

We set out to create a space for thinking and creativity for staff, trustees and volunteers from NAVCA's member organisations – to get out of our usual mindsets and conversations and think more broadly... and we heard so many different ideas, approaches and thoughtful insights from the delegates! Thank you to everyone who took part. Here's a quick reminder of what we had on offer, followed by some of the thinking which emerged – if you were there, we hope this is a useful reminder. If you missed it, we hope there's enough here to whet your appetite and entice you to our next conference.

In a nutshell...

Following discussions at the conference and the evaluations submitted from some of the attendees, we have identified the following actions for NAVCA:

On allyship and anti-oppression, we will:

- Continue the work of our Anti-Racist Group.
- Support and encourage the Allyship Network – we hope to see people in every one of our member organisations and at every level feeling they have the support, information and authority to be an ally, to be brave and speak up on racism.

On the climate emergency:

- Create an online space for members to share learning and practice on responding to the climate emergency, working towards net zero, and more.
- Search for support for our members on developing net zero plans, that they can share with their networks.

On poverty and inequalities:

- Arrange an online session on universal basic income (UBI) early in 2022 for members who want to connect to the UBI lab.

On volunteering:

- Continue to play a lead role in the development of the Vision for Volunteering.
- Develop the Quality Assurance Framework which includes work on volunteering.

On levelling up:

- Build relationships with ministers and senior advisors at the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, seeking opportunities to influence policy.



- Work with members to develop an appropriate response to the imminent Levelling Up White Paper and with other national infrastructure organisations to influence government.

On thriving communities:

- Create spaces and opportunities for members to come together and share their creativity, experiences and learning about the communities they work with.
- Continue to speak up for 'the local' in interactions with policy makers and decision takers.

Conference in more detail:

Each section that follows covers one of our provocations, the provocation content, the discussion that follows, some ideas and suggestions for what next, and the actions NAVCA has identified for itself. The provocation reports are followed by a brief summary of the two keynote speeches. You can find speaker biographies towards the end of this document.

A note about provocations: we ask our provocateurs to provide a short challenge, argument or call to action (no more than five minutes) which then forms the basis of a conversation, discussion, debate, heated exchange... we've found that this leads to some creative, challenging and inspiring sessions.

Provocation on allyship and anti-oppression – Collette Philip

Provocation:

Collette challenged the delegates with five actions that we all need to take to start or kick-start our anti-racism work. These may also be refocused for other anti-oppression work, but the primary goal is acting to defeat racism and be an ally to those who are affected by its existence and continuance. So, what are Collette's five actions?

1. Understand the true nature and reality of racism: covert and overt racism, structural and systemic racism as well as interpersonal racism. Racism is a 'social construct' – but that doesn't mean it isn't real! Money is also a social construct. And racism was deliberately invented to build and maintain one thing: white supremacy.
2. We need to lean in to the discomfort of being actively anti-racist. Facing up to reality can often be uncomfortable. Experiencing racism is uncomfortable –so why would we expect or even want tackling it to be comfortable? Use that discomfort as tool to fire your sense of injustice.
3. Be led by people with lived experiences of racism. Prioritise, listen, uphold and uplift those people, above all others. Lived experiences are the data you need to kickstart this work.

4. No excuses. No time? No budget? Other priorities? Other oppressed groups? No, says Collette. No more excuses. This work needs doing, and it needs doing now. Start making it happen.
5. Face the fear you may feel head on, and do the work anyway. Whether that's the fear of being found out, called out or getting it wrong, these aren't the worst things that can happen in life. We need to surface racism and oppression and tackle them head on.

Discussion:

There were two main areas of discussion: first, about our own organisations' values, culture and behaviours, and, second, about the communities we work in.

In respect of our own organisations, we need to do better. Having inclusive policies is a start, but there also needs to be practical action: what steps can we take to make our organisations more inclusive and welcoming?

Across our communities and our networks, our usual approach is to bring people in to existing networks, to 'give them a seat at the table' and encourage them to speak up. Is this is right approach though? We are often asking people to fit into systems and practices that they have had no part in creating, and at the same time asking them to share painful experiences for our benefit rather than theirs. Several people spoke about events they had been part of which were about organisations becoming antiracist, where all the speakers were white, often middle class, and often the 'usual suspects'/'great and good' from the community – this is not good enough.

What next?

- What does a truly anti-racist organisation look like? Some suggestions of what to do next:
 - support the creation and development of a BAME network for your members of staff and volunteers – from within your own organisation or more widely – work with your members of staff and volunteers to overcome isolation in the organisation.
 - create a safe space within your premises such as a reflection room/prayer room
 - sit down and listen to people who have lived experience of racism.
 - pay people for sharing their lived experience – their pain is not a free resource for your learning needs.
 - look carefully at processes such as recruitment and see how inclusive they really are, and what you can change eg where you advertise vacancies, what the application process requires, how people can engage if English is not their first language.
- What about community engagement?
 - What are the existing relationships and history between different groups across your communities? Do these relationships need rebuilding with acknowledgement and apologies for past misunderstandings? Can you find an engagement budget, to properly resource the relationship-building work with communities that you have struggled to connect with?
 - What are other system partners doing in your area eg local authority, CCG, ICS to ensure that systems are actively anti-racist? What's the role of local infrastructure here?

- Listen to what works on creative and engaging co-production

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Provocation on climate emergency – Shahin Ashraf MBE

Provocation:

Are our current voluntary and community sector charitable models outdated in light of the climate emergency? How do we navigate reparations in the current model for communities that have consistently experienced 'environmental' racism and how do we aim towards a justice-centred green transition? Is the maths as simple as the morality that we are looking to claim within the sector?

Discussion:

Lots of conversation around these questions and more questions were generated!

- How do we build the climate emergency – and effective engagement and responses – into our work as local infrastructure, when this isn't part of our 'core mission'?
- Do we need a climate emergency strategy for the VCSE sector – and who would be responsible for developing this? Where (as ever) is the funding?
- What's the role of the regulator and of governance in making sure charities (and non-regulated voluntary sector organisations) are fit for a different world?

What next?

One suggestion – which emerged from research published by Charity Finance Group on the day after the conference – is that organisations should consider a Net Zero plan. CFG's data revealed that [eight in 10 charities \(84%\) said that they do not yet have a net zero objective](#) and only 14% said they currently report on their carbon emissions.

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- Search for support for our members on developing net zero plans, that they can share with their networks.

Provocation on poverty and inequalities – Jonny Douglas

Provocation:

A universal basic income (UBI) is a regular payment that is given to everyone in society to create a minimum income floor. That means that everyone earns the same amount of money through the payment and, therefore, cannot earn less than that in income. The money is unconditional with no strings attached to dictate how it should be spent and no guidance on how to act to earn it. The idea is meant to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality and the stigma associated with state handouts as everyone is receiving the same.

How can we change the economic imbalance in society, and everything that entails? Would a UBI be an answer? How could ending poverty also address other forms of inequality? Is all inequality fixable with money?

Discussion:

Some of the discussion focussed on the technical aspects of UBI – how is it allocated? What are the safeguards? What does it mean, in practice? The VCSE sector often does work that is described as preventative, but we are reaching a pinching point where this is becoming incredibly challenging. General feeling that we will always be here for people in crisis, but we also need to do the work to prevent crisis arising. So what can we do to strengthen our influencing work, and for this to be seen as a legitimate part of our charitable activities, or in line with our charitable objectives?

On one of the wider questions: inequality is not solely economic, it relates to prejudice and discrimination. Money does not fix anything, but it does facilitate the conditions needed to tackle other inequalities. It enables us to bring together people. It enables people to access things that they would not otherwise be able to.

What next?

Poverty and inequalities can only be tackled through changing the system which has enabled that poverty and inequality to exist. It is up to each of us – individually and as organisations – to decide whether and how we can take up the challenge of making change happen.

NAVCA will:

- Arrange an online session on universal basic income (UBI) early in 2022 for members who want to connect to the UBI lab.

Provocation on volunteering – Dr Eddy Hogg

Provocation:

Eddy set out a challenge around the values and behaviours of volunteers, the recent racism in elite cricket cases. The vast majority of our country's sport is volunteer-led.

Over the last 18 months – and long before that in some quarters – there has been much discussion in the voluntary sector of how we can make volunteering more diverse. We know that Black, Asian and ethnic minority volunteers have a poorer volunteer experience than their white counterparts.

Often systemic factors are held up as the barriers to greater diversity in volunteering. Huge effort has been putting into overcoming these. Volunteer Centres have a superb track record of recruiting and supporting under-represented groups to volunteer.

But what if the barrier to true inclusion is your existing volunteers? Cricket club committees are not unique in the voluntary sector in being dominated by older, white men. According to a Charity Commission report from 2017, one in twelve charity trustees is called John or David. Many of these Johns and Davids will be fully committed to diversity and volunteering being open for all but racism is still very much present. So if we want to address diversity among volunteers, first we need to address the attitudes and behaviours of our existing volunteers. This isn't going to change overnight. The first step is to admit that while we may think volunteering and the voluntary sector are on the side of the angels, cricket's reality has shown that all too often, racist views and actions are held and done by the same do-gooders who help make our sector tick.

Discussion:

Members commented they had identified a correlation between the more varieties of volunteering opportunities and the diversity of people accessing those opportunities. Are volunteers still largely seen as 'little old (white) ladies? What can be done to remove barriers and widen opportunities to be open to people from any ethnicity, age, health/disability men.

Where volunteering has gone wrong – such as in sport, with football, swimming, gymnastics and Dr Hogg's case study on cricket, we need to be brave in challenging and reporting when things aren't right. We need to make values and behaviours explicit and call out behaviour which conflicts. We need to make sure volunteers understand the reasons for, and are proud to be a part of upholding, an inclusive culture. Changing the narrative on volunteering means we can break down the 'formal' interpretation of volunteering and make it about numerous ways for people to contribute to their communities. We will all benefit.

What next?

Have a look at the work being done on the [Vision for Volunteering](#). There are plenty of ways to contribute your views! Development of the Vision for Volunteering would really benefit from the involvement of more volunteers, as well as VCS professionals – can you encourage some of your volunteer contacts to add their views and experience?

NAVCA will:

- Continue to play a lead role in the development of the Vision for Volunteering.
 - Develop the Quality Assurance Framework which includes work on volunteering.
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Provocation on levelling up – Ruth Ibegbuna

Provocation:

Levelling up in political terms sounds like a grand vision offering so much – but at the same time, it seems to mean nothing at all. What we need to understand is that the disparities in our communities have not arisen by chance: they are the result of policies and plans which have created and entrenched this situation over decades. So levelling up needs to be far more than investing in the communities which have the least – it needs to be about dismantling systems which have led to inequality and 'left behind' communities, and replacing them with systems that will actively prevent the gap from widening so far in future.

Can we level up without 'levelling down'? How do we think about levelling up without sending a negative message about our communities in need? How can we make the case for additional investment and support, without resorting to a 'look what we haven't got' narrative?

Discussion:

What are we levelling up – and to what level? Significant scepticism about the whole concept but a recognition that we need to work with the Government's narrative in order to access funding and other support for our communities. How do we incorporate discussions about power and privilege into our work and into engagement with different sectors of our communities?

What is the appetite and the capacity for the voluntary and community sector to move ahead of 'stepping in and filling gaps' – to go beyond operational delivery and start to shape structurally in our communities, nationally and maybe even globally? What are we saying about fairness, parity and respect?

To step up here we may need to move out of our comfort zones, to be uncomfortable as we speak truth to power, to be disruptors.

What next?

The Levelling Up White Paper is due to be published before Christmas 2021 and members will have their own views on the extent to which they can – and should – engage with the Government's agenda. As we've seen the term 'levelling up' move from a campaign slogan to a central element of government policy, complete with its own department, it feels that levelling up is here for the medium term at least. More insight on to how we can align our organisations' aims with the political narrative will be needed.

NAVCA will:

- Build relationships with ministers and senior advisors at the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, seeking opportunities to influence policy.
 - Work with members to develop an appropriate response to the imminent Levelling Up White Paper and with other national infrastructure organisations to influence government.
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Provocation on thriving communities – Matthew Mazzotta

After two last minute Covid-19 related programme changes, we found Matthew's TED Talk video which generated some inspiring conversations. We used the TED Talk video under the Creative Commons license (we weren't able to generate specific video for the NAVCA conference in the time we had available) and we also contacted Matthew ahead of the conference as a courtesy. He said, "Thank you for reaching out. Happy to hear you are showing my TED talk."

You can find [Matthew's TED Talk here](#).

Provocation:

This TED talk was about using public space with imagination to, first, engage communities and, second, create public spaces and facilities that the community wanted and would value.

Thriving communities are those where people are engaged, where everyone can use their voice and where people can take action on what matters to them. What can we learn and how can we change what we do to foster greater participation from and connection with all the different people in our communities, building and using assets to greatest effect?

Discussion:

After so much talk of resilience and resilient communities during the last 18 months, it was refreshing to turn the language in a more positive direction. Resilience suggests continuing to brace against external forces and threats; thriving, on the other hand, relates to flourishing, growing, prospering – all positive development in conditions where potential can be realised.

To create the conditions in which communities can thrive, there does need to be investment in 'shiny projects' but there also needs to be a concerted and determined effort to invest in, build and nurture connections, relationships and communication. With diverse communities and diversity within communities, it's crucial to create a culture in which everyone can be heard, can understand their validity as part of that community, and feels empowered to be part of the change they want to see.

Spaces where people can come together are recognised as important. There was a sense of some frustration that policy often overlooks the local and hyperlocal, but this is where relationships and ideas can spark and set chain reactions off to achieve massive change.

What next?

We know NAVCA members will continue to use their knowledge, expertise and creativity to find new ways to engage with different sections of the communities you work with. Please keep telling us about the work you are doing – we'll share your stories across the network, and use them to demonstrate the value of local infrastructure.

NAVCA will:

- Create spaces and opportunities for members to come together and share their creativity, experiences and learning about the communities they work with.
- Continue to speak up for 'the local' in interactions with policy makers and decision takers.

Keynote – Jonny Douglas, Futurist and member of the UBI Lab

Technology, artificial intelligence and human ingenuity are combining to create near future potential systems, hardware and connectivity that have the potential to transform our world. Science fiction could soon be science fact. We have a lot to be alarmed about, from the effects of the climate emergency, pandemics and the impact of technology on the world of work: could we see the rise of AI meaning that manual and technical roles become automated?

But where there is challenge there are also opportunities. Transport projects from driverless vehicles to hyperloop technology could transform how we move ourselves and products around the country and the planet. With developments in 3d printing and similar, maybe we'll reach a point where manufacture takes place closer to the end user of products, with the potential to reduce our carbon emissions associated with transportation, as well as improving safety.

We may see a future where we need to become accustomed to change at high speed. Under current conditions, large scale transformative projects have the potential to be obsolete before they are completed. A lot to think about!

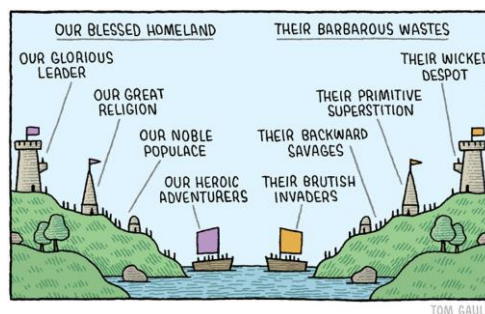
Keynote – Ali Goldsworthy, CEO of the Depolarization project and co-author, *Poles Apart*

Key points:

Ali spoke about affective polarisation and the benefits of changing our minds. Polarisation can take place around issues – think Brexit, vaccines, Trump – or be affective polarisation, where divisions are formed around our social/group identity with increasing distrust and dislike of people from the opposing side. Feelings become more important than facts. Partisan labels come to act as proxies for differences in beliefs, values and behaviour that go far beyond political considerations. The

psychological forces here are strong and will affect you – even if you think they don't – as well as affecting the communities NAVCA members work with. The language we use to describe ourselves and others has a huge impact on how we feel about our own and different communities – have a look at the image below.

Changing our mind often makes us uncertain about our own identities – and our place in the various groups we identify with. One way we can think about this is to bring people together on the basis of what unites them, before looking at the things they don't have in common.



Speaker biographies:

Shahin Ashraf MBE is the Head of Global Advocacy for Islamic Relief Worldwide and she has just finished taking part in COP26. With over 25 years of experience in the sector, her expertise lies in faith and development and the intersection of gender, social inclusion and social protection, including first-hand experience of working with women in humanitarian and development contexts. Prior to joining Islamic Relief Worldwide Shahin served at a senior level at a women's rights organisation where she conducted a wide range of policy research projects. Outside of work Shahin enjoys reading and is a keen walker. She is a Green Party councillor in Solihull.

Jonny Douglas is a change catalyst; dedicating time to being at the heart of a diverse range of cultural and strategic initiatives. He has a wealth of experience in 'making things happen', always seeking to push boundaries through creativity, collaboration and harnessing talent. He sits on a number of advisory boards on Enterprise, Economic Strategy and the CDI Sector for Sheffield City Council and the LEP, and has recently been appointed to the Sheffield Creative Guild Board. Jonny says "I imagine a world where the majority of people have the means and opportunity to find and fulfil their true potential. I believe the challenges we face can bring people and ideas together to build the better world we all deserve. Everything I do is dedicated to creating the conditions and communities to make this possible." As well as using his expertise in Universal Basic Income (UBI) to provide provocations for the Thinking Space Conference, Jonny provided a vision of the future and what might be coming over the horizon – a very different world. Jonny Douglas is closely involved in the work of UBI Lab, a worldwide decentralised network of citizens, researchers, activists and campaigners exploring the potential of Universal Basic Income. UBI Lab started in Sheffield as a collaboration between multiple organisations and individuals, seeking to explore the potential of a Universal Basic Income and the possibility of a pilot in the city.

Alison (Ali) Goldsworthy is CEO of The Depolarization Project. In her academic work she is an advisor to the Conflict and Polarization Lab at Stanford, California, and Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow at the Intellectual Forum, Jesus College Cambridge. Ali has spent over 20 years active in politics and campaigning. She is Vice-Chair of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust and sits on the board at Open Democracy. Her debut non-fiction book, *Poles Apart*, written with co-authors Laura Osborne and Alexandra Chesterfield has received widespread critical acclaim. Ali is now principally working on issues around political polarization - what causes it, its advantages and disadvantages and what can be done to course correct when it becomes too extreme. She says "I used to be known for being as rebellious as possible. Now it feels like the best way to do that is suggesting people who disagree politically could co-exist. When you are involved in innovation it can be intoxicating and exciting - as can bringing about change. But it's worth taking a moment to stop and think about its wider societal effects and how to counteract them. Moving fast and breaking things has consequences, you need to make up for them."

Dr Eddy Hogg is a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Co-Director of Education and Student Experience for the Division of Law, Society and Social Justice at the University of Kent. His research looks at volunteering and charitable giving, with a particular focus on the role that voluntary action plays in the delivery of public services and the social justice implications of this. Widely published, his teaching covers a range of modules within Social Policy and the wider social sciences including practical modules that include active volunteering and social research placements. He has been actively involved in extensive efforts to decolonise the curriculum.

Ruth Ibegbuna is the founder of the multi award-winning youth leadership charity RECLAIM and The Roots Programme, a radical new approach to bridging divides between UK communities. Ruth is a passionate voice for young people and a 'professional northerner' – always pushing for greater recognition for the talents and leadership that exist outside London, Ruth works hard to connect influencers in the capital with new opportunities to learn from those from different parts of the country. Ruth is a highly successful social entrepreneur who is passionate about all sections of business and society working together to enable ambitious social change. Ruth is a passionate voice for young people and a 'professional northerner' – always pushing for greater recognition for the talents and leadership that exist outside London, Ruth works hard to connect influencers in the capital with new opportunities to learn from those from different parts of the country. Ruth is a highly successful social entrepreneur who is passionate about all sections of business and society working together to enable ambitious social change.

Matthew Mazzotta "...uses clouds, giant flamingos, houses and dog waste to design unique public spaces with communities to solve unaddressed issues." He works at the intersection of art, activism, and urbanism, focusing on the power of the built environment to shape our relationships and experiences. His community-specific public projects integrate new forms of civic participation and social engagement into the built environment and reveal how the spaces we travel through and spend our time living within have the potential to become distinct sites for intimate, radical, and meaningful exchanges. Through his process, each project starts by creating temporary public spaces for listening – 'Outdoor Living Room' - as a way to capture voices from local people that might not attend more formal meetings. Stemming from this approach are experiences that involve people

from a range of backgrounds working together to create new models of living that contribute to local culture beyond the economic realm.

Collette Philip is the founder and MD of Brand By Me, a brand meets strategy consultancy which facilitates 'strategy that drives long-term change and help organisations put ANTI-RACISM at the heart of their brand.' Collette works with other ambitious change-makers looking to develop a brand strategy that drives social justice and who are genuinely committed to Anti-Racism. Collette's unique insights and lived experience mean that working with her to implement full Anti-Racism and justice drives better experiences and better business for everyone. Collette is also Director of Mentoring and a Role Model at Media for All (MEFA), helping Black, Asian and Other Minoritised Ethnic talent thrive in the media industry.

Thank you to all our speakers, provocateurs and everyone who worked to make our Thinking Space Conference 2021 a success – and thank you to everyone who attended for some or all of the session, took part in the interesting and challenging conversations and contributed to the creativity and inspiration we experienced.