



## Volunteer Now's response to the Consultation on the Social Investment Fund

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Volunteer Now welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Social Investment Fund.

Volunteer Now works to promote, enhance and support volunteering across Northern Ireland. Volunteer Now is about **connecting** with individuals and organisations to **build** healthy communities and create positive **change**. **Volunteer Now** enhances recognition for the contribution volunteers make, provides access to opportunities and encourages people to volunteer. We provide training, information, guidance and support to volunteer-involving organisations on issues of good practice and policy regarding volunteering, volunteer management, child protection, safeguarding vulnerable adults and governance.

Volunteer Now would like to make the following key points in relation to the draft report:

- In The report outlines that the aim of the fund is to “encourage communities, statutory agencies, business and departments to work together in a co-ordinated way, reducing duplication and sharing best practice” (page 5). Volunteer Now supports this aim wholeheartedly and agree that the communities should be included in a meaningful way.
- We agree that each of the potential strategic objectives are worthy areas of support. Due to the cross cutting nature of volunteering, it can make an important contribution to each of these areas, particularly building pathways to employment and tackling systematic issues linked to deprivation. For example, Volunteer Now is currently involved in a 6-month pilot (June to November) with the Jobs and Benefits Offices in Ballymena and Antrim. This includes running a targeted volunteer promotion campaign, disseminating information to job centre staff, engaging clients about volunteering and supporting them in identifying suitable volunteering opportunities. Volunteering is recognised as holding many benefits for people i.e. maintain skills and confidence and learn new skills. The Goldmark Dungannon Project is aimed at unemployed 16-24 year olds, within the Dungannon area, with a particular focus on males. This initiative is being carried by Volunteer Now in partnership with a range of sporting governing bodies and sports clubs. This decision was instigated by research conducted by the Equality Commission which showed that Dungannon has one of the highest rates of unemployment for young men in NI and other research which has shown that young people are more likely to engage in volunteering based around sport. Volunteer Now has produced a report which outlines the work that it does to build healthy, participative communities.  
<http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/publications/?category=26&type=52&Search.x=41&Search.y=18>
- The Shared Future principles should be embedded within the way the investment zone programmes are developed, and actions should be aligned with the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration
- However, is it realistically possible to make a significant impact in all of these areas? A possible way of dealing with this issue is to ask local people in each of the investment zones to prioritise the objectives that they would like to funding to focus on. This type of consultation has been successful in other areas, Lambeth Council in England has used ‘participatory budgeting’ and the Patient Client Council has also taken this type of approach to prioritizing their work. The area

plans should reflect input from local people in identifying need; this should start from the setting of priorities.

- In terms of Area Plans- we would like to get clarity on what is meant by 'community' in the draft proposal? We believe that engagement in the area plans should be at the citizen level as well as at an organisational level. Individual citizens are the consumers of the outputs of the fund and therefore steps should be taken to engage them. The steering group has an important role to play in this regard. The SIF should attempt to engage with local people through existing community infrastructure i.e. tenant groups, community groups but also take a different approach for those harder to reach groups, that are not part of existing groups.
- There is little mention of local authorities within the report. With the introduction of community planning, social well being plans and the changes within the health and social care system towards more care in the community it would be important to mention them.
- In terms of deciding on the most appropriate management structures, we would refer you to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, 'Designing Citizen- Centred Governance'. This report offers some very useful and practical ways of making citizen engagement happen. Citizen centred governance involves creating new ways of enabling local people, working with statutory and other agencies to decide how public services can improve their quality of life.  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/system/files/2205-governance-citizens-engagement.pdf>
- This Fund will be implemented at a time of change for the Community and Voluntary Sector and with a changing relationship between public funders and the Sector. It is important for the Fund to recognise other funding bodies such as the Building Change Trust (BCT) which is funded by the Big Lottery, was established by a consortium of five organisations including Volunteer Now. This independent trust is responsible for investing £10 million into the Community and Voluntary Sector. This investment is being targeted at identifying community assets and needs, designing and targeting interventions, and building and utilising capacity and assets.
- Many of the communities that will be targeted under the SIF will have had previous intervention work carried out in them. It is important that the work carried under this Fund, builds upon and recognises the learning made from previous work and importantly does not duplicate mistakes made in past.
- There is clearly a very important role for community development. Volunteer Now has recently written a paper which has highlighted the integral role of volunteering in community development and has offered a number of strong case studies which demonstrate the success of projects within disadvantaged areas which involve local people in meeting social need. Building of sustainability within communities is very important. This will be done best if local people are recognised and valued as 'social assets'. It is important that local people are supported to make a contribution and be engaged in work to build healthy, participative communities which reflects their needs and builds on their strengths.
- In order to understand the levels of engagement of local people in community activities, it would be important to carry out an audit. This audit would identify groups that are under-represented with the community and therefore inform more targeted work to ensure the full diversity of people

within communities are engaged and have ownership of their community and what happens in it. As the involvement of local people in these investment zones is paramount; monitoring and outcomes systems should be designed to capture the changes in civic engagement levels, including volunteering as a consequence of the Fund being made available and to include a way of measuring the difference that volunteering is making to key stakeholders in these communities i.e. volunteers, organisations, beneficiaries of services, community representatives etc. The Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit is an existing assessment resource that could be used to do this. <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/supporting-organisations/measuring-impact/volunteering-impact-assessment-toolkit>

- Volunteer Now has carried out research on volunteering in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA) to look at social capital and volunteer involvement. This work carried out in the Enniskillen NRA has produced information to assist in understanding local barriers and developing relevant strategies to address these. Many of these barriers are generic to a wide range of communities and there can offer learning to others. Furthermore, the completion of similar work in other NRA's is being discussed.  
<http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/publications/?category=11&type=19&Search.x=33&Search.y=13>
- Connected to this point is the need to keep the bureaucracy attached to fund proportionate to the funds received. Often, the monitoring processes connected to funds / awards take up a considerable amount of organisational resources and the rationale for the type and level of detail required is not well communicated. An ability to adapt to the changing needs of communities is what sets the Community and Voluntary Sector apart, SIF structures should allow for this type of change to be considered and auctioned where appropriate.
- We have no particular favorability for any of the option for delivering the fund. However, regardless of the delivery plan, the level of bureaucracy attached should be kept to a minimum whilst maximizing the effective delivery of outcomes. The Northern Ireland Audit Office report titled 'Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector' offers some useful examples of good practices in the working relationship between Government bodies and the Sector. The SIF should use this document for its own learning in moving forward.  
<http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/pubs/onereport.asp?arc=True&id=266&dm=0&dy=0>
- It is vitally important that the fund adheres to the principles and values set in the Concordat between the Community and Voluntary Sector and the Government.

Volunteer Now would be pleased to discuss any of the points raised above.