



# The Voluntary Sector

# Manifesto



# A Voluntary Sector Manifesto

**Charities\* and volunteers exist to make communities stronger. For everyone, everywhere.**

The UK is facing challenges that no political party can solve alone. To bring about a new era of success and growth across the country, the power and commitment of the voluntary sector must be realised.

Government should invest in the voluntary sector as an equal partner of the state. This will unlock talent, expertise and innovation that is embedded in communities.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to forge a new and innovative relationship with the voluntary sector. We can trailblaze a new model of delivery and create a powerful partnership that builds a fair and thriving society.

**We are a force for good, and a force for change.**

\* Throughout this manifesto we use 'charity' and 'voluntary sector' as umbrella terms to describe a range of organisations that are driven by social purpose. These organisations may have different legal forms.



# Why the voluntary sector is essential

The voluntary sector isn't a 'nice to have'. Charities don't exist for handouts. And volunteers shouldn't be taken for granted.

Charities underpin the country's social infrastructure. They deliver public services. They meet needs, connect communities and individuals, and help address systemic inequality. Through decades of hard work, they've earned deep-rooted trust.

The voluntary sector:

- helps solve challenges with integrity, drive and dedication
- has far-reaching knowledge about the people and causes they support
- works innovatively and responsibly for people instead of profit
- builds trust with those who are often not heard
- mobilises, develops and empowers volunteers

**The opportunity is here to forge a renewed and strengthened partnership between the voluntary sector and government to drive change, innovation and growth.**

# How to use the manifesto

This manifesto presents a range of ways the next government can work with charities to make a positive difference.

It was shaped by NCVO and ACEVO's 17,000+ combined members. Members were given opportunities to provide feedback and input at every stage.

It presents a clear vision for the future and asks for the next government. You can use it in the following ways to inform your work.

## Political parties, candidates and policy makers

- We want all parties to think about how they can support charities and volunteers
- We want party manifestos to show support for charities and volunteers
- At a local level, we want candidates to think about how they can support their local charities

The manifesto offers a starting point for thinking and planning. It's informed by voices across the voluntary sector – from leaders at some of England's biggest charities to small community groups.

We're keen to speak to all parties ahead of the upcoming elections. We can offer further insight and explanation on the points in the manifesto. We can also advise on how to make sure charities are represented in your policies and manifestos.

Email NCVO and ACEVO's policy teams with any questions, or to arrange a call or meeting: [policy@ncvo.org.uk](mailto:policy@ncvo.org.uk) | [policy@acevo.org.uk](mailto:policy@acevo.org.uk)

## Voluntary organisations and charities

- Use the manifesto as a framework to start conversations with parties and candidates
- Use the 'Our Vision' and 'Our Asks' sections to understand the issues affecting our sector
- Use with our political campaigning guidance for charities to develop your election campaigning strategy

# Our vision

We want the next government to take significant steps to address deep-rooted societal challenges. From inequality and poverty to climate change and the erosion of rights.

A strong relationship between government and the voluntary sector is essential to achieve this vision. This relationship should be built on a foundation of partnership, accountability and honesty.





## A society where we can all speak out

Charities bring vital knowledge and expertise. This expertise can benefit policy making and service design. Especially when charities are involved early in the process. Our sector also raises the voices of people most affected by changes.

Government is stronger when it values outside expertise and listens to charities and the public. A healthy democracy actively encourages civic participation.

We're concerned about:

- voter ID making it harder for marginalised groups to participate in elections
- the weakening of human rights legislation
- legislation that undermines the rights of immigrants



## An economy that benefits us all

Charities make a vital contribution to the economy. They support people into work, create jobs and circulate local wealth. It's estimated that the charity sector contributes £200bn to the economy, including the value volunteers bring.

Charities also provide social infrastructure – the spaces and places that connect us. Social infrastructure boosts social capital – the relationships and connections that society needs to function. Social capital is essential for economic growth.

Collectively, we're very concerned about rising poverty and inequality levels. We want to work with government to develop and promote solutions. This will help drive an economy that works for everyone.



## Sustainable climate action

Across the country, charities are dealing with the impact of climate change in their communities.

Charities and volunteers respond to climate-related crises and deliver community energy projects. They advocate for changes to climate policy and support citizens to take action.

Our vision is for a world which is viable, livable and clean for all.

This includes:

- a transition to net zero that is fair for everyone
- workers with the right skills to deliver net zero
- local and national government designing solutions to reduce inequality in partnership with charities and the most impacted groups



## Stronger communities

Strong communities give us all a sense of belonging, support our wellbeing and boost our local economies. Charities and volunteers are the backbone of our communities. Our sector represents and engages people who are often excluded.

Volunteering and voluntary infrastructure are vital to support strong communities. According to the UK Civil Society Almanac\*, 14.2 million people volunteered through a group, club or organisation in 2021/22. Charities and volunteers play a vital role in building resilience

and responding to emergencies.

Volunteering should be an enjoyable and rewarding experience for every volunteer. Volunteering can provide skills, confidence, connection, purpose and wellbeing.

We want barriers to volunteering to be removed. Particularly for people who don't have equal access to good volunteering experiences. We want it to be easier for people in paid work to give their time through employee volunteering schemes.

\* <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2023/>





## A support system for all

Charities deliver and advocate for a range of services. This includes everything from housing, health services and social care, to education and advice.

Our vision is for a society where all citizens can live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives. We see a future where people can access high quality, joined up public services that meet their needs, no matter where they live or their background.

- We want investment in services that stop people from reaching crisis point
- Public services need to be preventative
- The people who are most impacted by services should help design them
- Services should be accessible for people facing barriers
- Services should address inequalities within and between communities



# Our asks



## Ask 1

# Engage charities in policy making

Processes for engaging charities should be embedded in policy making.

We want the next government to:

- **commit to establishing a civil society charter.** The charter should support charities to work effectively with government
- **develop a civil society engagement strategy** to support the delivery of the civil society charter. The strategy should be underpinned by cross-government collaboration between ministers and officials. It should outline each department's responsibility for voluntary sector engagement. It should also include a quarterly forum with the Treasury
- **work cooperatively with the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.** The government should reach a consensus on cross-UK issues, rather than imposing solutions from Westminster

## Ask 2

# Ensure fair and sustainable partnerships

Government should work with charities as a true partner in public service design and delivery.

We want the next government to:

- **prioritise collaboration over competition in public service delivery.** Specific guidance should be developed to ensure the commissioning of people-centred public services supports collaboration, learning, flexibility and a focus on impact
- **create a dedicated role in the cabinet office** to oversee the state of the public service market
- **invest in public services and local government.** This will make sure charities have enough funding to deliver quality services on behalf of the government

### Ask 3

# Make sure every voice is heard

We want the next government to:

- **protect the rights to freedom of assembly and expression**
  - Ensure that protest is enabled. The policing of protests should also be limited, proportionate, consistent, predictable and accountable
  - Repeal Part 3 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act and the whole of the Public Order Act. Replace them with legislation that enables protest
- **reform electoral law** so that everyone eligible to vote can take part in elections and engage in public debate. Introduce new legislation to:
  - abolish the requirement to show voter ID
  - restore the Electoral Commission's independence
  - reform the rules for non-party campaigners

This will ensure greater transparency and prevent undue influence.



#### Ask 4

# Build strong and resilient communities

We want the next government to:

- **provide a successor to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund** and build on the Community Wealth Fund. This will help provide locally led funding in deprived areas. It should be designed in partnership with charities and devolved administrations
- **develop a strategy to support and direct investment in social infrastructure** – the spaces and places that connect us
- **introduce a Community Power Act** to establish new community rights

## Ask 5

# Place value on volunteers

We want the next government to:

- **adopt the cross-sector Vision for Volunteering.** The Vision sets out a roadmap to address barriers to volunteering in England
- **provide backing for key volunteering campaigns,** such as Volunteers' Week and The Big Help Out
- **introduce a right to request paid leave for volunteering** and enable reasonable time off for trustee duties. This will support skilled volunteering. School governors are already entitled to time off work
- **guarantee everyone claiming benefits can volunteer.** They should be able to volunteer without fear of their benefits being taken away

## Ask 6

# Support a thriving charity sector

We want the next government to:

- **improve the tax system for charities**
  - Introduce 0% VAT for charities
  - Extend charitable rate relief to wholly-owned charity trading subsidiaries
- **develop a thriving voluntary workforce.** Work with the sector to address barriers across skills, education and migration
- **protect the independence of the Charity Commission.** Ensure the public appointments process encourages fair competition and select the most qualified candidates
- support charities to **prepare for the transition to net zero**



## Ask 7

# Make public giving easier

We want the next government to:

- **appoint a 'philanthropy champion'** to encourage more philanthropy. This role should lead the government's approach to philanthropy and promote match funding
- **streamline Gift Aid** by taking up the Future of Gift Aid recommendations, and raise thresholds for the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme
- **bring back the Innovation in Giving Fund**
- **extend DCMS's growing place-based giving scheme**
- **introduce philanthropy training for all financial advisers.** This should form part of their qualifying curriculum or be part of mandatory continued professional development (CPD)
- **protect fiscal incentives for charitable bequests** and incentivise payroll giving

# Find out more

We're keen to speak to all parties ahead of the upcoming elections.

We can offer further insight and explanation on the points in the manifesto. We can also advise on how to make sure charities are represented in your policies and manifestos.

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