

SUMMARY

This is a practical guide to help CoST members build long-term and cooperative relationships with the British Embassy¹ in their countries, based on successful experiences in Panama, Guatemala, Colombia, El Salvador and Thailand.

WHY ENGAGE WITH THE BRITISH EMBASSY?

CoST is an internationally supported initiative that started as a pilot by the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The FCDO is still CoST's largest and longest standing funding partner.

All CoST members have received FCDO's support whether directly through grants or indirectly through receiving CoST's technical support and assistance. The UK government also promotes the CoST approach and work of CoST members' as international best practice in building better infrastructure.

Directly engaging with the UK government via the British Embassy in your country creates opportunities for you to further your infrastructure transparency and open government goals through:

- accessing **increased engagement and visibility** platforms to strengthen your public image and unlock new strategic partnerships e.g with ministers, multilateral organisations, wider stakeholders in your country - and even within your own government;
- accessing potential **additional financial resources and institutional support**. Embassies can bid for specific financial support to deliver their priorities or as part of wider UK government programmes;
- **strengthening bilateral cooperation** between your country and the UK. Embassy endorsement can strengthen collaboration in-country between governments, the private sector and civil society, as well as being shared as potential best practice by the FCDO with colleagues across your wider region.

GUIDANCE NOTE

Engaging the British Embassy in your country



Patricia Rincon (CoST Board member), James Dauris (British Ambassador to Panama), Luis Arechiga (Jalisco Construction Chamber representative) and Evelyn Hernandez (Head of Members at CoST). Regional reception dinner at the British House in Panama City in November 2024.

OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF UK TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In 2026 the UK announced significant funding cuts to its Overseas Development Aid (ODA) and a shift away from being a donor, to a partner and investor. Most embassies have broad portfolios including development and trade so this is an optimum time to ensure you are engaging with, and well known by, the British Embassy to ensure the relationships and strong track record built up by CoST are used in this approach.

¹ British Embassy or British High Commission (in Commonwealth Countries) are used interchangeably throughout this guide, as are ambassador or high commissioner accordingly.

GUIDANCE NOTE

Engaging the British Embassy in your country

Who do I engage in the British Embassy?

Understanding the key people within the British Embassy and what their roles and responsibilities are will help you to speak to the right people.

Each British diplomatic mission (also known as post) is different depending on its size and country priorities. Most senior staff will be British diplomats whilst more junior roles may be country-based staff. Below are some of the most common and relevant roles for your engagement but these will not all exist in all embassies:

- **Ambassador or high commissioner (also known as head of mission):** Most senior British diplomat at post who is responsible for bilateral relations. May be the final point of contact for major proposals, high-level projects, ministerial engagement or high-level speaking opportunities.
- **Secretary for political affairs:** In charge of overseeing the embassy's political agenda and the implementation of political government-related programmes.
- **Secretary for economic affairs:** Responsible for economic and development relations. Focused on technical cooperation initiatives and economic programmes, including infrastructure. They will have a team of in-country economic and other development advisers² and programme managers.
- **Development officer:** Key liaison for development cooperation issues who could support specific projects related to transparency in infrastructure.
- **Department for Business and Trade (DBT) team:** This is a separate department within the UK government. It has a large presence at UK posts to drive forward UK growth through increasing trade and investment.



Heizel Padilla (Country Manager of CoST in Guatemala), sharing the experience of Social Accountability with the National Infrastructure Agency of Colombia, British Embassy project in Colombia in March 2022.

How do I engage the British Embassy?

Below are a series of practical steps and engagement opportunities you can follow to build an effective relationship with the FCDO via the British Embassy in your country:

1. **Identify and map key contacts and their contact details** within the embassy, from senior officials to those in charge of specific programmes. Often you cannot visit the embassy without an appointment so it is important to make advance contact over email. Each embassy website will have a general contact point you can use or the CoST International Secretariat will have contact details for those embassies we have worked with before. If you do not receive a response to your approach let your CoST Regional Manager know and they can contact FCDO HQ to ask for an introduction.
2. **Start with a formal introduction:** One idea is to begin the relationship with a formal introduction or invitation letter to the ambassador. This letter or email should explain briefly a bit about CoST including its link with the FCDO as they may not be familiar with our initiative. You should also explain how you have taken the CoST approach forward in your country including your multi-stakeholder approach, any major successes or impact you have had, and your interest in collaborating to promote transparency in infrastructure. You should clearly set out what you want from the British Embassy – more ideas below. This should be written in a concise and formal style and any letter should not be more than one page of A4. More detail can always be provided as follow-up or in attachments.

² Some advisers not obviously involved in infrastructure may provide an opportunity for engagement – for example education advisers engaged on school construction, or climate and environment advisers, etc.

Engaging the British Embassy in your country

3. Have a clear ask: Identify and propose specific areas or impact of your work that you would like to share. The British Embassy will be keen to hear the positive impact you are making to deliver shared priorities (more information on priorities at “what do I say when engaging?” section below). Set out clearly where they can provide support, this can range from: general introductions for an ongoing relationship, specific help with a barrier you have, project financing for a specific piece of work that delivers shared aims, promoting public transparency policies, or sharing best practices in country, etc.

4. Invite to events and activities: When hosting high-level events, seminars or workshops it is key to invite embassy representatives to participate. This can include meetings with key sectors such as government, the private sector, and civil society, and even offering welcoming or closing remarks at high-level events can be beneficial for bilateral relations and visibility. If you have any engagement or visits with your ministers then this is also a great opportunity to engage with the British Embassy.

5. Invite to be observers: Some managers have found success in inviting embassy representatives to become observers. For example one idea may be offering a visit to see first-hand the difference you are making or observe a CoST multistakeholder meeting. This way, they will be kept informed and can offer ongoing support.

6. Monitor the relationship: The CoST manager is responsible for following up and maintaining an ongoing relationship with embassy representatives, including updating them on annual plans and projects to be implemented.

7. Long-term game: It is important to keep in mind that relationships with embassies should be built with a long-term vision. Strategic collaborations when developed consistently and efficiently result in greater impact, visibility, and ongoing support from those involved.



Carlos Pimentel (Public Procurement Director of Dominican Republic) and Carol Ann van der Walt (British Ambassador to the Dominican Republic) in March 2025.

GUIDANCE NOTE

Engaging the British Embassy in your country

When should I engage the British Embassy?

It is always a good time to start building your relationship with the British Embassy. As set out previously there are some hooks you can use to do this such as events, delivery of significant milestones or ministerial engagement. In addition having a basic understanding of British embassies' annual timeline can help you identify the optimal time depending on your needs. The most significant dates are:

- **Country and Growth Plans:** Each embassy will agree an ambitious Country and Growth Plan for the financial year ahead including what their priorities and programmes of work will be across the whole embassy and all the different UK government departments represented at post. This is often finalised around May. These Plans are not made public but it is worth considering the timing as it can be an important opportunity to try to influence future areas of work you may wish to progress with their support, as well as an opportunity to promote how your work is helping deliver their goals around growth and a better international business environment.

■ UK Government Centre of Expertise's GCIEP

Programme: The FCDO provides funding opportunities for partner countries to access expertise from CoST, alongside other partners, through the Green Cities, Infrastructure and Energy Programme (GCIEP). Support is available via two potential routes:

- **The UK Expertise Offer (UKEO):** GCIEP enables partner governments to apply a portfolio of UK-proven, cutting-edge toolkits and methodologies to help improve and accelerate infrastructure planning, decision-making, project design, procurement and implementation. Funding under this offer is limited and demand driven. It is essential to engage early with the British Embassy in your country to explore potential funding opportunities via local budgets for the application of CoST tools and standards in alignment with GCIEP priorities and objectives. For more information about this offer, please refer to the [UKEO handbook](#).
- **The Targeted Offer (TO):** This is an open call to submit concept notes for short-term projects developed in collaboration with the British Embassy in GCIEP priority countries (the CoST International Secretariat can help provide you with a list of GCIEP priority countries as these can change). It may be available to existing CoST members who have a specific need that aligns with the programme's objectives and for which funding is required. The bidding window typically opens twice a year, although the timeline for open calls may vary. CoST will inform members as soon as we receive further details for the next round of applications. Examples of previously funded TO projects, such as [Dar es Salaam waste management study](#) and [road maintenance in Jamaica](#), can be found at the [GCIEP's website](#).

PANAMA

The partnership between the British Embassy and CoST Panama has produced significant results over the past eight years. With the continuous support and participation of the FCDO as an observer in the Multi-Stakeholder Group, CoST Panama successfully launched the country's first Infrastructure Transparency Index (ITI). In addition, together they delivered multiple capacity-building workshops for government officials, civil society, and the private sector. CoST's ongoing engagement with the Embassy through providing updates, opportunities for collaboration and attending events has built the relationship further. Both parties have worked together to jointly shape the strategy for implementing CoST in Panama, ensuring alignment with both local and international development priorities.



Launching event of www.panamaenobras.gob.pa, with representatives for government and institutions and former British Ambassador to Panama in January 2019.

What do I say when engaging?

To be successful in collaborating with the British Embassy in your country, it is crucial to align your messages and objectives with the priorities and values of the UK government to deliver maximum results. This includes focusing the narrative on shared interests and priorities as set out below:

- **Economic growth:** This is the number one priority of the UK government at present. The UK is increasingly looking to how it can support growth of the UK at the same time as it supports growth of countries abroad that receive its financial and technical assistance, for example showing how CoST's work delivers a better international business environment. The UK published a flagship [Industrial Strategy](#) in summer 2025 which focuses on deepening the UK's multilateral and bilateral economic partnerships in support of growth and growth-driving sectors including infrastructure.
- **Sustainable economic and social development:** Highlight how transparent infrastructure projects in your country contribute to the sustainable economic development of the region, with a particular interest in building an enabling environment for climate resilient infrastructure and ensuring an efficient use of climate finance for infrastructure.
- **Strengthening governance:** Explain how CoST supports strengthening public governance and anti-corruption through the implementation of tools and international standards from the initiative.
- **Inclusion of the SDGs (UN Sustainable Development Goals):** Emphasise how transparency in infrastructure helps achieve various United Nations SDGs, especially SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

COLOMBIA

CoST Bogota has successfully established a strong working relationship with the British Embassy in Colombia. This has been achieved through various means, including extending an invitation to the FCDO through the Embassy to become observers in the Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG). This initiative has contributed to enhancing the MSG's multi-sector collaboration and ensuring the continued engagement of the FCDO with CoST Bogota. Additionally, CoST Bogotá maintains ongoing communication with the Embassy regarding the progress and key developments in the country. This includes regular meetings to showcase to the FCDO the projects that the UK is supporting in Colombia.

This collaboration has yielded notable outcomes, including the provision of substantial support from the Embassy for the baseline study of infrastructure transparency in Colombia. Furthermore, the Embassy has played a pivotal role in encouraging other Colombian cities to adopt the CoST approach.



A British Embassy official (left) with Alejandra Rodas Gaiter from Bogota's Municipality (right) in the British Embassy in Colombia in July 2025

GUIDANCE NOTE

Engaging the British Embassy in your country

Final tips

It is crucial to understand that the relationship with the British Embassy should not be one-off, but rather an ongoing process. Active engagement over time strengthens trust and collaboration.

Remember to:

- **maintain an ongoing and constant dialogue:** Communicate regularly with updates on impact, project progress/major milestones and barriers which are of relevance to the UK government along with proposed solutions and asks; and
- **be proactive in creating new opportunities:** Always seek new areas for cooperation and present new initiatives that align with the UK government and the British Embassy's interests at the same time as delivering CoST's objectives in your country.

If further assistance is needed in building a relationship with the British Embassy in your country, please feel free to contact your CoST Regional Manager.



Gracia Ramirez (CoST Honduras), Peter Tibber (British Ambassador to Colombia) and Manuel Gonzalez (CoST Senior Regional Manager for Latin America) at the National Infrastructure Conference in Cartagena in November 2019.

Let's build a *great* relationship with the British embassies!

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