



# IMPACT ALOUD EVALUATION

**Lindsay Hodgson**

**MAY 2016**

## Contents

1.	About the Evaluator.....	2
2.	Context of Impact Aloud.....	2
3.	Executive Summary .....	3
4.	Introduction.....	6
	Impact Aloud.....	6
	Overview.....	6
5.	Evaluation aims.....	7
6.	Methodology.....	8
	Survey.....	8
	Telephone interviews.....	8
	Profile of VSOs.....	8
7.	Model of operation .....	9
8.	Addressing the need.....	10
9.	Routes to engagement.....	12
10.	The value of shared experience.....	13
11.	Accessing support .....	14
12.	Transforming knowledge to action.....	15
13.	Making changes.....	17
14.	The impact of making changes .....	18
15.	Strengths.....	20
16.	Suggestions for the future.....	21
17.	Conclusions.....	22
	Appendix A: Online Survey .....	23
	Appendix B: Topic Guides.....	27



## 1. About the Evaluator

Lindsay Hodgson is a freelance consultant specialising in social impact measurement in the charity sector. Lindsay supports a range of local and national organisations to identify their intended outcomes and implement data collection systems to analyse the effectiveness of their activities. Through her experience, she recognises the need for affordable technology and the barriers that some organisations face when trying to adopt new technology. The main findings from this evaluation are outlined below and show how Superhighways is supporting local organisations through their Impact Aloud project to understand and implement technology to capture and communicate impact.

## 2. Context of Impact Aloud

Impact Aloud is a project run by the team at Superhighways – led by Kate White & Sorrel Parsons with additional support from Dawn Sainsbury and Philippa Leary. It has been delivered during an unprecedented time of change - both for the sector's frontline groups and infrastructure / support organisations. Funding cuts have resulted in reductions in capacity, greater turn-over of staff and closure of some groups, whilst a move to commissioning has also brought opportunities for organisations who can adapt to this changing environment.

Increasingly, demonstrating impact is becoming a priority, both internally to help target resources, and externally to show value and effectiveness when competing for funding. It will also become more important as organisations diversify sourcing income from elsewhere, for example, local or online fundraising where they will need to engage with individuals. Impact Aloud supports organisations with both capturing the impact of their work and communicating these results.

*“It is clear that increased digital fluency is an absolute necessity if the UK's social sector is to cope with, and adapt to, the significant funding pressures it currently faces.”* – Dame Mary Marsh, Review of Skills and Leadership in the VCSE Sector, 2013

*“This is the challenge for the charitable sector – the potential need to redesign their own organisations at the same time as changing the way they deliver services to end users”* - Baroness Martha Lane Fox, The New Reality Report, 2015

### 3. Executive Summary

Impact Aloud is a project developed and delivered by Superhighways, supporting voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) to use technology to monitor, evaluate and communicate their impact. The project has been funded for three years by City Bridge Trust and operates in partnership with six Councils for Voluntary Services (CVSs) in south London which make up the South London CVS Partnership.

Over the 2.5 year period of operation, Impact Aloud has supported 319 unique organisations through awareness raising and knowledge building, training, 1:1 support, annual events and workshops to help organisations capture and communicate their impact.

This evaluation explores the experiences of CVSs and VSOs that have worked with Impact Aloud over the last 2.5 years along with input from the funder and a technology provider. The evaluation investigates the extent to which the activities of the project result in positive impact on organisations. This evaluation is in addition to extensive ongoing feedback and evaluation conducted by Superhighways during the lifetime of the project.

#### Need

The need for the project was reinforced by all organisations involved in the evaluation: they need to use technology to demonstrate impact and they need support with this.

- Common barriers to implementing technology in VSOs are a lack of time, resources and skills. Impact Aloud has strong local knowledge and understanding of the voluntary sector which allows them to address these directly. VSOs stated financial and practical accessibility as key drivers to engaging with the project alongside Impact Aloud's unique offer and trusted reputation.
- In their role supporting local organisations, CVSs reported that Impact Aloud was complementary to their own programmes of support. With limited skills and capacity to offer technology support, CVSs viewed Impact Aloud as an effective way to deliver technology support to VSOs.
- City Bridge Trust recognised the lack of funding for infrastructure support in the sector. Their investment in Impact Aloud responds to this need and aligns with their recent programme of ICT development and current focus on monitoring and evaluation.
- Lamplight – an online database provider – highlighted the need for organisations to undertake extensive preparation before implementing new systems. VSOs supported by Impact Aloud were both better prepared for the implementation and also better supported post-implementation.

#### Impact

Operating in partnership with CVSs has an impact on both VSOs and CVSs. It also creates two routes to impact: directly on VSOs and on VSOs through the upskilling of CVSs. The model therefore maximises opportunities for capacity-building and reach and, through shared experience, also increases credibility and trust about the use of technology between CVSs and VSOs

All participants in the survey and telephone interviews reported an increase in knowledge and skills in using technology and all participants rated this as useful for their organisation.

The high conversion rate of transforming knowledge into action is a result of Impact Aloud effectively understanding and responding to the financial and practical needs of organisations. Of the 34 survey respondents, 29 stated they intended to implement changes to their organisation; 27 of these proceeded to implement changes. In telephone interviews, all participants from CVs and VSOs reported implementing new technology or improving the way they use current technology.

The impact of improved use of technology and increased knowledge and skills in VSOs was:

- Raised profile and presence online through social media.
- Improved content online including website and impact reports.
- Increased reach to potential beneficiaries and connections with other organisations.
- Better data to inform strategy and planning and report to funders.
- A more convincing evidence-based case for investment and funding.
- Expanded skillset and capacity within the organisation
- Increased confidence to try new technology
- Securing funding as a result of increased profile and using technology to stand out.

The impact of the partnership itself and the resulting impact of improved use of technology and increased knowledge and skills in CVs was:

- Increased capacity to support VSOs with using technology to monitor, evaluate and communicate impact.
- Expanded skillset and capacity within the organisation
- Increased awareness of opportunities to work together with VSOs and CVs.
- Strengthened connections and collaboration with other CVs.
- Increased motivation within the team to implement technology and support VSOs with implementation.
- Improved reputation

### Strengths & Improvements

The culture and interpersonal skills of the Impact Aloud team at Superhighways are a further strength to the project. Respondents valued the flexibility, responsiveness and reliability of their practical support along with softer skills such as the reassurance, encouragement and creativity that the team offered.

Many participants found it difficult to identify areas for improvement but some suggestions included providing a higher level of support to organisations that have implemented tools at a basic level and want to expand or improve their use of the tool. Other suggestions included connecting with local networks that could provide a platform for information sharing or potential collaborative opportunities and which are outside of the 6 current boroughs the project focusses on.

## Conclusion & Next steps

Without question, the feedback gathered from stakeholders and beneficiaries demonstrates the need for Impact Aloud. Participants were vociferous that they would like to see the project continue and in response to this demand, Superhighways will need to consider how they approach this in the most effective way.

The current model of delivery through partnership with local CVSs is evidently effective to maximise reach and engagement. By also upskilling CVSs, Impact Aloud are not only expanding their reach but also increasing sustainability of their interventions.

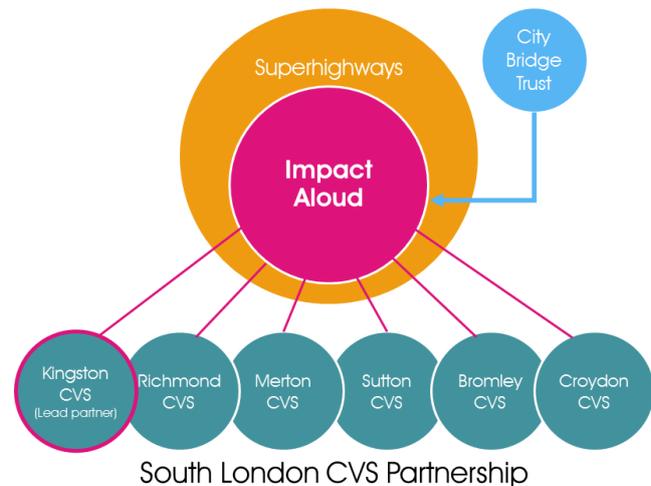
The Impact Aloud team, with its genuine insight into the voluntary sector, first-rate expertise and trusted reputation is in a prime position to continue supporting VSOs acquire and use new skills and data capture systems, to more robustly measure and evaluate the effectiveness of their services.

## 4. Introduction

### Impact Aloud

Impact Aloud is a project delivered by Superhighways helping voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) to use technology to monitor, evaluate and communicate their achievements. The project has been funded for three years by City Bridge Trust and operates in partnership with six Councils for Voluntary Services (CVSs) in south London which make up the South London CVS Partnership. The lead CVS partner is Kingston Voluntary Action. After two and half years of the project, this independent evaluation has been commissioned to explore the experiences of beneficiary organisations. This is in addition to extensive ongoing feedback and evaluation conducted by Superhighways since the inception of Impact Aloud in November 2013.

- Kingston Voluntary Action (lead partner) (KVA)
- Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA)
- Community Links Bromley (CLB)
- Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC)
- Sutton Centre for the Voluntary Sector (SCVS)
- Richmond Council for Voluntary Service (RCVS)



### Overview

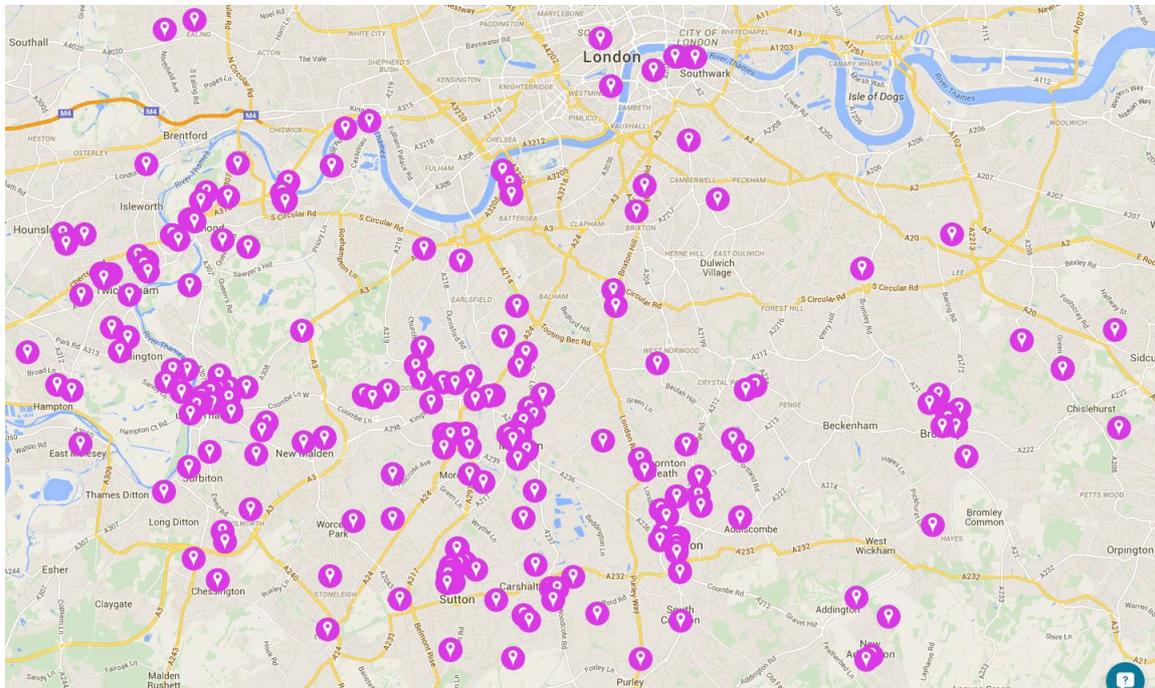
Impact Aloud has developed and delivered a range support to groups to help them use digital tools to better monitor, evaluate and communicate their impact. Since November 2013, this has comprised of 25 stand-alone awareness raising sessions, 29 sessions at network and forum meetings and 25 training sessions including:

- Top Digital Tools for Monitoring & Evaluation
- Top Digital Tools for Communicating Impact
- So you need a Database?
- Excel for Monitoring & Evaluation
- Getting started with Audio Capture and Editing
- Creating easy Infographics
- Communicate your impact using Case Studies
- Tiny Films, Big Impact
- Take your Surveys Online and Mobile
- Engaging and impactful Annual Reviews
- Create Presentations that Count

Impact Aloud has also provided 1:1 support to organisations to support implementation of tools – over the phone, by email or face to face - including 90 minute surgeries and more

in depth longer term support (e.g. database implementation or short films). There have also been two annual events with expert speakers invited to run specialist workshops, which otherwise would not be accessible to small groups targeted by the project.

The map below shows the spread of the 319 unique organisations that Impact Aloud has supported across the six boroughs over the last 2.5 years.



See [www.superhighways.org.uk/projects/impact-aloud](http://www.superhighways.org.uk/projects/impact-aloud) for further information.

## 5. Evaluation aims

The aim of this evaluation is to explore the experiences of CVs and VSOs that have worked with Impact Aloud over the last 2.5 years. The evaluation investigates the extent to which the activities of Impact Aloud result in positive impact on organisations. It focuses in-depth on providing information on the assumptions inherent in a simple logic chain below:



In exploring these questions, the evaluation seeks to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Impact Aloud in realising these objectives.

## 6. Methodology

Feedback from stakeholders was collected through an online survey and via telephone interviews in March – April 2016.

### Survey

The survey was sent to a sample of the total number of organisations engaging with the project - the 131 organisations that had attended the annual Impact Aloud events. Of these, 34 responded to the survey; a reasonable response rate of 26%. There was a mixed spread of respondents across the six boroughs with the highest response rate from Kingston – the lead borough in the partnership (Kingston=11, Bromley=8, Richmond=6, Sutton=6, Croydon=5, Merton=2). Respondents were given the option to add their name and contact details if they were willing to be contacted for a follow up telephone interview, otherwise responses were anonymous. Of the 29 respondents that gave their contact details, 6 also participated in telephone interviews. The questions generated quantitative and qualitative data which is included in relevant sections throughout this report. The full set of survey questions is included in appendix A.

### Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted in March – April 2016 with a mix of organisations suggested by Impact Aloud and organisations randomly selected by the evaluator. The rationale for this type of selection was to obtain a balance between organisations that had been known to have significant interaction with Impact Aloud and those that have had various levels of engagement. The topic guides for different stakeholder groups is included in appendix B. A breakdown of the organisation types, selection methods and number of participants interviewed in each cohort is presented below.

Organisation Type	No. Organisations
CVS	5
VSO (suggested by Impact Aloud)	4
VSO (randomly selected by evaluator)	5
Funder	1
Technology provider	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>

### Profile of VSOs

The table below gives some brief information on VSOs involved in telephone interviews including size and income.

Income	Organisation	Overview	No. staff
£10,000 - £50,000	Sutton Migrant Refugee Network	The Refugee & Migrant Network Sutton offers Friendship, Advice, Counselling and English Language Classes to refugees, asylum seekers and newly settled migrants and their families from over 20 countries, who are now living in our area.	1
£50,000 - £100,000	Lay Witnesses for Christ International	LWFCI is a global sport ministry supporting youth and local communities to positively impact others through Sport Activities, outreach programs, employability skills, training, and the Right Track programs: Drug, Alcohol & Violence Prevention Program.	N/A
£50,000 - £100,000	Merton Centre for Independent Living	Merton Centre for Independent Living has a vision to enable Disabled people to take control over their lives and achieve full participation in Merton & wider society.	8

£100,000 - £500,000	RUILS	Ruils is a local, user-led charity supporting individuals (irrespective of age, impairment, health condition or capacity) to live independently at home and in their community.	11
	Healthwatch Bromley	At a local level, Healthwatch Bromley works to help local people get the best out of their local health and social care services. Whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow. Healthwatch Bromley is all about local voices being able to influence the delivery and design of local services. Not just people who use them, but anyone who might need to in future.	6
£500,000 - £1m	Kingston Carers Network	Kingston Carers' Network (KCN) is a local registered charity, providing independent information, advice, advocacy and support to people who care for someone living in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.	13
	Jigsaw4U	Jigsaw4u is a community based charity working for children and young people affected by complex social, emotional and bereavement issues. We work proactively to get children, young people and their families back on track by building positive relationships and empowering them to have a voice in their future.	17
	Advocacy for All	Advocacy for All supports people who need it by giving free independent, and confidential advocacy.	35
Unknown	ABCD Croydon	Asset based community development (ABCD) is a localised and bottom-up way of strengthening communities through recognising, identifying and harnessing existing 'assets' (i.e. things like skills, knowledge, capacity, resources, experience or enthusiasm) that individuals and communities have which can help to strengthen and improve things locally. Instead of looking at what a community needs or lacks, the approach focuses on utilising the 'assets' that are already there.	N/A

## 7. Model of operation

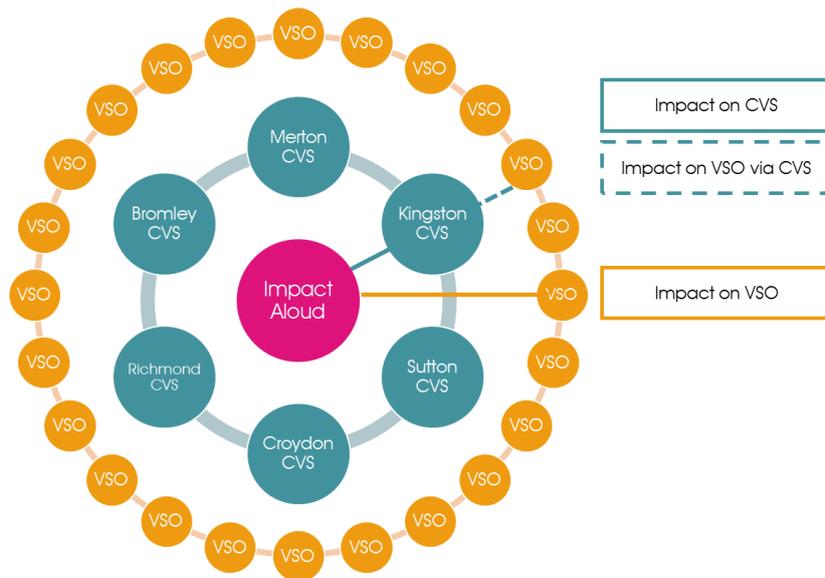
The model of operation in partnership with the six CVSs is an important aspect to explore both in terms of its effectiveness as a mechanism to maximise reach to VSOs and as a potential channel to provide benefits to CVSs themselves. Initially, many of the CVSs saw their role as signposting, advertising and encouraging VSOs to access Impact Aloud; feedback in this evaluation revealed a somewhat unexpected ripple effect whereby many CVSs benefitted from Impact Aloud and that experience helped them to support VSOs. This creates two levels of impact and provides two routes to impact on VSOs:

### Levels of impact:

- I. Impact on CVSs
- II. Impact on VSOs

### Routes to impact on VSOs:

- I. Directly from Impact Aloud
- II. Via CVSs



The implications of this ripple effect are explored throughout this evaluation.

## 8. Addressing the need

In telephone interviews, participants from different stakeholder groups were asked whether they thought there was a need for Impact Aloud. As expected, different groups prioritised different needs depending on their role in the project or position in the sector, however, the emerging themes matched the mission of Impact Aloud: organisations need to use technology to demonstrate impact and they need support with this. For both VSOs and CVSs there is a need to demonstrate their own impact and for CVSs there is an additional need to be able to support VSOs with this. Impact Aloud's funder – City Bridge Trust – recognise the need for monitoring & evaluation and technology support in the voluntary sector and emphasise the necessity for the solutions to be sustainable given a reduction in funding for infrastructure support.

VSOs	CVSs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to keep up / be more modern</li> <li>• Need to demonstrate impact &amp; attract funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to demonstrate own impact and support VSOs to demonstrate their impact</li> <li>• Need to capacity-build VSOs</li> </ul>
Funder (City Bridge Trust)	Technology Provider (Lampplight)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The voluntary sector needs a sustainable way of embedding ICT in organisations</li> <li>• Organisations need tools to demonstrate impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisations need to understand their data and the resources needed to implement new systems</li> <li>• Organisations need follow up support</li> </ul>

We asked VSOs why they chose to engage with Impact Aloud to meet these needs.

The main reasons that VSOs chose to engage with Impact Aloud were:

**Financial** – support was free / low cost and it was judged as good value for money. This emerged as a key driver for engagement and is also strongly related to the barriers discussed in section 11.

**Practical** – training and events were local and convenient with good sized groups. This is also related to the barrier of time discussed in section 11 and the enabler of shared experience discussed in section 9.

**Reputational** – Impact Aloud was seen as a trusted provider with good quality content and trainers and a reputation for delivering.

**Insight** – several VSOs stated that it was both time saving and reassuring that Impact Aloud understood the sector and the activities and challenges of their organisation. The belief was that because of this, the VSO would get the appropriate practical support they needed.

**Unique offer** – many VSOs reported that they did not know of any other organisation offering what Impact Aloud offered.

*"There's nobody else offering the things we wanted. It's different to the standard stuff out there... It's charged at a reasonable rate which makes a difference when you're a small organisation and it's a new skill – you want to know you can afford to take the risk" – VSO participant*

*"There's nothing else on offer – there's no-one to talk things through with and help us" – VSO participant*

*"They have a thorough understanding of what we're trying to achieve. We don't have to explain everything we do. We would spend a lot of time researching tools and platforms and end up side-tracked from delivery" – VSO participant*

We asked CVSs how Impact Aloud meets their needs and those of the VSOs they support. In addition, we asked how Impact Aloud fits with other programmes in their organisation.

When asked what the synergies were with their own programme of work, most CVSs described Impact Aloud as being complementary to their own capacity-building offer to VSOs. Many CVSs offered support and training around monitoring and evaluation, outcomes, funding, finance, development, policy and commissioning, however, many identified a skills gap around the tools and technology for capturing and communicating data.

*"[VSOs] wouldn't be served without Impact Aloud – we don't have the skills. There would be a massive gap in our capacity building programme" – CVS participant*

*"It's an add-on to what we provide – we have no expertise in that area. If Impact Aloud wasn't there people wouldn't automatically use these tools; they would probably just carry on doing it the way they're doing it" – CVS participant*

*"Our capacity building team is very small these days due to funding cuts...so we wouldn't have the capacity to look into things like comms, social media and databases" – CVS participant*

We asked City Bridge Trust about their view on the need for the project.

When asked what the need was for Impact Aloud, the project funder recognised the need for technology support in the voluntary sector. At Impact Aloud's inception, City Bridge Trust's programme prioritised ICT development. A shift in focus means that they are no longer funding technology support but continue to prioritise monitoring and evaluation and impact reporting. The scope of Impact Aloud brings both of these priorities together to use technology to capture, monitor and report on impact.

*"There are big question marks around who will fund infrastructure support given the lack of money from Local Authorities to support it. City Bridge Trust is committed to infrastructure support– Funder"*

Lamplight – an online database provider was also interviewed as part of this evaluation. They had worked with some VSOs that were supported by Impact Aloud to implement databases. We asked them about the needs of organisations that implement technology solutions and how Impact Aloud supports that.

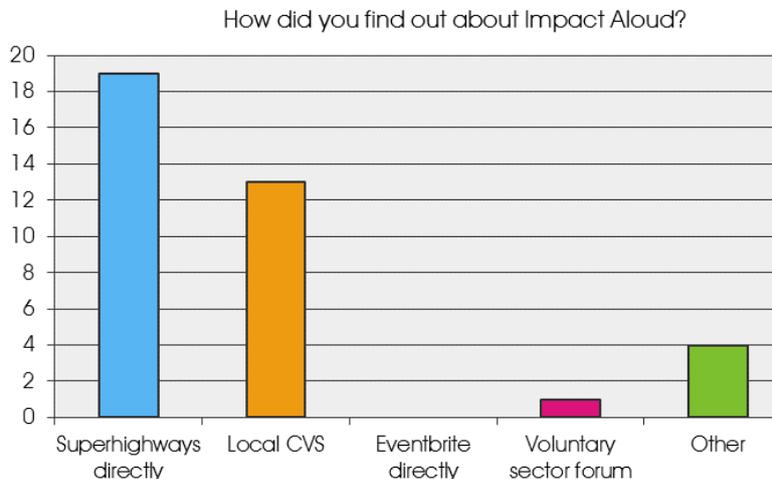
Lamplight were asked about their thoughts on the need for Impact Aloud and the experience of working with organisations who had been supported by the project. Two main strengths emerged when discussing the difference between those organisations who had received support from the project and those who had not: pre-implementation preparation and post-implementation support. Lamplight observed that organisations supported by Impact Aloud benefitted from both of these aspects.

*"Organisations often need training after implementation. Impact Aloud kept in proactive contact [with the organisations] to check-in and see how they're going and get a sense if they're struggling or need support" - Lamplight*

*"Organisations were further down the road when they had Impact Aloud support so could spend time fine-tuning the structure of the system without having to spend time explaining how to understand the data...they were already at a point where they understood their data and how much work is involved" – Lamplight*

## 9. Routes to engagement

In the survey, we asked organisations how they found out about Impact Aloud and how they had engaged with the project. More details are given about the type of support VSOs received in section 10.



Most frequently, organisations had found out about Impact Aloud through Superhighways directly or their local CVS. This was echoed in the telephone interviews with most VSOs stating they found out about Impact Aloud either through their local CVS or through an existing relationship they had with Superhighways. This gives some support to the CVS partnership model being an effective way to reach organisations. Impact Aloud will, however, have to respond to the changing landscape of infrastructure funding from local authorities. This could be viewed as a threat to the model but also as an opportunity for Impact Aloud; as CVSs may undergo funding cuts putting pressure on their capacity for partnerships such as this, it may mean opportunities open up for specialist infrastructure organisations such as Impact Aloud.

An invaluable asset of the CVS partnership model is how the ripple effect described in section 6, can contribute to building trust and credibility through shared experience.

## 10. The value of shared experience

Many of the CVSs were not expecting to be supported to the extent that they were by Impact Aloud; all of them reported receiving some support with using technology to capture and communicate their impact. In addition to the benefits this brought to their organisation, some participants recognised that it improved the way in which they could support VSOs having experienced the process of knowledge acquisition, skills building and implementation themselves.

*"Initially I expected them to support VSOs only. I didn't think they would support us on our work with VSOs" – CVS participant*

*"It changed how we looked at our own impact. I wasn't expecting that" – CVS participant*

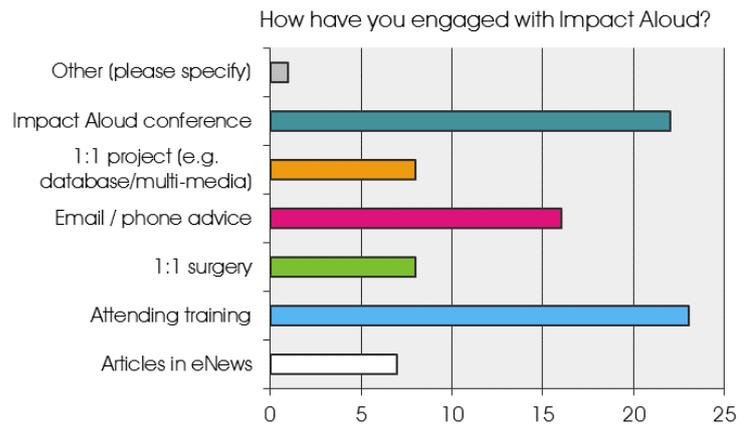
*"It means we're better positioned to help local groups because we've been through the same process" - CVS participant*

This shared experience is highly valued by VSOs who reported some of the following strengths of shared experience from Impact Aloud:

- The knowledge and understanding Impact Aloud has of the work of their organisations, their stakeholders and the political and local context in which they operate. Impact Aloud, as a VSO themselves has first-hand experience of some of the challenges faced by other VSOs.
- The opportunity to see what other organisations are doing at showcasing events. VSOs reported that events where other organisations had demonstrated what was possible were motivating and inspiring.
- Connecting with other local organisations. VSOs reported that local events and networking meant they built new local relationships which encouraged opportunities for collaboration.

## 11. Accessing support

The type of support accessed by survey respondents varied. Around two thirds of survey respondents had attended the conference and/or training and around half had received personalised support through email / telephone advice. A smaller cohort of around a quarter of respondents had accessed intensive one to one support through surgeries where they were able to book a 90 mins slot with project staff for 1:1 support e.g. following up something they wanted to implement after training.

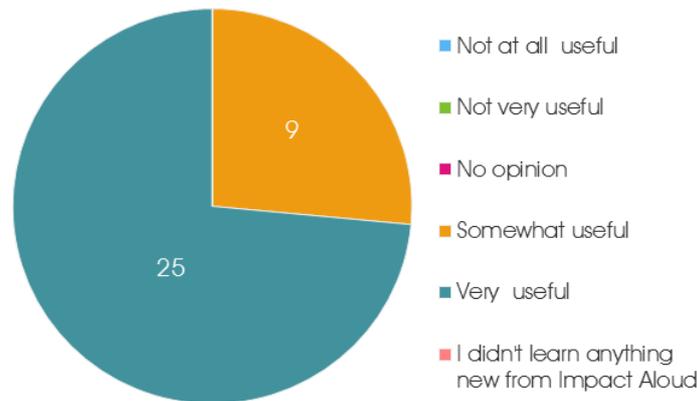


In telephone interviews, CVSs and VSOs all reported accessing knowledge building support from Impact Aloud. Similar to survey respondents, most participants had attended training and the annual conference. Some had received more intensive support such as one to one support through a 90-minute surgery or bespoke projects such as database selection or short film production.

## 12. Transforming knowledge to action

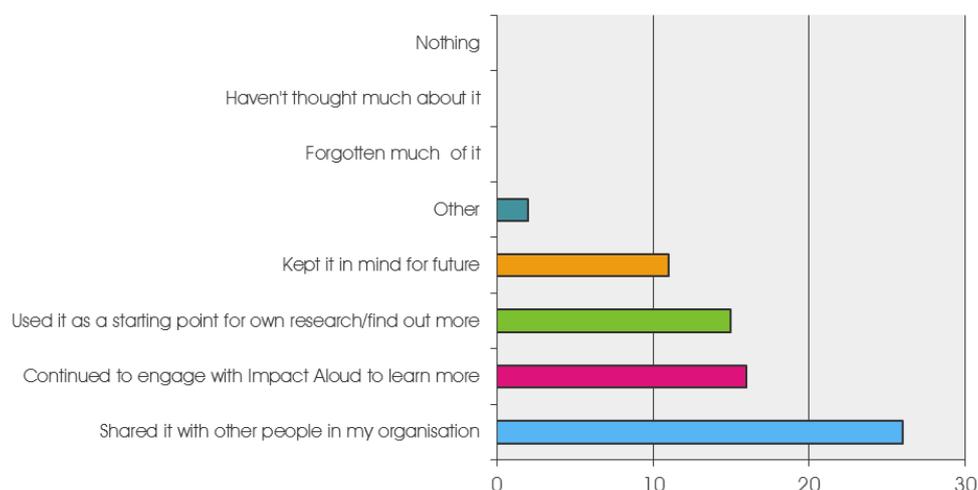
Having engaged with Impact Aloud, we asked survey respondents whether what they learned was useful and what they did with that information. All respondents said that what they learned had been useful, with almost three quarters stating it had been very useful.

Thinking about what you have learnt from Impact Aloud, please rate how useful this has been to your organisation:



An inherent risk of awareness raising and knowledge building is that the effect is short-lived. We therefore asked people what they had done with the knowledge they acquired from Impact Aloud. No respondents answered that they had forgotten it, not thought about it or done nothing with it. Three quarters of respondents said they shared it with other people in their organisation. This is an extremely beneficial outcome as it means knowledge remains in the organisation even after people move on. Almost a further half of all respondents said they used it as a catalyst to find out more by themselves – which is an empowering outcome – or by continuing to engage with Impact Aloud where they will invariably learn more. Around one third said they kept the information in mind for future.

Thinking about what you have learnt from Impact Aloud, please tell us what you have done with that knowledge:

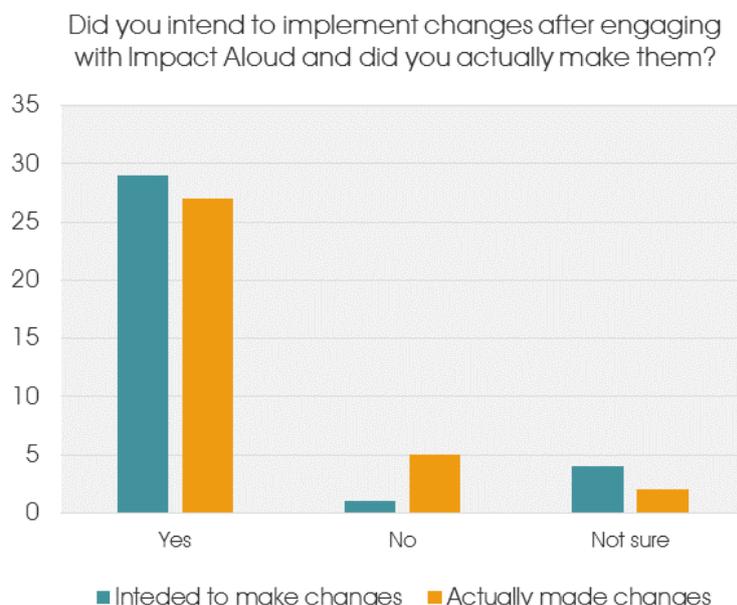


In telephone interviews we asked participants what the barriers were to converting their knowledge to action (i.e. implementing the things they learned through Impact Aloud). The most cited factors were: lack of time, lack of money, lack of skills and fear of or resistance to change. Later in the interviews, participants were asked what they thought the strengths were of Impact Aloud. Many of the strengths that participants stated directly addressed these barriers. This suggests that the methods of support that Impact Aloud offer are likely to be effective as they take these barriers into account and attempt to overcome them.

Participants' views on the barriers to implementing changes and the ways in which Impact Aloud addresses these are illustrated in the table below.

	Time	Money	Skills	Fear/ resistance
VSO	Impact Aloud reduce the learning curve for VSOs as they research, recommend and train VSOs in using appropriate tools.	Impact Aloud Signposts VSOs to free/low-cost tools which are appropriate for their needs.	Impact Aloud's training is accessible and easy to understand. They also provide opportunities to test out tools and apps at events and training.	Impact Aloud team are encouraging, reassuring and realistic.
CVS	Using Impact Aloud as a specialist adviser reduces the time CVSs spend researching and mastering new tools to recommend to VSOs. It also reduces the duplication in time expended if all CVSs are doing this independently of one another.	Impact Aloud can plug the gap that some funding cuts have created in capacity building teams in CVSs.	By supporting CVSs to learn about and implement new tools, Impact Aloud increases the skills that CVS staff have to use and advise VSOs on tools.	Making small changes with Impact Aloud increases confidence to make further changes

When we asked survey respondents whether they intended to make changes after engaging with Impact Aloud and whether they actually went ahead and made those changes, the conversion rate from intention to action was high. Of the 29 VSOs that said they intended to make changes, 27 of them actually implemented changes. Of the 5 organisations that did not implement changes, they stated time constraints and unsuitability of the tools as reasons. Details about the changes made by telephone participants are given in section 12.



These results are promising in light of the need for a sustainable way of embedding technology in organisations. By signposting organisations to free/low-cost tools, and providing the necessary support to test and become comfortable with using them, Impact Aloud is helping to embed sustainable use of technology. The soft skills of the team, their understanding of the culture of small VSOs and their experience of pitfalls and challenges means they are able to help VSOs prepare to implement and then continue to use the tools they adopt.

### 13. Making changes

All telephone participants – both CVSs and VSOs – stated they had made some changes as a direct result of engaging with Impact Aloud. These ranged from small changes in how they communicated their impact to major changes in the way in which they collected and managed data.

VSOs reported implementing new tools or improving their use of current tools to collect data from their stakeholders. Examples include:



- A small VSO that moved from collecting feedback using pen and paper to discovering and implementing Survey Monkey.
- A community development VSO needing to capture complex data around real neighbourhood relationships and improved how they captured this journey using qualitative methods.
- A VSO that used Quick Tap Survey to collect real-time data at their Annual General Meeting to understand how people were feeling and feed it straight into their strategic planning.
- A medium sized VSO that was supported to select and implement a new database system to manage their stakeholder information.

Both VSOs and CVSs reported making changes around the way they communicate the work that they do. Examples include:



- A VSO that incorporated infographics in their communications to their stakeholders, many of whom have learning disabilities and prefer visual information.
- A VSO that implemented Mailchimp to better target the information they send to the right people.
- A CVS that has moved their impact report online and a VSO that has changed their annual review to an impact report.
- A CVS that now uses Audioboom and video to capture data from their events.

VSOs and CVSs reported increasing or improving their use of social media. Many organisations already had a Twitter account or Facebook page but support from Impact Aloud meant organisations started using these more effectively. Examples include:



- A VSO that has started using Vine to share their short films about the work they do and integrate this into their Twitter feed.
- A VSO that promoted a short film (produced in partnership with Impact Aloud) on Twitter which attracted votes to win funding.
- A VSO that created a Facebook page as a result of the Impact Aloud conference
- A CVS that has redeveloped their website to integrate a range of social media tools such as Audioboom and Flickr.

## 14. The impact of making changes

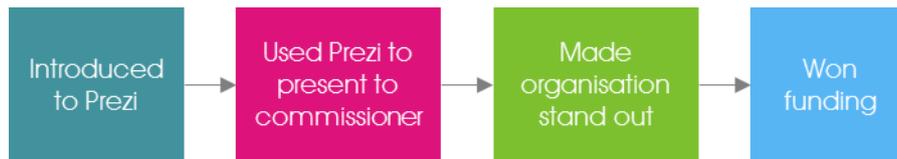
Some organisations had examples of how the changes they had made had a financial impact on their organisation. This relates directly back to the need for Impact Aloud that VSOs stated in section 7 'to demonstrate impact and attract funding'. Two examples of this are illustrated below:



In this example, a VSO learned to use Vine (a video sharing app) and Hootsuite (a social media management tool). This improved their use of social media which raised their presence and profile online and connected them to new organisations. As a result of these connections, they were nominated for an award which they won, partly as a result of the re-tweets their nomination received. An added benefit that they reported of using Vine is that the content can be re-used. This latter benefit was echoed by another VSO:

*"Impact Aloud helped us with a short film which was vital to show commissioners and explain our strengths. It was concise and simple so commissioners have time to watch it. For such little resource it has a massive reach and impact and we can use it over and over again"*

– VSO participant



This simple example illustrates how the VSO used technology to present and promote their work which they believe made them stand out in a competitive commissioning process.

Other VSOs made similar comments on how presenting and promoting their work using technology led to other benefits:

*"We now use Mailchimp to send our monthly bulletin to our supporters which has been a revelation. We've found that the newsletter ripples down and other organisations tell their clients about us. It's quick to do and now we have more people coming to our activities"*  
 – VSO participant

More generally, both CVSs and VSOs both described a range of benefits to their organisations as a result of engaging with Impact Aloud.

The impact of increased knowledge and skills and improved use of technology in VSOs was:

- Raised profile and presence online through social media.
- Improved content online including website and impact reports.
- Increased reach to potential beneficiaries and connections with other organisations.
- Better data to inform strategy and planning and report to funders.
- A more convincing evidence-based case for investment and funding.
- Expanded skillset and capacity within the organisation
- Increased confidence to try new technology
- Securing funding as a result of increased profile and using technology to stand out.

Below are some examples of statements from VSOs about the impact on their organisations:

*"It has improved our confidence to do new things"*

*"We have only had to invest a little resource for something that has increased our reach and impact"*

*"It shows how we're different"*

*"We have a more convincing case to take to funders and commissioners"*

*"It makes us more competitive"*

*"Once people are skilled up in our organisation we do it again and again"*

*"We now have co-ordinated data for our organisation as a whole picture and can report to our funders easier"*

*"We can leave behind clear, powerful messages"*

*"We're more professional"*

*"We can make the case for investment"*

*"we have case studies and stats to evidence our impact"*

*"We have better content which is easier for people to find"*

The impact of the partnership, increased knowledge and skills and improved use of technology in CVSs was:

- Increased capacity to support VSOs with using technology to monitor, evaluate and communicate impact
- Expanded skillset and capacity within the organisation
- Increased awareness of opportunities to work together with VSOs and CVSs.
- Strengthened connections and collaboration with other CVSs.
- Increased motivation within the team to implement technology and support VSOs with implementation.
- Improved reputation

Below are some examples of statements from CVSs about the impact on their organisations:

*"It has brought knowledge and skills to our organisation that we otherwise wouldn't have known about"*

*"It has created links with other CVSs beyond the partnership now we can share our specialist knowledge with them"*

*"It has improved our reputation"*

*"It has motivated the team to do more"*

*"Impact Aloud helps us identify opportunities and work together"*

*"It's helped us collaborate more and share information between CVSs"*

## 15. Strengths

Many of the strengths of Impact Aloud have been highlighted in relevant sections throughout this report but one aspect of the project which should not be overlooked is the strength of the delivery team. The culture and interpersonal skills of the Impact Aloud team are a further strength to the project. Respondents valued the flexibility, responsiveness and reliability of their practical support along with softer skills such as the reassurance, encouragement and creativity that the team offered.

When asked about the strengths of Impact Aloud, participants invariably commented on the approach and skillset of the team:

*"People don't know what it is they don't know so the suggestions from Impact Aloud are extremely valuable"*

*"They are really interested in both tech and the voluntary sector"*

*"If they don't know something they will always go away and find out for you"*

*"They are really flexible, approachable and easy to understand"*

*"They take time out to meet personally"*

*"They give us a sense of security and confidence"*

*"They are always there to support us if we have any anxieties or queries"*

*"It's great that they sit with us and help us test out the tools"*

*"They have a good diversity of offers"*

*"We have a good relationship with them"*

*"They respond promptly and they're always available"*

*"They have a wide variety of skills and expertise"*

*"Their conferences are always well organised and you know the speakers will always turn up"*

*"They are willing to work creatively to come up with solutions"*

## 16. Suggestions for the future

Many of the participants found it difficult to think of areas of improvement or suggestions for the future of Impact Aloud. Those who did, generally caveated their response with the statement that they thought it was beyond the remit of the project. The main suggestions were around connecting with other local networks that could provide a platform for information sharing or potential collaborative opportunities. One suggestion was to link up with London Development Workers Network to share information or to work more closely with the London Voluntary Service Council in order to expand Impact Aloud into a regional programme. One participant suggested linking up more closely with local universities or Adult Community College to bring in expertise or setting up a programme of interns across the CVSs to increase capacity.

At a more practical level, VSOs were very enthusiastic for the project to continue. Some suggestions for the future were to follow up training with the next level of skills required to optimise the use of tools that they had implemented. There is certainly an opportunity here for Impact Aloud to expand their offer and develop new resources to support organisations with tools at a more advanced level. One approach could be a tiered offer of teaching basic, intermediate and advanced skills. Equally, training could be developed for different sized organisations which are likely to have different needs. Other suggestions for the future included more training on communications/ information dissemination/ promotional tools, more support with client surveys and more in-depth analysis of which solutions suit different sized organisations.

Impact Aloud should review these suggestions in conjunction with the major findings from this report to assess where their greatest impact lies in relation to their activities in order to make strategic decisions about the project going forward.

## 17. Conclusions

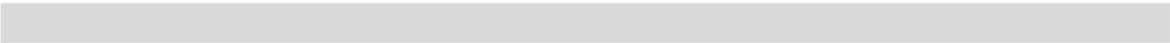
Without question, the feedback gathered from stakeholders and beneficiaries in this evaluation demonstrates the need for Impact Aloud. Participants were vociferous that they would like to see the project continue and in response to this demand, Impact Aloud will need to consider how they approach this in the most effective way.

The current model of delivery through partnership with local CVSs is evidently effective to maximise reach and engagement. A third of VSOs heard about Impact Aloud through CVSs and half found out directly through Superhighways. Although the survey did not explore how people had found out about Superhighways in the first instance, there is reason to believe from the interviews that this is often via their local CVS. This has created a dual role for CVSs: firstly as a convener to pass on information about Impact Aloud to VSOs through an established network; secondly as a conduit to pass on the skills and experience that they learn themselves from Impact Aloud to other VSOs. This latter aspect emerged as something slightly less expected by CVSs but also highly valued. By engaging with Impact Aloud, CVSs are in a better position to support VSOs as they have expanded their own skillsets. Importantly, they have also gone through the journey of learning and implementing new technology themselves and through this shared experience are more able to anticipate and respond to the challenges and fears of VSOs.

By upskilling CVSs, Impact Aloud are not only expanding their reach but potentially reducing the resource intensity and increasing the sustainability of some of their operations. A key strength of the Impact Aloud team is their responsiveness and the trusting relationships they build with VSOs. Repeatedly stated throughout this evaluation was the team's willingness to deliver above and beyond what people expected. This, over time, built trust and bolstered the VSOs confidence that having successfully adopted some new technology they could go on to try other things. This approach of the team is likely to be one of the key enablers that makes Impact Aloud successful but given the size of the team and the scarcity of funding for infrastructure support, it may also limit their capacity to expand in the future. Capitalising on CVSs as a conduit for both capacity-building and ongoing support to VSOs may therefore be an effective way to expand and sustain the project. It is clear, however that Impact Aloud has specialist technology skills that CVSs currently do not have and if these skills are to be truly embedded it may require an additional programme of work.

A major impact of the project on VSOs is that skills – once acquired, or content – once produced become a long-term asset to the organisation. VSOs have experienced that with minimal time and financial investment, small changes in the use of technology can result in long-term time saving and – in some cases – acquisition of funding. The immediate impact of implementing technology has been to raise the profiles of the VSOs and improve the way they communicate this to beneficiaries and funders. Over time, it would be encouraging to see more VSOs using their new skills and data capture systems to more robustly measure and evaluate the effectiveness of their services. This is likely to come with time now that systems are successfully embedded. Impact Aloud with its genuine insight into the voluntary sector, first-rate expertise and trusted reputation is in a prime position to continue to support this.

# Appendix A: Online Survey



\* 1. How did you find out about Impact Aloud? (tick all that apply)

- Superhighways directly
- Local CVS
- Eventbrite directly
- A voluntary sector forum
- Other (please specify)

\* 2. How have you engaged with Impact Aloud? (tick all that apply)

- Articles in eNews
- Attending training
- 1:1 surgery
- Email / phone advice
- 1:1 project (e.g. database or multi-media)
- Impact Aloud conference
- Other (please specify)



\* 3. Thinking about what you have learnt from Impact Aloud, please rate how useful this has been to your organisation:

- Not at all useful
- Not very useful
- No opinion
- Somewhat useful
- Very useful
- I didn't learn anything new from Impact Aloud (please tell us what you would have liked to have learnt)



\* 4. Thinking about what you have learnt from Impact Aloud, please tell us what you have done with that knowledge: (tick all that apply)

- Kept it in mind for future
- Nothing
- Shared it with other people in my organisation
- Forgotten much of it
- Used it as a starting point to do my own research to find out more
- Haven't thought much about it
- Continued to engage with Impact Aloud to learn more
- Other (please specify)

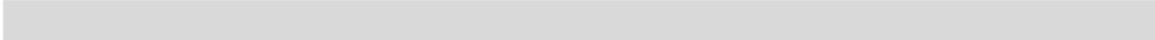
\* 5. Did you intend to implement anything new or change your practices after engaging with Impact Aloud?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure



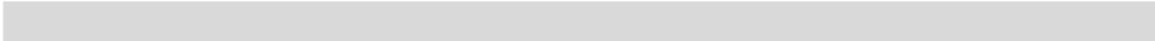
\* 6. Have you actually implemented anything new or changed your practices after engaging with Impact Aloud?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure



\* 7. What have you implemented / what changes have you made?

\* 8. What impact has implementing something new or making changes had? (including short-term & long term changes)



\* 9. What were your main reasons for not implementing anything new or making changes?



10. Do you have anything else to share with us about your experience of Impact Aloud?

\* 11. In which borough do you operate? (tick all that apply)

- Bromley
- Croydon
- Kingston
- Merton
- Richmond
- Sutton
- Other (please specify)

12. Please enter your organisation name, if you're happy to share this with us (optional but useful)

\* 13. We will be conducting some short telephone interviews to discuss people's experience of Impact Aloud. Could we contact you? If yes, please enter your contact details below:

- Yes
- No

Contact details:

## Appendix B: Topic Guides

### VSOs

#### Engagement:

1. How you found out?
2. Drive to get involved?
3. Expectation of involvement with IA?
4. Why choose IA?

#### Support

5. How IA supported you with your needs? (what was need/ type of support/ process/ access)
6. Made any changes as a result of IA? Barriers to making changes?

#### Impact

7. Were expectations met?
8. What impact has involvement with IA had on your organisation?
9. Strengths / suggestions for improvement for IA?

### CVSs

#### Partnership

1. Tell me about your role in the Impact Aloud partnership? (remit, roles and responsibilities)
2. Expectation of partnership and how it would serve VSOs? (what is the need and how is IA addressing that).
3. Experience of partnership – aspects that have worked well / anything you would change? (Between you and other CVS / you and Superhighways / you and VSOs)

#### Impact

4. How does IA fit with other programmes in your CVS (complementary/overlap/duplication/unique)? How would these VSOs be served without IA?
5. Were expectations of partnership met?
6. Impact of IA on your organisation and any views on impact on VSOs?
7. Strengths / suggestions for improvement for IA?

### Lamplight

#### VCSOs

1. How do VSOs that have implemented Lamplight with IA support compare to other orgs you work with? (size / readiness / knowledge of options / data & technology skills)
2. Your experience of working with VSOs supported by IA?
3. Any particular challenges/opportunities implementing Lamplight with VSOs supported by IA?

#### Impact Aloud

4. Strengths / suggestions for improvement for how IA supports VSOs with database selection/ implementation?

### City Bridge Trust

1. Experience of working with IA?
2. Your view on the need for the project?
3. What you see as priorities for digital / M&E? (extent to which IA meets these).
4. Strengths / suggestions for improvement for how IA serve VSOs?