CO3

Strategic Plan 2016-2019

Introduction

Established in 1985, by a group of chief officers who started meeting to share good practice, information and peer support, to help them be more effective, CO3 (Chief Officers 3rd Sector) is a leading membership-based organisation that focuses on supporting, developing and connecting Third Sector leaders in Northern Ireland.

CO3 has a niche role focussing on individuals in leadership positions in Third Sector organisations rather than with the organisations themselves. CO3's unique selling point is that it supports the individual leader.

CO3 has a growing membership base of just over 500 Third Sector leaders, from leaders of some of the largest charities and social enterprises through to small community and faith-based groups.

We use the term Third Sector to describe the breadth of our members' work. Members work across all policy areas and connect to all government departments. Our members offer considerable expertise, services and innovation. They lead organisations that contribute resources and investment in public services, employ tens of thousands of people and have a considerable asset base to help strengthen the economy.

CO3 is supported by a small staff team who work closely with members, as well as partner organisations in the private and statutory sector, as well as government departments.

CO3 receives funding from a range of sources, including membership fees, training, a small proportion of government funding, and income from a number of Trusts and Foundations.

Full membership is open to chief officers (the most senior staff member in Northern Ireland) of Third Sector organisations in Northern Ireland. Full members are entitled to vote at the AGM and elect Executive Committee members. Other categories of membership are open to Third Sector senior managers (associate members); members of the Trustee Network; and partner organisations in other sectors via our corporate membership.

Member support services

CO3 does not only offer training and events to its members and opportunities to network with other members, but also provides them with a unique tailor-made service

that consists of generalist advice on a range of business support services including; legal governance and HR advice, mentoring, counselling, and a very practical Call for Help 'peer to peer' system, thanks to which members can request help from other CO3 members.

Achievements

CO3 is proud of its achievements over the last three years covered by the previous strategic plan. It has not only survived, but thrived, in an exceptionaly tough external environment. These achievements include the following:

- Increased opportunities for members through the growth in the number and range of events, including successful and popular leadership training, development, networking and mentoring programmes. In the last year alone CO3 organised 62 events with 1474 delegates
- Providing increased opportunity for public policy engagement through ministerial round tables, linking Third Sector leaders to government ministers and senior civil servants. In the last year there were seven ministerial round tables
- The provision of the Interim CEO programme (and relevant training) which has placed more than a dozen Interim Executives in organisations
- The development of the Trustee Network and delivery of a popular and relevant programme (with seven events in 2015) to board members/trustees /directors
- Greater public recognition of Third Sector leaders through the very successful Leaderships Awards
- A growth in membership to over 500. More than 100 members have joined in the last year alone plus 142 members of the Trustee Network.

Key external factors

In drawing up this strategic plan the board were very conscious of a challenging and rapidly changing external environment. Some of these changes include the following:

- Severe constraints on public finances leading to reduced public services; cuts to the funding of Third Sector organisations; while, at the same time, there are increasing demands for these very services
- The transition from public sector grant funding to the commissioning/tendering of services and the change in skills that this transition requires
- Restructuring of both local government as a result of the Review of Public Administration and of government departments, with resulting changes of strategies, policies, personnel, as well as geographical boundaries

- Increased legal compliance requirements on Third Sector organisations including by the Charity Commission which is systematically registering all charities in Northern Ireland
- A reduction in trust, and increased public scrutiny, of Third Sector organisations and their leaders
- Rapid changes in technologies including mobile technologies and social media, bringing both opportunities and challenges
- Changes in demography, including the increasing number of older people and increases in BME communities, asylum-seekers and refugees.

Strategic planning process

This strategic plan was developed by a planning group of CO3, including board members and staff, informed by a board strategic planning workshop; survey of members; and consultation on the basis of a draft strategy.

The evidence gathered, confirmed the view of the members of the planning group that the programmes, services and benefits provided by CO3 are very much appreciated by members. It was clear that the strategic direction for CO3 over the next three years needs to build on its achievements to date. Both expanding and developing the existing work, as well as formulating new programmes and events in response to the needs of members. Some of the new initiatives highlighted in the new strategy, which were not in the previous strategy, include the following:

- Improving Third Sector governance, building on the establishment of the Trustee Network
- Improving the data on trends in Third Sector leadership through a quarterly survey of members.
- Enabling Third Sector organisations to assess and improve their capacity through the Core Capacity Assessment (CCAT) framework
- Improving skills around commissioning/tendering
- Improving public policy advocacy skills
- Reporting more specifically on CO3's performance and impact.

Mission
To inspire and enable great Third Sector leadership.

Vision
Our vision is of great Third Sector leadership driving positive change to create a thriving, participative and inclusive society.

Values
The following values will inspire all aspects of CO3's work:

Quality
All those involved in Third Sector leadership deserve to receive services of the highest quality that meet their needs. We will regularly assess the needs and satisfaction of members and ensure that all CO3 services are of the highest quality.

Collaboration
Needs are often better served by leaders and organisations working together. We will continue to provide spaces where partnerships can flourish.

Inclusion
Everyone has the right to be valued equally and be included in society. We will work to identify and remove barriers to accessibility and inclusion.

Mutuality
CO3 is its members. We will optimise opportunities for mutual support and the sharing of skills and knowledge.

Integrity
Trust depends on consistently acting honestly, openly and in good faith. We are committed to living out our values and ideals and doing what we say we will.

Responsiveness
The success of CO3 depends on being understanding and responsive to members. We will ensure we are empathetic to members and respond on a personal and professional level to their needs.

Aims and Priorities for 2016-2019

Develop Third Sector leadership skills and knowledge
Aim 1: Enable Third Sector leaders to develop excellent skills and receive appropriate recognition.

Priorities for 2016-19:

1.1 Assess and develop the hard and soft leadership and management skills of chief officers
1.2 Invest in emerging leaders - managers in the sector who may become the next generation of chief officers; and promote succession planning
1.3 Develop the governance skills and knowledge of trustees/directors
1.4 Develop skills relevant to the commissioning/tendering agenda
1.5 Recognise excellent leadership through the Leadership Awards
1.6 Improve the data available on trends in Third Sector leadership
1.7 Provide members with distinctive, accurate, timely and relevant information, through the most appropriate methods
1.8 Provide members with appropriate resource materials and guides
1.9 Support Third Sector leaders to assess and improve the capacity of their organisations.

Facilitate networking and collaboration between leaders
Aim 2: Provide opportunities for Third Sector leaders to network, share with each other and receive mutual support.

Priorities for 2016-19:

2.1 Provide safe spaces for chief officer networking and mutual support
2.2 Facilitate networking between all Third Sector leaders
2.3 Facilitate networking between Third Sector leaders in Northern Ireland and elsewhere
2.4 Facilitate networking between Third Sector leaders and leaders in other sectors
2.5 Promote effective collaboration within the sector and with other sectors

Support policy advocacy and communications
Aim 3: Support the public policy advocacy of Third Sector leaders.

Priorities for 2016-19:

3.1 Provide spaces for Third Sector leaders to have relevant public policy conversations
3.2 Provide opportunities for confidential discussions with ministers and other senior decision/policy-makers
3.3 Develop Third Sector leaders' public policy advocacy and lobbying skills
3.4 Contribute to public policy development relevant to CO3's role

3.5 Promote a positive image of Third Sector leadership through effective public relations

Promote and build membership

Aim 4: Expand and develop CO3 membership.

Priorities for 2016-19:

4.1 Increase CO3 membership through recruiting new members and retaining existing members
4.2 Ensure an appropriate membership structure
4.3 Regularly assess member needs, views and satisfaction, in order to inform the development of services and member benefits
4.4 Develop appropriate membership benefits
4.5 Provide support and care to Third Sector leaders

Running an effective organisation

Aim 5: Ensure an effective, well-governed sustainable organisation which has the appropriate resources which are effectively and efficiently managed.

Priorities for 2016-19:

5.1 Assure and continuously improve the quality of delivery of all CO3 services and activities
5.2 Ensure the governance of CO3 role models best practice
5.3 Measure and report on the performance and impact of CO3
5.4 Ensure CO3 has the staffing it requires to achieve its plans and they are appropriately managed and supported to develop
5.5 Ensure CO3 generates sufficient funding to achieve its plans
5.6 Increase net income from social enterprise trading
5.7 Ensure sound financial planning, management and reporting
5.8 Ensure CO3 has the premises and physical resources to achieve its plans and these are effectively and efficiently managed