



Home Office

Working with civil society: what we have learned

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Why we are here

I know the whole country was proud of the generosity of spirit shown by the British businesses and families who offered to shelter Syrian refugees in their own properties this summer. So to help turn these acts of humanity into reality...We'll develop a community sponsorship scheme, like those in Canada and Australia, to allow individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to support refugees directly.

**Theresa May, Home Secretary, Conservative Party Conference
October 2015**



Why is our role different?

- Unprecedented commission from senior politicians to work with civil society
- Approach of 'co-design': very small budget was both a limitation and an opportunity
- Worked with civil society to develop something new and different for the UK



Opportunities and challenges

- Ethics and propriety
- Timescales and capacity
- Unrealistic expectations
- Budgets and funding streams
- National versus local



Red tape and bureaucracy

'Thousand flowers blooming'

Numerous approaches: hard to establish who was making a genuinely philanthropic offer

Lots of new ideas and opportunities being offered

Commercial considerations: government rules perceived as bureaucracy and delay

Civil society organisations could act more quickly than Government

Caution around introducing organisations and being seen to 'endorse'

Civil society working together across boundaries

Stalemate and missed opportunities



Timescales and capacity

People wanted to help NOW: perceived Government to be dragging feet

Civil society already in place and could take action more quickly

People wanted to do something but unclear what: wanted us to tell them what to do

Civil society organisations knew what was needed locally

Reactive: we had no time to triage or develop offers

Some organisations stepped up as convenors

Existing civil society structures helped quick delivery

Low 'hit rate': few conversations translated into long-term relationships



Unrealistic expectations



Frustration – and negative media – when we were unable to respond to offers of help e.g. jobs, spare rooms.

But with help of civil society organisations, better able to direct well-meaning offers of help.

Budgets and funding streams

Limited budgets and small grants more reactive than large-scale Govt tenders

Government budgets work on annual basis

NGOs need longer term funding certainty to set up programmes

Government tenders time-consuming and strict

Opportunity for NGOs to step up independently

Threat of legal challenge if we deviated even slightly from rules

Govt 'doesn't understand' NGOs – making their lives difficult



National versus local

Civil society provided another route for local engagement

Government needs to engage nationally

Some national organisations have good local reach

NGOs wanted to engage with Ministers and senior officials

Ministers could engage faith and community leaders

Asked for advice: not our expertise

NGOs published best practice guidance and advice

Need to engage at both levels but no one level of govt equipped to do this



Final thoughts

- As Government, we have learned lessons through trial and error:
 - Insist on a clear offer, be clear about what we can or can't offer in return
 - Try to deliver as much as possible through third parties to avoid the money and propriety issues
 - Be open to ideas that don't match our original expectations.
- But much still to learn:
 - How can we share best practice effectively?
 - How do we make best use of the knowledge and experience in civil society?
 - How do we manage risk without stifling innovation?