Together We Make a Bigger Difference

NCVO Strategic Plan 2014–19
For almost 100 years, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has brought people together to solve problems, address root causes, and inspire each other. We know the power of the voluntary sector and volunteering. No one organisation can solve society’s challenges alone, but collectively we’re all vital for sustaining society in times of challenge and change.

In 2013, NCVO merged with Volunteering England to renew our commitment to championing and strengthening volunteering and voluntary organisations. Our new organisation is stronger than ever and will provide an even more powerful voice. We’re financially sustainable into 2014/15 and beyond. NCVO is ready to lead, to address the challenges we all face, and to work with energy and determination with our members to champion a vibrant, powerful, independent voluntary sector and volunteering movement.

In our strategy, Together We Make a Bigger Difference, we set out our plans for NCVO for 2014 to 2019 and the change we want to see. We’ve listened to what our members had to say about the challenges they face, and what they value from us. We’ve drawn on the experience of our people and listened to their hopes and aspirations. We’ve talked to our partners about how we can work effectively together. Our strategy is the result of our consultation.
Our strategy also reflects our assumptions about how the world is changing. We expect the environment for voluntary organisations and volunteering to be very different in five years’ time. A more diverse, atomised and ageing society will create more demand for traditional public services, but also the need for stronger ties between generations, places and social groups. In a fragmented public sphere, the role of voluntary organisations and volunteers in bringing people together and amplifying their voice will become more important.

Public spending will continue to be under pressure, as will household spending and voluntary organisations’ own budgets. Value for money will continue to drive most decisions, but funders and commissioners will be keen to identify new providers and new solutions, while donors – treated as consumers in most aspects of their lives – will support voluntary organisations in new and different ways. There will be clear opportunities for volunteers and voluntary organisations to play a more important role in the design and delivery of services.

Changing social attitudes will bring challenge and opportunity: higher expectations of transparency and accountability, less preparedness to trust institutions, fewer expectations of the welfare state but more responsibilities placed upon individuals and communities. These trends will further emphasise the place of trusted voluntary organisations, and volunteering, at the heart of our communities. We are optimistic that a millennial generation that wishes to ‘do some good’ in everything that they do, irrespective of sector, can increase levels of social action.

Finally, the pervasive role of technology means that to make the biggest difference we will need to evolve new ways of working. In some cases this will mean using technology to reduce costs or reshape services; in other cases it will be to extend reach or access new assets or resources. NCVO’s own ways of working will change, and we hope that our response to a changing world will provide learning for our members and beyond in the next five years.

‘We expect the environment... to be very different in five years’ time.’

It will be just as important to hold onto what has worked: we know that voluntary organisations are resilient and that volunteering is both popular and enduring.

So, we will harness the strength of being part of a global civil society, working with and through our members, providing leadership, creativity and expertise. Inspired and empowered by our members, we will build upon the fantastic assets of public trust in voluntary organisations and the spirit of voluntary action. Above all, we will ensure that in a changing world we champion the organisations, values and aspirations that underpin people’s motivation to give their time or money, or organisations’ ability to make the biggest difference.

And in doing so, we will ensure that volunteering and voluntary organisations remain not only relevant to that changing world, but essential to it.

Martyn Lewis CBE
Chair

Sir Stuart Etherington
Chief Executive
Our vision

A society where we can all make a difference to the causes that we believe in.

Our mission

To help voluntary organisations and volunteers make the biggest difference they can.
Our values

We’ve adopted the following values to shape NCVO’s culture. They guide how we behave and make decisions.

**We will:**

- **Be creative**
  We explore new ideas and approaches, looking for what will add real value.

- **Be inclusive**
  We value diversity and work to make sure that opportunities are open to all.

- **Be collaborative**
  We work with our members and partners to achieve the best results.

- **Use evidence**
  We base what we say and do on the best research and our members’ experiences.

- **Work with integrity**
  We are open and honest and do what we believe is best for our members, volunteers and the voluntary sector.

Blenheim CDP
NCVO member since 2005
The principles and ways of working that underpin our values

Valuing our members: we put our members first in what we do and make opportunities to involve our members wherever possible.

Maintaining our independence: we take views from many sources and weigh them according to evidence and experience. We are never afraid to speak out for what we believe and guard our independence at all costs.

Quality and impact: we focus our resources on those areas where we can make the most difference.

Partnering: we support, champion and work in partnership with other organisations, recognising that we can achieve more when we work together.

Showing leadership: we champion our members and challenge them to do better, and we use our deep understanding of our sector to identify how we can all thrive in the future.

Piloting and modelling: we secure funding to pilot new ways of doing things, then disseminate the learning and roll out effective innovations.
Our strategic aims

Five strategic aims will determine our programmes of work over the next five years, and we will judge our success against them.

What we aim to achieve for volunteering and the voluntary sector:

- We will champion volunteering and the voluntary sector.
- We will strengthen voluntary organisations.
- We will grow and enhance volunteering, wherever it takes place.
- We will connect people and organisations.
- We will be a sustainable and socially responsible organisation.

How we will work and develop as an organisation to support the first aims:

We have set out how we will judge our success in relation to these aims on page 24.
Aim

We will champion volunteering and the voluntary sector
We will champion volunteering and the voluntary sector

At NCVO, we know the power of volunteering and the voluntary sector. Our sector is driven by its values and works first and foremost for social good. It’s powerful.

It solves problems. It addresses root causes. It provides space, opportunities and freedom for anyone to join with others to take action and make change.

So we will champion the ethos and values of the voluntary sector and its way of doing things, which provides alternatives to the models of the state and the market.

We will fight and defend it when needed, but never be defensive. We will tell stories and share evidence about impact and innovation. But we will also lead and challenge the voluntary sector when it needs to up its game. We will make sure that the voluntary sector has a voice around the table. But we will never be complacent about hard won rights or a positive climate. And we will not shy away from difficult issues.

We will work to change minds and attitudes as well as influence policy and practice. We will ensure that government understands and knows the true value of volunteering and the voluntary sector. We will protect public trust because voluntary action relies on the time, energy and money given by millions.

We will work with and through others wherever possible, recognising that we cannot and should not do this alone. We will convene and amplify the voices of our members to those in power, and work with our members to influence public attitudes.

We will champion volunteering and the voluntary sector

The change we want to see...

Voluntary organisations are more confident in speaking truth to power: an independent voluntary sector campaigns with confidence and legitimacy, bringing expertise and the voice of users to policy debates.

Voluntary organisations are widely trusted, open and accountable: organisations operate to the highest standards, supported by an effective regulatory framework, ensuring public trust and confidence are widespread.

Voluntary organisations and volunteering lead the development of a new generation of user-led, co-produced public services: the voluntary model is at the heart of better public services that provide more value for money.

Voluntary organisations and volunteering are widely understood and valued: the public has a better understanding of voluntary organisations and volunteering, and their values and models, and role in society.
Our priorities for the next five years

What
We will demonstrate the value of voluntary organisations and volunteering.

How
We will gather high-quality evidence of the value of voluntary organisations and volunteering.
Working with colleagues in academia and government, we will strengthen recognition of voluntary organisations and volunteering in official statistics and policies.
We will help our members to communicate the value of voluntary organisations and volunteering to colleagues, users, supporters, family and friends.
We will act more as a showcase for our members, using NCVO’s position and influence to highlight their innovation, best practice, needs and concerns.

What
We will show that the sector is transparent and accountable for the way it uses its resources.

How
We will improve the NCVO voluntary sector data site at data.ncvo.org.uk and the volunteering evidence bank at irv.org.uk to provide better information.
We will lead the way on open data. We will develop tools which will help people to use open data to understand the sector and make informed decisions about how to support the causes they believe in.

What
We will champion the right of voluntary organisations to campaign.

How
We will campaign with our members for a supportive legal and regulatory framework that enhances public trust in voluntary organisations and volunteering.
We will support voluntary organisations to operate to the highest standards when campaigning.
We will use the Compact to support effective working relationships with statutory bodies.

What
We will work with our members to ensure our members’ and their users’ voices are heard by those in positions of power and influence.

How
We will use research and our members’ views to inform and influence parliamentarians, political parties, civil servants and opinion formers in the UK and EU.
We will work closely with other ‘infrastructure’ organisations to amplify our collective voices.

‘We will ensure our members’ and their users’ voices are heard by those in positions of power and influence.’
Aim
We will strengthen voluntary organisations
Strong voluntary organisations have a greater impact. Voluntary organisations are stronger when they can access the resources they need to deliver their mission.

They’re stronger too when they have committed and skilled volunteers, paid staff and/or trustees. And, crucially, they’re stronger when they have effective governance, inspiring leadership and robust strategies that help them to adapt and change. We will share knowledge and expertise to strengthen voluntary organisations, bringing together the best information and advice from all sources. We will convene and connect people and organisations so that expertise within the sector can be shared and organisations can support each other. We will show leadership by identifying how organisations will need to adapt in the future in order to continue to survive and thrive, for example in digital delivery or accountability. And we will challenge the voluntary sector when it needs to up its game.

We will build stronger relationships with organisations at the beginning of their lives, at the point when people first come together to take action or make change. We will back these organisations and support them to respond to change. We will influence funders and others that control the resources that come into the sector. We will to ensure that conditions are in place that allow organisations to become stronger. We will base our work on the best research and evidence and the experiences of our members. We will collaborate with other organisations that share our mission of strengthening voluntary organisations.
Our priorities for the next five years

What We will provide high quality support and advice to voluntary organisations.

How We will focus on providing support in the following key areas: funding and financial sustainability, volunteering, trusteeship and governance, strategy and impact, campaigning and influencing, and public service delivery.

We will change our priority areas in response to changing and emerging needs.

We will continue to provide support and advice through: events, training, consulting, publications and online content.

What We will campaign for a more effective, intelligent funding environment that reflects members’ needs and the work they do.

How We will work with UK and international funders to learn from the best funding models, and spread best practice.

We will shape and influence the development of new funding and financing approaches, from social investment and contracting to giving and grant making.

What We will widen access to our one-to-one support and training.

How We will work in partnership with charitable foundations to build the resilience of the small organisations that they support.

We will develop an online events programme and continue to add new courses to our affordable online training platform.

What We will strengthen local and specialist support to voluntary organisations.

How We will explore different ways of working with local and specialist ‘infrastructure’ organisations to make our support as effective as possible.

We will champion the importance, value and impact of local ‘infrastructure’ organisations.

What We will help voluntary organisations to cut costs and become more effective.

How We will use our buying power to negotiate access to products and services and reduce costs for our members.

We will develop support and advice around effective use of resources, and mergers and collaboration.

What We will increase our support for new organisations.

How We will support new organisations with tailored services and content.

We will build stronger links with the Charity Commission so that we are identified as the first port of call for new charities.

What We will strengthen voluntary organisations...
Aim
We will grow and enhance volunteering wherever it takes place
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We will grow and enhance volunteering wherever it takes place

Volunteering is fundamental to a thriving, healthy and open society. It’s integral to delivering and supporting a diverse range of services and activities that enrich communities. Volunteering empowers people, connecting them to their communities and each other, enabling and driving change.

We will work to develop a culture of volunteering across society, embedding volunteering at every phase of people’s lives. We will create a positive environment where volunteering flourishes and everyone has the opportunity and support to volunteer.

Volunteering is of immense value to society and to the people who take part, but it’s not cost free. It requires investment to flourish. We will continue to advocate with government and funders for the resources to ensure that the value of volunteering is maximised.

The change we want to see...

- More people are inspired to volunteer and given the opportunity to contribute to the causes they believe in.
- Organisations are more aware of the value of volunteering and inspired to create meaningful and well managed opportunities for people to get involved.
- There’s greater recognition among policy makers and funders of the benefits of volunteering and of the need to invest in its development and support.
- There’s a more conducive policy environment for volunteering, where there are more opportunities for volunteering and fewer barriers.
- There’s a greater blending of volunteering and social action, harnessing the power of new technology and social media to ensure everyone has the opportunity to get involved.

We will work with organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and with less formal groups and networks of volunteers, to help them to make the biggest difference that they can.

We know that volunteering relies on a sustainable network of Volunteer Centres which support volunteering at a local level. It also relies on a group of skilled and committed people who support and manage volunteers. We will actively champion these organisations and people to ensure that the power of volunteering is fully realised.
Our priorities for the next five years

**What**
We will inspire more people to volunteer, and find new ways to involve volunteers.

**How**
We will seek funding for demonstration projects and pilots on new and innovative ways of involving volunteers. We will build partnerships with digital enterprises to explore how organisations can use online tools to spread awareness of volunteering and make it easier for people to get involved.

We will embed peer-to-peer and micro volunteering within the wider volunteering movement.

We will make the most of Volunteers’ Week and other national campaigns to inspire more people to volunteer.

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**What**
We will encourage our members to develop meaningful and well-managed volunteering opportunities.

**How**
We will strengthen good practice in volunteering through high quality guidance and advice.

We will develop a good practice consulting offer for voluntary, public and private sector organisations that involve volunteers. This will include employer-supported volunteering and stronger support for trustees.

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**What**
We will support volunteer managers’ professional development and status.

**How**
We will work with partners to develop a national strategy for volunteer management.

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**What**
We will continue to support the development and sustainability of Volunteer Centres and other local organisations which support volunteering at a local level.

**How**
We will encourage excellence through quality accreditation.

We will research the impact of Volunteer Centres, and run demonstration projects with them to pilot new forms of support.

We will champion the importance, value and impact of local ‘infrastructure’.

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**What**
We will ensure a positive regulatory framework for volunteering.

**How**
We will bring members and stakeholders together to co-produce powerful policy positions.

We will build strong links with European and international volunteering networks to share experiences and learning.

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**What**
We will generate and share evidence of what makes volunteering effective.

**How**
We will carry out high quality research on what works in volunteering and on its value and impact. This will include new and innovative forms of volunteering and social action.
Aim
We will connect people and organisations
We will connect people and organisations

As a membership organisation we have always brought together people and organisations. As NCVO has grown, we’ve recognised that networks are our most powerful asset: they’re an incredible source of knowledge, experience, skills and resource.

We believe that our networks could be our members’ most powerful assets too. So in the next five years we want to put our networks at the heart of everything that we do, connecting organisations with the people, partners and resources they need to make the biggest difference. We will need to be a more open organisation to do this.

Together we’re louder and more powerful. We know that we’re taken most seriously when we campaign with members working on the frontline. We will do more of this and work more in coalitions.

Innovative ideas and experiences of overcoming challenges can be found across the sector, often in the smallest organisations. But voluntary organisations too often reinvent the wheel or – worse – past mistakes.

So we will build on the success of our collaborative online spaces where hundreds of people are already sharing and learning from each other.

Digital technologies have made it so much easier to connect people, knowledge, ideas and resources, not only in England but across the world. We’re at the front of this fast-moving environment and will use our networks to share experiences and developments, and to help all our members to make the most of the digital world. But we will also invest in bringing people together face to face, as we know that it is a blend of online and offline encounters that brings the greatest benefits.

We will connect people and organisations

A louder voice: by participating in networks, voluntary organisations campaign more effectively and bring their knowledge and experience to bear on policy development.

Quicker, easier access to the right resources: voluntary organisations and volunteers are better connected to the resources that they need to make a difference (knowledge and data, people and skills, community assets, finance and funding).

Easier collaboration and sharing: open, networked organisations face fewer barriers and make a bigger difference when they share knowledge, skills and assets with each other.

A more engaged NCVO: we’ll make it easy for people to build personal relationships with us, get to know us well, and participate in our work.

UK voluntary organisations and volunteers are part of a wider global civil society: voluntary organisations are strengthened by participation in international networks, learning from wider civil society.
Our priorities for the next five years

What
We will make sure members can quickly and confidently get the help they need.

How
We will use and develop our digital platforms so members can easily find the people, funding, data, and advice they need to be effective (for example Funding Central, Trustee Bank, Civil Society Almanac).
We will continue to experiment and innovate with social media and online communities so that we can get the right support, from the right community, to the right organisations.
We will support the development of more peer-to-peer learning and sharing through digital and traditional methods of engagement.
We will help members to navigate the wealth of online information and advice by aggregating and filtering this information and sharing the best of it.

What
We will enable members to connect easily with like-minded organisations and individuals.

How
We will further develop the knowhownonprofit.org platform to help users to find and connect with relevant people and form groups.
We will host and facilitate more expert communities and special interest groups, both face to face and online.

What
We will work with members to develop our policy positions and campaign together.

How
We will develop new ways to collaborate on policy development, including online (through wikis and online events) and through our Members’ Assembly.

What
We will contribute to and learn from the global volunteering community and from international networks of voluntary organisations.

How
We will seek opportunities to share knowledge and expertise, including exchange visits and collaboration with our international membership.

‘We will make sure members can quickly and confidently get the help they need.’
Aim
We will be a sustainable and socially responsible organisation
We will be a sustainable and socially responsible organisation

Transparency and accountability underpin public trust, and all voluntary organisations should strive to be sustainable and behave in socially responsible ways.

We will practise what we preach, ensuring that we meet the high standards expected of our members.

Over many years we have developed a diverse income base. We will continue to grow our earned income streams in order to deliver our mission and to seek to raise money in ways that bring the greatest benefit to our members. We will become an organisation where we all think entrepreneurially, learning from our enterprising members and collaborative partners and so compensate for the ending of strategic partner funding.

As we develop NCVO’s role in convening and connecting people and organisations, we will explore the best ways to do this in a financially sustainable way. And we will seek to be creative and responsive in how we respond to the needs and priorities of our members.

We are proud to have a highly respected, committed and motivated team of staff, trustees and volunteers.

Looking to the future we will focus on how we can become an organisation where everyone learns and develops.

We believe passionately in volunteering and will explore the best ways of involving more people in our work, adopting the highest standards of volunteer management.

We have invested in reducing the environmental impact of our ways of working and taken opportunities to make sure that we are socially responsible in our practices. We will continue to encourage our staff to volunteer and to be engaged in their own communities, ensuring that our policies and practices support them in doing this.

We will be a sustainable and socially responsible organisation.
Our priorities for the next five years

What
We will strengthen our networks and our relationships with our members.

How
We will strengthen our regional presence by convening and networking people at events. We will better tailor our support to the needs and aspirations of our members. We will maintain a relationship with people throughout their career in the sector.

What
We will continue to increase our unrestricted income each year.

How
We will re-evaluate each part of our business to identify opportunities to operate more consistently as a social enterprise. We will develop products and services that our members want and need. We will explore innovative ways of raising funds to deliver support and advice.

What
We will enable more people to get involved in our work as volunteers. By 2019, all teams will be involving volunteers in the delivery of their goals.

How
We will learn from what works and model best practice in volunteer management. We will identify where we need to change policies, procedures or attitudes to get the most mutual value out of opportunities. We will explore additional ways to broaden involvement through partnerships, secondments and apprenticeships.

What
We will be an environmentally and socially responsible organisation.

How
We will explore options for buying more from social enterprises or voluntary organisations so as to retain resources within our sector. We will continue to reduce our carbon footprint. We will continue to be a London living wage-accredited employer.

What
We will encourage and celebrate our own staff’s volunteering.

How
We will build the expectation and opportunities for learning and sharing into our management framework. We will develop people’s coaching skills.

What
We will monitor and report on how well we meet our aims and standards.

How
We will continue to examine our practices to ensure we meet high standards of transparency and accountability. We will develop effective systems for monitoring and reporting our social responsibility and environmental performance, and for sharing what we have achieved.

What
We will become much more of a learning organisation.

How
We will continue to examine our practices to ensure we meet high standards of transparency and accountability. We will develop effective systems for monitoring and reporting our social responsibility and environmental performance, and for sharing what we have achieved.

‘We will encourage and celebrate our own staff’s volunteering.’
Judging success
Judging success

We’ve created an ambitious strategy that, we believe, reflects the ambitions of our members and the heightened expectations of the public when it comes to the voluntary sector or their own volunteering.

In an era where transparency and accountability are paramount, and scarce resources mean we have to make every action count, it’s important that we monitor and evaluate our successes and failures, and communicate them.

Under each of our five strategic aims we’ve referred to the changes we want to see in volunteering and the voluntary sector, or the environment they operate in. These focus more on the well-being of the sector than NCVO itself. So, we will develop and monitor indicators of change to see if volunteering and voluntary organisations are on the right course. We will also track the operating environment for voluntary organisations to see if it is becoming more or less supportive. We would like to see subjective indicators for:

• public understanding of voluntary organisations and volunteering
• public trust and confidence in voluntary organisations
• levels of charitable giving and volunteering and other forms of participation.

In addition, we will collect objective indicators of the voluntary sector’s and volunteering’s well-being, including:

• numbers of voluntary organisations, by size, activity and place
• measures of income and expenditure: distribution, diversity and total change
• measures relating to people: paid staff, trustees and volunteers, including the number of volunteering opportunities.

‘Success is not just about what we can deliver, it is about what we achieve in partnership with our members and others who support the sector.’

We know that we can’t simply make a link between our work and positive changes in the voluntary sector and volunteering, or in their operating environment. Our strategy also means that we will need the support and action of our members to achieve success.

So, using indicators developed for our Value of Infrastructure project, we will work with members and opinion formers to understand their perceptions of how the voluntary sector and volunteering are changing and what contribution NCVO and its members are making to that change. These will include indicators of:

• the well-being and effectiveness of voluntary organisations
• the extent of collaboration and sharing
• the support they need and receive
• relationships with sector stakeholders, including the public
• impact on public policy
• confidence in the future.

Finally, we will look at our success as an engaged membership organisation that is seeking to operate sustainably. We will develop indicators relating to:

• the reach and diversity of NCVO membership
• the extent to which individuals and organisations are actively engaging with NCVO and its networks and receiving support or sharing insight
• satisfaction with our work to champion and support the voluntary sector and volunteering
• financial sustainability
• environmental and social impact.

We will continue to publish information about our own performance through our annual report and on the web as we endeavour to become a more open, transparent organisation. We hope others will share their learning with us as we do this.

Success is not just about what we can deliver, it is about what we achieve in partnership with our members and others who support the sector. Ultimately, our vision is of a healthy and vibrant voluntary sector where ‘we can all make a difference to the causes that we believe in’.