

**ANNEX A**  
**INVITATION TO TENDER FOR RESEARCH INTO EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE  
CONSULTATION WITH THE THIRD SECTOR**

**Introduction**

1. The Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office, in collaboration with the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO), wishes to invest in research to promote better understanding of effective and innovative methods of consultation with the third sector.
2. This paper sets out the context for this work and the outcomes required. Terms, conditions and timescales, as well as details of how to tender for the work and evaluation criteria, are contained in accompanying documents.

**About the Office of the Third Sector**

3. The Office of the Third Sector was created in May 2006 and placed at the centre of Government in the Cabinet Office. The aim of the office is to develop an environment which enables the third sector to thrive, growing in its contribution to society, the economy and environment. Our role is to:
  - drive action to improve government and third sector partnership working and ensure better terms of engagement
  - fund programmes to support the sector's development, such as Capacitybuilders and Futurebuilders
  - lead on the evidence base and analysis of the sector to better inform work of the government and third sector
  - ensure a good regulatory environment for the sector.

**About NCVCCO**

4. NCVCCO is the umbrella body for voluntary organisations working with children, young people and families. The membership encompasses large household names such as Barnardos and NSPCC to tiny groups working in one housing estate or village. Our role is to support the sector to achieve more for children and families through:
  - **Promoting** the role of the sector in providing innovative solutions to the needs of children and young people
  - **Campaigning** for children to remain at the top of the policy agenda
  - **Speaking** with the collective voice of the sector and its service users
  - **Advocating** for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Members meet regularly in regional and specialist working groups and NCVCCO provides a comprehensive information and policy service, including facilitating collective responses to a range of Government consultations and initiatives.

## Background and policy context

5. Consultation is an integral part of policy development whereby the Government seeks evidence, validates existing evidence and exposes preliminary policy analysis and options to scrutiny. Consultation helps public bodies make better informed decisions on matters of policy. It helps them improve public-service delivery. And it helps improve the accountability of these bodies to the public, to businesses and to civil society. Government is most credible when it listens and shows that it is listening to the customers of public services, the country's experts, businesses, the third sector and those who are most directly affected by the Government's actions.
6. The recent Cabinet Office & HM Treasury third sector review<sup>1</sup> highlighted that listening and responding to the views of citizens and communities is a vital part of the policy making process and a thriving democracy.
7. At their best, consultations can provide the opportunity for third sector organisations to have their views formally recorded, listened to, and taken into account and to have their recommended policy prescriptions considered and incorporated within public policy making.<sup>2</sup>
8. The review recognised, however, that more needs to be done to continue to drive best practice in consultation, particularly in hearing multiple voices, including from marginalised groups and from the smallest organisations. In order for the voices of a range of organisations to be heard the Government needs to think creatively and take active steps to reach out to and listen to communities.
9. As set out in the review, the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) wants to invest in research to promote better understanding of effective and innovative methods of consultation with the third sector and with a diverse range of third sector organisations.
10. The Government recognises that listening and responding to the views of citizens and communities is a vital part of the policy making process. In 2000 the Government first published the Code of Practice on Consultation setting out the principles of consultation for all Government Departments to follow:  
<http://bre.berr.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/code/>
11. The Government has recently consulted on this Code of Practice on Consultation, recognising that the current practice of a 12 week written consultation is sometimes on its own not enough, may sometimes be superfluous to requirements, and is not always the most effective way of getting views from those who might be affected by what is being discussed. Third sector responses to this consultation would be available to the successful bidder for this research contract - [http://bre.berr.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/policy\\_review/index.asp](http://bre.berr.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/policy_review/index.asp)
12. The Government has also published a Code of Good Practice on Consultation and Policy Appraisal as one of the Compact Codes on relations between

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office & HM Treasury, July 2007, *The role of the third sector in Economic and Social Regeneration: Final Report*.  
[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector/third\\_sector\\_review/](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/third_sector_review/)

<sup>2</sup> Understanding the role of Government in relation to voice and campaigning, Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO and Sheila McKechnie Foundation, February 2007.

Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England. This Code sets out good practice in terms of the Government consulting with voluntary and community sector bodies.

13. The characteristics of effective consultation (by Government) highlighted in the Compact ([www.thecompact.org.uk](http://www.thecompact.org.uk)) include:
  - consulting the sector on issues that are likely to affect it;
  - building consultation with the sector into plans for policy development;
  - consulting early;
  - being sensitive on a case by case basis as to additional resource implications for the sector in disseminating consultations and to the most appropriate methods of consultation to encourage responses;
  - preparing consultation documents that are concise, clearly laid out and written in simple language;
  - taking account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector which represent women, minority groups and the socially excluded;
  - respecting the confidentiality of information provided by the sector;
  - analysing carefully the results of the consultation;
  - providing feedback on the results of consultation; and,
  - evaluating consultations
  
14. The independent Commission for the Compact, established in 2006 to promote effective partnerships between Government and the third sector, will review the codes of the national Compact for a potential update in 2009.

### **The research**

15. It is anticipated that the fieldwork for the research will start within a week of the award of the contract and that a report will be delivered within 6 months.
  
16. The questions this research will help to answer are:
  - How can government most effectively consult with third sector organisations at all levels?
  - How, in particular, can it reach organisations normally under-represented in typical government consultations, for instance small community groups and social enterprises?
  - Are there specific ways in which consultation with the third sector differs from other government consultation?
  
17. This research will:
  - provide a useful resource to wider Government as they seek to consult with third sector organisations
  - inform future OTS consultation exercises as it seeks to act as an exemplar of best practice in consulting and feeding back to the third sector
  - act as useful supplementary information as the new Code of Practice on Consultation is implemented across Government
  - input into work the Commission for the Compact is undertaking to review and revise the Compact and its Codes
  
18. The research should be England wide and cover the whole of the third sector, including voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities,

cooperatives and mutuals. It should look at consulting with the third sector in the widest sense, and pay particular attention to the small, modestly funded organisations, largely dependent on voluntary effort. These should be recognised as distinct from the larger, professionally staffed agencies which are most visible in voluntary and community sector profiles.

19. It must cover examples of effective consultation with the third sector - including central and local Government, Government agencies or within the sector itself (e.g. umbrella bodies consulting with their third sector members) - and what lessons can be drawn from those examples.

20. In appraising these examples, the research team should consider:

- as a key component of effective consultation, the impact seeking the views of third sector organisations had on subsequent policy development or outcomes, as well as the consultation process itself.
- some of the critical success factors to effective engagement with the third sector.
- the effectiveness of the consultation both from the viewpoint of those undertaking the consultation and those being consulted.

21. More specific questions to be addressed might be:

- How should the impact of the consultation best be fed back to the third sector?
- What do consultees do with any feedback?
- Are particular methods preferred by third sector organisations and government departments?
- What is the effect of 'consultation fatigue'?
- How do third sector organisations decide whether to participate in any specific consultation?
- To what extent are different methods appropriate for different types of third sector organisations?

22. The research team should also gather representative views of third sector organisations on what they consider to be effective ways to be consulted - including views of different types of third sector organisations - particularly:

- Small third sector groups (with incomes of less than £10,000)
- Equalities based groups - including black and minority ethnic groups, women's groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender groups, faith groups and disability groups
- Rural third sector organisations

23. The team might usefully include other examples of innovative means of consulting with the sector. The research should identify how innovative approaches to consultation could be used more affectively and widely to deal with issues identified.

24. Tenderers are invited to suggest what they consider to be the most appropriate ways of collecting this evidence, whether it be quantitative, qualitative or case studies. Key will be the ability to successfully deliver the research on time.

## **Outcomes of the research**

25. There are three required outcomes from this research:

- a. A report of around 5,000 words highlighting examples of best practice, lessons learnt and views of the sector, Government departments and their agencies. The report should include recommendations and learning points as to the most effective ways for the Office of the Third Sector and wider Government to consult the third sector.
- b. A manual or tool kit (potentially web-based) that would assist Government Departments, local Government and their agencies in thinking about consulting with the third sector.
- c. A series of seminars for Government Departments, local Government and their agencies as well as third sector organisations to discuss the practical application of the findings of the research for conducting effective consultation with the third sector.