



‘Going Forward Together’

NICVA Development Plan

2003-2006

(1) INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 NICVA was established in 1938 as the Northern Ireland Council for Social Services, a body to promote and represent voluntary organisations. As part of a reorganisation NICSS changed its name in 1986 to the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action recognising the expanding breadth and depth of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 As the representative body for voluntary and community groups in Northern Ireland, NICVA is owned by its members, over 1,100 voluntary and community groups. NICVA also has just under 100 Subscribers to NICVA Services (Associate Members) who receive the same entitlements as members except they do not have a vote at General Meetings. NICVA's full members elect an Executive Committee, or Board, to govern the organisation. A list of the members of the current Executive Committee is attached at the end of this document. The Executive Committee sets the strategic direction for NICVA, approves major policy positions and ensures the accountability of the Director and staff in the work the organisation carries out.
- 1.3 This Development Plan takes on board the recommendations of a major evaluation of NICVA which was carried out by KPMG and Colin Stutt Consulting in November 2002 and which was commissioned by NICVA's core funder and key stakeholder, the Department for Social Development. The recommendations can be summarised as:

External

- Recognise the need to develop further the policy and representation role of NICVA.
- Continue to develop a challenging independent role from government.
- Develop lobbying/campaigning capabilities and facilitate similar development throughout the voluntary and community sector.
- Continue to develop strategic relationships with networks and sub-sectoral umbrella groups promoting greater synergies and effective information and skills flows.
- Promote and develop the right conditions that facilitate sustainability.
- Further develop the role in the area of funding advice to the sector.
- Continue to develop and promote the essential ethos and values of voluntary action, separate to public and private sector influences.
- Continue to provide added value services to members which are additional to their own resources and activities.

- Develop mechanisms to measure NICVA’s success in terms of outcomes.

Internal

- Develop a system of quality standards.
- Develop a means of better measuring success/impacts.
- Refine the NICVA Strategic Planning process.
- Refine the internal structure of the organisation to promote more internal cohesion in key related work areas.
- Continue to develop a more flexible organisation responsive to changes in the external environment.

1.4 NICVA’s Executive Committee welcomed the Evaluation Report as a positive endorsement of NICVA’s development over the last six years and a key foundation on which to build. NICVA acknowledges the central thrust of the report as a validation of NICVA and its work on behalf of the sector. NICVA also welcomes the helpful recommendations of the report which will assist NICVA to improve its efficiency and effectiveness in pursuit of its central role and mission on behalf of the voluntary and community sector and the wider society in Northern Ireland.

(2) CONTEXT

2.1 In developing this strategic plan, NICVA has taken into account a number of factors, foremost the needs of its members, the external environment and the resources available to enable us to deliver. All organisations are restricted by the availability of resources and this is particularly the case for voluntary and community organisations. We have adopted a challenging, stretching ‘reach for the stars’ approach which is the optimistic perspective of the voluntary and community sector. NICVA and our sector believe we can make a difference that is positive, progressive and that will lead to further step changes in society. But we are also realists and this plan is about ‘how we can do’.

2.2 Taking the advice of NICVA’s own publication on strategic planning, *Inventing The Future* by Roger Courtney, we recognise that much of our work over the next three years will be influenced by the political, economic, social and technological context within which we are operating. This section focuses on that context and sets out some of the issues and concerns which NICVA will have to address, concluding with an assessment of the needs of the voluntary and community sector and NICVA’s role in meeting those needs.

Political

- The political process is long drawn out and the devolved political structures are extremely fragile with the Northern Ireland Executive now in its fourth period of suspension.
- The Civic Forum, a new experiment to complement the political structures, is also suspended. To add value to the political process from those outside the government decision-making apparatus is an innovation still with potential to deliver but in need of further development.
- The non-government social partners represented by Concordia have worked in partnership with government, as social partners should, for the greater good. This process needs to be further developed, recognised and solidified.
- Continuous development in government relations with the sector has seen the replacement of the *Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector and Community Development in Northern Ireland* with the *Compact*, the creation of the Joint Government/Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, *Partners for Change* and a Taskforce on Sustainability.
- Devolution has brought a new Northern Ireland planning process around the Programme for Government. NICVA and the sector have had our voices heard in that process.
- The evaluation and review of New Targeting Social Need could lead to a change in the delivery of this key government policy that would create an effective anti-poverty strategy linked also to government's equality strategy and statutory duty under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.
- The continuous development of NICVA's Policy Manifesto focusing on key demands for change is a vehicle for promoting the sector's views to Northern Ireland's political parties and influencing their own strategic direction in social, economic and environmental matters.
- The Reform of Charity Law in England and Wales will potentially impact on voluntary organisations and charities in Northern Ireland in terms of a broadening definition of what will be deemed charitable, including voluntary amateur sport, issues around trading, new legal structures available to the sector, mergers, the roles of trustees, accountability, and more co-ordination across UK-wide regulatory bodies.

Economic

- Northern Ireland's economic situation changed and improved during the 1990s with a resultant fall in unemployment but still the gap is wide in terms of social cohesion. Many people in employment are on low wages and there is a need to narrow the gap between those on the highest and lowest incomes.

- It has been a key thrust of NICVA and the sector to build cohesion across economic, social and environment policy. The needs of the economy should not be seen in isolation or to the exclusion of the other policy areas. Solving economic problems alone, though highly desirable and essential, will not solve all of Northern Ireland's ills.
- NICVA recognises that there is a broad economic consensus in the developed world that calls for greater innovation, efficiency, diversity and partnership in the delivery of services and in the organisation of society.
- The voluntary and community sector is very diverse and has a wide financial resource base but some parts of the sector are dependent on short-term funding like Peace II. There are problems of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability in these funding relationships. There is a need to promote mainstreaming of under-developed, under-funded areas of work like community development, community infrastructure and community work, with the support of public resources to ensure their sustainability and effectiveness.
- The general funding environment for the voluntary and community sector is always changing, is always difficult and always challenging. Too much time chasing resources is energy taken away from real work and promotes pessimism over optimism, spoiling a can-do culture.

Social

- Economic globalisation has seen civic society play catch up as our sector tries to respond to the changing climate. NICVA members have identified the international context as an important realm for ideas and influence. We are committed to Northern Ireland being an 'Outward and Forward Looking Region' with a two way process of solidarity and learning. CIVICUS, the world organisation for our sector, now headquartered in Johannesburg, will help connect NICVA and the sector into the international debates and experience that Northern Ireland can both contribute to and learn from.
- A key role for civic society is to combat democratic deficits in Northern Ireland. During Direct Rule the democratic deficit was easy to recognise with the lack of a direct link between those who governed and the electorate. Society is however becoming increasingly more sophisticated and within the European Union trying to find ways of strengthening the links between government and people through consultative processes and social partnership. The sector is keenly interested in the Review of Public Administration as an opportunity to build progress.
- Sectarianism and the resultant effects are probably the most serious issues facing development in Northern Ireland on social and economic fronts. There can be no equality and no social cohesion in a society plagued by sectarianism.

- NICVA and the sector are involved in a whole host of partnerships, coalitions, forums and consultative bodies like the Civic Forum, Local Strategy Partnerships, Joint Government/Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, Human Rights Consortium and Equality Coalition. They all take time, energy and commitment but have the potential to help achieve the step changes we are looking for in society.
- NICVA developed the concept of community infrastructure and saw it inserted as a strategic priority into the Northern Ireland Single Programme Document in 1994. We have seen and helped geographic and thematic networks develop, in our view the bedrock of community infrastructure. The sector has to continue this process to put in place a solid infrastructure, effective at nurturing, servicing and strengthening voluntary and community activity.

Technological

- Government is committed to major developments in new technology and the knowledge economy. E-government will drive change in information and communications. NICVA and the voluntary and community sector are conscious of the dangers of the digital divide in today's information society. Communities, groups or individuals not able to access and harness the information society will suffer the fallout of exclusion.
- Information communications technology can benefit society and be used as a means of closing divides and lessening social exclusion.
- ICT developments impact on how NICVA delivers services, particularly its information services, to the sector. NICVA intends to provide information at a time that suits our members not at a time that suits us. That can only realistically and economically be achieved through electronic means, both the web and electronic mail.
- NICVA's website is being radically overhauled and restructured to simplify sourcing information relevant to our members and the wider sector. E-consultation is an option to help organisations become involved in discussions in ways they find efficient, effective and appropriate.

Needs of the Sector

As the representative body for voluntary and community organisations NICVA's starting point in developing this plan is to consider the needs of the voluntary and community sector itself. After discussion and analysis NICVA considers the sector's needs to be:

Strategic

- To develop and play its part in building a better, more just society in Northern Ireland, the sector needs stable political institutions whose existence can be depended upon.
- A Champion Minister within government charged with representing and promoting the relationship between government and voluntary action in a democracy.
- Leadership from NICVA on key issues of broad policy that can affect all organisations.
- Recognition from government that voluntary and community organisations are independent though they will work in partnership with government to achieve common goals.
- To be facilitated to take part adequately in consultation and not be subject to a dearth or surfeit of consultation, so that the sector can impact where it has experience and help find solutions.
- Targeted information from NICVA and other sources including policy briefings.
- Opportunities to network and develop ideas and positions with peers and to learn and share experience.
- Good quality research to facilitate evidence based policy development.
- A better spread of resources within the sector particularly at local level.
- A better understanding of roles and responsibilities at all levels of government and key points of influence.

Operational

- Improved financial stability particularly in poorly and precariously resourced parts of the sector that is meeting real need.
- Integrated support and training to aid organisational development.
- To raise quality standards within organisations to ensure that users receive the best services that the available resources can deliver.
- To increase their capacity to manage and develop through practical support and exposure to models of best practice.
- Crisis support and access to high quality advice and experience at critical times of threat or opportunity.

(3) MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

3.1 Mission

NICVA's Mission is to achieve progressive social change by tackling disadvantage through voluntary action and community development.

3.2 Vision

NICVA's Vision is of a healthy, vibrant, progressive voluntary and community sector which contributes to social cohesion, equality and justice.

3.3 Values

- In pursuit of equality, equity, justice and valuing diversity, NICVA opposes violence and discrimination of any sort on grounds that include class, gender, religious belief, political opinion, disability, race or ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status.
- NICVA is an independent association, is non party political and is committed to an active anti-sectarian approach to its work.
- NICVA is committed to collective action informed by people's experience and an analysis of their circumstances. Therefore, NICVA's primary method of operation is supporting community action, whether geographically or issue-based, amongst the disadvantaged, impoverished and powerless within society.
- NICVA will be open to new ideas and concepts and is willing to consider new and challenging ways of working. We will adopt a partnership and community development approach to our work so that we can share our ideas and knowledge as well as learning from others.
- NICVA will strive for excellence in all we do in order to provide high quality and effective leadership and service to the sector.
- NICVA will conduct its affairs in an honest, open, transparent and accountable way to its members and other stakeholders.
- NICVA will strive to represent the interests of the voluntary and community sector to all other parties 'without fear or favour' and offer leadership to the sector in areas that fall within NICVA's competence.
- NICVA values its staff as the key resource of the organisation.

NICVA's values will underpin all aspects of its work at all levels within the organisation.

(4) STRATEGIC THEMES

4.1 Developing the Policy Agenda

NICVA will promote debate within the sector on key issues, exploring and articulating the sector's experiences to policy makers, with a view to influencing change and increasing social cohesion.

- (i) NICVA will debate key issues and revise the Policy Manifesto through policy discussion groups and seminars every three years in order to lobby Northern Ireland political parties.
- (ii) NICVA will influence the Priorities and Budget to reflect the priorities of the voluntary and community sector.
- (iii) NICVA will stimulate debate on and influence government policy on major policy issues arising during the year in line with sectoral priorities within target dates.
- (iv) NICVA will continue the implementation of its five year research strategy.
- (v) NICVA will inform the sector on Northern Ireland regional and local political institutions and develop its lobbying capabilities.

4.2 Developing the Voluntary and Community Sector

NICVA will develop and support new and existing voluntary and community groups, paying particular attention to extending community infrastructure, enhancing the activities of networks, encouraging appropriate legislative frameworks and sharing best practice.

- (i) To develop and map civic participation and social partnership, NICVA will encourage and support sectoral representation and engagement on a range of relevant partnerships and other bodies.
- (ii) NICVA will develop a focused strategy by September 2005 to engage with all known thematic and geographic networks to develop community infrastructure and their relationships with regional organisations.
- (iii) NICVA will provide information and advice to members, the sector and others through regular communications as appropriate.
- (iv) NICVA will develop the capacity of the sector through the implementation of a Management Development Programme and other identified training and development interventions.

- (v) NICVA will work with the sector on implementation of recommendations arising from the Department for Social Development's Taskforce on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- (vi) NICVA will devise a strategic approach to developing the ICT capacity within the sector.

4.3 Developing NICVA the Organisation

NICVA will develop itself as an organisation to continue to provide high quality services to the sector. NICVA will increase its flexibility, allowing it to prioritise resources to deal with new demands which the sector may face.

- (i) NICVA will ensure an efficient, effective and flexible organisation by using the EFQM model to review and develop systems, services and people.
- (ii) NICVA will ensure ongoing development of the NICVA building as the accessible hub for the voluntary and community sector and those engaging with it.
- (iii) NICVA will continue to promote its work to the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.
- (iv) NICVA will continue to develop its membership base to increase the representation and develop the voice of the sector.