

Research Report 2018

Small Charities: How loved do they feel?

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Introduction

The Small Charities Coalition surveyed our member charities in January 2018. We asked them how valued they felt by national and local government. We also asked them what needed to happen for their situations to improve. This document reveals their answers.

Headline Statistics

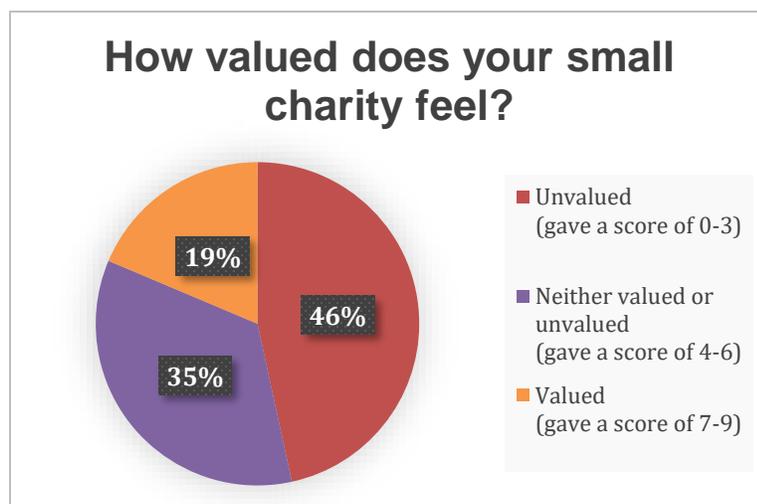
Our survey revealed that the majority of small charities in the UK are not feeling valued by the government at a national level:

- 53% of small charities feel unvalued
- 44% feel neither valued or unvalued
- Only 3% feel valued

In response to the question about feeling valued at local government level we used a scale of 1 - 10 with 1 representing highly unvalued and 10 representing highly valued. Responses were as follows:

“Our community association is used as a political football. Investment made on a short-term basis and then no support to deliver services in the lowest area of deprivation as defined by local government data.”

– Small Charities Coalition member from South East England



None of our respondents gave a score of 10 and 12% selected a score of zero, despite this not being listed as an option.

What would make small charities feel more valued?

At national government level the most frequent response to what would improve the situation was **recognition** and **appreciation** of what small charities do.

This was closely followed by small charities naming more and sustainable funding as their top priority. 13% named greater engagement and consultation. 10% called for more proactive government support for and promotion of small charities with ideas including a “Minister for the Third Sector” and support with making better use of social media (including government departments retweeting posts).

“If decision makers actually understood the reality and value of small charities. The major problem, at a national level, is that they really only see the big charities. At a local level it tends to be a case of who you know.”

— Small Charities Coalition
member from North West England

At local level the top answer by far was an end to the use of professional tender processes for local social welfare and value projects. 40% singled this out for creating a non-level playing field which disadvantages small charities.

Greater engagement and consultation at local level was the second most popular response at 27%. 15% prioritised greater funding by local government and 10% voted for national government increasing funding to local government and an end to cuts in local government budgets.

“[We need] recognition that the benefits of engaging with small charities are not achieved by competitive tendering.”

- Small Charities Coalition member from Scotland

Regional Variations

East Anglia comes out as the region in which small charities feel least valued by national government with 70% saying they feel unvalued. However, their average rating of 5/10 for how valued they felt at local government level was among the highest suggesting a slightly better relationship with local authorities overall.

57% of small charities in London reported feeling unvalued at national government level with 39% feeling neither valued or unvalued. North West England and South West England reported slightly less pessimistic responses, both achieving 56% for neither valued or unvalued as against 37% for feeling unvalued. Some of the scores for feeling valued or otherwise at local level were skewed by the numbers of charities rating 1/10 in regions where the majority scored significantly higher, thus dragging down the average total.

Nevertheless, the numbers reporting that they do feel loved at either national or local level is very low - around 3% for both.

Other Interesting Statistics

One of the reasons why even the most frequent responses, especially in relation to national government, may seem relatively low is because a large fraction of participants gave answers that only appeared once or twice.

Among the ideas suggested were:

- 6% rated better communication as their top priority
- 6% selected greater appreciation for volunteers
- 1% mentioned allowing small charities to reclaim VAT
- 1% mentioned making more funds available in grant form.

Some respondents referred to the contradiction between the rhetoric around the concept of 'think local' and the reality that more money is going away from small charities and towards the biggest.

Conclusions

Clearly the first conclusion must be that small charities as a whole feel largely unloved and unvalued.

Local Government can take some small solace from the fact that scores were more varied at local level although even so the most popular score was 1/10 (which represented 1 in 5 small charities) and only 2% ticked 9/10.

The responses in relation to what would make small charities feel more appreciated echo the anecdotal evidence we have been receiving from our members and potential members. In particular, the results underline the strength of feeling about local government tender processes. This can be divided into the following key issues:

- there is confusion around the appropriate interpretation of existing European Union legislation about the threshold for commissioning bodies to award contracts without the need for a professional tendering process
- there is a strong suggestion that local procurement officers either do not understand or are choosing, for whatever reason (which may be purely down to stretched resources) not to use the *Light Touch Regime* principles. These would allow them greater discretion both in the awarding and the drawing up of contracts (including breaking contracts up to reflect separate specialisms)
- there has been a trend reflected by other recent reports of more money being driven towards the larger organisations in direct contradiction of the rhetoric about supporting local charities
- the entire infrastructure around funding and wider support for local and specialist charities needs to be reshaped. This should ensure small charities are not overlooked but rather identified and supported as key service providers in their communities.

Next Steps

The Small Charities Coalition will continue talking to government and fellow stakeholders to explore long-term solutions to the current problems facing small charities.

The survey demonstrates a desire at both national and local level for greater engagement and consultation. This is an aim we will support along with calls both for more and sustainable funding to keep small charities building and consolidating their successes over the longer term.

There is a significant desire across the sector for a fairer, more consistent and workable approach at local level. The Small Charities Coalition will play a leading and proactive part in making life easier for small charities.

About the Small Charities Coalition

The Small Charities Coalition exists to make life easier for small charities. Our vision is that all small charities (those with an annual income of less than £1m per year) are supported, inspired, and empowered.



As a small charity ourselves, many say that we punch above our weight. We have over 9,000 members and are the largest, and fastest growing support body for small charities in the UK. Our lean operating model through which we broker volunteer and pro bono support for small charities allows us to remain a small charity in relation to our financial turnover.

We have a small, dynamic team of six employees who work with and empower a network of over 550 expert volunteers to deliver low-cost support, training and advice. We also act as a catalyst for change around attitudes towards small charities and the way they are treated. With ten years' expertise in delivering capacity-building support to small charities, and the daily experience of being a small charity ourselves, we are perfectly placed to support these organisations' needs.