PBE Economics to improve lives

Better evidence, better outcomes:

The business case for a Civil Society Evidence Organisation

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PBE Economics to improve lives

We use economics to improve lives. Through analytical expertise and our close connection with the social sector, we help charities, funders, firms, and policymakers tackle the causes and consequences of low wellbeing. Our analysts, researchers, and economists work on a wide range of issues related to low wellbeing, including mental health, education, employment, financial security, poverty, disability, inequality, volunteering, and civil society. Working with over 600 volunteer economists, we have supported over 600 charities since 2009.

AL Philanthropies

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1. Summary

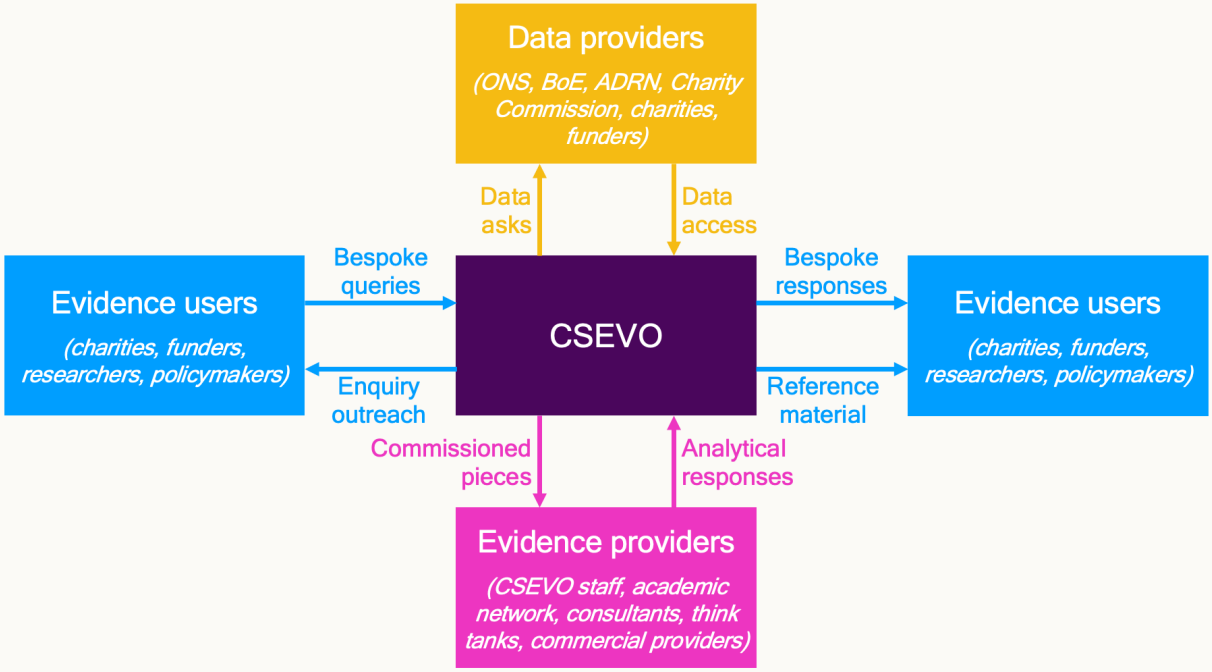
Civil society is one of the UK's greatest assets. It is driven by innovation, rooted in communities, and committed to tackling some of the nation's most complex challenges, but it faces barriers that prevent it operating at its full potential. The Law Family Commission on Civil Society brought together experts from within the social sector and beyond to explore those barriers and, concluding in January 2023, made a range of practical recommendations designed to unleash more of this immense potential.

Prominent among these was a call to invest in the infrastructure that enables charities and social sector organisations to share knowledge, learn from one another, and build on what works. The Civil Society Evidence Organisation (CSEVO)[1] is our answer to that call. Its purpose is to improve the flow and use of evidence across the sector, reducing duplication, spreading best practice, opening up economies of scale, and enabling smarter decisions by practitioners, funders, and policymakers alike.

At its core, CSEVO operates as a hub-and-spoke model, acting as a central coordinating body ('hub') that connects three key stakeholder groups ('spokes'): evidence users (charities, funders, policymakers, and researchers seeking insights to guide strategy and resource allocation); evidence providers (academic institutions, think tanks, commercial agencies, and in-house analysts who generate insights); and data providers (organisations that hold or manage data, including the Charity Commission, official statistics bodies, funders, and charities themselves).

1 Pronounced seh-seevo

Figure 1: The hub-and-spoke CSEVO model



Via this model, CSEVO will undertake three key areas of activity designed to build the civil society evidence base. First, it will engage with civil society actors to understand their evidence needs and the gaps that need filling with the greatest urgency. Second, it will generate and disseminate evidence, thus producing and curating high-quality, openly accessible research that draws on administrative, proprietary, and newly commissioned data. Third, CSEVO will focus on translation and application, thus ensuring that outputs are accessible, actionable, and neutral, helping users make evidence-informed decisions.

In practical terms, this results in a structured five-step process for the CSEVO hub:

1. Actively prompt and reactively receive research enquiries, and triage these with reference to a database of past responses.
2. Address enquiries in-house if feasible, making use of past work and connections with the data-provider spoke.
3. Commission external experts from within the evidence-provider spoke when needed, sometimes working in coalition.
4. Share findings publicly and add them to a searchable knowledge base.
5. Use insights from enquiries to shape a communications agenda that promotes practical improvements for all parts of civil society.

Our consultation has identified a strong appetite for a model such as this among both potential evidence users within the social sector and the likely evidence providers. For the latter group,

CSEVO offers the opportunity to foster coordination in a way that generates benefits for all, by developing shared standards, building an open evidence repository, and creating efficiencies through common methodologies and data linkages.

Table 1: Benefits of CSEVO

Evidence users (charities, funders, researchers, policymakers)	Evidence providers (CSEVO staff, academic network, consultants, think tanks, commercial providers)	General public
Benefits include: • Prioritisation of evidence needs • Better benchmarking data • Off-the-shelf management / operational information • Insight into what 'works' • Stronger voice advocating for better data for the sector to use • Independent provision of evidence supports collaboration	Benefits include: • Understanding of user demand • Coordination efficiencies and mapping of evidence base • Creation of common standards and methodologies • Potential for data and code sharing • More secure and potentially larger source of funding	Benefits include: • More informed policymakers and funders making better decisions • More effective and efficient civil society meeting more of the need it faces • Rebalancing of emphasis from crisis control to prevention • Better economic, social and environmental outcomes

The benefits of CSEVO are far-reaching. Charities, funders, and policymakers will all be able to make more informed choices. And ultimately, the public – who rely on civil society – will benefit from improved outcomes. However, structural barriers within civil society mean this kind of coordination won't emerge on its own. The sector lacks the profit motives of the private sector and the central coordination of the public sector. This is why CSEVO must be deliberately built, with co-investment from both the social sector and the state.

We propose locating the hub within a trusted existing organisation, ensuring neutrality and reach. Our central funding case calls for £2.5 million over five years to pilot CSEVO, with steady-state costs amounting to around £600k a year. Our recommendation is that the costs should be split evenly between the sector and the government, with the latter using a matched-funding approach to incentivise social sector funders and philanthropists to contribute. The government and the sector would, likewise, both contribute to the governance of CSEVO, with structures built in a way that ensures the organisation recognises the voices of all users across civil society.

The case for CSEVO is clear. Despite being home to passionate innovators with an aptitude for cost control born of necessity, civil society records lower investment in technology, leadership,

and skills compared to the public and private sectors. Organisations are under pressure, stretched for capacity, and too often forced to prioritise short-term service delivery over long-term development. Add to that a fragmented evidence base – much of it inaccessible, duplicated, or too technical for practitioners – and the result is a sector of brilliance being held back by structural obstacles.

A central evidence organisation, co-created and co-managed by the sector and by government, has the potential to change this picture and unleash more of the immense potential of civil society. Our consultation process has identified strong demand for the sort of hub-and-spoke approach we have set out here. The next step is to make it a reality.

Introduction

The Law Family Commission on Civil Society, which PBE (formerly Pro Bono Economics) ran between December 2020 and January 2023, brought together experts from the public, private, and social sectors to collectively explore ways to release more of the potential of the UK's civil society.[2] The final report[3] presented 26 recommendations split across five broad areas: supporting better data about, by, and for the sector; plugging civil society more tightly into the UK's policymaking process; creating closer collaboration between civil society and business; improving the quantity and quality of funding flowing into civil society; and investing in the infrastructure underpinning the sector's activities.

A key recommendation within the fifth of these areas called for the establishment of a centralised body that would coordinate evidence-building activity across civil society to support a step change in effectiveness among charities and other social sector organisations. Specifically, the recommendation suggested that:

> "Government and funders should work together to create a new Civil Society Evidence Organisation (CSEVO), which is essential for improving the availability and spread of evidence across the sector, reducing duplication and increasing best practice."

The recommendation was well received, with a range of potential users, including charities, social sector funders, and policymakers expressing enthusiasm about its potential. Accordingly, following the conclusion of the original Commission, the Law Family Charitable Foundation provided follow-on funding to PBE to explore the idea in further detail. This report presents the business plan developed via that exploration.

We have been supported in producing this business plan by an expert task and finish group and have additionally consulted with more than 50 other leaders and practitioners from charities, funders, research institutions, and policymaking institutions through a mix of roundtables and one-to-one interviews. Our thanks go to all of those involved.

2 The Commission was chaired by Lord Gus O'Donnell and comprised Baroness Valerie Amos, Joel Davis, Shaks Ghosh, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, Mary Rose Gunn, Ruth Ibegbuna, Dr Javed Khan, Ailbhe McNabola, Sir Harvey McGrath, Mitch Oliver, Dame Nancy Rothwell, Stephan Shakespeare, Theresa Shearer, James Timpson, and Matt Whittaker. Vidhya Alakeson and Karl Wilding also served as Commissioners in earlier parts of the project. The Commission was fully funded by the Law Family Charitable Foundation.

3 Pro Bono Economics Unleashing the power of civil society (January 2023).

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 looks at the case for CSEVO in more detail.
- Section 3 describes how CSEVO will work for potential users and includes some examples of the sort of insight it might generate.
- Section 4 details how CSEVO will engage with evidence providers and considers how it could work alongside existing activity.
- Section 5 sets out the estimated costs of delivery and the outcomes required to ensure that the model provides value for money.
- Section 6 provides a one-page summary of the business proposal, which we hope can be taken forward.

2. Investing in infrastructure: The case for CSEVO

Civil society is populated by innovators, but held back by structural barriers around capacity, incentives, and evidence

Civil society plays a vital role in supporting the UK's social, economic, and environmental wellbeing. It does so through three main mechanisms: campaigning to improve our lives and our environment; building and bolstering our communities; and providing services to those who need them. Ultimately, it serves to make our country a better and more equitable place to live.

It is a sector that is necessarily nimble. In the face of needs that are often complex and always evolving – sometimes at great pace, as with the experience of the pandemic, for example – civil society must constantly flex to deal with new challenges. And it does so while contending with resources that are, typically, in short supply and liable to even greater constraint during the moments of national crisis, which is when the public most needs to draw on the sector's support.

The result is a sector that is populated by people who find a way: risk-taking innovators who develop new means of delivering what's needed; hard workers fuelled by passion who go above and beyond the expectations of a 'job'; and visionaries who inspire others to join them in making a difference. And yet, relative to both the private and the public sectors, civil society lacks the same level of strategic investment in the infrastructure that underpins longer-term effectiveness.

For businesses, profits provide a clear imperative to take a longer view. Firms and their backers invest time and money into understanding their customer base, developing new products and refining working practices because of the financial rewards these generate (and the financial costs of standing still). Competition means they carefully guard the advantages they secure, but sector-wide understanding is developed and shared by academics, by a government that is interested in catalysing economic growth, and through an active market of advisers, consultants, and operational management experts who service business appetite for insight and edge.

The public sector lacks the same profit motive, but it is, nevertheless, subject to a growing emphasis on delivering taxpayers' value for money. In pursuing this, the sector benefits from central coordination and economies of scale. This has been exemplified in recent years by the investment that has been made in understanding how to conceptualise and measure productivity in the delivery of public services.[4]

4 See, for example, ONS, Public Services Productivity Review (October 2024).

Absent of either the profit imperative or the central coordination that helps to drive investment in these other sectors, civil society organisations that want to maximise their potential can find themselves held back by three, key structural barriers relating to capacity, incentives, and evidence.[5]

On capacity, the conversations we have undertaken over the last two years with funders, membership bodies, academics, and charities of all sizes have consistently cited the lack of time, finance, and headspace that limit charities' ability to lift their heads from the day-to-day grind. We have also heard that organisations frequently lack the confidence to engage in productivity-building activities such as training, applying evidence, or changing operational practices.

We know, for example, that just 39% of social sector organisations were using, or planning to use, artificial intelligence in 2021, compared to 65% of the wider economy.[6] We know, too, that civil society is struggling to recruit to plug this gap, with 37% of charity and voluntary sector organisations reporting that they find it hard to fill vacancies for digital skills, compared to 31% of private-sector organisations.[7] Likewise, we know that charities spend just 0.5% of their annual income on leadership development and that they are three times less likely to invest in these critical skills than their private-sector counterparts. Relatedly, 47% of social-sector organisations believe their staff are underutilised, compared to 33% among private-sector organisations.[8]

Regarding incentives, we have repeatedly heard about an over-emphasis on the short term. In part, this flows from the often-immediate needs of service users in that bias activity towards the front line and a doubling down on what is known to work, even if it is suspected that there may be a better way of delivering support if the space to explore this was available. It also follows from the restrictions placed around many forms of funding, with binding links to specific projects or the rapid turnaround of service-delivery contracts. A tight-funding environment also militates against collaboration and evidence sharing. Organisations with overlapping goals might better reach them by working together, but they are too often shunted into competing for resources and guarding closely any competitive advantage they might hold. Individuals in civil society may be naturally innovative, but experimentation, capacity-building and strategic development are supported only to the extent that funding allows.

On evidence, we have heard about the dual challenge of insufficiency and inaccessibility. On the former, the sector suffers from a lack of live, comprehensive data, making it hard for charities, funders and policymakers to understand what works and where to direct resources.

5 Jack Larkham, Productivity of purpose: Bringing charities into the UK's productivity drive, PBE (2023).

6 Jack Larkham, Productivity of purpose: Bringing charities into the UK's productivity drive, PBE (2023).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

The infrastructure that supports knowledge diffusion is, likewise, patchy, and there is little benchmarking data that can help organisations to measure their own progress or understand how they compare to others, making it harder to assess performance and take informed steps toward improvement.

To the extent that evidence does exist, too much of it is inaccessible. Some of it is simply not in the public domain – for example, information that exists, primarily, in someone's head or is stored away in an evaluation report for a funder. With insufficient sector-wide knowledge management or connection between organisations, good work is too frequently lost and research is duplicated. Shared approaches to problem solving – such as systems leadership, designing joined-up services, and sharing data and insights – are lacking, undermining the potential for greater collective impact.

Other evidence is publicly available but hard to find, fragmented, or difficult to decipher due to technical language. Available evidence may also lack a practitioner focus, particularly when sources are theoretical or academic.

Supporting a more effective civil society matters because the sector is a significant engine of good

The chronic underinvestment in evidence infrastructure faced by civil society represents a missed opportunity. Without access to high-quality, digestible evidence, civil society organisations are held back, while, in turn, funders and policymakers lack the insights needed to support and invest in the sector in a way that maximises its potential. Given the critical work undertaken within civil society, this clearly matters. However, it is likely even more important than might be assumed, because civil society accounts for a significantly greater amount of activity across our economy than is often realised.

Officially, the gross value added by the non-profit sector, as recorded within the UK's National Accounts, is estimated to be equivalent to around 1% of GDP (or roughly £20 billion).[9] However, in the absence of the price signals that support the valuation of activity in the private sector, this is largely an input cost measure. It is comprised, primarily, of the wage costs of workers in the sector[10] and, therefore, omits some important aspects of the value add created by civil society.

9 See NCVO: UK Civil Society Almanac (2024) and NCVO: UK Civil Society Almanac (2023).

10 Or, more accurately, in the part-sector that is captured with the National Accounts category of 'NPISH' (non-profit institutions serving households). NPISH includes some organisations that are typically not thought of as being part of civil society but excludes a very significant proportion of charities and social sector organisations.

As an example, the contribution of the millions of volunteers who work across civil society is absent. Likewise, prevailing wages represent a poor indicator of worker value (and a shadow indicator of volunteer value) because many charity employees earn less than their skills and experience would command in other sectors. Adjusting for these factors radically alters any valuation of civil society. Add in a return on capital broadly in line with that recorded in other similar sectors, and the value added quickly jumps to at least double the official estimate.[11]

This is still little more than an input cost measure, which is inadequate in a sector that exists to generate social good. Civil society supports individuals to live fuller lives, boosting employability, lowering crime and anti-social behaviour, improving health and wellbeing, and creating connections that can unleash more of the potential of the population. It supports higher incomes and reduces demand on public services. If these spillovers are included, the benefit to the UK economy from civil society might be considered closer to 10% of total GDP (or £200 billion).[12]

Given this scale of impact, there is a clear national case for doing more to support the sector to secure maximum effectiveness. Indeed, once we value civil society more accurately, its absence from many recent reviews of productivity[13] and from initiatives designed to spread best practice[14] starts to look like an act of national negligence.

The strategic and economic cases for reversing underinvestment in civil society's evidence infrastructure are, therefore, strong. But how might a central Civil Society Evidence Organisation – a CSEVO – make a difference? And how will it operate in practice? Those are the questions we turn to in Section 3.

11 PBE, Double or nothing: Charities may be more than twice as valuable as first thought (2022).

12 PBE, Undervalued and overlooked? The need for better understanding civil society's contribution to the UK economy (2020).

13 See for example: HM Treasury, Fixing the Foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation (July 2015); Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Industrial Strategy: building a Britain fit for the future, (November 2017) and J Maier, Made Smarter Review, (October 2017).

14 Including Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Growth Hubs, the British Business Bank, Be The Business, and Help To Grow. See J Larkham, Productivity of purpose, Law Family Commission on Civil Society, January 2023 for further discussion.

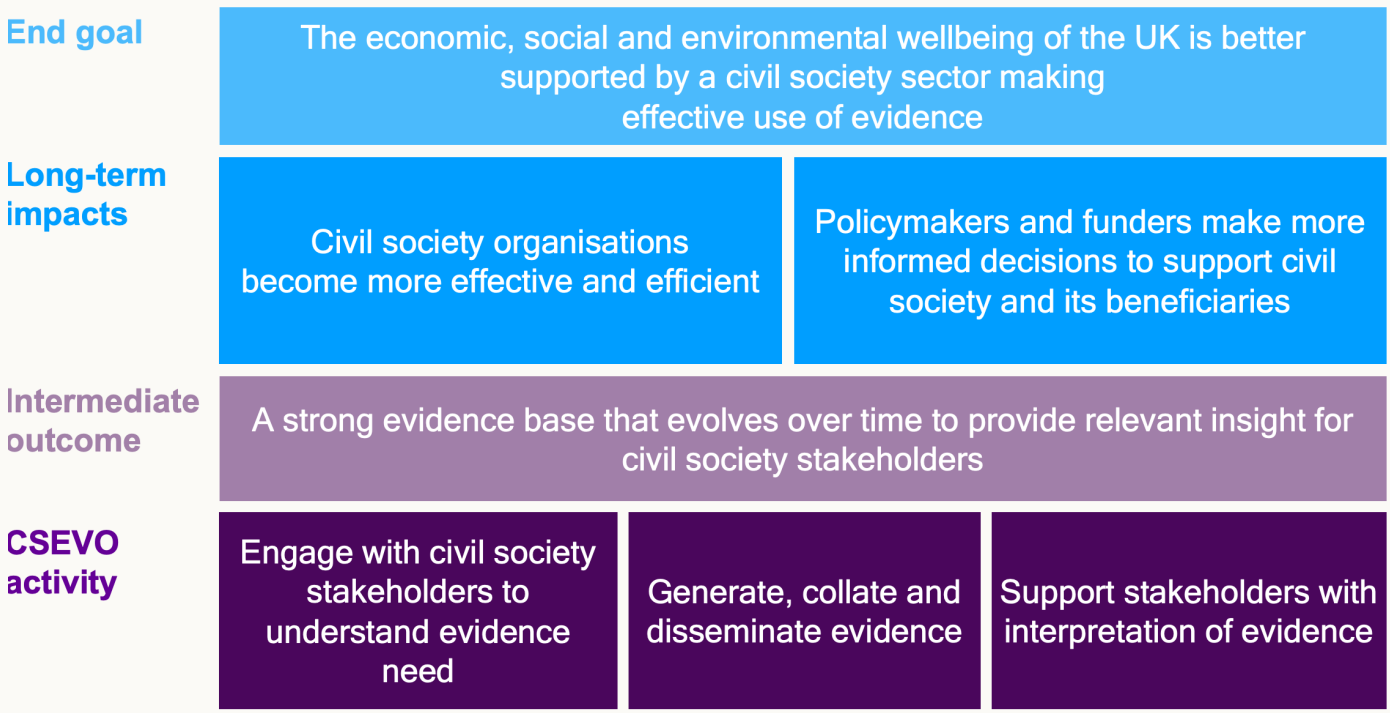
3. A model that works for users: Evidence of demand for CSEVO

CSEVO will enable better evidence to inform better decisions by a range of users

Section 2 showed how market failure within civil society prompts underinvestment in its evidence infrastructure. The sector is under-resourced in any case, but the resources that do exist are misallocated with the incentives that apply to individual actors leading to sub-optimal outcomes for the wider population.

In designing CSEVO, our assumption is that better evidence will lead to better decisions – by civil society organisations and by the funders and policymakers who engage with the sector. Better evidence will, in turn, lead to better outcomes for the communities being served and for society as a whole. Figure 2 presents a high-level theory of change that speaks to this assumption.

Figure 2: CSEVO theory of change



As the diagram suggests, these outcomes and ambitions are underpinned by three key areas of CSEVO activity: engagement with the sector to understand evidence needs; the generation, collation, and dissemination of high-quality evidence; and the translation of evidence to ensure that it can be understood and applied.

(i) Engagement with civil society to understand evidence needs

Strengthening civil society's evidence base starts with understanding what gaps need to be filled and their prioritisation. It will, therefore, be vital for CSEVO to engage with a wide range of stakeholders within the sector. This will include exploring the information that charities need to understand their own effectiveness, as well as the insight that funders and policymakers want to use to make more-informed decisions about resource allocation and strategic investment. And it will involve working with sub-sectors and with wider civil society to identify opportunities for updating, replicating, or scaling existing evidence to benefit new and broader audiences.

It is a process that can be supported by inviting inquiries and building an understanding of frequently asked questions over time. But a CSEVO will also engage in active outreach, not least to ensure that it captures the evidence needs of those potential users that may lack the time, resources, and confidence to make their own approach.

(ii) The generation, collation, and dissemination of high-quality evidence

Responding to the evidence needs identified, CSEVO will generate evidence that will be openly available to all civil society stakeholders. It will develop and maintain a core repository of evidence and it will collate work from across evidence providers to ensure that it serves as a one-stop-shop for social-sector organisations, funders, and policymakers that want to better understand the condition and the effectiveness of the sector.

CSEVO will seek out all opportunities for developing evidence. This will include the exploration of administrative data, with the information held by the Charity Commission of England and Wales (and counterparts in other nations) offering an especially rich source. It will also include the (appropriate) socialisation of proprietary work. This might take the form of establishing a database of impact evaluations for example, with any potential competitive sensitivities soothed by data anonymisation or, perhaps, by strict conditions of reciprocity. Alternatively, it may take the form of commissioning evidence-building work from a commercial provider, such as a market-research organisation.

CSEVO will also act as an advocate for better data for civil society. It will explore data collections within official agencies, such as the Office for National Statistics and the Bank of England, and identify opportunities for adding flags or data cuts that make collections meaningful for those who are interested in civil society. PBE's own experience of accessing charity data in the Bank of England's Decision Maker Panel (DMP) provides a good example of what CSEVO might look to do in the future, as explored below.

The Bank of England's Decision Maker Panel

Established in 2016 and with aggregated findings released monthly, the DMP covers more than 10,000 businesses across the UK. It provides reflections on current business activity and attitudes as well as expectations for the future. It, therefore, helps to inform policymakers' understanding of near-term economic prospects and has become a key source of evidence for the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank.

The Panel is designed to be representative of the UK business population and, therefore, also covers a small number of charities. However, the data published as standard by the Bank provides no disaggregation and the presence of charities in the dataset is not advertised in any way.

PBE speculated on the possibility of charity inclusion in the DMP and approached the Bank in 2022 to ask if such data existed and whether it might make it available. The Bank *was* able to provide a charity cut, allowing PBE to explore and draw attention to the specific challenges and opportunities facing the social sector as it emerged from the worst of the pandemic period.[15]

The Bank subsequently provided PBE with further charity cuts in 2023. It also started to deposit the DMP microdata with the ONS Secure Research Service on a regular basis, meaning that all approved researchers can now undertake their own charity-specific interrogation of the Panel data.

It is a data source that CSEVO will, undoubtedly, want to make use of, but it also highlights the potential for finding other hidden sources of insight in existing 'business' datasets delivered by the Bank and other official agencies.

15 Max Williams, "Shared stress: uncertainty, pay and recruitment strains across the charity and private sectors", PBE, June 2022.

(iii) Translation of evidence to ensure its relevance

Just as CSEVO's engagement with civil society stakeholders will help it identify priority evidence needs, it will provide support in the translation role it will play. Generating evidence that is genuinely useful, in a sector in which the bandwidth for engaging with such material is constrained, requires the production of outputs that are accessible, digestible, and actionable, so it will be important for CSEVO to consult with its end-users to understand what that means in practice.

In doing this, it is important that CSEVO operates with neutrality and with an emphasis on rigour. By serving as a neutral and trusted evidence provider, it will have the opportunity to play an additional convening role – bringing together civil society organisations, funders, and policymakers to discuss collective evidence needs and to agree data standards and common methodologies.

In time, CSEVO might also undertake capacity building within the sector, offering training and tools that help with the adoption of analytics and data use. In doing so, CSEVO can help to embed an evidence-driven culture across all parts of civil society. Resource constraints will, of course, always impose a ceiling on the capacity of organisations to engage with evidence, but done right, the work of CSEVO should prompt funders and others to facilitate the raising of that ceiling by diverting more resources towards the sector's evidence infrastructure.

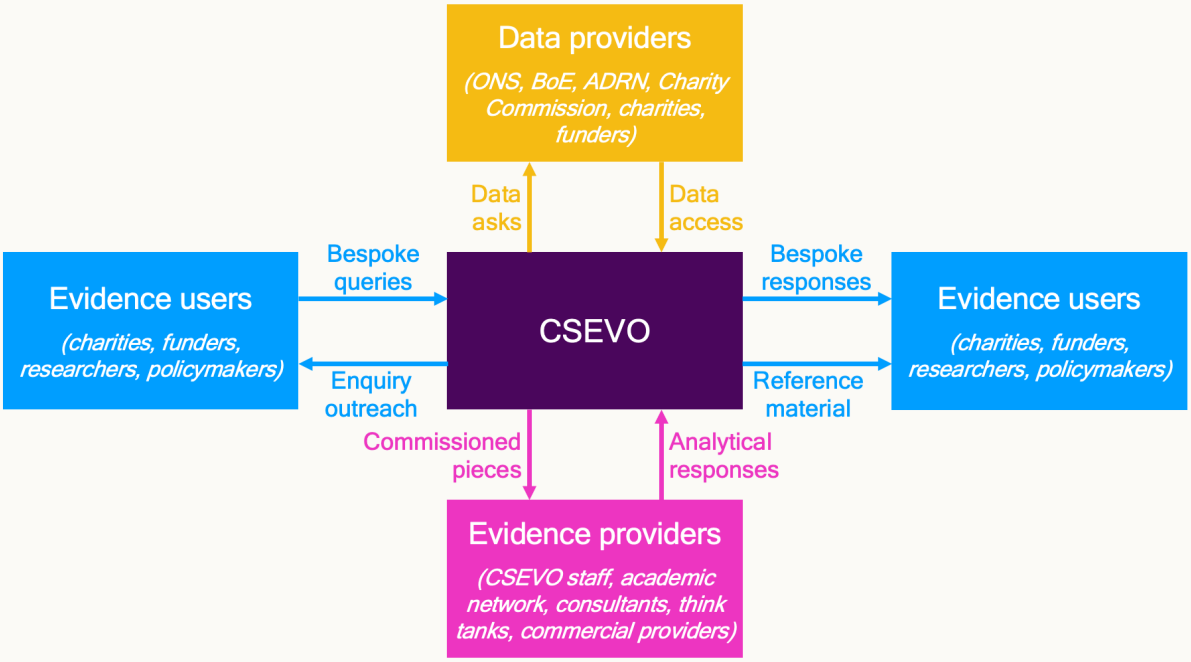
At a practical level, CSEVO will work to improve sector-wide knowledge management to prevent valuable insights from being lost or duplicated. And it will create physical and digital spaces for collaboration, ensuring that organisations have opportunities to share insights, collaborate in problem solving, and build collective solutions to challenges common to many within the sector.

CSEVO's key role is a 'hub' that connects data demand and data supply 'spokes'

To do this effectively – and economically – we propose that CSEVO follows a hub-and-spoke model, as described in Figure 3.

In this model, CSEVO exists as a relatively lightly staffed 'hub' that serves as a broker between stakeholders with a demand for evidence and those who can supply it. This means CSEVO connects to three different 'spoke' categories.

Figure 3: The hub-and-spoke CSEVO model



The first group comprises evidence users, such as charities, funders, members of the wider research community, and policymakers – anyone who has an interest in understanding more about how civil society operates to support its effectiveness. The second group incorporates evidence providers, to include academics, think tanks, membership bodies, commercial organisations, consultants, and in-house CSEVO staff, for example, anyone who can provide ongoing or ad hoc insight into the functioning of the sector and the organisations within it. The third group covers data providers and might include official statistics agencies, holders of administrative data, proprietary sources, funders, and charities themselves.

There is of course potential for considerable crossover in the membership of the spokes, with some organisations likely to feature at different times in all three groups. However, by sitting at the centre of the model, the CSEVO hub can manage the relationships that play out between different stakeholders, providing a framework for the ecosystem and coordinating the matching of demand and supply. This includes a five-step flow to generating and disseminating evidence.

1. As discussed above, CSEVO will draw in demand for evidence in two main ways: by inviting bespoke enquiries and by engaging in active outreach with the user community. However, it is established that once a request for evidence is in place, CSEVO staff will search through the organisation's database of past enquiries to determine whether it is a question that has been answered previously. If an existing answer exists and remains relevant, it can be reused.
2. If the evidence request is a new one or if the previous response needs updating, CSEVO staff will assess whether it is a question that can be handled by the in-house research team. This will depend on the nature of the question, data availability, and the capacity of the team. If it can be done in-house, the team will interact with the relevant parts of CSEVO's data-provider spoke to produce the output. This might involve the interrogation of publicly available data, some form of data scraping or freedom of information (FOI) request, or via bespoke agreements with the data providers.
3. If the request can't be covered by the in-house team, then CSEVO will consider options for commissioning a response from members of its evidence-provider spoke. Where CSEVO knows that the enquiry provides a close fit with a specific research partner, it will directly approach the organisation in the first instance. Where the fit is less clear, CSEVO will take a more exploratory approach by asking a range of research partners to reflect on their ability to take the enquiry on. Once an appropriate research partner is identified, CSEVO will manage the commissioning process, setting clear directions on its expectations for the final output.
4. In all instances, the final output will be shared with the original enquirer and additionally published on the CSEVO website to ensure that all parts of civil society can benefit from the evidence that has been generated. It will also be added to CSEVO's searchable database, allowing it to be reused at a future point. Especially when the evidence has been produced by a third party, CSEVO will ensure that a user-friendly summary is provided alongside the main report/output.
5. A CSEVO team will additionally monitor the requests that come in and the responses that are produced to inform a proactive research and dissemination agenda. This will include four elements: the publication of updatable 'reference' notes to cover frequently asked questions; the publication of 'action' notes designed to support civil society stakeholders with an interpretation of the range of evidence being generated by CSEVO; the organisation of outreach events to actively share insight and prompt discussion of best-practice approaches across civil society; and the exploration of opportunities for filling the evidence gaps that remain within civil society, including by opening up new data sources.

Early consultation finds clear demand for the sort of evidence CSEVO expects to generate

The three case studies further illuminate how the CSEVO model might work in practice, by setting out examples of potential evidence-building that were raised by civil society participants at a PBE roundtable in December 2024. Those in attendance identified a long list of practical use cases, and we have developed three of these in more detail.

CSEVO case study 1: Understanding donor behaviour

Many civil society organisations rely on the generosity of their donors – whether mass, modest-giving, or dedicated large-scale support from a narrower base of high-net-worth individuals. Understanding donor behaviour, therefore, provides a route to generating more sustainable and impactful support with more efficiency. Yet relatively few organisations have the resources available to invest in developing anything more than a rudimentary or generic picture of this behaviour. And there is little in the way of transparent sector-wide data that can provide additional insight.

In this example, we assume that an arts and culture charity wants to develop its fundraising strategy. It has long-standing relationships with a small number of wealthy benefactors, but it has found it hard to refresh its donor base by bringing in younger high-net-worth individuals. Therefore, it approaches CSEVO and asks for an assessment of cohort-on-cohort changes in donor attitudes, motives, and behaviours.

CSEVO doesn't have anything on this topic already to hand, so instead works with philanthropy membership organisations and with the wealth advice community to understand what evidence is available and what options exist for generating new qualitative understanding. CSEVO additionally commissions a market-research agency to undertake some quantitative cohort analysis.

CSEVO brings the quantitative and qualitative information together to produce a briefing for the arts and culture charity, which is additionally published on the CSEVO website. The charity now has the information it needs to develop and refine its donor-engagement strategy, with the potential to increase retention and revenue.

Given the breadth of likely interest in the topic, CSEVO considers opportunities for doing more with the material produced, including both a seminar with leading philanthropists to discuss the implications of the findings and the establishment of a regular research output that can keep the wider social sector informed on trends in donor behaviour.

CSEVO case study 2: Addressing regional disparity in sector funding

There is no clear existing picture of how public and philanthropic funding flows through civil society, resulting in the potential for inefficiencies, missed opportunities, and inequity in funding distribution by location, organisational demographics, and service type.

In this example, we assume that CSEVO identifies appetite for more insight through outreach conversation with a range of civil society stakeholders drawn from charities, membership organisations, and policymakers.

It, subsequently, works collectively with evidence-provider and data-provider partners, including charities, funders and holders of government datasets, to map these funding flows and analyse disparities across regions and nations. Using FOI requests and local authority data the researchers identify trends and gaps in funding by region, sub-sector, and organisational size. CSEVO uses the evidence that is generated to produce a reference report comparing funding allocations and identifying systemic gaps. The report informs and guides funders and policymakers and facilitates discussions between local authorities and charities to address some of these discrepancies.

Evidence users are, subsequently, able to develop targeted funding initiatives to bridge the gaps that have been identified. Charities can use the evidence to advocate for equitable funding allocations and influence funder priorities. Funders can adjust their strategies to address gaps and duplication in funding, ensuring resources are distributed more fairly. And local authorities and policymakers gain a clearer understanding of funding inequities, allowing them to shape policies that support underfunded regions.

Smaller or underrepresented organisations benefit from increased visibility, improving their ability to secure funding. CSEVO's data repository will store insights from this work, meaning future funding analyses can build on a growing evidence base.

CSEVO case study 3: Mapping youth services

Local authorities often struggle to get a clear picture of youth service provision in their areas. For example, there is no consistent record of youth clubs, participation levels, or data on how well young people are served by existing services. This makes it difficult to benchmark opportunities, identify gaps in provision, and allocate resources effectively.

In this example, we assume a local authority wants to understand the availability of youth clubs and services in a specific area. It approaches CSEVO and asks for its help in mapping youth services and understanding the potential demand for such support. It wants to know how its level of provision compares to other local authorities.

CSEVO uses its relationships with data providers to aggregate data on local authority spending and service availability. From this, it develops benchmarks and identifies underserved areas. CSEVO further works with key stakeholders to define key metrics for youth services, looking at not just the distribution of services but also its impact.

Alongside the output for the local authority, CSEVO publishes a methodology that provides a step-by-step guide for anyone who wants to replicate the work. If there is sufficient interest, it might also choose to publish a comparative tool on its website.

As a result of this work, local authorities, policymakers and funders can identify gaps in youth provision and allocate resources more effectively. This ensures better provision and more equitable opportunities across different places.

Inevitably, the precise model operated by CSEVO and the balance between in-house and commissioned activity will be refined as it is developed: the examples set out in this section are designed to be illustrative rather than definitive. However, we believe that some form of hub-and-spoke model would work well, ensuring that a wide array of stakeholders are brought together to collectively strengthen the evidence base that underpins civil society.

This approach has the benefit of coordinating activity and resource that already exist to some degree. It avoids the trap of reinventing the wheel on evidence and creating duplication or competition that leads to inefficiencies and inconsistencies in standards and methodologies.

But will existing evidence providers engage with CSEVO, and what might the governance of the model look like? These are the questions we turn to in Section 4.

4. A model that works for providers: CSEVO's engagement with the evidence supply

Other hub-and-spoke models provide important lessons for CSEVO

Section 2 identified clear strategic and economic cases for some form of CSEVO and Section 3 set out a sample of the use cases that charities, funders, policymakers, and others have shown an appetite for seeing developed. The case for engagement with CSEVO by existing evidence providers – and the form that this engagement might most appropriately take – is perhaps less immediately obvious. This is the subject of this section.

To understand how evidence providers might engage, we have spent time looking at two existing data-driven hub-and-spoke models, which take different approaches to governance and operation. Hub-and-spoke case study 1 outlines the model used in the delivery of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), while Hub-and-spoke case study 2 details the case of Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK).

While the two approaches differ considerably, they share some commonalities. And they offer clear lessons for a CSEVO.

Hub-and-spoke case study 1: The UK Household Longitudinal Study

Established in 2009 and building on the British Household Panel Survey that had been collecting detailed longitudinal data on households since 1991, UKHLS generates regular data on a wide range of topics, starting with a panel of around 40,000 households. The study provides data and evidence to a wide range of users across academia, government departments, charities/NGOs, thinktanks, and business organisations. Media coverage of research findings and other activities are used to engage the public.

It has a distributed governance and advisory structure. Formal governance and accountability for delivery sits alongside various advisory groups. The Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex (ISER) serves as the core hub for questionnaire content, data collection and methodology, management, user engagement and impact, drawing on external expertise in specific areas (e.g. subject-specialist 'topic champions', policy engagement and impact generation, and data users).

The study was initially centralised with survey methodologists at ISER playing a 'controlling' role. Over time, however, it became clear that external expertise was needed, leading to a gradual expansion of collaborations with researchers and other stakeholders. Advisory groups subsequently developed organically, with the use of academic advisers on different topics user groups (charities/NGOs, think tanks, and policymakers) to ensure accessibility and relevance, and participant panels to involve those who respond to the survey in shaping the study's direction and future.

UKHLS is multi-funded, with its primary backing coming from a combination of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), specific government departments, and other research funding bodies. Most external contributors work on a voluntary basis.

Hub-and-spoke case study 2: Administrative Data Research UK

ADR UK initially came into being in 2018, supported by funding from the ESRC, to open up access to public-sector admin data for research as a means of enabling better policy decisions. It brings together government, researchers, and data experts to facilitate secure, privacy-protected access to linked datasets across different government departments. The central body (the 'Strategic Hub') is embedded within the ESRC and coordinates national partnerships across the four UK nations.

The model was created in response to past difficulties in opening up government data. Previous approaches had proved too bureaucratic and failed to meet the needs of policymakers. For this reason, the initial ADR UK programme ran as a three-year pilot, testing approaches before moving to the full-scale roll-out that now exists.

The governance structures that have been settled ensure that ADR UK acts as a neutral broker between policymakers and researchers. The hub aligns national partnerships (comprising ADR England, ADR Scotland, ADR Wales, and ADR Northern Ireland) while respecting local autonomy. Each of the four national bodies has its own governance arrangements, but all must comply with ADR UK's core principles. And it is ADR UK that distributes funding and ensures it is spent effectively through reporting and evaluation. The ONS serves as an additional partner in the programme.

Following the successful £44 million three-year pilot phase (2018-21), the programme is currently in a £105 million five-year phase (2021-26) and is seeking funding for a further five-year phase (2026-31). The core partners (the four national bodies) receive funding based on agreed deliverables. This means they are required to open up research access to administrative data sources, producing metadata, user guides, and training materials to help other researchers to use this data, as well as carry out policy-relevant research informed by government (UK and devolved) evidence needs. Outputs from these research studies are designed to reach academic and more public-facing audiences, including policymakers. The involvement of both government and academic partners in the programme is non-negotiable. Without both being involved in the whole range of activities being delivered, the model would not work. Smaller grants (e.g. research fellowships) are also awarded, but always with strict conditions.

(i) The hub must balance central control with decentralised expertise

UKHLS and ADR UK operate with very different degrees of centralisation, with the former running a much looser model.

UKHLS works with many collaborators, alongside its partnership with funders and fieldwork agencies. The study is governed and overseen by a Management Board, a Strategic Oversight Board and by a government department Co-Funders Group, but only the first of these has 'control' over the network's activity. The network spokes operate relatively independently within their own areas of specialism, supported by Participant Panels, a Policy and Partnerships Programme, and Topic Champions. Wider workstreams are managed by dedicated task and finish groups drawn from people across a range of spokes.

In contrast, ADR UK plays a strong project-management role underpinned by its position as gatekeeper of the programme funding. The Strategic Hub currently comprises 18 people and takes the lead on programme oversight, communications, commissioning, and public engagement. Overall responsibility for the programme is held by the ESRC as the hub host. Advice is taken from a leadership committee comprising accountable leads from the national partners, and from a board of external experts. Ultimately though, the ADR UK leadership takes a directive role, with a particular focus on ensuring partners deliver efficiency and effectiveness.

As different as these approaches are, both case studies reveal the importance of balancing some centralised coordination with a degree of decentralised autonomy. This is about: i) the hub recognising that it can't be expert in all things; ii) allowing for some level of contextual flex – reflecting the different legal and data infrastructure backdrops across the nations of the UK, like in the case of ADR UK; iii) and ensuring that the different spokes can help shape priorities and work towards collective goals, rather than simply providing a transactional service.

This approach also ensures that the hub can focus its efforts on activities for which the greatest efficiencies can be achieved by working together, for example, the connection to users, conversations with government, and the setting of standards and common methods. In doing this, it can be supported to a greater or lesser extent by a range of advisory groups drawn from across the spokes.

This balance is, perhaps, an especially important consideration for CSEVO. Civil society is inherently diverse, and charities, funders, and policymakers have different evidence needs. A single centralised body would, therefore, almost certainly lack the range of expertise and perspectives required to serve them all effectively, with the voices of smaller charities and the, often, very specific population groups that they serve being particularly likely to go unheard. But, as we have seen in Section 2, some measure of coordination *does* need to be imposed to avoid misallocation of effort.

(ii) The model should have space to evolve with experience

Flexibility in the early period of establishing each hub-and-spoke approach was cited as helping avoid governance overload, with an emphasis on just getting on and "trying some stuff".

For example, we heard that the UKHLS model took time to establish itself, with the successful approach taken today looking very different from the initial concept. Crucially, the strong commitment enjoyed by the project gave it the space to be agile and the freedom to fail, learn, and try again. ADR UK benefited from a similar learning process, although, in this instance, many of the lessons related to efforts made ahead of the establishment of the new model.

However, both organisations reflected on the degree to which their governance structures had shifted over time, reflecting the demands of funders, shifting policy contexts, and emerging operational needs.

It will be important that CSEVO bakes in similar flexibility in its early stages, adopting a 'test, learn, and grow' approach. It also suggests that it should be realistic about its initial ambitions, rather than trying to do too much and spreading itself too thin.

(iii) Connection to the user community is critical

The UKHLS and ADR UK examples provide reminders of the importance of connections with the evidence-user community. We heard that, while it was obviously important for the hubs to understand evidence demand during the start-up phases of the two organisations, sustaining such understanding proved equally crucial over time. Indeed, given the extent to which both organisations have been learning as they go, the links to user needs have arguably grown in importance.

This includes the obvious, but critical, job of ensuring that potential users *know* about the service. We heard from the UKHLS, for example, that it spent a lot of time in its first three-to-five years both increasing overall awareness and use of the survey data, and coaching on its appropriate application. For ADR UK, the key connection was with government – as both user and administrative data holder – with a lot of effort put into ensuring that the data-access systems introduced by the Strategic Hub fit with the needs and capabilities of this key partner, across all four UK nations.

Both organisations emphasised the need to establish trust among users and evidence providers alike, alongside a reputation for combining rigour and neutrality. They both commit to producing accessible communications, with a focus on converting often complex data arrangements and analyses into user-friendly outputs and interactions. Regular newsletters and communiques are used to support coordination and a sense of common network, and leaders reach out to persons of influence within the research community to promote increased use and engagement across a wider audience.

The host websites are seen as being critical in both instances. They serve as the main point of interaction for many users, so must provide simple, accessible, reliable, and timely means of engagement. Given the extent to which our consultation for this project has highlighted capacity and bandwidth constraints within civil society organisations, when it comes to engaging with

evidence, this lesson feels like an especially important one for a CSEVO to learn. Investing in establishing and maintaining a comprehensive but user-friendly website is likely to be a key priority.

Early consultation finds a clear appetite for engagement among existing providers of evidence

The examples provided by UKHLS and ADR UK highlight the viability of hub-and-spoke models, and we have built a strong case over the course of this report for developing one in the context of civil society. But will existing evidence providers be persuaded to work with CSEVO? Our engagement with several potential evidence partners suggests that the answer is a resounding 'yes'.

Many – including academic institutions, freelancers, consultants, and commercial organisations – are strongly supportive of the role that CSEVO would play in identifying and coordinating user demand for evidence. Those with whom we consulted were clear about the potential efficiencies involved in having a hub organisation engaged in regular communication with a broad range of evidence users. There is appetite, too, for having CSEVO provide a clearer picture of the breadth of research that is being undertaken across civil society, with its searchable repository of evidence set to be a valuable resource for researchers.

There is similarly strong backing for the potential for CSEVO to provide strategic guidance on evidence and data gaps, and to coordinate the research community in a way that would help set (and elevate) common standards and methodologies. Evidence providers saw merit in exploring options for sharing statistical code and step-by-step guides on using different datasets. And we heard about, at least some, potential to take this further still, with the sharing of cleaned datasets under controlled conditions and with the provision of reciprocal arrangements. This would likely be an exception rather than a rule, but there was, nevertheless, strong support for taking a joined-up approach to linking datasets and to opening up access to administrative data. The role of CSEVO as an advocate for better data for the sector is also seen as a major plus.

Evidence providers are also bought in to the potential step change that CSEVO might create in attitudes to research across civil society. With clearer sight of demand for evidence, more visibility of its impact, and newfound efficiencies in managing resources around its generation, CSEVO could prompt an 'open first' approach to evidence sharing alongside boosting the amount of funding and focus given to research and capacity building across the sector.

Potential evidence-provider partners are open to multiple, different contracting arrangements. Academics cited the option of operating retainers that buy out certain portions of an individual's time over a specified period, but also noted the growing use of 'call off contracts', which operate similarly to zero-hours contracts for research. These are used by several government departments as a way of engaging with research bodies, agreeing the principles of partnership, and providing some indication of workflow but with no fixed commitments on timings. Other evidence providers note the possibility of using invitations to tender for specific pieces of work, or a division of projects across an approved consortium on a case-by-case basis.

Several of those we spoke with also expressed an interest in serving as a CSEVO hub. Embedding it within a pre-existing institution has the benefit of reducing many of the set-up and back-office costs associated with creating a new organisation from scratch. It should also help with marketing the service to drive use and with establishing the networks needed to make the hub-and-spoke model work.

Neutrality and appropriate governance arrangements will be important considerations

Reflecting the experiences of UKHLS and ADR UK, several people emphasised the need to locate CSEVO within an organisation that would be viewed as neutral. This includes ensuring that there is no bias within the hub for directing commissioned work elsewhere within the parent institution.

To support this, we recommend the use of a widely drawn advisory board that includes representation from each of the model's spokes. The advisory board's remit would include two clear priorities: to ensure CSEVO understands and meets the needs of all parts of the evidence-user community; and to ensure that the work it delivers is rigorous and independent.

We envisage that the advisory board would support CSEVO in the establishment of clear selection criteria designed to support decisions around work prioritisation. Whether prompted by reactive or proactive exploration, potential CSEVO research projects would be assessed against a standard checklist before they were moved from 'longlist' to 'green light'. While the CSEVO team would retain full control of the operationalisation of this process, its governance would sit with the organisation's advisory board. Criteria might include some evaluation of the potential impact of the work, with an emphasis on spreading benefits broadly across the sector and across society.

Of course, the devil will be in the detail. But this section has shown that CSEVO has the potential to work just as well for evidence providers as it would for evidence users. The remaining question related to how much all this will cost and who would pay for it is something we turn to in Section 5.

5. Costs and benefits: CSEVO finances

The case for CSEVO that we set out in the previous sections is compelling. A central evidence organisation has the potential to fix a market failure that acts as a barrier to effectiveness within civil society, and we have identified significant support for the hub-and-spoke model we are proposing among potential evidence users and evidence providers alike.

In this section, we turn to the question of funding, providing a sense of the cost of delivery and the outcomes required to ensure value for money, as well exploring *where* the funding might come from.

The precise cost of CSEVO will depend on the scale of its ambition, but an initial five-year commitment will allow for proof of concept

As discussed at the end of Section 4, our proposal is that CSEVO would be housed within an existing organisation. Our financial modelling is, therefore, largely based on marginal costs, which means it is very dependent on the scale of assumed CSEVO activity. Given that the hub-and-spoke model comes with the advantage of scalability, this means that the model can, to some extent, be cut to fit the funding cloth already available. However, for the purposes of illustration, we set out three scenarios here: low demand, central demand, and high demand.

We plot a five-year trajectory, both to allow for some scaling up towards steady-state and to reflect our preference for ensuring that a CSEVO is launched as a medium-term pilot project – reflecting the lessons we have taken from our study of the UKHLS and ADR UK models of the need to allow for some significant bedding-in time before determining whether a hub-and-spoke model of this kind has landed. However, we recognise that a shorter initial pilot period might prove easier to fund.

Table 2 provides a summary and shows that we estimate that CSEVO would cost in the region of £2.5 million over its first five years under a central-demand scenario. Our low-demand scenario, instead, comes in at £1.7 million, and our high-demand scenario at £3 million. Activity expands year-on-year, but, by Year 5, steady-state annual costs are assumed to sit somewhere between £0.4 million and £0.8 million.

Table 2: Modelled costs of CSEVO over an initial five-year horizon

Scenario	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Low demand scenario	£0.2mn	£0.3mn	£0.4mn	£0.4mn	£0.4mn	£1.7mn
Central demand scenario	£0.3mn	£0.4mn	£0.5mn	£0.6mn	£0.6mn	£2.5mn
High demand scenario	£0.4mn	£0.5mn	£0.6mn	£0.7mn	£0.8mn	£3.0mn

The estimates are the product of bottom-up calculations relating to the volume of work being generated, the balance adopted between in-house and commissioned activity, and the costs of overheads (with the investment needed to develop and maintain a comprehensive, user-friendly, and reliable website being a significant consideration here).

In Year 1, the central-demand case assumes that CSEVO delivers two significant internally produced reports, two significant commissioned reports, two commissioned data infrastructure projects, and 10 smaller data responses (after triaging around 20 requests for support). By Year 5, assumed activity rises to five internally produced reports, five commissioned reports, two commissioned data infrastructure projects and 25 smaller data questions (and 50 triaged requests). More detailed breakdowns are provided in Annex 1.

Value for money can be secured by boosting productivity in a relatively small number of civil society organisations

In Section 2, we reflected on the overall strategic and economic cases for developing CSEVO, and we believe that the associated benefits will amount to many multiples of the costs set out above. By drawing together best practice and developing new research that provides actionable insight, CSEVO can play a vital role in helping social sector organisations to become more effective and efficient, releasing substantially more value to the wider economy.

But what might it mean on an organisation-by-organisation basis? There is no definitive evidence on this, but research into the role of information provision for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the private sector suggests that those firms that receive information and advice to support their growth and development experience around an 8% improvement in productivity compared to similar organisations that do not.[16]

16 Enterprise Research Centre, What Kind of Business Advice Improves Small Business Productivity?, (2024).

If we assume that CSEVO has a similar impact on the productivity of the organisations it supports, then, across the five-year horizon we model, it would only need to help five average-sized charities a year to increase their productivity to secure benefits that outweigh total costs.[17] Alternatively, if CSEVO helped to boost the productivity of 100 average-sized charities – that is, less than 0.1% of the total population of charities – then wider economic benefits might amount to £12 million. That would be equivalent to a £26 return for every £1 spent.

Given the society-wide nature of the benefits associated with CSEVO, we propose drawing in cross-sectoral funding

The Law Family Commission on Civil Society's recommendation to create a CSEVO called on government and social-sector funders to work together to establish the new organisation, and we believe this remains the right approach to take.

As the work of the Law Family Commission very clearly showed, a strong and effective civil society is good for all parts of the economy, so it is right that the government should play some part in investing in the infrastructure that supports the sector's activity. Government involvement would also help to elevate CSEVO beyond another data initiative in a crowded space and embed the policymaker voice within the user community that CSEVO seeks to work with. The Law Family Commission recommended making use of some portion of the nearly £400 million a year unclaimed Gift Aid to support this work and we stand by this recommendation.

However, we have heard from policymakers that any proposal for funding is much more likely to be positively received by the government if it comes with evidence of strong willing – and financial backing – from the sector itself, so it is right that the initiative should be part-funded by social-sector finance. Funder involvement has the added advantage of creating a ready-made means of promoting the sector use of CSEVO via the network of grantees associated with the members of any coalition. Likewise, sector funders can provide another route for CSEVO in its efforts to engage with evidence users to help shape its priorities and modes of operation.

A combination of government and sector funding also lends itself to a natural governance structure that involves both parties, not dissimilar to those in place for UKHLS and ADR UK. Importantly, it binds both sides into the endeavour more tightly than it would if it was either purely sector-funded or purely government-funded. That is, when future funding pressures bear or personalities change or political trends shift, it will be harder for either side to walk away from CSEVO knowing that they are part of a partnership. Therefore, the funding base benefits from additional stability and durability.

17 This estimate assumes that each charity delivers social benefits that are a multiple of its expenditure. We assumed a return of £4.50 in social benefits for every £1 of productivity improvements, based on a two-stage process. First, previous work has shown that the value of volunteers, staff accepting a below-market wage rate and returns on capital mean that the market value of charity expenditure is likely to be around 2.5 times the recorded cost. Secondly, evaluation evidence typically finds substantial social returns to charity sector interventions – we have assumed a conservative £2 for every £1 spent.

The sequencing of establishing this funding partnership could run in one of two ways. In version one, a coalition of trusts and foundations could instigate the process by committing to providing part funding for the initiative and then approaching government for a top-up. In version two, it is the government that kick-starts the process by approaching the sector with an offer of match funding for a CSEVO proposal. Given a generalised move away from capacity building funding within the social sector, and the free rider problem associated with an initiative that will benefit all funders, irrespective of whether they form part of any funder coalition, our preference is for government to act as instigator.

We believe that the government can play a key role in supporting an initial CSEVO pilot phase. It might, for example, establish an invitation to tender (ITT), which would invite organisations interested in serving as a CSEVO hub to set out their plans for what this might look like over an initial three-to-five-year period. Any such ITT might include some specifics around governance, objectives, and ambitions, but, in the spirit of 'test, learn, and grow', we would encourage a relatively open-ended approach that allows for the development of new ideas through experimentation. This could be particularly important given the likely continued evolution of AI opportunities over the coming years.

6. The CSEVO business plan

CSEVO aims to enhance the effectiveness of the UK's civil society by addressing the gaps in evidence and data management that hinder organisational productivity and impact. The organisation will serve as a centralised hub to collate, generate, and disseminate high-quality evidence to support charities, funders, and policymakers.

Mission

To unleash more of the potential of civil society by providing charities, funders, policymakers, and researchers with access to reliable evidence and insights that drive informed decision making, foster collaboration, and enhance operational effectiveness.

Structure and key activities

- Hub-and-spoke model connecting evidence users, providers, and data holders. A small 'hub' team will manage operations, respond to requests, commission work, and support and advocate for a civil society research community.
- Delivery of robust but user-friendly evidence and development of a searchable evidence repository. Regular outreach to gather evidence needs and disseminate actionable findings.

Objectives

- Establish CSEVO at the centre of a civil society evidence network within the first three years.
- Engage with over 500 civil society stakeholder groups in the first five years – covering charities, funders, policymakers, and researchers – to understand the sector's evidence needs.
- Generate and disseminate a minimum of 20 significant evidence reports by Year 5.

Budget and governance

- Estimated costs range from £1.7 million (low demand) to £3 million (high demand) over a five-year horizon. Opportunity to generate a return on investment of £26 for every £1 spent by increasing productivity among just 0.1% of the charity population.
- Government match funding used as a prompt for social sector funders to share the costs.
- Governance shared across the government and the sector, with an emphasis on ensuring independence of output and a close connection to the evidence needs of all parts of civil society.

CSEVO has the potential to transform the landscape of civil society in the UK by providing critical evidence and insights that enhance operational effectiveness and strategic decision making. By securing funding from both government and sector sources, CSEVO will create a sustainable model that benefits the entire civil society ecosystem, ultimately leading to greater social impact.

Annex 1: Detailed costings

In this annex, we provide a more detailed breakdown of costs and underlying assumptions for each of our central- (Table 3), low- (Table 4), and high- (Table 5) demand scenarios.

Table 3: Central-demand scenario cost breakdown

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Assumed activity (number)					
Assumed enquiries	20	28	35	43	50
Small data queries	10	14	18	22	25
Internal research projects	2	3	4	4	5
External research projects	2	3	4	4	5
External data infrastructure projects	2	2	2	2	2
Implied staff (full time equivalent)					
Director of CSEVO	0.5	0.7	0.9	1	1
Digital Communications Officer	0.5	0.7	0.9	1	1
Senior Researcher	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.1
Researcher	0.5	0.7	0.9	1	1.2
Costs (£)					
Staff costs	124,021	174,596	223,193	256,195	280,920
Commissioning budget	130,000	158,100	187,272	191,017	221,899
Events	10,000	15,300	20,808	21,224	27,061
Website & AI	15,000	15,000	15,000	-	-
Other overheads	55,804	72,599	89,255	93,687	105,976
Total costs	**334,825**	**435,595**	**535,528**	**562,124**	**635,855**

Table 4: Low-demand scenario cost breakdown

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Assumed activity (number)					
Assumed enquiries	5	10	15	20	25
Small data queries	3	5	8	10	13
Internal research projects	1	1	2	2	3
External research projects	1	1	2	2	3
External data infrastructure projects	1	1	1	1	1
Implied staff (full time equivalent)					
Director of CSEVO	0.5	1	1	1	1
Digital Communications Officer	0.5	1	1	1	1
Senior Researcher	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.6
Researcher	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.7
Costs (£)					
Staff costs	90,262	166,373	187,651	197,186	219,805
Commissioning budget	65,000	66,300	93,636	95,509	124,480
Events	5,000	5,100	10,404	10,612	16,236
Website & AI	15,000	15,000	15,000	-	-
Other overheads	35,052	50,555	61,338	60,661	72,104
Total costs	**210,315**	**303,327**	**368,029**	**363,968**	**432,625**

Table 5: High-demand scenario cost breakdown

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Assumed activity (number)					
Assumed enquiries	30	40	50	60	70
Small data queries	15	20	25	30	35
Internal research projects	3	4	5	6	7
External research projects	3	4	5	6	7
External data infrastructure projects	2	2	2	2	2
Implied staff (full time equivalent)					
Director of CSEVO	0.5	0.7	0.8	1	1
Digital Communications Officer	0.5	0.7	0.8	1	1
Senior Researcher	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.4
Researcher	0.8	1	1.2	1.4	1.7
Costs (£)					
Staff costs	146,723	195,729	246,637	299,503	330,067
Commissioning budget	155,000	183,600	213,282	244,078	276,020
Events	15,000	20,400	26,010	31,836	37,885
Website & AI	15,000	15,000	15,000	–	–
Other overheads	66,345	82,946	100,186	115,083	128,794
Total costs	**398,068**	**497,675**	**601,115**	**690,501**	**772,766**

Economics to improve lives

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