Civil Society Futures.
The independent inquiry

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How can we shape the future together?

“Our vision for the future is a civil society formed on innovation, boldness and challenge. This is the precursor to a positive and healthy society.”

A time of change

Civil society cannot stand still as society shifts. We have never just stood on the sidelines and watched. Through previous decades and centuries we have responded to change, reshaped and reinvented.

We combated the squalor and chaos of the Industrial Revolution, supported displaced people, refugees and traumatised veterans after world wars, organised on homelessness and domestic violence in the 1960s and 1970s, mobilised around AIDS in the 1980s, and in the last decade have welcomed refugees and opened food banks.

A strong, renewed, re-energised civil society is urgently needed to shape the future now. Today we face big upheavals and crises, and new opportunities that call us to reinvent ourselves again, to transform ourselves and transform society.

Civil society has the opportunity to rebuild our dented democracy, heal social division and resist environmental degradation. We need to lead change and bring people together. There is an opening now that is real and urgent, but in order to meet it we need to be fit for the future.

The world is changing quickly, as we’ve seen in the two years of this inquiry. Collectively, we must transform ourselves – or risk becoming irrelevant. The big message from the many hundreds of discussions we have held and submissions we have received is that the big role for civil society in the coming years is to generate a radical and creative shift that puts power in the hands of people and communities, preventing an ‘us and them’ future, connecting us better and humanising the way we do things.

We are putting forward a PACT for civil society, by civil society – shared aspirations for us all to commit to, for the decade ahead and beyond. It’s not waiting for permission, or hoping others will provide a plan. It’s civil society making a commitment to get ready for the future. It is a response to the changing world we live in, based on what Civil Society Futures has heard from thousands of people across England.

Carers and chief executives, funders and activists, national networks, major institutions, regulators, civil servants and local authorities, local community groups, young people from Liverpool to Gloucester – many, many people’s voices have shaped this PACT. It is intended to support us all to thrive in the future, and to build on the very best existing initiatives across civil society.

Collectively, we have the power to change ourselves and shape our country and communities for the better. Let’s take responsibility for the future of civil society and society itself.

This change won’t come from outside – it is in our hands. It requires all of us to re-examine and renew our behaviours, attitudes and practices.

“We can only make a change in the world by making a change in our community.”
Navigate the future

The PACT is a map to guide us all in the future: a set of principles, practices and questions that are designed to help each of us forge our own future.

Each person, each group, each organisation, each movement will use it differently. There are no easy one-size-fits-all solutions. This is about getting ready for uncertain futures and thriving in them. Whoever we are, whatever we do, whatever happens in the years ahead, shifting power and fostering deep connections can help us be more relevant to the people and communities around us, and an even greater force for good.

Please read, reflect and share with others. These are practices for the long term. They need ongoing reflection and long-term commitment. There aren’t necessarily quick or simple answers.

Some things may be challenging. To change and evolve there are certainly things that are challenging. Judgement and criticism are not helpful. Let us all be open and questioning, listening very carefully to what people are saying and paying attention to the changes around us.

Throughout, stories of what others are doing can inspire us: there are many more of these at civilsocietyfutures.org/stories
Our PACT

>>By civil society, for civil society, shared by us all

Power

>>A great power shift

Too many people feel unheard and ignored. There are too many imbalances of power.

Change in society begins by changing ourselves in civil society.

We don’t want to deny anyone the chance to make the contribution that only they can.

We will practice shared and distributed models of decision-making and control.

We will do whatever’s needed so that all those who want to – not least those who have been excluded – can play a full part in the things that matter to them, and can bring the wisdom and expertise that we need.

Connection

>>Building deeper, closer connections

At its heart, civil society is and always has been about the power of human connection.

But too often we have lost connections, because the world is changing fast or we have become too remote from the people and communities we are here for.

We will build real and meaningful relationships between people, meeting as equals – especially where this is hard to do.

We will create and invest in better ways to connect that are fit for the 21st century, to create a national people–power grid, energising and universalising social action across communities and across our country.
Accountability

>>An accountability revolution
For too long we’ve focused only on accountability to funders and to government. It’s time we focus on accountability to the communities and people we exist to serve.

Whether we’re a long-established charity or a new social movement, we will hold ourselves accountable first and foremost to the people, communities and causes we exist to serve.

We will be collectively accountable across civil society and to future generations.

When we talk about our impact, we will always acknowledge what others have contributed.

Trust

>>Investing in our core currency
Trust is the most important asset we have – even more important than money, it is an essential foundation for everything we do.

Following abuse, damagingly competitive pursuit of funding and loss of faith in institutions, we cannot take trust for granted.

We will build trust by staying true to our values and doing what’s right – being honest about our failures and successes, defending rights and calling out injustice.

We will take the time, commitment and care to build trust with the people and communities we work with. And we will trust them to provide insights, make decisions and run things.
Putting it into practice

“Social change is always rooted in strong values, beliefs and principles.”

This PACT is something we can all put into practice in what we do as part of civil society. Change will come through our individual and collective leadership, and through the ways we organise and work together. It needs to be part of our everyday actions and decisions, as well as inform our long-term dreams, visions and strategies. Those with established prestige and power might have more of a role to play – but every one of us can help to lead the way.

Individuals

Below are suggestions of what it might mean personally for each of us to recognise our own role and lead the way – being open, courageous and willing to change our everyday practices. We can cultivate each practice and make them visible in how we work – it’s not just what we do in public and not just about those at the top of groups or organisations. We will each be better at some of these than others, and each day might be different, it’s a constant journey.
**Power**

>>Consciously shift power

From

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power unaware</th>
<th>Power aware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am unaware of my power and privilege, and am not actively working with it to shift imbalances.</td>
<td>I am aware of my power and privilege and actively work with this to shift imbalances.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power over</th>
<th>Power with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I exert control over people and activities.</td>
<td>I create an enabling environment for people I work with, to build and cultivate their power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unaware</th>
<th>Self reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am unaware of my perspective and the impact that has on the choices I make, and who or what is listened to and valued.</td>
<td>I am mindful of my perspective and the impact that has on the choices I make, who and what is listened to, and what is valued.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How to put this into practice**

Consciously shift power:
- Recognise your own power.
- Bring attention to power dynamics in groups you work with by openly discussing and exploring it with them.
- Support others to build power and become leaders.
- Stand up for everyone, not just the majority.

**Accountability**

>>Explore and change your accountability

From

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Interdependent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do things alone, create silos and assume I know best.</td>
<td>I am accountable to those I work and interact with and seek their views.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scrutiny</th>
<th>Shared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a predefined view of accountability that is predominantly based on formal processes.</td>
<td>I build relationships based on dialogue and feedback, which informs how I work on an ongoing basis.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rigid</th>
<th>Adaptive</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a fixed way of doing things, even when I know it isn’t the right thing to do.</td>
<td>I constantly learn and embrace the unknown, admit mistakes and adapt how I do things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to put this into practice

Explore and change your accountability:
- Ask for and act on feedback
- Actively seek diversity of views and opinion about how to improve things
- Identify who you are accountable to today and who else you interact with. Look at what it would take to change this
- Admit and share your mistakes and failures and talk about how that informs your actions

Connection

>> Deepen connections with people and communities

From  Towards

**Transactional**
I build relationships built on one defining aspect of a person.

**Relational**
I meet people as equals and recognise we’re all complex beings with different identities that intersect and create unique experiences of the world.

**Scarcity**
I believe people need help, are lacking something and won’t change.

**Abundance**
I believe in the capacity and potential of people to change themselves.

**Echo chambers**
I build connections with those like me.

**Bridging divides**
I value multiple perspectives and actively build understanding, connections and collaboration with those who are different to me.

How to put this into practice

**Deepen connections with people and communities:**
- Understand your own / multiple identities and what this means for your connections.
- Listen to people you might not otherwise and those with different views to your own.
- Find out more about who isn’t engaging with your work and try to find out why.
- Make time and create spaces to discuss some of the challenging issues that prevent people from connecting with and supporting each other.
- Understand more about who is working on similar issues in your area: be curious, connect with and learn from them, and try to do something together with them.
**Trust**

>> Maximise trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Towards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk averse</strong></td>
<td><strong>Courage and bravery</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer not to move out of my comfort zone, to speak out, stand up, challenge and act on things that matter in solidarity with others.</td>
<td>I speak out, stand up, challenge and act on things that matter and in solidarity with others, even when that’s uncomfortable.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Listening lightly</strong></th>
<th><strong>Listening deeply</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I listen to the facts and what is visible.</td>
<td>I invest time in people, move at the pace of the slowest and seek different perspectives. I get to know people, am curious and listen deeply to their feelings and needs, and this informs how I choose to act.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Avoiding creative tension</strong></th>
<th><strong>Embracing creative tension</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I find it hard to trust people and respect their way of doing things. I avoid challenge, conflict and tension.</td>
<td>I trust people and the process and see value in people doing things their way. I find ways to work with challenge, conflict and tension in a constructive way.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**How to put this into practice**

**Maximise trust:**
- Notice when you’re taking or avoiding risks. Ask what you would do in that situation if you were ten times braver.
- Understand how to gain trust and acceptance within different spaces and communities.
- Make time to seek out different perspectives and views and to listen deeply.
- Admit when you don’t know, and ask for support.
Much of the PACT is about what we do when we come together, whether that's in a formal organisation or any other way.

Below are questions designed to help you begin reflecting on what it means collectively for you. It is an opportunity to start a conversation with those you work with, to bring to the surface different perspectives on your work and to identify areas you might wish to change or work towards.

Beyond starting this conversation, there are number of other areas for groups' and organisations' ways of working that you could usefully explore:

- Use the PACT as a basis when you review how well you are doing.
- Integrate and use the PACT to inform your strategy and planning cycles.
- Look at your story and narrative – be clear about your purpose, role and contribution to long-term change on each of the areas of the PACT.
- Develop your own PACT manifesto for your group or organisation that supports your activities and culture.
- Review and evolve your HR, recruitment and pay practices.
- Review your governance and decision-making approaches.
- Critically review your feedback approaches and mechanisms.
- Develop an approach to conflict resolution.
- Create explicit measures of connection and trust (and mistrust) in your group or organisation.
- Include honest reflections in your annual reports on your practice, learning, failures and questions you’re working with.
- Find other ways to live out the PACT: for example, create connections and shift power and money by buying services from within civil society – from meeting spaces, catering, IT support, design and research to grounds maintenance.
Power
How well do we understand our own power?

From
- Not sure what you mean
- Experts and consultants
- Decisions are made by a small/selective group of people (e.g. a board or management team) alone
- We only work on / learn about issues affecting the group we represent

Towards
- We recognise the power and position we have and are doing what we can to use this in a positive way
- Value and recognise there are multiple perspectives and views on topics
- Value and recognise there are multiple perspectives and views on topics
- We often work with those who experience other forms of inequality or injustice, recognising that we can achieve more together.

Whose views, voices and perspectives do we value the most?

From
- Experts and consultants

Towards
- Front line staff or those with lived experience of the topic
- Value and recognise there are multiple perspectives and views on topics

How do we make difficult and important decisions about the work we do?

From
- Decisions are made by a small/selective group of people (e.g. a board or management team) alone

Towards
- Decisions are made by a small/selective group of people (e.g. a board or management team) in consultation with staff and users
- Value and recognise there are multiple perspectives and views on topics

How do we work with other groups on issues of equality or justice?

From
- We only work on / learn about issues affecting the group we represent

Towards
- We recognise that inequality affects other groups in society and we are looking for opportunities to work with them
- We often work with those who experience other forms of inequality or injustice, recognising that we can achieve more together.

Want to explore more?

- **Power and Privilege: A Handbook for Political Organisers** (NEON)
- **Social Power – How Civil Society can ‘Play Big’ and Truly Create Change** (Shelia McKechnie Foundation)
- **Power cube – understanding power for social change** (Institute of Development Studies)
- **Losing Control** - a movement for people who want to let go of power to unleash social change (Social Change Agency and Practical Governance)
- **“But Wait, I’m Woke!”: The Trials of the White Male Manager** (Guppi Bola)
- **People Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Understanding Report** (doteveryone)
- **Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change** (Carnegie Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
- **Power Moves – Ignite the power of your philanthropy for equity and justice** (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy)
Accountability

Do our actions line up with what we say we do?

Our actions sometimes, but not always, line up to what we say

• We say one thing but do another in reality

Who mainly drives our group’s/organisation’s agenda?

Our board/leadership team

• Our funders

What processes/systems are in place to seek feedback?

We do an annual review/survey

• We don’t have a regular feedback process

When something goes well who gets the credit?

We acknowledge the contribution of other people and organisations as well

• We claim all the credit

How do we view our strategy and approach to change?

As providing direction for a period of time but we will need to update it in a few years

• As a fixed approach that will ensure we are doing the right thing

Want to explore more?

• Charity Governance Code – a practical tool to help charities and their trustees develop high standards of governance (Charity Commision)
• Resilient Roots Accountability Initiative (Civicus)
• Loomio – a tool for collaborative decision making (Loomio)
• CoBudget – tool for collaborative budgeting (CoBudget)
• Enspiral Handbook – handbook of alternative agreements and practical guidance (Enspiral)
• Future of Community Enterprise – a vision for a future accountability with community enterprises (Power to Change)
Connection

How do we view and actively describe people we work with?

From
As recipients, beneficiaries, grantees or service users

Use different words at different times depending on who we are talking to

Towards
As people with unique experiences, stories and identities

What would people we work with say about us?

From
We are just looking after our own interests

Do some good work but don’t really understand what matters most to them

Towards
Do good work and at the same time are supporting us to be more confident and powerful

Are we well-networked with other aligned people/networks/organisations?

From
We mainly do our own thing

We belong to several networks within our specialist area

Towards
We network across many areas, sharing skills, and building a mutual give/get culture

Do our efforts focus on causes or symptoms?

From
We put a lot of effort into addressing the immediate presenting problems

We put a lot of effort into addressing underlying causes

Towards
We put a lot of effort into both – our work on the ground informs efforts to bring about systems change

Want to explore more?

- The State of Collaboration - How Ready are We to Work Together? (Collaborate)
- Four essential ingredients of collaboration (Forum for the Future)
- Identity-based forms of organising in civil society: good or bad? (Asif Afridi)
- Racial Diversity in the Charity Sector – leadership principles and practical recruitment advice (ACEVO and Institute for Fundraising)
- Walking the Talk on Diversity: What is Holding the

Charity Sector Back from Putting Words into Action? (NPC)
- Getting Started - A guide for communities on doing research (ARVAC)
- Safer Spaces policy – guidelines to create a respectful, understanding and kind space where people feel able to express themselves and ask questions without fear of reprisal or humiliation (Sisters Uncut)
- Time to Change – employer pledge to demonstrate a commitment to change how we think and act about mental health in the workplace (Time to change)
Trust

Do we create opportunities, places or spaces in which people come together and build trust?

From

Not really, that’s not how we operate

Towards

Yes, that is a big and successful part of our work

When people disagree with us and behave in challenging ways, what do we do?

From

Avoid them wherever possible

Towards

Question our own practice and behaviour and consider what could be done differently

Are we prepared to speak out on something fundamentally wrong, even when that might anger those who hold power over us?

From

We would never speak out, if by doing so we might jeopardise our reputation or key funding relationships

Towards

We would still speak out even if we were isolated, uncertain we could bring about change, and faced personal/organisational risk, if the matter was sufficiently central to our work

Want to explore more?

- [Charity Code of Ethics](#) – a guide for how to recognise and resolve ethical issues and conflicts
- [The Future for Communities: Perspectives on Power](#) (IVAR and Local Trust)
- [Detectorism Insights #1](#): Stories, provocations and cultural portraits from an experiment by participatory Social Lab, CoLab Dudley (CoLab Dudley)
- [Community Leadership](#): Tales from the front line of community based organisations (Various)
- [Civil Society Futures Conversation Toolkit](#) – a guide for hosting a conversation about the future (Civil Society Futures)
“My hope for the future is that civil society is ingrained in who we all are,”

“We have the potential to be extraordinary.”

Civil society has always been about coming together – to celebrate, to connect, to face our greatest challenges, to create justice.

To embrace the decade ahead, we need to change simultaneously as individuals, communities, organisations and systems. We need to work together through a shared endeavour.

Let us shift power, revolutionise accountability, build real, meaningful connections and invest in trust.

www.civilsocietyfutures.org