



20 Embracing Movements

More nimble hybrids combine the strength of charity with the fluidity and freedom of people-powered movements.

Today, more of us are tiring of traditional fundraising organisations and are uniting around particular issues. People-powered movements are on the up. The growth of decentralised networks and the immediacy of social media have made it possible to connect millions to a single cause. All over the world, individuals have self-organised behind a hashtag and, through this, can drive significant change for something that matters to them. Many find this liberating. *“These organisations are seeking to avoid being formalised, which is part of their attraction.”*¹⁹⁵ Established charities find this is both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is to develop an ongoing relationship with an energetic new support base. The challenge is how to embrace or work with them within the constraints of charity regulation, particularly when there is often no defined leadership or governance structure in place.

Capitalising on grass-roots support is of course not new. Indeed, in the UK, the Armed Forces charity Help for Heroes is well known for its ability to motivate millions over a short time period. Inspired by the seemingly inadequate care given to injured soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, it sparked a wave of youthful idealism and patriotism among its supporters, and was able to grow into a multimillion-pound phenomenon as a result. *“Help for Heroes appeared because there was a glaring gap in provision, and so a new organisation stepped in to fill the gap.”* Much has been learned from successes such as this, but ten years on, when support for causes is even more fluid and informal, we heard caution, *“I don’t think the Cobseo charities are thinking like that - not thinking about it with a broad holistic agenda.”*¹⁹⁶

Movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and XR (Extinction Rebellion) all provide examples of the way in which people are now choosing to spend their energy, and importantly, donate money. They believe that giving directly to a cause, rather than through a formal charity, provides a flow of future cash directly to the front-line. *“These organisations are seeking to avoid being formalised, which is part of their attraction for people.”*¹⁹⁷ This allows flexibility, and as long as change is happening, few have questioned where the money flows. *“XR or BLM - these are unregulated: no one quite knows where the money is going, but people can see the impact.”*¹⁹⁸ This lack of clarity may only be acceptable in the short term. As they evolve, some see the inevitability of movements becoming less fluid in order to continue to drive and measure positive impact: *“If they want a financially resilient model, they may have to change, because with that, and the need to attract funds, comes greater governance and safeguarding.”*¹⁹⁹ Already there are, for example, *“lots of internal conversations in XR about having a legitimate arm to collect money.”*²⁰⁰

Movements are also seen by some as the fastest way to create political policy change, particularly where orthodox advocacy has demonstrably failed to deliver change at pace. Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future international climate movement is a case in point. By overtly representing the voice of the people on a single issue, it becomes harder for policy makers to ignore, particularly when they themselves are elected democratically.

Looking ahead, this could go in two ways. Today's cause-driven movements do indeed become hybrids - more formalised organisations that can fit within the established governance of charities. More disruptively, cause-driven movements scale and capitalise on the support for their new approaches – becoming major conduits for future funding flows, and so leaving traditional charities behind.

An Implication: Foundations and charities change core policies to better enable working with appropriate grass-roots movements and the charity regulation framework adapts to support these changes.