



NICVA Impact Report 2024

# Supporting the voluntary and community sector to thrive

[nicva.org](https://www.nicva.org)



# Introduction

As the leading membership and representative body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, NICVA works to strengthen, support, and champion voluntary and community organisations to create more resilient communities.



Through tailored guidance, expert training, and collaborative initiatives, we empower organisations to overcome challenges, innovate, and thrive. From providing resources on governance, fundraising, and leadership, to advocating for policy change, NICVA is dedicated to building a resilient, impactful sector. Our combination of leadership development, organisational support, and policy influence creates a stronger sector that delivers real change for communities.

This report highlights our achievements over the past year, demonstrating how our work has helped voluntary and community organisations deliver transformative outcomes for the communities they serve.

## Core Values

Our mission is underpinned by four core values that guide our work:

**Courage:** We take action in the face of challenges, speak up for our sector and communities, and push the boundaries to find solutions for positive change.

**Collaboration:** We work with others across and beyond the sector, sharing expertise and embracing new ideas to help shape our work and increase our impact.

**Caring:** We act with empathy and kindness, treat everyone fairly, respect the insight and diversity of others, and support each other to succeed.

**Committed to Excellence:** We strive for the highest standards, using data and sector feedback to continually improve and innovate.



## Strategic Goal 1

# Support

## Empowering Communities Through Innovation and Development

### Our Commitment

NICVA is committed to empowering the voluntary and community sector to innovate, develop, and improve, enabling organisations to respond to the diverse and ever-changing needs of the communities they serve. We provide the tools and support necessary to ensure organisations can deliver impactful and sustainable solutions.

### How we achieve this:

- **Innovation:** We foster a culture of creativity and forward-thinking, encouraging the development of new ideas and solutions.
- **Development:** We provide resources, training, and support to help organisations grow and thrive.
- **Improvement:** We continuously seek feedback and implement best practices to enhance our impact.
- **Capacity Building:** We provide support and opportunities to strengthen the operational capacity of voluntary and community organisations.
- **Support and training:** We deliver tailored training to meet the specific needs of the sector, ensuring that organisations have the skills and knowledge to succeed.

### How do we do this and what difference does it make?

- We are an accredited centre to provide recognition for the skills and knowledge of staff and volunteers working in the sector, while also providing opportunities for individuals to manage their continuous professional development.
- As well as TQUK and ILM, this year we became an OCN NI awarding body - enabling NICVA to offer a range of professional courses from learning and development to digital skills and Quality Assurance Awards.
- We delivered 70 training sessions to 747 participants. Key topics included governance, fundraising, communications and workforce development.

### We work in partnership to build capacity

#### Capacity Building Accelerator and Mentoring

**Programme:** In June 2024, we successfully completed the delivery of a two-year programme for grant recipients of the Department of Health's Cancer Charities Support Fund, Carers' Support Fund and Mental Health Support Fund. Working in partnership with **The Community Foundation Northern Ireland (CFNI)**, our focused and tailored support has led to a lasting legacy in the community. With our help Lighthouse is now delivering an annual mental health conference for over 300 people.

*"This support allowed us to think bigger and to work more efficiently. We delivered a conference, have made meaningful connections with our local universities, and developed a bespoke template for evaluation and measuring our impact. The support from the mentoring programme helped make this happen."* **Paul Finnegan, Chief Executive, Lighthouse**

#### Transforming Local Leadership Programme:

In partnership with the **International Fund for Ireland (IFI)** and **The Wheel**, we delivered the Transforming Local Leadership Programme to the IFI funded groups. We provided 81 tailored support and training sessions and hosted networking events. 100% of those who engaged in this support rated it as excellent or good.

*"NICVA's support has helped us improve the way we work with staff, committee and volunteers. The governance workshop in particular was very informative and has assisted us having robust policies and procedures. It has focused our attention on areas for improvement and highlighted the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved."* **Bridget Nugent, Project Coordinator Gamechanger Programme, Galbally Youth and Community Association**

### We are proud our training is helping make a difference in the community

At NICVA, we are dedicated to equipping the voluntary and community sector with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive. Our comprehensive training calendar covers areas such as leadership, management, HR, governance, fundraising, and impact measurement.

We continually adapt to the changing needs of the sector by offering training on new and emerging topics. In 2024, we expanded our offerings to include areas such as social value, cyber security, and podcasting, equipping organisations with the tools to navigate pressing challenges.

*"Excellent training tailored perfectly to our organisation and context."* **Suzanne McLean, National Director, Youth for Christ Northern Ireland**

*"Another valuable session provided by NICVA. The presenters were thorough and brought clarity to a complex issue. The participant questions were really helpful in bringing clarity too. NICVA staff are always so helpful and encouraging."* **Deirdre O'Rawe, Director, ACCORD NI Catholic Marriage Care Service**

### We develop leaders who are making a big difference in the community

NICVA's leadership training impacts individuals and their organisations by cultivating essential leadership skills and fostering personal growth. Participants gain confidence, strategic thinking abilities, and effective communication skills, which translate into stronger, more visionary leadership within their organisations. This, in turn, drives organisational success, innovation, and resilience.

**Ashley Keane, Chief Executive, CDM Community Transport** reflected on the impact of completing ILM Level 7 in Leadership & Management course:

*"I cannot believe how empowering this course has been to me in my work as I navigate my way through daily challenges. I am using new styles and questioning techniques to help drill down and get to the 'real' issues."*

And **Michael O Reilly, Engage Area Worker, New Lodge Youth Centre** summed up his experience of completing ILM Level 5 in Leadership & Management course:

*"The course is amazing if you want to meet amazing people who want to grow and develop. It provides you with a safe space to learn and develop your leadership and management skills."*

### We provide practical tailored support that strengthens organisations

At NICVA, we provide a range of tailored support to voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations, ensuring they run effectively and efficiently. Our dedicated team excels at tackling specific challenges and crafting innovative solutions, empowering organisations to achieve their full potential. Bespoke support ranges from governance, leadership and management, HR, impact, fundraising and organisational change management.

**NICVA's tailored governance support** enabling organisations to establish robust frameworks and best practices, enhancing their operational efficiency and accountability. This support fosters stronger leadership and decision-making, ultimately leading to more resilient and effective organisations. Providing bespoke support to members is a cornerstone of NICVA's work. This support is tailored to the needs of organisations from grassroots community groups to household name charities.

Two organisations reflect on their experience of the receiving this support:

*"The advice received from NICVA was extremely helpful in assisting us to negotiate our way through some challenging issues. The Governance Training delivered to our Committee was most helpful in outlining our Trustees various roles and explained Officers responsibilities in straightforward and understandable manner. We are now better equipped to move forward with our strategic plans and objectives."* **Terry McKeown, Manager, Sailortown Regeneration**

**Fiona McCabe, CEO Threshold** shared her experience of positive impact of governance support:

*"Threshold is going through a period of strategic review and transformation and NICVA provided excellent support on that journey, and I have every confidence in their governance expertise and ability to expedite tasks in a timely fashion."*

**NICVA's tailored fundraising clinics** and developing a case for support sessions significantly enhance the capabilities of the organisations they support, enabling them to secure essential funding and achieve greater sustainability.

*"Best use of three hours you may ever have."* **Briege Burns, Lecturer, Tales from the Towers**

*"Lots of useful information about the process and tips on "how to" approach the funding applications".* **Kasia Kichanska, Coordinator, Arts for All**

*"A worthwhile [session] which will give a clear picture of potential avenues to increase your income".* **Johny McClurg, Funding Officer, Community Sports Network**

**NICVA's tailored impact support** NICVA provides bespoke impact support to organisations in the voluntary and community sector, working directly to demystify impact and assist them tailor measuring, evaluating and telling the story of the difference they make in communities.

*"This is one of the most informative sessions I have been to as a volunteer. Information learned will be invaluable."* **Joseph Crilly, Volunteer, Antrim Foodbank**

*"Gave practical advice and tools to implement in our everyday work, which we can use to promote our work in the community. Important to remember the small stories count."* **Rachel McClure, Manager, HOPE Magherafelt**

### The NICVA building acts as a hub for the sector

The NICVA building serves as a central hub for voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises, and Government agencies, providing a venue for conferences, events, and training. It fosters collaboration and innovation, strengthening the sector by bringing together diverse organisations.

In 2024, we hosted over 500 room bookings in our state-of-the-art conference facilities, ensuring NICVA remains a vibrant centre for learning and connection. Our commitment to supporting the sector extends to our partnership with USEL, a social enterprise that provides catering services for our events, creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities or health conditions.

Reflecting changes brought about by NICVA's hybrid working model, we now provide office space for 11 voluntary and community organisations within the NICVA building. This offers organisations an affordable and supportive environment where they can thrive.

*"The experience of Kith and Kin Well-being being based within NICVA building has been excellent, the fact the rent includes the reception for taking calls, heating, Wi-Fi etc is a bonus. Being in the NICVA building helps give trust to potential employers for contracts etc, and we make some connections"* **Sean Bruen, Director, Kith & Kin Well-being**



## Strategic Goal 2

# Influence

### Amplifying Our Sector's Voice #ValueOfTheSector



#### Our Commitment

NICVA is dedicated to driving policy change by connecting members with decision-makers through forums, research partnerships, and key group support. We ensure that the experiences and needs of voluntary and community organisations are embedded in policy development, ensuring their voices are heard. Our work with the Government and Voluntary Sector Joint Forum and the All-Party Group amplifies the sector's voice, highlighting members' contributions and fostering a more informed and engaged community.

#### How we achieve this:

- **Advocacy and Representation:** We advocate for the critical role of the voluntary and community sector, embedding members' insights in policy and decision-making processes.
- **Engagement and Collaboration:** We create inclusive forums to engage with policymakers and established the All-Party Group on Voluntary and Community Sector, providing a platform for them to share experiences and influence key discussions.
- **Supporting Partnership:** We facilitate the Government and Voluntary Sector Joint Forum, and we support faith-based groups through the Community Faiths' Forum.
- **Impact Measurement and Innovation:** We showcase the sector's contributions through impact measurement and facilitate the Impact Practice Network.

We are proud that our work to amplify the voice of the sector is having an impact and helping deliver positive change. Outlined in this section are examples of how NICVA has worked to make a difference in this area.

#### How do we do this and what difference does it make?

- We have responded to a broad range of public consultations with and on behalf of the voluntary and community sector, including the Departmental Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the 2024-25 Budget, the Department for the Economy's 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill and the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027.

- We held **48** policy engagement events attended by **828** people. In addition, we held over **300** specific advocacy meetings.
- NICVA staff sit on over **50** committee to represent and advocate for the sector.
- To inform our responses we held a range of consultation events, in partnership with other network organisations and Government departments to create opportunities for sector organisations to feedback and share views.
- We provided briefings, held meetings and supported sector engagement with the NI Government Ministers and Departments including Health, Economy, Communities, Justice, Finance and Education, on key issues including sustainable funding and policy development, as well as bringing evidence regarding the needs of the voluntary and community sector.
- We provided briefings, held meetings and supported sector engagement with senior UK Government representatives and departments on key issues. This included the office of the Secretary of State for NI, NI Westminster MPs and the Northern Ireland Office.
- We facilitated the Economic Inactivity Coalition and Steering Groups, coordinating a sector campaign to secure the future of UK Shared Prosperity Fund, calling for more sustained investment.
- We hosted a 'Call to Action Event' for our NI Westminster MPs to raise awareness of the cliff edge with regard to the future of UKSPF funding to the sector and to press for more sustainable investment. This was attended by MPs across all 5 main political parties and sector representatives.

- In partnership with The Wheel, we co-hosted the iCommunity All-Island SDG Symposium in NICVA focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) implementation.
- We joined with trade unions to hold an anti-racism rally attended by over 100 people at Stormont, highlighting the impact of racism on ethnic minorities and new residents in Northern Ireland. Following the rally, we engaged with community leaders to identify next steps in addressing the needs of ethnic minority groups.
- In partnership with Belfast City Council, we hosted an event highlighting the role of the voluntary and community sector in building an inclusive labour market, bringing together policy makers and leaders to discuss the impact and the critical role of the voluntary and community sector.

#### We work to shape the future relationship with government

In partnership with the Department for Communities (DfC), NICVA provides Secretariat and development support to the Government and Voluntary Sector Joint Forum, which aims to develop and lead an effective working relationship between government and the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

Alongside DfC, NICVA supported the Joint Forum in delivering a refreshed workplan for the joint public and voluntary and community sector membership of the Joint Forum. This has included supporting the forum's joint membership in the development of a new draft Partnership Agreement between the voluntary and community sector and government. Detailing core values and ways of working that should underpin the relationship between the sector and government at all levels, this work has also included agreement of a set of Fair Funding Principles to address key challenges in the funding relationship between the voluntary and community sector and government, with the shared aim of delivering better outcomes for communities across Northern Ireland.

In support of this workplan NICVA has provided development support to cross sectoral subgroups and supported the forum's VCS panel in the delivery of a range of sector engagement sessions to take feedback and hear views on this work as it was under development.

**Colm McDaid, CEO of Supporting Communities and VCS member of the Joint Forum- shared his thoughts:**

*"It is important for NICVA to be involved in facilitating the Joint Forum, from the point of view of having a 'trusted and experienced' organisation who has the knowledge, experience and reputation to 'do the job' and hopefully the capacity as well which the other members don't possess.*

*For me the success, is the update of the Concordat and the new Partnership Agreement which sets out in clear terms the expectations from both VCSE & statutory sectors as well as KPI's and a work plan to achieve and work towards outcomes for all. Once again, for me, NICVA provides that 'independent and expert support and help.'*

**In addition, Karen Smith – Disability Action Head of Contracted Services and VCS member of the Joint Forum and Co-Chair of the Fair Funding Subgroup shared her perspective on the impact of this work:**

*"NICVA's role in the development of the Fair Funding Principles via the Joint Forum has been invaluable in getting us to the point of having a (largely agreed!) set of Fair Funding Principles. Of particular note, was the NICVA co-ordinated engagement sessions to hear views on the initial set of draft principles. There was diverse representation at those events and attendees' views and ideas have been extremely helpful in identifying the next steps for this work. NICVA's continuing role will be essential to sustain our work and impact going forward.*

*We are entering an important new phase within the Joint Forum, where I hope we will see even more diverse views and experiences enrich the VCS Panel with our new member recruitment to be completed shortly. With the foundation of a finalised Partnership Agreement and Fair Funding Principles that will receive NI Executive approval, I believe we will have a strong basis for the newly formed VCS Panel and NICVA working side by side to achieve lasting change for our sector."*

#### We have been championing the role of the sector in health and social care transformation

We are a member of the Integrated Care System Regional Forum and the HSC Improvement and Transformation Board. We have actively supported sector engagement with the Department of Health on the development of the new Core Grant Funding programme, facilitating sessions for sector organisations to engage directly with senior DoH officials on the development of the scheme.

We also worked with the Department of Health to facilitate the nomination processes for VCS on the five Shadow Area Integrated Partnership Boards being established for the roll out of the Integrated Care System and positions across the Children's Social Care Services Strategic Reform Programme Board. Reflecting on this experience, **Marc Bailie, Head of Family and Children's Policy Directorate, Department of Health** commented:

*"NICVA's participation was invaluable for two main reasons. Firstly, NICVA's strength of membership and reach ensured that we maximised applications to our Programme from across the voluntary and community sector. Secondly, NICVA's independence from the Department was an important factor in giving the sector confidence that the process was open, transparent and merit based."*

*"I believe we received a higher level of applications, and the experience and expertise of the Board members on the assessment panel ensured the strongest possible candidates were identified through the process and put forward to join the Reform Programme."*

*"This process was an excellent example of partnership working between the Department and CVS, and I know this was the experience of the Board members on the panel as well."*

## We supported the establishment of All-Party Group (APG) for the Voluntary and Community Sector

NICVA is proud to have worked in partnership with APG Chair, Diane Forsythe, MLA to establish an All-Party Group for the Voluntary & Community sector, formally endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2024.

The APG's purpose is to 'ensure issues affecting voluntary and community organisations are recognised and discussed throughout the workings of the Northern Ireland Assembly, in order to recognise the value of the sector and ensure that the relationship between government and voluntary and community organisations is developed'.

Chaired by Diane Forsythe MLA with NICVA as Secretariat, the APG provides a vital platform for highlighting challenges facing the sector and engaging directly with local MLAs on key issues.

**Diane Forsythe, MLA** reflected on the establishment of the APG:

*"With NICVA as Secretariat, this APG will provide a vital platform to advocate for the future role and sustainability of our sector and provide meaningful opportunities to engage directly with local MLAs on a collaborative basis."*

## We have been actively lobbying to address the challenges regarding charity bank accounts

Some charities and other voluntary-led organisations are having issues with charity bank accounts. Bank closures and a move to digital have resulted in a lack of client facing and local bank staff, who have knowledge of voluntary sector legal structures. NICVA has been working closely with other umbrella organisations as part of the Civil Society Group to highlight these issues and is advocating for improvements to be made. Kate Clifford, Director RCN said:

*"Rural Community Network has long campaigned for accessible and affordable banking in rural Northern Ireland. It made sense that we would gather information and evidence from our membership and feed that to NICVA who has been working diligently on the issue. We were able to gather stories and anecdotal evidence from our membership and provide to NICVA when they were addressing the changes that needed to happen. This is a hugely positive example of truly collaborative working, and it is a great example of how an organisation like NICVA when it gets a seat at the table can fight for smaller communities and make changes for the sector."*

## We have supported the sector with the introduction of a Charity Registration threshold

NICVA has been part of the Department for Communities Working Group on the introduction of a £20,000 registration threshold for the last year. The consultation was launched in May 2024 and NICVA published a position paper in June to help the Sector understand the consultation questions.

*"NICVA has played a really important role in relation to the work on the proposal to introduce a Charity registration threshold including being actively involved in the Department's working group."*

*"NICVA has actively communicated the issues impacting smaller charities and organisations, addressed myths and championed the benefits of advancing both the need for the threshold and represented the sector along with Volunteer Now."*

*"NICVA's work in this area and the active communication with organisations like Fermanagh Trust is an excellent example of effectively engaging with sub regional members and constructively collaborating - resulting in the ability to create change in policy for the benefit of our sector."*  
**Laurie McCusker, Director, Fermanagh Trust**

## We support organisations to share knowledge and learning on impact

NICVA facilitates the Impact Practice Network for the voluntary and community sector. Meeting four times a year, it offers a unique opportunity to connect with peers and experts, learn from practitioners and share best practices and experiences.

*"The Impact Practice Network provides an excellent opportunity to engage with other organisations, learn and share, support and collaborate, and increase knowledge and understanding of methods and approaches to use in developing organisational Impact Practice. It is definitely worth the time to invest in attending the events."*  
**Lynne Kavanagh, Service Improvement Lead, Cancer Focus NI**

## We support the Faith Sector and the Community Faiths' Forum

NICVA's Faith Engagement Programme continues its support for faith-based community development and practice. Our support this year covered areas such as managing change, developing reflective practice, succession planning, developing a theory of change, understanding social value and measuring impact, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

*"I believe the faith sector contributes significantly to the service of the community and there is rarely any centralised support for us. NICVA's support has brought cohesion and encouragement to the wide raft of faith sector organisations and amplified the voice of the sector...Their coordination has helped break down the silos that often small organisation can find themselves in and enabled us to have a greater awareness of what's being done."*  
**Mark Houston, Centre Co-ordinator, The Link Centre**

NICVA provides secretariat to the Community Faiths' Forum which was established to develop a model of engagement between the faith sector and departmental officials in the Department for Communities, working across all areas of the department's policy remit. It encourages and facilitates multi faith dialogue around issues of poverty, disadvantage and social inclusion, through a membership that is drawn from a wide range of faith backgrounds interested in this area of work.

*"The faith sector can at times feel like "a place apart" within Northern Irish civic society. The role played by NICVA to bring this group into the mainstream sector is a huge benefit to the wider charitable world here in NI and includes a nuanced understanding of this sub-sector and what's needed to both support and amplify its work and impact."*

*"On a basic level, simply knowing the network exists is a huge source of comfort. It has created a safe space for people working for, or adjacent to, faith-based communities to share challenges, concerns and successes that are unique to the faith sector. NICVA's work in this area has been straightforward and transformational."*  
**Jonny Currie, Northern Ireland Network Lead, Trussell**



## Strategic Goal 3

# Develop

## Empowering the Voluntary and Community Sector to Innovate, Develop, and Thrive



### Our Commitment

In a rapidly changing world, NICVA is committed to empowering the voluntary and community sector to not only adapt but to thrive amidst evolving challenges. By fostering a culture of innovation and development, we unlock the full potential of the sector, ensuring it is resilient, forward-thinking, and capable of tackling future challenges.

### How we achieve this:

- **Support Collaboration:** By providing strategic development support, we enable stronger partnerships and collaborative efforts.
- **Monitor Emerging Trends:** We keep track of technological advancements, social changes, economic shifts, and environmental factors, ensuring the sector remains ahead of the curve.
- **Future Workforce Needs:** We're delivering robust evidence on future workforce needs, ensuring our sector is prepared and resilient.
- **Lead Digital Transformation:** We're spearheading digital initiatives to modernise our sector, making it more efficient and impactful.
- **Working Together:** We're building a vibrant, forward-thinking sector ready to tackle tomorrow's challenges today.

We are proud that our work to amplify the voice of the sector is having an impact and helping deliver positive change. Outlined in this section are examples of how NICVA has worked to make a difference in this area.

### How do we do this and what difference does it make?

- We provide Secretariat, jointly with Volunteer Now, to the Developing Governance Group (DGG) which is a partnership of 11 VCSE infrastructure groups with a working knowledge of governance practice. The DGG has produced the Code of Good Governance, governance health check and developed the [diycommitteeguide.org](https://www.diycommitteeguide.org)

- We hosted the first **Future Thinking Summit** for voluntary, community, social enterprise organisations, which was attended by 378 people. An opportunity to showcase the diversity of our membership, 55 organisations led 14 Engagement Hubs, which explored issues such as AI, Climate change, contested spaces, poverty and social finance.
- We have supported the Voluntary Youth Work Sector, a collaboration of 12 voluntary youth organisations exploring how to transform voluntary youth work. We facilitated monthly committee meetings and hosted eight events across Northern Ireland, engaging directly with over 200 people on what is required for future transformation in this sector.
- We hosted a series of engagement events to explore the key workforce issues facing the voluntary and community sector, and the solutions needed. This work culminated in the publication of a Workforce Needs Report for the sector, launched at our Good Jobs consultation event with the Department for the Economy.
- We facilitated consultation events for the sector on emerging needs and future developments in relation to DoH Core Grant and the Programme for Government.
- We published a Pulse Survey on financial stability and transforming the sector, this data was used to inform our conversations with Government.

### We support future thinking and sustainability in the sector

The **NICVA Future Thinking Summit** was a landmark event that brought together the VCSE sector to innovate, collaborate, and explore future possibilities. Attendees immersed themselves in the sector's expertise through a well-curated programme, showcasing its vital role in supporting communities. The event featured 14 member-led Engagement Hubs for in-depth discussions and Immersive Learning Zones for interactive project experiences. Thanks to our funding partners, the event was free of charge. The Summit fostered new partnerships, exchanged insights, and strengthened our community's commitment to progress and excellence.

NICVA enlisted the **Centre for Effective Services** to conduct an independent evaluation of The Summit to gauge its impact, demonstrating our commitment to transparency and continuous improvement. **Alison Montgomery, Project Specialist** who oversaw this work commented:

*"Delegates reported that the NICVA Summit provided valuable opportunities for learning, networking and collaboration across the voluntary and community sector and beyond. The range and diversity of themes and issues explored was welcomed and the sessions described as stimulating, informative and useful. Delegates described feeling energised and inspired by the Summit with calls for the event to be repeated next year"*

*"This event felt like the start of a new movement within our sector, embracing possibility, ambition and positivity."* **Cara Cash-Marley, Chief Executive, Orchardville Society**

*"The level of positivity at the event was amazing from the minute I walked into W5. The event focused on our strengths and took a positive perspective on the challenges ahead. Too often voluntary and community events focus on funding cuts and negatives; this was simply the opposite. Onwards and upwards"* **Karen Lennon, Business Support Manager, Extern**

### We work in partnership to build effective collaborations

Working in partnership with Halifax Foundation we provided tailored collaboration support and guidance to eight potential collaborations, as well as a calendar of training for organisations exploring collaboration funding opportunities. Our goal was to enhance their potential for successful partnerships.

*"NICVA is my go-to training provider as I know they have a highly skilled and connected training team. They have their finger on the pulse when it comes to VCSE support needs. They are also very approachable and passionate about wanting to do all they can for our sector."*

*The added value NICVA bring is the focus they put on building relationships. They listen to exactly what you need and their high level of expertise and personability means that we can form strong connections and have honest conversations about what they believe is the best way to support the sector. They put members at the heart of everything they do, which means our organisational values are completely aligned."* **Brenda McMullan, CEO Halifax Foundation**

### We support collaboration to strategically develop the future of voluntary youth work in Northern Ireland

Voluntary youth work in Northern Ireland is making a significant impact on children and young people through dedicated organisations. Despite challenges like limited funding and workforce issues, the sector remains committed to sustainability. Twelve voluntary youth organisations, known as the Voluntary Youth Work Sector, partnered with NICVA to strategically plan the next important steps for the future. NICVA facilitated eight workshops on this issue which engaged 226 staff and volunteers. Monthly committee meetings in 2024 continue to drive forward transformation in the voluntary youth work sector.

*"NICVA has confidently been able to facilitate co-ordinating committee meetings as well as promote, host, facilitate and report on sector consultations. Having the external and objective perspective from NICVA has been significant and reassuring. It has been uplifting to hear encouraging remarks and observations about our sectoral tenacity, commitment and vision to improve and transform youth work. Noticing and naming our development and progress has been a motivating role played by NICVA."*

*The key to success has been a relationship based on commitment, professionalism and with the much-needed humour and joy needed to embark on such a venture. NICVA have shown belief in our journey and our ability and capability to build on where are for the next part of the journey."* **Dr Martin McMullan, CEO, Youth Action and member of Voluntary Youth Work Sector**

## Strategic Goal 4

# Invest

## Empowering the Voluntary and Community Sector to Innovate, Develop, and Thrive

### Our Commitment

At NICVA, we are committed to providing the best service to our members by upholding excellent governance, fostering a flexible and skilled workforce, diversifying funding, enhancing digital systems, and continuously improving our membership offerings. Through these efforts, we strive for excellence, innovation, and adaptability.

### How we achieve this:

- **Supporting Excellent Governance:** Ensuring robust governance arrangements that uphold our standards and values.
- **Developing a Flexible Workforce:** Fostering a culture of continuous learning, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing. We equip our staff with the skills and insights needed to excel in a dynamic environment.
- **Sustaining Resources and Diversifying Funding:** Actively seeking opportunities to diversify our funding mix and sustain our resources for long-term stability.
- **Enhancing Digital Systems and Processes:** Innovating and improving our digital infrastructure to streamline operations and enhance member experience.
- **Developing and enhancing our Membership Offering:** Working to provide greater value and support to our members.
- **Working Together,** We achieve these goals by committing to excellence, innovation, and adaptability.

### How do we do this and what difference does it make?

- We reviewed our values, to ensure they reflect who we are and our approach to our work. Our values - Courage, Collaboration, Caring and Committed to Excellence - are linked to every staff member's performance metrics, and we actively hold ourselves to account

- We carried out a governance and organisational review of NICVA to ensure we continue to be fit for purpose.
- Through our now well-established Staff Well-Being group we have hosted a range of well-being events for staff including health-checks with NICHs, wreath making, yoga, an annual staff away day, alongside regular newsletters.
- We have established an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Staff Group and have developed an EDI plan.
- We retained Cyber Essentials Plus Accreditation

Our work is all driven by, with and for our members. Consistently collaborating with and championing our members, we strive to understand their unique needs and aspirations. By providing tailored support, resources, and advocacy, we empower them to achieve their goals and make a lasting impact in their communities.

- NICVA is the largest membership organisation for voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland with currently 1,447 members.
- Our membership reflects all aspects of civic society with representation from grassroots community groups right through to large household-name charities.
- We continue to offer free membership to small organisations with an income of under £20,000 per annum - representing **43%** of our membership base.

### Membership making a difference in the community

NICVA's membership support empowers organisations by providing essential resources, training, and strategic guidance. This support enhances governance, diversifies funding, and builds capacity of staff, enabling organisations to operate more effectively and serve their communities better. Ultimately, it strengthens the entire sector, fostering a more resilient and impactful network.

Together we are a powerful network of organisations shaping Northern Ireland's voluntary and community sector. Through their membership, organisations access expert guidance on governance, funding and team development, while joining a collective voice that drives positive change. This shared expertise and united influence helps build a more effective sector that delivers lasting impact for communities.

*"Being part of NICVA enables us to be part of the wider charitable family, to enhance our skills to meet our own and that of our funders' targets and goals. It is not possible to be able to know what is going on across the sector but thanks to NICVA and their regular newsletters and updates it is easier to feel more connected."*

*Having access to post jobs is beneficial too as it reaches our target audience easily and is very cost effective. Using the rooms for meetings has been helpful as they are well appointed and someone is always on hand to support"* **Melanie Bowden, Headway NI**

NICVA is proud to be part of the growth journey of our members, as was reflected by our member, Cancer Lifeline as they marked 25th Anniversary on 23 October 2024:

*"Cancer Lifeline celebrated our 25-year anniversary today. Over 100 attendees from across the sectors joined us in celebrating the positive impact of the work of Cancer Lifeline, helping cancer patients and their families in North Belfast address the devastating effects of a cancer diagnosis. Cancer Lifeline would like to thank NICVA who have been a key source of support, information and advice over the years. Helping us to transform from humble beginnings as a cancer support group to a vital cancer support organisation for North Belfast. We can't thank you enough."* **Liddean McStravog, Co-ordinator, Cancer Lifeline**

We have learned a lot in 2024, and we have relished working with and for our membership. There is much still to be done in 2025.



# We aim to make a big impact in 2025

We are leading transformational change across Northern Ireland's voluntary and community sector - strengthening organisations, developing leaders and driving policy reform. This year we will develop our new strategy ensuring that NICVA continues to meet evolving challenges and maximises our collective impact.

## We will also:

1.

### Strengthen our Policy Influence

Amplify our advocacy efforts by increasing opportunities for sector engagement, delivering targeted policy events and forums to inform new approaches and ensuring our sector's voice is heard in key discussions across Government and beyond.

2.

### Implement Effective and Meaningful Change:

Driving forward and supporting the implementation of the Partnership Agreement and Fair Funding Principles through NICVA's support and membership of the Joint Forum and continuing to address ongoing banking issues and resolve the Charity Registration threshold; and supporting delivery of an ambitious and responsive work plan for the All-Party Group on the Voluntary and Community Sector.

3.

### Expand Member and Sector Engagement

Boost the number of engagement initiatives, including workshops, conferences, and networking events, to foster stronger connections, create new networking opportunities and expand our reach and impact across Northern Ireland.

4.

### Build on Our Approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Partner with relevant member organisations to ensure meaningful opportunities for sharing knowledge, learning, and capacity building, including delivering a conference in partnership with relevant stakeholders and building stronger links with under-represented communities to create a truly inclusive sector.

5.

### Build Capacity of the Sector

Increase the number of training courses and support sessions to reach more organisations and leaders across Northern Ireland and provide targeted support to improve governance, fundraising and HR practices within member organisations, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet future challenges.

6.

### Foster Innovation and Collaboration

Create more opportunities for innovation and collaboration within the sector, encouraging new ideas and partnerships that drive impactful change.

7.

### Support Digital Development

Develop the digital skills and confidence of the sector through capacity building programmes and connect the sector with digital expertise.

8.

### Showcase the Impact of the Sector

Enhance efforts to measure and showcase the sector's impact, highlighting success stories and best practices to inspire and inform stakeholders.  
**#ValueOfTheSector**

9.

### Invest in Well-being and Share Learning with the Sector

Enhance staff development and well-being through comprehensive development programmes and flexible work environments, boosting both employee satisfaction and organisational effectiveness.

## How Can NICVA Help Your Organisation Make a Bigger Difference in 2025?



### Boost Your Leadership Skills

Sign up for one of our accredited training programmes and take your leadership to the next level!



### Become an Accredited Trainer

Complete our flexible TQUK course and start training others at your convenience.



### Tailored Support

Get in touch for bespoke training and support, and advice on governance, HR, fundraising and impact.



### Community Faiths' Forum

If you're working in faith within the community, join our Community Faith Forum and connect with like-minded individuals.



### Impact Practice Network

Join our Impact Practice Network and share best practices.



### Influence Policy

Connect with our Policy Manager to explore numerous opportunities.



### Showcase the Value of your Organisation

Share your news, events, and job opportunities on Community NI.



### Stay Informed

Sign up for our newsletters to receive the latest charity news, developments, and resources.



### GrantTracker

Access comprehensive funding information to support your charity.



### Amplify Your Voice

Let us help share your news through member spotlights, bulletins, and social media.





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