

Covid-19 Impact Survey March 2020

This survey was disseminated in March 2020 to heads of VCSE sector organisations in Northern Ireland. A total of n=579 participants responded to the survey, indicating a response rate of 15%.

1.Has the COVID-19 crisis impacted your organisation?

	Number	Percent %
Yes	569	98.3%
No	5	0.9%
Not Sure	5	0.9%
Total	579	100%

2.How is the crisis currently impacting your organisation? (n=576)

	Number	Percent %
Services/Activities have been stopped	462	80.2%
Services/Activities are likely to be stopped	73	12.7%
Events have been cancelled	472	81.9%
Managing our staff, volunteers and activities is posing major challenges	248	43.1%
Funding /Income is likely to be lost	309	53.6%
Funding/Income has been lost	194	33.7%
The survival of our organisation is threatened	136	23.6%
Other (Please Specify)	76	13.2%

2. Other- Please Specify

Staff/Volunteers

- Staff/ volunteers remotely working
- Staff off sick with virus
- Staff on redundancy notices
- Freelance staff lost income/financial help needed for self employed
- Concerns around loss of volunteers
- Loss of sessional staff
- Volunteer led and hiatus has given breathing space
- Loss of social contact

Service Provision

- Support/additional services needed
- Increased demand on services
- Services limited/modified
- Activities now remote
- Direct contact/services with families have ceased
- Community based mental health services under threat/threat to life
- Pastoral care restricted
- Moved to distant counselling
- Increase in usage of food banks
- Potential loss of organisation
- Access to spiritual support curtailed
- Loss of members in clubs
- Cancellation of political campaigning

Income/Funding

- Loss of income
- Depletion of reserves
- Awaiting outcome of annual funding applications for 2020/21
- Allocated budgets will not be spent
- Mixed messages from Central Government/Stormont re staff pay

Remote Working Challenges

- Working differently/more creatively with staff and volunteers
- Working from home- strain on IT sources
- Communication difficult in isolation
- Concerns around management of employees when remote working

3.Services/Activities have been stopped - How many service users/beneficiaries will be affected per week?

	Number	Percent %
1-50	167	36.6%
51-100	84	18.4%
101+	205	45.0%
Total	456	100%

5.What actions/plans have you undertaken in response to the Covid-19 crisis?

<p>Scaling Down, Suspension or Cessation of Key Services or Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning closure of buildings • Cessation of services • Cancellation/postponement of core business and/or activities • Reduced key services
<p>Operational and Financial Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabled staff to effectively work remotely • Redirected staff and resources and adapted services for immediate response • Offering support and guidance to staff, volunteers, and service users • IT and technical issues with getting services and communications online • Implementation of enhanced health and safety measures for staff and facilities • Introduction of new organisational policies and practices • Ensured proper guidance and support for staff/volunteers/service users • Communicating with funders to get clarity and flexibility in terms of funding obligations and targets • Retaining staff for as long as possible • Furloughing staff and applying to the Government’s Job Retention Scheme • Potential staff redundancies • Seeking to defer payments e.g., rent • Freezing staff recruitment/future project planning • Using this time to review governance/business plans/finances

Supporting Local Communities and Service Users

- Adapted service delivery and processes to meet need
- Established/ participating in community partnerships or networks developed in response to Covid-19 related challenges in communities
- Organisations swiftly adapting services to respond to increasing demand, often outside usual role, or practices
- Directly lobbying MLAs, funders and government departments for advice, resources, and guidance
- Staff redeployed to areas of great need

The Use of Digital and New Technology

- Using online methods of contact e.g., MS Teams, Zoom, Teleconferencing and Virtual Group Work, as well as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter
- Use of IT allowed communication channels open with staff who are working at home, remote meetings with volunteers, committee members and other organisations, allowing the delivery of some services online and reaching out to organisations and individuals who need support
- Reviewing future service delivery around the possibility of streamlining or improving delivery by working remotely/online
- Taking the opportunity to update websites and social media platforms

6. What actions/plans are you intending to implement in the future to respond to Covid-19?

Finance

- Minimise the operating costs of buildings to plan for further reductions in income
- Develop/apply for funding for projects designed as non-centre based
- Find alternative ways to fundraise
- Sell assets
- Reduce overhead costs
- Implement new policies and practices with regards to paying suppliers etc.
- Work with the treasurer to prepare the next 6 months cashflow
- Apply for emergency funding to provide vulnerable families with additional support

Staff/Recruitment

- Staff redundancies if government support unavailable
- Redeploy staff within the community
- Rethink recruitment
- Reconfigure teams to deliver frontline support services in a community setting

IT/Online Systems

- Potential for online services
- Use online platforms for the delivery of counselling sessions
- Where possible, use online means to achieve event objectives
- Additional investment in IT infrastructure and develop more e based programmes
- Considering setting up more online support groups
- Evolve databases to provide more facilities form online community
- Ensure availability of equipment for remote working
- Encourage the use of a specialist app to collect data to facilitate learning around impact of virus on organisations and methods of management

Service Planning/Delivery and Training

- Undertaking more local initiatives
- Reopening but restart social enterprise
- Provision of sanitisers at each entrance
- Develop a business continuity plan and policies and procedures
- Retract all but essential services
- Seek advice to determine when facilities can be accessed by individuals again
- Go paperless
- Buy food for foodbank stock as unable to obtain donations
- Consider whether the new ways of working could be carried into future activities
- Provision of additional mental health services post – Covid-19 which will be in high demand
- Develop training packages

7. How many weeks do you think that your reserves will be able to sustain your organisation activity in the Covid-19 crisis?

	Number	Percent %
1-5 weeks	103	18.9%
6-10 weeks	113	20.8%
11-20 weeks	156	28.7%
21-50 weeks	99	18.2%
51+ weeks	73	13.4%
Total	544	100%

**8.What kind of support does your organisation need in the current crisis?
(n=536)**

	Number	Percent %
Financial/funding support to sustain the organisation's staff and work	355	66.2%
Advice and guidance on managing staff and volunteers	159	29.7%
Advice and guidance on governance issues	127	23.7%
Advice and guidance on managing events and meetings	89	16.6%
Advice and guidance on how to support local communities safely	242	45.1%
Advice and guidance on other issues? Please Specify	40	7.5%
Equipment/clothing to enable our staff/volunteers to support communities safely	151	28.2%
Representation of our concerns to government/statutory bodies	248	46.3%
Co-ordination by and collaboration with government/statutory bodies (e.g., health trusts)	214	39.9%
Flexibility with/Changes to normal rules and restrictions (e.g., to enable support for local communities)	256	47.8%
Other (Please Specify)	53	9.9%

Q8. Advice and guidance on other issues

Financial

- Achieving funders outcomes
- Provision of list of funders/accessible funding
- Provision of guidance and support in dealing with cuts
- Information on government financial packages for social enterprises
- Paying suppliers/staff when multiple signatories are required
- Information on the impact on commissioned contracts
- Central funds available
- How to deal with landlords re rent
- Guidance on how to access 80% salary costs
- Information on volunteer insurance
- Support for freelancers/self employed
- Clarification on CCNI deadlines- will they be extended if accounts cannot be signed off?

Digital

- Copyright issues with using digital platforms
- Digital learning for adults and young people
- Online training/confidence building on MS Teams, virtual platforms
- Provision of software

Support

- Mental health support in the aftermath of lockdown
- Engaging vulnerable groups so they do not become socially isolated
- Shopping windows for 75yrs+

Operational Advice

- Advice on working from home
- Access NI
- GDPR
- Classification of “essential workers”
- Public/private transport
- Measures implemented to support recovery in aftermath of lockdown e.g., phased working, risk plan to prevent Covid-19 returning in future

Communication/Collaboration

- Suspension of statutory functions and how to respond
- Consultation with representative bodies
- Partnership effort

Q8. Other Types of Support

Funding/Financial Support

- Funding for community campaign to allow vulnerable people to obtain free internet with crisis/support button apps on main screen
- Financial support for future production/delivery of work related to Covid-19
- Flexibility from funders re meeting outputs and targets
- Funding provision
- Clarity on funding packages
- Confirmation of 2020/2021 funding to prevent closure
- Cash flow

Resources/Volunteers

- Access to free coaching/support for leaders
- Community donation of second hand smart phones and sims
- Younger volunteers to get groceries for those in isolation
- IT solutions/support and costs
- Training on online systems that can help e.g., Zoom, social media
- Volunteers for pet food deliveries and support for those who are unable to care for their animals
- Support for long term international volunteers
- Access NI checks

Housing/Property Issues

- Support for charitable private landlords who have no recourse to public funds
- Rent Relief/support
- Assistance with property management e.g., rates holidays

Communication/Collaboration

- Improved communication from statutory bodies e.g., EA and HSCT's
- Assistance on Policy formation re homeworking
- Live weekly webcast by NICVA where questions and concerns are asked and answered live
- Update by NICVA on latest community guidance/best practice/ideas
- Ensure CCNI is flexible
- Joint up/coordination with other umbrella agencies
- Advocacy to HSCT's to freeze contract changes/reviews
- Avoidance of overlapping of services and advice notifications

Annex 1

Q5- What actions/plans have you undertaken in response to the Covid-19 crisis?

Scaling Down, Suspension or Cessation of Key Services or Activities

‘Closed training centre completely, suspended staff, consulting on furloughing. Investigating online learning provision models, planning business survival’

“Non-essential activities stopped; essential activities restricted in line with government guidelines. Non-essential staff have been furloughed. Shops have been closed”

“All our group meetings, events, summer outings, celebrations, social gatherings, classes are all cancelled until further notice. Contact will be by social media and telephone, but not the same as the interaction of being together”

“Limited access for volunteers, all training of new volunteers has ceased. All group activities have been cancelled for 30 days with potential of extension”

“Group social activities and meetings have been postponed indefinitely”

“Stopped face to face consultations. Cancelled tenant meetings”

“Making contingency to mothball the company in the absence of funding/ support”

“Paralyzed”

“We have had to cancel all activities planned. We have informed our only funder - but most of our income is generated by activities”

“We have had to completely shut down”

“We feel no option but to close and work from home as much as possible”

“All services ended, all shops closed, and furloughed Letters issued to all staff”

“All non-essential group work ceased; all non-essential contact stopped”

“Stopped all activity, will look if we can provide some online support/content, but unsure”

“We have closed to the public and are trying move online but that will likely stop as the lockdown increases. We have lost all bookings, workshop hires, room bookings and

office rental income. These are hard to plan around and likely will mean that we are in danger of closing for good in two months' time"

"All direct support work with families ceased. We have and will continue to maintain contact with families by phone and email and maintain regular contact with volunteers. We have advised main funders and referrers of the current situation"

"Cancelled all meetings with the local community groups which we represent. Staff working from home"

"Services limited to advice and information through email and phone help line, social media and website only, all community workshops, and face to face meetings cancelled"

"Closed to the public. Trying to maintain access to resources for our members who subscribe and have 24/7 access. Likely have to completely shut"

"Closed our building, postponed two major events, cancelled venue hire as they were incompatible with the lockdown"

"Shut down of childcare provision due to lack of available staff. Shutdown and mothballing of our Centre due to zero activity. Currently trying to assess what helpful services we can deliver at present"

Operational and Financial Issues

"We are awaiting further information and guidance. With such an unprecedented issue we are still working on our action plan"

"Regular online meetings to remain updated. Possible staff redundancies if government support not available. Planning for the resumption of events/activities in September 2020"

"With the new near 'lockdown' in order we are apprehensive of planning far in advance, even unsure as to how this will affect the postal and assistance ideas"

"Potentially furlough staff and gradually shut down services, depending on duration of Government "lockdown" measures"

“We will continue to monitor the situation and take appropriate action where possible. We are in contact via email and conference call with various funders to keep them abreast of the work that we are doing. We are worried that we will not be able to meet our targets if no extensions are provided”

“Continue to monitor the situation and adjust programmes, accordingly, continue to monitor staff and freelancer wellbeing and support, continue to monitor financial impact”

“Reviewing the viability of the company. Mothballing activities to reduce costs and minimise outgoings. Looking for grants and support”

“We plan where possible to continue to deliver on programme activity adjusted to take account of government instructions. When the detail is known we will look at job retention funding. Moved internally and externally to virtual meetings”

“Trying to see if we can furlough staff members. As yet, HMRC online access portal has not been launched. With lack of cash flow, wondering if we can sustain the overheads of the building that we rent”

“Situation will be reviewed immediately prior to Easter. Will try to retain staff as long as possible but redundancies now highly likely”

“Planning to continue with existing restrictions and support participants using technology Cash flow modelling and close monitoring of cash flow”

“[Will] follow all guidance given; we are unsure if we will have a future after COVID-19”

“We will need to apply for the self-employed Government support which is nothing close to the working level of income we generate to support Directors. We will aim to complete the contracts we have as swiftly as possible re-negotiating as much as we can on the process/methods”

“Full closure. Begging for rent relief (literally). Cancelling contracted staff very reluctantly. Building socially media presence while we have time”

“Ongoing review of programmes and protocols established to support organisation response. Staff with key organisational roles have been provided with the means to work from home”

“To continue following the government guidelines/instructions”

“Plan to ensure governance of org continues. Budgets and business plans being redrafted. More detailed look at remote working provision as lockdown stretches beyond 6 weeks”

“Some staff will be put on furlough. Just trying to keep our heads above water”

“We hope to claim for furloughed workers but have just recruited staff who we feel will be outside the scope”

*“Staff: Look into sustaining the organisation and enabling staff to keep their job
Funders: Work closely with key funders to assert what the gaps in funding are and how we mitigate them. Finance: Work with treasurer, prepare the next 6 months cashflow and understand the financial health of the organisation and act accordingly and appropriately”*

“Some staff working from home, other staff in the office, though only those that have their own office. End of year means there is still plenty to do, so working through that. Also, staff working on new ideas and plans that there just hasn't been the time to think through”

“Remain closed. Staff to be placed on Job Retention Programme where possible”

*“Ensure we have equipment available for remote working where necessary.
Consider whether the new ways of working now could be carried into future activities to enhance how we do our work”*

“All activities in the medium-term (i.e. May/June to September) will be planned to be moved online if social distancing measures still in place. Our organisation will follow closely advice from Governments (in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland), and implement any necessary measures”

“Improve access to working away from office and online security issues”

“Our National Office is working on a script of guidance specific and person centred to our Clients which will enable staff and volunteers to engage in a telephone support service providing signposting, information, and emotional support. Support will be provided to our Volunteers equally to provide emotional support during this time. We will be completing a COVID-19 evidence form to collate unmet needs and liaising frequently with health and social care professionals to monitoring changes in service provision”

“Government advice will form basis of any emergency planning”

“Comply with government advice until we can resume our programmes as normal”

“We don’t know; because we are a charity, we don’t believe the government will help us financially”

“All staff working from home and service being delivered electronically and by telephone”

“Access funding to continue to meet the needs of residents including gas electricity support, technology assistance, online programmes, group chats, meet new and unforeseen needs as they arise”

“Reviewing practically what can be achieved if this context remains for the next 3-4 months which looks likely”

Supporting local communities and service users

“We are still at information gathering, planning stage, we want to connect with other groups to ensure we are not double up on funding or double up on efforts. We believe a combined approach is best and are happy to support other agencies”

“[We are] seeking to bring practical support to those who are going to struggle”

“The situation is very fluid at the minute, and we are altering as we go along - there is no template for this. We are also feeding into a Covid-19 website for our local area and those managing this will be available should any of the local and individual community groups is overwhelmed”

“Redirecting efforts into developing resources and support services which can be delivered over the phone or online. Staff and volunteers previously involved in face to face services will aim to reach as many individuals as possible via online/phone support”

“We have implemented a pastoral care network and volunteer helpers to assist the vulnerable. We are using technology to keep in touch”

“We will continue to adapt our service delivery as we evaluate the response and success or otherwise of the various elements”

“We are assessing this situation daily in relation to our services users’ needs”

“We are intending to provide our services where possible, we will continue to redeploy staff to prioritised services”

“Continuing to use online facility to disseminate useful info for elderly members. Keep posting some activities that members can join in with at home - keep fit and yoga classes. Keep posting info to the remainder. Keep the phone lines open in the building for one-to-one calls”

“Hopefully, we will be able to set up a network of volunteers to deliver supplies/food /prescriptions to the elderly and vulnerable in our community also we are at present signposting people to existing services in our area”

“Re-planning activity/event to be delivered online. Pivoting content to be relevant to sector needs. Reviewing areas like IT, GDPR, financial procedures, staff policies to ensure they are fit for purpose. Talking to the sector we work in to find out what they need and helping the sector talk to their audiences”

“We are looking at reducing staff contracts and hours. Investigating the government help that has been offered. We are contingency planning for several potential scenarios on running our events later in the year”

“Continuing to engage with government to implement volunteering plan”

“We will be depending on volunteers to help reach the vulnerable. This needs to be collaboration with government bodies so that volunteers are properly protected”

“More of what we are doing - online programmes, creating signposting information to assist people, online youth provisions, information leaflets produced, started a befriending service, offering to do food/prescription delivery and key role in sharing vital info to people online and hard copy”

“[Our] advice team will be delivering the advice service via phone and arrangements are practically ready. We are awaiting a decision in relation to the project recently submitted and planning how this will be rolled out. Both will be advertised on [social media sites]”

The Use of Digital and New Technology

“We will also start developing online learning but are concerned about financial capacity in the sector and public sector to pay/commission these”

“We are looking at implementing online chat services and video conferencing”

“Monitoring falling enquiries and how we continue long term with offering a service of this kind via SKYPE , Zoom etc. given that some areas of NI do not have strong internet/Wi-Fi signal and not all families will have this an option for this activity”

“Develop a range of online activities and projects”

“Currently we are working online with groups and will continue to look at methods to engage and support young people through the digital platform. Part time team will continue to have a role to play in supporting young people through these online forums”

“Use of MS Teams more. CRM functionality - needs resourced and connect to Time Mgt. Delivery of services (e.g., Training) remotely and virtually”

“Hoping to provide virtual access to rehearsals, online concert material for the general public and other incentives to keep company members active and encourage a feeling of togetherness”

“We have also established one WhatsApp group to keep in contact with groups to allow areas to be kept update as to what is going on and we've become part of wider WhatsApp group setting up a 2 contact numbers and distributing 5000 leaflets around areas that don't have any active community groups”

“Exploring how we can use digital platforms and social media to reach and support individuals/groups. Ensuring all info on websites is up to date, in line with government guidance, and provides support, information and signposting”

“Develop online training delivery/service”

“Online support groups. Continued education and mental health support”

“Continue working from home. Teleconferencing and Zoom are the new norm”

“Encourage use of specialist app to collect data during this time so we can learn more about how this virus affects us and how we can best manage it. Hold meetings online”

“Consider future of online communication with local community, help to educate older people in use of Social Media and Internet use to alleviate isolation. Do more outreach work within the community instead of being bases in a static location”

“At the moment we are using zoom and other non-direct ways to provide teaching, but it really is a day by day and week by week situation”

“Arrangements are almost ready, but we have problems with ICT and equipment which we are having to sort out, but we will get there. We are also using Zoom software to coordinate staff and volunteers”