Foreword

The Dalai Lama said that a lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity. All organisations, whether public, private or not-for-profit, need to be transparent in order to build trust and to be accountable to their stakeholders.

Meaningful transparency requires a thoughtful, nuanced understanding of what people want to know and why and it means responding to those needs. Less is more. Transparency does not mean that we have to stuff our communications and websites with technical documents full of acronyms and jargon that evaluate the impact of our work. We need to find other more succinct, audience-appropriate ways to convey the richness and impact of our work. Digital can help us do this in visceral and powerful ways.

Openness about our financial affairs and how we spend the money we raise is important, but we should not delude ourselves that publishing detailed financial information to standards like Three Sixty Degree Giving or the International Aid Transparency Initiative is the complete solution to being transparent to our supporters and beneficiaries. It’s an important part of the picture but does throw up challenges including accessibility of information, and the resources required to comply with such standards.

Transparency is much broader and deeper than that. It is a way of working that enables you to demonstrate putting values into action. Transparency is transformative – particularly for beneficiaries, but also for supporters and other stakeholders as access to quality, timely and relevant information enables them to make more meaningful choices and decisions.

The idea of a crowdsourced report on transparency came out of discussions at an ActionAid workshop on thought leadership a few months ago. The purpose of the report is to improve policy and practice in the not-for-profit sector by bringing in comparative perspectives and highlighting examples of good practice. We wanted to work with others to promote transparency that is meaningful and proportionate.

The report will certainly create debate about these important issues. I know that each of the contributors is as keen as I am to shape the debate. ActionAid has deliberately not moderated the contributions and we do not endorse them all. If you have any questions about any of the issues raised in this report, please feel free to contact the contributors directly. Alternately you can contact ActionAid as the editor of this crowdsourced report via transparency@actionaid.org.uk.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this project. The wide variety of organisations that are represented in the report demonstrates how highly transparency is regarded. I would also like to acknowledge the ‘behind the scenes’ contributions made by Zoe Amar and Alison Whyte.

Judith Davey
ActionAid Director of People, Performance & Accountability
Contributors

ActionAid                              www.actionaid.org.uk
Amnesty International                 www.amnesty.org.uk
BBC                                     www.bbc.co.uk
Big Lottery Fund                      www.biglotteryfund.org.uk
Bond                                    www.bond.org.uk
CharityComms                           www.charitycomms.org.uk
Department for International Development www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development
Development Initiatives               www.devinit.org
John Lewis Partnership                www.johnlewispartnership.co.uk
Karuna (and one of their supporters)  www.karuna.org
London Borough of Lewisham             www.lewisham.gov.uk
Media Trust                            www.mediatrust.org
NCVO                                    www.ncvo.org.uk
NSPCC                                   www.nspcc.org.uk
Publish What You Fund                  www.publishwhatyoufund.org
Small Charities Coalition/Charity Leaders Exchange www.knowledgepeers.com
World Vision                           www.worldvision.org.uk
Why transparency matters

All organisations, whether public, private or not-for-profit, recognise the need to be transparent in order to build trust and to be accountable to their stakeholders. The organisations contributing to this report examine the opportunities and challenges that transparency presents from various angles.

CharityComms sets out why we would want to be transparent, and suggests that this means clear, honest, up-front and open communications.

Transparency in the not-for-profit sector is achieved in a number of ways. Crucially, we need to be open with our beneficiaries, clearly explaining what we are doing in their name. The Charity Commission also requires us to demonstrate public benefit. A number of the contributors like Karuna, the NSPCC, World Vision and ActionAid talk about the importance of transparency in terms of connecting with beneficiaries. The Media Trust stresses the need for authentic voices in stories about the impact we are having as organisations.

We also need to show our financial supporters that we have made a difference with the money they have donated. While it is easy enough to publish reports on our websites that evaluate the impact of our work, this does not necessarily ‘cut the mustard’ – a short, clear summary in the appropriate language might suit audience needs better. But while supporters want to know that their donation is being spent on mission-related activities, succinctly summarising dense data can be a difficult and time-consuming task.

The BBC talks about transparency as a means of demonstrating value for money. A number of other contributors, like Big Lottery and Charity Leaders Exchange, also mention the balance between being open and the resources required to do this.

John Lewis Partnership and the London Borough of Lewisham explain eloquently how being transparent is an integral part of managing your brand and reputation. John Lewis, Amnesty and others talk about the role of transparency in effective governance.

Other themes include the balancing act between disclosure and confidentiality (as discussed by NCVO), and the role that technology and social media can play in providing timely, succinct information.

Bond, Development Initiatives, Department for International Development and Publish What You Fund focus on transparency in international development. Each of these contributors makes important points that are relevant to the whole of the not-for-profit sector – not just those concerned with international development. Good quality, timely information enables people to make informed choices about their lives.
Making sure that transparency is deeply embedded in our ways of working is one of ActionAid’s core values. Our vision is to be as transparent as possible by providing our stakeholders with clear, easily-accessible information about our impact and effectiveness.

Transparency can be transformational – access to accurate, timely and relevant information can make a world of difference to the lives of the poor and marginalised people that we work with in communities around the world.

Knowledge is power, and transparency is a stepping stone to increased empowerment. We are known for our participatory methods which include involving beneficiaries (or rights holders to use our terminology) in decisions that affect them in a meaningful way. Transparency Boards in communities describe the work we are undertaking, who the donor is and how much the project costs.

Our ways of working also enable us to communicate clearly what we do to our many and varied stakeholders in the UK. Where possible, we ask our stakeholders what information they require from us about our impact and effectiveness, then we seek to deliver it succinctly, in the right form, through the most cost effective channel.

Our transparency strengthens our mission and connects UK supporters with beneficiaries overseas. So for example, we linked up our UK supporters with women in Bangladesh who were survivors of acid attacks – a particularly brutal form of violence against women and girls. Through social media they were able to exchange messages and our supporters expressed solidarity and support. Both supporters and beneficiaries were hugely affected by the experience – they found it emotional, engaging and uplifting. I doubt there could be a better way of getting across the impact of our work. This pilot was so successful that we hope to repeat it.

Openness about our financial affairs and how we spend our money is important and we routinely make financial information available through our website and via our supporter communications.

We publish financial data to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), a small but important aspect of our approach to transparency. However, the resources required to comply with standards such as this can be high. Full compliance presents some challenges, particularly given the current lack of evidence about the usage and effectiveness of such initiatives. How the UK public and beneficiaries regard the IATI data is not yet clear. As a sector we need to ensure that we focus on ways of being transparent that are proportionate and meaningful.

No organisation is perfect, and ActionAid is on a journey to improve its policies and practice. We look forward to taking part in the transparency debate as this will help us to learn and improve.

Judith Davey
ActionAid Director of People, Performance & Accountability
Amnesty International is a movement of individual members, supporters and activists around the globe. Accountability is at the heart of what we do – making human rights a reality around the world, often by calling those in power to account for their actions, or lack of action. To do our work effectively and to live our values we also need to be accountable.

Accountability for our actions – what we choose to advocate for and campaign on – cannot come without transparency about the way we govern ourselves, make decisions, set priorities and choose the organisation’s strategic direction. Strong and transparent governance is essential to the credibility, legitimacy, relevance and inclusiveness of our human rights work – and also its effectiveness.

The key to understanding what transparency in governance means for us lies in our democratic principle: any person who is willing to contribute to the advancement of Amnesty’s mission can become a member, be represented and have a voice in the governance system. This principle underpins the functioning of both our national and global governance, and of our decision making bodies.

At the national level individuals elect their respective national board and vote on national strategies. At the international level, representatives of national bodies can propose changes in policies, procedures, vision and mission and influence the global strategy. At our biannual global assembly representatives from all countries where we have an office make decisions that guide the movement. This dialogue is kept alive between assemblies through a consultation process on key issues affecting the movement. Open discussion and information is an integral part of our transparency practice.

Our global campaign My Body, My Rights launched this year – which demands sexual and reproductive rights for all women and girls is, for instance, the result of such an open, transparent, democratic (and often lively!) process. A consultation to identify this campaign as a global priority in the movement began in late 2012 and the campaign was collaboratively developed, ensuring that our grassroots activists and external partners continue to have a voice in the process to select, design and develop the campaign.

The exercise of democracy comes with its challenges: ensuring meaningful representation and participation of our membership can lead to variable standards. Also, the tension between democracy and efficiency can create a lack of flexibility and speed in decision making. That is why we are currently reforming our governance: being open about our weaknesses is part of being transparent!

Maro Pantazidou
Learning and Accountability Lead Advisor, Amnesty International
As a public body the BBC has a responsibility to operate as transparently as possible. Since 2009, the BBC has annually published the salaries and total remuneration for its most senior managers – those earning £150k and over and also those with the greatest responsibility for spending public money and for overseeing the BBC’s services and operations. Expenses, register of gifts and hospitality received by this group and any declarations of personal interests are also published on a quarterly basis.

In 2012, the BBC Trust tasked the BBC with setting new standards in openness and transparency. As a result, we have also started to publish details of severance payments, bullying and harassment cases, environmental emissions and procurement spend alongside our Annual Report and Accounts. We are continuing to put the right policies in place to ensure that we are more efficient, representative, fair and innovative.

In addition to the oversight provided by the Trust, the BBC appeared in front of 14 parliamentary select committees in 2013, investigating a range of issues from women’s participation in sport to severance pay and impartiality of climate change coverage to media plurality. We also handle approximately 2,000 requests submitted under the Freedom of Information Act every year.

We aim to be as open as possible but there are areas where, to protect our ability to get the best value for money for the licence fee and protect individuals’ right to privacy, we can’t release information. Whilst the BBC is funded by the licence fee, it operates in a largely commercial sector and we therefore do not release information about programme costs.

We go further than our competitors in releasing information about talent spend but do this in bands as recommended by the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, both to protect individuals being identified by information being pieced together (known as ‘jigsaw identification’) and to protect the BBC in securing the best talent at the lowest cost to the licence fee payer.

Anne Bulford OBE
Managing Director, BBC Finance and Operations
Transparency is a difficult topic for a funder, particularly when it comes to individual funding decisions. We have to balance the aim to be open and honest with respecting confidentiality and creating a ‘safe space’ for applicants. And beyond the individual application, all funders struggle to balance the desire to be accessible with the need to manage the volume of work associated with an application. Inevitably this is a journey and we have developed some new approaches recently in the spirit of learning.

Our recent Your Voice Our Vision (YVOV) consultation was a big step towards transparency. It was a public forum inviting discussion about every aspect of our work to inform our new strategic framework. We were impressed by the ideas we received but remain mindful of the funder/funded power dynamic. For example, one YVOV respondent said, “We need more genuine honesty about what works and what doesn’t... This will only happen when funders and the sector create the space for mistakes to be shared.”

So how can we create more space for transparency? We’ve made a start by publishing data on all grants since 2004; we may publish international grants data on IATI; and all the data collected through YVOV will be published online. As we develop our new strategic framework we will share our thinking and invite feedback as we shape our plans – again, this will be new and challenging for us – certainly more transparent.

We are also about to launch a new online community, an interactive part of our website where people can link up to share stories and learning. This is an experiment which we will refine as we get feedback – including from those who choose not to participate.

Transparency and openness can go beyond simply exposing our processes to scrutiny and making data available. We are also working more collaboratively around programme design and delivery. The In Good Hands programme in Wales was designed with potential beneficiaries and the Big Local Trust is supporting 150 communities to decide how they want to spend funds in their area. It is their agenda, their timetable, their decision.

_Dawn Austwick, Chief Executive_
Big Lottery Fund
Each of our 420 member organisations affirms its support for transparency by signing up to the Bond Charter. Bond’s experience of working on this issue since 2011 has shown us that there are benefits and challenges for organisations seeking to achieve transparency.

Bond believes that NGOs can benefit in five ways:

1. Providing accessible, timely, useful information for stakeholders – whether they are beneficiaries, staff or supporters and donors – makes NGOs more accountable to them.
2. Allowing staff time to prepare for greater transparency enables them to think about how they would explain and justify the results of their work. Even the anticipation of this accountability could improve effectiveness.
3. As a network, Bond values sharing and collaborating between its members. Transparency oils that process and can lead to innovative and unanticipated forms of learning as organisations build upon one another’s work.
4. Even if an NGO’s data and information receives few hits or downloads, simply making it known that data is available for scrutiny helps build public trust in NGOs at a time when public support for aid and confidence in NGOs is shaky.
5. Making a critical mass of project information and financial information available in common formats will improve the coordination of aid. For example, the International Aid Transparency Initiative relies on organisations providing enough information to make it practically useful.

NGOs want to ensure that anything requiring precious resources is worthwhile and provides value for money. But the benefits of transparency may be hard to measure. Furthermore, the value of some aspects of transparency (such as publishing to International Aid Transparency Initiative) is only unlocked when enough organisations share information: those who lead the way take a ‘leap of faith’ without gaining immediate benefits.

Transparency doesn’t need to cost much. Take a few minutes to post an evaluation on your website (better still, inform readers about follow up). Just provide basic data on what you’re doing, where. With support from Bond you can post it to IATI in a matter of hours. The fear of transparency must be overcome.

We strongly believe that the long term and collective benefits of honesty and openness in our sector are the greater good. We have a duty to seek constant improvements in transparency. We need to overcome fear, recognise the benefits and put our values into practice.

Sarah Mistry
Director of Effectiveness and Learning at Bond (British NGOs for Overseas Development)
When it comes to charity communications, the irony is it’s not entirely clear what ‘transparency’ means.

In the debate raging within and outside the sector, ‘being transparent’ is seen in some quarters as a stick to beat charities with; it’s interpreted as a reaction to accusations that charities are hiding unpalatable information or dirty secrets.

Somehow, it seems, any charity that doesn’t show every aspect of its internal workings like a full-body x-ray is somehow pulling the wool over the eyes of an unsuspecting public, duped into parting with cash it can ill-afford, to subsidise the lavish lifestyles and suspect practices of a bloated, inefficient sector and its scandalously overpaid staff.

Unsurprisingly, it’s not an interpretation many charities favour. If – less sensationally – you take transparency to mean being clear, honest, up-front and open in our communications, it is of course a principle which charities should embrace.

Charities should be clear, honest, up-front and open about our objectives and purpose, about our achievements, and about the areas we need to improve, act differently or work harder to fulfill that purpose. We also need to be clear and open about what we’re achieving with donors’ money and what’s left to do. After all, perceived performance – how a donor or supporter thinks you’re doing with the funds you raise – is one of the key drivers of supporter loyalty. So charities should use transparent communications to demonstrate pride in what we do and what we’ve achieved.

But transparency shouldn’t be taken to mean simply making available every piece of information about your charity without explanation or context. It’s acceptable for charities to be sensitive to the risk to their organisation’s reputation by being free with out-of-context facts that can be misinterpreted, especially if it’s clear they are going to be used to criticise or attack them.

As with all effective communications, it goes back to your charitable purpose: if by presenting information in a certain way you are undermining your ability to achieve that purpose, then you shouldn’t present that information without context and explanation, or even at all. By extension, the act of ‘being transparent’ should not undermine the charity’s responsibility to its beneficiaries.

Because, ultimately, as well as donors, the general public, Members of Parliament and the media, charities are answerable to our beneficiaries, and the effective fulfilment of our charity’s purpose is our primary responsibility.

Vicky Browning
Director, CharityComms

The biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.

George Bernard Shaw
The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) has grown significantly in the past couple of years, and we now have over 250 organisations publishing data in this open international standard. With this number of organisations publishing, we have been thinking about how IATI could have much more of an impact on users in the following three areas:

Access: More than five European countries have separately developed a solution to accessing aid data, including the UK’s own Development Tracker. While these are great tools for their intended users, we are in danger of ending up with lots of tools that meet the user needs of donor citizens but don’t address the needs of users in developing countries. What more can we do to make sure that people who need information on international development projects are able to get it in a format that’s easy to access and understand, and is relevant to their needs?

Use: More than six global initiatives (sponsored by multiple major global players) are separately running projects to increase open data use in developing countries. In such a crowded field it’s harder to see which user groups (government, civil society and citizens) are being reached and what type of open data (budget, aid, extractives etc) is being used. Are there any gaps? If so, how can we best fill them?

IATI has made good progress engaging with partner country governments, encouraging and supporting the development of their Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS). But there’s a gap in examples of civil society and citizens using open aid data to address local community needs. The challenge is, how can we stimulate more use of open aid information in developing countries, across a wider range of users that includes not only governments but local groups and citizens?

Evidence: What difference does aid transparency make anyway? Evidence is scarce at this stage and people tend to respond to the evidence gap in a couple of ways. For some, the way to build the evidence is by ‘doing’ – taking open data as a starting point, building capacity in developing countries to use the data more and more through small investigations, experimental events etc. From that the evidence will emerge.

Others favour more of a ‘learning’ approach – taking local community need as a starting point, working with people to build capacity to measure and report change as well as use open data. The danger is we see these as two different choices rather than complementary approaches that need to connect if we’re to strengthen support for aid transparency and enhance its impact. The challenge is, how can we generate more and better evidence of the difference aid transparency makes not only to organisations but to services and people’s lives?

John Adams  
DFID Head of Business Innovation Team

Morag Patrick  
DFID Policy Adviser

This was originally published as a blog on 14 July 2014 on https://dfid.blog.gov.uk/2014/07/14/open-data-change-the-world/

DFID’s Development Tracker: devtracker.dfid.gov.uk
At Development Initiatives we believe that transparency can be transformational – putting the right information in the right hands enables citizens to hold decision-makers to account, and it empowers them to make choices and take control of their own lives. Information must be timely, easy to understand and relevant to people’s needs. Only then can it help people understand their rights, and access services from government and the market. Data and information can also help governments allocate resources and business target investment. Better information makes spending more efficient, reduces corruption and helps citizens make more informed choices.

Promoting greater transparency of all development actors is therefore core to DI’s mission, and that is why we have played a key role in the development of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). IATI is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative that seeks to improve the transparency of development cooperation in order to increase its effectiveness in tackling poverty. IATI focuses on user-centric publication of data, recognising that timely, comprehensive, forward-looking and accessible information is essential to enable governments, civil society, parliamentarians and other stakeholders to plan and monitor development activities, and hold development actors to account.

As well as encouraging others to publish to IATI, Development Initiatives believed it was important to lead by example, so we became the first civil society organisation (CSO) to publish data on our activities to the IATI Standard in 2011. Organising our data for initial publication did require a significant investment in staff time but we believe it was worth it. Being IATI compliant helps us to be more accountable to our funders, it enables us to advocate transparency to others from a position of strength and being guinea-pigs for CSO publication gave us valuable experience we’ve been able to share with others. Over the past three years, we have worked with Bond to support over 150 CSOs to publish to IATI, as well as providing technical support to bilateral and multilateral donors, foundations and private sector companies to publish to IATI.

Once open, DI is committed to revolutionising the use of data at all levels. This involves making data discoverable and accessible – for instance, by extracting data from all sources, including budget data available in books and finance data in annual reports, then digitising it and translating it into accessible and usable information. Our data analysis and visualisations help people to make informed decisions about the allocation of resources.

DI is working at the national and global level to join up data with in-country budget management systems or joining up different types of finance (domestic revenues, remittances, private giving, commercial investments, military spending) to generate information on all resources for ending poverty and responding to humanitarian crises.

Harpinder Collacott
Director of Engagement and Impact, Development Initiatives

Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts. —Winston Churchill
Transparency in the John Lewis Partnership is primarily based on publishing and giving information. The Partnership is a co-owned business in which all the assets are held on trust for the benefit of all its employees, who are known as Partners.

The Partnership’s founder, John Spedan Lewis, established a flow of information from management to the Partners through weekly journals and through democracy. He set up democratically elected Councils made up of employee representatives, who receive information and can question management and hold them to account. Partners can question management by publishing letters in the journals or in an open forum through their democratically elected representatives.

It’s considered important by the Partnership’s Board to publish its policies, targets, aims and objectives. The Board also decided to establish clear measurements so that objective judgements can be made about whether the Board’s policies, aims and targets are being met in appropriate and efficient ways. The Board also considers it important to outline clearly the controls that the business has in place.

An important way in which democracy enhances transparency within the Partnership is through the election of five ordinary Partners onto the Board. These elected directors help to oversee the deliberations of the executive management.

A clear explanation of roles and delegations and the contribution being made by directors and senior management is also critical to an understanding of where accountability lies. A framework has been published which clearly shows where responsibilities lie. This means that when delegations are made, those with responsibility can gain assurance from the Partners to whom they have delegated activities that actions and operations are being carried out in line with policy and regulations. This gives necessary clarity to monitoring and evaluation of processes and activity.

The Partnership strives to communicate openly with all its wider stakeholders – customers, suppliers, finance institutions and those who live near its stores. And as a co-owned business, it must ensure that its annual report also speaks to employees. It therefore recently modernised its Annual Report and Accounts to make the information more accessible and user friendly.

In the past there was a reliance on only printed information. Nowadays JLP publishes its Report and Accounts online and the journals and its policies on its intranet. Partners’ comments and dialogue with management are exchanged online and Partners also engage through social media. Spedan Lewis’s vision of an open and transparent business is alive and up-to-date!

**Margaret Casely-Hayford**
Former Director of Legal Services and Company Secretary
John Lewis Partnership

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* A democracy requires accountability, and transparency. — President Obama
Karuna is a Buddhist-inspired charity working with local community groups to help some of South Asia’s poorest people. For us, transparency and truthfulness are fundamental values.

We don’t try to provoke guilty reactions in supporters by confronting them with images of abject poverty or starving children. Instead we encourage an empathic connection with our beneficiaries’ lives. We also place great importance on showing our true fundraising costs and exactly how precious funds are used. Transparency has to be a value that you live by otherwise it’s just a cliché.

**Ciaran Maguire**
CEO, Karuna Trust

I remember Lucy, the Karuna fundraiser who came to our door in Wilmslow, very well. She was different to the usual fundraisers. She was sincere and she told me she was Buddhist. I liked that she wasn’t pushy. She didn’t oversell and she was genuine. I had a very good first impression of the charity. I also liked that she left me time to do my research, and I did just that.

It irritates me when I see the UN use a dozen or more luxury Toyota land cruisers to deliver a few thousand pounds worth of aid. How much better that money could be spent.

I thoroughly checked Karuna’s accounts, which were easy to find on their website. I was looking for transparency. From what I could see they were spending the money wisely and where it was needed. They weren’t spending it on luxury transport.

When Lucy returned a few days later, she answered my questions with sincerity and honesty. I liked that. She didn’t oversell the charity’s influence. We discussed the scale of the problem in India, and she explained that what Karuna did was a drop in the ocean, but they were making a difference to people’s lives. I appreciated her honesty.

Transparency for charities is essential. As a supporter, we need to see that there’s a defined objective. All charities need to show what they do, who they’re helping, how they’re doing it, how much they’re spending, and what on. Then the supporter can make an educated choice on whether to donate to the charity or not.

One last thing that impressed me with Karuna is that Lucy explained they educate people trapped in the caste system. Those who become educated then help others. Helping themselves and helping others struck a chord with me.

**Terry Norman, Wilmslow, Cheshire, July 2014**
Karuna Trust supporter

“A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity.” — Dalai Lama
Local government has a strong history of openness and transparency. Transparency is necessary in advice giving, decision making, implementation and reviewing effectiveness. Of course there are examples of councils that fall short of best practice. Closed, inward looking cultures in politics and in management can prevent real accountability. That’s why a culture of openness is so essential.

English local government is founded on a ‘unitary powers’ model. This means that public interest decisions are council decisions rather than those who make them (whether elected mayors, leaders, cabinet members, planning committees or professional officers).

That is why local government decision making is constitutionally drenched in accountability. Decisions are traditionally made in open meetings and, among those councils that cherish transparency, they remain so. Moreover, public interest decisions (about allocating public goods, regulating public bads, choosing between competing claims) are best made on the basis of professional advice which is itself published and open to public scrutiny.

So the basis on which council decisions are made is central to local government’s claim to be open and transparent. But most of what happens in public service involves delivering public services. And the principles and practice of transparency need to be applied with equal force in this executive domain. It is no good being open in making a decision while being closed in its implementation. For the way in which a policy instrument is implemented (whether it involves allocating resources, building infrastructure, or delivering directly to the public) ought to be open to public scrutiny.

In Lewisham, we publish a monthly Management Report explaining how we manage our priorities, money, risks, services and projects. This ensures that organisational and partnership performance is reported regularly in addition to published information on council reports.

But being open to public enquiry is an ethical requirement not simply a matter of good practice. And the arrival of big data and analytical tools requires more of us. Openness and transparency give a guarantee of public visibility. But we also need to identify what’s important and in the public interest. Too often citizens experience ‘informed bewilderment’, when a blizzard of data acts as a stumbling block to accountability, rather than its essential stepping stone.

This is why disclosure and intelligibility are vital. Public authorities need to make intelligible information available. This is not simply a matter of ‘being open about everything’ but consciously disclosing the most critical issues (including errors and mistakes) to ensure public accountability. This is the mature but difficult step to take. The best councils are thoroughly open and transparent in their dealings. We need to go even further – disclose what’s critical, make complex issues intelligible and be thoroughly open to enquiry.

Barry Quirk
CEO, London Borough of Lewisham

"If we all wrote in plain English, how much easier – and efficient – life would be. It is no exaggeration to describe plain English as a fundamental tool of good Government."

Baroness Thatcher
The nature of today’s media and social media means that transparency and accountability must cut across and underpin every element of an organisation’s communications. Organisations now need to be more proactive and sophisticated in creating their own voice, in reaching new and wider audiences, and in engaging and enabling the voices of the people and communities who benefit from their work to be heard. No longer is it enough to focus communications on a narrow target audience. Wider consumers, volunteers, donors and crucially service users, alongside their families and friends will want to engage, find out, understand, and comment – publicly.

The digital ‘long-tail’ creates a whole new element of communications planning and activity, monitoring and response. This can be both challenging and costly, and at worst unmanageable, but offers innovative and high impact opportunities for transparency and accountability.

At Media Trust we are increasingly providing communications training and mentors to staff and volunteers across an organisation, giving a wide range of internal stakeholders the tools and skills to tell the story of their organisation’s activities and impact.

Mainstream media are hungry for these diverse and authentic voices, so it is to an organisation’s advantage to make sure that there are rich layers of authentic and transparent stories, content, images and video layered across social media, easily ‘findable’ by journalists and researchers. We increasingly provide training for charities in social media content creation, and also in the digital analytics skills to ensure their content is found.

Media Trust has developed a range of innovative communications initiatives, training service users, beneficiaries and volunteers to be the storytellers and even the evaluators of charitable and public sector-funded activities. For one national charity, working in and with some of the most ‘hard-to-reach’ and disadvantaged communities, we developed a participatory model of evaluation, giving 26 beneficiary communities the training, skills, and video equipment to enable them each to capture on film, in their own voices, and crucially, from their own perspectives, the stories of the impact the funding had made in their different communities over the years of the project.

Increasingly funders and national charities are recognising the benefits of providing grantees with a package of communications training and resources, often building in requirements for communications to ensure transparency and accountability from the very start of the funded work, and as an integral part of evaluation.

Building the capability for comment and digital media – photography, video, story-telling – at all levels of an organisation can create the transparency that enables feedback, response, accountability, representation and engagement.

Caroline Diehl, Chief Executive

Media Trust
When it comes to transparency in the voluntary sector a sensible balance needs to be struck. First, as privileged, influential organisations we need to be accountable. Second, as we expect others to adopt high standards, it is right that we live up to them ourselves. And third, we will gain more public trust if we positively welcome scrutiny. On the other hand charities' annual reports are already online. And small voluntary sector organisations may lack the capacity to cope with the additional burden of organising further disclosure.

That is why the obligation to publish on request under the Freedom of Information scheme is not appropriate for the voluntary sector. I believe that the current regulatory requirements strike the correct balance. However the voluntary sector itself should drive the move towards higher standards of openness and accountability.

We would like charities themselves to develop genuine, voluntary transparency. This can’t happen overnight, but as organisations adopt new systems they should consider how data can be conveniently made available to the public.

The NCVO inquiry into charity senior executive pay exemplified this approach. The minimal regulatory requirement is for charities to publish the number of employees on salaries over £60,000 in their annual report, in £10,000 bands. Our inquiry recommended that the total remuneration of senior staff, along with their names and roles be published in an accessible place on the charity’s website along with an explanation of how the salaries were set.

This isn’t a big leap in information disclosure but it is a significant step forward in principle. It no longer suffices to say that donors or stakeholders can track down information in the back of an annual report. The onus is now on us to make that information clear and accessible. Organisations in different sectors already publish information about salaries, spending and environmental impact. Transparency has become the norm.

Some worry that transparency will fuel the arguments of those who may wish to harm charities. But there is no surer way to invite scepticism than by concealing information. Partial information can be easily misinterpreted. An open organisation engenders trust.

The advantages of greater transparency far outweigh the risks. The integrity of charities is too important to risk in opposing greater transparency. Greater openness creates higher standards and it demonstrates to stakeholders and donors that we are worthy of their trust and respect.

*Sir Stuart Etherington*
Chief Executive, National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

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*With greater transparency will come greater accountability and better corporate behaviour. Rather than engage in futile resistance to it, firms should actively embrace transparency and rethink their values and generally get in better shape.*

*Don Tapscott (co-author The Naked Corporation)*
At the NSPCC we are fortunate to achieve what we do through a wide and extended family. We focus on every aspect of transparency in terms of how we go about building and working with that family whether they are trustees, staff, volunteers, donors, corporate partners or any other stakeholder or member of the general public.

What we deliver can best be achieved by building a movement of people from all walks of life who share a commitment to our cause of ending cruelty to children. They all become a part of something unstoppable.

‘Working Together’ is one of our organisational values. We have been developing a variety of ways of encouraging open dialogue, offering people the opportunity to debate issues with us or be involved in decision making. We run online forums for young people in which they comment on issues that affect them. We also directly involve young people in the selection and recruitment of all of our senior appointments.

We offer opportunities for volunteers to meet with staff, share their views and feedback, ask questions and feed into the development of our services. We are opening out increasingly direct routes for staff to contribute to everything from the development of internal policy to the development of our strategy. In addition we hold Annual Council Meetings, embedded in the formal governance of the society, where volunteers and supporters can meet and talk directly with our Executive and trustees, propose motions and hold us directly to account.

It is important to us that these opportunities to share and discuss issues are informed by the personal preferences that people have and the level of engagement that they would like to have with us. So if someone is interested in knowing about our strategy or how we spend our money they can find out from our website where we publish details of the work we do, along with our annual reports. If people have any specific queries they can also call or email our supporter care team directly.

We want to encourage people to be involved with us in the ways that they would like to be. Building a healthy family requires openness and transparency so that trust can be developed and everyone can contribute to their full potential. We believe this is the way to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people that we care about and that it will attract even more people to our cause.

Siobhan Sheridan
Director of People, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
We believe that anyone should be able to access, use and reuse aid data for free. This means aid flows must be opened to allow stakeholders to access information for any reason.

Publish What You Fund is a pro-aid campaign but we think not enough information is made available to make informed decisions about development activities. A finance minister should be able to find out how much aid money will be spent in his or her country in 2014. He should not have to approach each organisation separately. The information should be in one place and easily accessible. A rural health worker should be able to find out how much is spent on mobile inoculation clinics and where they are located in her region, whether the clinics are funded by the national government or external donors.

Open aid data is not a magic bullet to reducing poverty but without it you cannot see the big picture, make informed decisions and hold governments and donors to account. We need good quality, comprehensive, comparable, timely data published at least quarterly. Some organisations already publish their aid information to a common, open standard that was agreed in 2012, called the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

Our campaign focus is on the biggest providers of development money. Some are setting an excellent example – the Dutch government publishes to IATI monthly. It uses the information for internal decision-making and for external reporting. The Department for International Development in the UK, the Swedish International Development Agency and the United Nations Development Programme send information to IATI and they place the user-friendly data in their information portals.

Some big challenges remain. Several key providers of development cooperation have not fulfilled their commitment to make aid transparent. As the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (set by the UN in 2000 to alleviate global poverty) approaches, there is a call for a data revolution to be part of any new goals so that we can meaningfully assess which targets have been met.

If donors want to operate effectively in the development sector they need to openly publish current and future activities to enable people to access and compare the information. To improve development we need to get aid on budget and encourage country ownership. If information is made available we can hold governments accountable and track activities from provider through to implementer.

We need every donor organisation to meet its commitment to make aid transparent. This requires time, money and political will. They have made this commitment. Now they need to deliver on it.

Rachel Rank
Director, Publish What You Fund - the global campaign for aid transparency

Truth never damages a cause that is just.

Mahatma Gandhi
Many debates around transparency focus on big institutions and powerful people. How transparent are our political institutions, our law makers and the people who influence financial markets? How transparent are FTSE-100 companies, celebrities and billionaires?

When we consider the charity sector, we tend to focus on the biggest, household names. But the vast majority of the sector is made up of small charities. Does transparency matter for them? I would argue that it does, with a few caveats.

Charities in general and small charities in particular are able to do the work they do because of trust. Charities are correctly held to high standards and people trust that they will use money wisely and actually do some good. People donate vast amounts of money and millions of us volunteer for charities every week. The smallest charities are run entirely by volunteers. If there is a lack of transparency, fewer people will volunteer and small charities will cease to be able to function.

Another important aspect of trust and transparency is the fact that small charities work with some of the most vulnerable people in society. They support causes that may not yet be well understood by the wider public and champion things that don’t fill column inches. It is crucial that small charities are trusted by their beneficiaries. The advent of social media provides a free, effective way for small charities to share their work in a more transparent way with the public.

So, should small charities be totally transparent? Well no, for two reasons.

The first is the issue of proportionality. Smaller charities don’t have the resources to share information in the way that big charities, or other large institutions can. This isn’t due to a lack of willingness but due to a lack of time. Small charities may find it harder to keep detailed records or be able to measure their impact as fully. After all, people don’t normally volunteer for small charities so they can spend their time being record-keepers. They want to focus their attention directly on the cause.

Second, all charities need to strike a balance between transparency and confidentiality. Many people who would benefit from charity support already find it hard to ask for help - we need to make sure they feel secure when they share their personal life stories.

Alex Swallow
Programme Director of the Charity Leaders’ Exchange and Assistant Editor for Good News Shared. He was previously Chief Executive of the Small Charities Coalition.
World Vision is committed to improving the well-being of vulnerable children in partnership with its community partners and supporters. World Vision’s financial resources come from three main sources – child sponsors, direct donors and government agencies.

Over 3.2 million sponsors from 35 countries contribute almost half the resource base of World Vision globally. They provide long-term support for programmes that serve the children registered for sponsorship, together with other vulnerable children in their communities. Sponsorship-supported programmes reached over 32 million children last year.

World Vision is committed to upholding high accountability practices and ensuring transparency in all its operations. In managing child sponsorship, World Vision works directly with community groups to select children for participation in programmes in a transparent manner, and to decide the priority projects to be implemented. Financial contributions from sponsors are combined to support these child-focused development projects. Communications about sponsorship engage and empower families, children, sponsors and other partners in promoting meaningful change. Reports on the progress of children and the community programmes are shared with local leaders and sponsors.

Global communications trends are changing expectations as people become more connected online and through mobile devices. Supporters’ perceptions of the transparency of organisations are shaped by expectations for on-demand experiences and sharing through social media. This is a global trend: children across the developing world are also online in internet cafes, homes and schools.

Based on a 2010 study of emerging risks, responsibilities and opportunities for child protection in digital communications and social media, World Vision updated its child protection standards and developed resources to equip children and families to engage safely online. Programmes are empowering children and youth with increased skills to lift their voices as agents of change.

Building on the foundation of child safe engagement in digital communications and social media, World Vision is adapting its child sponsorship approach. Increasingly, children and communities tell their own stories, especially through digital photos and short videos. The new ways of connecting build trust, increase sponsors’ understanding and their satisfaction. The new approach shows positive signs of encouraging and maintaining transparency as the organisation works to revitalise child sponsorship for a new generation of children and supporters.

Elie Gasagara
Partnership Leader, Global Accountability, World Vision International

The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark.

Michelangelo