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ACEVO's policy strategy: an overview

1. Introduction

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to outline the top level strategy and vision for ACEVO's policy objectives.

Guiding principles

ACEVO's vision and mission

ACEVO wants to see great leaders making the biggest difference. Through our network, we inspire and empower civil society leaders to provide the vision, energy and leadership needed to change the world for the better.

Policy principles

Our policy work should:

- **Support** and enable our members to lead strong, sustainable organisations that meet the needs of their beneficiaries.
- **Champion** the dedication, professionalism and expertise of civil society leaders.
- **Represent** the experiences and needs of our membership to those with the ability to make positive changes for the sector.
- **Stimulate** debate that leads to the improvement of sector standards and stronger leadership.
- **Achieve** political change by pursuing reforms which are both aspirational and practical.

2. Public policy

ACEVO's public policy work has often previously involved large research reports or commissions, for example *Winterbourne View: Time for Change* and *Coming in from the Cold*, our report on youth loneliness.

With a smaller policy resource than in recent years and our new policy principles focusing primarily on the needs of civil society leaders, we are proposing that we do not take on new public policy research projects in the short to medium term.

However, in order to maintain key relationships in local and national government, especially in regards to the areas of health and social care provision, learning disability and transforming rehabilitation we will be working with members to create policy champions who will represent ACEVO at certain stakeholder meetings. If you are interested in finding out more about these roles, please contact the policy team.

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3. Leadership-related policies

The majority of our policy and research work will focus on the four areas explained below.

1. Regulation

For the sector: Good regulation is enabling, inclusive and transparent. Strong regulators balance enforcement and support functions and their leadership teams include people with voluntary sector expertise.

For civil society leaders: Regulation should be clear, enabling and supportive. It should give civil society leaders the tools and information they need to run effective organisations.

Context

Charities are regulated not just by the Charity Commission and the newly formed Fundraising Regulator, but potentially a number of other bodies including the CQC, Ofsted and the Homes and Communities Agency. Many of these regulators charge a levy to those they regulate to part-fund their service, and the Charity Commission is hoping to consult imminently on adopting a similar model. Alongside this the Information Commissioner's Office has recently investigated and fined a number of charities for their fundraising practice.

Our goals

- That civil society is regulated by fair, transparent, expert organisations.
- That civil society has staff at senior management and board level with experience and knowledge of the third sector.
- That regulators engage in supporting and shepherding activities as well as enforcement activity.
- That regulators operate transparently and fairly.

2. Freedom to campaign

For the sector: Charities must be allowed and encouraged to campaign in order to further their charitable objectives.

For civil society leaders: To have the confidence and freedom to campaign to meet the organisation's charitable objectives no matter who the organisation receives funding from at whatever point in the election cycle.

Context

In recent years charities have faced a number of attacks on their freedom to campaign and advocate on behalf of their beneficiaries. This includes the introduction of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, attempted introduction of anti-advocacy clauses in government grants and the Charity Commission's announcement that charities should only campaign on the EU referendum in exceptional circumstances.

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Charity Leaders Network

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In April 2017 we released a report on charity campaigning in which we started the process of re-focusing the debate on the public benefit of charity campaigning.

Our goals

- That the general public understands the value of campaigning and supports a charity's right to do so.
- For Lord Hodgson's recommendations on the Lobbying Act to be implemented.
- That the principles of CC9 are protected and applied fairly.
- That no charity is unable to campaign due to clauses in any local or central government grant funding they receive.
- For politicians to understand that campaigning is a necessary and vital part of charitable activity.

3. Diversity and inclusion

For the sector: Civil society leaders should be representative of the communities they operate in and the people they support.

For civil society leaders: For anyone who seeks to become a civil society leader, or who is currently a leader, to have the same opportunities for career development.

Context

Over the last 12 months increasing attention has been drawn to the lack of diversity at both senior leadership and board level in charities. This includes reports by Inclusive Boards and a number of opinion pieces in sector press.

This year ACEVO decided to extend its annual pay survey to include questions about diversity at CEO level. Following release of the report we were approached by a number of people in the sector who wanted to discuss ways to work together to tackle the under-representation highlighted in the report.

Due to limited resource we cannot engage in work to improve diversity across all the protected characteristics, so we will initially be focusing on leaders from a BAME background and women. We chose these two groups because research has shown that BAME is one of the most underrepresented groups in the sector and female leaders because our members tell us it is important to them. We have also already done a lot of work to promote female leadership (e.g. through our women in leadership special interest group and women in leadership summit) so it is important to build upon this.

Our goals

- For charity sector leadership to be reflective of the diversity of the country.
- To identify and remove barriers that prevent the progression of civil society employees and staff from a diverse range of backgrounds.

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- For the charity sector to lead the way in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion within its leadership.

4. Commissioning

For the sector: Commissioning decisions should be made in consultation with both third sector providers and service users. The commissioning process should allow sufficient time for collaborative submissions and social value should be considered. Greater value should be placed on provision of preventative services.

For civil society leaders: For civil society leaders of organisations of all sizes to have the tools and networks to work together on an equal footing to provide needs-led services.

Context

Commissioning is one of the most discussed issues in our regional CEO forums. Members report unfair and opaque commissioning that is focused on a race to the bottom line.

ACEVO's priority is to build on the work we did in *Remaking the State* and *Free Society* in order to create a commissioning framework that a) places the citizen at the heart of the decision and b) does not unfairly disadvantage third sector organisations.

Our goals

- Commissioning places an equal value on prevention as well as delivery of acute services.
- The interests of local communities and service users are built into commissioning processes, preventing the public services market becoming nothing more than a race to the bottom on price.
- Contracts both allow and encourage for appropriate costs to be spent on back office functions.
- To facilitate collaborative working between charity leaders – especially between leaders of very large and very small organisations.
- Social value – through the Social Value Act – is considered in all public service contracts.

4. Reactive commentary and member communication

We have a commitment to keeping our members abreast of developments that are relevant to their operation and to champion best practice and leadership. Outside of the activities we undertake to help us reach our policy aims, we will engage in the following key reactive activities:

- Reaction, briefing and rebuttal

- Weekly Leader to Leader email

- Monitoring parliamentary activity

- Opinion pieces and high impact letters on government announcements relating to our policy pillars

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- Blogs

- Consultation responses

5. Thematic strands

These are strands which are of significant importance to our members but which are too broad for us to address in their entirety within current resource. We will therefore apply each of these strands to our main policy pillars as described below:

1. Trust and confidence

Public trust and confidence is necessary for the sector to achieve its aims. However, over the last two years numerous studies have shown that public confidence in the sector has at worst diminished and at best remains volatile.

We will work across all policy strands to positively communicate the role and impact that charities have in public life. Public support will enable us to achieve more of our aims, especially around campaigning, levies and commissioning.

2. Good governance

Good governance is a broad issue and one that we will be supporting our members with through leadership development and events. In terms of policy, we will look at the governance implications of each policy strand; for example with campaigning, our governance work would be to give boards the confidence to continue campaigning; with diversity it would be for trustees to work with CEOs to help improve representation.

3. Digital

Harnessing the opportunities of digital technology is not just about social media or a functional website but means understanding how technology can apply to every strand of work within an organisation, from service delivery to fundraising. We will consider how digital innovation and transformation can help us to achieve each of our policy pillars.