



Volunteer Now Strategic Plan

2011-2016

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Introduction

Volunteer Now is a new organisation (April 2010), the result of a merger between nine Volunteer Centres and the Volunteer Development Agency. This created an integrated regional/local infrastructure support organisation concerned with the promotion, support and development of volunteering.

The commitment to merge was driven by an agreed benefits based approach. The organisations believed that an integrated organisation would:

- give clear accountable leadership;
- sustain and strengthen the regional/local expertise and experience;
- increase volunteering, opportunities and good practice;
- enhance capacity to meet the needs of volunteers and organisations;
- demonstrate impact of the volunteer contribution and influence policy;
- deliver a more effective and consistent marketing approach to volunteering;
- provide equity of access to volunteering opportunities reflecting local differences;
- create consistency in service delivery, management and priorities and provide greater effectiveness in resource management.

It is important to reflect that these benefits underpin the aims and objectives outlined in this Strategic Plan 2011 – 2016. The aspiration is to take forward a creative and dynamic integrated regional/local organisation that can deliver for volunteering. Those organisations involved in the merger process took a leap of faith and the Board of Trustees and staff of Volunteer Now remain committed to carrying forward their motivation and turning aspiration into reality.

Context

Research evidence shows that volunteering is at something of a cross roads in Northern Ireland, with formal volunteers at best static since 1995 (282,000, 21% of population) whilst informal volunteering has fallen substantially from 600,000 in 1995 to 470,111 in 2007 (35% of population). There is an issue of supply and demand, 60% of voluntary & community organisations surveyed, in It's All About Time, said that volunteers are becoming harder to recruit, yet 77% said they couldn't operate without them (2007). Also there is a need to encourage under-represented groups to volunteer, generally volunteers tend to be mainly white, middle aged and from higher socio economic groups.

A report produced by Voluntary Services Bureau showed that volunteering was lower in the Enniskillen Neighbourhood Renewal Area (13.5%) than across the general population (21%). NICVA's State of the Sector V report (2009) indicated that over 50% of organisations responding to the survey intended to increase volunteer



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numbers. A recent report 'UK Fiscal Restraints: Implications for the NI Community Organisations' (CFNI Sept 2010) indicates that of the community development organisations surveyed the general picture is of many small organisations relying on few if any employees; they are volunteer led and run. These organisations cannot exist without volunteers and require access to information and support to enable them to sustain and develop volunteer involvement. The picture is also being influenced by the current recession which is showing an impact on levels of volunteering. Early statistical information points to increased numbers of volunteers however this poses the challenge of meeting their expectation for short term opportunities that enables them to develop/retain skills. There is opportunity and challenge in the indication that more volunteers are needed and that potential volunteers are looking for new opportunities and ways to be involved.

The opportunity is to provide greater community engagement by more individuals thus supporting positive community development, building social capital and community cohesion. The challenge is to increase recognition for the volunteer contribution, grow the number of people stepping forward to get involved as volunteers and improve the volunteering experience. In this Strategic Plan you see objectives that will maximise opportunities to deliver on key outcomes such as increased number of volunteers, improved access and equality of opportunity to volunteer, enhanced collaboration to meet local and community needs, increased number and diversity of volunteer opportunities, increased number of organisations incorporating good practice standards in their work with volunteers, greater measurement and evidence of impact. This is a plan that tackles the key issues around the promotion, support and development of volunteering. Northern Ireland is set to have its first ever Volunteering Strategy, which will undoubtedly set the policy framework for volunteering for the next five years. Volunteer Now is well placed to make a significant contribution to the successful implementation of this very important policy initiative.

Going Forward

Volunteer Now is taking on the challenge because we are passionate about volunteering. We want to contribute to building a better society in Northern Ireland by promoting and supporting volunteering as a vehicle for positive social change. We believe that volunteer involvement is about civic engagement and at the heart of a vibrant and caring community. Communities work better when volunteering is part of who they are and what they do.

Joe McVey OBE
Chairperson, April 2011



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Volunteer Now believes that:

- Volunteering activity enables people to **connect** to each other, their communities and the causes they care about.
- Volunteer involvement helps to **build** democratic, healthy and self-sustaining communities.
- Volunteering is relevant to all spheres of life and volunteers are making a positive **change** on the economic, social, cultural and environmental issues of our time.

Our Vision:

Individuals connecting with others and their community to build a better society.

Our Mission:

To increase recognition for volunteering, enable community engagement and maximise the impact of civic involvement.

Guiding Principles:

- **Inclusiveness** – we recognise that diversity is strength and will seek to involve all people, as active participants in their community.
- **Responsive** – we will strengthen the efforts of individuals and groups to meet community needs and make a difference.
- **Quality** – we will strive for excellence in the delivery of our services and activities.
- **Connected** – we will work with others through local and regional cross-sectoral links and partnerships to enhance community well-being.
- **Accessible** – we will provide fair and open access to volunteer opportunities and support.
- **Forward looking** – we will recognise the need for continual review and improvement.
- **Impact focused** – we believe that success is measured by outcomes, and will seek to deliver results that benefit both individuals and the community.



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Volunteer Now is a dynamic regional to local organisation that promotes and delivers services across Northern Ireland. To achieve our vision we have identified three strategic aims and in support of these a number of strategic objectives underpinned by a set of outcomes.

Strategic Aims & Objectives

Volunteer Now believes that volunteering empowers people and communities to fulfil their potential and contribute to social change.

Strategic Aim One:

To demonstrate the benefits and impact of volunteering, foster civic engagement and increase voluntary participation.

Strategic Objectives:

1. Provide a strategic and operational understanding of volunteering in Northern Ireland including establishing an evidence base that informs policy and best practice.
2. Promote the value of and represent volunteering to increase recognition and support for volunteer involvement.
3. Inform and market volunteering to the general public to increase awareness of the benefits and opportunities to get involved.
4. Facilitate the offer of volunteer opportunities and match between organisations and individuals to add value to volunteer involvement.
5. Encourage diversity and enhance access to volunteering by addressing barriers and targeting those not involved.
6. Work with organisations and communities to enable volunteering and community engagement to have a positive impact on addressing areas and issues of need and disadvantage.
7. Engage with initiatives to maximise the profile of volunteering and involvement of volunteers e.g. proposed strategy for volunteering in Northern Ireland; 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
8. Raise awareness and recognition of volunteering within community development and as an expression of civic participation.

Outcomes

- Increased number of volunteers in Northern Ireland.
- Increased awareness of volunteering.
- Central and local government endorsing and supporting volunteering.



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Volunteer Now believes that volunteering is a mutually beneficial gift relationship, which meets the needs of individuals, organisations and communities.

Strategic Aim Two:

To increase access to volunteering opportunities, enhance the volunteer's experience and the volunteer contribution to organisations and communities.

Strategic Objectives:

9. Develop and implement a local and regional engagement strategy to enable effective delivery of support services to promote and develop volunteering across Northern Ireland.
10. Develop partnerships and collaborative working with relevant organisations to creatively enhance service delivery.
11. Increase the number and range of opportunities for individuals to volunteer.
12. Provide training, development and support to enhance the volunteering experience for volunteers and organisations.
13. Promote and enable best practice standards.

Outcomes:

- Improved access and equality of opportunity to information, training and support.
- Increased number and diversity of volunteer opportunities.
- Positive volunteering experience.
- Increased number of organisations incorporating good practice standards in their work with volunteers.

Volunteer Now believes that a sustainable organisation is focused on mission, outcomes and demonstration of impact.

Strategic Aim Three:

To develop a creative and adaptive organisation.

Strategic Objectives:

14. Provide effective management that involves and develops staff and volunteers, systems and resources to provide responsive and accountable services.
15. Provide a technological platform that supports innovative and strategic delivery of organisational objectives.
16. Support Trustees in the development and delivery of good governance.
17. Develop and implement a comprehensive PR marketing and promotional strategy.



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18. Ensure an accountable and transparent organisation that meets the requirements of external and internal stakeholders.
19. Position Volunteer Now as an organisation and brand that is recognised as a centre for information and expertise on volunteering.
20. Create and implement an organisational development strategy, develop a cohesive organisational culture and ensure organisational capability, competence and flexibility.
21. Establish an entrepreneurial organisational culture that enables and provides income generation.

Outcomes:

- Achieve and sustain standards of organisational excellence.
- High (80%+) satisfaction levels of service users.
- Increased independently generated revenue.
- Improved staff knowledge and skills.
- High (80%+) satisfaction levels of staff and volunteers.
- Achievement of financial stability and probity.



Volunteer Now delivers services across Northern Ireland. We have offices in Belfast, Broughshane, Enniskillen and Newry. T: 028 9023 2020 E: info@volunteernow.co.uk W: www.volunteernow.co.uk

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