

Workforce Development Conference: Lessons and Next Steps

On March 27th this year, delegates and representatives from voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) and adult education colleges across London gathered to learn more about workforce development, what it is, and what it might mean for their organisations. The conference, organised by the Central London Changeup Consortium, focused on creating opportunities for Colleges and the voluntary and community Sector (VCS) to work together to find out about, develop and create workforce development provision that is appropriate for the sector.

During the first half of the conference, delegates learned how other organisations from across the UK had recognised the importance of workforce development and how, through a variety of innovative approaches and partnerships, they had developed workforce development strategies that were tailored to their needs and those of the communities they worked in.

During the second half of the day, delegates were invited to participate in a round of knowledge café's during which they were given the opportunity to discuss how workforce development could contribute to aspects of their work. Discussions centred on how workforce development opportunities could be delivered around the following areas:

- Staff management and human resources
- Project management
- Financial management
- Leadership and motivation skills
- Fundraising
- Negotiation skills
- Other issues

Each delegate was given the opportunity to record their thoughts and suggestions in the knowledge that they would be included as part of a workforce development strategy for the sector. The main findings from the event were:

- *The greatest assets within the VCS are the people (trustees, managers and volunteers) who work within the sector. This means that the sector's future relies on the continuous investment in the skills of its workforce*

- Even so, because of confusion over what workforce development is, what it means for organisations and how it will be funded, *the case for investing in workforce development has yet to be successfully made*
- *The VCS urgently needs training around organisational development and leadership*, not only to manage workforce development, but also to ensure that organisations continue to effectively meet the needs of the communities they serve both now and in the future
- Workforce development training and support needs to be *tailored to the VCS in terms of its affordability, format and content*

What follows is a brief summary of these findings and an explanation as to how they will drive the next steps in developing an effective workforce development strategy.

The VCS's greatest asset is its workforce

Delegates used the day to place heavy emphasis on the breadth and depth of everyday activities undertaken by people who work and volunteer in the VCS. Hundreds of comments were recorded by delegates that requested training on:

- Staff management and human resources
- Project management
- Financial management
- Leadership and motivation skills
- Fundraising
- Negotiation skills
- Partnership brokering
- Health and safety
- Marketing
- Information management
- Communication
- Time management

People who work in the voluntary sector clearly employ a range of skills and aptitudes that make real and lasting differences to the communities they

serve. The VCS depends heavily on the ingenuity, inspiration and commitment of its workforce to deliver quality services to communities. If the people who volunteer and work in the VCS are its greatest asset, then just as companies regularly invest in the skills of their workforce in order to retain and attract the best staff to continue to make a profit, the VCS must constantly invest in its workforce to ensure that it continues to provide the best services to communities. In short, any future strategy for the sector must have its primary asset, its workforce, at its heart.

Case yet to be made for workforce development in the VCS

Despite the recognition of the importance of investing in people, especially in a sector like the VCS which relies so heavily on its workforce to play so many roles, many of the comments recorded by delegates were indicative of the fact that participants did not have a clear consistent understanding of:

- What workforce development is
- What workforce development means for them and their organisation
- Why workforce development is important
- What funding and training are available

Participants identified the following as key factors that prevent VCOs from investing more in workforce development:

- Resource limitations both in terms of time and money
- Little support from funders, no clear channels of funding
- Few case studies illustrating how and why VCOs have invested in workforce development
- Lack of awareness of responsive, accredited and practical training opportunities
- Lack of strategic planning that would enable VCOs to invest meaningfully in workforce development

Through a combination of limited resources and a lack of understanding of the benefits of workforce development, participant responses at the event have made it clear that more work needs to be done to promote workforce development in the sector. As some delegates suggested, greater efforts toward providing clarification of why workforce development is important to the sector and how it might be funded is vital, both now, and in the future because:

- The sector should invest in ensuring that it attracts and retains people with the skills to deliver the services their communities deserve
- There will be a greater need to get better training as evidence to funders of good practice
- Funders will require partnerships so need a common agreement on workforce development

Getting serious about management and leadership

'Identify training and support needs (you need to know what you don't know)'

The quote above, recorded by a participant during the knowledge cafés is indicative of the fact that there is genuine concern within the sector that VCOs do not have the management, leadership, resources or capacity to effectively address workforce development issues. Delegates repeatedly stated that training around organisational management and leadership should be a high priority for the sector. Having the skills and resources to carefully plan ahead and inspire colleagues is critically important to the sustainability of organisations within the VCS. Training in organisational management and leadership will allow organisations to identify strengths and weaknesses and develop work plans that ensure that they continue to deliver quality services to the communities they serve both now, and in the future.

Developing training that fits the needs of the sector

Beyond the need for training in organisational management, delegates made a number of useful suggestions as to how workforce development training should be delivered in the future. These suggestions requested that training should be:

- Affordable and sensitive to the resource limitations of the organisations within the sector
- Tailored to the different roles played in the sector i.e. training developed specifically for trustees, managers and volunteer staff. This will require colleges and other training providers to have a greater understanding of the needs of the sector
- Delivered in a format that makes sense i.e. modular or online learning, seminars or workshops
- Accredited and nationally recognised
- Ongoing with new strategies of support and capacity building developed i.e. mentoring from the corporate sector, continual assessment and staggered learning

Next Steps

Our main aim is to help the VCS find ways of continuing to provide the best possible services to the communities it works with. Having listened to the suggestions and comments of colleagues from across the sector, the CLCVS is working with consultants from Rocket Science UK Ltd on a plan of action to develop practical, accessible and affordable workforce development programmes and training for managers and senior paid staff working in the sector. The primary objective of the action plan will be to make the case for workforce development in the VCS to funders, colleges and those who work in the sector itself. The plan will include:

- Meeting with key funders about possible funding opportunities
- Meeting with colleges and other education institutions about developing existing and potential workforce development programmes tailored specifically to the training needs managers and paid senior staff within the VCS
- CLCVS will support a two day leadership course for VCS managers
- Publish a paper updating the sector on what has happened since the publication of the workforce development strategy in 2006
- Develop and update a webpage dedicated to workforce development on the CLCVS website. The webpage will highlight new workforce development resources and opportunities as well as case studies of how other organisations created courses and training that were right for them

Dear Colleague,

Re: Workforce Development for the Voluntary and Community Sector

Thank you for attending the Workforce Development Conference on March 27th. We hope you found the event informative and useful, we certainly did. Since then, we have been working closely with consultants from Rocket Science UK Ltd on developing the next phase of a workforce development strategy for individuals working as part of the Central London Voluntary and Community Sector. We are working hard to make sure that the contributions and suggestions you made at the event underpin workforce development initiatives in the future. Some initial findings from the event include:

- *The greatest assets within the voluntary and community sector are the people (trustees, managers and volunteers) who work within the sector. This means that the sector's future relies on the continuous investment in the skills of its workforce*
- *Despite this, because of confusion over what workforce development is, what it means for organisations, and how it will be funded, the case for investing in workforce development has yet to be successfully made*
- *The voluntary and community sector urgently needs training around organisational development and leadership, not only to manage workforce development, but also to ensure that organisations continue to effectively meet the needs of the communities they serve both now and in the future*
- *Workforce development training and support needs to be tailored to the voluntary and community sector in terms of its affordability, format and content*

We will use these headlines, as well as the detailed comments from the conference, to develop a programme of action that results in practical, relevant and accessible workforce development initiatives for the sector. Our main aim is to help you find ways of continuing to provide the best possible services to the communities you work with. A full programme of action will be available on the Central London CVS website soon. If you don't have access to the internet, you will be able to order a copy by post.

In the meantime, please visit our expanded and updated workforce development webpage : <http://www.clcvs.net/content.asp?cat=50&par=0>. Here you will find out why workforce development is important for your organisation and what resources are available to you. Please visit the site regularly for updates and workforce development opportunities. Again, if you don't have access to the internet, you can order a paper copy of workforce development webpage directly from us.

Best wishes