

Enabling social action

SECTION E

Creating the conditions for social action



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

NEW
ECONOMICS
FOUNDATION

Social action requires certain conditions to grow, to endure, and to be effective. This section explores what those conditions are and how the public sector can foster them to enable social action to flourish.

In this section, you will find the following resources:

E1 Conditions for social action checklist

A tool to help public sector leaders map current conditions with a view to supporting social action

E2 Funding social action

A tool providing advice on how to decide the most appropriate way to fund social action

E3 Linking people to social action

An outline of the various ways that public sector organisations can ensure that people can access and participate in social action

These external resources also provide useful content on creating the conditions for social action:

- [What is organizing? – Harvard Organizing School](#). An introduction to community organising covering the role of organisers and the impact organised communities can have written by Marshall Ganz, a leading theorist of organising methods
- [Community Organisers programme: Evaluation – Ipsos MORI & NEF Consulting](#). An evaluation of a national training programme in community organising, including examples of outcomes that can be achieved through community organising
- [Doncaster Community Funding Prospectus 2013/16 – NHS Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group and Doncaster Council](#). A prospectus launching three funds to create the conditions for social action: a seed fund to support the development of new collective activities; a capacity building fund for existing community organisations; and an innovation fund for commissioning services that increase volunteering and other opportunities for public involvement

- [Working Together with Communities: Haringey's Community Strategy, 2015 – Haringey Council](#). A community strategy, setting out how the council plans to give local people the information, tools, and confidence they need to make positive change with intervention from the council when needed. Covers five strategic objectives and actions for achieving these, including use of time credits, community hubs, and working with a VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector) strategic partner

E1: Conditions for social action checklist

The conditions for social action to take place do not always pre-exist in a locality – sometimes they need to be created. In other words, commissioners will need to foster the conditions and build community capacity for social action to flourish and solve issues.

- 1.** The first condition for social action to flourish is having a clear sense of purpose or **mission**. Often social action arises in response to a need, a gap, or a grievance. To stimulate social action, it is important to listen carefully to citizens, to engage in public dialogue, and to set priorities and outcomes *with* people and not *for* them. Genuinely co-producing outcomes from the start engages and empowers citizens, making them more likely to participate in achieving those outcomes.
- 2.** Social action requires **resources** – both financial and non-financial. Making social action a success requires an investment; this could be time, funding, skills, physical assets such as buildings, support in kind, advice, and more. This need not all come from the public sector; though leading by example, public sector organisations can promote approaches such as employer-supported volunteering which help release more resources (in this case more volunteer time) for social action. The role of the commissioner can be to mobilise previously untapped resources from the public, private, and voluntary sectors, as well as from citizens and communities.
- 3.** The third condition for social action to flourish is **relationships**. Relationships need to be built and maintained for social action to develop and grow. This can be promoted in a range of ways: through community organising, dedicated roles embedded in communities (e.g. Community Links Officers in Buckinghamshire), and through social prescribing. See tool E3 (Linking people to social action) for more detail on these examples.

Figure 1. Conditions for social action.

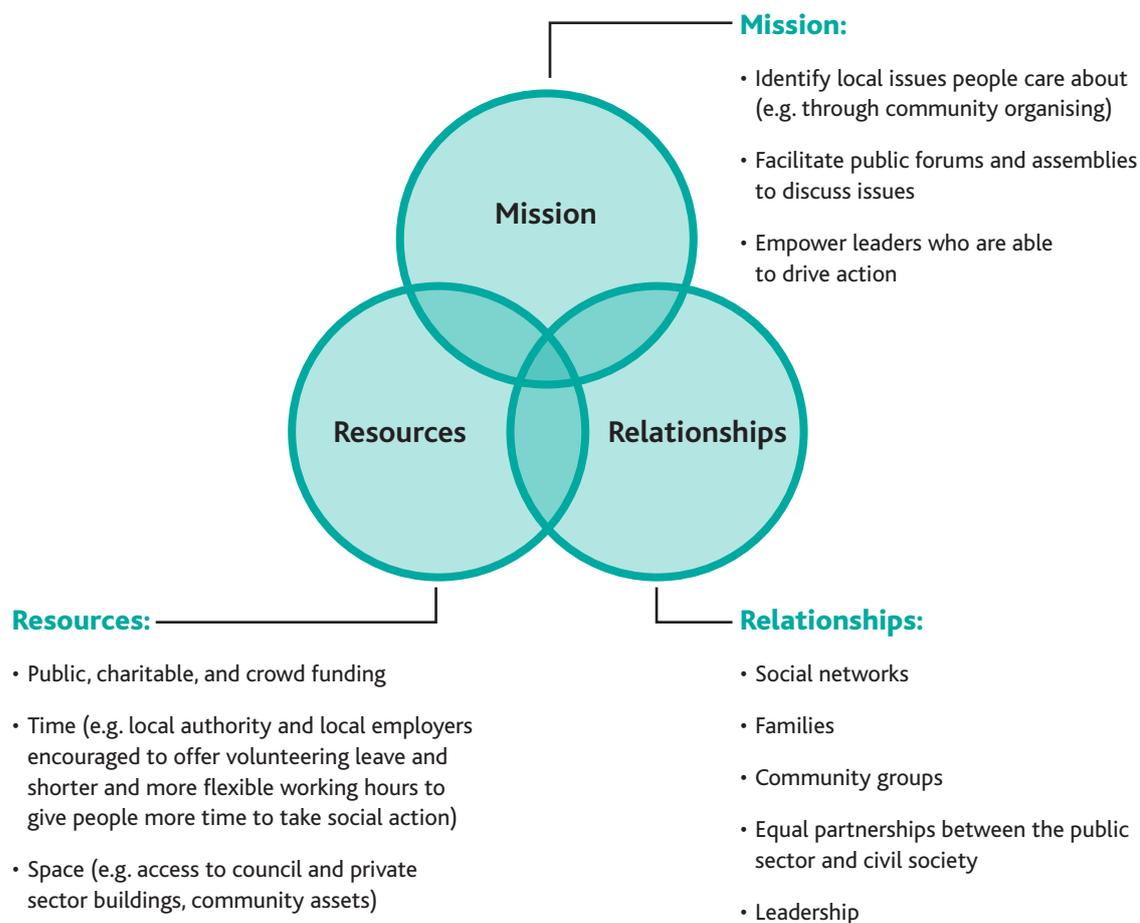


Table 1 presents a checklist intended to help commissioners and other public sector leaders think through the extent to which the conditions for social action exist in their local area.

While it is not necessary for *all* of these conditions to exist for social action to flourish, our research suggests that it is essential for some of them to be in place. If these conditions are lacking, public sector leaders can refer to the other documents in this toolkit for advice on developing the relationships, resources, and mission needed for social action to grow.

Table 1. Conditions for social action checklist.

Mission	Y/N
Are there key issues that concern citizens locally?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there driven individuals on a mission to tackle these issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have people been brought together locally to discuss these issues or explore what the issues might be?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there champions of social action in the public sector; the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector; and the wider community?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources	Y/N
Is there financial investment in civil society?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there accessible spaces for citizens to use?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are expertise and advice available to citizens trying to take social action?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do citizens have time to take social action?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there volunteering leave schemes (such as Employer Supported Volunteering) offered by public sector organisations and by other local employers?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationships	Y/N
Are there currently strong, active social networks and groups in the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there trusting relationships between the public sector and citizens?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there equal and open relationships between the public sector, providers, and citizens/service users?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there community organisers and/or local leaders who can develop social networks in the area and bring people together to take action?	<input type="checkbox"/>

E2: Funding social action

Enabling social action may help the public sector reduce spending on acute services in the long term, but it is important to note that it is not a free option. Equally, not all social action needs public sector funding to get off the ground. Clearly, many valuable community initiatives manage without. However, if the aim is to scale up social action to the point where it can reduce demand for acute services, then a degree of public sector support will very likely be required. At the minimum, the cost may simply be officer time, for example commissioners can play an important role in linking up individuals, groups, spaces, activities, and joining the dots to make things happen. Alternatively, some social action will need funding to start up and/or to become sustainable.

Public sector leaders can refer to the following three principles when deciding how to fund social action:

- 1. Start with the assets.** It is useful to start with public conversations about the assets that already exist in the community. This will get people thinking creatively about how they can solve issues together. Once you introduce the idea of a new pot of funding, there is a risk of triggering competition and in-fighting rather than encouraging collaboration and creativity between community groups. Nonetheless, announcing a new pot of funding for social action may also signal commitment to a new way of working and stimulate innovation once public conversations about existing assets have taken place.
- 2. Choose the appropriate type of funding.** It is important to choose between grants and procurement when stimulating social action, depending on the aims of the project and the context. Each approach has its benefits and drawbacks. For example, grant funding can be effective to drive innovation and support early stage or small-scale community programmes. Conversely where the public sector is seeking to commission a specific service with set outcomes, a procurement process is likely to be necessary. There are legal considerations to take into account when making this decision, the National Audit Office's Successful Commissioning Toolkit provides good advice on this.¹
- 3. Consider alternative funding models.** Challenge prizes are one useful way of stimulating innovative and/or early stage social action, often at a relatively low cost. Typically, they involve organisations receiving small pots of money, and/or specialist advice (e.g. business development or evaluation design)

¹ National Audit Office. (no date). Successful Commissioning Toolkit: Sourcing providers. Retrieved from: www.nao.org.uk/successful-commissioning/sourcing-providers

to seed fund and support the development of a project over a fixed period of time, for example six months. At the end of the period, using fixed scoring criteria, a winner is selected and receives a small prize (usually financial). They are a way of stimulating innovative social action to solve local issues while ensuring that applicants will not rely on continued funding to sustain the project. Crowd funding is another method that can be used to enable social action.

E3: Linking people to social action

The public sector can play a role in linking people to social action – ensuring that those who need support can find it in their communities, that would-be volunteers can quickly and easily find the information they need, and that groups doing social action are linked up with each other and with the public sector. All this helps to ensure that social action becomes the normal way of getting things done.

This work of 'linking up' can be done in several different ways.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TEAMS

The public sector has often assigned the function of linking people to social action and civil society activities to a dedicated set of roles or a team. Within a local authority or clinical commissioning group, this is often referred to as the community partnerships team. This team's role involves supporting the VCSE sector and engaging with citizens to ensure that their voices are heard and they can access community activities.

Allocating these functions to a particular team gives them dedicated attention, but also runs the risk of separating social action from the whole system of service delivery. As such, we explore complementary ways of linking people to social action.

Buckinghamshire

Buckinghamshire's Prevention Matters programme is a prevention focused model for adult services. It aims to support those who are not in receipt of care, but at risk of needing it, as well as those who are in receipt of low-level support, such as meals on wheels, or laundry services. It does this by linking them to frontline community services and groups in Buckinghamshire.

A key part of the way Prevention Matters works is through its Community Practice Workers and Community Links Officers.

Community Practice Workers:

- Work with individuals referred to the service
- Assess individuals' needs
- Develop support plans to help link them into community groups and services either in their home or out and about

- Work closely with Community Links Officers to understand services available and identify gaps in provision across the county
- Community Practice Workers' (CPWs) advice is free at the point of delivery. Though there may be charges for the groups and services an individual wants to access, CPWs aim to find appropriate, affordable services

Community Links Officers:

- Work with organisations and community groups delivering social action
- Identify services available across the county
- Encourage and support services to expand or develop to fill gaps in provision
- Support organisations to access grants and funding to develop services that could support individuals to remain independent

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

Social prescribing is another way of linking up service users – be they patients at a GP surgery or people using mental health day centres – with community activities or services. It can either take the form of a prescription (e.g. a doctor prescribing drawing classes for someone with mild depression) or a gateway whereby professionals working in service delivery signpost service users to social action programmes.

The advantage of social prescribing over a dedicated community partnerships team is that it means social action can work across the whole system of public services.

Social prescribing in Kirklees

Kirklees Council uses a social prescribing model as part of its social action programme, Better in Kirklees. By referring service users to community activities through GPs and social services, it has helped over 600 people find out about or access community activities, 70% of whom have high levels of need. In some cases, this has led to people turning down the offer of more acute health and social care services because they prefer the community activities they have been referred to. Kirklees Council and the two Kirklees

clinical commissioning groups have invested £130,000 in social prescribing for two years, based on a calculation that they only need to keep 13 people with high levels of need out of traditional services to break even.

Kirklees Council also uses social prescribing as a way of ensuring that the community activities it funds are being used by the people who need them most. The number of people with initial referrals to Adult Services halved between 2010 and 2014/2015. At the same time, the number of people supported in communities more than doubled, with 14,700 involved in 2009/2010 compared with at least 38,000 in 2014/2015.

WEBSITES

Websites can also be a great way to enable citizens to access and participate in social action. Such websites can be a way for the public and VCSE sectors to publicise all the social action happening on one online platform. This can be an effective complement to having a dedicated community partnerships team and a social prescribing model.

The Good Life website in South Staffordshire



The Good Life is a website set up by South Staffordshire District Council to collect information about community activities and services into one easily accessible place for local citizens. It aims to help people to stay active, fit, and independent by providing them with listings of local community groups, venues, and activities.

Comoodle website in Kirklees



Comoodle is a sharing website, designed to help residents and local organisations in Kirklees lend and borrow resources such as sports equipment, event kits, vehicles, land, and venues, as well as skills and support to facilitate social action. The site allows users to make both offers and requests for resources.

Part of Enabling social action – tools and resources developed by the
New Economics Foundation in collaboration with the Office for Civil Society.
Available from www.gov.uk

Department for
Culture, Media & Sport
4th Floor, 100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ
www.gov.uk/dcms

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is the only people-powered think tank.
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where people really take control.
www.neweconomics.org
info@neweconomics.org
+44 (0)20 7820 6300 @NEF
Registered charity number 1055254

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