

The Civil Society Covenant

Partner communications and engagement toolkit.

Last revised: 4 November 2024



Toolkit overview

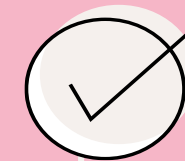
This toolkit has been created to help you understand, engage with and talk about the UK Civil Society Covenant.

This toolkit is for any civil society organisation, such as charities, community groups, social enterprises, cooperatives and funders. Finalising the Covenant requires input from organisations of all sizes, from across the UK, and with representation from all groups.

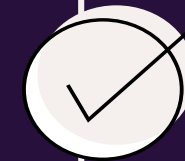
The toolkit includes:

- Section 1: Introduction (*an overview of the Civil Society Covenant*)
- Section 2: Understanding the form (*guidance for completing the consultation*)
- Section 3: Ways to engage (*understanding ways to engage and share with your networks*)
- Section 4: Help us promote participation (*how to get involved by promoting the framework, including via downloadable social media and email templates*)
- Section 5: Tools and resources (*links you may find useful*)

By the end of this toolkit, you'll:



understand what the Covenant Framework is



know how to get involved in developing the Covenant



have the tools to be able to talk about the Covenant with your network



know how we can support you with useful tools and resources



answer questions you may have about the Covenant Framework and principles.

Section 1: Introduction

BACKGROUND

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) are working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to engage the wider sector to develop a 'Civil Society Covenant'.

The Covenant will be a new agreement to improve the relationship between civil society and government. A strong, two-way relationship is vital to ensure organisations like yours can achieve your mission.

Since the general election, we've engaged over 50 voluntary infrastructure bodies and worked with DCMS to develop draft principles that will define this new two-way relationship. Once finalised, these principles will form the Civil Society Covenant.

Now is your chance to share your views on this work to help us finalise it. NCVO, ACEVO and DCMS are engaging civil society organisations to get their feedback before 12 December.

The Covenant will:

- support collaboration between civil society organisations and government
- ensure respect for the different roles we play, and protect our independence
- support all public bodies and civil society organisations
- build on and support existing agreements in place at a local level
- complement other arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The 4 high level principles

- 1 **Recognition:** to ensure a strong and independent civil society
- 2 **Partnership:** to ensure effective service delivery and policy making, and shared learning of best practices
- 3 **Participation:** to ensure people and communities can be heard and make a difference
- 4 **Transparency:** to ensure civil society and government have the information needed to best serve people and communities

LAUNCH EVENT

On 17 October, Culture Secretary, Lisa Nandy, hosted a roundtable discussion at Number 10 Downing Street, followed by a reception with the Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, to launch the engagement with the sector. They were joined by civil society representatives from across the UK to discuss plans for the Covenant and how it will enable a new working relationship between government and civil society.



"To fix the foundations of our country we need a fundamental reset of the relationship between government and civil society. That is why we're building a new partnership with the sector to tackle the complex social and economic challenges we face as a country."

Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer



Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, talking to NCVO CEO Sarah Elliott (above) and ACEVO CEO Jane Ide (below) at the launch.



GET INVOLVED

This is your chance to help us develop the Covenant.

To help ensure we hear from as many people as possible, in as many ways as we can, there will be several ways to get involved:

1. **Fill in the form** – there is a consultation page live on NCVO’s website for you to complete before 12 December
2. **Attend a workshop** – we will be running workshops to discuss your thoughts and compile them into our overall feedback
3. **Discuss and share with your networks** – sharing is as important as taking part, as you can help us reach and hear from more people

In parallel, DCMS will engage across government, including government departments, devolved governments, arm’s length bodies (ALBs) as well as local authorities and mayoral combined authorities.

“Civil Society organisations are integral to the fabric of our society, delivering for communities across the UK.

“This Covenant marks the start of a reciprocal and trusted partnership between government and the civil society sector. We are asking charities, social enterprises and community groups to share their views on a new way forward, to restore civil society to the centre of our national life and work hand-in-hand to deliver for communities.

“We want to hear from voices representing the full breadth of the sector across the four nations, including grassroots organisations and those supporting a range of diverse communities.

“We look forward to working collaboratively to co-create a Covenant that enables us to tackle some of the nation’s biggest challenges and deliver a decade of national renewal, together.”



Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Section 2: Understanding the form

We have created a form to understand:

- How you think civil society organisations and government should engage with each other
- What supports or prevents a good relationship with government
- What actions public bodies and civil society organisations can take to improve the relationship
- What supports civil society organisations to innovate.

In the form, we ask questions about your organisation to make sure we know whether we are hearing from a wide range of organisations.

The form is open until 12 December.

Our focus

Our engagement will focus on issues that include:

- are the 4 key principles- recognition, partnership, participation, transparency - the right ones?
- what are the enablers of effective partnership and what are the examples of best practice?
- what are the barriers to meaningful partnership and collaboration?
- how do we ensure this Covenant holds weight and is effective?
- how do we harness the excellent ability of civil society to innovate and find new solutions to societal problems and how do we support that spirit to spread across the sector?
- how do we make the new relationship a reality, especially in the current economic context?

THE FORM

Before completing the form, it is important you read the draft principles, as the questions will relate directly to these principles.

Understanding your organisation

Step 2: Complete our feedback form

To share your experiences and provide feedback on the draft Covenant Framework principles, please complete this form by midday on Thursday 12 December.

It should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

About you and your organisation

First name *

Last name *

Email *

Confirm email *

Organisation name

What is your organisation's annual income?

Where do you operate?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> North East of England | <input type="checkbox"/> South West |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North West of England | <input type="checkbox"/> All England |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yorkshire and the Humber | <input type="checkbox"/> Wales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Midlands | <input type="checkbox"/> Scotland |
| <input type="checkbox"/> West Midlands | <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Ireland |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East of England | <input type="checkbox"/> UK wide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> London | <input type="checkbox"/> International |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South East | |

Please select all that apply.

What does your organisation focus on?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addiction and substance misuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Health (including mental health) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animals | <input type="checkbox"/> Homelessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts and heritage | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing and accommodation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asylum seekers and refugees | <input type="checkbox"/> International development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children and young people | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal and advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal justice | <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure and sport |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence and abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Older people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education and learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Poverty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency response | <input type="checkbox"/> Social care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment and training | <input type="checkbox"/> Transport |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary infrastructure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equality and human rights | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Please select all that apply.

Type of organisation

- Charitable company (limited by guarantee)
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Unincorporated association
- Trust
- Funder
- Cooperative Society
- Other

What role does your organisation play?

- Community organisation
- Frontline
- Infrastructure
- Service delivery
- Other

Select all that apply.

Are you or your organisation a member of ACEVO and/or NCVO?

- NCVO
- ACEVO
- Don't know

Please select all that apply.

Is your organisation led by and for marginalised communities?

- Yes
- No

This means your organisation is run by a majority of people from the group your organisation works with.

Working with government

Your relationship with public bodies

How do you engage with public bodies?

- Recipient of funding
- Influencing decision-making
- Influencing service design
- Supporting public bodies to engage volunteers
- We don't
- Other

Please select all that apply.

Which public bodies do you engage with?

- Local government (for example, a local authority, local council, or Mayoral combined authority)
- Central government departments (for example, the Department of Health and Social Care)
- Arm's-length bodies (for example, NHS England)
- Local or regional public bodies (for example, Integrated Care Boards)
- We don't
- Other

Please select all that apply.

Do you experience barriers when engaging with public bodies?

- Yes
- No

This could include obstacles when communicating, regulatory barriers or any other challenges.

What supports an effective relationship between civil society organisations and public bodies?

Please share any examples

What actions should civil society organisations take to improve the relationship with public bodies?

What actions should public bodies take to improve the relationship with civil society organisations?

What supports civil society to innovate and find solutions to societal problems?

Getting your feedback on the framework

Your feedback on the Civil Society Covenant Framework principles

Do we need a Covenant to improve the relationship between civil society organisations and government?

- Yes
- No

To what extent do these four principles support an effective relationship between civil society and public bodies?

What changes or additions, if any, would you make to the draft principles?

How can we ensure civil society organisations and public bodies uphold these principles?

In this section, we are asking questions about your organisation to make sure we know whether we are hearing from a wide range of organisations.

This information will help us make sure the final Covenant is created in a way that supports the whole of civil society.

We may also contact you to discuss your answers in more detail if this will help us improve the outcome of the consultation. We will not use this information for any other purpose.

This section helps us understand how civil society is currently working with government.

The free-text answers help us to get qualitative insight into how you think these relationships could work better in the future.

This section specifically asks for your feedback on the framework principles.

These free-text responses help us get more insight on what you think of the principles, whether or not you have any thoughts on how they can be evolved and what is needed to ensure that these principles can be actioned in partnership in the future.

Section 3: Ways to engage

We want to hear your thoughts on the Civil Society Covenant Framework – whether you’ve had a positive or negative experience of engaging with local or national government. We’re looking for input from organisations and groups of all sizes across civil society. Your input will ensure this agreement makes a difference to the people and causes we work with and for.

As well as giving your feedback via the form, there are a couple of other ways you can get involved:

Online workshops

We will be hosting a series of online workshops to enable you to co-design the Covenant and share your experiences.

These workshops are available to book on the [NCVO website](#).

We encourage you to join, and to share these workshops with your networks.

Discuss with your networks

We are developing materials to support you to run your own workshop and share the findings with us. These materials will be designed for organisations with networks of civil society organisations, such as membership bodies or federated charities.

Depending on our capacity, one of the team may be able to join you.

Updated details, including discussion guides and other materials, will be added to this section when they are available.

Section 4: Help us promote participation

The success of the framework relies on as many people as possible engaging and providing their feedback on the draft principles. We want to hear from a wide range of organisations from across the UK. You can help us to achieve this by encouraging organisations and leaders to take part.

Suggestions of how you could promote the Covenant through your channels

Email

You could include an article about the Civil Society Covenant, and tell people that you have taken part, in your emails and e-newsletters going out between now and 12 December.

Sample copy is available to download on slide 11.

Social media

Promote across your social media channels – either by posting your own content or by re-sharing from NCVO, ACEVO or DCMS channels.

Social media copy and graphics are available to download on slide 10.

Speaking opportunity

You might want to consider mentioning the Civil Society Covenant at any upcoming speaking opportunities to encourage others to participate and give their views.

This could be internal, or external with other organisations.

Existing comms products

Talk about the Covenant in your existing communications products, and signpost the page on the NCVO website so others can participate.

This might include your:

- Website
- Podcast
- Media quotes / press releases

SOCIAL ASSETS YOU CAN USE

Use the downloadable social media assets and copy to amplify the key messages on your own channels.



Suggested caption copy

🗨️ NCVO and ACEVO are working closely with the government to develop the #CivilSocietyCovenant – a new framework that aims to reset how government engages with civil society.

Learn more and how you can get involved: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/civil-society-covenant/>



Suggested caption copy

Your input is needed to shape the #CivilSocietyCovenant – a new framework to improve the relationship between civil society organisations and government.

Complete the consultation form today: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/civil-society-covenant/>



Suggested caption copy

🗨️ We've completed the consultation form for the #CivilSocietyCovenant Framework.

Share your experiences and provide feedback on the draft Covenant Framework principles today: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/civil-society-covenant/>



Suggested caption copy

🗨️ *"This Covenant marks the start of a reciprocal and trusted partnership between government and the civil society sector."* - Lisa Nandy, Culture Secretary

Help shape the #CivilSocietyCovenant: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/civil-society-covenant/>



Suggested caption copy

🗨️ Do you work with local or national government?

Your input is needed to help shape the #CivilSocietyCovenant - a new agreement to improve the relationship between civil society and government.

Complete the feedback form: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/civil-society-covenant/>

[Download the assets.](#)

EMAIL ASSETS YOU CAN USE

Use the downloadable email signatures and copy templates to let your audiences know about the Covenant and encourage them to engage.

Add the banner to your email signature, and encourage others to do the same. When inserting the banner, add a hyperlink to the [Covenant webpage](#).

Use the example copy to send out your own emails to let people know about the covenant.

The Civil Society Covenant

Let's reset the relationship between civil society and government

Give your feedback today



NCVO **acevo**
Imagine, inspire, improve

The Civil Society Covenant

Let's reset the relationship between civil society and local government

Help us shape the Civil Society Covenant

NCVO **acevo**
Imagine, inspire, improve

Dear FirstName,

Have you heard of the **Civil Society Covenant**? A framework which will reset how government, local and national, engages with the charity and voluntary sector.

NCVO and ACEVO are working closely with the government to create the Covenant, with the goal of creating lasting and positive change for charities. And we need to get involved! It's a unique opportunity for charities to help shape the relationship between government and our sector.

Why does it matter?

The decisions made by public bodies, including our local councils and infrastructure organisations, have a huge impact on our work as charities and the communities we serve.

We have an opportunity to influence this working relationship for the future. To build long-term partnerships that are advantageous to charities and groups of all shapes and sizes, throughout our communities.

Get involved, share your thoughts

Your voice matters and your input is needed. We want to ensure the final agreement **reflects the real-world experiences and needs of organisations like ours**.

Let's work together to develop an agreement that truly places the voluntary sector at the heart of government decision-making!

Get involved and help shape the Civil Society Covenant

Best wishes,

[Download the assets.](#)

Section 5: Tools and resources

There are a number of tools and resources for wider reading and understanding. We are sharing these for your information, and they are not essential for your participation in the consultation. Everything you need to know is either in this document, or on the website.

You may want to share these links with others to support their understanding of the Civil Society Covenant Framework.

Over the course of the consultation period, we will be updating this section to ensure that you have access to tools and resources that are relevant to the Covenant.

[Find out more about the Civil Society Covenant](#) and complete the consultation form on NCVO's website.

[Read an article on the Civil Society Covenant](#) and why it is important to have your voice heard.

[Read the paper](#) as well as [further guidance](#) on gov.uk.

Check out the FAQs on NCVO's website.

For more information

If you would like to discuss how you or your organisation can get involved with the development of the Covenant, we'd love to hear from you!



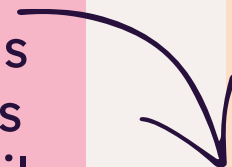
You can email us via:

NCVO: policy@ncvo.org.uk

ACEVO: policy@acevo.org.uk

DCMS: civilsocietycovenant@dcms.gov.uk

Don't forget to follow us on social for more news and updates on the Civil Society Covenant.



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