



Bristol Wireless C3 Case Study – May 2007

Compete for public and private sector contracts

Background

Bristol Wireless is a volunteer run co-operative committed to social improvement through the building of a wireless computer network. Freely distributable and alterable software is promoted by providing training, support and advocacy. By providing a computer network that is free to use we can grant access to the Internet as well as services similar to television, telephone and radio distributing locally-focused content. Environmental sustainability is key to our philosophy; we use primarily recycled and home made equipment, with many computers being provided freely to potential network users and community organisations.

Motivations for involvement in C3

The co-op became C3 beneficiaries in the Spring of 2006 looking to bring increased order and control to an entirely volunteer run and owned organisation. In particular they wanted to improve volunteer satisfaction and retention by both developing the quality of their funding bids since volunteers are able to work as self-employed contractors on these projects and by implementing an effective human resource policies and procedures. Potential additional benefits were seen to be in the areas of management processes and strategic and operational development.

Process

The C3 advisor attended the Annual General Meeting of the co-operative to receive the support of the whole co-operative for the C3 process. At the AGM a small Performance Improvement Team was identified who would attend the diagnostic and action planning sessions.

It took several short sessions to complete the Perform workbook and the action planning was completed using the coloured stickers method.

Improvements made

A year later they are able to demonstrate improvements in:

- Strategic leadership
- Monitoring processes both internally and for clients
- Project management processes
- Effective internal communication
- Partnerships
- Increased trade
- Volunteer support process
- Increased & more diverse membership
- More interesting and diverse range of projects
- Improved reporting of achievements through better monitoring and appointment of a press officer
- National recognition in the form of a commendation in the ICT Hub 2007 awards for 'most innovative use of IT'.

Exemplary contractual achievements include:

▪ Partnership with Bristol City Council

Bristol City Council invited Bristol Wireless to draft part of the Connecting Bristol Digital Challenge bid. Bristol went on to become a key partner in the bid, and, although it failed, Bristol Wireless projects now play a significant role in delivering in the Council's digital priorities. Bristol Wireless also believe that the increased activity around measuring and reporting achievements improved their visibility and helped them appear more credible to BCC.

▪ UK Online and Social Impact Measures

Bristol Wireless are also working with UK Online to develop and test social impact measurement methods for digital providers. They have been invited to join this project because their community access activities successfully develop innovative and inclusive digital opportunities. An additional benefit is that by the end of the project Bristol Wireless will be able to demonstrate their social impact.

Feedback from the client

Bristol Wireless have been reluctant to point to any one C3 improvement that has led to their growth and development. Instead they prefer to say that it was the process itself that improved them the most. They were already aware of the improvements that needed to be made and already has aspirations around achieving them – what C3 did for them was to allow them space in which to practice and develop the strategic thinking skills that enabled them to both gain control and clarity over the organisation and to approach potential public and private sector clients with confidence and credibility. As Rich Higgs, co-op member, says 'now that we are more focused on our own objectives we have been able to identify the council's objectives more clearly to mutual benefit'.

Next Steps

Bristol Wireless are happy for the time being to enjoy their improvements and although they don't have any clear plans to engage in specific performance improvement work in the future they are keen to explore better methods of demonstrating their impacts and value, starting with the UK Online Social Impact Measures project.