INSPIRING IMPACT

The Code of Good Impact Practice Consultation

Response to the Voluntary and Community Sector

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Introduction

Between 19th February and 5th April, NCVO – on behalf of the Inspiring Impact programme – released a draft version of The Code of Good Impact Practice for further public consultation. This draft had been the subject of several weeks of consultation with a working group of representatives from across the sector and the Code was published for wider consultation in order to ensure that the final version will be as useful and relevant as possible for all non-profit organisations.

The consultation was publicised widely via the Inspiring Impact partner networks and through the sector press. As a result the consultation received a good level of engagement, with approximately 130 responses being captured via a combination of individual and group survey submissions, which were submitted on behalf of charities, social enterprises, community groups, infrastructure bodies, public sector bodies, charitable trusts, and monitoring and evaluation specialists.

This consultation response highlights the key themes that emerged and clearly identifies how, following further consultation with the Code working group, certain suggestions have been incorporated to improve the Code. Where suggestions have not led to changes is also explained.

This paper reflects the main themes that emerged out of the many different comments and suggestions offered by respondents but, inevitably, it can't include every different view. However, we are confident that the majority view is captured here and that, ultimately, the final version of the Code will be a stronger and more useful document as a result of all the constructive ideas and challenges offered by our colleagues from across the sector.

What was said and what we did

General	Overall respondents felt positive about the core elements of the Code: the impact practice cycle and the 8 principles of good impact practice. Some felt that the Cycle of Impact Practice is particularly helpful and that the document should be structured around this, rather than the principles, whilst others found the cycle useful but potentially misleading if taken too literally as a straight-through four-step process. There was broad consensus that the Cycle and Principles are both helpful, however, and all of the principles were considered to be important and relevant to varying degrees by respondents, with 'Be willing to change and act on what you find' and 'Focus on purpose' considered to be of particular significance. The majority also found the Principles underpinning the Code to be the right ones, with only a few suggesting additional Principles (although there was no particular pattern within these suggestions). Equally, the tone of the Code was well received, with the majority of respondents finding the levels of challenge and detail to be right for a Code providing guidelines for all kinds of non-profit organisations. Respondents working in frontline charities were particularly comfortable with the tone, whilst several respondents from a monitoring and evaluation background would have liked more technical detail included. Regardless of background, the vast majority of respondents stated that they could imagine using the Code in future when considering their impact practice, in particular as the basis for discussions about impact with stakeholders and to help generate ideas for focusing on their own impact practice. To this end, there is a desire to see more practical examples that support the Code and help bring it to life.
Response	The Code is designed to provide broad guidelines that can help all kinds of voluntary organisation to focus on good impact practice. The feedback we received suggests that, on balance, the Code achieves this aim, although in order to do so it has to occupy a middle ground that satisfies the majority. This means there is a danger that very small voluntary organisations may find the implications of the Code daunting whilst for others, such as monitoring and evaluation experts, elements of the Code may appear over simplified. The breadth of the Code means it's deliberately non-prescriptive and as such it resists the temptation to specify certain tools or approaches for fulfilling the Principles. Inspiring Impact as a programme does generally recognise the need for more practical examples and guidance, though, and once the Code has been in use we will seek to develop examples to show how different organisations have realised the Principles within their contexts. Future outputs from Inspiring Impact will also support the practical realisation of the Code, with 'Measuring Up!' allowing organisations to consider how they're currently doing in relation to good impact practice and an online marketplace through which to identify tools for monitoring and reviewing impact.

Principle 1 **Take responsibility for impact and encourage others to do so too**	Respondents tended to find Principle 1 to be important, useful, and clear. There was some suggestion that Principle 1 should swap places with Principle 2. There were also some comments about the need to engage stakeholders from across an organisation to ensure responsibility was truly shared.
What has changed	As there were no major challenges to this principle, it hasn't been changed. Although we recognise the importance of engaging stakeholders from across an organisation it was acknowledged by several that this point is already covered under Principle 3 and that it is important enough to warrant its own principle. Equally, we took on board feedback about the order of the principles and can understand the case for swapping Principles 1 and 2, but on balance it was decided that leadership is required to focus on purpose and so the order remains unchanged.

Principle 2 **Focus on purpose**	Principle 2 was also considered to be important, although slightly less clear than some other principles. A number of respondents felt Principle 2 conflated two separate issues: 1. Organisational purpose and 2. The purpose of any impact review or evaluation. There was also some desire to include examples of tools that might help organisations to become clearer about their purpose e.g. logic models and theory of change. As stated above, there was some discussion around swapping Principles 1 and 2.
What has changed	Based on the feedback we received, the Principle has been redefined to ensure it centres on organisational purpose. Questions of the purpose of evaluation are covered more appropriately elsewhere in the Code (e.g. under principle 4). We have resisted the temptation to insert specific tools that organisations can use to focus on their purpose on the grounds that the Code is intended to offer broad guidelines and not to be prescriptive. That doesn't mean the tools suggested aren't of potential benefit, only that there are several ways an organisation may choose to focus on its purpose and the key point of the Principle is *that* they do so, rather than *how* they do so. The reasons for not swapping Principles 1 and 2 are discussed earlier.

Principle 3 **Involve others in your impact practice**	Principle 3 was well received and several respondents felt the engagement of others was fundamental to successfully focusing on, delivering, and understand impact. The only suggested changes were additions, and again these were of a largely technical nature.
What has changed	Nothing. The Principle was considered to be essential and clear and, as with other Principles, changes of a mainly technical nature were avoided in order to keep the Code as widely applicable as possible.

Principle 4 **Apply proportionate and appropriate methods and resources**	Responses to Principle 4 were largely positive. Some minor improvements to the language were suggested in order to make it simpler and clearer (less technical). The purpose of evaluation was seen to require emphasis under Principle 4, since appropriate methods and resources depend on the purposes you need any review to serve.
What has changed	The description of the Principle has been re-written in plainer language and a line about the purpose of evaluation has been added. Under the "Suggestions for applying it" section technical language has been changed to make the suggestions clearer and now includes a suggestion about using simple and free data gathering tools, which can be beneficial.

Principle 5 **Consider the full range of the difference you make**	Although seen as a key Principle by respondents – especially for understanding your impact – it was widely felt that the Principle should be expanded to ensure that, in using this Principle, organisations seeking to understand their impact also consider what would have happened anyway, without their activity, so as not to over-claim their impact.
What has changed	The Principle itself has slightly altered ('Consider the full range of the difference you *actually* make') and the explanatory paragraph has been expanded, making it clearer that impact is long-term as well as potentially wide ranging and that any understanding of impact should pay consideration to what impact would have occurred without the organisation's work. There have been some other minor changes to language in order to make the "Suggestions" section even clearer.

Principle 6 Be honest and open	Principle 6 was warmly received and there were no specific suggestions for improving the Principle.
What has changed	Nothing.

Principle 7 Be willing to change and act on what you find	Overall respondents recognised the value of this Principle, although some felt it needn't be a stand-alone Principle. Others suggested it is important for those considering their impact to also consider the process of creating it, in order to learn more fully.
What has changed	Nothing, since the majority considered this to be an important Principle in its own right. It was also decided that, whilst important, learning from the process of creating impact is supported elsewhere by the Code.

Principle 8 Actively share your impact plans, methods, findings and learning	The general consensus was that this Principle is not only important but also a realistic aspiration, even within a competitive environment. However, there was recognition that the openness it calls for is particularly difficult, since larger organisations may be reluctant to lose any competitive advantage and smaller organisations may lack the resources to put into the activity of sharing. Regardless, respondents considered this to be a significant Principle and something organisations should be working towards. The consultation further highlighted the important contribution this Principle makes to increasing knowledge, within and beyond the voluntary sector, regarding what does and doesn't work, thus also strengthening the voice of the sector.
What has changed	An expansion under the 'Why?' section to cover the point about increasing learning within and beyond the sector and, in so doing, also strengthening the voice of the sector. Some additional changes were made to the language of the 'Suggestions for applying it' section so that it is less passive, as well as some other minor tweaks to language to ensure it reads more easily.

Conclusions and next steps

After a good level of response and the thoughtful inputs of those who responded, relatively few changes were required to be made to The Code of Good Impact Practice as a result of the consultation. There are two main reasons for this:

1. There was a sense from those responding that, due to detailed consultation on the Code before it was distributed more widely, the draft Code was a fairly refined document already.

2. We chose not to make several of the technical changes suggested because many of them are already effectively addressed in the Code, just using non-technical language, and adding lots of technical detail would have made the document too detailed and less accessible.

There have still been a number of important changes made to The Code of Good Impact Practice as a result of the excellent ideas and challenge provided by our colleagues from across the sector. Thanks to the inputs of everyone who contributed we will be publishing an even stronger definitive version of The Code of Good Impact Practice on 17th June 2013. It can truly be said that the Code of Good Impact Practice has been produced by the sector, for the sector, and as such we hope you will all be proud to be associated with the Code and to use it as you develop and improve your own impact practice.