

The Building Change Trust

Monitoring, Evaluation, Impact Measurement and Reporting within the Northern Ireland Community and Voluntary Sector

Future challenges, issues and opportunities

On Friday 2 December, [Building Change Trust](#) convened a consultation workshop and seminar with an invited audience to consider the question

What action needs to be taken to support the development of monitoring, evaluation, impact measurement and reporting within NI in the context of enabling positive social change?

Following presentations from Brendan McDonnell of [CENI](#), Dr. Nick Acheson of University of Ulster and Tris Lumley of [New Philanthropy Capital](#), those present were facilitated in a highly participative process drawing on the [Consensus Workshop Method](#) to address the above question.

The Trust organised the consultation workshop and seminar with two key objectives

1. To capture ideas from key stakeholders to contribute to a wider discussion on how to better assess impacts of activity designed to support and bring about social change, from both a commissioning or programme design perspective and from a practitioners or development perspective.
2. To begin to provide the Building Change Trust and others with a clearer understanding of what work needs to be done to improve monitoring, evaluation, impact measurement and reporting.

The Trust in identifying potential participants for the event sought to achieve regional representation from funders, statutory bodies and service delivery community and voluntary organisations.

Those attending were as follows

Name	Organisation
James Magowan	Association for Charitable Foundations
Catherine Taggart	Belfast City Council
Norrie Breslin	Big Lottery Fund

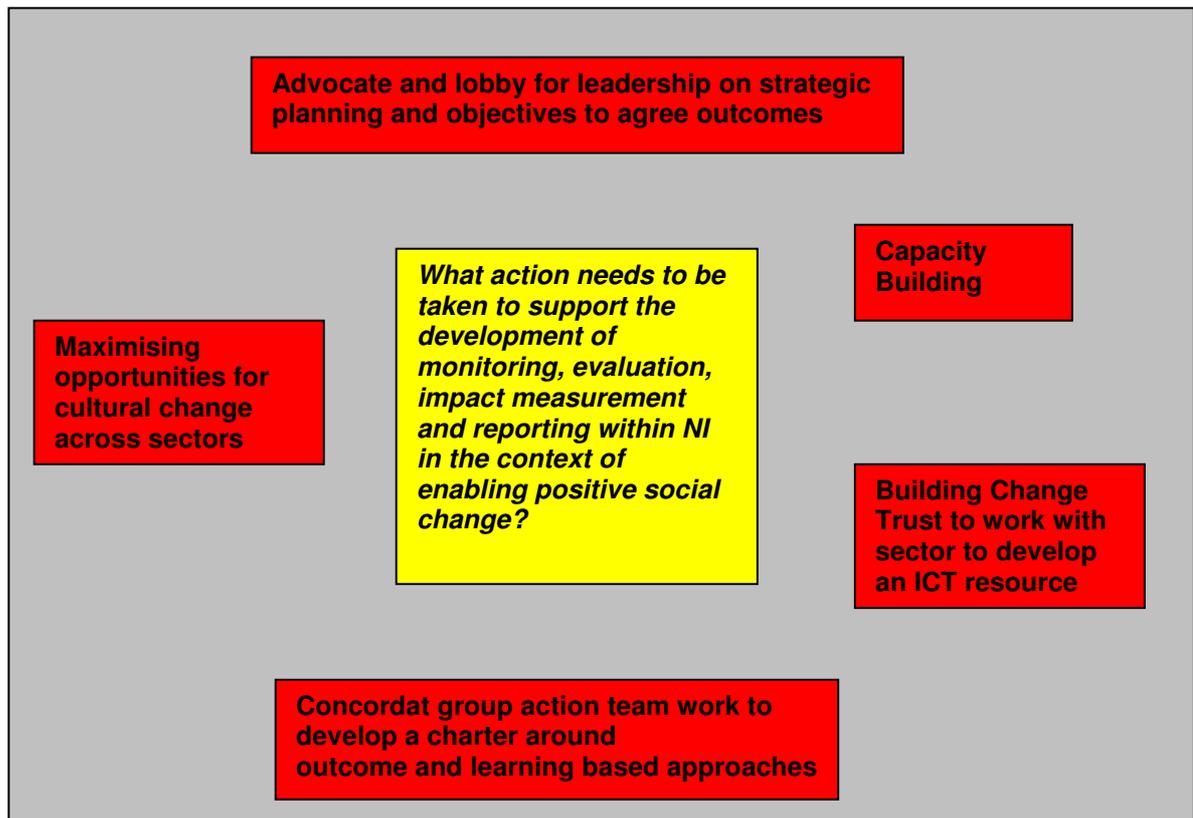
Mary Crawford	Brook NI
Lisa Griffin	Bryson Charitable Group
Gladys Swanton	CENI
Brendan McDonnell	CENI
Ruth Taillon	Centre for Cross Border Studies
Vernon Ringland	CFNI
Nigel McKinney	CFNI
Charlie Fisher	CFNI
Paul Donaldson	Charity Bank
Peter McCafferty	Cunamh ICT
John Waddell	DARD
Lisa Follis	Devenish Partnership Forum
Andrea Patterson	DSD
Roy McGivern	DSD
Kate Martin	MACS
Pauline Spence	Mencap
Conor Shields	New Belfast Community Arts Partnership
Tris Lumley	New Philanthropy Capital
Caroline Bloomfield	Public Health Agency
Dr Nick Acheson	University of Ulster
Brendan McAllister	Victims Commission
Christine Irvine	Volunteer Now
Mary Field	Youthnet
Seamus Carlin	Gauge NI

2. Workshop outputs

The workshop was facilitated using an adaptation of the Consensus Workshop Method.

Individuals were allocated to one of four tables and first worked individually to

list and prioritise answers to the question. Each table then worked to clarify and prioritise answers identifying their top 5 answers in the process. The answers from each table were then collectively grouped and the lists given names by consensus. The answers agreed by the whole group to the question and names given to the lists are detailed in the table below.



Maximising opportunities for cultural change across sectors.	Advocate and lobby for leadership on strategic planning and objectives to agree outcomes	Building Change Trust to work with sector to develop an ICT resource which would support impact measurement: knowledge hub, different tools/providers	Concordat group action team work to develop a charter around outcome and learning based approaches	Capacity Building
Measuring impact to be treated as seriously as auditing financial probity	Respond to Programme for Government highlighting outcomes approach. Use other opportunities to influence/get message across	Resources to implement - put your money where your mouth is	A shared vision of benefits of impact measurement at organisational and funder levels	Conduct research to scope baseline skills and gaps , tools and commitment levels to impact measurement to inform future strategy
Increased focus on learning (failure allowed)	Engagement with those who commission services from VCS to increase understanding of outcomes.	Toolkits	Organisation commitment to outcomes	Create strategies to build capacity for groups of all sizes to do some level of impact measurement
	Intelligent commissioning - partnership approaches	Resources for providers and funders	Development of principles around impact measurement between government and community and voluntary sector	Capacity building skills and tools for all
		ICT resource to support impact measurement	BCT to support funders to develop common frameworks	Develop practice across sector themes
		A knowledge hub including the why? Tools, Policy, Links, Good practice	Common language - harmony of funding systems and reporting	Build knowledge in sector of range of impact measurement tools - inc - information sheets, website, case studies
			BCT to facilitate a dialogue with those who commission services from VCS	Support for sector to develop systems to measure impact
			Develop an interim framework to offer to stakeholders	
			Baseline data gaps and inconsistencies to be addressed	
			Adoption of lead funder approach to agree common	

			framework	
			Rationale for measurement, clear communication. Measurement to meet a need for groups	
			Agreed framework for outcomes based approach including compendium of sectoral indicators	
			More joined up approaches	

4. Evaluation of event

The evaluation of the event by the participants was overwhelmingly positive. Of the 20 evaluation forms received the majority of respondents agreed that speaker inputs were relevant to them and their organisations and also agreed that the discussion was stimulating and informative and that they had the opportunity to contribute. Some comments were made as follows

“A clear overview of where we are at here in Northern Ireland with regards impact measurement and how we might move forward”

“Very interactive – encouraged proper consideration of issues”

“I will now front up on an expensive evaluation that did not show what I wanted it to. An executive summary will be done by xmas”

“Very well facilitated – well done!”

5. Next steps and discussion

Whilst this report is the product of the event and thus addresses the first of the two key objectives set out above, how does the event address the second objective?

To begin to provide the Building Change Trust and others with a clearer understanding of what work needs to be done to improve monitoring, evaluation, impact measurement and reporting.

The answers to the focus question do contain some specific actions that could relatively easily be picked up by others and resourced by the Trust as stand alone projects dealing with the issue of impact measurement. Doing only that however would limit the potential impact of any investment by the Trust and if anything is to be done it is worth considering how a range of actions might proceed in a coherent, co-ordinated and synergistic way.

The issue of impact measurement is very topical and within Northern Ireland and further afield there are a number of pieces of work already taking/have taken place;

1. The [Centre for Cross Border Studies](#) recently launched an [Impact assessment toolkit for cross border cooperation in Ireland](#).

2. [Youthnet](#) and the [Youth Council of Ireland](#) ongoing work on the development of an impact measurement framework for the voluntary youth sector.

3. Work by CENI with Big Lottery Fund on a matrix and process for [measuring change](#).

4. Work done by [Volunteer Now](#) on the promotion and application of the [Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit](#) including training and mentoring support for its use.

5. The Knowledge Transfer Partnership between Bryson Charitable Group and the University of Ulster looking at impact measurement in a multipurpose social enterprise.

6. Work done by a range of organisations on [Social Return on Investment](#).

7. The launch of a new international [Social Impact Analysts Association](#) by New Philanthropy Capital.

8. The development of the [Inspiring Impact](#) initiative in England led by New Philanthropy Capital and others.

The issue is also topical given the current economic climate with funders of all hues seeking to maximise impact of their investments, organisations seeking competitive advantage by identifying and communicating their impact and a move by government towards more consideration of outcomes as opposed to inputs and activity.

The issue is complex and some also have concerns about the implications of and potential outcomes of an apparent drive to more and better impact measurement. Might this result in organisations and funders only investing in work that can be easily measured and readily demonstrate positive outcomes and impacts? What of smaller organisations that make up the bulk of the community and voluntary sector both numerically and in terms of volunteer participation in Northern Ireland – what are the implications for them of a new era of impact measurement and focus on outcomes?

The question for Building Change Trust is maybe less if it should invest in the issue of impact measurement but what it should do and how this should be done?

Lessons from the Inspiring impact initiative in England, building on the outcome of this consultation event (which clearly highlight the views of those attending that the Trust should take a lead role on the issue) perhaps provide some lessons on what should be done and how it should be done and also an opportunity to link any future initiative in Northern Ireland to what's happening elsewhere for mutual benefit.

In England New Philanthropy Capital and others held an Impact Summit which agreed that more social organisations need help to be focused on impact, using measurement to demonstrate their achievements and improve the way they work, ultimately changing more people's lives.

Five key factors have been identified that are involved in encouraging or holding back the development of impact measurement:

Incentives: Charities and social enterprises need to have incentives to measure their impact. This could be the promise of funding or an internal drive to improve services.

Resources: More funding needs to be invested in impact measurement, and we need more affordable and accessible products and services to help with measurement.

Capacity and skills: We need to make affordable, user-friendly tools and systems more widely available, and we need to train staff to use them.

Support: Social organisations need more support to look at their impact, with clear standards and coordination.

The way that results are used: We need to do more to learn from our impact measurement—shared measurement approaches are key to this.

A range of key stakeholders have subsequently agreed the first steps for a forthcoming decade of high impact: a 12-month action plan, which involves more than a dozen activities and objectives.

These include clarifying what good impact measurement looks like, campaigning to change the attitudes of leaders in the sector, setting up online resources, and making tools more accessible with actions grouped under 5 themes

1. **Leadership and culture**
2. **Shared measurement**
3. **Data, tools and systems**
4. **Funders, commissioners and investors**
5. **Impact measurement support**

These themes and some of the practical projects set out in the Inspiring Impact were also raised at the consultation seminar on 9 December. And logically lead to the question; could Building Change Trust play a role in developing, co-ordinating, leading and helping to resource a collaborative process for Northern Ireland linking to Inspiring Impact and which sets out a range of actions to be taken here over the coming period?

The Trust Board will be discussing the issue in the New Year.