

RIC Impact Assessment

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Summary

The Regional Infrastructure Consortium (RIC) has existed in its current form since May 2007. Its role is to assess need and identify new projects region-wide, agree plans and priorities for region-wide infrastructure services, allocate resources, and feed into strategic regional structures. The RIC has a membership of around 60 individuals and organisations, and holds regular meetings within the region.

To conduct this impact assessment, email questionnaires were sent to three stakeholder groups: RIC members, Regional Infrastructure Development Group (RIDG) members and Infrastructure Strategic Partnership (ISP) members. 14 RIC members and 8 others returned completed questionnaires.

RIC members were quite positive about their involvement with the RIC, agreeing that, for instance, it had enabled them to contribute to the RIC Business Plan and provided networking opportunities. However, several people made comments regarding the role of Capacitybuilders, which was seen as problematic and was thought to have increased time pressures on the RIC. In addition, it seemed that there was not a clear vision of the RIC's specific role, responsibilities, and relationships to other regional and sub-regional bodies, and there were concerns expressed about future funding issues.

Key recommendations for the RIC were developed at a review session. RIC members and stakeholders were asked to use the survey findings to assess the impact of the different aspects of the RIC with reference to the resources devoted to each. Following the Change Check method, the recommendations were categorised as actions for now (within the next 6 months), soon (in the next 6–12 months) and later (12 months and beyond). These are shown below.

Now: in the next 6 months

- Refresh the aims and objectives of the RIC and promote this clear and simple vision.
- Develop a clear regional identity making the RIC North East specific and develop a clear regional brand.
- Clear guidance is needed for the RIC's gatekeeping role in the Big Lottery Fund Basis Round 2 funding.
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding for links and information exchanges with RIDG and sub-regional consortia.

Soon: in 6 to 12 months time

- Refresh RIC membership and consider adopting two or more levels of membership.
- Develop publicity about RIC's work and proactively promote it to the third sector.

Later: 12 months plus

- Build in a continuous capacity to review and reflect on the progress of the RIC to ensure its mission statement is being met and remains relevant.

1. Background

From 2004 until March 2007 the North East had Consortia in Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, County Durham, Tees Valley, plus a Region-wide Group. The 5 consortia developed 5 Infrastructure Delivery Plans which identified need and prioritised projects which were funded through the ChangeUp Programme. A regional event was held in September 2006 to celebrate the achievements of these projects. A best practice review was prepared demonstrating the impact of ChangeUp funding, focusing on 23 projects.

In 2006 an agency was set up to manage the ChangeUp Programme. Capacitybuilders has provided tools and funding to assist the consortia in their performance and delivery. It also provided a national model template for the regions to work to. The Regionwide Consortium was struggling to perform well. VONNE commissioned consultants to review it, consult widely, make recommendations for change, and provide a second model template (report: April 2006). Members reviewed the two proposed models and in April 2006 agreed a new structure incorporating elements of both.

According to the new agreement, the Regionwide Consortium was disbanded and a new **Regional Infrastructure Consortium (RIC)** was created in May 2006. Its role would be to assess need and identify new projects region-wide, agree plans and priorities for region-wide infrastructure services, allocate resources, and feed into strategic regional structures.

A number of issues were identified with the ChangeUp programme in the North East, including:

- Short timescales for prioritisation and planning.
- Inadequate time for evaluation of projects.
- Inadequate time to collaborate between consortia.
- Poor attendance at meetings.
- Inadequate representation in consortia.

This led to the commissioning of the Regional Development Project, which aimed to review the effectiveness of the Consortia, learn lessons from previous research and collate mapping of new infrastructure need, which could assist in writing a new regional plan. Following the findings from this project and the recommendations from Capacitybuilders, the Consortium has been overhauled. In April 2007 the Region-wide Consortium agreed a new structure for Consortia in the North East. The agreed model comprises of 4 sub-regional consortia and one regional consortium, plus a collaborative group – the Regional Infrastructure Development Group or RIDG - made up of members of the 5 consortia, and a Strategic Partnership.

During 2007-08 the main task for the five consortia was to develop 3 year business plans and a 7 year strategy around infrastructure need, to be submitted to Capacitybuilders. The consortia have been assessed by Capacitybuilders during this year to ensure that they are working effectively and that the Consortia Development Fund (CDF) can resource any improvements necessary.

The purpose of this project is to assess the impact of the RIC in its current form, which will involve focusing on its performance since May 2007.

RIC vision

‘To improve infrastructure services for frontline organisations to ensure that all Third Sector groups throughout the region are able to meet their own potential and to fully contribute to social, environmental and economic development of the region’.

RIC mission

‘The North East Regional Infrastructure Consortium has been established to identify infrastructure needs that can not be met at a local level and/or are specific to regional organisations. It will recommend activities that will contribute to the improvement of infrastructure within the region’.

RIC objectives

The RIC has agreed to work together to:

- Strategically plan for infrastructure services at a regional level;
- Identify specialist regional infrastructure needs across the third sector and identify new partnerships and projects;
- Secure funding and allocate against priorities in strategy;
- Collaborate with all regional infrastructure and consortia;
- Identify and respond to public policy;
- Oversee the mainstreaming of equalities within the organisations and projects which provide infrastructure support funded through the Business Plan.

2. Evaluation methods

The following research methods were used for this impact assessment:

1) Desk-based research

Reports and papers relating to the Regional Infrastructure Development Project were reviewed to gain an understanding of the RIC and provide background information for the impact assessment. Materials studied included monitoring information, meeting minutes and supporting papers, and RIC protocols.

2) Interviews and meetings

A semi-structured interview took place with Jane Cater, the Senior Policy and Development Manager at VONNE. VONNE is responsible for facilitating the development of the RIC and administering Capacitybuilders' funding in the region.

Members of the research team attended RIC and RIDG meetings over the course of the research programme to give progress reports and consult with members.

3) Questionnaire survey

Questionnaires were designed and sent out by email to RIC stakeholders. For the purposes of the evaluation, project stakeholders were divided into three separate groups – RIC Members, RIDG (Regional Infrastructure Development Group) Members and ISP (Infrastructure Strategic Partnership) Members. Separate questionnaires were developed to target each of these groups, although they were each based on the same overall design. The survey findings reflect the views of these different groups.

To maximise response rates, the survey was emailed to RIC stakeholders twice. Copies of questionnaires were also taken to the RIC meeting in May 2008 for members to complete by hand.

4) Change Check

Change Check is an approach to assessing the impact of community organisations which is endorsed by bassac and the Community Alliance. Three groups of stakeholders were identified and sent questionnaires about the activities of the project, after carrying out an interview with the project lead to break down the resources used by the different parts of the project (i.e. standard working hours in a month) which were represented in graph form for the review session. Key stakeholders were invited to this session and the collated findings presented to them. They were then asked to rank the impact of each part of the project against the time committed to each, based on the information presented to them. Working from this visual record the participants in the session examined the various aspects of the work undertaken by the project and from this developed a number of action points/recommendations for the future.

3. Evaluation findings

Survey response rates

A total of 22 respondents provided information about the RIC. Questionnaires were sent to 62 RIC Members. 14 completed and returned questionnaires, while a further 4 replied but declined to comment. This represents a response rate of 23%. Questionnaires were sent to 38 RIC Stakeholders (25 ISP members and 13 RIDG members). 8 completed and returned questionnaires, while another 2 replied but declined to comment. Of those who returned questionnaires, 5 were ISP members, 1 was a RIDG member, and 2 were members of both the ISP and the RIDG. This represents response rates of 28% for the ISP and 23% for the RIDG.

Response rates were fairly low despite the fact that stakeholders were given at least two chances to contribute to the process. There are several possible reasons for this:

- People may have felt that they did not have sufficient understanding or knowledge of the RIC to contribute (this was mentioned by several people who responded but declined to complete the survey);
- The RIC may not be especially relevant or interesting to some of its members or stakeholders;
- People may have felt it was too early to assess the impact of the RIC, after less than a year in its new structure;
- People may have been too busy to complete the survey, given the short timescale;
- People may not have had particularly strong opinions about the RIC, so did not feel the need to comment on it.

Headline survey findings

- The majority of RIC Members agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements (number of responses is shown in brackets):
 - The amount of work RIC members are usually asked to do at RIC meetings is acceptable (10).
 - RIC meetings provide networking opportunities that have a positive impact on my work (10).
 - RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to feed into the RIC Business Plan (9).
 - The time commitment involved in being a RIC member is acceptable (8).
 - Being a RIC member has a positive impact on my involvement with other groups or networks (8).
 - RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise to the work of the RIC (8).
 - RIC members have had sufficient input into the development of RIC materials (8).

- 6 RIC Members either disagreed or strongly disagreed with each of the following statements: Capacitybuilders is an effective leader and supporter of the RIC; and the RIC has had a positive impact on the VCS in the region in the past year.
- 5 RIC Stakeholders agreed with the statement that the RIC re-organisation in 2007 has resulted in an improvement in its overall structure.
- 4 RIC Stakeholders agreed with each of the following statements: the RIC re-organisation in 2007 has made it more effective than before; and RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise to the work of the RIC.
- 3 RIC Stakeholders disagreed with the idea that Capacitybuilders is an effective leader and supporter of the RIC; while 4 disagreed that the RIC Business Plan had helped their organisation to lever in extra funding.

Comments on the RIC

RIC members were given the chance to provide additional comments about the RIC in support of their survey responses. Comments were made relating to a number of issues or themes. These are described below:

Several people thought that the **RIC has had limited impact** to date on third sector organisations in the region. Three people pointed out that it may be too early to see what impact the RIC will have, with one saying that the foundations had now been laid and it was up to members to make sure the RIC was a success. However, one respondent thought it was time to start seeing some benefits: *'If organisations do not benefit in some way, people may not continue to support the RIC'*.

Four people thought that the **time pressures** associated with the RIC had been a problem, and that this was largely due to Capacitybuilders: *'The deadlines imposed by Capacitybuilders have often led to little or no time for effective consultation and discussion'*. This also limited the time to prepare evidence and reports when needed. One person thought that the RIC should raise this issue formally with Capacitybuilders.

Five people said they thought the **relationship with Capacitybuilders** was problematic for a range of other reasons, such as *'shifting goal posts'*, funding cuts and uncertainty of future funding, unrealistic demands, too much bureaucracy, delays in the implementation of funding streams, and general lack of support:

'One is left with a conviction that Capacitybuilders are mutating their funding strategies almost on a daily basis and in a fire-fighting fashion one would anticipate from an entity who is way behind time targets in allocating the sector's multi-millions. It's like they all went on sick leave for 6 months and got back to work to find that no-one advanced anything whilst they were away. Queue panic stations.'

Three people expressed concern about the level of **transparency in decision making** within the RIC. Comments were made such as *'it seemed that many decisions were already taken, and that a small part of the group had a disproportionate amount of influence'*. One person described what they saw as attempts to 'hijack' the agenda by some members. This was thought to be at the expense of building *'new and emerging networks'* and developing as a group.

However, one person thought that things had started to improve recently in terms of **team building**: *'there seems to be a more concerted effort to build us in to a proper team and network more effectively'*.

RIC membership involves being given a great deal of information, which can lead to what one member described as **'information overload'**.

One person said they thought the **time allocated to tasks** had not been proportionate, with too much time spent setting up the organisation, and too little on the business plan.

Finally one person expressed concern about the RIC's development in terms of what is seen as its **increasing role in regional funding**: *'It does concern me that it the RIC is apparently going to have some influence over funding decisions, and that those decisions are likely to go in favour of those who have time to devote to the RIC'*.

RIDG and ISP members were also asked for their comments on the RIC. ISP members commented on the uncertainty and *'constant refreshing'* at a national level and the restrictions imposed by Capacitybuilders' framework (one comment on each). One RIDG member emphasised Capacitybuilders' responsibility to provide future funding to the RIC, while another commented that the RIC had *'grown and gelled significantly as a group over the past year'*.

Comments about the future for the RIC

RIC members participating in the survey were asked what they would like the RIC to achieve over the next few years. The most common responses were related to more **clearly defining the role and purpose** of the RIC:

'A clear vision, and communication of that vision, is needed.'

- Three people said that the RIC needed to have its purpose clarified;
- Two said a clearer view of **third sector needs** was required;
- Two said there needed to be better understanding of **how the RIC related to the sub-regional consortia**;
- be involved), while another said that there needed to be a more diverse group of organisations involved;
- Two people said that there was a **need to communicate** RIC's role and purpose more clearly.

Other comments were made on a range of different issues, as shown below:

- The RIC needs to **work together harmoniously** as a group (comment made by two people);
- To address the issue of **financial stability**, both for the third sector as a whole and for projects in the RIC business plan (two comments);
- *'To make strategic decisions and interventions based on regional needs, capacity and agreed priorities'* (one comment);

- *'We need to provide projects that are innovative and different and of course useful'* (one comment);
- To create **sub-sections of the RIC around particular interests**, such as enterprise and assets, volunteering, health, etc (one comment);
- To carry on **pooling intelligence** about VCS needs (one comment);
- To continue to **review** the work and purpose of the RIC, the business plan and other strategies on a regular basis (two comments).

ISP and RIDG members were also asked for their comments on the future of the RIC. The comments generally echoed those made by RIC members, focusing on issues such as a clear role and purpose for the RIC, clarity with regard to the relationship between the RIC and other regional and sub-regional bodies, and a clear strategy for future action.

4. Change Check review process

Impact assessment

A review session was held for RIC members. It was attended by Jane Cater from Vonne, the RIC Chair, three other RIC members, and Stuart Thompson, the consultant working on the RIC Communications Strategy. Two members of the research team were also at the meeting. The survey findings were presented to them, and they were asked to use these to assess the impact of the RIC with regard to meetings, networking, and consultation/work arising from meetings. They were asked to mark this on a graph using colour-coded stickers, in order to create a visual summary of the findings.

The graph and the stickers measuring the impact of each area are shown below. The final three columns refer to the RIC Impact Assessment.



A review report was prepared including notes on the review process and discussion, comments by those taking part, and a summary of the action points and recommendations. The rest of this section is taken from the review report.

RIC meetings

Generally substantial impact with RIC members being more engaged than other stakeholders. RIDG generally the lowest.

Networking

This was a mixed response on the impact – the results looking somewhat different from the comments. RIDG again the lowest.

Consultation/work arising from meetings

This showed up with very mixed results as per the impact on the Ric members and the ISP. Much lower on the RIDG responses.

Review session quotes

RIC – It would be nice to see a more proactive approach in explaining the benefits to the VCS and potential active participation of the regional organisations.

ISP – The membership of the RIC were fully consulted on the business plan, however within Capacitybuilders' framework it was difficult to be clear if all the right people were being engaged.

RIDG – Better understanding of the importance/significance of regional work within the wider sector and beyond.

Summary of impact

Overall, where is the organisation having most impact?

RIC meetings had the most impact overall. But there are some variations in responses from the RIC members that indicate an underlying problem. Also RIDG consistently gave the lowest response.

Where does the organisation want to strengthen its impact?

There were a number of issues discussed which, in essence, stemmed from the one main problem i.e. RIC members, and other stakeholders, lacked clarity and confidence in the aims and objectives of the RIC. Recent work undertaken to meet Capacitybuilders' requirements has blurred the sense of ownership by all of the groups. The RIC has to look at being clear and specific about its aims and objectives. It must be able to promote these to a wide audience making links to work funded which supports VCS infrastructure organisations and, eventually, to frontline VCS organisations.

5. Action planning and recommendations

The Change Check review meeting resulted in a series of suggestions and recommendations for the RIC to act on over the coming year and beyond.

Now: in the next 6 months

- Refresh aims and objectives of the RIC and promote this clear and simple vision both internally with RIC and externally – in particular with the RIDG, ISP and sub-regional consortia. *Work on this is already planned for the away day on the 3rd July.*
- The RIC needs to be clear about its role as the ‘*change agent*’ for the Third Sector regional infrastructure – as opposed to being a ‘*change agency*’. As an agent it is involved in a dialogue internally and externally with the agencies of change, i.e. with RIDG and sub-regional consortia members.
- The RIC should develop a clear regional identity highlighting a clear separation from (or perhaps in addition to) CapacityBuilders’ requirements. Possibilities for branding the RIC include a new phrase or logo, with small cards bearing the agreed vision/mission statement.
- Clear guidance should be developed about the RIC’s gatekeeping role in the Big Lottery Fund Basis Round 2 funding. This needs to take place alongside the RIDG and sub-regional consortia.
- Clear information and mechanisms should be developed to highlight the evolutionary nature of the RIC. Although it was initiated by Capacitybuilders, the RIC is now in a place where it can become a tool shaped by and for the third sector in the North East.
- The RIC should also begin to develop a Memorandum of Understanding for the links and information exchanges with RIDG and sub-regional consortia.
- The RIC funds other work in the region i.e. FINE and the ICT project but, from the evaluation responses, there is limited internal knowledge of the work funded. As part of the work establishing its identity and promoting its work the RIC needs to receive regular information on this work. This needs to be done in a ‘live’ way as seen by the recent presentation by the ICT Champion. Also the possible involvement of reports from the recipients of the funded work would help – this would be an ongoing action as long as the RIC was funding projects.

Soon: in 6 to 12 months time

- The RIC should refresh its membership. It may wish to develop two levels of membership: one for people who want to be actively involved, and one for people who want to be kept informed but not involved (this last group could include the ISP and RIDG).

- As part of its communications strategy, RIC should develop publicity and information about its work in order to proactively promote it to the third sector e.g. in VINE, VONNE website, RIC members' networks etc.
- As the 2 funded projects remain in the priorities in the Business Plan and Strategy the RIC should consider the aspirations for the 2 projects as described by the managers in the reports. If these are considered and agreed as furthering the aims and objectives of the RIC then resources should be identified to support the development of these projects. These developments could also be used to promote the RIC and its work in the infrastructure consortia sub-regionally – helping to ensure that the work done by all is more coherent.

Later: 12 months plus

- There is a need to build in a continuous capacity to review and reflect on the progress of the RIC, in order to test if it is keeping to its mission statement, and whether the mission statement needs to be refreshed.

Comments from Jane Cater, VONNE

With less than one third of RIC members feeding comments into the evaluation this is only a snapshot in time. The back drop to which includes two other consultation exercises and a disappointing response to funding applications to Capacitybuilders from the Business Plan. The RIC has had very little time to develop or promote its purpose and activity so the reaction from stakeholders is not a surprise. There has been a strong reaction to the process that the RIC has been encouraged to undertake by Capacitybuilders which I can confirm has been echoed across the other regions. This has been fed back to Capacitybuilders by a team of regional workers. The main issues that were collated in the evaluation were also highlighted in the self assessment exercise which demonstrate the need to build the team, clarify the purpose and communicate to stakeholders. It is also worth noting that most information and systems are in place and there is a need for RIC members to become better informed and aware of developments. The promotion of the RIC is the responsibility of all members. The idea that the consortium could have made a significant impact after 9 months is one that crops up often. The product of the work over this time is clear, but the dissemination and next steps are not yet evident. This impact assessment will need to be regularly refreshed to show the value that the RIC and its work has had on the members and the sector as a whole.

Funding proposal or idea

A working group from the RIC could focus on the funding framework which will ensure that the RIC Business plan projects are considered for funding opportunities and partnerships are formed.

Collaboration with the sub regional consortia to promote the value of the consortia and the benefits to ChangeUp projects in the region.

Campaigning with Consortia for secure Infrastructure funding.

Appendices

Survey findings in detail

RIC members

Statement	Number of responses (%)		
	Agree/ strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/ strongly disagree
The time commitment involved in being a RIC member is acceptable	8 (62%)	2 (15%)	3 (23%)
The amount of work RIC members are usually asked to do at RIC meetings is acceptable	10 (77%)	2 (15%)	1 (8%)
Being a RIC member has a positive impact on my work within my own organisation	6 (46%)	2 (15%)	5 (39%)
Being a RIC member has a positive impact on my involvement with other groups or networks	8 (62%)	1 (8%)	4 (30%)
RIC meetings provide networking opportunities that have a positive impact on my work	10 (77%)	1 (8%)	2 (15%)
The RIC re-organisation in 2007 has resulted in an improvement in its overall structure	5 (42%)	7 (58%)	-
The RIC re-organisation in 2007 has made it more effective than before	2 (15%)	11 (85%)	-
The RIC has had a positive impact on the VCS in the region in the past year	2 (15%)	5 (38%)	6 (47%)
Capacitybuilders is an effective leader and supporter of the RIC	4 (30%)	3 (23%)	6 (47%)
RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise to the work of the RIC	8 (62%)	3 (23%)	2 (15%)
RIC members have had sufficient input into the development of RIC materials	8 (62%)	4 (30%)	1 (8%)
RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to feed into the RIC Business Plan	9 (70%)	3 (23%)	1 (7%)
The RIC Business Plan has had a positive impact on my organisation	2 (16%)	5 (42%)	5 (42%)
The RIC Business Plan has helped my organisation to lever in extra funding	1 (8%)	4 (34%)	7 (58%)

ISP members

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The RIC re-organisation in 2007 has resulted in an improvement in its overall structure		4 (80%)	1 (20%)		
The RIC re-organisation in 2007 has made it more effective than before		2 (40%)	3 (60%)		
The RIC has had a positive impact on the VCS in the region in the past year		2 (40%)	3 (60%)		
Capacitybuilders is an effective leader and supporter of the RIC		1 (20%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%)	
RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise to the work of the RIC		2 (40%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	
RIC members have had sufficient input into the development of RIC materials		1 (20%)	4 (80%)		
RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to feed into the RIC Business Plan		2 (40%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	
The RIC Business Plan has had a positive impact on my organisation			4 (80%)	1 (20%)	
The RIC Business Plan has helped my organisation to lever in extra funding			3 (60%)	2 (40%)	

RIDG members (note: 2 of these are also ISP members)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The RIC re-organisation in 2007 has resulted in an improvement in its overall structure		2 (66%)	1 (33%)		
The RIC re-organisation in 2007 has made it more effective than before		3 (75%)	1 (25%)		
The RIC has had a positive impact on the VCS in the region in the past year			3 (100%)		
Capacitybuilders is an effective leader and supporter of the RIC		1 (33%)		2 (66%)	
RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise to the work of the RIC		2 (66%)	1 (33%)		
RIC members have had sufficient input into the development of RIC materials		2 (66%)	1 (33%)		
RIC members have had sufficient opportunity to feed into the RIC Business Plan		1 (50%)	1 (50%)		
The RIC Business Plan has had a positive impact on my organisation			1 (50%)	1 (50%)	
The RIC Business Plan has helped my organisation to lever in extra funding			1 (33%)	2 (66%)	

Time invested in the RIC by RIC members

The table below shows the time that RIC members spend on events and activities directly associated with the RIC. This is the total amount of time spent by all RIC members, e.g. if ten RIC members attended a meeting that lasted 3 hours, the total time spent would be 10 x 3 hours = 30 hours. This calculation does not include any time that members spend, for instance, feeding back information from the RIC within their own organisation or to those that they work with. The information was collected by VONNE staff for quarterly monitoring returns. In addition to this, VONNE staff spend around 65 hours per month on work resulting from the RIC (this does not include work associated with the Facilitation and Grant Management projects, each of which take up 30 hours of staff time per month).

Event or activity	Total time spent in hours
July meeting	38 hours
August meeting	32 hours
September meeting	28 hours
Quarter 2 sub-groups	20 hours
Quarter 2 preparation time	45 hours
October meeting	32 hours
November Planning Day 1	150 hours
November Planning Day 2	136 hours
Q3 strategy and consultations	(time not specified)
January meeting	51 hours
February meeting	39 hours
March meeting	36 hours
May meeting	33 hours
TOTAL	640 hours

The table shows that, in the nine months between July 2007 and March 2008, RIC members spent at least 640 hours – or 80 working days – on the RIC. This represents a significant commitment from RIC members in terms of time and the associated costs.