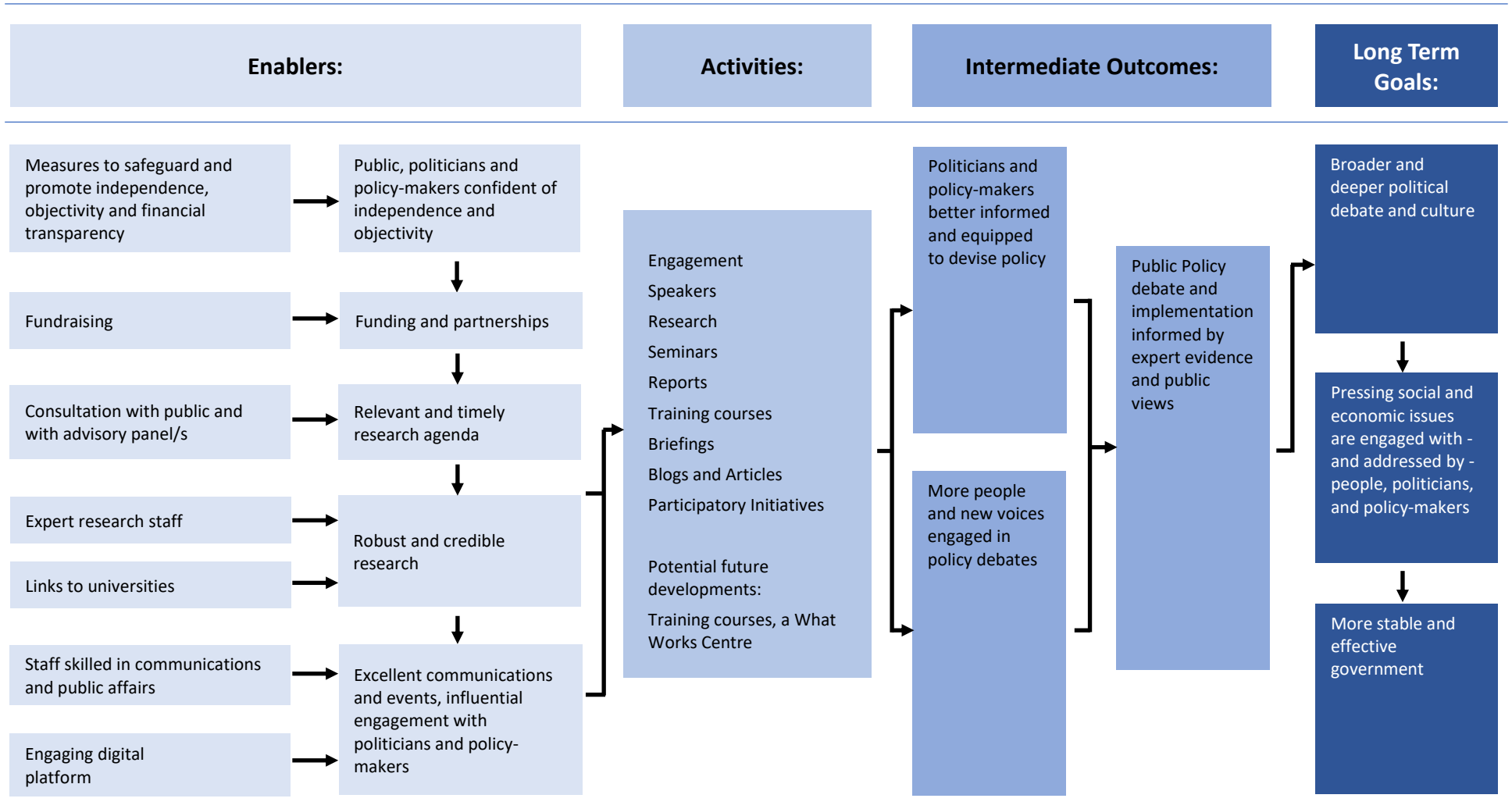


Public Policy Forum:

Outline Proposal for a new Public Policy Think Tank

# Our Theory of Change



## Long-Term Goals and Intermediate Outcomes: “Why” the Organisation Exists

Despite the scale of the challenges faced by Northern Ireland – economic underperformance, social division, failing public services – policy making here remains the preserve of the public sector, and a disproportionately small number of influencers. Public debate on policy is generally restricted to debates related to the constitutional question or aspects of the legacy of the conflict; and tend to involve politicians and a narrow circle of commentators. There are too few opportunities for other voices to be heard, and a very real risk of increasing alienation and apathy.

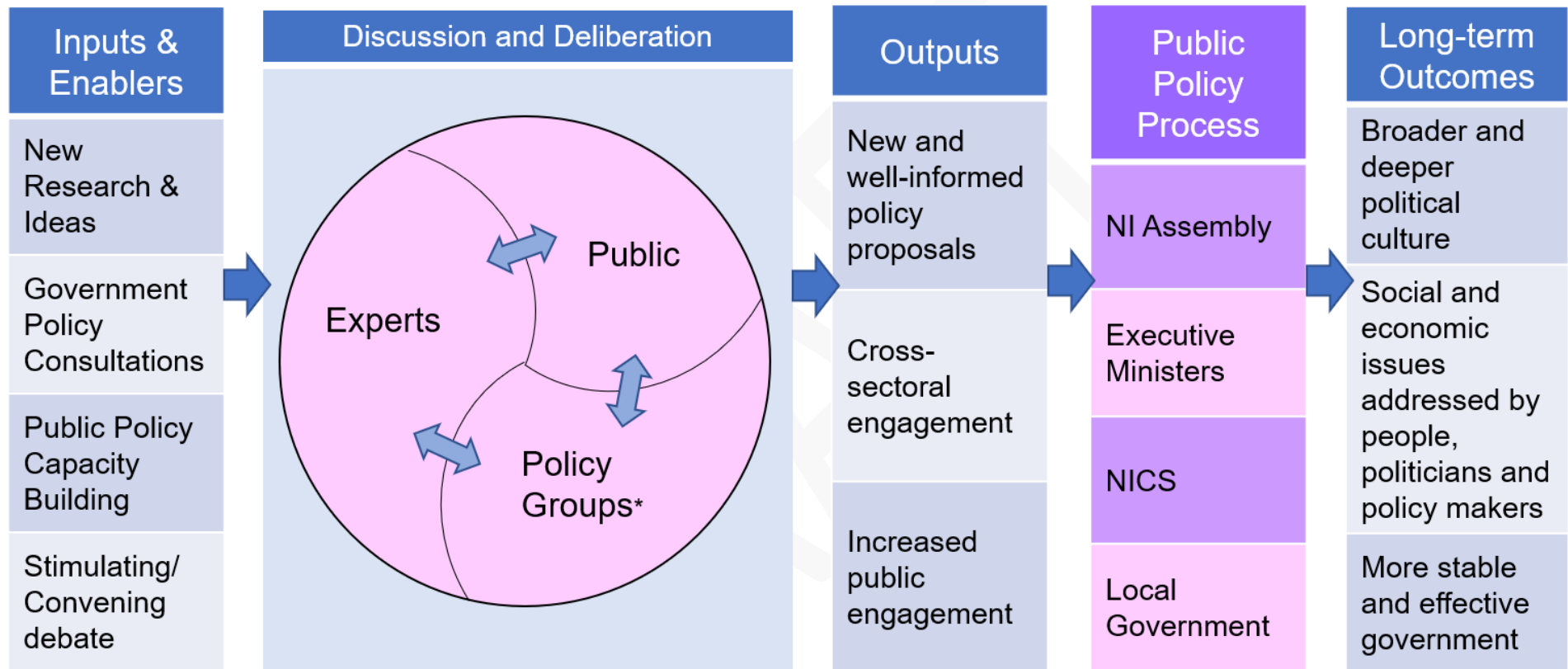
Public policy think tanks are a prominent feature of public life elsewhere, including Edinburgh, Dublin, Cardiff and London. They help develop long-term thinking, contribute substantially to public debate and foster new policy networks.

But no wide-ranging think tanks exist in Northern Ireland, where new thinking is needed as much as, if not more than, anywhere else. Northern Ireland faces serious problems of economic underperformance, social dysfunction associated with the community divide and creaking public services. And the nature of its political institutions – even when functioning as intended - makes these challenges especially hard to grip.

The organisation will build a reputation for undertaking and commissioning independent, robust and relevant research which will provide the basis for its activities. A key aspect of those activities, and a strong emphasis in the goals and intermediate outcomes set out in the Theory of Change, will be engagement of the public in the process of debating and determining public policy. As such, the organisation will work to open debate about public policy to a wider audience, informing people in a manner that non-experts will understand, and ensuring they feel that their inputs have been properly considered in formulating inputs to politicians and policy makers.

In pursuit of its goal of engaging the public, the organisation will develop the capacity, or partner with other organisations, to engage new or otherwise relatively marginalised groups, in public debate.

A diagram outlining the approach that the organisation will take is shown overleaf.



\* Policy Groups convened depending on issue/s under consideration, comprised of relevant representatives of Private and Voluntary / Community Sectors, Trade Unions and NGOs.

## **Activities and Early Agenda: “What” the Organisation will do**

### **Research**

The organisation will conduct its own research, whether by utilising its own staff resource or commissioning others. Its research will be independent, robust and relevant.

### **Reports and Briefings**

While the organisation’s overall output must be suited to a wide range of audiences, it will demonstrate its credibility by producing substantive reports on its own research and recommendations. Shorter, more readily digestible briefing papers will also be produced on issues upon which the organisation has conducted specialist research, and on a wider range of current economic and social policy issues.

### **Blogs and Articles**

As well as its own website and publications, it will also seek other platforms to promote and distribute its outputs. Blogs and articles will allow it to draw on its research and expertise to provide engaging comment on current issues.

### **Speakers**

Thought-provoking presentations by invited guests on subjects relevant to the organisation’s work will assist in raising profile, engaging audiences and stimulating debate; organised by the organisation, or in collaboration with others.

### **Seminars and other participatory events and initiatives**

The organisation will organise, or commission partner organisations to organise, innovative and creative events and initiatives to engage more people and new voices in policy debates.

### **An Early Agenda of Research and Activities**

The organisation’s remit will cover a wide range of economic and social public policy issues. It will not become involved in debate on constitutional issues, the structure of our political institutions, or policy on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles. In terms of activities, and reflecting a strong emphasis on long-term thinking beyond the timeframe typically adopted within the political process, the organisation will undertake a ‘foundational’ Vision project, ‘Vision 2040’. Led by younger people but inclusive of all, this project will map out the nature of society people want to live in by

the year 2040. Alongside the Vision project the Forum would publish research on what the demographic data tells us about 2040; and flowing from that, would examine the challenges and opportunities that would need to be met in order to achieve the outcomes that Vision 2040 identifies.

In addition to the Vision 2040 project, and reflecting the determination to inform, equip and encourage people to engage in debating public policy, the Forum would publish digital material to increase people's understanding of how the system of public policy-making works.

Throughout its first year the organisation will work determinedly to establish and raise its profile, offering spokespersons to media organisations, seeking opportunities to meet with and brief elected representatives, and seeking additional opportunities to collaborate with other organisations and think tanks.

## **Enablers: "How" the Organisation will go about its work**

### **Confidence in independence and objectivity**

Reflecting the importance of establishing confidence in the organisation, "Independence and Objectivity", and "Openness and Transparency" will be included within the organisation's "Statement of Key Values" – a statement of the key values that will characterise the organisation and influence its work, what those values mean, and how they will be demonstrated, as set out at Annex A.

### **Independent, but not isolated**

While the organisation will be robust in asserting and protecting its independence, it will strive to establish and maintain strong relationships with civic society, politicians, and policy makers; and with other organisations, including universities and think tanks elsewhere in the UK, in Ireland and beyond.

### **Capable of producing robust, credible and influential research**

The organisation's determination to ensure that its work is "Authoritative, Effective and Influential" will be reflected in its "Statement of Key Values", as shown in Annex A.

### **Connected to universities**

The organisation will seek to partner with both local universities. While independent, it will work with each of them, and with academics in other universities beyond

Northern Ireland. Engagement with both local universities will be reflected by the participation of academics from each in its Reference Group.

### **Capable of communicating**

The organisation will be creative and effective in the ways in which it communicates, aiming to become an essential “go-to” source of comment and advice for print, broadcast and digital media, with a name that is immediately recognised and respected by audiences.

The organisation will work to build its own audiences through new media, reaching out to and engaging new audiences and bringing new voices into public debate. This will require the development of an engaging digital platform upon which new audiences can be attracted to engage in public policy debates.

## **Governance**

### **A free-standing think tank**

In governance terms, the organisation will be free-standing, but not stand-alone, in any isolated or disconnected sense. The success of the organisation will depend on its ability to connect and partner with a wide range of individuals and other organisations.

The organisation will be constituted as a Limited Company, with charitable status. Pending the achievement of charitable status it will continue to be incubated with the support of NICVA and Co-operation Ireland.

### **A Board**

The organisation’s founding Members (5-10 in number) will form its Board of Trustees. These Trustees will have overall control of the charity and collective responsibility for making sure it is doing what it was set up to do and is operating within its charitable purposes for the public benefit.

The Trustees will appoint a Director, decide on strategy and budget, and approve the organisation’s research and engagement strategies. The Trustees will also have the power to appoint additional Members, with the expectation that Members will serve as Trustees.

## **A Reference Group**

In order to secure a wide range of voices and inputs, and ensure that the organisation's work is well-grounded, a Reference Group has already been established, as shown at Annex B. The Reference Group includes representatives from the two local universities and people drawn from across civic society.

The Reference Group will not be a decision-making body. Its members are invited to join in order to provide insights and ideas in relation to the organisation's current and future research and communication strategies, and provide feedback on the organisation's contribution, rather than to represent any other organisations in which they may be involved or employed.

## **Political Engagement**

In order to ensure that the organisation's research agenda is informed by, and relevant to, the needs and priorities of elected representatives, the organisation will seek to engage with politicians across the political spectrum on an ongoing basis.

## **Staffing**

The organisation will require a staffing resource that will enable it to relate to elected representatives, their advisors, and civil servants; but to do so without compromising the organisation's independence. They will have to produce robust, credible and influential research; research, analyse and develop public policy; and organise events and communicate effectively across a range of platforms and audiences.

The new organisation will start its work with a small core team, drawing in additional resources as and when required. Rather than recruiting a large team of research staff and reflecting the desire to work closely with other organisations, including universities, it will utilise Research Associates. It will also offer internship opportunities to graduates or PhD students, who have the necessary skills and who can benefit from the experience of working in such an environment.



## Funding

In order to ensure both sustainability and independence, the organisation will seek to develop a mixed model of funding, including: individual donations, corporate donations and sponsorship, philanthropic support, and research commissions. The model may also include an element of funding from public sources, so long as it would not prejudice its independence.

The Statement of Values at Annex A includes commitments that reflect the determination to maintain the new organisation's independence, including on how the organisation will approach its fundraising. These include commitments to retain the freedom to publish its findings regardless of whether funders agree with them, and to make its publications and programme of events and activities accessible to all.

If the new organisation is to establish a reputation and track record over time – and particularly if it is to be freestanding of other - philanthropic support will be essential.

While the organisation will seek to ensure that it is not reliant on any one source of funding, a small number of sources may be necessary during its foundation stage. Such support would free its staff to concentrate on building the organisation's credibility through the delivery of its activities and outcomes; rather than struggling from one grant to the next, with all of the resource that is required to keep applying for more funding.

Regardless of where funding is drawn from, appropriate safeguards will be put in place to protect the organisation and its values from undue influence.

## Statement of Values

Value:	What that means:	How we will demonstrate it:
<b>Independent and Objective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will act only in the public interest</li> <li>• We will not be associated with any single individual, organisation, political party, or ideology</li> <li>• We will remain free to think radically and objectively, promoting policies based on evidence, not opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While we will ask others for their views on our research programme, nobody will be able to tell us what we can, or can't include</li> <li>• We won't allow ourselves to be dependent upon funding from any one individual</li> <li>• We will retain the freedom to publish our findings regardless of whether our funders agree with them, and will share our outputs with all</li> </ul>
<b>Authoritative, Effective and Influential</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our research, analysis and advice will be accurate, credible, and authoritative</li> <li>• We will have the expertise to communicate and influence in order to make an impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will build a network of connections amongst politicians, civil servants, and civil society</li> <li>• Without prejudicing our independence, we will work constructively with elected representatives and civil servants</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusive and Accessible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will seek to engage and involve the widest possible spectrum of people in our work</li> <li>• We will provide a platform for new voices, particularly from areas of the community under-represented in public debate</li> <li>• We will make all our work accessible to the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will make our programme of events and activities accessible to all</li> <li>• We will actively seek to include participatory research methods in our research</li> <li>• We will publish all our reports and make them free to access</li> </ul>
<b>Open and Transparent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will be transparent about how we are funded, who we are working with, and what we are doing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will publish information on the source, purpose and duration of our funding on our website</li> </ul>

## Reference Group Members

**Peter Sheridan** Chief Executive, Cooperation Ireland, formerly Assistant Chief Constable, Police Service of Northern Ireland

**Barry Andrews** Director-General, Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin

**Jessica Caldwell** Programme Manager, Connect at Catalyst Inc and World Economic Forum Global Shaper

**Eamonn Donaghy** accountant, tax consultant and former spokesperson for Grow Northern Ireland

**Marianne Elliott** former Director of The Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool

**Lisa Faulkner Byrne** Project Co-ordinator, EPIC; Deputy Chair of Intercomm Ireland

**George Fergusson** formerly British diplomat

**David Gavaghan** formerly Chair of the Confederation of British Industry, Northern Ireland

**Neil Gibson** Chief Economist (Ireland), EY

**Richard Good** public policy consultant; formerly Special Adviser to the Minister of Justice

**Cathy Gormley Heenan** Pro-Vice Chancellor, Ulster University

**Clare Higgins** Policy, Public Affairs & Communications Officer at Royal College of General Practitioners and WEF Global Shaper

**Leo Green** formerly Political Director, Sinn Féin

**Eva Grosman** Director, Centre for Reconciliation and Peace Building

**Will Haire** formerly Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Department of Social Development

**Robert Hazell** founder and formerly Director of the Constitution Unit, University College London

**John Hunter** formerly Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance; Pro-Chancellor, Ulster University

**Olwen Lyner** Chief Executive of niacro; Board Member of Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

**Seamus McAleavey** Director, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

**John McCallister** formerly Deputy Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party

**Fergal McFerran** Northern Ireland Client Account Manager at Stonewall UK, President Queen's University Graduates Association

**Ann McGregor** Chief Executive, NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry

**Brigid McManus** formerly Secretary-General, Department of Education and Skills, Dublin

**David Phinnemore** Dean of Education, Professor of European Politics, Queen's University of Belfast

**Dawn Purvis** formerly MLA; board member, Community Foundation

**Trevor Ringland** Solicitor

**Alastair Ross** formerly Minister, the Executive Office

**Suneil Sharma** Entrepreneur and Owner of Varsity Estates Group, formerly Member of Policing Board and Commission for Racial Equality NI, Trustee of RAM Foundation.

**Alan Whysall** Constitution Unit, UCL; formerly Head of Political and Economic Group, Northern Ireland Office.