

Groop – Local Authorities Case Study

Building VCSE Capacity, Developing Local Volunteer Programmes, and Supporting Community Resilience

About Local Authorities

Local Authorities are responsible for a range of vital services for people and businesses in defined areas, ranging from social care and education to housing, planning and waste collection, to licensing, business support, registrar services and pest control.

They receive funding to deliver these services from central government and income from council tax and business rates.

With cuts to funding levels and increases in the costs for delivering statutory duties, Local Authorities are having to review their services in order to improve productivity, deliver in more effective and efficient ways and make savings.

Increasingly Local Authorities are working with VCSE and developing their own volunteering programmes to 'add value' to their own service offer.

They are also recognising the need to move to using digital systems to support and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their work in communities and with volunteers.

The Opportunity

Volunteering and providing help in communities has taken on a greater level of significance in recent months due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many more 'working age' volunteers have come forward offering their help, often for the first time.

Over the coming months there is an opportunity to:

- Build on the legacy of these volunteers who better reflect the demographics, i.e. age, ethnicity, income, of local communities
- Overcome the resistance to changing to use digital solutions by older volunteers as their digital capacity has accelerated during lockdown.

This response to a crisis should be turned into a real opportunity to grow volunteering into the future and build capacity and resilience that will help individual volunteers and communities' long-term wellbeing and support economic growth.

The Challenge

Local Authorities' work with VCSE, communities and volunteers is often limited due to a lack of digital capacity, leading to them:

- Struggling with pulling together disparate information from multiple spreadsheets and written documents, with no audit trail
- Using public social media forums such as WhatsApp and Facebook to hold personal data which is recognised as unsafe and not practical long-term, again with no audit trail
- 'Making do' by utilising existing systems, often with siloed functionality
- 'Shoe-horning' their requirements into generic features often based on existing CRM

Some Local Authorities hire tech companies to build bespoke solutions. But tech companies simply just don't understand how Local Authorities work or recognise the range of complex user journeys, e.g. for volunteers working to support service delivery. This often leads to solutions being built that do not meet end user requirements, significant money is often wasted.

The Risk to Local Authorities

Local Authorities must deliver services and collect and share data in line with the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) and GDPR requirements.

They must ensure that any tech systems they use are compliant and do not leave them open to risk of challenge.

Any tech system they use must be both sustainable and scalable to ensure that it can grow with the services it enables and transfer between departments and individuals. The current pandemic crisis has often led to one designated person being 'in charge' without a tech solution which risks lack of sustainability for the future.



"We have chosen to work with the Groop team due to their experience and cross-sector knowledge of community engagement in connecting organisations, people and places through a GDPR compliant online management platform."

Syd Dennis, Service Manager

A Community Management System, Groop offers a full circle eco-system, provides an organisational overview, and delivers a range of features that support the management of a hierarchical organisation across its structures, linking staff, volunteers, beneficiaries or members and citizens. With online tools and a Mobile App designed with the 'end user' in mind, Groop enables data collection, payments, communication, managing people, governance processes, and impact reporting.

Groop is:

- **Cloud based** - Hosted by UKCloud, a highly secure hosting service accredited with all appropriate ISO accreditations that is trusted by UK Government for HMRC, Home Office and the NHS.
- **Scalable** – Architecture to handle millions of users
- **Resilient** – Resilient architecture that copes with the failure of individual components
- **Secure** – 2048-bit layer of encryption
- **Separated** - Allows separate services to be developed in tandem and easily integrated into the stack

Groop Solutions

1. Crisis and Disaster Recovery - Groop enables Local Authorities to **co-ordinate a rapid response** via direct communication with grass roots organisations and volunteers in a crisis; to implement a consistent infrastructure and deliver **safe data-sharing**.



“The Groop system has enabled us to successfully organise and coordinate our volunteers and Community Hub provision during most difficult and challenging times. We have found the system easy to use on both our mobile devices and within our office environment.”

Gemma Maret, Support Co-ordinator

Results:


- Co-ordinated response enabling local residents to be supported by volunteers at Stevenage and VCSE Partners

2. Tail-end contract impact measurement – Groop enables VCSE groups to **record activity** against a specific grant/contract, communicate with grant givers/commissioners and upload required documentary **evidence of spend and impact** in Groop's Resource Base

3. Community Engagement – Groop communication tools can be used to send out messages to citizens across the Local Authority, by ward or by super output areas, enabling consistent and regular communication. Local Authorities can build a data base of contact details to support other **cost-saving** exercises, e.g. sending electronic council tax bills.

4. Social Prescribing - By registering **quality checked community activities** on Groop that adhere to criteria set and recorded by local Public Health Teams, Groop supports **signposting** to patients and members of communities by staff and volunteers across an Integrated Care System (ICS).

5. Community Management Platform - Groop provides a range of tools to enable local authority commissioned or partner VCSE groups to **manage their people, activities and payments** securely, enabling evidence of outcomes/impact, and enabling Covid19 'Track and Trace' through registration at activities and events



“Groop’s reporting functionality enables us to see if any reported ‘missing’ children/young people, have attended any of our clubs. This is an important function for us, as we work closely with Children’s Social Care and the Police to ensure we understand the movements of vulnerable young people who are missing and maybe involved in sexual or criminal exploitation.”

Bridget Craigen, Youth Work Commissioner

Results:

- Significant saving of administration time
- GDPR compliant data collection and sharing
- Impact reporting

6. Insights and Impact Reporting – Groop provides reports for VCSE groups to support them to **evidence the outcomes and outputs** of their work. The 'so what?' - proof and validation of their service delivery. Reporting can be tracked back to individual funds.

Return on investment

By having all your features in one place - Groop - less time is spent switching between other tech applications, spreadsheets, word documents. Staff and volunteers can save from 0.75-5hours a week.

Ongoing Development

Groop's Community Management Platform will continue to evolve and introduce additional features and products that will support the retention and skill development of volunteers and new approaches to volunteering across the UK.