

# Civil Society

Civil society refers to charities, voluntary organisations or trusts, social enterprises, mutuals and community interest companies. These organisations contributed £23.5bn to the UK economy in 2017, 1.3% of the total.<sup>23</sup>

Beyond its direct economic contribution, civil society helps create the thriving places that growth and prosperity in general depend upon. It gives us a sense of belonging that comes from feeling connected to our neighbours. It offers people a sense of control over their future and that of their community, empowering local groups to provide solutions to the problems they face.

Civil society has local knowledge and real insight into how policies could impact communities. It can offer innovative and flexible solutions in response to local needs and complex issues.

Civil society also creates opportunities for local people to engage in social action such as volunteering, which has a significant impact on wellbeing.<sup>24</sup> Our youth interventions could also help increase human capital by enabling young people to develop skills, networks, and resilience that can improve productivity at work and life chances for young people.<sup>25</sup>

## Baseline

You are encouraged to consider developing a baseline of the civil society sector in your area in order to understand the local contribution of civil society and identify opportunities and challenges in collaborating with the sector to meet local priorities.

The additional resources, outside the formal private and public sectors, which are already deployed in our communities is inspiring, and often far more than policy-makers and funders expect. Quantifying these resources, in terms of finance, physical assets, or skills and man-hours, can be highly effective in attracting further funding or assistance from government and businesses.

Measures could include:

- the number of charities, social enterprises and public service mutuals.
- the policy areas that civil society supports e.g. social care, social inclusion, education and training.
- the number of active volunteers and the monetary value of volunteer hours contributed.
- the number of civil society employees, turnover and income including contracts delivered.

You could work with local voluntary sector support and development organisations (civil society infrastructure organisations) to undertake this baseline. You can look for organisations in your area by using the search function offered by the [National Association for Voluntary and Community Action](#).

Several LEPs have undertaken research into the size and nature of their local civil society sector. In some cases this has led to the formation of Civil Society Sector groups to inform LEP policy, enabling civil society representation, access to business development advice and funding for the sector. For instance, [South East LEP](#) has developed a Social Enterprise Strategy and established a Social Enterprise specific Working Group.

The [NCVO almanac](#) and the Social Enterprise UK [State of the Social Enterprise Sector](#) are useful resources for understanding national sector trends, and include some regional data. UK Community Foundations, with local Foundations in almost every area of England, undertake [Vital Signs work](#) to identify issues affecting local areas.

## Agreeing objectives

Civil society and local actors can come together to help address a range of complex challenges facing society, and thereby improve the growth, livability and productivity of an area. You will want to consider how civil society could help you to deliver your local

23 [DCMS Economic Estimates GVA 2017](#), p.6

24 [Wellbeing and Civil Society working paper](#), 2013

25 [NCS Evaluation 2016](#)

priorities.

The sort of objectives you may wish to consider include:

Increase by [X%] the support offered to long-term unemployed residents by local charities

- X% increase in employment in local civil society organisations by [20XX].
- X% increase in social enterprises created by [20XX].
- X% increase in the number of people volunteering locally by [20XX].
- [X amount] employer-supported volunteer hours per month given locally by [20XX].
- X% decrease in residents' subjective loneliness by [20XX].

## Designing interventions

The creation of thriving communities and social value to enable inclusive economic growth is the central focus of the government's [Civil Society Strategy](#), published in August 2018. This sets out a vision of how government will work with civil society to create thriving communities, improving prosperity and economic growth. At the local level there is an opportunity to develop LISs that encompass the ambitions of the Civil Society Strategy.

Useful interventions for LEPs to consider focus on developing sustainable funding models for local civil society. A range of funding opportunities are needed to enable the work of small and local social sector organisations. This includes opportunities to increase earned income (trading) and to fund services through grants, which when used well can combine flexibility with the accountability and performance rigour of a contract, as well as bringing additional benefits, such as charitable investment.

LEPs can also help develop public service mutuals to innovate and reduce demand. Mutuals are staff-led social enterprises, charities or co-operatives, and can

offer a great way to actively involve communities and customers in service design and delivery. Research shows mutuals are developing better quality, more innovative public services with happier, more productive staff.<sup>26</sup> You can contact the DCMS Mutuals Team if you want to talk through your ideas.

A key local resource is citizens themselves, in the form of social action: volunteering, the giving of money, or simple acts of neighbourliness. Through the commitment and skill of citizens, social action can empower communities and help people in need. Taking part in social action is also associated with higher levels of wellbeing, and can improve people's confidence and skills. LEPs can help promote a culture of social action locally: for example, by championing employer supported volunteering; or by linking up business leaders with social sector organisations to help upskill and advise those further away from the labour market.

Youth social action is particularly valuable, not least because it builds the skills and capacity of young people. In 2017 81% of young people participating in meaningful social action believed it would help them get a job in the future.<sup>27</sup> Government is supporting youth social action nationally through the £40m #iwill fund (jointly funded by DCMS and the National Lottery Community Fund). The #iwill fund has attracted 20 match funders to date and aims to create new social action opportunities for an estimated 450,000 young people by the end of the fund, particularly targeting those from disadvantaged backgrounds. You can find the opportunities available in your area by visiting the [#iwill website](#). LEPs should consider complementary approaches to boosting youth social action.

## Evaluation and monitoring

Evaluation you may wish to conduct to monitor progress towards your objectives include participant data and feedback surveys collected before, during and after interventions; local information on rates of volunteering and other forms of social action; and

26 [Public Service Mutuals State of the Sector 2018](#)

27 Ipsos-Mori, [National Youth Social Action Survey](#), 2017

qualitative analysis of case studies and stories written by volunteer organisations to help understand the nature of the community activity they supported.

There have been many evaluations conducted across civil society that can be a guide on the type of monitoring data that you may want to collect, for example: [Community Organisers Programme](#), [National Citizen Service Evaluation Report 2016](#), [Youth Investment Fund Learning Project](#), and work from the [Government Outcomes Lab](#) (Social Impact Bonds). To test whether your interventions are helping to promote thriving and connected communities, you

may also wish to use the [ONS's Loneliness Measure](#).

DCMS data sets may help in monitoring the impacts of policies, depending on the granularity of the data available, including the [Community Life Survey](#) and the [Taking Part Survey](#). These surveys provide statistics at a regional level on trends related to social action, empowering communities and participation in DCMS's sectors. For data corresponding with your LEP area, we would suggest consulting your constituent local authorities and social sector organisations to ascertain local rates of social action.



### Case study: Smart Works

[Smart Works](#) is a volunteering organisation that helps unemployed women back into the workplace by providing high quality interview clothes, styling advice and interview training. The model has a profound impact on the women it supports, many of whom have been out of work for many years and are low on confidence and self-esteem. The government provided funding to Smart Works through the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund, a fund to support the growth of innovations that mobilise people's energy and talents to help each other, working alongside public services.



### Case study: Volunteer It Yourself

Volunteer It Yourself (VIY) pairs professional tradespeople volunteering their time with young people, aged 14-24, to help renovate and repair youth centres and other community buildings. This supports young people to learn trade and building skills on the job, and helps them gain vocational skills accreditations as well as access to further training, work placement and apprenticeship progression opportunities. VIY is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company and has received government funding through the Centre for Social Action Second Half Fund. It has formal partnerships with a range of public and private sector organisations, including Wickes.



### Case study: IntoUniversity

IntoUniversity supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to attain either a university place or another chosen aspiration. Volunteers offer tutoring and mentoring support to these young people at IntoUniversity learning centres across the country. The IntoUniversity programme can demonstrate evidence of improvements in academic performance, chances of getting to university, and attitudes to learning.<sup>28</sup> The government provided funding for new learning centres through the Centre for Social Action.



## Case study: Social adVentures

Social adVentures spun out of NHS Salford in 2011 as a public service mutual to deliver health and wellbeing services across Salford. It is jointly owned by employees and service users, so they have a meaningful say in decisions made about the future of the organisation. Since spinning out, it has quadrupled its turnover, employs four times as many staff, and is consistently innovating its service offering to support the changing needs of the community. For example, it uses its community hub to work with Mind to run mental health services, deliver social prescribing and offer fitness classes to the community at an affordable rate. In 2014 it identified a need for affordable childcare, and took on social investment to acquire three children's nurseries which are now running successfully under the Kids adVentures brand.



Photo by Perry Grone on Unsplash