

Environmental NGO: Remit and Funding

The future of many environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs), and the environment sector as a whole, has been placed in jeopardy by the financial crisis and impacts this will have on budgets and subsequent funding opportunities. Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL), along with the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), commissioned Envision Management Consultants to produce an independent report on the current position and future prospects for the environment sector in Northern Ireland. The report mapped the remits and resources of individual organisations in order to begin to identify opportunities for and barriers to collaboration. The full report can be downloaded at: <http://www.nienvironmentlink.org/publications/reports.php>.

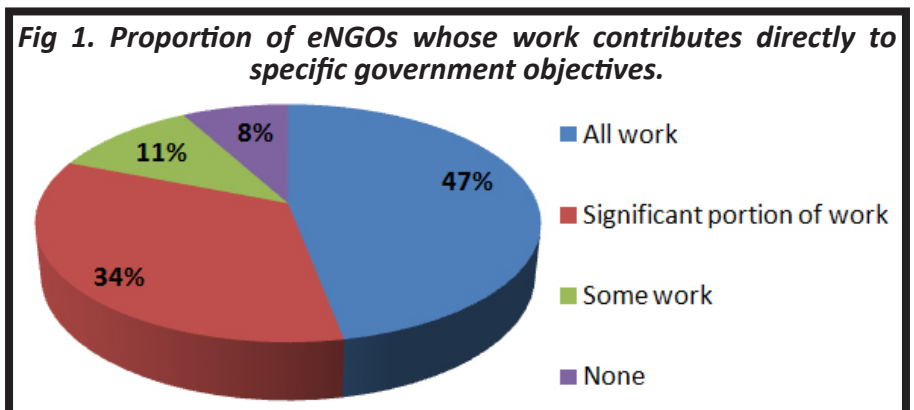
The review involved a survey of a wide range of eNGOs. Of 64 questionnaires sent out, 38 were completed – a very high return rate. The 38 participating eNGOs have 720 full time employees and four are responsible for land management in Northern Ireland totalling 30,000 acres.

Why should government fund eNGOs?

• Delivery of government objectives

eNGOs contribute to the key objectives of all Northern Ireland government departments (Figure 1). eNGOs tend to take a holistic view with a level of integration which government departments cannot match.

Responses from a range of government interviewees highlight a significant and worrying difference between what eNGOs believe they are doing for government and how eNGOs are perceived by government. Government interviewees identified eNGOs' roles as mainly consultative, advisory, promotional, educational and site management.



• Access to other sources of income

Government funding does not cover the full cost of eNGO delivery of government objectives. As a result of government funding, eNGOs can access matched funding, bringing additional income to environmental work which government alone could not access. The leverage ratio is 1.46:1, and rises to 3.37:1 if two recipients of large amounts of government project funding are excluded (Table 1).

Additional funding streams are available to many eNGOs, including membership subscriptions, funding from businesses, sponsorship, grants and Trusts or by providing service delivery. However, many eNGOs feel that fundraising will not be enough to fill the gap left by reduced central government funding. Fundraising is also highly time and resource intensive and brings with it many restrictions. Much of the work carried out by eNGOs is not likely to attract commercial sponsorship.

Table 1. Multiplier effect of matched funding.

	Value of government funding (£)	Value of non-government funding (£)	Value of volunteer contribution (£)	Multiplier effect
Funding received by all 38 eNGOs	14,873,000	18,041,500	3,700,00	For every £1 invested by government, the eNGO sector access an additional £1.46
		21,741,500		
Funding received by 36 eNGOs (excluding two large organisations that received high levels of funding for specific projects)	4,873,000	12,741,500	3,700,000	For every £1 invested by government, the eNGO sector access an additional £3.37
		16,441,500		

• Access to volunteers

Government cannot access the expertise, knowledge and energy of volunteers. The value of eNGO volunteers across 26 eNGOs is £3.65million. Half of this is related to CVNI whose business is volunteers. Volunteer roles include Committee membership, student placement, administrative support, research, site management, practical conservation work and community action. It is vital that such valuable input is not jeopardised in any collaboration.

• Value for money

eNGOs can provide excellent value for money in terms of delivering environmental objectives. In 78% of the organisations, direct delivery constitutes more than 61% of total staff costs with support costs often being less than 20%.

Funding Issues

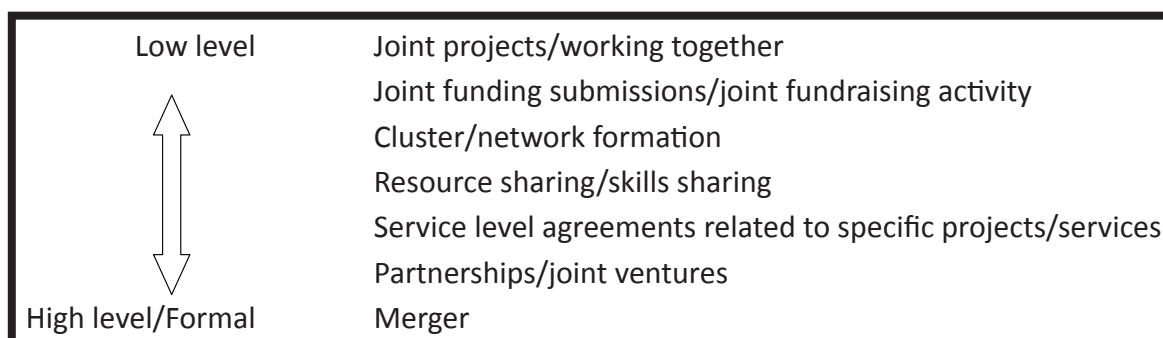
Government funding is often perceived as inflexible, piecemeal, restrictive and discouraging of collaboration and innovation. In most cases, government funding requires additional match funding. This, while an opportunity to access a range of other funding, has significant impacts on eNGOs. Large inputs of time and expertise are required to complete funding applications, often with little expectation of success.

Lack of continuity of funding is a major problem with regard to successful completion of projects due to staffing difficulties. Short term contracts mean that staff often look for another job before the end of a project. Replacing them is difficult for the final few months. Three year funding also discourages permanent staff; longer term funding would help retain skilled staff.

Collaboration

• Types of collaboration

The report identified a continuum of collaboration, each of which may be beneficial in different situations:



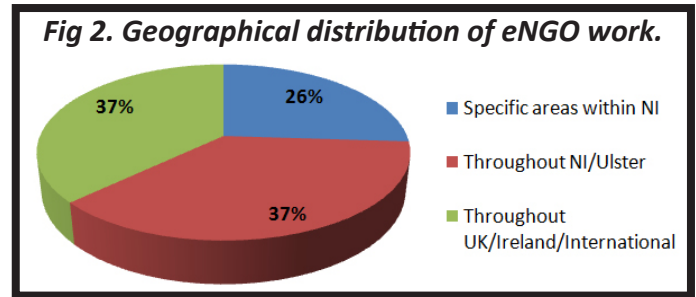
Other options include shared service arrangements, remote working, pay freezes, voluntary reduction in hours, complementary working, collaboration in work delivery, collaboration on funding bids and outright mergers.

• **Collaboration considerations**

A number of factors can have impacts on an organisation’s ability or willingness to collaborate.

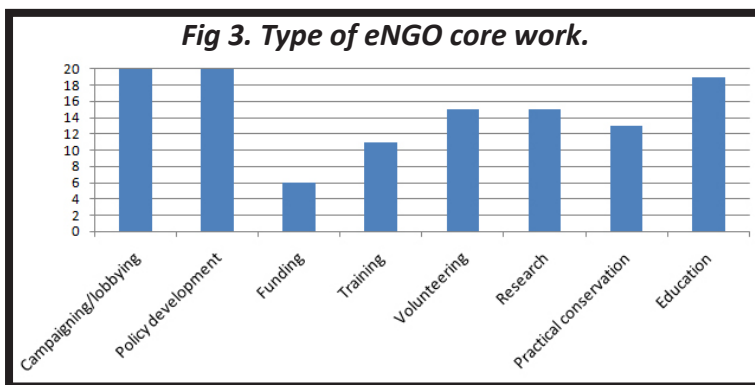
- **Geographical distribution** (Figure 2)

Organisations with a similar geographical spread can find areas of collaborative activity . Specific-area eNGOs may be less likely to find thematic overlap but could share administration, etc.



- **Type and theme of core work**

eNGO work can range from policy work to practical conservation work to research. Policy development, campaigning/lobbying and education were the most common foci among participants, closely followed by research, volunteering, practical conservation and training (Figure 3). The core objectives of the eNGO sector also varies across a number of themes, the most common of which were biodiversity, conservation and preservation of natural or built environments. Countryside and rural development



are core themes for half as many eNGOs (Figure 4). Overlap of types and themes may be a good basis for collaboration (11 of the 38 organisations are involved in 10 or more themes), while differences (10 are involved in 3 or fewer themes) may provide scope for complementary working. Collaboration of administration and technical services should also be explored.

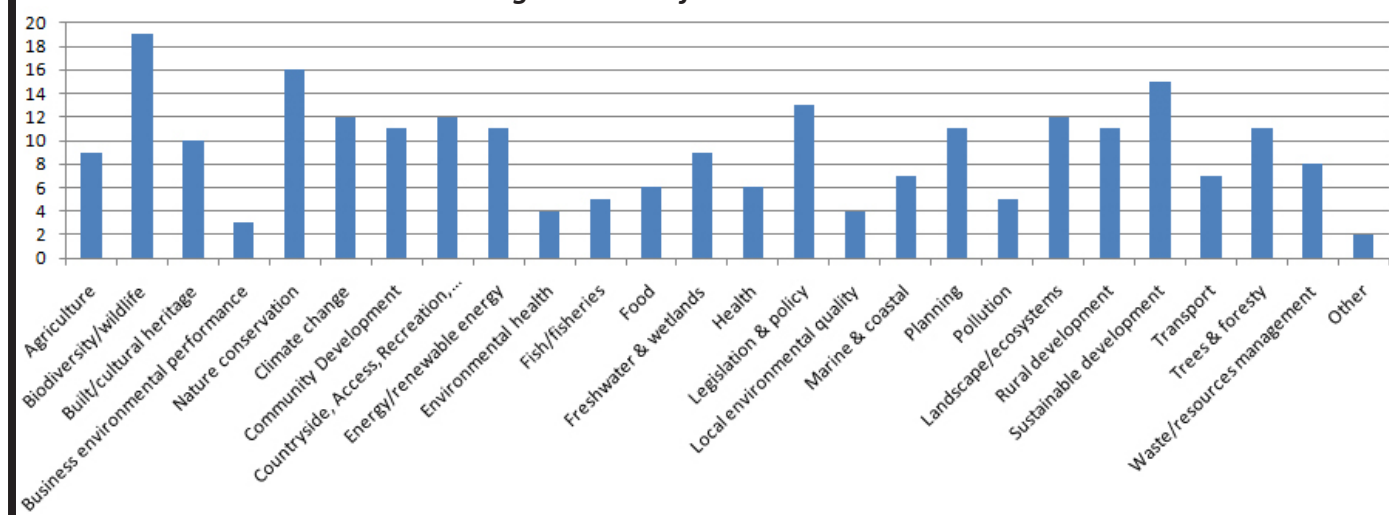
- **Status of organisation**

Most eNGOs are companies limited by guarantee with charitable status. This legal and funding status has implications for possible collaboration where changes in the emphasis of activities or focus may be required. On the otherhand, the vast majority of eNGOs are locally run and autonomous possibly making collaborative work easier.

• **Benefits and risks of collaboration**

Benefits	Risks
Financial savings and better value for money.	Loss of brand identity and the possible reduced ability to attract members or volunteers.
Sharing of expertise.	Loss of focus on core objectives resulting in ‘mission creep’. Chasing funding can distort priorities.
Improved sustainability.	Management needs to invest significant time, resources and expertise on collaborative arrangements. The outcomes may not justify the investment.
Better co-ordination within interest areas.	Different objectives, cultures and personalities may clash.
A more coherent voice to government.	Loss of flexibility arising from more complex management or governance structures.
Reduction in duplication (real and perceived).	A sector with fewer organisations is potentially less robust.
More rapid response to changing needs and demands.	Initiation and management of collaboration may require training or investment in skills and expertise for management, including Boards.

Fig 4. Theme of eNGO core work.



Conclusions

eNGOs bring a respected independent voice and expertise to decision-makers and the public. They can also provide unique and innovative ways for the public to get involved in their local environment.

eNGOs will require support to deliver the collaboration challenge and to cope with the changing priorities and financial environment. There is also a need to assess commonalities, overlaps, gaps and opportunities and to facilitate discussions and the development of partnerships and collaboration.

Other needs include communicating eNGO capabilities to government, especially focussed on areas where government spend is decreasing. The government needs imaginative, proactive, innovative solutions. eNGOs need to co-operate, show flexibility and a willingness to adapt. The next five years are likely to be difficult and the best survival strategy for eNGOs is to be flexible and open to collaboration and change.

The more eNGOs can structure their core and project funding bids to the shape of government priorities, the easier it will be to access government funds. Both government and the eNGO sector need to become more streamlined for more effective and efficient delivery of environmental objectives.

In the present financial climate, eNGOs need to emphasise their strengths:

- They are **cost-effective vehicles** for delivering government targets;
- They have a unique ability to **deliver across all sectors**;
- They are a **one-stop shop** for business, news and community on environmental issues;
- They have **professional and unique expertise** and a **proven track record**;
- They are **good value for money** with low overheads;
- They can **multi-task** across many objectives;
- The absence of an effective eNGO sector would require the increased use of costly consultants, often with the subsequent problem of **delivery on the ground**; and,
- Many of the eNGO activities allow government to **avoid fines for non-compliance with EU legislation**.

NIEL is funded by: