

Research reveals barriers to increasing diversity in voluntary organizations

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The impact of COVID-19 and a lack of resources has led to charities and voluntary sector organizations facing challenges in increasing diversity, despite the majority having drawn up plans to address equality, diversity

and inclusion (EDI) issues in their workplace, volunteers and services (79%) and 59% of these revising their EDI approach since March 2020.

Led by Nottingham Trent University, the National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO) and Sheffield Hallam University, the [eighth Barometer \(July 2021\)](#) has revealed the barriers that organizations are facing in their efforts to be more inclusive and address EDI issues. These include reports of limited financial resources (20%), staffing capacity (15%), lack of human resources skills, knowledge and capacity (12%), and lack of equality, [diversity](#) and inclusion knowledge or skills (11%).

However, when asked about the impacts of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions on the diversity of their service users, 17% of the respondents reported experiencing a more diverse range of service users, and 15% reported an increase in diversity of their volunteers. Only 9% reported an increase in the diversity of their workforce during the pandemic.

The data also reveals that charities with an annual income of less than £10,000 reported the lowest increase in diversity, with medium-sized organizations (with income between £100,000 to £1 million) reporting the highest increases in diversity among their workforce, volunteers, and [service](#) users.

Despite the barriers, 79% of organizations surveyed have drawn up plans to address equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues in their workplace, volunteers and services, with 59% of these having revised their EDI approach since March 2020. The most reported changes by organizations in procedures or policies to promote greater equality, inclusion and diversity since March 2020 have been staff training (16%), safeguarding (12%) and staff recruitment (13%).

Demand for services increases while financial outlook

remains mixed

Respondents to this month's survey indicated a mixed financial picture again. Compared to the previous month, 28% of respondents said their finances deteriorated, 27% saw their finances improved and 45% reported their financial stability being the same.

In the last month, 57% said they had an increase in demand for services, 29% reported demand for services stayed the same and 9% reported a fall in demand. Over the last month, the employment position in the sector is reported as relatively stable, with 47% reporting the same number of paid employees compared to previous months.

Daniel King, professor of organizational behavior at Nottingham Business School, part of Nottingham Trent University, and project lead, said: "The past year has seen a heightened awareness of issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Campaigns around racial justice have collided with a pandemic that has amplified inequalities that already exist. Our report shows that many organizations have been searching for ways to respond to these circumstances, leading to many conversations about diversity and inclusion.

"Many interviewees said that COVID-19 gave opportunities to reflect and challenge their assumptions, meaning they began having difficult conversations within their organizations about some of the changes they need to make. However, many interviewees recognize there is a long way to go, there are structural and systematic forms of exclusion, from the way organizations are run through to funding. Our report highlights some of these and signposts ideas for future action."

Anya Martin, research and insight manager at NCVO, said: "As lockdown eases, it's clear that the road to recovery will not be linear for

many voluntary and charity organizations, and this has had an impact on the sector's vital plans for EDI work. The report shows that smaller organizations in particular face challenges with limited funding and resources. However, some organizations have been able to revise their EDI plans during the pandemic.

"Despite the limitations of the funding and financial support available to charities throughout the pandemic, demand for services has remained at an upward trajectory. The rise in volunteers at the beginning of the pandemic also saw an increase in the diversity of volunteers working with some organizations. As we look to the future it is really important that charities are confident they are continuing to focus on EDI and adopting best practice both within their organizations, and in the services they deliver, to better reflect and support the communities and individuals they serve."

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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