

Why carry out a profiling exercise?

Compiling a community profile takes time and effort so it is important to be clear why the exercise is necessary, and what benefits are likely to be obtained.

A community profile exercise will usually be undertaken for one or more of the following purposes.

1. *A basis for policy*

Whether setting up a new organisation or reviewing the policy of an existing organisation, accurate information about the community the organisation seeks to serve is essential.

Information about matters like the age, mobility, race, gender and age mix, and so forth, is essential if a community organisation is to be geared to the real needs of the people in its neighbourhood.

2. *A stimulus to action*

A Community Profile will help in identifying gaps in service provision, or new needs and opportunities - and it may help in identifying potential volunteers.

3. *A process of education*

When the exercise is carried out as a group activity (or the findings presented to a group) it will most likely prove a significant learning experience. It's surprising how many false perceptions people have about their neighbours and neighbourhood - even when (or perhaps especially when) they have lived there a long time. A Community Profile will introduce them to new information and maybe bring them into contact with new aspects of community life, and thus alter their mental images of their own community.

4. *A tool for fundraising*

Most funders require 'evidence of need' before they will support any project. Profiling exercises can provide relevant, accurate and convincing factual evidence, which will greatly strengthen funding bids and local appeals for financial support.

Defining the parameters

Although most community profiling exercises will, to some extent, achieve all four of the above aims, it is important to be clear about priorities.

Before embarking upon a profiling exercise a group should to do three things:

- agree a short statement (say, two or three sentences) which expresses clearly and concisely the purpose or purposes for which the profile is needed (the Terms of Reference). This will help the subsequent process of deciding what needs to be investigated, and help avoid waste of time, effort and perhaps money;
- agree (e.g. by drawing the boundaries on a map) the geographical area to be covered by the investigation; and
- write down the matters to be investigated in order of priority.



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Information sourced from **COMMUNITY MATTERS - The National Federation of Community Organisations**.

