

Workshop 3 – Widening the Funding net

The group discussed a number of subjects relating to engaging with **new** organisations. Having an up to date skills list as well as a product list on the website was thought to be of value. This would offer the LRC an opportunity to review if additional services could be developed or give first time clients/users the chance to decide what might be of use to them.

IE gave an example of new product development that came out of this exercise at DBRC – A simplified data enquiry map was produced for a countryside manor house currently for sale. The house was being marketed on the basis that it is sat in a tranquil and idyllic haven. This map would allow the agent to quantify the high value of the local biodiversity as part of the marketing. DBRC have talked to the agent and they consider it may have merit for specific properties. Costings and discussions are ongoing but may also include DBRC producing other maps for the agent too.

One workshop candidate felt using the data for these purposes was unethical, however DBRC feel that if anything it helps get a positive message across to the public/educate them about whats on their doorstep. The consensus was that it may not be a sustainable income flow but new products/relationships were important.

The group briefly discussed using a prospecting database to record all contacts and dialogue/engagement with potential clients so that the history was available to all staff and a strategy was easier to develop.

Providing training courses has potential where some centres are yet to develop these. A number of centres already provide training courses, the recent IEEM document relating to skills gaps in the industry and the future problems this will cause might suggest that engagement by ALERC might open up more opportunities as LRC could provide localised training. Currently most courses by other bodies require excessive travel and overnight stays.

Large utility companies were discussed, IE had engaged with several during a previous NE project. Warwickshire have continued the engagement with Sever Trent and it appears to be bearing fruit. All agreed water companies were definitely engaging with LRC but power companies were not, this is a target to follow up. Highways Agency was generally negative but a few contractors had signed agreements with LRC in some cases. However, Simon Pickles stated that Highways Agency had approached his centre recently and signed an agreement. Simon was asked to find out if the trigger for this was of use to other LRC if they approached their local office.

Websites are now the shop window for attracting new clients/partners and a mixed feeling on whether they were fit for purpose emerged during the workshop. IE advocated changing the content to sell services/projects/people better and provided examples. Lack of funding/time etc were acknowledged as obstacles, however all agreed they should give time to marketing and business development.

The discussions on existing partners/clients such as Local authorities showed differences regionally on unitary or district set ups affected this aspect. The financial reserves of the LA was also seen to impact as some could afford to be fined so would continue to take that risk rather than agree terms with an LRC. The additional services that might be offered to these partners to add value varied according to the LRC being hosted by a WT/CC or independent.

Existing relationships with charities etc had been mentioned earlier in the conference and the group again had a mixed view on charging policy for these 'partners'. Some felt they should be charged whereas others felt that would be difficult to explain, especially where data was provided to the LRC 'in kind' for services. IE stated that DBRC were reviewing these agreements as often no data actually came from those organisations so the relationship was not balanced. FWAG are a good example as they use the data for commercial purposes in some counties, but are hosted by the council in a few areas. Commonality is therefore hard to achieve.

Differences in geography also affected whether the authority cared what people thought of them ie – public image issues or whether economic pressures outweighed this. Counties with high numbers of retired out of county householders or holiday parks might be more supportive as Biodiversity could be measured against local wealth or opinion.

Unfortunately the workshop was unable to discuss many points in depth and did not cover a wider range of sub-topics due to time constraints.

Ultimately it was felt by the whole conference attendees that LRC sharing information on new clients/partners and the trigger for this new relationship may help other LRC generally (as with the Highways Agency example) The Alerc Forum may offer this resource within a private area of the site. All LRC should submit information to this if it is to have value.