



Halton Strategic **PARTNERSHIP**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There are a range of techniques available for engagement, and many have been tried and proved to be successful in Halton. It is vital that any engagement process is fit for purpose, uses appropriate methodologies for particular objectives, audiences and/or stages. This toolkit aims to give practical help, but should not be seen as the absolute answer to everything. Use your initiative, make contact with groups working with specific service users, and remember this toolkit should be used as a guide only.

It reinforces the vision and principles set out within the Engagement Strategy, and includes four levels of engagement: Information, Consultation, Involvement and Participation. These levels span a wide range of activities such as: -

- Daily customer contact
- Partnership bodies developing/implementing policy
- Regular participatory forums
- Conferences/events/focus groups
- Open/public meetings/briefings/question & answer sessions
- Surveys/interviews/questionnaires
- Written consultations
- Roadshows/exhibitions/information displays
- Website information/interactive consultations
- Use of other media/electronic methods etc

Methods have to be used appropriately and be fit for purpose.

The overall strategy sets out principles for successful community engagement. Flexibility in approach is important so that all possible members of the community, from a range of diverse groups, may be engaged in the process. Engagement must take place early, and should not be seen as an “add on”, and needs to take place in time for the results to be able to influence the final result. People must be allowed a genuine opportunity to make a difference - not paid lip service.

Remember to recognise that all diverse individuals and communities are unique, and should have an opportunity to have their voice heard on an equal footing. Think about meeting the different needs of those trying to be reached, be they cultural or physical. Principles of Equality and Diversity should be at the heart of everything.

It's important to plan ahead, including the monitoring and evaluation stages of the process. When planning an activity be sure you've covered issues such as:-

- are the facilities suitable for what is required?;
- what resources are needed?;
- identify target audience;
- ensure information is clear and understandable;
- be clear about how response will be collected ;
- what are you actually trying to achieve?;
- what will be the proposed outcome or objective?;
- what kind of information/response is being sought?;
- how will evaluation findings be used?; and
- what feedback process to communities will be used?

It is important that views should be adequately weighted. Those of representative bodies and those most affected by the proposals should be given careful attention. However, undue weight should not be placed on responses from larger organisations or marginalise views from smaller organisations.

Feedback is a vital part of the engagement process and it doesn't have to be costly. Existing communication mechanisms can often be used, but it's important that Stakeholders are informed of outcomes and what influence their views had on those decisions. Feedback must be honest, especially where people were critical or the outcome was something the majority did not support.

Where engagement is linked to particular decisions and is requested for service planning or delivery, feedback should summarise:-

- The engagement process followed;
- How the decision reflects the results of the engagement exercise; and
- Where circumstances permit, a summary of views expressed (unless they are confidential) together with other information collected from the engagement exercise; and
- Where appropriate, it should explain if views have been rejected and why.

This is vital because Halton is adopting a principle of contestability i.e. decisions can be questioned if proper engagement processes have not been followed.

There are some fairly simple questions which should be part of your planning process:-

- Why do you want to engage?
- What is the objective?
- What do you expect to achieve?
- What impact will it have?
- Decide the level of engagement that is appropriate.
- Work out how much time you have, and how long it will take to complete.
- Plan the process out, using the tools available.
- Take advice from others (key contacts are given on the website)
- Monitor and review as you go along and provide feedback constantly.
- Evaluate the process and its impact at the end.

## **ENGAGING WITH SPECIFIC GROUPS**

### **Children and young people**

When working with children and young people, best results can come from working in partnership, and devolving some of the adult power to them. This can be difficult for all parties concerned, however the ownership of successful initiatives has shown positive results. Basic principles include:-

- Ensure children and young people are involved throughout the entire process of designing, creating and planning events and projects
- Value their contributions and reward positive behaviour.
- Ensure information is clear and in their “language”; and
- Try and make sessions fun and interesting, not stuffy and boring. Arts can be a useful tool to help engagement with young people.

### **Disabled People**

There are many barriers faced by individuals with a disability, and many of these can be addressed as part of the planning stage:-

- Inflexible organisational procedures and practices;
- Inaccessible information;
- Inaccessible buildings and transport;

Some basic principals to engaging with people with disabilities should include:-

- access audits with disabled people;
- develop guidance for event management, which include
- accessible pathways and ensure organisers are aware of disability issues; and
- support the development of community engagement projects run by and for disabled people.

### **Older People**

The number of older people in society is increasing and barriers to engagement can include:-

- inflexibility and processes, within organisations, that move at a pace that doesn't suit the older generation;
- use of jargon and acronyms; and
- negative attitudes and stereotypes.

When engaging with older people try and:-

- Use existing structures and organisations that are already engaging with older people;
- Don't underestimate the level of experience and knowledge of individuals;
- Be aware of timings and locations to ensure physical safety; and
- Information should be accessible (always check before using IT/online);

### **Gender Equality**

When planning and designing events, ensure that there are some basic principles covered:-

- Try and ensure that you have an even split between genders at events, both with delegates and facilitators;
- Monitor information collected with gender balance in mind;
- Don't let a particular gender dominate events;
- Consider single gender events to ensure a safe environment for individuals to freely discuss their views and opinions; and
- Consider such issues as childcare, timings (school day – working parents).

### **Black and other Racial Minority Groups (BRM)**

Our society is made up of very diverse communities, and although Halton may have a small population which reflects this, the different aspects of their needs should be considered:-

- Be aware of different traditions;
- Don't classify all BRM group together;
- Do some research and find out what different communities are in your area, and what needs are specific to them;
- Build relationships with existing groups or support the development of new ones;
- Are translation services required for materials and/or meetings, and what languages?; and
- Introduce diversity training to staff.

### **Faith**

This is perhaps one of the most uncertain communities to engage with. Although something like 77% of the population regard themselves as having some sort of religious affiliation (2001 Census), many organisers are unsure of what they should be doing to engage this specific group:-

- Research will provide information about groups within your area, and target resources and time to support this process;
- Use informal networks and contacts;
- Understand the differences between the faith group, and promote cross group working;
- Buy a faith calendar to ensure activities don't clash with important dates; and
- Consider dietary requirements, and don't use venues where alcohol can be consumed.

### **Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT)**

LGBT communities are one of many who are often the victims of harassment, assault and discrimination through ignorance and fear by others. Be aware of acceptable terminology used within this targeted group, and consider the following basics:

- Not everyone is heterosexual and don't assume that everyone taking part in the activity is;
- Ensure confidentiality and ground rules from the beginning, including acceptable and unacceptable words;
- Try and use staff (researchers/facilitators) from the same targeted group who are knowledgeable about the issues to be discussed; and
- Ensure safe venues.

## **INFORMING PEOPLE**

### **Posters**

Posters are a good way of getting a large number of people interested in what you are doing. A well-designed poster is eye catching, provides just the right information in an easy to understand way and can be put in a range of locations. As a rule, always ask yourself who you are trying to reach. What message are you sending to what audience? What are your objectives? Remember this with all communications. It is helpful to get a professional to design one, but if you can't do this, then the points below will help.

#### **Title**

Keep it short and to the point - titles should make a bold statement and draw the reader in.

#### **Text**

Keep the text to a maximum of 100 words. Don't get drawn into writing narrative. Bullet points and short messages have more impact. Posters are usually only seen for a short time: The more text on the poster the less likely it is to be read. In your poster text remember to include:

- Date and time of events.
- Where to get more information.
- Logos of the Council and/or organisations and partners.

Pictures, graphics and images should be kept to a minimum, be concise and have visual impact. Use of space and the layout are particularly important when producing posters. Too much on the page will lead to visual confusion and make the poster ineffective.

#### **Page layout**

Choose a clear and simple layout that is eye catching and easy to read. Try not to put more than five points on one poster. Use bullet points to add variety. Get a range of feedback on your drafts from different people and don't be afraid to edit. Use a minimum sized font of 18 point.

#### **The Audience**

Who are you hoping will read the poster? Have you catered for their needs? Have you used translations to make the poster accessible? Use images that reflect your community (and make sure you have permission to use them).

#### **Distribution**

It is necessary to have a distribution plan. This would be part of a communications plan. Who is going to get it and how will it get there? Will it go by post (a cost consideration), or by hand? Can you enlist the help of existing groups or networks? Where will they go? How many will you produce? Good places to distribute posters to display include local businesses, shops, post offices, community centres, libraries and the local media sales. Make sure you contact people

who might help with distribution at a very early stage to fit your headlines with their

schedules.

## **Resources**

Establish the budget that you will need and keep to it. How many copies will need to be produced? Does there need to be translation information? Can you design it on your own computer or will you have to go to a designer? All of these points raise financial considerations that need to be costed.

## **Additional – local designers, in-house style**

Don't forget that there may be in-house designs and styles that you need to meet, especially if you work for a Council. Have a look at other posters out on the streets, or in advertisements to get an idea of what you want to do. Don't be afraid to use your imagination.

## **Producing a newsletter**

Newsletters can be used to keep people informed, attract interest or recruit people for projects. Newsletters are important for giving information about services or a project you are trying to set up. If you are creating a newsletter make sure you aren't duplicating an existing one. Newsletters can be very different in the way they look, the size and the language.

Newsletters should be planned carefully to ensure you are getting maximum impact. Decide:

- What message you want to get across.
- What your newsletter's tone, content and language will be.

## **Planning**

Who is your audience? What are the aims and objectives of the newsletter? What will the content cover - what goes in or stays out? Will the tone be formal or informal? When does it need to be produced by? What will the format be? How will it be distributed? How much will it cost to design, print and distribute?

## **Production**

Communicate clearly so that contributors know timescales and responsibilities. Who has to do what by when? Develop drafts of the newsletter at key stages, check for accuracy and clarity. Make sure everyone involved in development knows what is happening.

- How is the newsletter going to be distributed?
- Will it fit into leaflet racks or fit into an envelope?
- Is it going to lie flat on reception desks and coffee tables, or is it going to be distributed through letterboxes?
- Good places to distribute a newsletter include libraries, community centres, leisure centres, schools, clubs, businesses, post offices and shops.

## **Photographs & captions**

You should include at least one graphic / photograph on each page. Pages of words make for a dull-looking newsletter. Include illustrations or photographs that complement the article and where possible have them include people. Make sure you have permission to use photographs of people.

Make captions short, sharp and inviting. Captions have high readability and present a good opportunity to get a key message across.

Quotes are a useful tool to add a sense of reality and inject life into an article. However, it is important to ensure that the quote used supports the point you are trying to make. Don't get obsessed with dates. They are often not relevant for the purposes of the newsletter. Often, the word *recently* will suffice.

### **Key points**

- Choose a bright and attractive heading.
- Date the newsletter.
- Use strong headlines with dynamic words.
- Keep sentence length to around 25 words or fewer. Use two or three sentences each paragraph.
- Vary the story lengths. Aim for a maximum of 300 word/item.

### **Costs and timescales**

These can vary greatly depending on the newsletter you produce and the design that you choose. Costs depend on design time, quality of paper, number of copies produced, distribution and photographers or writers if used. Always give yourself time to talk to people with experience in producing newsletters. Draw up a production schedule and allow yourself plenty of time for slippage, late advice or last minutes changes.

### **Information stalls**

Information stalls are interactive displays. They are a good way of finding out the views of significant numbers of people. They are particularly useful when researching the views of people using a particular street, public space or service.

### **Planning**

- What information will be given and who will be involved. Do other people with specialist knowledge need to be there?
- Where will you have the stall? A highly public location is good, with exhibition and interactive display material mounted for a selected period.
- How will you advertise the event? Do you need to?
- Do you need permission to set up your stall? Have a back-up plan if there is awful weather.

### **Delivery**

- Set up with plenty of time on the day.
- If there is a small number of you, make sure you have some drinks and refreshments available.
- Keep a mobile phone handy in case people get lost.
- Have a post-box so that people can make contributions.
- Bring a jacket or umbrella for wet weather.

# **METHODS**

## **Questionnaires and surveys**

Surveys can be an effective way to gather information. They can provide information about how people feel about issues using a series of structured questions. Surveys can be carried out either:-

- Where a person completes a questionnaire received by post or other means, or
- Where an interviewer asks the questions and records the answers.

### **When to Use a Survey**

Surveys are designed to collect views where those questioned have been randomly selected. The statistical results can then be generalized to a whole population. If surveys are used to conduct small-scale studies, the results can provide useful information but may not be representative of a total population.

### **Carrying out a survey**

Careful planning and timetabling is essential to carrying out a successful survey. This is in three stages:

#### 1. Design and preparation

- You must be clear about what you want to ask; who you want to ask; what you need to know; what you will do with the results.
- Decide what type of survey you wish to conduct; identify your population of interest and how the sample will be collected.
- Design of questionnaire: Most questions should be closed – asking people to tick a box. A limited number of open-ended questions may be used to explore more complex issues. The look and layout of the questionnaire is very important to encourage responses.

If you are intending to analyse the data numerically, it will need to be in a format that can be numerically analysed. You will need to use closed-end questions if you wish to analyse the data statistically.

Examples of ways to present closed-ended questions include:

- a. Yes/no questions (with check/tick boxes).
- b. Scales, for example: "How happy are you with the recycling service in you area?"  
Not happy at all     1     2     3     4     5     Very Happy

#### 2. Data collection

This is the fieldwork stage where the questionnaire is sent out or the interviewer contacts the selected sample. Response rates can be increased by:

- A pre-survey letter being sent.

- Using a covering letter with the survey, explaining the purpose of the study, giving assurances of confidentiality and a contact name.
- Using reminder letters and follow up surveys.
- Good timing: If possible surveys should arrive at the weekend. School holidays, especially summer and Christmas should be avoided.

### 3. Analysis and presentation of the results.

Analysing survey data is a skilled and time-consuming task. It is vital that the information is accurately represented and gives a balanced picture of results.

#### **Community/citizen's panels**

A Citizen's Panel is a group of people living within the same area, such as Halton, who have agreed to regularly provide information by participating in research. This kind of panel is used to assess the views of a large group, typically of around 1,000 members.

You may not be able to set up a panel of this size, however the information is useful to apply when establishing a smaller steering group, consultation group or reference group. The guide can also apply to establishing a group that may hold decision-making powers in addition to acting as a reference group.

#### **Planning**

- Identify the role and remit of the group you want to set up.
- Plan your recruitment carefully. How often will they meet? Where? What costs will be involved?
- Plan the running procedure.
- Plan how the Panel may be concluded, or refreshed and over what timescale.
- Ensure a Panel is representative of the target population. People who leave the Panel must be replaced and at the same time it must remain representative. This requires careful management and renewal as required.
- Replace Panel members before they become too conditioned with the issues, as this reduces their ability to represent public opinion.

#### **Administration**

- Keep a clear line of dialogue open so members can contact you with any concerns or questions.
- Send out information about meetings with plenty of time and always remember any accessibility or language factors.

#### **Focus groups**

These are discussion groups that tend to involve 10-20 people, usually led by a trained facilitator. It typically aims to bring together the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and experiences of different people on a subject. Focus groups can be successfully used for in-depth consultation regarding issues such as strategic plans, positioning policies, service-specific planning, or a new development in a local area. They could also form part of consultation strategy for community-building activities. They usually last for three to four hours, but can be much shorter.

Well-developed facilitation skills are very important for focus groups as they rely on the expression of views and opinions. The facilitator must ensure that everyone has opportunities to put their view across and that people don't dominate others. This can be challenging when the topic is one that the people attending are passionate about.

## **Planning**

- Identify how you will select participants. Do you want a random group, particular service users or people of an interest group? This can take time but you can use existing networks and structures to make contact.
- Give plenty of time to notify people and for them to decide. Writing to them and following up with a phone call can help.
- Clearly identify what will involve being on the focus group.
- If you are not facilitating, contact facilitators. Be clear on what you want to achieve from the day. Meet with the facilitator at least once before the event.
- Prepare in advance what you want the focus group to achieve.
- How will you write up the results and what will you do with them, make sure information gets fed back to participants.
- How will you inform people on what is happening after the focus group?
- What will your timescale be?
- Where will the focus group be held?
- Allocate plenty of time to develop an agenda, script, prepare materials, invite participants and agree the date.

## **On The Day**

- Introduce participants.
- Outline the process and timings and determine any ground rules for the conduct of the focus group.
- Depending on the level of information provided, an overview of the topic should occur.
- A set of questions or issues will then be discussed by the group in some detail.
- A simple evaluation sheet provided to all participants is a good way of finding out how the process was viewed.
- Focus groups conclude after issues have been thoroughly discussed or time is up.

## **Consultation on Written Policy, Plans or Strategies**

This can be seen as a more traditional or conservative form of consultation. There are legal requirements which may mean that the process is seen as more formal. However there is no reason why this should be the case. Gaining feedback on draft consultation documents, especially right at the start and throughout the development process can transform a project or initiative. It is important to carefully plan the approach that you will use, and always feedback the results to those included so that people are informed of outcomes.

## **Planning**

- What is it you want to get information on and how much information do you want?
- Be clear about the information you need. Can the feedback completely transform the shape and structure of your document or are there some things that are non-negotiable? Be clear about this and why, and explain this to consultees.
- Plan your consultation process. How will the information be presented? Consider wording, distribution, time for feedback.

- What timeframe will the consultation need? Draft up a timeline and make it as complete as possible and available to participants.
- Who will you be consulting with?
- What methods will you use? Will it be written, visual, focus groups or work shops? Will different tools be needed for different groups?
- Will you or others need to discuss the documents or help to facilitate discussion?
- Will you need to re-write the document in some way?
- Will meetings be face-to-face?
- How will people contact you with questions?
- How will you make your information accessible to people with English as a second language, or visually impaired people?
- How can you change your approach as a result of feedback? Be clear on this. There is no point in carrying out token consultation if the decision has been made beforehand.
- Set up a clear line of open communication. Be available to answer questions, meet with people.
- Factor in time to work on feedback as it comes back. Some may respond more quickly.

## **Conclusion**

- Write up all your feedback, clearly and concisely.
- Maintain a dialogue with those who participated. How did you use the feedback? How did the document change? Can they be involved in the development process?
- Set up a process to evaluate your consultation. What worked and what did not? How could it be done better next time?

## **Events**

Events are valuable for gaining information, sharing and networking good practice or to build interest in your community engagement work.

The first thing to ask is what type of event you wish to run. It could be a consultation event, a fun event, or a way of sharing knowledge. You need to think about the numbers of people to involve, for example an event with 100 people, or a smaller community consultation day.

## **To have a successful event**

- Plan well in advance, up to four months for a large event.
- Be clear what you want out of the event.
- Book venues early and contact people who have a role to play early, such as speakers. Plan out what you need to do and by when, allocating responsibilities if possible.
- Focus on how you will market your event, such as press releases, media partners, flyers, posters and appropriate publications.
- Make sure your event is accessible to everyone.
- Make sure there are emergency plans in case there needs to be an evacuation.
- Have a programme of what's happening where and when.
- Plan the evaluation right from the start.
- Plan your budget, and know everything that you are spending money on.
- If it is a community event, actively empower the community in planning and delivery to create ownership.

## Planning

The following points can be applied to all events. There may be some that are not relevant to your event, for example a small consultation event in a hall may not need traffic management planning, but working through them and making sure you have addressed them if need be, makes sure all bases are covered.

- Identify what type of event you are doing and why.
- Who will be responsible for doing what at the event?
- Who will attend to help on the day?
- How long will it be?
- Is the location accessible? If, for example it is in a building, does that building have hearing loops, wheelchair accessibility and accessible toilets?
- How will you advertise your event?
- What scale will it be? For example, is it a large event in a park where hundreds of people may come, or a large conference.
- Do you need event managers on the day?
- Do you need to do risk assessment?
- Do you have a plan of your location and what is going on where?
- Do you need public and employee liability insurance?
- Do you need to have police checks carried out? Have you provided crèche facilities?
- Do you need to provide food and if so, have you planned for dietary requirements?
- Do you need to consider traffic management, entrance gates, toilet facilities, marquees, fire equipment and food?
- Do you know emergency contacts and first aid considerations?
- Do you need a public address system? Do you need to communicate with members of the event team through radio? Do you need to consider lighting, and technical support for presentations?
- Do you need to employ and brief facilitators to support discussion?

## Delivery

- Ensure people setting up are adhering to the agreed plan.
- Do health and safety checks.
- Make sure the event starts and finishes on time.
- Manage people, movement from place to place, local people could work as volunteers with professional marshals.
- Make sure there's no anti-social behaviour if it's an outside event.
- Have a jacket, jersey, umbrella supply if it's outside.

## **INVOLVING COMMUNITIES**

### **Participatory Appraisal**

Participatory Appraisal (PA) is a powerful tool to research and engage communities. It is different from traditional methods. It often involves training a team of local people in PA skills. This team will carry out research with support from officers or professionals. It involves the team going to where communities meet and feel most comfortable such as community centres or pubs. It tends not to be one-off research. It is long term.

- The process is participatory in every step of the way. Community members work to set up the planning, delivery and evaluation processes at all stages.
- It is not a delivery process done to people, it is in partnership with them.
- Communities are empowered right from the start in decision-making and will take some responsibility for the project.
- Participants are empowered through learning skills at each step.

It requires the full involvement of local people and a regard for them by all sections of the community as partners and not as objects of research and consultation.

PA needs facilitators who have been trained in PA, or similar styles of research. Residents don't need to have existing skills as they develop skills along the way. It will take at least six months to carry out fully although principles and tools of PA can be used on smaller projects. It is complex and we recommend training. Here are some elements.

### **Planning**

- Identify your trainers for PA. Carefully plan the project and set out costs.
- Identify all the people to be involved, for example, people of a geographical area, interest groups or a whole community.
- Set out a communications plan. How will they be contacted, how can they respond and by when?
- Allocate a budget to each stage. PA works in, many different situations. Some people may need support to attend meetings at different times.
- Consider the needs of everyone involved. Because this is a broad process, many people will be included, such as women, young people, disabled people. Consult the sections in the back of this toolkit on working with different groups.
- Identify a collection of techniques that you will use. A number are set out below but try to keep things visual and participatory. Make sure that there is political and decision-maker support to implement options developed. If the results will not turn into action and the participants won't be supported to make it happen, then PA should not be carried out.
- Set out a communications plan. Who needs to be contacted, about what and by when?
- Keep communication open at all times, on what is happening and when it will be happening.

### **Carrying Out PA**

- Map your space. What is there now? What would people like to be there? What was it like in the past?
- Carry out an inventory of what is there now and what would be needed to implement ideas. Produce ideas visually, written or a mix of both.
- Brainstorm and develop these ideas using spider diagrams, wish trees, drawings, flip charts with post-it notes.

- Work in focus groups to expand and develop these ideas. Are they realistic? How long will they take? Who needs to be involved?
- Pull together all the information needed into a report (preferably written by the PA team), laying the groundwork for community action to support it.
- Always feed back the results of what has happened and what will be happening next.

## Planning for Real<sup>®</sup>

In Britain, Planning for Real<sup>®</sup> is a Registered Trademark of The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation.

"Organisations wishing to run Planning for Real<sup>®</sup> events, provide Planning for Real<sup>®</sup> training or to describe themselves as users of the process should first contact The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation to discuss using the technique to its full effect and to obtain permission for the use of the trademark"

This toolkit gives a summary of the process of Planning for Real<sup>®</sup>. We endorse the process as an excellent community consultation technique as long as it is carried out correctly and is followed up and supported after the event. It requires commitment from all parties, especially Local Authorities and Elected Representatives. It must have political support especially to implement the actions that come from the process. If this is not there, do not do it. It should be used where agencies are transparent with information and where the decisions have not already been made.

Planning for Real is not just about three dimensional models. It's a process that engages all sectors of the community initially using three dimensional models of a local area as a focus for people to put forward ideas and solutions to local issues. The information is then recorded. The community is invited back to the action planning stages where the information is prioritised based on the issues important to local people. The process is also educational because it highlights the feasibility of actions and timescales of ideas and solutions. The process should not be seen solely as a consultation tool but as a truly engaging community empowerment process.

A large three dimensional model of a neighbourhood is constructed, preferably by local people, using cardboard cut-outs for buildings pasted onto a base plan fixed to polystyrene or cardboard.

The model is used at pre-advertised sessions held in various locations in the community. Participants place suggestion cards on the model indicating what they want to see happen and where. The cards are sorted and prioritised to establish an action plan that is followed up by working groups. Participants mill around the model, and make their views known by placing pre-written or self-completed suggestion cards onto it.

Working in small groups, participants order the suggestions by placing cards onto a chart which is divided into three bands - Now, Soon, Later - on one axis and those who should be responsible for taking action on the other.

Meetings with communities follow this up to sort out and prioritise suggestions so that a profile or local action plan can be drawn up.

This process includes involvement in all the stages but can also be used to develop capacity in local communities. It can be applied to anything from a small patch of land through to Development Frameworks. Some of its examples of use include:

- Development of Parish Plans
- Supporting Local Development Frameworks and Community Action Plans
- Park and Open Space Consultation
- Community Audits

## **Resources Include**

- Citizenship Pack – A local citizenship study pack for secondary schools for Key Stage Three which embraces aspects of citizenship for young people.
- Schools Pack – The locality study teaching pack for primary schools for Key Stage Two.
- Training Programme of Courses – A free programme of 29 practical training courses ranging from Planning for Real<sup>®</sup> to Facilitation Skills.
- Free Training and Charitable support for Community Groups – A free training needs identification and training programme for community and voluntary groups within England.
- Engaging Young People in Regeneration – A new project using practical tools to look at ways of increasing the involvement of young people in the process of urban regeneration.
- For more information on Planning for Real<sup>®</sup> or any other aspect of the Foundations work please contact us at the address below:
- The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, The Poplars, Lightmoor, Telford TF4 3QN Phone (0870) 7700339 Fax: (01952) 591 77, [www.nifonline.org.uk](http://www.nifonline.org.uk)

## **Round table workshops**

These focus on involving key players in an area to generate a vision and strategy as part of a long-term initiative to bring about change. Those key players can be anyone from communities, business, Councillors or service providers. It could focus on a specific topic, or more general strategic vision/concepts. The process brings people together to discuss local issues of concern and brainstorm ideas for action. Workshops can be as short as half a day, or be spread over weeks. They are different from focus groups which tend to involve service users.

The workshops help to build relationships with different groups. Each workshop can have a mixture of participants and address a theme or several parts of an overall strategy.

Participants, who are briefed in advance, are seated in a room with seven to ten people. Round tables are helpful to avoid hierarchies.

## **Planning**

- Identify who will be involved and how they will be invited.
- Plan your briefing process. Identify how you will explain what is happening and why it is happening that way.
- Book rooms and spaces early. Consider access, space, refreshments, central location.

## **Carrying it out**

- Specialist presentations are necessary, up to one hour maximum to include any technical information needed.
- Round table discussion. Brainstorming. Writing down ideas on flipcharts and other techniques from PA.
- Report-back, from groups and discuss ideas and solutions.
- Feedback results to participants.

### **Devolving Decision-Making**

There are many ways to devolve decision-making power to communities and it can be done at different stages of engagement. It takes the partner who holds power (often the local authority) to challenge traditional thinking and shift power so that it is shared or devolved in the engagement process. Elected representatives and local democracy are at the heart of community engagement and this is not replaced or by-passed by devolving decision-making. Different ways that power can be devolved or shared, could be:

- During the development of a newsletter. A community group could hold editing power over sections, or all, of the newsletter.
- During a consultation process, where people involved get the final say on decisions, or the allocation of budget as a result of the consultation.
- Using techniques such as Participatory Appraisal that develop the skills of communities involved to eventually take a leadership role in the engagement.

All of the tools within this toolkit could be adapted to share and devolve decision-making. Key considerations in devolving any decision-making include:

- Looking creatively at how power can be devolved or shared and planning this into any initiative early.
- Being clear on how much is being shared or devolved. For example, do local people oversee a consultation process but have no say in the ultimate decisions from the consultation?
- Communicating the commitment involved. Council Officers for example get paid for their time. The involvement of communities in decision-making can be very time consuming for the participants. Try to plan in ways for rewarding effort and supporting communities. This should be supported by an effective communications plan and planning process.
- Communicating any shift of power in decision-making within the different levels of a local authority. It is vital that senior officer and/or political support has been gathered.

### **Participatory Budgeting**

Participatory Budgeting is a local government tool that enhances participation in local democracy. It is a form of devolving decision making at a budgetary level of local authorities. In this sense, it is one of the most powerful forms of devolving decision-making power. It has many different aspects to it and would need extensive planning and consultation. There are different principles that could be adapted to smaller initiatives. For more information, see [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk). A pilot programme of Participatory Budgeting is being carried out in Salford, in partnership with Community Pride and Oxfam UK. This focuses on the development of the community action plans that cover the city in 2004/2005. A budget has been allocated to each area.

## **SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ACTION**

### **Development Trusts**

Development Trusts are a way for communities to undertake regeneration and development projects themselves. They make it possible to achieve the long-term sustained effort that is needed to evolve their own plans and put them into action.

They are community-based organisations working for the regeneration of their areas. They may undertake a specific project or, more likely, a range of economic, environmental, cultural or social initiatives.

Development Trusts are independent bodies with management structures ensuring accountability to local people. They are not-for-profit bodies, often with charitable status, making it possible to attract resources from public, private and charitable sectors.

Development Trusts are high-level forms of community engagement and involve a long-term strategic approach. The information below is an overview. We recommend that this concept be explored through research, visiting case studies and contacting the Development Trusts Association. Development Trusts often come out of regeneration programmes and carry on regeneration work once the programme has finished, or support the programme as it runs. They require commitment at a political level and engagement before any Development Trust idea is started.

The information below is developed from the Development Trusts Association (DTA) and [www.partnerships.org.uk](http://www.partnerships.org.uk)

### **Planning**

Because Development Trusts are a long term commitment and may be very new to an area, no stone should be left unturned in the planning process.

- Research and study what Development Trusts are. A good first step is [www.dta.org.uk](http://www.dta.org.uk)
- Make visits to other trusts. Find out how they were set up, what costs were involved, the process used, what worked and what didn't.
- Develop a plan. What will need to be done and by whom?
- Set out a financial plan.
- Set out a communications plan.
- Look at the skills and knowledge of the local community and people who want to be involved. Is skills development needed?
- Establish a steering group. This should agree a set of policy guidelines and principles of good practice.
- Identify how the trust will be funded.
- Set out a long-term plan of action.
- Set the basis within the community. Spend time on networking.
- Structure the Trust to represent the whole community. Ensure broad representation - public, private and residential community.
- Provide for open membership of the Trust in the constitution.
- Make sure that the Trust is locally owned.

- Make sure that there is a clear role for the Trust within the community. What does it offer that businesses do not?
- Set up appropriate financial and administrative systems at the beginning.

## **Carrying it out**

- Provide induction and ongoing training.
- Run social events and creative or strategy sessions outside formal meetings.
- Develop projects which are net earners as well as projects which are spenders.
- Develop a contractual relationship with potential funders, offering products or services, rather than one based on grants.
- Develop project proposals through community engagement.
- Be open to suggestions from local groups and individuals.

## **Community Engagement Through Projects and Capacity Building**

An important part of community engagement is relationship building and empowering. The keys to successful relationship building and empowering include communicating, listening, being flexible, open minded and having long-term commitment. Capacity building means confidence and skills development.

Project based community engagement and capacity building is one approach to develop relationships with communities and interest groups, or those seen traditionally as harder to reach. This includes children, young people and older people. Successful project based community engagement and capacity building requires long-term planning, resource support and commitment.

In the long term, it is an important way to engage with all groups of people and as the project develops, it will be clear that children, for example, are not that difficult to engage with. It just needs different approaches and time to develop relationships.

A key aspect is capacity building. This means that throughout the project, those people participating develop their skills and confidence to participate within this project, but also community engagement in the future.

All tools throughout this toolkit can be used to develop project based engagement, especially the planning section at the front.

## **Planning**

- Project based engagement and capacity building does take planning, both short-term and long-term.
- Identify what sort of project you want to do and why.
- Plan the scale of it, who it will be with, for example young people, or ethnic groups and where it will be.
- Identify how you will carry out monitoring and evaluation.
- Set out a communications plan – always communicate with clarity and be honest.
- Identify how you will contact people who could be involved.
- Be clear on the benefits for them to be involved. What are they going to get out of it? What will you get out of it? Why are you doing this?
- Identify the need for any assistance, for example will you need any skilled facilitators in

particular areas for training and capacity building.

- Will your project be long term, or a one off initiative and how will this be communicated to participants?
- What budget will be needed and, especially if the project is long term, how will it be sustainable?

Once these first steps are done then specific planning will need to be carried out, bearing in mind what you want to achieve. Always:

- Have clear lines of communication.
- Remember accessibility, jargon free language and why the project was set up in the first place.
- Be flexible and listen to people involved in the project.

## **USEFUL WEBSITES**

- Halton Strategic Partnership: [www.haltonpartnership.net/site](http://www.haltonpartnership.net/site)
- Halton's Community Engagement Strategy: [www.haltonpartnership.net/communityengagement/](http://www.haltonpartnership.net/communityengagement/)
- Halton Observatory: [www.halton.localknowledge.co.uk/index.aspx](http://www.halton.localknowledge.co.uk/index.aspx)
- Active Citizens: [www.active-citizen.org.uk](http://www.active-citizen.org.uk)
- Commission for Racial Equality: [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)
- Community Development Exchange: [www.comm-dev.co.uk](http://www.comm-dev.co.uk)
- Community Development Foundation: [www.cdf.org.uk](http://www.cdf.org.uk)
- Development Trusts Association: [www.dta.org.uk](http://www.dta.org.uk)
- Improvement and Development Agency: [www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)
- International Association for Public Participation: [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)
- Local Government Association: [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)
- Neighbourhood Renewal: [www.renewal.net](http://www.renewal.net)
- Economic & Social Research Council: [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)
- Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation: [www.nifonline.org.uk](http://www.nifonline.org.uk)
- New Start Magazine: [www.newstartmag.co.uk](http://www.newstartmag.co.uk)
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation: [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)
- Oxfam UK: [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp)

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This shortened version has been reproduced here with their kind permission, and developed with the involvement of Halton's Community Engagement Practitioners Network.

The complete toolkit can be viewed at:

<http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/ManchesterCommunityEngagementToolkit.pdf>

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