

TURNING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE



**A Guide to Legitimacy, Transparency
and Accountability**



CIVICUS

World Alliance for Citizen Participation

FOREWORD

We, the civil society organisations (CSOs), are occupying more and more spaces in the public sphere, gaining access to more financial and political resources, advocating for civil society and citizen activism, and increasingly influencing public policies and fostering social change. In other words, we have more and more power. It is essential for us to use that power well, to be acceptable as institutions, to be justifiable to work on topics we claim to represent and are occupied with, to be clear, accountable and trustworthy to our beneficiaries (individuals, groups or organisations whether they are targeted or not, that directly or indirectly benefit from the CSO) with regard to our actions and the way we operate.

But we shouldn't wait until being told how to comply with those responsibilities. Moreover, our members, staff, volunteers, funders, partners, beneficiaries, the general public and other stakeholders expect us to take responsibility for our actions, to be accountable for our promises and to be transparent in our operations. Therefore, the CSOs must establish the principles of legitimacy, transparency and accountability (LTA). This material looks at how some CSOs are already successfully implementing LTA principles; some have established self-regulation mechanisms; some are running programmes and initiatives that help CSOs to learn more about the LTA; a few have researched and analysed the LTA and published helpful materials.

CIVICUS has developed several initiatives to equip CSOs to move from LTA principles to practices in their organisations and networks. In addition to this practical guide, we have developed a LTA Resource Centre that provides information on a range of organisations, initiatives and activities throughout the world seeking to increase trust and credibility. It contains the latest research by experts; it provides toolkits already used by civil society organisations; and it includes case studies by people who have address LTA challenges in their organisations.

This guide focuses on equipping you with ideas and knowledge about how to go and be LTA. It explains what to do to be legitimate, transparent and accountable, how to approach LTA, how to plan your LTA, how to report LTA, what other CSOs are doing. It is actually quite simple: first, learn what your stakeholders need and try to offer it; and second, look what others are doing and replicate best practice in your CSO. And you do not need to start from zero, you are practicing LTA already. Although this document illustrates examples and presents options to help you check, plan, implement, and monitor your LTA practice, you make the choices based on what is needed and expected from and in your organisation.

Enjoy and we hope this material is useful!

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PART 1

LTA is important



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1. WHY GO LTA?

Before we talk about how to practice LTA and what changes to implement, let's take a brief look at why LTA is important and what it actually means to an organisation.

And two important points to keep in mind when reading and using these guidelines:

1. Not all LTA goals and tools suit every civil society organisation (CSO), they are dependent on your organisation, your organisational mission, goals and actions.
2. You should not undertake LTA actions because of external pressure only; first and foremost you do it for yourself, for the right reasons.

Leading the way

All organisations irrespective of their sectoral belonging (i.e. business, government or not-for-profit) should be legitimate to operate, but it is particularly important for CSOs for four main reasons:

1. This is a way to do your work better, to analyse your organisation and the actual impact of your work, to receive feedback, to learn, develop and avoid mistakes;
2. CSOs themselves challenge others on LTA;
3. CSOs need to ensure their accountability to various and sometimes rivalling stakeholders;
4. CSOs mobilise people and develop their resources in the name of social values, needs and goals.

Therefore we need to be super-LTA and work with ourselves to achieve the highest possible levels of honesty, openness and morale. We need to set our own values because if we don't, they will surely be imposed on us. Having high principles of LTA is our main capital.

Several CSOs have set individual self-regulatory rules for their organisations (internal LTA guidelines), others have decided to follow sectoral guidelines (e.g. Code for Journalists or European Foundation Centre Principles of Good Practice), still others have built these principles into their reporting system (international advocacy organisations accountability charter). Several national associations have created codes of ethics for the whole sector in their countries. These examples all attest to the growing recognition of LTA.

CIVICUS' Civil Society Index programme research findings reinforce the global nature of the LTA issues. CSO accountability issues were identified as the most burning issue among the stakeholders of national CSOs in all regions of the world (Heinrich, Mati & Brown, 2008: 325).

The pressure to be LTA may come from various sources, including: internal (staff, volunteers, board, members), partners, donors and funders, beneficiaries, governments, the general public.

Internal responsibilities

You need your volunteers, employees and board members be aware of and in agreement with what the CSO does and plans to do. Otherwise they do not understand what is going on and cannot contribute. Hence, their requests for more clarity, openness and responsibility within your CSO are to be taken with genuine gravity. If your own people doubt the CSO's integrity or accountability, how can others take you seriously. Moreover, there is very little point to write that you are accountable to your stakeholders but your staff member is not able to respond to a question in a conference on where to find relevant information.

Member and beneficiaries requirements

Members want and need to know what their CSO is doing in order to understand whether it is fulfilling its goal. For advocacy CSOs, the member awareness of CSO's policy positions and their proper

engagement is one of the key factors of LTA. For service delivery CSOs, if the beneficiaries are asked about the quality of service and they provide negative feedback, the reputation and the legitimacy of the CSO suffers. Moreover, members and/ or beneficiaries are the ones on whose behalf we act, collect funds and speak. If we do not do it well, members challenge the CSO, start asking questions or even leave the organisation.

Investment in the future

Although the main push for LTA should come from inside to be better and to do better, in the last decade, CSOs have also been facing intense scrutiny from outside fronts: governments, private sector, the media and the general public. Most stakeholders want transparency and accountability from the CSO they are dealing with. They feel that because they support the CSO either financially or its principles, they are entitled to know how the CSO is doing, how it is funded, how it is using those funds, how it is governed and managed, etc. In addition, increased visibility and influence in policy making and service delivery have turned the spotlight on our activities. As such, the CSOs face more pressure than ever to demonstrate greater accountability in order to maintain member, partner, donor and public support; strengthen our position as key stakeholders in governance and improve the effectiveness of our work.

Dave Brown, Associate Director of the Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations, Harvard University:

It's to the advantage of CSOs to think hard about LTA. I think it's often true that "everyone wants to hold others accountable but no one likes being held accountable themselves." So why would CSOs want to invest in LTA if they are not under pressure? I can think of several responses to that question: (1) to build answers to challenges before they happen, (2) to build staff and supporter understanding of what is central enough to the CSO to merit LTA attention, (3) to focus attention on CSO promises to deliver results that are important enough to demand collecting and presenting accountability information, (4) to organise performance monitoring and evaluation that enables organisational learning as well as accountability, and so on.

Building and maintaining trust

In several countries the credibility of the non-profit sector in the eyes of the public is poor and CSOs are seen by many as money-making exercises for local entrepreneurs, politicians or as puppets of external interests. The latter relates to concerns about the lack of independency of CSOs from foreign agendas and the excessive focus of donors instead of beneficiaries. At the same time, in many countries CSOs are already very trusted but they need to maintain the trust. Here, practising what we preach, i.e. LTA, is the key.

CIVICUS believes that by understanding, honouring and practicing LTA principles, the public image of CSOs and the civil society will be more respected. CSOs from various countries with diverse environments and opportunities can learn from each other and use the success of others for the benefit of themselves and their target groups. LTA will enhance the ability of CSOs to respond to attacks against them and the concepts and practice of LTA will become mainstream.

Ivan Cooper, Director – Advisory, The Wheel (Irish national association):

Demonstrating LTA is very important as our work is aimed at making the case for positive social change and is often concerned with criticising existing public policy, and pointing out deficiencies in the work of public and private authorities. If the advocacy messages of CSOs are to be taken seriously, we must show that our legitimacy is anchored in accountability to the people who we work with and on behalf of - otherwise our messages can be dismissed by governments as being nothing more than "opinion" or worse, "ideological cant with no basis in fact". It is the special responsibility of CSOs to advocate effectively; to make sure that what we advocate is grounded in facts (which means research) and is "owned" by the people we advocate

with and for. By ensuring that we are directly accountable to the people we work with and for, and that our processes are open and transparent, we make ourselves accountable to the public. Even though we may not necessarily feel the pressure to be accountable, we should still do it; if we don't, we risk our advocacy being dismissed and failing the people who are depend on us to bring about positive social change.

Change in people's attitude

The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 has left a mark to people's attitude, including the one towards CSOs. Paraphrasing "Understanding the Post-Recession Consumer" by Paul Flatters and Michael Willmott (Harvard Business Review, 2009), entering the post-recession era brings increased choices for people (e.g. whom to donate to); people's preference of simplicity (e.g. stay away from complicate and muddled CSOs); competition among CSOs for power and financial resources; issues of governance (e.g. people choose a CSO based on its governance as much as based on its mission and achievements) etc. People do not support or volunteer for any good initiative; they request simple and honourable organisations that have positive impacts.

Government pressure

Another reason for LTA is coming from the government. Advocacy CSOs are enhancing their capacity to work with the public sector and trying to change the attitude of government actors to promote participatory and accountable governance. However, "accountable" may mean many things; moreover, one can be accountable to some constituencies but that is not recognised by others, or one can have all the best intentions to participate in public policy making but lack or been accused of lacking legitimacy as an institution. It is, for that reason, particularly important for CSOs that seek to hold the government accountable to ensure their own legitimacy and accountability.

Government pressure may manifest itself in several ways. Some CSOs, especially national associations, can be seen by the wider civil society and other stakeholders as being compromised if they work too well or too closely with governments. Some governments do not allow freedom of expression and space for CSOs in general for effective engagement; some challenge CSOs' legitimacy when these are advocating on sensitive issues; some amend or promulgate laws to regulate the operations of CSOs when they are under pressure to be transparent and accountable.

Building donors' or supporters' trust

It is, of course, important for donors that CSOs have good financial systems and are transparent and accountable. First, the donors want to be able to trust their funds into safe hands and second, they want to be assured that the promised results are being achieved.

CASE STUDY

We see these challenges coming to light in Canada recently as the voices of those whose views on social justice issues differ from those of the Conservative government have seen their federal funding cut including the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, the umbrella group of organisations involved in international development.

Olga Alexeeva, Philanthropy Bridge Foundation:

"Wealthy donors, especially from emerging markets, who may not be very transparent themselves pay a lot of attention to the issue of transparency and what they call "honesty" of CSOs. But by "honesty" they often understand a complete lack of self interest, full time volunteering and no compensation for any expenses. For example, they can be suspicious to any what they call "administrative" expenses of CSOs. So, although transparency is indeed an important subject for donors, in its current understanding can be very damaging for the sector. What it means for CSOs is that we (CSOs) should be very specific about our own approach and

methods of LTA since the donors themselves can otherwise be requesting strange proofs for LTA or even interpret certain aspects of LTA in a very twisted way. What needs to be done is raising awareness of donors themselves about LTA and what it really means, so they don't go radically in either direction."

International aid context

Karin Weber, Programme Analyst M&E, United Nations Population Fund:

Next to government pressure, there are two developments in the international aid environment that should be noted here. The first takes place within the so-called bilateral aid channel, namely the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The second is a multilateral answer to the Paris Declaration, namely the UN reform "Delivering as One". The UN reform is based on the same principles as the Paris Declaration, namely 1) Ownership 2) Alignment 3) Harmonization 4) Managing for results and 5) Mutual accountability. International CSOs have published an impressive number of statements and policy papers on this subject and push official donors to implement and expand the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. However, it can be questioned whether CSOs put the principles of the Paris Declaration into practice themselves? Should the so-called "civilateral" aid channel follow the example of the bilateral and multilateral aid channel and develop a Paris-like Declaration on CSO aid effectiveness? (Koch, 2008).

The power effect

Even in the hardest conditions and times, CSOs are fighting for their right to occupy more spaces in the public sphere, gain access to more financial and political resources, and increasingly influence public policies and fostering social change. This is our right. We also have an interest to use such power well, be credible on the issues, be legitimate as institutions, be accountable and trustworthy to the stakeholders (target groups, funders, volunteers and partners), be clear and understood about the actions and way we operate. This is our responsibility. By increasing the power and space for civil society to exercise its right to participate in the decisions that affect our lives, we also help bring the three sectors involved in development into balance (so says a Montreal-based business guru Henry Mintzberg) to bring about a more just, sustainable future for all.

Rob Lloyd, Programme Manager in One World Trust:

Strengthening accountability can benefit CSOs in a number of ways. First, it can help build trust with the public and other stakeholders. Organisations that freely communicate what and how they are doing, they are opening themselves up to outside scrutiny and saying that they have nothing to hide. Similarly, if CSO come together and develop common standards through codes of conduct and certification schemes that they are willing to enforce they are demonstrating their commitment to meeting high ethical standards.

CASE STUDY

HOW LTA PRACTICE HAS IMPROVED THE IMPACT AND RELATIONS OF A CSO

Credibility Alliance, an initiative of voluntary sector in India, started in 2004 to enhance credibility of the sector by focusing on good governance, accountability and transparency standards. In India, the government is the biggest financial supporter of the voluntary sector and therefore these standards needed to be accepted both by them, as well as by the CSOs. The standards have now been acknowledged in National Voluntary Sector Policy. Currently Credibility Alliance is giving inputs to the central government and a few state governments on setting up systems to evaluate and accredit CSOs on these standards. 80 CSOs have been accredited and around 100 are in process. Majority of the accredited CSOs feel that the accreditation process has helped to increase their visibility and acceptance among the donors, to build their capacity, to lead them to sustainability, including financial strength, and has also helped identify the weaknesses in their current systems and operations as well as provided them with the direction to eliminate those weaknesses.

Second improving accountability can help protect CSO's political space. Governments around the world are introducing restrictive legislation for CSOs under the pretences of a perceived lack of accountability. Actively demonstrating accountability can help to push back on such intrusive regulation. In addition it can also be used as leverage when advocating for accountability in others. If a CSO for example, is able to show that it discloses its finances it will be in a better position to demand that the government does the same. Lastly, accountability can improve performance. CSOs that are more open and engaging with their stakeholder, and are successfully learning from what they are doing will be more effective in delivering against their mission.

CASE STUDY

Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS) system was created by ActionAid to help focus program reporting and evaluation on important outcomes. It has been designed to bring together clients, partners and staff to learn from experience. The ALPS process emphasizes appraisal, strategy formation, program review and annual reflections in cooperation with community groups and partners, with a special emphasis on downward accountability. It includes elements to ensure:

- Participation by primary stakeholders in various phases of work;
- Transparency, sharing and reporting across stakeholders;
- Recognizing different forms of literacy, communication, and reporting;
- Emphasis on learning with stakeholders about achievements and failures; and
- Downward accountability to poor people.

For additional information about ALPS

2. UNDERSTANDING LTA

In the civil society world, we are overwhelmed with jargon. LTA terms and expressions may easily fall into the same trap unless we provide content and flesh to them. Another thing to keep in mind is that LTA is an everyday thing, more or less practiced by all CSOs. The question is how consciously and well you practice and use it.

Urmo Kübar, CEO of NENO (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations):

We need to keep in mind that although LTA is universal, concrete goals and actions are very organisation-specific. For example, all associations need to engage their members, but how exactly they could and should do it varies greatly. Many guidelines and policies are written by and for big CSOs; they are extensive and very detailed. For a small CSO, they may seem unnecessary and alien. For a small grass-root CSO, the LTA may be the best manifested if the information necessary for its beneficiaries is up in the village and all members gather in a social even on Sundays when all issues are discusses – everybody is aware, involved and happy.

LTA concepts

A scoping paper was prepared to explore the understandings of LTA concepts, their possible implementation and how they relate to each other. Read it.

Transparency

Transparency refers to the openness of processes, procedures and values of CSOs, the proactive public disclosure and dissemination of information that should be in the public domain. Transparent procedures include open meetings, financial disclosure statements, clear board elections and governance procedures, information on political positions, budgetary review, audits etc. Transparency is very environment and culture sensitive and the question about how open can and should you be with a hostile government or in a restrictive environment remains.

A transparent organisation is understandable and clear to its own people, to its supporters, beneficiaries and stakeholders. Transparent organisations are much more accountable in their nature since promises that have been made, goals that are being achieved, policy statements that guide the organisation and resources that have been allocated are made public. As a result, such organisation has much less room for any secrecy and corruption.

Transparency is one means to be accountable because once you have publicly declared your values, mission, plans, resources etc, you cannot reverse without problems. Whilst transparency minimises the potential of corruption, it does not imply that the organisation is doing good or relevant work, or that the resources are correctly used.

Carmen Malena, CIVICUS Participatory Governance (PG) programme's Part-time Director:

In my view, it is essential for CSOs to strive to be as open, transparent and accountable as possible in all political contexts. It could even be argued that in restrictive and hostile environments, where CSOs are vulnerable to government criticism, crackdowns or smear campaigns, it is even more important for CSOs to build public legitimacy and credibility by ensuring open, honest and transparent operations. There is, of course, the danger that a hostile regime could misuse information to its advantage, but such actions can occur regardless of the level of information made available by CSOs. Since abusive states have their own ways to obtain (or fabricate!) information, by sharing information (including financial information) openly in the public sphere, CSOs are likely protecting themselves rather than making themselves more vulnerable. It is much more difficult for the government to unfairly attack an organisation that has demonstrated transparency and accountability, and thus earned the respect and trust of the public at large. Even in extreme cases, where legitimate organisations have been driven underground, experience shows us that it is critical for these groups to find ways to continue to inform and account to their members and constituencies, in order to maintain their integrity and sustain support.

However, we also need to be aware that transparency can pose problems for CSOs operating in restricted civil society environments, and at times it may be necessary to find a balance between transparency and the ability of an organisation to fulfil its mandate. A study by International Centre of Not-for-profit Law (ICNL) on the impact of the NGO Law on the Transparency and Accountability of CSOs in Egypt is published [here](#).

TIP

But do not overdo it and be careful of the extent of transparency: transparency might not be automatically good. Indeed, more transparency may mean less secrecy but it also means less privacy – and some things might better remain private, such as the medical histories of staff members etc.

Accountability

Accountability (answerability, responsibility, liability) means the requirement to accept responsibility to act based on CSO's own promises and subsequent justified expectations by various stakeholders. Accountability is about being open and sharing information. For a CSO to be accountable, it needs to be transparent about what it is doing, what it is planning to do and how it is performing in relation to the goals it has set itself. This information should be made available to all stakeholders, such as donors and communities. Furthermore, the information that it makes available needs to be timely and accessible to those it is intended for.

Accountability also involves engaging individuals and groups in the activities and decisions that affect them. This is relevant for both internal stakeholders, such as staff, and for external stakeholders, such as the communities that a CSO works with. Sometimes it is difficult to identify various stakeholders and they may even have conflicting interests or requirements. There is a danger that when CSOs are not primarily accountable to one set of stakeholders, they may in fact be accountable to none.

Accountability is a means to achieve legitimacy which, in its turn gives a CSO the right to exist and act in the society.

Karin Weber, Programme Analyst M&E, United Nations Population Fund:

CSOs need to be accountable to many different sets of stakeholders, among them donors, governments, supporters and beneficiaries. Each of these sets of stakeholders has a very different level of leverage and power over a CSO. As a result, the strength and clarity of their different accountability relationships vary greatly. The mechanisms for ensuring accountability between institutional donors and CSOs, for example, are generally strong because of contractual obligations and the dependence of CSOs on donor funds. Similarly, governments create the legal and regulatory environment within which CSOs function, so they too have significant leverage to guarantee accountability. Beneficiaries, on the other hand, despite being the reason why most CSOs exist, generally lack the power to make demands of them. Few organizations have institutionalised means for beneficiaries to make their opinions felt, and as a result the accountability relationship with them is often weak (Lloyd & de Las Casas, 2005).



Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to perceptions by key stakeholders that the existence, activities and impacts of CSOs are justifiable and appropriate in terms of central social values and institutions. The Scoping paper speaks of four key kinds of legitimacy: legal legitimacy (CSO is compliant with legal and regulatory requirements); pragmatic legitimacy (the value the CSOs provide to various stakeholders); normative legitimacy (how people think the world ought to work, “the way things should be – i.e. CSO’s goals and actions are grounded in widely held social values, norms and standards); and cognitive legitimacy (how people understand the world works, accepted as “the way things are” – i.e. CSO’s activities and goals are widely seen as appropriate, proper, and “making sense” to the larger society). For example, corruption was for a long time accepted as the way things are, even though most would agree that it was not the way things should be.

Michael Edwards, former Director of Governance and Civil Society at the Ford Foundation in New York has put it very simply: “Legitimacy is a sense that an organisation is lawful, admissible and justified in its chosen course of action and therefore has the right to be and do something in society. And a legitimate CSO has more power, more authority and more success.”

In *Creating Credibility* (Brown, 2008), Dave Brown added two more: “associational legitimacy” (based on links to other legitimate people and practices) and “political legitimacy” (based on representing key constituencies). It is the latter that critics of “unrepresentative” or “unelected” NGOs are referring. In the LTA context, legitimacy is the outcome that is achieved through accountability and transparency.

There are various other definitions but for the purposes of the LTA programme, we follow the ones which are based on the LTA scoping paper. Just remember that LTA is part of the culture and not just a series of procedures. To be legitimate in big things requires accountability in processes and transparency in actions and promises.

TIP

An organisation is legitimate if it makes sense, has respectable people, competence and knowledge of the topic (organisational Curriculum Vitae). An organisation is accountable if it has processes and tools of reporting, engagement, management and governance in place and in daily practice and/ or it honours and follows sectoral codes. An organisation is transparent if it is open, clear and honest about its work, decision-making, programmes, information, achievements and failures.

3. GOING LTA

Is LTA the same for all CSOs?

The principles of LTA are generally the same across contexts. According to One World Trust, their experiences suggest that when CSOs break down what it means to be accountable, similar issues emerge: transparency, participation, monitoring and evaluation, learning, and good governance. There are two main variables, however. First, what tends to vary is how they are put into practice. In post conflict/conflict countries, for example, CSOs may want to limit transparency for security reasons. In other contexts, strong local community structures may shape CSOs engagement with other stakeholders. Second, the size of a CSO matters. Quite obviously, a small grass-root CSO can use much easier methods to get its work done than a national association. Also, a small CSO with a limited budget approaches accountability differently to a large international CSO. In the case of the former there may be reliance on more informal approaches that are grounded more in relationships and trust. These are important for large agencies as well, but may need to be underpinned by more formalised structures and processes.

Voluntary or obligatory

One question that many CSOs have asked is why accountability mechanisms are not a legal requirement. It could be enforced to strengthen the CSOs LTA practices and methods.

Doug Rutzen, President and CEO of International Centre for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL):

“Law often: (a) reflects widely held social values, norms, etc. – which in turn helps determine if civil society “makes sense” to the larger society, and (b) influences the very same factors (values, norms, etc.). So, in

CASE STUDY

Recent NGO legal initiatives in Russia reflect Putin’s concept of “Managed Democracy” and its corollary, “Managed Civil Society.” At the same time, the space that does exist allows think tanks and others to influence social norms, values, etc. Similarly, the NGO legal framework in China reflects China’s social/historical/political context. At the same time, the government is working on a new “charity law.” When Doug asked what the government sought to accomplish through a new law, one of the responses was that they wanted “signal” to officials around the country and to the public that “charity is now acceptable in China.” Both these examples show how the law reflects elements of legitimacy stated above (values, norms, etc.), while it also has the ability to influence these very same elements of legitimacy.

many circumstances, the law is both a reflection of the status quo and an agent of change. I think core standards (like the rule against distributing profit) should be in law. But I think we have to be careful about imposing “good practice” standards in law, lest we end up infringing the freedom of association.”

Dave Brown, Associate Director of the Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations, Harvard University:

“Many NGOs seek to reshape norms and widely-held values in “meaning-making” that then has an impact on many aspects of legitimacy. Transparency International, for example, has reshaped how corruption is seen in the international context from “the way things are” to a serious problem. We are seeing a similar evolution in the norms, laws etc now around LTA for NGOs.”

LTA deals with you

One thing is sure. LTA deals with you even if you don’t deal with LTA. The moment we say who we are and what we want, we are setting ourselves to be accountable for our promises.

What is helpful	What is not helpful
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking for potential and possibility in LTA. • Being prepared to honestly assess the LTA of your organisation. • Thinking LTA through your mission, strategy, activities and operations. • Enthusing yourself and your staff about the LTA process and culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking for ways to mask problems rather than deal with them. • Trying to find reasons why you cannot go LTA. • Thinking LTA is expensive, difficult and a procedure you have to do. • Making yourself and your staff feel anxious about LTA.

Commitment to LTA

Some CSOs have said that the reason they are not LTA is because they cannot commit to it; namely, leadership of some CSOs is unwilling to be more transparent (i.e. political or governance will from the board or senior management) mostly due to previous mischief. Others claim not to have time and organisational capacity to work on their LTA. Many simply lack any procedural systems within the organisation or have very poor internal and external communications systems and channels. Well, change that. Commit to LTA. You are doing it first and foremost for your CSO - your members, board, staff. But you are also doing it for other CSOs, civil society and eventually your country. Be passionate and forward looking about LTA. That is important.

Dave Brown, Associate Director of the Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations, Harvard University:

CSO leaders always have a lot on their plates and will be tempted to let LTA go if it is not tied very directly to important incentives.

Start with small steps, recognising there are barriers but that they are not insurmountable, introducing one change that is something you can and are able to do and maintain. For example, send a monthly summary of what your CSO is planning to do and achieve this month. Next time, add what was done and achieved and what is planned for next month. See how it goes and then introduce a new method. You do not need to try and jump the world record in the first time; in most cases it is too complicated, expensive, time-consuming and worst of all, often unachievable. Once you have had a few success stories and you are convinced that it was not so hard, the commitment is much easier to come and stay. It’s about taking the principles of accountability, looking at existing good practice and seeing how they apply to your own organisation and demonstrating how you are meeting them. No one size fits all approach.

Good story: How did you go LTA?

Please share with us your good story if you want it to be presented here: lta@civicus.org.

Benefits of LTA

Mary McBride, Partner in Strategies For Planned Change (SPC) and Clinical professor at NYU's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, explains how practicing LTA has a powerful effect on helping the CSO achieve better results: "Without legitimacy, CSOs have no basis for action. Key stakeholders must perceive the mission, vision, activities and outcomes to result in an impact that offers benefit to those served. To the degree that CSOs monitor, measure and effectively message the impact they have, they will be considered to be legitimate. Legitimacy does not guarantee power or success. But without legitimacy, success can be questioned and power eroded. This is true across all sectors. In short, it is the responsibility of CSOs as well as public and private actors to:

- 1) Act within legal and regulatory frameworks;
- 2) Act within norms, standards and social values consistent with their mission and populations served;
- 3) Act to effectively provide value and set goals to measure that value;
- 4) Act to communicate and confirm legitimacy across stakeholder networks using traditional and new media to increase the value of a commitment to legitimacy.

Transparency leading to an increased accountability is now an urgent demand rather than an earnest request. Civil society demands to know how decisions that will impact the whole of life are being made. Transparency International, GAP and GFI are working across sector boundaries to follow the decisions of organisations and monitor their legitimacy. This is essential to more fully accountable organisations.

In the private sector, companies like British Petroleum were able to leverage claims to legitimate investments in moving beyond petroleum. These claims were not false, although these investments represented a small part of the overall portfolio. However, non-transparent decision making and a lack of any real accountability now haunt not only BP, but also the government agencies that enabled them and the nonprofits quick to include them in SRI portfolios. Legitimacy is just a claim without transparency and its consequence, accountability.

CSO has the power and the responsibility to in some way "certify" LTA. As good as certification regimes like US LEED and the Green Guide and Green Seal and Fair Trade are, they are not sufficient. Legitimacy, transparency and accountability require more than voluntary adherence to guidelines. They require new audit procedures and reporting statements. Organisations across sectors who set the new audit and reporting standards will be the brands of the future."

TIP

Responsible CSO leaders should also count the costs of "doing LTA" and balance those costs against how the resources might otherwise be used. LTA is not the first and foremost priority in all situations.