

Talking about independent action and NCIA

NCIA wants to change the tone of the conversation about voluntary action. Privatisation isn't the only game in town, we can challenge inappropriate management practices, and we can say that local activism can and should be supported but the 'big society' isn't providing that support.

Speaking at events and commenting on blogs and forums are both good ways to promote independent action by voluntary organisations and community groups and to say why this needs protecting from privatisation, commissioning, cuts...

It's important to talk about the positive side of independent action and what it achieves – protecting democracy, helping people get what they need for themselves, providing space for people to meet and do activities on their own terms. Specific examples and stories from your own experience will be the most compelling information to give people.

However, not everything is positive and we should be confident about clearly saying that Independent action is under threat – voluntary organisations are expected to bid for contracts that ignore local knowledge or ask them to meet irrelevant targets, managers need to defend independence instead of expecting their staff to adopt hierarchical and bureaucratic ways of doing things, community groups are patronised or ignored, the 'big society' is a big deregulated market place – activities that can't be run for profit will disappear if they can't be provided by volunteers.

Here are a few things to say upfront:

1. Say that you're talking about **the voluntary and community sector**. (The sector is not easy to define but 'independent action' is sometimes used in different contexts)
2. The most important thing is that independent action helps people do **what matters to them in their own communities**, rather than following the agenda of government, local authorities, private businesses or other powerful groups of people.
3. People tend to know about the problems so try emphasising the positive side of independent action – **responding to local needs** and being accountable, **protecting democracy** and democratic ways of working in organisations.
4. Let people know that NCIA has been arguing since 2006 that **voluntary action is under threat**
5. **Threats from government and the private sector:** The New Labour government undermined the autonomy of community groups and voluntary organisations, and the pressure has intensified with the current government's programme of privatisation of public services and 'big society' campaign.
6. **Threats from being silent** We need to speak up about our desire to continue the traditions of voluntary action where people freely associate for whatever purposes they want: political change, personal change, solidarity, campaigning, cultural and leisure activities or anything else

7. **NCIA is informing and agitating** about these issues through our 3 campaign areas (there are short campaign statements on our website):
 - [public services and privatisation](#)
 - [managing for independence](#)
 - [supporting activism](#)
8. **Let people know they can do something about it** – with or without NCIA, in their own group or as individuals:
 - revisit your principles
 - tell your stories
 - find fellow travellers
9. NCIA is about **collective action** – people can get involved. Sign up to our newsletter, come to an assembly meeting, look at our website, use our research and leaflets in your group or workplace.
10. **Remind people that they are not alone!**

Notes for speakers: Think about your audience

Try and imagine how familiar your audience might be with independent action already. If you're talking to a regional anti-cuts campaign you'll have to use different language than if you're talking to a voluntary sector conference. If possible, try and run your talk by someone who's in a similar position to your audience.

Ask yourself these questions to help you prepare:

- How did I get interested in NCIA and independent action? What are some examples from my own experience?
- What makes me angry? Hopeful?
- Who are some of the people I'm talking to – what do they care about?
- What are the key issues that threaten independent action (e.g. privatisation, commissioning, cuts, managerialism, communities being ignored or patronised)
- What can I say to the people at this event that shows the benefit of independent action?
- What questions might they have? What might I say back?
- How can they respond to my talk? (e.g. ask questions afterwards, come and talk to me, pick up a leaflet, come to next assembly meeting, visit website)