

Government policy, as expressed in the Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, is about strengthening communities' involvement in decision making. The Government recognises that local situations vary widely and seeks to avoid any 'one size fits all' approach, promoting the development of local solutions to local needs.

Principles of Representation: A framework for effective third sector participation should stimulate local, bottom-up discussion and debate, rather than being seen as top-down guidance. The *Principles* set out how to improve partnership working between the third sector and local government.

The skills, knowledge and experience of the third sector in working with excluded and marginalised communities are essential to the design and delivery of services to vulnerable people. The sector can and does help ensure that services are targeted to where they are most needed and that resources are used as efficiently as possible.

It is vitally important that the sector is recognised and respected as a key partner of every local authority, and represented in a way that enables those with a legitimate interest in a particular issue to be heard in the decision making process.

NAVCA's members, the local infrastructure organisations (such as councils for voluntary service, voluntary action groups and community empowerment networks), offer direct paths to engagement with 164,000 local third sector groups and organisations who provide services, tackle discrimination and encourage volunteering throughout England. They are ideally placed to provide local knowledge, experience and expertise to support this policy.

Local third sector groups and their activities are extremely diverse in scale

and range. Proper representation of their interests and concerns is a vital element of a partnership's decision making. Key to this is the development of effective infrastructure organisations that have the capacity to enable the widest range of groups to be heard.

Encouraging and developing people's involvement and building consensus is not always a quick or easy process. By adopting the *Principles* the local third sector can engage a wider diversity of local people, broaden local communities' ownership of the decision-making process and consequently strengthen their voice at the partnership table.

The *Principles* offer benefits to public sector partners. While councillors are democratically elected to represent the whole community, third sector representatives act as advocates for those – often the most vulnerable groups and individuals – whose voices often go unheard. Third sector representation enhances local democracy, adding value to the work elected members undertake for their 'hard to reach' constituents.

The *Principles* provide a framework that can be adapted to local situations. They can be used as a checklist to ensure that, through the local third sector, all parts of the community are able to participate in decision making and the design and delivery of local services.

See inside for a summary of the *Principles of Representation* and a checklist for third sector engagement in the design and delivery of public services.

Principles of Representation

Openness
 Equality Leadership
 Accountability
Values
 Purpose
 Sustainability

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or 'How principled is your partnership?'

1 Accountability

Clearly defined responsibilities for all decisions and actions

2 Equality

Place equality, diversity and inclusiveness at the core of what you do

3 Leadership

The sector's representatives will need to think and act strategically

4 Openness

Be as open as possible in all your dealings and relationships

How principled
is your
partnership?

5 Purpose

Be clear about the local sector's objectives and support them with a strong evidence base

6 Sustainability

Ensuring the continuation of the collective voice

7 Values

Identify and build on the values of the local sector

1. Accountability	Process for supporting third sector reps?	Resources for wider engagement available?	Clarity around who leads on service delivery?	Clearly defined responsibilities in MAA/multi-tier areas?
2. Equality	All six equality strands* representatives consulted?	Equalities issues taken into account?	Equalities duties embedded?	Services regularly reviewed and equalities-proofed?
3. Leadership	Third sector properly represented?	Third sector engaging with elected members?	Third sector reps. involved in decision making?	Clarity at LSP around third sector priorities?
4. Openness	Information shared with wider sector?	Decision discussed at LSP board and sub-groups?	Procedure to ensure transparency of decision making?	Third sector participated fully in decision making?
5. Purpose	Priorities recognised and accepted?	Clear objectives established?	Full engagement with citizens/communities?	Wider sector fully signed up?
6. Sustainability	Funding for service delivery by third sector identified?	Third sector reps. adequately resourced/funded/trained?	Long-term funding to support sector engagement secured?	Long-term plans in place?
7. Values	Grassroots rather than 'top-down' proposal?	Local commitment to independence of third sector?	Commitment to best use of resources?	Commitment to benefit/'making a difference'?

*The six equality strands are: Gender; Race; Disability; Sexual Orientation, Religion or Belief; and Age.