Radical Hope: A Survival Guide for the Coming Storm

Published: June, 2025
Written by: Daisy O’Reilly-Weinstock and Eef Leurs
Published by: Good Innovation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

Hope is one of those words we use all the time but rarely stop to define. Ask ten people what it means and you'll get ten different answers. Some say it's a feeling. Others say it's a value. A light in the dark. A trap. A story we tell ourselves. A strategy of last resort.

And yet, despite all that ambiguity, or maybe because of it, hope is everywhere. From Obama's unforgettable campaign posters, to Dove, Nike, Lego and even Spotify, hope has operated like a marketing strategy promising optimism, resilience and even belonging.

In the charity sector hope runs through the heart of so many mission statements, brand straplines, and campaign promises. It's in how we talk to supporters, staff, funders, partners and collaborators. We ask people to hold it, to act on it, to stay in it. We dangle the promise and we leverage the good will generated by its presence. We live, breathe and survive on hope.

In the conversations behind this report, I asked every interviewee the same question: *how do you define hope?* There was no universal, agreed definition. But almost everyone knew where they felt it. In relationships. In community. At home. With their loved ones. Not in grand visions or strategic frameworks, but in the daily act of showing up for each other, especially when things feel uncertain and outside of your control.

We're collectively living through the certainty of uncertainty. A relentless churn of polycrisis pessimism, culture wars, cost-of-living pressures, climate breakdown, and institutional distrust. The rise of AI looms like a modern Sword of Damocles; its promise matched only by its potential to destabilise. The return of authoritarianism brings with it regressive ideologies, restrictions on freedoms, and the normalisation of cruelty. People don't just feel exhausted. They feel lost.

That's where this report begins. With a recognition that the neoliberal experiment across much of the Global North has ended, and we're exiting light mode and entering the unchartered waters of late-stage Boom Boom capitalism and a return to the dark. It is in this context that

we approach hope. Not with a perfect definition, but with the realisation that hope isn't just something we believe in. It's something we build.

But what if we (the impact sector) have been using the word, and profiting off its promise, without building the supporting structures to hold it, protect it and deliver on that promise?

Our people are tired. Tired of trying to hold everything together while the world keeps falling apart. Tired of systems that reward caution, communications that oversimplify, and strategies that ask people to do more with less. Tired of pretending that optimism is the same as impact.

And yet, something is shifting.

You can feel it in the conversations happening behind closed doors. In the questions CEOs are asking their boards. In the frustrations fundraisers are whispering to each other. In the discomfort bubbling up in strategy sessions where the old answers no longer fit. There's a growing realisation that business-as-usual is no longer an option. That we've reached a tipping point.

Not because everything has changed already. But because everything around us is changing, fast. And in the middle of all this sits the charity sector, trying to stay hopeful, strategic, and relevant in a world where old tools no longer fit the job.

The public aren't looking for slogans. They're looking for substance. They want something they can believe in, and something they can build with. Hope, maybe. But not the kind we've grown used to or traded off.

As part of this project we interviewed artist Mark Titchner. During lockdown, his work could be seen plastered on billboards across South East London. 40 feet wide on a massive outdoor hoarding as you drive down the Old Kent Road towards New Cross proclaiming the provocation, "It's the hope that keeps us here". This isn't a neutral statement. It's a challenge. It reminds us that hope holds tension. It can liberate us, and weigh us down. It can be a promise, and a pressure.

Mark's work for me hits a nerve. It captures how hope is shifting. In a moment of global and societal peril, the kind of hope that will sustain and

feed us going forward needs to look and operate differently. Otherwise, it risks becoming just another empty, utopian promise. Something that sinks instead of anchors.

Nick Cave calls hope the warrior emotion. “Hopefulness is not a neutral position,” he writes. “It is adversarial. It is the thing that can lay waste to cynicism.” I think of hope like a sourdough starter. It’s messy. It takes work. But the more you feed it, the more it grows. And the more you have to share.

Hope, in this report, is not sentiment. It’s structure. It’s not the light at the end of the tunnel; it’s the architecture we build inside it. Because what has surfaced, over dozens of conversations with CEOs, strategists, fundraisers, service designers, trustees, futurists and artists, is that we are all feeling the cracks. But we’re also feeling something else: the pull to build.

And that’s what this report is here for.

This isn’t a trends deck or a manifesto. It’s not a retrospective, and it’s not a list of feel good soundbites. It’s a tool for navigating the now, and helping you build what comes next for your organisation. It’s a cultural inventory of what’s ending, a reframing of what hope could mean now, and a working blueprint for redesigning the systems we work within.

We offer this report as an invitation. Not to agree with everything, but to stay in the room with us. To challenge what no longer fits. And to help shape what might, which is why we’ve structured it into three acts.

Act I begins with endings. It looks at what’s fraying, what people are already walking away from, and what needs to be grieved before it can be rebuilt. Because it is through letting go that we can see the space for what’s next.

Act II reframes hope. To treat hope as a cultural force, a political stance, and a strategic design principle.

Act III is the blueprint. It explores how hope can be operationalised across our work: community and people, strategy and mission, culture and leadership, innovation and growth, and mission delivery.

And the report closes with the **Architecture of Hope**; a practical foundation for organisations who want to do more than survive change. They want to shape it.

Because if hope is going to last, it has to live somewhere. Not just in our comms. But in our systems. Our culture. Our strategy. Our actions.

"*People speak of hope as if it is this delicate, ephemeral thing made of whispers and spider's webs. It's not. Hope has dirt on her face, blood on her knuckles, the grit of the cobblestones in her hair, and just spat out a tooth as she rises for another go*." - @CrowsFault

We need that kind of hope now. Hope that's lived. Structured. Shared. Hope that demands more from us, but gives us back the future in return.

Hope isn't the whole strategy. But it might be the start.

Daisy O'Reilly-Weinstock
Senior Director of Big Bets

ACT I: Endings

Introduction

We're living through a crisis of hope; a time defined by disillusion, distrust, and disconnect. The relentless churn of polycrisis pessimism, culture wars, polarisation, and cost-of-living headlines have left many people in a dopamine-seeking doom loop of sludge content and scrolling paralysis. And the charity sector isn't immune. Leaders are navigating growing scepticism, internal burnout, and a creeping doubt that radical change is still possible. Hope, once the lifeblood of fundraising and the glue of mission-driven work, is becoming harder to sustain and harder to sell. This section unpacks the drivers of this shift, and why we need to confront the darkness before we can rebuild something better.

Entering Dark Mode: Drivers of Change

Polycrisis Pessimism

We aren't just living through one crisis, we're living through all of them at once. The cost of living, climate collapse, geopolitical instability, AI disruption, democratic erosion. It's not just overwhelming, it's unrelenting. This is the defining feature of polycrisis: not just the number of crises, but the way they interact, compound, and leave little room to recover. For many, especially younger generations, the result is a persistent, low-level exhaustion. Younger generations, like Gen Z (once hailed as the climate generation), are now stepping back. Not because they don't care, but because the weight of saving the world has become unsustainable. News avoidance is up. Cynicism is rising. And within that context, constant crisis messaging no longer motivates, it numbs instead. For charities, this presents a challenge: how do we acknowledge the scale of what we face without contributing to despair? The answer isn't to sugar-coat it, but to offer a credible way through. Hope, in this context, isn't a soft sell. It's a strategic tool to break through fatigue and reengage people who are desperate to believe change is still possible.

Escapism & Conscious Disconnection

In an era dominated by relentless news cycles and digital saturation, many individuals are choosing to disconnect. Not from indifference, but as a means of self preservation. This conscious disconnection stems from the overwhelming nature of constant information, leading to a phenomenon known as "news fatigue." According to the Reuters Institute's 2024 Digital News Report, 39% of people now often or sometimes avoid the news, up from 29% in 2017.This trend is especially prevalent among younger demographics, who are seeking refuge in digital detoxes and curated media consumption. Instead of amplifying the noise, there's a need to create meaningful, hopeful narratives that resonate on a human level. By fostering genuine connections and providing spaces for reflection and community engagement, it's possible to navigate this landscape of conscious disconnection and rekindle a sense of collective hope.

Rising Inequality

Rising inequality is reshaping the UK's social and economic landscape, deepening divides in wealth, health, and opportunity. Despite being one of the world's largest economies, the UK has the 9th highest rate of income inequality amongst OECD countries, seeing its poorest households fall behind. In the UK, the poorest fifth of society holds 8% of total income, compared to the top fifth's 36%. These disparities mean an increased demand for services amid shrinking resources, as communities grapple with the consequences of deepening inequality.

Declining Trust

Trust in institutions (government, media, and even charities) is eroding, replaced by skepticism and disengagement. The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that 70% of respondents believe these institutions "purposely mislead people," a figure that has climbed every year since 2021. In the UK, trust in media has plummeted, making it the least trusted among 28 countries surveyed for the barometer. Disillusion is deepest among Gen Z, many of whom are adopting nihilistic worldviews, and opting out of institutions that they see as structurally broken. While trust in charities has seen a modest recovery, the sector is not immune to the broader crisis of confidence. It has faced significant challenges

over recent years, driven by increased scrutiny, high-profile controversies, and growing public expectations around transparency and accountability. Although this might sound bleak, NGOs do remain one of the most trusted institutions in the UK (47% trusted), just behind businesses (51%), and miles ahead of government (only 37%) and media (36%). Whilst we need to rebuild trust in general, we should also be looking to leverage the trust we have as a sector to help people navigate uncertainty in unstable times.

QUOTE: “I see an opportunity for charities in a world where some people struggle to find hope. Charities are generally trusted, even if that trust has dipped a bit. We can be a beacon of hope, and we need to seize that. But it starts with us. We’ve become pretty bleak and miserable as a sector, and we have to snap out of that.” Craig Fordham

AI Misinformation & The Post-Truth Spiral

In the age of AI, misinformation has evolved into an increasingly pervasive threat. Advanced AI technologies, like deepfakes and generative language models, can produce highly convincing false content, blurring the lines between reality and fabrication. Unfortunately, we’re also increasingly exposed to this misinformation. From Google AI summaries generating misleading answers to the torrent of AI-generated and perpetuated misinformation we can find on social media platforms like Facebook and X. Worse: distinguishing the false information from the truth is becoming increasingly difficult as the technology advances. The compounded spread of misinformation across digital platforms risks undermining democratic processes, public health initiatives, societal cohesion, and more. And this misinformation isn’t just due to AI; certain bad actors are purposefully leveraging this content to sow increased division, confusion, and outrage.

Polarisation & The Death of Nuance

QUOTE: One person's hope is another person's nightmare. Hope is such a situational thing that it's impossible for us to pin down universally. It means a myriad of different things to a myriad of different people. There is so much polarisation going on at the moment - how we get two

parties at the opposite ends of a polarised spectrum to be full of hope is really difficult. Richard Lee

In today's hyper-connected world, polarisation is intensifying, eroding the middle ground and stifling nuanced discourse. Polarisation is no longer confined to politics; it's shaping what we buy, who we trust, what media we consume, and even who we choose to be friends with. The ideological gap is widening, and the tone is shifting from disagreement to hostility. There's less space for ambiguity, complexity, or change of mind, and more pressure to pick a side.

One of the clearest examples of this divide is emerging among younger generations. In the UK, young men are becoming more conservative while young women are growing more progressive. A whopping 25-point gap that's influencing views on everything from gender identity to immigration and racial justice. This rift isn't theoretical. It affects how people engage with causes, how they respond to messaging, and whether they see your organisation as aligned with their values, or fundamentally opposed to them.

In this fractured landscape, hope isn't a unifying banner unless it's carefully held. One person's vision of a better future can be another's nightmare. The question isn't just how to inspire, it's how to navigate. How do you hold audiences across divides? Are you prepared to speak with clarity in a world where identity and alignment matter more than ever?

Dopamine Loops & Anhedonia

We're living in a dopamine loop, a cycle where short bursts of stimulation trigger feel-good brain chemicals, reinforcing the urge to scroll, click, and repeat. Whilst the loop model was originally used to explain addiction, this model now underpins much of today's cultural design. Social platforms are built to keep us locked in: endless reels, autoplay feeds, and gamified content designed for maximum engagement and minimum depth.

This dopamine-first design philosophy hasn't just shaped technology, it's reshaped culture. Everything is scrollable. Anything can be gamified.

The result is a constant churn of shallow rewards that leave us increasingly numb. Over time, these repeated hits start to lose their impact. We're left with stimulation, but not satisfaction. This is a state known as anhedonia, where even the things meant to bring us joy stop working. In this environment, finding hope and true dopamine is harder than ever.

SOURCE FOR IMAGES: https://www.honest-broker.com/p/the-state-of-the-culture-2024

Rise of Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is no longer a distant threat; it's a present reality. Across the world, democratic norms are being dismantled under the guide of stability. Perhaps the most high-profile example right now is happening in the United States, where the Trump 2.0 administration has raised serious concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions.

This global shift isn't confined to overt political repression. It also permeates civil society, with NGOs facing increasing restrictions and budget cuts. Yet, as authoritarianism rises, the role of civil society becomes ever more critical. We're navigating a challenging landscape, trying to foster resilience whilst advocating for democratic principles across the globe. It's not just a political fight, but a collective effort to uphold the values of freedom and justice.

Internal Burnout

Meanwhile, the charity sector is facing a burnout crisis, with nearly a third of organisations reporting increased staff exhaustion over the past year. High workloads, emotional strain, and a lack of support are all contributing factors. Leaders within the sector are heavily affected, often bearing the brunt of organisational challenges while striving to maintain services amidst financial constraints.

Burnout in the sector isn't new, but it's increasingly widespread and harder to ignore. In 2024, 75% of charity staff said they had either experienced burnout or seen it in colleagues over the past year. Just 12% said their organisation was equipped to address it. Right now, it's a

leading cause for people leaving the sector. Many fundraisers cite repeated exposure to grief and trauma, from both service users and supporters, adds a unique emotional strain. More broadly, across roles, people talk about impossible targets, limited resources, and the increasing expectation to “do more with less.”

The sector is not just losing staff, it’s losing faith. To gain more insight into this issue, in April 2025 we ran a survey to better understand why people are leaving (or thinking of leaving) the sector. 120 people responded. A whopping 66% of respondents said that they were considering leaving the sector altogether. Burnout remains a major factor, particularly in management roles, where 55% cited it directly, many pointed to something deeper and more difficult to repair. This isn’t just about overwork or under-resourcing. It’s about belief.

44% of respondents said they no longer believe the sector can deliver real change. More than half (51%) cited workplace culture and environment as key reasons for leaving. It paints a picture of people not just stretched thin, but emotionally and ethically conflicted; stuck in systems that preach hope and impact but often fail to model it internally. People talked about feeling undervalued, stuck, isolated, and disillusioned from lack of progress. Survey respondents described ‘losing faith in the charity sector’; like the sector is ‘lacking the structures that enable change’; and ‘focused on ‘unrealistic goals’ which ‘no longer align with charity values’.

People are not going quietly. They’re going with heartbreak, frustration, and a real sense of betrayal. These are individuals who came into the sector committed to justice and change, and are now walking away not from the cause, but from the gap between the values they believe in and the realities they experience day to day. The danger isn’t just attrition, it’s disillusionment. And it’s hard to recruit hope into a place where it’s no longer being modelled from within.

Designing the Funeral: What We Need to Leave Behind

Dark mode isn’t just about organisational pressure. It’s about political exhaustion, moral disorientation, and generational disillusionment. Trust

in systems is at an all-time low, and for good reason. Across government, business, media, and even civil society, people are waking up to the realisation that the game has always been rigged.

Many, particularly younger generations, have stopped pretending. They've pressed the nihilistic "fuck it" button. They've disengaged from institutions that offer slogans instead of change. And in doing so, they've named something many of us have felt but rarely say out loud: the system isn't working. It was never built for all of us. And it was never going to save us.

This could feel like the start of a slide into despair. A slow drift into cynicism, villain-era capitalism, and nihilism. But there's another way to read this moment.

What if this shift into the dark isn't collapse, but clearing? What if this is the space where we stop performing hope, and start building something real?

What if this is the invitation, not to be rescued, but to rescue ourselves?

Letting go isn't giving up. It's choosing not to carry what no longer serves. It's the first step in writing our own rules. In designing systems we haven't seen before. And in building a new kind of hope: one that's strategic, collective, and grounded in realism, not rhetoric.

As Angela Davis said: *"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."*

This is the opportunity.

QUOTE: "Sometimes when we go into 'dark mode,' that's when we're at our best—when we're most needed. It can feel pressured, but there's such a clear call to action. Everyone in the organization jumps on it with amazing focus, which is galvanizing. Recently, in the face of massive welfare cuts, it was awful, yet I've never seen the team more galvanized. They poured a week of energy into action and mobilization, and while the cuts still happened, we did make some difference. In dark mode, there's clarity, a tunnel vision on the change we can make. That clear,

time-bound priority reduces overwhelm and supercharges hope. We can say, ‘We can get this done in this specific window of time.’” Sophie Carre

We can’t build what’s next without letting go of what’s no longer working. The world is changing fast. A rising tide of global disruption is reshaping how people engage with everything, including the third sector. Audiences are anxious, exhausted, and overwhelmed. And in that climate, hope, the lifeblood of fundraising, is becoming harder to communicate. Donors are sceptical. Teams are burning out. The old stories aren’t landing. Case in point: people are disengaging from legacy news media, with 39% of people now actively avoiding the news; and ad fatigue is on the rise, as 91% of UK audiences saying they’re inundated with too many ads.

QUOTE: “We need a vision for the future, but everyone is struggling to come up with a coherent idea of what the world could look like.” Clara Maguire

If we keep delivering the same messages, through the same systems, in the same ways, we won’t just lose trust. We’ll lose people. We’ll lose relevance. And we’ll lose the ability to deliver real impact.

Because here’s the thing: the public are already changing their behaviour. Some are tuning out entirely. Others are moving their money, time, and energy towards movements and organisations that speak to the world they actually live in, and the one they want to help build. They’re not looking for blind optimism. They’re looking for action, clarity, and hopeful futures that feel possible, rather than passive.

Doing nothing is not an option. We don’t have the luxury of sitting back and seeing how this plays out. Inaction could cost us attention, credibility, and connection. To remain relevant in this landscape, we have to evolve. As Ivor Williams pointed out: “When you talk about creative destruction or death, you also open the possibility for rebirth. It closes the loop: after one thing ends, something new can begin.”

QUOTE: To quote Baz Luhrmann, Worrying is as useful as trying to solve a maths equation by chewing bubble gum. Worry is a wasted emotion. So what if the worst happens? What can I do in response? We can't disallow negativity, but we have to have a moment and space for it. And afterwards, we ask ourselves: "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Julie Milnes

This report is a provocation: to look honestly at what's no longer working, and to grieve it. And, crucially, to start designing what comes next. Not after the grief, but through it.

QUOTE: "It's about permission and creating a sense of safety so people can move through emotions letting go, sitting in that weird middle ground of uncertainty, which can feel really uncomfortable. That's a grief space. Alex Evans talks about how people want to jump from despair to hope, but there's grief in the middle. Nobody wants to deal with grief because it's messy, but we need to if we want to figure out how to generate hope again." Ivor Williams

ACT II: The Reframe

QUOTE: "There's a quote I love: 'Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.' It implies hope is an action—something you work for, not just an emotion you feel. If I want to experience hope, I need to keep doing this work and supporting people who are doing the work." Jennifer Estaris

What Is Hope, Really?

QUOTE: "Whatever the situation, however bleak it is, I'm always looking for hope. For me, there's a difference between being hopeful and being blindly optimistic—this isn't just a 'something will turn up' mindset. Hope means believing things can get better. Once you believe that, you can start asking, 'How can things improve, and what can I do?' When I've been in difficult situations, whether at work or in life, I quickly ask myself, 'Is this forever, or is there hope for the future?' The answer is always that there's hope. So what can I hold onto right now, and what can I work toward to make things better?" Craig Fordham

Hope is often misunderstood. It gets bundled up with optimism, positivity, and belief in a better future. But hope isn't the same as blind belief. It's not the Pollyanna idea that everything will be fine, or that things will improve on their own. It's more grounded than that.

Even our dictionaries disagree on the meaning of hope. Cambridge dictionary defines it as 'wanting something to happen or to be true, and usually have a good reason to think that it might.' Collins dictionary similarly suggests that there is a rational basis for hope that it's something you feel when there's a reasonable basis for it – saying: 'you want it to be true or to happen, and you usually believe that it is possible or likely.' Merriam-Webster, on the other hand, omits the aspect of rationality entirely, saying that to hope is 'to cherish a desire with anticipation; to want something to happen or be true.' This positions hope as something felt, rather than reasoned – more about yearning than expectation. Each of these dictionary definitions circle around the idea of hope, but rarely land on its most powerful quality: its ability to propel people forward in the face of uncertainty. Not because they're sure things will get better, but because they believe it's worth trying anyway.

Meanwhile, research across psychology, neuroscience, and economics has begun to unpack what hope really is. Unlike optimism, which is generally about expecting good outcomes, hope is about agency: the belief that you can take meaningful steps toward something better, even if success isn't guaranteed. Hope doesn't assume the odds are good. It just insists that action is still worthwhile. We describe hope as made up of two parts: the desire for something to happen, and the belief that it's possible to get there. That belief isn't passive. It's driven by a sense of self-efficacy, the internal conviction that change is achievable through your own actions or with the help of others.

This has real implications for wellbeing and resilience. Studies show that people with high levels of hope are significantly less likely to experience burnout, depression, or anxiety. Hope is also tied to greater creativity and long-term thinking. When people lose hope, they often struggle to

imagine a better future. Not just emotionally, but cognitively. Overwhelm, uncertainty, and persistent crises can physically limit our ability to think ahead. Hope helps restore that imaginative capacity.

This is particularly relevant in the charity sector, where long-term social change is the goal, but the work is often slow, complex, and emotionally draining. Hope doesn't mean pretending everything is fine. It means acknowledging that change is hard, and still believing it's possible. That belief isn't wishful thinking. It's a strategy for staying engaged, and helping others do the same.

QUOTE: Hope is acknowledging how bad things are, but believing things can change. Hope drives you to make that change. This is a complex world, as complex as it's ever been, and hope will help us navigate it. Anita Eade

So, to be useful, hope needs shape, structure, and application. That means moving beyond vague optimism and grounding hope in how we think, lead, design, and relate. For that purpose, we've developed seven dimensions of hope that offer a more nuanced lens: a way to turn hope into a working practice. These dimensions aren't about idealism, they're about building something resilient enough to withstand hard times and flexible enough to grow through them. We've drawn on these dimensions of hope throughout the report, and in deciding which areas we wanted to explore throughout this research.

QUOTE: You have to have some form of hope and belief that you are a key part of the solution to the problem you're trying to solve. We have to believe we have agency. Philip Almond

The Seven Dimensions of Hope

1. **NARRATIVE HOPE**: *The stories we tell (and who gets to tell them).*

It's not about perfection. It's about the messy reality of the journey. Don't overclaim. Don't oversimplify. Be honest, specific, and let the right people lead the story.

- **Own the messiness**. Reject simplistic, feel-good stories. Embrace complexity and contradiction.
- **Shift the mic**. Let communities speak for themselves. Don't assume authority you haven't earned.
- **Avoid hero myths**. Real stories don't always have neat endings or clear heroes. Allow ambiguity.

QUOTE: Empowering storytellers to tell their stories is the most powerful way to generate hope at a micro level. We can't tell the story for someone else. Genuine people telling genuine stories in a genuine way cuts through the news. Richard Lee

QUOTE: When you talk to the families who are fundraising in memory of a child, they're doing this with hope that it will be different for future generations and other families. The belief and hope that we will develop new treatments, find new cures. And we do lean into that as we seek to support them. But publicly we don't always talk as openly about the complex and long road that can sometimes be ahead to find those new cures and new treatments. Research can be life saving but it can also take time. It's an unknown path, and often not a linear one, towards achieving the change we might want to affect. Liz Tait

2. **STRUCTURAL HOPE**: *Embedded in systems and design, not just feelings.*

Systems that enable action, not block them. If your staff can't move, your systems don't work. Structural hope means creating organisations built to enable action, not block it. Systems reflect ambition, not fear.

- **Dismantle barriers**. If the rules are stopping good work, rewrite them.
- **Budget bravely**. Your budget signals intent. Don't pretend to be ambitious if you're funding cautious maintenance.
- **Stop performative risk aversion**. Good risk management enables action. Bad risk management paralyses teams.

QUOTE: "We talk about 'gathering snow and throwing snowballs'. Gathering snow is the daily work – collecting resources, building

momentum – and seizing opportunities is when we decide to throw them. It's a risk calculation." Will McCallum

3. **RELATIONAL HOPE**: *Built through trust, co-creation, and proximity.*

Relationships build hope. Not grand plans, not top-down initiatives. Relational hope starts small and close. This is all about community. Starting local. Starting small. Sharing ownership. Working in collaboration.

- **Start local**. Invest deeply in real communities. Hope is nurtured face-to-face, not via remote strategies or mass insight.
- **Prioritise trust**. Transparency, consistency, and honesty build trust; everything else undermines it.
- **Co-create, don't consult**. Shared ownership matters. Communities don't just want to be heard, they want to lead.

QUOTE: You can't steer people and say: "This is what you need to do". Instead, we're seeing an opportunity around how the public equip themselves with a better understanding of the problem. That's how we can give people the agency to help build hopeful narratives. Clara Maguire

4. **POLITICAL HOPE**: *Contested, uncomfortable, and emotional.*

Political hope isn't cosy, it's about clarity and consequence. Real leadership means making hard decisions, understanding their implications, and standing firm in them. Owning the uncomfortable truth that when you draw boundaries, someone gets left out.

- **Draw clear boundaries**. You can't and shouldn't try to please everyone. Choose your battles carefully.
- **Embrace discomfort**. If leadership feels easy, you're probably not leading. Real hope involves difficult, often unpopular, decisions.
- **Own your choices openly**. Stand by the exclusions and limits your strategy sets, acknowledge them, explain them, defend them.

QUOTE: You might enjoy some freedom, but if you're on one extreme or the other, you can't be for everyone. That contributes to polarization. If

you choose and clearly articulate where you stand, you gain a powerful tool to tackle this. Saad Eddine Said

5. **DESIGNING HOPE**: *Futures, ambiguity, and creative imagination*.

Hope isn't just what you believe, it's what you're designing towards. If your future is just your past recycled, you're designing stagnation. If your services, income strategy, and operating model are all based on what worked five years ago, you're not building hope, you're preserving stasis. Get intentional about the future you're shaping.

- **Use foresight actively**. Don't just predict; design for change. Question your assumptions
- **Normalise ambiguity**. Learn to hold uncertainty without rushing to false clarity. Flexibility is strength
- **Invent, don't replicate**. Stop defaulting to what worked before. The past is data, not destiny.

QUOTE: "Unrealistic or misguided hope – the kind that's not based on data – is the problem. You need realism: there's societal pressure, a decline in supporter income (time, money, or influence), and yet there's little curiosity about solving it smarter or better. Then there's disappointment when it doesn't work out, but no backward reflection. It's like we hope things will fix themselves, but you can't have dormant hope. It has to be active, it should lead to change." Lou Barton

6. **TRUTHFUL REALISM:** *Not soft, not sentimental; radical by necessity.*

Naming what's hard, and still showing up. Stop sugar-coating. Truthful realism means acknowledging the tough realities openly, without despair. Fluffy optimism is exhausted and exhausting. People want leaders who can tell the truth without giving up.

- **Tell hard truths openly**. Be direct, clear, honest—people can handle more than you think.
- **Balance honesty with meaningful direction**. Recognise difficulties explicitly, then point to credible, actionable next steps.
- **Reject comforting illusions**. Real hope thrives on clarity, not comfortable ignorance.

QUOTE: The increasing need for our sector puts into sharp focus the need for the support for different groups. We need to be the ones who communicate that there is a different version of the world possible, even if it's harder to get there, and even we need to go backwards to go forwards. Liz Tait

7. **POLYPHONIC HOPE**: *There isn't one story. The future is plural.* Polyphonic hope means holding multiple, often contradictory narratives simultaneously. Making space for the incompatible and the uncomfortable. No universal message. Leading with hope now means holding complexity, sometimes contradiction. That's not a failure of strategy. It's a strength.

- **Champion plurality**. Encourage different stories and perspectives to coexist openly, even when they conflict.
- **Embrace contradiction**. If everything feels aligned, you're missing something crucial. Real hope can handle tension.
- **Redefine coherence**. Align around shared values, not forced consensus. Contradiction is a strength, not a weakness.

QUOTE: Reframing a hopeful future means acknowledging everyone's value in society as part of the innovation, and ensuring all voices are heard in ways that optimise for the collective. By prototyping possible futures—short-term or multi-generational—and involving as many people as we can, we move closer to what we claim to envision. Samar Younes

Act III: The Blueprint

Act I began with endings. With grief, disillusionment, burnout, and the honest admission that hope is running out. Not because people have stopped caring, but because the systems we work within have stopped making change feel possible.

Act II offered a reframe. We looked again at what hope really is: not just a feeling, but a force. Not something soft or abstract, but something practical and strategic. A different way of thinking about time, power, progress, and participation.

Act III is the response. This is where we turn that reframe into action. Not with a masterplan. Not with a single path forward. But with a blueprint: a set of provocations, patterns and choices that can guide how we work, how we lead, how we design, and how we collaborate when we take hope seriously.

Because if hope is to be more than a message, it has to be something we do. And something we structure ourselves around.

We won't pretend that this blueprint is neutral. Much like hope, this blueprint is political and it’s polyphonic. It asks hard questions. About how charities show up in communities. About whose futures we’re designing for. About where strategy lives, and who gets to shape it. About whether our cultures, systems and collaborations are built to preserve the past, or make space for what’s next.

Each chapter in Act III explores one of those domains: community and people, strategy and mission, culture and leadership, innovation and growth, and mission delivery. It surfaces the shifts already underway and names the decisions still ahead. And it’s designed not as a roadmap, but as a set of building blocks. Something to test, to adapt, and to shape into what’s needed next.

Because the real work of hope isn’t just about what we believe. It’s about what we build.

Where Hope Lives: People & Community

Introduction

Hope doesn’t start in strategy documents or impact dashboards. It starts between people. In conversation. In shared spaces. In small acts of care. In the hard, daily work of showing up for one another.

For a long time, community was treated as an outcome. A warm, fuzzy by-product of programmes, services, or outreach. But what we’re seeing now is a return to something deeper: community as infrastructure. Not just who we serve, but how we work. Not just what we build, but what we build it from.

In uncertain times, people don’t look to institutions for hope, they look to each other. And the organisations that thrive will be the ones that make space for that: not just designing for reach, but for proximity. Not just delivering services, but facilitating relationships. Not just campaigning for change, but helping people connect, organise, and act together.

But real community work is not romantic. It’s not always harmonious. It requires trust, compromise, and the courage to let go of control. It means moving from centralised service models to shared ownership. From tightly held organisational identities to more porous, plural, and expansive forms of belonging.

This chapter explores how hope is built and held collectively: in neighbourhoods, in networks, and in organisational cultures. It asks how charities can move from being service providers to community catalysts. From convening audiences to cultivating relationships. From hoping *on behalf* of people to hoping *with* them.

Because if hope is going to last, it has to be something we do together.

QUOTE: You're tapping people's desire for change, their hope. But we're not tapping into people's desire for action. We don't tap into hope in a way that affects change. Right now, it's about making people think they've ticked a box and therefore their hopes and dreams will come true. We need to give people agency. Anita Eade

Community

The Shift: from local safety nets → to expansive networks of solidarity.

QUOTE: “We’re social creatures. Me being hopeful by myself is tough; it feels like I’m on my own. But when people meet up—at a pub or online, because geography doesn’t define community anymore—they strengthen each other. It’s a support system in difficult times, and it pushes you to do more than you would alone. It might even make you bolder and braver, because in a group you can take bigger risks.” James Alexander

Covid lockdowns changed how we experienced community. Isolation wasn’t abstract anymore; it became everyday reality. Our usual connections fragmented, and traditional support networks struggled. The pandemic revealed clearly that institutional safety nets alone weren’t enough. But it also sparked spontaneous organising: mutual aid networks, neighbourhood WhatsApp groups, and hyperlocal initiatives.

But after lockdown ended, we quickly snapped back. We collectively returned to BAU (both operationally and emotionally, in some cases in an attempt to process the trauma of loss), centralising services and support once again. Yet, this return exposed deeper cracks. People have realised that waiting for top-down solutions won't build resilience or lasting connection. Faced with continued uncertainty, economic strain, and institutions increasingly seen as disconnected and overwhelmed, communities are once again organising themselves, this time more deliberately. It’s not just crisis response anymore. It’s about lasting, expansive networks of solidarity.

Now, hope isn’t trickling down from institutions, it’s rising up from streets, kitchens, WhatsApp groups, and zine collectives. It’s about local initiatives, community gatherings, and everyday, micro acts of care. People aren’t waiting for systems to be fixed. They're creating change within their communities, building resilience and connection from the bottom up. Because the systems they’ve relied on are broken and

they're tired of waiting for big institutions to step in and step up. This "*hope is contagious. There's a need to amplify the voices of the people who are feeling it and working at it.*" (Caitlin Keeley)

The Blueprint: In difficult times, communal activities and shared experiences bolster people's sense of purpose and optimism. Our support systems are a vital source of comfort, guidance, and resilience. They remind us that we don't have to face hardship by ourselves. In fact, when people feel invested in their community, and trust its members, they tend to report higher levels of hope. Communities with strong social ties and accessible support structures are better equipped to respond to challenges and maintain hope during these times of uncertainty.

QUOTE: "A tactic that re-emerged in the 2024 election in America is the concept of relational, community-based organising. Brands are giving communities the training, skills, confidence, and resources to be able to have impactful conversations.." Paul de Gregorio

Community has always been a powerful source of hope. But we also need to be honest about its limits. The safety and intimacy of tightly-held communities can become protective to the point of exclusion, quietly reinforcing boundaries that separate rather than connect. The more we focus on creating community for us and ours, the more we risk othering people outside of our community. The challenge now is to stretch the bounds of our communities. To hold on to the deep value of local, relational organising while expanding our sense of belonging beyond what feels familiar. Real community doesn't just serve 'us', it prepares us to care for people we haven't met yet, in places we may never go, across times we may never see. The opportunity isn't just to build community, it's to build the kind of community that expands beyond itself. That prepares people not just to care for their own, but to act in solidarity with others and make hope contagious.

So What: For charities, this shift means fundamentally rethinking our role: moving from centralised service providers to proactive community catalysts. It means stepping away from top-down solutions and instead empowering grassroots action. Charities become facilitators, connectors, and genuine collaborators: handing resources, platforms, and trust

directly to communities, not simply delivering services to them. As Clara Maguire notes: *“people still want that sense of transaction with change, like signing a petition, but we need to give them the tools to affect change in the existing system where these accountability mechanisms are increasingly failing.”*

Income generation changes too. People invest in what they belong to. Fundraising must evolve from transactional asks (“What can you give us?”) to relational invitations (“Join us. Shape this. Lead with us.”). Building expansive solidarity isn’t just a social good; it’s a strategic foundation for sustained support and loyalty.

The Tension: This won’t be easy. It challenges organisational inertia, tests traditional notions of control and accountability, and asks charities to embrace uncertainty. But it’s also the clearest path to relevance and resilience in a world increasingly defined by community-driven action.

Localised Hope

The Shift: from digital disconnection → to face-to-face solidarity.

The last decade promised deeper digital connection. What we got was something thinner. Constant connectivity hasn’t made us feel closer. It’s made many of us feel lonelier, more distracted, and more detached from each other and from place.

Now, we’re seeing a reset. A renewed appetite for what’s tangible, local, and present. People want to be together in real time and real space. They want trust that’s built face to face, not filtered through algorithms. Hyper-local connection is re-emerging not as nostalgia, but as strategy. A move from reach to relevance, from mass appeal to proximity.

And if charities don’t create these spaces, others will. Not all of them will be rooted in care or community. Harmful figures are already mobilising isolated and disaffected people with alarming speed. In this landscape, offering messages isn’t enough. The organisations that thrive will offer meaning. They’ll offer connection. They’ll offer something real.

The Blueprint: That shift in focus - from reach to realness, from mass appeal to local proximity - is where hope gets built. While community-

wide wellbeing is difficult to measure, we know that place-based interventions can make a real difference. Since hope and wellbeing are closely linked, fostering hope at the individual level has the potential to ripple outward. When people feel hopeful, it benefits those around them. Hope spreads. But equally, so can overwhelm and one of the most effective ways to counter this is by strengthening connection: through volunteering, creativity, shared meals, and simply spending time in nature with others. The common thread is connection. That's where hope is nurtured.

Right now, we're seeing a renewed focus on hyper-localism. Endless scrolling and superficial online interactions have left many of us feeling detached. Although we're technically more connected than ever, it doesn't always feel like it: audiences feel that the last decade has made people more lonely and less community-oriented. The places where we live, work, and gather are a canvas for IRL community-building. Whether it's a shared garden, a local WhatsApp group, or a kitchen table conversation, these hyper-local touchpoints create the kind of trust and solidarity that people crave.

This shift isn't just about tactics, it's about urgency. Because if charities don't create these spaces, others will. And not all of them will be rooted in care. We're already seeing harmful figures mobilise disaffected communities with alarming speed. The organisations that thrive in the years ahead won't just offer messages, they'll offer meaning. They'll offer connection. They'll offer something real. People want to get involved in ways that feel human, meaningful, and real. The opportunity isn't to go viral. It's to go local. To step offline and build something together, rooted in face-to-face solidarity.

So What: For charities, this shift demands a move beyond broadcast. It's no longer enough to aim for reach. People want relevance. They want presence. They want to feel part of something close to home.

Service delivery needs to meet people where they are, literally. That means supporting neighbourhood responses, decentralised activity, and community-led design. It means thinking at the scale of streets, schools, libraries, shared gardens, kitchen tables. The best interventions won't be the biggest. They'll be the ones that feel rooted.

This shift also has real implications for income generation. People give where they feel connected. Not just emotionally, but physically and relationally. That means more tangible, place-based opportunities to get involved. Not just another passive ask, but an invitation to act, gather, and belong. Connection isn't just a communications strategy. It's the offer.

As Mark Titchner puts it: "*I'm thinking of how public space can be used as a way of communicating support for people in vulnerable situations. It's about giving a voice to people who may be marginalised. I try and bring their presence into a space that typically excludes them, and generate empathy, as opposed to just proliferating stereotypes*."

The Tension: National organisations are often built for scale, not intimacy. Funders still reward reach over depth. And for those without deep local roots, stepping into community spaces can feel forced—or even unwelcome. Hyper-local work can be messy, inconsistent, and hard to measure. But it's also where the most enduring impact happens. Building hopeful futures means trusting communities more, and being willing to relinquish some control.

QUOTE: "We need to recognise that we're not the only answer. If we're going to fix the problems, it's going to be through local agency. It's going to be through local hope, giving local people power." Anita Eade

Democratising Hope

The Shift: from top-down visioning → to co-created futures

The era of one-way engagement is ending. People no longer want to be consulted. They want to be involved. Top-down narratives about progress, hope, and what comes next are falling flat, especially in a context of political polarisation, declining institutional trust, and widening social inequalities.

Hope can't be handed down from the top. It has to be co-created. The future will not be built by committees in closed rooms, but by communities shaping it in public. Together.

The Blueprint: Agency is central to hope. When people feel powerless, hope becomes a hollow promise. But when they're invited to act, hope becomes active, contagious, and transformative. For charities, that means our supporters, volunteers, and especially our service users need to have skin in the game. They need to feel that their voice, decisions, and effort make a tangible difference. Without that sense of ownership over the future, people disengage. This is especially urgent for marginalised communities, where mainstream narratives of progress often feel detached from daily struggles. That's why democratising hope means more than messaging. It's about redesigning the systems through which people participate.

QUOTE: We're talking about hope and positivity to people who are getting up in the morning and might not have enough money or food to get through the day. Hope means a very different thing to those groups and yet the prevailing narrative from the charity sector is hope. It ignores the reality of many lives of people in this country. Anita Eade

We're not operating in a neutral space. In a polarised society where even the idea of a shared future is contested, hope can't be imposed. It has to be co-created. That means decentralising it. Building participatory systems where people can help define what a better future looks like, and how to get there. Participatory models like citizens' assemblies and grassroots co-design aren't just more inclusive. They work. In Ireland, a citizens' assembly played a key role in shaping the public debate that led to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2015, and later abortion reform in 2018. At its most basic level, the model entails randomly selecting a representative sample of citizens to deliberate on and make recommendations tackling complex, controversial, or significant issues. By 2020, an OECD report had found that over 300 similar processes had taken place in its member countries since 1986, with increasing success in building consensus and trust in public institutions. Hence, "*putting citizens at the decision-making table isn't actually radical – it's been tested for over 30 years. It's proven, it works, and it has a solid methodology about it. It's not so much radical change as it is understanding which systems work for the world today. The world is*

more dynamic and complex, so we need evolved systems to navigate it better." (Saad Eddine Said)

The same logic applies at the local level. Grassroots co-design (involving communities in shaping programmes, services, and campaigns) can dramatically increase engagement and trust. The design principle essentially implies an equal relationship between professionals and service-users. Research has shown that these co-designed public services lead to better outcomes, where the services themselves and the people who use them become far more effective agents of change. At their core, these models hand power back. They treat community members not just as contributors, but as co-creators. And when people see someone like them shaping the future, it doesn't just spark hope, it legitimises it.

QUOTE: "If we're making decisions without someone in the room who has lived experience, we risk getting it wrong. So in every step of our design work, we make sure those voices are part of the conversation. We're checking in with people who've been through it, making sure we're not missing what matters most." Sonya Trivedy

So What: This shift requires charities to fundamentally reimagine participation. Consultation isn't enough. We need structures that give people real decision-making power: from co-designing programmes to shaping campaigns, governance, and even income models.

That includes supporters and donors. Participatory donor models, where donors help shape funding priorities or strategy, aren't fringe anymore. They're part of a broader movement to build trust through shared ownership. When people feel genuine agency, they show up. When they don't, they disengage. Charities that embrace co-creation will deepen loyalty, improve outcomes, and build movements that feel truly democratic. You can read more about participatory models in the our report Navigating the Loyalty Landscape.

QUOTE: "People disengage when they don't have ownership, lose trust when you don't deliver on promises, and won't engage if they don't have proper access. Our current systems tick all those boxes of failing to

engage or foster ownership, so putting citizens around the table is crucial.” Saad Eddine Said

The Tension: This kind of participation is not easy. It asks charities to give up control, challenge internal hierarchies, and hold space for disagreement. It’s slower. Messier. Sometimes uncomfortable. And it won’t always lead to consensus. But that’s the point.

Democratising hope means building systems that are capable of holding complexity, not avoiding it. It means treating participation not as a risk to be managed, but as the route to something more just, more legitimate, and ultimately more hopeful.

“It’s always about giving people agency, seeing others like them taking action, or doing it themselves. Otherwise, it’s just optimism, and there’s very little reason for optimism right now.” Will McCallum

Case Studies

Citizen’s Assemblies

In 2016, the Irish government convened a Citizens’ Assembly to tackle some of the country’s most divisive and complex issues: the constitutional ban on abortion. Made up of 99 citizens from diverse backgrounds and electorally representative background, the Assembly spent months learning from experts, listening to personal testimonies, and deliberating with care. Their recommendation? To repeal the Eighth Amendment and allow the Oireachtas (Parliament) to legislate for abortion. The government accepted the recommendation, paving the way for a national referendum, in which two-thirds of voters supported repeal. Irish voters found that the citizens assembly brought greater clarity to the issue, and improved trust in the system.

So What: This is a powerful example of hope through participation. In a political climate often defined by polarisation, Ireland showed that meaningful, inclusive dialogue can lead to progressive change. It shows how giving people space, information, and trust can build consensus, shift narratives, and drive action. Hope is built in the process of listening, learning, and deliberating together.

Natural History Museum

This year, the Natural History Museum is running Generation Hope, an initiative designed to connect young people with climate scientists, campaigners, and policymakers through a series of talks, panels, and creative workshops. Held both in-person and online, the programme brought together voices from across the globe to tackle one core idea: how can we move from climate anxiety to climate action? The events were aimed at empowering young people to feel not just heard, but equipped with the knowledge, tools, and networks to shape a better future. Not just presenting the facts, but investing in the emotional and social infrastructure needed to process them.

So What: Young people don't just want to be inspired, they want to be involved. Designing programmes that move beyond information into empowerment, and creating space for collective imagination, is a hopeful act in and of itself. The hope doesn't just come from knowing the science; it comes from believing you, alongside those around you, can do something with it.

Braver Angels

In a polarised America, Braver Angels aims at bridging the gap through respectful conversation. Founded in the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Braver Angels brings together people from across the political spectrum for structured, facilitated dialogues aimed at rebuilding trust and understanding. The organisation's workshops, town halls, and debates don't ask participants to agree, but to listen, empathise, and humanise each other. Over the past 7 years, they've had over 63,000 participants, across more than 5,000 events.

So What: Hope can start with a conversation. In an increasingly polarised world, creating space for dialogue is central to social change. Especially social change that avoids marginalising or ignoring other voices. It's impossible to build a hopeful future that will please everyone, but if we want to try to get close to that ideal, we have to invest in the conversations and relationships that make it possible.

Porto Alegre

The Brazilian city of Porto Alegre has been a global pioneer in participatory budgeting for a long time, inviting ordinary citizens to help decide how public funds are spent in their communities. These neighbourhood assemblies discuss the funding allocations for the 16 districts of the city for the city government's responsibilities including schools, water supply, and sewage. The meetings are held in public spaces (e.g. churches and union centres across the city), and, crucially, are open to all. These debates decide the criteria for which the budget is allocated in the districts. For example whether it is population, an index of poverty, or a measure of shortages. At that point, the neighbourhoods designate delegates who will go on to create a series of recommendations for the city's budget. The result? Infrastructure in poorer neighbourhoods has improved, civic trust has increased, and residents report feeling more empowered to shape their city's future.

So What: Porto Alegre's model shows that when people are trusted with real decision-making, they show up with insight, care, and vision. The lesson is clear: we have to move beyond consultation and start co-creating. Hope grows when people feel not just heard, but trusted to lead.

Self Space

In 2024, mental health service Self Space launched the Walk Club, a therapist-guided initiative combining movement, conversation, and community. Designed to support "mental fitness," the club brings people together in public spaces for reflective walks led by qualified therapists, creating a low-pressure environment for emotional support, social connection, and collective care. It's part of a growing shift toward accessible, informal, and proactive approaches to mental health that meet people where they are.

So What: We have an opportunity, within the discussion around hope, to reimagine where and how care happens within communities. Where can you build similar spaces that reduce stigma, support wellbeing and strengthen social ties? But, watch out: given the success and subsequent popularity of similar walking and running communities, the answer isn't always to build something new, they're a dime a dozen. The

question is where you can do something unique, that aligns with your mission and brand, and where you can be additive to existing community spaces.

HOPE not hate

HOPE not hate was created to challenge the politics of hate and extremism in the UK, both online and offline. Combining rigorous research with grassroots community organising, the organisation works to expose far-right networks, support communities targeted by hate, and build resilience through education and storytelling. It's not just about naming threats, it's about equipping people and communities to stand up to them with courage, clarity, and care. What sets Hope Not Hate apart is its dual focus on resistance and renewal: resisting the spread of fear, misinformation, and division, while actively nurturing inclusive communities grounded in hope and solidarity.

So What: In the face of rising extremism and polarisation, this work hopes to show that the antidote to hate isn't silence or avoidance, but organised, courageous, community-led action. Don't just defend what you love, mobilise around it.

Where To Find Hope

If you're looking for hope, don't look up, look around. Join something. Join anything. A choir, a union, a community football team, a WhatsApp group for your street, a queer craft night, a lunch club at the local community centre. If the first thing doesn't click, try another. You're not shopping for the perfect group, you're building muscle memory for belonging. What matters is showing up. Doing something small, with other people, on purpose. And do it in person. Not doomscrolling, not debating online. Just being in a room with others. Hope is in the practice of connection. It's okay to do it badly, awkwardly, or inconsistently. Just don't do it alone.

Hope As The Strategic North Star: Strategy & Mission

Introduction

Hope isn't a mood. It's not a vague sense of optimism or a glossy campaign tagline. And it's not about setting utopian, unreachable goals that look good on a slide deck but never materialise in the real world.

Strategic hope is different. It's directional. It's disciplined. It's grounded in reality, shaped by evidence, and used to align decisions, internally and externally. When used well, hope becomes a north star: a clear, intentional sense of where you're headed and why it matters. It's not the fantasy of a perfect future. It's the clarity of a possible one.

QUOTE: Our strategy is ambitious. We have to be hopeful about it. There is an inherent element of hope within the challenge of taking on massive societal issues. Julie Milnes

And this matters more than ever. When charities are pulled in multiple directions; by funding pressures, shifting needs, media cycles, and internal tensions, hope gives focus. It helps you choose what to do, and just as importantly, what not to. It gives your team something to rally around. It helps supporters understand where you're going. And it makes it easier to say no to things that don't serve the mission, no matter how urgent or appealing they might seem.

But this only works if hope is real. Not fluffy. Not abstract. Not performative. It needs to show up in your goals, your language, your metrics, and your internal culture. It's not enough to *say* the future is hopeful. You have to be able to show that your strategy reflects it, your people believe in it, and your work is building it—step by step.

That's what this chapter explores: how hope becomes strategic. Not just as an idea, but as a framework for decisions, priorities, and communications. The organisations that use hope well don't avoid hard truths, they hold them. But they also make a choice: to move forward anyway, with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

Boundaried Hope

The Shift: from mission creep → to mission clarity

For years, the third sector has operated under an unspoken pressure to do more: more services, more audiences, more causes. We've stepped into the breach when government exited, when people fell through the cracks, or when no one else was interested in the problem. But it's also been driven by funding. When funders want something new, something ownable (and marketable). But the cost of trying to do everything has become impossible to ignore.

The result? Mission creep dilutes impact, fragments strategy, and exhausts teams. The result is organisations stuck in a cycle of reactivity, chasing relevance instead of staying rooted in purpose.

Now, the shift is toward clarity. Boundaries aren't constraints. They're commitments. In a crowded, polarised, resource-limited environment, saying "this is what we do" has become a radical act. Boundaried hope doesn't limit ambition. It focuses it.

QUOTE: "One of the hardest lessons I've learned is how to say 'no.' The world is exciting, and there's so much to do, it's easy to want to tackle everything. Part of it is knowing who else to recommend – there are plenty of people doing great work, and I can delegate or direct opportunities to them instead of trying to do it all myself." Jennifer Estaris

The Blueprint: Hope doesn't have to mean solving everything. In fact, some of the most powerful, actionable hope comes from narrowing your focus. For charities navigating huge societal challenges with limited resources, the temptation to expand can feel constant. But trying to do it all doesn't create impact, it creates burnout.

Boundaried hope is about choosing your lane, and staying in it with clarity and intent. It's not about thinking small. It's about going deep. When you draw clear boundaries, you give your organisation permission to act with purpose instead of reacting out of fear. You create the conditions to say no, end programmes that no longer serve, or even

wind down when your mission is complete. Focus is not failure. It's commitment.

Boundaried hope also means knowing who you're for (and who you're not). Trying to please everyone leads to vague missions and watered-down messaging. But clarity attracts. It rallies the right people around you, even if it repels others. And that's okay! That's not a weakness, it's strategic courage. But we're not going to pretend it's easy. Taking that step (when it's not forced upon you by external forces) is terrifying. It's about holding your nerve and knowing that the people who will stay are more important, more valuable, and more aligned with your mission than those who chose to leave.

It also means knowing when to speak, and when not to. In today's hyper-visible, polarised world, organisations and leaders are under growing pressure to weigh in on every issue. But that pressure creates a false binary: say something about everything, or stay silent about everything. Neither builds trust.

The real work is harder. It's about clarity, not performative activism. When do you speak up, and when do you step back? What happens when your people want to speak, and the organisation doesn't, or vice versa? When is silence a strategy, and when is it complicity?

These are values questions as much as strategic ones. Boundaried hope means supporting your people through that tension. It means creating internal cultures where personal values and organisational purpose can co-exist in conversation, not clash in silence. Setting boundaries isn't about avoiding politics. It's about integrity. And it's how we build trust from the inside out.

And it could have positive financial benefits as well; inverse giving (an influx of donations after charities tackle controversial topics) is on the rise. For example, a whopping 48% of Gen Z say they've engaged with inverse giving, compared to 27% of the general public. People want charities that aren't afraid to tackle difficult, uncomfortable truths. As Rob Halkyard points out: "*it doesn't matter if we piss certain people off, because they're not going to support us anyways. In fact, doing so might make others engage more. The real danger, rather than pissing people*

off, is that the sector becomes timid." By being clear on your values and staying rooted in your purpose, you give your collaborators something to rally around. It helps cut through polarisation, not by avoiding it, but by being transparent about where you stand and why. People want charities that are willing to name hard truths and stand by them.

That same clarity matters internally too. Boundaries aren't just external. They show up in what you talk about inside your organisation; how personal values intersect with organisational ones, and where tensions arise. It's not always easy. Staff bring complex identities, politics, and beliefs to work. What matters is having the space to explore those differences openly, and the frameworks to navigate disagreement with care. Boundaried hope helps here too: when your organisational purpose is clear, it becomes a touchstone for navigating ambiguity without defaulting to silence. Can everyone in your organisation articulate your mission statement clearly and concisely? Can they see how their day-to-day contributes to it? And are they empowered to speak up when you start to drift?

So What: Boundaried hope isn't just a mindset shift. It's a strategic necessity. Charities cannot solve everything for everyone. And in trying to, they risk solving nothing well.

That means setting clear priorities and resisting the pressure to chase every opportunity, jump on every issue, or stay broad to stay palatable. Strategy should be a filter, not just a roadmap. If your mission doesn't help you say no, it's not clear enough.

QUOTE: "A lot of charities forget their 'why.' They should go back to why they exist—the people they serve or the problem they're trying to solve. I want every organisation to do what's in the best interest of the people they exist for. If you've drifted from your 'why,' stop." Emma Malcolm

This clarity strengthens your message, speeds up decisions, and builds loyalty. Donors and supporters are more likely to back organisations that take a stand, even if they don't agree with every position. Gen Z in particular are drawn to organisations that name uncomfortable truths. Inverse giving is rising, and clarity attracts more than it repels.

Boundaries matter internally too. As staff bring their full selves to work, leaders need to foster dialogue, not just discipline. Boundaried cultures don't silence disagreement. They create frameworks for it. They help people understand when to speak, when to step back, and how to hold space for values that don't always align perfectly.

QUOTE: "We remain apolitical and balanced, but we'll do the right thing and speak up. Some people might dislike that, but we have resilience in our supporter base and staff." Sharon Pickford

The Tension: Boundaries sound strong in theory, but they can be painful in practice. Saying no can mean walking away from funding, from partnerships, or from visibility. It can mean turning down something good to protect something essential.

Internally, it can surface discomfort. Drawing lines means naming where the organisation ends and where personal politics begin. It means deciding who speaks, who doesn't, and how decisions are made when values clash.

And clarity doesn't eliminate conflict. It can invite it. But that's the point. Boundaried hope isn't about avoiding discomfort. It's about creating enough coherence to weather it. In a fragmented world, the most trusted organisations will be the ones that know what they stand for, and stay standing when it matters.

Evidence-Based Hope

The Shift: from highlighting the problem → to proving what works

For decades, charity messaging has been built around the scale of the problem. It's understandable - urgency drives action, and highlighting injustice has long been the go-to way to mobilise support. But something is shifting. Audiences are fatigued by a constant stream of crisis. They're tuning out. Trust in institutions is falling. And increasingly, people aren't just asking *what's the issue?*; they're asking *is anything working?*

At the same time, charities have more data, learning, and lived experience than ever. But too often, we lead with emotion and bury the

evidence, or we rely on numbers without narrative. Neither approach builds long-term trust.

The shift now is toward evidence-based hope. Not spin. Not perfection. Just clear, credible proof that change is possible, and already happening. As Emma Malcolm puts it: "*For the people we support, we have to demonstrate and inspire real hope, not hope-washing."*

The Blueprint: Hope becomes stronger when it's backed by action. And action becomes more believable when it's backed by evidence. That evidence isn't always neat. It might include failure, iteration, or slow progress. But that's the point. Real change is rarely linear, and people know it.

As Aimee Perry said: "Hope is the most fundamental need. Everything else only slots into place if they still have hope. But hope alone is not enough. We need to also actually provide solutions."

Too often, the work of learning is siloed, kept within evaluation teams or buried in donor reports. But supporters, partners, and even staff need to see that learning. What worked. What didn't. What changed as a result.

Evidence-based hope asks charities to elevate learning, not just impact. To show how you're evolving in real time. To share how decisions are shaped by evidence. To build a culture that treats insight as public, not private.

"We've found our readers want to see solutions, but also want to feel good by the end of a story. Sometimes we run dark stories, but if the angle resonates, people still engage." Will Doig

So What: This shift calls for new behaviours across the organisation. For service delivery, it means designing for learning. Build feedback loops. Share what's working. Show how you're adapting. Make evaluation visible and useful, not just something you report upwards.

For income generation, it means giving supporters more than an emotional ask. Show them the journey. Show them how their support is part of something that evolves and improves. That builds loyalty, not just conversions.

Internally, it means bringing comms, fundraising, and impact teams into the same room. Not once a year. All the time. Data and narrative should work together. Insight and emotion should be connected, not competing.

Hope that's grounded in learning doesn't dilute urgency. It deepens trust.

The Tension: Progress is often slow. It's complex, hard to visualise, and doesn't always match the pace of fundraising calendars. There's a fear that showing how long things take will make people stop giving. But the opposite is true. People disengage when they feel misled. They lean in when they feel included.

The bigger challenge is cultural. Many organisations aren't set up to make learning public. Reporting, impact, and storytelling teams often speak different languages. And failure still feels risky to share.

But this is where trust gets built. Not through perfect answers, but through honest learning in motion.

Communicating Hope

The Shift: From what's broken → to what's being built

For years, charity communications have centred on crisis. Urgency. Scarcity. It's a model that made sense; it sparked outrage, drove action, and raised funds. But now, audiences are overwhelmed. The language of need is everywhere, and it's exhausting. This doesn't mean people don't care. It means they can't see a way in.

At the same time, many charities are delivering real change. But those stories rarely reach the public. Headlines are still dominated by CEO salaries, not charity impact. As Liz Tait put it: "Hope is an emotion that we, as a sector, have leveraged for a long time, for better or for worse. And I think that, more broadly than fundraising, hope is absolutely what charities should be offering."

The shift now is toward communication that doesn't just describe the world we want, but invites people to help build it. From what's broken to what's being built. It's about reclaiming charity as a space of momentum, possibility, and vision. That doesn't mean ignoring hardship. It means

telling the truth about what's hard, and then showing how we're responding. Because the most powerful hopeful messages don't just describe a better future. They invite people to help create it.

The Blueprint: Hopeful messaging doesn't mean vague positivity. It means being honest about what's hard, and clear about what's changing. It means sharing the future you're working towards, and showing people how they can be part of it.

QUOTE: "Hope is crucial for giving people a vision they can rally behind. It runs through every brand in our space. But sometimes that hope gets overshadowed by more radical or reactive messaging. There can be tension between radical messaging and a hopeful tone." Angharad McKenzie

We've already seen the shift. The strongest narratives now follow a clear arc: here's the problem, here's what we're doing about it, and here's the future we're building. There's a growing appetite for this kind of storytelling. Around 39% of people worldwide (up from 29% in 2017) say they sometimes or often actively avoid the news. But research also shows that solutions-based storytelling can see higher engagement in comparison to standard stories.

This matters. Because for most people, communications *are* the organisation. It's how they experience your brand, your beliefs, and your work. As Paul de Gregorio said: "Most of what the public see from charity is their fundraising activity. I don't think charities always present a positive view of the future, because they're so focused on revenue and fundraising and this desire to present need. There needs to be a balance, charities need to paint a positive picture of what they're fighting for and celebrate successes along the way."

That doesn't mean glossing over pain or pretending everything's fixed. It means showing the work in progress. Being specific about what's changing, and grounded in what's real.

QUOTE: "There's a real pragmatism in how we handle hope. Beyond the hopeful tone of our communications, we reinforce it by highlighting impact and evidence. We've gotten much better at

sharing where change is happening and celebrating it.” Sophie Carre

Internal comms matter too. Some of the most hopeful stories stay locked inside organisations—boosting morale, but never shared publicly. That gap needs closing.

QUOTE: “The reinforcement that we are having an impact, and specifically the impact we have on individuals, is the most powerful fuel for our people doing the work they do. These are our most powerful stories, but they're never the ones that we're broadcasting to the public. We have to change that.” Philip Almond

The best hopeful messages do two things: they name the struggle, and they invite people into the response. That’s what makes them credible. That’s what makes them work.

So What: This shift asks charities to treat communications as strategy, not support. Not just a tool for fundraising, but a vehicle for trust, relevance, and participation.

Externally, that means messaging that reflects your theory of change. Don’t just tell people what you need. Tell them what you believe. Show them the vision you’re building, the change already underway, and the part they can play.

QUOTE: “We should have clear and simple narratives at the heart of all our public communications. It should illustrate what we believe in and what we want society to look like—a simple articulation of our theory of change and how our supporters can actively participate in us hitting our shared goals.” Paul de Gregorio

Internally, this means giving comms teams access to real stories, not just polished case studies. It means aligning language across departments. If hope is part of your strategy, it needs to be part of your voice.

The Tension: Done badly, hopeful messaging can feel naive or disconnected. Some fear it will weaken urgency, or confuse audiences about what still needs to be done.

But the real risk is fatigue. People are switching off, not because they don't care, but because they feel powerless. Hopeful messages don't reduce urgency. They create space for action.

There are also internal barriers. Comms teams often work in isolation from service or impact teams. Stories stay buried. Data stays siloed. Messaging gets stuck in the safe middle, neither energising nor credible.

But this is the moment to step forward. The sector doesn't just describe what's wrong. It builds what's next. And we need to get better at saying so.

Case Studies

Reasons To Be Cheerful
Reasons to Be Cheerful is a nonprofit editorial platform offering an antidote to doom scrolling by spotlighting real-world solutions to the world's most pressing problems. With a global team of journalists, it shares stories of progress, across climate, education, housing, justice, and more, that are grounded in data, impact, and replicability. This isn't blind optimism; it's evidence-based hope, designed to remind us that change is not only possible, but already happening. Each story is a case study in itself: from cities solving homelessness, to communities cutting emissions, to creative education pilots that actually work. It's a resource for changemakers and a mindset shift for everyone else.

So What: Reasons to Be Cheerful proves that hope thrives on proof, not platitudes. We can take inspiration from this approach: show what's working, share successes, and give people reasons to believe in better. We have to remind people (and prove to them) that progress is not only possible, but already happening, especially in bleak times.

Charity: Water
Charity: Water has one promise central to its mission: every donation funds clean water, and there's proof. Since launching, the organisation has built a model rooted in evidence-based hope, combining rigorous data, geotagged project updates, and stunning storytelling to show exactly where donations go and what impact they make. From mapped well installations to sensor-equipped pumps that track water flow in real

time, charity: water turns transparency into trust, and trust into action. They don't just ask people to care, they show them that change is real, measurable, and happening right now.

So What: Donors today want to know their support is working. That means real-time data, honest reporting, and compelling, grounded storytelling. It's the difference between telling your success story and showing the receipts. Proven hope is what builds belief in your mission.

Just Stop Oil

Just Stop Oil is known for their high-visibility nonviolent protests, which they've recently announced they'll be putting on pause. The organisation operated on a single-issue mission: demand that the UK government halt all new oil and gas projects. Now that this is officially government policy, they're hanging up their hi-vis jackets. By limiting its demands and avoiding the pressure to solve every aspect of the climate emergency, Just Stop Oil was able to offer a powerful emotional anchor: people could engage, act, and rally around something achievable. It's not about saving the entire world at once, but about knowing where to start. Doing one thing, and doing it well, and drawing a clear line in a crisis. Crucially, the end of their direct action campaign does not mean the end of their work. Throughout the past years, they've faced difficulties and set-backs in the courts, and will focus on challenging anti-protest laws there.

So What: Just Stop Oil shows us that hope is more powerful when it's boundaried. In a sector focused on tackling big, complex issues, it can often feel like we're being pulled in different directions. But clarity doesn't limit impact, it can strengthen it. In a noisy world, a focused, strategic mission can be a lifeline for people overwhelmed by scale and scope.

Oxfam

Oxfam's legacy campaign, 'Stay in the Fight', reframes leaving a gift in your will not as an ending, but as a powerful continuation. The campaign invites supporters to see their legacy as an act of sustained resistance: a way to keep standing up against injustice long after they're gone. With emotive messaging like *"You may be gone. But you'll still be fighting,"*

the campaign flips the narrative from passive giving to active, enduring impact. Rather than leaning on sentimentality or duty, Oxfam communicates hope as defiance: an invitation to stay in the struggle, to keep pushing for change, and to leave the world fairer than you found it.

So What: ‘Stay in the Fight’ taps into people’s desire for purpose, permanence, and agency, even after death. Hopeful messaging doesn’t have to be soft, safe, or euphemistic. It can be powerful, forward-looking, and deeply motivating.

Prebunking

Prebunking is an emerging strategy in the fight against misinformation, focusing on building resilience against it before it spreads, rather than clearing it up after the fact. There’s a few different ways of tapping into prebunking, but it largely relies on anticipating harmful narratives that could occur and warning against them before they do. For example, the OECD has begun adding warnings to some of their communications, which clear up any possible misconceptions or misinterpretations of their data before they occur. Other techniques involve exposing the mechanics behind misinformation, filling data voids where reliable information is missing, and collaborating across newsrooms, academics, tech platforms, etc.

So What: Prebunking reminds us that hope can be preventative. Misinformation breeds cynicism and apathy, and we have a role to play in building information resilience against that. That means clear, honest communication; anticipating bad actors’ tactics; and equipping communities to think critically. Because hope can’t thrive where trust in information has collapses.

Where To Find Hope

Hope shows up when we know what we’re working towards, and believe it’s possible. If we want to find hope, look for the places where direction brings relief, rather than pressure. You want to be able to say, “This is what we’re doing,” with just as much conviction as, “This is what we’re not.” So start with one boundary you hold in your strategy. Something you say no to (kindly but firmly), because it doesn’t serve you or the

work you’re doing. Hope in strategy is all about clarity, focus, and the confidence that what you’re doing matters. And that it might just work.

Rewilding Hope: Culture & Leadership

Introduction

QUOTE: “There’s so much pressure – on funding, time, KPIs, the cost of living crisis. It often leaves no space for hope. People are stressed: ‘I need this job to pay my bills, and I’m juggling multiple crises.’ So where does hope fit in? We don’t create time in organisations to ask, ‘What does our vision actually mean? How do we practice it day-to-day? Why are we really here?’ Yes, it’s a job, but we’re in this sector for a reason, so let’s remember our purpose.” Sheetal Mistry

Burnout has become normalised in the charity sector. The mission matters, the work is urgent, and the stakes feel high. But somewhere along the way, we forgot that care is part of the work, not separate from it. When teams are stretched, systems are rigid, and leadership feels isolating, hope becomes harder to hold.

And increasingly, people are walking away. Not just because they’re tired, but because they’ve lost faith. The belief that this work changes things. The belief that it’s still possible to make a difference from inside the system. Many are asking quietly (and some publicly) if the structures we’ve built can still hold the purpose we signed up for.

This chapter is about rewilding hope. Not in theory, but in practice. Inside the organisation. In the systems we build, the expectations we set, and the space we make for people to rest, recover, and reconnect.

Because hope can’t be something we broadcast to the world but fail to practise internally. It has to be felt by our teams. It has to show up in the rhythms of our day-to-day. And it has to be protected, not just by policies or benefits, but by the choices we make about how we work.

That means designing cultures that value boundaries. Recognising that stepping back is not a lack of ambition, it is a form of leadership. It means treating delegated authority as a strategic strength, not a risk. It means rethinking internal comms, not as top-down messaging, but as a source of clarity and connection.

And it means looking seriously at our operating models. Many traditional structures are no longer fit for purpose. What might we learn from more organic systems, like mycelium networks that share knowledge laterally, distribute power, and prioritise mutual support?

Rewilding hope is not about being soft. It is about building organisations that can hold complexity, adapt to change, and sustain people through uncertainty. Hope that lasts needs places to grow. This chapter is about creating them.

Staff Wellbeing and Psychological Safety

The Shift: from burnout culture → to care as infrastructure

The charity sector runs on hope. But what once pulled people in is now pushing them out. Teams are carrying more pressure, more emotional labour, and more responsibility, with fewer resources, less security, and little time to recover.

Staff aren’t just tired. They’re disillusioned. Burnout has been normalised, and too often, people are expected to stay hopeful and mission-driven without being meaningfully supported. As Anita Eade puts it, “Hope is knackering. Carrying hope means you can be let down.”

QUOTE: I'm no longer surprised when I get emotional during the working process. At the end of the day, it can be quite overwhelming. But that's how you know it means something to you. It's not transactional, and it's something you know is worthwhile. I do this work because I believe I can contribute something. Mark Titchner

This isn’t a problem of individual resilience. It’s a structural failure. The shift now is from reactive care to embedded care. From wellness add-ons to wellbeing by design. If we want staff to carry hope for others, we need to build systems that carry them too.

The Blueprint: Hope is a powerful force in the impact sector. But without the right conditions, it can become a burden rather than a strength. Staff are expected to inspire others while running on empty. Many are burning out quietly. Others are leaving entirely.

QUOTE: “It’s relentless and it’s not kind and I’m worth more.” Survey respondent
“We’re all working harder than ever for less money, and it still feels like we’re failing.” Survey respondent

The emotional labour of charity work is real. It takes clarity, boundaries, and care to sustain it. Research shows that employees with high levels of hope are 74% less likely to experience burnout, and suffer from anxiety. But hope can’t be faked or forced. It requires structural support.

This is not just a wellbeing issue. It’s a strategic risk. Burnout drains morale, drives up turnover, and erodes your ability to deliver impact. And it undermines trust. People can feel the disconnect between external values and internal culture.

QUOTE: “We forget why we’re doing this work—turning it into tasks, KPIs, and deadlines. But it’s a privilege to do this. If we don’t cherish and celebrate the people who choose this work, we’re missing a trick.” Sheetal Mistry

So what does embedded care look like?

- **PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY:** Creating an environment where staff feel safe to express concerns, admit mistakes, and share ideas without fear of retribution. Psychological safety encourages open dialogue and fosters trust, leading to increased innovation and collaboration.
- **FLEXIBLE WORKING:** Offering flexible schedules or remote work options can help staff balance their professional and personal lives more effectively. Watch out though: flexible work can sometimes lead to a blurring of the lines between personal and professional time. We need to implement strong boundaries in order to ensure that time off also means switching off.
- **MENTAL HEALTH:** Ensuring that employees have access to mental health support, such as counselling services or wellness programmes. Establish regular check-ins and open lines of communication.

- **TIME OFF:** Promoting a culture where taking breaks and using annual leave is encouraged helps prevent burnout. Crucially, leaders should model this behaviour, reinforcing its importance.
- **RECOGNITION:** Acknowledging the hard work and successes of staff can boost morale and reinforce a sense of purpose. Your staff is there because they want to make a difference. Recognise and reward the progress they're helping to build.

QUOTE: "Hope has always been central to who we are, but now we're amplifying it in our daily interactions. It's a way of shoring ourselves against the tide. … We need to ask: how are the systems, structures, and environments in our organisations supporting hope? And maybe we also need to show kindness to ourselves." Wendy Robinson

Culture is what carries the work. If your internal culture doesn't reflect your external values, the disconnect will show. And when staff can't stay hopeful for themselves, they can't sustain it for others.

QUOTE: "The charity sector is massively lacking in psychological safety. I think of it as showing your underbelly—vulnerable leadership. But the sector isn't good at handling that. Psychological safety requires trust. The ability to say, 'I don't have all the answers, and I'm okay showing that.'" Maggie Tierney

So What: This shift reframes staff wellbeing from a soft perk to a strategic imperative. It means moving beyond surface-level care and embedding it into culture, structure, and leadership.

For leaders, that means making it safe to talk about capacity. Creating systems that value recovery as much as delivery. And modelling behaviours, like rest, reflection, and honesty about limits, that give teams permission to do the same.

If you want your organisation to deliver hope, it has to feel hopeful to work there. That means designing systems that replenish energy, not just extract it. Creating environments where people feel safe, seen, and supported, not just stretched.

The Tension: Prioritising care can feel at odds with the pace and pressure of charity work. When demand is rising and resources are thin, it's tempting to push through. To keep asking more. To treat exhaustion as the cost of doing good work. As one survey respondent put it: "We're being worked to the bone, but expected to be grateful because it's for a good cause."

There's also a legacy to unpick. Many in the sector still equate sacrifice with virtue. Rest feels indulgent. Boundaries feel disloyal. For leaders especially, asking "how are we really doing?" can feel like admitting weakness.

Others worry about perception. Will funders think we're less committed? Will staff seem less productive? Will care be seen as overhead?

But the real risk is doing nothing. Burnout doesn't just cost morale. It costs continuity, trust, and long-term impact. If we don't build organisations that people can actually stay in, we'll keep losing the very people hope depends on.

Internal Comms

The Shift: From broadcasting hope → to building it internally

In many charities, hope is framed as an external output. Messaging is upbeat. Branding is optimistic. Campaigns speak to progress and change. But inside the organisation, the story can feel very different.

Teams are stretched. Restructures and uncertainty are common. Progress can feel stalled. Staff hear the external message and quietly ask: is that really us?

QUOTE: "In the wider sector, I think we often use optimism instead of reality or candour. And when the world feels like a permanent crisis, that creates dissonance because what's been sold [optimism] isn't real—like this Pollyanna view that 'everything will be fine in the end.' Kate Collins

This disconnect is more than just awkward, it does real damage. It erodes trust, saps morale, and turns hopeful messaging into background

noise. Because when people don’t see or feel what they’re being told, they stop believing it.

The shift now is clear: from projecting hope, to living it. Internal communications are not just functional, they are cultural. They shape how people feel, what they trust, and whether they stay.

QUOTE: “Hope is at the heart of our brand—it shapes how we communicate, both externally and internally. Our communications guidelines aren’t just for public use; they influence our whole culture.” Sonya Trivedy

The Blueprint: Hope can’t just be performed. It has to be experienced. And that starts on the inside. When internal comms prioritise surface-level updates or corporate tone, they miss the chance to reinforce purpose. But when done well, they remind people why they do the work, even when times are hard.

QUOTE: “People come into the charity world to affect change. They do all of the hard work in order to make a difference. And they don't always see their impact. Instead, they see infighting and politics, and no change.” Richard Lee

Hopeful internal comms are not about blind positivity. They are about clarity, consistency, and connection. Tell the truth, even when it’s difficult, but pair it with progress, however small. Show people where they fit in the bigger picture. Make the mission feel close.

QUOTE: “We share a lot of the small wins. We take snippets and quotes, and we have a team channel where we'll post those to share the impact that we've had. You just have to have reinforcement that we're on the right track and that there's people being impacted day to day. The impact is huge. We just have to talk about it.” Aimee Perry

And in times of uncertainty, clear communication can act as a stabiliser.

QUOTE: “Internally, the huge amount of uncertainty can feel debilitating. When you don’t know what’s happening next, you might freeze – like being on the edge of a cliff. As an organisation, we do a lot to break down complicated issues step by step. We’ve found that setting clear

frameworks and parameters gives us handrails through uncertain times, but it's still hard to keep them in place. Even if we remind people and make them visible, it remains a tough period." Sophie Carre

The role of internal comms isn't to sugar-coat. It's to connect people to purpose. To reflect reality without collapsing into despair. And to offer enough visibility that people feel seen and valued, not just instructed. Because if we want to tell hopeful stories externally, we need our people to believe in them internally first.

So What: Internal comms shape culture. If hope is part of your external brand, it must be part of the internal experience too.

That means being honest. Especially when things are difficult. Avoid glossing over complexity. Share what's happening, where things are uncertain, and how decisions are being made. People don't need spin. They need transparency and direction.

It also means celebrating progress. Share small wins and impact stories often. Don't let meaningful moments stay buried in inboxes or reports. Build rituals: weekly posts, team highlights, informal updates, that make the work visible, and the mission feel alive.

When staff feel informed, appreciated, and aligned, hope becomes more than a message. It becomes a condition for culture.

The Tension: When people are overstretched, even well-intentioned messaging can backfire. If it doesn't feel grounded in reality, hopeful communication risks being seen as sugar-coating, distraction, or spin.

Internal comms also get deprioritised. Seen as 'nice-to-have' next to service delivery or external engagement. But neglecting them is a false economy. The cost is hidden; in morale, alignment, and missed opportunities to build internal cohesion.

And there's fear. Leaders often avoid honesty because they're worried it will cause anxiety or signal weakness. But silence and spin are far riskier. People can handle hard truths. What they can't handle is being left out of the story.

Hopeful internal comms don't say everything's fine. They create a culture where people feel respected, informed, and connected, even when the path ahead is tough. That's what builds trust. That's what builds resilience.

Siloes

The Shift: From gatekeeping knowledge → to collaborative problem-solving

Charities exist to create change. To innovate, design, test and deliver solutions to their missions that might be out of the realm, boundaries or abilities or other institutions, bodies and influencers. (At least, that's our opinion). But too often, it's not external influences, but internal structures that hold that change back or radical thinking and innovation. Siloed teams, risk-averse cultures, and centralised decision-making drain momentum and erode hope.

Meanwhile, the problems we're tackling are too complex for any one team, department, or leader to solve in isolation. The shift now is toward systems that unlock action, not stall it. From gatekeeping knowledge to collaborative problem-solving. From rigid hierarchy to shared ownership. From fixed roles to fluid networks built on curiosity, not control.

This isn't just structural. It's cultural. And it requires leaders who know when to lead, and when to get out of the way.

The Blueprint: Hope relies on action. But when systems block movement, energy collapses. Siloes create friction. Risk-averse governance slows or blocks decisions. People doing the work are often cut off from the power to change it. If hope is to be credible inside an organisation, the systems have to support it, rather than stall it.

QUOTE: "Silos exist everywhere, and they cause the most pain internally. Often, another team has exactly the puzzle piece you're missing, but they won't share it. Then there's data—data, data, data. It's not just about the data you already have, but the data you need to seek out. That's a big behavioural shift. So much of the

solution lies in curiosity—just ask questions instead of assuming." Lou Barton

When teams work in isolation, or when decision-making is overly centralised, collaboration slows and frustration grows. Too often, the people closest to the work aren't the ones empowered to shape how it's done. Yet hope fails when systems block action. If we want to sustain belief, we have to make change possible and achievable.

We need to break siloes, not just to improve coordination, but to distribute ownership. This could mean cutting teams differently, rethinking hierarchy, or devolving power so decisions aren't bottlenecked at the top. That shift is cultural as well as operational: it's about encouraging curiosity, questioning, and openness.

QUOTE: "Instead of everything sitting on my desk, it's about saying, 'Okay, here's a problem—who has the time and interest to solve it?' Then we guide them on who else to involve and maybe free up time for them to work on it. We have great ideas and great people everywhere." Craig Fordham

That means changing how we work, not just where teams sit. It means treating openness as a default. And it means breaking the habit of assuming the most senior voice is the best one in the room.

So What: When internal systems stall collaboration, isolate knowledge, or block decisions, they don't just slow work, they drain belief. People lose energy when they feel stuck. They lose trust when they're cut off from decisions. And they lose hope when good ideas disappear in the process.

To stay hopeful, teams need to feel effective. That means designing systems where knowledge moves freely, power is shared, and progress is possible. Where decision-making is closer to the work. Where roles flex. And where collaboration isn't a workaround, it's the way things work.

Charities need to actively dismantle unnecessary siloes. That might mean rethinking team structures, reworking approval chains, or

embedding curiosity into job design. The goal isn't just smoother comms. It's to create cultures where problem-solving is collective, not centralised.

Because when people feel like they can make things happen, they stay hopeful. And in complex environments, that hope is one of your most valuable resources.

The Tension: Breaking siloes is easy to say, but hard to do. These structures often exist for a reason: protection, accountability, efficiency. Letting go of them can feel risky, especially in already uncertain environments.

It's also personal. Collaboration means stepping into unfamiliar territory. Asking for help. Admitting gaps. Being willing to let others lead. That kind of openness takes trust; and trust takes time.

There's also the risk of creating chaos. When everything is shared, who owns what? When everyone is responsible, who decides?

But the deeper risk lies in keeping things locked. Siloes slow progress, fragment mission, and keep teams from seeing the full picture. If we want to build organisations that can hold complexity and generate change, we need to build systems that connect rather than divide.

That means making space for dialogue. Building muscle for cross-functional work. And treating internal openness not as an operational nice-to-have, but as a core condition for doing better work.

Hopeful Leadership

The Shift: From leading in the moment → to leading with legacy

Leadership in the charity sector has never carried more weight. Leaders today are holding not just strategy and delivery, but emotional load: mission, team wellbeing, financial stress, and community need. When that burden is carried in isolation, it leads to burnout at the top.

At the same time, leadership is about more than managing the now. It's about modelling what's possible, and shaping what comes next. Hopeful leadership isn't about relentless optimism or having the answers. It's

about creating the conditions where hope can survive, for others, and for yourself.

The shift is from leading in the moment to leading with legacy. Not legacy as status or permanence, but as care. Building systems, cultures, and people that will outlast you. Leadership that sustains hope doesn't just hold responsibility, it prepares the future to hold it too.

The Blueprint: The emotional toll of leadership is real. And rising. Leaders in charities are not just managing operations, they're often carrying the emotional weight of mission, staff wellbeing, financial stress, and community need. But when that load isn't matched with support, it leads to burnout at the top. Many leaders admit to feeling isolated, unable to voice their own uncertainty or fatigue. Research shows over 80% of small charity leaders say their work negatively impacts their mental health, with 28% of those saying they feel unsupported. The pressure to stay strong, upbeat, and inspiring can become its own kind of silence.

QUOTE: "I get a lot of hope from seeing my team do great things. It meets my need for connection just as it does for them, it's reciprocal, and it fills my tank. I also find hope in other chief executives. We might think CEOs have all the answers, but they're often the ones needing to share vulnerability with one another."
Kate Collins

Hopeful leadership is not about projecting certainty. It's about building trust. It means being transparent about limits, honest about fears, and clear about priorities. It's about creating spaces where other people can step into leadership too, regardless of role or title. Hopeful leadership is not about relentless positivity or having all the answers. It's about creating the conditions in which hope can survive: for teams, for communities, and for leaders themselves.

QUOTE: "There's never been a more important time for leaders to be bold problem-solvers. That doesn't mean having all the answers, but leading by example, naming the real issues, and creating space for others to challenge, contribute and adapt. We use something called a 'stinky fish', a fear or anxiety that only gets worse the

longer you ignore it. Good leadership means putting it on the table so we can deal with it together." Lou Barton

Leadership also sets the emotional tone. Research shows that employees with strong managerial support are significantly more likely to feel respected, valued, and resilient. And, crucially, employees with hopeful leaders are more likely to thrive and less likely to experience difficulty at work than their non-hopeful counterparts.

Yet even well-meaning attempts to show care can backfire. Daily check-ins or wellbeing interventions, without autonomy or clarity, can slide into micromanagement, which can worsen burnout instead of relieving it. The challenge is to build leadership cultures that are clear, consistent, and shared. That balances authority with humility. And that allows space for people to say, "I don't know" without losing trust. It also means distributing ownership; letting others step into problems, test solutions, and lead from wherever they sit. And trusting that good ideas don't only come from the top.

Hopeful leadership means shaping not just outcomes, but conditions. Not just vision, but legacy.

So What: Sustainable leadership is a strategic necessity. Leaders who burn out, isolate themselves, or try to hold everything alone will eventually falter—and so will their organisations.

That means shifting how leadership is held. Less top-down control. More distributed ownership. Less heroic expectation. More shared accountability. Leaders need to model clarity, rest, and boundary-setting, not just urgency and sacrifice.

It also means investing in the emotional infrastructure of leadership. Peer networks. Reflective practice. Space to think, not just react. Mental health support for senior leaders is not indulgent. It's vital to the sector's capacity to keep going.

If we want hope to thrive across our organisations, it has to be modelled from the top, not just as tone, but as practice.

The Tension: Leadership myths run deep. Many still believe leaders must be inspiring, decisive, and relentlessly capable. Admitting uncertainty feels risky. Setting boundaries can feel like failure.

Even where leaders want to share power, structures often resist it. Boards want clarity. Funders want certainty. Teams may default to hierarchy, especially under pressure. And without space to reflect, leaders slip into overwork and short-term firefighting.

There's also risk in trying to share power without the right conditions. Delegation without clarity causes confusion. Participation without support breeds resentment. For distributed leadership to succeed, it must be intentional, supported, and culturally reinforced.

Hopeful leadership is not soft. It takes courage. Not the courage to pretend everything is fine, but to lead with honesty, empathy, and a long view. The kind of leadership the sector needs now. The kind that leaves something stronger behind.

Case Studies

The Shine Hope Company
The Shine Hope Company is reframing hope as a practical, teachable skill, one that can be embedded into daily life, including at work. Through workshops, training programmes, and evidence-based tools, they help individuals build psychological resilience by strengthening what they call "hope habits." Their approach draws on cognitive behavioural science, storytelling, and reflective practices to equip people with the tools to navigate stress, manage uncertainty, and stay connected to purpose. With burnout and disengagement on the rise, their work is timely: hope needs to be functional. It helps people feel grounded, energised, and able to persevere through challenges.

So What: For charities and mission-driven teams navigating constant uncertainty and overwhelm, equipping staff with the skills to sustain optimism and bounce back from setbacks is more than a nice-to-have. It's key to retaining motivated, resilient teams. What would it look like to centre hope in your employee wellbeing strategy? What would it look like to reframe hope as a teachable skill for your employees?

Hapi

Hapi, developed by Dreamscape Solutions, is a digital wellbeing platform designed to combat burnout and boost morale in the charity sector. Recognising the emotional toll of mission-driven work, Hapi gives charity employees a space to track their mental wellbeing, reflect on their emotional state, and access tailored support through a simple, easy-to-use interface. By encouraging regular check-ins and offering proactive wellbeing tools, it helps staff build emotional awareness, resilience, and balance over time.

So What: Hope isn't just something we give to others, it's something we need to protect, nurture, and model within our own walls. It's about taking a more structured, preventative approach to staff wellbeing. Because hopeful missions need hopeful teams.

Spill

Spill is a workplace mental health platform that integrates seamlessly with tools like Slack and Microsoft Teams to make support accessible, immediate, and part of the everyday. Designed to remove the barriers to therapy and mental wellbeing, Spill offers everything from therapist-led drop-ins and full counselling sessions to asynchronous advice, all available directly within the flow of work. By normalising mental health conversations and embedding support into daily routines, Spill helps organisations foster emotionally healthy cultures where people feel seen, supported, and psychologically safe.

So What: When emotional support is visible, easy to access, and non-stigmatised, people are more likely to ask for help and bounce back from challenges. This kind of integration is crucial to make your internal support feel genuinely useful. Mental health care shouldn't be something that staff have to seek out, but something that quietly shows up for them every day.

Patagonia

Outdoor clothing company Patagonia has long been celebrated for its environmental activism, but just as radical is how it treats its people. At

Patagonia, employee wellbeing is built into the business model: flexible working hours, on-site childcare, and crucially, a focus on supporting staff purpose. They're hiring people who eat, breathe, and sleep environmental purpose, and they don't want them to lose this drive once they're in the building. As a result, they have policies like paid time off to volunteer for environmental causes, and will give legal support for staff engaging in activism. Staff are also encouraged to take time out to rest, go outside, and reconnect with their purpose, without guilt or grind. The result? High retention, deep loyalty, and a team that feels energised to fight the big fights, without burning out in the process.

So What: Hope at work isn't just about your mission, it's about your culture. If we want staff to stay committed to bold, world-changing goals, we have to give them the conditions to thrive. That means modelling rest, valuing balance, and designing systems that protect people, and, crucially, their sense of purpose.

Where To Find Hope

Take your lunch break. No, really. Start there. Hope doesn't thrive on 12-hour days and unread policies about wellbeing. To put it succinctly: it doesn't thrive in burnout. We need to normalise rest that isn't earned by exhaustion. Build systems that don't rely on people going above and beyond, full speed at all times. If you're in a position of influence, use it to foster psychologically safe spaces, both for yourself and others. None of this is radical, but we can lose sight of it when we're doing important and urgent work in a context of consistent uncertainty and crisis. While that means we won't always get it right, we can find hope by creating space and moving beyond a focus on outputs alone. Start small. Take that lunch break; set one less KPI; celebrate the wins you've had, no matter how small.

Designing Hopeful Futures: Innovation & Growth

Introduction

Hope can’t be just a feeling. It has to be an active design choice. It shows up in what we prioritise, how we plan, and the systems we build to carry us forward. For charities, the challenge is not just to talk about hopeful futures, but to create the conditions where they can actually be realised.

That means moving beyond crisis response and short-term fixes. It means confronting the ways in which many of our models - operating, strategic, and cultural - are still designed for immediate survival, not long-term impact. If we want to build lasting change, we need to make time for what comes next. Not just what comes next week.

It also means looking backwards as well as forwards. Ancestor thinking invites us to learn from those who came before us; those who built resilient systems, protected collective wellbeing, and planned for generations they would never meet. The wisdom is there, if we’re willing to listen.

This chapter explores what it takes to design hope into the future of our organisations. That includes reclaiming agency in how we use technology, shifting away from imported solutions and towards community-led design, and taking seriously our responsibility to be good ancestors. It also means embedding foresight as a discipline, not just to predict the future, but to build the capacity to shape it.

Designing hopeful futures isn’t about having the perfect plan. It’s about building the muscle to hold complexity, act with intention, and invest in possibility. Because the future isn’t something that happens to us. It’s something we make together.

Reclaiming Agency in Technology

The Shift: tech-led overwhelm → empowered by human-centred technology.

The pace of technological change has become overwhelming. Generative and agentic AI agents that can design, draft, deliver and launch and test a full campaign with limited human intervention, or immersive digital spaces that offer full sensory experiences (sight, sound and smell) are no longer science fiction, they're here, shaping how people connect, learn, give, and organise. But instead of feeling equipped, many (inside and outside the sector) feel outpaced and underprepared. The risks are real, and the ethical terrain is murky.

The temptation is to either opt out or chase trends. But neither route offers agency.

The shift now is towards intentionality. From passive adoption to purpose-led exploration. From fear to design. Technology isn't neutral, but it can be shaped. And charities, uniquely grounded in values, have the opportunity to model what ethical, inclusive, human-centred technology can look like. But only if we choose to lead, not follow.

QUOTE: "Technologies like AI or quantum computing can be used for good or evil, just like anything since industrialisation. The real issue is they evolve so fast we don't have time to fully absorb or deploy them responsibly." Samar Younes

The Blueprint: For many, new tools like AI feel both promising and exhausting. On one hand, we see the risks of misinformation, bias baked into algorithms, climate concerns, and more. On the other, there's the promise of wider access, creative exploration, and new ways of connecting people to purpose. The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between. Technology has always been about power. The question is: who holds it, and what do they do with it?

Charities face very real barriers to meaningful engagement with tech: capacity, budget, and confidence among them. But we also hold a unique opportunity: to use these tools not to replicate extractive models, but to create more inclusive, imaginative, values-led systems. We can be the ones who build with inclusion from the start, using digital tools to redistribute power, test ideas faster, and expand what participation looks like.

QUOTE: “In the Web3, or even crypto, space, I see this unifying idea that things could be different than the way that they are. That, to me, is hope.” Caitlin Keeley

Human-centred tech in this context means:

- Tools that reduce pressure, rather than add to it
- Systems that extend reach without sacrificing relationships
- Design processes that prioritise equity, imagination, and care
- Mindsets that centre experimentation, not perfection.

QUOTE: “If it lets me play more and reclaim that sense of play, that’s the essence of human ingenuity... If we use technology as a mega-assistant to handle busywork, we’ll still have plenty left to create ourselves.” Samar Younes

For Gen Z and younger audiences, tech isn’t just a tool, it’s a space for identity, connection, and creative expression. A space to play, experiment and be part of something bigger. That doesn’t mean abandoning physical presence, but expanding how we think about participation and belonging.

The genie is out of the bottle on this one and these developments aren’t going away, nor is the human desire to use it. Our job is to keep asking how digital systems can serve our people. The most hopeful uses of tech don’t automate humanity out of the process. They make space for it to thrive.

So What: Charities don’t need to be tech innovators. But they do need to be intentional adopters.

That starts with mindset. Treat technology as a strategic layer of your organisation, not just a function of digital teams. Ask bigger questions before choosing tools. What do we need to solve? Who is this for? What kind of system are we reinforcing?

In service delivery, that means using tech to remove barriers, not reinforce them. It could mean offering support asynchronously, opening up access in new ways, or tailoring services to people’s preferences, not the system’s convenience.

In income generation, it might mean exploring new models of participation, recurring giving platforms with more transparency, immersive experiences that build emotional connection, or AI-assisted stewardship that's personal, not robotic.

Above all, charities need space to discover the use cases that matter most. Not everything needs a digital solution. But when it does, it should be one that reflects your values, not just your vendor's roadmap.

The Tension: Technology feels like progress. But without intention, it replicates the past. Many charities are already under pressure. Exploring new tools can feel like one more thing, especially when funding favours short-term deliverables over long-term innovation. That leads to reactive adoption, defaulting to tools designed by others, for different purposes.

Ethical concerns run deep. From bias baked into algorithms to environmental impact, much of today's tech is built on extractive models. Charities can't ignore these issues, but they also can't opt out entirely.

There's also a mindset barrier. Technology is still seen as the responsibility of digital teams, not something strategic or cross-cutting. As a result, opportunities get siloed. And the bigger questions: how might tech reshape our whole operating model, go unasked.

If we want to design hopeful futures, we need the space and support to think beyond upgrades and platforms. We need to reimagine what tech could mean when driven by care, equity, and imagination, not just efficiency.

Hopeful technology doesn't promise less human connection. It makes more of it possible.

Post-Colonial Hope

The Shift: From imported solutions → to community-led design

Much of the global charity system still runs on colonial logic. Models and solutions are developed in one place and exported to another. Power flows from donor to implementer. Budgets follow funders. Stories are crafted to reassure institutions, not reflect communities.

Post-colonial hope challenges this entirely. It asks us to stop seeing Western systems as the default, and instead build futures from the margins out. It means shifting power: budget, narrative, and decision-making, into the hands of those who've long been excluded.

This isn't about adapting dominant models to fit new places. It's about designing new models altogether. Ones that reflect different histories, values, and visions of progress. Not repair. Reimagination.

The Blueprint: Post-colonial hope is a radical reimagining of power, agency, and future-making. It's not about designing one universal future, but many co-existing ones; often messy, sometimes in tension with each other, but all valid. It requires us to confront the enduring legacies of colonialism embedded in our institutions, language, and systems, and to actively dismantle them. We need to recognise that the structures shaping power and poverty today are not neutral, but trace back to legacies of colonial exploitation: resource extraction, cultural erasure, and systems built to centre some voices while silencing others.

QUOTE: "We have to move beyond linear, binary progress, towards imagining multiple futures, multiple ways to create hope. If we keep insisting we have the 'best idea' or 'best civilisation' for delivering hope, we stay stuck. Instead, we should think seven generations ahead, not remain in short-sighted or colonial models." Samar Younes

The charity sector is not exempt from these legacies either. From language like 'development' and 'aid' to the continued dominance of large funders in the Global North, many of our models still replicate colonial patterns. These can be found in funding conditionalities, narrative control, and the assumption that Western knowledge systems are the default. This includes the imposition of Western-centric narratives, decision-making processes that exclude local stakeholders, and funding models that prioritise donor preferences over community needs.

Post-colonial hope asks us to design from the margins, not the middle. That means shifting decision-making power to local NGOs and communities, not just through partnerships, but through budget control,

narrative ownership, and genuine autonomy. It also means recognising the value of traditional knowledge, and backing communities that are blending ancestral practices with modern tools to reclaim agency.

It's also worth acknowledging that without sustained, structural commitment, these efforts risk becoming performative. Token gestures of inclusion that replicate the power dynamics they aim to dismantle, instead of dismantling them.

Building post-colonial hope requires not just listening, but learning. Not just inclusion, but invitation. And not just representation, but reallocation. Post-colonial hope isn't just about repair. It's about creating futures that were never previously allowed to exist.

This means facing the legacy the sector was built on. Resource extraction. Cultural erasure. Narratives written to secure funding, not reflect lived experience. From 'aid' to 'development', the language may have shifted. The assumptions often haven't.

So What: If charities want to stay relevant, they need to stop reinforcing the systems they say they want to change. That starts with taking a hard look at the ways their internal structures, funding models, and language still echo colonial patterns, whether in international programmes or domestic ones.

This work is already underway in parts of the sector. Organisations are rethinking their governance, shifting who tells the story, and challenging the assumptions that sit underneath their theory of change. But too often, these efforts stop short. Inclusion becomes aesthetic. Partnerships become extractive. Power is shared in name, but not in practice.

Community-led design means going beyond consultation. It means embedding participation from the start, into funding decisions, service delivery, and the narratives you share with the public. It means letting go of saviour storylines. Following the lead of local organisations, rather than asking them to deliver against donor priorities. And it means recognising the value of knowledge that doesn't come wrapped in Western credentials.

That also requires looking inward. Who sits at the board table? Who decides strategy? Who defines what success looks like? This isn't just about programmes, it's about who holds power across the organisation, and whether that power is ever redistributed.

Post-colonial hope isn't soft. It's not branding. It's not a toolkit. It's a fundamental reorientation of where you look for answers, who you trust to lead, and what you're willing to let go of. If the sector is serious about transformation, it has to start by following those who've been excluded from shaping it.

The Tension: This shift is deeply political. And it comes at a time when space for political honesty is shrinking.

Cuts to international aid, rising hostility toward 'woke' agendas, and institutional pressure to depoliticise the sector have made many organisations cautious. Talking about colonialism, power, or white supremacy feels risky. But staying quiet is worse.

Tokenism is another risk. Without structural follow-through, "community-led" becomes another label to stick on existing models. Listening without shifting budget. Including without sharing decision-making. Spotlighting without relinquishing control. All of it reinforces the dynamics it claims to change.

Time is a tension too. Structural change moves slower than funding cycles allow. It requires building trust, shifting pace, and rethinking what counts as impact. But without that time, the work stays stuck in symbolism.

This is hard. But it's also happening. And it is where the most urgent, creative, and courageous work in the sector is emerging.

Post-colonial hope is not about being polite. It is about being honest. And it's about building futures that weren't allowed to exist under the old logic, and choosing to back them anyway.

Ancestor Thinking

The Shift: From annual plans → to strategies that outlive us

QUOTE: “We need big dreams and hope, but we’re stuck in the realities of survival, which can mean we never articulate a path to that vision. Sometimes it requires wider systems change. The sector isn’t set up to create that because we’re in survival mode. Some organizations are trying to be bolder, but it’s a really tough time for big moves.” Sheetal Mistry

Funding cycles, political pressures, and performance metrics keep charities focused on annual outputs and short-term targets. But that rhythm comes at a cost. The pressure to deliver quickly can flatten ambition, shrink vision, and delay the deeper structural changes that lasting progress depends on.

Ancestor thinking invites a different lens. It asks us to act not just as leaders in the present, but as stewards of the future. It challenges us to slow down enough to design for resilience, to build cultures and systems that can endure, and to make decisions that our successors, and the communities they serve, won’t have to undo.

The shift is from annual plans to strategies that outlive us. It’s about taking the long view, planning beyond individual tenure, and holding ourselves accountable to futures we may never personally see, but that we still have the power to shape.

QUOTE: I am deeply sustained by the concept of slow hope as it acknowledges that meaningful progress – whether in personal growth, social justice, climate action, or other areas takes time and steady persistence. This idea is particularly relevant in times of crisis when quick or visible fixes may not be possible, but steady efforts can still lead to significant transformation over time. Wendy Robinson

The Blueprint: Ancestor thinking asks us to imagine ourselves not just as actors in the now, but as stewards for those who will come after us. What would it look like to be accountable to the people we may never meet? What part of your current strategy is designed to outlive your leadership?

QUOTE: “I’m confident that influencing young people who become social changemakers—however that takes shape—matters just as much as how many food banks or mobile clinics we fund. Our ability to shift social attitudes and reinforce the idea that things can be better is critical.” Angharad McKenzie

From political cycles to in-year ROI, the sector is wired for immediacy. But short-term pressures often come at the cost of long-term progress. Ancestor thinking flips that logic. It challenges us to slow down just enough to plan beyond our tenure, to build cultural, financial, and environmental resilience that outlasts the current leadership team.

QUOTE: “Part of my job as chief executive is ensuring Teenage Cancer Trust is still here for kids who are six right now — who don’t know they might get cancer at 16. We have to exist in 10 years, whether I’m the chief exec or not.” Kate Collins

It’s about making decisions today that your successors, and the communities they’ll serve, won’t have to undo. That includes funding models built for sustainability, governance structures that can flex over time, and internal cultures that support bold, slow, long work. This isn’t about predicting the future. It’s about holding a long view: designing for intergenerational impact, planning beyond your tenure, and acting today in a way that your future counterparts will thank you for.

QUOTE: “We’re worried about the world we’re handing over, and what we want future generations to continue in our legacy. We can either leave something the same, or in a better state for the next generation to inherit. It’s thinking about our ancestors, what they created for us, and how things have changed – then figuring out what younger generations need, plus what they don’t yet know is important for a healthy ecosystem. That drives our new strategy.” Sharon Pickford

That kind of intergenerational accountability demands structural change. It means shifting power to those who are most affected and recognising that long-term solutions often lie in local knowledge and inherited wisdom. Sometimes, it means looking to other communities who have

avoided the problems we're facing altogether through different ways of life.

QUOTE: "It's about looking at how other cultures live in ways that prevent problems in the first place. Rather than 'They had a problem and here's how they solved it,' it's 'They never had this problem at all. How do they live? Can we learn from them?' That's a longer-term, more organic approach – rather than this very Western idea of creating big problems and then rolling out big programs to fix them." Will Doig

So What: Charities have always been future-facing in spirit, but their systems are often stuck in the short term. Funders ask for year-on-year impact. Boards want visible wins. Teams are stretched to deliver more with less. In that environment, it can feel countercultural (even risky) to slow down and plan for a horizon that sits beyond your tenure.

But that's exactly what the moment calls for. Taking the long view is not about abandoning urgency. It's about protecting the organisation's capacity to deliver lasting impact. That means building financial models that prioritise sustainability, not just survival. It means investing in leadership succession, adaptive governance, and cultures of learning that hold through change.

It also means building a strategic vision that outlives a single leader or plan. Where the direction is clear, even if the conditions change. Where today's decisions make life easier, not harder, for those who come next.

This mindset also builds trust externally. Supporters want to invest in futures that are resilient, not reactive. Long-term thinking signals ambition, confidence, and care. It shows your organisation is not only responding to need, but shaping what comes after.

Planning for the next generation is not a luxury. It is a responsibility. And it starts with the question: how will the work you're doing today be remembered, and continued?

The Tension: Long-term thinking is easy to agree with in principle and difficult to practise in reality. Most charities are navigating short funding cycles, reactive planning, and intense delivery pressures. In that context,

planning beyond the immediate feels like a luxury, or worse, a distraction.

There's also a cultural challenge. Many boards and senior leaders are still incentivised around short-term results. Strategy is often rewritten every few years. Success is measured in twelve-month increments. The result is a rhythm that discourages depth, reflection, or legacy thinking.

There can be resistance internally too. Taking the long view means making decisions that may not pay off quickly. It may require saying no to short-term gains, slowing down pace, or investing in foundations that are hard to measure but critical for future resilience. That can feel uncomfortable in environments where staff are already stretched and outcomes are expected fast.

And yet, avoiding long-term thinking doesn't eliminate risk; it increases it. Organisations that operate only in survival mode can't build trust, plan transitions, or shape the future. They can only react to it.

Ancestor thinking requires bravery, structure, and belief. It means doing the slow, quiet work of preparing ground for others. That is not a detour from impact. It is how lasting change gets built.

Foresight As A Discipline

The Shift: From responding to crisis → to preparing for possibility

QUOTE: "My purpose is to help people help themselves, to make the world a better place—not by directly doing things for them, but by teaching them how to fish." Tiffany St James

For many organisations, strategy still means reacting. Responding to crises, chasing short-term funding, or navigating the pressures of now. It's a three- or five-year window of now and next, rather than a real conversation about the future. But that rhythm limits what's possible. It creates a cycle where everything is urgent and nothing is visionary.

Foresight offers a different path. It's not about predictions. It's about preparation. It gives us structured ways to explore uncertainty, challenge assumptions, and stretch our thinking across time. It opens space to ask

better questions, imagine different outcomes, and design for futures that feel both possible and bold.

The shift now is from responding to crisis to preparing for possibility. That doesn't mean ignoring what's happening today. It means creating space to imagine what could come next, and equipping ourselves to meet it with clarity, confidence, and care.

QUOTE: "I picture a chart: Are we headed straight down, or are we about to level off and build toward something new? Is this just collapse, or is it transformation? We won't know until we're through it. It might be collapse, or it might be a turning point. That's where hope comes in—the possibility that it's transformation, even though it feels like collapse until we reach the upswing. Sarah Housley

The Blueprint: Designing hopeful futures isn't just about vision, it's about capacity. If charities want to move beyond reactive survival mode, they need tools that make long-term planning practical, not theoretical. That's where foresight comes in. It helps us navigate complexity, unlock long-term thinking, and design systems that prioritise both present realities and future generations.

We don't need perfect predictions. We need better preparation; especially for futures that feel ambiguous or uncertain. Not crystal balls, but structured, repeatable rhythms that help prepare you for the unexpected as much as the hoped for.

In the charity sector, this mindset is still underused. Many organisations are focused on the now: reacting to the latest crisis, chasing short-term funding, or delivering against targets that expire in twelve months. But if we want to embed hope into our operating models (not just our messaging) we need to upskill teams in futures thinking.

Often, we find that people embedded in the urgency of the present get stuck on the 'how' of delivering solutions. Foresight creates room to unstick: to explore what's possible, play with time, and test bold ideas before they become urgent.

QUOTE: “Reframing a hopeful future means acknowledging everyone’s value in society as part of the innovation, and ensuring all voices are heard in ways that optimise for the collective. By prototyping possible futures (short-term or multi-generational) and involving as many people as we can, we move closer to what we claim to envision.” Samar Younes

The practice of foresight can help us unstick from the present, and make long-term change feel practical. To move futures thinking from theory to action, there’s three pillars to keep in mind:

1. **FUTURE-INSPIRED:** Strategic foresight gives us the tools to stretch time, challenge assumptions, and imagine alternative futures. This helps us move beyond reactive cycles and activate long-term vision in a structured, tangible way. It creates the space to ask, “What could we do differently now, if we stopped assuming tomorrow had to look like today?”
2. **TRANSFORMATIVE:** Apply foresight practice in a transformative way. Leverage your knowledge to shift the systems we work within, from outdated institutions to inherited norms. This means bringing in diverse forms of evidence, including indigenous knowledge and lived experience, and applying foresight in ways that make space for radical redesign, not just reform.
3. **STEWARDSHIP:** Future-building is not solo work. It requires change-makers who can hold complexity, broker power, and convene coalitions across difference. It’s not about controlling outcomes. It’s about cultivating the conditions where change can happen.

When applied with intention, foresight is both imaginative and grounded. It helps us challenge assumptions, build long-term strategy, and stretch beyond inherited patterns. It can be transformative when it invites radical redesign, not just reform. And it’s a discipline of stewardship, not individual vision. It’s about cultivating the conditions where change becomes possible across generations, not just campaign cycles.

Foresight doesn’t have to be grand. It can start small: with questions, curiosity, conversation, and space for “what if” thinking inside your planning cycles.

So What: Foresight isn’t a luxury. It’s a discipline that can help charities build resilience, reimagine services, and make more confident decisions in an uncertain world. The sector already knows how to respond to crisis. But to design hopeful futures, we need to become equally skilled in preparing for possibility.

That starts by creating room for long-term thinking. It doesn’t mean big scenario projects or glossy reports. It means weaving foresight into the everyday: testing assumptions, stretching planning horizons, and challenging the status quo.

For income strategies, it means anticipating shifts in supporter behaviour, policy, or technology. For service design, it means uncovering unmet needs, surfacing early signals, and imagining new ways to meet them. For governance, it means helping boards think beyond annual risk and toward long-term opportunity.

It also means building confidence across your team. Foresight isn’t just for strategists. Anyone can ask better questions about the future. The key is making that feel possible, and making space for it to happen.

If hope is going to be more than a message, it needs infrastructure. Foresight helps build that. Not by predicting what will happen, but by preparing your organisation for whatever might.

The Tension: The biggest barrier to foresight in the charity sector is time. When teams are already stretched by day-to-day delivery and short-term funding cycles, stepping back to think about the future can feel impossible, or indulgent. But without space to anticipate and adapt, organisations stay locked in reaction mode.

There’s also a mindset challenge. Many charities and leaders are uncomfortable with ambiguity. Planning tends to focus on what’s most certain, most fundable, or most immediate. Foresight asks us to sit in uncertainty, test assumptions, and think in terms of multiple futures. That can feel unfamiliar, even risky.

In some organisations, foresight is seen as abstract or inaccessible. Without a clear process or visible value, it's deprioritised in favour of more immediate tasks. Others assume it's something only large organisations can afford.

But foresight doesn't need to be expensive or complex. It starts with cultural permission. The willingness to imagine alternative futures. To ask: What if this no longer works? What could change? What are we not seeing?

Without that shift, hope stays reactive. With it, organisations can move from firefighting to future-building, and unlock a different kind of confidence, creativity, and care.

Case Studies

The Fight Back Toolkit

In response to growing concerns over the unchecked power of big tech, The Citizens launched the Fightback Toolkit, a free online resource designed to help individuals protect their digital rights and take collective action. The toolkit drew on journalists, academics, researchers, artists, campaigners and citizens to inform its recommendations, and demystifies the complexities of life online. Its goal is to arm people with practical steps they can take, and the hub has 4 different types of actions: educate, to build understanding; practice, with small actions to take; connect, for ways to build solidarity and share ideas; and rebuild, for a list of resources to help us all rethink the internet and our relationships with it.

So What: The toolkit aims to show that people have power, even when facing systems much bigger with themselves. It's a way of equipping communities with the tools to reclaim agency in the digital era, both through education and community intelligence and involvement.

Douglas Rushkoff

Media theorist Douglas Rushkoff has long been a critical voice in the conversation around technology and society. His latest work urges us to reclaim agency in our digital lives, challenging the dominant narrative that tech is something being done to us rather than with us. Or, as he

puts it: reclaiming our humanity on the internet. Rushkoff's hopeful provocation? Technology is not inherently extractive or divisive, it's a tool shaped by how we choose to use it. He calls for designing digital spaces that enable presence, creativity, and connection, rather than distraction and polarisation. He champions education, art, and media that cultivate awe, build shared identity, and remind us that digital environments are not cages, but canvases.

So What: Hope in the digital age means reclaiming authorship. We have to use the technological tools at our disposal with intention, not just to compete for attention, but to create meaning. We don't need more content for the sake of content. Our digital presence should be there to inspire reflection, creativity, and connection.

Living Paradigms

The Living Paradigms series by Reasons to Be Cheerful explores how cultural practices; past and present, near and far, can help us rethink the way we solve problems. From communal land ownership to restorative justice and indigenous ecological knowledge, the series encourages us to look beyond dominant Western frameworks to discover how other societies have designed systems centred on prevention, cooperation, and long-term wellbeing. It's not just about solutions, it's about learning from worldviews that prevent problems before they arise. By lifting up overlooked models of living and governing, Living Paradigms offers a powerful reminder: the future doesn't have to look like the past.

So What: This series is all about the willingness to learn from ways of living that challenge our assumptions. It's a call to expand our imaginations, challenge the dominance of short-term fixes, and co-create systems that prevent harm rather than just respond to it. It's an example of designing hopeful futures by widening the lens.

#ShiftThePower

The #ShiftThePower movement calls for a fundamental rebalancing of how change happens; challenging traditional models of international development and philanthropy that concentrate power and resources in the Global North. Instead, it advocates for community-led, locally rooted

action, and repositions those closest to the issues as the architects of their own futures. Whether through funding reform, participatory grantmaking, or network building, #ShiftThePower is about dismantling top-down control and nurturing grassroots agency.

So What: #ShiftThePower reframes hope as shared ownership. It's a call to charities and funders alike: if you're still designing solutions for communities instead of with them, you're reinforcing the very imbalance you claim to fight. This isn't just about equity—it's about effectiveness. Real change happens when power is distributed.

Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies

The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (CIFS) helps governments, businesses, and institutions prepare for long-term challenges. Not by predicting the future, but by strengthening their capacity to imagine and shape it. Using tools like scenario planning, megatrend mapping, and cultural analysis, CIFS equips organisations with the frameworks to think beyond immediate crises and start planning for the world they want to build. Their work sits at the intersection of imagination and strategy, offering a structured, evidence-based way to hold space for complexity and possibility.

So What: Foresight gives organisations a way to turn uncertainty into opportunity, and panic into preparation. CIFS aims to build resilience by embedding longer-term thinking into strategy, funding, and programme design. If our mission is to design a better future, we need those tools that help us see (and shape) what's ahead. Think of foresight like the planning department for hopeful futures.

Building Hopeful Futures Festival

Hosted by the School of International Futures (SOIF), the Building Hopeful Futures Festival is a multi-day event that brings together activists, strategists, artists, and community leaders to explore how we can make hope actionable. Rather than treating hope as a vague emotion, the festival frames it as a deliberate, future-oriented practice; something that can be built, tested, and scaled. With workshops on storytelling, participatory futures, systems change, and community

foresight, the event is designed to equip people with the tools to imagine and co-create better futures, especially in uncertain and volatile contexts.

So What: The festival reminds us that hope is infrastructure, not just inspiration. If you want to build long-term impact, you need to invest in people's capacity to imagine, plan, and collaborate towards better futures. For charities, it's a call to make hope tangible, through tools, spaces, and strategies that don't just describe a better world but help people design it.

Teach The Future

Teach the Future is a global movement dedicated to bringing futures thinking into education. Its goal is simple but radical: equip young people with the tools to imagine, question, and shape the future, rather than simply inherit it. Through workshops, curricula, and educator training, Teach the Future helps students understand megatrends, explore alternative scenarios, and develop agency in the face of uncertainty. It's not about predicting what's next, but preparing young people to participate in creating what's possible.

So What: Future generations need tools to build the futures they stand to inherit. Futures literacy is a form of empowerment, helping young people navigate uncertainty with imagination and agency. Luckily, future-building and designing is teachable. Crucially, hope and long-terminism isn't just about what we protect, it's about who we prepare.

Where To Find Hope

Don't wait for the future to feel exciting. Start shaping it into something worth looking forward to. Start with a long view: not just next year, but next generation. Block out time for thinking, not reacting. Ask 'what if?' without following it with 'but that's not realistic.' Talk to someone who's been doing this longer than you have. Talk to someone who's just getting started. Read sci-fi. Read history. Read something from a perspective you haven't considered. Read climate reports (if you have the stomach to), but then seek out a story about someone who's building a solar co-op or teaching kids climate resilient skills.

Delivering Hopeful Futures: Mission Delivery

Introduction

Hope is not delivered through strategy alone. It's delivered through structure, power, and practice.

If we want hopeful ideas to turn into meaningful change, we need to build organisations and coalitions that can hold the weight of that ambition. That means moving beyond short-termism, brand protection, and surface-level collaboration. It means rethinking what leadership looks like, what role the sector plays, and how change really happens.

This chapter explores the shift from charity as aid to charity as civic power. It looks at what it takes to collaborate with depth and integrity, not just for efficiency, but for transformation. And it challenges the idea that movements can be manufactured from the top down. Real mobilisation requires giving away control, and investing in the people and communities who will carry the mission further than any one organisation can.

Delivering hopeful futures isn't about owning the solution. It's about creating the conditions where new solutions can grow. Where action is collective, leadership is shared, and the future is shaped together.

Sector Role

The Shift: From charity as aid → to charity as civic power

Charities have never existed solely to provide aid. At their best, they've been engines of social transformation; challenging injustice, defending rights, and reimagining what society could be. But over time, that role has been narrowed. Political pressure, regulatory caution, and funding structures have pushed many organisations toward a more passive model: delivery over disruption, care without critique.

The problem isn't that charities have always been quiet. It's that they're increasingly expected to be. To stay in the service lane. To avoid the

harder, more contested work of challenging the systems that cause harm in the first place.

The shift now is not about becoming something new. It's about remembering what the sector is capable of, and choosing to lead with that. It's about reclaiming charity as a form of civic power. Not an add-on to public life, but a vital force for reshaping it.

The Blueprint: Earlier this year, the outgoing Chair of the Charity Commission, Orlando Fraser, described the third sector as "a lovely sector with lovely people doing lovely things," and suggested it steer clear of culture wars and stick to its core aims. It was meant as praise. But it posed a deeper question: are we here to keep things nice, or to make things different?

Fraser's vision casts the sector as a side character: palatable, quiet, non-political. A sector meant to soothe, not to shift. It's a view reinforced by lobbying legislation, funding constraints, and an outdated perception of the skill and professionalism needed to deliver change through charities.

But that raises a fundamental challenge: what is our role in change? Are we here to implement someone else's blueprint, or to shape what comes next?

We have a choice. We can stay in the lane of quiet delivery, grateful for our place. Or we can step into our full role as civic actors, holding power to account and helping reimagine what comes after the current system.

We can embrace hope as a radical force. Because the challenges we face (climate collapse, inequality, political polarisation) are not about the future of our brands or even our sector. They are about the fundamental makeup of our society, our governments and our culture for the coming decades.

If we're serious about hope, we have to help reimagine the systems that shape our lives.

That means reclaiming voice, influence, and a history rooted in disruption, not deference. It means stepping out of the role of passive

aid and into the role of active civic power. The risk of not doing so? Leaving the future to be shaped by those with no interest in building something better.

So What: This is a moment of strategic choice for the sector. Do we stay focused on filling gaps and fixing symptoms, or step up as architects of long-term change?

Reclaiming civic power means asking harder questions about the systems we operate within and who they serve. It might mean taking public positions on injustice, even if it risks backlash. It might mean using lived experience, evidence, and storytelling to shape public debate; not just policy responses. It means shifting from “how do we help?” to “what needs to change?”

To do that, we also need to confront the frameworks that limit our voice. Ambiguity around lobbying rules and charity campaigning has created a chilling effect. Many organisations feel silenced before they even begin. If we want a sector that can speak up, we need to push back on the systems that keep us quiet.

Not every charity needs to adopt the same tactics. Some will disrupt. Some will bridge-build. Some will influence quietly from inside. All are valid. What matters is clarity of purpose, and courage of intent. A healthy civic space needs a diversity of approach, just as much as it needs solidarity.

That also means building political confidence internally. Boards that understand risk. Leaders who understand power. Teams who feel safe to speak. Not every organisation needs to campaign, but every organisation should be able to articulate the change it exists to make, and how its work contributes to something bigger.

This isn’t about being party political, reckless, or combative. It’s about using the legitimacy, trust, and reach the sector holds to lead on behalf of those whose voices are often left out. It’s about acting like what we do matters, not just to the people we serve, but to the future we’re all part of shaping.

The Tension: Stepping into a more active civic role brings real risk. Many charities are already overstretched. Unsure how far they're allowed (or supported) to go. Laws around campaigning are vague. The cost of getting it wrong feels high. For many, silence feels safer.

There's internal resistance too. Boards worry about reputational damage. Funders avoid controversy. Staff are cautious about jeopardising relationships. The idea of public advocacy still feels uncomfortable in a sector trained to be apolitical.

But neutrality is not safety. Inaction is not neutral. When charities hold back, they leave space for narratives and policies that actively harm the communities they serve.

This isn't a call for uniformity. Not everyone needs to take the same approach. Radical activism, quiet influence, narrative change, community organising, these are all part of a healthy civic ecosystem. But each of these roles needs protecting, resourcing, and legitimising.

If we want a relevant, courageous sector in the years ahead, we need to defend the right to speak, and support each other in using it.

Radical Collaboration

The Shift: From competitive coexistence → to collective action

Collaboration is one of the sector's favourite words, but not always its strongest practice. Many charities work side by side, but not truly together. Partnerships are often transactional: designed around funding bids, brand alignment, or PR value. We coexist. We occasionally coordinate. But we rarely build something none of us could create alone.

That's not because people don't want to collaborate. It's because the structures, pressures, and incentives often work against it. Scarcity mindsets, competition for visibility, and rigid governance make it easier to stay in our lanes. But those lanes are not where change happens.

QUOTE: "There's a desire to sit around the table and say: 'Here's the task. Here's how big it is. These are all the moving parts. We can't do all of it—but we'll take this bit, you take that bit, and we'll overlap in the

middle.’ That’s where the sweet spot is—but it’s hard. The intention is there, but everyone’s competing for the same funding pots, and collaboration becomes more difficult.” Wendy Robinson

The shift now is from competitive coexistence to collective action. Real collaboration starts with culture. It asks us to move beyond protecting our patch and toward sharing power, loosening control, and being willing to be changed by those we partner with. It means collaborating not just across the sector, but beyond it, with government, business, and communities.

Because the problems we’re facing don’t recognise organisational boundaries. Our solutions shouldn’t either.

The Blueprint: We can’t keep solving systemic problems in silos. Radical collaboration is about working together in service of shared purpose, not brand protection. It’s about collaborating with unexpected partners in unexpected places, and recognising that the most transformative work won’t happen in isolation.

QUOTE: When you visit our social channels or website, you see that we’re dedicated to ending homelessness, and we celebrate what other organisations are doing. Ultimately, that’s a brand win. You don’t have to compete; you can choose a different game. Rob Halkyard

Of course, it’s easier said than done. True collaboration takes time, trust, and capacity. Differences in culture, governance, or reporting can derail even the best intentions. And in a world of in-year income targets and visibility metrics, it’s tempting to prioritise self over system.

But here’s the truth: if we want to achieve lasting, sustainable impact, we need to do the internal work first. You can’t partner bravely if you’re operating from fear. When organisations hoard data, cling to credit, or avoid discomfort, collaboration stays surface-level.

Radical collaboration starts by shifting internal culture; loosening control, sharing power, and being open to influence.

QUOTE: One of the things in our strategy is that we can't end homelessness alone. We need to work with other organisations. Where

are we best placed, and where are other people best placed? Where's their priority, our priority, and how are they balanced? And what degree of power or secondary position are we prepared to be in? Julie Milnes

This isn't just about partnerships within the sector. Some of the most powerful collaborations will come from outside it: with business, with government, with communities. Cross-sector problems demand cross-sector solutions. We need to stop waiting for invites to old tables and start building new ones.

QUOTE: "Collaboration means looking at who's already out there and building on the foundations they've created, instead of always starting from scratch. That's one major mistake in the sector: assuming nothing like this has been done before. We should ask, 'Has someone had this idea already?' If so, let's partner with them, or help them, rather than duplicating efforts. If our missions are similar, recognise it's bigger than us." Sheetal Mistry

Real collaboration isn't quick. But it's how we get from impact in isolation to transformation at scale. Let's stop competing for space and start building it together.

So What: To make radical collaboration real, charities need to be honest about what's getting in the way. That includes internal competition, brand-first thinking, and the instinct to protect what's 'ours' instead of growing what's possible.

Collaboration isn't just a comms exercise or a strategic alliance. It's a cultural shift. It requires bravery, humility, and trust. It starts with letting go of the need to own every idea, lead every initiative, or be the loudest voice in the room. It means asking where you're best placed to lead, and where you're better placed to follow.

That shift needs to be reflected in your strategy. Make space for shared outcomes. Budget time and resource for collaboration. Build governance and reporting frameworks that support collective effort, not just individual performance. (All of which we covered in more detail in the Future of Charity report).

It also means expanding who you collaborate with. That might mean working with businesses that share your values, government bodies willing to pilot new approaches, or communities with the knowledge to lead. Collaboration doesn't require agreement on everything. It requires alignment where it counts, and a commitment to stay in the room.

Radical collaboration isn't just about achieving more together. It's about building something neither of you could build alone.

The Tension: True collaboration is hard. It asks organisations to give up control, share credit, and move at the pace of trust. That can feel risky in a sector measured by visibility, attribution, and year-on-year growth. Many charities simply aren't designed for the kind of slow, relational work that collaboration requires.

Structural barriers make it harder. Different governance models, reporting frameworks, and funding rules can prevent alignment. Funders often ask for individual attribution, not shared success. KPIs pit organisations against each other, even when their missions are aligned.

QUOTE: "We can't do this alone—collaboration is essential. We need to work in partnership across sectors: voluntary, commercial, everyone. We need to learn from each other and be greater than the sum of our parts. But one thing that's holding us back? Governance. It needs to evolve if we want to move forward together." Sonya Trivedy

Internally, it runs deeper. Collaboration means admitting you don't have all the answers. It means letting go of control. That can trigger fear, ego, or inertia, especially when the organisation is under pressure.

And there's the pressure to perform. In a competitive funding landscape, it can feel safer to prioritise what's ownable and measurable. But that instinct kills collaboration before it begins.

These are real tensions. But the alternative is more duplication. More fragmentation. More missed opportunities. Radical collaboration asks us to step beyond what's comfortable, and into what's possible. It's not easy. But it's where the future lives.

Institutions vs Movements

The Shift: top-down messaging → ground-up mobilisation.

Movements are everywhere (at least in name). Charities, brands, and campaigns increasingly frame their work as a “movement” to inspire urgency, build loyalty, and reach wider audiences. But not everything that wears the language of a movement behaves like one.

Real movements don’t start with KPIs. They don’t begin in strategy sessions or comms teams. They start in communities. They grow out of shared urgency, lived experience, and the belief that change is possible, if people organise together to make it happen.

The challenge is not whether charities can build movements. It’s whether they’re willing to let go. Movements are not owned. They’re catalysed. They require trust, participation, and power-sharing.

The shift is from top-down messaging to ground-up mobilisation. That means not just asking for support, but building the conditions where people can lead, shape, and grow the work themselves. Because if the mission isn’t bigger than your organisation, it’s not a movement. It’s a marketing strategy.

QUOTE: “It’s about building a groundswell from the bottom up—helping people realise that the only way to shift this dynamic is to get political. So we ask: what are we convening around? What are we protesting against—and more importantly, what are we protesting *for*? Hope works best when it’s anchored to a vision. If we can collectively create a shared vision—even if it’s not concrete—we can begin to move towards it with purpose.” Johnty Gray

The Blueprint: Right now, the word “movement” is everywhere. Yet too many of these movements are, at their core, rebrands, campaigns, or exercises in reputation management. Real movements are not the same as campaigns. They aren’t built in boardrooms, and they don’t start with KPIs. They’re rooted in urgency, belonging, and collective action. If you’re calling something a movement, but you’re really seeking visibility or income, people will feel the disconnect and they won’t stick around.

Movements work when people believe the mission is bigger than your organisation. When they see themselves in the change you're trying to make and feel equipped to drive that change forward. This is about more than messaging. It's about power. Movements don't just ask for support, they invite leadership from the ground up. Ask yourself: why do you want to build a movement? Is it to spark systemic change? To challenge something broken? Or is it just another layer of brand positioning? Because if the purpose isn't collective, the impact won't be either.

QUOTE: "Mobilisation is a more equal relationship between an organisation and the public, it's more than money, it's about inspiring people to act. It's easy to see why charities want to build movements. But we're coming up with movement propositions, without any understanding of movement practice, and it just becomes marketing or lead generation for fundraising." Paul de Gregorio

Not every cause is a movement. And that's okay. But for those that are, movements that grow from lived experience, shared urgency, and aligned values, the potential is transformative. When done well, movements build loyalty, momentum, and cultural shift. But only if you're willing to give away control. If you're not prepared to be changed by the people who join you, you're not building a movement; you're just managing a message.

QUOTE: "I worry that financial support is the goal, rather than change. When we think about how effective big organisations are at making change—who is really effective in the UK? Who's won anything? Who's stopped something? There's tactical moves all over the place, but we're lacking big wins." Paul de Gregorio

So the question isn't just: can we build a movement? It's: are we willing to let others lead it?

So What: If you're going to talk about building a movement, you have to be ready to change how you work. Movements aren't top-down. They don't begin with brand assets or messaging grids. They start with people, people who want to lead, organise, challenge, and create.

For charities, that means rethinking what leadership looks like. It means treating supporters, service users, and communities as co-builders; not audiences. That might mean offering platforms, not just messages. Training and tools, not just asks. Feedback loops that influence direction, not just reflect it.

It also means getting comfortable with mess. Movements grow in unexpected ways. You can't control every message or manage every outcome. If you need everything to align with your risk register, you're not ready to move.

But if your mission demands cultural change, collective action, and power from the ground up, then investing in movement infrastructure could be your most important strategic decision. That includes facilitation skills, narrative space, listening systems, and digital tools that prioritise participation over performance.

You don't have to build a movement. But if you say you are, you have to mean it.

The Tension: Building a movement requires different infrastructure, and a different mindset. Many charities aren't set up for it. Governance structures are slow. Teams are overstretched. Risk appetite is low. Most systems are designed to deliver services or campaigns, not cultivate long-term participation.

There's a resourcing gap too. Movement-building takes time, facilitation, digital tools, and sustained investment in people and relationships. These rarely fit within traditional funding models, which prioritise short-term outputs and individual attribution.

Then there's the challenge of humility. Movements ask organisations to follow as much as they lead. That can disrupt identity, hierarchy, and strategy. It asks leaders to be changed by the people they invite in.

These are real barriers. But the risk of avoiding them is greater. We mistake brand awareness for momentum. Performance for progress. Movements aren't just a tactic. They are a different way of working. And if the mission demands it, the structure needs to be ready.

Case Studies

Extinction Rebellion

Extinction Rebellion (XR) has redefined what climate activism can look like: disruptive, decentralised, and deeply rooted in collective hope. Through art, nonviolent direct action, and open-source organising, the movement empowers everyday people to take a stand against ecological collapse. Its strength lies in its ability to blend urgency with vision: not just protesting the status quo, but creating new ways of being, gathering, and imagining the future.

So What: Your supporters don't just want to donate, they want to belong to something bigger. And when given the tools to step up, people will want to get involved. The catch? It's all about participation and co-creation, and, most importantly, a genuine, urgent, and engaging cause to rally around.

Funders Collaborative Hub

The Funders Collaborative Hub, launched by the Association of Charitable Foundations, is creating a new blueprint for how UK funders can work together. Instead of operating in isolation, the Hub offers a space for foundations to align strategies, share learning, and co-invest in solutions to society's most complex problems. From hosting collaboration events to making personalised introductions, the Hub supports a growing culture of generosity. Not just in funding, but in insight, influence, and intent.

So What: The Funders Collaborative Hub proves that hope scales when power and resources are shared. In a landscape of complex, interlinked challenges, collaboration isn't a luxury, but a necessity. Think beyond organisational ego and toward shared infrastructure for change. What could you achieve if we stopped competing, and started building together?

Where To Find Hope

The best work is collective, messy, and full of shared Google Docs. If you want to find hope in this space, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. You can join a campaign that already exists; say yes to the unexpected

partnership; reach out to the person doing work you admire and ask how you can help each other. Pass the mic onto the people doing work that you respect. Introduce someone to a room they'd never be invited into otherwise. Hope scales when we stop competing for change and start building it together.

The Architecture of Hope

We began this report with a truth that's easy to feel and hard to say: hope is running on empty. Not because we don't care. But because we've been carrying too much, for too long, while systems stay stuck. We're working in a time of burnout, polycrisis, and institutional distrust. Business-as-usual isn't working. And doing nothing isn't neutral, but a risk we can't afford.

The world is changing. People are walking away from institutions that offer slogans instead of action. They're demanding credibility, not just communication. Which means this is a moment of danger, and of opportunity. Because hope is shifting. It's becoming more grounded, more collective, more strategic. So, how do we respond? Not by making hope smaller. But by making it real.

This is the Architecture of Hope. A set of organising principles for change. Seven moves to turn intention into action, and belief into build.

Each principle maps directly onto one of the seven dimensions of hope explored in Act II. Together, they offer a way to translate culture into structure, and values into action. This isn't a checklist. It's a shift in how we work; how we design, lead, fund, and collaborate when we take hope seriously.

1. Narrative Hope: Make the story true

Hope isn't a tone of voice. It's a discipline. When internal culture doesn't match the external story, people switch off. Trust weakens. Belief erodes. If you want people to believe in your mission, they need to see it lived inside your organisation first. That means starting with alignment. Let the story reflect the work. Let the work reflect the values. Be honest about where you're stuck, and open about what you're building. Hope travels further when it starts from the inside.

- From storytelling → to story-living
- From "how we look" → to "how we work"

- From polished messaging → to cultural alignment

2. Structural Hope: Redesign the centre

If your systems are built to minimise risk, suppress difference and hoard control, hope has nowhere to land. Redesigning the centre means rethinking who gets to decide, how power moves, and what success looks like. It means creating governance, strategy and funding models that act like change is possible. Don't optimise the old system. Build a better one.

- From control → to redistribution
- From legacy structures → to living systems
- From institutional inertia → to responsive design

3. Relationship Hope: Build with, not for

Hope is co-created. It grows in proximity, in relationship, and in shared ownership. That means moving beyond participation as a gesture, and into participation as design. The communities you serve are not just recipients. They are co-builders of change. Shift your posture. Share the pen. Build structures that hold more than one voice at a time.

- From delivery → to co-creation
- From gatekeeping → to shared ownership
- From centralisation → to decentralised design

4. Hope is Political: Act like what you do matters

This is not a time for neutrality. The problems we're facing are structural, generational, and urgent. Charities do not exist to soften the blow, they exist to build what comes next. Take your mission seriously. Speak with moral clarity. Use your influence. Hope without action is performance. Action without purpose is noise. Hope with purpose? That's power.

- From delivery → to leadership

- From “we’re just doing our bit” → to “we’re shaping the future”
- From nice → to necessary

5. Designing Hope: Design for futures, not fixes

If your strategy only solves for now, you’re building fragility into the system. Hopeful organisations design with time in mind. They embed foresight, embrace uncertainty, and build in the ability to adapt. This isn’t about long-termism for the sake of it, it’s about resilience, relevance, and care for those who will inherit what we build.

- From reacting → to rehearsing
- From short-term fixes → to intergenerational thinking
- From predicting → to preparing

6. Truthful Realism: Build from what’s real

Hope doesn’t live in strategy decks or vision statements. It lives in people’s daily experience: what’s working, what’s breaking, and what’s being carried quietly out of view. If we want to build hopeful systems, we have to start with what’s real. That means listening deeply. Letting lived experience shape the agenda. And resisting the urge to abstract complexity into something cleaner than it really is. Hope doesn’t grow from pretending things are better than they are. It grows from naming what’s hard, and still choosing to act.

- From abstraction → to grounded action
- From “how do we help?” → to “what’s already happening?”
- From research subjects → to agenda-setters
-

7. Polyphonic Hope: Hold complexity, not consensus

Real hope doesn’t flatten the landscape. It makes space for contradiction, discomfort and difference. When organisations chase consensus at all costs, they lose clarity. When they acknowledge trade-

offs, make boundaries visible, and own the discomfort of exclusion, they lead with integrity. The future is plural. If your strategy can't hold that, it's not ready.

- From universal messages → to situated truths
- From avoidance → to accountability
- From pleasing everyone → to standing for something

This is the Architecture of Hope.

It's not a checklist or a copy and paste set of promises. Because the question now isn't just what you do, it's how you do it. Not just what you say, but what you make possible. Not just who you are, but what you're willing to build.

Hope isn't a message. Hope isn't a feeling.

Hope is a decision. Hope is a structure. Hope is the work.

It's cultural. It's systemic. And it's already being written. The question is, are you ready to be part of the next chapter?

Turning Hope into Action

You've read the report. You're feeling the shift. Now comes the hard part: doing something with it.

The ideas and calls to action in this report aren't designed to sit on a shelf. They're designed to shape decisions. To help you reframe what's possible, rebuild how you work, and redesign what you offer. **But we know how hard that is.**

Because strategy alone won't get you there. Because new ideas won't stick in old systems. Because the future won't be delivered by tweaks to the past.

At Good Innovation, We help charity leaders transform their income and services by thinking differently, building the right systems, and creating products and services that actually make a difference.

That could be a bold new strategy, a new service, a new way to generate income or a better way of working across teams.

We work with Fundraising and Service Directors who believe that growth won't come from doing more of the same. Whilst a new CRM, a new TOM and a new three year plan are important, they alone won't close the gap between the ambition and what's actually getting delivered.

We approach this through our three stage approach to transforming income and services.

It's a practical, future-focused way to turn ambition into strategy, strategy into delivery, and delivery into income and impact. It's also a flexible approach, recognising that every charity is different.

This approach has evolved through our work not just in charities, but in startups, innovation labs and complex systems change. It's grounded in how real change happens in the real world - through people, momentum and belief.

Our approach has three stages:

Navigator helps build strategies for growth, designed from the future, not as an extension of the past. We support leadership teams to define a bold, credible ambition and direction and then create a living, agile strategy with clear priorities, testable hypotheses and belief across the organisation.

Engine helps build the Growth Operating Model that makes a growth strategy deliverable - aligning the people doing the work with those enabling it. We redesign how decisions are made, how teams work, and how change moves through the system.

Launchpad helps create and scale the new services, products or initiatives that will drive growth. We work alongside teams to test, build and launch what's next using our entrepreneurial, test-and-learn approach to reduce risk and move faster.

We’re already working with leaders who are asking the same questions this report raises. They’re not looking for silver bullets. They’re looking for partners who will challenge, design and deliver with them.

If you’re ready to move from ideas to action, we’d love to help.

Let’s build something that lasts.

Thank You

We would like to extend a massive thank you to everyone who made the time to chat to myself and Eef about hope. I'd particularly like to thank those from the sector who filled in the survey about losing hope and burnout, and those CEOs who had off the record conversations about their frustrations and worries about the future of charities. You all brought a unique and nuanced perspective to a really challenging conversation. I'd also like to thank the following people who are quoted in this report:

Aimee Perry, Senior Service Innovation Manager - Pancreatic Cancer UK
Angharard Mckenzie, Director of Fundraising - Comic Relief
Anita Eade, Director of Fundraising, Marketing and Communications - WWT
Caitlin Keeley, Partner / Head of Imagination - RADAR
Clara Maguire, Executive Director - The Citizens
Craig Fordham, Director of Public Fundraising - Macmillan Cancer Support
Emma Malcolm, Director of Fundraising and Transformation - Macular Society
Ivor Williams, Founder - Mortals
James Alexander, Director - Future Agenda
Jennifer Estaris, Game Director - Monument Valley 3
Johnty Gray, Individual Engagement Director - Oxfam
Julie Milnes, Director of Fundraising - Centrepoint
Kate Collins, CEO - Teenage Cancer Trust
Liz Tait, Director of Fundraising - Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity
Lou Barton, Strategy Principal Consultant for Engagement - Manifesto
Maggie Tierney, Charity CEO
Mark Titchner, Artist
Paul de Gregorio, Founder - Rally
Philip Almond, Executive Director of Marketing, Fundraising and Engagement - Cancer Research UK
Richard Lee, Director of Fundraising - Marie Curie
Rob Halkyard, Former Executive Director of Brand, Marketing & Fundraising - Crisis

Saad Eddine Said, CEO and Artistic Director - New Art Exchange
Samar Younes, Founder, Transcultural Futurist, Quantum Culture Theorist & Hybrid Artist - SAMARITUAL
Sarah Housley, Design Futurist - Author of Designing Hope: Visions to Shape Our Future
Sharon Pickford, Executive Director for Experience and Revenue - National Trust
Sheetal Mistry, Social Change Facilitator & Learning Designer
Sonya Trivedy, Executive Director of External Engagement - Samaritans
Sophie Carre, Director of Public Engagement - Trussell
Tiffany St James, Chief Commercial Officer - Vitalis Capital
Wendy Robinson, Services Director - Campaign Against Living Miserably
Will Doig, Executive Editor - Reasons To Be Cheerful
Will McCallum, Co-Executive Director - Greenpeace