



SURF COVID Cross Sector Connector Service

Background

SURF is delivering the COVID Cross Sector Connector Service (SCSC) as part of a package of programmes within its 20/21 agreement with the Scottish Government.

The SCSC is an expanded version of SURF's successful People and Sector Connector Service, which had successfully worked with local government to share and promote knowledge and best practice on topical regeneration policy themes. The original programme provided networking and shared learning opportunities for more than 100 participants with regeneration related responsibilities in local authorities across Scotland. <https://www.surf.scot/projects/alliance-for-action/people-sector-connector/>

The knowledge and experience of those members will remain at the core of the enlarged service. It will now include a wider range of regeneration partners, including those working in the community, voluntary, academic and private sectors, in addition to other public bodies such as Health Boards and national agencies.

SURF's plan

SURF's continuing research and learning from its own unique, cross-sector forum will inform a series of regional interactive SCSC events. The main aim is to promote shared understanding and encourage collaboration and also to:

- respond to immediate, and longer-term issues created by the pandemic
- provide socially and economically pressured communities with more holistic support
- identify common causes, shared challenges and collaborative solutions
- record, analyse and present further learning, which will assist communities and relevant policy makers to rebuild better

Delivery

SURF will convene and host five online events in the autumn, all designed to provide information, enhance place-based trust and learning and to encourage open, inclusive and constructive cross sector discussion.

Invitations will be issued to those already on SURF's sector connector database and to SURF's wider network of 3000 plus members engaged in regeneration work across Scotland.

Each event will cover the same topics in a different, geographical region, as follows:

October 20th – South-East;

October 22nd – North;

October 26th - East Central;

October 28th – West;

November 3rd – South West.

SURF will subsequently summarise the shared and differential learning across the five settings. It will then produce a final report of the process and outcomes, including recommendations for further activity on a sectoral and collective basis.

Content

SURF has recently (August and September 2020) completed two sequential phases of research and associated reports on COVID learning. The reports - [*Lessons from the Frontline*](#) and [*Building Community Resilience*](#) - were based on the experience of SURF's extensive network of organisations delivering frontline services and the cross sector agencies which support them.

Lessons from the Frontline identified ten common themes¹ (see Appendix) and learning from those activities. This practice based learning from SURF's active network, was shared to help Scottish Government, and other key regeneration partners, to connect with, learn from and sustain these frontline examples of cooperative resilient action in place based communities.

This second report ***Building Community Resilience*** focuses on three of those ten themes, recording challenges and successes and exploring ways of sustaining positive change to optimise community resilience

- Mutual support - Collaboration/partnership working
- Relaxation of rules - Flexible funding
- Online Scotland - Digital access

Those three themes will form the basis of interactive discussion in the five geographically-grouped SCSC online activities. Each event will feature presentations from relevant, informed national agencies on Digital Access and Flexible Funding and local interviews with 'regional' organisations to discuss Partnership Working and their experience of the other themes. Participants will then use question and answer sessions and open discussion to explore varied perspectives and opportunities for shared learning and cooperative ways forward.

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1. **Volunteers** form the life-blood of almost all the practical activities
 2. **Mutual support** – there have been powerful outcomes from newly formed collaborative partnerships
 3. **Relaxing the rules** – funder flexibility and the repurposing and adapting of existing programmes to meet demand, has encouraged agency, autonomy and reciprocal trust
 4. **Extraordinary efforts** have been made to meet an ongoing and increasing demand for imaginative, nourishing and fast responses to food insecurity. Literally **millions of meals** have been distributed across Scotland.
 5. The **smallest of actions** – posting a letter, a weekly telephone call – have the potential to be life-changing
 6. **Pre-existing community based, assets, services, networks** and interconnectivity have been crucial in setting up signposting and advice hubs
 7. **Successful agencies are listening** to what communities are asking for and are adapting their processes and priorities quickly to meet the demand.
 8. **Scotland is not online.** The impact of the digital divide in intensifying isolation and blocking knowledge exchange has been heightened
 9. **Creativity has flourished** – not only in terms of the benefits of 'artistic' approaches but in the imaginative and innovative processes which have been developed to resolve problems
 10. **Heightened awareness** of the potential mental health and wellbeing pressures exacerbated by the lockdown, has informed intelligent pre-emptive mitigating action