

Civil Society and Democracy - Advocacy Toolkit

The Brexit Civil Society Alliance's report, **Seizing the Opportunity: the case for embracing civil society in democracy** sets out a number of recommendations for decision makers to implement. We encourage all organisations to call for these changes to be made at all levels of government. However change won't happen instantly.

In this toolkit we set out some steps which civil society organisations themselves can take to better engagement and protect civic space. This brief guide should be read alongside the report, with page references noted where relevant.

How to Ask For Meaningful Engagement

A key theme of the report is the problem of engagement lacking meaning: that it is merely a tick box exercise for policy makers who are not open to considering the ideas of those in civil society who are being consulted. There are three elements to asking for meaningful engagement which organisations can consider:

1) Demonstrating your worth

Civil society organisations do not solely exist to fill gaps in public service provision left by the state. Civil society organisations carry out a broad array of functions, and are valuable sources of evidence (See pages 9 - 12). Organisations may benefit from asking themselves how they can make the following explicit to those in government:

- (a) Value to decision makers - what can your organisations add and how can you help those they are seeking to influence achieve their goals?
- (b) Value to the public - what does your organisation add to society generally, and what support do you have amongst the public?
- (c) Legitimacy - why should your organisation be listened to? This can be evidential, representative, moral and/or legal.

Particularly at a local level, organisations will benefit from building long standing relationships with local government officers.

2) Communicating clearly

In communications both with the public and with decision makers, organisations need to consider:

- (a) Avoiding jargon and sector specific language.
- (b) Why the audience should listen. For politicians, how does listening to you help them achieve their objectives. For supporters, how does supporting your cause relate to their day to day concerns and hopes for the future.
- (c) Demonstrating how evidence provided fits into the policy process.

3) Holding governments to account for the effectiveness of their engagement strategies

A key ask of the report is that decision makers adopt the Bond checklist¹ for effective engagement when working with civil society organisations. Organisations may benefit from using the checklist during their interactions with government and grounding feedback on how engagement can be improved on its criteria.

A copy of the checklist can be found on page 51 of the report.

How to Fight Against the Encroachments on Civic Space

Page 54 of the report sets out a number of recommendations for the Government relating to the safeguarding of civic space. Organisations need to work together in networks and alliances in order to call for these changes. In doing so, there are a number of ideas to bear in mind:

- 1) Networks must take care to be truly inclusive of all organisations, including social movements and not just based in London and the South East.
- 2) Funders should review the terms of their contracts to ensure organisations have the flexibility to undertake advocacy (See page 35 of the report).
- 3) In addition to looking to governments, organisations need to sell themselves and their vision for a better future to the public. Civil society is large and people - from all parties - care about it. This is an untapped resource.

Further Resources

We recommend the following resources and networks for further information about strategic communication and joined-up working on these issues.

Abrahamson, Z. et al (2019) [Ensuring civil society is heard: principles and practice to improve government engagement with civil society](#), Bond.

[Civil Society Voice Network](#), Bond.

Equally Ours, [Strategic Communications](#) resources.

Overseas Development Institute (2014) [Tools for bridging research and policy: the RAPID Context, Evidence, Links Framework](#).

¹ Abrahamson, Z. et al (2019) Ensuring civil society is heard: principles and practice to improve government engagement with civil society, Bond.