



## Rapid assessments

This snapshot explains what rapid assessments are, how and why we used them and what we learned. Rapid assessments can be described as a way of planning and gathering a consistent set of information<sup>1</sup>, or overall picture, about diverse sets of people and organisations. They are designed to be pragmatic in that they can be done quite quickly and can make use of existing datasets<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Why did we use rapid assessments?***

GoWell wanted to understand how to best engage communities in its study areas that would stand to gain the most short and long-term benefits from engaging through research and learning.

### ***How did we use rapid assessments?***

Rapid assessments of the 15 core GoWell study areas were undertaken over three months to understand the priorities and ways of working in community organisations. Our focus was on understanding their priorities and ways of working to understand how GoWell's research and learning could form the basis of an empowering knowledge exchange with these communities that also added to our evidence base.

### ***What did rapid assessments tell us?***

The rapid assessments identified 466 groups across the 15 GoWell study areas. These groups comprised housing associations, third sector and voluntary sector organisations.

The priorities of these groups in terms of the types of information they sought and the topics they prioritised emerged as eleven categories. Conversations with 110 members of these groups revealed a common theme for their work – social regeneration. They described this theme as a process of working with people to improve lives, reduce inequalities and improve health and wellbeing. This insight helped us understand which GoWell research findings communities were likely to find useful.

Many groups also commented that they rarely had the opportunity (due to lack of funds, time and capacity) to visit other parts of the city undergoing regeneration. As a result, these groups rarely had the opportunity to gain support or share practice with others working in similar situations beyond events in their neighbourhoods or occasional other events (including GoWell conferences). When they did, it was usually staff, committee members or core volunteers who went. As a result, their organisational knowledge was often limited to the same set of people.

The rapid assessments also revealed that community groups often comprised peripheral members who were not part of the core membership (i.e., not on committees or boards). Housing associations and public services, such as GPs, also echoed this message during the rapid assessments. Housing associations were especially aware and interested in succession planning with tenants and widening their engagement beyond their committees. Likewise, the Links Worker programme in General Practices reported that they worked with

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<sup>1</sup> Beebe J. *Rapid assessment process: An Introduction*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press; 2001.

<sup>2</sup> McNall M, Foster-Fishman PG. Methods of Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, and Appraisal. *American Journal of Evaluation* 2007;28(2):151-168.



patients whose wellbeing had not been traditionally met by the GP and who stood to gain wellbeing socially and culturally from widening their networks by getting to know citizens experiencing regeneration in other parts of the city.

As a result of this insight, we reasoned that if we engaged with peripheral members of these organisations who did not usually network with other neighbourhoods, then their groups stood to increase their organisational knowledge and strengthen their capacity in the long term by broadening the range of members who could critically engage with the topic of social regeneration and increase their capability to make positive changes as a result. In this way, rapid assessments helped us be specific about who to engage within community organisations and the kinds of outcomes we might expect as a result.

Lastly, the process of undertaking these the rapid assessments, which included spending time with community organisations, helped us understand some of the main working practices and expertise of community organisations. For example, we noticed that community groups often used experiential learning (or learning by doing) while the GoWell research team was led by its expertise on quantitative and qualitative research. This insight helped us design our ways of working with the Panel and bring them together with the researchers – see experiential learning, co-production and facilitation snapshots.

### ***What did we learn?***

Rapid assessments helped us understand how to best engage with communities in two ways. Firstly, the rapid assessments helped us understand which topics within our research findings were likely to be of use to communities – social regeneration. Secondly, the rapid assessments helped us understand who to engage with among community organisations and what types of working practices might be most useful.