

What is a CVS?

Over the last 100 years a network has developed of organisations which describe themselves as Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS or an equivalent name). The first CVS was founded at the end of the 19th Century. Its aim was to co-ordinate voluntary effort and promote new organisations to fill gaps in local services.

In 1945 individual CVS linked up to form a Standing Conference, serviced by what is now the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS) was established as an independent body in 1991 and now has a membership of over 260 CVS in England. There are specialist networks within the membership to enable CVS with specific needs and interests to link together effectively to share information and good practice.

The benefits of CVS

Every area involves a variety of voluntary action without which many activities and services would not exist. Over the years, CVS has been established in order to:

Co-ordinate this voluntary action

- Promote the establishment of new organisations to fill gaps in local services and meet new friends
- Provide services to support the local voluntary and community sector
- Act as an advocate for, and enable representation by the sector
- Act as a strategic partner for the sector
- Develop an infrastructure in order to give the voluntary sector stability, support, visibility and status

The design and development of a CVS

The value of a CVS is its ability to meet local need. Its design and development reflect this. On establishment, a CVS needs to have a clear structure and be of a certain size to support its core functions. Some CVS have existed for many years and have seen many changes both in growth and structure in response to local need. A CVS normally covers the same area as local authority in order to perform its functions effectively.

A CVS needs to provide local benefits and be able to remain responsive and proactive. This means both establishing accessible office bases from which to work with paid staff and volunteers, and having a working style which encourages participation.

Core functions of a CVS

1. Development
2. Liaison
3. Enabling representation
4. Services
5. Strategic partnership
6. Accountability

A CVS has many stakeholders predominant among which are its members. Others include staff, funders, users of local voluntary services, local authorities and other public agencies which have a relationship with the local voluntary sector. However, a CVS is mainly responsible to its membership of voluntary and community groups and it is therefore important that its independence and integrity is clear to other stakeholders.

Every CVS has a constitution which details the minimum requirements for accounting of these stakeholders, and which reflects the status of the CVS either as:

- A registered charity
- A charitable company limited by guarantee

Further Help

Southend Association of Voluntary Services

Telephone 01702 356000 or www.savs-southend.org