What the next government can do to help charities and volunteering make an even bigger difference

The British people are incredibly generous. We have a proud tradition of helping others, giving time and money, sharing skills and coming up with new ways to solve problems. Whether it’s helping to look after a local park, providing advice on mental health or helping out with sports for children, we come together through charities and community groups. Together, we work on the issues we care about and pursue the interests we enjoy.

At NCVO, we think people getting involved and helping others are among our country’s biggest assets. The 2017 election is an opportunity to look at how we can support and encourage the people and charities who want to help in their communities.
1. Make it easier and more rewarding for people to volunteer

People everywhere want to give their time and talents to their community. We know young people in particular are getting involved in increasing numbers, while businesses recognise that helping staff volunteer builds skills, confidence and employability. We’d like to make it easier and more rewarding for everyone to volunteer. Anyone who wants to should be able to make a contribution to their community. We want to seed people’s interest in and ability to volunteer, setting them on a path of contributing to their communities, by:

- Getting more employers to allow time off work for volunteering, including time off for charity trustees.
- Providing a support fund to address barriers to volunteering for people with disabilities. This could make volunteering accessible to more people, helping with costs such as travel or adaptations to buildings or equipment.
- Doing more to recognise the difference that volunteers make to their communities and doing more to celebrate their contribution.
- Strengthening volunteer development and management, to ensure volunteers have the right skills and support to make a bigger difference, and a rewarding experience.

2. Support local communities for a generation to come

Small and local charities are the glue that binds communities together. With more support, particularly in the form of grant funding, they could do much more. We’d like to create a legacy for small and local charities for a generation to come. This could be done by investing the money from dormant bank accounts in two ways:

- Build on the success story of local community foundations by creating income-generating endowment funds. These can be used to fund small and local charities now and into the future.
- Put more assets in community ownership. We can create more facilities for the public’s long-term benefit by using the money from dormant accounts to buy local community assets, such as pubs, green spaces or historic buildings, and put them in the control of local people.
3. Make it easier for charities and volunteers to support our public services

Public services are better when charities and volunteers are involved. From the NHS to social care, fire services to conservation, volunteers in public services support the work of paid staff, freeing them to get on with what they do best. Volunteers are helping services do more.

Charities are doing the same, involving people who use public services in running those services, helping to improve them. They help to make spending on those services go further. Charities can be more involved in delivering services, or they can help to reduce demand for overstretched services, if public money is spent differently. And with public money tight, charities will rise to the challenge of becoming even more focussed on value for money and impact.

We would like to build on this by:

• Asking services such as the NHS to set targets for the management and development of volunteering. These would aim to increase volunteer numbers, involve volunteers in a wider range of roles, and improve the experience and impact of volunteers.

• Asking our senior public service leaders to become volunteering champions. Champions would raise awareness of where volunteers could make the biggest impact and change culture around involving volunteers.

• Making better use of public money. We need further reforms to how government buys and provides public services. Public bodies should use grant funding instead of large contracts, and spend public money in a way that takes account of the wider social value of a contract. This will deliver better services and extra value for taxpayers.

4. Make it easier for people to build their skills and get a good job

Voluntary organisations help build the skilled workforce that our country will need in the future, teaching new skills, networking people to opportunities, giving them a leg up, not a hand out. Charities and volunteering could do more to build skills and help people to get a good job if we:

• Replace European Union programmes that help people get back to work or start a social enterprise with new, lighter-touch, flexible programmes. These should focus on local people making decisions about what is needed.

• Make it easier for unemployed people looking for work to volunteer, by getting rid of red tape and confusion about the rules.
5. Give everybody a stake in post-Brexit Britain

Getting people more involved in their communities is an important way of giving them a say in their future: people will get involved if they know that they are heard and that they are making a difference. Charities can help by giving people the confidence and a route to speak up for themselves, bringing them together to find common ground. And charities can harness people’s expertise and skills, developing new ways of tackling old problems in a quickly changing world. Charities’ role in providing a voice and informing public debate, either by raising awareness or by influencing change, is valued by the British people and makes our democracy one of the strongest in the world.

- We can get more people involved if when parliament legislates to replace EU laws and regulations through the Great Repeal Bill, there is proper chance for changes to be debated and scrutinised, informed by the expertise of charities and the communities they work with.

People from the EU have enriched our culture, society and economy. Along with their families, they work and volunteer in our public services, including for charities. We think it right that they should continue to have a stake in the future of country.

- We ask that as part of the negotiations to leave the EU, the right to stay of people from elsewhere in Europe is resolved without delay.

The time and talents of people from overseas will continue to be an important resource for our communities and public services. This will range from the scientists needed by medical research charities to the care assistants needed by social care charities.

- We ask that simple and effective visa requirements, or a waiver programme, are in place to enable this.