

Mapping Volunteer Involving Organisations in Northern Ireland

(Executive Summary)

June 2010



Executive Summary

This research was initiated by Volunteer Now, the lead organisation for the promotion and development of volunteering in Northern Ireland, and follows on from previous research presented in *It's All About Time*¹, 2007. The research was funded by the Department for Social Development.

For this report, the largest ever survey on volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland was undertaken by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and Copius Consulting. Almost 7,000 organisations across Northern Ireland were surveyed by post and a further 3,500 organisations were invited by email to complete an on-line version of the questionnaire. The report covers **1,609 organisations**.

Objectives of the research

- To produce a report which will set out the key issues emerging from the mapping exercise and provide a follow up to some of the themes in the organisational aspect of *It's All About Time*.
- To undertake an organisational survey to produce a regional database of organisations detailing the address, organisational interest and number and range of volunteer roles available, broken down by geographic area across Northern Ireland.
- To produce key volunteering information which will inform the implementation of both the Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland and Community Planning.

Key Findings

Volunteering

- **1,433** organisations reported that they currently involve volunteers in their activities.
- The total number of volunteers reported by respondent organisations totalled **96,464**.
- Voluntary and Community organisations accounted for **76,424** volunteers.
- The distribution of volunteers is dominated by organisations with an income of £1million plus (7%) which account for 40% of volunteers.
- Groups with an income below £10,000 represent 44% of the respondents yet account for just fewer than 10% of the total number of volunteers.

¹ It's All About Time (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007)

The research also set out to review the different types of volunteering opportunities available in organisations.

The six most popular types of opportunities offered by organisations –

1. Administration / office work (55%)
2. Committee / Trust member (44%)
3. Working with children (37%)
4. Fundraising / flag days (36%)
5. Working with young people (36%) and
6. Advice / information (31%).

Best Practice in formal application and monitoring processes

A comparison between this report and *It's All About Time* indicates that **best practice has increased** in coverage since 2007. This increase in coverage is to be welcomed although the research indicates that there is **still room for improvement** as only 350 organisations employ all five procedures listed in the table below.

The overall improvements in best practice are presented below.

Formal application and monitoring processes – changes between 2007 and 2010	2007 (%)	2010 (%)
Ask new volunteers to complete an application form	53	58
Interview / Informal chat with potential volunteers	79	87
Ask new volunteers to provide references	50	53
Undertake an Access NI check	59	76
Require new volunteers to undergo a trial period	44	52

The research indicates that the likelihood of each of the procedures being employed by organisations increases with **organisation income levels**, a theme replicated throughout the report. This may be a reflection of a greater **informality**, or a **lack of capacity**, in lower income groups compared to their larger counterparts. In terms of capacity building and skills development smaller income organisations could be encouraged to make greater use of the **Managing Volunteers Health Check** offered by Volunteer Now, which would assist in the development and implementation of good practice.

Whilst the increased evidence of good practice is to be welcomed it comes with a caveat. There may be a danger that the **increasing bureaucracy** relating to volunteering, particularly the major increases in relation to Police record checking, and the developing legislative environment may be viewed negatively by potential volunteers

and may act as a deterrent. Organisations need to be clear about which volunteer roles necessitate a Police record check and to follow the guidance provided by Access NI.

Volunteer Management

Ten further elements of volunteer management were identified in *It's All About Time* and replicated in this research.

Elements of best practice in volunteer management – changes between 2007 and 2010	2007 Yes (%)	2010 Yes (%)
An induction with regard to the organisation	84	87
A named person to go for support	81	86
Training to carry out their role	76	80
Copy of / information about child protection policy	72	79
Support and / or supervision meetings	69	73
Copy of / information about health and safety regulations	69	73
Copy of / information on equal opportunities policy	61	60
Copy of / information about insurance cover	57	53
A written role description	53	48
A written volunteer agreement	39	35

Each of the top six ranked practices has become more common over time which would indicate a positive response across the various sectors to the need to embrace good practice. **The four less common practices in 2007 have however decreased in coverage.** The decline in providing information on equal opportunities provides a particular **challenge** vis-à-vis ensuring diversity in volunteering and demonstrating a community relations impact.

A **written volunteer agreement** and **role description** are the least common approaches to volunteer management, particularly in the lower income groups. The decline in the use of role descriptions is particularly concerning as it is a key indicator of good practice which can assist in the recruitment of volunteers by clearly outlining what will be expected of them in an organisation. For potential volunteers role descriptions can be useful in identifying what skills they can develop. This again points to the need to engage with the range of organisations across the various sectors to ensure that there is **significant capacity** to fully develop a range of appropriate volunteer management procedures.

The research also suggests that **developing best practice needs to be focused** on particular sectors and sub sectors. The report suggests that evidence of best practice is weaker in a number of sectors including the Church / Faith based sector and in Sports / Arts Groups. Within the **Voluntary and Community sector** evidence of best practice is strongest in a number of sub-sectors e.g. Children and Young People, Volunteer Development and Advice and Information but weaker in Arts / Cultural / Heritage, Older People and Sport.

The report suggests that further research is needed on the **barriers to developing good practice** in organisations with particular emphasis on **low income organisations** and with regard to **particular sectors and sub sectors**.