



SUPPORTING YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS THROUGH COVID-19 CRISIS

Charities and community organisations are playing a vital role in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, but many are facing serious challenges. Leaders in the voluntary sector have warned that NI charities and community organisations are facing a very uncertain future and, for some, imminent collapse as fundraising income runs out.

The Government has recently announced a range of measures aimed at supporting charities through the funding shortfalls of COVID-19, these include:

- Charities in Northern Ireland are to get over £10million as part of [a government support package](#), to ensure they can continue their vital work during the Coronavirus outbreak– including hospices and those supporting domestic abuse victims
- £200,000 match funding has been provided from the Department for Communities to the [CFNI Coronavirus Community Fund](#)

- Funds are available for local organisations tackling the impact of COVID-19 on residents within each [NI Council area](#)

[NICVA's weekly Covid-19 survey](#) reveals the issues and experiences of sector organisations in the current crisis and consistently shows the most pressing issues facing organisations are:

- Sustaining the organisation and its activities
- Finance/Cash flow
- Well-being of staff/volunteers
- Adapting my services to deliver online



Businesses are stepping up to support in this time of crisis and it is those with established community partnerships that can create real impact to the people they support. Here's how you can help.

Check in with your community partners

If you haven't already, contact your partners and find out what the specific needs of the charities and community groups you are currently engaged with are. As a business, there are many ways that you and your employees can support both the organisations you partner with and their beneficiaries during this time.

Support for beneficiaries

Think about how your charity partners support people in need and is there a way you can flex your business to support these beneficiaries? For example, in this time of increasing uncertainty and change, when web accessibility is more important than ever, software company [Texthelp](#) is offering [free 90-day access](#) to its digital inclusion tool Browsealoud, so organisations can ensure their website is accessible to every visitor. [Lidl and FareShare](#) ran an emergency food appeal in stores across Northern Ireland to support those in need during these challenging times and supplement the existing store donations with the extra demand on long-life goods for those cocooning.

[Intercontinental Hotels Group](#) is offering rooms as a safe space for homeless people to self-isolate

[Lidl](#) has extended its partnership with NSPCC for a further year to provide security and protection to the charity through this time. It is in almost daily contact with its charity partners to stay informed of their needs & challenges. It has also introduced a Lidl Capsule colouring book in aid of NSPCC in all stores to raise money for the charity.

Grant funding

Do you have an existing grant funding arrangement that could be flexed, and could you offer more? As we wait the outcome on whether government will extend emergency grant funding to all charitable organisations in the UK, many organisations face collapse within weeks, at a time they are needed most. Have you put restrictions on existing funding that could be relaxed?

The [Standard Life Foundation's](#) approach has included outlining support to current grant holders, proceeding with current applications and allowing any adjustments that organisations wish to make in light of coronavirus. It has also made work-related funding available as a result of the pandemic. M&S is working with Neighbourly to link local [M&S stores](#) with needs from local community groups.

Fundraising

Undoubtedly many planned fundraising activities have unfortunately been cancelled, as the government's policies on social distancing are observed. This doesn't mean that fundraising should stop, particularly as your community partners who rely on fundraising income will need it more than ever.

Can your employees be mobilised into innovating your fundraising activities as they isolate at home? For example, the 'ice bucket challenge' is said to have raised over \$212,000 in additional income for the ALS association in the US. This was a challenge that was largely done in people's back gardens. From the Big Issue's '[donate your commute](#)' idea to sponsoring remote cycling challenges, innovative ideas are emerging. [Citi](#) employees in Belfast are raising thousands of pounds by donating via Justgiving for local Food Banks and can opt to donate an hour of their monthly salary to a local Community fund and Citi are matching staff donations as well as making



significant up front donations to the Trussell Trust and to the NI Community Foundation's Coronavirus Community Fund.

BITC is also backing [Community Foundation's Coronavirus Community Fund](#). If your business has the capability to support voluntary and community groups beyond your immediate partners, please consider donating to their appeal, as they are best placed to allocate resource based on the needs of community organisations around the country.

Mobilise your employees

When crisis hits, people step up – and we're seeing lots of that right now.

There are lots of ways that your charity partners may need volunteering support during this time that can utilise your employees' skills from their desk at home. For on-line volunteering opportunities you can direct employees to our [Skills Match platform](#) and [Digital Help programme](#).

Not all employee volunteering will be cancelled. Your charity partners still need your help in adapting their volunteer provision to the current climate.

As a result of COVID-19, more than 750,000 people signed up to the NHS volunteering initiative, to the point that sign-ups to the scheme had to be paused. Can you support employees who have signed up for this scheme? A BITC member, [E. G. Lewis Group](#), has agreed to provide a company vehicle and cover all fuel costs to support one of their employees who has volunteered as a driver for this scheme.

[Firmus](#) has introduced a Care scheme and registering customers who are older, registered

disabled or are chronically ill. Staff are contacting those registered by phone or letter, to see how they can help them while they stay at home. Staff are collecting groceries, prescriptions and offering reassurance and sharing stories to help keep isolation at bay.

Collaborate

Who are the other businesses supporting your charity partners? At a time when community organisations with a small number of staff might be inundated with requests to help, dealing with supporting employees and volunteers, businesses can step up to provide a coordinated response with our assistance.

Business in the Community's [Northern Ireland Business Response Network](#) provides a single and efficient way for businesses to see where and how they can quickly give the right support to communities.

We are continuing to work with Jonathan Andrews from [Remarkable Partnerships](#) and have produced a webinar for local charities on **How to shift your charity partnerships approach in response to COVID-19**. We will be running a similar webinar to support businesses, and this will be recorded and available to download from our website in June.

Business in the Community is currently looking for the best examples of responsible business practice in response to COVID-19.

If you have an example of how your business has supported a community partner, please share it with angela.mccartney@bitcni.org.uk or with your BITC relationship manager so we can share it and inspire other businesses to take action.