COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Guidance

Community Voluntary Groups & Organisations

This guide from The Bridge aims to provide support to our voluntary groups and organisations that exist to serve our Border communities, specifically through this unprecedented time of uncertainty.

We recognise that you will have many queries as to how you navigate through the best possible way for your organisation, we hope this will support you in that journey.

Below are the topics we will cover, this has been derived from our TSI Survey responses, but if you need further information, or identify an area that is not covered then please get in touch and we will endeavour to provide the support needed. We have referred to the sources, SCVO and OSCR, where further detail is available and where possible, links have been provided.

You can get find us in our website here and you can also follow us to receive regular updates on our Facebook page here.

You can contact us on following emails:

The Bridge HQ: Morag.Walker@the-bridge.uk.net
Cheviot and Teviot & Liddesdale areas: Heather.Batsch@the-bridge.uk.net
Eildon area: Pauline.Grigor@the-bridge.uk.net
Tweeddale area: Lorna.McCullough@the-bridge.uk.net
Berwickshire area: BAVS – jenny.haines@bavs.org.uk or Marianne.broadgate@bavs.org.uk

Funding

You will undoubtedly have concerns around how your organisation can sustain itself when any ability to generate income has stopped. There is help available for this.

Third Sector Resilience Fund (TSRF) supports organisations that already deliver services and products but find themselves in financial difficulties directly as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The primary intention of the fund is to help third sector organisations to stabilise and manage cash flows over this difficult period.

Wellbeing Fund supports organisations across the third sector that are providing important services for people as a result of coronavirus. The Wellbeing Fund is now open for expressions of interest from all third sector organisations. For more information please click here **Funding**.

You may also be wondering how you can resource an alternative sort of service or activity through this difficult time, when your normal face to face activity isn't possible. There is extra funding to support this type of activity;

The Bridge Community Micro Grants, we are working with The National Lottery Community Fund to distribute micro grants of **up to £500** to local groups and organisations across the Scottish Borders (except Berwickshire who have their own grant programme, please contact **BAVS** here) to help you help your communities at this difficult time. We want to keep it simple, so that funds can get where they are need fast. See **The Bridge** for details on how to apply.

Community Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund. This will support local charities and grassroots organisations across Scotland to help them respond to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and recover from its impact. Only constituted groups, with a governing document, can apply. Please visit **Foundation Scotland** to find out more and apply.

SCVO Frequently Asked Questions are helpful, read them here **Funding FAQs**

For further information about delivering your service differently, perhaps on a digital platform, see 'New Service Delivery'.

If you are already in receipt of funding, you may also have concerns about meeting the outcomes and timescales of that funding. SCVO have support and information **From the Funders** in this link.

AGMs & End of Year Accounts

Most charities will need to change the way they work during the outbreak. Decisions about how you can operate during this time need to be taken collectively by the charity trustees, where possible. Major decisions and changes need to be recorded and advice taken where necessary.

For general information, please refer to OSCR Covid-19 Guidance for Charities but here are the specific AGM and End of Year Accounts sections that may help at this time.

AGMs

The COVID-19 pandemic is going to have an impact on your ability to hold your AGM. This might make it difficult for you to finalise your annual report and accounts.

Wherever possible, OSCR would ask you to try to get these to them on time. All you need to do is log on to OSCR Online as usual and scan us your report and accounts. However, they understand that it might be difficult for some and will take an understanding and proportionate approach to this and no charity in this situation will be penalised for being late. See the **Reporting to OSCR** section of the guidance for more on accounts.

It may be that by postponing your AGM, you are not fulfilling what it says in your governing document. However, OSCR say they would be understanding and proportionate about that.

Meetings & Homeworking

Virtual meetings

Meeting face-to-face is not going to be possible at the moment so holding meetings virtually will be a good option. Some charities have specific provisions in their governing documents to allow meetings to take place over the phone or using digital solutions. However, in the current situation, OSCR are happy that charities hold their meetings in this way even if the governing document doesn't say anything about this. This will allow charity trustees to have important discussions and to take decisions at this difficult time. Where you decide to take this virtual route, you should record that they have done this, demonstrating good governance of your charity.

SCVO have tips for virtual meetings and remote working here SCVO Remote Working.

Quorums

A quorum refers to the minimum number of people necessary to make decisions and conduct the charity's business. A quorum can refer to:

- the number of charity trustees required for board meetings, or
- the number of the charity's members required for membership meetings, for example Annual General Meetings (AGMs).

This number is often set out in the charity's **governing document**.

Even if your governing document does not currently allow it you can use telephone or online meetings during the COVID-19 outbreak to help make sure you have enough people to make decisions and form a quorum.

We know you may be concerned that there may be circumstances where you cannot get enough charity trustees or members to form a quorum because of COVID-19 but need to make decisions on the future of your charity.

If this is the case you should check your governing document to see if it allows you to change the number of people required to form a quorum. If yes, you could change the number now by following the provisions set out in your governing document.

You should notify us of this change using the **Notification of Changes Made form**.

If you find yourself in a position that you cannot form a quorum you should check your governing document to see what it says about appointing additional people to form a quorum to make valid decisions.

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If there is nothing specific in your governing document, it may be that the law governing your legal form (for example Company law or Trust law) makes provision for the appointment of additional charity trustees or members. If you are unsure you should seek legal advice on how you can resolve this issue and the risks to the charity and charity trustees in making decisions without a quorum.

If you have tried to get enough people to form a quorum but are unable to, any decisions you make may be invalid and may be open to challenge from people affected by those decisions, for example, employees or service users.

We will be proportionate when assessing any concerns raised with us about decisions made without a quorum. However, others affected by those decisions may take a different approach. So you should take advice and fully understand the implications of any decisions you make.

We will look at whether your actions were in line with **charity trustee duties** and if you acted in the interests of your charity and with care and diligence.

Homeworking

Brodies have a temporary homeworking policy to download which deals with issues such as hours of work, communication, health and safety, equipment, expenses and security. Three key points to remember are:

- It will impact team members differently, and will require flexibility and understanding

- Clear, frequent communication is really important. Modern collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, Google Hangouts Meet or Zoom make this easier

- You will learn as you go – so be open to reflecting on what is working and change your approach as you need to.

Governance, Trustees, Events & Insurance

Governance & Trustees

Trustees may be concerned about the solvency of their organisation during the coronavirus shutdown, and about the possibility of personal financial liability if they continue to operate. The risks will be different depending on the legal structure of your organisation and if you are a charity.

For trustees of an unincorporated association there is a risk of personal liability if the organisation becomes insolvent and there are debts or liabilities outstanding. For company directors, the UK government has now suspended the 'wrongful trading' provisions in the Insolvency Act for a period of three months from 1 March 2020. This is not a fixed period, and may be extended if necessary. This suspends, temporarily, the threat of personal liability for trustees of charitable companies if the charity eventually falls into insolvency.

Have a look here at OSCR guidance on use of reserves and restricted funds. OSCR Finance.

Trustees should take professional advice if they think their organisation may become insolvent. SCVO member organisations are entitled to up to two hours free legal advice Pro Bono Service and partners Burness Paull have produced guidance Burness Paul Weathering the Storm, Legal Risks for Third Sector Board Members.

Events

It may be that you have been set up to host a specific event, for instance a festival or an agricultural fair. It may be that this event is specified in your governing document. OSCR know that it will be impossible for you to do that if the event is taking place in the next few months, you do not need to get their permission to postpone your events.

Insurance

COVID-19 has been added to the list of notifiable diseases which may help organisations seek compensation through their insurance policies in the event of any cancellations they may have to make as a result of the spread of the virus. Contact your own insurer to check your policy and ask what risks you are covered for, or if there are particular steps you need to take. Keegan and Pennykidd provide professional and independent insurance advice to the voluntary sector in Scotland.

The Association of British Insurers have guidance here on how insurers are supporting unoccupied properties here ABI Insurance and for motor insurance for volunteer drivers using their cars to help their communities ABI Car Insurance.

New Service Delivery & Befriending

New service delivery models

With many charities, community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations shifting their service delivery into digital and remote channels, here are also some short examples of how organisations have used digital technology to support people in their communities.

Key principles

1. **Start with user needs** – spend time understanding what your service users need to do, and which digital channels they find easy to use. See this guide from Cast Better Digital Principles.

2. Remember **the need to protect privacy and support good safeguarding practice** where users are sharing personal details. Youth Link Scotland have good resources on digital youth work Better Digital Principles.

3. Be ready to **test, learn and iterate**. A good approach is to try small projects over a short timeframe, then 'persevere' with what is working and 'pivot' away from ideas that have not worked well. For a lot of charities, the test/learn cycle will be a day or two at this point.

4. Think about issues **around social and financial inclusion**. For example, a Housing Association might need to give its tenants free WiFi, or a youth organisation might want to offer supported young people mobile data top-up vouchers.

If you want audience participation, Zoom is the 'go-to' option for larger groups, with lots of useful controls for meeting facilitators. For small informal groups a quick WhatsApp video chat (up to 4 people) or a Google Hangout meeting can work well.

Befriending

Befriending Networks have produced resources to support organisations change from face to face or group befriending/support to telephone/distance methods and also created resources and links that might be helpful to community organisations thinking about offering telephone support. These are free to access from their website and can be found here Befriending Resources.

In addition they are offering Q&A sessions open to anyone and soon will go live with training that organisations will be able offer their new telephone supporters/befrienders via video and webinar training access. All of their updates can be followed here Befriending Q & A.

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Volunteers

We know that many people will want to help at this difficult time. We also know that many organisations could use extra help, but it is very important that you carefully risk assess taking on new volunteers at this time. This includes the risk of volunteers being exposed to the virus, and any safeguarding risks to the people you are supporting.

You can contact **Volunteer Centre Borders** for information and support, you can also register to volunteer in your own area using this link.

Volunteer Scotland is providing practical guidance for organisations managing volunteers during the coronavirus crisis.

Specific guidance on PVG and Coronavirus is available from **Volunteer Scotland** and from **Disclosure Scotland.** .

Scottish Government

Please visit **Ready Scotland** to find the latest advice on volunteering and helping your community.

Community Assistance Hubs
& Resilient Communities

Community Assistance Hubs (CAHs) have been set up to support all requirements for 'shielding' and are linked into the national framework.

- Multi-agency CAHs are now available in each locality as part of a co-ordinated response between Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders, the Third Sector and local Resilient Communities Groups.

- Staff from across the Health and Social Care Partnership are working with Community Development and Third Sector colleagues to support vulnerable local residents impacted by the outbreak.

- They are also co-ordinating, alongside Resilient Communities Groups, the significant number of offers that have been received from people and organisations willing to play their part and volunteer their support.

Hubs operate from central locations in Berwickshire, Tweeddale, Cheviot, Teviot and Liddesdale and Eildon. For further information visit **SBC Community Assitance Hubs.**

Resilient Communities tend to be linked to each Community Council area, although there are some exceptions. These groups work on a voluntary basis more locally within each of the above areas, to co-ordinate volunteers to provide the direct needs to their own communities like shopping, collection of medication and a friendly ear. To get in contact with your local group please go through the CAH, details above.