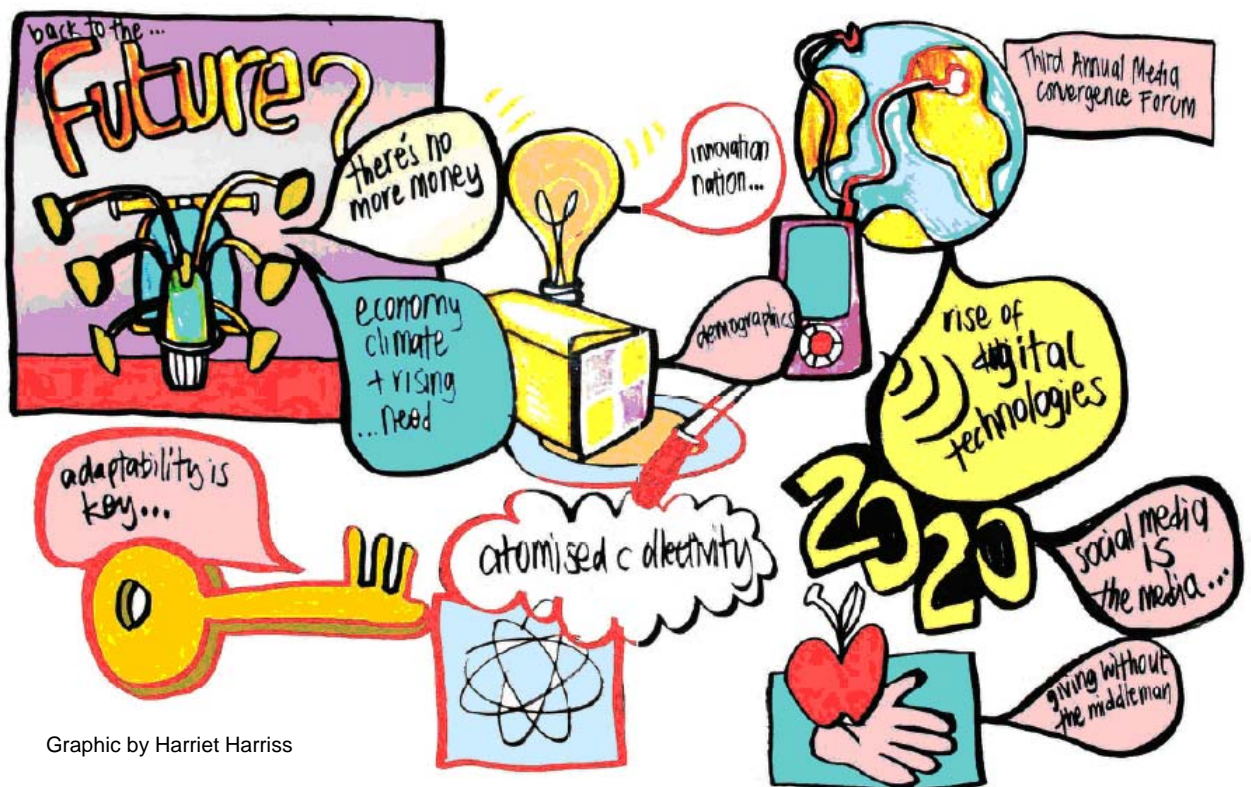


NCVO Foresight

Responding to social change –

Impact report

April 2008 to March 2011



Graphic by Harriet Harriss



2.1 What we do

By providing training, consultancy and support as well as tools and resources we help voluntary and community sector organisations to look into the future and think strategically about how external forces and trends (drivers) may impact on their future operating environment, and that of the organisations they support. We help organisations to understand the implications of these drivers and support them to translate elements of their strategic plans into practical actions that address change.



2.2 Flexible approach

We work with and support a wide range of organisations from very small community led charities to large national operations. We appreciate that the people and organisations we support have different needs and may be at different stages in both their organisational and personal learning journeys. We take particular care to design our programmes to meet these different needs. Similarly, we make available both our learning opportunities and resources in a variety of formats in recognition of the fact that the people we support have different preferences and circumstances.

“Interestingly, 79% of respondents were willing to recommend the services they had used to colleagues. Respondents and interviewees wanted more of what they had experienced and enjoyed; those who had taken part in face-to-face events felt that they were the most useful method, while those who used web-based services were equally convinced of the value of that approach.” Roehampton University evaluation

2.3 Strengthened by NCVO

We benefit from being part of NCVO, a respected national organisation with extensive experience and knowledge, a solid skills base and established networks. NCVO led four of the Capacitybuilders national workstreams (Campaigning and Advocacy, HR and Employment Practice, Leadership and Governance and Responding to Social Change). This helped us to integrate our approaches and share learning and innovation.

“A number of interviewees expressed very positive views about NCVO, its services and its staff. They described it as a ‘good solid organisation you could depend on’ which was responsive and efficient. It was honest about what it offered, did not oversell its product and essentially did what it said it would do, and did it well.” Roehampton University evaluation

3. Overall aims

As the *National Support Service for Social Change*, NCVO Foresight set the following specific objectives:

- Raised awareness among support providers and frontline organisations of the importance of social change.
- Improved access to clear, accessible and relevant information about social change for both support providers and frontline organisations.
- Increased confidence in support providers in interpreting and adding to our generic information about change with more tailored information for their audiences.

- As an outcome of increased support provider confidence, frontline organisations have access to information on how to respond to social change and use this knowledge for better planning and decision-making.
- More support providers base strategic decisions on a good understanding of social change (and are, therefore, more sustainable, risk-aware, innovative and flexible).
- More support providers and frontline organisations have access to appropriate materials to help them develop plans and strategies.
- Funders, policymakers, other national support services and national performance programmes have access to up-to-date intelligence on social change and its impact on those they support.

“A number of interviewees said that their involvement in the workstream had helped them to develop funding strategies and improve their skills in writing funding bids. One interviewee had used the materials to train staff, trustees and volunteers within their organisation on strategic planning.” *Roehampton University evaluation*

I had to plan a discussion of our membership strategy with our trustees. We used the *Future Focus* membership guide as the basis of our whole work: downloaded the whole thing and used it wholesale.” *Consortium member*

4. Overall impact

4.1 Relevance

All voluntary and community organisations are operating in an era of unprecedented change. It is has never been more important that they have strong strategic planning skills – to enable them to sustain their organisations by anticipating and managing change as well as being able to identify and seize new opportunities.

The external drivers that are the focus of our work are most readily summarised using the PESTLE framework: **P**olitical | **E**conomic | **S**ocial | **T**echnological | **L**egal | **E**nvironmental.

In practice these translate into specific issues and challenges such as the ‘big society’, public funding cuts, changes in public attitudes, ageing population, personalisation of services, the rise of social media, equality legislation and climate change – to name just few.

Our work embraces both generalist drivers (as above) and specialist drivers such as those related to mental health, hospices, young people etc.

“I wonder if one of the big drivers is change itself? I think we’re now in a world in which rapid, continuous change is going to be the norm. One of the big training areas for all our staff is managing change and strategic management.”

Phil Coward, Regional Education Manager, Workers’ Educational Association (Eastern Region, participant on Making sense of your environment, training for leaders

“The project was extremely valuable to Mind. It refreshed and updated our skills in strategic analysis and planning. These foresight skills have proved exceptionally important in the last year with the enormous change in the operating environment for local Mind.”

Tessa Denham, Head of Local Mind Association Services

4.2 Collaborative / listening and learning

NCVO Foresight forged strong partnerships, with both regional and specialist sub-sector organisations. This helped us to learn continuously and adapt and refine our programmes to meet the needs of the sector.

Throughout we listened to our partners and gathered feedback from programme participants enabling us to evolve and refine our approach.

“The scope and reach of the activities delivered by the workstreams were extended in key ways. In the first place, many services were delivered through partnership arrangements involving national organisations which specialised in particular areas of work or user groups, or regional bodies which had a knowledge and understanding of the local sector and its needs. NCVO in particular and support providers more generally can learn from and build on the successes of this experience.” **Roehampton University evaluation**

Commenting on concerns about relationships between national and local organisations and infrastructure and frontline organisations:
“It is also noteworthy that interviewees specifically excluded NCVO and its partners from the criticism in respect of these two issues. They felt that NCVO and its partners had acted in a sensitive and professional way, avoiding the pitfall of ‘parachuting’ in to a geographical area or specialist sector. The collaborative nature of partnership with both local organisations and infrastructure were commented on as key successes across each of the workstreams.” **Roehampton University evaluation**

4.3 High user satisfaction

With specific reference to NCVO Foresight, 358 people completed surveys (the highest total across the four workstreams) and referenced 43 activities. The results showed that: ³

- 82% percent of support organisations said they would use this learning now and 81% in the future
- In terms of beneficiaries or members they felt 53% of them would use this learning now and 58% in the future
- 81% said the use of services had increased their knowledge
- 66% said their confidence had increased
- 61% said their skills had improved

“Overall, there was a high degree of satisfaction on the part of the users of the services provided by the four workstreams... This can be explained by:

- the success of the workstreams in identifying and meeting key needs
- the quality and relevance of the services
- the use of a range of methods and approaches to reach voluntary and community sector organisations and
- the competence of NCVO and its partners in provision.”

Roehampton University evaluation

5. Project impacts

5.1 Training partnerships

In partnership with the Centre for Charity Effectiveness, Cass Business School and the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum we developed two complementary training courses:

Making sense of your environment: training for leaders

Understanding the external environment: supporting the frontline

The aim was give leaders and development workers of infrastructure organisations the opportunity to step back from busy, day-to-day schedules to focus on how their external landscape is changing. They were encouraged to use this information to improve their organisation’s future outlook through better strategic planning and also to deliver better

informed guidance to the organisations they support. By providing the two courses, tailored to the different roles, we aimed to facilitate the cascade of information and skills within an organisation.

After piloting the training with the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum, we rolled out the course in partnership with a further eight regional infrastructure organisations. Each partner was supported with an allowance to cover delivery, including event and travel costs, a significant contribution to staff time, a comprehensive marketing pack and promotion through NCVO and Capacitybuilders' channels. Our partners were:

Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum | Regional Action and Involvement South East | London Voluntary Service Council | One East Midlands | South West Forum | Voluntary Organisations' Network North East | Voluntary Sector North West | Community and Voluntary Forum: Eastern Region | Community Matters

The courses were attended by 138 leaders/CEOs and 163 development workers.

The training was offered at a minimal cost to participants, with the revenue retained by the partner organisation. This minimal fee was charged to maintain attendance levels as previous experience shows that when training is free, attendance is often low on the day. Travel bursaries were also offered.



Leader / CEO perspective

- 99% rated our handouts and materials as good or very good and 99% rated the trainer as good or very good
- 100% felt more confident about describing the value of strategic analysis and 96% felt the course had raised their awareness of key drivers
- 100% felt they were taking away new ideas about options for strategic action
- 94% said they intended to work with others in their organisation on improving understanding of the external environment and use this when planning
- 72% said they intended to look at how their organisation provides support to groups in making sense of the external environment.

“Broadly we are thinking more about drivers as a whole... The political drivers were the most interesting. We are now making a response to ‘big society’ and making more relationships with MPs and doing more lobbying.”

Nicky O’Brien, Grants Director, Community Foundations for Merseyside and Lancashire
Making sense of your environment – training for leaders course participant

Other comments included:

- “Useful to look at strategic issues from a different angle.”
- “Good discussion at sophisticated level.”
- “Targeted attendees meant that all were speaking the same language.”
- “Good chance to explore issues with peers.”

Making sense of your environment – training for leaders course participants (South West)

Development worker perspective

- 99% rated our handouts and materials as good or very good and 100% rated the trainer as good or very good
- 100% felt more confident about describing the value of strategic analysis

- 97% felt the course had raised their awareness of key drivers and 98% felt their awareness of the implications had increased
- 97% planned to help others with strategic analysis and 93% planned to improve how they support organisations with key driver information

“Vital – if infrastructure organisations are to have a future and really make a difference to the frontline voluntary and community sector.”

Understanding the external environment: supporting the frontline participant (South West)

“I will be taking this forward for the voluntary and community sector in Devon, hopefully with one of my colleagues in infrastructure who attended.”

Understanding the external environment: supporting the frontline participant (South West)

Other comments included:

- “This is something I will be doing more of in the future.”
- “I feel I have more knowledge about the info and resources available to share with organisations.”
- “This is a key part of my role and something I see as valuable.”

Understanding the external environment: supporting the frontline participants (North East)

Partner perspective

“It was a very interesting journey. We enjoyed doing it and got very good feedback. Regional partners working with NCVO and Third Sector Foresight is definitely a good thing. It ended up fitting into our portfolio of work as a useful addition to our direction of travel.” Richard Caulfield, Chief Executive, Voluntary Sector North West

5.2 Sub-sectoral partnerships

NCVO Foresight partnered with eight specialist support organisations to research specific drivers relevant to the future of their sub-sectors and analyse the implications and possible responses to challenges and opportunities. Additional aims included helping infrastructure leaders to plan ahead and support the frontline.

Partners were appointed after a competitive bidding process and awarded an allowance towards their staff costs. We covered all other costs.

These collaborative partnerships included a secondment of a member of staff from the partner organisation to the NCVO Foresight team for 12 days over six months and co-facilitated events with members or affiliates of the partner organisation, as well as representatives from the wider sub-sector where possible.

We partnered with:

Age Concern | Help the Hospices | the National Union of Students | Mind | Disability Lib | Voice4Change England | the National Council for Voluntary Youth Service | the Central Council for Physical Recreation

Working with our partners, we researched, analysed and published specialist drivers on the following topics:

mental health | hospices | older people | student unions | black and minority ethnic (BME) third sector | disabled people | youth organisations

These new specialist resources were published, free of charge, on our website www.3s4.org.uk.

Partner perspective

“It was a very good fit with the work of my team which involves helping 180 local Mind associations, a number of whom look to us for leadership to respond strategically to their changing operating environments. It continues to inform our work.”

William Snagge, Specialist Support Team Manager, Mind

“Working with Foresight improved our skills, practices and methods a lot. It gave us much more confidence and knowledge, and definitely helped us plan our future. It also reminded us what makes us unique, what we’re really about, and stopped us getting distracted by other people’s agendas.” Stephen Hodgkins, Director of Disability LIB

5.3 NCVO Foresight website

Our website at www.3s4.org.uk gives easy access to a unique set of resources, developed specifically to support the needs of voluntary and community sector organisations and not available elsewhere. It includes:

- a searchable library of more than 100 drivers
- *Looking Out* – an online guide to strategic analysis and how to turn plans into action with tools and other resources
- news, research, reports and events
- a community of around 2,600 people actively sharing their thinking about the future via our free membership network.

The site is regularly updated by the NCVO Foresight team who contribute new drivers, news, think pieces and stimulating discussion. Based around user feedback, a redesign to refresh the look and feel and improve usability of the site is imminent.

Website stats

- The site attracts an average of 8,000 unique visitors each month
- We have more than 2,600 registered members.

Website user perspective

“Respondents described the website and other materials as ‘authoritative and trustworthy’ as well as ‘well thought out and researched’ and presented in an accessible and user friendly way from a variety of perspectives.” Survey respondents/Roehampton University evaluation

“I would not have been able to find this information in such a usable, readily available and free format elsewhere.” Rob Jackson, Director of Development and Innovation at Volunteering England

Rob Jackson finds the drivers on topics related to the economic downturn and ageing population particularly useful and regularly forwards information to his colleagues to kick-start their thinking.

“The toolkit is a fantastic resource for strategic planning. It’s a really good starting point – there’s something for everyone including general and specific information. There’s nothing else like this around.” Meg Abdy, Legacy Foresight

5.4 NCVO Foresight bulletins

Two email bulletins, sent out twice a month, signpost members to articles and events designed to help the sector plan ahead for change:

- *Insights*: dedicated to giving frontline network members the tools to adapt to a changing environment.

- *Insights for Infrastructure*: designed to help our infrastructure network members support the frontline in a fast-changing world.

These e-bulletins have the highest open and click-through rates in NCVO, indicating that we are reaching people that other teams don't.

I found it a really good analysis of the situation at the minute and some good suggestions. Excellent. **Nichola Brown, Workforce Development Officer, NCVYS**

"It's really good! It's really exciting to be presented with such useful articles and links."
Mike Jousiffe, Information and Membership Communications Officer, Association of Charitable Foundations

5.5 Leading Lights Seminar series

This popular seminar series, featuring expert speakers, was free to network members and non members and provided new analysis on future trends, together with an opportunity for members to meet up and join stimulating discussions. Seminar topics included:

- Campaigning Futures: What will campaigning be like in five years' time?
- The Future of Membership in the voluntary and community sector
- Changing ICT: What will it mean for your organisation?
- Climate change and the voluntary and community sector
- X & Y: The implications of a changing workforce for the voluntary and community sector
- The impact of an economic slowdown on the voluntary and community sector

The *Campaigning Futures* seminar was run with the Campaigning and Advocacy National Support Service and included an innovative online seminar – our first.

The seminars were attended by a total of 196 people. To minimise costs we hosted them at our London Kings Cross base.

We published each seminar's presentations and driver information on our website.

Participant perspective

- 90% said that their knowledge of the seminar specific drivers increased (92% of delegates have a strategic planning role in their organisations)
- 83% said they were taking away new ideas about how to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented
- 97% rated the speaker presentations as good, very good or excellent
- 86% said they would recommend *Leading Lights* seminars to their colleagues

5.6 Publications

Researched and written by our team, as well as external sector experts, NCVO Foresight produced a range of specialist publications available free or at a discount to members and partners. All publications can be ordered from our website.

Looking Out – this practical workbook includes information, checklists and exercises to help plan and prepare for potential change. It complements the *Looking Out* resources on our website.

Tools for Tomorrow – a complete set of practical tools to simplify and structure the planning process.

Surviving in a Changing Environment – this annual publication supports strategic planning by providing insight into political, economic, social and technological developments in the sector.

Future Focus – this series of eight, pocket-size booklets helps voluntary and community sector organisations to identify and analyse the strategic drivers that will have an impact on their future success. They address complex issues but distil them into easily accessible, bite-size blocks of information. The *Future Focus* topics are:

1. What will our funding be like in five years' time?
2. What will our volunteers be like in five years' time?
3. How will we use new technologies in five years' time?
4. How is local democracy changing?
5. How are social attitudes changing?
6. What will the UK population be like in five years' time?
7. What will campaigning be like in five years' time?
8. What will membership be like in five years' time?



In order to reach as many frontline organisations as possible we made the booklets available in bulk, free of charge, to infrastructure organisations. As a result, over 50,000 copies have been distributed via 300 organisations.

User perspective

“They [the Future Focus booklets] are great as a strategic tool to get people thinking about where they are going to be in three or five years time. The groups I work with all come together for a meeting and we use the booklets as the basis for discussions. It’s been brilliant and it really does make people think in a different way. Chris Wardle, Project Officer at Merseyside Disability Forum (distributed 250 sets to her network)

Consultancy

NCVO Foresight provides consultancy services and training tailored to meet the needs of individuals and organisations.

Client perspective

“It [the training] worked really well for us. It helped to unlock a vision of what the future looks like and the exercises prompted people to go back and look at their own operational models and structures.” Muzahid Khan, BME Programme Director, Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum: commissioned a workshop for BME network members

“It [one-to-one consultancy] helped me to create something workable and realistic that was easily explained to people.” I got really solid, practical, uncomplicated advice, backed up with brilliant, up-to-date online tools.” Harriet Gill, Chief Executive of Brook London

5.7 Future of Membership project

NCVO Foresight worked with a consortium of leading membership organisations to undertake new research into what membership means and what motivates people to become members. As a consortium, we analysed the different challenges, strengths, purposes and models of membership and sought to understand why people become and remain members.

Working collaboratively we mapped the most important drivers for membership and developed operating scenarios and strategies for membership organisations in 2020. This involved desk research, focus groups and workshops. Each of the consortium members contributed financially towards the project. The members were:

Action for ME | Amnesty | National Autistic Society | National Children's Bureau | National Trust | RNLI | Royal Academy of Arts | The Scout Association | Supporters Direct | Workers' Educational Association | Ramblers | National Council for Voluntary Youth Services

The full research findings were shared with the consortium members. We also made the project outcomes publicly available, in a distilled and readily digestible format in the Policy, Campaigns and Research area of the NCVO website at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk and in the *Future Focus* booklet: *What will membership be like in five years' time?*

Consortium member perspective

"We got a huge amount of value and learned a lot. It certainly has had an impact on how we structure our membership package."

CEO, Consortium member

"Our engagement with the project had a beneficial and distinct impact on how we structure our membership. We got good ideas. It all kind of rubbed off."

CEO, Consortium member

"I found it incredibly useful that you took us out of the closed arena that we normally work in and made us think about broader issues." Consortium member

"Working with Third Sector Foresight on the Future of Membership project pushed forward my thinking on a range of emerging trends. I've been able to flag them up with my senior colleagues, building on the insights from the project to start and support the ongoing conversations that are at the heart of delivering our organisation's strategy."

Alex Hunt, Head of Foresight, National Trust, Consortium member

Sharing the learning

As well as sharing our findings on our website, the project leader gave presentations at conferences and other events. These were positively received as were contributions to printed publications including NESTA's *Social by Social* guide, NAVCA's newsletter and the NCVO's *Civil Society Almanac*.

"Thank you for posting this article. It really resonates with some of the discussions that we have been having internally in NAVCA recently and I'm aware that other local and regional infrastructure organisations are also reflecting on their own relationships with their members"

Members' Support and Development Manager, NAVCA

How the findings impacted on NCVO's work

We shared our findings with NCVO's membership and marketing team and used this as an opportunity to test out new approaches. NCVO changed the emphasis of some of its marketing materials and achieved a 13-fold increase in response rate.

6. Building on a successful experience

The following three key principles emerged from the evaluation as the basis for success which can be built on in future:

1 Clear targeting

The Roehampton University evaluation concluded that the workstreams “appear to have met the needs of the many organisations they targeted to a considerable degree and, successfully, reached their target audiences”.

The audiences targeted were infrastructure organisations and the frontline groups they support. In the future, a more comprehensive set of services, extending range and variety, could be offered to meet a broader set of needs within this varied and diverse sector.

2. A collaborative strategy

The Roehampton University evaluation emphasised that a key success factor was that the scope and reach of the activities were extended by delivery through national, specialist and regional partnerships.



NCVO Foresight feels it was able to deliver more, with greater impact, by working with its partners than it or the partner organisations could have achieved alone. We are committed to continuing to work closely with a wide range of partner organisations to continue to build on this success.

3. An holistic / integrated approach

The Roehampton University evaluation underlined the continued need for a comprehensive and integrated package of services and stressed that the value of individual services provided by the NCVO-led workstreams was enhanced by their use in conjunction with other activities.

The wide range of services and expertise within NCVO means that it is particularly well-placed to offer support in a variety of formats to suit different learning preferences and circumstances (e.g. online or face-to-face) in a way that is easily integrated with other services. Because NCVO offers a wide range of services, NCVO Foresight is also readily able to signpost people to other functions within the organisation to further their development.

An integrated approach is vital as the sector experiences significant change in a constrained funding environment where sustainability and close focus on mission are key considerations.

7. Key approaches to take forward

Key approaches to success and improvement, which NCVO embraces, include:

- The importance of reaching out and collaborating with others to share learning and support and to help achieve shared goals.
- Pitching products and services appropriately both to serve a wide variety of needs and to meet fast-changing as well as ongoing needs.

- Continuing to address, in collaboration with the sector, barriers to accessing services in terms of location, cost, time and other capacity issues.
- A co-ordinated 'whole sector' approach that builds on collaboration that avoids organisations working in silos and engaging in regional or specialist work without due consideration to existing services and sufficient planning.

NCVO Foresight supports the Roehampton University's conclusion that a holistic approach offering a comprehensive and integrated package of services, targeted and marketed to the sector, is valued and should be considered going forward.

We are working in a changed and ever more challenging environment, both in terms of income generation and demand for services. NCVO Foresight is committed to balancing these demands and to continuing to deliver and improve the services developed as an outcome of Capacitybuilders' funding so that the knowledge, resources and learning continue to benefit the sector.

8. Moving forward

8.1 NCVO Foresight Consultancy

As well as free information and analysis about trends at www.3s4.org.uk and in our publications, we can work with you directly to help prepare for your future.

We can coach your senior decision makers. A fast, efficient way to impart the skills and confidence they need to spot future threats and opportunities.

We can run tailored workshops for your board, managers, staff or users, to pool their insights about the trends affecting your organisation and get them thinking in a strategic way.

We can save you time and money by scanning your horizon for you: filtering out jargon and noise to spot understandable trends that you can act on.

We can pool your interests with similar organisations to study trends that will affect you all.

We offer a 20% discount for NCVO members.

8.2 Joint projects

Our work draws on NCVO's huge experience of all parts of UK civil society and our acclaimed expertise in statistical and social research, political analysis, innovation, strategy, impact measurement and organisational design.

If you help other organisations, maybe as a funder, umbrella body or thought leader, talk to us about how we can help you with ideas, links and practical know-how gained through helping thousands of organisations.

"The sector would be a lot less thoughtful – and thought-provoking - without Third Sector Foresight."

Meg Abdy, Consultant (and ex-Associate Director of the Henley Centre)

NCVO Foresight

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