

# **IVAR development planning process for the future of collaboration support to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland**

## **Stage Three Report**

April 2014



## **Foreword**

Having invested in a collaboration support service – CollaborationNI – and a linked Collaboration Enabling Fund – for the community and voluntary and social enterprise sector in Northern Ireland for a three year period commencing early 2011 and having more and better collaboration as a key outcome to be achieved by the Building Change Trust, the Board of Directors of the Trust decided in mid 2013 to invest in a development planning process to help the Trust shape any future investment.

The Trust has allocated £2 million overall to the theme of collaboration over the 10 year lifespan of the Trust with approximately £1.2 million committed to date.

The Trust identified the issues it wanted to consider and then sought out a suitable organisation to develop and deliver the process. The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) was a natural choice being within the sector, having detailed knowledge of collaboration and collaboration support and being independent of the sector in Northern Ireland.

The process was itself collaborative involving the Trust and the existing CollaborationNI consortium and was carried out by IVAR between September 2013 and January 2014.

As a result of the process and having considered the process outputs, the Trust Board have now invited the existing consortium to submit a new business plan for a continued and developed CollaborationNI service up to a cost of £600,000 and for three year period commencing 1 July 2014.

The development planning process with IVAR has been of critical importance in helping to clarify the issues of importance in the future period and the areas in which a service should focus.

**Nigel McKinney**

**Director of Operations, Building Change Trust**

## Summary

### Introduction

CollaborationNI was formally launched on 30 March 2011 as a partnership programme between the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), CO3 and Stellar Leadership, commissioned by the Building Change Trust ('the Trust') to provide practical support and resources across the whole spectrum of collaborative working to voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in Northern Ireland.

In July 2013, the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) was asked by Building Change Trust to *identify priorities (in relation to need) and identify options (in relation to services and activities) for the future of collaboration support for the Northern Ireland voluntary and community sector.*

It was clear from the outset that the purpose of this exercise was not a review of performance – the Trust was satisfied and impressed with the activities and achievements of CollaborationNI's first two years:

*The intention [was] not to produce a business plan or a set of recommendations; rather, it [was] to validate current thinking, test ideas with a wider audience, unearth new thinking about next steps, and reach consensus on priorities for the next period of delivery. The Trust [had] signaled that, in principle, it [wished] to extend the contract with CollaborationNI and therefore it [would] be for the Trust, at an appropriate stage of the process, to invite CollaborationNI to submit a business plan for consideration.*

### Process

The fieldwork for this process comprised the following elements, over three stages:

#### Stage One: Set up and Scoping

- Scoping interviews and first workshop for representatives of the Trust and the three CollaborationNI delivery partners (NICVA, CO3 and Stellar Leadership).

#### Stage Two: Fieldwork

- An online survey completed by 117 organisations that had been in contact with CollaborationNI since April 2011 (please see Appendix One); semi-structured interviews with 20 key informants; two focus groups for VCS organisations (held in East Belfast and Cookstown) attended by 14 people; and second workshop for the Trust and the three CollaborationNI partners.

#### Stage Three: Future options

- Planning workshop for the three CollaborationNI partners; and third workshop for the Trust and the three CollaborationNI partners.

### Key findings

#### 1. Reflections on Phase One

From the survey and fieldwork, it is clear that the sector has formed a high opinion of the current CollaborationNI offer; both its technical and facilitative contributions are, for the most part, highly valued, as are its sensitive and careful approach. Going forward, attention might be given to: deeper engagement with public officials in order to shape attitudes and practice around VCS collaboration; extending the reach of collaboration support services into the VCS.

#### 2. Context for a possible Phase Two

Five related factors contributing to the case for VCS organisations continuing to require collaboration support have been identified: the continued pressure to collaborate from governmental agencies; the impact of the review of public administration (RPA) and other policy

changes; a more competitive funding environment; the possible proliferation of local council initiatives to provide collaboration support; the need and opportunity to promote the benefits and opportunities of collaboration.

### **3. Purpose of a collaboration support service going forward**

In a possible second phase, the change that a collaboration support service for the Northern Ireland VCS would aim to bring about is that:

- i. VCS organisations will be more willing and able to collaborate in order to bring about more meaningful and sustainable benefits for their beneficiaries and to be fit to deliver and shape services for a better Northern Ireland.*
- ii. VCS leaders and organisations will have the skills, knowledge and confidence to collaborate more effectively and productively, through:*
  - *Increased knowledge of what collaboration is and what is needed to make it work*
  - *Improved understanding of processes and challenges involved*
  - *Support and capacity to implement and manage change.*

### **4. Support needs and audiences**

The service will continue to respond to approaches for support from individuals and organisations with a serious interest in the possibility of collaborating in order to bring about benefits and change: *'the collaboration of the willing for purpose'*. In addition, there will be more targeted work (both geographically and thematically) with leaders and networks, as well as key individuals within public agencies. The service will be designed to support VCS practitioners get to grips with their changing operating environment and use collaboration as a way of tackling complexity. With public officials, the focus will be on trying to influence policy and practice.

### **5. Core Offer**

The core offer would comprise three distinct, but related elements:

- Breadth, including an online collaboration toolbox and specialist training on key aspects of collaboration
- Depth, concentrating on more intense packages of bespoke support for more formal collaborations
- Influence, with a focus on conversations and events for key individuals within public agencies.

### **6. Outcomes**

The outcomes for Phase Two services would need to be both pragmatic (mindful of obstacles to collaboration that are beyond the control of an independent collaboration support service) and aspirational (committed to supporting organisations achieve meaningful change through collaboration). It is hoped that practitioners will increase their understanding of collaboration and grow their confidence and skills to work with others. For public officials, the focus would be on achieving movement in policy thinking and practice as it relates to collaboration.

### **7. A Phase Two business plan**

If the Trust Board does decide to ask NICVA, CO3 and Stellar Associates to draw up a business plan for a second phase of CollaborationNI, the following principles might usefully be applied:

- A degree of flexibility around the detail of projected activity to ensure that the service can respond to emerging and unexpected demand; commitment to a more integrated service,

both in terms of the interplay between the three strands and the interaction between the partners

- A commitment to build on the collaborative approach taken by the Trust and CollaborationNI partners during the IVAR process over the lifetime of Phase Two, in order to identify and take advantage of links and synergies with other strategic Trust initiatives.

## **Introduction**

### **The development planning process**

#### **Remit**

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##### **Stage Three: Future options**

- Planning workshop for the three CollaborationNI partners
- Third workshop for the Trust and the three CollaborationNI partners.

#### **This report**

This Stage Three summary report should be read in conjunction with the December 2013 Stage One and Stage Two reports. The material is set out in three sections:

##### **Section One: Background**

1. Progress – reflections on Phase One of CollaborationNI
2. Context – for a possible Phase Two of a collaboration support service

## **Section Two: Phase Two: introduction**

3. Purpose
4. Support Needs
5. Key Audiences

## **Section Three: Phase Two: outline**

6. Introduction
7. Core Offer and Outcomes
8. The CollaborationNI partnership
9. Funding
10. Phase Two Business Plan.

Throughout, we draw on material from Stages One and Two, including (in italics) unattributed contributions from interviewees, focus group participants, the Trust and the CollaborationNI partners.

## **Section One: Background**

### **1. Progress – reflections on Phase One**

- 1.1 From the survey and fieldwork, it is clear that the sector has formed a high opinion of the current CollaborationNI offer; both its technical and facilitative contributions are, for the most part, highly valued, as are its sensitive and careful approach. This chimes with the Stage One reflections of partners, where the high quality and flexible offer of the CollaborationNI team was highlighted, alongside a shared view that the work of CollaborationNI had facilitated a shift in culture and awareness, helping to *'up the sector's game'* in terms of collaborative practice.
- 1.2 The fieldwork also highlighted possible areas for development going forward, including:
  - The articulation and promulgation of an overarching narrative about changes in the sector and the potential role and contribution of collaboration, as part of a communications drive to encourage the full breadth of the VCS (including smaller, community-based organisations) to have access to collaboration support services
  - Greater engagement with governmental agencies and public officials in order to influence and shape the context within which VCS organisations are being *'encouraged'* or *'required'* to collaborate.
- 1.3 More detailed thoughts about possible adaptations and changes to the core offer of a collaboration support service are set out in Section Three below.

### **2. Context – for a possible Phase Two**

From our work to date, we can identify a small number of related factors contributing to the case for VCS organisations continuing to require collaboration support.

- 2.1 First: *'there was a slightly unrealistic push coming from government and from other funders about collaboration at the start of this project – an unrealistic understanding about what merger and collaboration really involves'*. This *'push to collaborate'*, without a detailed grasp of the implications for organisations of being pushed into enforced collaborative

arrangements, has been accompanied by a signal from government: *'[they] want people to work together to create fewer bodies, bigger contracts, [it's a] drive to collaboration from an efficiency basis'*.

- 2.2 The second factor is the potential impact of RPA and other policy/funding changes. More specifically, the transfer of functions from central government to local government and the review of funding allocations seem likely to: *'create a challenge about how you create a vision for a more coherent, aligned sector across new geographical boundaries and, within that, what opportunities might there be for collaboration and service delivery'*. Linked to this, reductions to the level of charitable funding available for VCS organisations may increase the pressure on organisations to compete, rather than collaborate.
- 2.3 Third, linked to Local Government Reform (LGR), there is a risk of a proliferation of local council level collaboration support initiatives, modestly funded, which risk creating a more confusing, and possibly competitive, environment. In order to mitigate some of these risks, there may be a case for investing in strategic engagement with the new council clusters, in part to *'connect CollaborationNI's offer to their constituencies'*. In addition, although there is confidence in the visibility and availability of CollaborationNI, there will continue to be a need to *'keep the offer fresh and modern'*.
- 2.4 Fourth, the accumulated experience of the CollaborationNI partners suggests that individual and organisational obstacles to collaboration – for example: suspicion, parochialism, anxiety about loss, resistance to change – will continue to impede efforts to encourage VCS organisations to work together. Although there will be a role for a collaboration support service to articulate the potential benefits of collaboration, its primary focus may need to remain on the *'collaboration of the willing'* (see 5.1 below).
- 2.5 Finally, in the context of rapid change and reorganisation, and associated uncertainty, it is felt that: *'organisations need help to face up to the reality of their situation'*. As part of this, it will be important: *'to remind our sector of the benefits of collaboration and supporting and promoting all of that'*. In other words, a collaboration support service would need to take a position about the *'value of collaboration for purpose'*.

## **Section Two: Phase Two: introduction**

### **3. Purpose**

3.1 The purpose of CollaborationNI in Phase One was:

*to shape VCS understanding about collaboration; shift thinking towards a 'culture of collaboration'; and develop and enhance awareness, knowledge, practice and learning, principally through support and information.*

3.2 In a possible second phase, the change that a collaboration support service for the Northern Ireland VCS would aim to bring about is that:

- i. *VCS organisations will be more willing and able to collaborate in order to bring about more meaningful and sustainable benefits for their beneficiaries and to be fit to deliver and shape services for a better Northern Ireland.*
- ii. *VCS leaders and organisations will have the skills, knowledge and confidence to collaborate more effectively and productively, through:*
  - *Increased knowledge of what collaboration is and what is needed to make it work*

- *Improved understanding of processes and challenges involved*
- *Support and capacity to implement and manage change.*

3.3 It is agreed that a collaboration support service would need to become more explicit about its own position, by producing and publicising a ‘narrative’ about the context and case for collaboration in the VCS (e.g. to enhance mission: ‘*collaboration for purpose*’), and the key characteristics of its approach to providing support, guidance and leadership around collaboration:

- Independent
- Acting as an honest broker
- Not being prescriptive or directive
- Taking a dynamic and flexible approach to supporting individuals and organisations through the process of collaboration
- Knowledge of the context within which the sector is trying to collaborate: ‘*of the sector, with the sector*’ focus
- Committed to influencing the VCS ‘collaboration environment’.

3.4 The implications of this for delivery are discussed in 6.5 below. At this stage, it is important to note that there is likely to be a higher threshold of eligibility/suitability for more in-depth work, in order to ensure that flexible packages of more intense support are offered to organisations with serious intent and willingness to change. That will require more careful and thorough assessment so that staff can make informed judgements about if and how to proceed.

**Purpose: what would be new and different?**

A more explicit focus on ‘*collaboration for purpose*’ (to improve benefits for beneficiaries and to be fit for purpose in a new and changing operating environment)

More explicit emphasis on the need for support to extend along the spectrum from knowledge and awareness through to action and change

**4. Support Needs**

Looking across our various findings, we can identify four distinct, but related, areas of need for the early stages of a second phase of collaboration support for the VCS in Northern Ireland.

**4.1 Tackling complexity and change**

In relation to the ability and capacity of VCS organisations to deliver their missions and make a difference to the lives of individuals, families and their communities, we heard a number of concerns about the need for organisations to be supported in navigating their way through change and uncertainty, with collaboration being viewed as one of the means available of achieving greater organisational stability and effectiveness: ‘*work in complex areas cannot really be effectively tackled by one organisation on its own and therefore there is a need for collaboration*’.

Linked to this, there is a big challenge in supporting organisations to understand and adapt to their changing operating environment: ‘[people need help to] *shift mindsets from inward*

*looking parochialism to a more outward looking approach. That will require a mix of technical skills and knowhow as well as a more profound cultural shift. [There is a need] for organisations to recognise the various options and opportunities available through collaboration, including an appreciation of which other organisations are in their area and what connections might be made. CollaborationNI's job is to focus on practical, meaningful changes to the way in which organisations can interact with each other and that needs to be prefaced by identifying shared issues and goals'.*

#### 4.2 **Funding**

The second specific area of support relates to ongoing and planned changes to funding: *'The sector's going to need a huge amount of support to get its head around the new commissioning rules. A lot of third sector groups don't understand the professional nature of commissioning. There needs to be a big push on that and a lot of support needed'*. As discussed above, the shift to fewer, bigger contracts and the practice of funders requiring 'partnership bids' can create difficulties for VCS organisations, not least in balancing the contradictory demands to compete and collaborate, often with the same organisations.

#### 4.3 **Work with public officials**

Third, we found widespread agreement about the need for more intensive work with governmental agencies and public officials: *'There is a big education job. I think that they still don't completely understand the ask that they are making; there are still on the horizon a number of strategic policy decisions that will have collaboration implications. There's still a process of awareness-raising outside our sector'*. A number of participants also highlighted the importance of cross-sector support: *'geographically or thematically targeted work with officials in local government or the relevant government department to say here is how you need to support the sector to collaborate through these changes'*. Failure to engage with this agenda will, it is suggested, place unnecessary pressure on organisations and jeopardise both their independence and freedom to prioritise the needs of their own beneficiaries. For future collaboration support to be effective in this area, it will be important to ensure that the focus remains on collaboration, with appropriate links and connections made to other, related policy-shaping work carried out through CollaborationNI partners (in particular, NICVA and CO3).

#### 4.4 **New approaches to collaborative working**

Finally, the debate in Northern Ireland appears to be moving away from seeing mergers as the only solution (to, variously, perceived duplication, a desire for greater 'impact' and organisational instability) towards alternative forms of collaboration. This creates an opportunity for an independent support service to work with VCOs and others to develop organisational arrangements that can balance different interests, in the pursuit of tangible benefits: *'[It] will require a lot of discussion, not just cooperation and coordination and forms of collaboration but a collaborative mindset'*. The need to handle this sensitively was widely acknowledged by a number of participants who highlighted the importance of taking a nuanced and creative approach, in contrast, it was argued, to the heavy handed *'merger, merger, merger'* approach adopted by governmental agencies. With limited demand for merger support during Phase One, the time is ripe for developing organisational arrangements that can, for example, balance some of the benefits of collaboration (e.g. service improvements and cost savings) with the retention of independent identity.

### **Support needs: what would be new and different?**

Greater engagement with the changing VCS operating environment and the need to be 'fit for purpose'

Importance of engaging more with the attitudes and actions of governmental agencies

Explicit acknowledgement of the shift away from merger to other forms of deep collaboration

## **5. Key Audiences**

### **5.1 Responsive**

The importance of continuing to provide a responsive, open access service has been stressed, alongside the need to introduce some more proactive elements to the service. For the more responsive service, it will be important to prioritise individuals and organisations that demonstrate and articulate their willingness and readiness to explore collaboration and are open to the possibility of change. In a possible Phase Two, the notion of 'collaboration of the willing' from Phase One would continue to be used:

*'We use 'collaboration of the willing' in the sense that when a number of parties have made initial approaches to each other and have decided they will collaborate, then we are willing to help them, rather than us having an agenda which basically acts as a government mantra that you ought to collaborate and you should collaborate, at least around budgetary consideration. Our role isn't to force them into the collaboration, but once they say they are willing to do it we will help them. We're not entirely neutral, [it's] just that we don't push an idea that the only way to do things is to collaborate. We wouldn't push it for the sake of it.'*

During Phase Two, a slightly more rigorous process of assessment and diagnosis would be required; this point is explored further in 7.2.1 below.

### **5.2 Proactive**

For the more proactive work, two broad target groups have been identified. In the event of CollaborationNI continuing to lead this work, it will be important for the partners to liaise closely with the Trust to ensure that decisions about who and where to target take account of other initiatives and opportunities:

- Individuals and organisations that are directly affected by policy/funding changes and might benefit from collaboration support – this might, in the first instance, be leaders of thematic groups of VCS organisations in the membership of NICVA or CO3, or organisations operating in specific council clusters, where there are already links with CollaborationNI itself or the three partners
- Policy makers, decision makers and funders (specifically in relation to their requirements and expectations of collaboration, and cross-sector partnership working), with a particular focus on work with the small number of individuals who hold responsibility for decisions that directly affect VCS organisations. Part of this work might also usefully focus on specific council clusters.

### **Key Audiences: what would be new and different?**

Planned balance between being responsive and proactive

More explicit prioritising of '*collaboration of the willing for purpose*'

Introduction of targeted work, principally with leaders, both geographically and thematically

Acknowledgement of the need to connect with Boards

Direct targeting of key individuals within public agencies

## **Section Three: Phase Two: outline**

### **6. Introduction**

6.1 It has been widely argued that there needs to be a common understanding about what an independent support service can reasonably be expected to achieve (or contribute to) in relation to organisational change. Whilst some people argued that: '*collaboration needs to start rolling across the line; we need to see evidence and examples of organisations stepping up to, and over, that line*', many others took a more cautious approach:

*'What would be wholly inappropriate would be to have a target number of organisations that are collaborating at the end of the process, the focus should be on creating opportunities and recognising that collaboration often happens organically and incrementally'*.

*'It may be appropriate to have a more relaxed approach to outcomes and accept that the process of supporting organisations may result in a merger, in a status quo, in a closure or in an alliance'*.

6.2 In developing their thinking about outcomes of a possible Phase Two, partners have highlighted the following points:

- It will be important to manage expectations around outcomes and for them to be proportionate, appropriate and meaningful
- The Phase Two mission (see 3.2 above) should act as the framework for Phase Two outcomes. That would mean that arrangements would need to be in place to collect data (about both outputs and outcomes) and assess progress in relation to:
  - Increased understanding of what collaboration is and what is needed to make it work
  - Improved understanding of processes and challenges involved
  - Greater appetite to initiate, implement and manage change.

6.3 Turning to the broader aspiration (of VCS organisations being: '*more willing and able to collaborate in order to bring about more meaningful and sustainable benefits for their beneficiaries*') the task is likely to be more complex. Rather than a standard metric or data collection tool, it might make more sense to gather qualitative data, at key intervals, in order to build a more detailed picture of the contribution made by a collaboration support service to this level of change.

Central to this will be:

- An appreciation of *'what lies within CollaborationNI's sphere of influence'*, with an emphasis on contribution rather than attribution
- A more systematic approach to identifying the rationale, purpose and hoped-for benefits of collaboration (e.g. in action plans) and monitoring progress at critical stages.

6.4 For the Trust, there is a very clear desire to see *'more and better collaboration'*. One of the implications of this may be a view that Phase Two of a collaboration support service needs to: *'go beyond being safe and neutral – we should expect a bit more now; we want to see quality collaborations coming through, we don't just want to do the superficial stuff for the sake of it, or just force people into inappropriate collaborations'*. This supports a greater emphasis on 'depth' during Phase Two (see 7.2 below). It also raises questions about what criteria to use to determine 'quality'.

6.5 Partners noted that informed and grounded decisions not to collaborate can be viewed as positive outcomes; lower profile collaborations that *'don't set the world on fire'* also have merit, so 'quality' needs to be understood flexibly and imaginatively, with a spectrum of arrangements having validity, *'rather than seeing merger as a gold standard when in practice the under the radar stuff is equally important'*. In discussing the notion of *'quality collaboration'* as an outcome for the more in-depth work, it was suggested that there should be a focus on initiatives whose ambitions extended beyond *'short-term gain'* and that *'proposed to deal with more fundamental organisational change'*. As discussed above (see 3.4), this will require a more thorough assessment before embarking on in-depth support.

## 7. Core Offer and Outcomes

Three elements of the core offer for a possible Phase Two have been highlighted:

7.1 **Breadth:** principally knowledge and expertise: 'technical' aspects of collaboration, especially legal – *'governance in relation to progressing collaborative working'*; models of collaborative working (in particular, alternatives to merger); guidance on the process of collaboration.

### 7.1.1 Key services:

- Online 'collaboration toolbox', with particular attention paid to sourcing and replenishing a *'well stocked up to date online resource'*. Much of this material will be generated through the more in-depth work (see 7.2.1 below): *'It may be helpful to work in more depth in a smaller number of areas in order to develop models of collaborating and to see those organisations as pathfinders for others; that would require those organisations and individuals within them to talk openly and publicly about where the journey has taken them to'*. In addition, training materials (see below) will be made available in a variety of media (e.g. trainer notes; video summaries; participant stories).
- Targeted (content and audience) training, with a shift away from generalist courses (the content of which will be available online) to more specialist areas concerned with developing the skills and behaviours required of VCS leaders to act collaboratively and manage collaboration, including:
  - Negotiation skills
  - Handling difficult conversations
  - Winning collaborative tenders
  - Building (campaigning) coalitions

- Leading collaboration.

In order to retain a degree of flexibility (for fluctuations in demand and changes in priorities), not all of the training programme will be set in advance. This more balanced approach will also allow the collaboration support service to respond to specific needs identified through its more proactive work (see below).

- Facilitated conversations – to be offered by invitation to specific groups – including leaders of VCS organisations (e.g. through CO3); sub-sectoral networks (e.g. through NICVA) and groupings of VCOs in specific council cluster areas – in order to: *‘put collaboration on their radar, raise the possibility of some joint action and stimulate demand for follow-up work’*. For participants willing to engage and explore collaboration in greater depth and with more intent, training or more intense work can then be offered or designed.

### 7.1.2 Outcomes

Outcomes for these services will include:

- Improved awareness and understanding of the process, benefits and challenges of collaboration
- More appetite for collaboration
- Increased confidence to work in collaboration
- Improved skills to work in collaboration.

#### **Breadth: what would be new and different?**

Shift from generalist to specific training content

Holding back part of the training programme to respond to demand and changes in need

Diversification of media and content for the online resource

Introduction of targeted work to raise awareness, stimulate demand and inspire action

7.2 **Depth:** a flexible, intense, wraparound service, centred on *‘bespoke, tailored packages of support’*.

### 7.2.1 Key services:

The key components of the more in-depth work in Phase Two will be facilitation support for the design and implementation of collaborative initiatives, balanced with ‘technical’ (in particular, legal) support. For this more intense element of the offer, partners have noted the need for:

- More detailed assessment ‘upstream’, to gauge levels of (individual and organisational) commitment, support needs, engagement and willingness/openness to change
- The importance of Board involvement in more formal collaborations
- Focus from the outset on the idea of *‘collaboration of the willing for purpose’*
- Ensuring a flexible process, with facilitators: *‘able to make judgements about what is required and not feel constrained by targets or restrictions’*

- Interim judgements about if/how to continue support and greater licence to withdraw support: *'people need to feel confident about taking a position and making a judgement if they think they are just flogging a dead horse. We need to get tougher about that message, as the underlying thing about collaboration that we are trying to encourage is the idea of change and improvement'*.

In addition, there will also be the possibility of follow-up/implementation support for organisations that have entered into collaboration agreements or completed formal processes: *'it's not just about getting over the line, it's also about staying over the line, so there is a need for supporting the sustainability of some collaborations'*. This follow-up work has the potential to generate useful learning about the lived experience and benefits of collaboration.

### 7.2.2 Outcomes

The bespoke service is highly valued and there is confidence that arrangements could be put in place to track and articulate the contribution made by collaboration support to facilitating and guiding tangible and concrete organisational changes.

In order to assist with further developing arrangements for assessing the value and usefulness of its contributions, it might help to instigate a more detailed start-up process for the in-depth work. This assessment can then be used to shape subsequent interventions and can contribute to judgements further down the line about the duration of engagement with a particular collaboration. As discussed above, part of this start-up conversation might usefully hinge around an exploration of the purpose of collaboration, including intent and compatibility with mission.

Specific outcomes for this strand of the work include:

- More and better collaboration within the VCS as a means to enhancing mission and improving benefits for beneficiaries (e.g. a collaboration agreement or action plan which sets out the desired benefits of working together. This provides an opportunity to integrate any legal materials with statements about vision and aspirations)
- The development, identification and promotion of new thinking about why and how to collaborate (including models of collaboration).

#### **Depth: what would be new and different?**

Removal of some elements of the one-to-one support offer (e.g. mentoring and executive career guidance)

New, more targeted approaches to reaching/connecting with leaders

Greater flexibility in packages of support for serious collaboration initiatives

Provision of implementation support/follow-up work

The development of new organisational arrangements for 'deep collaboration'

7.3 **Influence:** shifting mindsets and attitudes of public officials and governmental agencies: *'helping [them] understand the realities (e.g. skills required) of collaboration in the VCS'*.

#### 7.3.1 Key services

We have found widespread concern about the need to reframe the debate within public bodies about what is feasible, desirable and appropriate in relation to collaboration in the

VCS. In Phase Two, the priority will be to develop one-to-one relationships with key officials with direct responsibility for engagement with VCS organisations in order to shape their thinking about collaboration and modify the demands or expectations placed on VCS organisations. The two key strands of this work will be:

- Building and promoting an evidence base about collaboration in practice (drawing on the services outlined in 7.1.1 and 7.2.1 above)
- Events and conversations (remembering that the role of the collaboration support service: *'is not to influence policy. Its focus must be on the collaboration elements of [governmental] policy'* with key governmental officials, ensuring that, where possible: *'safe spaces are created for a more open exploration of concerns and ideas'*. In the first instance, some of this work will be targeted at specific geographical or thematic areas where other proactive work is planned; where possible, it will also include the facilitation of cross-sector dialogue. For this strand of the work to be effective, it will be vital to take an integrated approach to planning and delivery – in this way, key messages coming out of the face-to-face work with VCS practitioners can be fed in. As discussed above, it will also be important for NICVA and CO3 to liaise closely in order to avoid duplication or confusion with the other strands of their policy influencing work.

### 7.3.2 Outcomes

Outcomes for this strand of the work will include:

- Greater awareness and appreciation amongst public officials of the practical realities of VCS collaboration and the conditions required for it to happen and be effective
- Movements in the thinking of policy makers in relation to their expectations and demands around collaboration
- Adjustments to the practice of public funders in relation to their expectations and demands around collaboration.

#### **Influence: what would be new and different?**

Better use of the evidence base

Shift to targeting key individuals

Shift to geographical and cross-sector focus for some of the influencing work

## 8. The CollaborationNI partnership

8.1 The general consensus is that the CollaborationNI partnership: *'has worked well to date and there isn't really any case for changing the core partnership'*.

8.2 In thinking about possible changes, the key consideration has been: *'whether the partners can deliver on a slightly more assertive, focused, in-depth offer to the sector around collaboration, change and transformation'*. The view at the end of the IVAR process is that the proposed changes to the work programme, coupled with an ongoing commitment to work closely with other (sub-contracted) delivery partners, will enable a dynamic service to be delivered across the full breadth of the VCS. There is a risk that the establishment of advisory (or similar) arrangements could prove an *'unnecessary and time-consuming*

*distraction*', taking energy and resources away from the pursuit of change in collaboration thinking and practice.

- 8.3 However, in order to ensure that the offer remains relevant and grounded in the challenges and opportunities facing VCS organisations, it will be important to establish arrangements for taking soundings and seeking ideas from the sector over the lifetime of Phase Two, should the Trust decide to commission further work.

## **9. Funding**

- 9.1 Whilst responsibility for drawing in other funders lies principally with the Trust, partners have stressed the importance of engaging on '*independent terms*'.
- 9.2 More specifically, in thinking about the implications of possible Department for Social Development (DSD) funding, some concerns have been expressed about the implications for the perceived independence of a collaboration support service for the VCS in Northern Ireland, as well as expectations around outcomes. It might be more appropriate to explore DSD investment for the Trust's Enabling Fund, rather than the core programme of collaboration support.
- 9.3 Finally, it has been suggested that the scope of the Enabling Fund might benefit from further consideration, in order to ensure that it has the flexibility to provide smaller amounts to small organisations to cover costs associated with formal collaboration.

## **10. Phase Two Business Plan**

- 10.1 Finally, the following principles might usefully be applied by the BCT Board to their request for a business plan for a second phase of a collaboration support service for the VCS in Northern Ireland:
- A degree of flexibility around the detail of projected activity to ensure that the service can respond to emerging and unexpected demand
  - A balance between ambition and realism around outcomes
  - A commitment to a more integrated service, both in terms of the interplay between the three strands and the interaction between the partners
  - A commitment over the lifetime of Phase Two to build on the collaborative approach taken by the Trust and CollaborationNI partners during the IVAR process.

## Appendix One - Shaping collaboration support in Northern Ireland



### 1. Looking ahead to April 2014 and beyond, do you anticipate:

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely or unlikely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A	Rating Average	Rating Count
Wanting to collaborate with other organisations in order to survive	<b>41.7%</b> (48)	28.7% (33)	12.2% (14)	6.1% (7)	8.7% (10)	2.6% (3)	2.09	115
Wanting to collaborate with other organisations to deliver better outcomes for your beneficiaries	<b>59.0%</b> (69)	36.8% (43)	1.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	1.7% (2)	0.9% (1)	1.47	117
Wanting to collaborate with other organisations in order to compete for public sector contracts	<b>40.2%</b> (47)	34.2% (40)	13.7% (16)	1.7% (2)	3.4% (4)	6.8% (8)	1.86	117
Needing to find out more about what is involved in working in collaboration with other organisations	27.8% (32)	<b>48.7%</b> (56)	13.9% (16)	4.3% (5)	3.5% (4)	1.7% (2)	2.05	115
Feeling under pressure from public agencies and funders to collaborate with other organisations	24.1% (28)	<b>49.1%</b> (57)	17.2% (20)	4.3% (5)	1.7% (2)	3.4% (4)	2.07	116
Struggling to find other organisations to collaborate with	9.6% (11)	14.0% (16)	<b>36.0%</b> (41)	33.3% (38)	4.4% (5)	2.6% (3)	3.09	114
Finding collaboration with other organisations relatively straightforward	5.2% (6)	27.8% (32)	<b>31.3%</b> (36)	24.3% (28)	9.6% (11)	1.7% (2)	3.05	115
Finding collaboration with other organisations difficult	10.3% (12)	29.3% (34)	<b>31.9%</b> (37)	20.7% (24)	6.0% (7)	1.7% (2)	2.82	116
<b>answered question</b>								<b>117</b>
<b>skipped question</b>								<b>5</b>

## 2. More specifically, do you anticipate needing support with any of the following?

	Yes	No	N/a	Don't know	Rating Count
Finding organisations to collaborate with	38.3% (44)	<b>50.4% (58)</b>	1.7% (2)	9.6% (11)	115
Meeting other people/organisations with experience of collaboration	<b>57.4% (66)</b>	34.8% (40)	1.7% (2)	6.1% (7)	115
Working with other organisations to maximise benefits to beneficiaries	<b>71.3% (82)</b>	24.3% (28)	1.7% (2)	2.6% (3)	115
Information about consortia	<b>71.7% (81)</b>	17.7% (20)	1.8% (2)	8.8% (10)	113
Information about mergers	<b>52.6% (60)</b>	31.6% (36)	3.5% (4)	12.3% (14)	114
Information about other models of collaborative working	<b>80.9% (93)</b>	11.3% (13)	2.6% (3)	5.2% (6)	115
Forming a consortium for collaborating on tender bids for service contracts	<b>56.9% (66)</b>	22.4% (26)	7.8% (9)	12.9% (15)	116
Hands-on facilitation of collaborative working	<b>69.3% (79)</b>	21.1% (24)	1.8% (2)	7.9% (9)	114
Helping government/funders to understand the realities of collaboration in the voluntary sector	<b>78.4% (91)</b>	13.8% (16)	1.7% (2)	6.0% (7)	116
Legal guidance and advice (e.g. collaboration agreements)	<b>77.2% (88)</b>	13.2% (15)	2.6% (3)	7.0% (8)	114
Informing those with commissioning powers in public agencies about the skills and requirements for groups being asked to collaborate	<b>76.5% (88)</b>	11.3% (13)	3.5% (4)	8.7% (10)	115
Governance in relation to progressing collaborative working	<b>78.1% (89)</b>	13.2% (15)	2.6% (3)	6.1% (7)	114
				<b>answered question</b>	<b>116</b>
				<b>skipped question</b>	<b>6</b>

**3. In relation to your priorities, which of the following do you think is most important for collaboration support to concentrate on from April 2014 onwards? Please rank from 1 to 4, with 1 being the highest priority. Note - the list will automatically reorder as you make your selections**

	1	2	3	4	Rating Average	Rating Count
Delivering a largely responsive service on a first come, first served basis	21.7% (25)	17.4% (20)	25.2% (29)	<b>35.7% (41)</b>	2.75	115
Targeting services geographically	31.3% (36)	<b>42.6% (49)</b>	16.5% (19)	9.6% (11)	2.04	115
Targeting services thematically	<b>34.2% (39)</b>	29.8% (34)	27.2% (31)	8.8% (10)	2.11	114
Targeting services to organisations of a particular size	12.2% (14)	10.4% (12)	31.3% (36)	<b>46.1% (53)</b>	3.11	115
<b>answered question</b>						<b>115</b>
<b>skipped question</b>						<b>7</b>

**4. If you selected targeting services geographically or thematically as the highest priority in the previous question, please use the box below to explain this support need further.**

	Response Count
	61
<b>answered question</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>skipped question</b>	<b>61</b>

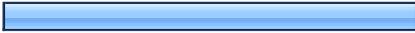
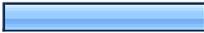
**5. Thinking about the type of support that will be most useful from April 2014 onward, please rank the following options from 1 (most relevant) to 7 (least relevant). Note - the list will automatically reorder as you make your selections**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Rating Average	Rating Count
Providing information about different kinds of collaboration	14.4% (16)	18.0% (20)	<b>23.4%</b> <b>(26)</b>	18.0% (20)	12.6% (14)	9.0% (10)	4.5% (5)	3.41	11
Delivering training on different kinds and aspects of collaboration	11.7% (13)	16.2% (18)	<b>26.1%</b> <b>(29)</b>	22.5% (25)	15.3% (17)	7.2% (8)	0.9% (1)	3.39	11
Arranging study visits and introductions to other organisations with experience of collaborative working	9.0% (10)	10.8% (12)	10.8% (12)	17.1% (19)	17.1% (19)	13.5% (15)	<b>21.6%</b> <b>(24)</b>	4.50	11
Providing bespoke, tailored support packages for organisations trying to collaborate	<b>24.5%</b> <b>(27)</b>	16.4% (18)	10.9% (12)	13.6% (15)	16.4% (18)	12.7% (14)	5.5% (6)	3.41	11
Providing support aimed at helping organisations respond to policy and funding changes	11.7% (13)	<b>19.8%</b> <b>(22)</b>	9.9% (11)	15.3% (17)	<b>19.8%</b> <b>(22)</b>	18.9% (21)	4.5% (5)	3.86	11
Providing support to other VCS support providers (e.g. local infrastructure organisations)	2.7% (3)	4.5% (5)	8.1% (9)	6.3% (7)	10.8% (12)	30.6% (34)	<b>36.9%</b> <b>(41)</b>	5.58	11
Trying to educate and influence policy makers, commissioners and funders	25.2% (28)	14.4% (16)	10.8% (12)	7.2% (8)	8.1% (9)	8.1% (9)	<b>26.1%</b> <b>(29)</b>	3.87	11
<b>answered question</b>									<b>11</b>
<b>skipped question</b>									<b>1</b>

**6. To what extent to you agree with the following statements about any future collaboration support service? Future collaboration support should:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Rating Count
Act as an independent, honest broker with organisations trying to collaborate	<b>71.9% (82)</b>	23.7% (27)	4.4% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.32	82
Only respond to self-referrals from the VCS	1.8% (2)	15.3% (17)	<b>42.3% (47)</b>	32.4% (36)	4.5% (5)	3.6% (4)	3.23	47
Provide high-quality expert advice, support and services	<b>73.5% (83)</b>	21.2% (24)	4.4% (5)	0.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.33	83
Require organisations seeking support to demonstrate their genuine commitment to collaboration	<b>45.5% (51)</b>	33.9% (38)	14.3% (16)	6.3% (7)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.81	51
Remain neutral about whether and how to collaborate	25.9% (29)	<b>31.3% (35)</b>	21.4% (24)	17.0% (19)	4.5% (5)	0.0% (0)	2.43	35
Actively promote the potential benefits of collaboration to the VCS	41.1% (46)	<b>43.8% (49)</b>	10.7% (12)	3.6% (4)	0.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.79	49
Deliver a 'wake-up call' to the VCS about the importance and value of collaboration	34.8% (39)	<b>41.1% (46)</b>	14.3% (16)	5.4% (6)	3.6% (4)	0.9% (1)	2.01	46
Provide a reality check to public officials about the cost and complexity of collaboration	<b>61.6% (69)</b>	35.7% (40)	2.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.41	69
<b>answered question</b>								
<b>skipped question</b>								

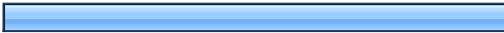
**7. Are you aware that the Building Change Trust commissioned the existing Collaboration NI service?**

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		66.1%	74
No		32.1%	36
Don't know		1.8%	2
answered question			112
skipped question			10

**8. Are you aware that the Building Change Trust has augmented the support available from Collaboration NI with a Collaboration Enabling Fund that makes awards to enable the implementation of collaboration plans?**

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		49.1%	55
No		48.2%	54
Don't know		2.7%	3
answered question			112
skipped question			10

**9. Have you applied to or received support from the Collaboration Enabling Fund?**

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		15.2%	17
No		80.4%	90
Don't know		4.5%	5
answered question			112
skipped question			10

## 10. Do you think that a fund to accompany collaboration support is necessary?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		79.5%	89
No		1.8%	2
Don't know		18.8%	21
answered question			112
skipped question			10

## 11. To what degree do you think the following issues are likely to affect your organisation in the coming 18 months?

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely or unlikely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A	Rating Average	Rating Count
Maintaining current staffing levels	<b>41.5%</b> <b>(44)</b>	25.5% (27)	14.2% (15)	9.4% (10)	3.8% (4)	5.7% (6)	2.03	106
Employing additional staff	<b>25.5%</b> <b>(27)</b>	<b>25.5%</b> <b>(27)</b>	18.9% (20)	17.0% (18)	7.5% (8)	5.7% (6)	2.53	106
Making staff redundant	15.1% (16)	23.6% (25)	<b>27.4%</b> <b>(29)</b>	17.0% (18)	10.4% (11)	6.6% (7)	2.83	106
Increasing numbers of management posts	7.5% (8)	10.3% (11)	19.6% (21)	<b>43.9%</b> <b>(47)</b>	12.1% (13)	6.5% (7)	3.46	107
Decreasing numbers of management posts	3.7% (4)	22.2% (24)	<b>28.7%</b> <b>(31)</b>	27.8% (30)	11.1% (12)	6.5% (7)	3.22	108
Increasing volunteer management practices	19.8% (21)	<b>37.7%</b> <b>(40)</b>	23.6% (25)	10.4% (11)	2.8% (3)	5.7% (6)	2.35	106
Decreasing volunteer management practices	1.9% (2)	4.7% (5)	28.3% (30)	<b>35.8%</b> <b>(38)</b>	19.8% (21)	9.4% (10)	3.74	106
Maintaining the number and type of beneficiaries you support	30.2% (32)	<b>38.7%</b> <b>(41)</b>	13.2% (14)	10.4% (11)	2.8% (3)	4.7% (5)	2.13	106
Reducing the number and type of beneficiaries you support	10.2% (11)	9.3% (10)	18.5% (20)	<b>33.3%</b> <b>(36)</b>	23.1% (25)	5.6% (6)	3.53	108
Increasing your campaigning and/or lobbying activities	<b>37.4%</b> <b>(40)</b>	27.1% (29)	22.4% (24)	7.5% (8)	0.9% (1)	4.7% (5)	2.03	107
Decreasing your campaigning and/or lobbying activities	1.9% (2)	2.8% (3)	23.6% (25)	<b>34.9%</b> <b>(37)</b>	27.4% (29)	9.4% (10)	3.92	106
<b>answered question</b>								<b>108</b>
<b>skipped question</b>								<b>14</b>

## 12. To what degree do you anticipate the following situations arising in the coming 18 months?

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely or unlikely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A	Rating Average	Rating Count
An increase in competition for funding	<b>71.3%</b> (77)	21.3% (23)	5.6% (6)	0.9% (1)	0.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.39	108
An increase in organisational income	8.4% (9)	21.5% (23)	16.8% (18)	<b>45.8%</b> (49)	6.5% (7)	0.9% (1)	3.21	107
A decrease in organisational income	17.8% (19)	<b>33.6%</b> (36)	24.3% (26)	18.7% (20)	4.7% (5)	0.9% (1)	2.58	107
An increase in organisational expenditure	20.6% (22)	<b>44.9%</b> (48)	14.0% (15)	17.8% (19)	2.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	2.37	107
A decrease in organisational expenditure	7.5% (8)	16.0% (17)	24.5% (26)	<b>40.6%</b> (43)	11.3% (12)	0.0% (0)	3.32	106
Expanding the number of services you provide	20.4% (22)	<b>32.4%</b> (35)	20.4% (22)	22.2% (24)	3.7% (4)	0.9% (1)	2.56	108
Reducing the services you currently provide	4.7% (5)	16.8% (18)	25.2% (27)	<b>39.3%</b> (42)	12.1% (13)	1.9% (2)	3.38	107
Closing services you currently provide	2.8% (3)	15.7% (17)	<b>36.1%</b> (39)	25.0% (27)	18.5% (20)	1.9% (2)	3.42	108
Closing your organisation	0.9% (1)	4.7% (5)	18.7% (20)	25.2% (27)	<b>44.9%</b> (48)	5.6% (6)	4.15	107
<b>answered question</b>								<b>108</b>
<b>skipped question</b>								<b>14</b>

### 13. Which of the following best describes your role/position?

		Response Percent	Response Count
CEO		31.5%	28
Chair		10.1%	9
Trustee		2.2%	2
<b>Senior manager</b>		<b>44.9%</b>	<b>40</b>
Practitioner		4.5%	4
Volunteer		6.7%	6
	Other (please specify)		14
<b>answered question</b>			<b>89</b>
<b>skipped question</b>			<b>33</b>

## 14. Which of the following best describes the nature of your organisation?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Voluntary organisation		63.1%	53
Community group		21.4%	18
Church/place of worship		0.0%	0
Housing association		0.0%	0
Sports club/association/governing body		0.0%	0
Grant-making trust		1.2%	1
Social enterprise		10.7%	9
Credit Union		2.4%	2
Co-operative		1.2%	1
Mutual		0.0%	0
	Other (please specify)		20
<b>answered question</b>			<b>84</b>
<b>skipped question</b>			<b>38</b>

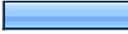
### 15. Please indicate from the list below the legal status of your group

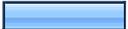
		Response Percent	Response Count
Trust		8.4%	7
<b>Company limited by guarantee</b>		<b>83.1%</b>	<b>69</b>
Unincorporated association		8.4%	7
Industrial and provident society		0.0%	0
	Other (please specify)		14
<b>answered question</b>			<b>83</b>
<b>skipped question</b>			<b>39</b>

### 16. Please indicate your organisation's approximate income NB - If your organisation is part of a UK, all Ireland or international organisation, please only record the income for your operations in Northern Ireland. If your organisation is a local or branch office, only record income for that office and not the whole organisation.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Up to £5,000		6.1%	6
£5,001 - £10,000		1.0%	1
<b>£10,001 - £250,000</b>		<b>26.5%</b>	<b>26</b>
£250,001 - £500,000		18.4%	18
£500,001 - £1 million		10.2%	10
£1 - 5 million		20.4%	20
Over £5 million		13.3%	13
None		4.1%	4
<b>answered question</b>			<b>98</b>
<b>skipped question</b>			<b>24</b>

**17. From the options below, please select THREE that most closely describe your organisations main areas of work.**

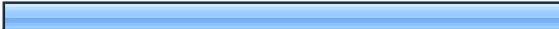
		Response Percent	Response Count
Arts in the VCS		0.0%	0
Carers		5.3%	5
Children and families		20.2%	19
Community development		35.1%	33
Community relations		13.8%	13
Criminal justice and community safety		4.3%	4
Disability		13.8%	13
Education and training		29.8%	28
Equality		4.3%	4
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>		<b>41.5%</b>	<b>39</b>
Housing and homelessness		6.4%	6
Human rights		5.3%	5
Men		0.0%	0
Older people		12.8%	12
Poverty		12.8%	12
Race/ethnicity		3.2%	3
Rural development		9.6%	9
Sport and recreation		2.1%	2
Sustainable development		6.4%	6
Transport		5.3%	5
Urban regeneration		10.6%	10
Volunteer development		6.4%	6
Women		7.4%	7

Young people		19.1%	18
		Other (please specify)	17
		<b>answered question</b>	<b>94</b>
		<b>skipped question</b>	<b>28</b>

### 18. Where is your organisation based?

		Response Percent	Response Count
<b>In Northern Ireland only</b>		<b>88.7%</b>	<b>86</b>
Part of a UK-wide organisation		7.2%	7
Part of an all Ireland organisation		2.1%	2
Part of an international organisation		2.1%	2
		Other (please specify)	5
		<b>answered question</b>	<b>97</b>
		<b>skipped question</b>	<b>25</b>

### 19. How many paid staff does your organisation currently employ?

		Response Percent	Response Count
<b>Full-time</b>		<b>89.5%</b>	<b>85</b>
Part-time		81.1%	77
Total		74.7%	71
		<b>answered question</b>	<b>95</b>
		<b>skipped question</b>	<b>27</b>

## 20. How many volunteers are currently involved with your organisation?

	Response Count
	91
answered question	91
skipped question	31