



RCO's and Sustainability

experiences from the
Regional Refugee Forum North East (RRF)

From a dialogue between RCOs, specialist infrastructure support agencies, and local mainstream development agencies
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Emerging challenges: 2010

Spending cuts leading to reduced funding – this is not a small change but a new scenario. Less infrastructure support, fewer grants to RCOs, reduced capacity and range of services, fewer new services, loss of both core funding and specialist services, reduced funding for advocacy, empowerment & training, reduced community facilities. All will need to make the most of reduced resources

Impact of Recession - Charitable Trusts have decreased capital and give fewer grants. Increased unemployment, lower household income, increased negativity about migrants, backlash, threats to safety and discrimination all lead to stressed communities needing more support from RCOs. Out-migration of key volunteers

Government Policies - The Big Society agenda – vision of unfunded volunteering. Decommissioning of regional structures and increased localism: Recognise the risks but also the opportunities in it. How and where will RCOs make sure their minority voices are heard? Asylum support policy – will it become harsher?



Persisting challenges

Knowledge and Skills of mainstream support services Low level of awareness of the specific and additional needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities, and of RCO's unique role, potential and support needs. Poor cross cultural competency in service delivery. Low receptiveness. Prejudice and negative stereotyping, including of RCO leaders as 'gatekeepers'

Knowledge and Skills within RCOs – creates barriers in accessing and maximising uptake of the widest range of appropriate services, in planning and acting strategically, in leading change, in evidencing and advocating for needs, in achieving influence, in securing resources

RCOs' own practice – internal and external communications, marketing unique value, awareness of wider context, timekeeping, mobile phone interruptions, realistic expectations, realising value of training and joint working



Recommendations

Be adaptable – be alert to the changing environment, revise strategy, share resources, don't over rely on raising funding, consider other forms of support such as in-kind, consider partnerships with other RCOs and Agencies

Be professional - in your communications, timekeeping and progressing actions between meetings, so that you maximise the support and opportunities available to you. Persevere. Be clear about the roles and responsibilities of other agencies, identify shared interest and common agendas with others.

Be realistic – be clear about your *unique* value. Move step by step rather than be overambitious, focus on what you can do rather than be frustrated about what you can't do. Rationalise your work

Market your unique contribution - Celebrate and raise awareness about your achievements, develop publicity materials about your work.

Make mainstream services work better for your community: help them to learn about your community's needs and build 2 way relationship with them

Review your RCO model – consider Social Enterprise, mergers, consortia, service level agreements or offer to be part of the service delivery chain



Maximise opportunities

Big Society agenda – be proactive in exploiting opportunities. Produce evidence about what you are already contributing, and make sure the Local Authorities know this. Find and get involved with new community engagement platforms and processes, in your neighbourhood and locality. Don't risk being left out

Take part in the National Census in March 2011 – make sure your community fills in the census return forms to ensure Local Authorities recognise the community exists and needs to be engaged in local planning and delivery. It will give you more influence

Increase your skills – be active and strategic about finding routes to build your skills in advocacy, evidence gathering and presentation, and partnership building

Engage in real open dialogue – with allies and other community organisations in your area, to build co-ordinated or joint working, shared action, and collective advocacy to protect essentials and lobby for good practice



RRF response to the sustainability challenge

Our response is to re-focus our work from supporting the organisational development of RCOs to

- ➔ supporting key RCO leaders / volunteers to develop their knowledge and skills to plan and act strategically, to minimise risks and maximise opportunities
- ➔ promoting greater networking, collaboration, co-ordination, sharing of resources, and access to in kind support
- ➔ recognise and act on shared interest and commonalities



RRF support to our members (RCOs)

*Enabling their Collective Voice to influence Policy and Practice
& working to support their development and sustainability*

Our staff team works directly with our members to assist them to

- ➔ Secure access to the whole range of services and support available
- ➔ Connect to, plan joint actions with, or develop partnerships and alliances with other organisations
- ➔ Work together with other members on shared issues for greater influence
- ➔ Deliver training and exchange learning with mainstream services to increase the understanding and skills of service providers
- ➔ Research the experience of their community and advocate for those needs
- ➔ Engage in local and regional planning processes so that their Voice is heard



Share the experience, views and recommendations from your region

We welcome your opinions of the challenges you face in your region and your ideas and recommendations on what will work best for RCOs' sustainability. We can share this with our members, for their benefit

Thank You

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