

# Taking the PULSE Seminar/Te Kokiritanga o te Ha

## Background

The *Tangata Whenua, Community & Voluntary Sector Research Centre* has as one of its priorities in its strategic plan, the idea of initiating an ongoing 'sector wide survey'. When Lester Salamon (Director, Centre for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore) was to be in Aotearoa New Zealand to launch the New Zealand national report of the Johns Hopkins *Comparative Non-profit Sector Project*, the Research Centre agreed to ask Dr Salamon to conduct a small, invitation-only seminar with the Research Centre and some key sector people to brief us on a US sector wide survey - '*The Listening Post*' project – which he leads.

The Seminar was entitled *Te Kokiritanga o te Ha/Taking the PULSE of the Sector* - where PULSE stands for Prospects, Understandings and Lessons from our Sector's Experience. The purpose of the seminar was to hear about the experience of the US *Listening Post* project, and identify what needs there are for an ongoing sector-wide survey in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how that might best meet our needs as a sector.

## Participants

It was aimed to keep the seminar to a small number of participants, so that it could be a 'working session', rather than just a passive presentation – and a target of 20-25 participants was set. Around 30 invitations went out, approximately equally to tangata whenua researchers and organisations, and community & voluntary sector organisations, and some selected government officials & philanthropic funders. Members of the Research Centre governance group were also invited. (Some invitations went to people out of Wellington, not in the expectation that they would necessarily travel for a 2.5 hour seminar, but as a courtesy to keep them advised of the development.)

Sixteen people participated in the seminar:

- Tim Burns (Volunteering NZ)
- Branka Cicak (Volunteering NZ)
- Kate Frykberg (Todd Foundation)
- Pat Hanley (Research Centre and Social & Civic Policy Institute)
- Leon Hawea (Research Centre & Community Sector Taskforce)
- Iain Hines (J R McKenzie Trust)
- James King (Office for the Community & Voluntary Sector)
- Claire-Louise McCurdy (Council for International Development)
- Garth Nowland-Foreman (Research Centre and Committee for the Study of the NZ Not for Profit Sector)
- Tina Reid (NZ Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations)
- David Robinson (Social & Civic Policy Institute)
- Sonya Rimene (Research Centre and Ministry of Women's Affairs)
- Lester Salamon (Centre for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins University)
- Adrian Shields (Charities Commission)
- Diana Suggate (Office for the Community & Voluntary Sector)
- Roger Tweedy (Work and Age Trust)

An apology was also received from Peter Glensor (ex Community Sector Taskforce).

Although the smaller than expected number was a little disappointing, it did include a good cross-section of key Wellington-based people from community & voluntary sector and relevant government agencies. Apart from Research Centre members, there were no other Tangata Whenua researchers or organisations represented, and we clearly still need to make stronger links here if this project is to go ahead successfully.

## The Seminar

The seminar ran from 11.00am to 1.30pm on Monday 11 August 2008, at the Centre for Global Action, James Smith Building 49-55 Cuba Street, Wellington. It was opened by Leon Hawea, who welcomed participants, and Pat Hanley (as co-chair of the Research Centre) introduced the purpose and agenda of the seminar.

Dr Salamon outlined the background, purpose and activities of the *Listening Post* project in the US. The project was initiated by Johns Hopkins University Centre for Civil Society Studies, but recruited a steering committee of partner organisations – primarily specific sector umbrella organisations, which has expanded over time. The steering committee identifies the topics to be explored in the surveys, roundtables and case studies. The primary purposes of the project are:

- to assess the health of key components of the American non-profit sector;
- to determine the challenges these organisations are confronting; and
- to help organisations identify how best to respond.

The project is aiming to recruit a ‘panel’ of 1,500 respondents (“listening posts”), who respond to two or three web-based surveys (“soundings”) a year (in order to identify how non-profit organisations are effected by major developments confronting them. The partner organisations recruit 1,000 survey respondents from their membership, and further random samples of 500 non-profit organisations in the same fields are also being recruited directly by Johns Hopkins University to ensure the initiative captures the full range of non-profit issues and developments. After running for five years the project currently has 500 ‘directed’ (partner identified) and 400 ‘random’ respondents. The Innovators’ Roundtables and Case Studies explore in more detail what is working and why (to speed the generation and dissemination of practice-relevant knowledge).

Dissemination includes *Communiqués* providing summaries of the survey results (made available on Johns Hopkins University website) and usually accompanied by media releases on the findings; a regular series of *Innovators’ Roundtables* to explore in greater depth some of the innovations uncovered by the surveys, and *Case Studies* capturing some identified innovations in a form that can be used in non-profit training.

Since 2003, surveys have focussed on: what are the key issues and challenges facing non-profit organisations; how they were responding to government cut-backs; how they are coping with payment of health benefits to staff; what financial disclosure arrangements are already in place; governance and accountability arrangements of non-profit organisations; access to investment capital for non-profit organisations; fiscal trends and challenges for non-profit organisations; the non-profit workforce; and the role of non-profit organisations in advocacy and civic engagement. (A copy of Dr Salamon’s presentation is attached and Communiqués reporting on the findings

for each of these topics and further background information on the project are available at [www.jhu.edu/listeningpost](http://www.jhu.edu/listeningpost).)

Pat Hanley provided a brief outline to remind participants of the ANGOA Sector Confidence survey undertaken in this country on a quarterly basis from 2001-2003. Around 300 plus non-profit organisations (out of a sample of 700) answered three core questions - in line with the business confidence survey (attitudes to general social conditions, confidence in ability of organisation to fulfil its mission, attitude to government policy in your field), and occasionally one or two specific one-off questions were added (for example, attitudes to Budget measures). (A paper by Will Low and Eileen Davenport on the ANGOA survey, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping: A Confidence Survey of Aotearoa New Zealand's Voluntary Sector*, is available at <http://www.sprc1.sprc.unsw.edu.au/nspc2001/abstract.asp?PaperID=29>.)

An opportunity was provided for Questions and Answers to clarify any matters that the two speakers had raised, and then there was general discussion on research needs of the sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some of the key issues raised in discussion are listed in the section below.

### **Issues Arising and Impact**

Overall the seminar provided an excellent opportunity for an 'expert' audience to familiarise themselves with and interrogate the purpose, approach, and methodology of the US *Listening Post* project. As a result it has also given us an excellent opportunity to identify what lessons could usefully be applied to any work on such a project in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as begin to identify where a different approach may be required.

- Discussion among the participants focussed as much on the overall research needs of the sector – and indicates a need for the Research Centre's *Strategy in Action* <http://tinyurl.com/Research-Centre-Strategy> to be further proactively promoted around the sector. This would assist both in ensuring parts of the Sector are better informed about our intentions and ambitions as a Research Centre, and also in getting additional feedback as our strategy and implementation plans are further refined and developed.
- There was strong support for 'sector friendly' and sector-determined research – both to ensure relevance to the sector's practice and culture, and to enable greater pick-up and utilisation of the findings of the research. A number of participants particularly felt that while there was already much useful research around, many people in the sector were not aware of it or did not have the time or capacity to make the most use of it. (One participant suggested that all sector organisations might be encouraged to nominate a voluntary 'research contact person'.)
- Improving the research capacity of the sector, was also an important need identified by the group. If resources were available, the Research Centre was encouraged to organise 'how to' workshops for the sector outlining what was in, and how sector organisations could make the best use of specific key pieces of research – such as the Ministry of Social Development's *Social Report*, and

publications of the Committee for the Study of the NZ Non-Profit Sector and Statistics NZ on non-profit institutions, etc

Separately the Research Centre held discussions with Statistics NZ at its September meeting, and have agreed to work together to provide plain language links to key Statistics NZ data and reports on the Clearinghouse website (“if you want to know more about..., click on here”). In particular, this would include links to tools such as Table Builder <http://tinyurl.com/Table-Builder>. It was also agreed that further discussions will be held with Statistics NZ on ways of improving sector access to, and understanding of official statistics.

- There was considerable discussion on the key role of dissemination – which often meant taking available research, translating it into ‘bite size’ pieces, making sure it was easily ‘digestible’ and ‘spoon feeding’ the media, politicians (and perhaps also government policy analysts) and the sector.
- It was also noted that many valuable existing data sources were not useable, because they did not distinguish between non-profit organisations and other entities (for example, gaps in Ministry of Health funding data, but also many labour market and enterprise collections). A different but related issue was the absence of ‘tags’ to identify Maori organisations across various categories. In addition to looking for new collections, there would be considerable benefit in unleash useful existing administrative and official data sources, if they were able to be convinced to include standard ‘non-profit’ and Maori ‘tags’ across other classifications.

At its September meeting with Statistics NZ, the Research Centre also highlighted its high priority for a Maori ‘tag’ on the Business Frame and other Non-Profit Institutions. It was recognised that this would take some further work on a standardised definition, but was understood this was also strongly supported by the Maori Statistics Forum.

- As was noted above, there was still not much engagement from Maori researchers or Tangata Whenua organisations in development of any sector-wide survey. There was still a significant task to ensure Tangata Whenua organisations might see something of value for them in a sector wide survey, be assured it would not create harm, and engage in any such research.
- It was noted that boundaries for a sector wide survey also needed to be discussed. The Charities Commission was interested in research on charities – which represented a sub-sector (perhaps around a quarter) of the wider Sector. To date, it was probably true that mainly ‘social’ non-profits (working in the health/education/welfare fields) had taken the lead in such initiatives. Thus proactive efforts would also be required to reach into other parts of the Sector. It was noted that the *Listening Post* project had not aimed to cover all parts of the sector but had started with a cross section of five specific fields (family & children’s services, elderly services, community & economic development,

theatres & orchestras, and museums), based on the interest of the relevant umbrella associations.

- One participant asked if we were clear about what the priority issues for the Sector were, that would be researched. The Community-Government Relations Working Party (2001) identified a number of priority research needs for the sector at the time. These had not yet been up-dated. It was noted that the *Listening Post* project had undertaken its first survey on identifying what were the major challenges and issues of concern to the sector, and input was also sought through the partner organisations, who determined the final research agenda.
- Dr Salamon identified that some of the particular advantages of the *Listening Post* approach for funders, the Sector, researchers and other stakeholders were: it was more cost-effective than acquiring sample frames for one-off surveys; it enabled a sensitivity to overall respondent burden; it structured in better engagement and responsiveness to Sector needs; it enabled representative survey data to be married with in-depth qualitative information from the Roundtables and Case studies – including the value of focussing on helpful strategies.
- In terms of impacts of the *Listening Post* project, Dr Salamon noted that there were examples of strong impact on specific policy issues; there was also evidence of significant impact on the thinking and practice of the partner umbrella associations and other ‘intermediary’ organisations; there was some but perhaps less evidence of impact in changes of behaviour of the respondent organisations; and it would be speculative at this stage what the impact on the wider sector might be – though feedback suggested they found the information useful.

A key issue in both planning and allocation of resources right from the beginning was considered to be determining how the findings of this research would be actively disseminated in order to achieve impacts at the policy and knowledge level, in the practice of intermediary organisations, and in the practice of individual organisations across the Sector.

This seminar was briefly reported on and discussed at the meeting of the *Tangata Whenua, Community & Voluntary Sector Research Centre* on Thursday 4 September, 2008. The lessons identified above were noted.

While there was still opportunities for further voluntary work on the development of the idea for a sector-wide survey, it was considered by the Research Centre at its September meeting that significant progress will depend on either some project funding (which had been applied for) coming through, or the planned appointment of a part-time Research Centre manager around the end of the year.

## **Acknowledgements**

The seminar was sponsored by the *Tangata Whenua, Community & Voluntary Sector Research Centre*, and organised on a voluntary basis on behalf of the Research Centre by Garth Nowland-Foreman. The seminar was financially supported by a small grant

from the *J R McKenzie Trust's* Chairman's Fund – at relatively short notice. The flexibility and responsiveness of the Trust assisting in this way, to enable best use to be made of Dr Salamon's visit to Aotearoa New Zealand, is greatly appreciated. We also sincerely appreciate Dr Salamon giving up some of his limited and busy time in Aotearoa New Zealand to make a key intellectual contribution to the seminar.

*Garth Nowland-Foreman*

Convenor, Strategy & Projects

Tangata Whenua, Community & Voluntary Sector Research Centre


*September 2008*



The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project

## LISTENING POST PROJECT: GOALS, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, NEXT STEPS


Lester M. Salamon, Director  
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY



The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project

## BACKGROUND

- Major changes in nonprofit funding and operations
- Growing for-profit competition
- New accountability demands
- Significant nonprofit adaptations
- Little systematic information
- Knowledge lagging practice



The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Spot and document trends
- Inform training, technical assistance
- Improve practice
- Educate broader publics
- Inform policy



The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project

## APPROACH

- 1,000 – 1,500 organizational “listening posts”
  - 1000 “directed”
  - 500 “random”
  - State component
- 5 fields



The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project

## FIELD SELECTION

- Family & children’s services
- Elderly services
- Community and economic development
- Theaters/orchestras
- Museums



The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project

## APPROACH

- 1,000 – 1,500 organizational “listening posts”
- 5 fields
- Partnerships with intermediary organizations
- 3 modalities
  - Soundings
  - Pro-Roundtables
  - Case studies
- Active Dissemination: Communiques, Web

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## ACCOMPLISHMENTS: PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Alliance for Children and Families
- American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
- Theatre Communications Group
- American Association of Museums
- United Neighborhood Centers of America
- National Council of Nonprofit Associations
- Alliance for Nonprofit Management
- Independent Sector
- Lutheran Services of America
- League of American Orchestras
- Michigan Nonprofit Association

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## ACCOMPLISHMENTS: POST RECRUITMENT

- Recruited 900 Listening Post Orgs
  - 500 identified by umbrella partners
  - 400 identified randomly
- Representativeness
  - Size, age, & location
  - Tilt toward particularly interesting and innovative

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## 8 “SOUNDINGS”

- Major challenges
- Budget cuts/ financial health
- Health benefit costs
- Governance and accountability
- Capital needs
- Major challenges II
- Workforce
- Advocacy

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## DISSEMINATION

- 6 Communiques
- Roundtable on finances, capital
- Extensive press coverage
- 24,000 hits per month on web site

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## News Coverage

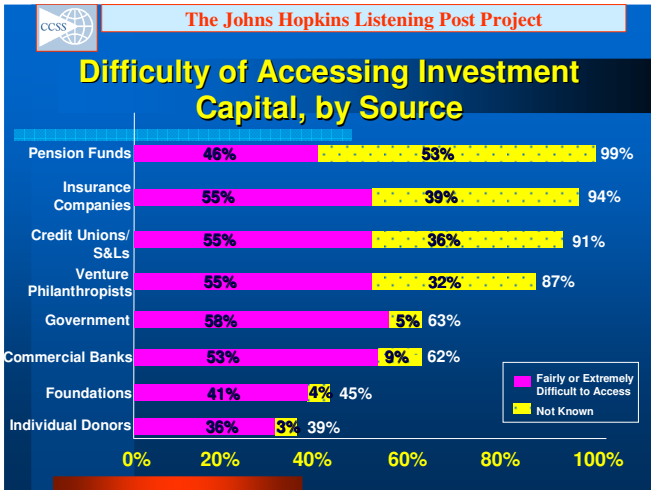
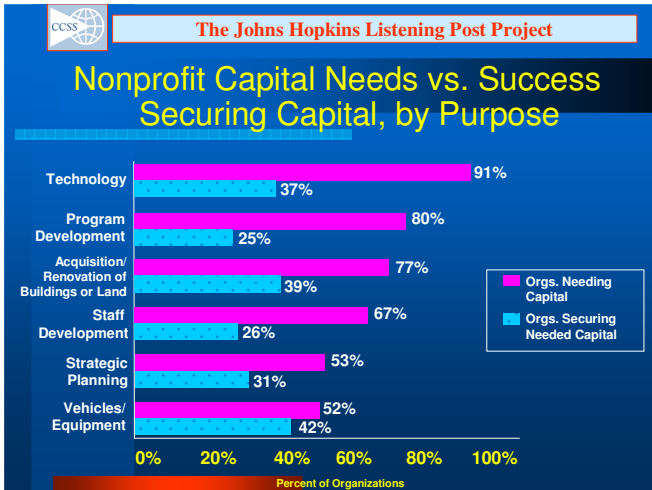
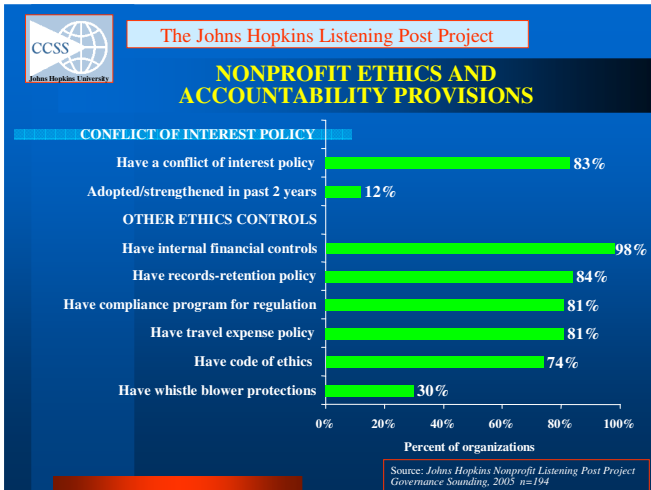
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## FUNCTIONS IN WHICH BOARDS ARE HIGHLY OR SIGNIFICANTLY INVOLVED

Function	Percent of organizations
Setting organizational missions/goals	93%
Setting executive compensation	88%
Establishing/reviewing budgets	87%
Setting organizational objectives	87%
Reviewing auditing/acctg practices	83%
Approving significant financial transactions	81%
Fundraising efforts	70%
Advocacy activities	43%
Setting program objectives	42%
Setting basic management policies	41%
Setting program performance measures	36%
Setting staff compensation	29%

Source: Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Listening Post Project Governance Sounding, 2008





- ### The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project
- ## RECOMMENDATIONS
- Make n/ps more "investment savvy"
  - Expand "intermediaries"
  - Transform foundations into "philanthropic banks"
  - Broaden tax credit for n/p investments

### The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project

## LISTENING POST PROJECT

"... a Bloomberg News for the charitable sector."