



Northern Ireland Open Government Network

Terms of Reference (ToR)

Background

Since its launch in 2011, OGP has grown from 8 countries to 65 participating countries. All participating countries are required to co-create a National Action Plan with civil society. Action plans cover a two-year period and include commitments to advance transparency, accountability, participation and/or technological innovation.

In the UK, an Open Government Civil Society Network was formed to collaborate and challenge government to develop and implement ambitious open government reforms. This network, currently made up of more than 450 members, is coordinated independent of government and has been integral to the development of the UK National Action Plan.

In May 2014, Building Change Trust began exploring the viability of establishing an Open Government Network in Northern Ireland. Following a piece of exploratory research and a series of events the Northern Ireland Open Government Network was established in November 2014. Members then engaged in a facilitated action-planning process and elected a temporary steering committee to serve until the end of the year. The Building Change Trust committed to fund the network's activity for an initial 24 month period starting from July 2015. Additionally the Northern Ireland Environment Link was appointed to act as Secretariat for the NIOGN during this period, following an open tender process.

The Northern Ireland Open Government Network set up an interim steering committee as an interim arrangement and elected a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. The Steering committee will stand down in January 2016.

Name and Vision

The name is the Northern Ireland Open Government Network ['NIOGN'].

The overarching vision of the NIOGN is to contribute to delivering:

Open, transparent and accountable government that empowers citizens to shape decisions that impact on their lives

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Open Government Network (NIOGN), should operate as a network consistent with the values of open government. These values include:

- Transparency and openness in its dealings internally and externally with other stakeholders;



- Integrity in decision-making and the conduct of business;
- Accountability, toward members, funders, partners and external stakeholders;
- Participation, appropriately and equally of all members;
- *Inclusion* of members in decision-making and in setting strategic direction;

Membership of the NIOGN

An expression of interest should be lodged with the Secretariat in order to become a member of the Northern Ireland Open Government Network.

Any individual can join unless there is a conflict of interest as deemed by the Steering Committee (individuals with a deemed conflict of interest include politicians and government officials). Those with a deemed conflict of interest may instead be considered as a possible OGN 'ambassador' or 'champion'.

Steering Committee

The Northern Ireland Open Government Network shall elect no more than 15 members to become the NIOGN Steering Committee. The elected Steering Committee members will serve for one term (two years) and retire by rotation – 5 members (33%) to retire every two years - with a maximum of three terms (six years), provided they are re-elected.

Election of Steering Committee

There will be an election for the NIOGN Steering Committee every 2 years. All members of the NIOGN have one vote; any member of the NIOGN is eligible to stand for election.

The Steering Committee shall have the power to co-opt further members to fill any casual vacancy arising on the Steering Committee, or to enlist committee members with particular skills, who shall serve until the conclusion of the next following Annual General Meeting PROVIDED that the number of co-opted members shall not exceed one-third of the total membership of the Steering Committee. Co-opted members shall have the right to vote.

Steering Committee Code of Conduct

Members of the Steering Committee of the NIOGN should commit to endorse the principles enshrined in the Open Government Partnership Declaration. [See Appendix A.](#)

Steering Committee members should conduct themselves according to the Nolan principles¹:

Selflessness

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>



Holders of office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of office are accountable to the OGN Membership for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

A Steering Committee Member may be disqualified in the following circumstances:

- Attendance at less than 50% of steering committee meetings in a rolling year unless there are exceptional circumstances e.g. illness or maternity/paternity leave.
- Breaching the Northern Ireland Open Government Declaration.

The role of the Chairperson

The Chairperson provides effective leadership of the Steering Committee and promotes the NIOGN's agreed strategy and policies in the public arena.

The Chairperson is elected by the NIOGN members at the Annual Meeting. The normal tenure of the Chairperson is 2 years.

Remit of the Chairperson

- I. To chair all meetings of the Steering Committee;
- II. To lead the communication of the NIOGN's strategy and policies;
- III. To preside at all meetings of the members including the Annual Meeting and any special meeting convened by the NIOGN;
- IV. To represent and further the views of the NIOGN at meetings with Ministers, elected politicians and government officials;
- V. To represent and further the NIOGN interests in the public arena;

The role of the Vice Chairperson

The Vice Chairperson deputises for the Chairperson in his/her absence. In addition, s/he should support the Chairperson in all his/her functions with continuing emphasis on monitoring the overall effectiveness of the NIOGN strategies and action plans.

Role of OGN Steering Committee members

- Ensure that the NIOGN upholds and pursues the Objectives and strategic planning
- Develop strategy and policy in the interests of NIOGN as a whole and the public, putting forward ideas and constructively building on those of others
- Take decisions about the prioritising of strategy according to the importance of the issue to the NIOGN
- Monitor implementation of policies and activities of committees at a high level and assesses the effectiveness of the agreed strategy
- Represent the NIOGN policies and views in a positive way to external Audiences
- Communicate with the membership, representing the views and policies of the NIOGN and gauging the views of the wider membership

Steering Committee meetings

The steering committee meets every six weeks, normally lasting for approximately two hours. There may be exceptional circumstances - e.g. when there is a lengthy agenda - when the meeting may have to continue longer.

It may also be necessary to hold additional special meetings when a topic of importance develops that cannot be fitted into the steering committee agenda.



At a meeting of the steering committee, the Chairperson, or in his/her absence the Vice-Chairperson, shall act as Chair, and, if both the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson are absent, one of the members of the steering committee present shall be elected Chair by the majority present.

At all meetings of the steering committee, the questions considered shall be decided by a majority, and, in the case of an equal division, the Chairperson shall, in the event of a split decision, have a casting vote.

The quorum for a meeting of the steering committee is six members. Required annual attendance is 50%.

Representatives of the Secretariat (Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) and Building Change Trust (BCT) may delegate a member each to attend the steering committee; they will have no voting rights.

Conduct of Steering Committee meetings

Steering Committee draft agenda should be published one week before the next steering group meeting.

Attendance at Committee meetings will be limited to Steering Committee members. However, individuals from the wider NIOGN membership may attend meetings to present to the Committee on a specific issue. This can be arranged through a request to, or invite from, the NIOGN Chairperson.

Committee members and Network members may propose items for inclusion on the agenda prior to the meeting. In the interests of openness and transparency every effort should also be made to include items not previously submitted for inclusion on the agenda, subject to agreement by the Chairperson.

Minutes of each meeting will be taken by the Secretariat. Minutes should be circulated electronically amongst Committee members prior to the next committee meeting. Once Minutes are agreed by the Steering Committee, they will be made available online.

Where deemed appropriate by the Steering Committee, task and finish groups may be established to assist the OGN coordinator with delivery of a particular aspect of the OGN Action Plan. Each group will be coordinated by a Chair (usually a Committee member). With the permission of the OGN Committee, non-committee members with relevant experience and knowledge may be asked to join a task and finish group. Agenda setting and minuting of these meetings will be undertaken by the secretariat in conjunction with the Chair. The Chair will brief the Steering Committee on the activities of the group.

Annual Meeting

The Steering Committee shall organise an Annual Meeting for the NIOGN.



At this meeting;

- The Chairperson will report on the activities of the NIOGN
- NIEL will report on the finance of the NIOGN
- Election of the Chairperson as required
- The NIOGN action plan will be reviewed

Confidentiality

No Party shall use another Party's confidential information for any purpose other than to perform its obligations under this Terms of Reference.

These confidentiality obligations shall not apply to any information which is publicly available or becomes publicly available through no act or omission of the Parties or which a Party is required to disclose by order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

These confidentiality obligations shall continue to apply after the termination of this Terms of Reference.

Branding and Publicity

All references to NIOGN will carry any relevant NIOGN branding rather than the logos of any organisations that may be represented on the NIOGN.

In addition, all publicity, promotional materials and press releases shall be approved by the Chairperson before being communicated to any third parties.

Media enquiries will be directed to the secretariat and forwarded to the Chairperson to be dealt with in the first instance and thereafter as agreed appropriate by the Steering Committee.

Role of the secretariat

To provide the practical, technical and human resource support to the steering committee and members of the NI Open Government Network in the delivery of their action plan over a 24 month period, being responsive and adaptable to changing circumstances and requirements.



APPENDIX A: OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP DECLARATION²

As members of the Open Government Partnership, committed to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention against Corruption, and other applicable international instruments related to human rights and good governance:

We acknowledge that people all around the world are demanding more openness in government. They are calling for greater civic participation in public affairs, and seeking ways to make their governments more transparent, responsive, accountable, and effective.

We recognize that countries are at different stages in their efforts to promote openness in government, and that each of us pursues an approach consistent with our national priorities and circumstances and the aspirations of our citizens.

We accept responsibility for seizing this moment to strengthen our commitments to promote transparency, fight corruption, empower citizens, and harness the power of new technologies to make government more effective and accountable.

We uphold the value of openness in our engagement with citizens to improve services, manage public resources, promote innovation, and create safer communities. We embrace principles of transparency and open government with a view toward achieving greater prosperity, well-being, and human dignity in our own countries and in an increasingly interconnected world.

Together, we declare our commitment to:

Increase the availability of information about governmental activities.

Governments collect and hold information on behalf of people, and citizens have a right to seek information about governmental activities. We commit to promoting increased access to information and disclosure about governmental activities at every level of government. We commit to increasing our efforts to systematically collect and publish data on government spending and performance for essential public services and activities. We commit to pro-actively provide high-value information, including raw data, in a timely manner, in formats that the public can easily locate, understand and use, and in formats that facilitate reuse. We commit to providing access to effective remedies when information or the corresponding records are improperly withheld, including through effective oversight of the recourse process. We recognize the importance of open standards to promote civil society access to public data, as well as to facilitate the interoperability of government information systems. We commit to seeking feedback from the public to identify the information of greatest value to them, and pledge to take such feedback into account to the maximum extent possible.

² See <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/open-government-declaration#sthash.a59HTWPQ.dpuf>, Retrieved 27/07/2015.



Support civic participation.

We value public participation of all people, equally and without discrimination, in decision making and policy formulation. Public engagement, including the full participation of women, increases the effectiveness of governments, which benefit from people's knowledge, ideas and ability to provide oversight. We commit to making policy formulation and decision making more transparent, creating and using channels to solicit public feedback, and deepening public participation in developing, monitoring and evaluating government activities. We commit to protecting the ability of not-for-profit and civil society organizations to operate in ways consistent with our commitment to freedom of expression, association, and opinion. We commit to creating mechanisms to enable greater collaboration between governments and civil society organizations and businesses.

Implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout our administrations.

Accountable government requires high ethical standards and codes of conduct for public officials. We commit to having robust anti-corruption policies, mechanisms and practices, ensuring transparency in the management of public finances and government purchasing, and strengthening the rule of law. We commit to maintaining or establishing a legal framework to make public information on the income and assets of national, high ranking public officials. We commit to enacting and implementing rules that protect whistleblowers. We commit to making information regarding the activities and effectiveness of our anticorruption prevention and enforcement bodies, as well as the procedures for recourse to such bodies, available to the public, respecting the confidentiality of specific law enforcement information. We commit to increasing deterrents against bribery and other forms of corruption in the public and private sectors, as well as to sharing information and expertise.

Increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability.

New technologies offer opportunities for information sharing, public participation, and collaboration. We intend to harness these technologies to make more information public in ways that enable people to both understand what their governments do and to influence decisions. We commit to developing accessible and secure online spaces as platforms for delivering services, engaging the public, and sharing information and ideas. We recognize that equitable and affordable access to technology is a challenge, and commit to seeking increased online and mobile connectivity, while also identifying and promoting the use of alternative mechanisms for civic engagement. We commit to engaging civil society and the business community to identify effective practices and innovative approaches for leveraging new technologies to empower people and promote transparency in government. We also recognize that increasing access to technology entails supporting the ability of governments and citizens to use it. We commit to supporting and developing the use of technological innovations by government employees and citizens alike. We also understand that technology is a complement, not a substitute, for clear, useable, and useful information.



We acknowledge that open government is a process that requires ongoing and sustained commitment. We commit to reporting publicly on actions undertaken to realize these principles, to consulting with the public on their implementation, and to updating our commitments in light of new challenges and opportunities.

We pledge to lead by example and contribute to advancing open government in other countries by sharing best practices and expertise and by undertaking the commitments expressed in this declaration on a non-binding, voluntary basis. Our goal is to foster innovation and spur progress, and not to define standards to be used as a precondition for cooperation or assistance or to rank countries. We stress the importance to the promotion of openness of a comprehensive approach and the availability of technical assistance to support capacity- and institution-building.

We commit to espouse these principles in our international engagement, and work to foster a global culture of open government that empowers and delivers for citizens, and advances the ideals of open and participatory 21st century government.