

North East ChangeUp Good Practice Review & Case Studies

Summary Report

July 2006

Introduction

One of four recommendations resulting from the North East Regional Voluntary and Community Sector ChangeUp Infrastructure Development Plan was to develop a mechanism to share good practice at a regional level. On behalf of the Regional Consortium, Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE) commissioned Regeneration Exchange and ARK 19 to undertake a North East Good Practice Review involving 23 case studies of region-wide and sub-regional ChangeUp initiatives.

Aims of the Good Practice Review

The Good Practice Review aimed to identify and highlight areas of good practice as well as issues facing the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations involved in delivering ChangeUp in the North East. The Review aims to feed in at local, regional and national levels in order to:

- Share with others what works in the North East via the views of stakeholders and by presenting case study examples of good practice projects
- Inform the continued development of regional and national ChangeUp Strategies for the VCS
- Support a case for continued funding for North East VCS infrastructure interventions

What did the Review involve?

- Desk based research and scoping national, regional and sub-regional consultation, research, strategies and policy documents relevant to ChangeUp
- Case Studies of 23 ChangeUp activities
- Interviews with 5 strategic regional organisations and meetings with the three North East Community Foundations
- A final case study report
- A final ChangeUp event to share good practice, facilitated by Regeneration Exchange and VONNE

ChangeUp National Overview

Following the findings of the Government's 2002 Cross Cutting Review of the Voluntary and Community Sector in public service delivery and subsequent consultation in June 2004, the Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework, ChangeUp, emerged as the Active Community Unit's (ACU) proposed capacity building strategy for the VCS. ChangeUp is being driven forward as a joint Government and VCS vision for how capacity building support and infrastructure for the VCS should develop over the next decade. The aim of the ChangeUp framework is:

'...that by 2014, the needs of frontline voluntary and community organisations will be met by support which is available nationwide, structured for maximum efficiency, offering excellent provision which is accessible to all while reflecting and promoting diversity, and is sustainably funded.'

The Government has begun to recognise the vital role being undertaken by VCS infrastructure organisations in supporting other VCS organisations. It was also recognised that provision differed from area to area and gaps exist in both quality and quantity of provision.

The ChangeUp framework recommended that a series of national centres of expertise or 'hubs' be developed to support and promote best practice in six key areas:

- Performance improvement
- Paid and unpaid workforce development and leadership
- Better use of ICT
- Improving governance
- Recruiting and developing volunteers
- Funding VCS activity

The ChangeUp programme received support of £80million of Home Office funding from 2003–2006.

Capacity Builders

In March 2005 the Home Secretary announced the creation of the Capacity Builders Agency. Capacity Builders was launched on the 3rd April 2006 as the new vehicle for the delivery of the £150 million ChangeUp programme. Backed by £70m over the next two financial years, ChangeUp is now managed at arms-length from Government by the Capacity Builders Agency, led by VCS expertise.

Funding for the national hubs of expertise for 2006/2007 has been agreed and continuation funding for local and regional activities for 2006/2007 has been secured. As a result, actual funding available stands at around £48m for the next two financial years nationally. Capacity Builders aims to focus upon the following:

- Provide a focus, informed by sector expertise, for accountability and ownership of ChangeUp
- Take ownership of fund management
- Ensure the programme is joined up and co-ordinated
- Mainstream diversity issues into the design and delivery of activities within ChangeUp
- Ensure real time action and longer term evaluation

Policy Context: Challenges & Opportunities Facing The VCS

The 2002 HM Treasury Cross Cutting Review of the Role of the VCS in Service Delivery indicated that the VCS may have inherent structural advantages over the public sector and private sector:

"Voluntary agencies have a comparative advantage over other sector agencies in areas where their distinctive ambiguous and hybrid structures enable them to overcome problems."

The Review further emphasised issues that need to be acted upon in order for the VCS to deliver more effective and efficient services:

- The need for more effective relationships between funders/purchasers and providers of services – this will however, require a level of trust that takes time to build.
- The need to streamline regulatory and reporting requirements is now being recognised.
- There is a clear need for a level playing field between public, private and voluntary and community sector providers of public services. This includes the need for the public sector to do things differently and to package opportunities for service delivery, differently.

From Grant Culture to Contract Culture

Traditionally, there has been a reliance on grant funding among VCS organisations that have charitable and social aims and objectives. In the North East, there has been a focus upon a funding crisis post 2006 and campaigns such as Invest 2006 have identified an estimated shortage of funds for the voluntary sector as high as £60 million. Whilst some VCS organisations are willing to explore alternatives to grant income, others feel there is a current drive to move from grant culture to contract culture.

The role of the VCS in public service delivery

The Government has two major strategies to improve the performance and efficiency of Government departments and local Government: The National Procurement Strategy identifies how councils can improve the delivery and cost effectiveness of public services. The Gershon Review (2004) focussed on ways to reduce the spending of central Government departments and to improve the efficiency of public sector service delivery, including contracting out to the

VCS. The review indicated the need to move towards longer-term multi-year funding arrangements, streamlining monitoring, regulatory and reporting requirements and a more appropriate assignment risk between statutory bodies and VCS when contracting for services.

ChangeUp does however represent more than just a move from grant dependency to income streams. The process relates to the Governments modernisation and wider inclusion agenda linking in with local decision making and civic renewal such as Community Plans and Local Area Agreements, active citizenship, procurement and the Together We Can Plan, launched in June 2005.

Central Government changes geared towards the VCS and local communities are continuing, for example, the introduction of a new Minister for Communities and Local Authorities in 2005. In addition, the Active Communities Directorate (ACD) also now comprises four support units responsible for delivering the ACD policy including:

- Charities and VCS Development Unit (CSDU)
- Civil Renewal Unit (CRU)
- Volunteering and Charitable Giving Unit (VCGU)
- VCS Partnership and Delivery Unit (VPDU)

The Charities and VCS Development Unit has a specific remit to develop the regulatory and legal framework within which the VCS operates and for developing the ability of the VCS to deliver, including through a range of funding programmes such as Capacity Builders and Future Builders. Specific policy responsibilities include Charity Law and regulation and VCS development.

How ChangeUp Worked in the North East:

ChangeUp investment to date has been made through Government Office North East then via the Region-wide and four sub-regional area consortia. The three North East Community Foundations were the responsible bodies for managing and delivering the initial £616,270 ChangeUp funding for the region.

Following the introduction of ChangeUp, a Regional Steering Group was established. One region-wide and four sub-regional cross-sector Consortia partnerships were also developed, the latter covering the four sub-regions:

- County Durham
- Northumberland
- Tees Valley
- Tyne & Wear

The role of the five consortia partnerships was to:

- Undertake research and mapping exercises
- Produce Development Plans for each area
- Prioritise capacity building activities to be undertaken in response to the identified gaps and opportunities

ChangeUp funds were made available for activities run by VCS organisations whose main purpose is the provision of infrastructure services to other voluntary and community sector groups and organisations.

Positive Outcomes from North East ChangeUp

Fulfilling the aims of Change Up...

Despite the rush to get structures in place, ChangeUp has funded a range of activities in the North East – many of which are revenue funded to support the infrastructure for the VCS. The short-term nature of the funding has, ironically, forced organisations to work together strategically.

The North East region is very pragmatic; the VCS responded well to partnership working and quickly formed the five consortia in the shortened timescales, enabling implementation of the ChangeUp programme at regional and sub-regional area levels.

A common theme among case study organisations was that ChangeUp had encouraged individual projects to work in real partnership with others, in some cases, leading to other forms of collaboration. This was seen as a very positive and unexpected outcome. The fostering of collaboration and co-operation is fundamental to the VCS. In the past VCS organisations have been encouraged to compete against each other. Perhaps ChangeUp has begun to provide the North East VCS with an opportunity to begin replacing competition with collaboration.

Most of the ChangeUp projects are seen to be performing well and achieving added value in terms of working together effectively.

A number of the projects have identified new ways of doing things and have tried to be experimental. In addition to this Good Practice Review, the range and scope of ChangeUp activities have been regularly reported via each of the five consortia and the three Community Foundations. ChangeUp has also been reported upon in VONNE's newsletter and web-site, and thus periodically shared with others.

The consortia and working together...

Government Office North East (GONE) viewed that the ChangeUp programme in the North East has gone very well and some of the consortia had evolved well together with collaborative working rather than competition.

The consortia have created a recognised mechanism for the VCS to engage with other sectors, partnerships, GONE and One North East (ONE).

The North East VCS recognise more of the advantages of working and linking together. It is likely that the consortia will continue and have a role to play in working with Capacity Builders. However, it was acknowledged that the down side of the consortia is that there are now more and more meetings to attend.

In some sub-regional areas the consortium approach worked well. The consortium in County Durham used the ChangeUp funding effectively to develop structures; Northumberland used it to identify needs and gaps in services.

Increased awareness and understanding...

ChangeUp has raised awareness of the frontline VCS organisations and many of the generalist infrastructure VCS' (e.g. CVSs, VDAs) have learned more about who is doing what in their areas and vice versa.

Some stakeholders suggested that external bodies such as the LSC are now much more conscious of the VCS as a sector as a result of ChangeUp.

Many of the consortia members used the structure to identify and discuss issues. The North East Region-wide Consortium used a mechanism to rank priorities as a way of bringing specialist and generalist priorities together.

Strategic Issues and Opportunities

Introduction...

Findings of the Good Practice Review were drawn from desk based research of strategic and policy documentation as well as the North East Development Plans. In addition to 23 case study interviews, strategic interviews were also undertaken with representatives of five key regional organisations: The Northern Rock Foundation, ONE, VONNE, GONE and the Association of North East Councils (ANEC). Each representative has been involved in ChangeUp as a regional strategic partner, since ChangeUp's inception.

Many examples of good practice and projects were acknowledged across all stakeholders; however, one strategic stakeholder suggested that ChangeUp comprised too many small projects. A national evaluation of ChangeUp was suggested as one approach to measuring the impact of ChangeUp from a national perspective and among the regions.

Despite investment of approximately £80million through ChangeUp, many challenges and uncertainties still face the VCS in meeting the objectives of ChangeUp over the longer term. In the North East, there are a number of important issues and opportunities that ChangeUp must consider. The Review has highlighted the following areas:

Being Inclusive...

Although the consortia have generally functioned well, there is some concern about how representative they are in reflecting the whole of the VCS in their geographical areas – a difficult and on-going task.

The region has a tradition of partnerships working together and ChangeUp in the North East has benefited from such consensus frameworks and partnership settings. However, it was pointed out that although internal networking worked well, there are difficulties in connecting to those outside the circle.

A level of frustration amongst those organisations who have not received funding was also mooted. Being more inclusive and reaching the wider VCS is seen as an important future challenge for ChangeUp.

Aligning with the wider renewal agenda, existing strategic opportunities and organisations...

The Review has highlighted the opportunity for ChangeUp to better integrate with existing and emerging structures. These include, the need to establish or greatly improve ChangeUp's alignment to pan-regional, regional, sub-regional and local strategies with particular reference to the Regional Economic Strategy, the Northern Way and the emergence of City Regions. ChangeUp also needs to strategically align to public sector and strategic bodies including local authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships and ONE. The regional VCS Learning and Skills Co-ordinator initiative is already setting a good example and developing strategic links with the LSC.

Although the five area consortia are fairly broad-based they have not necessarily included potential funders or the more traditional funders of the VCS i.e. the local authorities. It was also suggested that ChangeUp now needs to address how social and community development relate to economic development and how the overall ChangeUp programme and the five consortia relate to the regional (and area) bodies and strategies.

Involving ChangeUp in Local Area Agreements...

Local Area Agreements (LAA) are underway and this will require a greater involvement of VCS organisations in the planning and delivery of services locally. This is perhaps an opportunity for the infrastructural organisations to offer support to those organisation in the VCS who will take part in the Local Area Agreements.

Co-ordination...

Some strategic stakeholders observed that ChangeUp appeared to be very centrally controlled by Government and therefore, it was uncertain what role and influence the North East would command. It was observed that

VONNE played an effective role in supporting the co-ordination of the ChangeUp programme in the North East and that some of the activities had made a big difference in supporting VCS infrastructure.

National ChangeUp Hubs...

Some stakeholders feel that the proposed hubs are a negative outcome as they are too exclusive and propose to replicate services that are already available instead of operating more strategically on a national level e.g. with the Learning and Skills Councils, etc. It is not clear how the hubs will relate to VCS infrastructure organisations (particularly at a local level) and how they will align to Capacity Builders. Concerns were expressed by stakeholders that although the national hubs might be good for national organisations such as NCVO, it is unclear how they will assist local VCS organisations.

Alignment to other infrastructure funding...

One of the main rationale for ChangeUp was to enable the VCS to compete for and succeed in, the procuring of public sector contracts and agreements to deliver public sector services; notably, ChangeUp has not yet revealed other ways of how funding for VCS infrastructure (and indeed, frontline) organisations will continue in the future.

The Northern Rock Foundation has established a Support the Sector Programme and the Big Lottery Fund has also established support for VCS infrastructure organisations. Both organisations also now have in place provision of funding for some social enterprises. There is still some debate over what constitutes an infrastructure organisation as some organisations are almost entirely infrastructural e.g. CVS' in a generalist way and Youth Forums in a specialist way. There is a need for the VCS to properly present itself in order to maximise infrastructure funding opportunities.

Marketing and publicity...

A range of stakeholders stated that publicity and marketing of ChangeUp did not reach a wide enough audience, resulting in a lack of involvement by many organisations both regionally and sub-regionally. Whilst it is acknowledged that marketing and publicity differed from area to area, it is also recognised that various attempts have been made to promote ChangeUp to the wider sector. For example, the Region-wide Consortia has an open membership policy and ChangeUp has been regularly advertised on VONNE's and GO-NE's web-sites. One Voice County Durham also has a

dedicated and informative ChangeUp area on its website. Lastly, some organisations have very successfully used their own newsletters, marketing strategies and events to advertise ChangeUp to many hundreds of VCS organisations. For example, Tees Valley VCS Forum led by infrastructure partners in Tees Valley, 2D in County Durham, Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum and BECON, the regional BME network.

New versus old...

Stakeholders at strategic and project level felt that the ChangeUp programme (particularly in a national context) has not necessarily recognised the good work of existing local and regional infrastructure organisations both specialist and generalist. It is essential that ChangeUp does not create new opportunities for new players at the expense of those VCS organisations, both frontline and infrastructure, who are already successfully providing services or filling a gap. However, it is also important that the VCS positions itself to take advantage of new opportunities and challenges that are emerging, for example, within growth sectors of the economy, such as arts and culture, health, recycling, care, environment and leisure.

Small versus large...

Competition is increasing and size does matter. Are the smaller organisations likely to lose out to bigger and stronger regional and national organisations that have business research, planning and development functions? There are tensions regarding the desire by the VCS to provide a local response to local needs, however, increasingly some funders/markets would prefer to fund larger or fewer organisations. There is also a need for the VCS to acknowledge that national or larger bodies are in some cases moving in. Where this occurs, there is a need to adjust to new circumstances, be flexible and develop relationships that can enable VCS organisations to either compete with, or work as partners with these new big players. Consortia-building or alliance among thematic/specialist but also geographic VCS organisations may provide potential opportunities when addressing this particular challenge.

Services versus income...

The Government, both local and national, needs to recognise that there has to be a balance between the demand for essential products and services versus the need to generate new income streams. Some infrastructure services are unlikely to generate income,

for instance, volunteers or frontline organisations requiring basic training are cases in point i.e. they cannot be expected to pay for such services. Likewise, if limited scope exists for VCS organisations to enter into contracts to deliver their services, it is likely that for many, grant income will remain the most appropriate form of funding.

Specialist versus general...

Concerns were mentioned in that priority of funding bids seemed to go to more holistic or generalist infrastructure organisations and less to those that are specialist in their target audience. There remains a need for ChangeUp to identify with, and respond to the different roles, markets and support needs of specialist infrastructure and generalist infrastructure VCS organisations. It is true to say that it is the same for frontline VCS organisations as well.

New markets...

Being more enterprising and identifying new business opportunities will be an option for some VCS organisations. There are opportunities to market specialist or niche skills, products and know-how within and outside the region. Whilst some VCS organisations may go down this route, it is not an easy option for some and should not be at the expense of the core values and services of individual VCS organisations.

Diversity of VCS...

The VCS is not a uniform sector; each organisation is independent with its own views on how to respond to the needs that it is concerned with. The VCS is made up of a range of different organisations variant in size, activity, structure and values. However, opportunities exist but in an increasingly competitive arena. To maximise opportunities, the VCS will have to be aware of and decide how it presents itself and this is a most difficult challenge and one that must be addressed.

Quick fix solutions don't work...

There are concerns that ChangeUp is a quick fix solution, which despite the long-term goal has no long-term commitment of funding beyond 2008. Funding decisions and direction of Capacity Builders beyond this point are yet to be made. The VCS and ChangeUp should draw on what has worked best and what still needs to be done and actively use this to influence the make up of future ChangeUp funding for the North East and wider VCS.

Some Examples of North East Good Practice

- The North East VCS responded well and quickly to ChangeUp despite the tight timescales imposed. The consortia structures have linked together a diverse range of cross-sector organisations.
- Through the effective operation of the consortia, the region and sub regions now have in place a conduit for policy development of the sector. The consortia have created a recognised mechanism for future engagement by the VCS across funders, other sectors, partnerships, regional and local Government and ONE.
- The region-wide projects are diverse and include the further development of an LGBT Network, the establishment of a Mental Health Consortia, region-wide Faith Sector Support, increasing the voice of the BME sector through PR and a region-wide ICT project, highlighted by one stakeholder as being exemplar.
- The Good Practice Review highlighted evidence of wider penetration of ChangeUp of those not involved in the consortia or bidding process. This is particularly demonstrated via the large numbers of frontline and infrastructure VCS organisations attending major thematic regional, sub-regional and local events.
- Whilst some organisations stated that Change Up funding was available at the time, the majority said that ChangeUp was one of the few sources of funding that allowed the VCS to strengthen their core services. ChangeUp was an opportunity, which for many VCS organisations in the North East, could not be overlooked.
- There was consensus among the majority of case study organisations that ChangeUp is addressing the right issues and funding has been used to improve the infrastructure of the VCS in the North East. Despite many of the concerns that organisations had about ChangeUp in general, it was viewed that ChangeUp was welcomed by most VCS organisations.
- BECON's aim to promote and raise the voice of the BME VCS through its PR project, has resulted in much positive publicity in the media for BME groups as well as a regional BME Network Directory.

- 2D and partners in County Durham have co-ordinated Equality & Diversity Audits among infrastructure organisations across six districts of County Durham to raise awareness of Equality & Diversity issues facing the VCS.
- All participating case study projects had a clear idea of what their ChangeUp initiative was trying to achieve and most had objectives, outcomes and outputs that guided their activities and that they referred to. Apart from delays due to the programme, most initiatives seemed to be achieving what they had set out to achieve and in many cases, more is being achieved.

Lessons Learned and Ways ChangeUp Could be Improved

Understanding the VCS...

The ChangeUp programme has been top down from central Government to GONE and then to the sub-regions. There is an inevitable tension between this centralised approach and the needs around the provision of localised services. The Government may have found dealing with the VCS to be particularly challenging due to the hugely diverse range of organisations varying in size and activity with differing structures and aims.

There is little doubt that the VCS is complex and not easily defined. There was a feeling amongst several case study organisations interviewed that the Government in general and those involved in ChangeUp from a national level down, did not fully understand the sector. An understanding of the VCS must at least take into account the diversity in terms of size, geographical area, specialisms and type of support provided.

Public Service Delivery Procurement...

The Government is recognising that the VCS is not a uniform sector. ChangeUp needs to ensure that it is not simply aiming to impose on the VCS a new way of working that is only concerned with procuring contracts to deliver public services. It needs to be recognised that a large number of VCS organisations may not want to become social enterprises. For those that do, local authorities and local Government must address the inequalities in procurement. One such example was recently highlighted in New Sector (2006) by Peter Gershon who conducted the Governments review of

public sector efficiency. Gershon suggests that there are great disparities between contracts for third sector and commercial bidders:

“The same public sector bodies are perfectly willing to enter into seven or ten year contracts with the private sector for back-office functions are also perfectly willing to drip-feed the voluntary sector on a month to month basis to provide social services”

Timescales...

At the beginning there were a lot of negative views of ChangeUp in the North East (and some still remain) as there was a rush to spend available funding within a short space of time and an emphasis on short-term projects when the development of infrastructure would normally expect to take much longer.

Monitoring and evaluation...

Stakeholders who commented upon monitoring and evaluation felt that there should be less monitoring and reporting, and more sharing of good practice across the region.

The need to gain a better balance between short term experiments and long term initiatives was raised especially in relation to the difficulties in sustaining core income for infrastructure organisations. The need to measure the impact that infrastructure organisations have was also highlighted.

Nationally, the State of the Sector Panel, comprising 3,600 VCS organisations across England, was created in 2003 in order to monitor progress on VCS activity. Particular reference was paid to those VCS organisations providing key public services. The Panel will survey the organisations on a regular basis to monitor progress in increasing VCS activity as set out in Public Service Agreement 8:

“To increase voluntary and community sector activity, including increasing community participation by 5% by 2006.”

However, it is unclear whether resulting data will be used to inform the ChangeUp framework nationally.

Penetration of ChangeUp...

In future programmes more strategic links should be made with a wider range of existing partners involved in the regeneration and renewal agenda in the North East and this provides a good future opportunity for the continuation of ChangeUp in the region. Marketing of

ChangeUp should also be improved; linkages should have been made with other organisations such as the sub-regional partnerships; there should have been a better strategic fit; and, the outputs and outcomes should be evaluated.

In retrospect, GONE thought that ChangeUp could have been linked more specifically to the change in the funding environment and the move away from grant funding and more towards contract agreements. Case study interviews showed however, that a high number of organisations did link ChangeUp to procurement and contract culture.

Conclusion of the Good Practice Review

Over the last three years, the Voluntary and Community Sector in the North East have gathered together (supported by new partners and old) and they have listened very carefully to the Governments ChangeUp agenda in relation to public service delivery and the need to build the capacity of the VCS. The North East ChangeUp Good Practice Review has identified that the VCS organisations on the whole, have responded very well, and very quickly to what ChangeUp has offered so far.

In the North East, ChangeUp has particularly highlighted the Governments' intention that the VCS should play a role in the delivery of public services and Government contracts. Many VCS organisations in the North East have begun to consider that the procuring of public sector services/service agreements can be wholly or partly an option for the VCS in terms of sustainability, but, this is not seen as the way forward or the long-term answer to sustainability for many VCS organisations.

ChangeUp has introduced the procurement option to the North East VCS, perhaps in some areas more than others. One of the Government's intentions is to flex the procurement agenda to enable the VCS to play a role in the delivery of public services. The rationale behind this is not to simply provide an alternative means of funding for the VCS; rather, it provides an opportunity for the public sector to expand its pool of suppliers to gain best value and greater efficiencies and to benefit from local knowledge and specialisms and to meet the Governments goal:

“To achieve a 5% increase in the volume of public services provided through the VCS by 2006.”

The Active Communities Directorate recently established the VCS Partnership and Delivery Unit (VPDU) in order to work with Government departments and public authorities to increase the level of public services delivered by the VCS. The VPDU has the specific remit of ensuring that the Compact covering the relationship between Government and the VCS is effective, valued and mainstreamed. ChangeUp has not yet made good in-roads with the public sector and local Government in the North East, as it is indeed, a very difficult task that can only be achieved over the longer term and if both parties are willing participants. The VPDU is welcomed but it must understand the real difficulties facing it and replace rhetoric with reality, especially at a local level; persuading Government and the public sector that VCS are definite candidates to win public sector contracts will no doubt be a major long-term challenge.

The VCS has demonstrated in the North East, in a meaningful way, that it is thirsty and willing to explore and grasp new opportunities, doing whatever is required of it in order to take advantage of such opportunities. However, procurement and contract culture is very new to many VCS organisations in the North East (and other regions, no doubt) and the Government needs to be realistic in recognising that contract culture will not be a suitable, sustainable route for many VCS organisations.

There is awareness, but less focus, among the North East VCS of one of ChangeUp's original intentions to provide an opportunity for the public sector to be more inclusive, increase voluntary and community sector and public participation and to work more closely with communities. Government at all levels and local authorities must recognise that they can learn from the VCS' vast experience of working with and engaging with communities and including the excluded.

Whilst support for the VCS is always welcome, the sector should remember, and the Government needs to recognise that there are special characteristics of the VCS that will always separate it from other sectors. Firstly, the VCS responds to an identified local need or gap in services – often where the mainstream provision has failed to deliver. The VCS then fills the gap or need, often through other means than the public purse. Secondly, the VCS have traditionally had a lobbyist or pressure group function, often challenging inequality and advocating for communities and/or groups what is believed to be right. Lastly, in line with the Government's civil renewal agenda, working with communities to improve communities is traditionally inherent in the VCS.

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