

Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland

Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future



VSB welcomes the Department for Social Development's consultation and fully supports the proposed actions and objectives for the Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland.

We would urge individuals, organisations, groups and political parties to respond.

Time given freely by people for the common good, to counter inequalities, to protect the environment, to develop the artistic, cultural and sporting life, to provide services for others, to combat

poverty, to promote justice and to offer challenge and alternative voice is a powerful force for the good of our society.

Time given freely is something that cannot be taken for granted, rather as a unique resource it must be cherished.

The Consultation document is extremely detailed with over 40 proposed actions.

To aid responses here are 12 of VSB's thoughts that might assist you in preparing a response.

- 1 Welcome the development of the Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland. This is a major achievement by DSD and the NI Assembly, which gives significant recognition to the contribution being made by volunteers.
- 2 Volunteering is quite often the beginning of a powerful process for social change, particularly to tackle issues of disadvantage, exclusion, social justice and poverty. People who give their time because they want to, not because they have to, make things happen. In this context the process of voluntary civic engagement is a fundamental facet for a democratic society. It is therefore essential for government to support but not own the process. The process is equally important as the activity undertaken by the volunteer and as a consequence requires resourcing from government to enable and foster an environment in which volunteering can flourish.
3. Access to information and promotion of volunteering is critical to sustaining and developing volunteering. Research and all the evidence shows that if people are asked they will volunteer. A fully functional single Northern Ireland website and database will enable individuals to be “asked” by organisations who require volunteers. It is not the only way, but would be a significant resource to individuals, organisations and those who volunteer,

particularly if combined with information, opportunities for training, questions and answers, stories and latest volunteer campaigns, and

was supported by local councils and statutory agencies to market their volunteering opportunities.



- 4 Volunteers do not go looking for rewards but do appreciate being acknowledged and thanked. Organisations could be encouraged by government departments and agencies to make more use of Volunteers Week – 1st week in June – to celebrate and recognise the contribution made by their volunteers.
- 5 Local Government has a key role to play in the delivery of the Strategy. Some Councils, do recognise the contribution of volunteers by hosting awards and events to pay tribute to local individuals and groups. All Councils should be encouraged to have recognition events during the life of this Strategy.

Councils, through their community planning, should be encouraged to develop local Volunteering Strategies that compliment the Northern Ireland Strategy.

Councils could be encouraged to promote and publicise their internal volunteering opportunities more widely and by engaging with a new NI website and database would greatly aid the implementation of the Strategy. Council's websites should also





incorporate volunteering opportunities provided by the Council and signpost people as to how to become engaged as active citizens.

- 6 All Government departments should commit to supporting the Strategy and contribute to a major bi-annual Northern Ireland recognition event. Departments and Public Bodies need to look at ways in which volunteering can be encouraged within their activities for example DCAL could examine how to support volunteering within the Arts, Museums and Sport. An "Ask" publicity campaign to recruit volunteers could be funded by DSD or jointly by all departments over the lifetime of the Strategy.
- 7 Statutory Agencies such as Health and Social Care Trusts, Education Library Boards benefit significantly from the investment of volunteers. They could be encouraged to commission research to audit the level of volunteering, assess the economic contribution and added value volunteering makes to their respective agencies. Their corporate plans and annual reports could highlight services provided by volunteers.
- 8 Specialist programmes could be introduced or developed to target specific sections or groups within society. Millennium Volunteers for young people is a current example that could be enhanced, a similar campaign could be developed for older people - Retired and Senior Volunteers and Civic Ventures are two

USA programmes. The latter have developed the Purpose Prize to recognise and invest in the potential of social innovators over the age of 60. It is important to replicate and modify good practise from elsewhere.

Increasingly evidence is being produced that sustainable communities, particularly related to crime and the fear of it, require links to be made between the generations. An intergenerational volunteering programme might be a model / concept worthy of investigation or piloting. The idea of family volunteering should be encouraged and piloted.

- 9 All funders should be encouraged as part of their contract or grant award to ensure that organisations have in place effective standards for involving and managing volunteers. In this respect funders should be recognising, supporting and resourcing the Investing in Volunteers Standard.

Statutory funders in particular could make Investing in Volunteers Standard a minimum requirement (or to be achieved) when providing a contract or grant to organisations where volunteers play a significant role in the delivery of services.





10 To be effective and to obtain the targets anticipated in the Strategy a regional infrastructure with local delivery mechanism will be required. Northern Ireland is a relatively small place with a population, although more dispersed than other places, of approximately 1.7 million. At a time of economic recession the impacts of which will be felt over the lifetime of this strategy it is timely to consolidate rather than fragment. An integrated volunteering infrastructure therefore will provide, co-ordination of recruitment and promotional campaigns, consistency of standards, efficient use of resources, bring added value to the new RPA Structures, offer the same service to individuals and organisations throughout Northern Ireland. It will provide a responsive local service that will increase volunteering locally and regionally - thus meeting the needs of organisations and local communities.

11 An implementation group needs to be established to, take the Volunteering Strategy forward and ensure that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place. Learning and experience from the evaluation needs to be shared and changes made to the Strategy, if appropriate, during its lifetime.

12 Two forms of financial investment from government are needed to take the Strategy forward

- Funding to underpin the implementation

of the Strategy, such as The 'ASK' Campaign, Infrastructure Development, Recognition Events, Specialist Programmes / Campaigns, North / South Development, Investing In Volunteers Standard and Volunteers Week.

- An enhanced Small Grants Scheme to develop the volunteering experience within organisations. The current Small Grants Programme is a good model but has limited financial resources and is restricted to organisations with income of less than £100,000. More investment is required and the income threshold should be increased to £500,000. The Small Grants Scheme could be more focused during the life of the Strategy to support particular aspects of volunteering that organisations need to develop, such as, local promotional campaigns to recruit volunteers this could be linked to the 'ASK' Campaign, recognition events and volunteers' week, training programmes, family volunteering days / events, youth volunteering, increasing diversity within the volunteer pool. A Volunteering Innovative Community Event Awards could be established to capture and develop some of these ideas.



Respond to the Volunteering Strategy by logging on to the Department For Social Development's website www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultations-join-in-get-involved.htm or log on to VSB's website www.vsb.org.uk where you can download the Strategy and leave your comments. There is also a list of dates for the Public consultation events to be held by the Volunteer Development Agency during September.