



Our strategy

The NPC team
July 2019

‘A leader in thinking and not afraid to float controversial ideas—fearless!’

NPC survey respondent

CHANGING TO MEET A CHALLENGING FUTURE

It's hard to ignore the reality that our world has a lot of problems. In Britain, we face rising homelessness, in-work poverty and a social care crisis. Brexit and austerity have exposed divisions by class, race, religion, geography and politics. Across the world, climate change, mass migration and globalisation are impacting people's lives more and more. Growing numbers of people think that the future will be worse than the past.

Taking on all this man-made misery, but also facing down personal tragedy and natural disaster, is what the social sector does. Charities, funders, community groups and social enterprises, all share optimism that change can happen and the desire to do something about the problems people are dealing with.

Doing something takes many forms—at NPC our way of doing something is to inspire, help, and campaign for charities and funders to be the most efficient, best run, and most forward thinking they can be, to increase the positive impact they have on people's lives.

But given our ambition and our impatience to get this great sector achieving more, we mustn't become complacent that because we are doing something, we are doing enough.

The strategy set out here is the culmination of us thinking very hard about our mission and how we add value to the sector. We're focusing on the benefits to people's lives that the social sector offers and our role in boosting that.

We think it's urgent to ask ourselves these questions, and we believe the whole social sector should do the same because with the many challenges that we face, both new and old, it's clear that what we have been doing up until now will not be enough.

So, we're going to keep offering support, as well as provoking and challenging, because the social sector is too important to be left alone. Too many people rely on it for it to fail; it protects and preserves too much to be neglected; it has too much potential to transform lives and communities to be wasted. It can't just be what it is, and we can never be happy with it. It always should try to be stronger and to help more people in better ways.

And to be legitimate and deliver, the social sector must go beyond keeping up with change, it has to lead. It is not acceptable for the sector to be complacent where it is behind on technology, behind on diversity and failing to give enough say to its users.

We don't want to tell people they must do this initiative or have that process. It is the wrong approach and it does not lead to sustained change. But we are determined to pursue and promote new approaches which offer benefits to all kinds of social sector organisations and the people they work with. There is limitless potential for us to improve the places where we live and work, to improve our health and happiness, and to address longstanding social problems like homelessness. But we can't change the world without changing ourselves. As problems get bigger, we can always be better.

So, just like the rest of the social sector, we're optimists. Specifically, we're optimistic that we can work with the sector, from the smallest community group to the largest international charity, so that they can do better for more people.



Dan Corry, CEO, NPC



TRANSFORMING THE SOCIAL SECTOR

This document sets out our new strategy. It's our plan to make sure that we're effective at transforming the social sector. But transforming for what end and for whose benefit? Sometimes in the past, we've not been good at explaining our mission. It's been too abstract and has sometimes left people feeling as if we were attacking or lecturing them. We're not. We're here to help.

So how does NPC, a consultancy and think tank with a unique mission of working to increase impact across the social sector, contribute to overcoming the challenges which Britain faces? What can an organisation like ours actually do about any of the divisions pulling our society apart?

We're the first to admit that we're at least one step removed from the people at the sharp end of these issues. The people facing ill health, loneliness, unfair systems, or living in areas of deprivation or without any sense of community spirit. The people just trying to live well and happily, against the odds. But charities, funders, social businesses—they are all there, providing support, advice and advocacy for people. And it's because we care about these people that we care about the social sector: this strategy is about how we are going to help the sector do more for them.

So, what does that look like—what does it mean to give people the social sector they deserve?

It means we offer support and advice to charities, funders and philanthropists on a wide range of topics. We help partners be more strategic, we understand their contexts better and we put the latest thinking into practice.

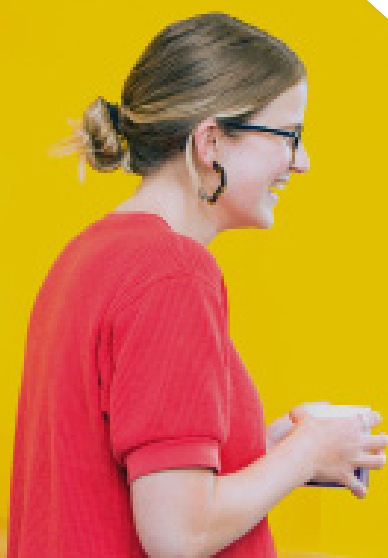
We do our own research and run our own programmes in innovation and in funding, so that we can understand the issues first-hand. And we make our research and innovations available for free for the whole sector to benefit from.

We bring together charities, funders, philanthropists, social investors, social businesses, government and the media to make the connections that aren't always obvious but have the power to make change happen.

We help organisations to understand the systemic causes behind the problems that people face, and we look at how we might find holistic solutions to those problems.

We're independent, not beholden to members, so you know the analysis we offer and the debates that we provoke don't come with any bias, other than towards creating a more effective sector. Speaking truth to power, be that to the sector, or to government, is what we do.

We're not trying to transform the sector because we believe in change for change's sake. We're doing it because people need charities, and those who fund them, to be the best versions of themselves.



OUR MODEL OF CHANGE

How does NPC work for people and communities? Our ambition to make the world a better place for people relies on working and collaborating with different kinds of organisations, both in the social sector and outside it.

We are a capacity building organisation working at different levels. We help individual charities, funders and philanthropists to become the best they can be. We help the whole sector to increase its impact, by giving it the tools, guidance and thought leadership which allow it to support people ever more effectively, and we develop and promote the new models that will help charities and funders reach more people, better.

The final part of our mission is to go into different arenas such as government, business or the media and talk to them about the potential and the importance of impact and the power of the social sector, creating collaboration and networks which have the potential to spark new kinds of change.

The ultimate goal of all of this is to transform the social sector into a more responsive, more efficient resource for the people who need it.



THEMES

Our work to transform the social sector

Impact

Every time a charity, social enterprise, investor or funder makes someone's life a bit better they are having an impact. Measuring it, quantifying it and doing more of it is hard, but it is the duty for any organisation which cares about people.

Our goal:

We want the social sector to be led by its heart, but also by its head. Every decision should consider the evidence whether it will or will not that it will lead to better outcomes for people.

How we will get there:

1. We will publish updated guidance on theory of change that will help organisations of all sizes to articulate their mission, refine their strategy, and provide a roadmap for impact measurement.
2. We will continue to support small and medium sized charities through the Inspiring Impact programme and our other free resources We want to make good impact practice the norm and create a culture of continuous, proportionate, improvement among voluntary organisations.
3. We will promote and encourage shared measurement. By pooling insights from different charities into what's going well and what's not going well, charities and funders can learn from each other and take steps to better serve the people and causes they support.

Effective philanthropy

Funding is unique to the philanthropists, foundation or social investor making the decision. What binds them together is a responsibility to people to use their money as effectively as they can. It's good to give but it's better to give well.

Our goal:

We want funders to be fit for the 21st century. We want them to have productive relationships with grantees, fund core costs and set constructive impact reporting requirements.

How we will get there:

1. NPC will provoke, facilitate, and convene debate and thinking on the future of foundations and philanthropy, asking how they can and should work differently to achieve change. We will encourage funding of core costs and explore funders' geographic biases.
2. We will campaign for more impact investors to use the Impact Risk Classification (IRC), to assess the chance of an investment achieving its intended impact. We want investors to start to compare impact investments across diverse portfolios and focus on the most impactful.
3. We will convene a debate around power dynamics in funding and try to mainstream the principles of user involvement and community empowerment into the work of foundations and philanthropists.

Strategy and leadership

Strategy is how an organisation can make the biggest impact in line with its purpose, given the resources it has and the external environment it faces. Leadership is vital because implementing a strategy requires both the vision to push an organisation forward and the skills to bring it with you.

Our goal:

We want every charity, funder or philanthropist to deploy their people, money and time strategically. We know it's hard to find the space to think about the big picture when day-to-day needs are so high, so we will work to simplify the strategy process and make it more accessible.

How we will get there:

1. We will build on *Strategy for Impact* and work to promote the idea that strategy can be an accessible tool, widely used throughout the charity sector that will help increase impact.
2. We will explore unique possibilities, afforded by the financial independence, scale and patience of many funders, to ask what strategic funding really means and what it can achieve.
3. We will continue to support high quality leadership in the sector through our event offerings, our publications and our work on the Charity Governance Awards.

Data

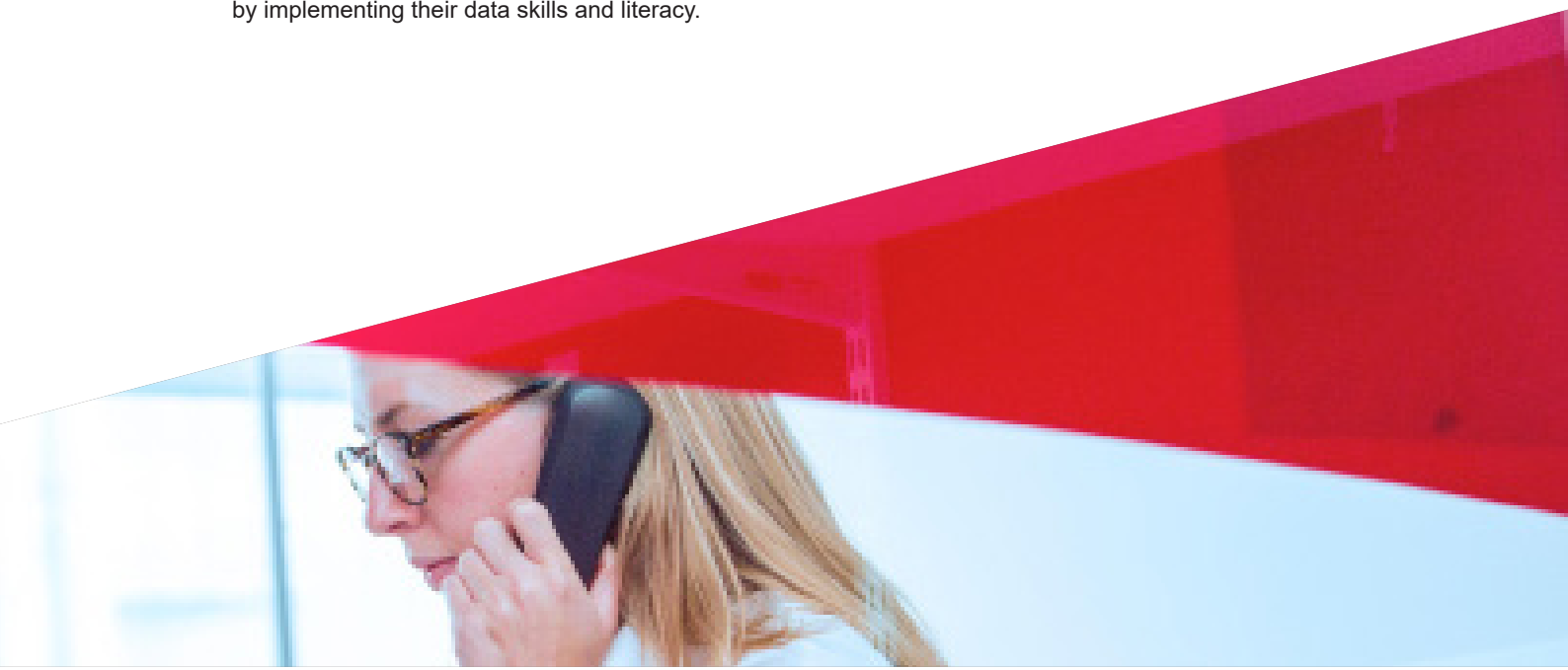
Charities and funders can use data to assess the needs or gaps within a community or group of individuals; to understand short, medium and long-term trends; and to identify suitable interventions.

Our goal:

We want to see more organisations using data to understand the work they do, the work they could do, and to maximise the impact they have. Among the more advanced data users, we need to see more data sharing and collaboration.

How we will get there:

1. We will continue our work on data labs, both supporting the data labs we have helped establish (such as at the Ministry of Justice) to thrive and we will keep working to establish new data labs in areas where we believe they could have a huge impact, such as health, employment and education.
2. We will support charities and funders on the ethical and proportionate use of a data, and how they should balance the reporting requirements and the desire to understand issues with users' rights and needs.
3. We will identify solutions that meet the needs of charities and funders that are willing to maximise their impact by implementing their data skills and literacy.



APPROACHES

Powerful modes of work and thought

Place

Places are where people live, where services can join up and where social capital is created. 'Place' is a way of grouping different approaches defined, generated and delivered locally.

Our goal:

We want the social sector to be led by its heart, but also by its head. Every decision should consider the likelihood that it will lead to better outcomes for people, and whether there is evidence for or against.

How we will get there:

1. We will explore and make accessible the huge range of place based work which already exists inside and out of the social sector.
2. We will test different forms of place based projects around the country, to get at what works, what doesn't work, what unites, and what makes these projects unique.
3. We will create tools to help charities understand their potential in place based working, such as a guide for more advanced charities on systems change in a place based setting and a guide for philanthropists and funders on funding in a place based way.

User involvement

User involvement here refers to the ways in which service users, volunteers, communities and frontline staff can and should influence and help determine an organisation's decisions about services or strategies. We recognise other terms, such as involvement and inclusion, have currency in the sector and this is an evolving field.

Our goal:

We want funders and charities to involve the people they work with in their decision making. We want this because it legitimises their work, and because it makes it more effective.

How we will get there:

1. We will support the mass adoption of user involvement practice by developing accessible tools These will build upon what we have learned through research work at a subsector level. This will make the tools suitable for charities at all levels of their user involvement journey.
2. We will lead a programme on evaluating involvement and co-design, so that we and others can better evidence and argue for the widespread adoption of user involvement.
3. We will convene involvement leaders in the fields of impact investing, foundations, health, homelessness, criminal justice, and children and young people's organisations to share their learning and support take-up of their work by others.

Digital

Digital offers limitless potential for charities to improve their offering through technology. Its increasing ubiquity creates a new frontier of work on rights and advocacy for social sector organisations to be involved in.

Our goal:

We don't want charities to be left behind by the digital world and miss out on the tools they need to help their beneficiaries. We do want charities and funders to be advocates for people's digital needs and rights.

How we will get there:

1. We will lead a global programme of thought leadership, innovation and policy, sharing our vision of digital transformation, highlighting emerging examples of leading practice and experimenting with new models.
2. We will produce a digital roadmap to help charities to include digital when delivering their current strategies and when developing new strategies.
3. We will work to get charities and the social sector involved in the debates around the ethics of the use of digital and technology. These are the issues that are going to shape our future, such as algorithms, automation, and commodification of personal data.

Systems change

Systems change asks charities and funders how they can attack the causes of social problems by altering institutions, relationships, thinking and the power which makes 'the system' generate these negative outcomes.

Our goal:

We want complex social problems to be solved, permanently. To do this, we will equip charities and funders with the tools and understanding to tackle their underlying systemic causes.

How we will get there:

1. We will work to make the concept and benefits of systems change more popular and better understood across charities and funders.
2. We will bring organisations taking systems change approaches to social issues together, to share their experiences and explore what is transferable between different contexts and scales.
3. Through our think tank and policy work, we will produce useful, practical guides to systems change for organisations with different levels of ability to take the approach.



TOPICS

Areas of severe and growing need where NPC can make a unique contribution

Children and young people

Children today face a challenging digitized world of rising violence and soaring rates of mental health issues. Meanwhile, government spending on youth services has been cut by 62% in the last 10 years. Can the sector bridge the gap?

Our goal:

We want to help charities and funders meet the needs of children and young people. This means accessible, fit-for-purpose provision and support for children, young people and their parents, with additional strategically targeted provision for those facing more difficult times.

How we will get there:

1. We will support funders and philanthropists, with research and evidence, to make strategic funding decisions that consider the breadth and complexity of the challenges related to youth work.
2. We will promote the voice and approaches of the youth sector when tackling complex challenges, like poor mental health and youth violence, in our blogs and at our events.
3. We will look to do a landscape review of need and youth sector infrastructure in different parts of the UK (across urban, rural and coastal areas), to understand how this differs across the country and where funders could provide support.

Health

Both a deeply personal thing and one influenced by social factors, charities can and should have a major impact on health. But how do they interact with a complex and creaking system?

Our goal:

We want to get charities better integrated within the health system in order to serve and advocate for patients, and we also want the health system to understand health in a broad, holistic, social context.

How we will get there:

1. We will produce research to help charities navigate and engage with new models of integrated care that are being developed within the NHS—including social prescribing and new models of personalised health and care. Our guides will help charities to understand this opportunity and how to position themselves.
2. We will use our advocacy and convening power to influence the architecture of the health system, ensuring that the voice of the voluntary sector and the people that it works with are heard in national conversations about what integrated care looks like.
3. We will support charities, who sit outside the traditional 'health' spaces, to understand their contribution to delivering health outcomes by addressing the social determinants of health. We will support those organisations to communicate their work in health terms, to design their services with a view to health impacts, and to advocate for more joined up thinking in local areas on how social factors influence health.

Criminal Justice

Prisons are in crisis and the charities working with the people in them are facing big challenges. Funders are drifting away, and a sense of hopelessness is setting in. This needs to be addressed.

Our goal:

We want people that have spent time in prison to have the best possible chance of a successful return to life after prison, and for them to have the means of breaking the cycle of reoffending. We believe that voluntary sector organisations have a crucial role to play in achieving this.

How we will get there:

1. We want to stop funders, who are understandably frustrated with a system that seems to be in decline, from withdrawing from funding work in prisons. We will highlight and evidence the positive impact that charities are having in prisons and their potential to change the system for the better.
2. We want to understand the complex relationship between the voluntary sector, government and the prison as an institution. We will look at the effectiveness of traditional advocacy and also at the potential for practice on the ground to influence policy.
3. We think that charities' work in prisons is not widely understood by the general public, however if it was it could open up opportunities for greater integration between charities and the system. So, we will explore how to tell charities' stories in this difficult context.

Homelessness

A persistent issue, the levels of both homelessness and rough sleeping have exploded since 2010. The crisis shows no sign of abating and innovative solutions are needed to tackle it at the root.

Our goal:

Our vision is that if people experience homelessness, it should be rare, brief and non-recurrent. We want a voluntary sector that enables this by delivering more effectively and leads on systems change.

How we will get there:

1. We want to help the voluntary sector to scale effective approaches. Fixing homelessness is not just about beds for the night. Trauma informed, asset led approaches are working around the country. We will help evidence this and provide the model for scaling them on a wider level.
2. We want people experiencing the disorienting experience of homelessness to be able to access whatever services they need, as easily as possible. We will use our place work to explore how services can be joined up in an area.
3. We want data and evidence to become a more standard part of decision making in response to homelessness, especially outside of London. We will explore new methods of data collection, analysis and sharing in this space.



SUPPORT OUR WORK

I want to thank you for your interest in and support of us. You've seen how ambitious our plans for the sector are, and I hope you've seen in this document our acknowledgement that we cannot do this alone.

We need partners in the sector and outside it. We need them to deliver our mission, we need them to inspire us, and we need them to invest in us and our mission.

Like most charities, our model relies on diverse income streams. We have income from consulting, we take on restricted funding for projects and we also need unrestricted funds to give us the flexibility to innovate, campaign and push the agenda in the social sector.

Without the support of funders and our generous supporters circle, we would not have had the ability to work with young people experiencing disadvantage in London, turning their needs and perspectives into the My Best Life project. It is now setting the framework for design of digital services for young people in the UK and underpinning our thinking on how civil society should be leading in the fight for the rights of individuals over their data.

We wouldn't have produced our State of the Sector programme—which is so vital to helping everyone understand where charities and funders are, what they are thinking and where they are going. It identified trends in commissioning, such as charities financially subsidising public sector contracts, the consequences of which are now being felt by charities and communities up and down the country.

Without unrestricted funding giving us the space to think, to come up with these ideas, to discuss them with our networks and to build them into something compelling—none of these, or any of our other initiatives, would have got off the ground.

Every year we are becoming more secure and more resilient but there is still so much more we can do. With your support, we can transform the sector into a more effective, more efficient version of itself.



Vaughan Lindsay, Chair, NPC



‘I can’t now imagine a world in which NPC doesn’t exist.’

Carol Mack, Chief Executive, ACF

TRANSFORMING THE SOCIAL SECTOR

NPC is a charity, think tank, and consultancy to the social sector. Over the past 15 years we have worked with charities, funders, philanthropists and others, supporting them to deliver the greatest possible impact for the causes and people they exist to serve.

NPC occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders. We are driven by the values and mission of the social sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: We exist to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact for people.

Increasing the impact of funders: NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: Our mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact. We can help funders and those they fund to connect and transform the way they work together to achieve for people.

New Philanthropy Capital
Harling House, 47-51 Great
Suffolk St, London SE1 0BS
020 7620 4850

Info@thinkNPC.org
[@NPCthinks](https://www.thinkNPC.org)

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