An academic and civil society collaboration …

The Scottish Civil Society Data Partnership project is an ESRC-funded collaboration between the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and the Universities of Stirling and St Andrew's. The 18 month project is centred at Stirling, and combines expertise from the partners in social statistics, civil society management, engagement and collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

… to develop the use of data on Scotland's civil society.

It forms part of Phase III of the ESRC's investment in the Big Data Network. It aims to develop the availability of administrative data on CSOs, while also helping civil society organisations to improve their ability to work with data.

Using civil society data for research …

The project will facilitate the provision of better data on the characteristics of Scottish civil society activity (including organisations, service provision, employment and volunteering) to researchers and policy practitioners in government, academia, and civil society itself. This data will be drawn from a range of sources, including the Milo database of civil society organisations which is populated by local civil society infrastructure bodies across Scotland. Use of this data will increase understanding of how both civil society participation and service delivery is distributed across communities, and its relationship with inequality and deprivation.

… and developing the capacity of organisations to use data.

We will also develop the capacity of civil society organisations to make use of both the data they generate and the other data sources becoming more widely available, thereby supporting performance enhancements in service provision and organisational practice. Finally, the project will help to support collaborations between academics, public sector organisations and CSOs in Scotland to propose substantive research projects making use of this data that will impact policy and/or practice.

For more information on the use of third sector and civil society data in Scotland visit www.thinkdata.org.uk

The work packages in more detail …

Work package 1: Curating data on Scotland's CSOs

The first work package will concentrate on reviewing and preparing a range of data on Scotland's civil society held by SCVO in order to create a dataset for wider research use. In particular, much of the local data about CSOs, services, and volunteers is brought together in Milo, an online database, knowledge management and reporting platform managed by SCVO. Milo currently contains around 40,000 unique organisational records, covering a range of data from basic CSO profile information to volunteering opportunities and financial information. This dataset is collected primarily for management purposes, and it requires significant preparation, cleaning / sanitisation and quality-checking to ready it for research use. Robust geographical and sectoral aggregates would be produced to facilitate linking of aggregate data in a consistent way.

Work package 2: Optimising data within CSOs and partner networks

The second work package will focus on assisting the leaders of Scottish civil society organisations (CSOs) to better utilise the data that they hold both within their organisations (e.g. about their volunteers, services) or that they access and share through their networks and collaborative partnerships (e.g. social media, service delivery partners). A series of café conversations will bring together three key groups - frontline CSOs, CSO lead bodies, and organisations in data-related partnerships with CSOs - to share practices, experiences, and insights from which lessons can be drawn that have relevance for CSOs within Scotland, the UK, and beyond. The café conversations will also identify a number of CSOs from which illustrative, best practice case studies can be generated.

Work package 3: Building Data Analysis Capacity amongst Scottish CSOs

The third work package will focus on providing support to develop the skills amongst CSO staff in working with and analysing data. The workshop-based development programme will include both face-to-face workshops and online webinar teaching with a focus on developing practical skills, backed up by online resources. The core audience for these development activities will be the civil society infrastructure organisations (TSIs). They are responsible for collecting the local data which will be combined and prepared in WP1, and they also provide advice and support to local organisations. However, the resources and activities will be made available to any civil society organisations who wish to develop their capacity by participating in the programme.

Work package 4: Developing collaborations to make better use of data on civil society activity

This work package will connect academics, public sector organisations and CSOs to support collaboration in the use of data. It will aim to foster a shared understanding and seed future substantive research projects making use of the data generated by this project. WP4 will develop connections with civil society policy and practice by brokering meetings with national bodies, civil society infrastructure organisations, Scottish Government and other civil society organisations. The WP will gather information on academics in Scotland and beyond interested in working with Scottish civil society data. It will support the development of the Scottish Third Sector Data Network. A series of three roundtable seminars will bring together strategic partners, and a 'roadshow' series of six workshops will be hosted for public, private, academic and civil society sector organisations that hold relevant data. A major event held at the Gathering Conference towards the end of the project will bring together all partners and interested parties to review state of play, key learning points during the project and next steps in establishing collaborations.