

Regional Forum and NAVCA
Briefing Paper No. 4

LAAs and VCS Engagement

NAVCA and the Regional Forum
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Introduction - Judy Robinson

The Regional Forum has had a long standing concern about the engagement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in partnership arrangements at all levels in the region. So, the Autumn 2006 Local Government White Paper, with its announcement about establishing a standard by which third sector bodies should organise themselves to be effectively represented on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and the involvement of national "umbrella bodies" to work on this, was intriguing.

For this reason the Forum organised a briefing with the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) to discuss its involvement in the development of standards, to consider how Yorkshire and the Humber VCS could work on this with NAVCA and to share experience of LSP representation.

We had a very lively discussion - this is noted in the report- and Neil Cleeveley, NAVCA's Director of Information and Policy gave excellent briefings on what is happening and how we might be involved.

Lastly, some regional actions were identified and the Regional Forum will be trying to take these forward.

1 - Update on the White Paper

As the Local Government White Paper becomes an Act of Parliament, Neil Cleeveley, Director of Information and Policy at NACVA gave an overview of the issues for the VCS to look out for.

Neil's presentation: [A Bill for Community Action?](http://www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/conference_reports.php?id=233) can be downloaded from:
http://www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/conference_reports.php?id=233

2 - Yorkshire and Humber

i) Local Experience of Yorkshire and the Humber

Attendees shared their experience of working on this agenda in our region. Some common points of attention were:

o **Barriers to empowerment**

There remains some institutional barriers to empowerment of disadvantaged groups, this includes:

- Lack of support/resources available to develop the capacity of individuals to act as representatives
- Respect from local authority partners for representatives from non-traditional backgrounds, or representatives only sought from paid staff/officers or the 'professional' voluntary sector
- Work still needs to be done to make representation work better in practice, and also on how messages are delivered through the whole of organisations, both VCS organisations and networks, and particularly throughout statutory agencies

- **Accountability**
 - A key action is to ensure that all partners in any “strategic partnership” are accountable both to their own organisations/members/bodies as well as to each other
 - An example of best practice is where an open briefing is held, where issues can be both raised and fed back.
- **Structural Fatigue**
 - There is some evidence of people/organisations tiring of being engaged with dull ‘structural’ activities and meetings that do not focus on relevant or ‘live’ issues and do not get enough actually done
 - This could be linked to the lack of support funds now available especially since the loss of the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)
 - The same issues recurring with nothing being done, or with activity having little impact on the core issues
 - One example of good practice is “locality working” where local area commissioning and community initiatives have been worked on jointly
 - Where Local Authorities have employed Community Engagement Officers there is potential for these workers to be based in or employed by VCS organisations

ii) Impact of Sector Engagement

Attendees discussed if and where the development of Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) / Local Area Agreements (LAAs) / Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) has made a positive difference to the work of the sector.

YES:

- There is a lot greater understanding of the need for and the role of the sector at strategic level
- There are some fine principles to work from:
- e.g. Wakefield - the CEN and the Wakefield Infrastructure Partnership have received funding through the LAA, where the VCS used the policies as drivers to work more closely with the Local Authority
- e.g. Bradford - early engagement with the structures meant influence, and where best practice on some projects has now been adopted by other Local Authority processes

NO:

- The strategic commitment has not yet been matched in its links to commissioning and procurement from the sector
- The working principles haven’t extended to the setting of budgets and allocation of funds to the sector
- There remains a knowledge deficit on how to work with the sector
- The reducing Local Authority budgets has meant limited scope to lever in more funds

iii) NAVCA's role

- NAVCA acknowledges that there is still a large piece of work to be done to achieve effective representation of the sector and representation of the sector's client groups
- NAVCA also wants to work on how knowledge is transferred both to organisations and through organisations
- NAVCA has a seat on the national steering group for the Local Performance and Delivery Board and would welcome any evidence from the sector to help put forward the case for the sector
- E.g. from next year there will be training delivered to 2000 local authority commissioners which will include a briefing on understanding the sector and how it may affect the delivery of commissioning and public service delivery
- NAVCA is working with the sector on how to further develop (and sell) its offer, and how the sector can lead more and be more proactive in the development of its own agenda.

3 - NAVCA's Standard on Representation

i) NAVCA's Standard on Representation

Neil Cleeveley, Director of Information and Policy at NACVA gave a presentation on the standard for VCS representation on LSPs. His presentation [Liberation or Straightjacket?](#) can be downloaded from here:

http://www.regionalforum.org.uk/publications_resources/conference_reports.php?id=231

ii) Working Together

How the VCS in Yorkshire and the Humber can work together, with NAVCA and other nationals, to shape the outcome of this work. Three groups of attendees share their ideas:

Group 1: Considerations for developing the NAVCA representation standard

- The standard must make a visible difference in practice to the representation of the sector. There are currently a whole host of standards, protocols such as the Compact available. It shouldn't just become another one to add to the list.
- How will we measure the impact that the standard has? Discussion focused on developing a set of indicators to measure the outcomes achieved by following the standard.
- The standard needs to take account of the general context of developments in the voluntary sector. It needs to find its place amongst the plethora of initiatives and to complement their tone and objectives.
- If this is a standard for voluntary and community sector representatives - what is being drawn up for representatives from other organisations?
- The sector needs to take ownership of the standard if it's going to be successfully adopted.

- It's not all about the sector developing standards for itself or in isolation. We need to work with our partners on developing processes jointly. For example if a local authority is looking to appoint a community engagement officer, it would be beneficial to involve representatives from the voluntary and community sector in the planning and recruitment process. The post could potentially be co-hosted with the appointee spending some time based at the local authority and some time within the voluntary sector. This closer collaboration leading to better understanding of each sector's work.
- How does this representation standard fit alongside the other standards NAVCA is developing for its members?

Group 2: How the VCS can be proactive in shaping the issues

- CENs
 - There *is* some good practice out there, just waiting to be shared - how we do this will shape the effectiveness of the VCS as a sector in our region
 - There has been some good practice that has come out of exchange visits to other CENs both in the region and outside the region. Can we facilitate this to happen more?
 - The current work that links CENs is not sustainable as it is not adequately funded to provide effective developmental support
 - CENs have potential power in their ability to cut across all agendas
- LYONS
 - The sector needs to anticipate what the recommendations might be and position itself accordingly. Though this needs to be balanced with what might differ from the Local Government White Paper (or how it might still change with the impact of Lyons)
- THIRD SECTOR REVIEW
 - The role of CENs has been increasingly recognised during the course of the review - how can we capitalise on this to ensure the retention of good initiatives?
- REGIONAL CEN Network and MULTI AREA AGREEMENTS
 - The loss of the resource/support at regional level has left a deficit in terms of sharing best practice, shared development opportunities and information flow as well as being an 'eyes and ears' group for Government Office
 - However - the success of CENs is still largely dependent on the Local Authorities' engagement with it in any area, and not on its effectiveness as a partnership.
 - There remains no obligation for Local Authorities to fund any of this work.
- COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
 - Community Development remains a key building block to ensure all other work can be done for maximum effect, and needs to be funded as such. The reduction in funding and posts is a worrying trend and there needs to be strong advocacy regionally and nationally for independent funding for community development workers.

- REPRESENTATION
 - There needs to be capacity building for non traditional representatives both on how to achieve representation and how to be most effective and representative in a role
 - There remains great scope to improve knowledge and use of representation both in the sector (when to say no) and in partner organisations (what to expect from representatives)
 - There needs to be greater support to set up and support representational roles, and created clear lines of accountability
 - There needs to be greater linkage to resources and support - particularly around the challenge of working with new communities, and minority voices within minorities

Group 3:

Issues/considerations regarding the Standard for VCS reps on LSPs

- How do we measure the impact of the standard? What difference would it really make on the ground?
- There needs to be a real push to clarify the purpose of VCS representation and therefore the role of the standard
- Need to acknowledge and explore the different models that LSPs are adopting for nominating/selecting VCS reps. In some cases councils are asking the sector to nominate representatives but in other areas councils are selecting who they invite!
- Need to be careful that Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) don't become "the police" for the standard locally
- CENs already have a performance management framework - why not use this as a starting point and don't "reinvent the wheel". We accept that some modification will be required
- The Standard could also learn from the experience of the district wide Change-up consortia
- Concern over how the standard is sold - to grass routes organisations and LIOs but also to the other sectors.
- Information, training, guidance and support for VCS representatives will be vital.
- The standard needs to consider the health services/Primary Care Trust (PCT) dimension
- The standard should be a "partnership standard" and link into the compact

iii) Some possibilities for regional or collective action:

- An informal discussion forum would be useful
- An information-sharing network would be useful,
 - o Especially for sharing information on the Safer and Stronger Communities agenda and looking at how to measure the 'stronger' element of Safer and Stronger communities from a joint perspective
- Working together on how to use the "community" indicators for maximum effect
- Develop linkage with the regional equalities/ communities of interest networks
- Use the network to explore how to be more innovative (less bureaucratic) in our approach to representation and working together - is there a role for cultural organisations? How would we resource this?
- How do we build on baseline information - how can we collate the intelligence we already have?

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Attendees:

Alison Crouch, Voluntary Action Wakefield District
Andy Crossland, Humberside Learning Consortium
Ann Rushman, West Leeds Healthy Living Network
Brian Lawrence, Regional Forum
Carol Barber, Harrogate Citizens Advice Bureau
Carole Phillips, Voluntary Action North Lincs
Caroline Savage, Regional Forum
Dorothea Annison, Voluntary Action Kirklees
Eddie Street, Voluntary Action Barnsley
Gill Cashmore, Selby District AVS
Janet McDoughall, East Riding Yorkshire PCT
John Corbishley, Community Network Bradford and District
Judy Robinson, Regional Forum
Karen Wardman, Doncaster CEN/ Doncaster CVS
Lai Lim, Doncaster Black Minority and Ethnic Key Strategic Partnership

Lisa Parkin, Leeds VOICE
Marie Lane, Doncaster Black Minority and Ethnic Key Strategic Partnership
Mark Crowe, Regional Forum
Miriam Jackson, Youth Work Unit - Yorkshire & Humber
Neil Cleeveley, NAVCA
Nick Warren, Voluntary Action Sheffield
Penny Stanley, Voluntary Action Barnsley
Rachael Loftus, Regional Forum
Richard Weightman, Scarborough District CVS
Sarah Tyler, South Yorkshire Open Forum
Simon Cale, National Children's Centre
Stephanie Sturrock, Scarborough District CVS
Steve Kimberley, Hull Community Network
Tony Dean, VOX - Wakefield CEN

Contacts:

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Regional CEN Meetings

For more information on regional meetings for CENs in Yorkshire and the Humber, contact Tony Dean at VOX in Wakefield.

Tel: 01924 787379

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