

# Cooperation between municipalities and civil society – inspirational examples from



**mucf**

Swedish Agency for  
Youth and Civil Society

Author: **Riccard Slettengren Badiali**,  
development manager and process manager  
for cooperation with civil society and citizens'  
influence in Ekerö Municipality.  
Translation: Translator Scandinavia AB

## Foreword

All Swedish municipalities currently work with civil society issues and attempt to strengthen the foundations of civil society organisations in various ways. This is achieved through cooperation, dialogue, advice and support, grants, support in terms of knowledge and more. This publication is part of the work to promote cooperation between public actors and civil society and is intended to serve as inspiration and knowledge support. It describes how Ekerö Municipality has worked with civil society and how they have cooperated locally.

The aim of the publication is to enable civil society organisations to expand their knowledge of how municipalities support and cooperate with civil society. At the same time, the story can inspire other public actors to strengthen their cooperation with civil society.

Multi-level cooperation is needed to meet society's challenges, and best practice and lessons learned are presented here to inspire more people to view cooperation with civil society organisations as an opportunity to come up with creative solutions to future challenges. Civil society organisations also need support to help them carry out and develop their core activities. For example, this may involve reducing the administrative burden; simplifying the conditions for funding; simplifying and clarifying opportunities for support and information; or access to premises.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) is responsible for promoting the achievement of the objectives of civil society policy by developing, collecting and disseminating knowledge. Furthermore, we are tasked with promoting cooperation between public actors and civil society and developing knowledge support for civil society.

The publication was produced by Development Manager Omar Nur of the Knowledge Support Department.

**Lena Nyberg, Director General**

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society

## Introduction

This publication is part of a series of publications and has been produced to illustrate different examples of relationships between municipalities and civil society organisations. Six municipalities in Sweden have been asked to describe how they have worked with civil society issues and how they have supported and cooperated with civil society. Sweden has a civil society policy. Through this policy, the government wishes to highlight the crucial importance of civil society, and develop civil society and its conditions. The aim of civil society policy is to make it easier for civil society to continue playing a key role in democracy – involving people and contributing to the development of society and to welfare. This is to take place in dialogue with civil society organisations.

Civil society consists of a formalised part and a non-formalised part. Within the formalised part of civil society, there are a number of different organisational forms, the most common being non-profit associations, registered faith communities, foundations, economic associations, limited liability companies with a special limitation on dividends, and community and joint ownership associations.

Municipalities emphasise the importance of cooperating with civil society organisations to meet current societal challenges and those they envisage in the future. Improving the conditions of civil society requires a better understanding of its needs and conditions. The publications include several examples that aim to meet civil society's need for knowledge in different ways. It should be possible to use them as inspiration for development and cooperation – both within civil society and between civil society and other sectors of society.

There seems to be a great deal of variation between municipalities on issues of supporting and cooperating with civil society. Although differences may exist between municipalities, there is a clear interest in working more on these issues. There are many different initiatives taken by municipalities that seek to work with civil society to better deliver social benefits. This publication focuses on Ekerö Municipality, but you can also read more about the work of the other municipalities in our series.

### **Borås**

An agreement led to deeper partnership

### **Ekerö**

From global disaster to local cooperation model

### **Linköping**

Gender equality in sport leads to successful development

### **Lund**

Creative culture grants and structuring networks

### **Helsingborg**

One grant system for all associations

### **Jönköping**

The benefits of a well-organised civil society

# Ekerö: From global disaster to local cooperation model

Cooperation between the public sector and civil society requires will, courage and a belief that together we can create a better tomorrow. Most people want to contribute to the common good. If only because it gives us a sense of purpose that says we are part of a larger context and goal.

## Commitment creates hope

It is often a case of finding your way through the jungle of initiatives on offer. A meeting, a heated social debate or a crisis can be the catalyst that, if the conditions are right, triggers lifelong commitment that makes a difference, and creates meaning and new relationships.

The municipality has much to gain by creating good conditions for civil society. According to Ersta Sköndal Bräcke Folkhögskola's latest population study from 2020, 51 per cent of the population in Sweden aged 16–74 are involved in non-profit work. The average involvement is 18 hours per month. Translated to the population of Ekerö, this is equivalent to 2.15 million hours or 1,144 annual work units. This may be compared to the 1,495 annual work units performed in the municipality in 2019<sup>1</sup>.

With the range of needs that we have in the municipalities, we can make it easier for such efforts to take place where they are needed most and make the biggest difference. We can create space for it to complement the work of the municipality, permitting us to work together. At the same time, consider the potential of the 49 per cent of the population who is not currently involved in non-profit work. If we can also involve those who lack the knowledge, resources or experience of involvement, we can do even more.

Getting involved along with others creates hope for the future. Together, we can create the spaces we need to talk about how to tackle society's challenges. Facilitating involvement and creating interfaces between civil society and the public sector will therefore be a way to create a less polarised and more trusting society.

For those of us who meet and work with people involved in civil society, an open mind and a welcoming attitude are crucial. How this interaction is designed can influence how the involvement begins or develops. The fact that

<sup>1</sup>Jegermalm, Svedeberg & von Essen – Ersta Sköndal Population Study – 2014

civil society actors operate under different conditions and largely carry out their work on a non-profit basis, unlike those of us in the public sector who receive a salary, means that we cannot make the same demands of them. Instead, our approach should be one of inspiring enthusiasm and showing appreciation.

### **An arena for participation and involvement**

Since the mid-1980s, the proportion of the population who are members of a political party has fallen sharply. According to statistics from Statistics Sweden, 15 per cent of the population were members of a political party in 1985. By 2015, this had fallen to 5 per cent<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, statistics show that the average age of elected representatives in municipal politics is increasing and that women, young people and people born abroad are under-represented.

However, civil society involvement has remained constant over time, and through good cooperation and structured dialogue, civil society perspectives can be taken into account better in municipal decision-making processes, including between elections. This may also enable those who do not normally make their voices heard to influence policy decisions and the development of society.

### **Broad cooperation requires knowledge, flexibility and clear mandates**

Perhaps even more than in other contexts, cooperation with civil society requires openness, responsiveness and flexibility from the public party. New needs arise, more actors may be added and new ideas may be generated. Civil society actors are often experts at dealing with the variability of challenges. For cooperation to work, therefore, the municipal staff members who are tasked with developing this work must be given a broad, permissive mandate that promotes courage, new solutions and new partnerships.

At the same time, those working to promote cooperation need to acquire knowledge about the issues and, in regional and national networks, keep abreast of the latest developments. The knowledge should be both theoretical, dealing with the conditions of civil society and local democracy, and practical, with tools and methods for interactive processes and workshop management.

At the same time, it is an advantage when strategic tasks are combined with direct cooperation projects. This leads to better knowledge about the conditions

<sup>2</sup>SCB (2018) – Survey of Living Conditions [Electronic]. Available. <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2018/allt-farre-ar-medlemmar-i-politiska-partier/> [2020-08-04]

SCB (2016) – Elected representatives in municipalities and county councils, 2015. [Electronic]. Available: [https://www.scb.se/contentassets/aeb5a63c530148ed9743afe73f83f1d8/me0001\\_2015a01\\_br\\_me09br1602.pdf](https://www.scb.se/contentassets/aeb5a63c530148ed9743afe73f83f1d8/me0001_2015a01_br_me09br1602.pdf) [2020-08-04]

and potential of local civil society, which in turn generates greater motivation in the work and enables better planning and action plans.

Broad cooperation with civil society means that many parts of the municipal organisation are involved. The part that owns a particular issue should be the one that carries out a large part of the direct cooperation with civil society in the area. A strategic working group that leads the cooperation work in a municipality must therefore be supported by the municipal management to reach out to the municipal organisation with information and training activities. A policy document or clear guidelines on how the municipality and civil society should work together are helpful.

For us, it has been beneficial to base our cooperation model on and learn from a current issue, in our case the situation of refugees. The high level of commitment to helping these people made it easy to find actors willing to work with the municipality. Previous attempts to develop general structures for cooperation with civil society had failed in our municipality. It was not always clear to the actors what the cooperation was supposed to achieve, which led to misunderstanding and suspicion. Getting to know each other around a shared need, a desire or a societal challenge has made it easier to create the sense of community that often holds a cooperation together.

### **The starting point was a global disaster**

*For us, it all took off in 2015, when many refugees made their way to Europe and Sweden, triggering widespread public involvement. We have used the lessons learned to develop cooperation between the municipality and civil society in many areas.*

In both 2014 and 2015, the media reported extensively on the consequences of the Syrian war and the unsustainable situation faced by refugees. Images were wired from the humanitarian disaster in the Mediterranean, where unseaworthy boats overloaded with people were heading for Europe. Many drowned. At the same time, there was growing involvement in recipient countries. People came together to ensure that those who fled were well received and became part of society more quickly. This was also the case in Ekerö Municipality, a rural municipality with 27,000 inhabitants located on a number of islands in Lake Mälaren.

Many citizens and associations contacted Ekerö Municipality to ask how they could help. They wondered where the needs were, how they could get in touch with those who had come here as refugees and whether they could get involved in municipal activities on a non-profit basis.

At first, there was no capacity in the municipality to deal with the high level of involvement and much of it ultimately came to nothing. At the same time,

there was a growing realisation of the potential to identify volunteers and make it easier for them to become involved.

At the time, the County Administrative Board announced funding for public actors to facilitate cooperation with civil society in the field of integration. Ekerö Municipality's Culture and Leisure Department seized the opportunity to apply. Funds were granted to appoint a project manager for integration. The project's task was to enable cooperation with civil society to ensure a good reception for new arrivals, and to bring people in the municipality together. Cooperation meant partnership on joint projects, dialogue and sharing knowledge and information.

This is where the *Islands Without Borders* cooperation platform took shape. It was also where a general effort to develop cooperation between Ekerö Municipality and local civil society began.



#### Our lessons learned

- The global refugee crisis generated a high level of involvement in civil society. At the same time, municipalities in Sweden needed help receiving refugees. With limited resources and a new way of thinking, we were able to make use of these efforts to make a difference where it was needed most.
- Civil society was able to provide many of the components of the integration work that the municipality lacked the opportunity or resources to perform adequately on its own.
- The new thinking that emerged from this difficult situation was the seed for the model for cooperation with civil society that would emerge in Ekerö Municipality.

### The Islands Without Borders network took shape

A large number of people who wanted to help had already contacted the municipality before the project started. A natural first step was to contact them. They shared their perspectives on how best to build cooperation. At the same time, we were able to provide information about the reception of new arrivals in the municipality and where the needs were.

And then we and other municipalities received a request from the City of Stockholm. Help was needed to arrange initial accommodation for the unaccompanied minors arriving at Stockholm Central Station while they waited to be offered permanent accommodation in different parts of the country. In 2015, a preschool in our town of Stenhamra had moved and the old premises were empty. These were deemed suitable for temporary accommodation, and we informed the City of Stockholm that we could accommodate 60 unaccompanied minors at a time there.

Municipal employees were offered the opportunity to depart from their regular duties for a period of time to work at the arrival centre. However, we needed more staff than could be achieved in this way. A natural step was therefore to contact the many people who had contacted the municipality to offer help with the integration work. We put together a form asking those who wanted to help to indicate their language, medical and educational skills, as well as how close they lived to the arrival centre and how often they could help.

More than 150 people registered via the form. From these, we selected 70 people whom we contacted with an offer of volunteer work and asked them to consent to our requesting an extract from criminal records in their name. The police had opened a special channel for this purpose. All we had to do was submit the personal identity numbers of those who had been offered a volunteer position. Then the police came back with a list of those who had no criminal record. It turned out to be all of them.

In order to make staffing transparent and smooth, volunteers had to schedule their work sessions themselves via the digital tool Doodle. There they could see how many people were already registered for each session and where the need was greatest. The manager and the regular staff at the centre described procedures and assigned tasks.



#### Our lessons learned

- Involvement may be short-lived. So seize the opportunity and make use of it when it is available.
- The municipality often has knowledge about the situation that can make it easier to leverage involvement to make a difference where it is most needed.
- If such efforts are not needed now, a need may arise later. Explain this in an amenable way to those who contact you and ask whether you can contact them again at a later date. Enable regular communication and feedback.

The atmosphere had been tense in some parts of Stenhamra before the arrival centre was to open. Racist organisations handed out leaflets spreading lies about who would come and what they would do. There were also direct threats against staff members and politicians. But the centre opened and a number of unaccompanied children and young people arrived. They soon went down to the nearby football pitch with a ball. Some children and young people from Stenhamra joined them and they started to play together. The local children then went home and told their parents about the fun they had had together. After that, the negative attitudes that had existed in Stenhamra quickly dissipated. Instead, the volunteers' work became increasingly visible. From that moment on, it was those who were contributing to the community and helping out who were highlighted in the local debate, and their positive view of the centre took centre stage.



#### Our lessons learned

- Sharing positive examples of involvement can be crucial to breaking down negative attitudes and counteracting the spread of rumours in the local community.

### More and more parts of the local community participated in the work

Several activities and initiatives were launched in the local community of Stenhamra. The parish invited the unaccompanied minors to its regular youth evenings, the Scouts organised clothes collections and some citizens started an exercise group for the children. At that time, there was a young people's cultural centre in the municipality called Fabriken run by the organisation Studieförbundet. Nenne Thorin, who was in charge of Fabriken, went out to Stenhamra with a few young people. They wanted to know if they could do something with the young people in the arrival centre.

Most of the children and young people at the centre were from Afghanistan, and they said that kite flying was popular in their country. One of the young people from Fabriken, Mika Troell, then had the idea that they should organise a kite-making workshop. It was quickly arranged and a week later, the local community was invited to learn how to make and fly kites with the young people. It was a successful, educational day for everyone who took part. On other occasions, Mika and the young people held workshops on baking muffins and dance.



#### Our lessons learned

- Consider early on how the target group of a help initiative can be involved in the work itself. Their perspective is crucial if the initiative is to take full effect. At the same time, inclusion is necessary to strengthen the target group and individuals' sense of self-worth and control over their situation.
- Involvement may take many different forms. Some people want to volunteer in a structured way, some want to start their own projects and others want to invite people to join an existing activity. Therefore, consider how different types of involvement can be enabled in a given situation.



More than 100 unaccompanied children and young people were already living in care homes and foster homes in the municipality. Mika and Nenne at the Fabriken cultural centre decided they wanted to get to know them too. A project group called Friendship without Borders was formed to promote meetings between unaccompanied minors and local children and young people.

The concept was to match newly arrived and local young people as friends. Children and young people were asked to register by filling in a form that included their interests, age and place of residence. Based on this, local and newly arrived young people were then matched with each other in groups of four. The first meetings were organised by Fabriken and consisted of exercises and games to help them get to know each other. The hope was that most of them would get to know someone they wanted to spend time with. This was often the case.



#### Our lessons learned

- Outreach and enabling work is important to reach new people who want to become more involved in the community. A positive first experience of involvement often leads to more projects and initiatives.

Civil society involvement remained high, cooperation with the municipality was ongoing and a number of new initiatives had emerged. However, many residents still wanted to do something but had not found something to suit them. There was not enough space to make use of all the volunteers in the arrival centre. Some had not found a type of involvement that suited them and others wanted to be active in the particular geographical area of the municipality in which they lived. We then decided to organise a workshop on involvement to promote inclusion and integration. More than 70 people registered. Some were active in associations, others participated as individuals and many had no previous experience of volunteering.

The workshop began with the municipality briefly explaining the situation of the new arrivals to Ekerö and how we were organising reception and integration. We then told them how the municipality could make it easier for those who want to get involved. Among other things, we had premises to lend and grants available for integration initiatives. Then, some of the civil society actors active in the area spoke about their involvement and initiatives.

The workshop itself, in a form known as an open space, then began. Participants were free to form groups according to their own areas of interest. Action plans were created on different themes for how we would work together to ensure that new arrivals were received well and that they would be able to meet the local population in Ekerö Municipality.

The workshop was organised by two students from the Kaospilot school in Aarhus. Among other things, the school had given them the tools to hold interactive meetings and workshops. All participants had their say and were able to work on the topics that interested them. The groups worked on issues such as friendship matching between new arrivals and local adults and families, language cafés, dealing with the spread of rumours and making it easier for new arrivals to join associations.

Based on the action plans that were developed, many new initiatives were launched, several of which are still active. The workshop provided an important platform for people involved in integration to meet, get to know each other, discuss shared solutions and launch specific initiatives. Many of those who participated said afterwards that they did not know many other residents of the Mälaren Islands before. The workshop provided them with networks, new friends and the opportunity to get involved locally.



#### Our lessons learned

- A workshop that brings together people with a shared interest can act as a springboard for new initiatives and advanced involvement.
- The workshop format gives participants the opportunity to formulate solutions and launch initiatives based on their own areas of interest and the needs presented, in this case by the municipality. The workshop format can also foster cooperation between a public party and civil society.
- A well-planned workshop can allow all participants to have a similar opportunity to speak.

One initiative taken at the workshop was to organise regular networking meetings for all of us who want to ensure that new arrivals are received well and for people from different backgrounds to get to know each other. The municipality would convene the meetings, but the content would be determined by the participants, who could submit questions and points they wanted to raise in advance. One standing item was a review of the situation of refugees from a global perspective and then at the levels of the EU, Sweden and Ekerö Municipality. In this way, we were able to place the local issue in a global context and remind ourselves of the reasons why we were welcoming new arrivals to Sweden.

At the meetings, we usually invite someone to give a lecture on a chosen topic. This has ranged from asylum law to how we can empower those who get involved to refugees' own stories. Various initiatives in progress in civil society and in the municipality are then presented. Sharing knowledge and information and meeting each other at the network meetings has led to more actors starting to cooperate and develop the issues together.



This has allowed each of us, with our respective expertise, to make a joint contribution to the common good.

Another benefit of the network meetings is that they have provided a safe platform for people with shared interests and involvement. At the meetings, those involved in different parts of the municipality, who have knowledge of the situation of new arrivals, have been able to share their experiences and describe the reality as it actually is for them. This sometimes contrasts with the story communicated in public debate. The meetings have created a sense of community and perseverance. Those who get involved encourage each other and their involvement has been kept alive even as opinion in the community has shifted more towards closing borders than including new residents.

Several people who have come to Ekerö Municipality as new arrivals themselves have started to get involved in the issues and participate in network meetings. Initially, the network meetings were held three times every six months, but as new issues have arisen, sub-networks have been formed. These have covered topics such as the situation of unaccompanied refugees, housing solutions and labour market issues. The need to meet frequently in the wider network has therefore diminished and today we meet once every six months.



#### Our lessons learned

- When the municipality and other actors share knowledge and information, it creates incentives for cooperation. Therefore, facilitate platforms where the municipality and civil society can meet.
- Networks can provide a safe space for those who share a particular interest or issue. They also allow for changing, needs-driven involvement that is kept alive.
- Ensure that the target group supported by a network is given space to participate in the work and share knowledge.

### Communication and transparency are crucial

The way we communicate is crucial to how the cooperation between us as the public party and civil society develops. In Islands without Borders, the starting point was to share the knowledge we have about the reception of new arrivals and their situation. Those who get involved want to make as big a difference as possible, and with the knowledge about needs that the municipality possesses, they can do greater good. Similarly, we need to be open about the limitations of the municipality's work.

Being responsive and open to suggestions from civil society allows us to learn and improve our work, while signalling that we take the non-profit sector seriously. A friendly approach should also be a matter of course in cases where civil society actors contact the municipality with criticism.

Regular communication also creates a sense of security for all parties involved. They then know that they will receive information when it is available.

Between the network meetings, we have communicated through a dedicated website, Facebook and emails. We have talked about what is going on right now, both in civil society and in the municipality, described the situation in relation to the reception of new arrivals and highlighted positive examples of involvement. In addition, we talk about what support the municipality can provide in the form of grants and premises. A list of all civil society actors (associations and networks) that have worked in the area has also been available on the municipality's website. The hope is that the list will inspire more people to get involved.

The interaction on Facebook takes place in a group that has been administered for some time by some civil society actors. We have also contacted journalists at our two local newspapers several times. They have been happy to highlight best practice in terms of involvement. The municipality has passed on information to them about ongoing activities, and they have then taken over and written news stories. Continuously highlighting best practice is important to encourage those who are involved to continue their involvement and to encourage more people to join.



#### Our lessons learned

- Good communication is essential to good cooperation.
- Be transparent. Don't be afraid to share public information. Let people know what is happening. Highlight best practice. Share the needs situation.
- Always treat citizens and civil society actors with respect, even if, as a municipal staff member, you may sometimes find that some people have an unpleasant way of treating you. Their response is often based on previous experience of contact with the municipality. Friendliness and information are a path to change. Explain in an instructive way how the municipality works, what is possible and what is not, and why.
- Never forget that citizens are your clients. It is for them and our common good that you do the work you do.

### Civil society's ingenuity and ability to deal with difficult situations

It is amazing to see the ingenuity demonstrated by civil society on the Mälaren Islands in terms of including new residents and the range of activities they have organised since 2015. There are probably thousands of individual activities, from regular language cafés, taster activities in sports clubs and help with homework to cooking with others and interfaith dialogue.

When the unaccompanied minors who were still in the asylum process lost their right to housing in Ekerö Municipality on their 18th birthday, a group of volunteers made it possible for them to be accommodated free of charge by Ekerö residents. This enable everyone who wanted to do so to remain in the municipality where they have their friends and their schooling. When the new law on upper secondary education stipulated that work or study would be required for unaccompanied minors to be granted a residence permit, civil society joined forces with business owners to match young people with job vacancies. For newly arrived adults and families who no longer have the right to stay in the housing allocated to them by the municipality, civil society has found other housing solutions here on the Mälaren Islands.

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, language cafés have had to cancel their activities. Instead, some actors, in cooperation with the municipality, have taken the initiative to lease an allotment. New arrivals work with locals on the allotment. They can practise their Swedish and everyone gets to know each other.



#### Our lessons learned

- Civil society is not bound by the same laws as the municipality. This often means that it can act flexibly and quickly and step in where the municipality cannot.
- Civil society is innovative and contributes new solutions. Municipalities can enable this by providing information, support and enthusiasm.

### A family twinning network through a Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnership

One of the initiatives that started in 2016 was the *Family Twinning Network*. This was at the workshop aimed at enabling involvement in the area of integration. A group of workshop participants outlined a plan to facilitate meetings between new arrivals and local residents.

The plan was that all new arrivals to the municipality would be offered friendship matches with local residents. Our social services office would act as intermediary. Around 70 per cent of respondents said yes. They then had to sign a consent form allowing the social services office to provide their contact details to the group, which had assumed the name Family Twinning Network.

Local people were recruited via a form and the matching process began. During the work, the Family Twinning Network noticed that most of the new arrivals in the municipality lacked proper furniture and household items. At the same time, they saw an opportunity to make use of the abundance of items on the Mälaren Islands, in particular the things that people throw away when they buy new ones. The network then started a recycling flow in which anyone who wanted to throw away a fully functional item could have it picked up by a volunteer. The volunteer then took the item to whoever needed it. This is how the *Towing Hook Club* started.

As the work evolved and the number of new arrivals on the islands increased, it became difficult for the Family Twinning Network to manage all the administration and coordination on a non-profit basis. The Family Twinning Network, Ekerö Municipality and Ekerö Parish then made a joint application for development funding from the County Administrative Board in Stockholm to employ a person to manage the work. Funds were granted and a coordinator was appointed. We considered it would be advantageous for the employment to be with a NGO partner that could act with greater speed and flexibility in certain situations. The person was employed by Ekerö Parish (Church of Sweden).

The development funds were intended to last for one year. By the end of the year, it was clear to all parties how much good the work of the Family Twinning Network had done. New arrivals had got to know local residents, entered the community and learned Swedish more quickly. At the same time, they had been helped to settle into their new homes and made contacts that would help them enter the labour market. Our social workers were thus able to focus more on their core tasks. Ekerö Municipality's social welfare board saw the positive effects and decided to continue to pay for the coordinator's employment with municipal funds. Ekerö Parish offered to be their employer and to provide their workplace.

The partnership was initially governed by an annual agreement. However, to enable better planning and sustainability, it was decided in 2019 that Ekerö Municipality and Ekerö Parish would enter into a Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnership for three years. The work has since evolved to include a range of activities, including a sewing studio at which women with few opportunities to find gainful employment repurpose used textiles.

**! Our lessons learned**

- Cooperation with civil society can give a lot back in terms of resources, knowledge and readiness to face challenges.
- Cooperation with civil society can provide greater flexibility and rapid responses.
- Encourage flexible forms of cooperation that can evolve as needs change.
- Large cooperative projects often require joint funding from the municipality.
- The socio-economic impact of the non-profit sector often saves the municipality money and resources in the long run.

### Cooperation as a catalyst for initiative and involvement

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graph LR
  1((1. Need)) --> 2((2. Information))
  2 --> 3((3. Coordination of actors))
  3 --> 4((4. The project starts))
  4 --> 5((5. Possible new needs))
  5 --> 6((6. Development))
  6 --> 7((7. Conclusion, continuation or acceptance))
  
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Several of the integration projects in civil society were initiated as a result of cooperation and dialogue with Ekerö Municipality, which can be illustrated by this process map. The Family Twinning Network is one of several projects that followed this path.

1. At the beginning of 2016, the number of people with residence permits assigned to Ekerö Municipality increased. This increased the need to create encounters between new arrivals and local residents.
2. The Islands Without Borders project manager outlined this and other needs at a workshop on involvement in February of the same year.
3. Based on needs and areas of interest, working groups were set up with representatives of associations and other local residents involved. Themes included language cafés, the labour market, cultural activities and dealing with rumours. One of the groups aimed to bring new and existing Mälaren Islands residents together.
4. In cooperation with the municipality, the group started a network of family friends, which aimed to match new arrivals with local people based on interests, age of children and employment background.
5. In the course of the work, it was discovered that many new arrivals came to the municipality empty-handed and that their settlement process was complicated by the fact that they did not have access to household items and furniture.
6. The network saw an opportunity to take furniture and household items on the islands that would otherwise have been thrown away and use them to furnish the homes of new arrivals. The project was developed by creating a recycling flow with car-based volunteers picking up and dropping off furniture.
7. As the number of new arrivals assigned to Ekerö Municipality increased, it was crucial to employ someone to coordinate the network's work. The municipality applied for development funds from the County Administrative Board in cooperation with various civil society actors. Funds were granted and Ekerö Parish employed a Family Twinning and Housing Coordinator.
8. The project is proceeding in a more structured form with a steering group consisting of staff members from the municipality and the parish. For the past year, the partnership has been formalised in a Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnership.

## Cooperation with regional and national actors

For us, it has been a great advantage to be part of various regional and national networks and projects aimed at cooperation with civil society in the area of integration. We have met colleagues, shared experiences and worked together.

We were trained in friendship matching methods through the national Språkvän (language buddy) initiative led by Eskilstuna Municipality. We helped start the VIDA project in Stockholm County, which aims to help new arrivals join an association as part of the process of settling in. One advantage of this project is that it reaches out to all new arrivals who come into contact with the Public Employment Service. Consequently, even new arrivals who lack the ability or knowledge to take the step themselves to participate in one of the activities offered by civil society can be helped along the way.

Thanks to the Bris project Together for Refugee Children, we have developed the municipality's work to enhance the mental health of recently arrived and asylum-seeking children. Bris offered both support groups for refugee children and training for our school counsellors in Teaching Recovery Techniques, which is a proven method for processing traumatic events. Bris also gave lectures on the subject to our civil society actors and offered them support to continue their involvement following the consequences of increasingly tough public debate and new asylum legislation.



### Our lessons learned

- Civil society contributes knowledge and perspectives that we do not have in the municipal organisation. Find ways of identifying this.
- Be open to national and regional partnerships, including with actors that are not primarily active in your own municipality.
- Have the confidence to apply trial and error. Participate in networks, reference groups and projects. If it turns out that they are not suitable for your municipality, be open to the idea of leaving them and trying something else.

## Community crucial to involvement

In May 2016, a conference was held in Eskilstuna under the title 'Combining forces for integration – in practice'. Municipalities from all over the country demonstrated how well we had worked together to meet the challenges we faced as more and more refugees came to Sweden. With a shared desire to do our best, we had come up with new solutions and adapted our ways of working, often in cooperation with civil society. A positive image was conveyed. Last on the list of speakers was the government representative, a state secretary. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the podium and gave a speech on crisis, chaos

and exceptional circumstances. In Sweden. Somewhere before that, the times in which we operate had been given a new official description, a description that went against the experience of many, both in the municipal sector and in civil society.

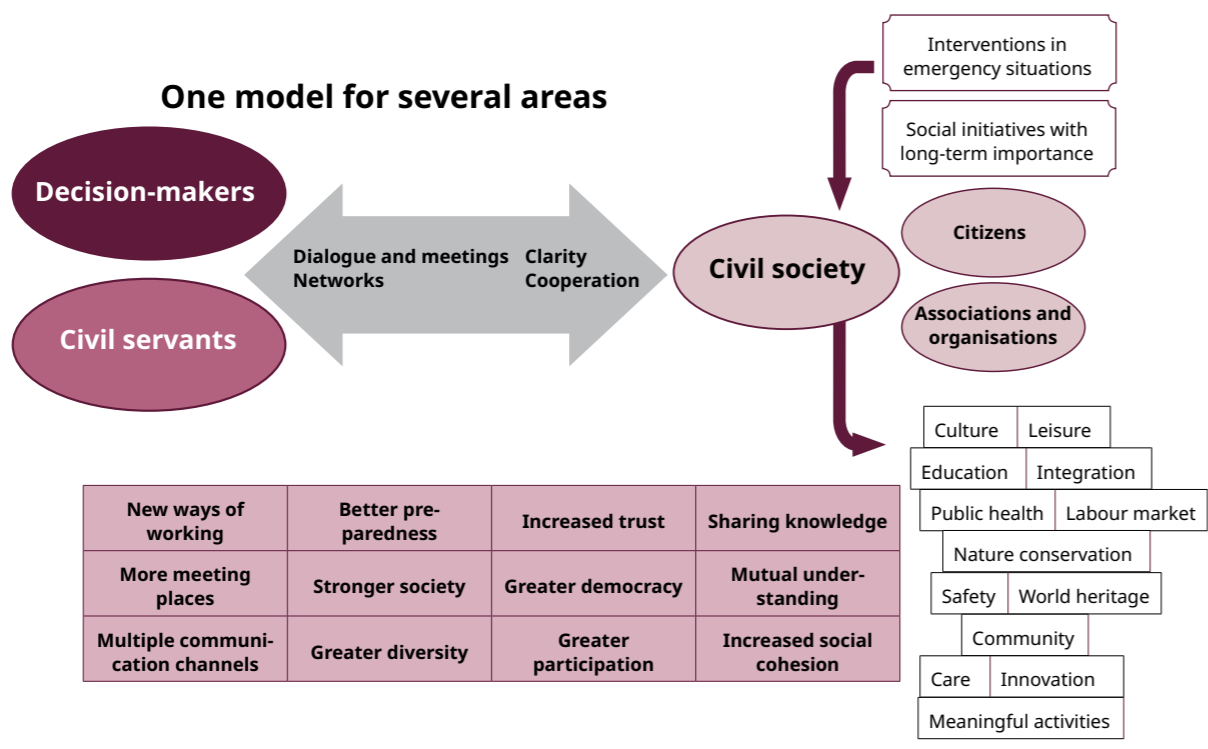
Today, when the number of refugees in the world is higher than ever before, approaching 80 million, public opinion is different in many European countries, including Sweden. In political debate, more and more people are highlighting the need to reduce numbers of asylum seekers, and fewer and fewer are highlighting the humanitarian disaster that the situation of refugees represents. The harsh opinions and the new asylum policy have a demoralising effect on people's involvement. Not as many are willing to make an effort to welcome and make life easier for those who come to Europe as refugees.

However, on the Mälaren Islands, this involvement has been kept alive. The sense of community and the meeting platforms that took shape in 2015 have contributed to this. People with a desire to contribute and make a difference have met and supported each other. The knowledge about the plight of refugees and the good opportunities we have to help have been preserved there. And it has been able to evolve and take new forms as needs change. Regardless of political views, this must be considered positive. It will speed up the integration of those who have come here, create a sense of community and contribute to the feeling that together, we can create a better society.



### Our lessons learned

- Keeping involvement alive as public debate changes requires platforms where people meet, support each other and share knowledge. Municipalities and other public actors can serve as enablers for these platforms.



### Side-effects of cooperation and involvement

Islands Without Borders aimed to enable initiatives in which people get to know each other, practise their Swedish and build social networks, in turn facilitating their entry into the labour market. The work also had a number of positive side-effects for society at large:

- New ways of working. More meeting places where people get to know each other.
- More and new communication channels.
- A stronger civil society: when actors meet and work together, ongoing initiatives are developed and new ones created.
- Greater diversity of activities, initiatives and organisation.
- Increased trust and social capital: meetings and communication between actors have led to greater trust between them, with people feeling that the cooperation between the municipality and civil society allows us to tackle challenges together in a good way, strengthening trust and confidence in the future of the local community.
- Greater democracy: the dialogue between civil society and the municipality has enabled both parties to benefit from each other's knowledge, ideas and descriptions of the situation, which has contributed to better informed decisions.
- Mutual understanding: the ongoing dialogue has helped both parties understand each other's organisations, missions and conditions.
- Social cohesion has been strengthened when we have worked inclusively together.

## A model takes shape

The benefits of cooperation with civil society were clear to everyone involved in Ekerö Municipality. They demanded a new way of thinking, a new way of communicating, and the investment of municipal resources in the work. As new arrivals settled in the local community, they contributed to it, both socially and economically. The benefits were enormous.

Our cooperative approach to integration was made permanent in 2017. At the same time, there was a desire to explore whether the model could be adapted to other areas. The Culture and Leisure Committee was therefore commissioned by the Municipal Council to investigate how cooperation with civil society could be further developed. The terms of reference included:

1. learn best practice from other municipalities, organisations, companies and agencies
2. engage in dialogue with associations on how to achieve a higher level of cooperation
3. make an inventory of and describe local conditions within the municipal organisation and civil society
4. identify the need for and barriers to cooperation.

An obvious part of the investigation was to engage in dialogue with civil society actors and listen to their experiences, views and ideas on how to develop the cooperation. The dialogue process provided an opportunity for actors to become aware of each other. To facilitate an open and personal conversation, we decided that the dialogue meetings would be led by an external facilitator. The dialogue took place in three stages:

1. First of all, a survey was developed, made available on the municipality's website and sent out to associations and networks, as well as to municipal staff members. It was answered by 90 civil society actors (representatives of associations and involved citizens) and by 36 municipal employees.
2. Five focus groups were then organised – four with representatives of civil society and one with representatives of the municipal organisation.
3. Finally, a full-day open workshop was organised with 40 participants.

The survey responses, focus groups and workshop revealed a consensus between municipal functions and civil society actors that closer cooperation was desirable. The benefits of cooperation were described as being multiple, and there was great potential and willingness to develop it. Ways forward included extended dialogue, a wider range of initiatives and clarity on how we can better complement each other's activities.

## The views of civil society can be summarised in the following topics:

- **Communication:** Participants in the dialogue wanted greater transparency in the municipal organisation and greater insight into decision-making processes. It was requested that municipal objectives and areas in which civil society and the municipality can cooperate be clarified. Current needs need to be communicated better to enable civil society to do more to reach out and make a difference.
- **Dialogue:** Participants wanted more constructive dialogue and less one-way communication from the municipality. Dialogue with civil society could often take place earlier in the decision-making processes. There was a desire for the municipality to take the suggestions and opinions of the associations on board to a greater extent. When this is not possible, clear feedback is requested.
- **Response:** The participants felt that the municipality's response could often be better, take more of a listening approach and be respectful.
- **Workshops, networking and meeting forums:** Participants wanted more workshops and networking opportunities at which civil society actors and the municipality meet, share information and cooperate.
- **Cooperation with more departments:** Participants wanted broader cooperation with more parts of the municipal organisation.
- **Cooperation with associations on marketing:** Participants wanted more support from the municipality on the marketing of activities and initiatives to reach a broader section of the population with their activities.
- **Ideas lab:** It was proposed that the municipality set up an ideas lab to which citizens could turn for help implementing ideas or projects. This help may involve coaching, support regarding project applications, premises, networking and more.
- **Facilitate young people's civic involvement and initiatives:** The young people who participated in the dialogue requested more initiatives to enable young people's civic involvement, influence, networking and contacts with the municipal organisation.

Responses from municipal employees also showed great willingness and potential for advanced cooperation. There was a call for clearer mandates to cooperate with civil society, greater information sharing and more knowledge. The staff members also called for more inter-departmental work on civil society issues.

There was thus willingness to develop cooperation both within the municipal organisation and in civil society. This would allow for better service to citizens, sound conditions for involvement and organisation and greater sharing of information for decision-making by both parties.

The investigation report made a number of proposals for how the work could be developed. The proposals originate from views and ideas from the dialogue process and draw on tools and lessons learned from the municipality's cooperative work in Islands Without Borders, as well as research, studies and policy documents from other parts of the country. The general approach of the report was adopted by the Municipal Executive Board of Ekerö and forms the basis of our model for cooperation with civil society. The Municipal Executive Board then commissioned an inter-departmental Cooperation Body to continue the work begun to develop and disseminate the model.

## Ekerö's model for cooperation with civil society

Cooperation between the municipality and civil society takes place on both large and small scales. It may include parent patrols, prevention of loneliness among the elderly, taster activities in schools or meetings between new residents and those who have lived in the municipality for a while. Below are some of the tools that make up the model to facilitate and enable more cooperation. The model is an organic construct that needs to evolve constantly according to the needs and conditions we and civil society become aware of.

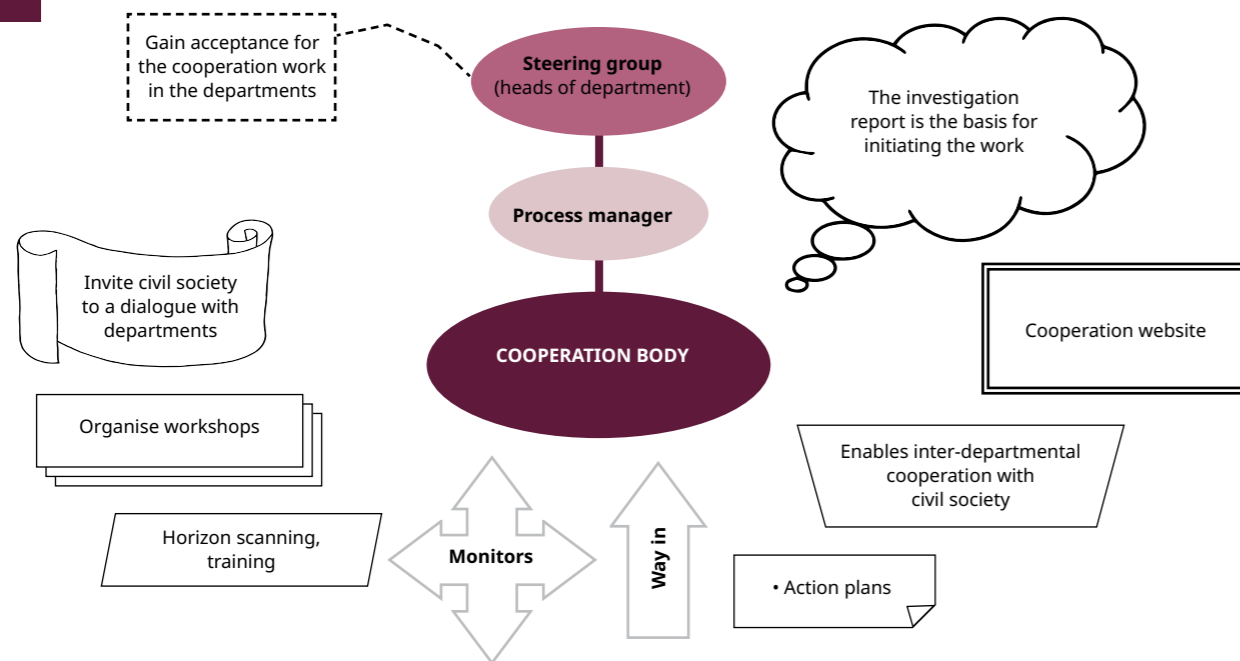
### Cooperation Body

There was a desire among staff members in Ekerö municipality for a clearer mandate to cooperate with civil society and for inter-departmental work on civil society issues. To make this possible, a working group, the Cooperation Body, was set up in 2017 with representatives from all the municipality's departments. The task of the Cooperation Body is to facilitate inter-municipal cooperation with civil society by sharing experience and knowledge and proposing new areas of cooperation.x

### Structure

The members of the Cooperation Body meet regularly to enable cooperation with civil society and facilitate inter-departmental cooperation. Their tasks are horizon scanning, examining areas in which cooperation is desirable, drawing up action plans and enabling a broad range of civil society actors to be invited to take part in dialogue. The members monitor how cooperation is taking place today and consider how it can be developed. At the same time, they create channels of contact between civil society and departments.

The Cooperation Body provides each department with an overview of potential areas of cooperation and of civil society actors whose activities are in line with the department's mission. By contributing knowledge, training and tools, the Cooperation Body works to create a spirit in the municipality in which employees gain an understanding of how civil society can help the municipality achieve its goals and they thus include civil society as a possible partner. The Cooperation Body is led by a process manager who reports to a steering group consisting of the municipality's heads of department. In turn, the heads of department ensure acceptance of the work in their respective departments.



### Ideas lab

To meet the need for and facilitate the involvement of local citizens in the municipality, the Ideas Lab opened in autumn 2018. The aim of the Ideas Lab is to harness, enable and inspire involvement and promote a diversity of initiatives and activities. People can approach the Ideas Lab with ideas that will benefit the municipality or its citizens. This could include activities, organisation or social responsibility. Those who approach the Ideas Lab must be involved themselves and drive the process of turning their idea into reality.

The Ideas Lab consists of two coaches with facilitation skills who work to enable and channel citizen's involvement. They therefore need to have a broad knowledge of the municipal organisation and of civil society on the Mälaren Islands, as well as of other agencies and civil society actors in the region and the country.

The Ideas Lab can help write a project plan or a funding application, suggest possible premises, organise workshops and facilitate networking. The role of the coaches varies between providing guidance in various creative processes, referring applicants to the relevant actor in civil society or the municipality and working with outreach initiatives to inspire activities, involvement and participation.

Activities should be adaptable, open to new impressions and ideas. In relation to the municipal organisation, the Ideas Lab acts as a contact point with civil society. It scans the horizon and works strategically to create good conditions for cooperation between the municipality and civil society.

The activities of the Ideas Lab are aimed at citizens of different ages and backgrounds. The aim is to enable cooperation with and participation in civil society. Young people are a priority group for the activities. The coaches make contact with young people through outreach activities in schools, youth centres and associations. They inspire participation, involvement and organisation. The work of the Ideas Lab is expected to generate the following:

- **Involvement:** The Ideas Lab will give more citizens an outlet for their ideas and involvement, either in associations or in less formalised groups. Involvement is made possible through coaching and by actors working together. The activities are expected to reach out to a wide range of local residents by making knowledge and tools available, through cooperation with civil society actors and different departments in the municipality and through outreach work.
- **Networking:** Actors working together enable a wider range of involvement and activities. The Ideas Lab will therefore enable civil society actors to become aware of each other and meet. Ideas are given the opportunity to develop when actors with different backgrounds and knowledge provide input and participate. At the same time, networking between different groups can lead to more citizens becoming aware of what civil society has to offer.
- **Participation:** The Ideas Lab will work to make more citizens feel involved in and able to contribute to society, partly by the coaches enabling involvement and participation and partly by explaining how the municipality and civil society are structured, providing feedback on proposals and, where possible, taking on board comments. In developing their activities, the coaches will involve civil society actors and young people and take advantage of their input.
- **Coaching:** Actors who approach the Ideas Lab receive support to turn their ideas into reality. This may involve access to creative tools, contact with other actors in the municipality or civil society, or knowledge about how to apply for grants and how to formulate project plans.



” Good, transparent information provision is crucial to the ability of society’s actors to form a fact-based opinion on the decisions taken in the municipality. ”

### **Citizens’ influence and enhanced dialogue**

Since the report on cooperation with civil society was presented, the Municipal Council of Ekerö has adopted a new set of goals involving enhanced citizens’ influence. The Cooperation Body that has been formed is working actively on this, both by disseminating knowledge in the municipal organisation and by carrying out citizens’ influence initiatives.

Citizens’ influence and civil society cooperation are closely related. Both areas require close communication and exchange with citizens and civil society actors. They also require an open mind, a listening approach and a willingness to take on board comments and ideas. There are therefore advantages to having the skills and resources for these two areas managed by the same working group within the municipal organisation.

In slightly simplified terms, Ekerö Municipality has the following levels of citizens’ influence:

#### **1. Information**

Good, transparent information provision is crucial to the ability of society’s actors to form a fact-based opinion on the decisions taken in the municipality.

#### **2. Consultation**

Through consultation, the municipality can get feedback or comments. Often these are proposals already formulated through, for example, consultation, an online form, an exhibition or an open day.

#### **3. Citizens’ dialogue**

Citizens’ dialogue is held on issues on which it is possible and there is an ambition to take on board citizens’ views. A final proposal for the issue is not then formulated but is developed based on the outcome of the dialogue. A citizens’ dialogue requires that different perspectives on a given issue are given space, brought together and discussed. This involves previous outreach work to identify, reach out to and involve different stakeholders in the dialogues.

#### **4. Partnership**

Partnership means that the municipality and one or more community actors share responsibility for implementing a decision or project. This requires a jointly formulated agenda and that the municipality and actors meet regularly to monitor progress and take stock. One type of partnership that may be suitable for cooperation with civil society is Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnership (VSOPP).

LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION	STEPS IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING					
	Setting the agenda	Formulation	Decision	Implementation	Review	Restating
Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working group or committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooperation during the formulation process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working group or committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working group or committee</li> </ul>
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working group or committee</li> <li>Hearings and public forums</li> <li>Citizens' forum and future council Central authority contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hearings and panels</li> <li>Expert seminars and meetings Committees and advisory bodies with various stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open meetings or committee meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity-building seminars Training seminars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working group or committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seminars and advisory forums</li> </ul>
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Petitions</li> <li>Consultation online or using other technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hearings and panels</li> <li>Expert seminars and meetings</li> <li>Committees and advisory bodies with various stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open meetings or committee meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Events, conferences, forums and seminars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conferences or meetings Online consultation</li> </ul>
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easy, free access to information</li> <li>Research Organisation of campaigns and lobbying Website for key documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open, free access to policy documents</li> <li>Website for key documents</li> <li>Campaigns and lobbying</li> <li>Public webcasts Research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation of campaigns and lobbying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open, free access to information</li> <li>Website for access to information via email</li> <li>FAQ Public procurement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open, free access to information</li> <li>Collection of examples</li> <li>Evaluation Independent research studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open, free access to information</li> </ul>

Source: the Code (Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process)

In the civil society dialogue surveys, focus groups and workshops, both civil society actors and municipal representatives highlighted the need for an enhanced dialogue to achieve a better understanding of each other's conditions, to benefit from each other's expertise, to enable greater diversity of activities and initiatives and to allow the different activities to complement each other better. Dialogue was also requested to facilitate, among other things, a broader range of civil society actors' perspectives in various decision-making documents. There seemed to be a consensus from both the municipality and civil society that the dialogue often starts too late, once the agenda has been set.

Facilitating dialogue requires a clear structure and knowledge about how and when dialogue can take place. In this context, the Council of Europe's Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making Processes can be used as a tool to highlight how dialogue takes place today and how it can be developed in the future.

The Code is designed to serve as a pragmatic tool for both public and NGOs. It lists examples but is not binding. It does not prescribe any rules or binding mechanisms. Instead it suggests types of participation at different points in the democratic processes. The aim of the Code is to provide tools, tips and support for public sector cooperation and consultation with civil society, and it can be used at local, regional and national levels.

Columns describe levels of cooperation or participation and rows describe when cooperation takes place. The purpose of the matrix is not to pursue partnership on all issues, but rather to sort and support the choice of activities and strategies to achieve set goals.

## Communication and response

Survey responses, focus groups and workshops highlight the importance of the municipality developing its communication with associations and citizens. Both the municipality's website and direct communication and response are identified as areas for development. Through good communication, we can create better conditions both for civil society involvement and for the municipality's own activities. In addition, we can make it possible for us to complement each other in the best possible way.

Plans are now underway for a future digital cooperation space for communication between civil society and Ekerö Municipality, which will correspond to the model for cooperation. In this space, we will highlight needs, enable networking and provide tools for citizens' influence.

The cooperation space will contain functions that enable the municipality, citizens, associations and companies to share ideas that make society better. It will highlight needs, enable those who want to get going and run projects, and open up cooperation with actors across sectors.

The municipality knows where people are and what their needs are, and has detailed knowledge about local responsibilities. At the same time, civil society actors possess knowledge that the municipality does not have. They can often reach a specific target group quickly, are more likely to try out new ideas and can change their activities quickly as new needs arise.

Through good communication, we can create better conditions both for civil society involvement and for the municipality's own activities. In this way, we can complement each other with the shared goal of working for a better tomorrow for citizens.



### Tips for good communication with civil society

**Here are some tips for municipal staff members in their contact with civil society.**

- Have the confidence to try out ideas that come in via civil society actors. Push the limits, but be clear with your civil society counterpart about the conditions.
- Think of civil society as a possible partner when you have an assignment or task. Can you achieve more by involving associations and citizens? Can civil society achieve things that we cannot within the municipal organisation?
- Treat civil society actors with kindness and respect. It is not always possible for the municipality to cooperate with civil society actors or to take their views into account. Whether it is possible or not, it is important to explain how the process works in the municipality and to give tips on methods for getting an idea or a point of view across.

#### **So bear the following in mind:**

- Provide answers at all times.
- Be transparent and clear. Provide information that may be useful to the civil society actor who contacts you. If you have additional public information that could be useful, please share that as well.
- If you are not the right person to respond to an enquiry, please refer the contact to someone who is. Follow up to ensure that the person who contacted you receives a reply.
- Civil society actors and the municipal organisation are organised in different ways, with different logical structures and different operating conditions. Within the municipal organisation, the laws and guidelines governing municipal activities need to be observed. Civil society can often be more flexible. For communication to work smoothly, both sectors need to be aware of each other's different circumstances.

## Guiding principles

The six principles below make up the national civil society policy. These must be taken into account to create good conditions for the organisation of civil society and cooperation with the public sector, including in Ekerö Municipality. The principles are:

### 1. Autonomy and independence

Civil society actors have the right to formulate their own missions and starting points. They have the right to assert their views and provide input without jeopardising cooperation with or support from the public sector.

### 2. Dialogue

Civil society actors must have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with public actors, thus asserting their interests and expressing views that can contribute to better decision-making. The dialogue must be open, reciprocal, recurrent and inclusive.

### 3. Quality

When civil society carries out public activities, the quality must be good and measurable. The purpose and conditions of the activities of civil society actors must be taken into account, and there may be added value in activities being carried out with the specific values that the actor represents.

### 4. Sustainability

The public sector must work to ensure that civil society actors have good opportunities for secure, long-term operations. This applies to forms of support, legislation and procedures for cooperation.

### 5. Openness and transparency

The public sector must promote transparency in decision-making processes and activities and provide civil society with the opportunity to study them. Similarly, where civil society activities are financed by public funds, civil society should be able to account for the use of these funds and offer public agencies reasonable transparency. Both parties must be assured the conditions for transparency and trust in the cooperation.

### 6. Diversity

The public sector must facilitate a diversity of actors, forms of organisation and forms of cooperation in civil society. Civil society should include people from the whole population.

## Association grants for networks and VSOPPs

In Ekerö Municipality, many initiatives are taken by people who have joined forces to meet social needs. They do so without first forming or seeking partnership with an association, especially in the field of integration. These are initiatives we have wanted to support. A couple of years ago, we therefore updated our Fast Cash grant, which can be applied for as a scholarship of up to SEK 10,000. The scholarship is open to at least three individuals who join forces to organise an open activity that benefits citizens. One condition is that they contact the Ideas Lab, which offers coaching if needed. We guarantee a response within three weeks of submitting a complete application. Usually it takes no more than a week.

Since the report on advanced cooperation was presented, Ekerö's Municipal Executive Board has adopted guidelines for Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnerships (VSOPPs). We see VSOPPs as an excellent structure for long-term cooperation with civil society in complex areas in which there is no ready-made or simple solution and there are no services and projects to procure.

## Model for collaboration

Cooperation between Ekerö municipality and civil society creates the conditions for a better tomorrow. Often the municipality and civil society share the same goals, but we pursue different paths to get there. Based on our different roles in the municipality, we meet civil society in different contexts. If we work together, we can achieve more and create an even better tomorrow for the citizens of Ekerö Municipality. With a better understanding of each other's conditions, experience and knowledge, we complement each other. When we enable and harness a wide range of involvement and participation, individual citizens' ideas and dreams can be realised. In addition, we pave the way for important community initiatives. Cooperation with civil society adds value, results in innovative and cost-effective solutions and enables a more democratic and inclusive society.

We can do more if we work together!

**Workshop:** Cooperation is about everything from working on joint projects to sharing information, networking and engaging in dialogue. Through cooperation, we create good conditions for civil society activities and for Ekerö Municipality's development work. Support is provided by the municipality's

**Cooperation Body**, which currently consists of representatives from the municipality's various departments. We are tasked with monitoring how cooperation with civil society is currently taking place and how it can be developed into other areas. At the same time, we are working to increase civil society cooperation between our units and departments. This enhances the impact and we can benefit from each other's knowledge and contacts.

The **Ideas Lab** was launched in 2018. The lab acts as a catalyst for civil society involvement, networking and idea generation. Citizens can approach it for help to implement ideas that benefit society.

**Results:** Working to harness the involvement of civil society enables us to perform important work in society more effectively. It enables people to trust each other more and to participate more in community development. This leads to a greater diversity of activities and a more inclusive society.

## Cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Sweden and Ekerö, we saw an opportunity to work with civil society to harness the commitment of residents to helping where they were needed most. The Ideas Lab was tasked with coordinating volunteers to help with food and pharmacy purchases for at-risk groups, making PPE and other activities. In cooperation with Ekerö Parish and Färingsö Parish, we also started a Facebook group for spontaneous matches between those who needed help and those who wanted to help.

The group had over 1,000 members within a few days. Volunteers could also sign up via a form. Throughout the municipality, posters were put up with the contact details of the Ideas Lab and the parishes so that those who needed help but did not have access to Facebook could get in touch to help match them with a volunteer. The Scouts helped distribute leaflets to residents' letterboxes.

Without the model and culture of cooperation with civil society that has been built up in the municipality, these initiatives would not have got off the ground so quickly and spread so widely.

## Some challenges for the future

There are a number of challenges involved in the creation of good cooperation and dialogue between civil society actors and the municipality. One of these is how to reach out to residents who are not represented by associations or organisations.

### Reaching out to those not already involved

Through outreach, we can generate enthusiasm and spread knowledge about the tools, benefits and consequences of involvement and participation. Schools, social services and other municipal functions can act as a bridge to residents who are not likely to be involved in networks and associations.

In addition, it is a good idea to combine cooperation with civil society with various tools for citizens' influence. A well-executed citizens' dialogue or consultation can enable us to include and embrace the perspectives of citizens who are not represented by civil society actors. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to harness the breadth of perspectives that can be found in individual associations and organisations. It is easy to assume that the views of an association chair fully reflect the views of association members, both young and old. But this is often not the case. Through drop-in future workshops, dialogue cafés and other participatory processes, we can reach into associations and better understand the complexity of the issues we want to explore with their members. We can then enable cooperation and dialogue to be strengthened.

### Spread best practice

Another challenge is about communicating the idea of cooperation in the municipal organisation. One way forward is to demonstrate best practice of partnership with civil society and the benefits it brings to the municipality and to society at large. It can be beneficial to develop a cooperation model based on a specific issue, such as integration, COVID-19 help or involuntary solitude. This makes it clearer that the cooperation is aimed at meeting a specific need and shows the benefits it generates. Hopefully, the result will be the best practice that will allow the model to be disseminated.

### Greater awareness and information

Within the municipal organisation, we need to create greater awareness of the conditions, roles and logic of civil society actors. When we understand each other better, we can also enable better cooperation. The inertia that may exist in a municipal organisation may sometimes contrast with the speed of action of civil society, which may create misunderstandings and conflicts. Knowledge about what is legally regulated, what can be influenced, when it is time to cooperate and where different decisions are made gives civil society actors a better understanding of the different choices the municipality makes and paves the way for cooperation where it is possible. Within municipalities, we can make this information more accessible and promote its dissemination.

### New ways of communicating

We need to keep up with digital developments. We need the courage to test and combine digital and analogue solutions that create interaction between the municipal organisation and civil society actors. Integrating new digital solutions with existing websites can sometimes be tricky. To achieve this, it may be necessary to allow the solutions to function independently for a test period, partly decoupled from the municipal digital infrastructure.

### Clarify links and benefits

One recurring question is how we should balance the resources the municipality invests to create better conditions for and cooperation with civil society against the benefits the work generates. The benefits are many. They include all the activities civil society offers citizens, the sense of purpose generated for those who get involved or participate, public health, inclusion of new target groups, increased trust, democracy and mutual understanding. And many more besides.

It is difficult to put an economic value on all this, especially as many of the effects are the result of longer chains of cause and effect and are therefore difficult to trace. And how should we put a value on advanced local democracy, community and social capital? These are questions that we need help to answer at local level. Perhaps one way is to get better at showing causality. For example, meetings between new arrivals and local residents lead to improved knowledge of Swedish, inclusion in networks and a better sense of well-being, and these are factors that also facilitate the establishment of new arrivals in the labour market, which generates both social and economic benefits for the municipality. Other cooperation benefits can be explained along similar lines.

### Thank you for getting involved and making a difference!

Actively promoting cooperation with civil society from within the public sector feels deeply meaningful. It allows us to see how civil society offers a diversity of activities and forms of involvement. How it reaches out and makes a difference. How it breaks down polarisation and builds trust. How it contributes to inclusion and community. How it takes initiative. How it shares different perspectives and knowledge. How it scrutinises us and offers alternatives. And we can see that, with relatively little funding, we can make it easier for civil society and all its amazing powerhouses to work for us all.



**EKERÖ MUNICIPALITY**

## WE MAKE KNOWLEDGE GROW

At the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, the focus is on the conditions of young people and civil society. This is where knowledge grows that decision-makers use when deciding which initiatives for young people and civil society to prioritise. We pass on this knowledge in our encounters with people at national and European levels. We also distribute government grants that enable organisations large and small to carry out their activities. This also gives young people the opportunity to volunteer, study or do an internship in another European country.

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