a similar project to the one undertaken by Heston West. Over the next year we will continue to support areas with carrying out research, including introducing some exciting new initiatives.

If you would like to know more or have a chat about your area's research needs, do [get in touch with us](#). You can also visit the [Heston West website](#) for the latest news about their research.

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