

Change for good

A summary of the report from the Commission on the future of local infrastructure

One in three of us take part in social action, doing something to make a difference in our communities. Many of us join one of the 900,000 organisations that support social action. Most of this social action is self-sufficient but from time to time people need help. They need help with making community voices heard by decision makers, finding volunteers, fundraising, organisational development and keeping within the law. In other words – they need infrastructure support.

NAVCA was concerned that many could get left behind by the quickening pace of social, political, economic and technological change. This is why it established the Independent Commission on the Future of Local Infrastructure. The starting point was how local infrastructure will meet the ever-growing demand for support with shrinking resources.

The Commission found that infrastructure will be needed in some form as long as people come together to form voluntary organisations and community groups. But the infrastructure of the future is likely to be a much leaner enabler, broker and catalyst rather than necessarily a deliverer.

If the message to funders is to invest, the message to infrastructure has to be to change. This must be a 'something for something' deal.

The Commission found plenty of infrastructure bodies around the country responding in new and innovative ways to the changing environment. It also identified challenges for social action that are addressed in the Commission's recommendations.



"Infrastructure needs to be financed, but it also has to undergo a redesign. It needs to be leaner, meaner and more technologically savvy. It needs to act as a lever bringing in new resources to the sector, including social investment, crowd funding and pro bono support. It needs to be the enabler of voice and the advocate of community action. It needs to collaborate and share more cost effectively. It needs to promote and develop the 'time economy', co-production and good volunteering practices. Above all, it needs to help the sector with foresight and managing change, because the pace of change is not going to slow."

Sara Llewellyn
Chair of the Commission

The Commission's recommendations

Main recommendation:

Local infrastructure needs to be redesigned and creatively resourced to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Recommendations for local infrastructure

1. Make sure you have the necessary skills available to help you navigate change effectively, build strong relationships, enable good management, focus scarce resources, demonstrate your value and support others in doing so.
2. Redesign your 'offer' to focus more on brokering relationships, especially in co-production, the 'time economy' and with potential corporate sector partners which can offer pro bono support through

volunteering, mentoring, and board members.

3. Promote and support other socially active organisations and groups. Work together in solidarity across local and regional geographies, for best possible support and representation, to influence decision-makers at all levels.
4. Demonstrate your social value, economic contribution and communicate your impact: to funders, your local council and other public bodies, local business, and the general public.
5. Insist on your seat at the planning tables which affect your communities and use your influence on them effectively and accountably.

Recommendations for independent funders

6. Offer longer-term funding for infrastructure organisations or functions to support social action in local areas. Funding should not be focused solely or primarily on innovation.
7. Collaborate with other funders to maximise impact and to help infrastructure bodies make more effective use of new forms of organising social action and the changing world of social finance.
8. The Big Lottery Fund should use its influential position as a funder of social action to convene a round table, with funders and infrastructure bodies, to consider how to enable the redesign of infrastructure bodies.

The value of local infrastructure

The Commission carried out a thorough investigation into local infrastructure. Over 250,000 words of evidence were read and the Commission interviewed infrastructure providers, voluntary organisations, community groups, public sector bodies, the private sector and academics. The research

demonstrated beyond any doubt the value of infrastructure.

Small organisations and groups, often led and run entirely by volunteers, have a huge impact in their local areas. The Commission found many rely on local infrastructure organisations to help

them stay up-to-date with changes in policy and legislation, work in partnership with other groups, recruit and retain volunteers, manage crises and have the foresight to grow and develop. They found that infrastructure doesn't just fill a need, it also creates success. As the Office

9. Offer short-term funding to support the redesign local infrastructure bodies.
10. The Big Lottery Fund should consider extending the Big Assist initiative to enable more infrastructure organisations to access support.

Recommendations for central and local government and local commissioning bodies

11. Engage with the ideas in this report, and be ready to continue the dialogue it opens, offering your support in principle.
12. Act strategically to fund core infrastructure functions at the local level, to act as a multiplier, drawing in other resources and creating social capital.

13. Provide a VCS seat on key planning fora to ensure community input to local decision making.
14. Collaborate with independent funders, infrastructure bodies, and others to invest in supporting social action and strengthening communities.
15. Listen to the stories the sector tells, and understand the value they demonstrate; share them widely, and respond to them appropriately.

Recommendations for the business community

16. Make sure your local representative bodies are connected to your local infrastructure bodies and able to help you get involved.

17. Work with your local infrastructure bodies to implement your corporate social responsibility strategy.
18. Deploy the skills of your workforce for the benefit of local charities and community groups. A finance assistant can help a community group organise its finances, for example.
19. Develop a volunteering policy for staff including incentives such as paid time to volunteer and a say in your company’s corporate social responsibility strategy.

for Civil Society has said, groups accessing infrastructure support have a “substantially higher likelihood of success in grant applications and bidding for contracts”.

Crucially, the Commission found that infrastructure support must

be resourced, But rather than support the status quo, funding should help infrastructure adapt to ensure local communities get the support they need.

WHAT IS INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT?

The purpose of local infrastructure bodies is to provide services, support and advice to, and promote, local charities, community groups and social enterprises that deliver social action.

A good infrastructure body will offer the right mixture of support, challenge, leadership, resource, skills and knowledge. It will also help to foster relationships between the local voluntary sector, public bodies and local business. They also promote social action and make sure local communities have a voice.

NAVCA's response to the Commission report

NAVCA is in no doubt that infrastructure's future viability depends upon the willingness of local infrastructure organisations to redesign and rationalise their services and support. NAVCA will support and promote the implementation of the Commission's findings, specifically, we will:

1. Promote the findings of the Commission and monitor the progress in implementing its recommendations.
2. Publish a review of progress on implementation of the Commission's recommendations in early 2016.
3. Provide opportunities for local infrastructure bodies and their partners to learn from each other and offer mutual advice and support.
4. Host a series of round table events in partnership with NCVO for local, national and specialist infrastructure organisations to create a collaborative approach to shaping the future of local infrastructure.
5. Work with funders at all levels to develop creative and sustainable solutions to secure the future of infrastructure.
6. Ensure that NAVCA itself complies with and models the best qualities of an infrastructure body as described by the Commission, and continually challenge our members to do the same.

We are grateful to the Commission for taking on this important piece of work. It reaffirms the significance of local infrastructure and carries important messages for all of us who care about local voluntary action, first and foremost that it needs long term support.

NAVCA is the national membership body for local infrastructure. We

support our members in their work with over 160,000 local charities and community groups. NAVCA is dedicated to helping people run and be involved with successful local charities and community groups. We also help communities have a say in local services.

To download the full report go to www.navca.org.uk/commission-report

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"This report shows how essential infrastructure support is to generating and supporting local community action. It also shows the need to change. Some NAVCA members are already at the leading edge, delivering innovative services. The challenge for NAVCA members is to be as good as the best. The challenge for NAVCA is to help them get there."

Caroline Schwaller
Chair, NAVCA