



The Understanding Charities Group theory of change

What lies behind our initiative

Vision of success (where we want to be)

Our ultimate goal is to secure public support for the charity sector in the long term – be this from people wanting to work or volunteer in the sector, or donors and funders.

The sector currently has high levels of support so this initiative is less about tackling a problem than about taking positive, proactive steps with our future in mind. We have identified ways in which support for the sector could be eroded or reduced if we are too complacent, so this initiative is about being proactive to ensure support for the sector continues to grow in the longer term. We believe we can do more to frame the debate about charity.

The main areas of risk we have identified and feel we could address are as follows:

- some parts of the public have little understanding of the scale and scope and the diversity of the sector, of the value of small and large organisations, of the different types, sizes and models for charitable organisations, nor of why so many charities are needed;
- the general view of charities may be out of date, with a lack of understanding of how modern charities operate and the fact that we are regulated;
- some are suspicious of the amount of money spent on salaries, admin and fundraising, and may not understand who is paid and who isn't, and why paid staff are needed;
- generally there may not be a full appreciation of the significant contribution different charities make;
- charity stories (in the media, on TV) are relatively low profile and, as with other sectors, what makes the news is often polarised – the high profile (eg national fundraising initiatives) or the negative (bad news stories about charities) – therefore not always giving a helpful view of what the sector is really about.

We believe trust could be dissipated and funding and support negatively impacted in the longer-term if we don't support the public to have a better understanding of what we do, how we work, the difference we make, and if we do not improve our ability to respond to information about the sector that is misleading. We believe the sector could do more to address these issues. For instance:

- We could improve the way we tell our stories and create new, more powerful narratives about the sector (stronger narrative);
- we could improve our understanding of how the public engages with and understands charities and what damages and what builds trust and confidence (better evidence) and our understanding of how media coverage could be influenced;
- we could be better at influencing or balancing media activity (more media savvy); and parts of the sector could be more transparent and responsive to public questions and concerns about our work, our governance, and how we use our funds (more engaged).

We want to assure and/or build up stronger and sustainable public support for charities based on increased public trust and confidence in the sector.

We have three target groups for change: the general public; charities themselves; the sector as a whole.

For the public we will have been successful if:

- the public has a better understanding of charities – their diversity, their work, how they operate, their achievements;
- public trust and confidence in charities is increased.

For charities we will have been successful if:

- charities are better able to demonstrate that they are transparent and accountable;
- charities are better able to tell their stories and respond to public questions about their work.

For the sector as a whole we will have been successful if:

- the charity sector is more visible and credible (has a stronger, more up-to-date 'brand');
- the sector is more proactive and in control of the stories told about it, including being better able to respond to questions, criticism and negative press.

Mapping out the journey

How we could achieve our ultimate goal (our story of change)

This should be read alongside our theory of change map.

INCREASED PUBLIC SUPPORT (supporting charity)

Assumption: We believe that to ensure public support people need to appreciate and value the sector and the contribution of charity/charities to life in the UK.

VALUING AND APPRECIATING THE SECTOR (valuing charity)

Assumption: If people appreciate and value our work and contribution they are more likely to continue to support us as donors, champions, volunteers etc.

CONFIDENCE AND TRUST (believing in charity)

Assumption: If people have trust and confidence in charities; if they believe in our integrity, values, and that we are effective and impactful, and do valuable and effective work, then they will value what we do and our contribution to society.

Trust and confidence are closely linked but we see trust as being a belief in the integrity or values of the sector, and confidence as being a belief in our competence. We believe what builds confidence and trust is what the public know and understand about charities based on:

- Direct contact and experience – if people experience charities positively themselves, this is likely to lead to a level of trust and confidence;
- What the mass media says about charities;
- Charities' activities in their broadest sense – what charities do and present themselves as doing.

What charities do and how people experience them is outside the scope of this programme, so our focus is what the media says and what charities say. Our assumption is that there is a risk of confidence and trust being eroded over time because there is a lack clear, accessible information to inform and reassure the public about our work.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Assumption: We believe in order to have trust and confidence, people need to have a good knowledge and understanding of charity. There are four specific areas where we would like to build knowledge and understanding. These are:

What is charity?	Why charity?	What difference does it make?	How do charities work?
The diversity of the sector – the need for large and small, its scale and scope (types of orgs and issues and roles and reach), how charities make things happen	People doing things they care about, the need for charities, non-profit, independent, underpinned by voluntarism, voluntary action, public benefit, place to be to make a difference AND why so many are needed	Better understanding of our contribution, value and impact: the people who benefit, the causes we take forward, the changes we contribute to	Better understanding of how charities work – our governance and regulation, our workforce, our funding, our standards, sector safeguards

Assumption: We believe a lack of good knowledge and understanding is linked to:

- Some not wanting to know – those who are not 'fans' of charity;
- We don't tell strong enough stories – some of this is our fault – we could tell stronger, more consistent stories (use more consistent terms/language) and we could make it easier for people to find out information about charities that would help them understand us and form their views;
- The media doesn't help – lack of generic coverage and a bias towards the extremes, with the sector response to negative stories not always as strong as it might be

So visibility is an issue, as is more accessible information.

VISIBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Assumption: People will be more informed and have greater understanding if we make it easier for them to access accurate information about charities and if there is more and/or more balanced media coverage of charities.

STRONGER STORIES BETTER TOLD

Assumption: We can raise the profile and awareness of charities if we tell our own stories more clearly and consistently (using plain English and more agreed/shared terminology), and we can raise our profile and ensure more balanced coverage if we increase our understanding of and ability to engage with the media.

ABILITY TO SHAPE OUR STORIES

Assumption: In order to tell stronger stories and to influence the stories told by others about us, the sector needs to develop some skills and expertise; to have better access to evidence to support our stories; and to work together on common stories and responses to media and other challenges.

OUR ACTIVITIES

The first stage of our activities will therefore be to:

- Support the development of skills and expertise;
- Improve access to information and evidence about the sector;
- Engage the sector (with an initial focus on champions) to look at media influencing strategies, a shared narrative, and the evidence base for our work.