



**Report prepared for:**

**Community Foundation for Northern  
Ireland (CFNI)**

*A scoping study of views on the support available  
to / accessed by the VSCE sector in Northern Ireland*

**December 2017**

***Final Draft***

**Prepared by RF Associates**



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## Executive Summary & Recommendations

### Project background

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) has commissioned RF Associates to produce this report. The prescribed purpose of the report is to:

- Map primary support programmes (i.e. RISP and RCDSS) for the VCSE sector in the region;
- Identify the current and future support needs of communities and community organisations and in doing so provide a general analysis on the state of the VCSE sector; and
- Make potential recommendations for the Foundation, and/or others to address.

Our research activity included: desk research and the mapping of support programmes; twenty qualitative stakeholder interviews; and an online survey. In total, the survey achieved a response rate of 18% from the CFNI contact database. (It was circulated to 542 contacts and 99 organisation representatives took the time to complete it.)

Please note throughout the report the term 'interviewees' is used to describe those who took part in the qualitative stakeholder interviews and 'survey respondents' is used to describe those who completed the online survey.

### **1. What support is currently available?**

Across the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) and the Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) organisations are meeting a range of support needs of regionally and locally based organisations. The Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) began on October 1, 2012. It had previously been known as the Regional Infrastructure programme (RIP) and was administered by the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) in the Department for Social Development (DSD). The Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) is an initiative of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). It funds rural community development through its "Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation" framework. Support through both these programmes is provided predominantly through training programmes / capacity building, representation activities, promotion activities, advocacy and collaborative activities.

In mapping this support it became clear that **all RISP strands, as well as the RCDSS programme**, have several organisations delivering training **to meet the same or very similar needs**, particularly in relation to: **governance issues and developing leadership** or what is termed "capacity building" regarding governance issues. This is distinguished from other areas of "capacity building" due to the volume of organisations explicitly referencing the specific area of governance and leadership in their activities. There are also similar activities being undertaken by organisations in relation to specific areas of practical skills development/ capacity building in each of the "strands", which we have also documented. (See table 1 below).

Table 1 – Number of organisations in relevant strand delivering Governance / leadership training and capacity building/skills development

RISP Strand	Governance / leadership training	Capacity building/skills development
Generic strand (4 in total)	4	4
Volunteering support strand ( in total)	2	5
Women in disadvantaged/rural areas strand	5	4
Faith based engagement strand	-	-
General advice strand	2	2
RCDSS	Governance / leadership training	Capacity building/skills development
	6	7

This duplication of training provision perhaps suggests that there is some concern in relation to governance structures/responsibilities. Further there seems to be duplication within the volunteering strand in terms of training and promoting volunteering, with activities happening at both a regional and local level. This also seems that it may be true within the strand of activity targeted to support women, in relation to training targeted towards some areas of skills development. **To ensure the best use of financial/funding support it may be helpful to address this duplication and free up organisations to address alternative support needs.**

Despite collaborative efforts, **the nature of the inter-organisational collaboration prescribed by RISP and RCDSS was raised by all interviewees as lacking in any true sense**, with the only incentive being financial necessity rather than a vision of working towards a common goal. This suggests that **ensuring effective collaborative working is about doing more than mandating organisations to work together to achieve funding**, and that there is a larger role to be played to support organisations to work together.

## 2. What support is currently being accessed?

Survey respondents were accessing financial/funding support from a range of sources, **but primarily: grant-making organisations (51 out of 83); local government (42 out of 83); the Lottery (36 out of 83) and central government (34 out of 83).** The high number of organisations stating grant-making organisations is likely due to the fact that the sample who completed the survey were CFNI contacts.

The online survey research found that there are a range of activities being supported by support organisations. Of those who were currently accessing support, **the majority (50 out of 68) were accessing funding support to deliver specific services and programmes.** 27 out of 68 were accessing advice support from support organisations, while 15 out of 68 were accessing core funding. 12 out of 68 were accessing policy/advocacy or training for board and executive members.

Out of the 27 survey respondents who said their organisations were accessing advice support, only 12 answered a follow up question about the type of advice support they were receiving. The most common type of advice support was 'information on funding sources' (8 out of 12), closely followed by 'governance/organisational support' and 'charitable status information' (6 out of 12).

Crucially, **48 out of 67 survey respondents either strongly or slightly agreed that they were unsure what support there was available from support organisations.** This suggests there is more work to be done to ensure organisations are aware of the support that they could be accessing.

### ***3. What are the key issues that the sector is facing currently?***

Survey respondents when talking generally about the issues facing the sector echoed a number of the key themes raised in the desk research. The desk research found that **reduced funding, the wider political climate of Northern Ireland, organisational restructuring and collaboration, and policy direction** are all influencing the current support needs of VCSE sector organisations.

Our survey highlighted **the top two current issues as 'political instability at Stormont' and 'limited funding' with almost all online survey respondents** (66 out of 68, and 64 out of 68, respectively) commenting that these were issues to some or a large extent.

The vast majority of survey respondents (60 out of 68) believed that a **'lack of consultation between policy makers and the community voluntary sector'** was an issue to some or a large extent. This was also reflected in qualitative interviews with support organisations who emphasised the advocacy and representation required in their support roles, as well as the importance of ensuring the independence of the sector.

53 out of 68 survey respondents considered to some, or a large extent, that **infrastructure organisations were too focused on delivering support to the Belfast area.** This was also reflected in the views of rural qualitative interviewees, who viewed much of the support focus as being Belfast-focused. These findings are likely informed by the composition of the respondents to our questionnaire, who predominantly came from areas outside of Belfast.

55 out of 68 survey respondents viewed Brexit as an issue to a large/certain extent. Qualitative interviewees emphasised the impact of **the uncertainty associated with Brexit** and how they needed to be supported in providing for the potential impact on their areas.

55 out of 68 survey respondents agreed, to either some or a great extent, that 'volunteering is not valued by society'. This reflects interview discussions with individuals from volunteering based organisations who commented that **it was difficult to promote volunteering** given the increasingly extensive role that volunteers were expected to play within the provision of services, and the lack of funding and support to recruit, train and fully support volunteer cohorts at a local level.

55 out of 68 survey respondents also agreed, to either some or a great extent that 'lack of collaboration between organisations' was an issue for the sector. **Interviewees wanted funding to address the specific need of their service users** rather than funding being tied to, or forcing, collaboration and/or partnerships with other organisations.

#### ***4. What are the most pressing support needs of the VCSE?***

**Core funding emerged as the most common need** with 26 out of 75 survey respondents highlighting it. In relation to the nature of advice support, most survey respondents (24 out of 73) indicated that information and advice on sources of funding were a priority need. Similar numbers also wanted advice on funding applications (23 out of 73).

Other pressing support needs highlighted in the online survey were financial training support and training support in community development. However, **there is a need to unpack what "community development" means and constitutes in practice**. As evidenced in the qualitative interviews, "community development" appears to represent a wide range of activities, and as such is difficult to provide for in policy terms without more specificity.

Other areas of support need indicated by survey respondents and interviewees included: **communication skills; mentoring support; and youth engagement**.

Additional comments in the online survey also included the need for support for particular groups, such as those living with disabilities, as well as additional expenses attributable to the nature of their work (i.e. volunteering).

The vast majority of respondents (almost three-quarters) to the online survey agreed either slightly or strongly **that their organisation would benefit from more support from support organisations**.

#### ***5. What is the experience of CFNI?***

**45 respondents from our online survey sample had received support from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. Overall they had a positive experience of CFNI. In most cases the support accessed was financial/funding support.** The majority of survey respondents agreed that CFNI were very helpful (34 out of 44) and very informative (28 out of 44). Almost all respondents who had accessed support from CFNI rated their overall experience of this as 'excellent' or 'good'. In terms of innovating their activity and better supporting the VCSE sector, respondents indicated the following areas for development:

getting out to meet groups; marketing and awareness raising; increasing availability of funding to the VCSE sector; reducing bureaucracy associated with funding; and holding “meet the funders” events.

## **6. Recommendations**

In reflecting on the research findings, the following are recommendations for CFNI to consider:

**i. We believe that there is an opportunity for CFNI to play a strategic role in the support and reshaping of the VCSE – but to do so it needs to be regularly listening to, and engaging with, the sector and more importantly encouraging a dialogue within the sector. A number of the findings suggest the need for an organisation that can help to bring the sector together to work through the current context, to a better set of circumstances. To this end we suggest that CFNI seek to regularly engage with the sector through a series of regular deliberative consultation events, supported by an independent facilitator, to address key themes.** The format could be for example that CFNI invite one delegate from each VCSE organisations to attend and that the sessions would include plenary and break out sessions – each focusing on pertinent themes e.g. funding support, volunteer support, governance support, advocacy support, funding application support, brexit etc. Holding these regularly would give a regular snap shot of the issues and needs on the ground, but also should encourage dialogue across the sector, and discussion of possible areas of solution. The CFNI team members would ideally be at the event/s to listen to the views of the sector and respond to questions, if relevant. The views and findings could then be analysed by the independent facilitator to create a picture of the sector’s views and needs. CFNI could share a summary version with VCSE stakeholders (email addresses collected at the events for those who want to receive this). The idea is that these forums would encourage engagement between grass roots based groups and CFNI and provide a forum for debate and discussion across the sector on pressing needs and issues. In these sessions best practice, possible changes etc could be suggested and discussed. **The consultation based approach outlined above would also support CFNI in helping to address concerns raised in the research about the ‘lack of consultation between policy makers and the community voluntary sector’ as well as providing a forum to discuss the ‘independence’ of the sector. In facilitating these challenging conversations around these areas, CFNI will be able to act at least in part as a conduit between the VCSE sector organisations and policy makers.**

Our survey findings also evidence a diverse sector, in terms of the scale and focus of organisations. An example of this presented by the research is that amongst qualitative interviewees from support organisations (i.e. those subject to support programme funding) there are **concerns about the ability of organisations within the sector to adhere to charitable governance guidelines.** In contrast to this, only minimal numbers of survey respondents indicated that they had a need for governance/charitable status advice. This highlights that the sector cannot be understood as a monolith and that different support initiatives are important for different parts of the sector for different reasons – any consultative based discussions as outlined above, would also need to take account of this diversity.

ii. **Collaboration in the VCSE sector also requires attention.** Interviewees indicated that they require funding to address the specific needs of their service users rather than funding being tied to, or forcing, collaboration and/or partnerships with other organisations. **However, a discussion about the nature of partnerships and more joint-up thinking and approaches is required, considering the best ways to support and develop collaborations. This goes to the core of what the role and purpose of the VCSE sector is, and how it can work more cohesively.** The risk of not having these conversations is the entrenchment of organisations in the sector, working in parallel to address similar need, with increasingly reduced budgets. **CFNI could seek to propose some ways forward, to support collaborative working, as a result of consultation with the sector.**

iii. The mapping research highlighted general areas of duplication around governance / leadership training and volunteering. It is important that efforts are made to reduce duplication. **As far as possible, support organisations should be encouraged to come together, to work together to ensure that there is not duplication of activity. This will ensure that the remit and activity of each organisation is clear, and focused on service users.**

iv. **The lack of coherence on what “community development” means in both policy and practice was evidenced in the research.** This was described by both interviewees and survey respondents as a fundamental area of focus for many of the organisations. However, **without agreement of what “community development” means in theory or practice, it is impossible to support it.** We recommend that more work is undertaken to unpack this term and what it really means in practice.

v. There is a need to increase awareness and understanding amongst VCSE organisations about what support is currently available to them. **It is incumbent upon CFNI, and the other organisations providing support, to ensure the details of their support offering is well marketed and accessible to all sizes and shapes of organisations. Ideally all support organisations would come together to ensure that duplication is limited and that sign posting to what is available is clear.** This could take the form of increased information sessions on an **area by area basis** (e.g. county, or council area) to increase awareness and grow relationships between organisations and CFNI.

vi. There was a sense amongst some interviewees that volunteering “is not valued by society” despite it being of increasing importance as a means to deliver support and services. Awareness needs to be created around the importance and value of volunteering at a societal level through a clear articulation of what it achieves locally and regionally. CFNI could address this in tandem with volunteer organisations, **by conducting relevant campaigning and research based work to showcase the value and benefit of volunteering.**

vii. The research identified a need **for core funding as a support need.** In response CFNI may consider **developing a core funding pilot programme,** to explore the potential of this and establish if it encourages organisations **to develop on a more holistic basis.**

viii. Other areas of support need were also indicated by survey respondents and interviewees, these included: **communication skills; mentoring support; and youth engagement.** CFNI





could develop programmes which will empower groups in their work to develop these skills. These could perhaps take **the form of a “training of trainer” model**, to ensure this direction and skills development is fostered in the sector itself, rather than from CFNI.

## 1. Background

This section details the background to this project.

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) emphasises several key values in its ethos: independence; innovation; flexibility and proportionality; empowerment; risk taking; and transparency and honesty. It primarily operates within three distinct strategic areas:

- Community Impact - making grants (and potentially other forms of social finance) to support local communities, particularly to help the most marginalized and vulnerable, and investing in the kind of projects that other funders might not fund;
- Donor Development - effectively helping donors direct their money to causes that make a difference; and
- Community Leadership - listening to the communities it works with and advocating on their behalf.

The Foundation commissioned RF Associates to produce a report, the purpose of the report is to:

- Map and explore the main support frameworks (RISP & RCDSS) and the nature of support they currently provide to the sector; and
- Survey the sector to help us understand the current situation in relation to support in the sector, and establish what the nature of support need is, which may provide CFNI with evidence to help direct their activity.

CFNI hope that the research findings will act as a baseline for further discussion around the support needs of the community in Northern Ireland at a time when there is an even greater reliance on local communities to address local issues at a local level.

## 2. Research Approach

This section details the approach taken to the research and provides the detail on those who participated.

### Overview

Our research approach included:

- Desk research; considering existing research, as well as mapping the two existing support frameworks (RISP and RCDSS) for the VCSE sector;
- Qualitative interviews with 20 representatives from organisations delivering and/or receiving support from these programmes; and
- An online survey, which was disseminated to CFNI grantees and contacts.

#### i. Desk research

The desk research considered key recent publications which touch on the current and future needs of the sector: CFNI's *Vital Signs: Helping make Northern Ireland a better place to live and work*, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Actions (NICVA) *State of the Sector*, the Building Change Trust and Ulster University's *The Independence of the VCSE Sector in NI and CO3's Third Sector Index*. This desk research provided us with a flavor of what is already known about the nature of the sector and in some areas touches on support needs.

#### ii. Mapping of organisations

We were asked to map out the activities of the organisations in receipt of funding from the following frameworks:

- **Regional Infrastructure Support Programme:** this has been implemented by the Department for Communities and aims to support the core costs of regional infrastructure organisations involved in playing a supporting, coordinating or development role in relation to voluntary and community sector organisations (with an emphasis on those working within the policy remit of the Department). It is concerned with five key strands: generic; volunteering support; women in disadvantaged/rural areas; faith based engagement; and generalist advice. This involved mapping the relevant activities of the Programme partners such as: NICVA; CO3; Rural Community Council; Supporting Communities NI; Community Evaluation NI.
- **Rural Community Development Support Service** (through Department for Communities and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) and the Rural Community Network.

The mapping involved creating a basic excel spread sheet and listing the relevant activities of each of the stipulated organisations. Having listed activities we then abstracted the key themes.

#### iii. Qualitative stakeholder engagement

We conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with senior representatives from organisations involved with delivering these programmes, and/or recipients of support of these programmes. These lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. The discussions addressed the themes of the project:

- Organisation background/focus/services supplied
- The nature of support they receive (if any) in their work
- Areas of greatest support need in their work

Table 2 shows the number of interviews conducted for each of the programmes and where relevant the various programme strands.

Table 2

<b>RISP</b>		<b>No. of interviews</b>
Generic strand		4
Volunteering support strand		2
Women in disadvantaged/rural areas strand		5
Faith based engagement strand	No interviews were pursued in this strand due to the discontinuation of the Churches Community Work Alliance (CCWA), who were originally included in RISP as a partner.	
Generalist advice support		1
	TOTAL	12
<b>RCDSS</b>		<b>No. of interviews</b>
	TOTAL	8

#### iv. Online survey

We designed and conducted an online survey to collect data about the VSCE sector. The survey sought to gain insights on the following themes:

- Types of organisations / organisational focus
- Geographical location;
- Current support activities / services;
- Key challenges in the VCSE sector;
- Current support needs of sector;
- Potential future support needs; and
- The experience of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

The survey was circulated by the CFNI team to their database of grant holders on several occasions across a six-week period between September and October, 2017. In total, it was circulated to 542 of CFNI's contacts. In response, 99 individuals completed the online survey, from a range of organisations from across the sector.

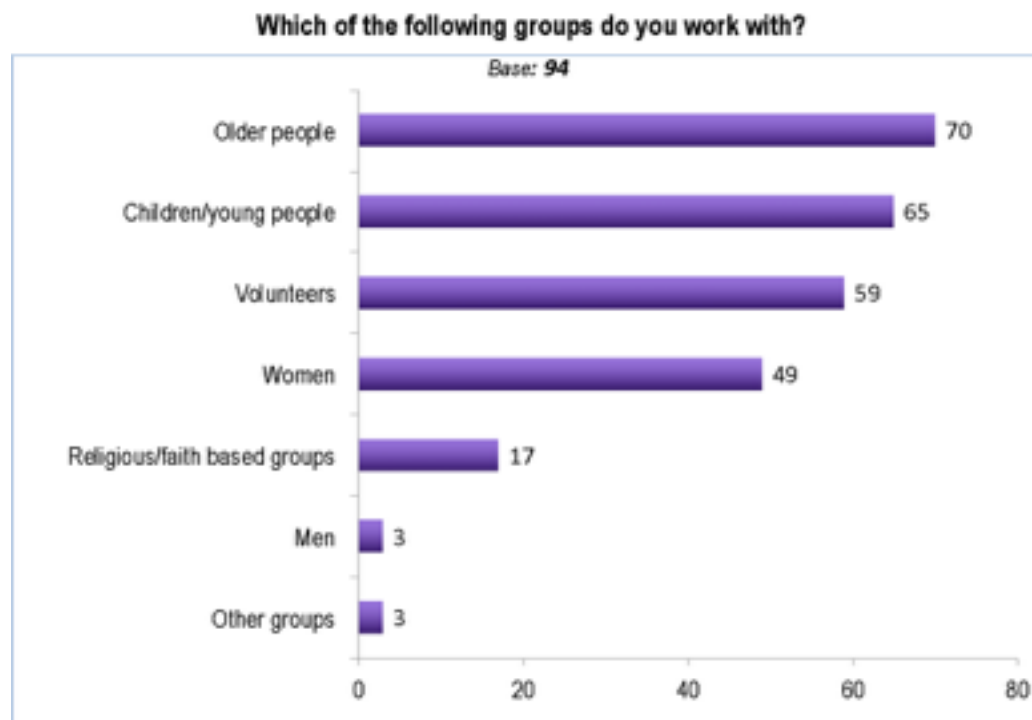
Almost two-thirds of survey respondents viewed their organisation's main focus as being 'community development'. Over four-fifths described it as 'capacity building' and just over two

thirds described it as 'Community relations/peace building'. Chart 1 below provides a full break down across organisational activity, with Chart 2 highlighting the main groups of users that organisations work with. The majority of survey respondents were from organisations that focus on older people and children/young people (see chart 2 below). Significant numbers were also engaged in work with volunteers and women. An observation we think it is important to make, on considering the responses to these two questions, is that some survey respondents completing on behalf of organisations, seemed to have difficulty in clarifying exactly what it was their organisation did in terms of competencies and displayed more confidence in describing the group that they provided services for. This would suggest that there are some organisations in the voluntary and community sector who could more clearly articulate to their staff what they exist to do, as well as who they exist to help.

Chart 1



Chart 2

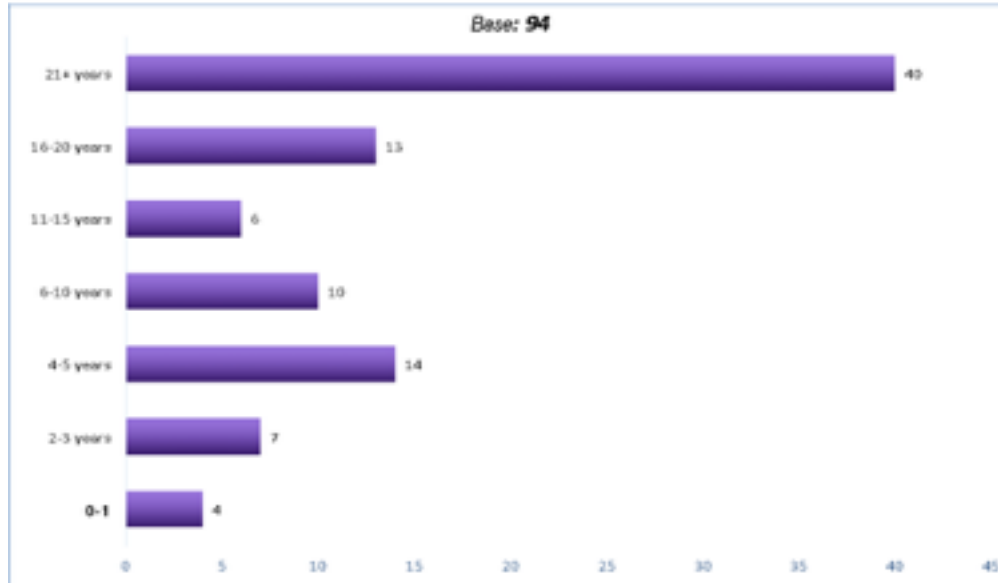


*\*\*Other groups" represents: ex-combatants; families; and the unemployed*

The vast majority of survey respondents were from organisations that had been in existence for more than 21 years. This evidences the well established and experienced nature of the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland, but also that there may be a lack of new organisations being set up.

Chart 3

**How long has your organisation been in existence?**

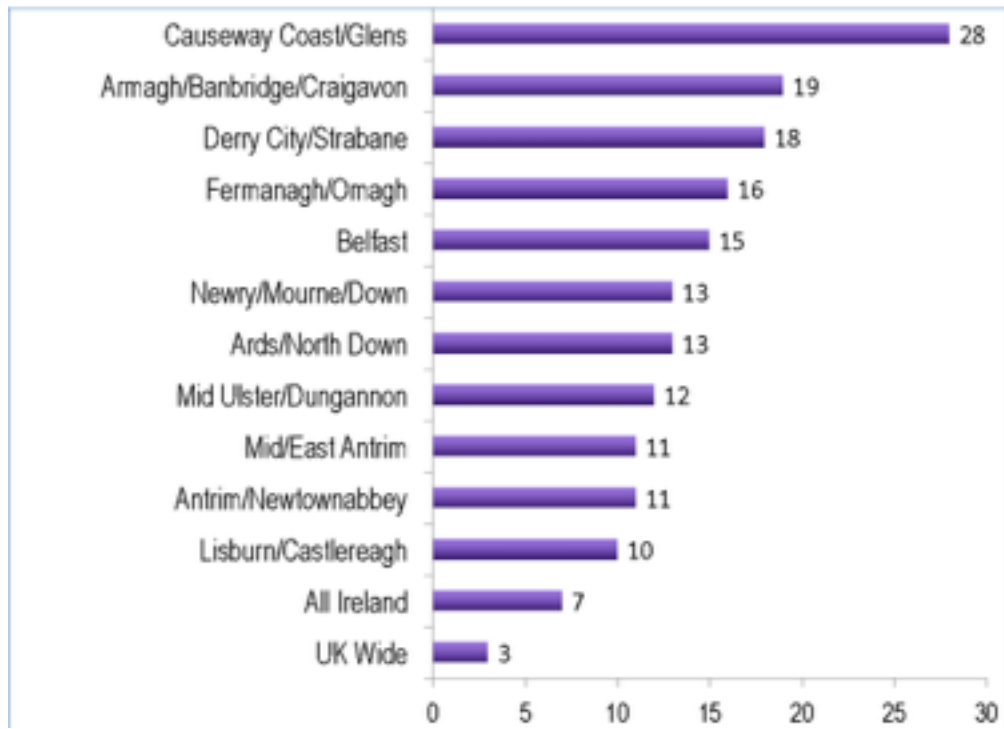


The survey drew responses from across Northern Ireland with the Causeway Coast/Glens area most represented. As chart 4 shows limited numbers of organisations operate on a UK-wide or all-Ireland basis.

Chart 4

**What is the geographical remit of your organisation?**

Base: 94

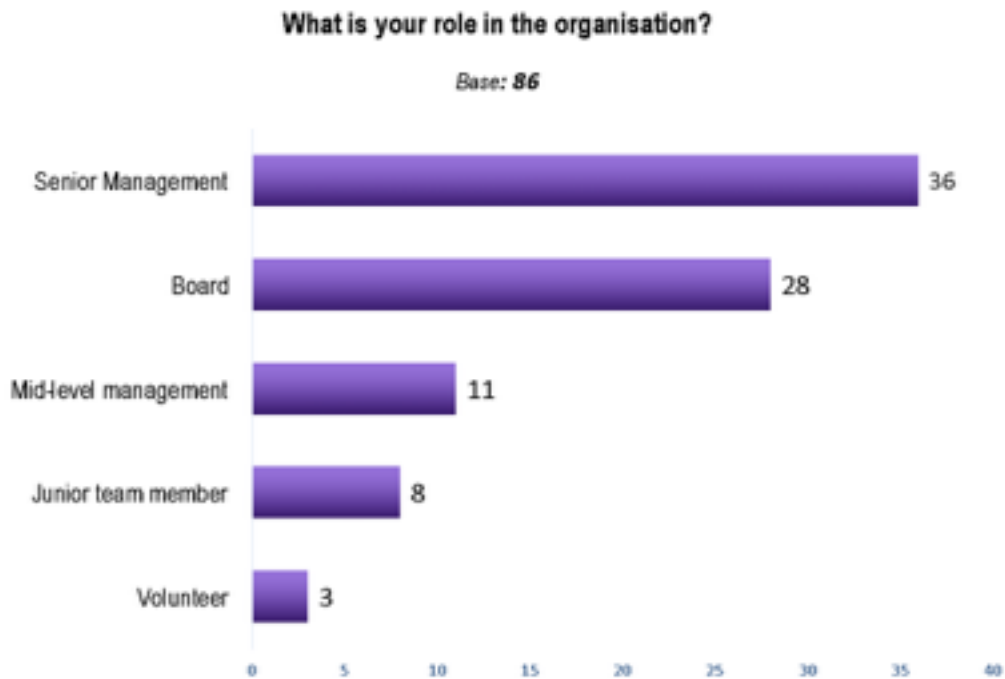






Survey respondents were mainly in senior management roles (36 out of 86) or board members (28 out of 86). The remainder were in mid-level management (11 out of 86), a junior team member (8 out of 86) or volunteers (3 out of 86). Consideration must be given to the predominance of board members in these findings and how this may influence the views expressed in survey findings in this research. Given that board members are not necessarily involved with the day to day running of organisations, this may be a factor influencing our survey findings.

Chart 5



### 3. Brief Desk Review Findings

This section highlights key themes from a selection of existing literature.

A number of reports have explored the experience of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Northern Ireland in recent years. In this section we highlight the main themes of pertinence to this project.

Table 3

Publication	Organisation	Year
<i>The Independence of the Sector</i>	BCT/UU	2015
<i>State of the Sector</i>	NICVA	2015
<i>Vital Signs</i>	CFNI	2016
<i>A consultation paper on proposals for the provision of strategic support to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland 2017-2021</i>	Department for Communities (DfC)	2017
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Sector Index Quarter One 2017 Report Quarter Two 2017 Report Quarter Three 2017 Report</i>	CO3	2017

#### i. Reduced funding

NICVA's *State of the Sector Report*, 2016, highlights a pessimistic economic outlook by the sector with a significant proportion of their sample (38.1%) expecting their income to decrease in 2016. 29.5% expected their income to remain the same and just 17.5% of survey respondents anticipated an increase in their income over the next 12 months. Despite many organisations reporting that they expected their income to decrease or stay the same, a substantial proportion anticipated an increase in their expenditure over the next 12 months (43.2%). Reduced funding / or the anticipation of it, is considered to create particular issues for organisations, for example:

1. **An inability to plan** - Research earlier in 2016 by CFNI identified that organisations in the community and voluntary sector are "*unable to strategically plan or develop long-term approaches to issues due to the short-term nature of much funding*".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CFNI. (2016). *Vital Signs: Helping make Northern Ireland a better place to live and work*. Accessed at: <http://www.communityfoundationni.org/copy-of-vital-signs>

2. **Pressure to reduce staffing and services** - Constrained public spending was also identified as a key issue in NICVA's *State of the Sector* report, with 79.5% of research respondents stating that they expected constrained public spending to have an impact on the sector's workforce<sup>2</sup> and just under one-fifth of those surveyed also stated that they were 'downsizing due to reduced funding' (19.8%).<sup>3</sup> Further one-sixth of research respondents (16.9%) expected to close services. This marks an increase of 7.6 percentage points from findings presented in previous *State of the Sector* research (2012).
  
3. **Pressure to 'follow the funding' which may not be core to organisational activity but is what is available and achievable** – The report *Independence of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Northern Ireland* suggests that some organisations have found themselves in difficulties as they try to align their mission and structures with government funding streams, revealing a fundamental disconnect between the reality of need that organisations are aiming to address, and that of the policy direction behind the funding.<sup>4</sup>

## ii. Impact of wider political climate in Northern Ireland

The wider political climate has also been commented on as impeding the work of VSCE sector. Recent findings from CO3's *Third Sector Index* suggests this:

*When questioned on what was their main concern regarding the latest political crisis in Northern Ireland, 44% reported that their funding was threatened by the lack of budget. Furthermore, a quarter (25%) expressed their main concern was a potential democratic deficit and the lack of accountability that implies. A fifth (20%) mentioned the need to address the erosion of political trust, while 8% reported that they were concerned about the negative impact on leadership and morale.<sup>5</sup>*

The CO3 research further highlights the impact of political instability: with just under a third of research respondents commenting that the lack of an Assembly has had a largely negative impact on their organisations and cash flow. It states:

*Indecision, uncertainty, and the instability that the current political vacuum has caused, is impacting on morale across the sector. The piecemeal approach to funding raises vulnerabilities on the cash flow situation of charities too. This quarter's results show*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> NICVA. (2014). *2014 Workforce Survey Top Line Findings*. Accessed at: [http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/d7content/attachments-articles/2014\\_workforce\\_infograph\\_topline\\_summary\\_2.pdf](http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/d7content/attachments-articles/2014_workforce_infograph_topline_summary_2.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> BCT/UU. (2015). *Independence of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Northern Ireland*. Accessed at: <http://www.buildingchangetrust.org/download/files/IndependenceFullReport2016.pdf>,

<sup>5</sup> CO3. (2017). *3rd Sector Index Q3 2017*. Accessed at: <https://www.co3.bz/sites/default/files/UB%20CO3%20Q1%202017%20report%2007Apr17.pdf>

*we have seen an increase in the number of charities stating that their cash flow is very unstable.*<sup>6</sup>

Also, survey data collected as part of this work by CO3 suggests that a significant minority of research respondents have avoided criticising government policy due the fact that it may impede their ability to access funds.<sup>7</sup>

### **iii. Restructuring**

Given the financial uncertainty already referred to it is perhaps not unsurprising that restructuring is a common feature of the voluntary and community sector. NICVA's most recent *State of the Sector* research found that in 2016, just over one-third (34%) of research respondents expected to undertake an organisational restructure in 2016.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, NICVA's *2014 Workforce Survey*, found that one-third of organisations who had engaged with the research had undertaken an organisational restructure in the past 12 months. Changing roles and responsibilities was the most common reason for restructuring (65.1%) and the second most common reason was 'new management methods/ structure' (38.7%).<sup>9</sup>

### **iv. Collaboration**

In the context of austerity the VCSE has been encouraged to work more collaboratively to deliver more effective and efficient services and at the same time achieve better outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

The most recent *State of the Sector* findings found an increased intention to collaborate:

*69.6% of respondents expected to collaborate with another organisation in the next 12 months, which marks an increase of 6.7 percentage points from previous State of the Sector research (2012)*<sup>11</sup>

Further there has also been some encouragement towards appropriate mergers. However, the *State of the Sector* report found that only 6.3% of research respondents anticipated merging with another organisation in the following 12 months, and this figure is almost unchanged from 2012 (6.6%). Further research, however suggests that it is unrealistic to expect bottom up reform through an organic drive to mergers and expectations.<sup>12</sup> Other research found that the nature of partnerships is being impacted by arrangements, such as subcontracting. This is due to the fact that the nature of the relationship between the contractor and subcontractor is not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> NICVA. (2016). *State of the Sector 2016*. Information accessed at: <http://www.nicva.org/topics/state-sector>

<sup>9</sup> Op cit.

<sup>10</sup> NICVA. *Collaboration crucial to the challenges that lie ahead - Mervyn Storey MLA*. Accessed at: <http://collaborationni.nicva.org/article/collaboration-crucial-challenges-lie-ahead-mervyn-storey-mla>

<sup>11</sup> NICVA (2016). *State of the Sector Research*. Accessed at: <http://www.nicva.org/stateofthesector/future-issues>

<sup>12</sup> Op cit.

born out of a partnership in terms of an equal footing, but is more of a supplier/distributor arrangement, based on mutually beneficial financial gains.<sup>13</sup>

#### **v. Support and policy**

A recent consultation document, *A consultation paper on proposals for the provision of strategic support to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland 2017-2021*, produced by the Department for Communities, explicitly deals with the issue of support and the sector and states its aim is to:

*“To support an efficient, effective, sustainable and inclusive VCS which will work collaboratively with Government to effectively deliver against agreed PfG<sup>14</sup> outcomes over the next 4 years”<sup>15</sup>*

This document states that this is underpinned by the following identified outcomes:

- . Outcome 1 - An efficient and effective VCS
- . Outcome 2 - A sustainable VCS that has navigated and implemented change
- . Outcome 3 – An inclusive VCS
- . Outcome 4 – Volunteering integral to the VCS

The document also discusses the changing environment the sector has had to adapt to in recent years:

*It is acknowledged that support is needed to help VCS organisations to navigate change and become more sustainable; transitioning away from reliance on grant based funding where possible. It is therefore proposed to establish a Change Fund, which VCS organisations can apply to for support in managing change. The Change Fund would be open to those VCS organisations at a point where leadership for change management is evident e.g. through completion of the Leadership for Change programme.<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> OFMDFM. *Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021*.

Accessed at: <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/consultations/draft-programme-government-framework-2016-21-and-questionnaire>

<sup>15</sup> DfC (2017). *A consultation paper on proposals for the provision of strategic support to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland 2017-2021*.

Accessed at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-proposals-provision-strategic-support-voluntary-and-community-sector-northern-ireland>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## 4. Mapping of key support infrastructure for the VSCE in Northern Ireland

This section provides basic information around the organisations funded by RISP and RCDSS and their funded activities and raises any relevant key issues.

Two support structures are in place to explicitly address the support needs of the VSCE sector. These include:

- The Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP)
- The Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS)<sup>17</sup>

### i. Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP)

The Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) began on October 1, 2012. It had previously been known as the Regional Infrastructure programme (RIP) and was administered by the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) in the Department for Social Development (DSD). In the period up until 2015, the policy outcomes were outlined as below:

#### **RISP Policy Outcomes**

*Outcome 1:* Efficient delivery of Generic Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

*Outcome 2:* Engage with sub regional organisations and local councils

*Outcome 3:* Produce baseline information and extend numbers of groups supported province wide

*Outcome 4:* VCS organisations across Northern Ireland, urban and rural, have access to key generic infrastructure support they need to function effectively and efficiently

*Outcome 5:* VCS organisations are supported to achieve their objectives better than before and provide an improved quality of service to their customers

*Outcome 6:* VCS organisations are fully supported to avail of the government programmes/initiatives that are available to them

*Outcome 7:* VCS organisations are supported in maintaining effective governance arrangements, obtain and better manage resources, and improve sustainability

*Outcome 8:* The VCS is supported in making a valued and effective contribution to policy development across Government

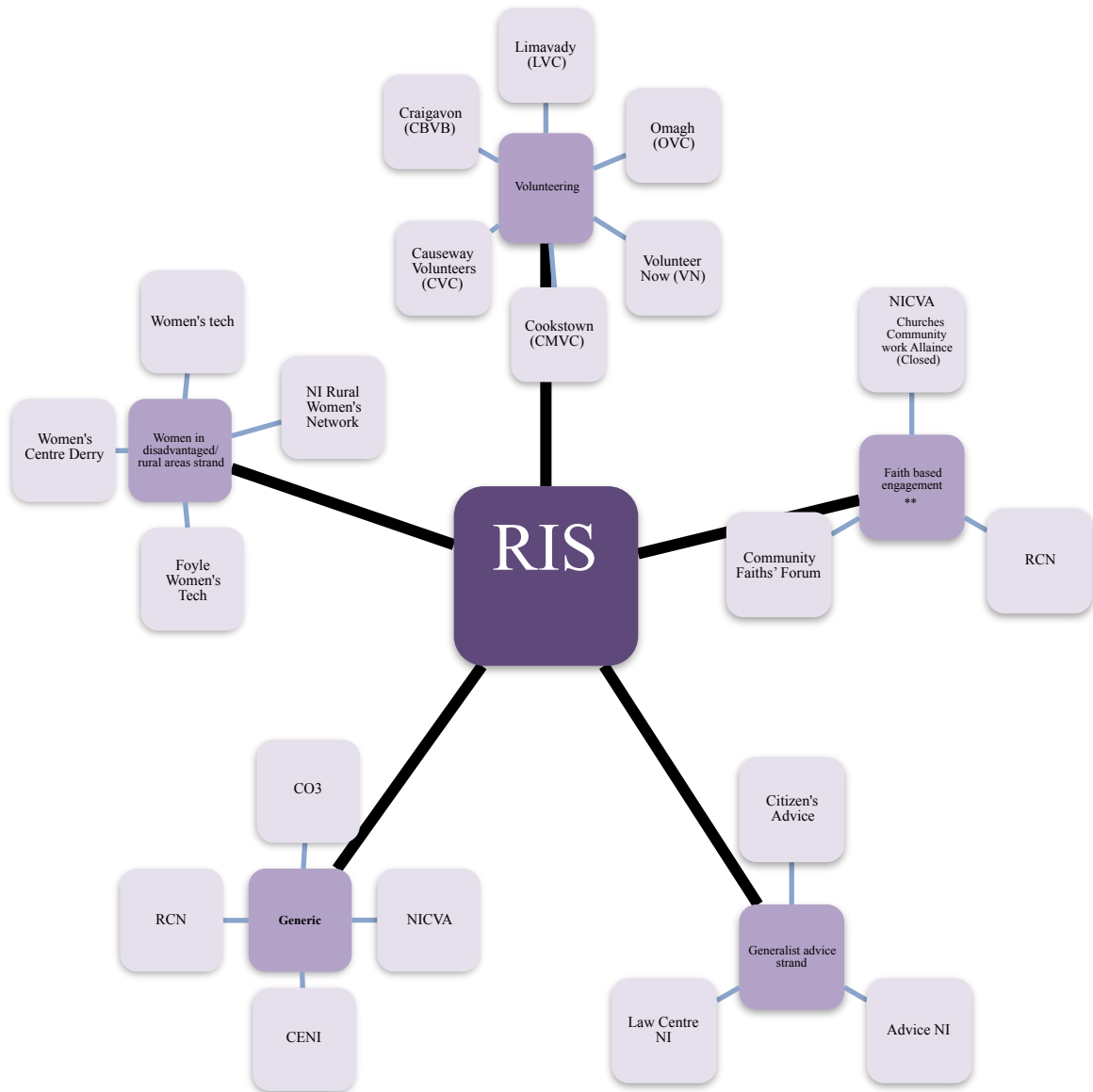
*Outcome 9:* There is increased VCS participation across NI and improved community development/engagement

monies are awarded to organisations, nor the detail of the specific activities that they have committed to undertake. It is not been the purpose of the work to 'audit' the volume / detail / quality of activities – rather this work has been about understanding the range of activity underway and to provide general comment on its scope.

RISP has five distinct, yet intertwining, “strands”:

- Generic strand
- Volunteering support strand
- Women in disadvantaged/rural areas strand
- Faith based engagement strand
- Generalist advice strand

Figure 1: RISP strands and associated organisations



\*\* Limited information on this strand – other than CCWA is now closed. NICVA and RCN now leading on this strand. NICVA undertook NICVA recently completed research on the faith-based sector in Northern Ireland. Accessed at: <http://www.nicva.org/article/nicva-releases-findings-from-northern-ireland-faith-survey>

#### 4.1 Generic strand



The generic strand of RISP is described as:

*“a joint arrangement between the Department and the Department for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), geared to support the voluntary and community sector in respect of representation, training board members, capacity building, handling governance issues and income generation”.*<sup>18</sup>

A consortium consisting of the following organisations delivers it:

- Community Evaluation NI (CENI)
- Chief Officers 3rd Sector (CO3)
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Rural Community Network (RCN)

The interviews and mapping conducted identified the following sorts of support activities being provided by the generic strand:

Table 4

Key features	No. of organisations
Training/capacity building	4
Representation	3

### Training / capacity building

There is a breadth of training currently being offered by members of the generic strand consortium. In discussions with organisation representatives ‘training’ and ‘capacity building’ were described, and discussed in similar terms. That is to say, training is deemed to be an integral part of capacity building in organisations, and hence local communities:

*“Capacity building is a really general, umbrella term, so we describe it in terms of the practice, in developing capacity through the range of training we deliver.”*

The following are the main areas of training and development:

Table 5

Training area	Some examples
Research/evaluation	Evaluation training / development of suitable evaluation methodologies in conjunction with organisations
Leadership	Leadership programmes such as ILM accredited training, focusing on leadership and management, Training to support leaders develop with key organisational issues such as Succession Planning
Governance	Governance training for board members e.g. Chairs’ Training - Building an Effective Board

<sup>18</sup> Information accessed at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/regional-infrastructure-support-programme>

Accredited training	OCNs in community development; good relations; and youth work
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## Representation

Three out of these four involved organisations are membership bodies:

Table 6

Organisations	Membership numbers	Organisational description (As per organisation website)
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)	1033	A membership and representative umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.
Chief Officers 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sector (CO3)	700	Membership organisation supporting, developing and connecting Third Sector leaders in Northern Ireland.
Rural Community Network (RCN)	252	Membership organisation seeking to articulate the voice of rural communities on issues relating to poverty, disadvantage and equality.

This membership structure means that they are also providing a representative function for their members. This was reflected in the qualitative interviews conducted as part of this research, with organisation representatives emphasising the role that they play in lobbying and advocating for their members which involves traversing a wide range of policy areas. They consider their work of supplying an evidence base for policy makers and funders as a key aspect of their function.

## 4.2 Volunteering support strand

The Volunteering support strand is described as being:

*“[g]eared to support, promote and maximise volunteering across NI. The volunteering strategy aim is to create the conditions under which volunteering activity within Northern Ireland can develop and flourish.”*

This strand is delivered through the funding of the following volunteering support organisations across Northern Ireland:

Table 7

Organisation	Description (as per organisation website)
Causeway Volunteer Centre	Causeway Volunteer Centre (CVC) is the leading Agency for volunteering in the Causeway Area covering Coleraine, Ballymoney and Moyle.
Cookstown and Magherafelt Volunteer Centre	The Cookstown & Magherafelt Volunteer Centre is a registered charity limited by guarantee. A need was identified to provide other services such as community transport and a volunteer bureau.
Craigavon and Banbridge Volunteer Bureau	Craigavon and Banbridge Volunteer Bureau is concerned with the promotion, support and development of volunteering in the local community and enhancing the personal development of its volunteers.
L i m a v a d y Volunteer Bureau	LVB seek to promote and encourage people to volunteer whilst working with organisations to help them develop opportunities and encourage good management of volunteers.
Omagh Volunteer Centre	Omagh Volunteer Centre acts as a central source of information, support, training and advice for those wishing to become involved in volunteering and organisations involving volunteers.
Volunteer Now	Volunteer Now works to promote, develop and support volunteering across Northern Ireland. Their work enhances recognition for the contribution volunteers make, provides access to opportunities, encourages people to volunteer and provides information and support to volunteer involving organisations on volunteer management and safeguarding vulnerable groups.

This strand involves a combination of organisations that support and train individual volunteers as well as organisations that provide support to organisations to help them in turn support and train their volunteers. It also includes organisations with a remit across Northern Ireland, as well as those with specific, localised geographical remits. Therefore the provision of support for volunteers in Northern Ireland may be accessed at two levels: locally and through regional

groups. Through the mapping it was not possible to see a clear delineation between support at the local level and at a national level, so there may be some overlap.

The interviews and mapping conducted identified training and promoting volunteering as the main support activities being provided by the volunteering support strand:

### Training

Organisations in this ‘strand’ are delivering training in a range of areas. In the table below we have sought to group these according to training areas:

Table 8

Training area	Number of organisations
Volunteering skills	5
Accredited training e.g. volunteer management training	3
Befriending e.g. for older people/ specific groups	2
Leadership skills e.g. committee members	2
Diversity e.g. good relations training for volunteers	1
Child safety e.g. Volunteer Now provide access NI checks	1
Health & safety, e.g. Safe working practices	1

### Volunteer support and promotion

In general terms these organisations are concerned with developing volunteering and increasing numbers of volunteers in specific areas/Northern Ireland wide. They seek to develop volunteering across a range of age groups (e.g. young people and/or those who may have retired). They also work with employers locally and regionally to identify potential volunteering opportunities. Further they seek to develop volunteering best practice in terms of governance issues (i.e. committees and boards), as well as ensuring that volunteer practice is adhering to the safeguarding of vulnerable groups and individuals.

### 4.3 Women in disadvantaged/rural areas strand

The Women in Disadvantaged/Rural Areas strand is described as:

*“a joint programme between DfC and DAERA, geared to maximise the ability of women living in disadvantaged/rural areas to contribute to their communities.”*

It is being delivered by the following organisations, whose focus is on the following:

Table 9

Organisation	Organisational focus description (As per their website/interviews)
Training for Women Network	A network for the promotion of women's training and development, through policy, training, networking and education.
Women's Regional Consortium	Overall aim of maintaining best practice in frontline services for women.
Women's Tec	Enabling women into non-traditional employment
NI Rural Women's Network	To be the voice for rural women at a policy level
Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN)	FWIN is an information network for community-based women's centres, group's, individuals and organisations. It seeks to increase the capacity, visibility and voice of women throughout the North West.
Women's Support Network (WSN)	Regional, infrastructural membership organisation for community-based women's centres, women's projects and groups.
Women's Centre Derry (WCD)	Promote women's equality and access to education, employment, social & economic life.
Women's Resource Development Agency (WRDA)	WRDA's mission, as a regional organisation, is to advance women's equality and participation in society. We work with women to achieve social, economic, political and cultural transformation.

The interviews and mapping conducted identified advocacy, training / capacity building and collaboration as the support related activities being delivered by these organisations. Below we provide more information on each area.

#### Advocacy

All of the organisation representatives who we interviewed as part of the qualitative research identified advocacy for women across communities in Northern Ireland, as one of their areas of activity. Examples of areas that they advocate on are:

- Access to, and affordability of, childcare; and
- Rural women's' issues, such as affordable transport; and social isolation.

#### Training/capacity building

Training and capacity building activity is also provided for individual women through activities in this strand. Further some organisations seek to train and support in turn other organisations to deliver support to individual women. As with other strands, it maybe the case that as a result there is some duplication of activity, which are primarily orientated around practical skills such as computer training.

Table 10

Area	Some examples are:
Training/capacity building	<p><b>Practical skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Soft skills and works skills training including confidence building and motivation</li> <li>- Training on technology for older women crafts</li> <li>- Public Speaking</li> <li>- Money management</li> </ul> <p><b>Health &amp; wellbeing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ILM Training; Level 3 Award - Mental Resilience for Line Managers</li> <li>- Dealing and Coping with Stress</li> </ul> <p><b>Professional skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Level 3 Certificate in Coaching and Mentoring</li> <li>- Level 5 award or Certificate - Effective Leadership for Middle Managers</li> <li>- Level 7 Certificate - Leading Change for Senior Managers;</li> <li>- ILM Endorsed Award - Train the Trainer</li> <li>- Public Appointments Workshop</li> <li>- Community Facilitator Programme</li> </ul> <p><b>Education / information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-vocational Skills Training covering pre-GCSE numeracy, literacy and computing skills</li> <li>- Issues of patriarchy</li> <li>- Computer Training</li> <li>- Getting smart with smart phones and tablets</li> <li>- Money advice</li> </ul>

### Collaboration

Examples of collaboration in this strand include the *Rural Women's Manifesto*. It was developed by a membership-based organisation, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN). It contains details on pertinent everyday issues affecting rural women, such as; caring responsibilities, transport, rural development, education and training, poverty and the economy and social isolation, health and wellbeing.

#### 4.4 Generalist advice strand

The Generalist advice strand provides support through the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium (NIASC). The NIASC comprises of two generalist advice providers: Citizens Advice NI; and Advice NI. It also encompasses the Law Centre NI.

Table 11

Organisation	Organisational focus description (As per their website/interviews)
Citizens Advice NI	Citizens Advice is the largest advice charity in Northern Ireland, working against poverty and meeting the information and advice needs of around 98,000 people per year in local offices and over 328,000 people viewing more than 2.7 million topics
Advice NI	Advice NI is a registered charity and exists to provide leadership and services to their 62 member organisations and to ensure accessible advice services across Northern Ireland.
Law Centre NI	Law Centre (NI) provides specialist legal support to organisations and disadvantaged individuals. They deliver legal services to members and support the work of advice agencies through advice, casework, training, information, publications, information-sharing practitioner meetings and policy development.

The interviews and mapping conducted identified the following support activities provided by this strand:

- Support specific to informing the public / organisations on their rights
- Support for disadvantaged groups
- Advocacy

Table 12

Examples of training areas	Numbers of organisations
Welfare reform training (for organisations)	3
Money management (for groups and individuals)	2
The Adviser Training Programme (ATP) (OCN NI Level 3 Certificate in Generalist Advice (QCF)	1
Universal credit	1
Information on specific policy/legislation (e.g. legislation for older people)	1
Training for those delivering debt advice to individuals and groups	1

Advocacy skills training (for organisations and individuals)	1
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### **Support specific to informing the public / organisations on their rights and entitlements**

This strand focuses on providing support in terms of accurate and specific information to members of the public and organisations on key issues such as:

- welfare reform
- pension provision
- benefits
- housing
- employment
- disability
- community Care
- consumer issues
- rights based issues, as and when they are presented.

### **Support for disadvantaged/vulnerable individuals**

All three groups provide support to disadvantaged / vulnerable individuals on issues such as benefits for older people; access to support when sick; and children's legal rights. Depending on the organisation, they also provide advice to individuals facing discrimination due to disability, race, religion or belief, or sex or sexual orientation. NI Law Centre works to this end in the strand as a "second tier organisation" – which means they deal with particularly difficult and complex casework that cannot be resolved by the other organisations.

### **Advocacy**

The advocacy work of these organisations is described as acting as a "go between" between service users and those at policy level in acting as a conduit between their service users and policy makers. Examples of campaigns include issues such as food poverty and welfare reform.





### **Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS)**

The Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) is an initiative of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). It funds rural community development through its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework. The table below highlights the aims of the programme, while figure 3 outlines the organisations engaging with the programme.

**Figure 2: Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) is delivered by the following organisations:**

#### **Aims of the RCDSS**

##### **Supporting Access to the NIRDP**

Support for individuals and communities, including farmers and farm families, to access the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

##### **Assisting Development of the Rural Economy**

Assisting individuals and communities, including farmers and farm families, to access information and advice on the economic assistance available to rural areas; and provide support in working towards the economic and social sustainability of rural communities.

##### **Supporting Access to the TRPSI Programme**

Actively promote and be an advocate for all aspects of the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme, and actively support the Department in the roll out of projects and initiatives.

##### **Developing Capacity and Leadership**

Developing capacity and leadership in rural communities along with proper governance as a means of supporting community involvement and maintaining strong rural communities.

##### **Community Development Service for the Unionist Population**

Deliver a community development service for the Unionist population living in rural border areas which is consistent with 'Renewing Communities – the government's response to the report of the task force on protestant working class communities'.

Figure 3: RCDSS groups

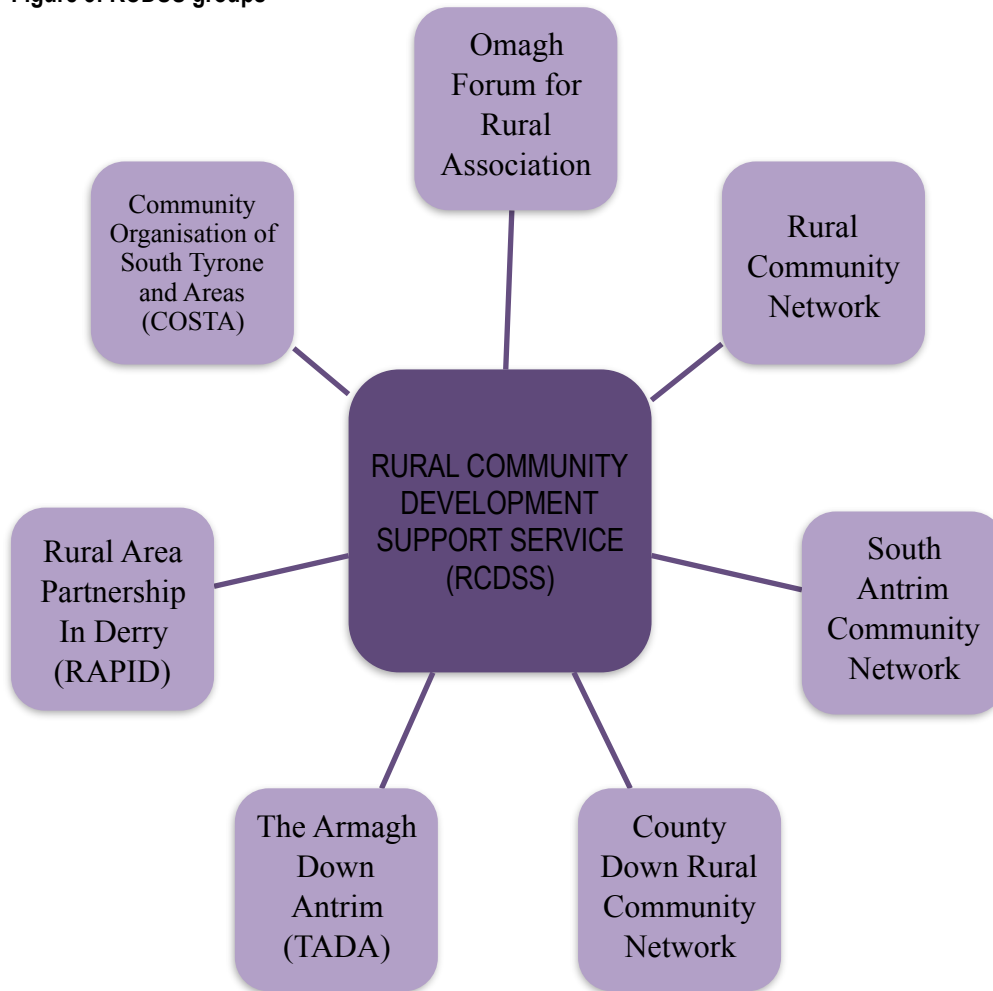


Table 13

Organisation	Organisational focus description (As per their website/interviews)
Omagh Forum for Rural Association (OFRA)	Omagh Forum actively supports communities to help themselves through valuing civic participation and volunteering as vital building blocks in the community.
Rural Community Network (RCN)	RCN aims to provide an effective voice for and support to rural communities, particularly those who are most disadvantaged.
South Antrim Community Network (SACN)	South Antrim Community Network, formally known as South Antrim Rural Network, provides community development support to communities within the council boroughs of Antrim, Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus Council Areas.
County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN)	County Down Rural Community Network is a voluntary umbrella body set up and managed by community groups in County Down.
The Armagh Down Antrim (TADA) Network	TADA is one of seven providers awarded this contract to provide local community development support and advice service. To help sustain vibrant local communities in rural areas through the development and support of all rural community groups and individuals by providing information, advocacy, capacity building and partnership working with all other relevant bodies.
Rural Area Partnership In Derry (RAPID)	The Rural Area Partnership in Derry consists of representatives from community organisations, statutory authorities, the private sector and special interest groups and its primary objective is: "To halt the social and economic decline of the rural communities within the Derry City & Strabane District Council Area and to enable these communities in partnership with all interested parties to devise locally led strategies to facilitate sustainable social, economic and cultural development.
Community Organisation of South Tyrone and Areas (COSTA)	COSTA was established in 2000 as a cross-community non-profit-taking Limited Company with Charitable aims and objectives. COSTA operates from an office at President Grants Homestead located between Ballygawley, Dugannon and Aughnacloy and is managed by a highly competent and experienced voluntary Board representing local rural groups, communities and statutory organisations.

The interviews and mapping conducted identified the following support activities provided by this strand: training; capacity building; and collaboration. Services are provided to smaller organisations within the geographic remit of each organisation.

Table 14

Area	Some examples of activity:
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<p>Specific training provision and programmes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Down District Health Development</li> <li>- Rural Ards Connecting Healthy Communities</li> <li>- Active Communities Programme</li> <li>- Interstates Community Development Programme</li> <li>- Maximising Access to Services in Rural Areas 'MARA' Programme (Phase II)</li> <li>- Assisting Development of the Rural Economy</li> <li>- Supporting Access to the Tackling Rural Poverty &amp; Social Isolation Programme</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capacity building (in relation to supporting smaller groups, locally)</b></p>	<p><b>Practical skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funding Information and assistance completing application form</li> <li>- Assistance and guidance in conducting focus groups and community audits</li> </ul> <p><b>Practical resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Start-up Support</li> <li>- Equipment hire</li> <li>- Meeting space</li> <li>- Advocating on issues of concern to rural communities</li> <li>- Regular networking opportunities</li> <li>- Signposting service to groups on various matters</li> <li>- Use of Funder Finder &amp; Grant Tracker data bases</li> <li>- Information &amp; Resource Library</li> <li>- Resource facility with photocopying, fax, computer, email &amp; internet</li> </ul> <p><b>Professional skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advice and Mentoring</li> <li>- Group Facilitation</li> <li>- Policy Consultation</li> <li>- Networking &amp; Partnership Development</li> <li>- Promotion of Sustainable Rural Development</li> <li>- Action planning</li> </ul>

Groups in the RCDSS are concerned with activities such as specific training provision (as delivered by specific organisations). Activities also come under the remit of “capacity building” and relate to: practical skills and resources; as well as professional skills.

## 4.5 Key Issues

It is important at this stage to raise two issues that strike us as a direct result of the mapping and qualitative interviews around activities before we address the theme of support needs in the next section.

- Collaboration
- Volume & spread of training activities

### Collaboration

Through the qualitative interviews most organisations commented on the fact that collaboration between funded organisations is supposed to be part of the activities under the funding of RISP and RCDSS. Whilst lip service was paid to the concept of collaboration, and how it may be of benefit to all the organisations and communities and groups they work in, current RISP activities were commented on as not a collaboration in any true sense, with arrangements based on paper, rather than involving robust partnership working:

*“We need to think about the collaborative advantage of more organisations working together on common issues.”*

*“I think, on paper, RISP was supposed to foster collaboration and working together. But reality is they are ‘on paper’ partnerships and don’t translate in reality.”*

Others labelled the process of collaboration as “reducing the autonomy” of their organisation, nebulous “policy speak” or ultimately a “cost cutting exercise” rather than any meaningful attempt by policy makers to support organisation to address the needs of service users on key issues.

More positively for some organisations the requirement to collaborate as part of RISP activity is effectively forcing partnerships. Some qualitative interviewees were clear that without the financial incentive to work together, many of the groups would not collaborate, due to varying, and at times competing agendas. They viewed competition as hampering the development of collaboration in any true sense:

*“It’s really easy to work with people and groups you aren’t going to end up competing with for funding at some point. That’s the thing with RISP, it’s [funding & competition] is still the wider issue.”*

One interviewee referenced the fact that they had never met any of the other groups in the RISP strand as evidence as a lack of collaboration, and that “relationships weren’t growing out of the programme”.

### Volume & spread of training activities

Our mapping activity and qualitative interviews suggest that there may be some duplication of training support / capacity building provided by organisations funded under RISP and RCDSS activities. It appears that **all** the strands have several organisations delivering training to meet the same or very similar needs particularly in relation to:

- governance issues and developing leadership;
- or what is termed developing 'capacity building' regarding governance issues

There is also evidence of skills training duplication. For example, the RISP "women in disadvantaged/rural areas strand" suggests that there are a number of organisations providing computer/IT training. It has not been our remit to fully understand the detail of course delivery, whom is accessing various courses and their relative take up – this should be an area of further research to clarify the detail of the overlap.

## 5. Key Primary Research Findings

This section highlights the research findings across the primary elements of the research activity: the online survey and qualitative interviews.

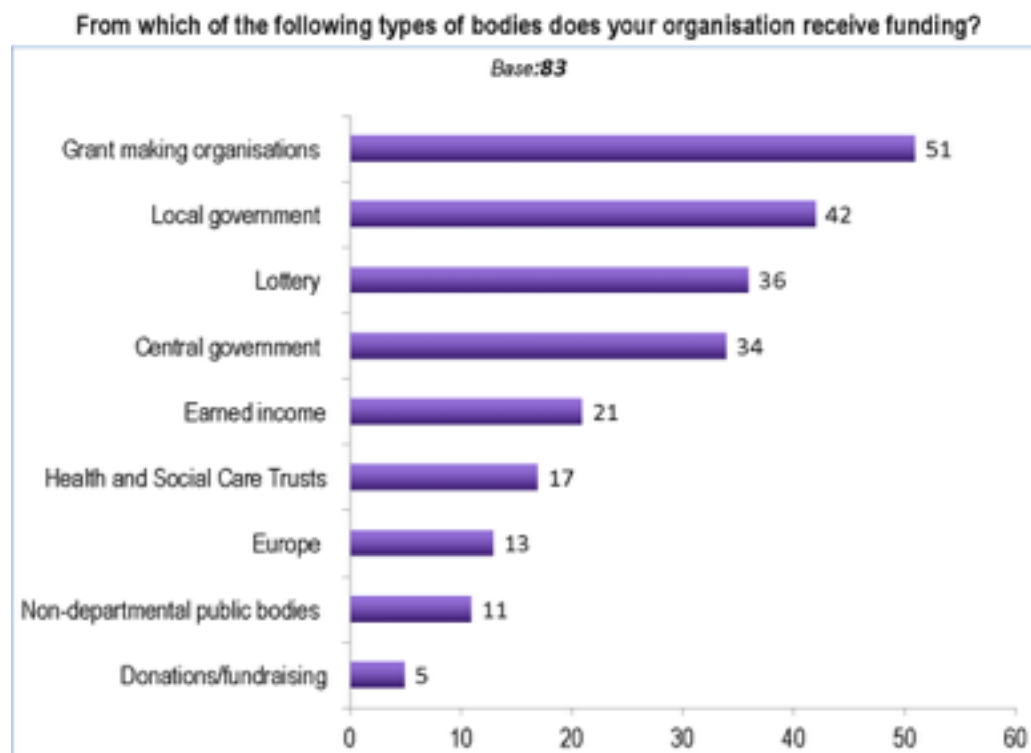
### i. What types of organisation provide funding to the VCSE?

Organisations across the sector accessed funding from a range of sources, as chart 6 below highlights. Around half of the surveyed organisations received monies from ‘grant making organisations’ and or ‘local government’, and over a third accessed monies from ‘central government’ and or the ‘lottery’. About a quarter (21) created their own ‘earned income’. Smaller numbers of organisations were accessing funding from ‘Health and Social Care Trusts’, ‘Europe’, ‘NDPB’s’ and ‘donations / fundraising’.

From our qualitative work we know that organisations are likely to receive funding from a range of sources:

*“We receive funding from a ‘patchwork’ of sources to do our work and for programmes.”*

Chart 6

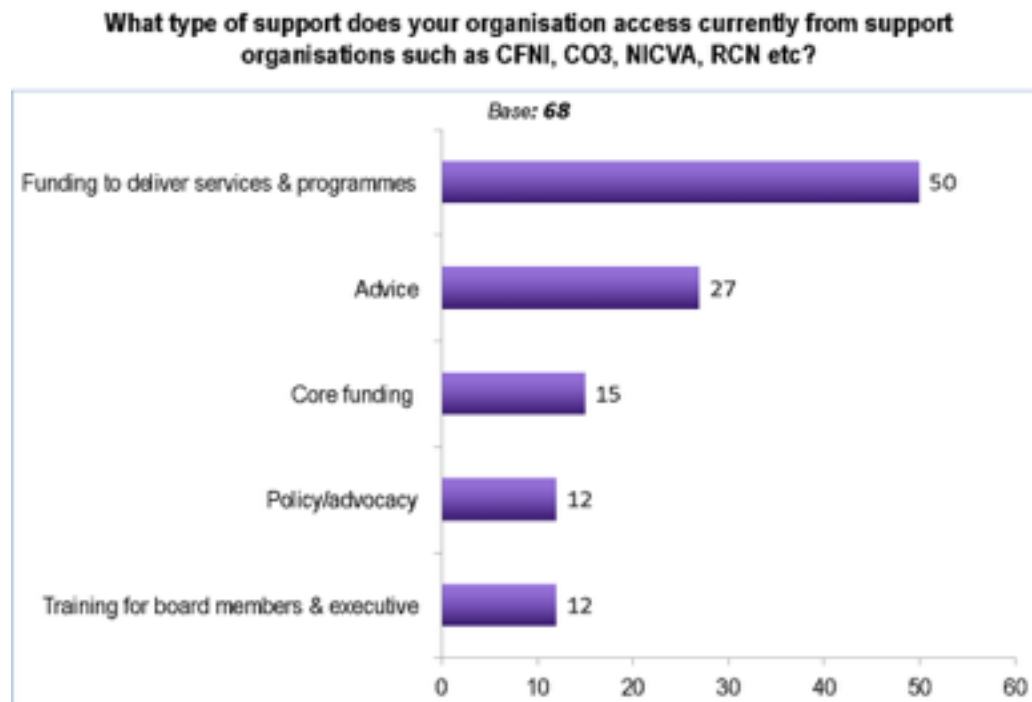




**ii. What does the VCSE access funding for?**

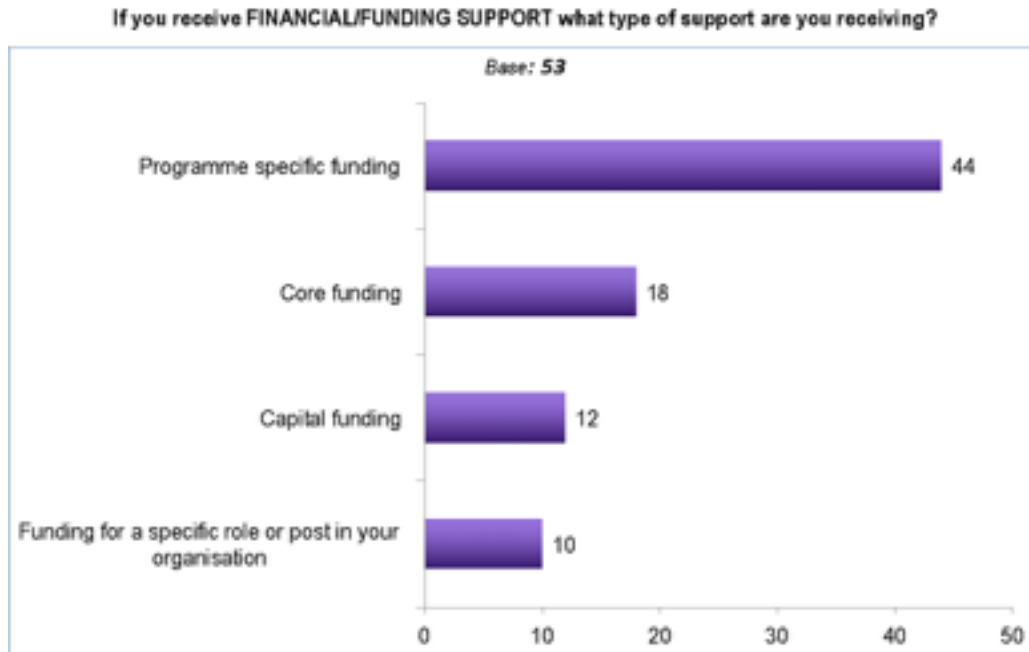
The reliance of the sector on 'funding to deliver services and programmes' was apparent in both our qualitative interviews and in our survey work. Chart 7 highlights the dominance of this with 50 out of 68 organisations stating it, in comparison to the other types of support accessed. Chart 8 further underlines this with substantially more organisations accessing programme funding (44 out of 53) than any other type of financial funding.

Chart 7



Survey respondents were asked to elaborate if there was any other support that their organisation currently accesses from support organisations that were not covered in the categories in chart 7. Eleven organisations gave further information. Six survey respondents indicated that they received funding support from specific organisations (Causeway Coast & Glens Council; EBCDA; Public Health Agency; CRUN; ABC Network; and Omagh Forum) but did not specify what this supported them to do. Two survey respondents stated that they had been supported through access to networking opportunities, and the same number had accessed NICVA's grant-tracker service. One of the responses indicated that they did not access support from these organisations since a number require a membership fee, that they felt they could not afford.

Chart 8



According to the online survey areas of support that are non-financial seem to be currently accessed to a lesser degree i.e. the online survey suggests that small numbers of organisations access support in the areas of advice, policy/advocacy and training for board members and executive. A small number of survey respondents gave more detail in the online survey, on the type of advice and support they accessed - the most common type of support was recalled as 'information on funding sources' (8), closely followed by 'governance/organisational support' and 'charitable status information' (6).

Chart 9



Survey respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate on this question in relation to advice / support with any answers that were not covered in the answer options in chart 9. Six survey respondents commented that they received donations from individuals/local businesses; two viewed their volunteers as constituting “support”; one drew support from member contributions; while another accessed hall hire as support. One also commented on receiving support from other charities.

### iii. What is the general context of the VCSE at the moment?

The key issues of the moment identified by the VCSE sector are captured in chart 9.

Chart 10



#### Political instability / Limited funding

Perhaps unsurprisingly and given the prior research work on the sector, the top two issues were 'political instability at Stormont' and 'limited funding' with all but one respondent commenting that these were issues to some or a large extent. These themes came through clearly in our qualitative research also:

*"We're dealing with civil servants in departments [as a result of instability of devolved institutions] and they simply scrutinise the sector. Their purpose should be to support it."*

*"We can't seem to get funding through the applications we're making and there's no funding available from government really, it's insulting to the work we do."*

#### Disconnect with policy makers

It is important to note that 'lack of consultation between policy makers and the community voluntary sector' also featured highly with almost all survey respondents (60 out of 68) agreeing that this was an issue to some or a large extent. Several qualitative discussions highlighted the frustration that organisations felt, as they considered themselves to be unable to influence policy makers to direct resources to what they as organisations on the ground saw as the key areas of need.

Engagement with policy makers was described as orientated around advocacy activity. Advocacy was described by several interviewees as being concerned with representing specific stakeholders (in this case, women and women's groups):

*"We are meeting with women on the ground, and at the point of need. On that basis, we aim to hold statutory agencies to account."*

Interviewees also sought to differentiate the nature of issues being raised in their advocacy roles:

*"The social isolation among women over fifty in rural areas is such a huge issue. We need to advocate on their behalf, because they are left out of the loop. Issues that affect older women in the north west are different to Belfast."*

There was concern that government was not interested in understanding the real impact of policy changes on people on the ground:

*"The sense of co-design has gone by the wayside. Departments don't want to change [policy] position. They are hardwired and no amount of what we tell them about what is going on, or what the need is, they are immovable."*

In turn some interviewees wanted to see representative organisations (such as NICVA, CO3 etc.) or indeed another organisation, playing as significant a role as they can in influencing on their behalf:

*"We're missing a representative that can speak to the political level. No organisation wants to be seen to be criticising the politicians too much, but independence of voice is fundamental."*

It is clear that "independence" of voice remains a key concern for those seeking to work in a representative capacity for wider groups and communities:

*"It comes back to how independent we are as a sector. If CFNI are serious about providing support, and not just funding, they need to help [the sector] to challenge politicians."*

### **Belfast is considered the focus of support**

53 out of 68 survey respondents considered to some, or a large extent, that infrastructure organisations are too focused on delivering support to the Belfast area. It should be noted that the bulk of the sample were delivering services outside of the Belfast area (see chart 4). Our interviews also reflected this viewpoint:

*"Rural community groups are paddling their own canoes. No one is prepared to support and get up and travel to rural organisations."*

### **Concern over Brexit**

Brexit was also a key concern to the sector due to the rural focus and orientation of the groups engaging with this research, with 55 out of 68 survey respondents viewing it as an issue to a large/certain extent:

*“We are a rural, farming community. And we’re a border county, and the government has no idea what’s happening with Brexit and how it’s going to impact us the most.”*

There was a sense that groups and organisation want to be supported in considering its potential impact:

*“Brexit needs to be considered, and we need time and support to consider the type of developments that will take place in country areas as a result of it.”*

### **The value of volunteering**

55 out of 68 survey respondents agreed, to either some or a great extent, that ‘volunteering is not valued by society’. This chimes with qualitative discussions with a representative from a volunteering based organisation who commented that it was difficult to promote volunteering given the more extensive role that volunteers are expected to play within the provision of services, and the lack of funding and support to recruit, train and fully support volunteer cohorts at a local level.

*“Statutory agencies need to start taking volunteering more seriously. We are having to work beyond remit, almost as social workers. We’re addressing unemployment, skills development and issue of universal credit.”*

### **The nature of collaboration**

55 out of 68 survey respondents also agreed, to either some or a great extent that ‘lack of collaboration between organisations’ was an issue for the sector.

*“We are in a partnership with seven other organisations, but we don’t meet with other RISP groups – we don’t have similar aims in a lot of ways.”*

As highlighted in section 4.5, qualitative interviewees were aware that working more collaboratively may bring benefits for the sector, however many were wary of it. They wanted funding to address the specific need of their service users rather than funding being tied to force collaboration and/or partnerships with other organisations.

*“The sector is divided and in survival mode. It has closed itself down and what has resulted is bad practice, poor community development, and our work has become a bureaucratic nightmare.”*

Other interviewees described the collaboration engendered by RISP in terms such as “an administrative working relationship” or that they were effectively having work “subcontracted” to them as part of the programme, not necessarily terminology which evokes a sense of partnership.



#### iv. What are the current areas of most pressing support need in the VCSE?

The qualitative interviews provided a detailed opportunity to discuss the current context of the VCSE and the issues that the sector is facing.

##### Financial support

Survey respondents were asked what type of funding/financial support their organisation most needed. Core funding emerged as the most common need with 26 out of 75 choosing it. This is perhaps understandable given the stability core funding affords organisations, in what our desk research has identified as an increasingly challenging financial environment for VCSE organisations.

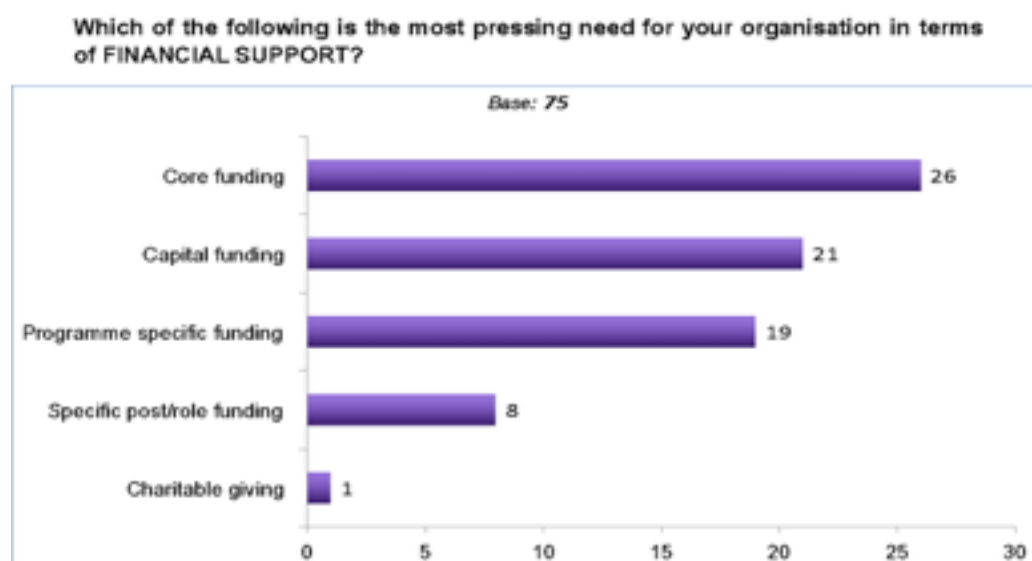
*“Our funding has been cut and cut. There seems to be a disconnect between us and civil servants [administering the funding]. They want to give out capital funding, but revenue funding is far more limited. Community development in itself is not prioritised enough.”*

*“We are less person centred as a result of funding cuts – we have to make what [funding] we can access stretch as far. It’s a huge problem.”*

However, in the survey findings there was some appetite for capital funding, as it ranked relatively highly, suggesting that organisations would like to improve their building and facilities more generally.

19 out of 75 however also commented on programme specific funding as being their most pressing need. 8 viewed specific post/role funding as a fundamental need in their organisation.

Chart 11



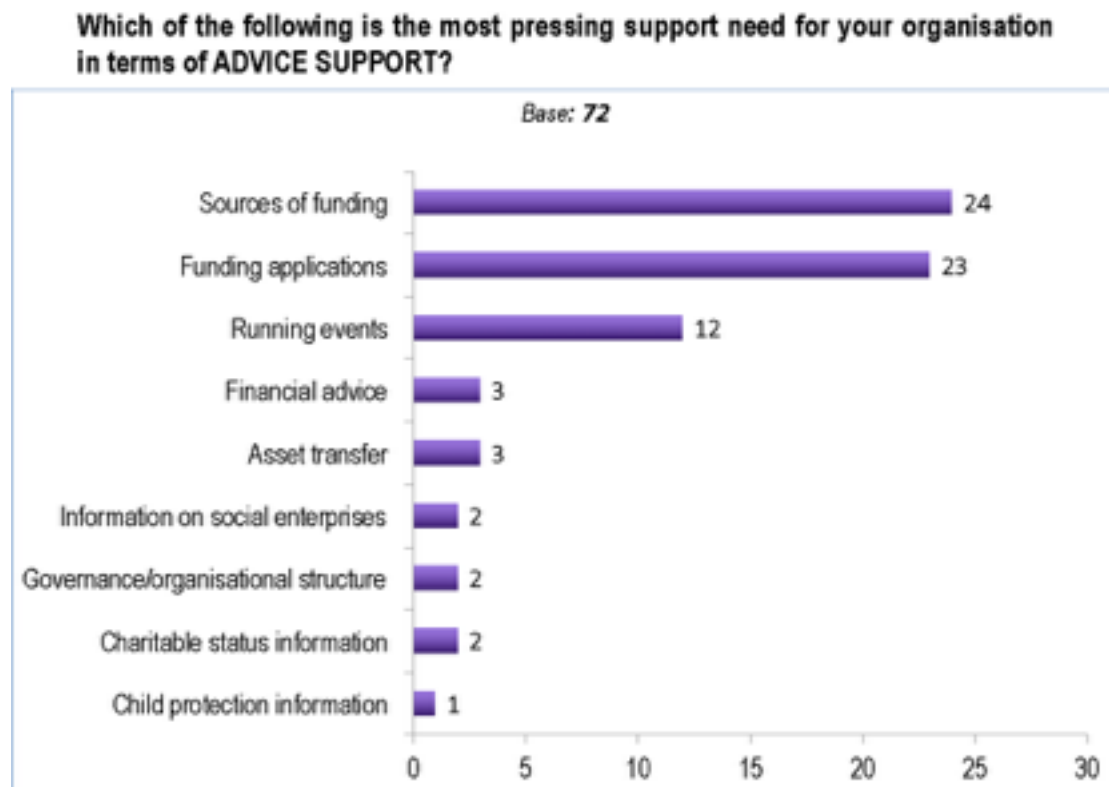


The reduction in funding was also identified by a qualitative interviewee as resulting in a “loss of expertise” within the sector as funding was reduced and organisations needed to reduce their employees accordingly.

**Advisory support**

In relation to the nature of advice support, the most pressing support needs identified by survey respondents were: information and advice on sources of funding (24 out of 73); and advice on funding applications (23 out of 73).

Chart 12



One qualitative interviewee identified an appetite from organisations for greater specialist information and advice but highlighted the challenge of accessing this locally:

*“We need specialist advice support – there’s a huge demand from smaller groups for information and advice on things like asset transfer, and we have the expertise and networks, we just need this support to be de-centralised from Belfast.”*

They identified asset transfer as a complex area that required professional information, advice and support from legal and financial experts.

*“It [asset transfer] is a niche market. Groups are working hard with communities to try and make it happen. We do our best to support it in terms of information and advice, but you need a network behind you on something this specific.”*

While many organisations are engaged in the provision of training and capacity building in relation to governance issues, there was some concern, particularly on the part of smaller organisations with regard to managing their charitable status and associated governance. To this end, there is a need to address these issues for smaller, locally focused organisations. Indeed, two of the interviewees felt that many of the organisations they dealt with in their locality would simply not be able to meet the governance expectations of the Charity Commission, and as a result their region was likely to lose what they deemed to be a worthwhile group/organisation (the example was given of a group for rural older women). They identified that there was also a lack of understanding of the requirements of the Charity Commission amongst the smaller voluntary and community groups.

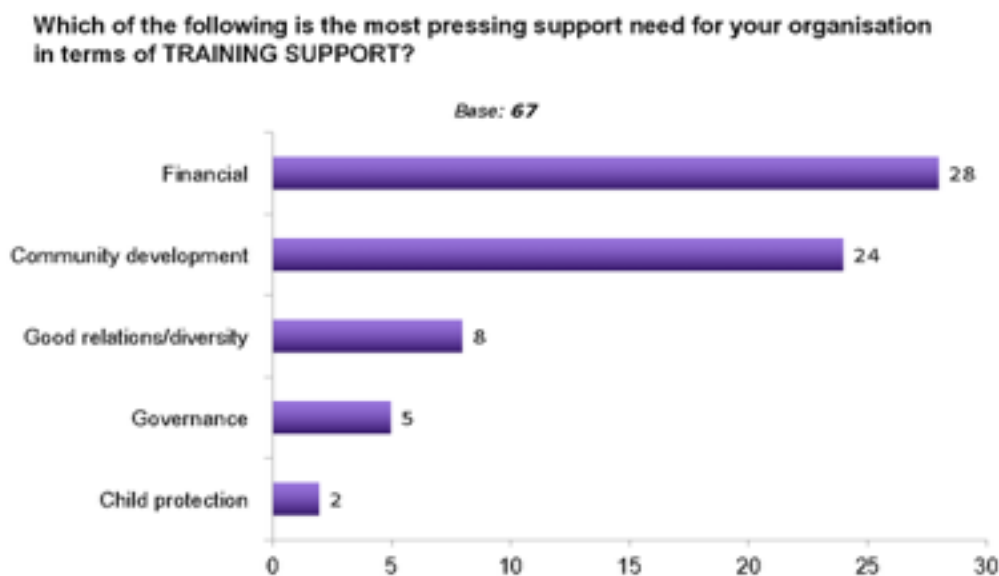
*“The guidelines and charity guidance is going over the head of a lot of smaller organisations. They won’t be able to continue with the rules being placed on them.”*

### Training support

Chart 13 shows that survey respondents identified financial training support and training support in community development, as their most pressing support needs. The research also explored what “community development” meant to interviewees and found this was understood in a variety of ways; from “community empowerment” to “capacity building”, but it came under the umbrella of any activity which provided an individual/group/community with practical tools to address specific issue/s. This is why it was frequently referred to in terms of training, or as shorthand for programmes targeting specific need in a particular area and/or community.

There was considerably less need identified for training support in child protection, governance and good relations/diversity.

Chart 13



Survey respondents were given the option to make a comment on their support needs. 23 made specific comments, which were orientated generally around training needs, funding requirements as well as the need for capital investment and the support of volunteers.

Table 15

Area	Number
Capital funding	7
Specialised training support	2
Specific post funding	2
Premises rent	3
Communication skills	2
Promoting volunteering	2
Policy support	2
Mentoring support	1
Youth engagement	1
Programme specific	1

There was also an appetite for very specific support in their work, such as: communication skills; mentoring support; and youth engagement. Additional comments in the survey also included the need for support for particular groups, as well as additional expenses attributable to the nature of their work (i.e. volunteering):

*“Our organisation needs specific support in terms of training including disability awareness, autism, etc.”*

*“Funding for volunteers expenses. This [would] help us to maintain our current volunteers and allocate new volunteers for our organisation to grow.”*

Some of the comments focused more on the general context within which the sector was operating, rather than dealing with support needs specifically. This leads us to hypothesise that organisations may not always know what the best and most specific types of support could be to address their current issues.

**v. What are the general attitudes to the existing support organisations?**

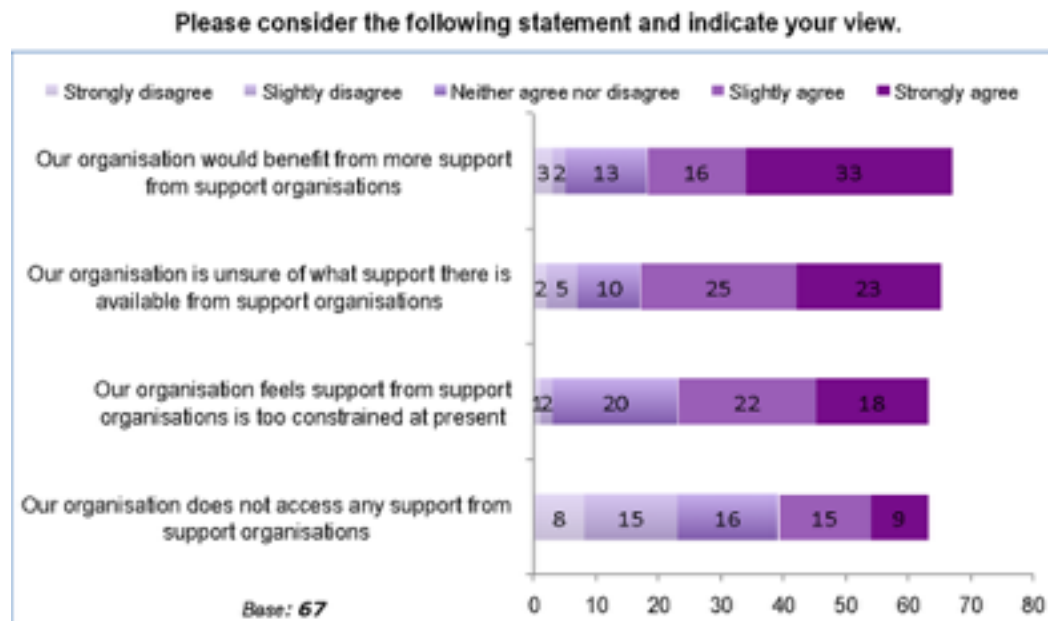
Just under three quarters of survey respondents (49 of 67) who answered this question agreed that their organisation would benefit from more support from support organisations.

Over two thirds (48 of 67) considered that their organisations were unaware of what support was currently available to their organisations. The focus of interview discussions on funding support reveals that there is a particularistic view of what ‘support’ means in terms of the VCSE sector, i.e. it is financial, rather than supporting organisations in any other manner, such as training or advice.

Over half (40 of 67) agreed with the statement that their organisation felt that support from support organisations was too constrained. The qualitative interviews also demonstrated that some felt that funding organisations/policy makers were too prescriptive in their specification of services and as a result organisations on the ground were not able to meet specific need:

*“The powers that be think that a wider area approach was best [in terms of funding] and we need it [funding support] on a area by area, issue by issue basis.”*

Chart 14



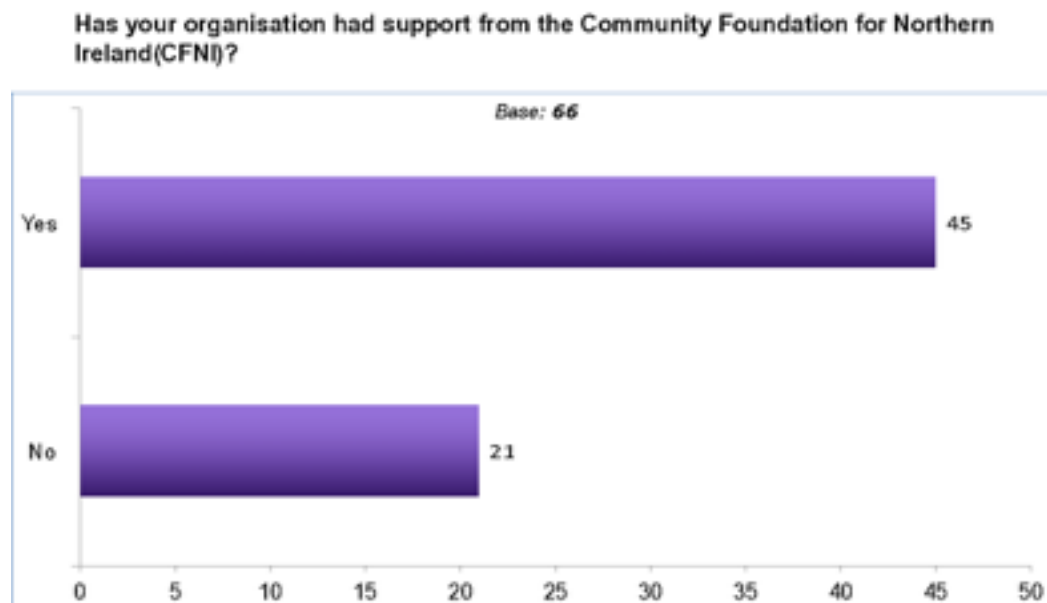
## 6. Experience of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

The project survey also sought to gain a brief insight into the experience of those who have accessed support from CFNI; this section details the findings from this section of the survey.

### i. How many organisations are accessing support from CFNI?

Of the 66 survey respondents who answered the question as to whether they had had support from CFNI, over half (45) had accessed support from CFNI. However, almost a third (21) had not.

Chart 15

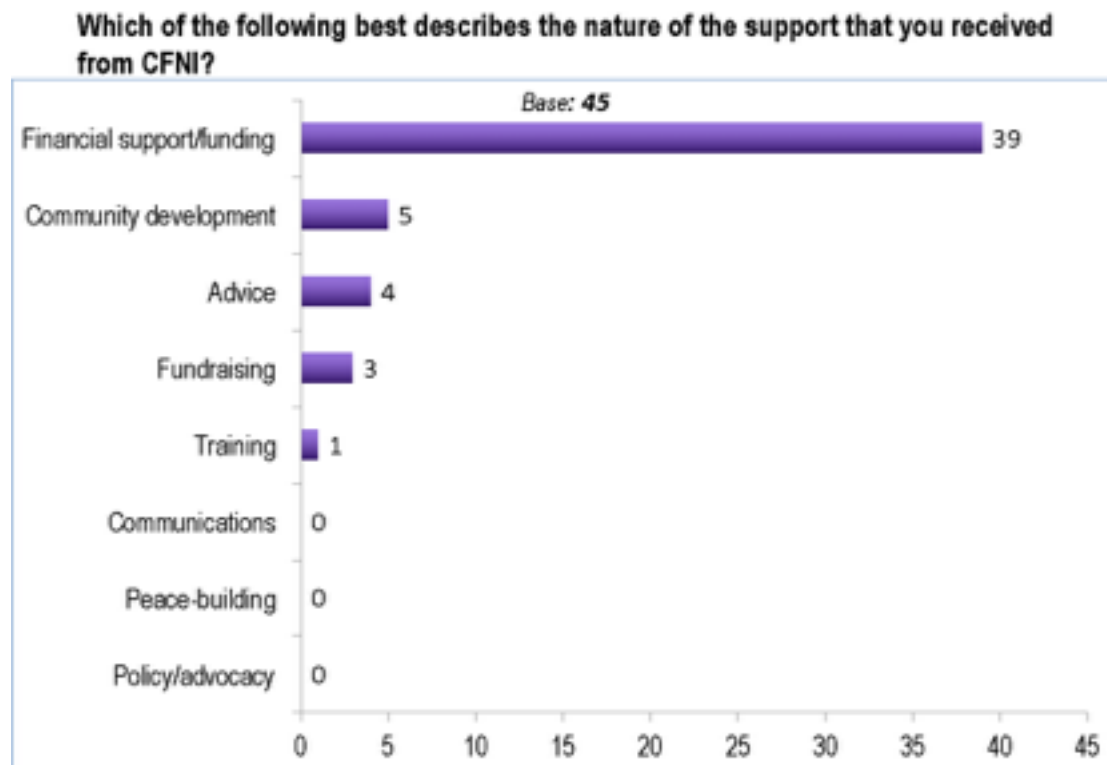


**ii. What support is being accessed from CFNI?**

Most commonly the support from CFNI had been in the form of financial support or funding. Organisations acknowledge some other areas of support such as support with community development (5), advice (4), fundraising and training (1).

Earlier findings on areas of training need in the sector (see chart 13) reveal that survey respondents were keen to receive training that was focused on community development. Chart 16 shows that only five survey respondents had accessed support focusing on community development from CFNI. However, echoing earlier discussion on the concept of “community development”, CFNI would need to decide on a specific approach to the application of what is a broad concept.

Chart 16

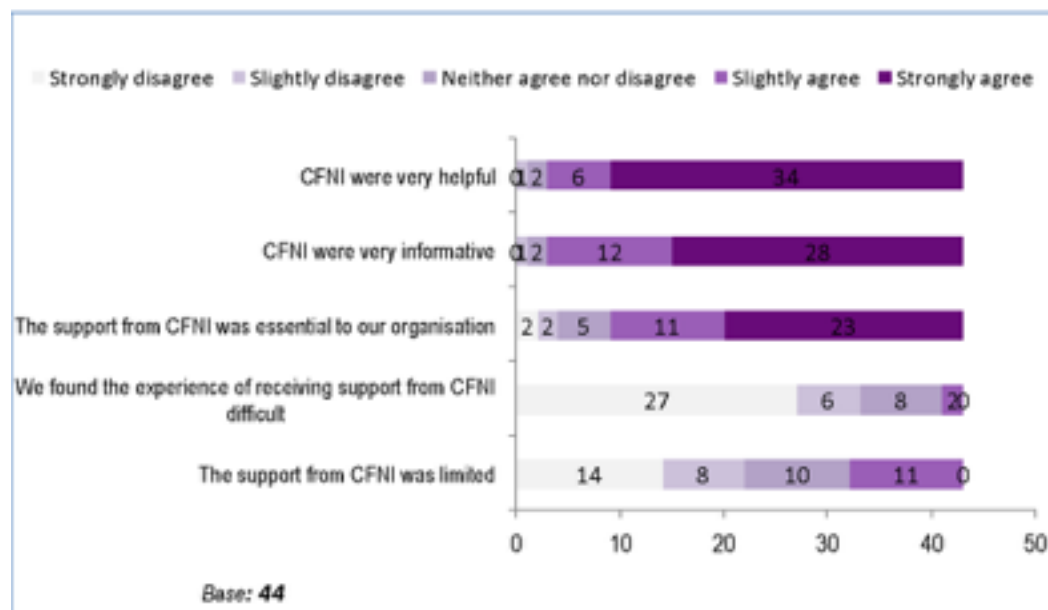


### iii. Views on experience of support from CFNI

This survey shows that most survey respondents who had accessed support from CFNI had a positive experience. The majority agreed that CFNI were very helpful (34 out of 44) and very informative (28 out of 44). Over three quarters (33 out of 44) either strongly or slightly agreed that the support from CFNI was essential to their organisation.

Chart 17

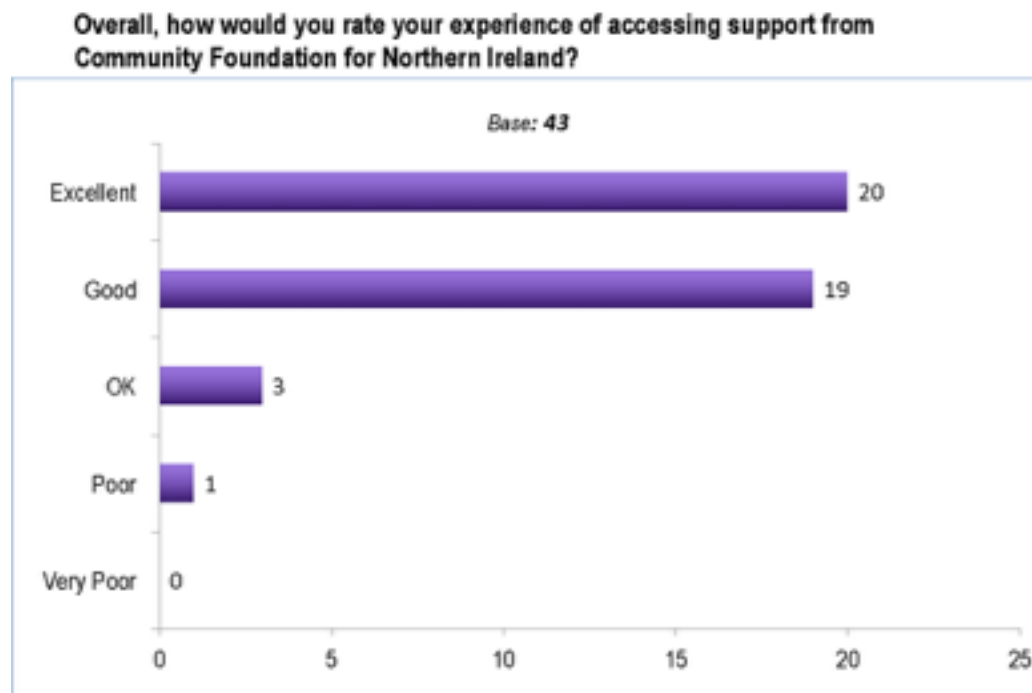
Please rank your level of agreement with the following statements about your support from CFNI.



#### iv. Overall experience of accessing support from CFNI

Almost all survey respondents who had accessed support from CFNI rated their overall experience of this as 'excellent' or 'good'.

Chart 18





**v. What could CFNI do to innovate their activity and better support the sector?**

The survey asked what survey respondents would like to see CFNI do to innovate its activity and better support the sector. The comments in this section related to: getting out to meet groups (6); marketing and awareness raising (5); increasing availability of funding to the VCSE sector (4); reducing bureaucracy associated with funding (3); and meeting the funders events (2).

Table 16

Area	Number
Getting out to meet with groups	6
Marketing and awareness	5
Increased funding opportunities	4
Reduce bureaucracy associated with funding	3
Meet the funders event	2

The primary response related to groups/organisations wanting to meet with CFNI representatives:

*“[CFNI should] get out on the ground and meet groups - like the lottery - and have 1-1 conversations. Consider area based clustering at a local level.”*

*“More direct person to person contact rather than email.”*

*“...to continue to follow through the funding by keeping in contact and continue to advise the group.”*

More advertising or raising awareness of CFNI work to the community sector was also mentioned:

*“Not sure how many groups are aware of the help CFNI can offer so perhaps some further PR is this regard.”*

Some other examples of comments included:

*“To continue to follow through the funding by keeping in contact and continue to advise the group.”*

*“A key area across the UK is how competitive funding has become. There is so much time and effort involved in putting together funding applications that is potentially wasted. I wonder if there is a way CFNI could look at ways to 'sift' applications at an earlier, less involved stage to minimise wasted effort. Some way of more closely matching funder priorities with proposals so that expectations are managed and frustrations minimised.”*

*“Do not put limits on how the money should be used. We would like to have saved some money in case we get no help with funding next year.”*

## 7. Conclusions & Recommendations

This research gives a sense of the experience and perceptions of support in the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland. The key support needs of the sector may be summarised under the following themes: financial/funding, advisory and training.

From this research we understand that survey respondents were accessing financial/funding support from a range of sources: **grant-making organisations (51 out of 83); local government (42 out of 83); the Lottery (36 out of 83) and central government (34 out of 83)**. **Financial/funding support was clearly the most pressing need** of those engaging with this research. Core funding emerged as the most common need, with this clearly being an attractive prospect due to the stability afforded by it. There was a sense throughout this research that **financial/funding need is compromising the ability of the sector to advocate and represent the communities/groups/individuals it works with**. This speaks to a conversation that is required on the **role and identity** of the sector, which will require problem solving and strategic organisational thinking.

Finances and funding also dominated the nature of advisory support groups require. Qualitative interviewees from support organisations expressed **concerns about the ability of organisations within the sector to adhere to charitable governance guidelines**. It appears that in response to this recognised need there has been a proliferation of the development of training and support in this area. The mapping research suggests that may be some duplication of advice around governance. In contrast to this, only minimal numbers of survey respondents indicated that they had a need for governance/charitable status advice. This suggests that the larger, perhaps more professionalised organisations and bodies are more aware of the charity regulations stipulated by the Charity Commission, for example. Thus, it may be that amongst smaller organisations there is a sense of “not knowing what they don’t know”.

Survey respondents identified **financial training support and training support in community development**, as their most pressing training support needs. **The qualitative research explored what “community development” meant to interviewees and found this was understood in a variety of different ways**; from “community empowerment” to “capacity building”, but can also mean activities which supply an individual/group/community with tools to address specific issue/s. Thus, to develop training in response will require some further more detailed work.

Furthermore, this research suggests that **current support programmes are not promoting and supporting collaboration beyond financial arrangements**. This is doing little to build inter-organisational relationships and cooperation. Therefore, **support programmes need to go beyond financing and funding support to better support cohesion between organisations** to work towards mutual goals and meet specific needs.

**Those who engaged with this research perceived CFNI positively.** There is perhaps an opportunity on the basis of this research for CFNI to develop support activities which are **guided by evidenced support need**, as well as learning from the experience and approaches of existing support programmes to ensure support is not duplicated, nor unsuitable in the changing socio-political climate of Northern Ireland. In practice this will involve increasing the levels of engagement CFNI has with groups, who may potentially access a range of support services from them.

### ***Recommendations***

In reflecting on the research findings, the following are recommendations for CFNI to consider:

**i. We believe that there is an opportunity for CFNI to play a strategic role in the support and reshaping of the VCSE – but to do so it needs to be regularly listening to, and engaging with, the sector and more importantly encouraging a dialogue within the sector. A number of the findings suggest the need for an organisation that can help to bring the sector together to work through the current context, to a better set of circumstances. To this end we suggest that CFNI seek to regularly engage with the sector through a series of regular deliberative consultation events, supported by an independent facilitator, to address key themes.** The format could be for example that CFNI invite one delegate from each VCSE organisations to attend and that the sessions would include plenary and break out sessions – each focusing on pertinent themes e.g. funding support, volunteer support, governance support, advocacy support, funding application support, brexit etc. Holding these regularly would give a regular snap shot of the issues and needs on the ground, but also should encourage dialogue across the sector, and discussion of possible areas of solution. The CFNI team members would ideally be at the event/s to listen to the views of the sector and respond to questions, if relevant. The views and findings could then be analysed by the independent facilitator to create a picture of the sector’s views and needs. CFNI could share a summary version with VCSE stakeholders (email addresses collected at the events for those who want to receive this). The idea is that these forums would encourage engagement between grass roots based groups and CFNI and provide a forum for debate and discussion across the sector on pressing needs and issues. In these sessions best practice, possible changes etc could be suggested and discussed. **The consultation based approach outlined above would also support CFNI in helping to address concerns raised in the research about the ‘lack of consultation between policy makers and the community voluntary sector’ as well as providing a forum to discuss the ‘independence’ of the sector. In facilitating these challenging conversations around these areas, CFNI will be able to act at least in part as a conduit between the VCSE sector organisations and policy makers.**

Our survey findings also evidence a diverse sector, in terms of the scale and focus of organisations. An example of this presented by the research is that amongst qualitative interviewees from support organisations (i.e. those subject to support programme funding) there are **concerns about the ability of organisations within the sector to adhere to charitable governance guidelines.** In contrast to this, only minimal numbers of survey respondents indicated that they had a need for governance/charitable status advice. This highlights that the sector cannot be understood as a monolith and that different support

initiatives are important for different parts of the sector for different reasons – any consultative based discussions as outlined above, would also need to take account of this diversity.

ii. **Collaboration in the VCSE sector also requires attention.** Interviewees indicated that they require funding to address the specific needs of their service users rather than funding being tied to, or forcing, collaboration and/or partnerships with other organisations. **However, a discussion about the nature of partnerships and more joint-up thinking and approaches is required, considering the best ways to support and develop collaborations. This goes to the core of what the role and purpose of the VCSE sector is, and how it can work more cohesively.** The risk of not having these conversations is the entrenchment of organisations in the sector, working in parallel to address similar need, with increasingly reduced budgets. **CFNI could seek to propose some ways forward, to support collaborative working, as a result of consultation with the sector.**

iii. The mapping research highlighted general areas of duplication around governance / leadership training and volunteering. It is important that efforts are made to reduce duplication. **As far as possible, support organisations should be encouraged to come together, to work together to ensure that there is not duplication of activity. This will ensure that the remit and activity of each organisation is clear, and focused on service users.**

iv. **The lack of coherence on what “community development” means in both policy and practice was evidenced in the research.** This was described by both interviewees and survey respondents as a fundamental area of focus for many of the organisations. However, **without agreement of what “community development” means in theory or practice, it is impossible to support it.** We recommend that more work is undertaken to unpack this term and what it really means in practice.

v. There is a need to increase awareness and understanding amongst VCSE organisations about what support is currently available to them. **It is incumbent upon CFNI, and the other organisations providing support, to ensure the details of their support offering is well marketed and accessible to all sizes and shapes of organisations. Ideally all support organisations would come together to ensure that duplication is limited and that sign posting to what is available is clear.** This could take the form of increased information sessions on an **area by area basis** (e.g. county, or council area) to increase awareness and grow relationships between organisations and CFNI.

vi. There was a sense amongst some interviewees that volunteering “is not valued by society” despite it being of increasing importance as a means to deliver support and services. Awareness needs to be created around the importance and value of volunteering at a societal level through a clear articulation of what it achieves locally and regionally. CFNI could address this in tandem with volunteer organisations, **by conducting relevant campaigning and research based work to showcase the value and benefit of volunteering.**

vii. The research identified a need **for core funding as a support need.** In response CFNI may consider **developing a core funding pilot programme**, to explore the potential of this and establish if it encourages organisations **to develop on a more holistic basis.**



viii. Other areas of support need were also indicated by survey respondents and interviewees, these included: **communication skills; mentoring support; and youth engagement**. CFNI could develop programmes which will empower groups in their work to develop these skills. These could perhaps take **the form of a “training of trainer” model**, to ensure this direction and skills development is fostered in the sector itself, rather than from CFNI.