

# LSIS Implementation plan: Converting the Learning and Skills Voluntary Sector Network to a Virtual Network

Provider name/consortia members	Involve Yorkshire & Humber Working with partner organisation Shipley College
Project title	Converting the Learning and Skills Voluntary Sector Network to a Virtual Network
Project summary	This project aimed to convert an existing Network of organisations, the Learning and Skills Voluntary Sector Network (LSVN) run by Involve Y&H, to a Virtual Network. Member organisations were spending time and money to meet every two months in Leeds. This project saves members' travel expenses, through training them in the use of technology. The project has wider application to the efficiency of voluntary sector networks and meetings, by demonstrating a cost-effective technological solution.
What were the aims of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project aimed to increase the size and effectiveness of the Learning and Skills Voluntary Sector Network (LSVN) by converting it from a physical to a virtual Network. One physical Network meeting per year will be retained.</li> <li>• The project aimed to expand the knowledge, understanding, and engagement of voluntary sector providers in the present landscape for learning and skills.</li> <li>• 100+ member organisations saving time, energy and expense by replacing the Network with a virtual version.</li> <li>• 100 member organisations gaining valuable insight and expertise in using technological solutions. The solutions will be built around the use of Skype, Webex and Google Apps, or similar.</li> <li>• The virtual Network will be sustained by making sure that member organisations are provided with the training they need to connect into the Network meetings.</li> </ul>
What did you do?	<p>Involve Y&amp;H worked with Shipley College to find a technological solution to the problem of enabling voluntary sector members to take part in meetings, without the associated costs in terms of travel fares and the cost of travel time away from the workplace.</p> <p><u>Defining the problem that this project has solved</u></p> <p>Involve Y&amp;H is a strategic support organisation for the voluntary sector that runs supportive networks for different groupings of its member organisations. The Learning and Skills Voluntary Sector Network (LSVN) is a network of organisations that deliver learning and skills provision for many excluded and disadvantaged groups of learners in the region. The LSVN meetings take place every two months in Leeds. The trend has recently been downwards in terms of attendance at meetings, indicating that people are having difficulty in finding the time and travel money to attend. Each meeting has evaluated well, and the content of each one is well received. The majority of member organisations are accessing the materials from the meetings via the Involve Y&amp;H website and communications, but not attending physical meetings. Of nearly 120</p>

	<p>member organisations from across the region, only an average of 40 attend meetings. The reasons given are cost of travel (most contracts these organisations have for skills delivery have no margin for overheads that could be spent on staff training) and the time taken away from the workplace to travel to Leeds.</p> <p>To solve this problem, Involve Y&amp;H worked with Shipley College on a technological solution for member organisations to attend meetings and events.</p> <p>Shipley College had recently successfully implemented a Google Apps based solution to staff training, across the College. The project leads considered this might be a solution that would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Enable people based in disparate and physically separate organisations to come together at the same time in the same 'space'.</li> <li>b) Enable speakers to present their topics to the whole network at the same time, without the members having to be physically present.</li> <li>c) Enable discussion and comment on the content of speakers' presentations</li> <li>d) Enable the supportive person to person networking that is valued by members.</li> </ul>
What did the project cost, including LSIS funding?	The project cost £15k of LSIS funding; split between the two partner organisations Involve Y&H and Shipley College
<p>Impact</p> <p>What were the benefits of the project?</p> <p>What were the savings and benefits?</p> <p>How did you calculate them?</p>	<p>Show here the impact and the outcome (not the output: A report is an output. A defined and measured cost saving that is auditable and sustainable year on year is an outcome).</p> <p>A Training Day for 25 LSVN members was held on the 10<sup>th</sup> July at Shipley College in Saltaire. This was the culmination of three training sessions for Technology Beacons, and was supposed to be the main way for LSVN members to become aware of the way the Network is changing. The Training Day was a full day of supported awareness raising and practical technique and skills application, as well as a chance for members to purchase the webcams, and headphones with integral microphones that were needed. The impact of the Training Day has been that a core of members is now fully equipped and trained to use a virtual method for attending LSVN meetings, and also has the knowledge and ability to run meetings and events themselves.</p> <p>Impact factors are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A core body of 25 organisations equipped and trained to use virtual methods of communication that replace costly meetings and events</li> <li>- Introduction of a culture of change and modernisation for a sector that is traditionally late adopters of technology</li> <li>- The cost of using the technological solution is a fraction of the travel and time cost formerly involved in meetings. The software can be downloaded for free, and the equipment costs less than £10 per set.</li> </ul>

- The cost of running the next (virtual) LSVN meeting for involve Y&H is likely to be far lower than the usual cost of a venue, lunches, and speaker travel expenses.
- A potential negative impact may be that LSVN members do not embed their learning soon enough and fail to retain the knowledge learned. The Project Manager will hold a virtual meeting within a week to check on learning and simulate a real meeting, followed by a genuine real meeting in October.
- Wider impact is expected from the adoption by other voluntary organisations of the technological solution for their own organisations. An example of this is the Alzheimers Society, which purchased sufficient equipment to communicate between branches instead of holding meetings.
- Some public sector workers attended from other parts of the region, and were keen to implement the solutions in their contexts. The impact of this could be increased efficiency in local authorities.
- A more individual impact is that some people who were afraid to experiment with methods that they considered alien to them are now conversant with new techniques. The value of this impact is hard to measure but may lead to their further development and to that of their organisations.

#### The financial benefits

Cost savings	Y&H <b>average</b> per member	Y&H saving for the whole membership (x120)	Annual saving, based on four meetings per year
Travel expense	£55	£6,600	£26,400
Travel time/equivalent 2 hours salary	£25	£3,000	£12,000
		Total: £9,600	£38,400

Show your auditable benefits, and put these in an easy to understand table.

We asked LSVN members to estimate the cost of their attendance at LSVN meetings, which are generally held in Leeds, a convenient central point for delegates from the Yorkshire & Humber. Delegates were asked for the actual cost of their train tickets, parking and petrol, and also to estimate the financial value of their travel time. This was inexact, as people often do not travel from a set workplace, but the aim was to gain a sensible estimate of the cost that would be saved by each delegate using a technical solution. Some delegates calculated out their cost in an exact way, using percentages of their salary, or hourly rate, others preferred to give a general estimate. All amounts were aggregated and an average found, these amounts were entered in the table above.

<p>What were the lessons learned?</p> <p>What tips do you have for other providers?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. This project accommodated a trend towards accessing meeting content online, rather than fighting the trend. Lesson: don't fight the trend.</li><li>2. This project worked with the realities of trying to run a voluntary organisation in what is essentially a hostile economic climate. Organisations have very stretched resources, this project started at the point of this need. Lesson: Meet a real need.</li><li>3. This project did not underestimate the change in culture, habits and skills that project participants would have to embrace in order to accept the changeover to a virtual network. Lesson: Culture change must be managed carefully.</li><li>4. This project selected a small number of 'champions' to be the first members of the Network to receive the training, these then became Technology Beacons, a resource for the others. Lesson: Start with those people most likely to become confident with the change.</li><li>5. Accept that culture change will be slow and patchy – people come to learning experiences like this with a wide variety of prior knowledge, lack of knowledge, and readiness to embrace change. Lesson: Work with people at their learning pace.</li><li>6. Work with the most widely used solutions – Google is well known as a search engine and its products 'Anymeeting' and 'Google Docs' are industry standard. If everyone uses different platforms communication won't work. Lesson: It's more important to all use the same platform in a consistent manner than it is to use the 'best' one.</li><li>7. Lesson: Have a period of time where 'old' and 'new' solutions are run concurrently. Involve's next LSVN meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> October will be run as a hybrid physical and virtual meeting.</li><li>8. The Technology Beacon model ensures sustainability and longevity of the project. Each time a new member joins the LSVN, they are directed to their nearest Technology Beacon, a person based in an organisation near them. The TB will then take the new member through all the knowledge and information they need to be able to connect into the network. Lesson: Have a sustainability strategy for the project, built into the design of the project.</li></ol>												
<p>Further information and key resources</p>	<p>Google Apps: Anymeeting and Google Docs</p>												
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