



Connecting for Progress



Government policy, local commitment and commercial sense are all promoting cross sector partnerships, effective community consultation and implementing diversity. Yet finding ways to do this well can be challenging. This brochure sets out some key information about how to do this.

The voluntary and community sector in Yorkshire and the Humber – what is it?

Throughout the Yorkshire and Humber region, there are more than 30,000 voluntary and community organisations. This diverse group ranges from the regional arms of large national charities to small voluntary groups working in their local communities. Activities include major service delivery for example, care for the elderly and social housing; sports and social activities; job creation projects; regeneration and environmental improvements; and working to improve relationships in communities and organisations that represent their members on everything from mental health needs to the rights of migrants.

Voluntary and community organisations employ an estimated 45,000 paid employees and work with more than half a million volunteers and trustees. In financial terms, they contribute over £500 million to the region's economy. So, voluntary and community organisations are a significant employer (3-4% of the region's workforce) and provider of services in the region.



Why engage with the sector?

Voluntary and community organisations work to tackle disadvantage and disconnection by providing services in some of the most marginalised communities. They have an extensive reach, innovative approach and broad experience of successful engagement techniques. There are real benefits in engaging with voluntary and community organisations and here are some examples.

- A range of voluntary sector services supports innovation and diversity.
- Effective consultation and participation improves how things work which benefits everybody.
- Actively engaging people means they are more likely to support new developments.
- Involving local people, particularly young people, can reduce crime against business.
- Corporate social responsibility has a proven record of improving business performance.
- Improving services needs involvement from users in the design, management and roll-out of those services.
- Both business and the public sector need to reach new and diverse communities.

Voluntary and community organisations with their diversity of coverage and unique reach can help other sectors to engage as described in the examples above.



What is the Regional Forum?

The structures and make-up of the voluntary and community sector are complex. The Regional Forum can help other sectors to understand how voluntary and community organisations link together. The Forum is a regional generalist network set up to:

- provide a link between voluntary and community organisations and other sectors and agencies;
- create a coherent voluntary and community sector regional voice;
- represent the sector at the regional level for example on European committees.



How the Regional Forum can help connections work

The Regional Forum can help other sectors connect in three ways:

1) The Regional Forum's services

- **Conference and consultation management** – the Forum has managed European programme consultations across the region, consultations on regional strategies such as the Integrated Regional Framework, and an employability conference in partnership with JobCentre Plus.
- **Communication systems** – the Forum manages a range of communications media including a website, electronic thematic newsgroups, printed and electronic newsletters, a sector based research database – “KnowledgeBank”, and conferences addressing sector issues.
- **Point of contact** – the Forum is a single point of contact to understanding how to connect with voluntary and community organisations in the region.
- **Formal representation mechanisms** – the Forum has developed accountable ways to choose voluntary and community representatives to join committees and partnerships such as the Care Services Improvement Partnership and the European Programme Monitoring Committees.
- **Contract management** – the Forum has managed a £1 million ChangeUp infrastructure investment programme for the region and a significant contract on behalf of the Learning & Skills Council.
- **Consortia development** – the Forum co-ordinates and supports voluntary and community sector consortia to develop joint working opportunities and links with regional bodies.



If you would like further details or to discuss potential partnership opportunities, please contact Brian Lawrence (Business Development Manager at the Regional Forum) on 0113 394 2300 or email: brian.lawrence@regionalforum.org.uk



Yorkshire & Humber Regional Development Agency



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

2) The Regional Forum's network

By retaining close links with voluntary and community organisations, the Forum has developed a sound understanding of the make-up of the voluntary and community sector in the region.

- The Forum knows about the key interests and concerns of the organisations.
- The Forum can identify the key voluntary and community organisations at local, sub-regional and regional levels and how they connect together.
- The Forum knows about the specialists in different fields for example, black and minority ethnic issues, the social economy and disability.
- The Forum knows about the most effective ways to communicate with voluntary and community organisations.

3) The Regional Forum's information

Providing information is a key role of the Regional Forum. Publications, briefings and information guides keep people up-to-date with the changing region and the contribution of voluntary and community organisations to regional progress. Publications include:

- "Practice Makes Perfect" - voluntary sector case studies highlighting the contribution of the sector to the regional economy.
- "Learning for Life" - Yorkshire & Humber voluntary & community sector Learning & Skills Manifesto.
- Regional Structures Guide - a listing of key regional bodies working in the Yorkshire and Humber region.
- Regional Networks Guide - a listing of key voluntary and community sector networks in Yorkshire and the Humber.

The website provides quick access to all our information, visit: www.regionalforum.org.uk

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