VCS | Assembly Northumberland

Information gathered from the Northumberland VCS Assembly Event (14th May 2015) informing VCS Assembly activities.

The following provides information that was gathered from the wall charts about what participants wanted from Northumberland VCS Assembly and includes a response from the VCS Assembly.

What I want from Northumberland VCS Assembly

REQUIREMENTS	VCS ASSEMBLY RESPONSE
Training	
• Governance training for trustees.	• A survey of trustees has taken place in relation to training needs which identified governance training as required. A programme of training will be put in place by September. http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/news/189-northumberland-trustee-network-report-on-survey-findings-now-available
• Web based distance learning for trustees	• This was also raised in the Trustee survey and will be considered. See website for updates
• Trustee training on running an organisation as a business	• A programme of training will be put in place by September and informed of other sources of support.
• Identifying skills needed of board members	• Information is available on the Northumberland CVA website http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/resources

• Volunteer Management Training	• Information is available on managing volunteers at:- http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/resources
• Help with marketing – how to sell our services	• Training in marketing and publicity will be arranged for autumn 2015
• Acknowledgement of specialisms locally and what we could deliver to each other.	• Networking meeting held across the county provide an opportunity to share what doing and how can support one another.
• Basics of health and safety relevant to any organisation	• Onus is on organisations to ensure that this is provided
Communication and Engagement	
• Engage with businesses to support the voluntary sector	• Organisations that can support the voluntary sector include SkillsBridge http://www.skills-bridge.org/ and Business in the Community http://www.bi tc.org.uk/north-east
• Clearing House for spare resources held by VCS in Northumberland	• There are no resources currently available to do this.
• Matching volunteering opportunities to workplace volunteer schemes.	• This is currently under consideration
• Issue based networks for Assembly members e.g housing	• The current geographical networks in place provide opportunities for issues to be discussed e.g. youth homelessness as well as in other issue based networks
• A code of conduct from the County Council to inform procurement.	• A Statement of Intent has been agreed between NCC and Northumberland VCS Assembly which includes consideration of the impact of funding decisions and procurement processes on the VCS.
• Assembly could put together a database of companies who could offer advice i.e. legal, HR.	• The Cranfield Trust provides charities with skilled business volunteers to make them more effective and sustainable. http://cranfieldtrust.org/ • Charity BackRoom, from Voluntary Norfolk, specialises in providing a personal HR & Employment Law service to help third sector organisations achieve operational

	excellence. www.charitybackroom.org.uk/navca-essentials
• Website to promote volunteering opportunities in Northumberland, links to organisations that have opportunities/ volunteers.	• Northumberland CVA advertises volunteering opportunities on its website. http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/volunteering?
• Engagement with schools to promote benefits to young people of volunteering to develop skills, future job opportunities.	• Northumberland CVA engages with schools, job clubs in relation to volunteering. • National Citizenship Service involves volunteering as part of its programme.
• Collective celebration of volunteering e.g. volunteers week.	• This could be developed through existing networks • Berwick Voluntary Forum Awards are held every year to acknowledge the valuable work carried out by the voluntary and community sector in Berwick and the surrounding area.
• Education sessions for statutory organisations on the voluntary and community sector – how it works, what it does.	• Briefing to be provided to councillors on Northumberland VCS Liaison Group. • Opportunities for education through involvement in working groups with statutory organisations.
• Promote/revive existing resources and solutions that Northumberland CVA provide.	• The website details resources and support available. http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk
Information	
• Volunteers need to have an interest and passion matching volunteers to areas of interest. Need to be supported and incentivised.	• There is no longer funding for a full blown volunteer brokerage service. Each VCS organisation needs to take responsibility for supporting and incentivising volunteers.
• Information about Assembly members shared amongst the membership	• Organisations that are members of the Assembly will be provided on the newly developed Assembly website. • A calendar of events that organisations can add to will be provided on the website. • Northumberland Advice Network has a directory of services with information about VCS organisations which Assembly members are

	encouraged to add to rather than the Assembly reinventing the wheel with a separate directory. http://northumberlandadvicenetwork.org.uk/directory/.
• Compile and share a directory of companies that can offer resources	• There are no resources currently available to do this.
• Management of database of organisations, keeping information up to date, who will and how will this be paid for?	• Northumberland Advice Network currently manages and keeps a Directory of services up to date. http://northumberlandadvicenetwork.org.uk/directory/
• Reciprocal working – but where to go to find out?	• The geographical networks in the north, central, south east and west and specialist networks provide scope for finding out about opportunities.
• VCS website database/directory of where to find information	• Access Northumberland CVA website and VCS Assembly website. http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk http://vcsassemblynorthumberland.co.uk/
• More opportunity for celebrating what is good, disseminating good practice, case studies	• Good practice is included regularly in the e-bulletins. Local examples of good practice would be welcomed. Also opportunities to present and disseminate good practice at network events.
• More proactive volunteering brokerage.	• The current commission is not about a brokerage service and funding is not available for this.
Influence	
• MP's/local councils, decision makers are not aware of what is going on and the needs of their communities.	• The Assembly relationship with the Council and other decision makers and through working groups will raise awareness of community needs.
• Raise profile of volunteering opportunities.	• There are currently 160+ volunteering opportunities on the website. VCS organisations need to provide information to include their volunteering opportunities on the website. http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/volunteering?
• Motivation/rewards for	• This is the responsibility of individual

• volunteers.	• community and voluntary organisations.
• As a new member, need support to build networks in Northumberland.	• Attendance at networking opportunities across the county.
• Decision makers become much more involved with communities and those supporting their communities.	• Awareness raising with decision makers at events, providing information so better informed and aware of opportunities where can get involved.
• Partnership working needs all partners to be accountable, transparent, understanding of roles, shared values and vision. Clear preparation and expectations need to be agreed.	All partners need to sign up to a Partnership agreement. Northumberland VCS Assembly and Northumberland County Council have agreed a Statement of Intent which defines how they will work together. See website http://vcsassemblynorthumberland.co.uk/
• Focus on trusted partners, minimum quality standards with a framework that enables intelligent commissioning with performance management.	• Alongside individual VCS organisations the Assembly will build relationships with partners in the public, private and voluntary sector taking the opportunity where appropriate to sit on working groups where they can have an influence.
• Provide a regional VCS network wider than Northumberland.	• This is not within the remit of Northumberland VCS Assembly.
• Nurturing and supporting small community groups to become part of a bigger county network.	• Opportunities are available for smaller organisations to be part of geographical and specialist networks across the county.
• A VCS patron.	• Any suggestions welcome for further discussion.

Challenges and solutions to sustainability of the Sector

The following provides information that was gathered from the discussion groups about challenges and solutions to sustainability of the sector.

Because there was some duplication in the information gathered from the wall charts detailed above and the discussions that took place, the following includes just additional issues that were raised. In some instances challenges have been raised without solutions.

Working together

- Because of capacity and stretched resources, losing innovation and becoming fragmented, VCS Assembly, NCC, CCG should agree a strategic approach to sustain the sector.
- More dialogue required with County Council, Town and Parish Councils to raise profile of organisations but relationships can vary depending on the local political landscape, a consistent approach is needed.
- Organisations need to think more about attracting corporate support and sponsorship as a way of attracting funding and resources
- The voluntary sector needs to build stronger relationships with the business community in order to tap into expertise that will benefit their organisations including recruiting new volunteers

Volunteers

- There is a need to attract people to take up volunteering roles. Involve young people and use social media and radio. Ask companies to volunteer, match up professional skills and get bigger voluntary organisations to support smaller groups.
- What should be the limit of what we expect from volunteers? Projects needs to be engaging and meaningful and respond to people's energies, interests and skills. Accept the terms on which people come to you e.g. to add to CV, for sharing expertise, for status/control, for making a difference, for social interaction. Match the role to the interest. Make the tensions between paid and unpaid work more understood and openly discussed, sharing expertise but clarity of boundaries. Progression and equal recognition –informed and skilled.
- Promote and raise awareness of the value of volunteering. Provides a career development opportunity giving valuable work experience that will help job seekers skills and make them attractive to employers. Need to link to schools so see as an opportunity to raise aspirations and personal benefits and to job seekers so see volunteering as a progression to work. Need to influence DWP, with management and frontline advisors building flexibility into the benefits system. They should promote volunteering as a positive thing so that

those who volunteer do not face potential sanctions when they are carrying out activities.

- When moving from informal to formal volunteering need to develop a clear strategy, job description, recruitment process, volunteer handbook, statement of confidentiality/governance. Also to provide induction, training, appraisal and support and cover expenses.
- Struggle to get the people with the right skill and knowledge mix to sit on boards. Board member roles have changed over the years as the landscape has changed.

Service Delivery

- Diminishing support services and increasing demand. Assumption held that VCS will pick up areas of work with no appreciation of capacity, resources and funding. High expectations from funders.