The Compact and the independence of the Third Sector

Guidance is currently being drafted on how the Compact can be used to promote and protect the independence of the third sector. This leaflet highlights some of the key issues.

Watch this space for in-depth guidance due to be published in the Spring.
What do we mean by ‘independence’?

Being independent can be thought of as having freedom *from* control and influence by government, and also having freedom *to* set priorities and values and challenge government.

The Compact commits government to ‘recognise and support the independence of the sector, including its right within the law, to campaign, to comment on Government policy, and to challenge that policy, irrespective of any funding relationship that might exist, and to determine and manage its own affairs.’

Why is it important to support the independence of the third sector?

Third sector organisations can often deliver effective and responsive services, but to do so they need to have enough freedom to use their distinctive experience and expertise. Third sector organisations work closely with people and communities, including groups that are hard-to-reach. They are a vital part of a healthy society and people increasingly engage through these organisations rather than traditional political structures. Listening to the voice of these independent organisations and those they represent helps government to design the most appropriate and effective policies and services.
How can I support third sector independence?

Some of the key issues that impact on independence are covered in the Compact. The Compact is a national agreement between the Government and the third sector that sets out the principles guiding the relationship. All local authority areas have a Local Compact.

A few examples of things to consider are listed below:

**Campaigning and Voice**
It is important to ensure that funded organisations feel free to campaign, challenge and comment on government policy irrespective of any funding relationship. This is essential for improving the quality of services through representing the needs of communities to government. Have you considered that third sector organisations that are funded by you, may decide to campaign against you?

**Funding**
In the same way as funding any other provider, there should be space to negotiate terms and conditions and find proportionate and mutually-agreed monitoring arrangements, outputs, outcomes and balance of risk.

**Consultation**
Meaningful consultation with third sector organisations enhances the design and delivery of services and programmes, because of the unique links such organisations have with communities and citizens. When conducting consultation or designing a service, the Compact provides guidance on how to seek out and listen to the voices of third sector organisations.
Further information

To find out more about these issues, two recent research reports provide further details and analysis:

- **Dancing to our own tune**: An analysis of national voluntary and community organisations’ experience of the Compact and independence, available from [www.compactvoice.org.uk](http://www.compactvoice.org.uk)

- **The State of Independence**: A research report into independence and the Compact, available from [www.thecompact.org.uk](http://www.thecompact.org.uk)

In addition the Office of the Third Sector website contains information on the government support available for building the capacity of the third sector. [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector)

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