Annex 2

Pre-Consultation Engagement and Evidence Gathering

This document provides:

- An overview of our engagement methodology, including reference group information

- A summary of evidence and what we heard through our pre-consultation engagement

- A summary of additional reading and desk resources

Overview of Engagement Methodology

Introduction

To assist in the development of refreshed policy and funding frameworks for our voluntary and community sector support, we have carried out extensive engagement at different locations throughout NI over the past few months. We have engaged with and brought together people from a wide range of organisations, to draw together their collective experiences, understand key priorities and needs, listen to ideas and opinions and add voice and input to help us to shape future programmes for whom the refresh will deliver.

We adopted an inclusive engagement approach bringing together Voluntary and Community sectoral representatives from both urban and rural locations, including those supported through existing funding programmes as well as those that are not. We are continuing to engage with other funders of infrastructure support to the Sector, including other Government Departments, Councils, and independent funders.

We were pleased with the willingness of so many people to take part in our engagement roundtables and workshops, both in person and virtually. Across the four months we spoke to over **300** people from a broad spectrum of organisations in the voluntary and community sector, along with other funders and local government.

Our engagement approach involved a range of methods to inform the shape and design of new policy and funding frameworks and took place between March and June 2023.

In summary, it included:

- Six stakeholder reference group meetings, meeting monthly

  - **20** members from a broad spectrum of VCS organisations

- Survey open for seven weeks to explore headline needs and priorities

  - **471** responses from **431** organisations

- Four engagement roundtables in Belfast, Derry-Londonderry and two virtual

  - **130** people attended from over **100** organisations

- Six general/open invitation workshops

  - **75** people attended

- Six targeted workshops with different subsectors: Age, LGBTQ+, BAME, Disability, Women's sector and Local government officers

  - **64** people attended

- Virtual feedback session

  - **75** people attended

- Ongoing engagement with both the Funders Forum for Northern Ireland and Government and VCS Joint Forum.

At the end of this first stage of engagement, we facilitated a virtual feedback session with over **75** people, including those involved at earlier stages and those who had not, to provide feedback on what we have heard to date and allow for further questions and discussion.

We also reviewed existing and previous consultations and research both in Northern Ireland and across the UK and Ireland, taking on board lessons learned from these.

Through all of our engagement, we outlined our understanding of infrastructure support, gave a brief overview of our current funding structures along with our ambition and motivation for doing this work. We also facilitated a word cloud exercise to help us determine key principles and words to support a future vision and outcomes.

Engagement

We split our engagement into roughly 3 blocks of work: roundtable discussions, workshops and targeted sessions.

Engagement Roundtables:

In the first block, we hosted **4** larger engagement roundtables, with up to **50** people at each in Belfast, Derry-Londonderry and 2 virtual sessions. The second virtual session was added due to demand. Over **120** people attended this first block of sessions.

At the engagement roundtables we provided some background and context for this work, looking at what we mean by voluntary and community sector infrastructure and capacity and the interrelated strands in this programme of work: charities regulation, advice and debt support and VCS infrastructure and capacity.

We also outlined the role of infrastructure support and capacity, how it supports the wider VCSE sector and why it is important for the Department to support this type of work. We shared our drivers for change, the responsibility of the Voluntary and Community Division within DfC and also the division's current funding streams, along with our ambition for this work.

Participants took part in a group Mentimeter exercise to explore what success looks like in this work, describing the kind of sector we are trying to sustain and develop.

The roundtables provided an opportunity to share our engagement plans, methods and timelines with a wider audience. A key ambition for these roundtables was to promote our survey, which was hosted on NI direct and open for 7 weeks. We also shared some early findings and data from the survey as these developed.

At the roundtables, we introduced four functions of sector infrastructure support, which formed building blocks for much of our engagement going forward. We also explored the differences between regional (country-wide) and local (sub-regional or more local) types of support and also general support (for all groups) and specialist support (for a particular sub-sector or a specialist type of support). We also looked at equality, diversity and inclusion in the VCS and how to help ensure this work is inclusive in both its methods and its outworking. The four functions of infrastructure support are as follows:

- Leadership and Voice

- Collaboration and Partnerships

- Capacity Building

- Volunteering

Participants also took part in three breakout discussions to explore a range of key questions:

- What are the most pressing support needs for your organisation or organisations you work with?

- Which needs can be met by sector infrastructure support?

- Consider the different roles of regional and local infrastructure organisations

  - What are the features of a local infrastructure organisation?

  - What sort of support is best provided regionally versus locally?

- Consider the relationship between infrastructure organisations and local government

  - How should this operate?

  - What is the link between sector supports provided by councils and the supports provided by sector infrastructure?

- If a more equitable and diverse sector is a desired outcome, then what are the practical support needs that relate to this?

- What is the role of sector infrastructure support in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion:

  - Within the sector?

  - Within society?

Engagement Workshops:

In the second block, we facilitated **6** workshops with up to **20** people at each. These took place in Belfast, Cookstown, Newry, Enniskillen and **2** virtual sessions, one morning and one evening. Over **75** people took part in these workshops.

At the workshops, we reiterated the background and context of this work, particularly for those who hadn't taken part in the first stage of engagement. We also highlighted our engagement to date, feeding back on roundtables, the survey and reference group meetings and also outlined what was still to come.

We fed back on what we heard through both the roundtables and our survey, noting key messages and headline challenges. We were also able to provide some interim findings and data from the survey.

Using the questions posed in the survey, we identified current needs and priorities for future support in the sector and mapped them against the four functions of infrastructure support, introduced at the roundtables:

• Leadership and Voice

• Collaboration and Partnerships

• Capacity Building

• Volunteering

Looking at the future support priorities under each of these four questions, we posed the following questions:

• How do we prioritise support to achieve the best impact?

• What are the key supports that are needed to enable individual organisations and the wider sector to thrive?

• How should this support be organised and delivered?

  – Regional

  – Local

Using the findings from our Mentimeter exercise at the roundtables, we developed and shared a word cloud highlighting key words to describe a vision for a thriving sector. We explored a couple of different ways of expressing a vision and gained some feedback on style. We also identified the groundwork for outcomes under each of the four functions of infrastructure support. Participants had an opportunity to discuss these and share thoughts and feedback.

Targeted Workshops:

The third block allowed us to have more targeted conversations with different 'sub-sectors' or parts of the sector that are traditionally underrepresented in our funding and engagement. We hosted conversations with LGBTQi+ organisations, people working in the Disability sector, the Age sector, Women's sector and organisations supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. We engaged with over **60** people across these **5** sessions.

We also hosted sessions with our colleagues in Local Government, the Funders Forum for Northern Ireland and Government and VCS Joint Forum, with over 50 people attending across 3 meetings.

These conversations followed largely the same format as the open workshops with a bit more of a focus on potential barriers to accessing mainstream infrastructure support and also looked at whether there are any infrastructure needs that are distinct to particular groups or sub sectors.

Survey

We also carried out a survey of sector organisations to explore headline needs and priorities, receiving a total of **471** responses from **431** organisations. A summary and analysis of this is shared along with more detail in the complete summary of responses.

Reference Group

In addition to seeking views from sectoral representatives and ensuring broad representation across stakeholder groups, a reference group was also established. Reference group members discussed the outcomes of engagement sessions, providing specific focus on certain topics and offering general advice.

The Reference Group comprises 20 individuals with a range of sectoral interests, through which we will draw on lived experience, expertise, and knowledge, and together explore a range of insights and ideas in the design of new approaches.

We have worked closely with this group of **20** people, representing a cross-section of interests from the voluntary and community sector, alongside local government, DAERA colleagues and other funders. This group met **6** times and has been instrumental in shaping our approach to engagement and helping us interpret and respond to what we are hearing through other engagement mechanisms.

Reference Group Meeting Summary

Meeting 1: 9 March 2023

The Infrastructure Support Reference Group held its first meeting in Girdwood Hub. There was full attendance across all members who also welcomed and appreciated the opportunity to shape the refresh of our policy framework. Members discussed and agreed the Terms of Reference and members' expectations. There was also a productive and detailed group discussion on engagement methodologies.

Meeting 2: 19 April 2023

The second meeting of the Infrastructure Support Reference Group was held in Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon. Members were provided with an overview and update on the first four engagement roundtables. Members also took part in the Mentimeter exercise which was used at the roundtable engagement sessions. DfC provided feedback on sectoral needs and priorities emerging from the engagement and a brief overview of the initial findings from the survey. There was a discussion and feedback on reflections from what we had heard so far. Members were introduced to the 'four functions of infrastructure support' – Leadership and voice, collaboration and partnerships, capacity building and volunteering. There was an open discussion on the next stage of engagement with feedback provided.

Meeting 3: 17 May 2023

The third meeting was held in East Belfast Network Centre. DfC gave a brief overview of the engagement sessions, noting those which had already taken place and those which were still to happen. There was also an overview of the headline challenges and an exploration of a potential vision statement and supporting outcomes. Members took part in a breakout session and subsequent group discussion looking at key questions under each of the four functions of infrastructure. There was also a discussion on how to target future engagement with feedback from the group taken on board.

Meeting 4: 19 June 2023

The fourth meeting of the reference group was held in Seamus Heaney Homeplace, Magherafelt. Members were presented analysis from the survey which focused on the profile of the sector, how organisations are operating and strategic priorities for support. There was a breakout session to discuss the survey findings. DfC also introduced a draft vision and outcomes framework. There was also a breakout and group discussion to respond to this draft text.

Meeting 5: 9 August 2023

The fifth meeting was in Clifton House Belfast. DfC gave a brief recap of the work to date, including updates on the draft vision and outcomes. There was a presentation on draft priorities for investment, delivery partners and principles for how to deliver this work. Members took part in two breakout and group discussions to explore and feedback on these priorities. It was agreed to have a further meeting in September.

Meeting 6: 11 September 2023

The sixth meeting was in NICVA offices, Belfast. DfC gave a summary of the work of the Reference group to date and a recap on the aims of the review and shared details of the draft Consultation document. In a breakout session, members revisited the headline outcomes and indicative priorities and fed back. A plenary discussion followed on programme level impacts with thoughts on definitions and metrics supporting an understanding the sector, what data was available and where areas where gaps existed. The group was thanked for its interest and contribution each month. DfC advised on next steps: the consultation process and work on commissioning with a potential role for current members of the Reference group to continue having an involvement.

A list of reference group members can be found here.

Organisation	Member
Age NI	Eithne Gilligan Dep Paschal McKeown
Ballynafeigh Community Development Association	Gerry Tubritt
Community Development Networks Forum (CDNF)	Cathy Polley
Community Foundation of Northern Ireland (CFNI)	Orla Black
Consortium of 6 Independent Volunteer Centres	Ashleen Schenning
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)	Ciaran McLaughlin, Rural Affairs Division (West)
Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC)	Barry O Hagan Dep Teresa Bradley
Falls Community Council	Gerry McConville
Funders Forum NI	Brenda McMullan
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (GSAP)	Rory McParland
Mid Ulster Council	Philip Clarke
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)	Una McKernan
Resurgam Trust	Adrian Bird
Rural Community Network (RCN)	Kate Clifford
The National Lottery Community Fund (TLNCF)	Alison Fraser
The Antrim Down and Armagh Rural Support Network (TADA)	Diane Ewart
The Rainbow Project	John O'Doherty
Volunteer Now	Denise Hayward Dep Jane Gribben
Women's Support Network (WSN)	Karen Sweeney
Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)	Anne McVicker

Summary of Evidence – What we Heard

Whilst our engagement focused on infrastructure support for the voluntary and community sector, we heard clearly about deep rooted and systemic issues relating to both the funding and policy environment and how this impacts all organisations in the sector and how they operate.

Much of what we heard echoed other consultations, notably the (pre COVID-19) Dormant Accounts consultation in 2019. Many of these issues will require a long-term approach, with better collaboration between the sector, government and other statutory bodies.

We heard a clear and strong message from all organisations in the sector that the current funding climate and operating conditions are very challenging. As such, this is a particularly difficult time to be engaging, consulting and trying to look ahead. There are long standing issues with resourcing and how the sector is evaluated, treated and valued leaving organisations feeling frustrated with government policy, ways of working and decision-making cycles.

This funding and regulatory environment has created a burden for staff and volunteers leading to issues around recruitment and retention of staff, the attractiveness of the sector as a place to work and a widespread concern about the sustainability of and reliance on volunteering. Some of the needs in the sector are being driven by 'bad funding' and too much regulation (applying for and accounting for funding, paperwork around volunteers, etc.). Infrastructure support is often seen as trying to mitigate or compensate for these issues.

A lot of the reasons why organisations are struggling are down to these bigger structural issues which is beyond the scope of what a potential future infrastructure support programme can address directly. However, it is imperative that any new framework incorporates improved funding practices with a commitment to 'fair funding' and proportionate bureaucracy.

Furthermore, advocacy for strategic change is one of the roles for regional infrastructure organisations and facilitation of a mechanism for collaboration, like the Joint Forum between government and the sector may prove integral.

Regarding infrastructure support specifically, there is still a clear need for this type of support within the sector. **99%** of survey respondents anticipate needing support in the future, with **59%** of organisations reporting that they also work on behalf of other organisations in some sort of support role. There is a clear demand for both digital and in-person provision and a strong interest in peer-mentoring with the Community Academy model put forward as an example of where this has been successfully formalised and structured to build capacity and spread good practice.

There is a need for different levels of support to reflect different starting points of individual organisations. Our survey suggests that there is a spectrum of support needs with organisational scale being a key differentiating factor. Regional organisations and more local delivery should and can complement each other with communication, accessibility of support and better collaboration between different providers being key to effectiveness. Regional and local infrastructure organisations are mutually dependent and lots of examples of where this works well were provided.

However, it is important to note that the extent of need and demand for support is probably greater than we as a department can meet, considering sub-sectors, the range of geographies and potential interventions that organisations would like to have access to.

The voluntary and community sector is complex and diverse, as reflected in the shape of current sector infrastructure provision and the range of partnership and engagement structures. The department is not the sole investor in sector infrastructure and nor should it be. The nature of the sector means that both public and independent funders have an interest in supporting capacity building linked to specific policy priorities. This includes funding specialist sectoral support organisations and also direct investment in organisational capacity building, for example through the Dormant Accounts Fund.

The distinctive role for the Department for Communities will likely be in our support for a core number of infrastructure organisations which can deliver a baseline of support for the sector.

We asked those who took part in our roundtable discussions and workshops about their future support priorities and needs under each of the four functions of infrastructure support. There is a clear need across all four categories of support (backed up by feedback from both the survey and workshops) and what we heard under each category is outlined in the next few pages.

Leadership and Voice

There is a continued need for training and development of leadership skills, including advocacy, campaigning, management & stakeholder engagement

Leadership and voice also requires organisations to build relationships, trust and confidence within communities at a local level. Infrastructure organisations need to both respond to policy and also understand its implications for the groups it supports; this requires two-way communication.

Flexibility in funding is required to allow space and resource to network and share best practice across different organisations.

Impact measurement continues to be key for leaders in the sector as there is a need to better understand and communicate an organisation's impact and value and be able to tell their story. This is intrinsically linked to better lobbying & advocacy skills as organisations develop how to get their message heard and influence decision making. There needs to be better and more meaningful data on the sector so that the health and impact of its contribution can be better understood.

Support is needed at both a regional and local level with better collaboration between each level to enable organisations to thrive in this area. However, organisations representing the sector need to also be held to account, challenged on their delivery and how they represent the sector.

We heard a lot about the importance of representation of different voices & understanding 'uneven' capacity in different parts of the sector. Resources for and capacity in organisations supporting people of colour is limited. There is a general understanding that this part of the sector has been left behind, particularly since the closure of key infrastructure organisations and networks.

In LGBTQi+ communities, there is expertise at both local and regional levels. But such groups have traditionally not been funded and as such are not able to cope with current demand and as such have to prioritise areas of delivery and support. There is a need to upskill individuals to become a positive voice and/or leaders in their community but a lack of resource is a barrier at present. As a result, people are putting themselves in the role of leader but without the protection and assurance gained from being properly trained.

There is also a need for advocacy training and skills development in the disability sector to ensure voices are heard. Often decisions are made without service users or people with lived experience being consulted or involved. Online provision is particularly good for disabled people as it eliminates transport and accessibility issues that people often experience.

There is a need to consider how to support voice within different subsectors and for more marginalised communities (often of identity), ensuring that this can be fed into wider conversations and reflected in policy development. Our targeted workshops with different sub-sectors highlighted some

additional costs and barriers for organisations, notably around translation and interpretation (including sign language). This is particularly relevant to the cost of trying to do outreach work or bring different perspectives and lived experience into policy development. Virtual options for consultation and engagement were welcomed as a way of increasing accessibility.

Developing and sharing good practice amongst organisations is important, particularly in terms of inclusive engagement methods; opportunities and mechanisms for knowledge exchange should be considered. There is a need to build skills and confidence on participatory methods.

Collaboration and Partnership

We heard a lot about how collaboration and partnership needs greater investment; this type of work and support does not happen without adequate resourcing. We also heard that partnership working is inhibited by the current funding crisis as organisations are "heads down" or inward looking as they fight for survival. There is not the time or space to think about any form of relationship building.

Collaboration requires capacity in terms of time, "bandwidth" and investment of time and resources – all of which is hindered in the current climate. The department needs to think about how it can enable and support this if it is a goal of infrastructure support and look at frameworks and models of collaboration supported by financial underpinning.

Any development in this space should build on and support existing assets and infrastructure.

Collaboration becomes key in times of crisis and effective partnership working within the NI Civil Contingencies Framework or the Joint Forum between Government and the VCS becomes even more important. Examples were given as to how well the sector worked together and with government during the pandemic.

Equality, diversity and inclusion is integral to better collaboration and partnership, but it cannot be a tick box exercise or simply included at the end of any policy development; it must be central and integral from an early stage.

Language and imagery used is key to enabling better collaboration and relationship building with marginalised groups. Our survey suggested that organisations in rural areas may be more isolated and less networked than urban organisations and there is a need to think about how this can be supported. Dispersed rural communities are often more difficult to support in terms of infrastructure, particularly in terms of both convening of people and diffusing of information and skills. Support in this area needs to complement the dedicated support programmes provided through DAERA.

It is important to also think about and consider the connections between different government departments and also non-government funders, looking at how that can better support infrastructure.

Core Capacity and Resilience

Supporting 'core capacity and resilience' is the biggest single area of need identified throughout our engagements. The needs within this category were most widely identified in the survey. This is an area where there seems to be an emerging market for 'private' infrastructure support with the rise of the professional/consultant/fundraiser.

What most organisations require to enable them to build capacity, is time; being able to take time out from delivering services and 'firefighting'.

There was a recognition that there is an ongoing need for skills development, training and education, both formal and informal but also post-training support, for example, mentoring and consolidation of training.

Training needs identified include for example income diversification, income generation, fundraising, tender writing, business planning, innovation, governance, monitoring, impact measurement, reporting, acquiring and managing assets, HR support, staff recruitment and retention and succession planning.

Many organisations told us about the need for peer support, again both formally and informally. The Community Academy model was put forward as an example of where this has been successfully formalised and structured to build capacity and spread good practice.

This eases the burden for smaller, leaner organisations who don't have these types of functions in-house; it allows processes to be demystified, better understood, simplified and brings skills and expertise into communities to address need.

Recruitment and retention of staff are key issues along with succession planning and career development.

There is an ongoing need for support around income generation and diversification. Specialist support is also required around acquiring and managing assets and also digital development to reduce the digital divide.

Evaluation and impact measurement remains a key area of support and development. We were told that the total impact and added value of organisations' work within the sector is not being properly captured with funders focusing on their own funded element, with individual outcomes being measured across a number of different funding streams and the overall bigger picture is lost. We heard that monitoring systems are expensive and that outcomes and impact could be measured much more effectively. Measurement tools need to be simplified, stripping out unnecessary bureaucratic information and allowing the focus to shift to reporting on what best highlights impact and value added.

We were told that the gap between 'voluntary' and 'community' groups is widening, particularly in terms of procurement and contracts. Smaller community-based organisations cannot compete with larger

voluntary charities. Capacity needs to be built to enable organisations to compete on a more level playing field.

Organisations told us that there is often too much focus on 'innovation'; funders often want to see something new rather than recognising models of good practice and mainstreaming them. There should be a process where success is recognised and supported without an organisation having to re-apply for funding time and time again.

Volunteering

Volunteering was widely recognised as a critical area with consensus that support in this area is limited and additional support is required. There were some suggestions that volunteering plays a central role and should be allocated additional funding under future arrangements, given the sector's reliance on volunteers and particularly in a climate where there will likely be less funding for staff.

The sector is becoming more and more reliant on volunteering with volunteers critical to service delivery, however feedback suggests voluntary activity is declining. As with staff working in the sector, recruitment and retention is also an issue in volunteering compounded by the lack of coordination, training, support, skills development, recognition and reward.

This leads to a high turnover of volunteers with numbers having significantly reduced since the pandemic. Volunteer management and coordination needs to be understood and valued as a specific and necessary skill set which requires a resource allocation.

Inclusivity of volunteering and diversity in the volunteer profile needs to be encouraged and supported. There are changing expectations around the volunteer experience particularly around the issue of the bureaucratic burden of sitting on boards and committees; volunteers are often reluctant to commit to taking on these much needed and valued roles. Voluntary activity in management positions, for example management boards or trustees, is a critical area for support. There is a need for skills development and also encouragement to increase volunteering levels in this area.

Volunteering requires a tiered structure of support across both the regional and local level. The core work of volunteer centres needs to be supported; these infrastructure organisations provide support and expertise in a local community to potential volunteers, existing volunteers and organisations that involve volunteers – such a network needs to be supported.

Digital resources will be key to supporting volunteering in terms of promoting advice, guidance and volunteer matching. There is also a need for recognition and reward for volunteers.

> **The engagement process gave us a lot of material and a range of insights to support the development of the draft proposals for future support for the sector and a strong basis for public consultation.**

Summary of Evidence - Survey

A survey to gather information on the needs and priorities of voluntary and community organisations and volunteers to ensure that any support is contributing to a sustainable, innovative and vibrant sector was launched on 28 February 2023 and closed on 14 April 2023.

The aim of this survey was to understand how the Department can continue to best support the sector and to help in developing a refreshed policy framework to inform future commissioning and funding of supports.

The survey was published on the NI Direct consultations webpage **(NI Direct - Citizen Space)** and publicised via the Department's Twitter feed. A full report with an overview of the responses provided is available.

Headline Analysis

How well is your organisation operating?

29% reported that their organisation was operating very well and **45%** reported that their organisation was operating reasonably well, however these figures varied when looking at annual income bands, geographic area and focus of their organisations.

- As income increases respondents are more positive about how the organisation is operating.

- Similar differences were found with geographic coverage of the organisation, with organisations that covered either all of Northern Ireland or one or more council areas being more positive about how their organisation was operating compared with respondents whose organisation covered either a city or town or a specific neighbourhood, village or hamlet.

- As the reported income of an organisation increases the proportion of respondents stating their organisation covered either Northern Ireland or one or more council areas also increased.

Providing Support to other organisations

57% of respondents said that their organisation provided support to other organisations:

- The number who offered support in a number of areas rose as the organisational income increased

- There were high levels of support across all annual income bands in the areas of collaboration and developing partnerships, fundraising and volunteering.

- More respondents operating in urban areas said they offered support compared to those in rural areas, across all areas of support.

Accessing support from other organisations

75% of respondents said that their organisation accessed support from other organisations:

- The proportion of respondents reporting that their organisations received support in a number of areas tended to rise as organisational income increased and the geographical coverage of their organisation increased, most notably in the areas of human resources management, cybersecurity, marketing and communications and strategic/ business planning.

Comparison of urban and rural organisations

- Access to support in the areas of human resource management, marketing and communications and strategic business planning was **15%** higher in urban areas than rural

- Support in collaboration/developing partnerships was **10%** higher in urban areas than rural.

- Volunteering was the only area where respondents in rural areas accessing support was over 10% higher compared to urban areas.

Support Priorities over next 3 to 5 years

84% said improving funding and financial stability, **62%** said developing the skills of staff, board and volunteers and **51%** said providing better services when asked about their support priorities for the next 3 to 5 years.

- Respondents who said their organisation operated in either a more rural area or more urban area reported that these were also their top three strategic support priorities, as did respondents across all areas of organisational focus.

- The top three strategic support priorities identified by respondents across all annual income bands included improving their funding and financial stability and developing skills of staff, board and volunteers.

- Over half of respondents whose organisation had an annual income of £250k or less reported that providing better services was a strategic support priority.

- In contrast, around half of respondents whose organisation had an annual income of between £251k and £1 million and two-thirds whose organisation had an income of more than £1 million said increasing their influence was a priority.

Annual Income Bands

Organisations with an annual income of less than £20k reported the following support needs in the next 3 to 5 years

- **30%** will need support in succession planning

- **60%** in volunteering

Organisations with an annual income between £20k and £50k reported the following support needs in the next 3 to 5 years

- **60%** expect to need support in volunteering

- **40%** in marketing and communications

Organisations with an annual income between £51k and £250k reported the following support needs in the next 3 to 5 years

- Over a third expect to need support in monitoring, evaluating, reporting and measuring impact, and strategic/business planning

Geographic area

Three of the top five operational areas of support and advice that respondents expected to need over the next 3 to 5 years were the same across all geographic areas and included:

- collaboration/developing partnerships

- fundraising

- income generation/business development

The ranking order of these support areas varied between geographic areas.

- Just under half of respondents whose organisation covered either a city or town or a neighbourhood, village or hamlet expected to need support in volunteering whilst around three in every ten said succession planning was an area they expected to need support.

General comments about infrastructure support

- Financial issues, most notably:

  - The need for long term and core funding

  - The need for investment in organisation expenses and running costs, including staff costs

  - Tight budgets and financial instability

- General comments on infrastructure support:

  - The importance of infrastructure support

  - Whether access to infrastructure support is fair and value for money

  - Better financial support for organisations providing infrastructure support

  - Any or all support would be helpful

- The benefits of collaboration and partnerships, including:

  - Organisations working in partnership, or wanting to work in partnership, with others

  - Organisations keen to share skills and knowledge with others

  - Support received through community networks

- Government support/ local government support and funding, most notably:

  - Organisations receive no or inadequate government support

  - Organisations have been helped and rely on government support

  - Support received from local councils

- The need for local support and for smaller organisations, including:

  - Support needed in particular by rural organisations

  - Support required in particular by smaller organisations

- Organisations wanting support to acquire or maintain premises

- Dependence on and recognition of volunteers

- The burdens of bureaucracy and time cost to organisations

- The desire to access training support, expertise and mentoring

- Community development

- Problems arising from the pandemic

Additional Reading and Resources

Charity Regulation

Independent Review of Charity Commission and Recommendations 2022

A Review of Charity Regulation in NI, commissioned by the Minister for Communities and led by an Independent Panel, which commenced on 25 January 2021. The Review considered the Charities Act (NI) 2008 and the roles of the Charity Commission NI and the Department thereunder. The full **Terms of Reference** can be found on the Department's website. In particular, the Review Panel was tasked with examining whether the Commission's performance within the existing legal framework struck the right balance, in light of best practice, between supporting charities to do the right thing and deterring or dealing with misconduct.

Independent Review of Charity Regulation Northern Ireland January 2022 (communities-ni.gov.uk)

Departmental Response to Independent Review of Charity Regulation in NI

This document sets out the Department's response to the recommendations from the Independent Review of Charity Regulation in NI (the Review) which was published in January 2022.

https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/ publications/independent-review-charity- regulation

Community Wealth Building

"Recommendations to advance Community Wealth Building in Northern Ireland".

Report published by an Independent Advisory Panel on Community Wealth Building to the Minister of Communities, October 2022.

Independent Report to advance Community Wealth Building in Northern Ireland | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)

Data

360 Giving

360 Giving's aim is for more money to go to where it is needed most to support communities and good causes through a more informed understanding of the grant making picture. Infrastructure bodies perform vital roles supporting and enabling voluntary and community organisations, both locally and at a national level. This report explores how voluntary sector infrastructure has changed over the last 12 years, particularly by looking at its finances and funding. It highlights a number of challenges around funding of these organisations.

https://www.threesixtygiving.org/ infrastructure-funding/

Benefacts Analysis of Irish non-profits

Every year Benefacts publishes a sector analysis report using the most up to date data publicly available from a regulatory source for all of the nonprofit entities in its database. Using public data derived from more than 8,000 non-profit company reports for 2013, 2014 and 2015 in Ireland, Benefacts has identified some key trends in the sector.

Home - Benefacts - Data for social good (madeincontext.com)

Data Collective

Research carried out at the request of the Data Collective and **Catalyst** into what data exists on the social sector. The research concluded that there are big gaps in existing data on the sector, and that collective action and collaborative leadership is needed to move us forward.

Why we need leadership on data in the voluntary sector, and how you can get involved – Data Collective (data-collective. org.uk)

Local Trust - Below the Radar research

Local Trust is a place based funder, established in 2012 to deliver **Big Local**, a National Lottery Community Fund-funded programme which committed £1m each to 150 neighbourhoods across England. This research focuses on community organisations that often get overlooked, and yet play a crucial role in bringing people together in local communities, frequently providing activities and services that others don't. Its principal aim is to explore how this knowledge and evidence gap can be reduced and how better data can provide insights into their role and contribution in society

https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/ below-the-radar/

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) - State of the Sector

NICVA is a membership and representative umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. Their State of the Sector research is a resource on the size, scope and finances of the Northern Ireland Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector. It provides an overview of the scale and characteristics of Northern Irelands' voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and a snapshot of the varied and dynamic environment within which it operates.

https://www.nicva.org/stateofthesector

The Law Family Commission on Civil Society

The Law Family Commission on Civil Society is an ambitious programme of ground-breaking research into how to unleash the potential of civil society, to harness and enhance the powerful community bonds that exist in our nation. It will provide tangible ideas for policymakers, companies, philanthropists and society to tackle the systemic challenges that are stopping civil society delivering on its potential. This research is a review of social sector data. Nearly half a million social sector organisations in the UK play a vital role in sustaining our society and economy, but a serious paucity of data is preventing the social sector from unleashing its full potential.

Better data, bigger impact: A review of social sector data | Commission on Civil Society Commission on Civil Society

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) - UK Civil Society Almanac

NCVO is the membership community for charities, voluntary organisations and community groups in England. They publish the UK Civil Society Almanac annually as the definitive publication on the state of the voluntary sector. It is widely cited by the media, used extensively by sector leaders, policy makers, journalists and academics.

https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2022/#/

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

NISRA is an Agency of the Department of Finance. It is the principal source of official statistics and social research on Northern Ireland. These statistics and research inform public policy and associated debate in the wider society.

Home | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk)

Voluntary & Community Sector Strategy and Infrastructure

Building Change Trust

The Building Change Trust was established in 2008 by the Big Lottery Fund with a grant of £10million as an investment for community capacity building and promotion of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. The Trust supported the community and voluntary sector in through the development, delivery of, and learning from a range or programmes including commissioned work, awards programmes and other interventions.

https://www.buildingchangetrust.org/

Dormant Accounts - What we heard Report

The Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act named the National Lottery Community Fund as the distributor of dormant account money under direction from the Department of Finance to increase capacity, resilience and sustainability in the Northern Ireland Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. On receiving these directions, the National Lottery Community Fund consulted with the VCSE sector on how dormant accounts should be delivered. This report details what they heard through this consultation.

https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/ media/Dormant-Accounts-What-We-Heard. pdf?mtime=20200228101658&focal=none

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)

NAVCA is the national membership body specifically for local infrastructure organisations in England.

https://navca.org.uk/what-our-members-do

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) - Manifesto for Change

NICVA's Manifesto for Change document was prepared at the request of the Minister for Communities, as an initial discussion document identifying some of the key strategic issues facing the sector and its future development. The issues in the Manifesto reflect key issues voluntary and community organisations have raised over a number of years and which NICVA has continued to advocate to government on, alongside and on behalf of the sector.

https://www.nicva.org/article/nicvas-manifesto-for-change-unlocking-the-full-potential-of-voluntary-and-community-action

The Third Sector Research Centre

Launched in 2008, the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) produces influential academic research on the third sector. This includes charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, social enterprises, cooperatives, and mutuals.

The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) (birmingham.ac.uk)

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024.

The Strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland, published in August 2019, sets out a long-term vision for Irish communities, setting a general direction of travel for Government policy in relation to Community Development, local development and the community and voluntary sector for the coming years.

gov.ie - Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024 (www.gov.ie)

Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership-Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector at a Local and National Level

Published in 2019 by the Irish Government's Department of Rural and Community Development.

Values & Principles for Collaboration & Participation Working - Ireland

Strategic Investment Board (SIB) Papers

SIB has completed a number of evaluations of DfC funding programmes. These are available by request.

White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector

A white paper from the Republic of Ireland to deal with the formal interaction between the State and Community and Voluntary sector.

White Paper on a Framework for Supporting (assets.gov.ie)

Volunteering

Institute for Volunteering Research – Volunteering, Research and the Test of Experience

IVR was set up in 1997 to undertake high quality research on volunteering. It started out as a department of Volunteering England, became part of the research department of NCVO in 2013 and moved to the University of East Anglia in 2019. During the last twenty years, IVR has played a leading role in applied volunteering research involving volunteer organisations, the public sector, private sector and the government. This book presents a milestone in volunteering research, offering rare and authentic insights.

Institute for Volunteering Research - Groups and Centres (uea.ac.uk)

Volunteer Now

Volunteer Now is the lead organisation for promoting and supporting volunteering across Northern Ireland. Volunteers played an essential role in providing support to communities across Northern Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic. As Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) transitioned through the recovery stage of the pandemic, Volunteer Now facilitated a series of Pathway for Volunteering workshops to explore how organisations are managing its impact.

FINAL VN PATHWAY for VOLUNTEERING.pdf

Youth Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2022

In October 2021 Volunteer Now commissioned a consortium of academic researchers from Queen's University Belfast and The University of Kent to undertake a review of youth volunteering in Northern Ireland with the aims to understand key trends in youth volunteering, and to raise its profile with stakeholders and policymakers. This report is based on a secondary data analysis of large-scale surveys on volunteering, a review of youth volunteering policy and literature, and data collected in four focus groups with policymakers, organisations involving young volunteers, and young people.

Review-of-youth-volunteering-in-NI-2022-Exec-Summary.pdf (volunteernow.co.uk)

National Volunteering Strategy (2021- 2025)

Published in December 2020 by the Irish Government (Department of Rural and Community Development), the National Volunteering Strategy (2021-2025) sets out a long-term vision for volunteering and volunteers in Ireland. It sets out the general direction for government policy in relation to the volunteers and the volunteering environment. It also builds upon and strengthens the renewed relationship and partnership between Government and the voluntary sector.

National Volunteering Strategy (2021-2025) - Ireland