



navca

local focus national voice

The power of local infrastructure: Working in partnership for thriving communities

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The power of local infrastructure



Local infrastructure can contribute directly to an incoming government's ambitions for thriving communities. That is why we are calling on the incoming government to recognise the value of local infrastructure, and to work strategically with NAVCA members to achieve positive outcomes.

NAVCA, the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, is the national membership body for local infrastructure organisations, supporting the voluntary and community sector in England. Our mission is to strengthen and champion a thriving and influential voluntary and community sector, through high quality local VCS infrastructure support organisations (LIOs). We provide support, resources and a national voice for our 180 members who, in turn, represent, support and develop voluntary and community action in their communities. In 2022, NAVCA members worked with over 165,000 VCSE organisations in England.

A shared vision

All levels of government and the voluntary sector want to see thriving communities, where citizens are safe, connected and able to flourish. In turn, thriving communities need an active voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) to be present so that there is the capacity to contribute to people's wellbeing, strengthen community life, respond in times of need, and deliver public services. An effective and engaged VCS also contributes to the local economy, education and training. It drives social action, active volunteering, and participatory engagement in all aspects of community life, including governance.

An active voluntary and community sector needs consistent, high quality support from local VCS infrastructure support organisations (LIOs). LIOs act as both convenor and connector at place between different statutory bodies, local authorities, charities and VCS organisations that, when working together in partnership, drive and accelerate action, and contribute to positive change.



What local infrastructure brings to an incoming government



Local infrastructure organisations provide direct support for communities and the VCSE sector through being an embedded long-term presence in a local area. That brings significant knowledge of the needs and aspirations of local communities to inform dialogue with policy and decision makers, such as local authorities and health systems.

An incoming government can benefit from this knowledge and activity, and LIOs can help shape and drive an incoming government's ambitions for thriving communities by:

- **Building strategic relationships and acting as an enabling and convening body at place**, working in partnership with health systems, local authorities and the VCSE sector to bring together knowledge and intelligence of the assets, skills and needs of communities
- **Developing partnerships and collaborations in local areas** to strengthen support for communities and enable VCS organisations to work together, to meet the needs of communities and deliver public services
- **Acting as a trusted partner, able to communicate effectively with communities**, including those furthest from public services, and bring their voices to the table
- **Building the capacity of VCS organisations**, supporting volunteering, and encouraging social action
- **Supporting early intervention and prevention**, and providing an agile and rapid response in times of crisis
- **Contributing directly to local economic development** through providing employment, supporting volunteering opportunities that develop skills and help people move into work, leveraging additional funding and supporting organisations to make funding applications.

Local infrastructure is in a critical position to support public sector reform because its work contributes to partners achieving their priorities and outcomes. Through its knowledge of local communities, it is able to rapidly identify gaps in policy or service delivery that are impacting local people, communicate this with partners, and work with others to fill those gaps.

How government and local infrastructure can work together



There are specific changes in government policy or approach that will enable local infrastructure to work more effectively and achieve outcomes for communities, the VCSE sector and statutory partners.

1. Work with the VCSE sector as an equal strategic partner. The VCS contributes directly to thriving communities. It can be an agile, trusted partner in achieving shared outcomes for people and communities.

2. Work with the VCSE sector at an early stage to help define problems, hear the voice of lived experience, and co-design services to meet need. The VCS holds much of the information and knowledge about a local area, its needs and aspirations. It also works directly with communities including excluded groups and those furthest from public services.

3. Devolve policy formation and decision-making closer to the people affected. Drawing on the experience of the VCSE sector is essential in identifying, shaping and solving problems locally. This avoids the creation of national programmes that are unable to adequately respond to real local priorities or dictate how budgets can be spent locally.

4. Deliver long term stable and sustainable commissioning and funding arrangements. This will allow planning and development by local authorities, health systems, local infrastructure and the VCSE sector, ensuring that public services can be delivered effectively.

5. Invest in local infrastructure as the convenor, partnership enabler and capacity builder to enable communities and the VCS to thrive. The strategic relationships with local authorities, health systems and other statutory partners forged by LIOs bring significant benefits to communities.

Thriving communities need an active and engaged voluntary and community sector, supported and enabled by consistent high quality support from local VCS infrastructure organisations. This is an opportunity for an incoming government to work in partnership with the whole VCSE sector to deliver policies that will give all communities the positive changes they need now to improve lives and thrive.

Local VCS infrastructure organisations

For thriving communities, where people can take action on the things which matter to them.



Leadership and advocacy

Mobilising and encouraging community action, strengthening our sector's voice and influence on key decision-makers and funders.

Partnerships and collaboration

Creating opportunities and driving effective joint working by building networks of local organisations and strategic partners.



Capacity building

Providing practical support and development for local people and organisations, to nurture skills and build community resilience.

Volunteering

Building an environment in which volunteers and their communities thrive, by encouraging and nurturing volunteering opportunities.

