

Localism and the VCS conference

September 26

The first part of this report analyses the notes taken at each table during the discussion session held in the afternoon. The second part reproduces the notes taken in their entirety.

Feedback from
discussion groups

Part 1 – Analysis of discussions

Conference attendees were asked to answer two questions and to note down their thoughts. The questions were

1. What type of project/approach will grow and thrive in the new environment?
2. What type of project/approach will wither and die in the new environment?

They were also asked for any other comments.

What type of project/approach will grow and thrive in the new environment?

Some very clear themes came out of this many of which are interlinked.

1. **Collaboration** – This was seen as a key issue. Groups need to look at how they work together on projects to deliver the services/support that is needed. There was also a belief that organisations would need to come together to reduce costs and that merger was possibly what was needed in some cases in order to make groups sustainable and ensure services were maintained. This included collaboration with organisations outside the sector (see 4)
2. **Commissioning** – Successful groups would be those that understood this and were having the dialogue with procurement teams to position themselves to deliver services. There is a clear link between this and collaboration
3. **Diversification of funding** – successful groups would have a diverse funding portfolio. This would include selling services and looking at how social enterprise models could generate funds.
4. **Better links with business** – From funding to sharing premises/resources to learning skills it was felt that the sector should improve how it works with local businesses. This included looking at how business operate and learning from this to improve how VCOs work
5. **Volunteering** – Groups that work with volunteers and promote volunteering will prosper. They need to ensure volunteers are well managed and that their roles are appropriate, and that adequate training is given.
6. **Groups must be well run** – There needs to be excellent leadership and governance. Organisations need to be innovative and able to react to new ideas; they have to be willing to take risks. Groups need to be networked and using all the appropriate tools to get their message heard.
7. **Projects must meet real need and show real impact** – Projects that can show why they are needed and what they achieve will be successful. There is a need to engage with communities to get their buy in and ensure that projects are not replicating existing services.

What type of project/approach will wither and die in the new environment?

In essence **the organisations that will fail are those that do not need the messages above**. However a number of other themes were also highlighted.

1. **Resistance to change** – Organisations that are resistant to change, or who do not anticipate changing environments, or who believe ‘they will be all right’ will fail.
2. **Lack of skills** – organisations without the right skills, or who fail to invest in developing skills will fail.

Part 2 – Notes taken at each table

What type of project/approach will grow and thrive in the new environment?

More joined-up services/partnerships

Volunteering projects

Inter-generational work

Sharing services and skills/ Peer mentoring

Links to local businesses

Working with Health/GPs based projects

Gaining support services from local businesses

Generate income by selling services/expertise

∞

Larger organisations

Contact with people who make decisions – the democratic members (rather than staff)

The social-based project e.g. Social car schemes etc.

Groups who are supported to learn about the procurement process will be able to contribute to challenge and bid on a level playing field against those who've had years to do so

Projects that are collaborative in delivery should be funded collaboratively e.g. as in Scotland joint commissioning can work!

∞

Making procurement and tender clearer and easier for local community groups

Social enterprise can provide funding and sustainability

Strong partnership and building relationships : example community/charity café in a business building

Finding a niche and taking a risk in trying something new

Collaborative working

- No wasting of resources – share backroom services
- Share information and skills

Using some business acuity in running organisations such as looking toward the future and finding cost savings

∞

Those who are adaptable and look for opportunities

Those who network

Part 2 – Notes taken at each table

Looking for a partnership

Consolidate where necessary – offices, mergers

Workplace sharing/back office facilities

Those who evidence their good work and impact

Those who build good relationships with commissioners – especially to win contracts

Business-like

Multiple income streams/avoiding over- reliance on any vulnerable funding streams

Reducing core staff where possible and using flexible staff, contacts and outsourcing



Organisations/groups that have a diversity of funding – not grant dependent

Ability/willingness to work in partnership with others delivering similar or complimentary services

High level of skills in Boards/Trustees:-

Good Governance

Willingness to fund raise/develop business models/ different models of delivery

Ability to think differently

Good marketed group/services. Good use of social media

Groups with a willingness to adapt to the changing environment and local needs

Groups with the capability to engage and react to issues

Recruiting/retaining skilled/willing volunteers

Groups with skills in managing volunteers

Medium, local orgs: Could support small orgs/groups therefore stop loss of smaller orgs yet not giving all the power to the BIG orgs



Youth support groups for homeless young people and those in difficult family set ups with little or no role models

Projects which empower the community itself and allow it to grow and move forward

Approach: - Encourage members of the community to create the services they (think??) are needed in their community giving them a sense of empowerment rather than obligation

Community innovative forums to meet with councils and feedback ideas directly from the community



Part 2 – Notes taken at each table

Groups providing services to older people

Groups with good leadership and commitments

Groups meeting a real need

Groups that can engender commitment from their volunteers

Groups that get support from funding

Groups that are ready to embrace change and are receptive to new ideas



Open to change/flexibility

Joint partnerships between small charities and big charities

Networking

Co-production - Bringing together skills

Innovation

Being creative in finding funding

Enable and facilitate Sponsorships/Business

Use community hubs/resources/skills

Effective modern communication – social media

Celebrate achievements

Designated roles

Engage younger generation/volunteers

Research funding/bids/criteria in the business community

Promote volunteering/something to gain

Target volunteers/train

Develop volunteer culture

Share knowledge/forums/groups

Workshops funding/bids etc.

Part 2 – Notes taken at each table

What type of project/approach will wither and die in the new environment?

Infrastructure can prevent progression and getting work done

Personalisation of adult social care funds

Not changing and waiting it out

Voluntary groups valuing their independence over the future. Afraid of losing the work if they open up to partnership working. Hesitant in looking at the future

Not having the experience to apply for contracts/commissioning

∞

! Authentic genuine charities

∞

Small groups that don't want to bid to run statutory services

Those groups that cannot measure and demonstrate soft outcomes, impacts

Procurement procedures that are over-complicated blocking success

Anticipating failure in bids

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Infrastructure and Advocacy – 70% living on reserves

Who will fund infrastructure bodies?

Shifting landscape/who and what structure exists and what are disbanding

Too much solo working instead of joint working

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Organisations which are solely dependent upon one source of funding – grants

Organisations – providing a public service which have contracts terminated or are at risk of this

Organisations – without access to expertise in making bids or tendering process

Organisations - which cannot market themselves get overlooked

Organisations which are not prepared to change or adapt to changing circumstances

Organisations without the capability or skills to react to issues or changes (or even to anticipate approaching changes)

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1st Principle of marketing is the product right

Incompetent leadership

Part 2 – Notes taken at each table

Lack of identifying potential impediments

Internal conflicts/differences in opinions to the funders

Excessive bureaucracy from funders

Abortive projects or projects without substance

Dependent upon one source of income (Don't put all your eggs in one basket!)

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Organisations:-

That can't change or adapt

Without the right skills/training

Not networking/isolated

Unable to meet statutory requirements

Uncreative

Poor leadership

Unable to agree strategies or approach

Resistant to joint working

Any Other Comments

Good idea to have universities to help with bid writing or marketing

Officers and staff in councils have different perspectives

Volunteers are a strength and a weakness

Localism will increase local democracy

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Council Tax changes will create more funding gaps

People don't know what services are available

Pooling funding from business i.e. One organisation (CCVS) makes bids to business and then shares funds out (United Way. VSA)

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County Council very large and not always talking to each other

Localism can add to costs (e.g. Right to challenge and procurement)

Small organisations need to be grant funded

Rules and regulations are preventing community work from happening

False understanding leads to putting up unnecessary obstacles