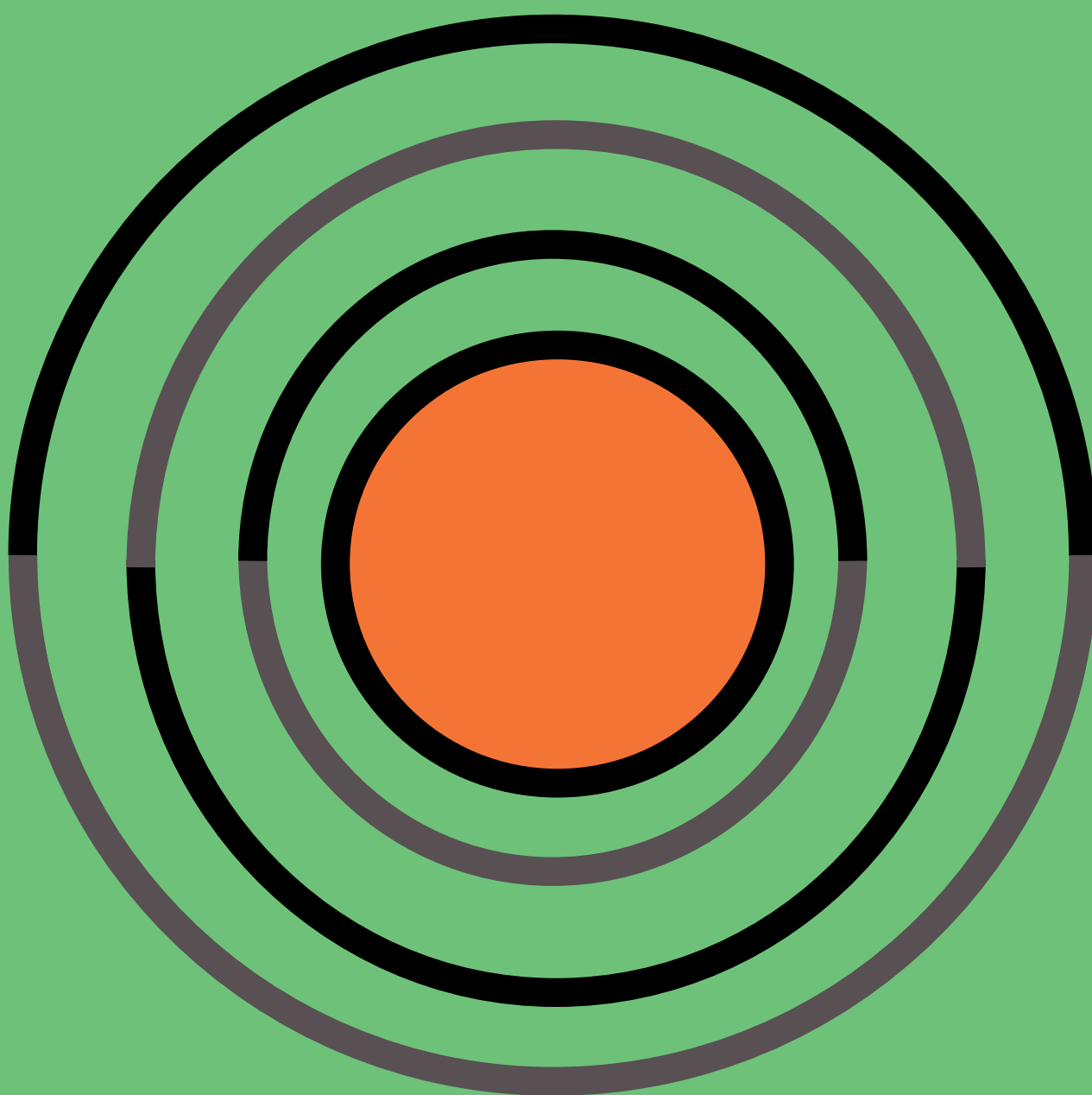# THE LASTING DIFFERENCE

Sustaining nonprofit organisations, leaders & impact

The *Lasting Difference®* guide to

SUSTAINING IMPACT AND CAPACITY

2nd edition

If organisations want to make a lasting difference, shouldn't they invest as much in putting themselves out of business as they do in keeping themselves going?

Contents

Introduction

Since we published the *Lasting Difference®* toolkit in 2016, most of the interest in it has centred on sustaining organisations. Although it also covers sustainable *impact*, it never addressed this quite as fully. We released the first edition of this guide in 2021 to address this—and to help organisations survive during the pandemic.

Since then, charities have faced capacity challenges like never before. This new edition helps to answer the question of how additional capacity can be *created.* This puts the guide alongside our related resources on organisation and system capacity:

- Managing Capacity
- Shine a Light: System sustainability, leadership and capacity

I hope it helps you to make a sustainable impact and builds your capacity and that of the people and systems around you. I'd love to hear what you think:

Graeme Reekie

@wrengreyhound

info@thelastingdifference.com

Background

The Lasting Difference toolkit[1] defines sustainability as the *capacity to make a lasting difference.* It identifies three clear principles that help organisations to make a sustainable impact:

- **Encouraging independence and ownership**
- **Increasing influence and capacity**
- **Generating and sharing learning.**

This guide sets out the practices that follow on from these principles. It presents seven areas (or 'domains') of sustainable impact, where individuals, organisations and communities build their own and other people's capacity.

*The only way to have a sustainable impact
is to ensure things have a life of their own without you.*

The seven domains of sustainable impact and capacity.

Individuals being valuable… but not precious.

People experience the long term benefits of support.

Services support independence, choice & control.

Organisations planning not to be around for ever.

Other organisations being more able to respond and take a lead.

Policy and policy makers respond to evidence.

Communities are better informed, connected and equipped.

[1] Free interactive PDF toolkit from www.TheLastingDifference.com

Before we explore the seven domains in detail, here's a reminder of the key principles from the Lasting Difference toolkit.

The key principles

Encouraging independence and ownership

The best way to make a lasting difference is to make sure that the people (or issues) you support need you less in future. Full independence isn't always possible or desirable. But have you done everything you can to help people strengthen their support networks, take their next steps and increase their independence? Many non-profit organisations talk about hoping to do themselves out of a job by fulfilling their mission. But how close are you to making this rhetoric a reality, and how comfortable are you with it?

Increasing influence and capacity

Two of the biggest risks to sustainability are unchecked growth and mission drift. You need to be focused and responsible enough to accept that some issues or projects are not your core business. Sometimes there are more appropriate organisations to take a project forward. Where there aren't, you still need to think carefully before filling the void.

The main way you can increase your own capacity is to improve other organisations' understanding of, and commitment to, your work, issues or client groups. Improving other services' policy and practice might be an important sustainability goal in its own right. Improving their capacity to address or take ownership of the issues or messages you promote is key to sustaining impact even when your input ceases.

Generating and sharing learning

In recent years, the trend has been for work to be funded or commissioned not just for the activities carried out, or even the outcomes achieved, but for the learning that is generated. How can you contribute to other people's learning about what works?

Even when things end, learning can help to build a bridge to the future. Indeed, sharing and preserving learning are sometimes the only way to ensure a lasting legacy. For example, projects or models that wind up (e.g. due to lack of funding) can be more easily resurrected if key learning has been preserved.

The seven domains: radiating energy, influence and learning

The seven domains

Each of the main ways to sustain impact and capacity are set out below, introduced with some provocations to get you thinking.

The only way to have a sustainable impact is to ensure things have a life of their own without you. This might be called capacity building, legacy, exit strategy or any number of other names. What matters is equipping other people – and the issues you serve – to need you less. The second domain develops this idea further. First of all though, it starts with you.

1. As individuals, being valuable...but not precious

Provocations

How much time do you have?
What's your exit strategy? What would your successor do?
What are you holding onto? What could you let go of?
What could be achieved if you let go of the need to take credit?
Are you part of the problem you are trying to solve?

Work with yourself

Self-awareness, self-reflection and self-care are critical to avoid being self-serving.

Start by being clear on your personal aims and motivations. What difference do you want to make in the world? What drives you? And how do you manage this healthily? The passion that burns in you can create a shadow[1] – for example it can make you protect your role and status instead of serving others. Or it can burn you out altogether.

Recognise when you get overloaded and take action. Slow down, prioritise, seek help. Monitor your levels of energy and commitment. It helps to be very clear on the difference between what *needs to be done* and what *you* need to do. Just because there's a gap to fill or a problem to solve, it doesn't mean it has to be you that does it.

Check your motivations for making decisions. Are they the right decisions for the right reasons? What would someone else decide if they had an objective view on your situation? Or what would you advise someone else in a similar situation to do? Recognise when it's time to move on to a new role, for example planning an individual exit strategy for when you leave your current job or project. Take time for personal and professional development. Like self-care, these are not selfish luxuries, they are altruistic necessities if you are going to be able to help other people.

---

[1] For more on this, see Lasting Leadership 3: Sustaining energy, focus and self care

Work with others

Identify other people's skills and interests and enlist their help. Bring people together. As the proverb goes: if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. Who are your key allies and sources of influence? Fundamentally, you need to be clear on what you have the power to influence and what you might need to share, delegate – or let go of altogether. The icons in this guide look like ripples in a pond, or spheres of influence for a reason.

Put systems and frameworks in place so colleagues are less reliant on you. Remember they can't step in or step up if you don't step out of the way. Develop a succession plan, delegate more actively and invest in time in colleagues' development. Agree goals together and work towards them together, giving appropriate amounts of trust and support.

(For more information, download our free, interactive _Lasting Leadership_ guides.)

This domain is in equal parts about ambition and humility. It means acknowledging but letting go of our individual need to feel valuable. This is easy to say and harder to do. But it's going to be vital as we work through the other six domains, all of which are about sharing, letting go and building other people's capacity.

Learn how to be valuable without being precious.

2. People experience long-term benefits of support

Provocations

What difference do you want to make?
What difference do you really make?
What evidence is there that your way of doing things works?

Outcome-based planning and evaluation have been the norm for most non-profit organisations (and their funders) for at least the last 20 years. But lots of organisations are still unclear about the difference they actually make. This is a problem. If you want to make a _lasting_ difference to the people or issues you support, first you have to make a difference.

First-order outcomes: effectiveness and alleviation (give someone a fish)

Since 2008, I've trained and supported more than 2000 organisations to plan and measure outcomes. Most of these focused on the immediate difference they want to make. This is understandable, as these are the outcomes that can be most easily achieved (and measured), either in a short-term intervention or as the first steps in a longer-term theory of change.

6

First-order outcomes are things like:

- **Increased awareness** (e.g. of issues, topics, support)
- **Improved access** (e.g. to rights, support, information)
- **Improved resources** (e.g. better information, more informed decisions)
- **Improved partnerships** (e.g. more joined-up working with other services)

Person-centred or asset-based approaches might also have appropriate open-ended outcomes like *people being more able to articulate and achieve their own goals*.

First-order outcomes like these are important. And in some cases, they might be all that can be achieved – telephone helplines for instance might only have short, one-off contacts with people, so they need realistic outcomes to reflect that.

But for outcomes to be sustained, something else needs to change. Capacity needs to be built, either in people, organisations or the systems they are part of. We'll think more about organisations and systems in the next five domains. For now, the second order of outcomes relates to increased capacity and longer-term resilience.
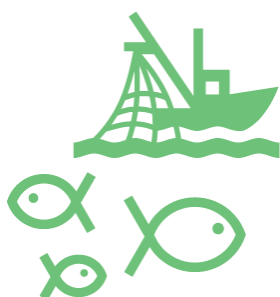
Second-order outcomes: capacity and resilience
(show them how to fish)

First of all, let's be clear that there are some situations in which people or issues will always need support. Some people need lifelong care. Complex, intractable issues like inequality and climate change won't solve themselves.

We should also be clear that nothing in the known universe is self-sustaining. Nevertheless, there's usually something we can do (and ethically, there's often something we must do) to ensure our impact is sustained after our input comes to an end. Things like people…

- Having increased **resilience,** problem-solving skills and resources for life (e.g. self-management skills, self-advocacy).
- Having increased **independence** (with or without ongoing support).
- Being better **connected** (e.g. with supportive peers or community life).
- Having the **skills** and motivation to help others (e.g. youth services are often sustained by former participants coming back as volunteers).
- Having increased **ownership** of an issue (e.g. a conservation charity can only install and monitor so many bat boxes, but it can equip networks of supporters to help).

Second-order outcomes have a multiplier effect. They build people's capacity to help themselves and others. For example:
- Helping families to develop parenting skills improves children's lives
- Training volunteer trainers improves community capacity
- Developing peer researchers and community activism increases agency.

Prevention

Second-order outcomes help to prevent future problems – indeed, prevention is an important second-order outcome. A question that's common in community development is whether it is better to pull drowning people out of a river (a first-order intervention, alleviating an immediate need) or to go upstream and build a better bridge (a second-order intervention, preventing future needs from arising).

Very importantly, upstream second-order outcomes are about improving the capacity of services, organisations and systems. We'll explore these domains later.

Second order outcomes and funding

Capacity building and prevention haven't traditionally been looked on favourably by funders, who typically prioritised direct, first-order interventions that can be delivered and measured within short-term funding periods. But the challenges we face in society are ever more complex and the resources we have to address them are ever scarcer.

Second-order outcomes are the only way to achieve sustainable impact with sustainable resources.

Second-order outcomes are about ensuring things have a life after you leave. As the old saying goes, give someone a fish and you feed them for a day; show them how to fish and you feed them for life.

Note on measurement

Many organisations find it hard to measure outcomes, sometimes for good reason. The most important outcomes are often intangible: 'soft' but vital things like wellbeing, confidence, employability, inclusion. Measuring them is tricky because cause and effect are unclear, or proxy indicators break the outcome down into manageable (measurable) pieces of the mosaic, but don't give a complete picture. Lots of resources are available on making sense of evaluation, including measuring prevention and capacity building (for example at www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk). There's no reason to let measurement get in the way of achievement.

Remember the first domain of sustainable impact too: being valuable without being precious. What could you achieve if you let go of the need to take credit or claim attribution?

3. Services support independence, choice and control

Do your services have an open door – or a revolving door?
What would you rather sustain: your service – or its impact?
Where is the power and where does it need to be?
How easy is it for people give something back to your service if they want to?

The third domain will be most relevant to organisations that work directly with people. However, other organisations will still find it useful to think about what it means for how they engage their stakeholders.

Support independence, choice and control

This domain is about how your services contribute to second-order outcomes like increased resilience, capacity and independence. These outcomes will mean different things to different people, so a person-centred approach is important e.g.

- **Promoting self-management skills,** self-advocacy and self-efficacy.
- **Giving people ownership of their support plans**, outcomes, progress reviews and evaluation methods.
- **Supporting informed decision making**, regardless of choice or outcome.
- **Signposting and introducing** people to other support where appropriate.
- **Introducing other services** to the people or issues you support (see the fifth domain).
- **Making informal networks** and peer support groups available.

Measures of the success of these approaches include:

- The number of people moving through services or onto other support (remembering that this won't always be possible for everyone).
- The rate at which people progress: e.g. average length of time spent in a service.
- The extent to which there are bottlenecks and waiting lists. This might be caused by the absence of successful outcomes, progress reviews that might identify them, or the availability of other appropriate support (the fifth domain).
- The number of successful referrals to other sources of support.
- The number of people returning for support (leave the door open for people to return if transitions don't work out, but be careful about creating revolving doors where people grow dependent).
- The number of requests people make for information or support – these might go up as people become more confident in their rights and choices, or down as they start to become more independent.

The Lasting Difference® guide to sustainable impact and capacity

Most service delivery organisations would like to think of themselves as being person-centred. In reality, person-centredness will depend on how much choice is really available to people and how much they have to fit into pre-determined models and approaches. Any service can only offer a limited range of support, choice and control. If you really want to promote independence, it is important to acknowledge and review these limits.

Focus

Many of the limits mentioned above will stem from an organisation's focus. It's vital to be fundamentally clear on who you want to reach with your work, e.g. numbers, demographics and location. Failure to do this increases the risk of mission drift, as there will always be unmet need and always more that could be done. Does your organisation know how much is enough?

Be clear on what your service can do most effectively, which means being equally clear about what it can't. Keep up to date about other sources of support. If you believe your service is the only one that really understands people, or that other services just wouldn't look after them as well, you're on the slippery slope of creating dependence. The absence of alternatives is not a good rationale for doing things which are not your expertise or your main area of focus.

Involve and adapt

Sustainable organisations identify the needs and aspirations of their stakeholders and the people they work with – *and adapt their services in response to these.* This could be anything on a spectrum from adapting an approach to suit an individual client, to service-user involvement initiatives, to complete organisational re-orientation. Whatever approach is taken, don't assume you know the types and levels of involvement people want. A range of approaches and opportunities will be needed, otherwise participation will not be fair or representative. Building people's capacity, interest, skills and confidence as valued contributors is what really counts. Don't expect, for example, people to be ready to step straight onto a board before they've had some experience on other committees. Equally, don't assume the board will be ready or willing to engage newcomers as equals. Boards often need training or support in increasing their diversity or including people who are experts by experience.

Address power imbalance and structural inequality

One of our clients describes *'moving away from being do-gooders trying to fix people'.* This neatly sums up the power imbalance in the way that services are traditionally designed. Alternative service models are attractive and easy to agree with in principle, but they represent a fundamental challenge to the status quo in organisational and funding systems. Look at the way 'person-centred' and 'co-production' began as radical, challenging alternatives to the status quo, But instead of transforming it, they became co-opted and watered down. The other power imbalance that must be acknowledged and addressed is that the inequalities that exist in society are also found in organisations. Non-profits that support social justice are far from immune. For more information on leadership as an equalities issue, download Lasting Leadership 4.

4. Organisations planning not to be around forever

Provocations

Why was your organisation set up?
Why does it still exist?
How long does it plan to be around?
What would happen if it focused on nothing else but achieving its mission?

Putting yourself out of a job?

Burning with revolutionary zeal, the Manic Street Preachers punkishly promised to split up after their debut album in 1992. They're still going, grey beards, acoustic guitars. Burning with the same zeal, many non-profits talk about doing themselves out of a job, but how many make this rhetoric a reality? How many projects (by definition, short term pieces of work) have an exit strategy? I was once involved in creating a charity's 10-year strategy, after which it aimed to wind up. The issue would be mainstreamed in other organisations' practice (the fifth domain), communities would be empowered to take action (the seventh). Job done. Until, 10 years later. Guess what, the next strategy came out.

We should have mixed feelings when charities celebrate a milestone anniversary. In some ways, it's a great achievement: survival is hard and we need healthy charities for a healthy society. But if the charity is still around then so are the issues it was set up to tackle, which is no cause for celebration.

Of course, lots of charities have wound up in recent years, though the question of survival was generally taken out of their hands, usually by the withdrawal of funding or support. Rarer for an organisation to choose the time and manner of its own exit. The pandemic led to several exceptions to this, with more charities or projects winding up early and funders publishing exit strategies or taking a 'spend-down' approach[2] (spending all their money until it's gone). This might seem scary at first. **But if organisations are interested in sustainable capacity and impact, shouldn't they invest as much attention in putting themselves out of business as they do in keeping themselves going?**

Single focused goals

What would happen if your organisation focused on nothing else but achieving its mission? Would it still do the things it does, in the same ways? Would it use its resources differently?

Is this a strange question? Or is it possible you spend time every day in activities that only contribute vaguely to your mission, if at all? Your mission, vision or aims are the reasons your organisation exists. You spent time developing and defining them. Which is only worth it if you use them every day to make decisions, manage capacity and stay focused. Having set goals, organisations usually then get on with… their 'real' jobs. And the more time they spend doing that, the less they have left to put into their actual mission.

[2] *Charity on a deadline: Why more philanthropists are spending themselves out of existence,* Albrecht, L.

Your organisation won't be around forever and you need to start planning and operating on that basis. Not because its demise is imminent (though it may be), but because it doesn't have an inbuilt right to exist. Its only purpose is to pursue and achieve its aims, not to keep itself going.

One of the foundations of having a more sustainable operating model is to align your organisation's work with its mission as closely as possible. This will help ensure it makes the best use of limited capacity and resources, avoid mission drift – and make a sustainable impact. It will ensure that if you face sustainability challenges it will be because you chose your own path rather than losing your way. As I heard one CEO put it,

'If we're going down in flames, we'd better make sure they're at least our *flames!'*

Strategy: mission invisible?

Strategic decisions are as much about what you won't do as what you will.

They often mean letting go of things: for example old habits and beliefs; attractive but distracting opportunities; the need to be all things to all people.

Do some simple analysis of how your time is spent, where your money comes from and where it goes. Whatever your strategic plan might say, your true strategy will be reflected in these results. Every time I do this, with clients or every year for my own company, the results are always revealing.

Review your commitments and resources. Do they reflect what's needed now, or situations, communities and opportunities from the past? Strategic decisions will be needed, for example to invest or disinvest in different activities, knowledge and resources to reflect changes in need or demand. For example, organisations reviewed their investments in the light of Covid–19. Should office space be reduced and savings be spent on home office equipment? Should budgets for travel and events be reinvested in IT and training?

The opposite of 'more' is not 'less'…it's better.
Seth Godin

One of the most common traps for any organisation is to assume that it must maintain the same levels of revenue in future as it has just now. Often this is understandably about CEOs feeling the very real responsibility to keep people in jobs. But other motivations also creep in, like pride, competitiveness or just the belief that it is natural, desirable and sustainable for organisations grow. It's not. There are natural limits to the growth of any organism or organisation. These may be internal or external (see below).

Internal limits to organisational growth are things like capacity, time and knowledge. But those are all consequences of something much more important: what you choose to focus on. When we have single focused goals, limits to growth aren't barriers to be broken down, but exciting enablers of something new. As Seth Godin says, 'The opposite of "more" is not "less." If we care enough, the opposite of more is better.' Taking this advice, in 2019 my company took the decision to grow by getting smaller, going from having seven staff and associates doing more work, to having a core team of three doing better, more focused work.

External limits to survival and growth come from the resources available in the environment. For example, charities sometimes campaign vocally about funding being reduced (usually it's described as being 'slashed' or 'cut'). They are passionate about their work and want it to continue. And they may well be justified in thinking that they are being treated unjustly. But it's also worth considering – have they reached a natural limit on their growth? Does the environment need an organisation of that type and size? And even if it does, can it sustain it with the resources available?

As Stephen Covey said, 'The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.' Keep your focus on the mission and use that to guide your choices.

No matter how big it seems, your mission is only impossible if it's invisible.

'The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.'
Stephen Covey

5. Other organisations are more able to respond and take a lead

Provocations

If your aims are achieved, does it matter who achieves them?
Are there parts of your work you could equip other people to do?
If it's not your job to educate other services, whose is it?

Partnership and ownership are fundamental to lasting capacity and impact, just as they are to organisational sustainability. Collaboration helps harness resources – and use them more efficiently – to achieve things you couldn't do alone. It equips other people to contribute to your aims and brings you together with a common purpose.

Sustainable organisations see themselves as part of a healthy ecosystem. They are open to their external environments, not shut off from them (there's a lot more about this in my book, *Making a Lasting Difference*). They share their ideas and resources because they know that this:

- Helps promulgate their ideas and further their aims
- Improves practice in other organisations
- Builds sector capacity
- Improves partnership responses

Let's look at each of these in turn.

Promulgating ideas and furthering aims

Organisations often talk about competition for funding and limited resources. But just as often they overlook competition for discourse: setting the agenda and getting the attention you believe your cause deserves. Your organisation's time, resources and expertise are all in short supply. It makes sense to get your ideas out there as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Often this means letting go of them, equipping other people with messages and resources they can use in their own work or in their own ways. In their influential book New Power, Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms (founder of #GivingTuesday) point out that the most effective ideas are communicated in ways that are:

Actionable – people can do something with them, including sharing.

Connected – enlisting willing networks of people to spread ideas.

Extensible – encouraging people to shape the idea in their own way.

Not only do these strategies spread your message, they give you access to knowledge, expertise and effort that would otherwise be out of your reach – and budget.

For everyone who has ever asked why our flagship Lasting Difference and Lasting Leadership toolkits are free, using a Creative Commons licence that allows remixing, there's your answer. We want you to share our definitions and resources with everyone who needs them! There's a clear business case for us: thousands of users get everything they need from the guides. This makes us very happy because we achieve our single focused goal without using up our capacity. At the same time, lots of users follow up and enlist our services. This makes us very busy and affects our capacity, but we can take people further, faster, with the foundation the toolkits give them.

Promulgating your ideas in this way isn't risk-free if organisational sustainability is your concern. For instance, environmental charities and campaign groups have done such a good job of mainstreaming environmental issues that everyone thinks they understand them, and most organisations do something about them. Some environmental charities now find themselves having to focus on specialist or niche subjects, or struggling to get public engagement or funding. Every house has a recycling bin these days, for example, but messages about 'reduce and reuse' haven't been mainstreamed in the same way. This takes us back to the fourth domain: if your organisation is successful, will it still be needed, and if so, what will its purpose be?

Improving practice

Sharing your ideas will help to improve practice in the sector or world around you (assuming they're good ideas!). Any charity that works with people should be particularly interested in this, as it will give the people they support better access to a wider range of appropriate services. Yet how many organisations hang onto people, or ideas, in the paternalistic belief that 'no-one else cares for them like we do'?

Sharing ideas and ownership of an issue helps you to ensure the voice of the people or causes you support gets heard. If you have done your work in the previous domains, you'll have good evidence of what's needed in your field, e.g. new needs that are emerging, or what people want. This is valuable evidence that can be used to inform other organisations and improve practice. (The sixth domain is about using this to influence policy). Sharing it boosts your organisation's credibility as a go-to partner whose expertise is sought.

Again this can be a mixed blessing for organisational sustainability – it helps your profile but can affect capacity. As the Chief Executive of an equalities organisation recently put it to me:

*'A few years ago we were banging on closed doors.
Now everyone's knocking on ours, and we can't say yes to them all.'*

Building sector capacity

The steps above help to build other organisations' capacity and sustainability: their knowledge, their connections and the resources available to them. For some organisations, like membership charities or infrastructure bodies, this is their core purpose. For others, it's a good answer to the universal funding question 'How will you sustain this work when the funding stops?' – you'll build other people's ability to take it forward. This helps sustainability by reducing reliance on you, maximising your limited capacity and resources, and increasing the number and diversity of organisations supporting your cause or furthering your messages.

A reminder about competition for resources and discourse is useful here. In a well-used business school example, when car manufacturers first wanted to develop people carriers, they shared the research and development costs. They created a common chassis that they could all build their vehicles upon: there's a reason why people carriers all look the same! Then they worked together to create a market for the cars. Only then did they compete for a share of the market based on differences in the cars' appearance and interior. Examples of this approach (sometimes called co-opetition) are not unusual in the non-profit world, with alliances working together to raise awareness of an issue, which each partner might then provide a different approach to.

Improving partnership responses

Every organisation's capacity, reach and resources are limited. Sustainable organisations know that the best people don't all work for them. The fifth domain of sustainable capacity and impact is about enabling and improving partnership responses, harnessing resources and focusing them on a common goal. (Find out more in our Guide to System Capacity and Leadership.)

6. Policy and policy makers respond to evidence

Provocations

Where did the policies (and funding) you are working to today come from?
What do you do with the privileged access to information that you have?
Do you focus on equipping the voice to speak – or helping the ears to hear?

Be proactive

There are lots of ways to be proactive about policy, even if you are not directly involved with it or funded to do it. You might start by scanning the policy environment to identify developments in your field: what strategies exist and what is being talked about as the next big idea? What priorities are emerging, locally or nationally? This doesn't have to be a formal activity; it might just be informal (but proactive) networking and intelligence gathering.

You can also be proactive in developing policy, not waiting for others to take the lead. This could take different forms, including devising your own organisational strategies and policies in response to (or anticipation of) changes in the environment. Each organisation will have its own approach to this, but if you wait for other people to develop their strategies before devising your own, you are probably selling your independence and autonomy too cheaply. (I once resigned from the board of a local charity because it wouldn't create its strategic plan until it had seen the local authority's own plans, 'to find out what they want us to do.') You can also gather evidence and develop your own policy asks, in readiness to inform political manifestos, government consultations, calls for evidence etc.

Doing these things will ensure you are knowledgeable about the sector and are well connected within it. Being a source of knowledge, which others draw upon, is a good way to build your own organisation's sustainability. They won't always credit you, but that's okay because, like the first domain says, you're valuable not precious, right?!

Understand what you are trying to achieve

When we look up and out of our organisations towards the wider policy environment, it's easy to lose focus. It's common to see organisations thinking that if they could only influence local or national policy, the world would be a better place. It helps to break this theory down into more manageable steps (the ones below are adapted from some insightful work done by Carnegie UK Trust a number of years ago). This will make your policy engagement more focused but also more measurable. Start by identifying whether you need to focus on advocacy, policy change, or social change.

- **Advocacy change** is about increasing awareness, understanding and support of an issue. Indicators include things like the number and range of politicians attending your events; the number of times your evidence and asks are raised in committees; the extent to which manifestos reflect your messages.

- **Policy change** focuses on influencing local or national policies, in the hope that this will create the conditions for wider change. Indicators could include contributing evidence to formal consultations; sitting on policy working groups and having your messages and evidence included in policies.

- **Social change** might rely on advocacy or policy change, but it's certainly not automatic, as many a frustrated policy maker will tell you! As a long-term, high-level goal, it's unlikely that you'll be unable to achieve social change on your own – or measure your contribution to it in any meaningful way.

It's easy to confuse or conflate these three stages. Remember that although social change will probably be the end goal, you might be more effective if you channel your limited energies into one of the other two changes first.

Use credible evidence based on real experience

Whatever your organisation's role, you have privileged access to information that no one else has. This can provide valuable evidence for informing policy and ensuring a lasting legacy from your work. For example, you might have access to the views and experiences of people who themselves may be unable to change the system, but who you can work with to change things. Or you might work with policy – and decision-makers (civil servants, politicians, funders) who need help accessing and interpreting good quality information. Either way, it's much more common to find charities that work on equipping the voice to speak than it is on helping the ears to hear. Both are needed.

This is where it is vital to value your consultations and evaluations and use the evidence you gather to influence local and national policies and practices. Many organisations treat evidence gathering as a necessary evil. They do it because funders require them to, even though they think it's a burden on them or the people they work with. Others see involvement and evaluation as a way to empower people, giving a voice to their experience and using it to influence things for the better. Think about it: where did the policies (and funding) you are working to today come from?

Using evidence in this way creates positive engagement from both the people giving and those receiving your evidence. Politicians and civil servants tend to know the familiar problems – they hear about those from every other charity. What they get much less of, and therefore need from you, are answers, ideas, models, evidence, examples and proof: compelling reasons to shift from the comfortably familiar status quo. Doors open when you have positive contributions.

For example, the *Carers' Collaborative* produced evidence-based reports and practical recommendations in the early days of health and social care integration. This led to a parliamentary committee seeing their report and taking evidence on it. Senior civil servants and ministers not only came to the carers' meetings when asked but started *asking* for the opportunity to do so.

Develop good links with policy, directly or indirectly

You might not have direct links to policy (this is easier in some countries than others). But you can take part in relevant local and national fora to learn about and influence policy. You can receive policy updates from membership or intermediary organisations (including funders) and work with or through them to exert an influence you might not be able to have on your own. You can raise your profile so the voices you represent get heard. Or, because your capacity and resources are limited, work with partners to raise the profile of your shared issues and interests.

Even if you are already successful in this area you might need to raise awareness across different areas of policy. Successful implementation will probably rely on it. For example, environmental policy needs transport, housing and economic development agendas to be aligned; social care needs education, housing and health. What can you do to ensure your messages and asks are recognised across all relevant areas of policy?

Show your contribution

Identify which national and local strategies you contribute to. Refer to these in your own strategies. Where you can't align because policies don't match your views, work to change them. For example, I worked in a community development mental health organisation at the same time as national policy became recovery-focused. At first, I couldn't understand why my organisation didn't align itself to the language and concepts of recovery. But recovery wasn't on our service users' agenda and our job was to make sure policy makers were informed about the things that were.

Still, it is likely that you are contributing to commissioners' and policy makers' agendas, and it is vital that they know that. Find out what they are and show how you are contributing. It's common, for example, for voluntary sector organisations to be well-respected by public sector referrers. But if that referrer's boss's boss doesn't know you exist, your work and its impact will not be sustainable.

- Would they notice if you weren't there?
- What costs do you save them?
- What could they not achieve without you?

7. Communities being better informed, connected and equipped:

Provocations

Are the people and issues you support visible and involved in community life?
Do awareness raising campaigns have to be done by you alone?
What does prevention look like?

The six previous domains come together here: the focus is not on services but on communities taking ownership of issues affecting them. There's a multiplier effect when you unleash the goodwill, skills and resources they have. Whether geographical communities, or communities of interest, lasting impact is people-powered!

When things are taken on by communities, that's when change happens. The pandemic provides many obvious illustrations of this. The role that footballer Marcus Rashford played in galvanising people into action on food poverty changed public awareness and the direction of government policy. Similarly, rainbows went viral as a symbol of hope against the virus after one family, and then millions around the world, drew one in their window. Neighbours looked after each other, giving small acts of kindness, collecting prescriptions for older people, or shopping for those sheltering at home. Innumerable hours and types of voluntary work were given to campaigns that belonged to everyone.

Raise awareness and understanding

Action starts with awareness. To make a lasting impact, provide information that resonates and makes sense to people – and that they can do something with. The issues that non-profit organisations support are often complex. This gets in the way of clear communication. People don't need to understand all the nuances to care, or to take simple actions. So give clear information – and make it clear why people should care. To do this, you might need to listen first – what matters to people? What are the things that bother them? What changes would they like to see?

Some issues won't be easy to talk about. Part of your job might be to make it okay to talk about those difficult things, raising the profile of the issue and raising awareness of how people are affected by it. For example, a charity supporting survivors of childhood abuse discovered that its leaflets were being removed from display in a public information centre because 'this kind of thing doesn't happen here.' The charity needed the community to understand that sadly this kind of thing did happen, and that victims felt marginalised and stigmatised by the lack of information, acknowledgement and support available.

I used to train professionals in mental health first aid. Everyone who attended had experience of mental ill health, either personally or in someone close to them. But it wasn't spoken about – it was a secret, or best left to the experts. So it remained a hidden problem. By demystifying it, showing people that it is a universal experience, training helped course participants to destigmatise it. All they needed was permission to talk about something they cared about, a little reassurance and good information. The buzz generated when people understood these simple things was always amazing. What can you do to promote public discussion and understanding of the topics you support? How knowledgeable are communities about the impact of issues on them and other people?

Make connections, provide resources, support action

If issues and action belong to communities, organisations become facilitators not service providers. They bring people together to identify issues and find common ground. They provide opportunities and spaces to meet. They are gracious hosts, making their resources, expertise and address books available, offering service not (just) services.

Bring technical experts together with people who are experts by experience. Teach people skills, give them resources, education and support. How are decisions made locally? What resources are available and where do they come from? How is policy made and influenced? Learn from people about what they want and what stops them getting it. Think about whether your time is better spent giving a voice to this or equipping those with power to hear it (see the sixth domain) – or both.

Communities might be dispersed. And lots of people will not be able or interested in taking part in group activities. How can people get involved remotely? What can be done remotely to create a community of interest? The digital divide means a necessary first step might be to provide information and resources to help online participation.

Awareness
Interest
Decision
Action

Sing Aida!

There's a simple acronym that sums up the two sections above: AIDA: Awareness, Interest, Decision, Action. Look at your organisation's publicity and promotions. It's likely that most of them are targeted at raising awareness of and generating interest in your work: a good foundation. However what you really want is action, and before you get that, people need to make a decision to commit to it.

To get to decision and action usually needs higher-bandwidth communication: getting face to face with people, showing films, hearing case studies, reading testimonials and so on. Show people why they should care - and act. The mistake lots of organisations make is to assume that it's self-evident that their work is a good thing. So they forget to make a clear ask. What do you want people to do with the awareness and interest you have generated? It might be obvious to you, but don't assume it's obvious to others. Develop clear and straightforward 'calls to action' so people understand what they can do to help. Spell it out and make it easy to act.

Build capacity

The other six domains all show the importance of involving others in your work. That's especially important if you want to increase your reach. Find other organisations with similar goals to share campaigns with, amplifying your voice, spreading the load and reducing the cost of awareness raising and promotion, like the car manufacturers in the fifth domain. Whose support can you enlist?

Provide information or campaign packs, with templates that people can use or customise to get your message across. Leave space for people to tailor things for themselves. For example, Befriending Networks use the hashtag '#BefriendingIs…' to encourage people and organisations to share their own stories of the impact of befriending. During Befriending Week, the organisation provides a pack of customisable resources, making it easy for supporters to create their own professional-level materials.

Identify champions, people who can be ambassadors for your message. They don't have to be famous or high-profile – in fact, the more diverse and relatable they are they better your chances of engaging people. Give them the information and support they need to share their own experiences or your messages.

Most non-profits rely on word-of-mouth marketing for referrals, fundraising and campaigns. But how many actively support and resource it?

At a glance: the seven domains of sustainable capacity and impact:

1. Individuals being valuable…but not precious.

2. People experience the long-term benefits of support.

3. Services support independence, choice and control.

4. Organisations plan not to be around forever.

5. Other organisations are more able to respond and take a lead.

6. Policy and policy makers respond to evidence.

7. Communities are better informed, connected and equipped.

References and reading

Resources

Free downloads from www.TheLastingDifference.com:

- **The Lasting Difference**: *tools for organisational sustainability*
- **Lasting Leadership**: *succession, empowerment, equality*

Books

Making a Lasting Difference: sustaining nonprofit organisations and their impact, Reekie, G. (available from https://flyingunderground.co.uk/shop)

New Power, Heimans, J. and Timms , H.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Covey, S.R.

Articles

Charity on a deadline: Why more philanthropists are spending themselves out of existence Leslie Albrecht https://www.marketwatch.com/story/charity-on-a-deadline-why-more-philanthropists-are-spending-themselves-out-of-existence-11601997107? Accessed Jan 2021

For more examples of exit strategies, see also:
- Life Changes Trust decision to close a year ahead of its originally-planned winding-up date.
- HIV Scotland's decision to create an end point and publish an 11 year strategy.

Creating Value through Relationships: in conversation with Professor Martin Christopher https://youtu.be/ml0cM0Fl_T4

'The opposite of "more". It's not "less." If we care enough, the opposite of more is better.' from Seth Godin's blog: https://seths.blog/2017/02/the-opposite-of-more/. Accessed Jan 2021.

Websites (with thanks to the following for permission to reference their work)

Befriending Networks and Befriending Week https://www.befriending.co.uk/

Carer Collaborative, c/o Coalition of Carers in Scotland https://www.carersnet.org/

Carnegie UK Trust https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/

Evaluation Support Scotland https://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/

The Lasting Difference www.thelastingdifference.com

THE LASTING DIFFERENCE

Sustaining nonprofit organisations, leaders & impact

We are the creative management consultancy behind the popular suite of Lasting Difference resources. We provide a range of services to charities, social enterprises and public bodies, including:

Workshops, e-learning, conferences and consultancy, sustaining organisations with effective strategies for:

- Involvement
- Income generation
- Impact measurement
- Innovation and improvement.

The Lasting Difference® toolkit

Used by over 7000 organisations worldwide since 2016, the go-to guide to sustaining non-profit organisations is now in its 5th edition.

Available as a free, interactive PDF from **www.TheLastingDifference.com**

Making a Lasting Difference book:

Sustaining non-profit organisations and their impact. We wrote the book on non-profit sustainability!

Available from **www.FlyingUnderground.co.uk/shop**

Lasting Leadership® Guides

Sustaining leadership capacity through succession planning, lateral leadership, equalities and attracting the next generation of leaders.

Available as free interactive PDFs from **www.TheLastingDifference.com**

Advance Retreats®

Calm, engaging facilitation and away days for non-profit boards, leaders and teams.

Contact :

info@thelastingdifference.com
www.TheLastingDifference.com
@TheLastingD

(+44) 01506 23 95 95

Wren and Greyhound
Create it • Plan it • Measure it • Sustain it