Results of survey of volunteering effort 2005-2006

This report summarises the results of a survey of volunteers, volunteering through iT4Communities, conducted by Glenn Williams, an independent consultant with substantial voluntary sector experience, in November 2006, combined with earlier research on the value of pro bono IT work to the voluntary sector completed in late 2005.

1 Result

Taking into account the number of Work Packages completed and in progress by volunteers, the day rates expected by the voluntary sector and the average time spent by volunteers on Work Packages, the total value delivered up to end October 2006 by iT4Communities and its volunteers is £2.08 million. Given that iT4C launched on 22 November 2002, this is a rate of more than £500,000 per year.

2 Methodology

2.1 Volunteer effort

The objective of the research was to determine the amount of effort volunteers put into each project (characterised as a Work Package, standard project management terminology). We had assumed that projects took about 4.5 days but this was based on a very early and limited survey around four years ago when iT4C was founded (November 2002).

The researcher was supplied with a list of the 42 Work Packages completed (status "Work Completed" or "Finished") in the year November 2005 - October 2006. Note that Work Packages are only marked completed when iT4Communites has confirmation form the organisation that the volunteer has done the work.

The values obtained were examined for consistency and appeared to represent a reasonable scatter of values with no anomalously large or small values.

2.2 Project Definition

The iT4C process includes Project Definition. Each request for a project from a charity[1] results in a phone interview by an experienced iT4C Project Definer, an IT professional with experience in requirements analysis and in talking to non-IT people. This establishes the underlying requirement for the project. Each PD generates zero, one or more Work Package (WP) definitions, describing the business and technical needs. These are the entries in our database visible to volunteers. Each Project Definition (PD) is given the nominal value of £100 (which has not changed since our launch in 2002).

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[1] We serve both registered charities and other voluntary sector organisations (who must have a not-for-profit constitution and an unpaid board of management). For the sake of brevity, this report uses the word "charity" to mean both

2.3 Rates expected by the sector

The earlier survey by another independent consultant, Paul Ticher (Report to iT4Communities on the value of pro bono ICT advice, consultancy and support) was used to derive an average day rate which the voluntary sector expects to pay for IT freelance work. Note that these rates are substantially lower than those for the commercial sector.

2.4 Assumptions

The work done by iT4Communites includes some work in progress and we assume that this averages 50% complete.

Reservations here include -

- Completion of work packages is always under -reported. Often volunteers and charities do not report work done until contacted by iT4C
- Work packages which are abandoned before completion (i.e. marked "Withdrawn" having been "In Progress") are not counted at all by iT4C. This represents a "fixed price" approach rather than a "time and materials" approach, as used by most commercial freelances. This is done to ensure that only successful work is reported. The effect is to under- rate the value of what volunteers do, by comparison with standard commercial practice
- It is becoming increasingly clear that some volunteers establish a long-term relationship with the charity and become "invisible" to iT4Communities. This is contrary to our previous default assumption that volunteers wanted to get in, do the job and get out. The analysis here does not take account of this phenomenon and we will be considering how much of this effort can be attributable to the iT4C programme. We have deliberately avoided directing the attention of our researcher to the volunteers and charities nominated for our 2006 award, since these have included a disproportionate number of such long-term volunteers.

The average day rate was multiplied by the total completed projects recorded by the iT4C system and added to the assumed Project Definition value to yield a total values delivered over the 4 year lifetime of iT4C.

3 Data

3.1 Volunteer contacts

The researcher succeeded in contacting 25 volunteers, 60% of the list and about 8% of all completed Work Packages.

The 25 Work Packages were reported to have required the following numbers of days effort (0.5, 1, 1, 1.5, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 6, 6, 10, 10, 13, 14, 15, 15, 15, 16, 40, 64).

This gives an average of **10.16 days per Work Package**.

3.2 Work Packages completed and in progress

The number of WPs completed or in progress at the end of October 2006 was -

In Progress	145

Using the 50% completed assumption, see Methodology above. This leads to an assumption of 72.5 equivalent completed work packages.

Finished	254
Work Completed	83
Total completed	337
In progress equivalent	73
Total including In Progress	**410**

3.3 Project Definitions

By end October 2006, iT4C had completed 1991 project requests (equivalent to Project Definitions). Using the assumed value of £100 per Project Definition, this yields a value of £199,100.

3.4 Sector day rates

The rates reported in Paul Ticher's report, cited above, were

Skill Type	Daily rate
Advice	£300.00
Audit	£600.00
Consultancy	£500.00
Database	£600.00
Network	£600.00
Technical Support	£300.00
Strategy	£500.00
Training	£450.00
Trustee	£350.00
Website	£300.00
Telephone Networks	£600.00
Other	£350.00
Audit/strategy	£600.00
Programming	£600.00
Needs Analysis	£500.00

Research	£500.00
Creative Design	£300.00
Mentoring	£450.00
Security	£600.00
Information Management	£600.00
Average	**£480.00**

The rates paid by the voluntary sector and identified in Paul Ticher's report (cited above) thus yielded a simple average rate across all skill types £480.00/day.

This does not take account of either -

> Differential demand (e.g. Website is a low rate skill but is in high demand, this will force the average rate down)

or

> Differential supply (e.g. Website is in high demand but low supply, there are thus less started or completed projects requiring this low rate skill, forcing the average rate up)

It was decided to adjust the assumed rate down to £460 to obtain a conservative result. We will be revising the figure as our analysis becomes more sophisticated. We are confident that any new figure will be an upwards revision.

4 Analysis

The days per Work Package was rounded down to 10. This produces an average value of £4,600 per Work Package. Given 410 Work Packages the volunteers have delivered £1,886,000. The Project Definition value is £199,100. Adding these two produces a value of **£2,085,100** delivered.