



Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

OUR PROSPECTUS

*HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT US
AND HELP US GROW*

November 2014

5 Year Development Strategy 2015-
2020

This report sets out an introduction to LARIA and what we have achieved to date and our development plan for the future.

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Executive Summary

The Local Area Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) is a membership led organisation which was established in 1974 and has consistently provided an invaluable support network for its members over the years. Its aim has been to support local researchers in the public sector. It has achieved the following in the last few years:

- Active Knowledge Hub and LinkedIn bulletin board discussions
- Developing networking links for members with Health Statistics User Group, Public Health England, INLOGOV, Improvement Service, National Records of Scotland, COSLA, MRS, Society of Local Authorities Chief Executives (SOLACE), Social Research Association, Royal Statistical Society, ONS and LGA
- Establishing a set of National Occupational Standards to promote CPD for local researchers
- Increased membership numbers and income
- Launch of the LARIA Research Impact Awards
- Launch of the LARIA Charter for full members
- Launch of the new LARIA website
- Merging with the British Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (BURISA)
- Number of free local networking events
- Responding to government consultations on behalf of local researchers including on the future of the Census
- Successful LARIA Annual National and Scottish Conferences now accredited by the Market Research Society (MRS) as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme
- Supported publications from the Alliance for Useful Evidence, Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Local Government Association (LGA)

However successful LARIA may be at present there is substantial room for improvement. There are a number of key issues that it needs to address as a matter of some urgency if it is to survive in the current difficult economic and political climate. Public services are having to adapt to many major changes in service delivery. LARIA also needs to continually adapt in order to be seen as an influential organisation that can promote robust local research that will support effective evidence based decision-making in public services.

One of the first key considerations that LARIA has to address is its current business model, which although seemingly stable is no longer sustainable in the current economic climate and has limited scope for growth. LARIA has two main sources of revenue: membership and events. With regards to both of these the income generated has been significantly reducing over the last few years as members have to prove the value for money provided. LARIA has survived as it has cut back costs and started to develop a clearer offer for members. The LARIA Council has been instrumental in maintaining LARIA's position. However, LARIA needs to carefully consider its current position as well as identifying what appropriate action needs to be taken to address this situation if the organisation is to survive in the longer term.

We think that LARIA can only achieve our aims and objectives through partnership. LARIA is largely a voluntary organisation with no permanent office or officers. We rely on the time and

goodwill of members. We are not looking to establish a large central LARIA bureaucracy or office. We want to focus on the outcomes we can contribute towards. At present we successfully commission out our administrative and event management work and see huge potential in rolling out this kind of activity to other areas.

The purpose of the prospectus is to set out what we have achieved to date and how we can build on this for the future. To achieve our goals we are looking to provide more opportunities for our members to get involved in our activities and to encourage financial support from partner organisations to help fund specific activities we have identified.

For our partner organisations we can offer our experience (we have been in existence for 40 years), our reach (we can access the skills, knowledge and experience of a broad range of people and organisations) and our network (we are at the centre of a 'network of networks'). We can apply our experience, reach and networking abilities in particular in driving forward leadership in local areas and places. By supporting our members we will be encouraging evidence-based decision making more generally across the public sector. At present we think we have identified clear workstreams for the equivalent of one person working full-time on our new activities. This would be on top of the existing voluntary work of our members and could not be funded directly by LARIA as it only achieves a small surplus each year. We would welcome creative discussions around how these activities could be resourced either with partners supporting individual tasks or a broader package. The ideas we want to implement and are looking for financial support to deliver are set out in detail within this prospectus and include:

- The establishment of a LARIA Partnership Group to help challenge the organisation to meet the needs of the broader sector
- Development of a clearer CPD programme
- Mapping out the local area research networks and providing members with the tools to do the same locally
- Creating an online marketplace that would help members join up commissioning on projects of shared interest
- Development of clearer guidance for members through a relaunched LARIA News
- Ensuring LARIA is seen as a central voice on four or five specialist areas

If we do nothing at all we are only prolonging the inevitable as we can only "*tread water*" for so long. There are a number of examples of member led organisations who have found themselves facing similar issues to LARIA and sadly many of these have had to cease their activities. Doing nothing is not really an option!

This prospectus sets out ideas for a sustainable future for LARIA. It sets out the activities that LARIA can undertake and a clearer member offer. It is a prospectus as it also establishes options for growth – investment from LARIA or external sponsors and partners that will lead to tangible outcomes for our members.

LARIA Council, November 2014

What we have achieved to date

Membership

The Local Area Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) traditionally supports local researchers in the public sector. The membership levels and the way we work puts networking and collaborative working at the heart of what we do. Corporate membership of £80 a year allows all individuals within the organisation to have access to our full range of benefits (except voting in elections which is available for Full members who pay an additional £10 subscription). We also have an Associate membership level that is free and enables us to keep in contact with individuals across the public sector. It is important that we keep our membership fees low to ensure we build up the largest membership base possible.

Since the start of 2013 we have modernised our membership processes. Through Mosaic Events we now manage the membership database and subscriptions online. This has helped ensure we maintain an accurate database and to efficiently collect subscriptions.

We currently¹ have 104 Corporate membership organisations (and 507 individuals on the database within those organisations), 102 Full members (51 within Corporate organisations) and 280 Associate members. Therefore in total we have 838 individual named members which is an increase on the same time in 2013 (609 individual named members). However, we have achieved more historically as between 2002 and 2009 we had just over 1,000 individual named members and 200 Corporate membership bodies. The change reflects a general downscaling of the number of people employed in our sector but also a tougher test on proving value for money to members. There has been a shift away from Corporate membership to our free Associate membership level.

In 2012 we changed the reference to “Local Authorities” in our name to “Local Area” Research and Intelligence Association. This reflected the changing nature of our membership and the greater number of partnerships being formed. We welcome local researchers from the following sectors:

- Education and universities
- Fire and rescue authorities and services
- Freelance researchers
- Government departments and other national representative bodies
- Health and NHS
- Housing
- Local government
- Police and Crime Commissioners and police forces
- Private companies
- Voluntary and community sector organisations
- Any other bodies engaged in local research

We have also recently merged with the British Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (BURISA) who had similar aims to LARIA.

¹ August 2014 figures

Annual Conference and other events

Our two-day Annual Conference is our flagship event. The Manchester Conference in 2013 saw increased numbers on previous years, with over 100 attendees each day, after a concerted effort on the part of the events group and the LARIA Council. The conference also saw strong links with health, especially Public Health England, and the LARIA regional group. This was also seen at our 2014 Annual Conference at the University of Warwick. Launched at the 2013 conference were our new Research Impact Awards (free for Corporate members to enter) which received over thirty entries and genuinely showcased best in class work from our members.



Manchester City Council one of our LARIA Research Impact Award 2013 winners



LARIA and the West Sussex Data Working Group (DWG), April 2014

We have also regularly held an annual conference in Scotland since the 1990s and since 2012 we have also had a voluntary regional network. This has had no budget but with active LARIA members is now turning into a vibrant network. We have seen particularly active regions in around half the country, with around 30-40 people attending each event, and only the North East does not have a named representative. Networking is at the heart of what we do so Associate members, or indeed non-LARIA members, are allowed to attend these free events. Our aim throughout is to capture all attendees details on the LARIA database and convert them through Associate to Full and Corporate membership.

We have also set a new one day conference for 4th November 2014 in Manchester which at the time of writing is nearly fully booked.

Communications

In 2014 we launched our new website which provided regular news updates focused on local research. The website is fully responsive and works on mobile devices. We send members regular email newsletters and are often asked by organisations such as DCLG, ONS and training providers to disseminate information.

The screenshot shows the LARIA website homepage. At the top, the LARIA logo is displayed with the tagline 'Local Area Research + Intelligence Association'. Below the logo is a navigation bar with a search bar and links for 'Research library', 'Professional development', 'Local network', and 'About us'. The main content area features several tiles: a large image of red telephone booths with the headline 'Make your views heard: What are the challenges facing our profession?'; a tile for the 'LARIA Annual General Meeting (AGM) for 2014'; a 'Member area' section with a 'Join now' button; a 'Knowledge Hub' section with social media links for Twitter and LinkedIn; and a 'Latest Tweets' section showing a tweet about an event hearing about @TalkLondon.

Our new website www.laria.org.uk

Our paper publication, LARIA News, converted to electronic pdf format a few years ago, but we have struggled to find an editor or produce editions from 2012 onwards. When the publication was launched in 1979 there was a clear need to collate and disseminate the information within it. However, much of the traditional content in it can now easily be found online and it has lost its purpose. We are looking to continue in some form, perhaps as a yearly review in conjunction with our new website.

Networking

We look to be a network of networks focused around local research. We do not have the resource to compete with other organisations and do not see the need to. Our unique purpose is to provide the links between our members and other organisations including the following who we have worked with in recent years:



Just some of the organisations we have developed links with

We have built stronger links with SOLACE and other organisations through the appointment of Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Coventry and Past President of SOLACE, as our Honorary President. In this role he has supported us in setting the challenge to our members to meet to ensure their work is relevant to senior decision-makers. There has also been particular progress in developing a joint agenda with Public Health England, Health Statistics User Group (HSUG), Social Research Association (SRA), Market Research Society (MRS), the Alliance for Useful Evidence and Skills for Local Government. In Scotland there have been strong links with National Records of Scotland, COSLA and the Improvement Service. We have focused recently on professional development and our new National Occupational Standards (NOS) which provides a framework for the skills a local researcher should have. This forms the basis of some of the ideas in this prospectus and helps us communicate with members the value of the activities we are asking them to participate in.

In 2013 we also, for the first time in many years, convened working groups to respond to consultations; including on the future of the Knowledge Hub, Census and ONS statistical

products. Our submissions to the ONS have been quoted in the final consultation response papers and we had feedback that our submissions provided a valuable perspective from our sector. These groups worked well in providing a focus for members to be involved with LARIA for a specific time-limited activity. This fits much better with the resources many members have to engage with LARIA than ongoing formal involvement with standing committees and groups. In 2014 we responded to the ESRC consultation on their priorities. The LARIA of the future needs to ensure a good combination of active members and strong links with other organisations.

What do our members and senior decision makers think?

At the end of 2013 we carried out a short online member survey. We had 63 responses which is not a huge response rate and we will look to improve and repeat the survey in 2014. Most of those responding speak highly of LARIA (71%).

“LARIA offers the best opportunity for fellow researchers/analysts to get together through the annual conference and training events.”

“LARIA is the closest thing most local authority research staff have to a representative body. LARIA does a lot of good work to promote both research skills and the cause of research within the public sector.”

“I have great respect for LARIA and LARIA members, but, whilst supporting efforts to raise the profile and value placed on local research and researchers, I believe that LARIA could ‘up it’s game’ further, and could do more to promote the role and value of a good research base in local decision making.”

The most important elements of LARIA membership are seen to be the conference (53%), email updates (47%), events/seminars throughout the year (31%) and LARIA representing the interests of their sector (27%). This shows an unmet demand as only 23% of respondents said they had actually been to the last conference. When asked why they did not attend financial constraints were cited as the main factor. Many members struggle to justify the cost of the conference and travel. LARIA eNews has been a key success of recent years. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents say they read it and four in five (80%) of those say they would recommend it to others, and 73% that it tells them what they need to know.

The elements seen to be most in need of improvement are professional development opportunities (33%), events/seminars throughout the year (24%) and regional networking (24%).

The website at the time, although not cited as a major priority, had lower ratings than LARIA eNews. Only 56% of those who had visited it would have recommended it to others. Key areas for improvement were seen to be research publications (47%) and latest news (34%). This led directly to relaunching the LARIA website to make it a more valued channel. Visitor numbers have gradually increased to around 100 unique visitors on a weekday.

In terms of their own professional development nearly half (47%) would like to develop skills in customer insight and data analysis. This was also the top priority for SOLACE members when asked in 2012² what skills they thought their researchers should develop (49%). LARIA members also see the professional development need for them to network more with other research professionals (40%), understand the impact of new government policies (33%), influence decision-makers (33%), and develop strategic/corporate thinking/awareness (31%). SOLACE members also put a big focus on strategic/corporate thinking/awareness (31%) as well as evaluation of policy impact (48%) and political acumen (46%) – options not included in the LARIA member survey. SOLACE members also put greater play on raising the

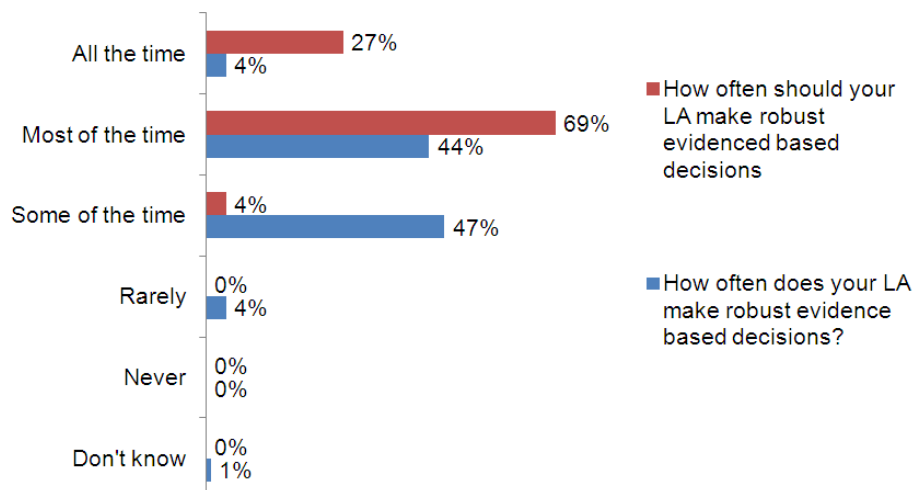
² 97 SOLACE members interviewed online September/October 2012. LARIA/SOLACE The Role of Evidence in Local Government Decision Making

profile/reputation of the council for evidence based decisions (37%) – which directly led into the development of the LARIA Research Impact Awards.

Over half (53%) of respondents to the LARIA member survey said that being involved in developing the future of the Census 2011 was the most important activity for LARIA members to be involved in over the following 12 months. LARIA convened a group of members and did submit a consultation response that was quoted a number of times in the final consultation report from the ONS.

The next most important activity to undertake cited by LARIA members was to convince colleagues of the value of research and the research profession (45%). Returning to the SOLACE member survey senior colleagues claim they do not need convincing. Nearly all (96%) say that local authorities should make evidence based decisions most if not all of the time, but only 48% say that their local authority actually does.

Making robust evidence based decisions



Source: 97 SOLACE members who responded to the survey online between September and October 2012

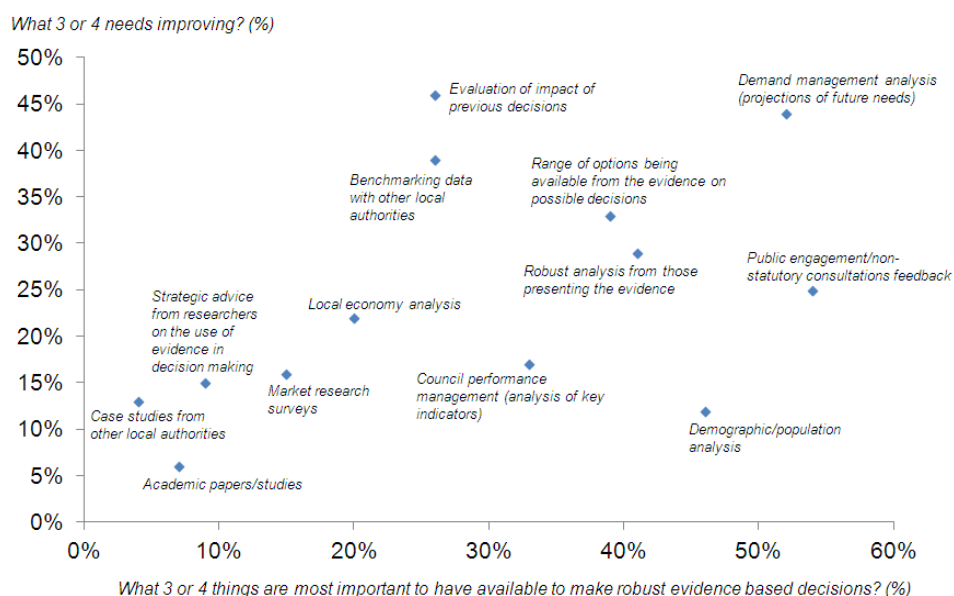
Four in five (80%) say they are well informed about what those providing research and intelligence in their authority are doing, but only 52% are satisfied with the way these professionals help them make evidence based decisions. There is unmet demand:

- Four in five (79%) SOLACE members would like to have more evidence on the likely future demand for services, while only one in five (19%) are currently satisfied with the quality of evidence they have on this topic.
- Three quarters (76%) would like more evidence on how to support welfare reform in their area, yet only one in eight (13%) have sufficient evidence in this area.
- Seven in ten (71%), including 91% of current chief executives and 53% of current senior directors/managers of a local authority, say they would like more evidence on how to support

welfare reform as only one quarter (24%) currently say they have sufficient evidence in this area in order to make robust decisions.

The three most important areas of work that are needed to help any local authority make robust evidence based decisions are seen by SOLACE members to be public engagement/non-statutory consultations feedback (54%), demand management analysis (52%) and demographic/population analysis (46%). Of these demand management analysis is seen to be the most important area in need of improvement (44%). This is summarised in the chart below and it is worth noting that this illustrates the perceptions of SOLACE members. Therefore looking at the areas that are not seen as important highlights where engagement is low – for example academic papers/studies. This could be interpreted as identifying a need to raise awareness of the potential value of this work to local decision-making.

What needs improving?



Source: 97 SOLACE members who responded to the survey online between September and October 2012

Over nine in ten (94%) SOLACE members say local authorities face barriers when trying to make evidence based decisions through government pressures/priorities and almost nine in ten (88%) face political pressures/priorities at least some of the time. The barriers faced by local authorities also relate to problems acquiring relevant research and intelligence. Around nine in ten (86%) say research evidence is too slow to gather at least some of the time, and a similar proportion (85%) identifies out of date evidence.

“Effective intelligence is often derived from the triangulation of a number of data sources. Local authorities need increasingly to adopt this approach, sourcing data from different places, in order to understand better the needs of our customers and to challenge future patterns of service delivery.”

“There has to be a balance of the use of evidence such as data and community engagement as well as professional and political judgement. Going 100% towards evidence based decision making can become restrictive and less responsive but none the less better outcomes can be achieved with evidence based decision making.”

“We are working through fast-moving times: it may not be possible to produce robust evidence on every decision of change. That is in part why people are paid to reach decisions - knowledge and experience enabling hopefully, good decisions. However fundamental changes should have a fundamentally strong evidence base.”

“There is a need for systematic research and evaluation of policy interventions. There is a need for more longitudinal analysis. We need better evidence on the role of prevention and early intervention in driving better outcomes and reducing costs across all service areas.”

Our plans for the future

From the evidence we have moved on as an organisation. As we celebrate our 40th anniversary in 2014 we have identified for our members to a number of the key themes we have developed further in this paper. These themes include professional development, the impact of research on making evidence based-decisions, the importance of regional networking and that we are looking for LARIA members to be active. The fundamental question we have to answer with this paper is what value does LARIA provide to its members and the wider public sector? In other words why should people join LARIA and why should others listen to what LARIA has to say?

At our 2014 conference Martin Reeves, the Honorary President of LARIA, set our members the following three challenges;

1. Providing insight into behaviours through the eyes of the public
2. Providing evidence for health and social care integration
3. Driving economic growth which is sustainable and not at any cost

Our aim

In 2013 we consulted with members over our new proposed Code for LARIA Full members (launched in March 2014). As part of this we set out our aim:

LARIA promotes continuous improvements in the quality and impact of local research and intelligence. We believe that local research and intelligence has the power to create prosperous and sustainable places. We work in the public interest to promote high standards and to deliver excellence in research, analysis and insight to ensure maximum impact in the delivery of high quality public service.

Our objectives

To achieve our aim we have set out a number of objectives:

Our Members

We have set out a Charter for LARIA Full members that codify the objectives they need to follow to help LARIA meet our overall aim.

LARIA Full Members improve lives and local areas through the use of research and intelligence. To do this they agree to do the following:

1. **Deliver professional research and intelligence by**
 - **Defining** the issue or problem to address and specifying the research question
 - **Designing** an appropriate and replicable research, intelligence and policy methodology (or methodologies) to use
 - **Managing** their own workload and support the team they work with
 - **Acting** ethically and with integrity in compliance with relevant statutory, regulatory and organisation requirements
 - **Analysing** the information gathered to a high standard to provide robust conclusions and intelligence

- **Practically** implement an effective research method to each specific situation
 - **Evaluating** the impact of decisions
2. **Support robust evidence-based decisions by**
 - **Identifying** the needs of decision makers
 - **Presenting** information and intelligence as required by the final audience
 - Helping others, including partner organisations, to understand and use the information and intelligence gathered
 - **Making** the case for research and intelligence to be at the heart of policy development
 3. **Develop a broad understanding of issues and methodologies by**
 - **Understanding** the broader social, political and economic context of the needs of the local people and local areas they serve
 - **Understanding** the strategic needs of the organisation they work for
 - **Having** an awareness of a broad range of specialities and research, intelligence and policy techniques
 4. **Support other research and intelligence professionals by**
 - **Sharing** best practice by for example writing articles and entering awards
 - **Networking** with other research and intelligence professionals through local and national LARIA events and online discussions
 - **Offering** advice, coaching and other support to other research, intelligence and policy professionals
 - **Actively** engaging in relevant government consultations and proactively help government and others to understand the impact of the decisions they make
 - **Being** an active member of LARIA by supporting its development and help organise activities
 - **Promote** the benefits of LARIA membership to others within their organisation and elsewhere

Please note: The Charter is an individual commitment and a professional development tool rather than a Standards Code. In exceptional circumstances the LARIA Council will consider submissions from LARIA members, or members of the public, to consider if a Full member has not fulfilled the commitment of the Member Charter. In such cases, if proven, it is likely the LARIA Council will recommend possible training and professional development opportunities. The LARIA Charter does not apply to the organisation the LARIA Full member works for. It cannot be used as the basis of any formal complaint or challenge to the robustness of consultations or any other activities. Any such attempts will be immediately rejected by the LARIA Council.

LARIA Council and local leads

We also think it is important that the LARIA Council commit to supporting members. Our objectives are set out in our Rules of Association

1. To **encourage** communication between those involved in Research and Intelligence in Local Government and other local public services and, in particular, to aid the sharing of technical knowledge and research methods.
2. To **promote** a wider understanding in Local Government and other local public services of the Research and Intelligence function and its application and to foster its further development.
3. To **improve** research and intelligence practice in Local Government and other local public services.
4. To **provide** a Research, Intelligence and information management viewpoint to national and international fora.
5. To **represent** the interests of Research and Intelligence practitioners with the local authority organisations, other local public services, government departments and other research agencies on issues of mutual concern and interest.
6. To **promote** activities which further the aims and enlarge the membership of LARIA including without limitation conferences, seminars and events, publications, the LARIA website, social media and all forms of publicity either independently or in conjunction with others, and in particular the circulation of a regular news sheet reporting on and promoting the activities of LARIA to members, potential members and all interested persons and organisations.
7. To **undertake** or commission research and set up working groups to investigate areas of interest.
8. To **promote** information and knowledge sharing among local research and intelligence professionals through the website, social media, events and LARIA News.
9. To **encourage** the continual professional development of members, which may include the LARIA Council agreeing a set of criteria to issue postnominal letters
10. Any such other activities as are from time to time deemed to be appropriate to further the purposes of LARIA.

Developing our core activities

We think that LARIA can only achieve our aims and objectives through partnership. In particular some of the activities we propose undertaking need financial sponsors. LARIA is largely a voluntary organisation with no permanent office or officers. We rely on the time and goodwill of members. We are not looking to establish a large central LARIA bureaucracy or office. We want to focus on the outcomes we can contribute towards and see our role as being a network of networks tapping into resources and contacts for our members. At present we successfully commission out our administrative and event management work and see huge potential in rolling out this kind of activity to other areas. We wish to develop LARIA as a lean commissioning organisation and could do much more with the right financial support.

Doing a few things well

Without further financial support LARIA must focus its resources on doing a few things well.

- *Ensuring active LARIA members*
 - Grow our Membership through engaging with them
 - Continually improve communications and member support services
 - Continually improve our local network
 - Promote strategic partnerships
 - Promote our local, regional, national and international profile by identifying key spokespeople/case studies for the work members do (currently delivered through the awards)
 - Ensure financial stability and security of LARIA
- *Focus on skills and the professional development of our members to aid evidence-based decisions within their organisations*
 - Promote professional standards
 - Support the development of skills around;
 - Providing insight into behaviours through the eyes of the public
 - Providing evidence for health and social care integration
 - Driving economic growth which is sustainable and not at any cost
 - Provide a comprehensive Continual Professional Development (CPD) framework and opportunities based on the National Occupational Standards (NOS)
 - Promote peer review/support
 - Ensure LARIA events have a clear professional development structure and outcome
 - Develop the LARIA methodological awards

How you can help

We would look to our members to become involved in activity groups to help implement our plans. They would ideally be supported by commercial partners and social innovation organisations such as think tanks and public sector bodies. To help us identify and allocate resources we have identified a potential workplan for the next three years based around three priority levels. Each of these levels could be achieved in turn through support for the equivalent of one full-time member of staff. LARIA only makes a small surplus each year and cannot fund this post.

We would welcome creative approaches to resourcing. If the sponsoring organisation(s) could not provide the resourcing in-house we would ask our members to respond to a proposal where they may be able to take on some of the activity. We would look to work with any partner to identify the work to be undertaken, the skills of those employed to drive this forward and the funding available. It may be that a partner organisation just supports one element of the work or a number of the activities.

By becoming a commissioning organisation we believe that this is a sustainable future for a professional body and that LARIA could lead the way in this kind of working. There are three types of activity:

- (S): Sponsorship – Ongoing support for an area of activity. (c.£500 - £5K in funding needed per activity)
- (P): Project – A standalone project with a clear end date. (c.£5K-£10K in funding needed)
- (TS): Technical Support – Support in-kind for an ongoing area of activity or a project

If the funding was available we could help our members undertake the following tasks.

Priority One (2015):

- **(S or TS) Establishment of a LARIA Partnership Group** to help challenge the organisation to meet the needs of the broader sector. We would look for members to be invited from partner and other organisations. We propose that the Group meets twice a year and sets out the challenge for the next six months. They would have six clear initial responsibilities:
 - Identify the demand for local research services and areas which need to be developed further
 - To support areas of activity suggested by LARIA members and the LARIA Council
 - Guide members in how to improve the quality of their work
 - Develop a clearer LARIA offer for policy makers and others to join LARIA
 - Development of a LARIA methodological award and further development for the Research Impact awards
 - To raise the profile of LARIA within their own networks

This would benefit members by providing clear guidance on future trends in research, intelligence and policy. This should increase the impact of their work and help them keep ahead of these trends in terms of their work outputs and personal professional development. It will also provide LARIA with a clear thought leadership role.

- **(S or TS) Development of a “Local area research week”** around the time of a LARIA event such as the conference. Partner organisations would be asked to produce content via their networks to promote the value of local research. This would benefit members by providing a clear focus for them to showcase their own work and also identify work done by others that was of interest. It should also raise the profile and prestige of local area research.
- **(S or TS) More investment in the regional structure** – support for more free local networking. This will help provide more local networking opportunities and also cut down travel costs. There could also be a clearer requirement for local partners. We have already set up links between each local group and Public Health England, and this principle could be expanded, for example, to include a university partner per local area.
- **(P or TS) Development of a clearer CPD programme** in partnership with other organisations. This would include signposting members to existing training providers and only developing LARIA training if there was a gap. Early indications are this gap could be connected to how to communicate research findings to decision-makers and the evaluation of the impact of policy. This would provide a clear professional framework that would support researchers in having requests for training accepted by their manager.
- **(P or TS) Map out the local area research networks** – both across the country in terms of other professional bodies but also provide members with the tools to do so locally. Members would be able to look for peer-to-peer support, keeping down costs and developing new previously unidentified networks across local areas, sectors and methodologies.
- **(P or TS) Establish a clear evaluation framework for the work of LARIA** – building on existing membership surveys and focusing on understanding how LARIA has promoted continuous improvements in the quality and impact of local research and intelligence. This would provide members with a clearer understanding of the value for money they receive from their membership.
- **(TS) Endorsement of professional development by senior decision makers** – such as the Civil Service commitment to five professional development days for policy makers.³ This would again help members to justify investment in their own professional development.

³ “To ensure that civil servants are well equipped to use new policy tools, and in line with the commitment to learning and development laid out later in the plan, all policy makers will be expected to undertake at least five days a year of continuing professional development to ensure they have the right skills, including in new areas such as behavioural sciences.” Civil Service Reform Plan, p17. <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Civil-Service-Reform-Plan-acc-final.pdf>

Priority Two (2016):

- **(S or TS) Ongoing support** for activities developed in 2015. This would ensure that activities continue to be successful and that the benefits of investments from previous years are fully achieved.
- **(S or TS) More investment in communication content and online discussions.** This would increase the access to relevant information that members receive.
- **(P or TS) Create an online marketplace** that would help members join up commissioning on projects of shared interest. This would help cut the costs of research for many of our members and ensure good value for money across the sector.
- **(P or TS) Development of clearer guidance (through relaunched LARIA news) on**
 - The appropriate use of customer insight including personal data
 - The robust evaluation of policy and showcasing examples of good practice

This will help members to get the best out of their work and develop more of a professional justification for the work they do.
- **(P or TS) Further support and involvement in the future of the Census.** The Census is at the core of the work of many of our members and it is in their best interests that the quality is maintained.

Priority Three (2017 and beyond):

- **(S or TS) Ongoing support** for activities developed in 2015 and beyond. This would ensure that activities continue to be successful and that the benefits of investments from previous years are fully achieved.
- **(S or TS) Ensure that LARIA is seen as a central voice** on four or five specialist areas and can produce how to guides. This will help members seek help on core issues and raise the profile of their work across the public sector.
- **(P or TS) Engage with members to draft specifications to commission joint research and intelligence projects** for questions of interest to all. This would help to drive real efficiencies across the sector and also ensure that members with limited resources can pool together with others to gain access to higher quality research than they would have done on their own.
- **(TS) Higher profile for the work of LARIA members among key decision-makers** in making evidence based decisions. This would reinforce the importance of the work of our members.

Targets

- **Partners:** To identify and successful work with key partners who can support the delivery of the proposed new activities
- **Delivery:** To achieve the above list of activities to time and on budget
- **Membership:** To achieve 150 Corporate members and 1,500 individual LARIA members by the end of 2016 (and the accompanying rise in income)
- **Events:** To continue to run the annual two-day and one-day conferences
- **Local network:** To continue to run the annual Scottish Conference (not including 2014 due to the referendum on independence) and have at least one free event in each of the local network areas every year.
- **Outcomes:** To be developed as part of the evaluation framework under priority one activity.

Conclusions

This prospectus has set out where LARIA is at present and where it could be. The organisation has a clear purpose which could be developed further. The challenge remains the resource that LARIA has to meet its ambitions. It is a voluntary organisation and many of its members do not have the resources or the influence within their organisation to devote substantial time to volunteering for LARIA. There is a need for greater financial support to help commission key activities for LARIA on behalf of the sector. LARIA is the primary network for UK local researchers and the more it grows the greater the links there will be between them. As the links grow the evidence base for decisions will improve helping to create prosperous and sustainable places.