People & Participation

How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making

involve

togetherwecan

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People & Participation is the first publication of Involve, a new organisation focused on the practical issues of making public participation work.

There have been many books and pamphlets about democratic reform. What is unusual about this publication is that it provides much needed practical detail, drawing on the experiences of over a hundred practitioners who have used new methods to involve the public in issues ranging from local planning to nanotechnology. Its starting point is that deepening and strengthening democracy depends on success in learning lessons about why some kinds of participation lead to better and more legitimate decisions, while others do not.

The book shows that greater public involvement can greatly help in addressing some of our most pressing problems and countering the risks of distrust and alienation. But it also warns that too much participation today is superficial, an exercise in ticking boxes as opposed to good democratic governance, or is used to to justify decisions that have already been made.

Participation works best when people feel that they can make a difference, when they have the time to fully engage with the issues and when there is a healthy relationship of mutual respect with elected representatives. It works worst when it is rushed, ill-informed and vague about the links to formal decision-making, or when it allows the loudest voices to dominate.

There are no simple formulae or 'off the shelf' solutions to improving participation. Nor is participation a panacea – turning government into a permanent public meeting can get in the way of making difficult decisions.

But in general, wider involvement is good for public organisations, improves their relationships with the public and reduces the risk of bad mistakes. As the book shows, there are some clear lessons to be learned about the methods that are more or less likely to work in different circumstances, and we are lucky in the UK in that there are now very many people with the experience and the enthusiasm to make participation work.

It is rarely easy or natural for big institutions to open themselves up. But a more educated and demanding public is no longer willing to sit on the sidelines watching passively while the big decisions affecting their lives are made by politicians, experts and officials.

We live in a democracy where political authority still resides, rightly, with elected politicians. But any democratic vision which stops at that point, and allows parties and politicians to monopolise discussion and decision making, is unlikely to be very legitimate – or very robust when the going gets tough.

To their credit, hundreds of public agencies have taken the lead in trying to involve the public more actively. The priority now is to build on that experience and to build confidence that public involvement can lead to better, and more legitimate, decisions.

Geoff Mulgan, Involve Chair

I want to thank the hundreds of people from across the UK who contributed to this publication. *People & Participation* is not just a document about public participation but itself is a real example of participation in practice.

The variety of individuals and organisations who gave up their time to make this publication possible demonstrates how public participation can bring new energy to our efforts to build strong and confident communities.

I am very pleased to be involved in promoting policies and practice for increased public participation through the government's Together We Can campaign and this report is a great example of the practical research we commission in support of this agenda for change.

Alongside community development and community cohesion, participation is now central to good governance in many different arenas, both nationally and internationally. Public participation has become key to achieving goals as diverse as sustainable development, social inclusion, and democratic renewal.

It provides us with a real opportunity to strengthen our own democracy by involving many more people in decision making. This will not always be easy, as profound institutional change and sharing power presents all of us with challenges. As a politician I must combine my own political values with the practical concerns of my constituents. We all have a part to play to ensure that wider participation empowers all in society and not just a privileged few.

This process will take time, but through publications like this we can capture learning and move forward. *People & Participation* provides an excellent step in that direction.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Minister of State for Policing, Security and Community Safety

The photographs in this book

The photographs in this report were commissioned to represent the broad spectrum of places where participation can take place. From the formal government meeting halls to the local pub or the new virtual spaces being created digitally.

It may seem strange to have a publication on participation without any people in it, but through these images we wanted to start moving beyond the clichéd pictures of smiling people to a more grounded sense of where public participation really happens. And, although government and its institutions are at the heart of politics, we believe that for democracy to flourish in the 21st century it must be citizen centred. This means starting with the people, wherever they are. That's why we have taken the pictures we have.

1

Introduction

Public participation could radically improve our quality of life. It can contribute to creating more active citizens, help manage complex problems in public service design and delivery, help build the new relationships and shifts of power and resources required for 21st century governance, and develop individuals' skills, confidence, ambition and vision. For these and other reasons, public participation has become an essential ingredient in public policy decision-making and delivery.

> *Participation provides people with the skills and relationships so that they are better able to govern themselves.* Sir Bernard Crick

Despite the enormous growth of participatory practice and theory though, there is still little shared understanding among all those involved. Participatory practice has emerged from many disciplines and in many sectors, often quite separate from each other, and the lack of effective communication across these interests has limited the opportunities for shared learning and the effective development of theory and practice.

There is a lot of good participation work going on but precious little chance for those of us doing it to share our learning. John Gaventa, Institute of Development Studies

Involve was set up in September 2003 to tackle these issues. In particular, Involve aims to create new systems that enable people to influence decisions and get involved in actions that affect their lives (see Appendix 1 for more on Involve).

This document is the first publication from Involve. It is based on new research funded by the Home Office Civil Renewal Unit during 2004/5.

1.1

Purpose of this guidance

Although participation has become an essential ingredient in public policy decision-making and delivery, the potential and pitfalls of participation in practice are not widely understood. This guidance is intended to be a thoughtful exploration of the issues facing participatory practice in Britain today, outlining in particular the challenges and opportunities of introducing participatory approaches into our institutions and organisations.

For many people, participation is most easily understood through the particular methods or techniques that are used to consult or involve people – such as focus groups, citizens' juries, public meetings, Planning for Real or workshops. This guidance intends to take that very common starting point to do the following:

To help people understand more about the practical workings of participation, so they can do it better. In particular, the guidance aims to:

— Increase the effectiveness of practice through greater understanding of the processes and methods involved;

— Contribute to institutional change by helping organisations move from being commissioners of participation to practitioners by building their capacity through increased understanding of participatory processes;

— Increase understanding of the links between 'neutral' participatory processes and the shifts of power and resources which lead to significant political change by ensuring that participatory processes are seen within the wider decision-making systems in which they operate.

To provide new frameworks for assessing different participation methods. The guidance offers some basic parameters for describing participatory methods, and applies them to some well-known methods. The aim is both to provide useful descriptions of the methods, and to enable others to use the frameworks to collect their own evidence about 'what works' for them in different circumstances.

This guidance is not, therefore, a 'how to' guide. Nor is it intended simply to provide a short cut to choosing a single method for involving people. Participation is a process which runs from deciding to open up decision-making through to finding effective ways of dealing with the input received from participatory processes, and linking these processes to mainstream democratic and/or organisational decision-making processes.

We expect the main users of this guidance to be those in public bodies such as local authorities, government departments or other statutory agencies who commission or deliver participatory processes. It is also likely to be of value to those with similar roles in the voluntary and private sectors. We hope it will also be useful to participants who want to understand what they should be able to expect when they get involved in decision-making processes, and help them hold process designers and commissioners to account.

1.2

Methods in their place

Too often, discussion of participation begins and ends with identifying methods. One-off events or individual methods are an important element of participatory processes, but they are only one part. Methods have probably become the main focus for people's participatory working because they are the front-line for interaction, the 'set piece' in which institutions come face to face with those they seek to involve. But as with all front lines, their effectiveness is determined almost wholly by the quality of the planning that precedes such action, especially the planning of how to handle the results from that interaction (the products and wider outcomes), and how to link the initiative with wider decision-making processes and systems, particularly in democratic institutions such as local government.

Specific methods thus form just one part of the overall participatory process, which will also need to take into account purpose and context. In summary, the key factors in participatory working are:

Purpose + Context + Process = Outcome

— **Purpose:** It is essential to be clear what a participatory process aims to achieve. Ideally, the purpose will be explicitly agreed among all participants ("this is what we are trying to do"). Some participatory exercises may have a primary purpose (for example, to influence a particular policy decision), and a secondary purpose (such as to build relationships). The nature of the purpose contributes to the choice of methods.

— **Context:** Every situation is unique, shaped by the issues, the people, history, location, structures of organisations and institutions taking part, wider decision-making processes and systems, and so on. These factors will fundamentally affect what can and cannot be done – and which methods will or will not work. Participatory working always needs to be understood in relation to the wider systems within which it takes place (such as organisational structures and policy priorities), especially external and internal decision-making systems. The nature of the context affects the choice of methods.

— **Process:** The design of the participatory process is about planning how the purpose will be achieved (including which methods should be used and when). The design of the process should always follow agreement on purpose – 'form follows function' – and understanding of the context (including how any eventual decisions will be made). The choice of individual methods is affected by the nature and stage of the overall process.

In summary, therefore, the choice of participation methods has to be made within an overall design for effective participatory processes (however short or long term, specific or comprehensive) and will depend on an understanding of the context, and an understanding of what participation may be able to achieve so that the purpose of any single exercise (or comprehensive approach) can be clear and realistic.

1.3

Structure of this document

The document has three main sections:

— **Introducing participation:** Some of the issues affecting participation in the UK today (section 2).

— **Planning for participation:** The key steps for ensuring that participation works (section 3).

— **Methods for participation:** The characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of different participation methods (section 4).

This guidance places participation methods in their proper place in participatory working – which is as part of a coherent design with a clear purpose. The overall design will always be different depending on the particular context.

1.4

How this guidance has been produced

This document is based on research and collaborative development through a programme of interviews, workshops, desk research and discussions within Involve, carried out in 2004/05. Full details of the process are given in Appendix 2. In summary:

— 39 people were interviewed, including people from organisations as diverse as HM Treasury and the Citizenship Foundation, as well as local authorities and professional facilitators.

— Four workshops were held in the autumn of 2004 around the UK.[1] A total of 57 people attended them and the workshop reports are available on the Involve website (www.involving.org).

— Finally, the first draft of the document was subject to an online consultation, which 200 people registered for and 43 participated in. This took place between 31 January and 21 February 2005.

The research and drafting was undertaken largely by Richard Wilson, Diane Warburton and Edward Andersson, with Tracy Carty's help on the initial research. The work was guided by an Involve research sub-group made up of Diane Warburton, Andrew Acland, Robin Clarke, Perry Walker and Lindsey Colbourne, all of whom also contributed to drafting text.

Involve is extremely grateful to all those who took part in the process, without whom this document simply would not have been possible. We are also grateful to the Home Office Civil Renewal Unit for funding the research, Dialogue by Design for providing the electronic consultation free and to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, whose core support for Involve underpins all our work.

1 Manchester on October 22nd, Newtown, Wales on October 25th, Glasgow on November 5th and London on November 12th

2

Introducing participation

Participatory practice in the UK has reached the stage where it is attracting almost as much scepticism as enthusiasm. Poor practice, lack of understanding of the limits and strengths of participation and the tensions that participatory working can create in organisations and systems, all contribute to growing confusion and suspicion.

As Involve's work continues, we aim to bring together colleagues from many fields to reach definitive conclusions about the ultimate contribution of participation to strengthening democracy, improving the quality of public services, building stronger communities and tackling complex problems. In the meantime, this section simply aims to air some of these issues and to summarise some current thinking.

2.1

More participation is not necessarily better

It is a serious mistake to presume that more participation is necessarily better

Paul Burton, University of Bristol

Bad participatory practice creates mistrust, wastes people's time and money and can seriously undermine future attempts at public engagement. Any subsequent proposals for involvement are likely to be greeted with cynicism and suspicion. A positive history of participation seems the key determining factor in the willingness of people to get involved again (Gerry Stoker, Manchester University). Clearly, bad practice can be worse than no practice.

Poor practice is not necessarily a result of lack of time and money, as Case Study 1, which was well-resourced, illustrates. Focusing on a single method can be equally dangerous. One local authority officer who attended a workshop found that a colleague "just wanted to try out citizens juries without thinking through what differences they hoped to make. The result was a mess: angry participants and no useful outcome" (workshop 2004).

Although there are serious risks in poorly planned participation, there are as many risks in not involving people in plans or decisions that affect them deeply. Case Study 2, below, illustrates what can happen if people are not given an opportunity to participate: positions become polarised and productive discussions are impossible. Although one side of the argument may win the short term battle, in the long term no-one wins from situations where anger, distrust, frustration and a sense of utter powerlessness infect social relations.

There are clearly times when participation is not the right approach. For example, it would be very bad practice to set up a participatory exercise to try to legitimise a decision that has already been taken behind closed doors and which participants are misled into thinking they can affect. Participation should also not be used to avoid responsibility for difficult decisions, or as "displacement activity" to avoid facing "the painful need for change" (Catriona Robertson, Stockwell Faith Forum and Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network). Participation is not a substitute for democratic decision-making and there are some dangers that "under current conditions greater participation leads to absolving the need for politicians to be leaders and have ideas" (Claire Fox, Institute of Ideas).

Finally, participation should not be used without respect for participants. The fuel of participation is people's time, and in a time-poor world this resource is in ever-shorter supply. Those designing participation processes cannot take this time for granted and must ensure that everything possible is done to ensure that a participant's time is well spent. This means ensuring that a process has focus and clarity of purpose, that participants' needs are fully aired and considered and that their level of influence in the process – what can be changed as a result of it – is clear from the start.

Government officials try to simplify all the conflicting purposes into a linear process to gain clarity. This is often unhelpful as the complexity is real. There will always be conflicting objectives, there will always be conflicting stakeholder views, there will always be more than one thing that is being achieved. You can't simplify that out. What you have to do is design a process capable of handling it.

Sue Goss, Office for Public Management

The conclusion from many examples in the UK and more widely is not that more participation is needed but that better participation is needed. And better participation requires more understanding of the complexities and contradictions of working with people to change the ways decisions are made and implemented.

Case Study 1.
A National Policy Process

Between 1999 and 2002, a national stakeholder dialogue process was initiated to agree solutions to an intractable policy area. The process involved over 200 people, 30 meetings, lasted three years and had overall costs of approximately £500,000. This ambitious project was quite new, as it was to be participant-led, have a broad focus and attempt to consider and influence national policy. It worked with a government representative throughout and aimed for collective responsibility for the outcomes. In order to achieve this goal a consensus building approach to participation was selected.

By 2002 however it had become clear that the process was failing to achieve its objectives and that a good use of the remaining funds would be to independently evaluate the process to ensure the experience was learnt from. The evaluation involved interviews with many participants in the process and concerns centred on the lack of a clear and shared purpose – "people were invited, got on the train but had no idea of the destination" – and the failure of the process to agree any collective action on shared priorities. This achieved, as one participant said, "a pile of plums rather than jam". The evaluation identified four major learning points for future national stakeholder dialogue processes:

- The need for any dialogue process to have a clear vision and purpose, ensuring that all participants understand and are committed to it. Purpose should not be dictated by the availability of funding within a given time frame.
- The need for outputs to be translated into actions, which depends upon effective leadership, planning, preparation, follow up and clear links to decision-making.
- The need for process designers and facilitators to have sufficient knowledge of the subject to be able to create the appropriate process and facilitate proactive discussion.
- The importance of understanding the potential conflict between principles of equality and inclusivity and effective participation, as participants are rarely equal in terms of knowledge of a topic, and may have diverse needs and expectations.

The participatory learning from the evaluation of the process helped participants feel that something worthwhile had been salvaged from the whole exercise. But the reputation of the organisation running the process and the particular techniques used, as well as people's willingness to participate in future, were harmed by the lack of focus and clarity in the design and implementation of the process.

Case Study 2.
Local development

In 2002, the development of three wind turbines was proposed in picturesque rural north Yorkshire. A site was selected by the developer and a planning application submitted with an Environmental Impact Assessment to the local authority – in line with official procedures. This development first came to the attention of John Braithwait, who later led the anti-wind farm campaign, when a friend mentioned that they had seen a planning application notice on the fence of the proposed site, which was remote and rarely visited. "If X hadn't been walking past we would never have found out about it in time. Before then nobody knew anything about it". That was all about to change.

Within a week they had formed an anti-turbine committee and within three weeks they had held a public meeting, attended by over 500 community members, and raised enough funds to start a campaign which got them front page coverage in the local newspapers, air time on the radio and the largest number of letters of opposition to any proposed wind turbine development in England and Wales. Unsurprisingly the application was turned down.

But the campaigners' success came at the price of community cohesion and the reputation of local democratic decision-making. According to John Braithwait "It completely split the Valley. A lot of people lost a lot of friends." Indeed, some people from the same family still haven't spoken to one another two years later. Some community members have expressed concern that the discussions were polarised, it was as if you were either "with us or against us", and there was no space for compromise. Others have noted that "there were no obvious benefits for the community, or if there were they weren't properly explained". In short the process was characterised by:

- **mistrusted information** – "the documents were utter nonsense";
- **no obvious benefits** for community members from the development;
- **the community's skills** were not always sufficient to ensure their concerns were effectively raised, although in this case "luckily we knew how to handle those types of meetings, otherwise the community would have really struggled";
- severely **divided the community**;
- **no real communication** with the community by the developer;
- **no opportunity for other opinions** to be heard;
- **no opportunity to find an alternative option**.

According to John Braithwait "Our only option was to fight the proposal, and the only public engagement that took place we organised ourselves".

Lack of consultation by the developer at an early stage led to an immediate sense of threat among the local community and they felt that the only response was complete opposition. The result was that the development was completely lost, and local relationships were badly damaged.

2.2

What is participation?

Participation in Britain today is characterised by its diversity of practice and theory. It is an emerging field with many different players using different definitions and with different perspectives. Understanding the range of perspectives is crucial to practical participation initiatives because it opens up a wider range of possible objectives and outcomes, as well as encouraging process designers to understand that participants may come with very different expectations and backgrounds and may not have any common understanding amongst themselves about what to expect or demand of a process.

Existing definitions of participation reflect this range of perspectives from the very broad "participation is genuinely feeling part of something" (Eve Bevan, Shepherds Bush Healthy Living Centre), to the more specific view that participation is the "Efforts that people make in order to influence public policy decisions" (Gerry Stoker, Manchester University). An older definition by the UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development) describes participation as "the organised effort to increase control over resources and regulative institutions on the parts of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control"[2] .

Some current ideas affecting definitions of participation include:

Social capital: Robert Putnam[3] connects the decline of social networks with a reduction of 'social capital' (sometimes summarised simply as 'trust') which undermines public goods such as low crime rates and high levels of political engagement. Because social capital relates to the nature and depth of existing social relationships, it is often argued that high levels of social capital underpin successful participation, and that more effective participation contributes to greater social capital.

Campaigning: Research[4] shows that voluntary and community organisations often use quite dramatic campaigning activities (including demonstrations and direct action) alongside policy negotiations and participating in formal consultation exercises, which the government (especially national government) recognises as a legitimate activity in influencing policy. Participation can be defined as including or excluding these types of activities. For example:

> *By definition, by going on a demonstration you are not participating, you are external to the decision-makers. If the demonstration forces a decision to be made you're still not participating in the decision process. That decision was made by Government. Participation is the involvement in the process of making a decision.* Ray Sheath, Scarman Trust

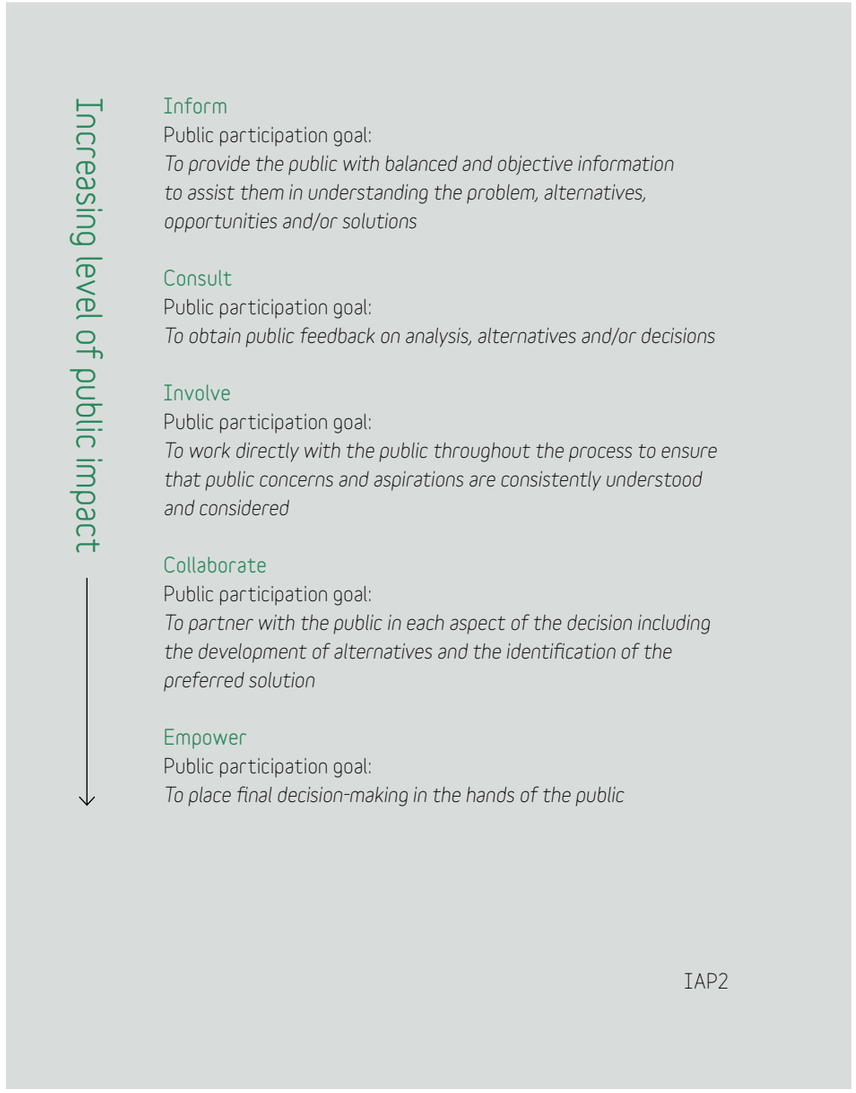
Participation and consultation: Some public bodies tend to use the term 'consultation' as a catch all term covering various forms of communication and involvement. Some participation practitioners consider consultation to be a weak form of listening, quite different from participation and its commitment to genuine power sharing.

Although these terms are often used interchangeably there is a clear distinction in simple dictionary definition terms. Participation means having a 'part', implying some level of collaboration and of shared ownership or responsibility. Consultation means asking or being asked for information or advice. There is clearly a difference in degrees of influence and control between the two terms.

Community-led initiatives: These are often excluded from analyses of participation but there are clear connections. Not only may campaigns be community-led, but community projects help build the capacity and interest of those involved so that they may be more willing and able to participate in policy initiatives.

Top-down and bottom-up: There are differences between participation which focuses on opening up opportunities for involvement, and the capacity building[5] / community development approaches traditionally used to empower disempowered people.

> *The critical distinction in terms of participation is that which occurs through the opening-up of existing government structures to greater public involvement [top-down]; and the creation of new empowered social groups [bottom up].*
> Stephen Coleman, Oxford University



Mechanistic or humanistic: Some see participation as a very practical exercise of getting people's input on something, such as a local plan or new development, and widening the sense of ownership around it (mechanistic). For others, the main point of participation is the expansion of people's horizons, social contacts and sense of their own power and ability (humanistic). These different expectations from participants, as well as commissioners, deeply affect people's attitudes to participation and how they behave in any participatory exercise. For some this is a matter of basic principle:

> *Participation must represent a humanistic view of the world, and not a mechanistic one.* David Wilcox, Partnerships Online

Levels of participation: Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation (published in 1969) is the most famous articulation of participation in terms of the degree to which power is devolved to participants. The seven levels of the ladder are manipulation, education, information, consultation, involvement, partnership, delegated power and citizen control (or co-production, to use more recent terminology). The naming of the first of these, manipulation, sets the tone for Arnstein's implicit assumption that there is a progression from poor to good participation, depending on the levels of power devolved to citizens.

Most practitioners and academics now recognise that different levels of participation are appropriate in different circumstances. The key lesson now from Arnstein is the need for clarity about which level is being attempted in any given exercise. A more recent spectrum of levels is that developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (Above).

Political or managerial: Some practitioners do not see participation as having anything to do with politics or democracy but see it simply as a more efficient and effective way of developing and implementing projects and programmes. Others see the entire process as fundamentally political, affecting the ways people have or take power in relation to the decisions that affect them, and changing the role of those affected from being 'targets' of policy change to joint designers of that change. Participation exercises can usually satisfy both, but the differences can affect the types of methods chosen.

Basis for this guidance

For Involve, participation is everything that enables people to influence the decisions and get involved in the actions that affect their lives. This understanding underpins this guidance.

This definition seems to reflect the nature of current practice across the UK. It includes but goes beyond public policy decisions by including initiatives from outside that arena, such as community-led initiatives. It includes action as well as political influence. It also encompasses the need for governance systems and organisational structures to change to allow for effective participation.

Beyond this broad definition Involve is also developing a set of values and principles for participation generally. The definition of participation, values and principles will continue to evolve through discussion throughout the participation field. At present, the following is offered as an initial view.

Values: There seem to be three main values underpinning current participatory practice in the UK:

— People have the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

— Beneficiaries of public policy can add value to its development and implementation (and similarly in voluntary and private sector policy and practice).

— Participation should lead to change for the better.

Principles: Good participation requires that the following principles are followed:

— **Makes a difference.** The purpose of participation is to achieve change in relation to the purpose identified; it may also make a difference to all those involved in terms of learning, confidence and sense of active citizenship. This requires active commitment to change by all parties.

— **Voluntary –** People may be encouraged to be involved, and even paid for involvement, but effective participation requires them to choose to be involved. Participation cannot be compulsory.

— **Transparency, honesty and clarity** about the purpose, the limits of what can and cannot be changed, who can be involved and how, and what happens as a result.

— **Adequate resources** to manage the process well and to deliver on the results.

— **Appropriate participants –** representative and/or inclusive, depending on the purpose of the exercise, with traditionally excluded groups given special support and encouragement when their involvement is appropriate.

— **Accessibility** so that no participant is excluded because of lack of physical access to meeting places, timing, appropriate support (e.g. child care), etc.

— **Accountability –** Participatory processes need to be accountable to all those involved (including the organisation that may be running / commissioning the exercise, and to the wider 'community'). This requires good record-keeping and reporting of both processes and outcomes.

— **Power –** Participatory processes should have sufficient power to achieve the agreed objectives. This may require a change in the existing power sharing arrangements.

— **Learning and development –** Participatory processes should seek to support a climate of mutual learning and development among all those involved.

> *Whether better decisions are reached through participation really depends on the ability of the participants to be open-minded, treating alternative arguments simply as alternative points of view*
> Caspian Richards, Scottish Environment Protection Agency

2.3

Why do participation?

Participatory working has grown because more and more organisations are finding that they can get significantly better results using participatory methods rather than traditional policy development and project management. Sometimes participation happens just because it is required (such as for regeneration funding), but more often these days, organisations are finding that participatory working fits very well with the idea of modern government 'enabling' as much as directly 'delivering', where consumers, citizens and communities all have a role to play in creating effective public services, alongside public bodies.

Although there are many good reasons for doing participation, the most important factor for practitioners is to be clear about why they are doing it in a particular instance, to communicate that to all participants and to agree it with them. Lack of clarity is one of the biggest causes of participation failure.

The different fields in which participation is practised have different drivers. For example, "research in the NHS suggests three drivers – quality, accountability and empowerment" (Michael Shepherd, Health Policy Researcher). Research for this guidance had similar results, identifying four main objectives of participatory activity in current public policy circles:

Governance – e.g. strengthening democratic legitimacy, accountability, stimulating active citizenship.

Social cohesion and social justice – e.g. building relationships, ownership and social capital, equity, empowerment.

Improved quality of services – more efficient and better services, especially public services, that meet real needs and reflect community values.

Capacity building and learning – for individuals and organisations, to provide a basis for future growth and development and, especially, to help build stronger communities.

Individual views on why participation matters and is useful include the following, from the various consultations on this guidance:

The participation movement has the chance to make politics more relevant, to bring the issues alive for people. But this will only happen if we start to understand what good participation is, and build that capacity. Patrick Diamond, No 10. Policy Unit

Participation provides people with the skills and relationships so that they are better able to govern themselves. Sir Bernard Crick

The complexity of modern policy making is such that it requires a far more involving and deliberative form of decision-making.
Tim O'Riordan, University of East Anglia

The only way we are going to have the services we want is through effective involvement. Catherine Staite, Audit Commission

We live in a customised world, listening to songs, not albums, on our CDs and I-Pods. People want to behave politically in the same way, engaging with the issues that most interest them. Peter Barron, BBC

There exists a tradition of public involvement, a cultural feeling in some societies that you should not just help your neighbour but help your neighbourhood.
Sir Bernard Crick

There is some evidence that people who have high rates of volunteering and participation are generally happier persons. People who devote their lives solely to work and consumer acquisition, then paradoxically the evidence begins to grow, are not very happy people.
Sir Bernard Crick

It is done by businesses so that they can be effective and achieve their business plans within the timescales they want to.
Ruth Rush, Environment Agency

To achieve more seamless, well targeted, effective policy outcomes in which people feel ownership. Debbie Wilkie, Scottish Civic Forum

Participation is undertaken to reduce crime through social cohesion.
Eve Bevan, Shepherds Bush Healthy Living Centre

Many service providers don't understand their 'clients' well enough and this in itself is a major reason for participation.
Chris Jones, Communities First Support Network

Genuine sustainability requires systems thinking and the integration of different scientific and technical expert knowledge with the knowledge and needs of other sectors. Diana Pound, Dialogue Matters

A good starting point for participation is about helping other people have better conversations. Mike King, The Environment Council

Participation can help catalyse the action needed to implement the new solutions. The FSC [Forest Stewardship Council] is an example of this. Penny Walker, Independent Facilitator

Early involvement at a point when key decisions have not yet been taken can lead to those decisions being more effective but also reduces the extent to which the process is extended. Debbie Wilkie, Scottish Civic Forum

Rather than weaken representative democracy, engaging in participative processes strengthens the legitimacy of politicians, enabling them to be seen by members of the public as listening and responsive, leading to greater trust.
Debbie Wilkie, Scottish Civic Forum

In addition to these, one further motivation for participation is in response to demand from the public. Everyone involved in participatory working has experienced the packed and passionate public meetings where strong views are aired. There is an energy here which many conventional democratic and political structures have not seen for decades. Good participation can make these events more positive than the shouting matches that can otherwise ensue, which are frustrating for everyone.

The dilemma for most participation in politics is that people have to be prepared to involve themselves on a collective basis, and that is not always immediately attractive... The point of politics is not to always get what you want, but to engage in a process of civic education and engagement. Gerry Stoker, Manchester University

2.4

Issues and tensions

This section has been included for two reasons: to help readers think through the issues they may face when implementing participatory processes; but also to try to move the debate on participation forward. This section does not provide solutions, but is more an initial exploration of some of the key issues currently facing participation in practice.

This section is divided into four main themes: efficiency and effectiveness, the quality and legitimacy of decision-making, organisational culture change and the nature and role of participants.

Efficiency and effectiveness

It has been argued that participation may not only slow down decision-making processes, it may actually lead to complete inaction by taking the place of real change. However, these comparisons do not take into account the quality of the decision-making and the extent to which participatory decision-making, including inputs to mainstream decision-making, can lead to 'better' decisions, such as ones more appropriate to local circumstances. Nor do they consider decisions which are more fully supported by those affected or take into account the costs of not involving those affected, who then disrupt carefully planned timetables with protests.

These competing arguments can be summarised as follows:

— Decision-making should be left to the experts who know all the technical details and political realities and can do the job more quickly;

— Understanding peoples' needs, preferences and values by talking with them is a way to enhance the effectiveness of decision-making and service provision;

— Involving people in the decisions that affect them can increase the legitimacy of those decisions among participants and more widely;

— Some public services (e.g. health) may need active participation (sometimes called 'co-production', e.g. by patients in their own treatment or healthy living) to be effective (e.g. improved health outcomes).

Participatory practice is often a balance between improving and delaying a decision. Participation can on some occasions radically speed up the process through avoiding legal disputes or the conflict that a more conventional approach can encourage; but it can also create frustration as seemingly clear decisions are delayed by what is perceived by some as unnecessary discussion.

It is usually a principle of participation to involve those affected as early as possible, and certainly before any major decisions are taken; preferably at the stage of setting broad direction, principles, and identifying options. However, different methods may enable participation to be just as effective at all stages of the policy process: agenda setting, detailed policy / project design, implementation and review.

The prevailing model of public services is still largely based on the idea that decision-making should be left to the experts who know all the technical details and political realities. The model of the expert-led democracy[6] advocated 'efficient' democracies which worked by limiting public involvement to the act of voting, to enable the experts to get on with the work of government.

Times change, and this model is less widely applicable in a more highly educated and less deferential society. It is now recognised that many 'non-professionals' are experts in their own right, either on specific issues which interest them, or local issues which they are best placed to understand. However, the culture of the expert-led approach is deeply rooted both in citizens and institutions, with the general public sometimes characterised as a homogenous mass to be 'managed' or 'led' and participants feeling reluctant to take on new roles, which they see as others' responsibility.

Much expert knowledge once accepted as objective truth has now been shown to reflect certain professional, political or other value systems, calling into question the legitimacy of such expert-led systems, where objectivity, detachment and independence have been seen as key qualities. Such qualities may be further questioned in cases where an expert has clear allegiances to a particular position (e.g. through being paid by a particular body or because of a historical allegiance).

Expertise is needed as much as ever, but the role of 'the professional' and 'the expert' may be changing and a much wider range of people may be called upon to provide expertise on a wider range of issues. This would be based on different forms of knowledge (e.g. personal experience as well as formal education) but still in a highly 'professional' way (i.e. efficient, effective, knowledgeable, rigorous and independent).

However, as well as the content of expertise being questioned, the preferential status that expertise has been accorded in decision-making processes also causes difficulties. 'Experts' may in future be expected to have their technical advice considered as merely equal to political priorities (as often happens now), and as equal to the outputs of wider participatory processes.

One of the main reasons for participatory initiatives not matching up to the expectations of those seeking greater effectiveness and efficiency is the rhetoric/practice gap[7]. Too often the fanfare that accompanies a participative process is not matched by the actual opportunities to participate or the eventual influence of the process. There are three dominant factors underlying the rhetoric-practice gap, often symptomatic of an inexperienced or naïve approach to participation:

— The focus on having large numbers involved driving an over-enthusiastic marketing of the process, "your opportunity to save the world", when in reality you may be simply informing a local policy; or

— The will and commitment to promote participation being greater than the individual and organisational capacity to make it effective; or

— The interest in participation not being matched by a willingness to actually change anything as a result.

As participation becomes formally integrated into more mainstream policy areas (e.g. land use planning, environmental impacts, health planning, housing management), there is growing pressure from public funders for clear targets and measurement of effectiveness and efficiency to ensure value for money.

At the same time, there is concern that targets, which may either prescribe a certain type of participation or make it a 'requirement rather than an option' may turn participation into simply another hoop for officials and politicians to jump through, rather than being seen as an enhancement of current decision-making. Any such targets in new legislation or regulation must therefore be produced with care and an appreciation for their indirect effects. However, there is also a need for much better evidence of what works when and an improved sense of the value and appropriate place for participation in wider political systems. In particular, mechanisms are needed to measure the direct and indirect (especially intangible) benefits of participation, and to create positive targets without cultivating a tickbox mentality.

Quality and legitimacy of decision-making processes

New forms of participation are seen as offering a mechanism to re-energise our public institutions, and as creating new tools for democratic renewal. Demands for change come from those who have found participation effective in enabling them to have a more powerful voice in the issues that affect their lives. They also come from new analyses of the policy process, which include identifying a cultural shift away from macro level polemic politics to interconnected, often issue specific, micro level government.[8]

Participation thrives on dynamism and creating new opportunities for action; traditional politics depends upon clear lines of responsibility and demographic legitimacy. In many senses, participation and representation are on a cultural collision course, with the protagonists of both sides often holding quite different values and beliefs. Even so, both will claim to be upholders and promoters of democracy and both will also agree that participatory practice sits uneasily alongside representation. There are real tensions here, particularly in relation to representative democracy, accountability, demand and equity, all of which are discussed in more detail below.

Relationship to representative democracy: There are various theories about how participation can supplement or fundamentally change representative democracy, such as 'associative democracy' and 'empowered participatory governance', with new roles for citizens, the state and civil society. These ideas vary in the extent to which representative democratic institutions are seen to be able or needing to change. Almost all such theories, however, see participation as a complement to, and not a replacement for, representative democracy.

You have to accept that there will always be tensions between participative and representative democracy, between the need for involvement and leadership.

Paul Thompson, Strathclyde University

The growth of participation has been seen as a threat to the role of elected representatives. This problem is particularly acute at the local level, whereas at the national level there is greater understanding of the complex roles of participants and the contribution participation can make to policy development and implementation.[9]

There can also be tensions between elected, co-opted and other representatives (e.g. in Local Strategic Partnerships, New Deal for Communities and other partnerships). These new structures are sometimes less than clear about the roles of non-elected representatives in relation to elected representatives. These new 'representatives' may not effectively represent the views of those they have been asked to represent. There may also be a sense that legitimacy can only be conferred on a decision-making process if it involves formally elected representatives. Although this view of the legitimacy of traditional decision-making processes is not shared by the general public, whose trust in politicians seems to be lower than for many decades, it remains a difficult issue.

I think a lot of councillors take so seriously the view that they are the providers of services that they then can become a bit jealous and even restrictive when community groups begin to do things for themselves, to demand a share of the action or to contradict the council. But such is real political life, not just party political party. Councillors should be enablers not just providers.

Sir Bernard Crick

Part of the problem between participatory activities and representative democracy is simple lack of mutual understanding and clear systems to link the two. Some of those promoting participatory processes do not have sufficient understanding of current formal decision-making systems, and some in government bodies know little about participatory working.

In my work there are clear tensions between the local authority and the new, emerging participating dynamic communities we are working with. To be honest I don't think the council understands the work and they certainly don't know how to handle us.

Shôn Devey, Barnados

At present, representative democracy and participatory working are cast in conflicting roles, but both have vital strengths in a strong and healthy society. There is clearly a need to explore the ways in which the civic energy apparent in new participatory working, and the experience of decision-making in the public interest from years of representative democracy, can be brought together.

Accountability: In many senses accountability epitomises the tension between representative and participative government. The great strength of representation is that it creates very clear lines of accountability, so when things go wrong we know where the buck stops. This is very often not the case for participative initiatives, and there are powerful challenges to participation in relation to its accountability. Indeed, participatory working can be used to undermine clear accountability by implementing the results of a participatory process with a view to using it as a scapegoat should the decision cause problems, or ignoring the results of the process, depending on whichever is more politically expedient.

Where participatory processes (and the organisations running them) do seek to increase their accountability, they have found real difficulties in managing the tensions between the formal bureaucratic systems traditionally used to guarantee accountability, and the dynamic, flexible leadership styles associated with participatory initiatives.

Two further aspects affecting accountability and participatory working have also emerged. Some believe that certain participatory processes have a key role in public scrutiny – in holding government to account – which places participatory working in a quite specific new role in relation to government. Others again see real dangers in non-representative participatory processes filtering the options considered by decision-makers, which may be seen as undermining democratic legitimacy and political leadership by effectively devolving important decision-making powers to unelected participatory processes. These issues relate both to specific types of participatory activities and raise important general questions about the accountability of processes.

Demand: People do not necessarily want to be involved more, or in every decision. Indeed, it is wrong to assume that there is a great latent demand for involvement from the general public. However, there is a demand from some sectors of society to influence those things which they do care about, which requires appropriate and more effective participation, not just more of it.[10]

At the same time as demand for involvement is being understood as more complex and sophisticated, consultation fatigue is becoming more apparent. Despite the willingness of government to consult on almost every issue there still exists an overwhelming sense of powerlessness felt by most citizens about influencing or changing anything. People are not apathetic, they do care about issues, but they understand that caring is not enough to change things, and they do not have faith that the existing participatory structures will ensure that their involvement will make a difference.

Demand for more participation exists, but it is related to whether or not people believe getting involved can enable them to make a difference.

Equity: Much current participatory practice still relies heavily upon the skills and commitment of the participants to ensure the process and outcomes are effective. Participation often involves the sorts of interactive meetings which can be alien and intimidating to people unaccustomed to such environments (both 'experts' and 'lay' participants).

The rise of more individualised and privatised forms of political action (such as ethical consumption) and the decline of more collective forms (e.g. political parties and unions), potentially exacerbates the uneven distribution of political power between social classes. Such inequalities can be further deepened by the differences in the existing and historical political engagement of people from different social and ethnic backgrounds.

Participation is still relatively young and these issues are becoming more important as experience grows of the

ways in which participatory activities can magnify inequalities of power, unless great care is taken to ensure that certain sectors of society are not excluded. These issues are covered in further detail in the paragraphs on Inclusiveness below.

Organisational culture change

All organisations, indeed often whole sectors, have their own dominant management culture which is a reflection of the values that underpin how they do their work. These may be values related to the mission of the organisation, specific professional values, personal or cultural values, or all of these. Such values can often be seen in management cultures. For example, organisations that value clarity of purpose and accountability usually have a strictly hierarchical structure. Those that value community and equality tend to be less hierarchical with decisions made through discussion.[11]

Whatever the values of the organisation are, they can be challenged by participatory working. In particular, organisations that place a high value on technical expertise and experience, such as health care and environmental management, can struggle with public participation. It is understandable for many professionals to be uncomfortable about involving 'ordinary' people, given that most professional training and experience is based on a completely different professional stance. These deeply held values can create real barriers to the effective integration of participatory working into organisations.

Most public organisations depend upon clear lines of accountability and responsibility to function effectively with political structures. Although this is necessary to protect their democratic legitimacy it can cause problems when working with the public. Participative processes are often, by their nature, non-hierarchical and dynamic, which can create problems of accountability and legitimacy because they do not fit traditional systems. Consequently, many public bodies find themselves caught between the conventional bureaucratic and political need for hierarchy and accountability and the need from participatory exercises for flexibility and dynamism.

Organisations are often most concerned about issues of leadership and power, as outlined below.

Leadership: The traditional view of strong leadership, of showing others the way, does not sit comfortably with the discussions that underpin participation. In those circumstances that require the strongest leadership, such as responding to an emergency call or fighting a war, participation, in the terms outlined in this guidance, may not be appropriate.

In most areas, however, good decision-making is a balance between taking a lead and listening to others. Participation is criticised for inhibiting the ability of decision-makers to lead because it reduces the number of decisions that can be made, it takes too long and it allows decision-makers to 'hide' behind the process. Andy Stirling has observed[12] that some participatory processes involve a prioritisation, or some other form of sorting mechanism, which promotes some decisions over and above the others. He suggests that this weakens the role of the decision-maker by limiting their scope for independent decision-making. As an alternative, he suggests that processes should be used which present all options and what people think of them equally.

Power: The level of influence a participatory process will have needs to be made clear from the outset so that people can decide if they want to become involved. These issues have been recognised for many decades, including being encapsulated in analyses such as Arnstein's ladder (mentioned earlier). A challenge here is to link shifting political priorities with outcomes from participatory processes, in ways which make both more effective, and make the exercise of power more transparent.

Good participation should provide opportunities to change the status quo for the better. In doing so, it is often opening up entrenched power structures and vested interests, which can provoke a strong reaction from those who consider their interests under attack. This is often the case for public participation around site-specific developments or whenever a vested interest is clearly on the line, for example setting a national policy which will affect specific industries with powerful lobby groups.

The participants

Defining the characteristics and roles of participants in any participatory process is often by-passed and attention focuses on who to invite to a particular event, often on the basis of a stakeholder analysis (see section 3.3).

The involvement of the public, citizens and stakeholders is often discussed as if these groups are interchangeable. Actually, they are all quite different. The term 'publics' is increasingly used in participation work in recognition that there is no such thing as a homogenous general public and the need to recognise that different publics may need to be involved in different ways. This is similar to the way that community participation now recognises the many communities in a neighbourhood, rather than one homogenous 'community'. The integrity of a process depends upon clarity about who the participants are and/or should be.

It is useful to differentiate between stakeholders, citizens, communities and consumers:

Stakeholders are those that feel they have a stake in the issue – either being affected by any decision or being able to affect that decision. These may be organisational representatives or individuals.

Citizens are the wider public / society who may have a right and interest in being involved. Citizenship is a political act, with people taking responsibility on behalf of the wider society (e.g. citizens panels).

Communities may be defined by identity (e.g. minority ethnic) or religion but most often, in terms of participation, communities are defined geographically (e.g. by neighbourhood or village).

Consumers are users of products and services. They are well-established in the private sector and have an increasingly important role in public service delivery and design.

Participants themselves need to know what role they are expected to play within any given participatory process, and they may play multiple roles – as citizens and consumers, for example, in discussing public services. The new term 'co-producers' has been coined to recognise the important roles of citizens and consumers in producing better public services. It is increasingly recognised that participants can be very sophisticated about these issues, behaving differently when acting as citizens (e.g. protecting the public good) or as consumers (defending their own interests as service users).

There are no absolutes in terms of selecting participants. Some techniques are based on making the process as open and inclusive as possible (i.e. everyone who wants to should be allowed to participate). Other techniques rely on creating a cohesive group that builds new relationships, which depend on the individuals involved knowing each other well.

The selection of participants will depend on the purpose and context of the exercise, which will set the parameters for which methods can be used. Specific methods generally have fairly clear rules on how to select appropriate participants.

In general terms, there are two ways of thinking about selecting participants:

Open – inclusive, anyone that wants to should be able to participate.

Selective – in that the numbers, types and actual individual participants may be chosen as part of the process. There are three main approaches to selecting participants, although these categories are likely to overlap:

- Representative: cross-section of the target audience (often organisations).
- Instrumental: those with appropriate power, knowledge (often individuals).
- Required: those required by any guiding regulation, funding regime etc. (e.g. all residents within a disadvantaged neighbourhood targeted for regeneration).

Two issues are relevant to understanding the nature and role of appropriate participants: representativeness and inclusiveness.

Representativeness: Some techniques require the involvement of a representative cross-section of an identified population and these can be more highly valued by decision-makers than other approaches. For example, opinion polls are often taken seriously because of their demographically representative sampling. Very often, a participatory exercise will be criticised for not being 'representative' and the legitimacy of the results therefore undermined, even when that was never the intention. For example, the GM Nation debate was criticised on the basis that it attracted only those who cared deeply about the issue, rather than a representative cross section.

Representation has become a difficult issue for participation and it may help to consider a couple of general points:

Some organisations represent their members directly by embodying the interests of their group (e.g. carers campaigning to improve the benefits to carers), or indirectly by representing those interests (e.g. Age Concern acting on behalf of older people). Where organisations are not made up of their beneficiary groups, they often establish complex systems to ensure that they represent their constituency's interests and priorities (e.g. through advisory groups, elected committees, consultations, etc).

Many interest groups are entirely unrepresentative in terms of formal membership, but may well represent the views of a much larger sector of society in less formal ways (e.g. GM-crop trashing groups, or tunnelers campaigning to stop motorway or airport building). Legitimacy may be conferred on such actions through tacit support, expressed in a variety of ways (e.g. providing food or funding).

Individuals are often invited to participate on the basis that they represent a particular interest, sector, place or organisation. This form of representation only works when participants make the effort outside of meetings to enter into a dialogue with their respective constituencies/ organisations. This ensures that they are acting as genuine representatives and bringing their constituencies/ organisations along. This then prevents the common problem of individuals moving forward as part of the process whilst leaving their organisation behind.

> *How participants communicate, spread the messages back from the process and therefore bring their organisations with them is critical.* Rob Angell, Independent Facilitator

In order to make sure that a participatory process can can demonstrate legitimacy, it is therefore essential to know whether or not the technique being used requires a representative cross-section of people, or whether the organisations that participate claim to be (or are expected to be) representative, so that any criticisms that may emerge after the event can easily be dealt with.

Inclusiveness: It has become common practice to set down a principle that participatory processes should be open and inclusive, but that is not always the case. For example, the juries established throughout the British legal system are limited to a certain number (twelve), and there are clear criteria for jury service (e.g. no-one with a criminal conviction). Nonetheless, some principles of good practice for participation still take inclusiveness as an overarching 'good'.

More often these days, practitioners take the view that everyone does not need to be involved in everything all the time. The key principles are to involve those that are appropriate to the particular process, including those who themselves feel they have a stake, and that particular groups or sectors of society are not excluded because they are outside the usual networks, or have not participated before.

Special efforts need to be made to avoid excluding certain people by accident or lack of sufficient care. This can seriously undermine the legitimacy and credibility of any process, and of participatory practice in general, and may reinforce existing inequalities of power and access to resources.[13]

> *There is a real problem, due to a lack of resources, so that those groups which are not easily identifiable don't get involved. Only those who can be approached through already existing networks are approached … There is a serious danger that current participatory / deliberative practice merely creates another elite.*
> Tim O'Riordan, University of East Anglia

This is not just about ensuring physical access to meetings (e.g. for people with disabilities), but also about cultural access.

> *Participation is not neutral. Many things get in the way, such as gender, race, ethnicity. Whatever your 'norm' might be, it may make others feel excluded.*
> Sue Gorbing, Working for Change

Special efforts to encourage the involvement of excluded or 'hard to reach' groups may include paying travel expenses, or providing a crèche. A useful approach may be: "The principle to aim for would be that if participation is accessible to the hardest to reach, it will be accessible to everyone." (Cathy Fish, electronic consultation).

This does not mean making every bit of every participatory process enormous, so that all those interested can be involved. Different individuals and organisations have different levels of interest, so processes need to be designed which use different methods and can provide information to those who just want to know what is going on, up to much deeper and long term involvement in decision-making for those who are willing and able to do it and are appropriate to the process.

All these issues need to be addressed in the detailed planning of any process, which is tackled in the next section of this guidance (section 3).

1 Pearse A. and Stifel, M. (1979), *Inquiry Into Participation – Research Approach*, UNRISD:Geneva
2 Putnam, David (2000), *Bowling Alone. The collapse and revival of American community*, Simon and Schuster, New York
3 Craig et al (2002), *Willing partners? Voluntary and community organisations in the democratic process*, University of Brighton and University of Hull
4 Capacity building has been defined as "activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities". Taken from *Firm Foundations*, Home Office, December 2004
5 Based on Schumpeter's 1942 *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*
6 See, for example, Cooke, Bill and Kothari, Uma (eds) (2001), *Participation. The New Tyranny*, Zed Books, London
7 Mulgan, G. (1997), *Connexity: Responsibility, Freedom, Business and Power in the New Century*, Vintage: London
8 Craig et al, 2002, *Willing partners? Voluntary and community organisations in the democratic process*, University of Brighton / University of Hull
9 For example: Audit Commission (2003), *Connecting with Users and Citizens*, Audit Commission , London
10 Beck, D. and Cowan, C (1995), *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change*, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford
11 Stirling, A. (2005),' Opening Up or Closing Down? Analysis, Participation and Power in the Social Appraisal of Technology' in Leach M., Scoones I. And Wynne B (eds) *Science and Citizens*, Zed Books: London
12 Stirling, A. (2005), 'Opening Up or Closing Down? Analysis, Participation and Power in the Social Appraisal of Technology' in Leach M., Scoones I. And Wynne B (eds), *Science and Citizens*, Zed Books: London
13 See, for example, Cooke, Bill and Kothari, Uma (eds) (2001), *Participation. The New Tyranny*, Zed Books, London

3

Planning for participation

This section outlines the basics for making participatory processes work, guiding readers through the key considerations for planning good participatory practice. It is not a detailed 'how to' guide, and is no replacement for experience, but it should help avoid some of the common pitfalls.

We have broken down the delivery of a public participation process into nine stages:

1 Scope
2 Purpose
3 Who to involve
4 Outputs
5 Outcomes
6 Context
7 Final design of the process
8 Institutional response
9 Review

3.1

Scope

The purpose of defining the scope of a participatory exercise is to clarify exactly what the boundaries to the exercise are – what can really be achieved in practice – and thus define an appropriate and achievable purpose.

There are some basic questions to answer in defining scope:

How much can really change? Establishing what can actually change as a result of participation – what is 'up for grabs' – is critical. Defining this will require liaison with the decision-maker(s) and should result in a clear statement from them as to what the participation can change. The International Association of Public Participation calls this the 'Promise to the Public'.

Is participation appropriate at all? There is no point in going any further with participation if, for example:

— nothing can change, no matter what the results of the participation;

— there is no demand or interest from potential participants in getting involved;

— there are insufficient resources to make the process work properly.

What are the risks? Every activity carries risks and working with the public is by its very nature unpredictable. This is partly why participation is being done – to reach something new, something not already known. Good risk management requires that the potential risks are considered from the start. The main risks in participation are to:

— **Reputations:** Everyone involved in participation is risking their reputation, whether in the design and delivery of the participatory exercise, the willingness to participate at all and the willingness to abide by the results (if that is appropriate to the technique used);

— **Resources:** Participation costs money and takes time, including that of skilled personnel;

— **Failure to deliver on promised outcomes:** Even where the desired outcomes seem clearly defined from the start, decision-makers may refuse to accept the outcomes.;

— **Relationships:** A poorly run process can damage relationships between all those involved. Although participation can increase social capital and build capacity if designed to do so, bad participation can damage relationships and undermine confidence.

What level of participation is being sought? Will the exercise:

— Inform those affected (inform);
— Inform those making the decision (consult);
— Change the decision (involve);
— Jointly make the decision (partnership / collaboration);
— Enable others to make decisions and/or take action (empower).

3.2

Purpose of the process

Establishing a clear purpose and getting agreement on it within the commissioning body is the single most important stage of any engagement process. Indeed, no participatory process should proceed without it.

There are, however, good and bad purposes. A good purpose will be highly focused with clear outputs (see Section 3.4) and outcomes (see Section 3.5), which are easy for all to understand. A bad purpose will be poorly defined, with unclear outcomes and open to many different interpretations. A measure of a good purpose is its ability to create a commonly shared understanding of the potential impact of the project.

This does not mean that a good purpose must be narrow in its scope. Indeed, many of the best purposes are very broad. The point is that a purpose must be easy to understand and an accurate reflection of what is going to happen. Much of the best participation depends on the participants coming up with their own agenda for change, which is fine, as long as the agenda can then be implemented satisfactorily and everyone understands what they are part of.

It is essential that all those with an interest or influence over the process in a commissioning organisation are aligned to its purpose. Too often, different purposes exist within the same organisation, sometimes unspoken or assumed, and this only comes to light when the process is underway, which can be both damaging and embarrassing.

Purpose as reference point

Once established, the agreed purpose can provide a reference point throughout the process. This is especially useful if participants are likely to introduce new subjects during the process, as their relevance to the purpose will determine whether they should be included.

A clear purpose enables the commissioning body to ensure that the right mechanisms are in place to transform the process outputs into outcomes. Many processes fail because commissioning institutions do not live up to the expectations placed on them (see Section 3.8). Clarifying the purpose of a process ensures that any commissioning body knows what it is getting into and can then check whether participation is appropriate.

A purpose also gives participants the opportunity to make an informed choice about getting involved. Too often people complain of feeling misled or manipulated. This is often because of mis-communication between the commissioner and participants as to what the process can change. Section 3.3 shows in detail how the purpose will influence who can and should be involved.

Defining the purpose

Defining a clear purpose is not as easy as it sounds. For an organisation to reach a shared understanding requires time, which is almost always in short supply, especially at the start of a process. External circumstances can also affect the purpose and this possibility should be anticipated. For example, the results of forthcoming research or a decision taken by others can both influence the context and the purpose of a participation process. This is a particular risk if the process is not recognised or valued by people more senior than those involved in the detailed design and delivery.

It is important that defining the purpose includes clarity about the desired outputs and outcomes. Outcomes are about what you ultimately want to achieve (for example, consensus on building incinerators); outputs are how you will achieve the outcomes (for example, by providing information in leaflets or holding meetings). Making the distinction clear will contribute to defining a robust and useful purpose.

Creativity and experience

Good participation can have both tangible (for example, policy changes) and intangible (people feel more empowered) impacts. The Institute for Cultural Affairs makes this distinction usefully by what they call the ‘Rational Aims’ and the ‘Experiential Aims’ of a process. Rational Aims are what the group needs to produce (what we describe as outcomes and outputs); Experiential Aims are what the group needs to experience or feel as a result. This distinction is useful to help people think through the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ results that are sought. Both are usually required.

Another type of output is innovation, which may be tangible, intangible, or both. Some processes are excellent at generating new ideas and solutions to challenging issues. If innovation is important this must be made clear, as certain methods are better at creating new ideas than others (see Section 4).

In summary, there are many possible purposes for participation, including to:

— Involve and engage;
— Explore issues and come up with new ideas;
— Network and share ideas and practice;
— Make a decision;

— Inform;
— Achieve any of the core purposes for participation already mentioned (governance, social cohesion and social justice, improved quality of services, capacity building and learning).

Identifying such purposes will involve:

— Liaising internally to clarify what can be changed as a result of the process and what outputs and outcomes are sought;
— Liaising externally with those affected by a process to identify people's interests and concerns.

The key questions to help clarify the purposes of the exercise will be:

— What do you want to have achieved at the end of this process (outcomes)?
— What tangible products do you want to have produced during and after the process (outputs)?

And a checking question:

— What will you have to do with the outputs to ensure you achieve the desired outcomes?

More detail on outputs and outcomes is given in sections 3.4 and 3.5 below.

3.3

Who to involve

The comments on selecting participants above (section 2.4) proposed some general principles for identifying appropriate participants. At the detailed planning stage more specific questions can help to make sure no important sectors are forgotten if the purpose is to be achieved. For example:

— Who is directly responsible for the decisions on the issues?
— Who is influential in the area, community and/or organisation?
— Who will be affected by any decisions on the issue (individuals and organisations)?
— Who runs organisations with relevant interests?
— Who is influential on this issue?
— Who can obstruct a decision if not involved?
— Who has been involved in this issue in the past?
— Who has not been involved, but should have been?

It is useful to consider categories of participants, which may include:

— The public at large – or just a sample
— Particular sections of the public affected by the issue
— Statutory consultees
— Governmental organisations
— Representatives of special interest groups, local or national NGOs, trade associations, unions etc.
— Individuals with particular expertise (technical or personal).

If the aim is to be inclusive and open to whoever wants to be involved the best approach is often to identify an initial list of people and then ask them who else they think should be involved.

Issues in participant selection

Finding the right participants is not only important to ensure that a process works well, it is also essential in creating legitimacy and credibility for the whole process. Issues to consider include:

Who decides who is involved: As the selection of participants can be such a politically charged responsibility, it is useful to make the selection process as transparent as possible. Ideally, the planning / design group for the whole process will make these decisions. It is wise to ensure that the reasons for selection are noted so that any questions about selection can be answered.

Resisting pressure on numbers: There is often internal and external pressure to expand or reduce the list of those involved. The number of people involved should not be arbitrary but based on a coherent understanding of the purpose and the context of the process.

'Usual suspects': Organisations sometimes try to avoid involving the 'usual suspects', which has become a term of denigration for people who habitually give time and effort to what they see as their civic responsibilities. Describing someone as a 'usual suspect' should never be grounds to exclude them from a process any more than it is grounds for including them: people should be involved because they are the right people.

Opponents: It is equally wrong to exclude an individual or an organisation for being a known opponent of a given purpose or process. Indeed, there are often good reasons for keeping opponents 'inside the tent': these can be the people who most need to be involved so that they gain some ownership of the process and perhaps become more likely to support any final outcome (or at least less inclined or able to undermine it by having been excluded).

Everyone does not have to be involved in everything: With good planning, and the agreement of participants, different people can be effectively involved in the parts of the process most relevant to them.

Campaigning organisations: Many campaigning bodies, especially national NGOs, are constantly asked to be involved in participatory exercises. But they do not always see these as the most effective use of their limited resources. In addition, some see the compromise that can be inherent in some participatory processes as conflicting with their primary purposes. It can be useful to consider (and discuss with them) at which stage of the policy process NGOs are best suited to participate: agenda setting, policy development, policy implementation or policy review.

What's In It for Them (WIIFT)? It is important to consider and discuss with participants what they want to get out of the process and what could prevent them from participating. If everyone's motivations can be clarified at the start, there will be less confusion and everyone is more likely to be satisfied with the outcomes. This is especially important in an area that is suffering from consultation fatigue.

There are some excellent guides on who to involve. Some guides and resources are listed in Appendices 3 and 4.

3.4

Outputs: activities and tangible products

It is important to distinguish between the outputs and outcomes of a process. We define outputs as the tangible products of a process, such as reports, meetings and leaflets, which are useful in themselves but do not usually meet the full purpose of the process. Examples of outputs include:

- Information (e.g. new information created as an input to a workshop and/or information from meetings);
- Leaflets;
- Meetings or workshops held with different groups;
- Posters;
- Exhibitions/presentations;
- Surgeries (i.e. one-to-one discussions to share problems, get advice etc);
- Reports;
- New research findings.

Defining the outputs is a crucial part of designing the process because it:

- Helps the process designer choose the right method to get the outputs wanted, as different participatory methods are designed to produce different types of outputs;
- Helps everyone think through how the outputs will achieve the outcomes ("how will this meeting help achieve our overall outcomes?") and therefore;
- Ensures the right outputs are produced at the right time.

Outputs can be seen as the building blocks that help to create the desired outcomes and the success of an exercise can therefore never be judged only on the outputs: the holding of a meeting does not necessarily mean full achievement of the objectives of the process.

Some outputs do, however, have intrinsic value regardless of whether they contribute to the overall outcomes. Exchanging information, for example, can help to build trust among participants even if the information itself is of no particular value. Similarly, simply having a meeting can sometimes be more important than what the meeting achieves because of the opportunity to build or strengthen relationships. Good process design means keeping an eye out for intangible as well as tangible gains.

3.5

Outcomes: overall results and impacts

Outcomes are the fundamental difference that a process makes, its overall results and impacts. Outcomes are more specific than ‘purpose’ and are the clear statement of exactly what is sought from the process. Possible outcomes include:

— Improved personal and / or working relationships;
— Wider circle of responsibility for decisions and actions;
— Agreement on purpose and direction of a project or programme, or new policy;
— Identification of issues, benefits and drawbacks;
— Generation of new ideas;
— New formal partnerships;
— Defusing conflict to enable progress to be made;
— Creation / enhancement of social capital;
— Improved services for people;
— Policy change;
— Cost savings;
— Capacity building and learning (individual and organisational);
— Building overt support for a new idea or initiative;
— Behaviour change.

Different methods are designed to produce different types of outcome, so identifying the desired outcomes helps to identify which method is most likely to deliver those outcomes. This is therefore a crucial part of the planning process. Identifying and agreeing the desired outcomes from a process helps:

— Choose the right technique to get the outcomes wanted;
— Ensure that overall objectives are not lost sight of as the process goes on;
— Deal with the likely short-term impacts and results so that you are best placed to get what is wanted in the long term.

Primary and secondary outcomes

It is useful to differentiate between ‘primary’ (essential) and ‘secondary’ (nice to have) outcomes. For example, a primary outcome may be policy change and a secondary one could be improved understanding among participants, or vice versa. Doing this work at the start should help to keep the main focus of the exercise clear as it progresses, and stop it being sidetracked into secondary concerns. Prioritising secondary outcomes at the expense of primary outcomes is often hard to avoid because of a subconscious desire to meet immediate needs, such as networking, but it will lead to frustration at the end if there has been no progress on the main purpose of the project.

Short and long term outcomes

It is useful to differentiate between the outcomes of the specific process itself, and the longer-term outcomes that may depend on decisions and actions outside the scope of the specific process, but which the process may affect. This should enable proper planning of how exactly the outcomes from the process are taken forward and acted upon effectively.

3.6

Context

A good participatory process must be well embedded within its context. A useful way to consider the context is as the landscape you are operating within. It may not be necessary to know all the details of a particular area, but you must know where you are going (the purpose), where there may be obstacles or easy access (the context) and have the equipment that will get you there (planning, methods etc.).

Understanding the wider context is important to ensure that it:

— Links with other relevant activities going on at the same time;
— Is responsive to participant needs / sensitivities by appreciating their wider role;
— Builds on previous experience and learns lessons from the past;
— Does not duplicate other activities;
— Progresses quickly and is relevant.

The factors that are likely to affect the success of any participatory process, and the choice of method, are likely to include:

Decision-making environment – you will want to know about:

— The interest, commitment and/or involvement of key decision-makers in the process;
— How this current participatory process fits into the relevant decision-making systems (e.g. timing, required documents, etc.).

History – you will want to know about:

— Past participatory exercises on the same project / programme, including how they went (e.g. conflict, agreement), and what happened as a result;
— Other relevant past activities which may affect planned discussions.

Characteristics and capabilities of participants – you will want to know about:

— Sectors of society which are unlikely to participate (e.g. from disadvantaged neighbourhoods) but which would add value to the process if they did and how best to reach and support their involvement;
— Existing relationships between key participants (e.g. antagonism, close alliances, etc), including relationships with facilitators, relevant decision-makers etc;
— The diversity of experience of participation among participants. Those with more experience, skills and confidence could dominate proceedings. The process may need to be designed to deal with these differences if they are significant (e.g. different sessions for different interests, with all brought together at the end). Alternatively, the process could be designed to suit the most – or least – experienced;
— The cultural diversity of participants which may affect, for example, people's willingness to meet all together (e.g. men and women together), and/or affect the way different participants are used to debating in public with others (e.g. those with formal committee experience may expect a chair and formal debating procedures);
— Language – do you need to provide interpreters to ensure you get the people you need there, and whether it needs to be made clear on any promotional literature that a translator will be used;
— Any barriers to people working together, e.g. gender barriers and whether men will be able to work with all women groups.

Other relevant activities – you will want to know which other relevant current, recent or planned activities are going on so that information can be shared, any duplication reduced and any outputs are disseminated and dovetailed (if that is appropriate). This could include other activities that are:

— Covering the same subject area (e.g. the same programme, or issue);
— Covering the same geographical area;
— Involving the same participants.

Once you have a good understanding of the context it is important to realise that all participants will have their own interpretation of the context within which they are operating. Time will probably be needed to allow participants to develop a shared understanding of the context for the specific participatory process.

3.7

Final design

When all the key issues have been broadly considered a detailed design will be needed for the whole participatory process. It is at this stage that the decisions about timing, numbers, costs, techniques, use of results etc. will finally be made.

This section provides only a brief summary. More detail can be found in the references and training courses listed in Appendix 3.

Stages of the design process

Perhaps the biggest barrier to good public participation is the time needed to effectively design and deliver a process. Too often, unrealistic timescales are set by commissioners, especially in the public sector. There are six main steps to detailed process planning, all of which take time to complete:

Step 1. Set up planning / design group

Step 2. Agree project plan

Step 3. Logistics

Step 4. Communications

Step 5. Planning the follow-up to the participatory activities

Step 6. Final thoughts

Step 1. Set up planning / design group

Even the simplest project will benefit from a formal planning group to ensure that the process planning is taken seriously and programmed into people's work schedules. The group can also be used to get early buy-in from those who need to take account of the results of the process (sometimes a separate 'executive group' may be needed for major processes to ensure senior management involvement).

The planning / design group can be the same people as those responsible for delivering the process, or a separate delivery team may be established, in which case very close working relationships need to be established. Both planning and delivery teams may involve external contractors as well as internal colleagues. External participation professionals, such as facilitators, can prove valuable if the issue is likely to be controversial, when the independence of the facilitation can become an issue.

There are many different participation practitioners and it can be quite daunting knowing who to choose. One respondent to this research suggested that "At present it is extremely difficult for those commissioning participation work to know whether they are getting what they need or even a good deal".

Facilitators may come from many different academic backgrounds, or may have been trained within different conventions. There is, as yet, no formally recognised accreditation system that can guarantee the quality of any professional, although the International Association of Facilitators does have a certification scheme.

Whoever is selected to deliver a process should be involved as early as possible. For example, facilitators are not just the people hired to run meetings, they can also help to plan processes and provide realistic guidance about what can be achieved and how to do it. In fact, many professional facilitators will not run meetings unless they have been involved in the planning process.

Personal recommendation can work well, but knowledge about facilitators tends to be limited to certain subject areas or approaches. Some factors to consider in choosing a facilitator are:

Subject knowledge – while facilitators do not need to be experts in the subject area, they need to know enough to facilitate the debate and take the process forward;

Reputation and experience, especially in similar circumstances;

Training and **methods** used (see Section 4);

Appropriate style – while many facilitators may be able to deal with a wide range of contexts, some facilitators may be more experienced and comfortable, for example, dealing with a professional high status forum rather than a small local community meeting (and vice versa).

In some processes it may be necessary to have support from other professionals, such as lawyers or planners, who understand the system being worked within. Local organisations may be able to provide these specialist services (as they may be able to provide participation practitioners) through, for example, local facilitators' networks, law centres or planning aid networks.

Step 2. Agree project plan

A project plan will include details of:

Timeline – remember to allow time for translating if that is required, and that time is needed between events for further work to be completed to take to the next stage;

Budget – an adequate budget is essential, including setting aside time for staff who need to be involved;

Key dates and actions – including when final decisions will be made, who by, and how this links to the participatory process;

Methods – the process may use a range of different methods at different stages and careful planning is needed to ensure these work well together to make the overall process successful.

Be realistic about how long things take and always allow more rather than less time for planning and for people to get involved. As soon as you can, forewarn participants that a process is in the offing so that they can set time aside to get involved.

Step 3. Logistics

Participatory processes require a lot of practical arrangements, especially in terms of briefing materials and venues.

Briefing materials – decide what materials the stakeholders will need to participate effectively. If a written document is produced, the language must be user friendly and avoid jargon wherever possible. Breaking information into small manageable chunks can help, as long as the overall messages remain coherent.

Venues – suitable venues will be needed for any workshops or public meetings. Venues can be problematic as many of our civic buildings are not designed for the more modern techniques, and many of the centres which are more suitable can lack the gravitas or be too expensive. The important point is to be aware of the various needs of the specific process and ensure that the venue can meet them (e.g. access for people with disabilities).

Step 4. Communications

Communication is important throughout a process: from the start to get people interested, during the process to ensure people are kept informed about what is happening and at the end to ensure that people are aware of what difference the process has made.

Individual invitations are often the best way to get people involved. However, if you are communicating with a wider audience you may wish to use:

— Mail shots;
— Leaflet drops;
— Advertising in local and national newspapers;
— Trade press or the newsletters of interest groups/representative bodies/trade associations.

Some formal processes (e.g. land use planning, environmental impact assessment, etc) have specific requirements for these communications.

Step 5. Planning follow-up to the participatory activities

The initial planning needs to consider, right from the start:

How the results of the process will be used – how it will feed into decision-making systems, and how the final outcomes will be reported back to the participants and others;

How you will know whether the process has been a success – what the success criteria should be for the process (e.g. specific changes to policy wording, a new team set up to work on something). 'Success criteria' are simply a reformulation of the original objectives of the process, but it can be useful at this stage to revisit those and possibly redraft them to make them easier to communicate to others.

Step 6. Final thoughts

Constraints on the detailed design – every participatory process has to operate within practical and political constraints including money, time, skills, numbers of people, accessibility, types of venues available, characteristics of participants. It will help to identify which constraints are genuinely fixed and those that may be negotiable.

Too much design – for some processes too much design can be inappropriate, either because it stifles creativity or because it makes the process too formal. The role of design is to ensure that the focus and structure of the process is appropriate to its context, people and purpose, not to ensure that it goes like clockwork with no room for spontaneity.

Ethics of the process – it is essential that processes explicitly avoid manipulating or abusing potential participants. Process ground rules need to be set to establish a clear ethical framework for the process (e.g. non-attribution or confidentiality; being aware of child protection, minority and disability issues).

3.8

Institutional response

An institutional response can be the most significant change that occurs following a participation process. It might be a policy change (e.g. we will change the routing of a road) or a reaction (e.g. we will not change the route of the road because…). Any such change requires agreement to change from the institution itself and preparation within the institution.

It is essential that explicit links are made between the participatory process and the location of the decision that will affect future action, if the decision is outside the participatory process. This will require clarifying how the institutional response to the outputs and outcomes of the participatory process will be managed.

The nature of the systems and processes that will make the final decision will affect which outputs and outcomes should be identified for the process, so they need to fit easily into wider systems. These issues will also, therefore, affect the choice of participatory methods that can be used.

Clarifying the process for gaining the institutional response is vitally important because:

— It establishes a commitment to change from the outset by recognising that some response will need to be made;
— It ensures that mechanisms are in place to deal with the outputs that come from the participatory process and ensures that these outputs can be dealt with effectively and within a given timescale;
— It allows those running the process to explain to participants exactly what will be done with their effort, how the process will be managed and how its outcomes will affect / change things;
— It helps clarify what is and is not discussed (there is no point discussing things that really cannot be changed);
— It helps clarify the roles of the different participants, as it clarifies what is expected of them all at different stages of the process.

Deciding the institutional response will require thinking through:

— What to do with the outputs from the participatory process when they arrive?
— What has been promised (explicitly or implicitly) to participants and others (externally and internally)?
— What are the expectations (internally and externally) in terms of how the results are taken forward?
— How will we communicate to others what we have done with the results of the process?
— How do we dovetail the results of the participatory process into mainstream decision-making processes and how might these need to change to enable the results to be acted on?

Specific problems affecting the links between the outcomes of the participatory process and existing decision-making systems include:

Agreeing how to respond to participation is not prioritised by decision-makers – other urgent demands may divert decision-makers' attention from agreeing how the institutional response to a participatory process will be made. The early involvement of decision-makers is essential in getting the individuals 'up-to-speed' on the issues in question (e.g. through establishing an 'executive group' early in the process), so that when they are required to respond at a later stage they can do so effectively and quickly.

Confusing participation with consultation – this results in confusion about what sort of institutional response is required and expected.

Wider political tensions – including issues of:
— Accountability: is the decision being devolved to legitimate process?
— Leadership: how does the process relate to conventional political leadership?
— Democracy: how does the process relate to the role of elected representatives?

Inability / unwillingness to do what the participatory process demands – it may not always be possible for all the conclusions of a participatory process to be acted upon immediately (or ever, in some cases).

If, for whatever reasons, it is likely that it will prove impossible for an institution to respond in the way participants in a process anticipate or desire, this needs to be made clear as soon as possible. It is the job of those steering the process to recognise this and decide how to deal with it; in fact, the process should never get underway in the first place if its likely outcomes are completely unrealistic.

Raising expectations, requesting the investment of time and energy and then ignoring the outcomes is a recipe for cynicism at best and civil disobedience at worst.

3.9

Review of the process

Participation is an emerging field, so evaluation and review of practice is very important. Indeed, formal evaluation is emerging as an integral part of good public participation management for on-going projects.

Planning a review process in advance is also important to ensure that the learning is gathered from the work as it happens. This enables those involved (and others) to judge whether or not the process has been successful. Evaluation can be an independent process working alongside the participatory process, or part of the management of the process (see below).

Coverage of the review

Success criteria for the review will need to be developed. These are likely to include:

— Whether the process met its own objectives and originally agreed purpose / aims;
— Whether the process met explicit and implicit demands from participants;
— Whether the process met standards of good practice in participatory working.

In addition, the review may wish to cover:

— Whether the level of participation (e.g. consultation or partnership) was appropriate;
— Whether the methods and techniques were appropriate and worked as expected;
— Whether the level and range of responses from participants legitimised the exercise;
— Whether the costs were as expected and reasonable (staff time, money etc);
— Whether what was produced and organised (outputs e.g. documents, meetings) was appropriate and worked well;
— Whether the ways in which the responses from the process (e.g. recommendations) were dealt with were appropriate and effective;
— What was achieved during and after the process (outcomes).

Since some of the outcomes are likely to be intangible (e.g. improved relationships, a sense of empowerment etc.), it is useful to set benchmarks which these can be measured against. Ideally, both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used: quantitative methods involve collecting numbers for measurement and judgement; qualitative methods involve collecting data from people to allow description and interpretation.

Any review process will include a basic description of what took place, for which the headings for this section can provide a framework (i.e. scope, purpose, context, who was involved, outputs, outcomes, institutional response).

An evaluation only works if it includes the perspectives of all those involved in the process – including whoever is leading the process, decision-makers and the participants. For example, one participative process was initially judged a ‘complete’ success; when questioned on the subject of establishing buy-in to the initiative the organisation commissioning the process responded that “What’s come out of the workshops has been a document… and everyone feels they own the document”. When a key participant was asked, he responded “If there are several stakeholders that feel they’ve got a degree of ownership over the decisions then I think they were the ones manipulated the most”.

The views of the participants can be the most useful, but also the hardest to get if not gathered at the time.

On-going review

For on-going participative initiatives it can be very useful to have a system of management that continually checks whether the process is meeting the purpose agreed at the start. This can happen through the regular design / delivery team meetings. This approach is especially useful if the team undertaking the analysis has a broad knowledge of other methods available so that if the current approach is not working an alternative method can be used.

An iterative approach enables a process to adapt to new and unforeseen circumstances. No matter how much planning is put in, when working with participatory processes the unpredictable is inevitable (be it new political agendas or participant responses). The trick is to have an iterative and flexible approach to managing a process, which helps you respond to the unpredictable.

Risk management

A robust review process can be an effective form of risk management. It helps map out the views and perspectives held at the start of a process and raises awareness of the challenges that the process may face.

Inclusion of a review process can increase costs (if separate from the management process), which can be difficult to justify when cost savings are sought. However, a robust review process should be considered an essential part of the management required in any process operating in an inherently uncertain environment. The costs of not accounting for the risk and being faced with things going wrong, as often happens when there is insufficient time for proper reviews as the process unfolds, may be far higher than review costs will be.

Sharing learning

For participatory practice to develop, learning must be shared as effectively and widely as possible.

We hope that all readers of this document will communicate their own experience and lessons with others in the Involve network via the Involve website (www.involving.org).

4

Methods for participation

This section is the starting point for exploring a variety of participatory methods and how they can be used. It is not meant to be a guide to choosing the right way to involve people, a list of all existing methods, or a 'how to' guide. The list is simply to illustrate some of the participatory methods currently being used in the UK and to cover what they can be used for (in terms of potential outputs and outcomes) and their strengths and weaknesses. It also gives some ideas of the scale at which certain methods work best and some general cost guidelines.

Every practitioner interviewed for this research agreed that the choice of method is less important in determining the success or failure of a process than the institutional context, the resources committed, and the detailed design.

All methods have their strengths and weaknesses and the key is to select the right one for the particular purpose and context, rather than to choosing one method as a 'favourite' and using it all the time. Participatory processes usually combine several methods to achieve an aim. For example, an Open Space event might be run as part of a larger Dialogue process in order to get people thinking creatively; or a Citizens' Panel may be combined with the more in-depth deliberations of a Citizens' Jury to articulate and develop public attitudes on a particular issue.

Participatory methods have developed from a variety of fields including various academic disciplines, conflict resolution, marketing, public relations, social research, community and international development. They have been applied in many fields including health, land use planning, housing, environmental and natural resource management, among many others.

In practice, and unsurprisingly, methods from certain fields tend to produce certain outputs. For example, those from conflict resolution (such as Stakeholder Dialogue) are good at building relationships and finding common ground, while those from marketing, such as Focus Groups, are good at identifying existing wants and needs. In addition, practitioners originally trained in certain approaches tend to value those outputs above others. For example, a facilitator trained in Stakeholder Dialogue will run a Focus Group very differently from the way a facilitator with a marketing background would run it.

In other words, the shape, use and results of methods are determined by who is using them, as well as by the nature of the methods themselves and the context, purpose etc. This is why any discussion of participation that focuses on methods alone is liable to be misleading and ultimately unsuccessful, both for those organising the process and for those participating in it.

4.1

Rationale for selection of methods

Some of the methods described in this section are implicitly or explicitly owned by certain organisations. We want to stress that the inclusion of a certain method here should not be seen as an endorsement by Involve, nor should the omission of a particular method mean that it is somehow deficient.

The reality is that there are innumerable different methods being used, and many greater or lesser variations of them, to the point where it is sometimes hard to know where one method ends and another begins. In addition, new ones are being invented all the time, so no list can ever be comprehensive. A longer list of methods can be found in *Beyond the Ballot – 57 democratic innovations from around the world*, published by the POWER Inquiry.

The key to success is to understand the broad range and types of methods being used, what they are being used for and why you might choose one rather than another in a particular context and for a particular purpose.

Methods covered in this guidance have been selected according to the following three criteria:

— Involve seeks to create systems which **enable people to influence the decisions and actions that affect their lives.** This guidance is therefore focused on those forms of participation which our analysis has shown are best able to achieve this. In particular we have selected methods that:

  — genuinely empower people;
  — encourage deliberation and/or;
  — build citizenship skills.

— For this exercise, the focus is on significant methods that are often seen as 'stand alone' initiatives (e.g. Citizens' Juries or Stakeholder Dialogue). However, no single method can actually 'stand alone' – it is always part of a wider process. The methods here have therefore been selected in part to illustrate the need to explicitly see these methods as part of wider systems and processes.

— The methods described here are all used in the UK. Methods used more widely may be added in forthcoming versions of this guidance.

The following methods are covered in detail in the remainder of this section:

Appreciative Inquiry
Citizens' Juries
Citizens' Panels
Community Empowerment Networks
Consensus Building/Dialogue
Consensus Conference
Deliberative Mapping
Deliberative Polling
Democs
Electronic processes
Future Search Conference
Participatory Appraisal
Participatory Strategic Planning (ICA)
Planning for Real
Open Space Technology
User Panels
Youth Empowerment Initiatives

4.2

Key parameters in assessing methods

Deciphering the benefits and limitations of different participatory methods can be difficult. The following framework has been developed to provide an at-a-glance overview. Each parameter relates to a key factor that should be considered when planning a participatory process. Reading the detailed description of each method is essential to understand what the initial 'scores' mean in practice.

Participation is not an exact science and the scores that we have given each method are only indications. A skilled practitioner can often make a method work in a situation for which it was never designed; equally, an appropriate method used badly will fail to live up to what our scales indicate.

The parameters use both scales and tick boxes, and we have deliberately weighted some to reflect important distinctions. For example, most methods that are able to involve 200 participants can also handle 300, whereas methods that deal well with 20 participants are more often than not unable to cope with 120. Using a normal scale in this case would obscure important distinctions at the lower end.

In summary, the key parameters are:

Suitable number of participants;
Roles of participants;
Budget;
Length of process;
Types of outcomes;
Where on the spectrum of participation the method works best.

Each of these parameters is explained in more detail below.

Suitable number of participants. How many participants can the method involve effectively?

There is usually a trade-off between involving as many participants as possible and having a high quality process, as the opportunity for each individual to speak and influence a process decreases as the number of participants increases. Many processes are only effective for a limited group of people. This tends to be especially true of methods that revolve around deliberation, which requires a lot of personal interaction and reflection. There are also situations where involving too few participants is counter-productive, for example if the approach relies on a statistically representative sample of a population.

Please note that, where this scale is used in this guidance, the numbers refer to those participants who are directly involved and does not include those that are reached through media broadcasts of events, reports or other outreach activities.

Roles of participants. What type of participant does the method require?

Most methods have been designed with a particular sort of participant in mind. Bringing in other kinds of participants may make processes less effective. What type of participants you want will depend on your objectives and goals.

Self-selected participants (anyone who wants to join can) are appropriate at, for example, community planning workshops where you want to engage the community as widely as possible;

Stakeholder representatives participate as representatives of the views and values of specific interest groups;

Demographically representative samples are selected to provide a sample of a larger population. (See Section 4.2);

Specific individuals can be targeted as participants in order to bring their skills, knowledge or connections into the process.

Budget. How much does a process of this type typically cost?

The estimates we give are for 'typical' processes. There are many reasons why it might cost more, including reliance on consultants or involving an unusual number of participants. Conversely, it is sometimes possible to do it more cheaply, particularly if you have in-house skills, access to venues or voluntary support. However, as a rule it is best to assume that you get what you pay for.

Length of process. How much time does this method require to be used effectively?

This scale reflects the time the method itself requires, not the planning and organising required around it. As a rule of thumb, to plan the use of a method properly you should allow at least twice as much time as the method itself requires, although for processes running over many years this is not necessarily the case.

Types of outcomes that the method can produce. Does the method match the outputs and outcomes required?

The type of outcomes required should influence the choice of method:

- Some methods are good for discovering existing opinions about an issue;
- Methods that involve deliberation usually lead to the creation of better informed opinions;
- Some methods are better than others at revealing common interests and thereby improving relationships;
- Some methods are good for creating a shared vision, which is especially important within organisations or where you want to build community cohesion;
- Some methods are also excellent at producing new ideas and visions for change;
- Finally, some methods empower participants by giving them skills and/or confidence to take a more active part in decision-making.

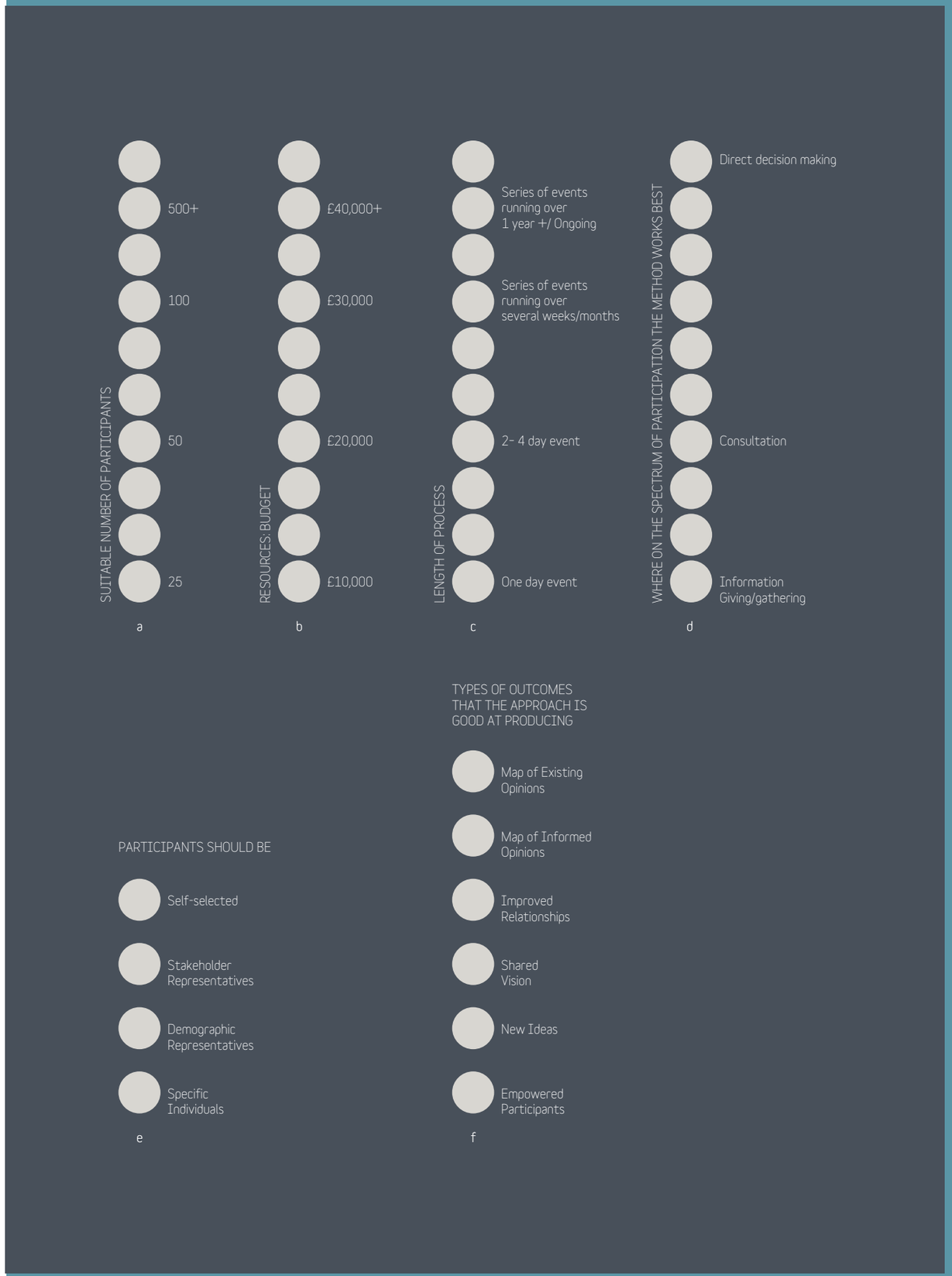
Where on the spectrum of participation the method works best.

There is a spectrum of participation which runs from the simple giving and gathering of information at one end to direct participation in decision-making at the other. Every method is best used at some places on this scale and avoided at others. For example, a method that involves a small and unrepresentative group of participants should not be used for decision-making because it will not have a mandate.

Information giving/gathering. Methods here can be used to understand people's interests and priorities or to raise awareness of issues;

Consultation is when participants are able to contribute their views but cannot make decisions;

Direct decision-making is where the participants themselves are able to take decisions.



4.3

Alphabetical listing of methods

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach for creating a vision and planning to achieve it. AI does this through understanding and appreciating the past, as a basis for imagining the future.

Description: AI builds a vision for the future using questions to focus people's attention on success. Questions often revolve around what people enjoy about an area, their aspirations for the future, and their feelings about their communities. The questions are designed to encourage people to tell stories from their own experience of what works. By seeing what works and exploring why, it is possible to imagine and construct further success, ensuring that a vision of the future is created with a firm basis in reality.

Origin: Developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastra at Case Western University in the US. They wanted to challenge the problem-solving approach to the management of change, by showing that organisations are not machines to be fixed but organisms to be appreciated.

Used for: Creating energy by identifying and building on what works and involving lots of people through outreach by the core group.

Who participates? AI can work in various ways. In the UK it usually consists of a small core group to develop and test appreciative questions. They then put the questions to family, friends and sometimes strangers.

Cost: Usually between £5,000 and £20,000.

Time requirements: The appreciative questions are developed, tested and analysed in two to four half- or full-day workshops. The results are then presented to the wider community in a larger event. Analysing the replies to all the questions can be time-consuming. AI works best when it is run as a long term process of change.

When should you use?
- When you want to energise a depressed community or organisation;
- When you want to build a vision but do not want it seen as 'pie in the sky'.

When should you not use?
- When it is important to involve all key stakeholders;
- If you cannot recruit a good core group;
- When there is no interest in sharing responsibility and decision-making.

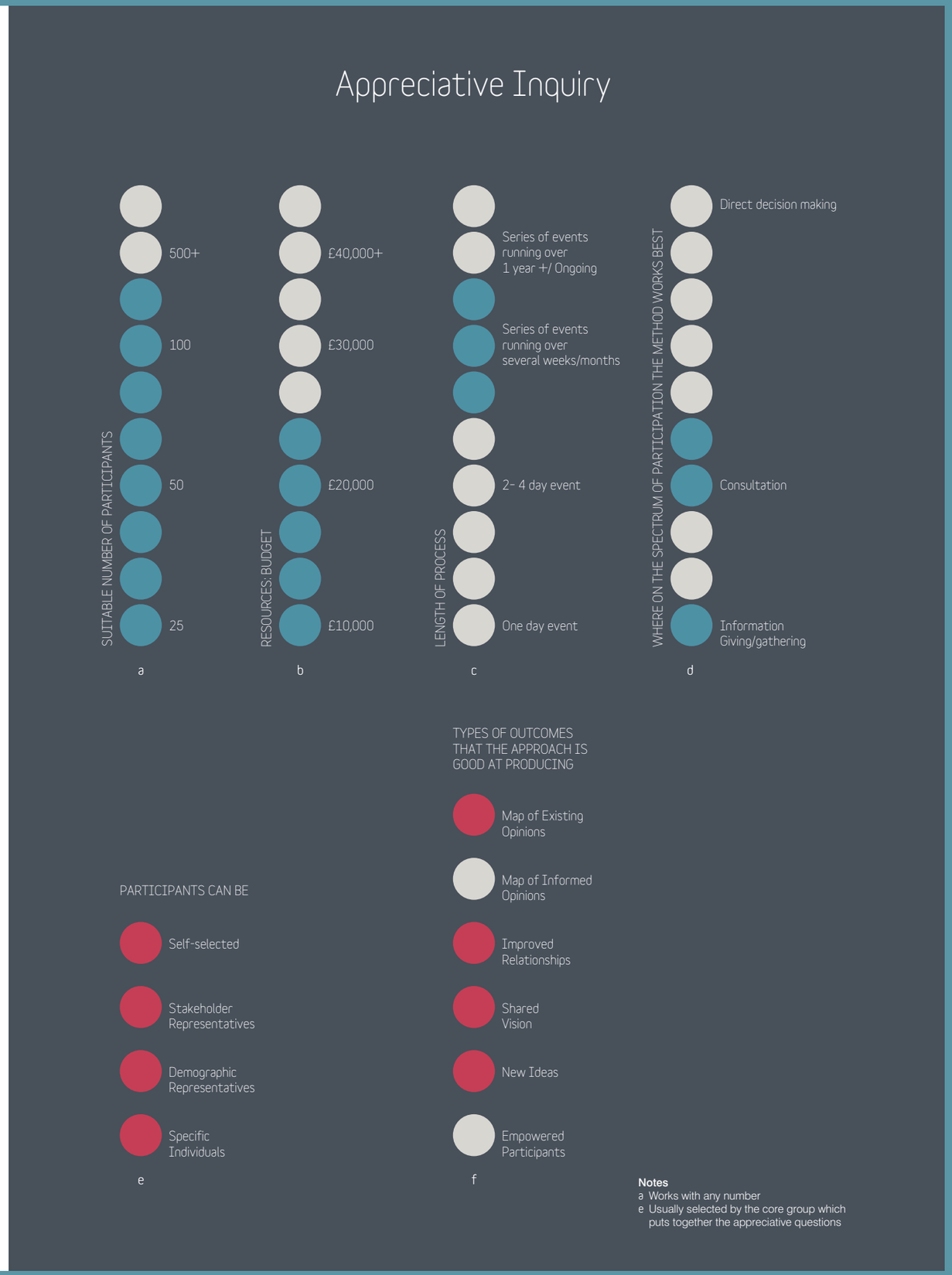
Can it be used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:
- Community involvement;
- Easy to include the people who normally don't take part;
- It builds on what has worked in the past;
- Vision;
- Partnership working. AI facilitates the development of partnerships by helping partners to identify the values and behaviour they want the partnership to have.

Weaknesses:
- AI is a philosophy first and a method second, so it is fairly loose;
- Some people view the lack of direct attention to problems as a weakness;
- AI pays little attention to who should be involved.

Can deliver:
- Energy;
- Shared vision.

Won't deliver:
- Action, unless an action planning element is added on.



AI Example: Ryedale Community Plan

The Local Authority in Ryedale, North Yorkshire wanted to base their decisions on a vision for the future that was shared with the community. In September 2002 a core group was set up with the help of the New Economics Foundation. A dozen local activists and council officers were trained in using appreciative questions to identify people's important values, aspirations and hopes for the future. The questions were carefully worded so that solutions were emphasised and not just problems.

These questions were then used in conversations, meetings, classrooms and even on a specially set-up phone-in line. Following this, the core group read four hundred and thirty scripts and drew out the recurring themes and issues. This process culminated in the drafting of vision statements around six identified themes. As far as possible, these propositions incorporated the exact words of the people who had taken part.

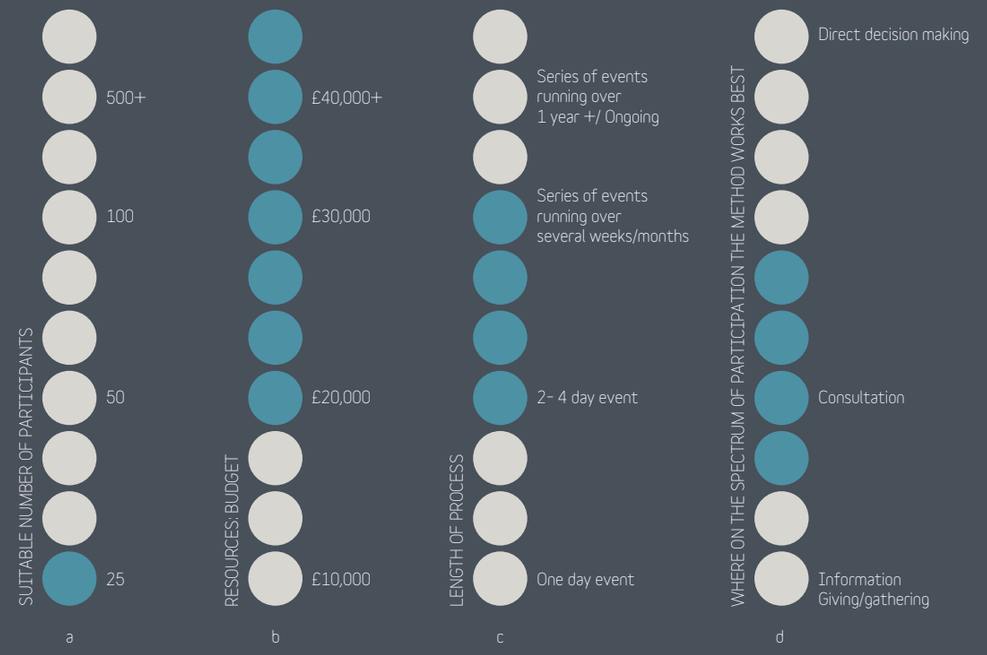
Next, the vision statements were taken back to those who had been involved in the process, giving them the opportunity to make changes before the vision became a part of the community plan. The final output was an agreed vision of Ryedale's Community Plan.

Contact Anne Radford
Telephone 020 7633 9630
Fax 020 7633 9670
Email AnneLondon@aol.com
Web www.aradford.co.uk

Online resources
www.appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu
Case Western Reserve University where AI was first developed

Publications
Griffin, T. (Ed.) (2003), *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: A Practitioners Guide for Leading Large Group Change*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco
Whitney, D. and Trosten-Bloom, A. (2002), *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*, Berret-Koehler, San Francisco

Citizens' Juries



Citizens' juries consist of a small panel of non-specialists, modelled to resemble a criminal jury, who carefully examine an issue of public significance and deliver a "verdict".

Description: A Citizens' Jury is an independent forum for members of the public to examine and discuss an important issue of public policy. It is deliberative in the sense that the Jury receives information about the issues in question. This information includes a full range of opinions, often in the form of worked up options, on what should be done about the issue. Much of this information is presented through witness presentations followed by question and answer sessions. Juries are not designed to create a consensus amongst the jurors, but there does tend to be a momentum towards consensus. In a four-day process, day one is largely about bringing jurors up to speed on the issue. Days two and three tend to focus on witness presentations about different ways of dealing with the issue. Most of the fourth day is spent by the Jury developing its recommendations.

Origin: Social Research – the model used in the UK is a mixture of the US Citizens' Jury developed by the Jefferson Center, and the German Pannungszelle (planning cell) developed by the University of Wuppertal.

Used for: Live public policy issues where opinion is sharply divided and policy makers cannot decide how to proceed. This deliberative model creates an informed public opinion about what they feel policy makers should do. Although originally designed for local communities to tackle issues of local concern, Juries are now starting to be used to look at national issues. Juries are decision-advising rather than decision-making tools. They are about enhancing representative democracy, not direct democracy.

Who participates? Most Juries include a 'best fit' (demographic) sample of 12 to 16 members of the public. They are brought together to examine both written and verbal evidence about different perspectives on the issue they are deliberating on.

Cost: A Citizens Jury usually costs between £20,000 and £40,000. The difference in the costing usually relates to how long the process is designed to last and the exact nature of the methodology. The original type of Jury introduced into the UK by IPPR and the Kings Fund tends to last for four days and involves much preparation time. This version would be at the higher end of the costing.

Time requirements: The set up time for a jury can be anywhere from two to four months.

When should you use?
- When you have a 'live' contentious issue where the way forward has not been decided;
- Juries usually work best where feasible policy options have been developed by policy makers about how to respond to a problem.

When should you not use?
- When you have already decided how to proceed on an issue;
- When the issue is not of significant interest to the public;
- When you seek consensus.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:
- Gives an informed public opinion about how a difficult issue should be tackled;
- Enables decision-makers to understand what informed members of the public might regard as realistic solutions;
- The results can also be used to generate wider public debate about the issues.

Weaknesses:
- Only involves a very small number of people, which means that the wider public may still hold a less informed view;
- A challenge for policy makers is how to reconcile these two different public voices to create wider public ownership of the jurors' recommendations;
- It can also be difficult for policy makers to decide how to proceed if they reject the Jury's recommendations.

Can deliver:
- Decision-making that better reflects the public's views;
- A high profile example of public engagement.

Won't deliver:
Wider democratic engagement and empowerment.

Contact Office for Public Management
252B Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8XG
Telephone 020 7239 7800
Fax 020 7837 5800
Email office@opm.co.uk
Web www.opm.co.uk

Publications
Declan Hall and John Stewart, *Citizens' Juries in Local Government: report for the LGMB on the pilot projects*, Local Government Management Board, 1996
Coote, A. and Lenaghan, J. (1997), *Citizens' Juries: Theory into Practice*, Institute for Public Policy Research, London.

Online resources
www.jefferson-center.org
Jefferson Center (US)

Example: DTI Citizens' Jury 2004

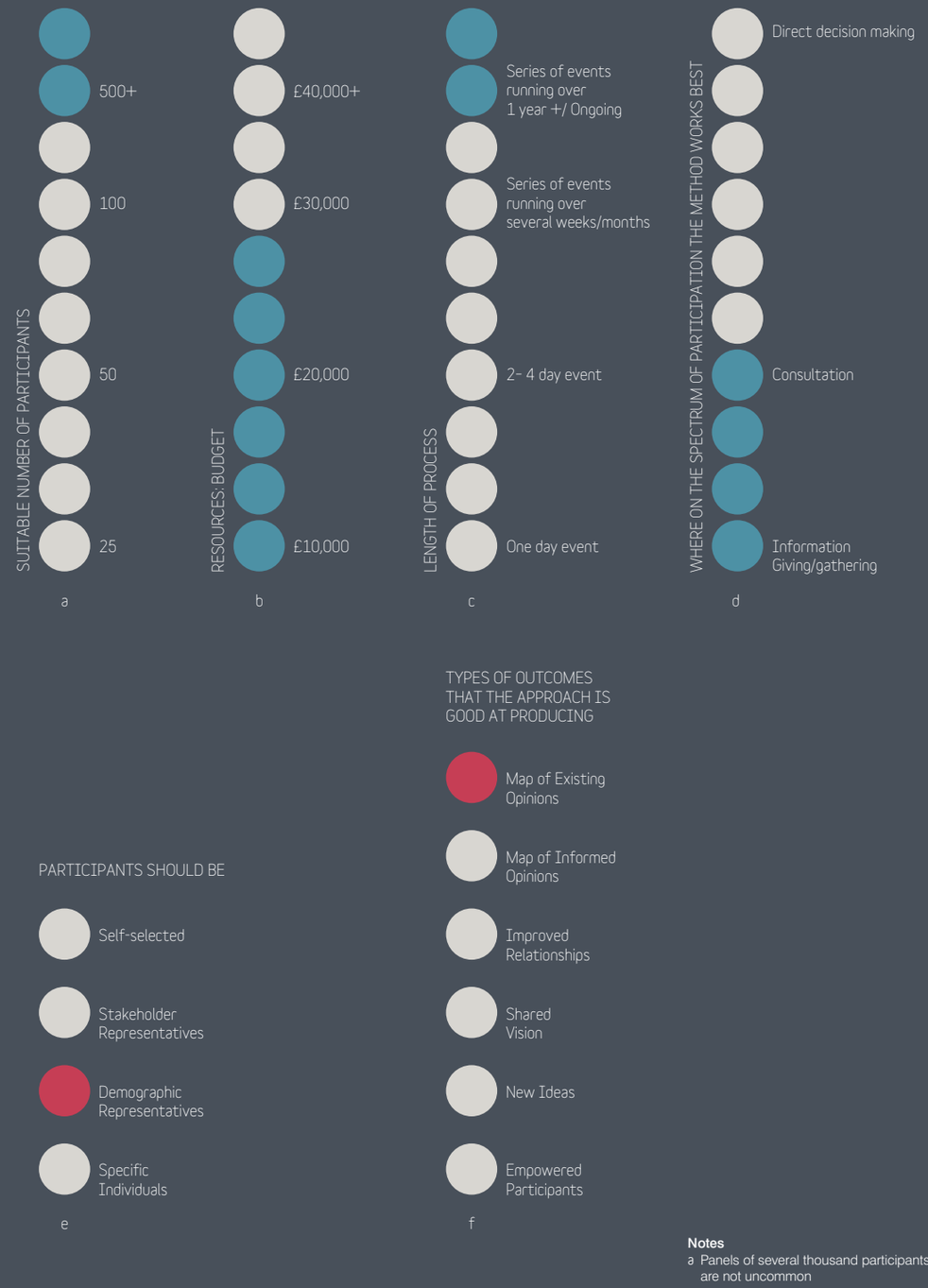
The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women, Patricia Hewitt, wanted to commission a Citizens' Jury to help to develop policies that will support people juggling family and work commitments. The Office of Public Management worked with the Department of Trade and Industry to make it happen.

Sixteen jurors, broadly representative of the wider population, were recruited. Witnesses came from ten organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry, Boots plc and the Equal Opportunities Commission. During the four-day jury, the jurors also requested an additional witness from Sure Start to provide information on the government's childcare agenda.

The DTI asked some jurors to keep a diary of their experience and also videotaped the process - to be able to share the process with other colleagues. The diaries also showed how the mindset of the jurors shifted during the four days and provided a very personal insight into the issues being explored. For example, one juror wrote about the difficulty of juggling her own responsibilities as a mother so that she could attend the jury each day.

Jurors had some scepticism about whether the jury would influence Government policy. However, its influence is already evident in elements of the Chancellor's pre-budget speech at the end of 2004 - the proposed increase in maternity pay is in keeping with the thrust of the jurors' recommendations. All the jurors were enthusiastic about the process and at the end said they would be willing to be contacted by the DTI in the future to help develop policy further.

Citizens' Panels



Notes
a Panels of several thousand participants are not uncommon

A Citizens' Panel is a large, demographically representative group of citizens' used to assess public preferences and opinions.

Description: Citizens' panels are made up of a representative sample of a local population and are used by statutory agencies, especially local authorities, to identify local issues and consult service users and non-users. Potential participants are generally recruited through random sampling of the electoral roll or door-to-door recruitment. They are then selected so that membership is made up of a representative profile of the local population in terms of age and gender.

Once they agree to participate, panel members, or sections of it, participate in surveys at intervals over the course of their membership and, where appropriate, in further in-depth research such as Focus Groups. The types of questions to ask the Panel requires careful thought to ensure that they are relevant to the participants. Panel members need to be clear about their role on the panel. Make sure you tell them what is expected of them from the start, as some people think a 'panel' will involve face-to-face discussions, where in fact questionnaires or telephone polling are the most common panel techniques. Members also need to be told how frequently they will be consulted, how long they will be on the panel etc.

Origin: Citizens' Panels have evolved from Opinion Polls and Market Research.

Used for: Panels can be used to assess service needs, identify local issues and determine the appropriateness of service developments. Large panels can also be used to target specific groups for their views on issues. Citizens' Panels measure the views of a large body of people over a period of time, thereby assessing the impact of developments.

Who participates? Citizens' Panels can range in size from a few hundred to several thousand people. With more than 1,000 participants it is often possible to identify sub groups of panel members who can be surveyed about issues specific to their needs or interests. The Panel needs to be systematically renewed to make sure it is still representative of the population in general. Panel members need to be recruited in a way which ensures that they are representative of the population as a whole.

Cost: Running a Panel can cost anything from £5,000 a year to well over £20,000. Costs vary depending on the size of the Panel, the methods in which the members are consulted and the frequency of consultation. If all research is telephone based and if the Panel is shared with other partner organisations the costs can be cut. Be wary when sharing the Panel with other organisations though, as this limits your own use.

There are considerable costs and work involved in running and maintaining the panels, requiring significant resources in terms of staff time, skills and money. In some cases incentives are given to encourage participation in a Panel; for example a prize draw. In the long run, it should work out cheaper than regular one-off surveys.

Time requirements: Staff time will be needed to keep the panel database up to date, recruit new participants, run and analyse the consultations. Feedback on the outcome of consultation needs to be disseminated among the participants, often through a newsletter.

There are mixed views on how often the Panel should be consulted. 4-6 times a year is a common recommendation but others engage with the Panel once a month. Too frequent engagement leads to some participants dropping out and others becoming too knowledgeable to remain representative.

When should you use?
- To monitor public opinion on key issues;
- As a source for participants for more in-depth processes, like focus groups;
- Engaging the public with the development of new policy areas.

When should you not use?
- Citizens' Panels should not be the only form of consultation.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:
- Can be used by a partnership of agencies;
- Can target specific groups if large enough;
- Allows surveys or other research to be done at short notice (once the panel is established);
- In larger panels members are representative of the population;
- Can track changes in views over time;
- The cost of a panel, once established and used several times, is less than a large-scale one-off survey.

Weaknesses:
- Needs considerable staff support to establish and maintain;
- Non-English speakers could be excluded;
- Reflects your agenda rather than the community's;
- The database of names and addresses requires constant updating;

— Younger members tend to drop out, so the panel gradually gets older.

Can deliver:

— Picture of public opinion over time.

Won't deliver:

— In-depth understanding of the public's views;
— Empowered participants;
— Consensus/Shared Vision;
— Improved relationships.

Example: Bristol Citizens' Panel

The Bristol Citizens' Panel was established to keep the council informed about public opinion, and is promoted as 'Bristol's biggest think-tank'.

A random sample and interviews were used in late 1998 to recruit 2,200 panellists that mirrored the population of the city as a whole. Since then, the Citizens' Panel has been asked more than six hundred questions, ranging from issues like recycling to whether or not Bristol should have a directly elected Mayor. Over the years new panellists have been recruited to replace inactive panel members. Each year the Panel receives up to four questionnaires, which can either be completed on paper or electronically on the council website.

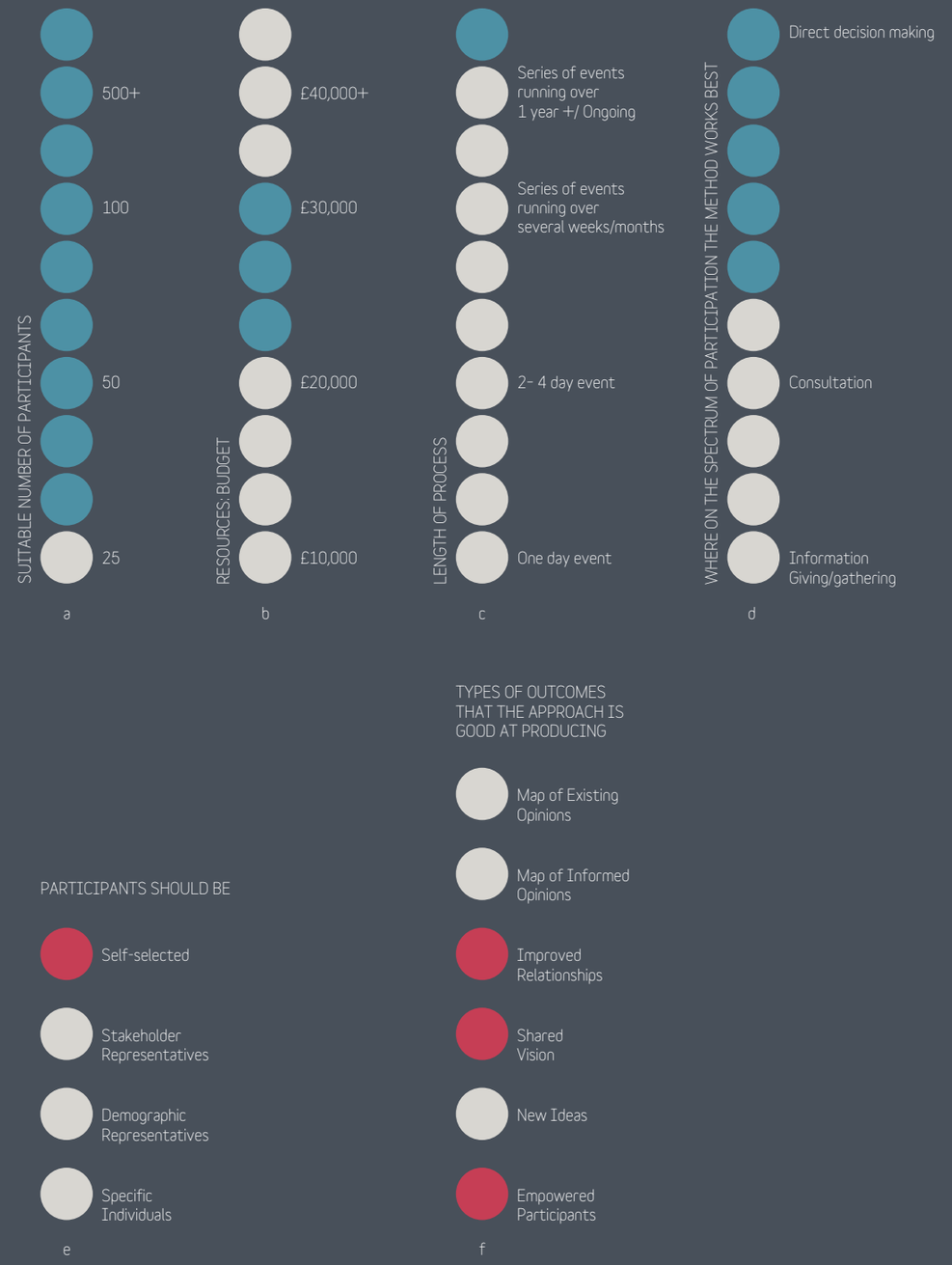
The results from the Citizens' Panel are regularly fed into decision-making, and the panel has also featured in the local and national media. Panel members are kept informed of the results of the surveys via the panel newsletter "Feedback" and results often appear in the local media and are all available on the council website.

Contact Bristol Citizens' Panel
Telephone 0117 922 2848
Web www.bristol-city.gov.uk/council/corporate_consultation_services.html

Contact Market & Opinion Research International (MORI)
MORI House 79-81 Borough Road, London, SE1 1FY
Telephone 020 7347 3000
Fax 020 7347 3800
Email mori@mori.com
Web www.mori.com

Online resources
Numerous Local Authorities have material about their Citizens' Panels on their websites.

Community Empowerment Networks



Community Empowerment Networks are structures set up by the government to enable civil society to play an equal role with the public and private sectors in local strategic partnerships. A Community Empowerment Network is not a method per se, it is a government initiative, but we have included it here because it demonstrates a way of dealing with the issues surrounding community capacity building and similar networks could be created.

Description: Local Strategic Partnerships have been set up across England to co-ordinate planning and spending on mainstream services. They are made up of a mix of public, private and voluntary sector representatives. However, of the three sectors, the voluntary sector is the least organised and lacks clear structures through which to elect accountable representatives.

Community Empowerment Networks have been set up by the Government to create a structure for the community and voluntary sector to interact with the Local Strategic Partnerships. The networks bring together both large 'professional' voluntary agencies and small community or residents group.

The responsibilities and activities of the networks include electing community and voluntary sector members to sit on Local Strategic Partnerships and keeping all sectors of the community informed about the Partnerships. It should also ideally function as a forum for people to get involved in and should gather the views of the sector and pass those on to sector representatives

In the longer term it should build the capacity of the sector to engage in regeneration partnerships, through training and support and seek funding and resources to support the sector and its representatives.

Origin: Government initiative. Set up to make the voluntary sector a more able participant in the Local Strategic Partnerships and oversee the administration of the Community Empowerment Fund in the local area.

Used for: Ensuring effective communication with local people and groups about Neighbourhood Renewal issues in their areas, helping voluntary, community, and residents' groups get involved as equal and full partners in Local Strategic Partnerships and assisting voluntary sector with advice on funding and other issues.

Who participates? Community Empowerment Networks are open to community and voluntary sector groups, and residents, in an area. Usually membership is free and the network is governed by a board elected by the members.

Cost: Community Empowerment Networks oversee the administration of the Community Empowerment Fund, organise elections to the Local Strategic Partnership, and organise training and information. This requires a number of staff members. Setting up Community Empowerment Networks is funded through the Community Empowerment Fund.

Time requirements: The Community Empowerment Networks are meant to be permanent features, creating a central institution for the voluntary sector in an area with which the authorities can interact.

When should you use?

— Community Empowerment Networks are now being implemented in areas targeted by Neighbourhood Renewal across the country. Similar structures may be useful elsewhere, where the voluntary sector is fragmented and you want to ensure that it is able to take part effectively in decision-making or improve information flows either within the sector or externally.

When should you not use?

— This and other similar initiatives need to be long-term in order for voluntary organisations to invest time and effort in them;
— Setting up a structure without sufficient funding for the future would be demoralising.

Can it be used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:

— Strengthens the voice of the local voluntary and community sector.

Weaknesses:

— Relatively new structure;
— Not yet clear if it will gain credibility among voluntary sector actors;
— The voluntary sector is not always able to handle the responsibilities that come with the network and support will be needed in the areas where this is the case.

Can deliver:

— Voice for the voluntary sector;
— Training and capacity building;
— Improved relationships;
— Potentially shared vision.

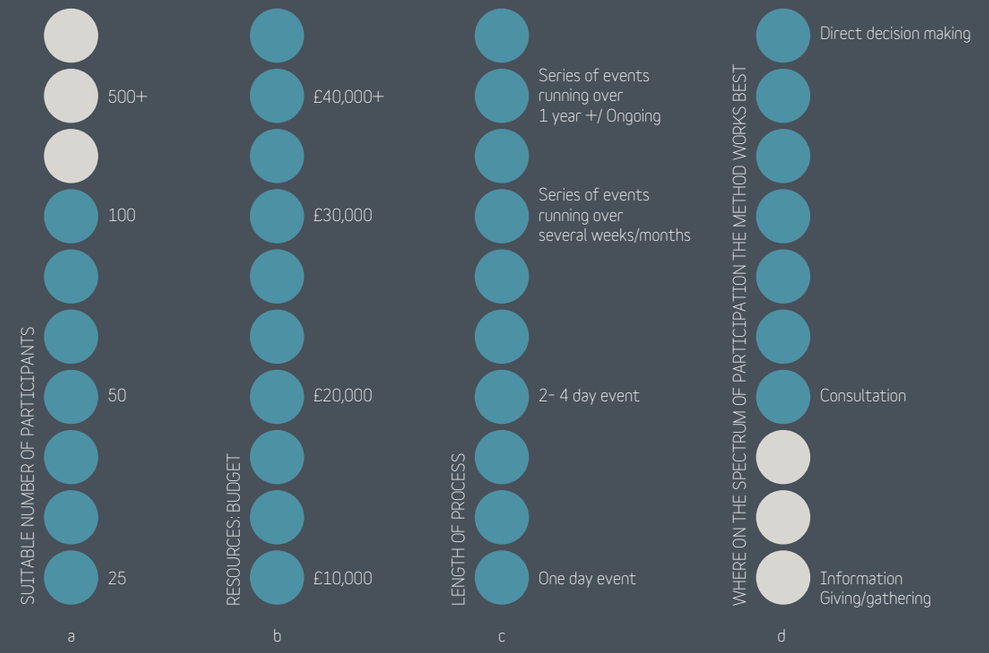
Won't deliver:

— Community Empowerment Networks function as a catalyst for other forms of participation and regeneration, it will not deliver on its own.

Contact The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 6th Floor, 6/G9
Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU
Telephone 08450 82 83 83
Email neighbourhoodrenewal@odpm.gsi.gov.uk
Web www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

Online resources
www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=583

Consensus Building/Dialogue



Notes

b Long-term and high conflict Dialogue processes often cost considerably more than this scale can show. Dialogue processes to address specific issues may cost considerably less.
e Depends on the scale of the process, in small processes or where there is less conflict, self-selection can sometimes be acceptable. Most Dialogues are run with stakeholder representatives who report back/feed back to their relevant constituency.
f Dialogue is designed around the needs of the situation. This can include some or all of the above.

An approach that is good for conflict resolution, building and improving relationships between diverse groups and involving normally excluded groups in decision-making.

Description: Dialogue incorporates a range of approaches designed to help participants identify common ground and mutually beneficial solutions to a problem. The process involves stakeholders in defining the problem, devising the methods and creating the solutions. Dialogue is mainly conducted through workshops and similar meetings. The minimum aim is to find a mutually acceptable compromise, but ideally the process seeks to build on common ground and reach a proactive consensus. Every Dialogue process is tailor-made to suit the situation and the people involved.

Origin: Evolved from conflict resolution and mediation approaches in the US and UK. Commonly used in environmental decision-making, with growing use in other areas.

Used for: Conflict resolution or conflict avoidance in decision-making. Good in areas likely to be regarded as controversial or where the facts are contested.

Who participates? As far as possible Dialogue involves all stakeholders, defined as people who have a concern about the outcome. This includes decision-makers, those directly affected by decisions, and those who could support or obstruct the implementation of decisions. In practice a Dialogue process can involve anything from a handful of people to several hundred. In general, the higher the number of participants the more limited the level of deliberation possible.

Cost: Due to the need for independent expert facilitation and possibly numerous meetings the costs can be high. However, Dialogue remains one of the few practicable participative options once a conflict has reached a certain point. Initiating a Dialogue at an earlier stage can save enormous effort, resources and anxiety later.

Time requirements: Dialogue projects have a tendency to take a long time to complete due to the slow process of building relationships and trust between groups.

When should you use?
- Where there is conflict;
- Where there may be conflict in the future if steps are not taken to prevent it;
- When you want to build working relationships with interest groups that are normally excluded, or feel excluded, from decision-making;
- When you want to improve communication and build trust between groups;
- When a debate is required.

When should you not use?
- When the stakeholders are unable to influence decisions in any significant way;
- When essential groups (e.g. key decision-makers) refuse to join;
- When time and/or money is in short supply;
- When participants need to be demographically representative.

Can it be used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:
- Deals well with contention and can really help with issues of low trust;
- Is an approach that hands the control of the process over to the participants themselves;
- Is highly flexible and can be applied at all levels of government.

Weaknesses:
- Extremely reliant on the skills of a facilitator or mediator, which can make it expensive;
- May be time consuming;
- The need to ensure participation by all significant stakeholders can slow progress or even render it impossible;
- Ensuring communication between the stakeholder representatives and their constituencies is challenging.

Some feel that when Dialogue is explicit in its quest for consensus it may not value organisational and individual positions. The final outputs may only highlight areas of agreement while ignoring other parts of the picture. This is particularly problematic for campaigning organisations for which positions are important.

Can deliver:
- Improved relationships between participants;
- Consensus/shared vision;
- Increased legitimacy for decisions;
- Creative new solutions.

Won't deliver:
- Information representative of society as a whole;
- Quick results;
- Clearly identified positions.

Contact The Environment Council
212 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BF
Telephone 020 7836 2626
Fax 020 7242 1180
Email info@envcouncil.org.uk
Web www.the-environment-council.org.uk

Publications
The Environment Council/Shell (1999), *Guidelines for Stakeholder Dialogue: A Joint Venture*, The Environment Council, London. Available online at www.the-environment-council.org.uk/docs/Shell_Guidelines_to_SHD.pdf

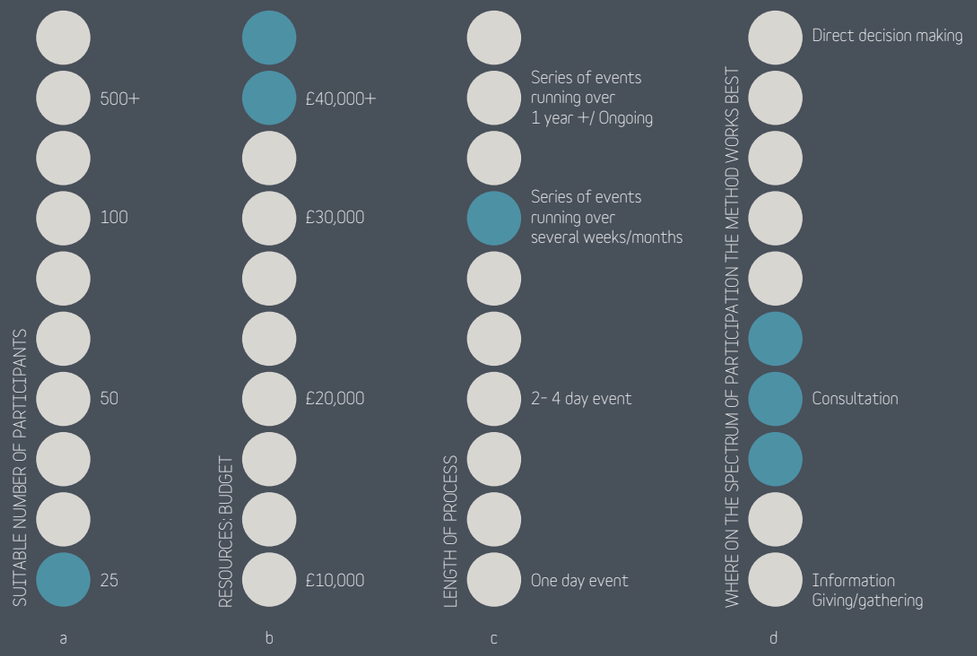
Example: BNFL National Stakeholder Dialogue

The BNFL Dialogue (1998-2005) was Europe's largest stakeholder engagement process around nuclear issues to date. It was funded by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd and was managed by The Environment Council. The Dialogue had as its remit "to inform BNFL's decision-making process about the improvement of their environmental performance in the context of their overall development". It was open to national and regional organisations as well as to specialist concerns, ensuring that a full range of views was heard.

The first stage in 1998 was spent building trust between the different stakeholder groups, many of whom had never spoken to each other. The initial meeting was attended by over 100 stakeholders who identified and prioritised a list of issues and concerns to be addressed in further meetings. The diversity and complexity of the issues made it necessary to set up a number of working groups, each to deal with a specific problem. . Through the different working groups and their reports the dialogue has been able to review and make recommendations on many different aspects of the nuclear industry, from the disposal of spent plutonium to the socio-economical effects of plant closures.

While some stakeholders have dropped out, the vast majority have stayed on and reaffirmed their commitment to the process. The BNFL dialogue has succeeded in building better relationships between key stakeholders and, while the issue of nuclear energy is still very contentious, the dialogue has established where there is room for negotiation between groups and where it remains impossible.

Consensus Conference



Notes

a This number indicates those directly involved and does not include those who may be influenced by reports about it or by its results.

b The costs of this method usually go well beyond this scale, sometimes amounting to £100,000.

A consensus conference consists of a panel of ordinary citizens who question expert witnesses on a particular topic. Their recommendations are then circulated.

Description: At a Consensus Conference a panel of citizens explores a topic through questioning expert witnesses. The panel is given time to prepare before the actual conference in order to fulfil their role as informed citizens. Panel members receive a comprehensive information pack and attend preparatory events (usually two held at weekends). A distinctive feature is that the initiative lies with the citizens. They decide the key aspects of the debate, including the choice of questions and selection of the witnesses, and formulate their own conclusions. The press and public are able to attend the main hearing. At the end of the conference, the panel produces a report outlining conclusions and recommendations that are then circulated to key decision-makers and the media. The process is usually run by an organisation with no stake in the outcome to limit accusations of bias.

Origin: Social Research. The Consensus Conference is based on a model of technology assessment originating in the health care sector in the USA during the 1960s and further developed by the Danish Board of Technology.

Used for: A Consensus Conference is a way of incorporating the perspectives of ordinary members of society into the assessment of new scientific and technological developments. In common with Citizens' Juries, Consensus Conferences aim to both inform and consult with the citizenry. The difference is that Consensus Conferences take place in open view of the public. This form of citizen participation is particularly appropriate for involving citizens in decision making on complex and highly technical issues otherwise requiring specialist knowledge.

Who participates? A citizens' panel of between 10-20 people is selected to reflect a variety of socio-demographic criteria (note however that due to its size the panel cannot be a statistically representative sample of the population). Panel members should not have any significant prior involvement with the conference topic – they are taking part in their capacity as citizens, not as professionals or specialists.

Cost: A trained and independent facilitator is required during the preparatory weekends and during the conference itself. A Consensus Conference is expensive, requiring large facilities to accommodate the media and public during the event. Some claim, however, that Consensus Conferences are cost effective compared to the cost of informing the public through the media. UK examples have ranged in cost from £80,000 to £100,000.

Time requirements: The Consensus Conference itself usually lasts for three days; the participants also attend preparatory events. Ensuring that the relevant experts can attend as witnesses usually requires contacting them well in advance of the events.

When should you use?

— Useful for dealing with controversial issues at a national level;
— Works well with issues that are seen as controversial, complex or expert dominated.

When should you not use?

— When it is important to involve all key stakeholders;
— When you want the participants to make actual decisions;
— When the topic is very abstract or uncontroversial;
— When the funding and/or delivering body is seen as biased.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:

— Good public outreach if run well;
— Open and transparent process which encourages increased trust;
— More control over subject matter and witnesses than is common in Citizens' Juries and Deliberative Polling.

Weaknesses:

— Expensive;
— The small sample of people might exclude minorities.

Can deliver:

— The views of informed citizens and their key issues of concern on a policy area;
— Useful and understandable written material suitable for public use;
— Wider and better informed public debate on an issue through the media.

Won't deliver:

— Decisions;
— Detailed technical recommendations;
— Results that are representative of society as a whole.

Example: UK's second national Consensus Confernce on radioactive waste management 1999

The National Consensus Conference on Radioactive Waste Management was run by the UK Centre for Economic and Environmental Development (UKCEED), an independent sustainable development foundation. From a random sample of four thousand people a panel of 15 was selected. Care was taken so that there was a balance of men and women, educational backgrounds, and geographical spread in the panel. The Citizens' Panel was set up to "focus on the effective and publicly acceptable long-term management of nuclear waste in the UK, both civil and military, concentrating particularly on intermediate and high level waste."

Before the Conference the Panel was provided with balanced background information. The Panel attended two preparatory weekends. Out of a group of 80 experts who expressed an interest the panel selected 26 witnesses to testify before them.

The Consensus Conference itself was held in London in May 1999. It was a four-day event, open to a wide audience. During the first two days of the Conference heard brief witness presentations, followed by further discussion and debate between the Panel and witnesses. Members of the audience were able to submit written questions throughout these two days.

On the third day, the Panel retired behind closed doors to write a report on their conclusions and recommendations. On the final day the Panel presented their findings to the Conference and answered questions from the audience and media. Key figures from government, industry and environmental groups were invited to respond to the report.

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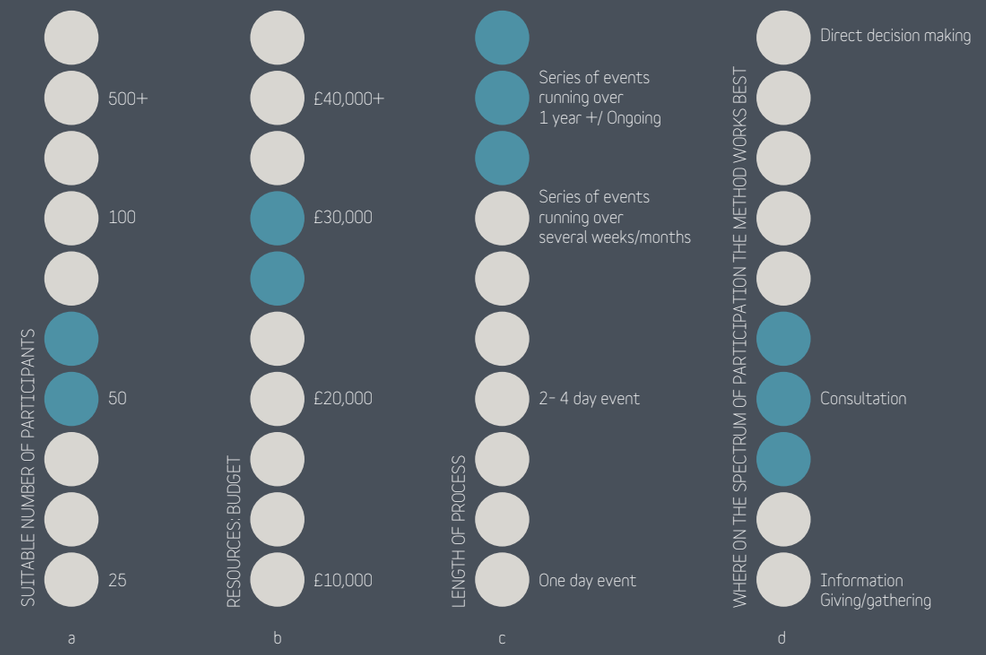
Online resources
Danish Board of Technology
www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?page=forside.php3&language=uk

Publications
Joss, S. & Durant, J. (eds) (1995), *Public Participation in Science: the role of consensus conferences in Europe*, Science Museum, London.

Deliberative Mapping



Notes
b This is an approximation due to the low number of non-research based Deliberative Mapping projects to date.
e Public participants are selected to be demographically representative while the specialist participants are selected for their individual knowledge and skills
f Improves relationships among participants, but not in society as a whole.

Deliberative Mapping involves both specialists and members of the public. It combines varied approaches to assess how participants rate different policy options against a set of defined criteria.

Description: The citizen and expert participants are divided into panels (often according to gender and socio-economic background to ensure that people are comfortable voicing their views). The citizens' panels and the experts consider the issue both separately from one another and at a joint workshop. This allows both groups to learn from each other without the experts dominating. The emphasis of the process is not on integrating expert and public voices, but understanding the different perspectives each offer to a policy process. The groups themselves determine which criteria they will use to score the options against, thereby limiting any structural bias, and arrive at a ranking of them. Deliberative Mapping incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods and participants work both individually and as a group.

Origin: Social Research. Developed from Multi-Attribute Decision Analysis (MADA) to resolve problems such as expert-dominated discussion in other participatory methods. Able to deliver both an overview and in-depth analysis of public opinion.

Used for: Fundamental to this approach is the involvement of both 'specialists' and members of the public. A sample of the public (around 40 people) from varied backgrounds is recruited onto citizens' panels. The experts (around 20) are selected to reflect the full spectrum of specialist knowledge in an area.

Cost: High – exact figures hard to give due to the limited number of practical examples to date. Requires expert facilitation.

Time requirements: This approach requires several months for the numerous meetings and workshops.

When should you use?
- When you want to understand public preferences;
- Useful when the issue area is complicated;
- When you want to give a decision-maker a good understanding of policy options.

When should you not use?
- When you want the participants to make the decision;
- When you want to reach consensus.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:
- The results are considered opinions rather than articles of faith or rash judgement;
- Specialists contribute to the process without dominating;
- Combination of different approaches creates a deep and comprehensible understanding of public priorities.

Weaknesses:
- Difficult to involve large numbers and high in cost and time-commitment;
- The results of the process can be contradictory views that leave decision-makers without clear guidance;
- Very few people have practical experience of running this kind of process.

Can deliver:
- Greater legitimacy for decisions;
- Information about public preferences towards policy options;
- Information on the different aspects of an issue and the considerations around them.

Won't deliver:
- Consensus/ shared vision;
- Better relationships between groups.

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Online resources
www.deliberative-mapping.org
Official site with information about the development of the method and current and past processes.

Example: 'Closing the Kidney Gap' and Radioactive Waste

There have been two applications of the Deliberative Mapping (DM) approach to date. The first addressed the question of how to reduce the gap between the number of people who are waiting for kidney transplants and the much lower number of donor kidneys available in a project funded by the Wellcome Trust (2001-2003).

Citizens and specialists were tasked with learning more about potential options for dealing with the kidney gap and assessing their performance against a range of criteria. 34 citizens from North London of different ages, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds were recruited to participate, along with 17 specialists from a variety of relevant organisations and disciplines. The different groups registered similar preferences: technology-intense options like xenotransplantation scored badly while preventive care and improvements to existing services scored highly.

The second full-scale DM trial brought 16 citizens and 9 specialists together to consider the range of options available to manage the UK's intermediate and high- level radioactive wastes. This project was sponsored by the Government's independent Committee for the Management of Radioactive Wastes (CoRWM) in 2004, over half of whom attended one of the two intensive weekends as observers of the process.

Citizens and specialists reached the conclusion that the option of phased underground disposal performed best overall and CoRWM used the results of the trial to assist in developing their nationwide program of public and stakeholder engagement. In both trials, the citizens involved expressed a feeling of ownership over the results of the process. They valued the opportunity to learn, have access to information and meet specialists in order to engage with the issues. The specialists felt that they learned about the citizens' ability to participate in scientific and technical decision-making.

Deliberative Polling

Notes
e Using a statistically representative sample of the public is important

A deliberative poll measures what the public would think about an issue if they had an adequate chance to reflect on the questions at hand by observing the evolution of a test group of citizens' views, as they learn more about a topic. Deliberative polls are more statistically representative than many other approaches due to their large scale.

Description: The participating sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather for a few days to discuss the issues. Balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts based on questions that the participants themselves develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. After this deliberation, the sample is asked the original questions again. The resulting changes in opinion are thought to represent the conclusions the public would reach if people had the opportunity to become more informed about the issues. Deliberative Polling creates dramatic, statistically significant changes in views. Follow up studies, however, tend to show that some of these changes are reversed over time. Deliberative polls are usually run in collaboration with TV companies, which then broadcast parts of the process, allowing the wider public to share the learning of the participants.

Origin: Social Research –Developed by US researchers to overcome the often uninformed and fickle nature of opinion poll results.

Used for: Deliberative Polls measure informed opinion on an issue. The results of a Deliberative Poll are partly prescriptive – pointing to what an informed and reflective citizenry might want policy-makers to do.

Who participates? The number of participants in a Deliberative Polling process range from around 200 to 600. It is important that the participants constitute a representative sample of society; if a random selection process might exclude minority groups there is a need for a more affirmative method of selection.

Cost: It is hard to estimate what a Deliberative Poll might cost as there haven't been any recently, but we estimate that running one will cost at least £30,000. This excludes expenses for the media and participants.

Time requirements: The poll itself is run over several days, a few months before, the participants take part in a number of events (usually over a weekend) where they are polled the first time and where they can familiarise themselves with the issues. Allow at least six months.

When should you use?
— Deliberative Polling is especially suitable for issues where the public may have little knowledge or information of the trade-offs applying to public policy

When should you not use?
— If issue is non-controversial;
— If issue and its relevant trade-offs are already well understood by the public.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:
— Combines the statistical representativeness of a scientific sample with interaction and deliberation;
— Better demographical representation of population than Citizens' Juries and Consensus Conferences;
— Increases public understanding of the complexity of issues;
— Includes people that would not normally choose to get involved;
— Demonstrates the large difference between people's uninformed and informed views;
— Good means of measuring the diversity of public opinion.

Weaknesses:
— Requires use of television to achieve its wider public awareness raising effects;
— Does not provide qualitative information;
— Expensive;
— Less scope for participants to identify witnesses and question them or determine the scope of the questions than exists for some other approaches (e.g. Citizens' Juries and Consensus Conferences).

Can deliver:
— A statistically representative view of what the public's considered/ deliberated opinion might look like;
— Increased public understanding of an issue through broadcasting of event.

Won't deliver:
— Improved relationships between groups of participants;
— Shared views/consensus.

Example: Channel Four Deliberative Poll – Crime In The U.K. 1994

The topic of Britain's first Deliberative Poll was crime, an issue chosen for its emotive nature and the public's strong views on the issue. The first stage of the Deliberative Poll involved interviewing a representative sample of the electorate about their views on crime and punishment. After the interview, each person was invited to take part in a televised weekend event in Manchester.

Around 300 people attended the event. Before arriving in Manchester they were sent briefing materials that introduced the issues at stake. Once there, they could cross-question various experts and politicians including pro- and anti-prison reformers, an ex-prisoner and politicians from all three main political parties. After the weekend they completed the questionnaire again. Finally, some ten months later, participants were again re-interviewed in order to assess the durability of any changes in their views.

The views and understanding of the participants changed significantly through the process. For example, 50% of the participants initially thought "stiffer sentences generally" would be a very effective way of reducing crime but in the ten month follow up poll only 36% thought this.

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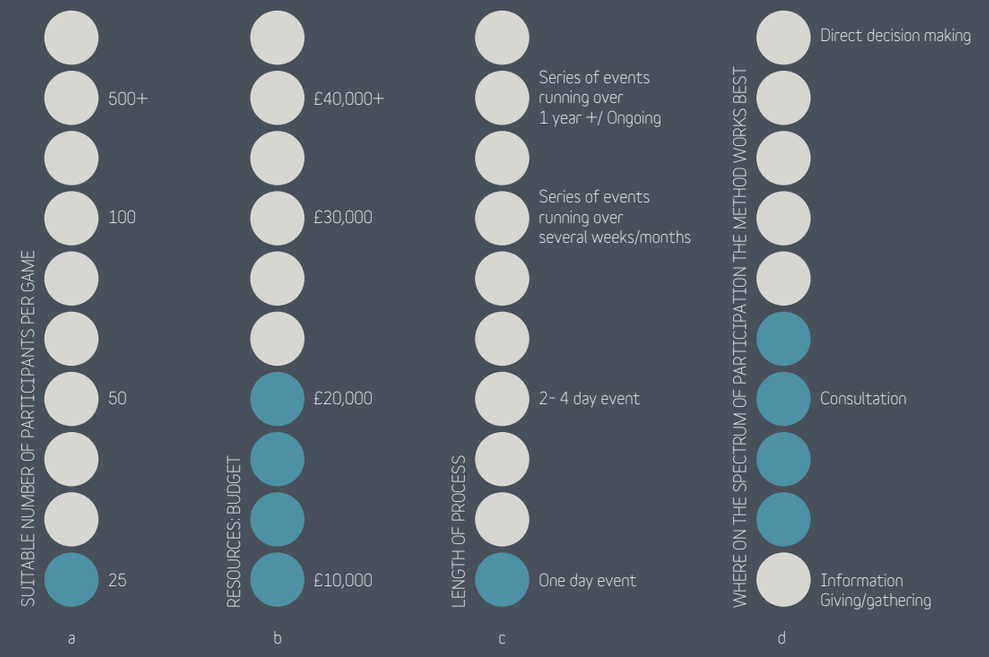
Democs
('Deliberative Meetings of Citizens')



Notes

a This is the ideal number per game. One public meeting involved over 120 people using nearly 20 kits.
b A single kit costs £30 in a box or is free by email. Developing the kits in the first place costs more (£5,000 - £10,000), as does a full consultation using Democs.
e One of the main attractions of Democs is that anyone who wants to can take part.

Democs is a conversation game enabling small groups to discuss public policy issues. No speakers or experts are needed, as pre-prepared cards convey the necessary facts. It works best for six people over two hours, but it is flexible.

Description: Democs helps people to absorb information and to make it meaningful. The information on the topic is provided on playing cards which are dealt out in two rounds. Each time, people reflect on their cards and choose one or two that they feel are most important. They take turns to read them out, explaining why they chose them, and then place them on the table. Next they cluster the cards, with each cluster representing a key issue relating to the topic. Once they've voted on a range of responses or policy positions they try to create a response that everyone in the group can live with.

Origin: Gaming/Deliberative democracy. Designed by the New Economics Foundation to provide some of the deliberation of Citizens' Juries and Deliberative Polls but for a wider use.

Used for: Helping citizens find out about an issue, form and share their opinions with others and establish whether there is a policy position that every member of the group can at least live with.

Who participates? Usually anyone who wants to. Sometimes representatives are sought. For instance, the Human Genetics Commission, investigating over-the-counter genetic testing kits, was interested in the views of the general public and in those of members of their consultative panel.

Cost: Low. A single kit costs £30 in a box or is free by email. Developing the kits in the first place costs more (£5-10k), as does a full consultation using Democs.

Time requirements: Individual sessions are around two hours.

When should you use?
- When you want to give people the chance to participate in their own time and place;
- When you want to increase public understanding of an interest in an issue.

When should you not use?
- For a one-off session on a particular topic, as developing the information cards would be too expensive;
- Dangerous to combine citizens and experts in a single game.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:
- It encourages people to form an opinion on complex topics and empowers them to believe that they have a right to a say;
- It avoids the passivity that can come with experts lecturing people;
- It provides a safe place that will appeal to inexperienced participants;
- The game format helps people to enjoy themselves while they talk.

Weaknesses:
- Works better with a facilitator;
- Establishing common ground is not possible within a single game;
- Representativeness is hard to achieve;
- Can create conflict between participants.
- It is hard to feed the results of a Democs process into decision-making.

Can deliver:
- A citizenry that feels it can have a say and wants to do so;
- Some information about common ground and preferences.

Won't deliver:
- Lengthy deliberation;
- In itself, it doesn't deliver follow-up to people who have taken part and want more;
- Tangible outcomes.

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Example: Over-the-counter genetic testing kits

In 2003 a Democs exercise was conducted for the Human Genetics Commission (HGC). 47 people attended six events organised by the New Economics Foundation. 14 were members of the HGC Consultative Panel and the rest were recruited via articles and existing networks.

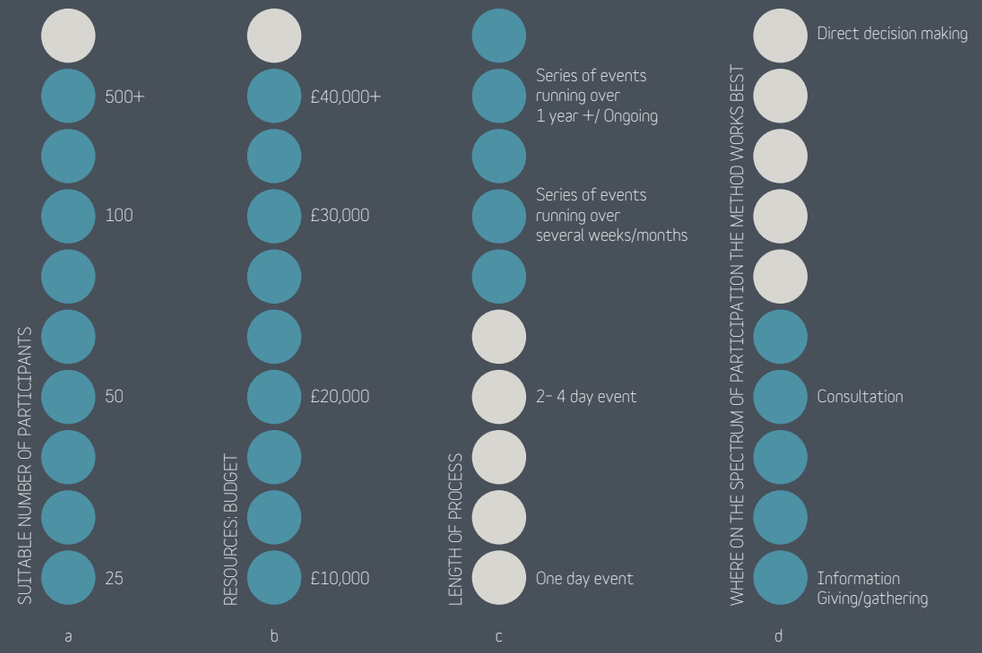
Each group clustered the issue cards and linked any relevant fact cards to make an argument. 21 main arguments were developed during the six events. The highest number concerned the impact of a test on the recipient and her/his family etc. This was what pushed many people towards supporting considerable regulation. A card that was frequently chosen said 'Tests that are unreliable or misinterpreted may cause needless anxiety, especially if no counselling is available.'

The votes for the policy positions are set out below. Note that they do not add up to 47 in all cases, showing that one or two people forgot to vote.

	Policy positions			
	1 No strict regulation	2 Voluntary regulation with no restriction on types of test	3 Voluntary regulation with restrictions on types of test	4 Strict regulation similar to prescription-only drugs
Not acceptable	40	29	5	11
Acceptable	3	12	21	14
Support	1	1	20	18
Abstain	1	3	1	1

Position 3 was most heavily supported, with 41 out of 47 votes for 'acceptable' or 'support'. Several people remarked that their ideal was somewhere between positions 3 and 4. This is what the HGC recommended to the government in the end.

Electronic Processes



Notes

b Electronic processes can range from the very cheap (for example, putting a document on a website) to the very expensive (a purpose-designed process involving thousands of people through several iterations)

c Electronic processes usually last a number of weeks at least; some may run for several months.

e Electronic processes are designed around the purpose and can involve any type of people or groups.

f Electronic processes can be designed to achieve as many and various types of output as conventional processes. While they are, on the whole, less good at creating and improving relationships, they can be used in conjunction with conventional processes to achieve 'soft' goals.

There are a number of electronic methods currently in use in the United Kingdom, ranging from the simple use of websites for information giving to more interactive processes that allow stakeholders to 'converse' online or participate in processes that emulate conventional participative processes. The two participative processes most commonly used are Online Forums and Structured Templates. The characteristics scored below are common to all electronic processes.

Description: Electronic processes use different types of software according to the nature of the process required. Online forums, for example, use linear or threaded asynchronous communication over the Internet. These allow people to discuss online, combining some of the spontaneity of verbal communication with the clear records of written communication. The difference between linear and threaded forums is that in the former the discussion is listed chronologically, emphasising conversation and relationship building. Threaded forums display individual discussions as a string of posts starting with the first one and followed by the responses. This is useful for more topic based discussions and for increased learning.

Structured templates, meanwhile, use software that is designed to emulate the face-to-face methods used in facilitated workshops. Different templates can be used, for example, to allow participants to brainstorm ideas, identify issues, prioritise solutions, or comment on consultation documents.

The relatively informal nature of online communication can foster both deliberation and build a sense of community. The discussions in active forums can provide decision-makers with valuable insights into how particular groups feel about an issue, while the Structured Template approach enables participants to comment in detail and those commissioning the process to collate responses and present the results back to participants quickly, comprehensively and transparently.

Origin: Online Forums are based on the early electronic bulletin boards of the 1980's and 1990's. Structured Templates were invented by Dialogue by Design in 2000.

Used for: Electronic processes can be used to gain input to decision-making and give/gather information without the group size or travel distance constraints that real life meetings have. Online Forums can also create communities that would not otherwise exist by putting participants in touch with people that they would not communicate with otherwise. Structured Templates allow very large volumes of feedback to be collated, analysed and presented back to participants swiftly and transparently.

Who participates? Electronic processes are very flexible when it comes to the number and location of participants, but do not presume that everyone has easy access to the Internet or that everyone can navigate it with ease. Organisers must ensure that the 'digital divide' does not prevent participation, usually by organising alternative methods of participation.

Cost: Hosting an electronic process cuts costs for venues and catering but entails costs of its own. These can include process design, technology set up, or, in the case of Online Forums, employing a moderator to oversee the discussions. The cost and effort of getting people to participate in online processes is often underestimated: it is still necessary to find and recruit participants in advance of the process.

Time requirements: Some electronic processes are only in existence for a few months to discuss a current event or situation while others become permanent.

When should you use?

- When you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve;
- When you are dealing with a large and/or widely dispersed group of participants;
- When your participants are more comfortable participating online than in other ways;
- If you want to offer people the chance to 'chat' informally.

When should you not use?

- When you cannot ensure that everyone has the opportunity to join in the process or provide an acceptable alternative means of participating;
- If your primary aim is to build strong relationships.

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:

- Allows participants to discuss an issue at their convenience (regardless of location or time);
- Anonymity of online processes can encourage open discussion;
- Large numbers can participate;
- Helps those who are not comfortable with other methods (for example, people who are inhibited by meetings).

Weaknesses:

- The technology can shape the process rather than vice-versa;
- Digital divide - many do not have ability to use the Internet;
- Written communication can

be a barrier for some already marginalised groups;
— Moderation – unmoderated Online Forums are often chaotic but anonymous and unaccountable moderators can also frustrate participants;
— Any perceived complexity, such as registration, can be a barrier to participation;
— Often, the lack of decision-makers involved.

Can deliver:
— General input to decisions;
— Informal sharing of ideas between participants;
— Improved relationships between participants/Community building (in some cases).

Won't deliver:
— Empowered participants;
— Strong relationships between participants.

Example: 'Taking it on' consultation on UK sustainable development strategy

Online consultation around 'Taking it on - developing UK sustainable development strategy together' began in April 2004 and continued until the end of July 2004.

The online consultation took two forms. A 'General Access' consultation process allowed members of the public and any interested organisations to respond online to the questions in the consultation document. This process was open for 12 weeks, at the end of which the results were collated and the responses made available for scrutiny on the website. The process generated 8,149 responses from 444 participants.

In parallel to this public process, a 'Virtual Panel', representing a cross section of organisations and individuals with an interest in sustainable development, was set up to provide its views in two stages. During the first stage the panel was asked to respond to the questions in the document. This process produced 2,904 responses from 151 participants. Following the collation of the interim results, panel members were asked to respond to further questions based on their earlier responses.

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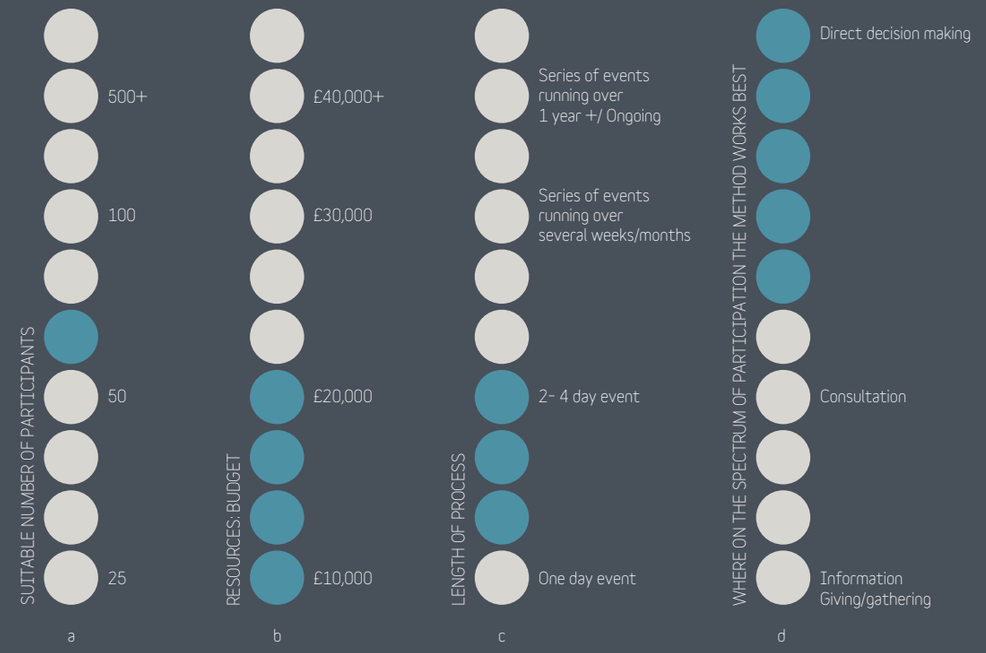
Publications:

Coleman, S., Hall, N. and Howell, M. (2002), *Hearing Voices: The Experience of Online Public Consultations and Discussions in UK Governance*, Hansard Society, London.
Local E-Democracy National Project (2005), *What Works: Key Lessons From Recent E-Democracy Literature*, Local E-Democracy National Project Available at www.e-democracy.gov.uk/documents/retrieve.asp?pk_document=260&pagepath=http://www.e-democracy.gov.uk/knowledgepool

Online resources

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government
Cabinet Office, -E-democracy Unit
www.edemocracy.gov.uk
Local E-Democracy National Project
www.oii.ox.ac.uk
Oxford Internet Institute.

Future Search



Notes
a 64 is the ideal number

A Future Search conference is a way for a community or organisation to create a shared vision for its future. It enrols a large group of stakeholders who take part in a highly structured process lasting ideally two and a half days.

Description: A Future Search conference enrols a large group of stakeholders, selected because they have power or information on the topic at hand or are affected by the outcomes. Ideally there are 64 people, who form eight tables of eight stakeholder groups. Examples of such groups are health care users, young people or shopkeepers. They take part in a highly structured process, which ideally lasts two and a half days but sometimes only one.

Origin: Organisational development. Originated in the UK some 40 years ago, but was developed in the US by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff.

Used for: Creating a shared vision combined with the energy to make it happen.

Who participates? Stakeholders are selected because they have power or information on the topic at hand or are affected by the outcomes.

Cost: Usually between £5,000 and £20,000

Time requirements: Ideally two and a half days but sometimes two or only one.

When should you use?
- When you want commitment from all stakeholders;
- When the most important thing is to generate energy.

When should you not use?
- When you are not prepared to put the work in to 'get the whole system in the room'. It may not work if some stakeholders are missing;
- When the task is imposed, for example by a funder, and it is not what the people in the room are most passionate about.

Can it be used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:
- Everyone with a stake in the issue is in the room, which produces a rich mixture of information and ideas;
- Proposals are more likely to be acted upon if all stakeholders feel committed to them;
- People are encouraged to explore what they feel about an issue as well as what they think about it;
- The event is designed to help participants understand and appreciate the agendas of others, which helps them to enlarge the common ground they share. It is hoped that if a shared vision is created it will inspire participants into the future;
- People are often energised by seeing that complex issues can be tackled when the whole system is present, when they can identify common ground with other people, develop a shared vision and agree concrete actions.

Weaknesses:
- Needs a lot of time and energy to organise;
- It can be hard to convey the energy and excitement of participants to non-participants;
- Needs careful follow-up to support action groups at a time when organisers are usually pretty exhausted.

Can deliver:
- Energy;
- Shared vision;
- Action.

Won't deliver:
- Action without good follow-up structures in place;
- On an issue that isn't central to the lives of participants.

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Online resources
www.futuresearch.net
Future Search Network (International)

Publications
Weisbord, M. & Janoff, S. (2000), *Future Search, An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations and Communities*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco
Weisbord, M. (ed.) (1993), *Discovering Common Ground: How Future Search Conferences Bring People Together to Achieve Breakthrough Innovation, Empowerment, Shared Vision and Collaboration*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco.

Example: Hitchin future search

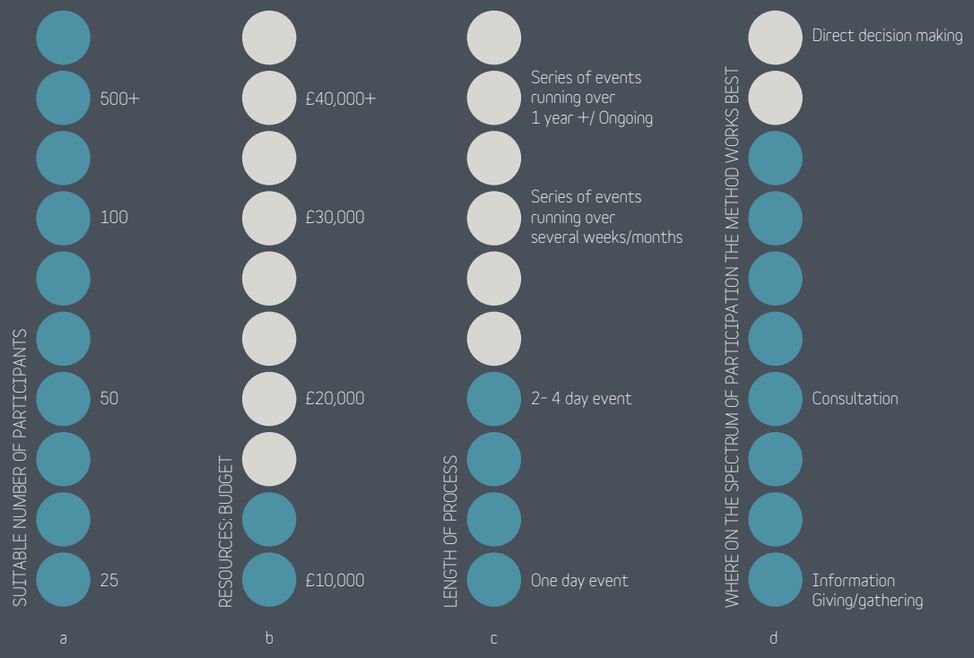
Hitchin is a market town in Hertfordshire. A future search conference was chosen as a way of creating a 'Whole Settlement Strategy' that looked at the town as a whole. The conference took place in 1995 over two days at a school in the town.

The future search led to action groups on several issues, including:

- A Transport plan with routes and facilities for cyclists
- A directory of social groups and facilities
- Land use guidelines
- Funding for facilities for the young and for ethnic minorities.

After the event people in Hitchin changed their response to the proposal to build 10,000 homes in Hertfordshire. Instead of just opposing it they started to develop a practical alternative.

Open Space Technology



Notes
c This does not include time for follow-up of the actions agreed.
e Open Space is highly flexible when it comes to who can be involved.

Open Space Technology is often referred to as "Open Space" for short. It is a meeting framework that allows unlimited numbers of participants to form their own discussions around a central theme. It is highly dynamic and good at generating enthusiasm, as well as commitment to action.

Description: Open Space events have a central theme, around which participants are invited to identify issues for which they are willing to take responsibility for running a session. At the same time, these topics are distributed among available rooms and timeslots. When no more discussion topics are suggested the participants sign up for the ones they wish to take part in. Open Space creates very fluid and dynamic conversations held together by mutual interest. A trained moderator can be useful, especially when people are used to more structured meeting methods.

The fundamental principles of Open Space are:
— Whoever comes are the right people (the best participants are those who feel passionately about the issue and have freely chosen to get involved);
— Whenever it starts is the right time (Open Space encourages creativity both during and between formal sessions);
— When it's over it's over (getting the work done is more important than adhering to rigid schedules);
— Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen (let go of your expectations and pay full attention to what is happening here and now).

Open Space also uses the "Law of two feet" – if participants find themselves in a situation where they are not learning or contributing they have a responsibility to go to another session, or take a break for personal reflection.

It is vital that there are good written reports from all discussions, complete with action points, available at the end of each day. Feedback and implementation structures are important to carry the suggestions forward after the event itself.

Origin: Organisational Development. Open Space Technology was created in the mid-1980s by organisational consultant Harrison Owen when he discovered that people attending his conferences showed more energy and creativity during the coffee breaks than the formal sessions. Open Space is structured in a way that recreates this informal and open atmosphere combined with a clear sense of purpose.

Used for: Good for harnessing the creativity that is stifled by more structured forms of meetings, and creating new forms of working relationships, for example cross-functional collaboration, self-managing teams, community building, conflict resolution, strategy development and implementation.

Who participates? Open Space is highly flexible in the number and nature of participants. It can be run with a handful of people up to 2000 participants or more.

Cost: This varies. The approach can be very cheap but it requires a venue with space to accommodate all participants in one or several concentric circles.

Time requirements: Flexible, an event usually lasts between one and five days and can be run as a one off event.

When should you use?
— When large and diverse groups are involved;
— When you require creative thinking around an issue;
— When you want an open discussion and collective decisions;
— When you want to develop ownership over the results;
— When you want to develop better working relationships;
— When you want to build a sense of community.

When should you not use?
— If you are unwilling to give up control over the direction of the meeting;
— If you are not prepared to follow through with the recommendations;
— If the achievement of a specific outcome is essential.

Can it be used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:
— Extremely flexible process;
— Participant driven approach;
— Unleashes creativity.

Weaknesses:
— Cannot be used to direct people to a specific outcome.

Can deliver:
— New ideas;
— Improved and new relationships between participants;
— Ownership;
— Shared vision;
— Action/energy.

Won't deliver:
— Predetermined, specific, and predictable outcomes.

Example: Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust Event 2002

The Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust used Open Space for an event involving 120 people, including service users, carers and health staff. The goal was to establish priorities for improving health services in Nottinghamshire. By using Open Space the discussion was kept open and flexible, allowing people to come up with their own ideas.

The event facilitator started things off by familiarising participants with how Open Space works. A diverse range of topics was put forward by the participants, ranging from alternative therapies to acute admission. Throughout the rest of the day the groups met to discuss the topics they had chosen. Feedback, consisting of the key points from the discussions, what the required action was and who was responsible for taking it forward was posted in the main room for everyone to read.

At the end of the day, each participant was given three red stars to prioritise the topics that were most important to them. Among the suggested improvements were research on alternatives to acute admission, providing funding for assisted transport and a cultural review of services and service delivery. Actions that have already been implemented include assisted transport and the establishment of a users' and carers' resource centre.

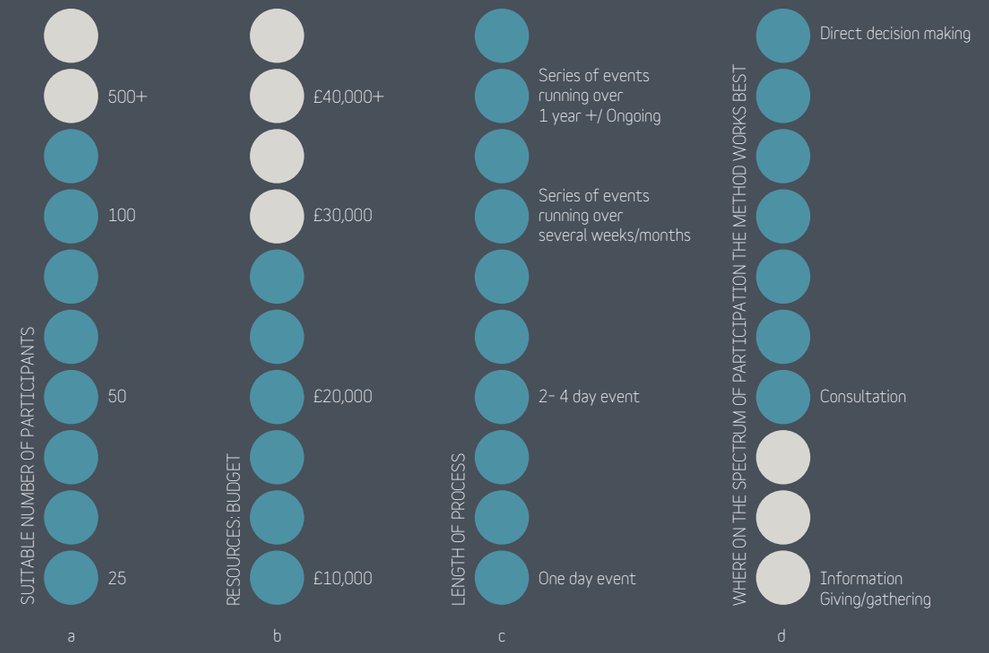
Contact Paul Sanguinazzi, Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust
Telephone 0115 993 4545

Practicioners
Contact Romy Shovelton, Wikima
Telephone 020 7229 7320
Web www.wikima.com

Online resources
www.openspaceuk.com
UK Portal on Open Space

Publications
Owen, H.A. (1997) *Open Space Technology. A Users' Guide*, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler

Participatory Appraisal



PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE

- Self-selected
- Stakeholder Representatives
- Demographic Representatives
- Specific Individuals

e

TYPES OF OUTCOMES THAT THE APPROACH IS GOOD AT PRODUCING

- Map of Existing Opinions
- Map of Informed Opinions
- Improved Relationships
- Shared Vision
- New Ideas
- Empowered Participants

f

Notes

b Varies widely depending on the length of the process and if there is a need for external expertise. The cost is principally in training and then normal staff time or support to volunteers.

c While it is possible to use Participatory Appraisal methods at one-off events it is designed to be a cyclical and ongoing process. Short-term use of Participatory Appraisal will not create an empowered community.

d It is important that Participatory Appraisal is not used simply as a research tool; the accessible nature of the methodologies have led to considerable use of it as a research tool for gathering opinion. In some circumstances this may be an acceptable use of Participatory Appraisal but when applied properly it has the potential to facilitate substantial and broad-based analysis and decision making within communities.

e It is important to check that those involved adequately represent the range of different people within a community – by age, gender, geography, race, faith, etc. For particular groups of isolated or marginalised people it might be necessary to organise separate activities or meetings.

Participatory Appraisal (PA) is a broad empowerment approach striving to build community knowledge and encouraging grassroots action. It uses a lot of visually based methods, making it especially useful for participants who find other methods of participation intimidating or complicated.

Description: The term Participatory Appraisal describes a family of approaches that enable local people to identify their own priorities and make their own decisions about the future, with the organising agency facilitating, listening and learning. It uses visual and flexible tools to ensure that everyone can participate regardless of background and can be used where people meet in their everyday lives, increasing its appeal to groups that are usually reluctant to get involved in meetings.

At the start of a process PA usually focuses on mapping. As the process develops participants start finding common ground and eventually this can lead to new plans being developed and implemented. In addition, a well facilitated process can bring people with different needs and opinions together to explore issues, so the prioritisation of actions to take forward can come from an informed or consensual position. Outsiders – technical advisors or decision-makers that will have information key to action planning – can be brought in to discuss and negotiate issues.

A commonly encountered problem is that, because PA uses very accessible tools, it is frequently used as an extractive, information providing exercise that does not follow through to facilitate decision-making within the community about priorities and actions. This is either an issue of poor practice by facilitators, or constraints of the process in hand – with no commitment from decision-makers to support the development of a more in-depth and empowering process.

Origin: International Development. Participatory Appraisal was developed in Africa and Asia and is used across the globe. Unfortunately this has led to a confusing multitude of acronyms used to describe it: e.g. PA (Participatory Appraisal), PLA (Participatory Learning and Action), and PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). We have chosen to use the term Participatory Appraisal because it is common in the UK.

Used for: Despite its name it is not merely for appraisal. Ideally it should be an ongoing cycle of research, learning and collective action. The long-term goal of this approach is to empower and enable people to analyse and tackle their problems themselves. In the shorter term Participatory Appraisal can be used to map local priorities and understandings of issues.

Who participates? Local community members in larger or smaller groups. Since everyone does not have to meet at the same place or at the same time it can involve a very large number of people without requiring a large venue. A key principle of PA is to ask 'who is not participating?' and ensure that the process actively includes members of the community that are not normally involved in consultations.

Cost: Can be expensive at first as it is very important that people running the process are properly trained in Participatory Appraisal approaches and values. However, if local community members learn the approaches themselves and become more confident the costs of hiring external help may be reduced.

Time requirements: To get the most out of Participatory Appraisal it should be an ongoing process.

When should you use?
- When you are willing to let the community take control;
- When you want to base your actions on local knowledge;
- When you want to reach out to very diverse members of a community.

When should you not use?
- If you want rapid results.

Can it be used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:
- Can be extremely inclusive, flexible, and empowering if run well;
- The knowledge produced by local community researchers has been proven to be highly reliable and can help to identify and tackle underlying issues to problems rather than just the symptoms;
- When local community members have been trained to facilitate a process this capacity remains within the community for the future;
- PA is a creative and flexible approach that can complement and draw on other techniques throughout a process. For example, after general information gathering the process could move to focus group meetings on particular issues or large community meetings using Open Space methodologies;
- It can draw on participatory arts and drama techniques to reach particular groups, or explore particular issues.

Weaknesses:
- Do not underestimate the need for training and experience among those running the process;
- Can be expensive to set up;
- To be truly effective, PA exercises need more time than one-off events, which may be difficult to fund and organise;
- It can also be challenging and time consuming to collate material from numerous events.

Can deliver:
- Empowered participants; Better relationships between participants;
- Reliable and valid mapping of local knowledge and priorities; Action/Energy;
- Consensus/shared vision.

Won't deliver:
- Quick results.

Contact Electric Palace
156a High Street, Bloxwich, Walsall, WS3 3JT
Telephone 01922 477499
Fax 01922 492616
Email pa@electric-palace.co.uk
Web www.patraining.co.uk

Other contacts
Institute of Development Studies
University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE
Telephone 01273 606261
Fax 0131 668 4379
Email ids@ids.ac.uk
Web www.ids.ac.uk
Scottish Participatory Initiatives
Woodbush Studio, Woodbush Brae, Dunbar, EH42 1HB
Telephone 01368 860 060
Email info@scottishparticipatoryinitiatives.co.uk
Web www.srds.co.uk/spi

Online resources
www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/sid
Oxfam UKPP website with links to published resources, to organisations using PA and providing training

Publications
Caldwell, C., McCann, G., Flower, C. and Howie J. (2003), *Have you been PA'd?*, Oxfam GB, Oxford. Available at www.oxfam.org/ukpp/resources
Pretty, J., Guijt, I., Thompson, J. and Scoones, I. (1995), *Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainers Guide*, IIED, London
PLA Notes (Journal) Available online at www.iied.org/sarl/pla_notes/index.html

Example: Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network 1998–2005

The Participatory Appraisal (PA) methodology and approach was first employed in Walsall in 1998 to work with a group of young people around sexual health. The success of that project led to the development of the Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network. The network has worked with over 40 organisations in the last seven years and employs one full time network co-ordinator. Funding comes from a number of sources including Walsall PCt / Health Authority to deliver training to health staff and service users. By 2005 the network has over 400 people trained in PA methodology, who then adapt the approach in their own field, and it has used the PA approach in over 30 consultancy projects.

The network has supported a number of organisations and initiatives in employing the PA methodology to engage with customers, members, community or staff within the Caldmore Area Housing Association including Supported Housing, Asian Care, Women's Refuge, Young Peoples Forum, Resident Representative Committees and Mental Health Schemes. Other initiatives include the support for service users in the development of The Walsall Disability Forum.

An evaluation of Walsall PA Network by OXFAM found that all those taking part viewed it positively and felt that they had learned approaches that could be applied in their own work and lives.

The Participatory Strategic Planning process is a consensus-building approach that enables a community or work group to articulate together how they would like their community or organisation to develop over the next few years.

Description: This is a four-stage process. First, the group determines their vision for the future of the organisation or community. Then they articulate the contradictions or obstacles that are preventing them reaching their vision. In the third stage they move on to agree strategic directions that will help them get past the blocks and reach the vision. The final stage is about implementation planning: what shall we do in the first year, and finally, what shall we do in detail in the first 3 months.

Each stage uses a consensus workshop process, which involves brainstorming to generate ideas, clustering to explore the insights that emerge and naming to discern the consensus of the group in each cluster. Each workshop involves a combination of working individually, in small groups and with the whole group.

A trained and experienced facilitator is required (a team of two is preferable), who could be an outsider or an insider. In either case, planning the process should involve others in the group as well as the facilitator. The venue should comfortably accommodate the participants in such a way that they can see and hear each other and the facilitator clearly, with good lighting and acoustics. A large, flat area of wall-space is best for organising participants' ideas, written on cards.

Origin: Developed by Institute of Cultural Affairs through over 30 years of working with local communities around the world, now applied widely in voluntary, public and private sectors. Participatory Strategic Planning is one of the group facilitation methods known collectively as the Technology of Participation (ToP).

Used for: Helping a group reach consensus about where they want to get to and how they are going to get there.

Who participates? From 5 to 50 is the typical range, but it can be more or less than that. The method works well with a mixed group of participants from all levels of the community or organisation. It is designed to be inclusive, so a wide diversity of participants can take part. Participants with low levels of literacy might need some support.

Cost: A team of two trained and experienced facilitators for a two-day event would typically cost £2,000-£4,000 including preparation, facilitation and documentation in addition to a venue, catering, travel, board and lodging, as required.

Time requirements: A two day event with a recommended follow-up after 6 months.

When should you use?
- When you want to build a spirit of ownership and commitment in a group;
- When you want to reach consensus on a way forward.

When should you not use?
- In a hierarchical situation if there is not commitment from the top to allowing the group to make decisions and take them forward.

Can it be used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:
- Flexible and multi-applicable;
- A remarkably quick way of enabling a diverse group to reach agreement;
- Works for people with auditory as well as visual preferences;
- Participants often find the process and outcome inspiring.

Weaknesses:
- Requires trained & experienced facilitators;
- Requires buy-in and commitment beforehand from people in power;
- Requires hard work & commitment on the day and subsequently;
- Requires all major stakeholders to be in the room.

Can deliver:
- A clear idea of where participants want an organisation or community to go;
- Consensus about directions;
- Commitment to making things happen;
- Stronger sense of being a team.

Won't deliver:
- The fine detail.

Example: Participatory Strategic Planning in Ponders End, North London

Going for Green and the Ponders End Development Forum used Participatory Strategic Planning as part of the wider Ponders End Sustainable Communities Project. The aim of this project was to empower and enable the residents and communities of Ponders End to address their local economic, social and environmental concerns and to improve their quality of life. The event was held in October 2001 and was facilitated by ICA: UK (the Institute of Cultural Affairs, UK). It was attended by a total of 22 participants including residents, representatives of local groups and businesses, service providers and Enfield Council officers.

The 'focus question' for the strategic planning was: "What do we want to see going on in Ponders End over the next three years?"

The first session was a vision workshop, in which participants were asked to come up with the specific achievements that they would like to see in place in Ponders End in three years' time. This process started with an individual brainstorm and continued with small group discussions. The ideas for achievements were then further discussed and clarified in the whole group, before being organised into columns and given titles to reflect the consensus of the group.

In the next workshop, using the same process as before, participants were asked to identify the obstacles or barriers standing between them and their vision. They were encouraged to think about the underlying issues, rather than the symptoms of the problem.

Following this, a strategic directions workshop was held to address the question of what practical actions the community could take to overcome the obstacles and lead them towards their vision.

The final stage was to revisit these actions and to prioritise them in an implementation plan for the actions the community wanted implemented over the next twelve months. Finally, participants assigned responsibilities for the different tasks that had been identified and interim team leaders were agreed.

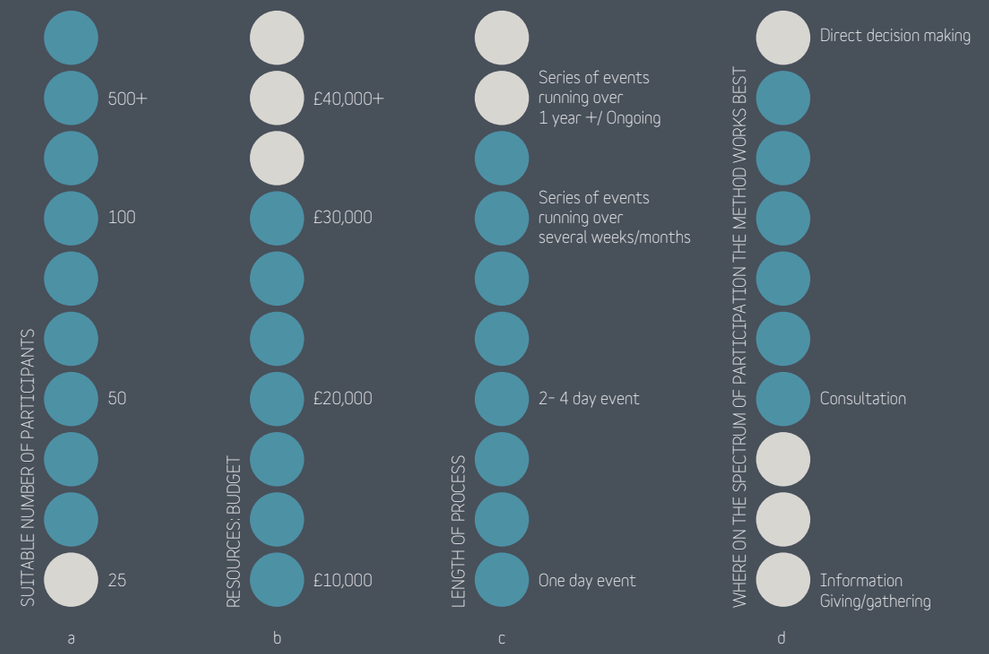
For the local Community Development Trust the process has functioned as a valuable reference point for the way forward. The trust has as a result been able to find funding and deliver an ambitious programme of community events and infrastructure according to the agreed plan.

Contact The Institute of Cultural Affairs UK (ICA:UK)
PO Box 171, Manchester, M15 5BE
Telephone 0845 450 0305
Email top@ica-uk.org.uk
Web www.ica-uk.org.uk

Online resources
www.openspaceuk.com
UK Portal on Open Space

Publications
Owen, H.A. (1997) *Open Space Technology. A Users' Guide.* San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler

Planning for Real



Notes

c While a single Planning for Real session using a model can be run as a half day event, this is only one part of the process. There will need to be time allocated for preparation, resident involvement, model making and publicity prior to the event, as well as time for prioritisation and action planning after the event. Follow-up and evaluation of the process is also important.

d In the British Isles Planning for Real® is a registered trademark of The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation. Anyone who wishes to run Planning for Real events should therefore contact them in advance. (See website: www.nif.co.uk)

Participants make a 3D model of their local area and place suggestions of the way they would like to see their community develop. They then prioritise these in groups and create an action plan for decision-makers to take away.

Description: Planning for Real events are famous for involving eye-catching three-dimensional models. The models only form part of the Planning for Real process though. Community members are usually involved from the start in deciding on a suitable venue and scope for the process. The model of a neighbourhood is usually made by local people themselves in order to create a sense of ownership over the process. A number of events are run depending on the number and nature of the participants. Sometimes separate events are run for specific groups, such as young people, who might otherwise not participate on equal terms.

The participants use their knowledge of living in the area to make suggestions by placing cards directly on the model. There are both ready-made cards with common suggestions (around 300) and blank cards for participants to fill in themselves. These suggestions are then prioritised in small groups on a scale of Now, Soon, or Later. These resulting priority lists form the basis for an Action Plan that decision-makers are charged with taking away, considering and implementing. Delivering the Action Plan is easier if the community is involved in delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

Origin: Local Planning/Community Development - A method developed in the 1970s to include community members who are deterred by traditional planning consultation. Since then it has been used in many locations internationally.

Used for: Planning for Real allows local people to engage hands-on with issues that affect them. Planning for Real is especially useful for planning, neighbourhood regeneration and capacity building.

Who participates? Local residents are the focus of a Planning for Real process. There is no upper limit to the number of participants that can be involved, as they do not have to attend at the same time or place. Other stakeholders who have an interest in the future of the area can also be involved.

Cost: Depends largely on the number of events and the size of the venue/s required (a reasonably large venue is required to accommodate the model and the participants). A trained facilitator is also necessary. The three-dimensional models are usually created by schools or local groups and aren't necessarily expensive.

Time requirements: Besides the meetings themselves you should plan to mobilise the interest of local participants. Following up on the Action Plan may take a few months to several years depending on what decisions come out of the process. Making the models may take a few months if local groups or schools are used.

When should you use?
- When you want decisions to reflect local priorities;
- When you want to mobilise local support;
- When you want to create enthusiasm.

When should you not use?
- When you do not have the buy in of important decision-makers;
- When you are short of time and/or staff.

Used to make decisions?
Yes

Strengths:
- An eye-catching and fun process that is enjoyed by people who would not normally get involved;
- The models lessen the need for verbal or literacy skills, making it a useful method to use when some participants don't speak English as a first language;
- It is a non-confrontational way of expressing needs.

Weaknesses:
- May be dominated by those used to working in large groups if not properly facilitated;
- Usually focussed on a local level, can be hard to scale up;
- The process of preparing the model and analysing and feeding back results to participants can be time-consuming.

Can deliver:
- Community input into local decision-making;
- Inclusion of participants that are often left out in other circumstances;
- Buy-in and enthusiasm;
- Shared vision for the future of an area.

Won't deliver:
- Input to regional or national level decision-making, unless part of a wider strategy.

Contact The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation
The Poplars, Lightmoor, Telford, TF4 3QN
Telephone 0870 770 0339
Fax 01952 591771
Web www.nif.co.uk

Example: Planning for Real in Wolverhampton

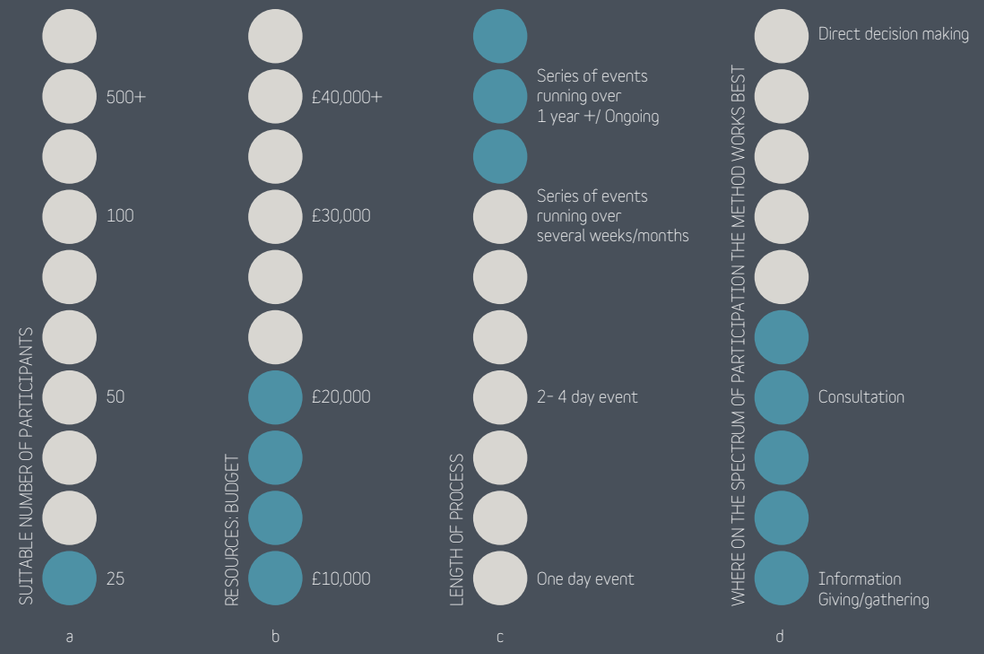
Whitmore Reans in Partnership (WRiP) is a community network working jointly with Dunstall and Whitmore Reans Neighbourhood Management to promote and support community organisations in Wolverhampton. In the summer of 2003, with training and support from the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, WRiP carried out a large-scale consultation exercise using Planning for Real, in order to get a clear indication of local needs and priorities. The information that came out of this process was later used in the development of the Local Action Plan for the area. Thanks to a tremendous preparation effort on the part of volunteers and officers the Planning for Real event was a huge success. Local participants placed over 1500 suggestions on the 3D model, not including the over 2000 ideas or issues identified by local school children as part of the event. Many agencies carried out further consultation as a result.

Local people who attended the consultation were then invited to take part in prioritising the information gathered at the consultation event. Attendance was again good and there was a clear sense of ownership by the community of what needed to be done.

As a result of the way if was created, the Whitmore Reans Local Action Plan is a precise and detailed tool, focusing on real issues, priorities and actions. The plan lists actions that will be undertaken, the agency or service provider involved and time scales. The participation of local people has ensured that the information is transparent and focused on their priorities.

The Planning for Real process in Whitmore Reans has been recognised nationally as a good example of community engagement.

User Panels



User Panels are regular meetings of service users about the quality of a service, or other related topics. They help to identify the concerns and priorities of service users and can lead to the early identification of problems or ideas for improvements.

Description: User Panels usually take the form of a workshop and it is important to establish clarity of purpose and the time required for participants' involvement from the start. There also need to be very clear lines of feedback between the Panel members and the decision-makers.

Origin: Market research. The panels have evolved from tools like focus groups and the spread of policy targets, such as 'Best Value', has increased the appreciation of the benefits of getting users involved in the planning and delivery of the services they use.

Used for: Getting users' views on their experiences and expectations of services and testing their reaction to changes and proposals. It can also be used to find and generate ideas for improvements

Who participates? A User Panel should be relatively small to allow quality interaction between participants, usually between eight and twelve people is a good number. Some organisations recruit a large pool of users so that they can draw out smaller groups to be consulted on a particular issue. These groups can be targeted to reflect certain subgroups of users, such as people with disabilities, or ethnic minorities.

Panel members can be recruited in different ways, adverts in the press is one way, but potential Panel members might also be suggested by people who work with service users, like nurses or teachers, or they might be members of organisations with an interest in the service. Try to include a diverse range of users in the Panel.

Panel members should not remain on the panel indefinitely, after a while participants tend to become too knowledgeable about the service delivery organisation and may come to identify with it and lose credibility with other users.

Cost: The Panel needs to be facilitated in a neutral way and Panel members should at least receive their expenses. Arranging free transport to and from meetings can be appropriate, especially if the service users are the elderly or health care users. It is hard to assess the costs of running a Panel, this depends on whether or not you have in-house facilitation skills, where the group meets, how large it is and how often it meets.

Time requirements: User Panels are usually ongoing (with participants being replaced as time goes on). A member of staff will need to provide support for the Panel. The accountability and credibility of the Panel can be increased if you allow time for representatives to refer back to wider user groups.

When should you use?
- Works with people who are not usually heard, for example those with learning disabilities, children, and the elderly;
- Good way to establish a two-way dialogue between service providers and users;
- Sounding board for new approaches or proposals relating to services;
- Can identify emerging problems.

When should you not use?
- User Panels should only be used when service providers and planners support the work and are willing to provide feedback;
- User Panels should not be the only way of getting user feedback

Can it be used to make decisions?
No

Strengths:
- Changes can be tracked over time;
- Most people can participate with the help of interpreters;
- Solution focused;
- The Panel members are well informed on the issues.

Weaknesses:
- Time consuming/long-term commitment;
- The Panel is not necessarily representative;
- A small number of people may dominate the group;
- May not take into account relevant needs of non-users of services.

Can deliver:
- User perspective;
- Sounding board on which to test plans and ideas;
- Relatively quick feedback;
- Continuing dialogue with users.

Won't deliver:
- Statistical information;
- Without commitment from management;

Example: Fife User Panels (Age Concern Scotland)

Age Concern Scotland's Fife User Panels were launched in 1992 as a project aimed at developing Panels of frail older people and providing them with an opportunity to influence the provision of services which help them maintain an independent lifestyle.

Panel members are aged over 70, have difficulty getting out and about without assistance and are users of various community care services. Thirteen years on there are 7 Panels across Fife with up to eight older people on each. The age range of Panel members is 70 - 101. As older people's everyday experiences are shared and discussed many issues are raised including health and social care, but also housing, transport, information, social activities etc.

The older people themselves control the agenda with one member of staff facilitating and another (or a volunteer) taking notes, to ensure that issues raised are accurately reflected. Service planners and providers from Fife Council and NHS Fife are invited by Panel members on a regular basis to discuss issues they are concerned about. The Panels are a recognised part of the consultation process of these agencies and they also work with researchers UK wide.

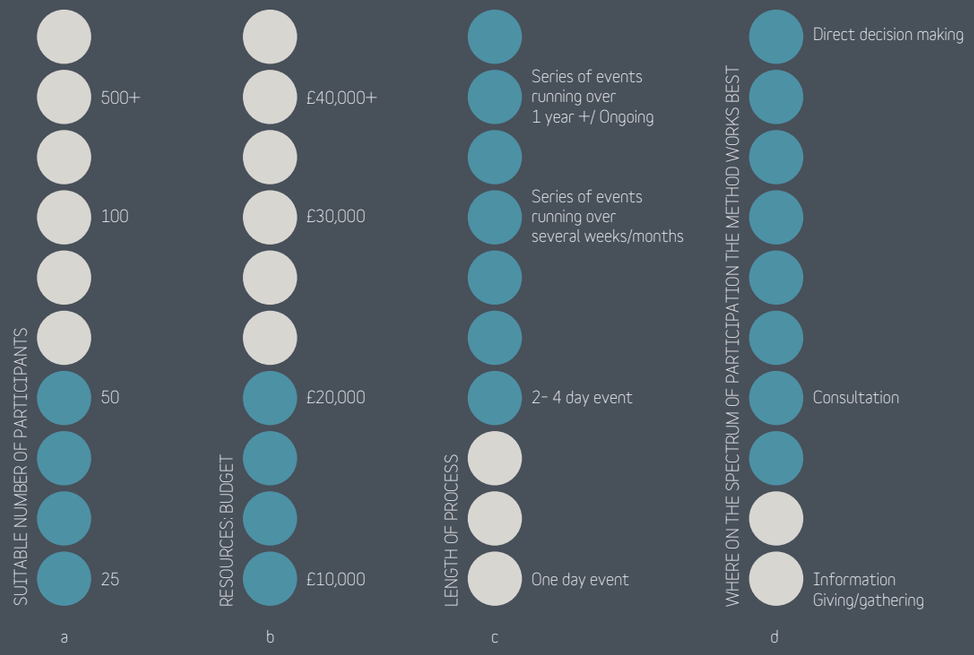
Panel meetings are informal and have enabled users to influence service provision within Fife. Two examples are an enhanced cleaning service for Home Care clients and good practice for Hospital Discharge.

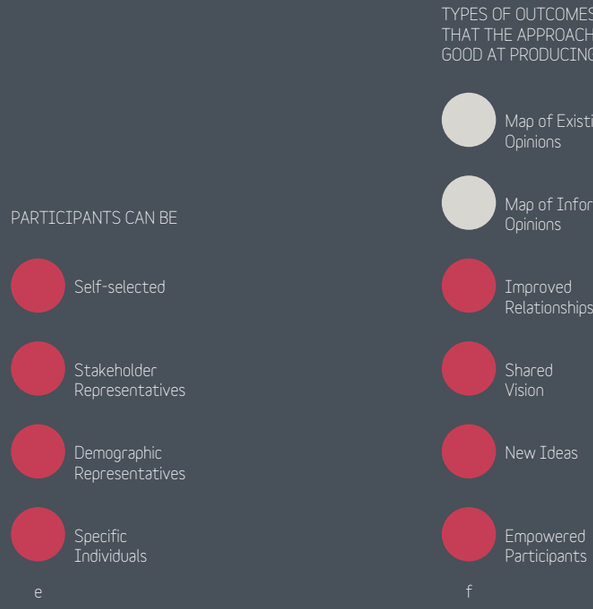
Contact Jessie Watt, Age Concern Scotland
Causewayside house, 160 Causewayside, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR
Telephone 01592 204 273
Web www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk

Publications

National Consumer Council (2002), *Involving Consumers: Everyone Benefits*, National Consumer Council, London. Available at www.ncc.org.uk/involvingconsumers/involving_consumers.pdf
National Consumer Council (2004), *User Power: The Participation of Users in Public Services*, National Consumer Council, London. Available at www.ncc.org.uk/publicservices/user_power.pdf

Youth Empowerment





Notes

c It is possible to engage with young people on a one-off basis, but the true benefits of empowered participants only emerge in a long process.
e Depends on the specific engagement process and its aims.

The reasons for involving young people in decision-making are not different from general community empowerment. However, there are certain characteristics that make engaging with young people different. The methods of youth participation differ widely, but they are all underpinned by the belief that young people have a right to be involved in decisions affecting their lives.

Description: Youth participation is a rapidly growing field, but not a unified one when it comes to the methods used. There is no one good way of engaging with young people. Several of the techniques previously mentioned in section 4.4 can be used, for example, youth panels or youth citizens' juries, and descriptions of these techniques will not be repeated here; instead we will focus on considerations that should be made when young people are involved in a process.

The short-term goals of youth processes are often the same as any other process, however, youth participation often emphasises empowerment. The low interest among young people in voting and party politics (but not in issues that affect them and their community) have prompted an upsurge in attempts to get young people more involved.

Many initiatives that involve young people make a point out of being less structured in form and content. Young people can be put off by strict timetables and giving them a space to discuss issues they feel strongly about without any required outcomes can boost creativity.

There are conflicting views on how close a youth initiative should be to existing political institutions. Some feel that youth councils and similar initiatives should maintain an arms-length relationship with the authorities in order to avoid getting sucked into the kind of party politics that many young people find unappealing. Independence is seen as a way of ensuring a creative process. Others argue that close working relationships with local councils and other institutions are necessary to maximise the influence of the young participants.

Origin: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been an important driver of involving young people in the UK. Over the last five years there has been a substantial increase in the number and size of projects.

Used for: As previously mentioned, the values and goals of youth empowerment are not very different from other forms of participation, so young people can be engaged with for many different reasons. As users of services they can be consulted to improve service delivery, young people are often targeted in projects to lower crime rates and, increasingly, the explicit goal of involving young people is stated as building the skills and values that are needed in their role as citizens.

Who participates? The term 'young people' is ambiguous. An easy mistake is to assume common views and experiences among all young people but there are considerable differences when it comes to cultural and ethnic backgrounds, living conditions and abilities. Certain groups, like homeless young people, young people in care and young people with disabilities can be very difficult to engage with and will require targeted efforts to involve.

Cost: Varies enormously, depending on scale, goals and time frame. While you should not underestimate the initiative of young participants in your projects you should always have support in the form of resources and staff time available.

Time requirements: Some youth engagement, like youth citizens' juries, are short term in length, others, like councils, take longer. Goals like youth empowerment require longer processes.

When should you use?

Young people should be given the same chance to participate as other age groups;

— Do not limit participation exercises to typical "youth issues". Young people also have a lot to say on more "mainstream" issues such as the environment, crime and housing.

When should you not use?

Unfortunately the ability of young people is underestimated by many. As a result, youth engagement projects are sometimes tokenistic and patronising. If you are not going to be serious about youth participation, it is better not to do it at all;

— Young people quickly see through any rhetoric and become disillusioned when they realise that they are being manipulated and used. This disillusionment harms not just individual projects but youth engagement overall.

Can it be used to make decisions?

Yes

Strengths:

Involving young people can be a very positive experience;

— Young people bring a lot of energy and enthusiasm into a process if they feel that they are taken seriously;

— Encouraging young people to have an equal say in issues that matter to them builds their sense of self worth and can build verbal abilities and other citizenship skills.

Weaknesses:

— There can be a high rate of turnover among young participants;

— Unless efforts are made to be inclusive, self-selected groups of young participants will often be biased towards certain groups.

Can deliver:

— Empowered participants;
— Information on values and priorities to influence decisions;
— Improved relationships;
— Enthusiasm;
— Feeling of ownership and pride over results.

Won't deliver:

— Rapid Results.

Contact Envision
Dennis Geffen Annexe , St. Pancras Gardens , Camley Street
London, NW1 0PS
Telephone 020 7974 8440
Fax 020 7974 8425
Email vision@envision.org.uk
Web www.envision.org.uk

Online resources
www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright/home.asp?cid=180&cats=215
Hear by right (National standards for Youth participation)
www.childpolicy.org.uk
4 Nations Child Policy Network
www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/cypi/home
Carnegie Young People Initiative (Includes resources for participation workers)

Publications
Dynamix (2002), *Participation: Spice It Up: Practical Tools for Engaging Children and Young people in planning and Consultations*, Save the Children Fund, Cardiff
YouthBank UK (2004), *Toolkit*, YouthBank UK, Leicester

Example: Envision Team, London Borough of Westminster: Recycling programme and fashion show 2005

Envision is a London charity supporting 16-19 year olds in schools and colleges to develop their own social and environmental projects. Teams of young people are set up at schools and are free to pursue their own projects, with a number of adult volunteers who support them.

In 2005 a local Envision team in Westminster decided to improve the recycling system at their school. They drew up plans for a system with recycling bins in every classroom as well as organic waste recycling outside the cafeteria and in the courtyard. The young people did most of the work themselves; they researched costs and facts, circulated questionnaires to their fellow students and presented their plans to the local council.

In order to promote the idea of recycling, as well as raising money for charity, the local team also decided to hold a fashion show where the clothes on parade were made from recycled materials. This ambitious project involved making the clothes from recycled materials, organising the venue and student models for the event, promoting the event, and researching where the money raised should go. The fashion show went well and raised around £1,000 for the SOS Children Tsunami appeal.

Working in the team has given the participants new skills and confidence in their abilities.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Involve

Involve was established in 2003 to create a new focus for thinking and action on the links between new forms of public participation and existing democratic institutions.

Background

Engagement in mainstream politics and formal democratic institutions has been declining. Governments cannot govern without the consent of the people and that consent has been undermined through lack of mutual understanding, trust and respect.

At the same time, the demand for public and stakeholder involvement in decision-making has grown and the number and range of participatory initiatives has increased dramatically as a result. There is apparently plenty of energy for democratic engagement, but it largely flows outside rather than through formal democratic structures and institutions, creating new tensions and conflicts that remain unresolved.

Despite the growth in participatory activity and theory, there is still little shared understanding among all those involved. Participatory activity has emerged from many disciplines and in many sectors, often quite separate from each other. Lack of effective communication across these interests has limited the opportunities for shared learning and the effective development of theory and practice.

Aims

Involve's aim is to create stronger democratic systems that enable people to effectively influence the decisions that affect their lives.

It plans to achieve this aim by working to:

— improve understanding of participatory processes and contribute to improving practice;
— improve links between those involved in participatory activities, from many different professional, disciplinary and political backgrounds, and contribute to the development of a sense of coherence across the field as a whole;
— identify and address the tensions within and between participatory activities and democratic institutions and contribute to more effective joint working.

Activities

Involve's activities focus on three main areas:

Networking: Involve now has an informal network of over 1000 people in the public, private and voluntary sectors, whose work and/or interests are related to participation and empowerment.

Involve will work with network members to share and reflect on interesting practice, identify key issues of policy and practice, and develop new themes of work in which network members can participate. Involve aims to build the network through a range of events and activities (including web-based) that bring people together and help create and strengthen relationships, improve communications and increase opportunities for joint working.

Research: Involve's research is designed to gather and disseminate new evidence about participatory working. It has completed two major research initiatives, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Home Office Civil Renewal Unit. One project has mapped the field of participatory working. The other reviewed current participatory practice through the creation of a new method of assessing different participatory methods and techniques. Both research projects used participatory methods and helped to establish Involve's network.

Current research work includes an exploration of a model for assessing the 'true costs' of participatory activities and a look at public engagement with science.

Innovation: Involve will establish experimental activities which provide opportunities to explore the tensions and boundaries of participatory practice. For example, it is currently co-ordinating a Sciencewise Project which is looking at the different ways in which people are seeking to engage the public with nanotechnology.

Who is Involve?

Involve was set up by a group of practitioners and researchers in participatory working. In its initial stages it has been supported by the New Economics Foundation and The Environment Council. It is being registered as an independent charity (during 2005), with a small staff, a management Board and an Advisory Group, working alongside the Involve network.

Staff

Richard Wilson (Director), Edward Andersson (Researcher, Civil Renewal), Faye Scott (Researcher, Science), plus additional staff as needed for specific projects.

Board

Geoff Mulgan (Chair), The Young Foundation; Andrew Acland, Dialogue by Design; Lee Bryant, Headshift; Ian Christie, Surrey County Council; Robin Clarke, Office for Public Management; Lindsey Colbourne, Sustainable Development Commission; Michelle Harrison, Henley Centre; Mike King, The Environment Council; Ben Page, MORI; Perry Walker, New Economics Foundation; Diane Warburton, Shared Practice.

How to get involved

Involve welcomes the involvement of anyone who is interested in issues of participation, empowerment and democracy. Please contact us and we will add you to our network database, to ensure you are kept up to date with Involve events and activities.

Involve 212 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BF
020 7632 0120 / info@involving.org / www.involving.org

Appendix 2:
Summary of Participatory Research Process

The research for this document has involved a programme of interviews, workshops, desk research and an electronic consultation, carried out in 2004/05. The process involved 134 separate individuals in directly shaping the final document.

Interviews

39 people were interviewed including people from organisations as diverse as the Treasury and the Citizenship Foundation.

Organisation	Individual	Date of Meeting
Audit Commission	Catherine Staite	24 June 04
BBC	Peter Barron	14 July 04
BDOR Associates	Jeff Bishop	June 04
Cabinet Office	Ian Johnson	10 June 04
Centre of the Study of Democracy	Simon Joss	18 August 04
Citizenship Foundation	Tony Breslin	July 04
Commission for Patient & Public Involvement in Health	Fiona Ward	23 August 04
Department of Trade & Industry	Gary Kass	June 04
Electoral Commission	Nicole Smith	10 August 04
Electoral Reform Society	Ken Ritchie	8 June 04
Essex University	Albert Weal	5 August 04
Essex University	Paul Whitely	15 October 04
Hansard Society	Ross Ferguson	15 June 04
Home Office	Bernard Crick	9 July 04
Home Office – Civil Renewal Unit	Duncan Prime	15 June 04
Institute for Public Policy Research	William Paxton	29 June 04
Institute of Development Studies	John Gaventa	16 July 04
Institute of Ideas	Claire Fox	24 June 04
Labour Party	Dr Tony Wright MP	21 July 04
Manchester University	Gerry Stoker	16 June 04
MORI	Ben Page	18 June 04
National Consumer Council	Saranjit Sihota	2 August 04
National Institute for Clinical Excellence	Ela Pathak-Sen	22 June 04
New Local Government Network	Dan Corry	16 July 04
New Politics Network	Peter Facey	27 July 04
No 10 Policy Unit	Patrick Diamond	3 August 04
Oxford University	Stephen Coleman	2 November 04
Oxford University	Prof. Steve Rayner	22 July 04
Public Management Foundation	Sue Goss	10 August 04
Renewal	Paul Thompson	8 July 04
Royal Society for the Arts	Susie Harries	22 July 04
Scarman Trust	Ray Sheath	22 July 04
Science Policy Research Unit	Andy Stirling	16 July 04
Strathclyde university	Geoff Fagan	6 August 04
The Royal Society	Darren Bhattachary	12 August 04
The Wellcome Trust	Roni Liyanage	4 June 04
Treasury	Selina Chen	13 July 04
University of Durham	Fred Robinson	6 July 04
University of East Anglia	Tim O'Riordan	22 June 04
Westminster University	Simon Joss	10 August 04

Workshops

Four workshops were held in the autumn of 2004: in Manchester on the 22nd of October, in Newtown, Wales on the 25th of October, in Glasgow on the 5th of November, and in London on the 12th of November. A total of 57 people attended these workshops the reports from which are available from the Involve website.

MANCHESTER, 22ND OCTOBER 2004

Organisation	Individual
Bradford University	Heather Blakely
ICA: UK	Anne Wilshin
ICA: UK	Martin Gilbraith
Independent Facilitator	Elizabeth McDonnell
Manchester City Council/LSP	Patrick Hanfling
PEANUT (Participation Evaluation Appraisal in Newcastle Upon Tyne)	
Northumbria University	Marilyn Doyle
Self Employed	Don Braisby
Y & N Regional Forum	Sarah Yorke

NEWTOWN, WALES, 25TH OCTOBER 2004

Organisation	Individual
CFSW	Chris Johnis
Dynamix Ltd	Chris Duw
Environment Agency Wales	Ruth Tipping
Participation Cymru	Megan Evans
PAVO	Eironwy Davies
Rural Resources/ R4c	Steve Evison
Ymbarel/Barnardo's	Shon Devey

GLASGOW, 5TH NOVEMBER 2004

Organisation	Individual
Civic Forum	Merlin Kemp
COSLA	David Jones
Heriot-Watt University	Harry Smith
Inclusion Scotland	Liz Ross
Independent Practitioner	Vikki Hilton
Landwise Scotland	Drennan Watson
LTS International	Kirstin Olsen
Oxfam UKPP	Adrian Girling
Oxfam UKPP	Charlotte Flower
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office	Graham Blount
Scottish Executive	Alison Platts
Scottish Executive, Civil Participation Research Team	Vikki Milne
Scottish Mediation Network	Roger Sidaway
Scottish Participatory Initiatives (SPI)	Susan Guy
University of Strathclyde	Geoff Fagan

LONDON, 12TH NOVEMBER 2004

Organisation	Individual
Carl Reynolds Associates	Carl Reynolds
Centre for Public Scrutiny	Jane Martin
Citizenship Foundation/Uni. of Brighton/ Trust for the Study of Adolescence	Saskia Neary
Civil Renewal Unit Active Community Directorate	Duncan Prime
Delib	Chris Quigley
Development Focus Trust	Vicky Johnson
e-Government Unit Cabinet Office	Ian Johnson
Engage East Midlands	Krista Blair
Envision	Nick Nielsen
Home Office	Rachel Howell
IAF Europe 2001	Gary Austin
ICA: UK/Zebra Collective	Michelle Virgo
IPPR	Miranda Lewis
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust	Steve Pittam
London 21 Sustainability Network	Vinciane Rycroft
London Civic Forum	Kate Monkhouse
NEF/ODI Associates	Daniel Start
New Local Government Network	Dan Corry
New Politics Network	Peter Facey
Nigel Westaway & Associates	Nigel Westaway
Partnerships Online	David Wilcox
Patient and Community Engagement (PACE), NHS University	David Gilbert
Runnymede Trust	Rob Berkeley
Scarman Trust	Ray Sheath
The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce	Susie Harries
University of Oxford	David Faulkner
WWF-UK	Niamh Carey

Electronic Consultation

Finally, the first draft of the document was subject to an online consultation, which 200 people registered for and 44 participated in. This took place between the 31st of January and 21st of February 2005.

Organisation	Individual
BJ Associates	Rowena Harris
Carnegie Young People Initiative	Abi Carter
Communities First Support Network	Chris Jones
Communities Scotland	N Woodhead
Consultant in User Involvement/ Good Practice	Cathy Coles
Creekside Forum	Bill Ellson
DEFRA	Neil Witney
Devon County Council Social Services	Geoff King
Dialogue by Design	Pippa Hyam
Dialogue by Design	Andrew Acland
Dialogue Matters	Diana Pound
Environment Agency	Ruth Rush
Fife Council	Heather Murray
Harlow District Council	Lynn Seward
Headshift	Lee Bryant
Health Policy Researcher	Michael Shepherd
Home Office	Duncan Prime
ICA:UK	Martin Gilbraith
Independent Facilitator	Penny Walker

Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University	Samuel Musyoki
Manchester City Council	Patrick Hanfling
Manchester City Council	Lynn Leggat
Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation	Don Burrows
Norfolk County Council	Kirsten Francis
Office of Public Management	Kate Dixon
OXFAM	Charlotte Flower
Partnerships Online	David Wilcox
PEANuT, Northumbria University	Duncan Fuller
Poldervaart Associates	Helena Poldervaart
R K Partnership	Rob Angell
RSA	Susie Harries
School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol	Paul Burton
Scottish Civic Forum	Debbie Wilkie
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations	Jillian Flye
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Caspian Richards
Scottish Executive	Fiona Timpson
Shepherds Bush Healthy Living Centre	Eve Bevan
Stockwell Faith Forum & Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network	Catriona Robertson
The Environment Council	Mike King
The Environment Council	Lynn Anderson
The Environment Council	Edward Kellow
University of Leeds School of Healthcare	Chris Essen
Vision 21	Ruth Turner
Working for Change	Sue Gorbing

Others

The following individuals have provided invaluable support on testing our methods section.

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Don Burrows, Neighborhood Initiatives Foundation
Romy Shovelton, Wikima
Martin Leith, Martin Leith, Ltd.
Martin Gilbraith, ICA:UK
Matt Price, Envision

Appendix 3: A Guide to the Guides

Please see the individual methods section for method specific resources.

Government

Audit Commission (1999), *Listen Up: Effective Community Consultation*, Audit commission, Abigdon. Available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/AC-REPORT.asp?CatID=&ProdID=EA01768C-AA8E-4a2f-99DB-83BB58790E34

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International

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Young people

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