

SMALL STEPS TO STRENGTHEN MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

In 2022, CONCORD published a paper gathering seven practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making.¹ These seven practices define what we mean by a meaningful engagement of civil society, have been recognised by and guide our interaction with the European Union (EU). However, the EU's evolving development architecture is reshaping civil society engagement. Through the Global Gateway strategy, the EU is redefining its international partnerships, creating new opportunities for structured civil society dialogue, but also new uncertainties. The upcoming 2028–2034 EU budget negotiations and the planned restructuring of EU delegations into regional hubs also raise important questions about future funding modalities and local engagement. In light of this context, it is essential that meaningful civil society engagement is systematically embedded in decision-making processes at all levels and supported by adequate human and financial resources.

To support this process, over the past seven months we have gathered the experiences of local civil society organisations (CSOs) in partner countries regarding consultations with EU delegations. In particular, we explored practices related to co-creation, information-sharing, inclusion and diversity, and feedback loops. Based on these insights, we have compiled this list of good practices and concrete, actionable recommendations to support and strengthen the ongoing dialogue between CSOs and the EU, in Brussels and in delegations.

We recognise that country contexts differ significantly, and not all recommendations will be applicable in every setting. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, this short document should serve as a practical tool for inspiration, for CSOs to open a dialogue with their EU delegation, and for EU delegations to identify concrete areas for improvement that can make a difference.

Before the consultation

- ☐ Share the timeline of your consultation process, with a clear stated purpose, to allow participants to plan and mobilise.
- ☐ Reach out to your country's CSO platform(s) for support, for example to identify CSOs.
- ☐ Consult civil society to identify and reflect on ways to overcome accessibility barriers.
- ☐ Consider budgeting for interpretation, cost of travel (trip, accommodation), and other accessibility measures.
- ☐ Consider organising consultations with different groups of CSOs and communicate transparently about these different opportunities to give civil society the full picture of the process.
- ☐ Create a database or mapping of civil society to go beyond the usual suspects.
- ☐ Include in the invitation: programme, background information, preparatory documents, and clear purposes and expected outcomes of the session.
- ☐ Send information with enough time for participants to prepare their attendance, inputs and questions.
- ☐ Share resources and hold information sessions about complex topics (namely on Global Gateway, Team Europe initiatives), especially ahead of consultations.
- ☐ Share information beyond funding and projects, including but not limited to the EU's new strategies for collaboration and support, regional and country priorities, an overview of current projects.

¹ CONCORD "7 practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making", October 2022.

During the consultation

- ☐ Look at local and national actors or partners and the community as a source of knowledge and expertise.
- ☐ Consider “workshop-style approaches and spaces that genuinely foster collective creation” (Costa Rica), such as break out groups or discussions on (even more) targeted topics.
- ☐ Consider multiple formats for CSOs to share their inputs and combine a couple as part of a process: interviews, surveys, meetings in-person and/or online, written inputs.
- ☐ Share confidentiality and other safety measures with participants.
- ☐ Avoid EU jargon when possible.
- ☐ Where appropriate, invite Team Europe actors or organise multistakeholder exchanges.

After the consultation

- ☐ Keep the websites updated with comprehensive information.
- ☐ Create channels for structural and systematic communication (e.g. an alert system/mailling list by area of intervention).
- ☐ Provide clear timelines for participants to follow the process after the consultation.
- ☐ Share a follow-up communication after the consultation. This could include: a collection of all ideas shared (e.g. minutes, summary of discussions), the key takeaways and priorities that emerged, an explanation of what will and will not be taken on board, and the next steps.
- ☐ Consider the most appropriate format to share feedback (face-to-face meetings, reports, summaries/briefs/one-pagers, email).
- ☐ Send notice once the final outputs have been published so participants can see the impact of their participation (e.g. through the creation of mailing lists with the consultation's participants).
- ☐ Share the outcomes of policy dialogues with governments of the partner countries with civil society, including how they reacted to their inputs.
- ☐ Ensure the engagement with civil society is a continuous dialogue with feedback loops to build long-term, meaningful partnerships.

**Read the full paper behind this short brief [here](#).
Access our meaningful engagement platform [here](#).**

**Contact: Salomé Guibreteau (EN/ES/FR)
salome.guibreteau@concordeurope.org**

