



HELPING YOUR COMMUNITIES – COVID-19

This factsheet outlines steps to mitigate the impact of coronavirus on communities with a specific focus on those that may be considered vulnerable.

The potential consequences and disruption of COVID-19 on our communities is a growing concern and businesses are acting to mitigate the negative impact. Income to the voluntary sector will be severely challenged by this crisis, caused by postponed events and cancelled meetings with prospective funders alongside disruption to previously planned fundraising activity.

The Deep RiverRock Belfast City Marathon and Half Marathon events [generated over a quarter of a million pounds for its five charity partners in 2019](#), which doesn't include fundraising income donated to the hundreds of other charities that were supported through both events. With the majority of this money being raised in the weeks immediately before and after the event, and mass fundraising activities now on hold for the foreseeable future, many organisations will be in need of help. It is important to support your partners, not just their beneficiaries

Support available

Communities Minister, Deirdre Hargey's commitment to [community and voluntary groups can be read here](#).

BITC is using advice and direction provided by its Place Leadership Team to determine resources and business commitments to the community as we progress through this crisis. Regular updates will be shared on our website – www.bitcni.org.uk

If any of your charity partners would like some advice on how to manage the impact of coronavirus, some useful guidance has been produced by the [Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action \(NICVA\)](#).

If your business wants to support other members of the voluntary and community sector, we encourage them to support the [Coronavirus Community Fund](#), set up by The Community Foundation. The focus of the fund will be to offer community organisations emergency funding to deal with emerging issues in the community, affecting older people (aged 50 and over), as a result of the continuing threat of coronavirus, and the need for self-isolation, and potential for further exacerbation of loneliness and isolation of these older people.

Supporting your communities

Ways in which the business community can support their communities:

- **Check in with community partners** – what are the needs of the schools, charities and community groups you are currently engaged with - both for their beneficiaries and the organisation?
- **Charity Partnerships** – If you currently don't operate a corporate charity partnership then consider taking one on. BITC can guide you on how to do this and we can also assist with helping you to identify the most relevant charities to partner with. This would provide you with a great opportunity to motivate and engage your entire staff team in a way that

will make a real and tangible difference to people's lives

- **Adapt methods for volunteering** – with traditional volunteering being cancelled business needs to deliver ongoing support differently or respond to the community need flexibly. BITC is working closely with NICVA and the Department for Communities in the development of a Skills Match platform. We aim to have this up and running by May. In the meantime, encourage your employees to be ready to register their skills with us. Sharing of skills will be done digitally until we are through this COVID-19 period
- **Donations** – support the voluntary and community sector across the country by donating to the [Coronavirus Community Fund](#)
- **Reviewing products and services** – to provide additional support for those that are particularly vulnerable at this time

Business can provide valuable flexibility in responding to the needs of vulnerable communities. [Lidl Northern Ireland](#) has implemented priority shopping hours from 9am-11am for elderly customers across its 39 stores and Asda has implemented a limit on a number of items that can be purchased to make sure everyone can get what they need.

The power of the Business in the Community network

BITCNI is a member of NICVA. It is made up of a range of organisations within the voluntary and community sector with the shared aim of improving coordination and maximising impact before, during and after emergencies. BITCNI is working to understand and inform responsible businesses' response to the pandemic. We are:

- Connecting with NICVA and local partners to work out the most effective response to the crisis and how corporate volunteers can have the greatest impact
- Supporting the [Coronavirus Community Fund](#)
- Reaching out to emergency responders to gather information on how business can best lend support encouraging members to support SMEs in their networks and providing advice on how SMEs can mitigate the impacts of coronavirus. Guidance is available [on our website](#)
- If you would like to become involved with the above or signal your interest, please reach out to your BITCNI relationship manager

We are also sharing stories of what our members and doing and how. If you have any great examples of how your business has supported voluntary and community sector partners, please do let us know. Contact Suzi McIlwain at suzi.mcilwain@bitcni.org.uk or share your news at www.bitcni.org.uk/share-your-news.

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