

Guide to using NCVO's manifesto

What is the manifesto?

Prior to a general election, many voluntary organisations and businesses produce their own manifestos.

For a political party, a manifesto is a statement of what they would do were they to be elected. However, for voluntary organisations, manifestos set out the policies they would like to see any future government implement on behalf of their beneficiaries. They are a useful tool in campaigning and engaging with existing MPs and people who are seeking election

NCVO's manifesto follows an extensive consultation with our members to identify the priorities and challenges for them for 2015 and beyond.

What does it say?

We started from the perspective of the issues any government in 2015 will be grappling with. We then looked at how the voluntary sector is already helping to meet those challenges and what the government could do to better support this.

This is grouped into three sections:

- economic growth which benefits all parts of society
- public services which are more responsive to people's needs
- an enabling environment so that people can make a difference for the communities and causes they care about.

[You can read the manifesto on our website.](#) We've also produced a crib sheet that we hope will be helpful, below, so you can quickly see what each of the recommendations are, why we think they are important, and some background information.

What does it mean for me?

In the coming year, you may like to invite your local MP and candidates to visit your charity and find out about the work that you do, and how they can support your organisation.

You can use the NCVO manifesto to contact your local MP and candidates to talk about your organisation and the work you do.

The NCVO manifesto looks at challenges and opportunities for the sector as a whole. You can relate it to your individual organisation and give examples of how two or three of the recommended policies would benefit the work you do.

You will probably have topics specific to your own organisation that you would like to raise with the local candidates. NCVO's manifesto is intended to give you the opportunity or framework to do this, not to be instead of those topics.

How do I contact my local candidates?

Importantly, you should contact the candidates for all the major parties, not just the current MP, or the candidate for the party you support.

You can [find out who is your local MP on the Parliament website](#) simply by entering the postcode of your organisation. If you click through to their profile, this will also give you all their contact details. Candidates from the other parties are a little harder to find, but [this website has a comprehensive list available for free](#).

It is up to you whether to send the invitation by letter or by email. Just make sure you include your postcode, either at the top of the letter or as part of the subject line of the email. This helps them identify you as a constituent. It can take MPs' offices a while to respond as they receive so much correspondence, so you may like to call to check they've received the invitation as well.

Events and meetings on Fridays are usually best for MPs because Parliament does not sit on Fridays and they spend the day in their constituencies. Thursday evenings and Monday mornings can also be good options.

If you ask for a meeting, be clear in what you want the MP or candidate to do. You may want to base this on the policy 'asks' in NCVO's manifesto, linking it back to how it would help your organisation and beneficiaries.

Think about what suitable activities they could do with your organisation or which volunteers they might be interested to meet. Local MPs and candidates like to attend events that are also photo opportunities, which they can use with the local press or on their own blogs. You can also use them on your own website and social media to publicise what happened.

Just be careful that you are complying with the new Lobbying Act, which will be active from 19 September 2014 until 7 May 2015, and the Charity Commission's campaigning guidelines. You should avoid giving preferential treatment to one candidate over others, and avoid saying anything publicly that could be seen to promote or oppose electoral success for a specific candidate or party.

How did it go?

If you do use NCVO's manifesto to arrange meetings or events with your local candidates we'd love to hear back from you. You can email us at 2015project@ncvo.org.uk to let us know what happened.

NCVO manifesto crib sheet

How to Strengthen the Economy and Help People Find Work		
Policy points	Reason	Additional information
Prioritise preventative spending.		
Changing accounting rules for government departments to include a ten-year test of the social and economic benefits of major spending decisions.	To achieve significant savings and improve outcomes for people using public services, government needs to adjust its short-term spending horizons. For example, too often contracts are too short to achieve positive outcomes for vulnerable people.	There is cross-party support for early intervention, but it has not been prioritised in practice.
Welfare to work programmes should be better designed to help people with complex needs.		
Future welfare to work programmes should include localised, grant funding elements. Job centres need more local discretion to refer people to appropriate services.	Individuals with the greatest barriers to employment often need longer-term, co-ordinated specialist support. Changes are needed to enable charities to provide this specialist support.	The work programme can be a controversial issue. You may want to research your candidates' views prior to the meeting.
Organisations delivering public service contracts should be able to pay a living wage.		
Spending settlements for local government and public bodies should reflect the costs of paying a living wage, recognising that this will reduce expenditure elsewhere on tax credits and benefits.	Companies and voluntary organisations that wish to pay staff a living wage should not be disadvantaged in the bidding process. Our members report that some public contracts currently do not pay enough for them to implement the living wage.	No political party advocates making the living wage compulsory, but rather favour incentives to organisations to implement it.

How to Transform Public Services		
Policy points	Reason	Additional information
Review the state of public service markets.		
A review of public service markets should consider whether they are fit for the future, identify current issues and make recommendations for the future.	Among the recommendations, we would expect to see a more stringent requirement placed on public bodies to consult citizens and providers about the design of public services, and to ensure voluntary organisations have fair access to grant and contract opportunities.	Good commissioning decisions are fundamental to better service outcomes and value for money. Left of centre candidates may also have concerns about the current level of private sector outsourcing.
Extend the Commissioning Academy and training offer for procurement professionals.		
Providing high quality training for commissioning and procurement professionals is critical to improving public service provision.	Training should include a focus on engaging with citizens to understand their needs and experiences of services; commissioning for social value; and establishing a level playing field for voluntary organisations to compete. In particular, understanding where grants can be a more efficient funding mechanism than more complicated contracts.	The Commissioning Academy was introduced by the current Government, but we would like to see it expanded and ensure its training is of the highest quality.
Create a Centre for Social Value.		
The Centre would help councils share best practice and assess value for money more rigorously; and help voluntary organisations measure and provide evidence of the added value they bring to public service delivery.	The Centre would promote effective implementation of the Social Value Act, which has enjoyed cross-party support but is in its infancy.	The Social Value Act was introduced by the current Government, but implementation has been limited.

How to Help Communities and Volunteering Flourish		
Policy points	Reason	Additional information
Support growth of the volunteer movement.		
Ongoing engagement with voluntary organisations and volunteer centres.	To identify opportunities to grow volunteering, support good practice in managing volunteers, and ensure that government policy does not stand in the way of volunteering.	1 – 7 June is Volunteers' Week. You could invite your local candidates to volunteer with you for a day.
Create a new Access to Volunteering fund.		
Government should open up volunteering opportunities for more disabled people - by contributing towards the additional costs and expenses incurred by voluntary organisations.	There are physical and financial barriers to volunteering for disabled people. Government statistics show that disabled people are less likely to volunteer than the rest of the population.	A similar fund existed under the previous Labour Government.
Support local philanthropy by match-funding donations from businesses and individuals.		
Building on the success of the 'Endowment Match Challenge', the Government should continue a match-fund programme.	To encourage giving to local good causes via community-focused foundations.	The existing scheme was introduced by the current government but is set to end in 2015.
Make the Small Donations Scheme more accessible to small charities.		
Simplifying the scheme by opening it up to all charities which are registered for Gift Aid. This would reduce red tape and support more small charities.	At present, the scheme is only open to charities that have claimed Gift Aid in 2 of the past 4 years and it includes a complicated matching rule.	The Small Donations Scheme was introduced by the current government, but is significantly underspent.
Improve access of frontline voluntary organisations to social investment.		
It will be critical to ensure that Big Society Capital's investment and future government initiatives reach frontline organisations promptly and on appropriate terms.	Since 2012, BSC has committed £150m to capitalise social investment providers. This investment has not yet had a major impact on accessibility of finance to frontline voluntary organisations.	